

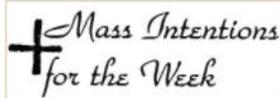
St. Thomas the Apostle Parish  
Diocese of Peoria  
904 E Lake Ave Peoria Heights  
stthomaspeoria.org



**THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD**

Reading I: Isaiah 52: 7-10  
Reading II: Hebrews 1: 1-6  
John 1: 1-18

In celebrating the event of the birth of Jesus, most people localize the time and place: Bethlehem two thousand years ago. And certainly they celebrate that event in the present in their own cities and homes. But in today's Scripture readings, John and Isaiah stretch our minds and hearts to consider a great cosmic view, maybe a God's-eye-view of salvation. Imagine a camera starting with wide lens, zooming in for a close-up and returning to the larger picture. John starts with the widest possible frame, "in the beginning was the Word; and the Word was God." Then God chooses to localize, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." Isaiah broadens the lens to remind us, "All the ends of the earth will behold the salvation of our God."



**Monday, December 26, 2016**

8:00am The Hafner Family Living and Deceased

**Tuesday, December 27, 2016**

7:00am Frances Johnston/Nancy Jones  
8:00am Penny Scherer/Family

**Wednesday, December 28, 2016**

7:00am Sandra Roberson/John & Sharon Lasher-Schleich  
8:00am Rose & Bill Chase/Family

**Thursday, December 29, 2016**

7:00am Gerry Stodd/The Catholic Women's League  
8:00am John Ambrosch/Jim & Pat Hagemann

**Friday, December 30, 2016**

7:00am Tony Ferris/Tom & Diana Joseph  
8:00am Ed & Mary Parry/Jeanne Parry Smith

**Saturday, December 31, 2016**

8:00am George Bodish/Angie Aeschliman  
5:00pm Jack Kocher/Todd & Maureen Green

**Sunday, January 1, 2017**

6:30am Ann Ribando/Mark & Jane Golowski  
8:00am For the People  
9:30am Bob Runkle/The St Vincent de Paul Society  
11:00am Edith Gibson/Dorothy Paesani  
5:00pm Dan Aspell/John & Sonia Nelson



**ST THOMAS SCHOOL** closed for the holidays from Wednesday, December 21 through Tuesday, January 3rd

**CENTERING PRAYER** Monday, December 26 at 7:00 pm in the old church basement

**ROSARY FOR PEACE** Tuesday, December 27 at 10:00 am in the church

**CHARISMATIC PRAYER GROUP** Thursday, December 29 at 7:00 pm in the old church basement

**ST VINCENT DE PAUL, FOOD PANTRY AND CHRIST CHILD COLLECTIONS** will be at Masses next weekend.



**WEEKLY COLLECTION**

	12/11/2016	Fiscal YTD
Collections needed	\$ 24,000	\$ 576,000
Sunday Collections	\$ 20,980	\$ 416,955
Electronic Collections	\$ 4,534	\$ 111,504
Total Collected	\$ 25,514	\$ 528,459
Over/(Short)	\$ 1,514	\$ (47,541)

**We appreciate your generosity.**

## *From the Pastor*

On behalf of everyone at St. Thomas Parish and School, we wish you a Merry Christmas as we celebrate the birth of Our Lord. I hope that this is a blessed time for you and for your families, with wishes for every grace in the new year.

In particular, I am grateful for all who work to make our parochial school a great environment for Catholic education. I am grateful for the hard work and dedication of our faculty and staff who want every student to meet and exceed their potential. I am grateful for the commitment of our parents and for your choice to invest in your children by providing a Catholic education. I am grateful for the generosity of many parishioners who support the school through contributions to our Msgr. Watson Educational Endowment or through our Sponsor a Student program

Next month, as we approach Catholic Schools' Week, we will extend an invitation to other families to discover the advantages of an education at St. Thomas. Please join me in praying for our parish and school.

Msgr. Gray

As a reminder all contributions given at Christmas are received by the parish. Any gifts intended for the staff must be clearly marked.

