“She gave birth to her first born son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.” Luke 2:7

My Brothers and Sisters,

He is never mentioned in Luke’s story of Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem, but he is the linchpin of the whole Christmas story. Were it not for him, Jesus would not have been born in a poor stable.

The innkeeper who presumably refused a room to Joseph and Mary forced them to find shelter in a shepherd’s cave. All Luke says is that “there was no room for them in the inn.” Almost every Christmas pageant includes the innkeeper. He is often portrayed as a gruff old man who cannot be bothered with a poor carpenter and a young bride. Sometimes he is a busy host, overcome with the demands of running an inn, during this busy time caused by Herod, who called for a census to be taken. Once in a while the innkeeper is a compassionate soul who has sympathy for Mary and Joseph and offers them hospitality, even if it is meager. I prefer to think of the innkeeper as truly kind, who just faces a challenge with love and concern.

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Christmas Celebrations

Christmas Reconciliation Schedule
Wed, December 13th: 8:30am-7:00 pm
Fri, December 15th & Tues, December 19th:
10:00-11:00am, 3:00-4:00pm, 7:00-8:00 pm

4th Sunday of Advent & Dec 23/24 Mass Schedule
Saturday, December 23rd: 5:00pm
Sunday, December 24th: 8:30am & 10:30am

Christmas Eve
Sunday, December 24th:
4:30pm, 7:00pm, 9:00pm & 12:00 midnight
(Carols one half hour prior to each Mass)

Christmas Day
Monday, December 25th: 10:30am, 12:30pm

Feast of Mary, Mother of God
(Holy Day of Obligation)
Sunday, December 31st: 5:00pm
Monday, January 1st:
10:30am, 12:30pm
The innkeeper did not realize whom he was housing in his cave. We should not be quick to criticize him. All of us are innkeepers when it comes to this child, Jesus. All kinds of things need to be taken care of; our lives are full of demands. The innkeeper’s plight is the challenge all of us face, to make room in our homes and hearts for Jesus. In the demands of our workplace, in the midst of our pains and anguish, demands are made at our kitchen tables, in our classrooms, in our wallets and cheque books, in our busy calendars; to make room for Jesus where he is welcomed even when his presence is embarrassing and inconvenient.

This is truly a busy season as you get ready for the Christmas Feast with family. Take a moment to remember that Jesus comes in every guest who comes to your inn. I look forward to you coming to celebrate this Feast that reminds us that God took on human flesh and lived among humanity. God chose to do this because He loves you and me. You are precious to Him.

Please consider coming at midnight, the traditional hour for the Church to gather. It is the darkest part of the night when the one who is the “Light of the World” comes to us.  

Merry Christmas

Fr. Murray Sample
Pastor

Mary Linaric has been a fixture in the life of St. Michael’s parish for more than 40 years. You might recognize her from the pews at 8:30 Mass on Sunday mornings, but most people do not know Mary even though she has been here for half of her life. The people who know her well were and are many of the priests who have served as pastors and associates (and our Bishop too!) here at St. Michael’s.

That is because Mary has been the cook and housekeeper at the rectory since 1977. It all began when Father John O’Donnell and Mary worked together when he was pastor at St. Pius X, and Mary was doing some cleaning and laundry there. When Father O’Donnell was moved to St. Michael’s, he asked her to come as well for a couple of days a week to do some cooking.

Mary was born in Gornja Bistrica, Prekmurje, Slovenia (at that time part of the former Yugoslavia) and was one of four children. Mary, as many of her friends had done, escaped her communist country in hopes of a better life elsewhere. At the age of 23, she and two boys who lived on her street crossed the border into Austria in the middle of the night. As was the practice in those times, they were picked up by the police and put into jail until it could be determined whether they were criminals who were wanted back in Yugoslavia. After that they were moved to a refugee camp in Austria for a year. They were asked where they wanted to travel to. Mary decided to go to Canada to follow a gentleman she had met in Austria whom she would later go on to marry. She arrived in Hamilton in 1956 and they started their family. She is the proud mother of four boys. In 1969 Mary came to London.

