



The Messenger

ST. MARY OF THE ASSUMPTION

January 2026

“IN THE TENDER
Compassion
OF OUR
God,

THE DAWN FROM ON HIGH
shall break
UPON US.”

- Luke 1:78

ALL THINGS NEW

Deeper Dive
P. 4

**KEEPING FAITH
THROUGH MISCARRIAGE**

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**CATHOLIC SOCIAL
TEACHING AND THE
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Contemporary Music Ministry: Stirring the Spirit Through Song

This month, we highlight the joyful witness of our **Contemporary Music Ministry**, a group whose music lifts hearts, encourages prayer, and helps our parish enter more deeply into the celebration of the Mass.

Rachel Bittner, who leads this ministry, shares that her love for music and liturgy began early. At 19, while serving as the full-time youth minister at her home parish of St. Ignatius in Hickory, she felt called to become more involved in music ministry. "I was so on fire for Jesus," she recalls. She joined the Folk Group, bought her first guitar from Musicland, and was mentored by her parish choir director and coordinator. Those early experiences showed her that "many hours of prayer, practice and intentionality go into planning music for liturgy. It is a part of who I am, and my soul soars when as the Body of Christ we lift our hearts and our voices to give Him praise."

At St. Mary's, the Contemporary Music Ministry continues this spirit of joyful service. The group's role, Rachel explains, is to "provide music for prayer, to stir the spirit, to uplift and to encourage as we celebrate Mass." Each week and throughout the liturgical seasons, the ministry prepares music that reflects the readings and the message of the day. "We always pray that whatever we plan, it is done to be pleasing to God and to His people."

Their work is understood as true prayer and service. Rachel often returns to St. Augustine's reminder that "He who sings, prays twice," noting that the ministry strives to encourage personal reflection, evangelization, and gratitude for all God has done.

The group practices **Thursday evenings at 7 PM** and provides music for the **Saturday 4 PM Mass**. **New members are always welcome.**

If interested, please contact Rachel Bittner at stmaryspylesville.org.



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WELCOME

Dear friends,

Praised be Jesus Christ, now and forever! Welcome to the January edition of *The Messenger*. Our main theme this month is *All Things New*. Whether you're a fan of New Year's resolutions or not, the New Year does bring a new opportunity. It's not magic, but it does remind us that time moves along, and we move along with it.

When I was studying for the priesthood, I had a mentor who would always remind us students: "**whatever it is, it can make you bitter or better.**"

We've all heard wise sayings, welcomed or not, and sometimes they're helpful. This one stuck for a few reasons. One is because it was a humbling reminder that you and I are capable of bitterness. It also shows that, while challenging, it is possible to become more who we were made to be.

But with the theme of *All Things New* - it's a reminder that the Lord will always give us grace to turn to Him: to become better people, stronger in faith, hope, and love, and stronger in virtue. Even if someone has sunk into bitterness, the Lord gives grace to turn even that around.

All Things New. In this issue of *The Messenger*, we see examples of the newness that Christ brings. A new look at something familiar, like our Catholic Apologetics page about the tabernacle, the red candle, and what it means to genuflect. Our Church History page looks at St. Benedict taking something old, making it new, and planting the seeds for what would become Western Civilization.

We also see new hope, bravely shared with us by parishioner Jamie Warne. In *Catholic in the Home*, Jamie writes about her faith, family, and her tragic experience of miscarriage. In *Salt and Light*, we also see new hope in the Works of Mercy where the Lord can work some of His most powerful graces: forgiveness and visiting the sick.

These and more offer us courage as we begin the New Year. May the One who makes *All Things New* give us new strength to receive His grace, live His Gospel, and be witness to others of the hope that He brings.

Peace,
Fr. John

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a Chance to Shine

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Go Deeper

All Things New

"So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come." (2 Cor. 5:17)

St. Paul writes about the renewal that Christ brings to each individual person. In last month's Deeper Dive, we looked at what it means to say yes to the will of God in the ways that are common for every disciple, no matter what.

This month, after a brief review, we'll begin to look at what it means to follow the will of God according to our own personal calling.

Review: The Will of God for all disciples

"Love one another as I have loved you."

Everyone is called to love. There are essential parts to love. It's kind of like how "four tires and an engine" are part of the definition of "car." Imagine a car with 3 tires and only half a working engine. We couldn't claim it was a complete car, even if the 3 tires were in good shape and the working half of the engine was new. It would still be an incomplete car.

