

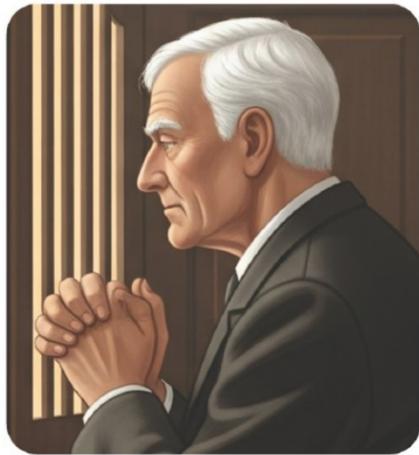
Dear Padre,

I went to confession, and then, months later, my priest was removed for alcoholism and theft. Is my confession still worthy?

Your confession is not dependent on the worthiness or the unworthiness of the priest. Your confession is made to Jesus; the priest is a witness who pronounces the words of absolution that Jesus intended in the sacrament. “From the moment that a sacrament is celebrated in accordance with the intention of the Church, the power of Christ and his Spirit acts in and through it, independently of the personal holiness of the minister” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1128).

The question of the efficacy of the sacrament and the unworthiness of the minister who performs the sacrament in the name of the Church is not new. During the time of persecution, in the early centuries of the Church, some people, including priests and bishops, avoided martyrdom by offering the required oblation to Caesar. Later, they repented and returned to the Christian community, a community that included the surviving family and friends of the men and women who were martyred. The question was asked, and with some animated energy, “How could these ministers who sinned to save their own lives now represent the Church?” The answer, arrived at with patience and discernment, is that the minister is only the representative of the sacrament, not the source of the sacrament. Jesus is faithful, even when his ministers have been unfaithful. ●

Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSSR / DearPadre.org



GEMINI

Our Parish COMMUNITY

December 21, 2025

Fourth Sunday of Advent (A)

Isaiah 7:10–14 / Romans 1:1–7 / Matthew 1:18–24



Close Enough!

MIGUEL DULICK

It is the fourth Sunday of Advent. When Christmas is this close, one takes that final leap. Isaiah is centuries from Christmas, but he cannot wait! He sees the “sign” as clear as day: “the young woman, pregnant and about to bear a son” (Isaiah 7:14). And how about that Son! None other than “Emmanuel” himself—God-With-Us! Paul, too, is bursting at the seams! Inspired by what he calls “the obedience of faith” (Romans 5), he is excited to see the gospel thriving even among the Gentiles. For him, the “Spirit of holiness” is a gift offered to all—Christmas every day, you might say.

Speaking of “obedience of faith,” Joseph is the perfect example. The word “obey” comes from the same root as “to hear,” and Joseph has almost supernatural ears! Matthew, the former tax collector, tells “how the birth of Jesus Christ came about” in today’s gospel reading like a bookkeeper—the Holy Spirit in Column A, Joseph in Column B, with Mary in the middle. But when an angel whispers to Joseph at night, his dream comes true: “he took his wife into his home.”

Everything is set for Emmanuel! So, the Bible is brimming with Christmas, that is, “God-With-Us,” from end to end. And when a virgin can conceive, are any of us exempt from “birthing” Jesus in our midst? Even when a “happy holiday” seems impossible in the midst of war or violence or poverty, when our ears hear only silence, let’s sing Christmas carols every day! ●



SCAN TO LEARN ABOUT AUTHOR MIGUEL DULICK



The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus.”

MATTHEW 1:20–21

A WORD FROM POPE LEO XIV



I think it is important for all of us to learn how to listen more, to enter into dialogue. First and foremost, with the Lord: always listen to the word of God. Then also listen

to others, to know how to build bridges, to know how to listen without judging, not closing the doors [and] thinking that we have all the truth and no one else can tell us anything.

