

WELCOME TO ST. JOSEPH – ST. LAWRENCE PARISH

“Two Churches, One Parish”

Growing as Disciples of Jesus; Making Disciples for Jesus
Fourth Sunday of Advent – December 20, 2020

St. Joseph of the Valley: 31151 207th Street, (Rural) Leavenworth, KS 66048
St. Lawrence: 211 West Riley, Easton, KS 66020
Parish Mailing Address: P.O. Box 129, Easton, KS 66020

Father Francis Bakyor, Pastor
Easton Rectory Phone: 913-773-5712
Father's cell: 913-235-6837

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Website: www.sjslparish.org
“LIKE” us on Facebook for new announcements

THIS WEEK'S SCHEDULE:

TUES	Dec. 22	06:00 pm	STL	For the Poor
Adoration will follow Mass until 7:30 p.m. - CANCELLED				
THUR	Dec. 24	04:00 pm	SJV	Donald and Edith (Sam) Erzen †
THUR	Dec. 24	07:00 pm	SJV	Parishioners of SJ-SL
THUR	Dec. 24	10:00 pm	STL	Parishioners of SJ-SL
FRI	Dec. 25	09:00 am	STL	Kenneth and Vermetta Herken
SAT	Dec. 26	05:00 pm	SJV	Rick Coffey † Mary Coffey †
SUN	Dec. 27	09:00 am	STL	Richard Heim †

Confessions: SAT-4:30 pm at SJV; SUN-8:30 at STL

PLEASE NOTE:

Attendance for Masses is limited. We will be seating every other pew. We must continue to practice social distancing (of at least 6 feet). Masks are required to be worn. We are offering four Masses per week. Please do not feel obligated to attend weekend Masses — weekday Masses will work just fine if it fits into your family's schedule. Please see online info for restrictions and guidance.

Please sign up online for one of our Christmas Masses.
<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/9040a4aa9ab2aa1fa7-stjosephst>

Please pray for the sick, especially: Phil Bell, Susie Beying, Jennifer Brushwood, Carl Davidson, George Dean, Carolyn DeMaranville, Vince Eimer, Tom Flack, Tina Gaspard, Alan Halstead, Marly Heim, Frank Heintzelman, Jim Heintzelman, Lydia Heintzelman, Melanie Herken, Jon Highfill, Trista Highfill, Mark Hund, Arlene Jennings, Wendi Johnston, Michael Jones, Elmer Karczewski, Phillip Leon, Kelly Long, Joyce Lowe, Mary Meinert, Jeni Mettelstedt, Don Navinsky, Kay Nocktonick, Dannie Phillips, Adam Pineau, Mike Pursel, Mary M. Ruhlman, Kim Sachse, Tanner Siebenmorgen, Julie Simonis, Jim (Poly) Sloan, Gary Stafford, Aaron Welch, Louise Wistuba and Nick Yuska.

Prayer List for Our Soldiers: ARMY: 1LT Daniel Broaddus, Pvt. David Crook, Lexi (Skaggs) Hargis, Major Bryan Herken, SPC Derrick Hunt, SGT Colby Seifert, William Stradley. AIRFORCE: E-4 Robert W. Herken, TSGT Scott Loecher, E-3 Connor Schuler, A1C Noah Tattershall. NAVY: ADDA Jason P. Herken, YNS1 (SS) Kevin Lansing.

Prayer for Vocations: Brother Seelos (Tyler Lunsford).

OUR PARISH NEWS

COLLECTION: Thank you for your gifts to our parish! Collections received is unavailable but will be published next week. Last week's on-line collection was \$254.23. Thank you for your generosity.

SPECIAL COLLECTION: Will be held at the Christmas masses for Catholic Charity. Last Fiscal Year your financial gift to Catholic Charities of Northeast helped provide essential programs and services to 75,088 people throughout the 21 counties of our Archdiocese. On behalf of the who are hungry and homeless, people who are alone and sick, and families that struggle with poverty, thank you.