St. Thomas Website: [stthomaspeoria.org](http://stthomaspeoria.org)  
St. Thomas e-mail: [parishoffice@stthomas-church.net](mailto:parishoffice@stthomas-church.net)

## *Our Sympathy*

**PLEASE PRAY FOR THOSE WHO HAVE DIED THIS WEEK:**

Louis Primus, brother of Anita Nelson; Irene Norbits

### **SERVER SCHEDULES**

**Please check in the sacristy when you arrive to see if servers are needed.**

**DECEMBER 24/25 VOLUNTEERS**

**Dec 26-31 8:00am VOLUNTEERS**

**DECEMBER 31/JANUARY 1 VOLUNTEERS**

**Jan 2-7 8:00am Tyler Robenstein, Katie Bruch**



## **Those you have touched...**

Faithful to the spirit of its founders, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul gives priority to the poorest of the poor and to those who are most rejected by society. Through your support of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, you have helped many struggling families within walking distance in any direction of St. Thomas Church. You don't see it, but poverty lives in our neighborhood. The wooden vessel in which you deposit your contributions to St. Vincent de Paul is your direct link to those whom serve. In our neighborhood, you have paid rent for a gentleman who missed work and does not get "sick pay," you have provided food and heat to a father and his children when the mother abandoned the family, your donations purchased medical needs for a child stricken by seizures, and the list goes on. You have touched the suffering directly because your contributions result in individual acts of kindness. Thank you for bringing Christ's presence to those who most need it.

Here is a summary of our activity during the fiscal year, 2016: October 1, 2015-September 30, 2016. Our expenditures vary according to seasons, with summer being the most demanding as Ameren can shut off service.

Home visits: During 2016 we made 241 home visits, affecting 673 people. The financial assistance given to help with rent, Ameren and American Water to avoid shut-offs, medical expenses, car repairs, and other miscellaneous expenses amounted to approximately \$68, 245. During home visits, Vincentians also ask about the family's immediate and long term needs. Last year, approximately 578 referrals were made. Other operating expenses for Christmas baskets, SVdP dues, and Haiti hurricane relief amounted to \$3,668.

Food Pantry: The St. Thomas Food Pantry relies on parishioner donations and the Midwest Food Bank to supply the needy with a sufficient amount of nutritional food. When there is a shortage of certain food items, the Food Pantry uses SVdP funds to purchase them. During the last fiscal period, approximately \$7,236 in SVdP funds were used for such purchases. The Pantry served approximately 5,020 people last year.

Again, thank you so much for your generosity in all that you do to serve the poor and the Society of St. Vincent Paul. Our collections are after all Masses on the first weekend of every month.

## Did you Know?

You can attend a Catholic School

Financial Assistance Available

Tuition assistance scholarship grants from the endowment fund established as a result of the diocese of Peoria Rooted In Faith Campaign and named in honor of Archbishop Spalding, the first Bishop of Peoria, will be available for the 2017-18 school year for students enrolled in or intending to enroll in grades Kindergarten through 12 in any Catholic school located in the diocese of Peoria whose families are active members of a Catholic parish in the diocese. All grants will be based on financial need objectively assessed.

Information about the grants and application material may be obtained from any Catholic elementary or secondary school in the diocese of Peoria or on the diocesan website [www.cdop.org](http://www.cdop.org) under **Catholic Education** and then under **Financial Assistance**. Consult the detailed protocols and procedures and checklist for all requirements necessary to be eligible for an award.

Parents are encouraged to apply online at [online.factmgt.com/aid](http://online.factmgt.com/aid). Families of students currently receiving grants are reminded that all grants are for one year only, and anyone seeking to renew a grant for the 2017-18 year must reapply.

Deadline date for the completed application is **March 15, 2017**. Notification of grant awards will be made by the end of April.

## St. Thomas Reads

The second book for the St. Thomas Reads book club is the Wind in the Reeds by Wendell Pierce. The discussion date is Thursday, January 26, 4:00 pm at Paneras on N. Knoxville. Hope you all have a joyous and peaceful Christmas—and find time to join us for our discussion.