In her working life, before she came to work at St. Michael’s, Mary recounts various jobs, including working on a turkey farm in Cold Springs, and cucumber and strawberry picking. Mary then began cleaning and doing laundry for Father O’Donnell at St. Pius X in 1971. When Father John McCormick took over at St. Mike’s, Mary was working two days a week here at St. Michael’s and two days a week at St. Pius X for Father Joe Schneider as a housekeeper.

In 1984 Father McCormick asked Mary to move into the rectory to work full-time as a cook. At that time Mary had really only cooked for her family and did not know if what she could cook for Father would be any good. After forty years of faithful service, the question of whether

Happy Retirement to Mary Linaric

by Doug Manners
she can cook has been answered many times over! In 1997 she moved from the rectory to live with one of her sons and her quarters in the rectory were reclaimed as a dining area. Over her career Mary has cooked for Bishop Fabbro, Fathers O’Donnell, McCormick, Mockler, Sample and for many, many associates.

I am sure that most parishioners would like to know a story or two from life in the rectory. Mary respectfully keeps confidences and knows that our priests’ home life is their personal time and place. She did, however, share that she remembers Father McCormick fondly because he loved to host parties, and he would have a little bell on the table that he would ring when it was time for the next course to be served. Mary is quick to state that all of the priests she has worked and cooked for have been wonderful to her. Their tastes were all quite different but happily they all loved her cabbage rolls, turkey with cabbage, and her strudel. Some liked to be served in courses while others preferred a ‘family style’ meal where everything was placed on the table at the same time, free for the priests to help themselves. When asked what she will miss the most, she pauses and reflects for a few moments and replies, “the kitchen.”

In 2013 Mary received the Pope’s Bene Merenti Medal which is an honour awarded to clergy and laity for their service to the Catholic Church.

From not knowing, forty years ago, if she would be able to fulfil this role of service competently, she has proved her ability to care for and nourish our pastors and priests. It is without question that those she has worked for in the past and in the present appreciate her very much, and that she will be deeply missed. Indeed, Mary will be impossible to replace. She is truly an example of one of God’s people devoting herself to the care of His shepherds.

Thank you, Mary, best wishes in your retirement and God bless you.

Parish Dinner
The Knights of Columbus and The Catholic Women’s League are sponsoring a parish social event on Saturday, February 3rd, 2018 in the church hall. The evening will include dinner and dancing, a Silent Auction and a Share-the-Wealth draw. Please watch the weekly bulletins for details.
John Paul II is my all-time favourite Saint. JPII loved young people, and it showed. He also knew there was an upcoming challenge.

“What is needed today is a Church which knows how to respond to the expectations of young people. Jesus wants to enter into dialogue with them and, through his body which is the Church, to propose the possibility of a choice, which will require a commitment of their lives. As Jesus with the disciples of Emmaus, so the Church must become the travelling companion of young people…” (Pope St. John Paul II, World Youth Day 1995, Philippines)

With these words Pope John Paul II echoed in the ears of the young Church and the bishops, renewing the vision, building a strong framework of goals for family ministry, with an important focus on parents and teens. With this direction, the Church has set out to empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in our world today, and to intentionally draw them to responsible participation in the life, mission and work of the Catholic faith community.

The hope is to foster parish life as well as the personal and spiritual growth of each young person. To accomplish these goals, the entire Catholic community must be willing to respond, coming together to minister to and empower the young people in the Church to be disciples of Christ. St Michael’s recognized the need for relational ministry and catechetical resources.

I am pleased that we have a pastor, a parochial vicar, a deacon, a pastoral team and volunteers who recognize the need for comprehensive Catholic youth ministry, beginning in elementary school and continuing to high school and beyond. However, even with the best resources available, a really cool youth group room or a big budget (all of which are important), relational ministry cannot even happen unless there is a response to the call.

Youth ministry relies on real people coming forward, ready to become disciples (and some, missionary disciples). The response has been great! With the implementation of a new plan for youth ministry, thanks to Fr. Murray’s vision and blessing, we have been able to grow in this ministry. Many people have seen and understood the vision, have come forward and are now part of the amazing and Spirit-filled youth ministry team.

