



THE ANNUNCIATION

ST. MARY'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Fourth Sunday in Advent

December 18, 2016

A Weekly Reflection

Christmas is fast approaching! This hectic and joyful time of year often appears to move towards Christmas with an ever-increasing speed full of gift shopping, events with children, parties, time with family and friends, and fulfilling our annual traditions for the Holiday season in a rush that seems to leave us little time for reflection as to what Advent and Christmas are truly about. During the four weeks preceding Christmas, Advent should be a time of expectant waiting, hopeful anticipation, and cheerful preparation for the time God enters our lives in human form with the birth of Christ. We are encouraged in our faith to slow down, be quiet, and look for the presence of God all around us and in our lives everywhere.

Throughout this Advent season, I strived to focus on the role of Advent and the birth of Christ and their meaning in our present day world. I was finding it difficult to truly feel and see the presence of God around us with the rush of the season, a country so divided politically, and a world full of terrorism and religious strife. In my efforts to see God's presence, I sought inspiration by reading the Revised Common Lectionary daily. I will confess, my efforts had not brought me the answers and feeling of God's presence to the degree I searched for until the morning of the second Sunday of Advent.

In the Celtic spiritual tradition, "thin places" are believed to be where ordinary reality and God's holiness meet, where the veil between heaven and earth seem almost transparent. As I was walking past the Sunday school classrooms that second Sunday, I glanced into the window and saw the happy, attentive, and expectant look on all of the children's faces as they were learning about Advent. It was evident that they easily felt the presence of God and achieved the true purpose of Advent without questioning it or having to try. At that moment, I had a feeling best described by the Celts as having discovered a "thin place". One of that prior week's Lectionary readings immediately came to mind as I realized that the answer to what I had sought was right before me. "Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." - Mark 10:15

We all could learn from our children's simple innocence.

Mike Blanks

Nursery

We have nursery available for **infants through 4-year-olds** from 8:30 a.m. until 12 p.m. The nursery is located in the Preschool and Sunday School Building. Our nursery leader, Meg Zehmer, and Melissa Alicea will be happy to help you get your child settled into the nursery.

Worship bags

We provide worship bags that contain a coloring page based on the Gospel reading of the day. It also has a wonderful parent-focused message on the back to help you talk about the day's reading with your child. Worship bags are located in wood bins near the entrances to the church.

Sermons available

Find past sermons available in hard copy in the narthex of New St. Mary's, or visit stmarysgoochland.org/sermons to hear audio and download print versions.

Connect with us

We would love to learn more about you! If you are a visitor, please pick up a **welcome packet** from one of our ushers.

Would you like to write for us? Contact Ashley Cameron at acameron@stmarysgoochland.org to learn more.

TODAY'S SCHEDULE

9 a.m. Holy Eucharist Rite One, *Little St. Mary's*

10 a.m. Sunday School, Confirmation Class, and Adult Education, *Sunday School and Education Buildings and New Parish Hall*

11 a.m. Holy Eucharist Rite Two, *New St. Mary's*

Noon Cookies and Coffee, *Café and New Parish Hall*

5:30 p.m. Lessons and Carols, *New St. Mary's*

6:30 p.m. Middle School Youth Group, *Education Building*

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www.stmarysgoochland.org

WELCOME! Whether it is your first Sunday at St. Mary's, or your 401st, we're glad that you're with us. Please feel free to introduce yourself to a greeter, usher, or a clergy member, and consider filling out an information form. We invite you to join us on future **Sundays** at 9 a.m. for Eucharist or at 11 a.m. for Eucharist or Morning Prayer, on Wednesdays for **Noonday Prayer** at 12 p.m. in beautiful and quaint Little St. Mary's, for a **class** or **Bible study**, or for many of our other **fellowship** and **outreach** offerings. **Little St. Mary's** is also **open** Monday through Friday between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. and available to you for prayer and reflection. See the back page to get a sense of what we have going on around St. Mary's.

CONFIRMATION CLASS CHOOSES GIFTS FOR LIFE

Did you know that the loose plate offering on the first Sunday of the month goes towards Outreach? On Sunday, December 4, the loose plate offering **totaled \$409!** The **funds were designated towards Gifts for Life**, a program of Episcopal Relief and Development, that allows individuals to buy animals and agriculture, green gifts, health and wellness items, and economic opportunities to **benefit individuals and communities throughout the world.** The 8th grade confirmation class met last Sunday, read through the Gifts for Life catalog, individually presented which gifts they thought would make the most impact on people's lives, and then voted. **After thoughtful deliberation**, they decided upon a **clean water system for a family**, which is a crucial element of health that can protect entire communities from illness. On top of that, they chose **three shares of vitamins and preventative medicine**, which ensure that children have a strong foundation for healthy growth. **Thank you to the community of St. Mary's for giving a gift with lasting impact.**