So, there are essential parts to the command of love. It includes the Ten Commandments and Catholic teaching on faith and morals, along with service, prayer, and sharing the Gospel. It also includes St. Paul's great litany of charity: *"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast..."* and the Golden Rule: *"Do unto others as you would have them do to you."*

This means that no one can say, "Well, I'm called to love, so that means I don't have to follow this Church teaching, or that commandment, or the virtue of patience..." If a commandment or Church teaching has been broken, then real love has been compromised.

This is the will of God for all of us. It is what it means to be truly human, a good person, and a faithful, authentic Catholic Christian.

Following God's Will for us, personally

We've established that a car—in order to be a good, authentic car—needs four tires, an engine, and probably a few other parts that I've heard are important. Now each of us has to ask the question: *"What kind of car am I?"*

This includes professions, vocations, and specific life decisions. This month, though, we'll look at...

Gifts, Talents, and Personalities

"If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? ... But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body." (1 Cor 12:17) We each have a cocktail of gifts and talents that make up our unique personalities—who we are individually in the Body of Christ. So, following the will of God includes discovering, nurturing, and using our gifts, talents, and personalities.

A Particular Set of Skills (thanks, Liam!)

These can be specific skills, like organizing, public speaking, behind-the-scenes work, or a specific sport or instrument. They can also be general topics like literature, administration, science, mathematics, or mechanics.

There are many ways to discern these. Mostly, this comes in time, with trial and error, and with simple exposure and encouragement. Most are discovered when we are young, but not all. New opportunities to learn and discover come along and often bring new life.

Though these can be linked with a profession, they are deeper than that. They are linked to the questions: "what makes you happy?" and "where do you naturally flourish?"

Personality Traits

The truth is this: *the more we know how we work, the better we can love God with our whole heart and our neighbor as ourselves.*

These can be personality types like extrovert/introvert, or sometimes just an adjective that generally defines a person. Most of these traits can be used for either good or bad.

For example, being assertive - not afraid to speak one's mind. It can be good - leadership, motivation, speaking a hard truth that helps guide others or give them courage. It can be bad - a person who's convinced their honest opinion is always the actual truth, or thinks they must teach others every possible lesson, or has an obsessive need for control.

On the other hand, being docile - holding back personal opinion or from asserting one's will. It can be good - peacemaking, consensus building, letting spiritual strength and real wisdom develop over time. It can be bad - avoiding disagreement at all costs, or when fear becomes cowardice, or becoming a doormat and therefore not bringing much-needed gifts to the world.

According to the Will of God

We are called to use our gifts, talents, and personality traits in keeping with the Commandments, faith and morals of the Church, and the call to service. This is what it means to use them according to the will of God. This is how they will truly flourish.

Sometimes these will clearly refer to God, the life of the Church, and the call to be a disciple of Jesus. Sometimes these will not have explicit reference to God, faith, or religion. Whatever the case, doing the will of God will always bear good fruit.

It's important to remember that we can be tempted to misuse our gifts, talents, and personalities. Sometimes outright, and sometimes by saying that we can't personally follow a commandment or church teaching. For example, "I'm assertive so I can't be kind," "I'm docile so I can't be brave," or "I have to develop this gift, so I can't devote time to prayer or service." These are lies that cause much darkness and disorder. We need to pray for help against them.

It's why we start with what every disciple of Jesus is called to be. This gives us a sure guide about how to use our personal gifts.

Next month, we'll look at discerning and following God's will in our professions and vocations. Let us ask for His grace to use our gifts, talents, and personalities according to His will. Let us ask for Him to daily make all things new!

Peace,
Fr. John

Reflection Question:

Which gift, talent, or part of your personality has brought life to you or others recently?

All Things Are Made New: Hope for the Mind and Heart

by Ellen Dumer, LCPC



In the Catholic tradition, the promise that God “makes all things new” (Revelation 21:5) is not only a future hope but a source of strength for our present struggles—especially when it comes to mental and emotional well-being. Many people carry anxiety, depression, past wounds, or burdens that feel too heavy to name. Yet Scripture reminds us again and again that God is not distant from these struggles. Instead, He enters them, transforming even the most painful places with His renewing love.