ENVELOPES: The weekly donation envelopes for 2021 are in the back of each of the churches for pickup for whoever wants to use them.

CHRISTMAS MASSES SCHEDULE:

We hope this finds you safe and healthy. Christmas Mass schedule is below. Christmas Mass attendance will be limited per Archdiocese guidelines (50 at SJV and 100 at SL) with precautions in place to help keep our parish members safe. To allow as many parish members to attend as possible Father has added an additional mass. Parish members are encouraged to sign up early to allow people to plan as necessary. To sign up for Mass, visit this link <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/9040a4aa9ab2aa1fa7-stjosephst> or call Jason Nichols (913-683-2661) or Sharon Wagner (913-683-4495) to reserve a spot. As a reminder the COVID precautions put in place to help keep our members safe are listed below. We wish everyone good health. We hope you can join us! Blessings to all, SJ-SL Parish Council

Christmas Schedule

Dec. 24 th	4:00 pm	SJV
Dec. 24 th	7:00 pm	SJV
Dec. 24 th	10:00 pm	STL
Dec. 25 th	9:00 am	STL
Dec. 31	5:00 pm	SJV
Jan. 1	9:00 am	STL

PLEASE NOTE: There will NOT be a 5pm mass at SJV on Christmas Eve – it has been changed to 4pm, in order to accommodate another mass later that evening.

COVID Precautions

- Mask must be worn at all times, except for reception of Holy Communion.
- Single line for Holy Communion (6ft Spacing).
- No communion from the cup, if taking on tongue please wait until the end.
- Congregational singing is suspended.
- Use hand sanitizer when entering/exiting.
- Bathrooms will be closed.
- Seating is front to back.
- Exiting church is back to front (6ft spacing).

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY: We are soliciting volunteers who would like to serve as our Parish Director of Religious Education (DRE), leading the effort to teach our children about their Catholic faith. Please prayerfully consider this incredibly fulfilling role within our parish. We are also open to co-DREs if that is an approach that works

for you. If you are interested please contact: Jason Nichols, phone: 913-683-2661 or email: jnichols@dfamilk.com OR Sharon Wagner, phone: 913-683-4495 or email: w5cattle@aol.com.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY: We are searching for a volunteer to clean the rectory twice a month. POC is Sharon Wagner, phone: 913-683-4495 or email: w5cattle@aol.com.

SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITY: The Finance Council is happy to announce that the parish will be accepting applications for one or more scholarships for Catholic school (K-16) attendance during the 2021-2022 academic year or Catholic camp attendance during summer 2021. The scholarship is made possible by donations specified for Catholic Education. Interested applicants should fill out the application form, attach either a report card or transcript, and provide contact information for a reference. Applications are **due by April 1, 2021**. The link to the application form is available on the parish website and parish Facebook page. If you cannot access the application form one of these ways, send an email to angela.broaddus@gmail.com to request the link. LINK: <https://forms.gle/TZprrU6dvCQ9wa9n7>

OTHER NEWS IN OUR ARCHDIOCESE

BABY SHOWER: The Knights of Columbus, Immaculate Council # 900 will be conducting their 21st annual Pro-Life Baby Shower throughout the month of January 2021. Donations of new and used clothing, diapers, baby formula or cash donations are very much needed and appreciated. Baskets will be located in the entries of area churches. The donations will then be given to Birthright of Leavenworth. For more information or questions, call Marty Moreno 913 702 4168, or Timothy J Lednicki 913 240 4122. Thank you in advance.

JURY PROTECTED THE UNBORN: In a Quad-City Times article (“Crack user gets 12 years for killing her unborn child”): This article states ‘a woman was convicted and sentenced to 12 years in prison for killing her unborn child by using crack cocaine during her pregnancy.’ I say bless that South Carolina jury for standing up for life of the unborn.