Please remember St. Thomas Church in your will.



## AREA EVENTS

**SPALDING AND THE ACADEMY OF OUR LADY FROM 1960-1969:** You are invited to the 1st Annual Spalding & Academy Holiday Gathering. Please contact classmates. We will meet at Gebby's Family Restaurant on Wednesday, December 28 from 4:00 — 7:00 pm. RSVP by December 10 to Tom Kahn [thomaskahn@yahoo.com](mailto:thomaskahn@yahoo.com) or Pat Bartolomucci [bartojp1948@aol.com](mailto:bartojp1948@aol.com) or Mary Ann Muller [ma48muller@aol.com](mailto:ma48muller@aol.com)

**CURSILLO TEAM MEMBERS** for the January, 2017 Cursillo from St. Thomas are Deacon Mark Kelsch and Jeffrey Birkel.

## ST. THOMAS FOOD PANTRY FOLLOWING IS A SUGGESTED LIST FOOD ITEMS:

Dry Pasta	Rice	Box Potatoes
Pancake Mix	Syrup	Can Tomatoes
Can Fruit	Tuna	Beef Stew
Crackers	Jelly	Peanut Butter
Can Veggies	Cereal	Meal Helpers
Mac & Cheese	Soup	Tomato Sauce

Thank you for your generosity

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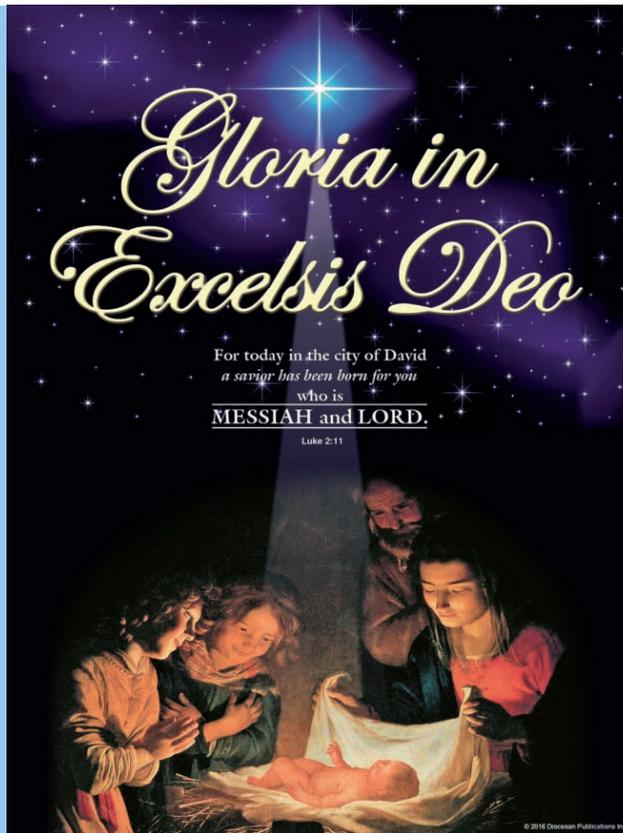
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### ***In the Middle of the Night***

In the middle of the night.  
When stark night was darkest,  
then You chose to come.

God's resplendent first-born  
sent to make us one.

The voices of doom protest:  
"All these words about justice,  
love and peace—  
All these naïve words  
will buckle beneath the weight of a reality  
which is brutal and bitter, ever more bitter."  
It is true, Lord, it is midnight upon the earth,  
moonless night and starved of stars.  
But can we forget that You,  
the Son of God,  
chose to be born precisely at midnight?

If you have been afraid of shadows  
You would have been born at noon.  
But you preferred the night.

Lord, You were born in the middle of the night  
because midnight is pregnant with dawn.