The prophet Isaiah speaks to people in distress when he proclaims, “See, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth—do you not perceive it?” (Isaiah 43:19). God does not wait until our lives are perfect to begin His healing work. He begins right in the middle of our exhaustion, confusion, and fear. For those who battle mental health challenges, this verse reminds us that God’s grace is not hindered by our limitations. Renewal often begins quietly—small steps of courage, moments of clarity, a return to prayer, or a single breath of hope in a difficult day.

St. Paul deepens this promise: “Whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Corinthians 5:17). While this transformation may not erase our struggles, it reframes them. In Christ, our identity is not defined by symptoms, diagnoses, or past failures. We are God’s beloved, continually being shaped, strengthened, and renewed. The sacraments, especially Reconciliation and the Eucharist, offer places where this renewal becomes tangible—moments where Christ meets us, restores us, and gently invites us to begin again.

Mental health healing often unfolds slowly, and God works through practical support as well—therapy, medication, supportive relationships, rest, and healthy boundaries. These are not signs of weak faith but instruments of God’s care. Christ Himself reached out through human touch, human voices, and human compassion; He continues to heal us through the people and resources around us.

In difficult seasons, the psalmist’s prayer can become our own: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Psalm 51:12). Renewal is both a gift and a journey. Each day offers a new beginning, even if it feels small.

May all who struggle know that God is already at work within them, quietly and faithfully making all things new—mind, heart, and soul.

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Keeping Faith Through Miscarriage

By Jamie Warne

Well, hello there. My name is Jamie, and I am a mother of nine precious babies—six here with us, and three whom I trust watch over us while resting in the arms of Jesus.

A little backstory: my husband Chris and I were married on November 19, 2005. Our first baby, Isabella, was born nine months and twenty-three days later. Our daughter Ava arrived fourteen months after Bella, and our son Michael sixteen months after that. I remember feeling so blessed—married to the love of my life and welcoming the large, beautiful family I'd always dreamed of.

Naturally, we were thrilled to be expecting again just a few months after Michael was born. But around seven weeks into that pregnancy, I began experiencing the unmistakable signs of a miscarriage. It felt so foreign, so shocking. Wait... this isn't supposed to happen.

Looking back, that first miscarriage was the most traumatic. The symptoms were significant, and the emotions ran high. Uncharted waters are always scarier until you learn their depth.

With time, we healed, and soon after we were blessed with our first "rainbow baby"—the term for a child born after loss, a light after the storm. Joseph arrived happy and healthy in September 2010. Nearly five years would pass before we brought home our fifth baby, Eli. Between Joseph and Eli, we experienced two additional losses—making Eli a "double rainbow." Two years after Eli, our daughter, Etta Mary, arrived and completed our little family.

Faith in the Midst of Loss

I've always felt close to God, but in the darker seasons, it can feel like He's distant or not listening. My friends, that is never the case. Looking back, God made His presence so clear, but I was too grief-stricken to recognize it in the moment.

During my first loss, my mother held my hand while Chris cared for the children. She supported me so beautifully. But by my second miscarriage, my mom had passed away. She died suddenly in 2012, and that second loss came on Mother's Day the next year. Brutal, right? And yet, Jesus stood right beside me. I could not have survived that year without God carrying me.

I have two stories—two blessings from that season.

One I've shared often. The other, only with a few. But I believe God is calling me to share it now.

A Dream and a Promise

Shortly after my third miscarriage, I had a dream. I was crying uncontrollably when suddenly my mom appeared. I told her about the losses and how defeated I felt. She smiled and said: *"My darling, don't be sad. I've seen your son."*

Two months later, I was pregnant with Eli—whose name means "ascended" or "uplifted." God sent me small blessings every week of that pregnancy.

A Stranger in the Garden

On the very day I found out I was pregnant with Eli, I felt a strong urge to go to Mary's Garden at St. Mary's Church. I didn't know why, but I felt pulled to pray for this yet to be named baby.

When I arrived, a woman was already sitting there. Not wanting to interrupt her prayers, I waited in my car, planning to have my turn when she left, but before I could finish that thought, I heard...

"Go sit with her."

I resisted. I can't go over there, that would be intrusive, I thought.

Again: *"Go sit with her."*

I heard it several times before I finally walked over, still afraid I'd be interrupting. Once I was close, I heard the voice again:

"Ask her why she's here."