All of us in these United States should be outraged at the death of babies and against killing them in the womb or after birth. How can a few minutes or months decide when it is legal to kill or not legal to kill? Killing is wrong whenever it is done. Abortions are done with scissors, suction, injections of solutions or pills. Whatever the method, the end result is the same - a baby dies - just like the baby killed by cocaine. God gave us a commandment to love one another. That most certainly includes mothers and their babies.

Too many people are indifferent to or ignorant of the abortion holocaust that is going on. Partial-birth abortion, for instance, allows the ‘abortionist’ (I refuse to call him a doctor) to deliver all but the head and then suction out the baby's brains. The dead body is then removed. Now you can no longer claim ignorance or deny that abortion is murder. We have degraded our humanness. We have become blind to sin.

STEWARDSHIP: “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!” (Luke 1:28)

After Jesus, we look to Mary as an ideal steward. Her entire life was lived in obedience to God's call. Mary teaches us to live with joy for all we have been given. Just as the moon reflects the light of the sun, Mary reflects the light of Christ. Like Mary, we are called to reflect Christ's light to the world through our gratitude and generosity.

XAVIER CATHOLIC SCHOOL: Did you know that Xavier Catholic School has mitigated COVID with great success? We were able to be in-person from August 2020 - December 2020, without going remote for all students Pre-K - 8. Enrollment information for Xavier Catholic School 2021-22 school year is coming soon!

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(FOR POSTING ON THE CHURCH INTERNET SITE)

BRIGHTEN YOUR CHRISTMAS SEASON!

A Christmas Prayer for God's Blessing

Heavenly Father, help us to honor the birth of Jesus.

May we join in the praises of angels,

the gladness of the shepherds, and the worship of the wise men.

May the Light of your Son shine forth in this dark world.

May His peace take away our anxiety and fear.

Help us to forgive and to be forgiven.

Teach us to love one another as you love us. Amen.

Enjoy a **free virtual concert** with John Michael Talbot and other Catholic musical artists. To register go to SCRC.org/Christmas. The Christmas Concert is a 1-hour celebration that includes a dozen performances and a message of Christmas Inspiration

“PLANNED GIVING BRIEF: END OF THE YEAR TAX PLANNING”

Congress enacted two tax provisions to encourage charitable donations before the end of 2020. These include: 1. Increase in tax deduction for cash gifts: For donors that itemize their tax return, before the new legislation, the annual income limit was capped at 60% for cash gifts. The new legislation allows for charitable donations up to 100% of a donor's annual income. 2. New deduction: If you do not itemize when filing your tax return, to reduce your tax liability, you will be allowed to take a special tax deduction of up to \$300 for charitable donations. Visit the Archdiocesan planned giving website, CatholicPlannedGiving.com to learn more ways to maximize your financial resources to benefit your family, charitable giving, and make a grateful response to God for the abundant gifts in your life. As always, contact an attorney or tax advisor to learn what is best for your life.

NEW YEAR'S SPIRITUAL REFLECTION AND PLANNING

RETREAT To be held at Christ's Peace House of Prayer, 22131 Meager Road - Easton, KS, Friday, **Jan. 8th** starting at 5:30pm and ending on **Jan. 10th** at 4:30pm. Set aside time this year to focus on spiritual growth, Create growth goals for various roles, Devise steps to reach goals and Write a vision statement for the year. The structure of the retreat will allow ample time for you to do work on your plan. We will be providing resources and ideas to incorporate in your plan. There will be time to brainstorm and share our plans with others as well as time to meet with a spiritual director if you prefer to speak on an individual basis. Private Time for Prayer/Reflection, Daily Eucharistic Adoration, Praying of the Liturgy of the Hours, Confession and Mass at the local parish will also be available. The suggested donation is \$170/Single or \$250/Couples for the Cabins and Courtyard Rooms or \$100 for the Single Guest Rooms (Meals Included). To attend, send an email to: info@christspeace.com or call 913.773.8255.

