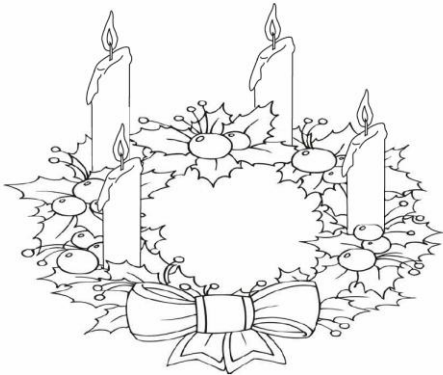


St. Columbkille
Religious Education Newsletter

December 2011



Advent Wreath
Symbolizes God's
Never-Ending
Love

Advent is the season when we prepare ourselves to receive God's gift of Jesus. It is a time of "getting ready" and counting the days until we celebrate Christmas. The advent wreath is one way you can prepare yourself and your family for celebrating Christmas and the birth of Jesus.

The wreath is a circle and is used to symbolize God's never-ending love. The wreath is green to symbolize life. An advent wreath contains four candles representing the four weeks leading up to Christmas. Many people also place an additional candle in the middle of the wreath to symbolize Jesus, the Messiah.

Advent, which comes from the Latin word for "arrival," is a four-week period of preparation for the celebration the birth of our Lord, Jesus. Jesus is always with us, but we remember in a special way on Christmas that he became man and is Incarnate being both God and Man. Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas and is the start of the Christmas season, which lasts through the Baptism of Our Lord. The first Sunday of Advent also marks the beginning of the liturgical year, the Church's "New Year's Day," at which time we change the cycle of readings we are using at Mass, this year we begin Liturgical Calendar B.

Advent is a time of joyous anticipation, but also a time of preparation for the great Christmas feast. The liturgical colors of the season is purple, a sign of penance and preparation, which is also used during Lent.

Holy Days During Advent and Christmas
Great Times to Go To Mass Together As A Family

Every Sunday is a little Easter. That seems strange to say as we prepare ourselves for Christmas during the four weeks of Advent. It is true that each Sunday as we gather together for the celebration of Mass we are remembering the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus.

It is wonderful that we have the opportunity to be with one another at Mass for 52 Sundays out of the year, for six holy days of obligation (Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God (January 1), The Ascension of Our Lord (40 Days After Easter), The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (August 15), All Saints Day (November 1), The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception (December 8), and Christmas Day (December 25). In addition we can attend Mass on the rest of the days of the year during the week.

In the United States, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, is a holy day of obligation because Mary is the patroness of our United States. The others are Christmas Day, December 25, and Mary, Mother of God, January 1. Please do not let these wonderful holy days go by without your family attending Mass.

Advent Saints

There are many wonderful saints whose feast days are celebrated during Advent. In this newsletter we will highlight a few of them. Please take the time as a family to explore more about each of these wonderful heroes of our faith.

Two Feast Days of Our Blessed Mother Fall in Advent

The Feast of the Immaculate Conception on December 8 is a holy day of obligation when we attend Mass on that day. It is a special feast in the United States since the Blessed Mother Mary, the Immaculate Conception, is the patroness of our country. This feast day reminds us that Mary was especially chosen to be the Mother of God. She was born free from sin and always lived a holy life.

The Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe is celebrated on December 12. In 1531 a "Lady from Heaven" appeared to Juan Diego, a humble Native American, at Tepeyac, a hill northwest of what is now Mexico City. She said that she was the ever virgin Holy Mary, Mother of the True God for whom we live, of the Creator of all things, Lord of heaven and the earth. She made a request for a church to be built on the site. When the Bishop hesitated to build a church, she sent a sign that he did not question. Juan Diego went back to the "lady from Heaven" in mid-December and she told him to gather an assortment of roses for the Bishop. He did so. She also left for us an image of herself imprinted miraculously on the native's *tilma*, a poor quality cactus-cloth, which should have deteriorated in 20 years but shows no sign of decay 480 years later.

