



Diocese of Thunder Bay

Newsletter

Catholic Pastoral Centre | 1222 Reaume Street, Postal Box 10400, Thunder Bay, ON P7B 6T8 | dotb.ca

Winter 2023

Christmas Treasures



An Array of Christmas “Treasures”. *By Fred J. Colli, Bishop of Thunder Bay*



Words can be very powerful and the two words entitling our newsletter this month are powerful words indeed. Each word, “Christmas” and “treasures” brings so many thoughts and memories into our minds and hearts, and

many of these are warm and very comforting. In a world where there is so much turmoil and upset, one might ask, “why think of Christmas and treasures in a positive way when so much pain and suffering surrounds us in our daily lives”.

As human beings we need to be aware of our surroundings and the messages it gives us of course, but also we need to seek positive things and comforting things to help us to carry on in our daily lives. Our newsletter hopes to bring some positive and hopeful messages to each all. The word “Christmas” of course reminds us of the birth of Jesus, the Christ, in Bethlehem. Without this event there would be no Christmas. This is the most important memory this word should bring to us. We think of the Christ child, born in poverty, the Son of God, coming into our world to redeem us. A very powerful thought. Christmas also reminds us of family gatherings, of special meals, and joyful moments with family and friends. These memories are very important for our mental well-being. They remind us that life is important and that joy is an important aspect of life and living. Christmas also reminds us of gift giving, and showing signs of love and appreciation to others, having gratitude in our hearts for the love and caring that touches our lives.

We know that for some people Christmas can be a difficult time, especially if they are alone, without family or friends, and are struggling for the basic necessities of life. This season gives all of us an opportunity to reach out in charity to help those who find Christmas as a difficult time. The season speaks to us of giving, sharing, being grateful and responding to our sisters and brothers in need,

both at home and abroad. We recall how Christ gave generously in responding to the needs of those around Him and how we are asked to model His generosity and love in our own lives and in our relationships with others.

The word “treasures” also brings positive and comforting thoughts to our minds and hearts. The word can mean many different things to different people. For some it may mean a large amount of money in the bank. For others it means success in business, a large home, many cars and special benefits. These are all material treasures and we know that they are important to many. But the Christmas season also reminds us of spiritual treasures that are just as important for our lives. Of course ‘love’ is the main treasure that sustains us and keeps us moving forward. The love of family, spouses, children and friends, all sustains us in our daily lives. The many gestures of love and caring shown to us by others, are all treasures that touch us, even though we seldom reflect on them. A kind word, a phone call, a note sent in the mail, a small gift, a special dessert of a cooked meal, a little personal visit, all are gestures of love and are treasures that sustain us.

We can also think of the gift of talent and special abilities that we share or see in each other as treasures. The gift of music, art, decorating, styling, woodworking and craftsmanship, especially the gift of prayer and our communion with God, the list goes on and on. All are treasures that touch and sustain us in our positive approach to life, both in our physical life and in our spiritual life.

During the Christmas season and leading into the new year, maybe we can make an effort to reflect on all the treasures that sustain us. In our hearts we can show gratitude for these treasures in our prayer of thanks to God for all these wonderful things that help live in a positive way. And as we begin a new year, let us ask ourselves how we can share our gifts and talents, our treasures, with those around us, especially with our families.

We pray during this time also for peace in our world. There is so much turmoil and unrest due



to wars and political difficulties, may leaders of countries work together for the good of humanity and for the good of our world family. We pray that hearts and minds will respond in love and caring for the good of all peoples everywhere, and that peace may always be our goal.

