This Advent, after a year of unprecedented trials and uncertainties, the Holy Family’s journey to Bethlehem is a reminder that Christ never forgets His people.

That is the theme of *Advent Hope: A Journey with the Holy Family*, a virtual event featuring Bishop David Zubik and Father Boniface Hicks, OSB. Father Hicks is the general manager and on-air host of We Are One Body Catholic radio (WAOB 106.7 FM), and speaks on the spiritual life at Catholic conferences, retreats and courses.

The event will take place from 7-8:30 p.m. on December 13, 2020, the third Sunday of Advent, or Gaudete Sunday, when Catholics reflect on the joy of Christ’s coming. It will be livestreamed from St. Anthony Chapel in Pittsburgh’s Troy Hill, home to the largest collection of Christian relics in the world outside of the Vatican.

The idea grew from the desire to create a communal faith experience this Advent, at a time when many in-person traditions are cancelled because of the pandemic.

“We realized that we needed to have a virtual event to help people keep their eyes on Jesus during this Advent season,” said Judene Indovina, diocesan director of Catholic Identity.

Father Hicks will reflect on what it means to travel the difficult road to Bethlehem with Mary and Joseph, confident that the joy of Christ’s coming is near.

The evening will also include Evening Prayer led by Bishop Zubik; adoration of the Blessed Sacrament; music; and a procession led by a girl dressed as St. Lucy, whose feast day is celebrated on that date.

St. Lucy, whose name means “light,” is a 4th century martyr and the patron saint of sight.

“Her burning desire was to see God,” Indovina said, pointing to St. Lucy’s life as an example of placing one’s hope in Christ.
Worship aids and at-home family activities will be available closer to the event on the diocesan website [here]. The event is not open in-person to the public due to health precautions, but all are invited to join via the diocesan YouTube channel [here].
Inspired by new names

DECEMBER 4, 2020

Categories: News
Tags: Diocesan News, Featured

https://youtube.com/watch?v=TLwEMnjZjYs
In a world that cries out for love and mercy, the pastors of two merging parishes believe that their new namesakes will help unify and inspire parishioners to spread healing graces.

Saint Faustina Parish brings together the parishes of Saint Alphonsus in Boyers/Murrinsville/West Sunbury, Saint Christopher in Prospect and Saint Peter in Slippery Rock. Most Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish was created through the merger of Saint Catherine of Siena in Crescent, Saint Joseph in Coraopolis and Saint Margaret Mary in Moon Township.

They are two of 14 new parishes that will be officially established on January 4.

“We are absolutely thrilled with our new parish name,” said Father Adam Verona, pastor of Saint Faustina Parish. “Saint Faustina’s visions of Jesus and conversations with Him had a huge impact.”

A Polish nun and mystic who died in 1938 at the age of 33, Saint Faustina inspired the devotion to the Divine Mercy, which is celebrated the second Sunday after Easter. Pope John Paul II canonized her in 2000.

“At the heart of this devotion is trust in God,” Father Verona said. “We are His children and need to have an open heart to the graces that He wants to give to us.”

Father Frank Kurimsky, pastor of Most Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish, is also excited about their new name and the possibilities it can bring.

“One of our pastoral council members pointed out that the name lends itself to novenas, devotions and litanies,” Father Kurimsky said. “It’s an opportunity to get refocused on the theology and meaning.”

The Most Sacred Heart of Jesus is one of the most well-known and widely practiced Catholic devotions, with the heart of Jesus seen as a symbol of God’s boundless and passionate love for humankind. It centers on the long-suffering love and compassionate heart of Christ toward humanity.
“How can we take that compassionate love outside our doors?” Father Kurimsky asked. “That's what we're called to do. What a wonderful way to evangelize.”

Both pastors are finding ways to bring their people together. Father Verona has geographic challenges in northern Butler County, with four churches in three towns that are about a 25 minute drive from each other.