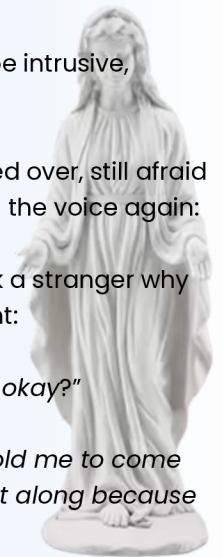
I argued with God in my mind—I cannot ask a stranger why she's here. But the voice grew more insistent:

"Ask her why she is here."

So, nervously, I asked, *"Excuse me... are you okay?"*

She looked up, smiled, and said,

"Honey, I have no idea why I'm here. God told me to come sit and wait. I was just asking Him to hurry it along because I have so much to do today."



In that moment, something broke open in my soul. I told her everything—my losses, my fears, the positive pregnancy test that morning, and how terrified I was of losing another child.

This perfect stranger listened intently, and then she prayed over me. I knew then, without a single doubt, that I had heard God, and more importantly, that He had heard me.

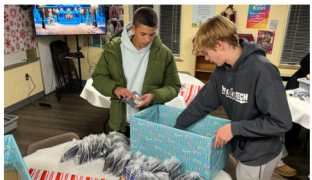
Held Through Every Storm

Jesus was with me. God was listening. The Holy Spirit was guiding me. The Lord doesn't leave us in our struggle. He holds us. He strengthens us—not by removing pain, but by carrying us through it.

And sometimes, when we're too overwhelmed to notice His subtler signs, He sends a sweet church lady to sit and pray with us. XO ~Jamie



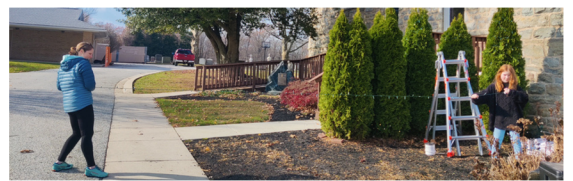
Teen Connect!
 Teens sanitized and changed out hymnals for the new Liturgical year, shared fellowship, and sat in holy Adoration. They also packed house blessing kits for parishioners and visitors.



Knights of Columbus Turkey Shoot! We're grateful to everyone who came out to support the Knights and enjoy some friendly competition. Your participation helps fuel the many ways the Knights serve our parish.



Together, we lit up the church and parish center—stringing lights, decorating, and preparing our spaces for a beautiful Advent and Christmas season.



Our Youth Group is preparing a special Christmas gift for the parish—filling holy water bottles to be blessed by Father. Grateful for their joyful service!



Belles Christmas Luncheon - a tasty celebration of the Belles year of service to St. Mary's and our community.



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Our Advent Fair was such a beautiful start to the season!
 Families gathered for a delicious pancake breakfast, created Advent wreaths together, enjoyed festive crafts, and joined in our big Faith Formation project. Our little ones shopped thoughtfully for their families at the St. Nicholas Shop. Thank you to everyone who donated time, talent, and treasure to make this joyful day possible.
 Your generosity continues to bless our parish family.



Thank you for your generosity to the Christmas Food Drive. Your kindness brought meals and Christ's love to families in need.



K of C Donut Sunday — a morning of fellowship, coffee, and donuts hosted by our Knights of Columbus.



Annual Parish Tree Lighting, and a visit from the Shepherds of Bethlehem, sharing the beauty of Holy Land craftsmanship with our parish.



Thank you to Upper Chesapeake for providing blood pressure checks, flu shots, and diabetes screenings for our parish community.



Our co-op students hard at work on their December service projects! The younger group created calendars for the food pantry, while the older students helped prepare the parish Christmas gifts.



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Care Ministry Christmas Lunch at Geneva Farm on December 4th — a joyful afternoon of fellowship, good food, and celebrating the beautiful work this ministry shares throughout the year.



QUESTION OF FAITH



Why Do We Bless Ourselves With Holy Water When We Enter the Church?

One of the first things many of us do upon entering a Catholic church is dip our fingers into the holy water font and make the Sign of the Cross. It's a familiar gesture we often overlook—but behind it lies deep and beautiful meaning.

At its heart, blessing ourselves with holy water is a return to our baptism. Water became the sign of our new life in Christ: we were washed clean of sin, reborn as children of God, and welcomed into the Church. Each time we bless ourselves, we quietly renew those promises and recall that we belong to Christ.

Holy water is also a sacramental—a sacred sign that prepares our hearts to receive God's grace. While sacraments like the Eucharist give grace directly, sacramentals help open us to that grace. When we bless ourselves, we ask God to purify our minds, strengthen us against temptation, and give us the peace we need for prayer and worship.