So how do we see this vision realized?

**Advocacy:** Being a voice for the voiceless: the unborn, the elderly, children, the poor and many more. Advocacy raises teens’ awareness on issues that often go unnoticed, allowing them to be a voice and witness the Gospel in the world today.

**Catechesis:** Reaching teens “where they are at” developmentally, spiritually and physically is what makes EDGE and LifeTeen effective. Based on the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops’ elementary and high school catechesis, our Edge and LifeTeen Curriculum Guides provide a 3-year catechetical structure. These guides can be used in building an engaging and educational semester for our children, teens and young adults.

**Life community:** Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. (Matthew 18:20) Community is where relational ministry becomes a reality. Through both gathered and non-gathered activities, relationships are developed at EDGE and Life Nights,
family events, Timmy’s events, sports fields, pews and retreats. Bringing teens into the entire parish life is accomplished when adults and peers are engaged in the life of teens, both at church and in their everyday lives.

**Evangelization:** Evangelization and catechesis are two primary tasks of the Church and of a successful youth ministry program. EDGE and LifeTeen seek to lead teens in a real relationship with Christ and to build the foundation for lifelong discipleship. Evangelization reaches out to young people by meeting them in their various life situations and building relationships. It invites young people personally into the life and mission of the Catholic community and calls young people to grow in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Finally, evangelization calls young people to be evangelizers of other young people, their families, and the community.

**Justice and Service:** We approach justice and service one person at a time. As St. Teresa of Calcutta humbly reminds us, “If you can’t feed a hundred people, then feed just one.” As we continue to strive forward on our discipleship journey, a missionary spirit is leading the way through youth ministry, missions in Canada and internationally. Our Justice Nights and service projects unite the parish family to serve the poor and witness the Gospel in every neighbourhood. Our parish offers ample opportunities for teens and families to be involved in works of service and charity.

**Leadership:** Through a spirit of servant leadership, our EDGE and LifeTeen leaders empower, affirm and call teens to live as humble disciples. Adults are called to serve teens and their community as Core Members, Parent Life ministers, chaperones and liturgical coordinators. Teens are encouraged to witness and serve their peers as Edge Core (for the elementary school youth ministry program), liturgical ministers and peer leaders. With leadership training available to all, volunteers have stated that they love the program.

**Pastoral Care:** More than teen counselling, pastoral care is a ministry which requires discernment and humility to recognize our limitedness and to seek the help teens need for true healing to take place. Creating networks and connections for teens and their families during crisis situations is an important tool for youth ministers. Our training for leaders has incorporated aspects of pastoral care for teens.

**Prayer and Worship:** Our prayer and worship are centered on the Eucharist and the celebration of a youth-focused liturgy, making LifeTeen unique and transformational. Our mission of leading teens closer to Christ starts at Mass. Monthly programming such as Life Nights, Edge Nights, Bible studies, and XLT Adoration experiences flow out of our Sunday Eucharistic celebration. This model is grounded in the sacraments. Elementary and high school teens are introduced to dynamic catechesis that removes the classroom desks and draws them into an interactive learning experience.

With this New Year upon us, we are pleased to launch LifeTeen London, for youth in grade 8 and high school. Come and experience the journey of being an intentional disciple: discover Jesus, follow Jesus, worship Jesus, and share Jesus. Learn what it is to live my favourite prayer:

*Lord, whatever you want me to do, I will do.*
The priests of the Diocese met from October 2 to 4 to listen to an invitation to invite the people of God to embrace and use the charisms that God has blessed them with. Each baptized person has been blessed with a charism and some of them with more than one charism.

Listen to St. John as he writes to the early Church “God with his call reaches the call of each individual and the Spirit, who abides deeply within each disciple, (1 John 3:24) gives himself to each Christian with different charisms and special signs. Each one, therefore, must be helped to embrace the gift entrusted to them as a completely unique person and to hear the words which the Spirit of God personally addresses to them.”

Each member of the Church must be invited to seek the charism that God has blessed them with. If each person of the Church was using the charism that God has blessed them with, we would live in a very different world. Our parishes would be overflowing, there would be no crisis in vocations, whether that is the vocation of marriage, priesthood, deaconate or religious life.

