



CHRISTMAS FLOWER DONATION

Thank you

to all who have given generously toward our **Annual Christmas Flower Fund.** The Church has been fittingly adorned for the season and beautifully decorated. The beautiful poinsettias are also an important reminder of those whose memory we hold near and dear. Even as these plants are arranged around the Altar, we remember and pray for our deceased loved ones, memorialized in red and white blossoms. Thank you for your gift and your prayer.



2017 PARISH CALENDARS

Our 2017 parish wall calendars are still available in Church and at the Parish Center. We are most grateful for the generosity of our sponsors, the McCriskin-Gustafson Family of Funeral Homes. May God bless you and your families every day of this new year.

BUS TRIP TO THE RALLY FOR LIFE IN TRENTON

JANUARY 23, 2017 - The Diocese of Metuchen's Respect for Life Office will be running a bus trip to the Rally for Life in Trenton, on Monday, January 23, 2017. The bus ride is free of charge, but as space is limited all passengers must reserve their seats. Passengers will board the bus at the Diocesan Center in Piscataway at 9:30AM. The Rally at the State House begins at 11:00AM, and ends at 1:00PM. The bus will bring everyone back to the Diocesan Center between 2:00-2:30PM. If you have any questions or would like to reserve a seat, please email amarshall@diometuchen.org or call 732-562-1990 x1543 or 1629.

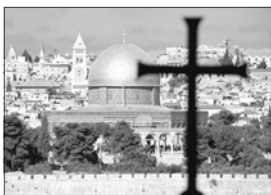
Due to the inauguration, the March for Life in Washington, DC will be held on Friday, January 27. For more information visit: www.marchforlife.org.

Give the Gift of Travel and the Blessing of a Holy Pilgrimage.



PARISH PILGRIMAGE

THE HOLY LAND: In The Footsteps of Jesus



MARCH 19-28, 2017; travel with Rev. John Alvarado on the journey of a lifetime. For full details, pricing & itinerary pick-up a brochure in Church or at the Parish Center or visit us at churchofthesacredheart.net (click on the travel icon).

Don't delay, we are booking NOW and taking registrations. You may also visit Peter's Way Tours at www.petersway.com or call 800-225-7662 ► **TOUR CODE: 9220**

From Bishop James F. Checchio

At Christmas one of the most faith-filled scenes that can be found in homes, churches, and communities throughout the world is the Nativity, a reminder that Christmas should be centered on the birth of Christ and Christ should be the center of our lives. It was St. Francis of Assisi, for whom our cathedral is named, who is credited with having created the first Nativity scene. He had a deep devotion to the Infant Jesus and on Christmas eve 1223 re-created the first live Nativity scene in a cave outside the town of Greccio, Italy. What St. Francis wanted to do was to help people see with their bodily eyes what Jesus' original coming was like. He wanted people to realize that the Babe of Bethlehem, the name he called the Infant Jesus, was born in poverty, humility and simplicity. So, with the help of a friend and landowner, Giovanni Velita, St. Francis constructed a manger, filled it with hay, and brought in an ox and donkey from a local farm. Then, he and his Franciscan brothers invited all the townspeople to come to the manger on Christmas eve. That night, they lit candles, sang songs and then had Mass at the manger he had built - and St. Francis, since he was a deacon, sang the Gospel of Christ's birth, and he preached about the birth of the poor king, born in Bethlehem, in a manger, like the one they were standing in. Contrary to our custom and popular belief, St. Francis used no statues of Jesus or Mary or the baby Jesus - nor did he recruit live actors to play those parts; he used no shepherds or angels or wise men, nor kings.

St. Francis' friend, Thomas of Celana, wrote in his journal that Christmas eve before going to bed, "Greccio was transformed into a second Bethlehem, and that night, wonderful night, seemed like the fullest day to both man and beast for the joy they felt at the renewing of the mystery...." Having lived in Rome for almost 20 years, Greccio was a place I enjoyed visiting, and it gratefully maintains that spiritual atmosphere to this day.