HOMILY, ROME, MAY 11, 2025

Monday

December 22
Advent Weekday
1 Sm 1:24–28
Lk 1:46–56

Tuesday

December 23
Advent Weekday
Mal 3:1–4, 23–24
Lk 1:57–66

Wednesday

December 24
Advent Weekday
2 Sm 7:1–5, 8b–12, 14a, 16
Lk 1:67–79

Thursday

December 25
The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)
Is 52:7–10
Heb 1:1–6

Jn 1:1–18 or 1:1–5, 9–14

Friday

December 26
St. Stephen, the First Martyr
Acts 6:8–10; 7:54–59
Mt 10:17–22

Saturday

December 27
St. John, Apostle and Evangelist
1 Jn 1:1–4
Jn 20:1a, 2–8

Sunday

December 28
The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph
Sir 3:2–6, 12–14
Col 3:12–21 or 3:12–17
Mt 2:13–15, 19–23

Do you have a question for the Padre?

Go to DearPadre.org to send your question and to learn more about *Dear Padre*.



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Immaculate Conception Catholic Church

1303 E. Reelfoot Ave. Union City, TN 38261

www.icuctn.org

731-885-0963

icuctnmaster@gmail.com



Saturday, December 20: 4:00 pm

People of the Parish

Sunday, December 21: 8:00 am

Rest of the souls of Jack & Theresa Haddad (Atwill Family)

Monday, December 22: 8:00 am

Rest of the souls of Carl & Charlotte Toon (Toon Family)

Wednesday, December 24: 9:00 pm

Intentions of BT Logan (Winnie Logan)

Thursday, December 25: 8:00 am

People of the Parish

Friday, December 26: 8:00 am

Rest of the soul of Edward Fitts (Logan Family)

Saturday, December 26: 4:00 pm

Rest of the soul of Grace Abernathy (Frank Maceri)

Sunday, December 27: 8:00 am

People of the Parish



Sunday, December 21: No PRE
 Monday, December 22-Friday, January 2:
 Church office is closed
 Wednesday, December 24:
 Christmas Eve Vigil Mass 4pm @ St. Jude
 Christmas Eve Vigil Mass 9pm @ IC
 Thursday, December 25:
 Christmas Day Mass 8am @ IC
 Christmas Day Mass 10am @ St. Jude
 Sunday, December 28: NO PRE
 Wednesday, December 31:
 Holy Day of Obligation Mary, Mother of
 God Vigil Mass 4pm @ St. Jude
 Thursday, January 1:
 Holy Day of Obligation Mary, Mother of
 God Mass 10am @ IC
 Monday, January 5:
 Church Office opens.

Parish Offertory
 Weekly Budget: \$5,400
 December 14, 2025

Regular Offertory: \$ 2362
 Online Giving: \$ 448

Immaculate Conception: \$ 304
 Retired Religious: \$603
 Our Lady of Guadalupe: \$766

Families giving with Envelopes or Online Giving: 60 out of 179
Thank you for your generosity & support!

WAYS TO GIVE

ENVELOPE
Mail or drop off a your offering

ONLINE

Download on the App Store
 GET IT ON Google Play

QR Code

Online Giving

Eucharistic Ministers & Lectors

December 27 & 28—The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph

Lector:
 4 pm: Donnie Bearden & 8 am: Julie Cunningham

Eucharistic Minister:
 4:00pm: Sue Holzner & 8:00am: Paul Cunningham

Please call the church office if you are interested in being a Lector or Eucharistic Minister while growing in your faith.

