

St. Mark's Messenger

January 2024

Reflections of Father John



After four weeks of patient preparation during Advent, the creche was finally full. Joseph, Mary, and baby Jesus were greeted by the shepherds and the angels, singing Gloria in excelsis (glory to God in the highest), the same song we sing at the beginning of our service. I hope that we sensed that all of God's angels were also singing with us.

We had record attendance at our two services on December 24: 10 at the early service, 53 at our midnight mass (which we held at 7PM), and 2 on Christmas morning. Two of our beloved shut-ins, Evelyn Wilson and Carol Mease, made a special effort to attend. Kaley's beautiful offertory from *The Messiah* proclaimed the right theme: rejoice!

Christmas marks the moment when God chose to enter our world in a new way. The prophets had been bringing messages for centuries, but sending Jesus, his own son, is unique, a gift of love and hope as well as a promise of peace and justice. Jesus will preach the Good News to a world broken by sin and injustice, war and exploitation. He will seek to make earth much more like heaven and will give specific directions for how this will happen: Matthew 25:45-46 ("the least of these") and the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:1-12).

January is a pivot point for looking back and looking forward, for being honest with ourselves and making resolutions. The world has been shocked by the cruel invasion of Ukraine and the slaughter of innocents in Israel (October 7) and Gaza. More than half of the 20,000 Gaza victims have been children. Let us pray for justice, mercy, and peace.



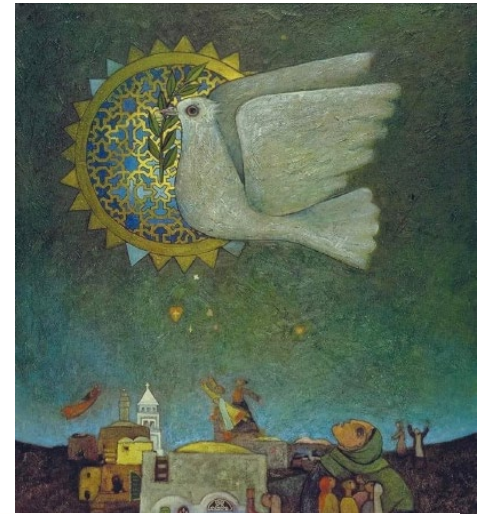
The challenges we face will require thoughtful people to work together for the common good. When we say the "Lord's Prayer," we pray to "our father," not "my father." We are all

in this together. Let us do so in the name of our Lord, Jesus of Nazareth, the light of the world and the Prince of Peace.

May the peace of the Lord be always with you – and may your holidays be filled with joy, peace, and hope!

P.S. Happy New Year! January 2024 marks the beginning of St. Mark’s bicentenary. Look for historical notes from our archives in future newsletters.

Father John ✠



FIRST SUNDAY PRESENTATION ON GEISINGER



On Sunday, January 7, at 2PM, we will learn about Geisinger's exciting plans for health care in our area.

Consider some of the changes we have already heard about: the Kaiser-Geisinger partnership; the new nursing program downtown; Geisinger's medical school; and

65 Forward in Belleville. But there are also ongoing challenges of providing medical care in a rural area.

Geisinger



Our speakers will be Aaron (“AJ”) Hartsock (associate vice president of clinical operations for Geisinger Western Region), and Stacey Osborne, chief nursing officer at Geisinger-Lewistown. Following their presentation, AJ and Stacey will be delighted to answer your questions. We will have light refreshments as well.

ANNUAL MEETING

We will hold our annual meeting on January 14 immediately after our service. Though we have no new vestry members to elect, we will elect our delegate and alternate delegate to the Diocesan Convention in October. A key part of this convention will be to vote on reunification with the Diocese of Bethlehem. We will distribute the reports from our committees and ministries and review the budget for 2024.

CHURCH ENVELOPES

In early January we will distribute church envelopes to people who requested them for their pledge. This year we have 23 pledges, and several other parishioners are regular givers.

TOYS FOR TOTS 2023

We helped 285 families bring a brighter Christmas to 607 children, which is a sharp increase from last year.

We distributed at least six toys and books to every child, and thanks to a raffle, two kids got new bicycles as well. Thanks to generous donors both in Lewistown and outside our area, the tables in the Recreation Building were full of wonderful gifts. We have reserved the building for the same week next December and hope to increase the number of volunteers and contributors.