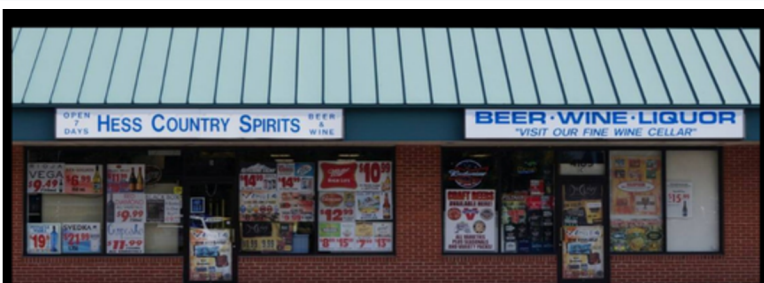
The Sign of the Cross itself is a prayer. In a few seconds, we proclaim the central mystery of our faith—

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We place ourselves under the Trinity's protection and mark our bodies with Christ's Cross, the sign of our salvation. This simple act shifts our hearts from the world to the sacred encounter awaiting us inside.

Blessing ourselves with holy water is also a moment of reverence. It tells the Lord, "I am here for You," and helps us spiritually wash our hearts before stepping into His presence. Whether we come for Mass, quiet prayer, or a brief visit, the gesture draws our attention back to God.

So the next time you reach for the holy water font, pause for a moment. Remember your baptism. Invite the Trinity into your heart. Ask the Lord to prepare you for worship. In that simple touch of water, heaven meets earth—and grace touches your day.

A humble gesture, filled with profound meaning and blessing.



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The Corporal Work of Mercy: Visit the Sick

"Lord, when did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you? And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.'" - Matthew 25:39-40

Jesus upholds visiting the sick as fulfilling a basic human need, such as food, drink, and clothing. And while His visits usually resulted in a physical healing, Jesus brought something that we can also bring: presence, time, and assistance.

Why? Because human company is one of our most basic human needs. This is not only for extraverts! And while introverts and extraverts may need company in a different way, and definitely a different quantity, the need is in every human heart.

And this is true especially when we are sick, whether temporarily or chronically, or shut-in. Sickness brings greater temptation to feel isolated and discouraged, and sometimes deeper, darker difficulties. A visit won't lift all burdens or guard against all future difficulty. It is, however, a work of mercy that brings good to the sick person's spirit.

How to visit the sick:

- Go physically to spend time with them.
- Make the call! Videochat, Zoom, Duo, etc.
- Write a card, letter, email, etc.
- Volunteer at an assisted living or nursing home.

Some things to remember:

- Your presence is the best thing you can bring.
- The visit is about both of you! Not just you helping them.
- Don't worry about being awkward. Many things in life are both awkward and fine.
- Acknowledge the suffering; tell them you're sorry they are sick, shut-in, and can't get out.
- Plan the length of the visit, and be flexible.
- No profound, life-changing wisdom required. Chat about life, faith, and hobbies.
- Ask if they'd like to pray. A decade of the rosary, or reading the Bible, is a good start.
- Pray for yourself beforehand, asking the Holy Spirit to guide the visit!

The Spiritual Work of Mercy: Forgive Injuries

"Let all bitterness, wrath, and anger be put away from you, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." - Ephesians 4:31-32

God's mercy is limitless. Ours, however, can feel very limited. We often struggle to show compassion because of our human weaknesses, especially when someone has truly hurt us: emotionally, physically, or both. Forgiveness can be hard. But it is possible, and it is something Jesus calls us to do.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation frees us from our sins and strengthens our desire to show mercy to those who have sinned against us. The Catechism reminds us there is no offense so great that God will not forgive when we sincerely repent (CCC 982). Our challenge is when forgiveness isn't asked for by the person who hurt us, yet the call to forgive remains.

Forgiving doesn't mean pretending the injury didn't happen, nor allowing ourselves to be harmed again. It means letting go of the bitterness and entrusting restoration to God. In this New Year, consider where God may be inviting you to release old grudges, and offer apologies with sincerity. Forgiveness is a work of mercy, and a path to deep peace.

How to forgive injuries:

- Begin by asking God for the desire to forgive... even if you're not ready yet.
- Pray for the person who hurt you.
- Bring your wounds to the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- Talk to a priest or counselor if the hurt is deep.
- Remember that forgiveness is often a process, not a moment.