Saint Francis Xavier – December 3

St. Francis Xavier tirelessly evangelized the people in the Far East and yet, as busy as he was he wrote songs about the truths of our Catholic faith. He composed verse and fit them to popular tunes in each of the countries where he served. For the people, this was a very successful way of spreading the Good News since the people sang these songs in the streets and in their homes. St. Francis also spent long hours in silence and prayer, asking Jesus to give him guidance and inspiration to spread the Word of God.

Saint John Damascene – December 4

St. John Damascene has the double honor of being the last but one of the fathers of the Eastern Church, and the greatest of her poets. He said, "The one who seeks God continually will find him, for God is in everything." St. John taught that religious art can be used as a way for us to understand the truths of our faith. He wanted the people to realize that we do not worship images, but do use them to consider the wonderful ways that God has revealed himself to us. When you look at your Christmas cards this year and see a picture of the Baby Jesus consider the wonder of the Incarnation, that God became man.

Saint Nicholas – December 6

There really was a St. Nicholas of Myra. He had a wonderful reputation for holiness long before the Church began formal process of beatification. He was recognized as a saint by popular acceptance without investigation and authentication of claimed miracles. St. Nicholas was a generous and kind bishop who helped the poor in many ways especially children and their families. St. Nicholas in his bishop's attire will visit our "Come To Bethlehem" program on December 10 and he will have a gift for each person who visits with him.

Saint Ambrose – December 7

St. Ambrose is sometimes called the "Singing Bishop." During a particularly difficult time in Church history, he and his parishioners stayed in Milan's Basilica from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday in order to protect the sanctity of the church. During that week they sang hymns of praise and did not resort to violence even though there were soldiers surrounding this great church. He is a great saint hero, because he was a true shepherd of his flock. Imagine when 33 years old Ambrose had it all in terms of a material world. He was a successful lawyer, held an important position as governor of Milan, and owned a large estate. How he became a bishop is most interesting because at the time the people and the politicians were demanding he be their bishop, he had not even been baptized.

Saint Lucy – December 13

St. Lucy was killed in the fourth-century because she chose to be a follower of Jesus. At that time, it was illegal to be a Christian. She wanted to give up all of her wealth and devote her life to the poor. Instead of being able to follow her dream, she became a victim of oppression. Her life shows us that life in the light of Jesus is worth devoting your life and it is worth dying for. At our "Come To Bethlehem" program on December 10 starting at Noon, there will be more information about St. Lucy. Each family will have an opportunity to plant Lucy wheat.

St. Columbkille Parish Advent Reconciliation Service TBA – Check the Bulletin Confessions – Every Saturday from 12:00 (Noon) to 1:00 PM

All parish families (especially with children in 3rd grade and 12th grade) are encouraged to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. St. Columbkille Parish will have an Advent Reconciliation Service in December. The date will be announced in the bulletin. Fr. Domenic is making arrangements to have five priests to hear confessions. All students and their families are invited, of course, to go to confession on Saturdays from Noon until 1 PM or to contact Fr. Domenic for other arrangements. There will not be time scheduled during regular religious education classes for confessions this year during Advent and Lent. It is difficult to get additional confessors during class times and Fr. Domenic cannot hear all of the confessions of our close to 500 in 3rd through 8th Grade by himself.

K- 8 Religious Education/ CCD Class December 2011 Schedule

Mondays 4:30 -6 PM

Dec 5 – Regular Class
Dec 12 – Regular Class
Dec 19 – No Class
Dec 26 – No Class
Merry Christmas!
Happy New Year!
Jan 2 – Regular Class

Mondays 6:30–8 PM

Dec 5 – Regular Class
Dec 12 – Regular Class
Dec 19 – No Class
Dec 26 – No Class
Merry Christmas!
Happy New Year !
Jan 2 – Regular Class

Wednesdays 5:30–7PM

Dec 7 – No Class
Immaculate Conception
Dec 14 – Regular Class
Dec 21 – No class
Merry Christmas!
Dec 28 – No Class
Happy New Year!