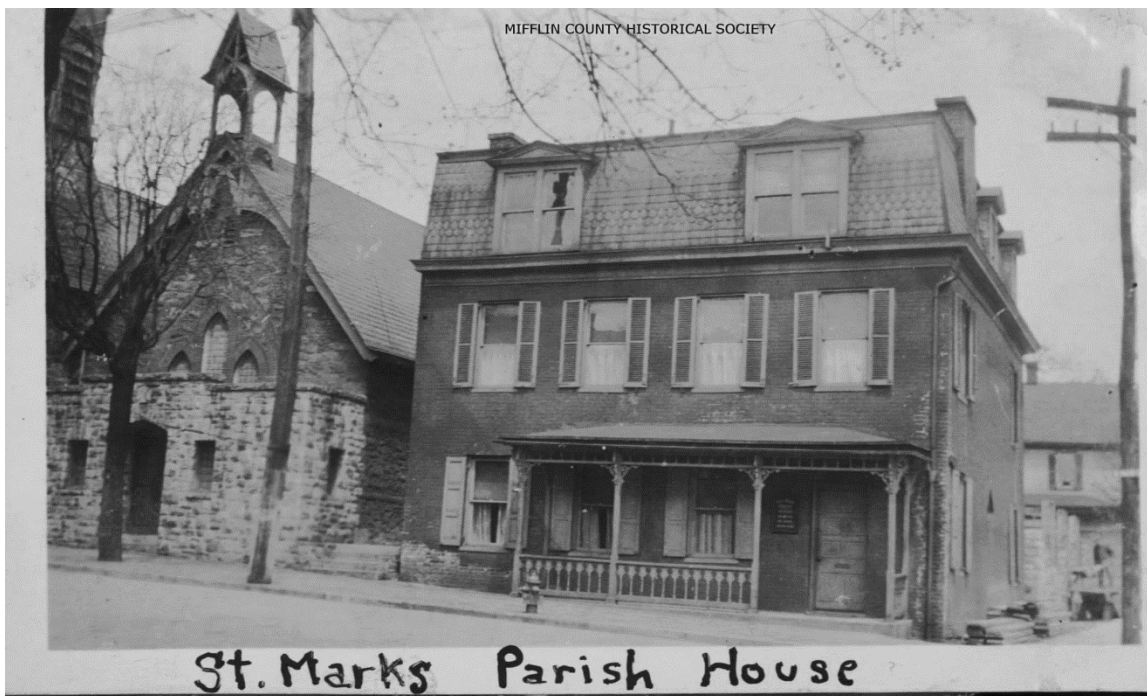


More than half of the physically able members of our parish were part of the Toys for Tots program this year, which is an astonishingly high percentage. What does this say about us to the community?

MOTHER HUBBARD’S CUPBOARD & BREAKING BREAD TOGETHER

IN November we helped 598 people (205 families, including 43 new individuals and 20 new families.) We have been especially busy since November and have distributed many holiday meals along with coats, mittens, and gloves. Through our monthly “Breaking Bread Together,” we fed nearly 500 people in 2023.

PROPERTY UPDATE



If you were on the Property Committee in the 1924, you would have to deal with the old rectory. The decision was to tear it down and replace it with a new one that faces Water

Street. They also removed the steeple on the Parish House. Luckily, we don't have those issues today!

What are our priorities for 2024? Replacing the roof on the Parish House and lots of gutters. We continue to struggle with the fire alarm system's quirks, and none of us likes the floor covering in the parish house. Pew cushions would be a great enhancement. Our stonework needs a really good, skillful cleaning to restore it to its original appearance.

PRAYER LIST

We pray for those celebrating birthdays and anniversaries this month: Carol Potts (3), Rebecca Ganoe (11), Mark Kaler, Jr. (17), Charles Clare (20), and Erin Anewalt (30).

We pray also for Ralph Bitner, Sharon Copenhaver, Mary Daily, Ron Diven, Susan Ferguson, Cynthia McKinley, Tony Hatfield-Nicholson, Doris McKee, Carole Mease, Steve Myers, Lauren Schwiebert, Lynn Stricker, Patty Wagner, and Evelyn Wilson.

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