Some things to remember:

- Forgiveness frees you. Holding onto anger weighs down the heart.
- You can forgive without excusing the behavior.
- You can forgive without reconciling a relationship that is unsafe.
- Pray for God's mercy to fill any places where your own mercy feels too small.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you, especially when forgiveness feels impossible.

ST. KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA: INDIA'S FIRST SAINT!

By Rayma Young

St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara

[KOO-ree-ah-kohss el-EE-as CHA-vah-rah]

St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara was born in India in 1805 to a Christian family. They belonged to the Indian Catholic Church that began way back in the first century when St. Thomas the Apostle traveled there to share the Good News. His first name, **Kuriakose**, means "of the Lord." His feast day is **January 3rd**.

Father Kuriakose was a priest who loved *everyone*. In his time, there was a group of people in India called the **Dalits**, who were unfairly treated as "untouchable." They were very poor, not allowed to go to school, and had almost no opportunities. But Father Kuriakose didn't see them as "untouchable" at all. He saw them as **children of God**.

So he got to work!

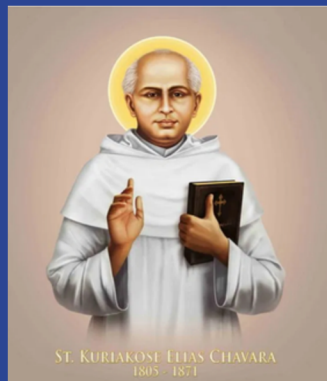
He helped start schools that welcomed Dalit children with kindness. He also knew children learn better with full tummies, so he began serving **free lunches** at school. This idea worked so well that the government eventually copied it and started free lunch programs in its schools, too!

Later, Father Kuriakose helped make a rule that **every church in India must have a school**, and that all schools must teach Dalit children. He also built **schools for girls**, even when people thought girls didn't need an education. He believed that when a girl learns, her whole family learns, and he was right! Today, in the place where he worked, **100% of the people can read!**

Father Kuriakose also began an Indian Eastern Carmelite order for both men and women. He wrote books about faith, poetry, and even plays. He even began the **first newspaper** in his language!

St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara is remembered most for his great love for people who were treated poorly and needed help the most.

St. Kuriakose, pray for us!



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H	J	A	R	E	S	Y	W	M	B	U
J	E	S	U	S	L	I	G	H	T	T
E	P	I	P	H	A	N	Y	A	P	A
B	A	P	T	I	S	M	H	O	P	E
S	T	A	R	J	O	Y	S	A	N	T
W	I	S	E	M	E	N	P	R	A	Y

Saint Benedict of Nursia

After the fall of the Roman Empire, chaos and uncertainty swept across Europe. Cities declined, learning faded, and faith wavered. Yet in the hills of Italy, one man's desire to seek God laid the foundation for a spiritual renewal that would shape the future of the Church.

St. Benedict of Nursia (480–547) was born into a world of collapse. As a young man, he left Rome, disheartened by its corruption, and sought solitude in the mountains near Subiaco. There, Benedict devoted himself to prayer, study, and simplicity. (Luke 10:41–42) His holiness soon drew others who wished to live as he did, focused on God alone, and committed to a life that reflected Christ in every action.

Around 529 AD, Benedict founded the great Abbey of Monte Cassino, where he wrote, "The Rule of St. Benedict," a guide for communal living centered on balance, obedience, and humility. His enduring motto, *Ora et Labora* ("Pray and Work"),



captures the spirit of a life fully devoted to God in both action and contemplation (Colossians 3:23). The Rule provided a clear structure for monastic life, blending prayer, labor, and study in a way that nurtured both the soul and the community.

Benedict's Rule emphasizes humility, stability, hospitality, and prayer woven throughout daily life. Monks were to see Christ in everyone (Matthew 25:40), to labor with purpose, and to order their days around the rhythm of prayer, through the Liturgy of the Hours (Psalm 119:164). Over time, Benedictine monasteries became safe havens where the Scriptures were copied, the poor were welcomed, and the faith was preserved with great devotion. Through these communities, Benedict's influence stretched far beyond Italy, shaping Christian culture and renewing hearts for centuries.

