

My Dear Parishioners,

She says: “That’s all very well for you to say but when do I get the wedding ring?” He replies: “Soon, soon, I **promise** you. Just trust me my dear. Really, you’ll see.” She responds: “**Promises, promises, promises.** That is all I ever hear from you!”

To make a **promise** is to always put oneself in debt as it invites another person to trust in you until you can deliver on your word. Sometimes we **promise** too much too quickly and we soon learn that we can’t deliver the goods. On the other hand, we are sometimes so doubtful of our own capacity to keep our **promises** that we don’t make any. Therefore, we live in the absence of **promise** which means that other people have to do the same.

To believe a **promise** is an act of trust in the person who makes it as it is to live in expectation holding fast to someone’s word. When **promises** are fulfilled there is a deepening of the original trust. However, if people have a distinctly wobbly track-record on keeping their word, we tend to be cautious about their sparkling new **promises**. We may file them under “Long Shots” and forget them. None of us wants to conspire in our own disappointments. When things look uncertain we may send accusing reminders to them: “But you **promised!**”

Of course, in all this we know that we cannot retire completely from giving and receiving **promises**. Life itself comes to us as a **promise**. Trust has to be exercised in the midst of the real frailty within and around us. When it comes to God’s **promises** we are hopeful and confident that God will deliver. Today’s Scripture readings remind us that God **always** keeps His **promises** so we can rejoice and be glad. Our readings present a sequence of **promised** events that God delivered to humanity throughout Salvation History. In the first reading from the prophet Micah we have the birth of the Messiah being foretold. The Gospel of Luke speaks about the miracle of Jesus’ Incarnation as the long awaited Messiah has been conceived in Mary’s womb and soon will be born. The reading from the Letter to the Hebrews speaks of the **new reality** that came into being as a result of the Son of God coming into our world.

In today’s first reading the prophet Micah announces God’s great **promise**: that the small tribe which settled in the insignificant town of Bethlehem will one day produce the long awaited Messiah. Micah lived at the same time as the prophets Isaiah, Amos, and Hosea. Micah proclaimed the same message of those other prophets: “Repent from your disobedience and return to God.” Micah came from a small village about 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem. Coming from “the sticks” to the city of Jerusalem, Micah spoke out against the evils he saw with all the bluntness that we would attribute to a simple “country bumpkin.” The king and religious leaders had grown complacent in their relationship with God and with God’s people. Micah condemns these political and religious leaders because they should have known what God wanted for His people. An oracle from earlier in the book of Micah offers a compelling example of the injustice of the leaders in Micah’s day: “Is it not your duty to know what is right, you who hate good, and love evil? You who tear their skin and their flesh from their bones” (3:1-2).

In today’s passage Micah asserts straightforwardly that any **hope** for the renewal of the leadership of the Jewish people couldn’t come from sophisticated Jerusalem. The people there were too hardened. The kings there had often oppressed the people and the current kings Ahaz and Hezekiah (though descendants of King David,) were evil and unjust. Whatever **hope** there was would have to come from somewhere else. Micah looked to the small town of Bethlehem which about five miles south of Jerusalem. He refers to Bethlehem as Ephrathah because when the Jews had come from Egypt and conquered Canaan, Bethlehem had been settled by the Ephrathah clan of the tribe of Judah. The name Bethlehem itself means “house of bread.” Its important origins were from ancient times from the ancient dynasty of Jesse and his son David. Micah envisioned a ruler coming from Bethlehem who would be worthy of David. As David had been a good shepherd so too this coming ruler would be a good shepherd as leadership style would be pastoral. But this ruler would be as unlike the descendants of David as David was. Unlike the weak, vacillating kings then ruling, this leader would be firm. Unlike their smallness this ruler would possess a greatness which the whole world would acknowledge. The new ruler **promised** will be called

forth by God and he would be strengthened by God. His rule will be like that of a shepherd who leads, protects, and provides for those in his care.

In our joy-filled Christmas preparations (when we might overlook the **why** and the **reason** for Jesus' appearance in human form) today's passage from the Letter to the Hebrews sets us straight. It has been one of the constant preoccupations of humankind to take sin away. Under the former covenant (the Old Testament) this was done by bloody sacrifices: animals slaughtered in a precise ritual. Blood was considered to be the life of the animal and sacrificing it a sign that the giver was willing to give his or her life to God. Today's passage from Hebrews contains a contrast between the ancient animal sacrificial ritual and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Though compliance to the will of God is clearly stated, the specific focus is Christ's offering of His body. The author of Hebrews argues that Christ annuls the first kind of sacrifice (external adherence to law) in order to establish the second (internal obedience). By freely offering His body in sacrifice, Jesus identifies His own will with His Father's will. Thus, we are all sanctified through Jesus' sacrifice; not through any sacrifice required by law.

Luke's story of Mary visiting Elizabeth (Lk.1:39-45) is theological by intent and design. In separate stories Luke has told us about the annunciation of the birth of John the Baptist as well as the annunciation of the birth of Jesus. In the story of the Visitation (today's passage) Luke brings Mary and Elizabeth together showing that even before either child was born, God's plan for their future was unfolding.