Immaculate Conception Catholic Church
Assumption Memorial Garden Cemetery

Columbarium Niches for Cremains \$1,600.00 per Niche
 contact parish office (731) 885-0963 Niche Face Plate
 Engraving Compliments of Edmaiston-Mosley Funeral Home (731) 885-1033 Curtis Monument Company (731) 352-5769 & The Wall Family

Immaculate Conception Parish Staff:

Office Hours: 9:00am—2:00pm

Pastor: Fr. Carl Gregorich
 Bookkeeper/Reception: Leticia Maldonado
Tuesday & Thursday 9am—2pm
 Religious Education Director: Teresa Vallee
 Communications/Technology: Lillie Vallee

Choir Rehearsal: Wednesdays 5pm

Knights of Columbus: 3rd Degree: Mike Morel
 4th Degree: Jason Batchelor
 Ladies Guild: Janell Gegg
 Meal Ministry: Brenda Piazza
 Rosary Prayer Group: Sundays 7:30am Lillie Vallee
 Sick Card Ministry: Sue Holnzer 731-335-0502

Flocknote: icuctn.flocknote.com/register

FORMED.org: Sign up as a parishioner & use the church zip code franciscanathome.com
 Catechetical Institute: Sign up under the Memphis Diocese

Facebook: facebook.com/icuctn

Bulletin Deadline: Noon on Monday

Wishing all of you a Happy and BLESSED December Birthday!

May your special day be filled with joy, sweet memories, relaxation, and God's blessings.



The Altar Candles are for Billy T & Winnie Logan.

Altar Linens Month of December: Beverly Canale
 Thank you for your service to our parish!

Holy Sacraments Offered

Baptism: Arrange by appointment three (3) months before the desired date of baptism with the Office.
First Eucharist: Arrangements made with the Religious Education Director.
Confirmation: Arrangements made with the Religious Education Director.
Confession: Saturdays 3:15pm—3:45pm
Matrimony: Arrangements must be made six (6) months before the wedding date with the Parish Office.
Marriage Blessing: Contact the parish Priest.
Marriage Annulment: Contact the parish Priest.
Anointing of the Sick: Contact the Parish Office.
Holy Orders: Contact the Parish Priest.

Sagrados Sacramentos Ofrecidos

Bautismo: Organizarlo por medio de una cita con la oficina parroquial tres (3) meses antes de la fecha deseada de bautismo.
Primera Comuni3n: Arreglos hechos con el Director de Educaci3n Religiosa.
Confirmaci3n: Arreglos hechos con el Director de Educaci3n Religiosa.
Confesi3n: Sábados 3:15pm—3:45pm
Matrimonio: Los arreglos deben hacerse seis (6) meses antes de la fecha de la boda con la Oficina Parroquial.
Bendici3n Matrimonial: Comuníquese con el párroco.
Anulaci3n de Matrimonio: Póngase en contacto con el párroco.
Unci3n de los Enfermos: Comuníquese con la Oficina Parroquial.
Órdenes Sagradas: Póngase en contacto con el párroco.



Names on the prayer list for family and friends will be removed on monthly basis. They will not be put back on until requested. Please notify church office to remove or add a person or email: icuctnmaster@gmail.com