St. Benedict's legacy endures wherever people seek God through community, discipline, and peace. His life reminds us that holiness grows in the ordinary rhythm of prayer and work, and that even in dark times, faith can rebuild the world. In Benedict's simple, faithful way of life, we see God's promise to make "all things new" (Revelation 21:5). What began as one man's desire for a pure and undivided heart became a movement that renewed the Church, restored hope, and shaped generations. His life assures us that God can bring newness even from ruins, and that He continues to make all things new in us today.

St. Benedict of Nursia, pray for us!

Seeing the Face of Christ in a Digital Age

How the Church Is Guiding Us Through the Rise of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence is no longer something reserved for science-fiction. It is now woven into daily life—guiding our online searches, assisting in health care, shaping education, and influencing how we communicate. With such rapid growth, many Catholics are asking important questions: *What does the Church say about AI? How should we use it? And how do we protect human dignity in a digital world?*

This summer, the bishops of Maryland—including the Archdiocese of Baltimore—offered a thoughtful response in their new pastoral letter, “**The Face of Christ in a Digital Age.**” In this document, the bishops invite every Catholic to reflect not only on the opportunities AI presents, but also on the deeper spiritual and moral responsibilities that accompany it.

AI Holds Great Potential—But Also Real Risks

The bishops acknowledge that technology can be a powerful force for good. In many fields, AI has the ability to improve lives: supporting doctors in diagnosing illness, expanding access to education, strengthening communication, and even assisting ministries and service programs. These tools, when guided by ethical principles, can enhance the Church’s mission to serve the common good.

Yet the pastoral letter also warns of serious challenges. AI can threaten privacy, distort truth, and replace essential human work. Even more concerning, it may tempt society to forget what makes us uniquely human. As the bishops write, no machine—no matter how advanced—can **replicate the soul, the conscience, or the eternal destiny** that belongs only to the human person made in the image of God.

The Church’s Call: Be a Prophetic Voice

Rather than reacting with fear or uncritical excitement, the bishops call Catholics to take up a different role: to be a prophetic voice in the midst of technological change.

This means:

- Insisting that human dignity comes first
- Encouraging ethical development of new technologies
- Teaching our families how to use technology wisely
- Protecting the vulnerable from digital harm
- And most importantly, remembering that our identity comes from God—not from algorithms, trends, or artificial systems

We are invited to think deeply about how we allow technology to shape our hearts, our relationships, and our communities.

A Reminder of Who We Are

At the center of the bishops’ message is a simple but profound truth: **We are not machines. We are beloved sons and daughters of God.**

AI can process data, but it cannot love.

It can imitate words, but it cannot pray.

It can generate images, but it cannot recognize the face of Christ in another person.

The pastoral letter reminds us that only the human person can know God, choose love, and reflect His image to the world.

Want to Learn More?

For those interested in exploring the full pastoral letter, you can find it through the Maryland Catholic Conference by searching for “**The Face of Christ in a Digital Age.**”

It offers a rich and hopeful perspective on how we—as individuals, families, and a parish community—can navigate the digital era with wisdom, virtue, and trust in God’s guidance.

As technology continues to evolve, the Church stands ready not just to adapt, but to illuminate the path forward. May we always seek Christ’s face—both in the people we meet and in the choices we make—whether online or in the quiet moments of daily life.



Save the date
Parish Lenten Mission
March 1-4

Catholic Apologetics

Why We Kneel, Why We Watch for the Flame, and Why the Eucharist is the Heart of It All

Like a message passed through generations, the meaning of our gestures can fade. Catholic apologetics helps us rediscover why we do what we do, grounding every movement in Scripture and Tradition.

Reverence: The Body's Language of Faith

Reverence is not an old custom—it is the living language of Catholic worship. Every time we enter the church, bend a knee, or notice the sanctuary lamp's steady flame, our bodies proclaim what our hearts believe: **Christ is truly present.**



Genuflection: Kneeling Before the King

Genuflecting is not "something Catholics do." **It is Catholic theology in motion.**

St. Paul teaches, "*At the name of Jesus every knee should bow*" (Phil 2:10).

The first Christians prayed on their knees (Acts 9:40; Eph 3:14). The Catechism reminds us that gestures express the heart (CCC 1146).

We do not kneel to a building or symbol. We kneel before a Person— **Jesus Christ, really present in the tabernacle.**

When the meaning is forgotten, the gesture becomes habit. When remembered, it becomes a confession of faith: "**My Lord and my God.**" (Jn 20:28)

The Eucharist: The Center of All Reverence

All reverence flows from one reality:

"The Eucharist is Jesus Christ Himself—Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity." (CCC 1374)

Jesus declares, "*This is My Body...This is My Blood*" (Mt 26:26–28). "My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink." (Jn 6:55)

The early Church believed this wholeheartedly. Around AD 110, St. Ignatius called the Eucharist "**the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ.**"

Some today claim the Eucharist is only symbolic.

