

MONROE Vicariate

MONTHLY PUBLICATION FEATURING NEWS
FROM AROUND THE MONROE VICARIATE



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From Our Vicar

FR. MARC GAWRONSKI

The light from the star of Bethlehem needs not electricity or glitter or LED's to power it. It shines in the darkness of our night with power and joy to spare.

Why Unplug Christmas?

For years, in the wake of a popular book entitled *Unplug the Christmas Machine*, people have struggled to find a balance in their celebration of Christmas. It is not Christmas we need to unplug. Christmas is the feast of the birth of the Savior. The light from the star of Bethlehem needs not electricity or glitter or LED's to power it. It shines in the darkness of our night with power and joy to spare. It is the Christmas machine that needs to be unplugged. This is the credit and consumer driven phenomenon that leads to lit Christmas trees in big box retail outlets on the first day of October. The Christmas machine reduces the birth of our savior to a commercial holiday, and obscures the gentle peace of the season we are about to enter into.

How do we unplug the Christmas machine? Well, there is no better beginning than the season of Advent! The four weeks invite us into a peaceful quiet anticipation of the feast of the Savior's birth. They invite us to contemplate the coming of the Lord into our lives even as we wait in line at the counter with gifts for our loved ones.

The Sunday readings for Advent are rich with images of the

hope of our salvation. In this year we will hear of "... the mountain of the Lord's house," toward which "all nations shall stream" so that "me may instruct us in his ways. The beautiful image of swords beat into plowshares and nations walking" in the light of the Lord" gives us hope in times of terrorism

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and recession. (Is. 2: 1-5) The well-known dream of God's Kingdom continues in the second Sunday of Advent when we envision the wolf as the guest of the lamb (and not the other way around!) (Is. 11: 1-10)

On the third Sunday of Advent we hear words of encouragement that might feel addressed personally to us: "Strengthen the hands that are feeble, make firm the knees that are weak, Say to those whose hearts are frightened: Be strong, fear not! Here comes our God...to save you." The vision of peace comes to its fulfillment on the fourth Sunday of Advent: "...the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel. (Is. 7: 14)



These powerful words of comfort, along with the challenge from the Jesus of Matthew's gospel can help us to resolve to focus on the holiness of Christmas, which is not found in maxed out credit limits and impressive gifts, but God's gift of His Son Jesus to each of us and all of us.

Why not take some time to look at the readings now. Reflect on them, and proclaim them to your children now, and during Advent. There is more than enough peace and joy in them to last a lifetime of Advents. The wisdom of the prophet Isaiah's vision is more than enough light for us as we endeavor to find a balance in our celebration of the nativity of the Lord, and find the will to unplug the Christmas machine once and for all!

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Inside: Read about ethnic Christmas Traditions courtesy of St. Joseph Parish, Monroe
Have a peaceful Advent journey and blessed Christmas season.

ST. ANNE, MONROE

St. Anne Women's Club **Christmas Bazaar** will take place on Sat Dec. 11 from 2-5:30 p.m., and on Sun., Dec. 12 from 8:30 a.m.-2 p.m., in the Parish Hall. Lots of quality holiday items at LOW prices, baked goods.

ST. MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL

Fr. Stephen Vileo will present the faith enrichment series **"Heaven, Hell and Purgatory - What are They?"** on the Mondays during Advent at 6-7:30 p.m. in the St. Michael School Cafeteria. Topics and dates:

- **Nov. 29**—Eschatology
- **Dec. 6**—Nature of Heaven
- **Dec. 13**— Nature of Hell
- **Dec. 20** - Nature of Purgatory.

All are welcome to attend.

SISTER SERVANTS OF THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY

Prayer and fellowship opportunities at Visitation Barn/Chapel, 529 Stewart Rd., Monroe. ■ **Our monthly Eucharistic liturgy** is celebrated every first Wednesday of the month at 7 p.m. ■ **Christmas Eve services** on December 24th will begin at 10:30 p.m. with caroling followed by the Eucharistic Liturgy. All are welcome.

ST. JOSEPH, MONROE

All are invited to the **Exposition of the Eucharist** on first Fridays of each month. Mass will be at 9 a.m. with adoring of the Eucharist to follow until noon in the old school. There will be refreshments offered by the Christian Service Commission in our hall.

CHRISTMAS AT THE JAIL

We need cookies for ministry to those in jail. Currently, there are about 500 inmates between the Monroe County Jail and the detention center. In the past, the inmates have said that the cookies help them "make it through Christmas." We will need the cookies by Mon., Dec. 13th. You may drop them off at St. Joseph Catholic Church 924 East 2nd Street Monroe, MI 48161 or call Joan Allor 734-241-9590 or 243-5637 to have them picked up. God bless you for your kindness.



THANK YOU for making the St. Joseph Cemetery, Monroe Fundraiser a Success.

