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THE GIFT OF THE LITURGY OF LESSONS AND CAROLS has been passed down for over 100 years, beginning in 1880 as a way for future Archbishop of Canterbury Edward White Benson to herd parishioners away from the pubs on Christmas Eve. However, on a theological level, this compilation of music and readings sought to offer hope through the prophetic story of Christ's coming.

Although it originated as an English tradition, Lessons and Carols has become a widespread celebration for Catholics and Protestants alike. Because this liturgy takes place outside of the Eucharistic celebration of the Mass, it allows for the full and active participation of every congregation. Generally, Lessons and Carols is separated into 9 parts; beginning with Old Testament Scriptures that point to the hope of a coming Messiah, the liturgy concludes with Gospel passages that demonstrates the Old Testament's prophetic fulfillment.

St. Phillip Neri's Lessons and Carols will be Sunday, Dec 11th at 2pm. It lasts about an hour and will conclude with light refreshments. The liturgy will be celebrated with the aid of the Adult Choir, Rejoice Youth and Ring Choir, the Handbell Ensemble, and a Brass Quintet. This will be the 9th year the parish has offered this liturgical celebration as we prepare ourselves for Christ's coming.

There is hardly a lack of Christmas music this time of year. Since Halloween we have been bombarded with Jingle Bells and Mariah Carey. But the beauty of Lessons and Carols lies in the fact this music dramatically demonstrates the beauty of the wisdom within these scripture passages. While we may not need to be herded away from the pubs as we did in 1880, we are still in need of a shepherd's crook to pull us away from the secular consumerism, and back into the mystery of Christ's Incarnation.

A Message From Father Fabio

Advent:

A TIME TO PREPARE OUR HEARTS

Amidst the rapid commercialization of Christmas, we often forget that the season of Advent is meant to prepare our hearts for Christ. With too much focus on the gifts we must buy and the ones we will receive, or how impressive we want our lights and decorations to be, we may become self-focused, and not leave room in our hearts and minds for Christ. But Christ is calling us to something greater. Let us not be like the innkeeper who had no room to receive the Christ Child. Let us not be so busy with all the external preparations of Christmas that we leave no room for Christ Himself.

Though the Christmas season is one of hope and joy, Advent is also a time to prepare our hearts for His coming—not only His first coming at the Nativity, but also His second coming at the end of time. This is why the readings of Advent “call us to be alert and ready, not weighted down and distracted by the cares of this world” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “What is Advent?”).

The commercialism of Christmas often distracts us with the things of this world. But we must remember that Christ is coming. In order to prepare ourselves to receive Him, we must learn to detach ourselves from sin and worldly matters—though we should be grateful for the gifts that God has given us, we cannot put our hope for happiness in them. Practices of penance and almsgiving help us to detach ourselves from these things and remind us that only God can fulfill the deep desires of our hearts. This is especially important to remember as we prepare for the coming of Our Savior! If we have properly prepared our hearts through the Sacrament of Penance and through fasting, prayer, and almsgiving, we can await His coming with peace, hope, and joy.

So, let’s consider how to make room for Christ this Christmas. Let’s consider what little sacrifice we can make this Advent, however small, in order to rely more on the Lord to satisfy the desires of our hearts. Let us receive His forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance. Let us offer up our prayers, sacrifices, gifts, and service out of love for Him and His children. And let us prepare our hearts for when He comes again.

Have a blessed Advent and a joyful Christmas!

Fr. Fabio Refosco, C.O.

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The “O” Antiphons- Invoking Christ in Seven Messianic Titles

“O Come O Come, Emmanuel!” is one of the most popular songs we hear during the Advent season. But why? What does this mean? The “O” Antiphons are the verses for this beloved ancient hymn and play a crucial role in our prayer of longing for the coming of Christ both at His birth and at the end of time.

