



INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL

# CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP

e-Bulletin • December 2015

## THE PRAYER OF MARY *The Magnificat*

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,  
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior  
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.  
From this day all generations will call me blessed:  
the Almighty has done great things for me,  
and holy is his Name.

He has mercy on those who fear him  
in every generation.  
He has shown the strength of his arm,  
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,  
and has lifted up the lowly.  
He has filled the hungry with good things,  
and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of his servant Israel  
for he remembered his promise of mercy,  
the promise he made to our fathers,  
to Abraham and his children forever.

*(Lk 1:46-55)*



## The Season of Advent: A Fruitful Time for the Christian Steward



Probably nothing challenges a Christian steward's use of time as much as the seasons of Advent and Christmas.

Each year, we marvel at the irony of it: a time to honor and ponder God's great mystery, the Incarnation, somehow falls prey to a time of stressful shopping, endless "to do" lists, strained check-books, and guilt over what's not getting done. Sometimes those non-stop Christmas tunes begin to grate on our senses.

How does the Christian steward answer this challenge to devote time to reflection and prayer while incorporating the best and most fruitful of our cultural traditions into this festive season?

One suggestion would be to set aside a special time of reflection right at the beginning of Advent for determining what our priorities for the season will be. Set aside an hour and begin by rereading the Christmas story in the Gospel of Saint Luke. Ask God to help you know what is the most generous and beneficial use of time in God's service during this season. Ask for help in setting aside time for prayer each day. Don't be afraid to cross things off your "must do" list if they add stress to what should be a peaceful time.

Only you and God can determine the best use of your time. For instance, some people find annual Christmas cookie baking a reflective, creative time and a wonderful way to share. For others, it's a self-imposed burden and a sure-fire way to a messy kitchen and a calorie overload. Likewise, that extra party may be just what someone needs to unwind and commune with friends while for another it may be the gateway to exhaustion or a temptation to overindulge in food or drink. Ask God which traditions are life-giving for you, and be bold enough to leave the others behind.

"I just don't have time," is the frequent lament of the holiday season. But the Christian steward is aware that we all have the same amount of time, and to each is given an opportunity of returning the first fruits of that time back to God. The season of Advent offers just such a grace-filled opportunity.

## STEWARDSHIP SAINT FOR DECEMBER



The Blessed Virgin Mary is not only the greatest saint in our Catholic family of faith, but the model of stewardship *par excellence*.

### The Blessed Virgin Mary: Our Model of Stewardship

During the Advent and Christmas seasons, we have a number of opportunities to reflect on and honor the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is not only the greatest saint in our Catholic family of faith, but the model of stewardship *par excellence*. Mary teaches us the meaning of stewardship by her own life witness.

On December 8, we celebrate the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, the conception of Mary in her mother's womb without the stain of original sin. Pope Pius IX proclaimed this truth on December 8, 1854, that Mary's preservation from original sin was a 'singular grace and privilege' given her by God. In anticipation of what God did for all in Christ, she alone was preserved from original sin "from the first moment of her conception."

On December 12, we celebrate Mary as Our Lady of Guadalupe. In 1531 she appeared to Juan Diego on a hill outside Mexico City. A life-size figure of the Virgin as a young, dark-skinned American Indian woman with the face of a mestizo was imprinted on his cloak. The image gave the indigenous people of the Americas assurance that our Blessed Mother was loving and compassionate toward them.

On December 25, when we celebrate the Nativity of Our Lord, we celebrate the birth of Jesus through his mother, Mary. The Incarnation took place through Mary's own flesh, and the infant Jesus was nourished by Mary's own body.

On January 1, Mary is honored as the "Mother of God," which is the greatest of her titles. This title is the foundation for every other title attributed to her as she became the mother of God from the instant Jesus was conceived in her womb by the power of the Holy Spirit. The title was formally announced by the Church in the fifth century.

## Amazing Stewardship Ancestors By Mary Ann Otto

Several years ago, just prior to Advent, I was thinking about Jesus' family lineage in sacred scripture. I wanted to ponder all the ways they were stewards of their day and pointed to the incredible event that was the Incarnation. As you may know, we refer to our salvation history ancestors as members of the Jesse Tree.

The time I spent with Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Ruth, David, Joseph and Mary to name a few, was wonderful. To look at their lives through the lense of stewardship was a remarkable and a prayerful time for me. Each Advent I find myself encouraged by their example of faith and wonder if my life in any way is preparing the way for Jesus' Second Coming.