At the very beginning of Luke's Gospel we are introduced to an aged married couple (Zechariah and Elizabeth) who stay alive on the **hope** that God indeed keeps His **promises**. Zechariah and Elizabeth represent that **hope** that did not die and they see it fulfilled in their son John who is to prepare for the one from Bethlehem. It is the fulfilled **hope** of that aged couple which is given to Mary as a sign: "Know this too, your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself conceived a son.....for nothing is impossible with God."

In today's Gospel passage Mary hurries to see this sign of **hope** fulfilled. In the meeting of the elderly Elizabeth and the young Mary the Old Testament meets

the New Testament. The ancient **promise** meets its fulfillment in two mothers: Elizabeth, the mother of the last great prophet who will go before the Lord, and Mary, the mother of the Lord Himself. It is a time of Good News and of great blessing and rejoicing. The old **promises** are new events, and now is the time of their long awaited fulfillment. It is a great time because it is through Mary that God the Father is seen to keep the **promise** announced through the prophet Micah so long ago. The **promise** of God will "take flesh" in Mary and be formed in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus **will fulfill** all that has gone before and give new meaning to all that will happen after Him. Jesus stands at the very center of time. Jesus **is** the One who stands at the very center of our lives.

Mary is blessed for believing "that the **promises** made to her by the Lord would be fulfilled." Mary's cousin Elizabeth recognizes and acknowledges this fact as the Holy Spirit provides her with the insight of who Mary is and what she has done. Elizabeth's words of blessing given to Mary gave witness to creation's joy: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb....Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken by the Lord would be fulfilled." Mary is the mother of the Lord and so she is the **most** blessed among women. Mary, because of her faith response to God's message brought to her by the angel Gabriel, then plays a key role in the mysterious action of God's **promise**. In Mary all can see that God doesn't just make **promises** but God keeps His **promises**. In Mary all can see someone who allows the **promise** of God to shape her whole life. Since Mary says "yes" to the **promise** happening in her and because she surrenders herself completely to God's will, Mary becomes the true role model for all faithful believers.

At Christmas time we celebrate the great truth that Jesus is the kept **promise** of God the Father. Jesus comes to us as the Father's gift. Jesus invites us to have the confidence to make a few **promises** ourselves. As Christians we are people of **promises** and God holds fast to the words of **promise** we have made in Him. As our Advent Season draws to a close, we thank God for keeping His **promise** to us and we ask Him to help us keep our **promise** to Him and to each other. Following the example of Blessed Mother Mary let us all **promise** to continue being God-bearers in a world that needs God ever so much. Have a blessed week.

Love & prayers,  
Fr. John

P.S. I want to wish everyone a most **Blessed** and **Merry Christmas**. May our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ give you and your families the gifts of **His peace, joy, happiness, and love** this Christmas Season and may He send plentiful blessings upon you and your loved ones throughout the coming 2019 year.

**FLU SEASON**

For health reasons, during the months of January, February and March (flu season) we will refrain from receiving Jesus' Precious Blood at Holy Communion. Thanks, Fr. John

**PRAYER FOR OUR BELOVED DECEASED**

Gracious God look with mercy upon the souls of our dear deceased family, relatives, and friends. Grant that those you have called from our homes and our hearts may enter the embrace of your faithful and everlasting love in heaven.

Eternal rest grant unto them O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May their souls, and the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen



**CHRISTMAS MASSES**

**Christmas Eve, December 24:**

Mass will be celebrated at **5PM, 8PM, and 11PM.**

**Christmas Day, December 25:**

Mass will be celebrated at **9AM and 11AM.**

**CHRISTMAS MASS SCHEDULE**

Please note that on **Monday, December 24<sup>th</sup>** daily mass will **only** be celebrated at **7am** and on **Wednesday, December 26<sup>th</sup>** daily mass will **only** be celebrated at **9am**. Thanks.



**FEAST OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD**

**NEW YEAR'S DAY, JANUARY 1**

**Holy Day of Obligation:**

The Vigil Mass will be celebrated on December 31<sup>st</sup> at **5 PM** and the Feast Day Masses will be celebrated on January 1<sup>st</sup> at **7:30, 9:00 and 11 AM.**

**MASS INTENTIONS**

**Monday, December 24, Christmas Eve**

- 7:00 Intentions in the Prayer Box
- 5:00 For the Parishioners
- 8:00 For the Parishioners
- 11:00 For the Parishioners



**Tuesday, December 25, Nativity of the Lord**

- 9:00 †For the Parishioners
- 11:00 †For the Parishioners

**Wednesday, December 26, St. Stephen**

- 9:00 †Philip Cardin

**Thursday, December 27, St. John the Apostle & Evangelist**

- 7:00 †Jill Cleary
- 9:00 †Eleanor Kennedy

**Friday, December 28, The Holy Innocents**

- 7:00 †Charles & Lucy Marrone
- 9:00 †Jim Mondo

**Saturday, December 29, St. Thomas Becket, Bishop & Martyr**

- 9:00 †Eleanor Kennedy
- 5:00 †Helen Neidermyer

**Sunday, December 30, The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary & Joseph**

- 7:30 For the Parishioners
- 9:00 †R.E. Families
- 11:00 †Jim Mondo

**DAILY MASS**



In the event of bad weather during the week, **if school is cancelled, know that Mass also is cancelled.** If school is delayed, then we will only have a 9 o'clock Mass, but please use your judgment whether or not to attempt to attend.