Today, 800 years later, the Nativity lives on not only in Greccio but around the world, and it often can be the one thing which touches our hearts most at Christmas. At live Nativity plays and scenes, not only children but adults can be awestruck as they are transported back to the see and feel, the birth of the Babe of Bethlehem. In Catholic schools and churches children's Christmas pageants, with their simplicity and innocence, can bring people to tears as it reminds them of the true meaning of Christmas. In homes everywhere families carry out the tradition of setting up their Nativity with the Blessed Mother, St. Joseph, shepherds, ox and donkey. In Rome, on the third Sunday of Advent, there is a beautiful tradition that the children of Rome bring the "*bambinelli*" (baby Jesus from their Nativity scenes) to St. Peter's Square for the Holy Father to bless them. It is a sea of *bambinelli*, and a beautiful sight. The Roman children then place the Infant Jesus in the manger in their homes on Christmas eve.

Yes, I'm sure we all have our memories of how the Nativity has had an impact on our life. I have my memories of Greccio and the third Sunday of Advent blessings by the Holy Father, and another one which occurred when I arrived in Rome as a seminarian. One of the first things we did was to go out to visit the Catacombs of Santa Priscilla on the Via Salaria. In there is a fresco from the 200's. It is of the Blessed Mother with the infant Jesus resting His head on her. There is a man standing next to her and he is pointing upward to a star which for the Jewish people is a symbol for the Messiah. The fresco is the earliest representation that we have of the Blessed Mother. It also tells the story of the mystery of the incarnation, of Mary becoming the mother of our Savior, and the fulfillment of the Divine promise for a Messiah.

It is my prayer that the Christ Child will be the center of your Christmas and life, that each Nativity scene you see will give you a sense of wonder and awe, and remind you that Christ should be the center of your life not only at Christmas but all year long. A Blessed Christmas to you all!



CHURCH OF THE SACRED HEART

Christmas Season Schedule

THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY & JOSEPH

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 30 - 9:00AM

THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

World Day of Prayer for Peace

SUNDAY, JANUARY 1, 2017

SATURDAY VIGIL: 5:00PM

SUNDAY - 9:00AM & 11:30AM

THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

SUNDAY, JANUARY 8

SATURDAY VIGIL: 5:00PM

SUNDAY - 9:00AM & 11:30AM

*The Children's "Procession of Stars"
begins Sunday at 8:50AM*

THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

MONDAY, JANUARY 9 - 7:00PM

EL SANTO NIÑO

SATURDAY, JANUARY 21 - 12:00PM

"THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS" Christians have always kept Christmas as a season from December 25 until January 6 (the traditional date of Epiphany). The church calendar today even extends the celebration until the feast of the Baptism of the Lord - the Epiphany. More "birthday," the is a time for reveling in the the revelation of Jewish revelation of Gentile magi Christ's baptism Jordan, and water into wine "on the third Cana of Galilee. In all these saving events, we know that "the Word is made flesh and dwells among us." How can we keep Christmas not just as a day, but as a season? Keep the tree up and shining bright until the Baptism of the Lord. Sing carols and read the scriptures every day. And...you can still send those belated Christmas cards out, because after all, it is still the SEASON of Christmas!



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20 † C † M † B † 17

THE TRADITIONAL EPIPHANY HOUSE BLESSING is a prayer that every Catholic can share. It can be a fun, family, faith activity! Blessed chalk is available at Church. Use it to write the above inscription over the main (inside) entrance of your house. The numbers of the new year 20 and 17 are the beginning and end. The initials of the Magi are included C, M, B — Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar. They may also represent the Latin words "*Christus mansionem benedicat*," "**May Christ bless the house.**" Four † crosses separate the letters and numerals.



Gather the family and pray the above words with the Sign of the Cross, and the Lord's Prayer as you write the inscription with the blessed chalk. You may choose to light a candle and read aloud a scripture passage from the Bible. Invite those present to share something of what they heard in scripture. Include your own special prayer of petition for family members and their needs. May all who enter your home may receive and share the blessing of Christ.



*May God bless
you this
Christmas
Season and
through all
the New Year.*