“We realize that change isn’t easy, it involves uncertainty,” he said. “But we can always trust in the providence of God.”

The other 12 parishes that are merging on January 4:

• **Mary, Queen of Peace**, which brings together the parishes of Saint Mary of the Mount (Mount Washington) and Prince of Peace (South Side);
• **Our Lady of Hope**, which brings together the parishes of Saint Gabriel of the Sorrowful Virgin (Whitehall), Saint Germaine (Bethel Park), Nativity (South Park) and Saint Valentine (Bethel Park);
• **Our Lady of the Valley**, which brings together the parishes of Saint Cecilia (Rochester), Saint Felix (Freedom), Holy Family (New Brighton) and Saints Peter and Paul (Beaver);
• **Resurrection**, which brings together the parishes of Saint John Capistran (Upper Saint Clair) and Saint Thomas More (Bethel Park);
• **Saint Catherine Laboure**, which brings together the parishes of Saint Joan of Arc (South Park) and Saint Louise de Marillac (Upper Saint Clair);
• **Saint Clare of Assisi**, which brings together the parishes of Saint Joseph (North Oakland), Mater Dolorosa (Chicora) and Saint Wendelin (Carbon Center);
• **Saint Francis of Assisi**, which brings together the parishes of Saint John (Coylesville), Saint Joseph (Cabot) and Saint Mary of the Assumption (Herman);
• **Saints Joachim and Anne**, which brings together the parishes of Saint Mark (Liberty Borough/Port Vue), Saint Michael (Elizabeth) and Queen of the Rosary (Glassport);
• **Saint Jude**, which brings together the parishes of Saint Raphael (Morningside/Stanton Heights/Upper Lawrenceville) and Sacred Heart (Shadyside);
• **Saints Martha and Mary**, which brings together the parishes of Saint Catherine of Sweden (Hampton Township) and Saint Richard (Richland Township);
• **Saint Matthew**, which brings together the parishes of All Saints (Etna), Saint Aloysius (Reserve Township), Saint Bonaventure (Glenshaw) and Holy Spirit (Millvale);
• **Saint Raphael the Archangel**, which brings together the parishes of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton (Carnegie), Saint Margaret of Scotland (Green Tree) and Saints Simon and Jude (Scott Township).
Father Adam Verona, celebrating Mass on Dec. 2.
Immaculate Conception– Passing the Faith to every generation

By Father Richard S. Jones, Chaplain, UPMC Mercy Hospital

Each week in his post-game news conference, Pittsburgh Steelers head coach Mike Tomlin assesses the performance of his team by saying, “There is nothing perfect about our play but our record.” He means that though the scores show we have not yet lost a game, the opposition is waiting to dethrone us. The same holds true for our life of faith.

The most famous Steelers play, one that most fans know well, was dubbed the “Immaculate Reception.” With the Steelers trailing in the final 30 seconds against Oakland in the AFC divisional playoff game on December 23, 1972, quarterback Terry Bradshaw attempted a pass to John Fuqua. The ball either bounced off the helmet of Raiders safety Jack Tatum or off Fuqua's hands. As it was falling, fullback Franco Harris grabbed it and ran for the winning touchdown. This amazing play propelled the Steelers to a 13-7 victory.

NFL Films chose it as their greatest play of all time. It was the turning point for the Steelers franchise, which reversed four decades of futility with its first playoff win ever, then won four Super Bowls over the next seven years.

Sportscaster Myron Cope was the first to call it the “Immaculate Reception.” The name is, of course, a pun derived from the Immaculate Conception, a dogma in the Roman Catholic Church. The moniker stuck because
the play seemed miraculous in nature (like a Hail Mary pass) and because the ball was kept pure from the stain of turf. That single miraculous play changed our city forever!