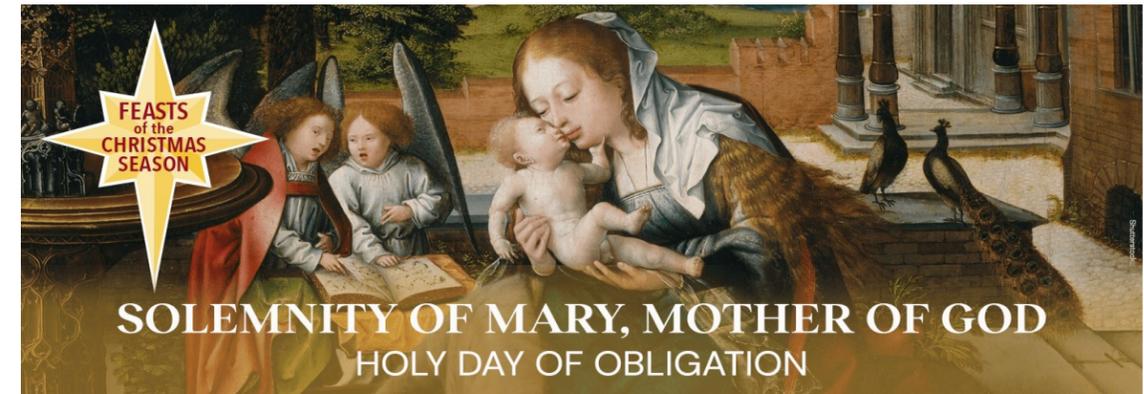
Parishioners	Friends & Family	
Lupita Berner	John Akers	Mary Jo Lattus
Richard Burpo	Heather Bacon	Nancy Long
Beverly Canale	Linda Boucher	Brian Maddox
Willis Hayslett	Butch Bugby	Fr. Jim Martell
Terry Johnson	Karen Canale	Josh McKinnis
James Judge	Robert Chmielewski	Linda Moore
Martha Lattus	Joseph Forner	Gabby Moss Family
Pat Martinek	Judy Gainwell	Barbara Parker
Barbara Pituch	Edward & Glenda Griffith	Logan Ricketts
Tom Pituch	Judy Guillory	Liliana Sanchez
Maria Searcy	Jean Haynes	Debra Spillers
David Sergerson	Geri Hinson	Teresa Sadler
Marilyn Stigler	Mayci Hogg	Gary Stephens
Del Torro	Frank Hutchinson	Allan Stevens
Paul Werner, Sr.	Dave Johnson	Ashley Taylor
Katie Young	Rhonda Jones	Grace Townsend
	Steven Kreis	Dottie Grace Tibbs
	Layla Karlz	Doris Ann Toon
	Linda Lattus	Doris & Van Veach
		Joe Young

The Christmas Flowers are dedicated in memory or in honor of these listed & all members of Immaculate Conception Parish.

Gabe, Amy, Curry, Jasper, Minnie Sullivan	Clarence & Ratit Johnson	Bill & Jewel Rush
Joseph Piazza/Lynn Piazza	John & Doris Knievel	Harold & Bettye Jenkins
Josephine Piazza / Tony Piazza	Larry Harmon	Amy Jenkins Rufus
Herman Hohensee	Delores Wade	Jon Jenkins
Dolores Noff	Doug Harmon	Agnes Williams
Gwen Wilkinson	Judy Buehler	Carnell Harrison
Johnnie & Margaret Wall	John WT Scott	Jim Harrison
Tom & Gertude Wall	Mr. & Mrs. GL Scott	Lucia Pena Mancada
WO & Rosa Kaufman	Mr. & Mrs. Charles Barnett	Helen Chmielewski
Katie Young	George & Josephine Oliver	Stanley Chmielewski
Jimmy & Pat Cooley	Phillip Maddox	Joseph Forner
The Prehoda Family	Milford & Gussie Vincent	DeEtta Chmielewski
Robert & Charlotte Garrigan	EW & Alice Finch	Billy & Peggy Logan
Harold & Vince Ray	Joey Nasso	Edward & Mena Fitts
Lavonna Ray	Betty McNeill	Billy T. & Winnie Logan
Deceased members of the Garrigan & Mangold Families	Heather Jenkins	Fr. Robert Ponticello
Scarlett Malone	Kathy Jo Roberts	James Bowers
Tommy Sergerson	Luptia Berner	The Vallee Families
Joyce Sergerson	Mr. & Mrs. Raymond Weatherly	Jim Brewer
Damon & Cecilia Sergerson	The Wall & Kaufman Families	Susan Brewer
Bettye & Gary Sergerson	The Werner Family	Bill & Beverly Dixon
Dayna Sergerson Cook	Edwin & Lois Hogg	Rudy & Carolyn Vallee
Marsha Phillips	Jack Hogg Family	All Unborn Children
	Allen & Carlyn Searcy	Nina Pierce
	Brian & Maria Searcy & Family	



- Wednesday, December 24:
Christmas Eve Masses
@ St. Jude - 4pm
@ IC - 9pm
- Thursday, December 25:
Christmas Day Masses @ IC - 8am
@ St. Jude - 10am
- Miércoles 24 de diciembre: Misas de Nochebuena en San Judas - 4pm y en IC - 9pm
- Jueves 25 de diciembre: Misas de Navidad en IC - 8am y en San Judas - 10am