CATHOLIC CHARITIES SNOWBALL 2021

Due to COVID-19, many businesses have closed their doors, and many jobs have been lost. As more and more families are facing financial hardships, they are turning to Catholic Charities for help. Your support to our mission has never been more critical as we continue to provide help, hope and hospitality across our 21-county service area. Snow Ball 2021 is sure to be unforgettable as the event shifts to an entirely virtual experience. Guests will host their own version of Snow Ball in their homes, much like the founders who started Snow Ball with a potluck dinner and a small gathering of family and friends over 47 years ago. Register now to join us on Saturday, **January 16, 2021**. Our hope is to expand, engage and celebrate hundreds of Snow Ball parties across the agency's 21-county service footprint and beyond! <https://catholiccharitiesks.org/special-events/snow-ball/> or Theresa Gaul 913.433.2068

MARCH FOR LIFE & TEENS ENCOUNTER CHRIST

We made the difficult decision not to take a delegation to March for Life in January in DC. But this opens up the possibility for teens to attend the Teens Encounter Christ (TEC) retreat. We will provide a small group retreat experience for high schoolers **on January 16-18, 2021** at Prairie Star Ranch (PSR). We will be following social distancing and other safety procedures that allowed Camp Tekakwitha to happen. TEC is a 3-day retreat based on the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ. TEC involves 16 and older adolescents encountering Christ in a way that many have never experienced before. On a TEC retreat, you will have the opportunity to grow in your relationship with Christ through talks, group discussion, individual reflection, prayer, and sharing in the Sacraments. The weekend retreats are led by a team of youth, adults and a priest as spiritual director. To sign up go to: www.sunflowertec.org

KANSAS MASS, MARCH & RALLY FOR LIFE IN TOPEKA!

The Kansas Mass, March & Rally for Life will take place this year in Topeka, KS on Thursday, **January 21st, 2021** to observe the National Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children and the 48th anniversary of Roe vs. Wade. Let's stand up for the full restoration of the legal guarantee of the right to life, in penance for the over 60 million lives lost, and to end violations to the dignity of the human person - both child and mother - committed through the act of abortion! 10:30 am Mass with the Kansas Bishops – www.livestream.com/ArchKCK/KSMassforLife 12:00 pm March to the State Capitol for the Kansans for Life Rally – In-person! Unfortunately, due to Covid gathering restrictions, in-person Mass attendance this year is by invitation only. All are invited to join in the March for Life from the Topeka Performing Arts Center to the Kansans for Life Rally at the State Capitol steps. Visit www.archkck.org/prolife for updated information and details on the day's event.

ONLINE MASSES: For those who may not be able to attend our parish masses, here are some of the masses that are available to watch on line or on television:

- For regular TV - Channel 38 airs Sunday morning Mass at 7:00am each week.
- For Dish and DirecTV - EWTN airs Sunday Mass a few times throughout the day.
- For livestream – here are some you may wish to look up:
 - Church of the Ascension, Overland Park - Sunday Masses at 8:15am, 10:00am, 11:45am & 5:00pm - <https://kcascension.org/>
 - Queen of the Holy Rosary, Wea - Sunday Mass at 8:30am - <https://qhrwea.church/watch-daily-mass>
 - St. Michael the Archangel, Leawood - Sunday Mass at 9:00am - <https://stmichaelcp.org/ecatholic-live>
- Here you can find links to Holy Masses online from different parishes all around the world. There is a link to see the calendar with the Catholic Holy Masses live online. Click on the chosen hour when you want to see the Holy Mass online. <https://mass-online.org/daily-holy-mass-live-online>

PRAYER FROM POPE FRANCIS DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

O Mary, you shine continuously on our journey as a sign of salvation and hope. We entrust ourselves to you, Health of the Sick. At the foot of the Cross you participated in Jesus' pain, with steadfast faith. You, Salvation of the Roman People, know what we need. We are certain that you will provide, so that, as you did at Cana of Galilee, joy and feasting might return after this moment of trial.