Now, for the real Immaculate Conception. In 1854 Pope Pius IX proclaimed solemnly in his encyclical *Ineffabilis Deus*, as an infallible dogma of the Catholic faith, that, “*The most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin.***

This momentous day celebrates the conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the womb of her mother Anne, without any inheritance of original sin. It should not be confused with the Virgin Birth, in which Mary conceived Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit alone, without any human father. The Immaculate Conception is about Mary’s miraculous holiness, the holiness that helped her to say “yes” to becoming the Virgin Mother.

The Catholic Catechism #492 states—“*The splendor of an entirely unique holiness’ by which Mary is ‘enriched from the first instant of her conception’ comes wholly from Christ: she is ‘redeemed, in a more exalted fashion, by the reason of the merits of her Son.’ The Father blessed Mary more than any other created person ‘in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places’ and chose her ‘in Christ before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before him in love.’***

St. Paul reminds us that all persons are born in sin (Romans 5:12) due to the sin of Adam and Eve, through which humanity lost sanctifying grace. Everything in us is tainted by sin – even the best in us is marred. Mary, however, remained obedient to God, just as Jesus’ life, death and Resurrection showed his obedience to God the Father.

St. Irenaeus wrote, “Being obedient she became the cause of salvation for herself and for the human race.” Through her Immaculate Conception, the Blessed Virgin Mary — true daughter of Zion, the holy city of God — is now ready to receive Emmanuel, God-with-us, in the temple of her womb.

In our human, sinful, fallen, and wounded condition, Mary, ‘the sinless one,’ is a sign of hope and a refuge of sinners. Mary, the New Eve, stands as a selfless model of humility, obedience simplicity, generosity, charity, prayerfulness, purity, holiness, trust, and faith who show us what a life of following Jesus truly can be.

Ancient people navigated by the stars. She is our guiding star. As Pope Benedict said, “The star of Mary Immaculate shines down the path of Advent....What person is more luminous than Mary? “ The Blessed Mother will help us in our struggle with sin, in our battle against all that separates us from God and one another. As adopted children of God, we rejoice in Jesus’ victory over sin, sickness, suffering, Satan, and death. Through faith, in baptism, grace is available to all who believe in Jesus, in every generation.

The medieval mystical theologian, Dominican Father Meister Eckhart, once wrote, “What good is it to me if Mary is full of grace if I am not full of grace too? What good is it to me if the Creator brings forth his Son if I do not bring him forth in my lifetime and in my world? This then is the fullness of time: when the Son of God is begotten in us.”

Let us thank God for his gift of our Immaculate Mother, Mary, and ask for her protection.
Cal U Grad Alive in Her Faith, Guiding Others

DECEMBER 4, 2020

Categories: News
Tags: Diocesan News, Featured

https://youtube.com/watch?v=xU9ysX-I2QY
The seeds of Cynthia Obiekezie’s faith were planted by her parents, took root in her parish and blossomed at college. Now she’s helping others grow in their relationship with Jesus.

While earning a Bachelor of Science degree in psychology at California University of Pennsylvania, Obiekezie served as president of the Cal U Catholic community during her senior year. She graduated last May and is now a member of a campus ministry alumni advisory board.

She also teaches faith formation to second grade students at Christ the Divine Shepherd Parish in Monroeville and Penn Hills.

“It’s a blessing to have her on the team,” said Father Larry Adams, moderator of team ministry. “I’m really impressed by her positive energy, attitude and demeanor. She’s providing witness to others.”

“I was active in the faith growing up at Saint Gerard Majella Parish,” said Obiekezie, who was born in Nigeria and moved here with her parents at age 4. “But it was Cal U campus ministry that gave me a chance to grow, to find my faith for myself, and help me to learn my identity.”

Director of campus ministry Meghan Larsen-Reidy met Obiekezie as a sophomore and saw her leadership potential.

“Cynthia was attending Mass every week, but at college she realized she had to really take ownership of her faith,” Larsen-Reidy said.