The first step in this process is to encourage the People of God to have a personal relationship with Jesus, the fruit always emerges out of a growing relationship with God. Bearing spiritual fruit occurs when we act because we are saying “yes” to God’s love, grace, inspiration, or command, which is why “evangelization, faith and conversion” precedes fruit-bearing. (CCC 1072).

When we listen to the Parable of the Sower and the Seed (Matt 13:1-23), the farmer goes out and sows the seed. Jesus notes some seed fell on rock where there was no soil and so the seed did not grow. Some seed fell on the path where the soil was packed hard from all the walking on it. Some seed fell among the weeds where it sprouted up but was choked out by the weeds. Some seed fell on the good soil where it produces thirty, fifty, even a hundred-fold.

We should look at the crop produced. The farmer does this sowing to yield a harvest. In other words, the seed in not sown for the sake of the seed but for the crop that will be produced.

The gift of baptism is administered not for the sake of the water, or a ceremony or for a baptismal certificate. Baptism is given for the sake of the fruit that will be produced. Each new member of the church is blessed with a charism so that the Church can reach out and draw more people to know Christ. This is what we need to focus on. What gift has He blessed you with and how can you use it to help us be the Body of Christ?

When disciples bear fruit then their priorities begin to change. They begin to worship regularly. Sunday Mass becomes a priority in their life. Prayer becomes a part of their everyday life because they have this intimate relationship with God. The ministry of service to their family, their parish and the larger community becomes life-giving. They begin to discern and vocations to Marriage, Priesthood, and Religious Life become more vibrant.

So, as I contemplate this challenge, we as a Parish are going to have to make an effort to draw out, honour, and encourage people with different charisms, so that all that God has given must be encouraged, understood, and venerated.

Pray that the charisms that God has blessed St. Michael’s people with are set free to do the work of evangelization.
Books are a magnificent banquet for the mind. Spiritual books are that and more: a literal feast for our souls and hearts. Just a taste may lead you to experience the essence of spirituality in your day, leaving you hungering to read more and inspiring you to live your life more fully.

Books have led me to the heart of God in a similar way that a homily, discussion group, film or painting has done. The difference in the art of the written word is that it can be picked up, set aside, and picked up again.

When you open a book you open a wondrous world. At different seasons of our lives the same book can speak something dramatically fresh and new. The books in our library are packed with knowledge, insights into a fulfilling life, prayer and helpful inspiration. They contain the voices of collective wisdom from Catholic traditions, and they invite us to use our imagination to build our faith, hope and trust in God. Time is precious and we do not want to waste it on non-productive reading.

St. Michael’s library, Wisdom’s Garden, offers Christian-based material to enlarge our life’s vision and make it more meaningful. It contains appropriate Catholic content ranging from light inspirational reading to more complex studies of Catholicism and Scripture. Some of my favourite authors include Henri Nouwen, Richard Rohr, Matthew Kelly and Jean Vanier. Check them out.

There is a selection of children’s books, youth-friendly books, Bible studies, and encyclicals by recent Popes. There are books on saints, prayer, Catholic social teaching, and grief and dying. For light, inspirational five-minute stories I suggest *Chicken Soup for the Soul*; for an easy review of our Catholic faith, I recommend Matthew Kelly’s *Rediscover Catholicism*; for a medium challenge I suggest any of Max Lucado’s or Jean Vanier’s books.

Are you up for more of a challenge? Try a Bible study series or a book on Catholic doctrine. I am in the process of writing reviews of the books I have read. If you would like to submit a review, it may assist someone else in their selection.

The library is monitored on a regular basis and donations are often accepted. Feel free to borrow a book for as long as you like; there is no need to sign them out.

If you would like some assistance in selecting a book, if you would like to discuss a book you have read, or if you have any constructive comments please contact me.

Books have led me to the heart of God and consequently to my own heart, where I am sometimes affirmed because the words speak what I am not able to formulate myself. Often the words challenge me to examine my life in light of the Gospel teachings. God is refining and fashioning us into the people with whom He wants to spend eternity, and good books help us achieve that goal.