An antiphon is a short chant sung like a refrain in a song. The *O Antiphons* (also known as *Greater Antiphons* or *The Great ‘O’*) are used during the Liturgy of the Hours during Vespers (Evening Prayer). Liturgy of the Hours (also known as the Divine Office) are a four-week cycle of psalms, scripture readings, prayers, songs, and spiritual writings that are prayed between five to seven times a day at assigned hours. Consecrated religious and priests are bound (meaning they are required) to pray Liturgy of the Hours at certain times during the day depending on their community, but the laity is highly encouraged to pray the hours as well. (For more information on Liturgy of the Hours or to begin praying it, please visit www.iBrivery.com.)

During Vespers there is a portion of the prayer called the Magnificat where we sing Our Lady’s beautiful song of joy and profound humility. She starts by saying: “My soul proclaims the greatness of my Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior...” There is wisdom behind placing the antiphons here. Our Lady sang her Magnificat to Elizabeth (Luke 1:46-55) as Elizabeth felt her child, John the Baptist, leap in her womb (Luke 1:41). The word “Magnificat” is short for “Magnificat anima mea Dominum,” which is translated “My soul magnifies the Lord.” Placing these antiphons, crying out in anticipation for Our Lord’s coming, directly before and after Mary’s song, show great reverence and importance of our Lady’s fiat to carrying the infant Jesus in her womb.

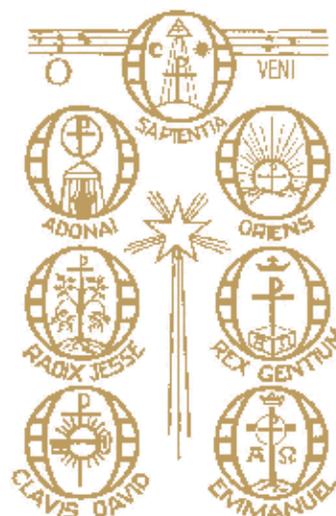
The *O Antiphons* are prayed during the Octave (eight days) before Christmas, December 17th-23rd. They speak of biblical messianic hopes found within the writings of the Old Testament that announce the proclamation of Christ’s coming. They reveal a deep, impatient longing for His coming to save mankind. They celebrate Christ for both His birth at Bethlehem, and also for His Second Coming at the end of time.

The following are the *O Antiphons*:

- December 17: O Sapientia (O Wisdom)
- December 18: O Adonai (O Lord and Ruler)
- December 19: O Radix Jesse (O Root of Jesse)
- December 20: O Clavis David (O Key of David)
- December 21: O Oriens (O Dayspring)
- December 22: O Rex Gentium (O King of Nations)
- December 23: O Emmanuel (O God with Us)

Although the exact origin of the *O Antiphons* is unknown, they date back to the sixth century and entered liturgical use in the eighth century. Starting with the last title and taking the first letter of each invocation is the word “ERO CRAS,” which means “Tomorrow I Will Come.” How profound and true a statement this is!

As stated in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, “The Tradition of the Church proposes to the faithful certain rhythms of praying intended to nourish continual prayer.” (2698) One way to foster a rhythm of constant prayer is to pray the Liturgy of the Hours. This Advent Season, if you aren’t already, consider taking time to pray Morning and Evening Prayer and meditating on the anticipatory *O Antiphons*. 🙏



WALKING WITH Mary

WE DON'T LIVE IN A CULTURE renowned for its mindfulness. In this time of convenience and instant gratification, the Advent of Christ's coming beckons us to slow down. As many mothers know from personal experience – the baby comes when the baby is ready. That is, in their own time. In God's time.

There is a women's service organization at Loyola Marymount University whose beloved chaplain, Sr. Peg Dolan R.S.H.M., began every retreat with the same advice: "Imagine yourself walking with Mary, 9 months pregnant." There is no rushing the Theotokos, the God-bearer. There is no destination so important, no schedule so binding, that would bring us to hurry along the Blessed Mother as she carries the incarnate Word within her. With that in mind, how would you walk differently, if you were the one accompanying her?

Each step would be intentional. Perhaps you would be supporting her with one hand on her waist and another under her elbow. You would be watching her steps, leading her away from uneven ground. You'd pay attention to things that usually pass you by: the way the grass grows in cracks in the concrete, making paths for God's smallest creatures. You're grateful for the cool breeze that caresses your faces, as you labor to hold the one who holds the Light of the World. You see the flowers turn their tiny faces towards her, offering delight at the sight of the Seat of Wisdom.