Her spiritual journey got a boost in early 2019 when she attended the SEEK Catholic conference in Indianapolis, encountering Christ in a deeper, more personal way.

“I met other Nigerian Catholics and found ways to connect with others,” Obiekezie said. “It was the most valuable experience of my life.”

Studies show the college years are essential in keeping younger Catholics practicing their faith. A report from the Pew Research Center found that nearly 80 percent of those who leave the church do so by age 23.

In an effort to offer guidance and support for younger Catholics, Larsen-Reidy and campus ministry chaplain Father Tom Lewandowski are linking local parishes with college students and alumni of Cal U, Washington & Jefferson College and Waynesburg University.

Obiekezie is on board with any outreach that helps to connect people with Christ.

“I became so much stronger in my faith through campus ministry,” she said. “That’s why I wanted to get involved in teaching faith formation.”

As a co-instructor at her parish, she leads parents through online lessons and hopes to grow in the role. Obiekezie works as a care attendant at UPMC Shadyside and is looking at graduate school to study international relations or acting.

She’s excited about the future, and her faith.

“I love the prayers we say, and the saints, and that we emphasize the role of Mary,” she said. “She is a beautiful guide.”
To learn more about this ministry, visit https://diopitt.org/calucatholic or contact Meghan Larson-Reidy at larsenreidy@calu.edu or 412-568-3561.

Obiekezie with Bishop David Zubik at Saint Benedict the Moor Parish in Pittsburgh's Hill District last February to mark Black History Month.

At a SEEK conference in 2019 with Larsen-Reidy (front, middle)
Cynthia Obiekezie at her college graduation
Our Lady of Guadalupe feast day traditions

DECEMBER 4, 2020

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About two years ago, in an effort to reach the vibrant and growing Latino community in the Diocese of Pittsburgh, Jorge Vela, director of Hispanic Apostolate, began writing a monthly spirituality column in Spanish.

We hope that it also will be enjoyed by native speakers of English, including students in our Catholic schools who are learning the Spanish language. (English translation follows Spanish.)

Fiesta de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe

Cada 12 de diciembre, la comunidad latina celebra la Fiesta de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe. Conmemora la aparición de la Santísima Virgen María al campesino mexicano Juan Diego en 1531. Una vez más se celebra en toda la Diócesis de Pittsburgh.

Queridos amigos, quiero darles algunas reglas importantes de salud y seguridad para asistir a misa el miércoles, 9 de diciembre en la Catedral de San Pablo, por restricciones relativas al COVID-19.

1. La capacidad máxima para esta celebración es de 350 personas. Después de alcanzar este número, no podremos permitir el acceso a más personas. Por este motivo, le pedimos que llegue con bastante antelación.

Hace aproximadamente dos años, en un esfuerzo por llegar a la vibrante y creciente comunidad latina de la Diócesis de Pittsburgh, Jorge Vela, director del Apostolado Hispano, comenzó a escribir una columna mensual de espiritualidad en español.

Esperamos que también lo disfruten los hablantes nativos de inglés, incluidos los estudiantes de nuestras escuelas católicas que están aprendiendo el idioma español.

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2. El uso de cubiertas faciales es requisito imprescindible para poder ingresar.

3. Las bancas estarán marcadas de tal manera que dentro de la Catedral todos respetemos el sano distanciamiento social. Se debe mantener en todo momento una distancia social de al menos seis pies, excepto para las familias que viven en el mismo hogar.

4. Para estar seguros, este año no tendremos la procesión de flores, por lo que le pedimos que si llega a la Catedral con flores las coloque en los contenedores correspondientes, manteniendo el distanciamiento social.

5. Todos entraremos por la misma puerta (puerta lateral del lado del estacionamiento) y la salida será por la puerta central.