Christmas treasures, a time to be grateful, to be generous and to be caring. This will make our season truly a 'treasure' for us all! †



Holy Family Parish Children's Bible Camp. *By Rev Jerin Louis*



Holy Family Parish held our first Children's Bible Camp this summer. The objective of the Bible Camp was to have children learn about our Holy Mass, our Saints and our many Traditions, using art and music. The Camp was aimed at children (ages four to ten) and ran weekly, starting on July 6th to August 31st. We had 28 children participating in the event. We had 14 volunteers who organized the weekly classes. We closed the event with a Festival of Saints where each child dressed up as their favourite Saint, a Children's Mass officiated by Bishop Colli, and a family BBQ. Thank you to everyone who helped to make our Bible Camp such a success! †



Christmas Treasures. *By Msgr. Pat Stilla, V.G.*

With its all-encompassing aura of faith traditions, family gatherings, glittering lights, carols and music, gift-giving, activities of generous sharing and festive colours of joyful celebrations, Christmas truly is a time of wonder and awe. When all these festive activities blend and harmonize together at the same time, they form a collection of what I like to call, “treasures” that Christians everywhere cherish in their hearts at this time of year.

The ancient adage, “All roads lead to Rome” is often used today to mean that all things will eventually lead to their centre. It has always been my conviction that these many “treasures” that we experience, even some of the secular ones, all lead to their centre, which is Christ, Himself!

The Treasure of Christ’s Mass

The English word, “Christmas” literally means, “Christ’s Mass”, and refers to the first “treasure” of the Lord’s Nativity, the special Eucharist that we look forward to at this time of year. This “treasure”, celebrated at altars in colourfully decorated and illuminated churches around the world, leads us to the Bethlehem event to discover the Christ child, the centre of the Season.

The Treasured Festive Meals of Christmas

Steeped in a variety of national customs and traditions, the much anticipated Christmas meals enjoyed by extended families gathered together, enable all who participate to connect or reconnect with those whom we love and then perhaps, to reach out to those whom we should love. These are “treasures” that remind us to observe Christ’s teachings of love, and so lead us to the Saviour.

- **In Europe and, for some also here in North America**, the usually meatless Christmas Vigil Meal, with its symbolic foods and traditionally set number of courses, helps us to anticipate and appreciate the meaning of Christ’s birth.

- **In countries like Slovakia, Poland and Lithuania**, a symbolic gesture is added to these large festive dinners. Flat bread wafers, embossed with images of the Nativity Scene, or with the Star of Bethlehem are blessed, shared, and eaten each year as part of a centuries-old family Christmas Eve tradition. In Slovakia, these wafers are called ‘Oplatky’, a word which means, ‘Angel Bread’, a treasured symbol of charity, unity, and friendship. The eldest in the family breaks the ‘Oplatky’, gives a piece to everyone and wishes each a joy-filled Christmas. Then each individual greets the others in the same way. This meal-time ritual “treasure” points to the birth of the Saviour because it reminds all present of His teachings to strengthen the bonds of unity and friendship and to forgive and reconcile if either is needed, to restore unity.

- **On Christmas Day**, families of all cultures, gather to partake in the large festive meal of the day, which includes a variety of traditional foods and practices. This Christmas “treasure” seeks to re-vitalize and strengthen family ties and relationships, and so ultimately leads all to Christ, the Teacher!

Three Treasured Christmas Traditions

- **Nativity Pageants and Displays**
In 13th Century Europe, when illiteracy was widespread among the vast majority of persons. St. Francis decided to re-create the Bible’s Nativity story at Christmas with live actors in a field near Greccio, Italy. This practice gained popularity throughout the world and has endured to the present day in the production of Children’s Christmas pageants and plays and in the creation of colourful Nativity Scenes of different sizes and complexities; “treasures” that make tangible the Nativity of Christ to all.



- **The Iconic Christmas Tree**

The custom of decorating evergreen trees with candles, gilded nuts, apples, dolls, and figurines, originated in Germany in the 16th century but has now become a beloved worldwide practice. The verdant trees symbolically reflect the eternity of the Living God and its bright candles (or modern lights) point to the glimmer of hope which the Saviour, at His birth, extended to all who seek Him.

