

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Dear Parishioners,

This week we continue our celebration of the Christmas Season. This Sunday, December's 31st, is the feast of the Holy Family. This Monday, is not only New Year's Day but is also the feast of Mary, the Mother of God. Also this week, although they are not technically Christmas feasts, we have the feast days of two American saints. Thursday, January 4, is the feast of St. Elizabeth and Seton, who as you have probably guessed, is one of my favorite saints. On Friday, we have the feast day of St. John Neumann, who was another of my favorites. All of these feasts remind us of the Light of the world, Jesus, who is come to shatter the darkness of sin and death. We have so many reasons to celebrate! The essay below explores what it means that the Light has come to shatter the darkness of our world.

With my prayers,
Fr. Conley

Christmas: The Light in the Darkness
by **Constance Hull**

The Solemnity of the Nativity of Our Lord is the time we celebrate the fulfillment of God's plan to bring light to a Fallen world. As C.S. Lewis said in [Mere Christianity](#):

Enemy-occupied territory - that is what this world is. Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, you might say landed in disguise, and is calling us to take part in a great campaign of sabotage.

Christmas is the stealthy landing behind enemy lines in which God condescends Himself to become a babe in a manger in order to bring about the salvation of the world. He descends into the utter darkness, weakness, and helplessness of the human condition so that He may shed a great light upon us and draw us into friendship with Him. This is accomplished in the most unexpected way imaginable!

There is little doubt as we look at the world around us that we live in Enemy territory. The news is a constant barrage of violence, injustice, disease, natural disasters, and suffering. Every single day people suffer immensely. In truth, the greatest suffering and tragedy to befall each one of us is sin. From a material perspective this doesn't seem to be the case, but in truth it is spiritual wounds that cause the most damage to us and our relationships. Christ tells us: "There is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have said in the darkness will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be proclaimed on the

housetops. I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body but after that can do no more (Luke 12:2-4)." Sin is what we do in darkness, but all will be brought into the light of God. It is this darkness that Our Lord seeks to free us from by His divine light.

The light of truth and charity

The light we are given at Christmas is the light of truth. It is the gift of God Himself who calls to us. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI explains in his Christmas Homily in 2005:

But first, light means knowledge; it means truth, as contrasted with the darkness of falsehood and ignorance. Light gives us life, it shows us the way. But light, as a source of heat, also means love. Where there is love, light shines forth in the world; where there is hatred, the world remains in darkness. In the stable of Bethlehem there appeared the great light which the world awaits. In that Child lying in the stable, God has shown his glory – the glory of love, which gives itself away, stripping itself of all grandeur in order to guide us along the way of love. The light of Bethlehem has never been extinguished. In every age it has touched men and women, "it has shone around them". Wherever people put their faith in that Child, charity also sprang up – charity towards others, loving concern for the weak and the suffering, the grace of forgiveness.

God provides us the truth, so that we may live in charity. He shows us that our lives are meant to be given away in self-emptying love. This is most fully realized on the Cross, but it is also seen at a deep level by the total self-emptying of the Son of God in His taking on human flesh and becoming completely vulnerable as a human baby.

We have a tendency to domesticate God. It is easy for us to view God in a sentimental way and to see love as a feeling we have towards God and others. In reality, love in any form is not a feeling—it is a matter of the will—and the love of God is all consuming. Love demands everything from us. I started to understand this reality when I was living in Washington, DC in 2009. I attended Sunday Mass at the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception each week. There is a depiction of Christ in the Basilica that is fascinating, and not just because the image is blonde. The look on Christ's face is of great intensity and at first glance appears to be wrath. It is intimidating and uncomfortable in the beginning. The more I meditated upon it, the more I realized the intensity is not wrath, it is love. God's love is a fire. It burns away all of our impurities so that we may be as white as snow, as the Psalmist tells us. The light we celebrate this Christmas burns with such an intensity that nothing can be hidden or held back from it. God wants all of us and He wants to give us Himself in return, nothing less than everything will do.