6. Con el fin de brindar más oportunidades para que todos celebren Nuestra Virgen de Guadalupe, la Misa también se llevará a cabo en las iglesias donde se dice en español:

   • Parroquia de la Catedral de Saint Paul, Pittsburgh / Oakland – miércoles. 9 de diciembre a las 7 p.m.
   • Iglesia de Santa Catalina de Siena, Pittsburgh / Beechview – miércoles. 9 de diciembre a las 7 p.m.
   • Parroquia de la Sagrada Familia, Ciruela – Vie. 11 de diciembre a las 7 p.m.
   • Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de la Medalla Milagrosa en Meadow Lands, sáb. 12 de diciembre, 4 p.m. y sol. 13 de diciembre a la 1 p.m.

Misa prevista para el viernes. El 11 de diciembre en el antiguo gimnasio de la escuela secundaria Quigley en Baden se canceló debido a un número creciente de casos de COVID a nivel local. Los funcionarios de salud están aconsejando a las personas que se queden en casa para limitar la propagación de la enfermedad.

Todos los demás están invitados a participar en la Misa Catedral, pero respetando las pautas antes mencionadas.

Bendiciones

Jorge Vela

**Artículo de consagración a la Virgen de Guadalupe**

El día 12 de diciembre del año pasado, durante la Celebración de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe en la Catedral de San Pablo, aquí en Pittsburgh, la comunidad latina que estuvo presente en la misa, consagraron a nuestra juventud y a nuestras familias a la Virgen de Guadalupe, de tal forma que vivamos de acuerdo con nuestro compromiso bautismal. Eso significa vivir nuestra fe con honestidad, congruencia y sinceridad.

Si ponemos nuestro corazón en nuestra vida diaria, y vivimos como decía y vivía Santa Teresita del Niño Jesús, haciendo lo ordinario de forma extraordinaria, estaremos viviendo de acuerdo con nuestro bautismo y de acuerdo a nuestra consagración guadalupana. También recomendamos el rezo de rosario en familia, ya sea diario o semanal. Les dejo la oración, por si alguno de ustedes le gustaría consagrar su vida, su juventud y a sus familias a la Virgen de Guadalupe, Emperatriz de la Américas.

**Oración de Consagración a la Virgen de Guadalupe**
Santísima madre de Guadalupe, en este día queremos consagrarnos a Ti como verdaderos hijos tuyos. Te consagramos nuestras vidas, nuestra salud, nuestra juventud, nuestros hogares, nuestras familias, el trabajo, cada uno de nuestros proyectos, así como todos nuestros bienes espirituales y materiales.

Que cada uno de nosotros sea una ofrenda viva y agradable a ti, para bendecirte en todo momento, y que te imite con humildad. Que diga “sí” al plan de Salvación, y que pueda ser fiel a la santísima voluntad de tu Hijo Amado, Jesucristo, y que me comprometa a difundir tu devoción y a hacer que muchos conozcan tu amor de madre intercesora, para que acercándose a Ti puedan experimentar tu amor maternal y tu protección como nosotros lo vivimos, y que, a través tuyo, lleguemos a conocer, amar e imitar a Nuestro Señor y Redentor.

Te consagramos nuestros pensamientos, palabras y obras, que nuestras mentes vayan de acuerdo con tus pensamientos, que nuestros corazones estén en sintonía con tus sentimientos, y que nuestras bocas prediquen el Evangelio de Cristo. Te consagramos nuestro pasado, nuestro presente y nuestro futuro. Recíbenos buena madre y presentanos ante tu muy amado Hijo, Jesucristo, para que, junto con Él, con el Padre y el Espíritu Santo te bendiga y te alabe por toda la Eternidad. Amen.

**Our Lady of Guadalupe Feast Day**

*Each December 12th, the Latino community celebrates the Feast Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe. It commemorates the appearance of the Blessed Virgin Mary to the Mexican peasant Juan Diego in 1531. Once again this is being celebrated across the Diocese of Pittsburgh.*

Dear friends, I want to give you some important health and safety rules about attending Mass on Wed. December 9 in Saint Paul Cathedral, due to restrictions relating to COVID-19.