A sincere thank you to all four City of Monroe parishes who worked together in one spirit to make our dinner fundraiser and silent auction a wonderful success on October 23rd! Thanks and may God bless the planners, the many volunteer workers, the generous donors, those who came to enjoy the event, and a big thanks to the parish priests who donated toward the dinner and gave strong support. You may still make a donation to help the cemetery. **Please contact the office at 241-1411**, or stop in at 909 N. Monroe Street. Checks may be made to St. Joseph Cemetery.

ST. ANTHONY, TEMPERANCE

St. Anthony Catholic Church in Temperance announces a Parish Mission, to be held November 27 – December 1, 2010. Fr. Dan Havron, OFM will present Healing and Advent, which addresses the need for spiritual healing especially as we prepare for the coming of Christ during the season of Advent.

Schedule for the Mission:

Fr. Dan will give the homily at our regular weekend Masses: Saturday, 5pm; Sunday; 8 a.m., 10 a.m. and noon.

Monday-Wednesday

Morning: Coming Closer to the Lord through Prayer, Healing, and His Holy Word. Mass at 8:30 a.m., followed by a 30 minute talk with Q & A; Confessions
Evening: Holy Hour begins at 7p.m. with Exposition of the Holy Eucharist, followed by Scripture and Talk; Quiet meditation; Praying over and laying on of hands; concluding with Benediction; Confessions

For more information or questions, please contact St. Anthony Parish Office 734-854-1143.



The Christmas Traditions of Italy

BY TONINO J VICARI
St. Joseph Parish, Monroe

The Christmas traditions of Italy are as rich, colorful, musical and diverse as the country is. There are many traditions and customs that are part of the holiday season and they vary from region to region. One bond and commonality that they do have is the focus on the Spiritual and religious significance of the day, the focus on the birth of Christ.



Zampognari

Christmas Novena—Christmas season begins eight days before Christmas Day in the form of the Christmas Novena. During the Novena, the children of a town go door to door reciting songs and Christmas poems to help the townspeople begin to feel the spirit of Christmas. This is also a form of Communal Christmas Prayer. Italians observe a strict fast the night before Christmas Eve.

Il Presepe: The Creches—The focus of the Italian household during the Christmas season is that of the Nativity scene, or Il presepio. Unlike the German and American tradition of the Christmas tree, the Italian tradition focuses on the baby Jesus and the Manger scene of the Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, three Wise men, shepherds and animals. This tradition of creating these scenes goes back to the 13th Century and St. Francis of Assisi

is credited for popularizing the tradition. In December 1223, in a natural cave in the Greccio, in a natural cave in the Greccio, he prepared a straw filled manger including animals. He then celebrated mass in the manger scene with others. There were stories of miraculous healings at this event which helped spread the tradition.

Today the tradition of Il Presepio is alive and well and has been take to an level of a High Art

Form. There are many artisans that create beautiful works for sale around the world, and Italian nativity scenes are among the most beautiful and most popular. There are also exhibits and Art Competitions throughout Italy during the Christmas season focusing on the Il Prespio with a focus on different artistic interpretations of the story of the Incarnation.

Zampognari—Shepherds that came down from the mountains of Abruzzo, they dressed in sheepskin vests, leather pants, and woolen coats. They play bag piped music through the city streets, and stop at every Nativity scene and shrine to the Madonna.

Christmas Gifts—In Italy, gifts given to children and families are traditionally not opened until the Epiphany on January 6th when the Christ Child was presented with Gifts by the Magi.

Mexican Traditions for Christmas

BY MARIA RUVALCABA
St. Joseph Parish, Monroe

Christmas for Mexicans, in traditional homes and rural areas, is a religious holiday. It is a celebration of the Nativity. This means the birthday of Our Lord Jesus. In order to prepare for the day of symbolic commemoration, we have the "Posadas." These celebrations are a "Novena" or nine days before the 24, which is the "Noche Buena" or "Holy Night".

These Posadas are an enactment of looking for lodging of St. Joseph and Virgin Mary, called The Pilgrims going to Bethlehem for the Census according to the Scriptures. In Spanish we called them: "Los Peregrinos, San José y la Virgen María." Each family in a neighborhood will schedule a night for the Posada to be held at their home, starting on the 16th of December and finishing on the 24th on Noche Buena.

Every home will have a Nativity scene. The hosts of the home are the innkeepers, and the neighborhood children and adults are Los Peregrinos, who have to request lodging through singing a simple chant. All carry small lit candles in their hands and four teenagers of about the same height are chosen to carry Los Peregrinos, which are two small statues of St. Joseph leading a donkey, which Virgin Mary is riding sidesaddle. The head of the procession will have a candle inside of a paper lampshade that looks like an accordion but open at the top and it is called a "Farolito" or little lantern.

The Peregrinos will ask for lodging in three different houses but only the third one will allow them in. That will be the house that is supposed to have the Posada for that evening.

Once the innkeepers let them in, the group of guests comes into the home and kneels around the Nativity scene to pray the Rosary and sing traditional songs like Holy Night in Spanish of course!