Contact dorothysolomon41@gmail.com.

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**Wisdom’s Garden: St. Michael’s Library**

**by Dorothy Solomon**
One of my favourite Christmas reflections is Max Lucado’s story “The Arrival.”

Lucado weaves a compelling tale of a smelly stable, where the ground is hard and a weary carpenter is dozing next to a young teenage girl who happens to be holding God in her arms: “Majesty in the midst of the mundane. Holiness in the filth of sheep manure and sweat. Divinity entering the world on the floor of a stable, through the womb of a teenager and in the presence of a carpenter.”

Lucado goes on to contrast this stable scene with the busy town of Bethlehem humming with business and crowds because of Caesar’s census. Merchants and innkeepers were excited about the many visitors, and yet, were completely unaware that God had just visited their village.

The citizens of Bethlehem were oblivious to the Messiah born in the outskirts of their town, not because they were mean or malicious but because they simply were not looking. They were too busy to even consider the possibility that God could be born in a lowly dirty stable. Are we any different today?

How often do we get caught in the never-ending rat race of work, chores, commitments, carpools, homework, groceries, laundry, etc.? How often do we think that our lives and our relationships are too messy for God? Do we feel that we need to change, to be better or holier before we can have a relationship with God?

We do not need to go looking for God, because He is already here in the midst of our busy, mundane, messy lives.

God is the one who comes to us, to our cluttered homes where laundry is piled high, Lego pieces are scattered around and the sink is full of dirty dishes. He looks for us when life is imperfect and our hearts are broken; when we do not know how to care for aging parents; when loved ones suffer from mental illness or battle cancer; when we simply don’t have any more energy to give and our teenage children are making bad choices.

What are some of the ways we can pause and notice God’s presence in the midst of our rushed, imperfect and real lives?

Let the events of your day be the springboards for your conversation with God. Tell God your feelings, both good and not-so-good, during your prayer time. St. Thérèse de Lisieux said: “For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.”

Pause and notice a gift or blessing that you are grateful for today: health, when so many are sick; a warm home, when you see a homeless person; dirty dishes because they mean your family was able to have a meal; piles of laundry because they mean your family has clothes to wear.

Pray for the various people who come into your life. Invite God to heal any wounds in your family. Pray during difficult situations. Pray for the grace to forgive when your feelings are being hurt. Pray for strength and energy when you are tired and discouraged.

Commit to at least one experience of quiet prayer time every day. Even taking just 5-10 minutes to step out of the spin cycle of life to allow God to love you will make a difference. I guarantee you will be transformed by the experience.
Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word. (Lk 1:38)

The magnitude of Mary’s words of complete and absolute trust in God is sometimes lost on us. Not only did Mary, a young Jewish girl with perfect faith in God, trust that the message brought to her by an angel was even possible, that a virgin could conceive a child, but she trusted that God would keep her safe until she gave birth to His Son. She was not yet married to Joseph, and the punishment under Mosaic Law for what might be assumed to be adultery was death.

Mary’s trust contrasts a long line of mistrust in God, dating all the way back to Eve, the very first person to give in to the subtle suggestion by Satan that God could not be trusted. The fall of man (detailed in Gn 3) set the stage for an ongoing struggle that has plagued us throughout history: the temptation to doubt God’s care, providence, and His divine plan for us.

We are no different today than the Israelites many centuries ago. Time and time again, God showed His chosen people His divine providence: with the parting of the Red Sea (Ex 14:21-31), He delivered them from the bondage of slavery in Egypt. He promised to bring them to the land of Canaan, but no matter how much He provided for them, the Jewish people shirked His care, choosing to do things their way. When God told the people not to gather extra manna because He would provide for them every day, they didn’t trust Him (Ex 16:14-21).

When God sent twelve men for forty days to spy out the land of Canaan to occupy it, they didn’t believe that with God they could conquer even the strongest of armies, and their mistrust earned them one year of wandering in the wilderness for each day they had spied (Nm 13, 14:34).

Even after the Incarnation, “God with us” (Mt 1:23), Jesus’ friends had witnessed, first-hand, the many miracles He performed. Still, they couldn’t seem to trust.