- **Christmas Holly**

Holly has been a “treasure” associated with Christmas for centuries, especially in Northern European countries and in North America. This symbolic plant points to Christ’s birth as an event to be thankfully cherished because one day this Divine infant would preach and heal and die on the Cross for the salvation of all. The red berries on the plant are symbolic of Christ’s blood, which He would one day shed for us and, the sharp points on the leaves, of the thorns of the crown which was placed on His head.

The Treasures of Festive Illumination

As we approach the winter solstice on December 21st, the days become progressively shorter, as if the darkness of the night is threatening to eventually overpower the light of day. Christ is the “Light of the World” who overcame the darkness of hopelessness and fear. For this reason, Christians everywhere, illuminate their homes and churches

with “treasures” of light during Advent and Christmas to remind a disheartened world that a new dawn of light was born to us at Christmas and continues to live in our midst.

The Magical Treasures of Music and Song

When I begin to hear the familiar strains of Christmas’ music and carols, I experience a spiritual re-awakening in myself each year. From the majestic and moving notes of “Handel’s Messiah” or “Oh Holy Night”, to the pastoral sounds of “Les Cloches du Hameau” and “Tu Scendi Dalle Stelle”, and even to the more contemporary, “Feliz Navidad” and “Silver Bells” musical scores and choral singing are “treasures” that express our joy at Christmas by raising our hearts and minds to Christ, whom we celebrate.

The Hidden Treasures under the Tree

Not only for children, but for all Christians, too, Christmas would not be Christmas without the exchange gifts. This “treasured” custom helps us to relive the scene at the manger when shepherds and Magi brought their varied gifts to the newborn child. Most importantly though the practice is rooted in God’s giving to the world of the greatest gift of all time, the gift of His only Son.

Yes, I believe that all things do lead to their centre and that the Christmas practices and traditions that we call “treasures” all lead us to the Season’s first and greatest treasure, Christ, Himself! †



Making a (Nativity) Scene. *By Fr Terry Sawchuk*

St. Joseph's Oratory in Montreal is the biggest church in Canada. As a place of pilgrimage, it welcomes over 2 million visitors every year, many of whom make their way through the Oratory Museum which features an exhibit made up of hundreds of nativity scenes from close to 100 different around the world.

Each scene has a unique twist, reflecting the culture from which they came. Certain African scenes replace donkey and ox with zebra and giraffe; an Indigenous nativity features a teepee as the shelter of choice instead of a cave; in the Arctic scene, the Holy Family is bundled up in fur coats and huddles together, flanked by polar bears and sled dogs. The miracle of the Incarnation – “the word became flesh and dwelt among us” – lives on as each scene give flesh to the mystery of nativity with a local touch.

A couple of years ago, however, one scene literally caused a scene – attracting no small amount of attention (and controversy) for its unconventional style. It is called the “Hipster Nativity” – a contemporary take on the classic nativity created by two Californian brothers. In this scene, there is a stable, but it is solar powered. The characters are all dressed in contemporary, casual apparel. St. Joseph is sporting a man bun, while the Blessed Virgin Mary (in hastily arranged gym clothing), is clutching a Starbucks-looking coffee cup.

The three wise men, armed with Amazon.com boxes arrive with their gifts on segways instead of camels, while a nearby tech-savvy figure, presumably a shepherd, sends Snapchat messages. All this happens as a lone cow, the token animal, branded “100% organic”, munches serenely on a meal of all-natural grass feed.

The creators of the scene tried to envision what it would look like if Jesus was born today. They market it as their own attempt at “inculturation.” Needless to say, not everyone is impressed. Some would like it gone.

There is, however, one potentially redeeming detail of the Hipster Nativity which reveals, intentionally or inadvertently, something about

the contemporary observance of Christmas. This striking detail is that in the Hipster Nativity, no one is looking at Jesus. Even the parents of the Christ-Child appear otherwise pre-occupied with trying to capture the moment with a selfie. The Child Jesus, the traditional focal point, center, and hub of the classic nativity scene appears to be lost in this one. No one is looking at Jesus. Is this a fair characterization of contemporary culture? Perhaps, even if only for this question it raises, the Hipster Nativity is worth keeping.

