December 2019

Stewardship Today is a monthly devotional newsletter prepared by the Office of Stewardship of the Catholic Diocese of Baton Rouge, designed to assist in helping to develop a greater understanding of the role of stewardship in all of life.

All we are, and all we possess, are gifts from God for our use and for the blessing of others. Through wise stewardship, we invest our time, our talents, and our treasures to the glory of God.

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Christ Has Come, Bringing Justice and Peace

Stewardship Today Staff

Christmas is a season of celebration and a time for worship and service. Christ has come, Emmanuel, God with us! As we rejoice, shepherds to whom the heavenly host appeared the night of the child's birth left the manger joyous, “glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them” (Matthew 2:20). They worshiped, they celebrated his coming, and they told others the good news. Christ had come. They had good reason to worship and celebrate, and they had a story to tell. Their Messiah had come.

We know the New Testament narrative and annually read from both St. Matthew’s Gospel and from that of St. Luke. The familiar shepherds were among the multitudes who prayerfully awaited the birth of their King; they'd long heard the prophetic testimony of the Old Testament. We look, for example, to the messianic eleventh chapter of Isaiah. A descendant of King David will assume the eternal throne of Glory, it proclaims, bearing gifts of justice and peace, wise counsel and heavenly knowledge.

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We call them opening acts, those who open a show for the headliner. As you can imagine, it’s how a great many successful artists got their start. Famously, in 1962, The Beatles opened for Brenda Lee and a year later for Roy Orbison. Four years after that, Jimi Hendrix—of all people—opened for The Monkees. In 1974, Anne Murray—a then-popular Canadian-born solo artist of such standards as “Snowbird” and “A Love Song,” invited a young New Jersey singer to open her big Central Park concert. The name of her opening act? Bruce Springsteen. He stole the show and never worked as an opening act again.

We understand the idea of an opening act. There are, of course, times in life when we’d benefit a great deal more from someone who doesn’t merely open the door. We need someone to provide guidance, to show the way. That can be a spiritual calling with great consequence, certainly true for the one called to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus Christ in his public ministry. “In those days John the Baptist appeared, preaching in the desert of Judea and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ It was of him that the prophet Isaiah had spoken when he said: ‘A voice of one crying out in the desert, Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths’” (Matthew 3:1-3).

John had come with an eternally significant purpose. Like all prophets before him, he called for repentance in the present. Like all prophets before him, he also pointed to the future and the coming of the Holy One, the coming of the Messiah. But, unlike all those prophets before him, that very Messiah was walking the same streets, at that very time. His appearance was imminent. The King was coming, and he was coming in a moment. The calling of John the Baptist was sure, but the coming of Christ brought certainty, redefining all of history.

Christ Has Come

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“A shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom. The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, a spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the Lord, and his delight shall be the fear of the Lord. Not by appearance shall he judge, nor by hearsay shall he decide, but he shall judge the poor with justice, and decide fairly for the land’s afflicted” (Isaiah 11:1-4a).

Jesus Christ has come, and he has brought with him a spirit of justice and the assurance of peace, and we worship him. “Justice shall be the band around his waist, and faithfulness a belt upon his hips. Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat; the calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to lead them. The earth shall be filled with knowledge of the Lord, as water covers the sea” (Isaiah 11:5-6, 9b).
May the Lord Bless You

Stewardship Today Staff

As we noted in the November issue of this newsletter, God provided Moses the words to one of the most commonly utilized biblical benedictions. We repeat it here, once again promoting the eternal blessing of the God we worship. “The Lord bless you and keep you! The Lord let his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you! The Lord look upon you kindly and give you peace” (Numbers 6:24-26). It is a timely message, with seasonal import. We praise God for our blessings, and we think of the holiday season and the many ways we might extend God’s blessings to others.

Do we really have all we need? More personally, do we feel blessed? “Blessed are all who fear the Lord, and who walk in his ways. What your hands provide, you will enjoy; you will be blessed and prosper; your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your home, your children like young olive plants around your table. Just so will the man be blessed who fears the Lord” (Psalm 128:1-4).

Though the first passage of this two-stanza psalm arises from an earlier day partly defined by the language of that era, the second stanza not only promotes similar truths but affirms a universal message of human prosperity and godly blessing. “May the Lord bless you from Zion; may you see Jerusalem’s prosperity all the days of your life, and live to see your children’s children. Peace upon Israel” (Psalm 128:5-6).

May you know God’s blessing this Christmas. May you experience the prosperity of heaven, the fruitfulness that comes from the hand of the Almighty, the presence of the very Son of God, and the joy of the Holy Family. “May the Lord bless you.”
Support the Important Work of the Bishop’s Annual Appeal

“Hope in the Lord”

Hope in the Lord. No matter the struggles we face, Jesus Christ is our hope and greater than any perceived difficulty or challenge. Our lives are a gift from God and, in gratitude, we acknowledge that all we do as faithful Catholics is motivated by our confidence in the salvation God promises the Church, his children.

Please join Bishop Michael G. Duca, whose motto echoes this year’s theme. Your generous gifts in support of the Bishop’s Annual Appeal express your love for God and will help meet the needs of others who see Christ in you. Hold fast to the faith. Hope in the Lord. And please give in support of the BAA.

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