—It's Midnight, Lord  
Dom Helder Camara

# Fear Not!

*Editorial from America Magazine  
December 19-26, 2016 Issue*

The recent presidential election unearthed a stratum of anxiety and fear that extends across the country like a vein of ore. There is the fear of the person living in a declining industrial town who watches as jobs migrate overseas and wonders how he or she will provide food, clothing and health care for the family. There is the fear of the migrant who seeks to support his or her family on a minimum-wage job, whose anxiety is compounded by the possibility of deportation. There is the fear of an American society in decline and an erosion of any truly meaningful sense of public morality and community, particularly in the wake of a poisonous election season. Across the world there is the fear of those who wonder where their next meal will come from and the real fear of unending, catastrophic violence in places like Syria, South Sudan and Afghanistan.

Into this world comes Jesus Christ—through the gracious presence of the Holy Spirit, through the church and its sacraments and through the love and care of Christians for their fellow human beings. Into this world, we believe, Jesus Christ, will come again in his glory.

But over 2,000 years ago, into this world came Jesus Christ.

Christians sometimes feel guilty about fear, seeing it as a sign of weak faith. If only they trusted in God more, they think, they would not be fearful. But the Gospels are replete with stories of fear, even among those who knew Jesus best. The disciples shrink in fear when Jesus stills a storm: “They were terrified and asked each other, ‘Who is this, then, who can command the wind and waves?’” (Mk 4:41). When they spy him walking on water, they feel the same: “‘It is a ghost!’ they said, and cried out in fear” (Mt 14:26).

The Nativity narrative also includes stories that hint at fear. Mary’s first reaction to the Angel Gabriel is often translated as “perplexed,” but there was probably no little fear involved. Otherwise, why would the angel say, “Do not be afraid” (Lk 1:28-9)? Pregnant mothers in precarious social situations know this fear.

When Joseph discovers that Mary is pregnant, a dream tells him, “Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife” (Mt 1:20). Fathers who worry over their families’ future know this fear. On their way from Nazareth to Bethlehem, since travelers had a great deal to fear from robbers in those days, Mary and Joseph worry as they wend their way through a violent land in search of a safe place for their child. Migrants know this fear. And like many migrants and refugees today, Mary, Joseph and their newborn son are forced to flee again after a violent ruler threatens their very lives.

Jesus himself, during his 30 years of ordinary life in Nazareth, would have known fear. We can presume that Joseph died before Jesus began his public ministry: He is nowhere on the scene in the Gospels, unlike Jesus’ mother and his “brothers and sisters.” His death would have injected a note of worry into a poor family in the small village. And surely Jesus’ extended family—aunts, uncles, cousins—knew what it was like to live both on the economic edge, as they eked out a living, and on the political edge, in an occupied territory.

Into a world crowded with fear Jesus comes to proclaim an end to fear. He proclaims this not only in his words, when he says repeatedly, “Fear not.” He proclaims it not only in his deeds, where his miracles remove the need for fear both in healings, where years of fear vanish, and in the nature miracles, where the storms that threatened to swamp rickety boats evaporate. He also proclaims it in his incarnation and birth.

The Nativity means many things—God became human, God is with us, God is among us, but also, as the angel declared to Mary, nothing is impossible with God. The tiny infant in the rough-hewn manger will grow up to be the greatest of rulers. The powerless one dependent on a poor young woman for sustenance will become the all-powerful one who bring riches to all who believe. The one who feeds will become our food. It is no accident that he sleeps in a manger, a word meaning “to eat.”

Jesus understands fear. He understands us when in prayer we confess our worst fears to him. But he tells us that hope is stronger than despair, love is stronger than hate, and life is stronger than death. Nothing—not poverty, not injustice, not cruel rulers like Herod—can thwart God’s desires in the world. But we must participate in those desires because God acts through us.

To those who lived in that world of fear, it must have seemed absurd that an infant would be the answer to their fear. But, improbably enough, it was true. For nothing is impossible with God.

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**SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM**

Baptism class is held for all parents before the baptism of their child. Please contact Sr. Rachel to schedule the class.  
 Next Baptisms: January 29 at 11:00 am Mass.



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