ADVENT AT ST. MARY'S

This is the last week of Advent when we prepare for Christmas, the coming of the incarnate Christ into the world. St. Mary's has these events left during this **special season of waiting and watching:**

- ❖ **Today's Adult Forum** at 10 a.m. will focus on today's **Advent gospel.** Join Weezie Blanchard and Bob Hetherington for this opportunity to deepen your understanding of Advent and enrich your faith.
- ❖ **Lessons and Carols tonight** at 5:30 p.m. in New St. Mary's. **Listen to and sing along** with St. Mary's Choir for a **festive introduction to the Christmas season** and its beautiful music.
- ❖ **Evening Prayer** this **Wednesday, December 21** at 5:45 p.m. in Little St. Mary's.

WORSHIP

Christmas Eve services on **Saturday, December 24** will include:

- ❖ **Children's Lessons and Carols (childcare provided)** at 4 p.m. in *New St. Mary's*
- ❖ **Holy Eucharist Rite Two with St. Mary's Choir** at 7 p.m. in *New St. Mary's*
- ❖ **Holy Eucharist Rite One with string quartet** at 11 p.m. in *Little St. Mary's*

The Christmas Day service on **Sunday, December 25** will be:

- ❖ **Holy Eucharist Rite One** at 10 a.m. in *Little St. Mary's*

The New Year's Day service on **Sunday, January 1** will be:

- ❖ **Holy Eucharist Rite Two** at 10 a.m. in *New St. Mary's*

ALTAR GUILD

Altar Guild needs you, your clippers, and greens. Please bring greens and/or help decorate for Christmas this **Tuesday, December 20 at 9:00 a.m.** in New St. Mary's. Contact Lori Smiley at (804) 784-5678 or at lsmiley@stmarysgoochland.org for further information.

Remember your loved ones this Christmas through poinsettias. Please let us know whom you wish to remember, and mail your donation of \$25 for each memorial to St. Mary's by **this Tuesday, December 20** with **checks made payable to "St. Mary's Altar Guild"**. All funds will be used to defray the cost of Christmas decorations at St. Mary's.

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

Lori Smiley, who has faithfully served St. Mary's Episcopal Church since 1998 as Parish Secretary and, most recently, as Assistant to the Clergy, has **announced that she'll be leaving St. Mary's at the end of 2016**. Lori has been the **lovely, friendly face and voice of St. Mary's for everyone** who has walked through the front door or called on the phone for 18½ years. As a former pastor's wife, Lori was initially wary of working for a church. As she says, though, **"When I came here, I fell in love with St. Mary's**. The leadership helps you to grow and to use all of your gifts." Rector Weezie Blanchard notes, "Lori is gracious and welcoming and has been an amazing pastoral presence for so many people during her time at St. Mary's. **She is beloved by the staff and has been especially helpful during this time of transition**. We will all miss her." **Godspeed, Lori**.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Middle School Youth Group Christmas Party today from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Meet at the church at 6:30 p.m. to hop on a bus and see some of the best and tackiest lights Richmond has to offer. Then gather back at St. Mary's for food, soft drinks, and a **white elephant gift exchange** to end at 8:30 p.m. **Please bring a \$10 gift and \$15 to help cover food and transportation**. Contact Matt Rawls at mrawls@stmarysgoochland.org for further information.

Children's Lessons and Carols will take place at **4 p.m. on Saturday, December 24**. There will be a **rehearsal on Thursday, December 22 at 9:30 a.m.** Please contact Amelia McDaniel at amcdaniel@stmarysgoochland.org to volunteer to assist during the pageant.

Today is that last Sunday of Sunday School, Confirmation Class, and Youth Group until after the New Year. Enjoy the holiday break! **Classes and Youth Group resume Sunday, January 8, 2017**.

ADULT EDUCATION

Book study opportunity for women! January is a time of fresh starts for many of us. Come join a group of women for six weeks on **Thursdays from 7-8:30 p.m. beginning January 12** for a group facilitated by parishioner Ashley Barlow as we read *Present Over Perfect* by Shauna Niequist. Based on her personal experiences, Niequist **openly discusses the hustle of "earning" our worthiness** by counting all the things we are doing, learning to say no and deal with disappointment, and how slowing down can actually mean showing up. For further information, contact Amelia McDaniel at amcdaniel@stmarysgoochland.org.

Spiritual practice for men resumes in 2017. Join Bob Hetherington in the Old Parish Hall starting **Tuesday, January 10 at 7:30 a.m.** This spiritual practice is an opportunity to deepen faith and is **open to men of all ages**.

VESTRY NOMINATIONS

Each year at our **Annual Meeting** on the last Sunday in January, **four new Vestry members are elected**. At St. Mary's, the **Vestry Nominating Committee** (outgoing Vestry members Scott Barton, Jane duFrane, Steve Guza, and Brantley Holmes and four at-large members) meets to consider and propose qualified nominees. This year's annual meeting will take place on **January 29, 2017**. **If you would like to nominate someone**, please contact Vestry Nominating Committee chair Jane duFrane at jane.dufrane@highwoods.com.