1. The maximum capacity for this celebration is 350 people. After reaching this number, we will not be able to allow access to more people. For this reason, we ask that you arrive well in advance to ensure your participation. For those unable to attend, the Mass also will be livestreamed at [http://christianassociatestv.org](http://christianassociatestv.org).

2. The use of face coverings is an essential requirement to be able to enter.

3. Pews will be marked in such a way, that within the Cathedral, we all respect healthy social distancing. Social distancing of at least six feet, other than for families living in the same household, must be maintained at all times.

4. In order to be safe, this year we will not have the procession of flowers, so we ask that if you arrive at the Cathedral with flowers, you place them in the corresponding containers, maintaining social distancing.

5. We will all enter through the same door (side door on the parking lot side) and the exit will be through the central door.

6. In order to provide more opportunities for everyone to celebrate Our Virgin of Guadalupe, Mass also will be held in churches where it is said in Spanish:
• Saint Paul Cathedral Parish, Pittsburgh/Oakland – Wed. December 9 at 7 p.m.
• St. Catherine of Siena church, Pittsburgh/Beechview – Wed. December 9 at 7 p.m.
• Holy Family Parish, Plum – Fri. December 11 at 7 p.m.
• Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal church in Meadow Lands, Sat. December 12, 4 p.m. and Sun. December 13 at 1 p.m.

A Mass planned for Fri. Dec. 11 at the former Quigley High School gym in Baden has been cancelled due to a rising number of COVID cases locally. Health officials are advising people to stay home to limit the spread of the disease.

All others are invited to participate in the Cathedral Mass, but respecting the above-mentioned guidelines.

Blessings,

Jorge Vela

**Article of Consecration to the Virgin of Guadalupe**

On December 12 of last year, during the Celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe in the Cathedral of San Pablo, here in Pittsburgh, the Latino community that was present at Mass, consecrated our youth and our families to the Virgin of Guadalupe, so that we live up to our baptismal commitment. That means living our faith with honesty, consistency, and sincerity.

If we put our heart in our daily life, and we live as Saint Therese of the Child Jesus said and lived, doing the ordinary in an extraordinary way, we will be living according to our baptism and according to our Guadalupana consecration. We also recommend praying the rosary as a family, either daily or weekly. I leave the prayer to you, in case any of you would like to consecrate your life, your youth and your families to the Virgin of Guadalupe, Empress of the Americas.

**Prayer of Consecration to the Virgin of Guadalupe**

Most Holy Mother of Guadalupe, on this day we want to consecrate ourselves to You as your true children. We consecrate our lives, our health, our youth, our homes, our families, our work, each of our projects, as well as all our spiritual and material goods.

May each one of us be a living and pleasant offering to you, to bless you at all times, and to imitate you with humility. May I say “yes” to the plan of Salvation, and may I be faithful to the most holy will of your Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, and may I commit to spreading your devotion and making many know your love as an intercessory mother, so that by approaching You May they experience your maternal love and protection as we do, and may, through you, come to know, love, and imitate Our Lord and Redeemer.

We consecrate our thoughts, words and deeds to you, may our minds be in accord with your thoughts, may our hearts be in tune with your feelings, and may our mouths preach the Gospel of Christ. We consecrate our past, our present and our future to you. Receive us good mother and present us before your very beloved Son, Jesus Christ, so that, together with Him, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, he may bless you and praise you for all Eternity. Amen.
Faithful Chronicles

By Father Frank D. Almade

Each Advent, we usually reflect on variations on common themes: prayerful reparation for the coming of Christ, or excited anticipation of the arrival of our savior, or patience practiced by pregnant women. But in this uncommon year of 2020, my thoughts gravitate to a theme rarely explored by Christian preachers—exile.