**SAVE THE DATE: Vacation Bible school will be ROARing into OMPH July 14 through July 18.**

### ALTAR SERVERS NEEDED!!

Any girl or boy in grades fourth and up that would like to become an altar server should contact Ben Hoover at 717-808-1115. This is a great way for RE and LCHS students to achieve required service hours.



There is a commitment involved with being an altar server, but the schedule can be planned around sports, work and any other activities if known in advance. Training will begin in January and the new schedule will come out in March.

### ADORATION OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

God doesn't need our sacrifices. We don't have to convince him to love us. We don't have to prove ourselves to him by giving things up or by working ourselves to death. Of course, he delights in seeing his children making sacrifices for the sake of his Church, but his love doesn't depend on it. It's not something we earn. It's something we receive as a generous gift—just as we receive any gift sitting under our Christmas tree.

Of course, our sacrifices do please the Lord—especially the sacrifices we make for our families and for the poor. But Christmas is about Jesus' love, not our efforts. It's about his generosity, not our hard work. Instead of demanding sacrifices from us, Jesus did the exact opposite: he sacrificed himself for us by becoming a man. Instead of abandoning us because of our sin, he came closer to us so that he could redeem us. Not by our sacrifices. Not by our suffering. But by his love.

There are just two days left. Jesus is about to do a new thing all over again. Fix your eyes on him. Let him reveal this new thing to you—the love that saves and the obedience that sanctifies.

### SANCTUARY LAMP



You may have the Sanctuary Lamp burn for a sick or deceased loved one for a donation of \$5, to defray the cost of the candles. This week the candle burns for Daniel Michaels.

### IN OUR THOUGHTS AND PRAYERS

We will be publishing the names of your dear loved ones who are seriously ill or injured. After the period of one month their names will be removed. **For example, names announced in the bulletin the third week of the month will be removed the third week of the following month.** If at that time prayers are still



needed, please feel free to contact the parish office, and we will be more than happy to re-publish your loved one's name.

Bishop Ronald Gainer, Margaret Gardner, Abigail Lowe-Critchfield, Michael Lillis, Richard Warner, Anna Leshner, Florence Windish, Gloria Reynolds, Patrick Michael Ward, Carlos Luciano Sr., Mary Kay Hensel, Gerald Gigliotti, Fr. Paul Bryan, CSSR, Francis Gatti, Antonia Scribani, Jean Mash, John Mento, Joseph John Lewis & Joe Ferrara.

### BUY GIFT CARDS

### SUPPORT OMPH CATHOLIC SCHOOL!

Gift cards will be available for purchase on Sundays in the parish office **after the 7:30 a.m. Mass, before and after the 9 a.m. Mass, and before the 11 a.m. Mass.** Funds will be used toward the Student Support Scholarship, which benefits all students attending OMPH Catholic School. Kindly consider buying gift cards at no extra cost to you to pay for your groceries, gas, and other items as well as to give as gifts. *We accept cash or check as payment.*

### DIVINE MERCY CHAPLET



Join us on Tuesdays at 7 PM in the Church Narthex for prayers of intercession. All are welcome. For additional information call Dave Olszewski at 717-271-8251.

**Text-To-Give Second Collection**

**Codes**

Second collection text-to-give is easy! Just text the amount you would like to give followed by the “code word” for each specific collection. For example, “10 flowers”, makes a gift of 10 dollars towards our flower collection. Each week before a second collection, the “code word” will appear in the bulletin for your convenience.

The code words for the next few weeks:

<u>Collection Name</u>	<u>Collection Date</u>	<u>Code Word for Text-To-Give</u>
Christmas	12/25/2018	christmas
Solemnity of Mary	1/1/2019	solemnity
European Relief	1/13/2019	europeanrelief
Initial	No date	initial

Reminder the Text-To-Give phone # is **717-401-4159**.

It has been a blessing and a privilege to work with such a great group of folks. We are look forward to working with you again in 2019. Thank you for serving our God, our church and our community. Until we see each other again; May God bless you and grant you peace.



**Religious Education Corner:**

**Our Religious Education Class Schedule  
For The Next Three Weeks Is As Follows:**

**Merry Christmas!**

**Sunday, December 23<sup>rd</sup> – NO RE Classes**

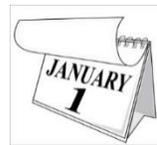
**Happy New Year 2019!**

**Sunday, December 30<sup>th</sup> – NO RE Classes**

**Sunday, January 6<sup>th</sup> – RE Classes Resume**

**Kelly Lawrence**

**2019 PARISH CALENDAR**



Our 2019 Parish Calendars are available in the Church Narthex. I want to express my appreciation and gratitude to **Paul L. Gravenor Home for Funerals** for sponsoring this year’s calendar. Thank you and God bless. Fr. John