Saturdays 9– 10:30 AM

Dec 3 – Regular Class
Dec 10 – Regular Class
Dec 17 – Regular Class
Dec 24 – No Class
Merry Christmas!
Dec 31 – No class
Happy New Year!

K- 8 Religious Education/ CCD Class January 2012 Schedule

Mondays 4:30 -6 PM

Jan 2 – Regular Class
Jan 9 – Regular Class
Jan 16 – Regular Class
Jan 23 – Regular Class
Jan 30 – Regular Class

Mondays 6:30-8 PM

Jan 2 – Regular Class
Jan 9 – Regular Class
Jan 16– Regular Class
Jan 23 – Regular Class
Jan 30 – Regular Class

Wednesdays 5:30– 7PM

Jan 4 – Regular Class
Jan 11 – Regular Class
Jan 18– Regular Class
Jan 25 –No Class
Volunteer In Service

Saturdays 9-10:30 AM

Jan 7 – Regular Class
Jan 14 – Regular Class
Jan 21 – Regular Class
Jan 28 – No Class
Volunteer In Service

Plan Ahead – There will be class on Wednesday, February 29, 2012 (Leap Year Day)

Epiphany Celebration for all Children (Grades K-8) in January All St. Columbkille Children (grades K-8) invited

We are going to have our Epiphany Celebrations each class day from January 2 through January 7 during regular class time and attendance will be taken. The Epiphany celebration days are as follows: Monday Classes – January 2 (4:30 – 6:00 PM); Monday 7th & 8th Grade Classes – January 2 (6:30 – 8:00 PM); Wednesday Classes – January 4 (5:30 – 7:00 PM), and Saturday Classes – January 7 (9:00 – 10:30 AM). The season of Christmas does not end the day after Christmas and at St. Columbkille we will continue to celebrate all the way until January 7 in our religious education classes. How about that? Our Epiphany Celebration will include a lesson about the visit of the Magi, an interesting Epiphany game with a real message, and refreshments. **This is a regular CCD class day, however, our celebration also includes other children from the parish who attend Catholic schools.** All are welcome.

Adult Volunteer Help Needed for Each Epiphany Celebration

Parents, grandparents, guardians, and other adults are you interested in helping at one of our Epiphany Celebrations? Please call the Religious Education Office (724.695.2146) and let us know which day and time you can help: Monday, January 2 (4:30 – 6:00 or 6:30 – 8:00 PM; Wednesday, January 4 (5:30 – 7:00 PM); and Saturday, January 7 (9:00 -10:30 AM). All volunteers must have taken the Protecting God’s Children workshop, have PA Act 33 and 34 Clearances on file, registered on the Diocese of Pittsburgh database, and signed necessary church documents.



**Sacrament of Confirmation to
Be Celebrated
At St. Columbkille Parish**

**On Thursday, March 8 at 7 PM
Bishop David Zubik, confirming**

Fr. Domenic received a letter from Bishop Zubik's office stating that Confirmation will be celebrated on Thursday, March 8 here at St. Columbkille at 7 PM. Bishop David Zubik will be the confirming bishop. Keep our 8th Graders in your prayers that they may decide to seriously prepare in heart and mind so that this is the year for them to be confirmed. Fr. Domenic will meet with each of the students throughout this year in anticipation of their reception of the Holy Spirit in Confirmation.

Confirmation Retreats

Two dates, Thursday, January 12 and Wednesday, January 18, are scheduled for our Confirmation candidates and their sponsors and/or parents to attend a special Confirmation retreat at the St. Paul of the Cross Retreat Center. Mrs. Mundis and Mr. Ploof's classes are scheduled for January 12. Mrs. Csonka and Mr. Grecko's classes are scheduled for January 18. The requested cost for each retreat participant is \$20 per person. The parish will pay for bus transportation. The retreat focuses on prayer, what it means to be a confirmed Catholic, what are the responsibilities for the confirmed, the role of sponsors & parents with the newly confirmed, and the relationship of sponsor to candidate. Please pray for our Confirmation students that they are open to the spiritual benefits of their retreat.