After all the prayer is done, then it comes the party for the children. There will be a **Piñata**, (pronounce Piniata, for it has an ñ instead of an n), filled with peanuts in the shell, oranges, tangerines, sugar canes, and seldom wrapped hard candy. Of course, there will be other types of chants the children will sing while the child in turn is trying to break the Piñata with a stick while he/she will be blindfolded.

Although the Piñata was originally from Italy, it has become a Mexican tradition for celebrations where there are children involved. The Piñata was made out of a clay pot and decorated with crepe paper in different colors. Today's piñatas are made out of cardboard and paper mache techniques and decorated with crepe paper. This change was made to prevent the children from cutting their hands when going for the fruit

and candy when the Piñata was broken and the clay piece would become a hazard. They have all kinds of designs besides the traditional star.

For the adults there is always "Ponche con Piquete" (sting), which is a hot beverage or "Punch" made out of seasonal fruits and cinnamon sticks, with a shot of alcoholic spirit. A good substitute here in Michigan is hot apple cider with fruits, without the "spirits."

On **Noche Buena**, December 24, everybody goes to Misa de Noche Buena, which is at midnight. After the Mass, everyone goes to their respective homes to have dinner with family and any friend who does not have a family is always welcome to be part of a family celebration, and most important of all to place the Baby Jesus in the manger in the Nativity scene.

The presents are not received on Christmas, for Christmas is a celebration of Life of Our Savior.

The New Year's Eve, there is a **Misa de Gallo**, (Rooster's Mass) that takes place at midnight also. Some families go to church earlier to give thanks for all the blessings received during the year.

The children's celebration of receiving presents is not until January 6th, "**el día de Reyes**," the day of the Kings, or the Wise Men Day.

It is the Magi who brought the presents to the Baby Jesus; thus, they bring the toys to the boys and girls who have been good. The children place their shoes by the window, so the Magi place the present in the shoe. If the present is bigger than the shoe, it will be placed next to it. Many children get a new pair of shoes for a present.

El día de Reyes is celebrated with a "Merienda" consisting of hot chocolate and "**The Rosca de Reyes**." La Merienda is the meal that takes place any time between 5 p.m. and 7p.m. it is not a heavy meal but the equivalent of "High Tea".

The Rosca de Reyes is a big oval wreath made out of egg bread (like an egg bagel, but huge) with dry fruit decorations and sprinkled sugar on top, but inside, there is a little ceramic doll, which represents the Baby Jesus. The person who gets the piece of bread with the Baby, must be the Godparent of the Baby Jesus in the celebration of the Candelaria, on February 2nd..

"**El día de la Candelaria**" is the day of the Candle or Light, known as the Day of Purification. That day, the Nativity scene is put away with a party given by the person who got the Baby Jesus in his/her piece of bread during the Rosca de Reyes celebration. He or she will be responsible for making a "Ropon" or christening gown for Baby Jesus. Generally, they have a Dinner with Tamales (Tamales are corn bread filled with meats in a sauce or raisins wrapped in corn husks).

The Spirit of Christmas

BY MARIE CRISTE
St. Joseph Parish, Monroe

St. Joseph, Monroe is preparing for Christmas long before the last autumn leaf hits the ground. As the days grow colder and shorter, plans are being made to take advantage of the last warm, sunny days to place lights around the church grounds so they will be ready when the time finally arrives to celebrate the holidays and the stable will be put in place, ready to receive the familiar nativity figures.



Weeks in advance, committees gather to plan the many events that are always part of our Christmas celebration. **Our Lady of Guadalupe** will be celebrated on her feast day, December 12, with a very special Mass which will include a Mariachi Band. Many will come to serenade Our Lady and join in the festivities. After the Mass, the celebration will continue with food and entertainment in our hall. **Posadas**, the re-enactment of the search by Joseph and Mary for a place to stay is part of the spiritual preparation for the parishioners. Often, the night of the re-enactment is cold and as we walk from station to station, realistic thoughts of Mary and Joseph on that first Christmas Eve are created. This is quite different from sitting in a warm room and reading about it.

During Advent, the Church is bare but on Christmas Eve, as parishioners arrive to begin the real Christmas season, they are greeted with a **colorful array of lights and flowers**. The Choir will lead them in song and serenade them with the special music we hear only at this time of the year.

The Food Closet is open every Wednesday morning. This committee plans special foods to include in the bags for all who come. Christmas Dinner should be a happy time for everyone. Those responsible for this weekly event prepare a Christmas Dinner that will be special for their guests. There will be gifts for the children.

The **Spirit of Christmas will linger** long after the calendar date has passed. The Food Closet and the Wednesday Night Dinner will continue throughout the year. As the new year begins, we will start planning to make the next year's Christmas celebration better.

The deadline for the January, 2011 issue is Mon., Dec. 20th
Please email articles/photos to communications@monroevicariate.com
Thank you!