As long as we walk in the light we will dwell in charity and truth. 1 John 1:5 reminds us: "This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him is no darkness." We are called to constantly live in the light each day of our lives; not only will this secure our own salvation, but it will draw others who live in darkness to the light. Charity demands that

we share the light we have been given to others. We know the great joy of Christmas and the Good News. That joy is meant to be shared with everyone we come into contact with, which is why we must rely on God to help us always remain in the light. If we falter or fail, then we crawl, march, drag ourselves, whatever we have to do to get back to the Confessional in order to begin again.

The light down through the ages

The Church's history and the lives of the saints demonstrate the impact the light of God has on people and the world. Holy lives radiate the love of God. Holiness is infectious. When we meet truly holy people, we desire to be like them because we have encountered God dwelling within them. We see the joy that comes from being a person of the light. From Bethlehem a stream of light, love and truth spreads through the centuries. If we look to the Saints — from Paul and Augustine to Francis and Dominic, from Francis Xavier and Teresa of Avila to Mother Teresa of Calcutta — we see this flood of goodness, this path of light kindled ever anew by the mystery of Bethlehem, by that God who became a Child. In that Child, God countered the violence of this world with his own goodness. He calls us to follow that Child.

MANY THANKS AND OUR PRAYERS TO ALL OUR PARISHIONERS FOR A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A BLESSED NEW YEAR. WE ARE ESPECIALLY GRATEFUL FOR ALL WHO HAVE SENT CARDS AND GIFTS. MAY THE SON OF GOD WHO BECAME MAN AT BETHLEHEM REWARD YOU FOR YOUR GOODNESS.

WANTED!!! SPONSORS WHO WOULD LIKE TO ADVERTISE ON BACK OF OUR CHURCH BULLETIN. If anyone is interested in advertising for the upcoming year that will start on March 1st, please call Mary at the rectory at 301-870-2220.

MASS FOR MONDAY, JANUARY 1

Not a Holy Day of Obligation - Mass at 9:30 AM
Feast of Mary, Mother of God (Schedule sent out was wrong)

SONS & DAUGHTERS OF GOD

Our new adult faith formation series begins on Thursday, January 11. This six-session series meets on the second and fourth Thursday of the month from 6:30-8:30 in the hall. We will explore what it means that Jesus Christ has made it possible for us to call God our Father. The cost is \$10 for the series and includes dinner before each session.

The first presentation is called "God Delights in You." Subsequent presentations will focus on the compassion of Jesus and the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Start

the new year right by strengthening your spiritual health. You may sign up in the foyer or by contacting Father Conley at 301-870-2220, ext. 13 or frconley@comcast.net

THIS FRIDAY is FIRST FRIDAY and we will have EXPOSITION OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT following the morning Mass and closing with Benediction at 8pm. We need volunteers from 10 to 11 and 3 to 7. Come and pray in the presence of the Lord in honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The sign up is in the foyer.

MASS INTENTIONS FOR THIS WEEK:

SUN: 8am Charlie Gardiner, 10am Ana Lopez, 12N: Parishioners, **MON:** 9:30am Betty Ann Watson, **TUES:** 8am Mark Conley, **WED:** 8am Herbert Conley, **THURS:** 8am Donald Lawson, **FRI:** 9:30am Joan Conley, **SAT:** 9am Rory Muldoon, 4pm Paul Istvan.

PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR DAILY

PRAYERS: Mary Bowes, Frances Card, Joe Cross, Kendall Farrell, George Fassel, Arlene Gandolfi, Martha Gehring, Judy Istvan-Windsor, Irma Johnson, Regina Kijesky, Marie Knobel, Lillian Komar, Susie Logan, Maurice Long, Liz Marcus, Mary Emma Middleton, Larry Miller, Joseph Mona, Wayne Mullings, Lenora Proctor, Joseph Quade, Sylvene Savoy, William Leon Savoy, Edna Sweeney, Lisa Thompson, Beth Weise, Tim Welch, Brice Zimmer.

OFFERTORY COLLECTION LAST WEEKEND,

\$7664.50. Christmas donation will be announced shortly. The Christmas collection is an important part of our budget, so if you have not contributed, yet please do so when you can.