Upon seeing Jesus walking on water, Peter said “Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water.” (Mt 14:28) Peter quickly became distracted by the wind and the waves, however, and was filled with fear. He began to sink. “Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, ‘Oh you of little faith, why did you doubt?’” (Mt 14:31)

It is easy to believe that God has our best interests in mind when things are going well in our lives. When the gifts are wrapped under the tree, the whole family is coming home, and Christmas dinner promises to be a bounteous feast, God’s providence is obvious. In times of struggle, however, it can seem that God has abandoned us. We can feel inclined to forget about God, believing, as the Israelites did, that we could do better by taking matters into our own hands.

In her book Answers, Not Promises the ever-memorable Mother Angelica (founder of EWTN) said “…trusting in God in those black hours when everything seems to be slipping through your fingers isn’t easy. In those moments, you have probably found that trust in God is as elusive as the contentment you seek... but we must begin with an important understanding. We must understand fully that we live in a completely ordered existence in which all forces, good and evil, are ultimately permitted by God. God eventually brings good out of whatever happens in this life He knows what you are going through at this moment, and He is there to give you what you need to get through it. As hard as it is to comprehend, you must realize that God loves you more than you love yourself. And realizing that He loves you that much, you can accept, with confidence, that there is a purpose, a holy, exalted purpose, in all things that He ordains or permits.”

It can be hard to see how God will bring good out of our most difficult circumstances. But then we remember that Holy Night. That night when all of Mary’s struggles, the doubts surrounding her pregnancy, the arduous journey to Bethlehem, and even the lowly cave where she was forced to give birth, surrounded by livestock fell away; that night when the young Jewish girl with perfect faith in God, gazed into the face of God Himself.

In the words of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, whose relic you can also read about in this newsletter, “God gives me whatever I want, because I want whatever He gives.” This Christmas, let us trust God to give us the greatest gift of all: the gift of His love.
The Feast of the Epiphany

by Angela Townend

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. (Micah 5:1-2)

Does Christmas overshadow the Epiphany? Some Christians say yes, and in a recent homily on the Epiphany, Pope Francis emphasized the importance of this feast day and the parallel between the three wise men’s longing to know Christ and our own: “Longing for God shatters our dreary routines and impels us to make the changes we want and need. Longing for God has its roots in the past yet does not remain there: it reaches out to the future. Believers who feel this longing are led by faith to seek God, as the Magi did, in the most distant corners of history, for they know that there the Lord awaits them.”

Many scholars and theologians agree that the Epiphany is one of the more complex feast days; in dispute is everything from how old Jesus was when the Magi came to see Him to whether or not there were only three wise men and if they were actually kings or in fact astronomers. What is not in question, however, is the powerful symbolism of this historical and sacred event.

Did You Know…?
1. The Feast of the Epiphany is one of the oldest Christian feasts, older than Christmas. Some historians place this feast’s inception at the end of the second century while others note that the Western Church only began to celebrate the Epiphany at the end of the fourth century.
2. The word “epiphany” is Greek in origin and means “manifestation” or “revelation”. Here it refers to the revelation by God of His Son’s humanity, and the presentation of Jesus to the whole world.
3. The Epiphany, though first celebrated on January 6th, was eventually moved by the Western Church to the Sunday between January 2nd and 8th. This great feast day originally also included the birth of Christ, but over time Christmas Day was separated and moved to December 25th.
4. The Feast of the Epiphany celebrates the Divinity of Jesus which “shone” through His humanity. The three divine events include His revelation to the three wise men who represented all nations, His baptism in the Jordan River, revealing His heritage as Son of God, and the wedding at Cana where His first miracle was performed.
5. It is only in the Gospel of Matthew that we find a full account of Christ’s birth and the visitation by the wise men, as well as King Herod’s plan to kill the Messiah.
6. The proper liturgical color for this Feast? White, of course, as it symbolizes purity and newness.
7. There is rich symbolism and foreshadowing suggested by the types of gifts brought to the baby Jesus. Gold symbolized His royalty as this was the currency of kings; frankincense, a gift symbolizing His priesthood; and myrrh which was used in ancient times to prepare bodies for burial, signified His mortality and foreshadowed His role in salvation, His Death on the Cross.
8. The days between Christmas and the Epiphany are important feast days also:
   - December 26th - Feast of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr
   - December 27th - Feast of St. John the Evangelist, one of Jesus’ disciples
   - December 28th - Feast of the Holy Innocents, the male children murdered by King Herod
   - January 1st - Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God
9. The Feast of the Epiphany in many cultures involves rich celebrations and traditions. The Irish call this day “Little Christmas”. In Latin American countries, it is known as “El Dia de Reyes” meaning King’s Day.
10. In Germany’s Cologne Cathedral, in the Shrine of the Three Kings, lie the relics of these three wise men. This is fittingly the most majestic Gothic Cathedral in Europe.