**Come to Bethlehem and Christmas Pageant
Sign Up By December 5**

Imagine how fantastic it will be to have the Parish Hall transformed into a busy Bethlehem Market Place as we think about when Jesus was born. The angels brought the good news of Jesus' birth first to ordinary people, the shepherds. The shepherds were at work, tending their sheep, when they witness a most important event in mankind's history. We have an ambitious plan to create a truly memorable parish family Advent/Christmas Experience for parishioners of all ages. "Everyone" is invited to watch and participate in our Annual Christmas Pageant and walk through the city's busy marketplace on December 10 from Noon until 2 PM.

We will have tents set up to create the many booths in the Bethlehem Market Place. Each "booth" will tell something about the first Christmas. The following booths may be visited: The Census Taker; The Tax Collector; Mary, the Mother of God, Remembered; St. Joseph, the Foster of Jesus, Stand; The Celestial Choirs; The Heavenly Angels; St. Nicholas' Home; The Star Gazers Center; The Shepherds Stable; "Sands of Bethlehem" – An Artisan Stand; St. Lucy's wheat stand, and The Bethlehem Café.

Students in Preschool through 6th Grade are invited to be shepherds, shepherdesses, and angels. 7th, 8th and High School Students are invited to assume key roles in the pageant and to take care of booths. All adults are encouraged to have an active part in this special program. Be sure to sign up by December 5. Call the religious ed office (724.695.2146) for more information.

Gifts for Others
**Reminder Donations for Little Sisters of
the Poor Home Due December 3**



Thanks to all who have brought in items for this year outreach collection for the residents of the Little Sisters of the Poor Home in Pittsburgh. There is still time to bring in your gift items such as white socks for the men and women, small gifts, writing supplies, stamps, wrapped candy, wrapped crackers, etc. Help is needed to pack the individual gifts on December 6 and with the delivery on December 15. If you and your family are interested in helping, please contact Dr. Josie (724.695.2146).

Thanks Weekly Volunteers – You Are Wonderful

“Everyone is busy these days” - “Everyone works in the home and outside of the home” - and yet, we are truly blessed to have 75 individuals who volunteer each week to spread the good news of Jesus in word and action. Thank you for your true witness to what it means to be a Catholic and for your donation of time, talent and energy! May God reward you for your generosity. It is wonderful that you take time from your busy schedule to be with us.

St. Columbkille No Peanut Policy

As we prepare for the celebration of Christmas that usually brings with it parties here at St. Columbkille. Please remember when you send in treats that we are trying to be as “peanut free” as possible. Remember to read the ingredient labels before sending in any treats or foods to the classrooms because foods you may not have thought to contain peanuts could be manufactured with peanut oil or could contain traces of peanuts. Baked goods purchased in a store or made at someone’s house are not necessarily safe.

Parents of children with food allergies are asked to contact the religious ed office with dietary requirements. We want to keep all children safe when attending our classes.



Snow Days and Cancellations for Classes and Special Events

When it is necessary to cancel classes or a special event because of poor weather conditions or power outages, notification will be recorded on the St. Columbkille Religious Education phone recording (724.695.2146) and on local TV and radio broadcasts and websites (KDKA, WPXI, and WTAE). If in doubt, call the religious education office.

Attendance for CCD Religious Education Classes

This is a reminder: regular attendance at religious education classes is important. Students who frequently miss without a serious excuse may not be passed onto the next level. If you know ahead of time that you or your child will be missing a class, please inform the catechist or call the Religious Ed. office (724.695.2146). No child will be denied the reception of a sacrament (First Reconciliation and Holy Communion or Confirmation), however, because of poor attendance and lack of attention they may need to wait a year.