- Wednesday, December 31: Mary, Mother of God Holy Day of Obligation Vigil Mass @ St. Jude - 4pm
- Thursday, January 1: Mary, Mother of God Holy Day of Obligation Mass @ IC - 10am
- Miércoles 31 de diciembre: Misa de precepto en la parroquia de San Judas, Día de la Santa Virgen María, Madre de Dios, a las 4pm
- Jueves 1 de enero: Misa de precepto en la parroquia de IC, Día de la Santa Virgen María, Madre de Dios, a las 10am



The 2026 Mass Intention book has several openings for your Mass Intentions. There are 3 Mass available each week to add your loved ones. Come by the office to request your dates.

El libro de intenciones de misa de 2026 tiene varias fechas disponibles para sus intenciones de misa. Hay tres misas disponibles cada semana para que añada a sus seres queridos. Visite la oficina para solicitar sus fechas.



The Greening of The Church

Thank you to all you helped "Green" the church. You are greatly appreciated to continue to make our church beautiful and festive for the Christmas Season.



A walk through the Christmas Season

Think Christmas is over on Dec. 25? Think again.

The Church's liturgical season of Christmas is one of its shortest, but also one of its most unique. Within it is the eight-day celebration of the Lord's Nativity — known as the Christmas octave — as well as other feasts pertaining to the manifestation that Jesus is Lord of the nations. And there are feasts of several saints, many of whose stories contain special significance to the season.

The configuration of the calendar relative to the season of Christmas is a bit complex. It always begins on the solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord — Dec. 25 — and ends on the feast of the Baptism of the Lord, a movable feast roughly three weeks after Christmas.

In the U.S., Dec. 25 is always a holy day of obligation.

Christmas Day

The liturgical celebration of the Lord's Nativity has many variables and components. There are four particular timeframes during which Mass might be celebrated in observance of this great feast: a vigil, a Mass at night, a Mass at dawn and a Mass during the day. Each of these Masses have their own unique prayers and readings. The newness of life made possible because of the Incarnation pervades the prayers and feasts of the Christmas season.

The four different Gospel readings assigned for use at the different Masses of Christmas all speak of the variety of the people affected by the Savior's coming. The beginning of St. Matthew's Gospel (see Mt 1:1-25), which lists Jesus' family lineage, is proclaimed at the Vigil Mass. This includes major figures of Judaism like Abraham and David, whose covenants with God foreshadow the new and everlasting covenant that will be sealed in the blood of Christ. But Christ's lineage also emphasizes that he came to save the poor and lowly, shown by connecting him to ancestors of low degree, socially or morally — like the four women mentioned, including David's mistress Bathsheba. Jesus came to save them all.

The Gospel read at the Mass at night (see Lk 2:1-14) also underscores the importance of Christ's coming for the marginalized and outcast, embodied by the news of his birth being shared firstly with the shepherds and not the rulers endowed with earthly power, who might be perceived as entitled to receiving such news on behalf of their subjects.

It is important to note that on Christmas, the faithful all are to genuflect or kneel during the Creed at the words relative to this central mystery of Christian faith, "and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary and became man." This helps us keep our hearts and minds focused on what the feast is all about. As the popular Christmas carol "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" phrases it, Jesus was "born that man no more may die; born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth. ..."

Dec. 26: Feast of St. Stephen

Within the octave are various feast days that have rich histories and traditions. It is interesting to note that the first feast day after Christmas — the very next day, Dec. 26 — is the feast of a martyr. Recalling the purpose for which Christ came and the assignment of his divine mission, Christians are reminded, at this early stage of the celebrations of the Christmas season, of the Lord's exhortation that anyone who wishes to follow after him must take up his cross. St. Stephen, the first martyr of the Christian faith, is held up as a living witness of what it means to proclaim that Christ is savior without counting the cost.