Despite the various interpretations of its history, the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord remains a great feast day, and in the words of Pope Benedict XVI, is “a many faceted mystery”. Moreover, this day should not be regarded as a “one-time event, but rather an opportunity to remember that, like the Magi, we are encouraged to constantly pursue Jesus”.

At the birth of a new year, envision the Epiphany as a chance to renew your faith, and to search for Jesus in your own lives as did both the shepherds and the wise men. It’s a wonderful gift to reveal Christ in our hearts and let the light of His love, like the star to Bethlehem, shine forth for all to see.

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12)
Melissa Veenvliet has been a parishioner at St. Michael’s for nine years, since the time that she and her husband completed the RCIA program and joined the parish family. They also were beginning their own family and became regular users of the babysitting program.

Melissa has an Early Childhood Education background, having taught in daycare centres and Kindergarten classes. She quickly realized that the Babysitting Room at St. Mike’s would be a good place for her to give of her time and talent. Melissa is now the Babysitting Coordinator. She and her team of volunteers offer a variety of activities during the 10:30 Mass for children aged 18 months to 4 years.

There is no formal program, but a focus on what each child needs. Songs, games, colouring, stickers, bubbles, and playtime are all part of what is available. There is always one adult and a teen volunteer at the program. Melissa is extremely grateful to all these volunteers who make the service possible.

Melissa says that the main goal is to allow parents a worry-free time to attend Mass. This allows them to enter prayerfully into the liturgy without distraction. She hopes the time will allow them to pray for their children and gain something for themselves by participating in the Mass.

To allow for parents to feel at ease, Melissa initiated a pager system. Parents are welcome to take a pager with them into the church, so they can be notified if their child needs them. The pager puts parents at ease and is a simple light-up device which does not disturb others.

There is also a speaker in the Babysitting Room, so that a parent can be with a child if necessary, and yet continue to hear the Mass. Melissa wants families to know that the room is available for their use during any of the Masses.

Melissa’s joy is infectious. She loves meeting great families and seeing happy smiles. St. Michael’s families are fortunate that Melissa and her dedicated volunteers have created a warm, safe environment for our youngest parishioners.

Markus Weber is St. Michael’s own volunteer landscape designer. He has been a parishioner here for eleven years. At the time he arrived at St. Michael’s, Markus noticed that there was a need for his green thumb. He decided to use his skill and passion by offering to refurbish the landscaping around the church. In short, Markus wanted to give back.

With an okay from Father Murray, Markus developed a blueprint for the outdoor space and sourced out a flatbed truck of plant materials, all at wholesale prices. With a lot of hard work, Markus removed the old plantings and replaced them with new trees and shrubs. Now, a decade later, the church is beautifully graced with a healthy, mature landscape.

Markus also provides the inspiration and the plants for the planters outside the main doors, which he changes every season. He and his wife often visit the Niagara Botanical Gardens and bring back great ideas because Markus loves to have something beautiful and unique.

Markus’s mother, Christl, and father, Franz, also assist with the planting. This summer Franz watered the planters every second day all season long!

