

Dear Parish family and friends:

May I take this opportunity to wish all of you a Blessed Christmas and a Happy New Year!

There have been a lot of changes over the past year, the biggest of course is our new Religious Education building, which will be open in January. We have been busy preparing the new classrooms, moving and rearranging furniture, as well as reorganizing and repurposing some old spaces. I want to thank all of you who have worked so faithfully to make our growing parish a place where we can gather together to experience the presence of Christ.

I know there are many things that are different now and getting used to a new way of doing things is not easy. (I still drive the wrong way around the new parking lot sometimes too!). However, in reflecting upon our parish experience, I am reminded that Christmas is a time when we remember and celebrate the biggest change the world ever saw....the Incarnation, the moment when God became man!

On that Holy night in Bethlehem when Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, the heavens were opened. God the Father gave us His only begotten Son, who took upon Himself our humanity and our sinfulness in order to offer us His gift of divine mercy and forgiveness. Jesus entered our world to free us from death and the darkness of sin and to grant us eternal life and the light of His salvation. God changed the world so he could change us, from sinners to saints.

No matter what we have done or how rebellious we have been, God offers to forgive us for only one reason: He loves us. It doesn't seem logical, and we do not deserve it, but it's still true: in spite of all our sins, "He loves us with an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3).

As Christmas draws near, let us take the time to listen to the Lord. He is inviting us to a closer relationship with Him, to heal broken relationships and to bind up the painful wounds that stem from resistance to change, resentment, hardness of heart or an unwillingness to forgive.

In the merciful presence of the Lord and Savior in our midst at Christmas, we are called to a deeper appreciation of God's love, so touchingly manifested by Mary and Joseph watching over the baby Jesus. God comes in the celebration of Christmas calling us to respond, like Mary, with a personal and sincere "Yes, Lord" placing ourselves completely in the hands of God.

When Pope Julius I authorized December 25 to be celebrated as the birthday of Jesus in A.D. 353, who would have ever thought that it would grow and change to become what it is today. Yet, in the midst of all the excitement and elaborate decorations which now surround Christmas, I hope we can take a moment to really consider the sacred time of Christmas and the Divine person of Christ whose birth we celebrate.

It is a long time since 353, and even longer since that Holy night in Bethlehem, however, our faith in the Divine Child Jesus, born for our salvation reminds us that the world is forever changed and that God is always with us, *Emanuel*. The merciful love of Jesus is a gift that endures forever. May that divine love, which changes our hearts, fill us with joy as we celebrate with friends and family during this Christmas Season.

Yours always in Christ,

-Fr. Mark