This practice of paying attention is hard to maintain, but the reality is that each and every moment is pregnant with God's presence. Christ is truly present in each person we encounter, whether we acknowledge him or not. And so this reminder to be gentle and intentional, to walk with a mother whose belly is so big she can't see her toes, is a reminder to recognize Him in the rest of His creation. 🙏



image: Pixabay



Our Lady of Guadalupe

On the morning of Saturday, 9 December 1531 a man named Juan Diago was on his way to Mass when he heard music and a beautiful voice calling out his name. Drawing closer, it was Our Blessed Mother appearing to him as the “woman clothed with the sun” (Revelation 12:1), pregnant with the Child Jesus. The location was Tepeyac Hill, the site of a former Aztec Temple. She requested a church to be erected at that site in her honor. Juan went at once and told the Bishop of Our Lady’s request, at which he did not believe. Later that day she appeared to him again presenting the request anew, and the following day Juan returned to the Bishop with Our Lady’s request. The Bishop asked for a truly miraculous occurrence to happen to prove that this was a true request.

On December 11th Juan’s uncle became very ill and Juan had to find a priest to minister to him on his deathbed. Early the next morning Juan set out. To avoid the possibility of seeing Our Lady, Juan went a different route, but our Lady came to him regardless. When Juan shared his reasoning with her, she said to Juan the now powerfully famous quote that many find great comfort in: “*¿No estoy yo aquí que soy tu madre?*” (“Am I not here, I who am your mother?”) and assured Juan of his uncle’s recovery. She asked Juan to gather roses from the cold, barren summit of Tepeyac. This in itself was a miracle, as roses were not to be in season in the cold of December.

Juan returned to Bishop, and as he opened his tilma to reveal the roses, a beautiful image of Our Lady was imprinted onto the cloak. The image is described as a woman that is pregnant (having on a black maternity band) wearing a blue-green mantle with stars on it that are arranged as they were in the sky the morning of the first apparition, and the gold fringe of her cloak mirrors the surrounding countryside. Her head is bowed and hands folded in prayer. Under her feet, she is shown to be stomping upon a crescent moon, which is a symbol of the Aztec god, Quetzalcoatl. In the center of her robe, overlying her womb, is a four petal flower in the shape of a cross which is the sign of the Divine and the center of the cosmic order to the Aztec. This is showing that the child within her, Jesus, is the true life and divinity.

The following day (December 13th) Juan visited his healed uncle who shared that Our Lady appeared to him, and was to inform the Archbishop of his miraculous recovery and that she requested to be known under the title of *Santa María, de Guadalupe* (Our Lady of Guadalupe).

The tilma is more than a symbol and image of our Lady. To this very day, scientists are analyzing this miraculous piece of material. A few of the many things that make this tilma miraculous are that this cloak is made of agave or maguey plant, which is only to last about 30 years, but to this day is in phenomenal condition. The image that is imprinted onto our lady, scientists say, is like a

“picture that was taken” being itself iridescent, and cannot be produced by hand.

If you zoom in very close to Our Lady’s eyes, they reflect the images of the witnesses present at the moment of the tilma’s unveiling. The eyes also the refractory characteristics of human eyes, meaning that they expand and contract. This image is also not touching the tilma, and is said to be “floating” on top of it. There is no undersketch, and an examination has revealed that there are no brush strokes. In addition, the origination of the coloring has not yet been discovered by scientists.

When being tested by a biophysicist with infrared technology, the tilma was discovered to maintain a constant temperature of 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit, which is the same temperature of a living person. Upon examining the stomach of the image with a stethoscope, there is a heartbeat of 115, corresponding to the pulse rate of a child in the womb.