Help us, Mother of Divine Love, to conform ourselves to the Father's will and to do what Jesus tells us. He who took our sufferings upon Himself, and bore our sorrows to bring us, through the Cross, to the joy of the Resurrection. Amen.

We seek refuge under your protection, O Holy Mother of God. Do not despise our pleas – we who are put to the test – and deliver us from every danger, O glorious and blessed Virgin.

“THE HISTORY & LEGACY OF IMMACULATA HIGH SCHOOL” is now available for purchase from the publisher, Lulu.com. Access the link to order from Facebook pages “Forever Raiders”, “Immaculata High School Alumni” or “The History & Legacy of Immaculata High School”. Direct link is:

<http://www.lulu.com/shop/mary-ann-sachse-brown-and-marti-sachse-judson/the-history-legacy-of-immaculata-catholic-high-school-in-the-first-city-of-kansas/hardcover/product-24157407.html> This is a keepsake hardcover 120 page book with nearly 300 images. Available in color (best quality) or black and white.

NEW FOSTER CARE WEBSITE: You can make a difference in the lives of vulnerable children in Kansas! Sadly, every day in Kansas, children are removed from their homes by no fault of their own for a variety of reasons. Each of these children is a precious, unique gift from God who deserves a loving and safe environment where he or she can THRIVE! Because care of the orphan and works of mercy are part of the mission for all baptized Catholics, the Church is the solution to an overwhelmed Kansas foster system which is facing increased needs due to COVID-19.

Please visit the new Archdiocesan Foster Care Ministry Website at www.archkcks.com/foster to learn how you can help vulnerable children in our community and support the families who have answered the call to love and protect these children. If you are currently fostering or have adopted your child/ren from foster care, we want to connect with you to support you on your journey! Please join the Archdiocesan Foster Family by registering here: www.archkck.org/fostercaredatabase

THE CATHOLIC GUIDE FOR END-OF-LIFE AND ESTABLISHING OF

ADVANCE DIRECTIVES The Ethics Council that serves Archbishop Naumann has produced a comprehensive resource for end-of-life planning titled “Catholic Guide For End-Of Life and Establishing Of Advance Directives”. The purpose of the guide is to assist the faithful in making wise decisions in accordance with the teachings of our faith about complex treatments in grave illness or as life's end approaches. It also includes two Appendices for a Durable Power of Attorney and an Advance Directive form. For a free digital copy of the Guide, visit www.archkck.org/prolife-end-of-life-care.

SAFE ENVIRONMENT PROGRAM - ADULT TRAINING (VIRTUS)

Effective Immediately In light of the current health conditions, one prudent and preventative measure we are taking is to make the VIRTUS Protecting God's Children for Adults training available Online as an option. Effective immediately, due to COVID-19, the Archdiocesan requirement for attending a VIRTUS Protecting God's Children for Adults workshop live session will be suspended and the option of the online version of the module can be offered in lieu of live training. This is a temporary safety precaution, and parishes may still offer the live training session available as an option if they prefer as long as the local county and state ordinances in effect at the time of the event are followed. Please note, the training must still be completed prior to participants working around youth, but the requirement may now temporarily be met by completing the online Protecting God's Children module. Individuals needing to attend a session will be offered the option of the online module at the time of registration. They will still need to follow the background screening and policy completion process at the time of registration. Individuals who are already currently registered for an upcoming live session, may log back into their account and change to the online module. These procedures will be reviewed and updated periodically as needed and are in place to protect you, those you work with, and your family. Please stay safe and healthy and continue to pray for all our brothers and sisters in Christ! We are praying for all of you and your families. If you have questions, please contact Sandy Vielhauer at svielhauer@archkck.org or Jenifer Valenti at jvalenti@archkck.org. May God bless you and keep you safe.

PLANNED GIVING BRIEF: Our Catholic Church has spanned the centuries and the globe and through all previous pandemics and disasters has been a source of charity to all through its parish priests and religious. We invite you to make a grateful response to God for these gifts by planning a deferred gift to your parish. Visit CatholicPlannedGiving.org to learn how to accept this invitation.