In the real nativity story, the wise men searched for Jesus, and upon finding him, they knelt down and adored him. In adoring, for that moment, they gave the Child Jesus total, undivided attention. The wise men bring us back to what is most important, to the center of the scene: the Christ-child.

Getting distracted, losing our way, going out of focus – these things happen. As the season of Christmas returns, however, a new opportunity presents itself. Re-focus. Look to Jesus. “Let us... persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus...” (Hebrews 12:2). †



Polish Outdoor Mass. *By Edward Borowiec*

Every year, parishioners from both Polish churches in Thunder Bay attend an outdoor mass. It is a long-time tradition for St. Casimir's Church and Our Lady Queen of Poland Church.

Mass is always celebrated at the Chapel of Black Madonna of Czestochowa located by the Polish Mound (Kopiec) in the Friendship Gardens on Victoria Avenue, Thunder Bay.

The Kopiec was built in 1967 to commemorate Canada's 100th Birthday and 1,000 years of Polish Christianity.



On the monument at the Chapel of Black Madonna also is a plaque in memory of Pope John Paul II, beloved son of the Polish nation.

This year Mass was on Sunday, September 10th Mass was celebrated by parish priest Father Piotr Dudek and assisted by Deacon Larry Kurec. †



10th Anniversary of Diaconate, Deacon Larry Kurec. *By Edward Borowiec*

September 7th, 2013 – September 7th, 2023

Parishioners of St. Casimir's Church and Our Lady Queen of Poland Church want to say thank you for your wonderful service for years. We wish you good health and all the best for the future. We pray for you! †



Rosary Rally. By Katelin Legros

On October 14, 2023 any and all citizens were invited to take part in both an outdoor and indoor Rosary Rally. The outdoor Rally started at Friendship Gardens (Polish site) & later in the day the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church held an indoor rally. †

CanadaNeedsOurLady.org

Canada Needs Our Lady is a special campaign of the Canadian Society for the Defence of Christian Civilization to win the hearts and minds of Canadians for Mary. The Canadian Society for the Defense of Christian Civilization was incorporated on June 25, 2013 as a federal nonprofit organization “to advance religion by the promotion of the religious teachings, tenets, doctrines, morals, and observances of the Roman Catholic faith and their application to individuals, families, and society in Christian culture and civilization.” From our main office in Saint Hubert, Quebec, Society members and volunteers reach out to concerned Christian families and individuals across Canada. We promote and defend the principles and values of Christian civilization and spread the Gospel message far and wide.



St. Pat's Hat. *By Msgr. Pat Stilla, V.G.*

Much has been happening at St. Patrick's Cathedral since November 1st, 2022, when we initiated our five year campaign to replace, "St. Pat's Hat".

I wanted to express my collective thanks and appreciation to our Cathedral Parishioners and to all in our Diocesan family for the ongoing support we have received and to provide you with the an update on the construction work that has been completed.

PHASE ONE OF A THREE PHASE PROJECT

- TBT ENGINEERING was hired to prepare drawings and to supervise and oversee the ongoing construction of the first and major phase of the project;
- The contract for this first phase was awarded to RML CONSTRUCTION of Thunder Bay and work began on May 1, 2023.
- This major phase which is now almost complete, included the replacing of the damaged roof on the main church building (scaffolding, the installation of rigid foam insulation and of a new metal roof and the setting up of a new roof drainage system of scupper drains with external downspouts to comply with current City bylaws).
- The second and third phases will include the re-construction of the Cathedral's side chapel flat roofs and the Rectory Office roof will likely begin later next year.

THE MANY INITIATIVES OF GOODWILL

The estimated cost of our first and major phase of the project is just over two million dollars. Stages two and three will add another nine hundred thousand dollars to the total cost.