The powerful story of our Lady of Guadalupe has been a source of comfort and conversion for millions of individuals over the years. As we venerate her this December 12th, let us recall the words that she spoke to Juan Diago: “*Listen and understand, my littlest son, let nothing frighten and afflict you or trouble your heart... Am I not here, I, who am your mother? Are you not under my shadow? Am I not your health? Are you not by chance held in my mantle?*” 

YOUR GPS GUIDE

for the Christmas Season

*During this often hectic time, we want to keep our focus on the reason for the season and foster the Christmas spirit of generosity and Christ-like love. How do we do this? As we strive to embrace discipleship as a way of life, our guide along the journey to God throughout the year is our **GPS: Giving, Prayer, and Serving.***

*Here are **12 ways** we can give, pray, and serve one another this Christmas Season, whether we're in church, in the community, or at home:*

GIVE

- 1. Angel Tree.** As usual, we will have an Angel Tree this year where you can donate a gift to families in need, and bring a smile to children whose parents would not be able to give them many presents otherwise.
- 2. Donations.** Of course, St. Philip Neri is always in need of your donations for the upkeep of the church and all of its ministries. You might prayerfully consider donating any amount you're able, or even committing to an ongoing donation if you haven't already. Or you might consider donating to any of your favorite charities as a special Christmas gift.
- 3. Thoughtful Gifts.** We can also be especially thoughtful about the gifts we give friends and family. Before buying a gift, we might want to ask ourselves: Is this actually something they would like or need, or is it just something I would want? If you have the time, you might also consider something homemade. This may especially be a great option for kids! Parents could even make a fun activity out of making Christmas treats or crafts to give to loved ones (a win-win-win situation: saving money, teaching your kids to be creative and give to others, and spending quality time together!)
- 4. The Gift of Presence.** Take time to be present with friends and family, putting away phones and other distractions as much as possible. Give the gift of your presence— after all, the good times with loved ones are what we remember most!





PRAY

5. Prayer Ministries. If you haven't already, you might look into our prayer ministries. These include Eucharistic Adoration, Ask-Seek-Knock Prayer Ministry, JOY in the Spirit, Legion of Mary and Pilgrim Rosary Group. Additional information can be found in our 2022-2023 Ministry of Discipleship Book.

6. Advent Reflections and Jesse Tree. At home, you could read an advent reflection every day leading up to Christmas (you might also do this along with a Jesse tree).

7. Devotions. You can also pray the Rosary or other Catholic devotions together at home. In particular, you might ask your family and friends how you can pray for them and offer these intentions up while you pray these devotions.

8. Offer It Up. Ask your kids, friends, and family not just what they would like for Christmas, but how you can pray for them during Advent. We can also offer up our daily struggles for these intentions, making these prayers even more powerful. We might even choose a small sacrifice to offer up during Advent (like we do during Lent).