As I pondered many of our ancestors, the person of Noah spoke to me in a new way. Though not a shipbuilder or zookeeper by trade, he remained very close to God, listened with an open



heart and trusted. Noah was a steward of his relationship with his Creator. His story relays a life filled with many questions and an unusual adventure, yet he was able to stay the course where God had placed him. He served God in many unexpected ways with his life.

One of the most touching moments for me in the story of Noah is when the water receded and he came out of the boat. He built an altar to honor God. This beautiful act of love and gratitude

calls me to ponder by own response to God as I journey through some of my greatest unexpected adventures. I would like it to be that authentic.

Since one of my roles in my ministry is to provide resources for parishes, I decided to reflect on these incredible characters and their qualities in a simple and understandable way that could be used inter-generationally. It became *Stewards in Scripture: A Joyful Parish Skit to Celebrate Advent*. If you would like to view or use it, please see the link below. In the meantime, may your Advent experience prepare you to welcome our Savior in a new and wonderful way.

[http://www.gbdioc.org/images/stories/Resource\\_Site/stewardship-pastoral-services/Stewardship/Documents/Stewards-in-Scripture.pdf](http://www.gbdioc.org/images/stories/Resource_Site/stewardship-pastoral-services/Stewardship/Documents/Stewards-in-Scripture.pdf)



# Be a Good Steward of the Advent and Christmas Seasons

December is such a busy time of year, and a month that tempts us to lose sight of the profound spiritual importance of the Advent and Christmas seasons. The best way to stay focused on the coming of Jesus Christ is to be good stewards of his presence in our daily lives. Here are simple ways to exercise good stewardship of this sacred time of year.

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**1. Give God a very special gift this year:** Let this gift be something personal that no one else needs to know about, and let it be a sacrifice. Perhaps your gift will be to commit to spending more time with God daily. Perhaps there is a habit you know you should give up. Why wait for a New Year's resolution? Start now.

**2. Celebrate the season of Advent:** Light the Advent wreath candles each night before dinner. If you have children, let them offer their own prayers to the Christ child for whom we are waiting.



**3. Set aside a special time to read the Christmas story in the Gospel of Saint Luke 1:5-56 through 2:1-20:** Consider reading this account with your family and discussing it together.

**4. Put a crèche up in your home at the beginning of Advent:** Consider having one set that is "kid-proof" which your children are allowed to handle. Kids love to make the Nativity story their own, and they especially love the angels!

**5. Plan a project to help someone this Christmas:** Identify someone with a genuine need, involve your whole family and see how happy you can make someone this Christmas. Participate in your parish Adopt-a-Family program or call Catholic Charities or another charity and find a family through their programs. Make sure your children take part in shopping for a family who needs extra help and make them aware of the needs in your community.

**6. Take a group Christmas caroling to a nursing home or a children's hospital:** Get people together. Make it festive. Bring the gifts of your joyful smiles and voices to those who may need these gifts.

**7. Give a surprise gift of service to each member of your family:** The idea of giving an unexpected gift of service to members of your family reveals your own love and concern for them. You might consider giving your spouse a day away, running an errand for your brother, or cleaning out a closet for your mother. Make it personal and meaningful.

**8. Send Christmas cards and thank you notes that convey a spiritual message:** This is an easy way to share your faith during the Advent season. Don't just sign your name! Include a personal message with each card. Set aside some time after Christmas Day to write thank you notes and help your children to write thank you notes for the gifts they receive. This is a wonderful habit for a lifetime.

**9. Write a Christmas letter to someone far away such as someone in the service, or perhaps someone working or ministering in a foreign country:** It has been said that receiving a letter when you are far away from home is like opening a priceless gift on Christmas morning, no matter what day of the year. Many people are unable to travel home for the holidays, so it can be a very lonely time for them.

**10. Attend Christmas Mass together with your family:** December 25 falls on Friday this year so start your extended Christmas weekend at the Table of the Lord. If you are alone this Christmas or don't have family living near you, invite a friend or a neighbor to join you.