As we come to the completion of the first of our projected five year fundraising efforts, we have collected over \$880,000 in pledged and/or received donations. These funds have been gratefully received from:

- Bishop Colli and many of our Cathedral groups and individual families as well as from parishioners from other Parishes across the Diocese;
- the Knights of Columbus and Catholic



- Women's League Councils of our Diocese who have collected donations from their members and sponsored various projects;
- the many City school communities and administrators of our Thunder Bay Catholic School Board and from members of the Catholic Teachers' Association and others who contributed to our cause;
- many well-wishing Corporations and Societies in Thunder Bay and members of our 'Friends of the Cathedral';
- those who sponsored and participated in novel fundraising initiatives like, bicycle marathons and bake sales;
- all who have made significant donations in memory of Deceased loved ones or to honour Family Baptism and Marriage Celebrations;
- persons throughout the Northwest who have supported and continue to support us by taking part in our monthly 50/50 raffles, and;
- all donors who have chosen to remain anonymous and others. †



Church Bazaars. *By Katelin Legros*

On October 21, 2023 St. Agnes held a bazaar at the West Thunder community centre. The event was very successful not just because there were many people in attendance but because of all of the hard work from volunteers organizing and working the event. Its moments like this where the generosity of the Catholic faith really shines through and bonds

a community. On October 22, 2023 St. Margarets held a bazaar in their basement, the space was smaller however you could feel the love of volunteer's hard work. The Diocese is proud of the dedication, determination & heart that is constantly put into Parish events. †



Unwrapping Christmas; the Treasure Within. *By Katelin Legros*

As the holiday season approaches, many people find themselves caught up in the whirlwind of preparations, gift-giving, and joyful gatherings. However, amidst the glittering lights and the hustle and bustle, it is important for Catholics to remember the true essence of the season – embracing the Lord during the holidays. For Roman Catholics, the holidays are not just a time for merriment; they are an opportunity to deepen their connection with God, reinforcing the spiritual significance of this joyous season.

Advent, the season leading up to Christmas, is a time of anticipation and reflection. It serves as a reminder to prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of Christ. The lighting of Advent candles, each representing a different aspect of faith, hope, joy, and peace, creates a sacred atmosphere that encourages us to turn our thoughts inward and upward.

Participating in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, takes on special significance during the holiday season. Attending Mass becomes not only a religious obligation but a heartfelt desire to celebrate the birth of the Savior. The liturgy, hymns, and readings during Christmas Mass provide a unique opportunity for us to immerse ourselves in the story of Christ's birth and to rekindle the flame of faith within.

The holiday season is also an ideal time for acts of charity and kindness. Inspired by the teachings of Jesus, Catholics actively engage in giving to those in need, embodying the spirit of selflessness and generosity. Through volunteer work, donations, or simple acts of kindness, we can embrace the love and compassion modelled for us by Christ.

Creating sacred spaces within the home is another way we can embrace the Lord during the holidays. Putting out the Advent wreath, setting up a Nativity scene, and incorporating prayer into daily routines can serve as constant reminders of the spiritual significance of the season. Family prayer and reflection time can become a cherished tradition, fostering a sense of togetherness and devotion.

Embracing the Lord through the holidays from a Roman Catholic perspective involves a deliberate and mindful approach. By incorporating spiritual practices, participating in Mass, engaging in acts of charity, and creating sacred spaces within the home, we can navigate the holiday season with a deeper connection to our faith. In doing so, we not only celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ but also cultivate a lasting and meaningful spiritual experience that surpasses the festive revelry. †





Christmas treasures can be found in every corner of the 4 seasons gift shop. Visit us today at the Catholic Pastoral Centre for all your holiday needs.



Monday - Friday: 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Saturdays: 8:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. Closed for lunch from 12:30 p.m. - 1:00 p.m.
Contact us at: (807) 343-9313 | Check out our Instagram: [@4seasonsshop](#)



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