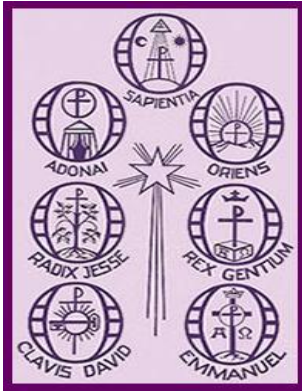
Early Dismissal and Late Arrival

Requests to leave early or arrive late should be rare, however, your family may have a need to have a student dismissed early from class or may arrive late for a class. We must have a signed note from a parent or guardian for an early dismissal on file in the office. An adult must come to the “ramp door” in the rear of the building to pick up children for early dismissal. Children are not permitted to leave the building and go out into the parking lot to wait by themselves. It is for the safety of all of our children.

O ANTIPHONS OVERVIEW

December 17 - 24

On the seven days before Christmas, beginning with December 17, the Church recites or chants the *O Antiphons*. The *O Antiphons* express the Church's longing and expectation for the Messiah. The Benedictine monks arranged these antiphons with a definite purpose. If one starts with the last title and takes the first letter of each one — Emmanuel, Rex, Oriens, Clavis, Radix, Adonai, Sapientia — the Latin words *ero cras* are formed, meaning, "Tomorrow, I will come." Therefore, the Lord Jesus, whose coming we have prepared for in Advent and whom we have addressed in these seven Messianic titles, now speaks to us in joyful conclusion. (Fr. William Saunders)



O WISDOM December 17 Sapientia

O Wisdom, who came from the mouth of the Most High, reaching from end to end and ordering all things mightily and sweetly, **Come, and teach us the way of prudence.** The "all-seeing eye" represents the all-knowing and ever-present God. The lamp is a symbol of wisdom taken from the parable of the wise and foolish virgins in Matthew 25.

O LORD AND RULER December 18 Adonai

O Lord and Ruler of the House of Israel, who appeared to Moses in the flame of the burning bush and gave him the law on Sinai: **Come and redeem us with outstretched arm.** The tablets of stone are a picture of the Ten Commandments given by God to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

O ROOT OF JESSE December 19 O Radix Jesse

O Root of Jesse, who stands for an ensign of the people, before whom kings shall keep silence and unto whom the Gentiles shall make supplication: **Come to deliver us, and tarry not.** The flower which springs up from the root of Jesse is another figure of Christ. Isaiah prophesied that the Savior would be born from the root of Jesse, that He would sit upon the throne of David, and in Christ this prophecy is fulfilled.

O KEY OF David December 20 O Clavis David

O Key of David, and Scepter of the House of Israel, who opens and no man shuts, who shuts and no man opens; **Come and bring forth the captive from his prison,** he who sits in darkness and in the shadow of death. The key is the emblem of authority and power. Christ is the Key of the House of David who opens to us the full meaning of the scriptural prophecies, and reopens for all mankind the gate of Heaven.

O RADIANT DAWN December 21 O Oriens

O Dawn, splendor of eternal light, and sun of justice, **come, and shine on those seated in darkness,** and in the shadow of death. Just as the natural sun gives light and life to all upon whom its rays fall, so Christ, the Rising Dawn, dispels darkness and brings eternal life and light

O KING OF THE GENTILES December 22 O Rex Gentium

O King of the Gentiles and their desired One, the Cornerstone that makes both one; **Come, and deliver man, whom You formed out of the dust of the earth.** The crown and scepter signify Christ's universal kingship. As we sing in the fifth O Antiphon, Christ is not only the King of the Jewish nation, but the "Desired One of all," the cornerstone which unites both Jew and Gentile.

O EMMANUEL December 23

O Emmanuel, God with us, our King and Lawgiver, the expected of the nations and their Savior: **Come to save us, O Lord our God.** The manger reminds us of the simplicity and poverty surrounding the birth of Jesus and is representative of His life of humility.