Bulletin Items: Contact Kim Sachse, 913-775-0690 Or Email Sjslparish@gmail.com. Mass intentions may be scheduled with Kim as well. **MUST SUBMIT BY 9 pm TUES FOR INCLUSION.**



MEMORANDUM

TO: BISHOPS OF THE U.S.C.C.B.
FROM: MOST REVEREND KEVIN C. RIGADES
BISHOP OF FORT WAYNE-SOUTH BEND
CHAIRMAN, COMMITTEE ON DOCTRINE
MOST REVEREND JOSEPH F. NAUMANN
ARCHBISHOP OF KANSAS CITY
CHAIRMAN, COMMITTEE ON PRO-LIFE ACTIVITIES
SUBJECT: VACCINES FOR COVID-19
DATE: 20 NOVEMBER 2020

There appears to be some confusion in the media regarding the moral permissibility of using the vaccines for COVID-19 developed by Pfizer Inc. and Moderna. We would like to offer some clarifications.

Neither the Pfizer nor the Moderna vaccine involved the use of cell lines that originated in fetal tissue taken from the body of an aborted baby at any level of design, development, or production.¹ They are not completely free from any connection to abortion, however, as both Pfizer and Moderna made use of a tainted cell line for one of the confirmatory lab tests of their products. There is thus a connection, but it is relatively remote.

Some are asserting that if a vaccine is connected in any way with tainted cell lines then it is immoral to be vaccinated with them. This is an inaccurate portrayal of Catholic moral teaching.

There are three documents from the Holy See that treat the question of tainted vaccines: 1) the 2005 study by the Pontifical Academy for Life, "Moral Reflections on Vaccines Prepared from Cells Derived from Aborted Human Foetuses"; 2) paragraphs nos. 34-35 in the 2008 Instruction on Certain Bioethical Questions (*Dignitatis Personae*) by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith; 3) the 2017 Note on Italian Vaccine Issue, by the Pontifical Academy for Life.

These documents all point to the immorality of using tissue taken from an aborted child for creating cell lines. They also make distinctions in terms of the moral responsibility of the various actors involved, from those involved in designing and producing a vaccine to those receiving the vaccine. Most importantly, they all make it clear that, at the level of the recipient, it is morally permissible to accept vaccination when there are no alternatives and there is a serious risk to health.

¹ See the chart provided by the Charlotte Lozier Institute: [COVID-19 Vaccine Candidates and Abortions Derived Cell Lines.pdf \(pohn.org\)](https://www.clonext.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/COVID-19-Vaccine-Candidates-and-Abortions-Derived-Cell-Lines.pdf).

The Pontifical Academy for Life gives as an example the case of rubella (German measles): "We find, in such a case, a *proportional reason*, in order to accept the use of these vaccines in the presence of the danger of favouring the spread of the pathological agent, due to the lack of vaccination of children. This is particularly true in the case of vaccination against German measles."²

The Pontifical Academy does call for appropriate expressions of protest against the origins of these vaccines as well as for vigorous efforts to promote the creation of alternatives. "There remains a moral duty to continue to fight and to employ every lawful means in order to make life difficult for the pharmaceutical industries which act unscrupulously and unethically." The Pontifical Academy adds, however, that public health must not be sacrificed. "The burden of this important battle cannot and must not fall on innocent children and on the health situation of the population."

4th Sunday of Advent, Year B, 12/20/2020.

Texts:

First Reading. 2 Samuel 7:1-5,8:11,16.

Second Reading. Romans 16:25-27.

Third Reading. Luke 1:26-38.

Theme: "Rejoice the Lord is with you"

Congregation: St. Joseph of the Valley- St. Lawrence Parish, Easton? Kansas.

My dear sisters and brothers warm greeting again to you all. Christmas will soon be here. Just a few days away. We are called to "Rejoice, the Lord is with you".