YEAR END GIVING NOTICE

The end of the year is rapidly approaching, and with that comes **an annual list of reminders**. First, thanks to all you who have paid or continue to faithfully pay your pledges. **Please help us stay on budget by paying your 2016 pledge** before the year ends. Check out the **Year End Giving Notice on the website** (<http://www.stmarysgoochland.org/year-end-giving-notice/>) regarding information **about stock gifts, gift designation, and other pledge information**. As always, your graciousness and generosity in giving is so appreciated, and many of you have gone above and beyond this year. It is a privilege for you to be a part of the St. Mary's family. For further information or any questions, please contact Gina Alexander at galexander@stmarysgoochland.org or call (804) 784-5678.

This Week at St. Mary's

Sunday, December 18, Fourth Sunday of Advent

Holy Eucharist Rite One, 9 a.m., *Little St. Mary's*
Sunday School, Confirmation Class, and Adult
Education, 10 a.m., *Sunday School and Education*
Buildings and New Parish Hall

Holy Eucharist Rite Two, 11 a.m., *New St. Mary's*
Cookies and Coffee, 12 p.m., *Café and New Parish Hall*
Lessons and Carols, 5:30 p.m., *New St. Mary's*
Middle School Youth Group, 6:30 p.m., *Education*
Building

Monday, December 19

Pastoral Care Team 3, 10 a.m., *Rector's Study*

Tuesday, December 20

Christmas Decorating, 9 a.m., *New St. Mary's*
Staff Meeting, 2 p.m., *Rector's Study*

Wednesday, December 21

Lectionary Bible Study, 10 a.m., *Library*
Noonday Prayer, 12 p.m., *Little St. Mary's*
Children's Choir, 5 p.m., *Choir Suite*
Evening Prayer, 5:45 p.m., *Little St. Mary's*

Thursday, December 22

Finance Committee, 8 a.m., *Rector's Study*
Children's Lessons and Carols Rehearsal, 9:30 a.m.,
New St. Mary's
Adult Choir, 7:30 p.m., *Choir Suite*

Friday, December 23

Church Office Closed

Saturday, December 24, Christmas Eve

Children's Lessons and Carols, 4 p.m., *New St. Mary's*
Holy Eucharist Rite Two with St. Mary's Choir, 7 p.m.,
New St. Mary's
Holy Eucharist Rite One with string quartet, 11 p.m.,
Little St. Mary's

Sunday, December 25, Christmas Day

Holy Eucharist Rite One, 10 a.m., *Little St. Mary's*

Coming Up

Monday, December 26

Church Office Closed

Tuesday, December 27

Vestry Meeting, 2:30 p.m., *Old Parish Hall*

Wednesday, December 28

Noonday Prayer - *Cancelled*

Friday, December 30

Church Office Closed

Sunday, January 1, New Year's Day

Holy Eucharist Rite Two, 10 a.m., *New St. Mary's*

Monday, January 2

Church Office Closed

CLERGY, STAFF, AND VESTRY

Gersain Agudelo, *Assistant Sexton*

Gina Alexander, *Parish Administrator*

galexander@stmarysgoochland.org

Melissa Alicea, *Nursery Assistant*

Adam Bailey, *Children's Choir Director*

Louise Browner Blanchard, *Rector*

wblanchard@stmarysgoochland.org

Ashley Cameron, *Director of Communications and Parish Life*

acameron@stmarysgoochland.org

Tammy Click, *Accountant*

W. Dwight Graham, *Organist and Choirmaster*

Robert G. Hetherington, *Priest Associate*

Amelia McDaniel, *Director of Children's Ministries*

amcdaniel@stmarysgoochland.org

Paul Pace, *Sexton*

Matt Rawls, *Director of Youth Ministries*

mrawls@stmarysgoochland.org

Lori Smiley, *Assistant to the Clergy*

lsmiley@stmarysgoochland.org

Meg Zehmer, *Nursery Director*

Susan Rawls, *Director of St. Mary's Episcopal School*

Vestry Members:

Al Rider, *Senior Warden*

Jane duFrane, *Junior Warden*

Bill Gooch, *Treasurer*

Charmaine Trice, *Register*

Scott Barton, Steve Guza, Brantley Holmes, Fay Lohr,

Tracey Ragsdale, Betsy Rawles, Bruin Richardson,

David Rose, and Tom Slater

THANK YOU

To all my friends at St. Mary's, some of whom remain anonymous, who have sent me endless prayers, an abundance of love and very generous support, from the depth of my soul, I thank you. You helped to keep me going and have touched my heart.

Linda Hendricks