Dec. 27: Feast of St. John

Dec. 27 is the feast of the apostle and evangelist St. John. Regarded as the disciple closest to Jesus, St. John — believed to be the author of a Gospel, the Book of Revelation and three New Testament letters — is the one who teaches us that "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8). Because St. John's Gospel alone includes the miracle at the Cana wedding feast, when Jesus miraculously changes water into wine, this feast has long been associated with the blessing of wine.

Dec. 28: Feast of the Holy Innocents

The Holy Innocents celebrated on Dec. 28 were martyrs killed as the result of Herod's murderous rage, resulting in his desire to eliminate any threats to his power by killing anyone who fit the profile of the newborn king he learned about from the Magi (see Mt 2:13-18). Taking no chances for the babe's survival, he ordered the murder of all boys in or around Bethlehem under the age of 2. Christ, of course, survives thanks to the heavenly intervention manifested by the angelic admonition to St. Joseph to flee with Mary and Jesus in the middle of the night to Egypt. The Gospel proclaimed on this day, referenced above, evokes two major issues about which the Church is concerned today: immigration and abortion.

Feast of the Holy Family

Many of the few details we know of Jesus' early life relates to his familial relationships. As a young man, we know he grew in the ways of faith as the obedient son of Mary and Joseph. The Church holds up annually the Holy Family of Nazareth as a model for all families, as a model for all human relationships. As Blessed Pope Paul VI said during a visit to the Holy Family's town in 1964, "Nazareth is the school in which we begin to understand the life of Jesus. It is the school of the Gospel." The feast of the Holy Family is celebrated on the Sunday after Christmas, except for the years when Christmas falls on a Sunday. Then it is celebrated on Dec. 30.



Jan. 1: Solemnity of Mary

The octave of Christmas ends with the celebration of the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God on Jan. 1. It is a holy day of obligation, except the obligation for Catholics in the United States is lifted when the feast falls on a Saturday or Monday. Jan. 1 also marks the Church's commemoration of the World Day of Peace, first observed 50 years ago in 1968. It seems appropriate and fitting to be celebrated on a Marian feast day, for peace is only possible through total self-sacrifice and surrender — through total love and obedience to the will of God, of which Mary is an icon for the Church.

It bears noting that Jan. 1 previously had been known as the feast of the circumcision of the Lord, because Jewish ritual prescribes that Jewish males would have been circumcised on the eighth day after birth, in accordance with the covenant God made with Abraham. As a member of a pious, practicing Jewish family, Jesus would have received this ritual induction into the Abrahamic covenant (see Lk 2:21).

Solemnity of the Epiphany

Traditionally celebrated on Jan. 6, the Twelfth Day of Christmas, is the solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord. The feast is transferred to the Sunday between Jan. 2-8 in the United States, however. In commemoration of Christ's manifestation to the Magi — who represent how Christ came to save all mankind, not just the Jews — this feast celebrates how Christ's identity is revealed, as is summed up in the gifts the Three Kings presented him. The gold and frankincense they gave Christ represent his status as king of the universe, the deity worthy of our true worship. And the myrrh tells of the bitter reality that the babe in the manger was born to die.

The Baptism of the Lord

The Christmas season ends with the feast of the Lord's baptism, which falls on the Sunday after the Epiphany. (That is, unless the Epiphany falls on Jan. 7 or 8, when it then is celebrated on the following day, a Monday.) This feast commemorates the day on which Christ formally accepts his mission as the redeemer when he receives St. John the Baptist's baptism of conversion and repentance. He sets out from the waters of the Jordan, identified as God's own son by the Father's voice that resounded from the opened sky, and inaugurates his saving work as the long-awaited Messiah who will free us of our sins.

Michael R. Heinlein is editor of *Simply Catholic*. Follow him on Twitter [@HeinleinMichael](https://twitter.com/HeinleinMichael).



Our PRE Classes celebrated a Posada during class last week.
Thank you to all the families that helped!