1 Daily life:

All of us receive messages from different people. It can be a friend who writes saying she/he will come to visit us next month. You have not seen each other for a long time and that message makes us very happy. Or, it may be a neighbor who sends his child to say he will lend us his motorbike the next day.

Messages can come to us also from people from the Government. Or, from the leaders of the Church. It may even be someone from another country who sends a message to us.

Usually, we think that the greater the person who sends the message, is the more important the message will be. In other words, we believe that a message from the President of the country is more important than a message from a local leader. We give more attention to a message from the school Headmaster, that to a message from a student. We see something of a greatness of the person in the message he/she sends.

2, God's Message:

In today's gospel, we hear of a special message given to somebody. It is not from a friend or a neighbor. It is not either by a leader of the Government, or the Church. **In fact, it does not come from a human being, but from god Himself. The words of that message are spoken to a young woman of the Jewish people. That young woman is called Mary.**

Mary was an ordinary woman, like other women around her, like women all over the world. God sent a messenger to her to speak a very important message. What was that message? It said this:

- Rejoice,
- The Lord is with you;
- Do not be afraid.
- You will bear a son- the Son of God.

**Imagine for a moment that you yourself received such a message how would you feel?
Probably, in your heart, you could feel something like:**

- surprise, that such a message is given to YOU;
- fear perhaps, not knowing exactly what the message means, what will be asked from you.
- wonder too, that such a great thing would happen to you. You may even ask yourself: Did I really hear well?

Mary must have felt a little like this. But God's messenger, the angel, reassures her: she has heard well, she should not be afraid. And he adds: "nothing is impossible to God".

What did Mary answer? She said simply:

"I am the handmaid of the Lord,
Let what you have said be done to me"

Simple words, but very powerful words. Words that allow God to do what He wants. What He wants for her and from her.

The message that Mary heard is also spoken to us. To us also God says: 'Rejoice- yes, rejoice because I am with you'. Last week, we heard John the Baptist telling us that God stands among us, unknown to us. Today, God Himself tells us He is with us, with each one of us.

Of course, we should not wait to see an angel coming to us. There is no need for that. God speaks in the depths of our hearts. There He assures us of his being with us, and of His love for us. When we keep silent before him in prayer, little by little we can hear Him. Then, we become certain that He is indeed with us. And we can pray the words of the Psalm for today:

"Of this I am sure, that your love last, forever".

You may think to yourself: This is something nice to hear, but is it really true for me? For Mary, yes, I can understand. She was "full of grace" as we say in the Hail Mary. But me, I am not like her. I am sinful. I do not always do what god asks from me. I try, but I often fail.

How can we be so sure, everyone of us? Because God Himself tells us again and again. This is what we are going to celebrate at Christmas: a child will be born to us, called "Emmanuel= God with us, God Himself will come to tell us anew, that He love us so much that He wants to remain with us.

Because of this, we should not be afraid. Can we be afraid when God Himself is with us? What can we fear when God's love, and care, and his strength are given to us?

But, as with Mary, God asks for an answer from us. The answer He wants from us is the same that she gave. We too are to say: "I am your servant, Lord, let it be done to me as you want".

And what do you think God wants from you and me? The apostle Paul has explained it in the second reading we have heard. He has told us that we should:

“live according to the good News”.

What is this Good News? It is what we have said earlier on: that, in Jesus, God has come to us and loves us. What is asked from us, Paul says, is “the obedience of faith”. To believe, to be completely sure of God’s words. To trust Him, not being afraid, and doing all we can to please Him, from day to day.

3 New Life: There remain only a few days before the Feast of Christmas. During these coming days, as we go about daily work, try to become more conscious of this great truth: God is coming to us. From time to time, stop for a short moment and repeat to yourself: “God is coming. He is coming to me”.

As you do so, you will see that more and more fear is going out of your heart, and away from you. And in its place, joy will come to fill you and make you truly happy.

Fr. Francis Bakyor.