# Ten Things You Can Do for the Poor at Christmas



In this new liturgical year, the Gospel of Luke urges us to be mindful of the poor and suffering among us. There are many things we can do during the Advent and Christmas seasons to assist efforts to alleviate hunger in our communities. Whether you volunteer individually, as a family or as part of a group or parish, the possibilities for serving the poor are almost limitless. Consider doing one or more of the 10 suggestions below:

1. Pray for the poor, and ask God to transform your own attitudes about those in need, realizing that all of us are poor in some way before God's grace.
2. Suggest that a petition be added to the Prayers of the Faithful asking that the members of the parish community open their hearts to the poor.
3. Collect food items for a food pantry in your community.
4. Volunteer to assist a pantry for a day of sorting, bagging or distributing.
5. Buy fast food gift certificates to give out to people you see who need a meal or to those who request your aid on our downtown streets.
6. Ask your pastor or church staff if you could collect fast food and other gift certificates to be handed out to those in need who stop by the parish.
7. Volunteer at your parish or neighborhood soup kitchen.
8. Get your parish involved in observing World Hunger Sunday every year.
9. Make your own generous financial gift to an organization that serves the poor.
10. Think about ways to use your professional skills in a volunteer capacity at your chosen anti-hunger organization. There are many programs, including Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) screening and application assistance centers, food banks, and other anti-hunger organizations, that can use your help to make sure that all eligible people have access to nutrition assistance and anti-hunger programs.

You will find rich rewards in fulfilling these stewardship tasks. For Jesus said that whatever we do for one of the least of his brothers and sisters, we do it for him (see Matthew 25:40).

## Save the Date

*and Save the Cost!*

### 2016 Annual Conference

October 2-5, 2016

**MEMBERS ONLY**  
Holiday Special

**Conference  
Registration Rate**

# \$399\*



*\*To take advantage of this special offer, register before December 31, 2015*

## CONTACT US

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## A STEWARDSHIP MOMENT

### **Second Sunday of Advent**

**December 5/6, 2015**

In today's second reading, Saint Paul prays with joy and confidence for his friends in the Christian community at Philippi. He is encouraged that the community has partnered with him to proclaim the Gospel. He sees Christ's active presence and plan of salvation at work in the community. God's overarching plan is unclear to us. But when we see evidence of God working through others, doesn't it give us reason to believe that Christ is alive among us? Does the witness of others help our own prayer lives? Does it inspire us to promote the Gospel? During this second week of Advent take time to reflect on how you see Christ's presence in your community.

### **Third Sunday of Advent**

**December 12/13, 2015**

In today's Gospel we hear the prophet John the Baptist being asked a profound stewardship question: "What should we do?" Each group wants to know the appropriate response to John's call; each reply points to how they should treat others. John does not simply say, "Be baptized." Rather, he points them to their jobs and personal relationships. The message of John the Baptist is simple: judgment is near, and repentance includes treating others well. We should be willing to share what we have with those in need. To listen to John the Baptist is to be called to account. Do I give only of my excess, or am I the good steward who is willing to sacrifice in order to help others?

### **Fourth Sunday of Advent**

**December 19/20, 2015**

As we draw close to the Feast of the Nativity, we hear the great stewardship proclamation twice in today's second reading from the Letter to the Hebrews: "Behold, I come to do your will, O God!" Who is this Jesus? Who are we that we should follow

him? Many want him as a friend, a guide, a king, an advocate. Jesus reveals the nature of God, the servant sent to give us new life in God's house. Take time to ponder these questions: Do we have the courage to follow Jesus? Do we reflect God's nature in our daily life? Are we able to say with confidence: "Behold, I come to do your will?"

### **The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas Day)**

**Friday, December 25, 2015**

In today's Christmas Mass at dawn we hear from the Gospel reading that God has entered quietly into the world. Not into the great city of Jerusalem, but into a small village about five miles south. Not into a noble family, but to an outcast couple keeping the newborn in a manger. Not announced by royal edicts, but to common shepherds, the first human heralds of Christ's birth. As Christian stewards we simply allow Christ to live in us no matter what our circumstances happen to be. We allow Christ to share his love with us and reflect that love out to others. We now are the heralds of Christ's Incarnation. What an unimaginable gift from a generous Lord. Good stewards rejoice in this gift and give glory to God.

### **Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph**

**December 26/27, 2015**

The ultimate aim of Saint Paul's Letter to the Colossians is to teach the community how to deepen its relationship with Christ Jesus. His list of virtues summarizes the ideals of communal stewardship: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. For Paul, practicing these virtues opens our hearts to Christ as individuals and as a worshipping community. This is how the Christian community ought to live. This is how its members should behave in their dealings with others, particularly with fellow believers. As we approach the new year, how might we embrace one or more of these virtues more fully in our parish community in order to deepen our relationship with Jesus?

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We encourage you to check out the ICSC Forum at [www.catholicstewardship.org](http://www.catholicstewardship.org) under 'members' where members can share ideas and questions. The Parish Stewardship section is reviewed every day by members of the Parish Stewardship Education and Services Committee.