Catholics respond with Scripture, history, and Christ's own words.

Once we rediscover Who is in the tabernacle, reverence becomes natural:

- We kneel because Christ is present.
- We grow silent because we stand on holy ground.
- Our posture changes because we are before the Living God.

Reverence becomes not obligation, but **love.**

The Sanctuary Lamp: A Flame That Tells the Truth

Near every tabernacle burns a small, steady flame. It is not decoration—it is proclamation.

Canon Law teaches:

"A special lamp...is to burn continuously near the tabernacle to indicate and honor Christ's presence." (Canon 940)

This flame echoes the lamp of the Temple (1 Sam 3:3), God's guiding fire in the desert (Ex 13:21), and Christ the Light of the World (Jn 8:12).

When the lamp is burning, it silently tells the truth: **This is no ordinary room. The King is present.**

It protects us from forgetfulness and awakens our awareness of the sacred.

One Message, Three Signs

- We genuflect because Christ is present.
- The Eucharist is that Real Presence.
- The sanctuary lamp announces the Presence with a faithful flame.

Together, they form a living apologetic—teaching not only with words, but with the way we move, pray, and enter God's house.

Reverence reminds us of the heart of our Catholic faith:

Christ is here.

Christ is adored.

Christ is loved.

Around the Archdiocese

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Time: 9:30 am - 4:00 pm EST

Cost: \$75

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JAN



02

First Fridays

"Behold Him here...our companion in the most Blessed Sacrament; it doesn't seem it was in His power to leave us for even a moment." - St. Teresa of Avila

Confessions
7 - 8 PM

Adoration
6 - 9 PM



03

First Saturdays

"Behold Him here...our companion in the most Blessed Sacrament; it doesn't seem it was in His power to leave us for even a moment." - St. Teresa of Avila

Confessions
8:30 - 9:30 AM

Adoration
8 - 10 AM



04

Donut Sunday

Sponsored by the
Knights of Columbus



After All Masses



06

Monthly Bingo/ Luncheon

BINGO! A Harford
County tradition on
1st Tuesdays.

Admission
includes lunch.

Doors open at 9:30 AM,
games begin at 11:00 AM



10

Confirmation

Our first Confirmation group received this beautiful sacrament together today. We're so proud of their "yes" to the Holy Spirit. Congratulations to our newly confirmed!

10 AM

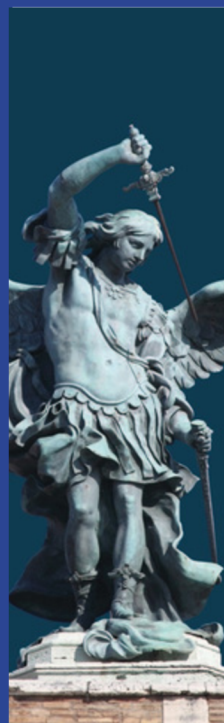


17

Food Pantry

Food Drive
that supports
families in need in
our area.

10 AM - 11 AM



Into The Breach

Jan 7, 14, 21, and 28

In the past two decades, more than 14 million Catholics have left the faith. In the face of these losses, Catholic men are called to put aside any hesitation to live a life of mission. We must enter into the breach.



6 PM - 9 PM

Top 10: "All Things New" Catholic Edition — Christmas & Epiphany

10. New year, new me... same pew.
9. The Magi asked for directions – so it's officially allowed.
8. Top sign you're Catholic in January: You're still saying "Merry Christmas!" while your neighbors have their Valentine's wreaths out.
7. Epiphany: When the wise men finally found Jesus... unlike my missing Tupperware lids.
6. Home blessing with chalk: Did we do it right or spell a Wi-Fi password?
5. New Bible reading plan: Strong start...
4. Gold, Frankincense, Myrrh... I offer Jesus the change I found in my car's cup holder, Lord. He accepts my offering.
3. Taking down Christmas decorations = penance I didn't expect.
2. Catholics in January: Celebrating Christmas until the liturgical calendar tells us otherwise.
1. Epiphany: Jesus is revealed... and so are the needles buried in your carpet.

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