SERVE

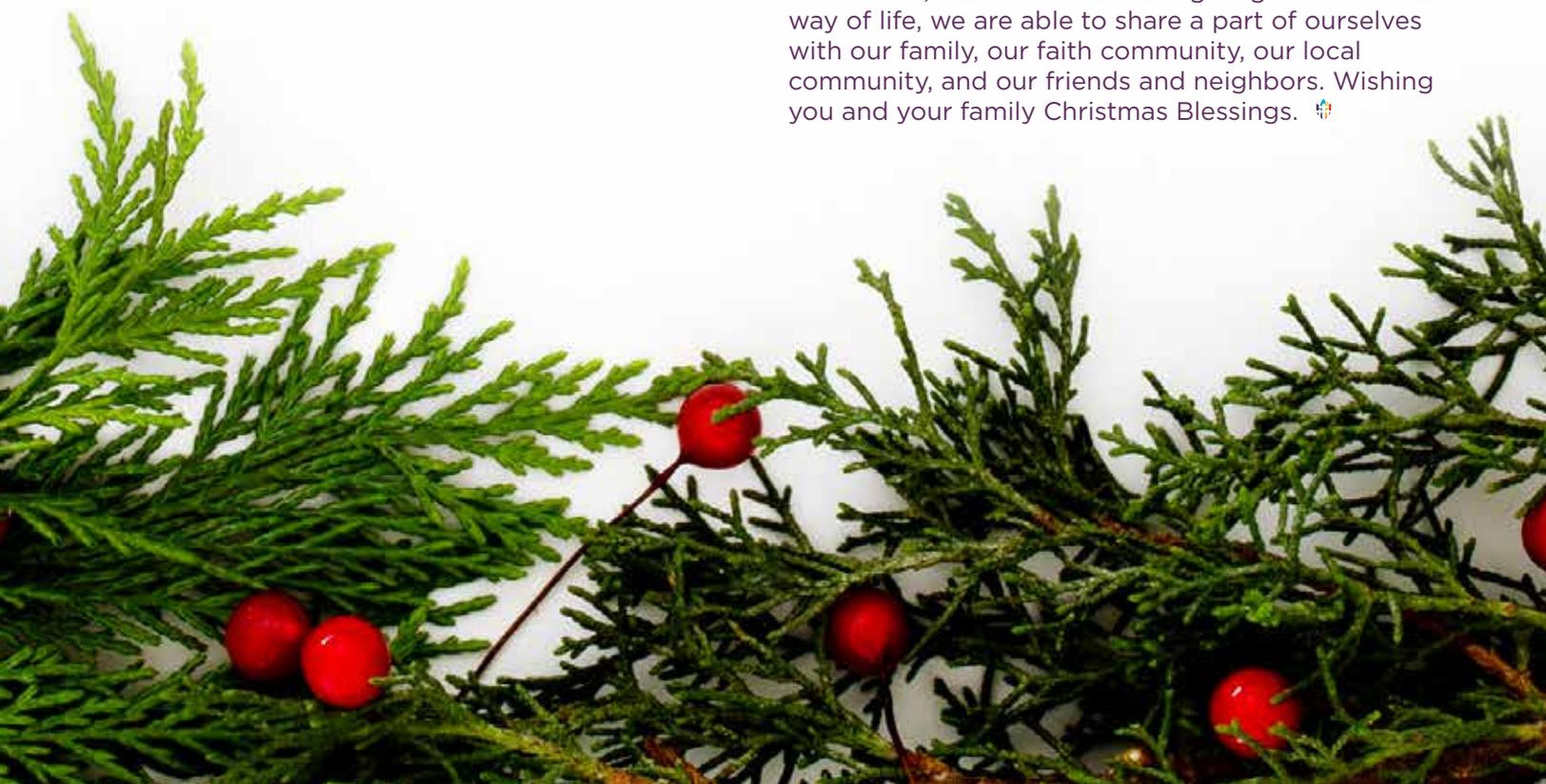
9. Church Ministries. We have so many service outreach opportunities. These ministries truly live out the works of mercy: feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, comforting the sorrowful, bringing the Eucharist to the homebound, advocating for life, welcoming people into the church, and so on.

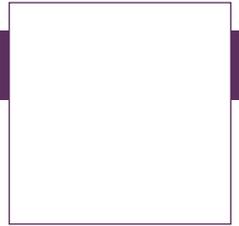
10. Christmas Caroling. Another fun Christmas activity is to go caroling at a nursing home! Those at the nursing home would look forward to having some company and celebrating Christmastime with a "joyful noise" (even if it isn't completely in tune).

11. Community Volunteering. Even outside of the parish, you might volunteer at a local toy drive or food bank, as a special gift to those in need this Christmas Season.

12. Serving Family. If you're a teen or young adult, you could offer to babysit for your family or relatives, so parents can have some time to themselves or to go out on a nice holiday date night. Or you could offer to do some extra chores around the house (Mom and Dad will really appreciate it!)

Remember, that when we make giving to others our way of life, we are able to share a part of ourselves with our family, our faith community, our local community, and our friends and neighbors. Wishing you and your family Christmas Blessings. ✨





St. Philip Neri

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An Advent Prayer for the Family

Heavenly Father, your son, Jesus, is your greatest gift to us, a great sign of your love. Guide us as we strive to walk in that love together as a family this Advent. As we prepare our hearts for Christmas, bring us closer to each other and to your son. Give us the grace and strength we need every day. Help us to always trust in you. Come, Lord Jesus, lead all people closer to you. Come and dispel the darkness of our world with the light of your love.

Amen.