Exile is what happens when powerful authorities or dire circumstances force us to live in a strange place, far from those we love. Large portions of the Bible tell of the terrible mass exile of the Jewish people in the late 7th century B.C. when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon invaded the city of Jerusalem, destroyed the great temple and forcibly deported most of the Israelite nation to what is now Iraq. The pain of this banishment from their ancestral home is captured in Psalm 137. “By the rivers of Babylon there we sat and wept….How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?”

For three generations, Jews remained in exile. Eventually the Persian ruler Cyrus released them to return, some to their homeland in Palestine, some to cities north and west, such as Alexandria in Egypt, Antioch in Syria, and Tarsus in Galatia. Their freedom from exile is well expressed in Psalm 126. “When the Lord restored the fortunes of Israel/we were like those dreaming/our mouths filled with laughter/our tongues with joy.”

But prophets such as Haggai, Zechariah and Joel reflected on the shattering experience of exile and attributed this horrible act as punishment for unfaithfulness to the covenant with the One God Yahweh. Some called for more fervent sacrificial worship in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. Others urged a change of hearts and
anticipation of a messiah who would bring forgiveness. All the prophets were required to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.

The reality of exile is not just a historical fact. It is also a social, religious and spiritual point of reference for Jews and Christians to this very day.

In this year of the coronavirus pandemic, I feel very much in exile and an exile—socially distanced from family, friends and neighbors, from sporting events and artistic performances. Also, religiously restricted by “COVID counts” in our churches and prohibitions on meetings for ministry, education or fundraising. And, spiritually separated from the comforting routines of Sunday Masses and annual parish celebrations.

The experience of exile is not just one of place but also of time. Exiles look backwards with rose-colored glasses and long for “the way things used to be.” Exiles have a hard time adjusting to the current realities, with changed patterns of behavior, limitations on freedom from outside authorities and the nagging sense that this moment just doesn’t feel right. Of course, they look expectantly to a future without separations or anxiety. Exiles are constantly wondering, what is the “correct” mindset I should have today. Are not these our feelings, too?

The season of Advent both affirms our sense of exile and offers comfort to the exiled. Thoughtful Christians know that these December weeks are more than the cultural shallowness of indulgent shopping or even the gaiety of attaching colored lights to our homes. These weeks are a time for serious re-examination of the mystery of the Incarnation. It is a time to ask, who do I believe Jesus Christ is and how much do I allow him to impact, even change, my life? Am I exiling myself from Jesus, or drawing closer to him?

The figure of John the Baptizer looms large in Advent. He resides in the harsh desert (an image of exile), isolated from the pleasures of healthy food, safe housing and the emotional support of family. He deliberately lives austerely so that he can point to what is truly real and essential.

John offers forgiveness in the washing waters of the Jordan River, yet he is forthright in saying he is not the savior. “One greater than I is coming, for whom I am not worthy to untie his sandal straps.” From his voluntary exile in the wilderness, John gives hope of divine forgiveness to those of us in the city who know we are sinners. Prophets in exile demand attentive listening.

Mary and Joseph walk the literal roads of exile, in Luke’s gospel from Nazareth to Bethlehem and the Savior’s birth, and in Matthew’s gospel from Bethlehem to Egypt, carrying Jesus away from the dangerous king. Through these difficult journeys the holy family is in spiritual solidarity with all exiles, displaced persons and migrants seeking a new home, ancient and contemporary.

Aren’t all babies symbols of human hope? The Christ Child is given to Mary and Joseph for temporary parental stewardship, and to us for eternal union with God through the Church, its sacraments and its grace. We may be for a time in exile on earth, but we are never far from the One Living God, who is always with us in Christ his son.

Let us hope this Advent season for a virus-free future, following the Savior who leads us safely to peace on earth and an eternal dwelling in heaven. As the psalmist sings, “Those who go out weeping/bearing the seed for sowing/shall come home with shouts of joy/carrying their sheaves.”