Markus also regularly provides assistance with ongoing yard work around the property, such as fall clean-up and raking of leaves. When asked why he volunteers in this way, Markus’s response is simple, “I wanted to help out.” How fortunate we are to have Markus, Christl and Franz’s talented handiwork to enjoy.
As a man was being buried, a marauding band was seen and the man was thrown into the grave of Elisha; as soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he came to life and stood on his feet. (2 Kings 13:21)

God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that when the handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were brought to the sick, their diseases left them, and the evil spirits came out of them. (Acts 19:11-12)

These are just two examples from Scripture that illustrate the healing that Jews and Christians alike have been blessed with over thousands of years by the veneration of holy relics.

Have you ever wondered why we bow towards the altar before we approach it? Or why we bow before we enter or leave the pews when we come to Mass? One reason we do this is because inside the altar we have a sacred relic of a saint.

When the first Christians were being persecuted in Rome, they celebrated Mass in the catacombs, in secret, literally on the tombs of the martyrs. They venerated the saints, reflected on their lives and deeds, and drew strength and courage from their sacrifices. And even now, the presence of holy relics in the church reminds us that when we celebrate Mass, we praise God in union with the saints and angels in heaven.

What are relics?
There are three types (classes) of relics:

- **First-class relics** are the body or fragments of the body of a saint or blessed, (i.e., pieces of bone, flesh, hair, teeth, or nails).
- **Second-class relics** are things that a saint or blessed personally owned, (i.e., a piece of clothing or a book, or a fragment of the item). Items which may have been used to inflict death on a martyr are also in this category.
- **Third-class relics** are those items which a saint or a blessed touched, or that have been touched to a first-class relic of a saint or blessed.

How do holy relics assist in our prayer life? They direct our attention to the Lord. In the fourth century, the great Biblical scholar, Saint Jerome, wrote, “We do not worship, we do not adore, for fear that we should bow down to the creature rather than to the Creator, but we venerate the relics of the martyrs in order the better to adore Him whose martyrs they are.”

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Relics: A Beautiful Church Tradition

by Keith Rodrigues

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The veneration of relics helps us to contemplate and appreciate the extensive history and impact that the Church has had across so many parts of the world. Praying and meditating before even these tiny bone fragments of the remains of the holy saints enables us to sense the power of true Christian faith unfolding across two thousand years.

When we join our prayers with theirs, we realize that the saints were people just like ourselves; they faced the same weaknesses and temptations, the same challenges to their faith that we do today.

We at St. Michael’s are truly blessed, for Father Murray has recently obtained from the Diocese of London a wonderful collection of these first-class relics of saints whose lives span the centuries:

**St. Thérèse of Lisieux (The Little Flower)** - Cloistered Carmelite nun who died in 1897 at the young age of 24. She is known for her “little way” of doing great things. In our own time, her work moved and inspired Mother Teresa, who was in fact named after St. Thérèse. She is the patron saint of aviators, florists, illnesses and missions.

**St. Francis Xavier** - Co-founder of the Society of Jesus and leader of the missions that evangelized much of Asia. He is known as the Apostle of India, Apostle of Japan, and Patron of Catholic Missions. He died in 1552.

**St. Pius X** - Pope from 1903 to 1914. He was known for his devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Many healing miracles are attributed to his intercession.

**St. André Bessette** - Our own Canadian “Brother André” who died in 1937 at the age of 91. Many of us have visited and prayed at his tomb in St. Joseph’s Oratory, Montreal.

**Canadian Martyrs** - St. Jean de Brébeuf and seven others, mostly Jesuits from Sainte-Marie among the Hurons, who were martyred in the mid 17th century. Visit the Martyr’s Shrine in Midland, Ontario to learn all about them.

**St. John Neumann** - Bishop of Philadelphia who died in 1860. He is known for founding the first Catholic diocesan school system in the United States.

Please visit the reliquary beside the altar, by the statue of Our Lady, light a candle, linger awhile and pray for the blessings and intercession of these holy saints.
The next capital project for improvement to the church is now well underway. We are very excited to be able to finally move towards a complete renovation of the three public washrooms in the church.

This renovation is the fulfillment of a commitment made to the parishioners that if our Capital Campaign - Give to Grow, Foundations for Our Future - was successful, we would celebrate this success by investing in washroom updates. While the HVAC project ate up all of the ‘over target’ funds, Father Murray and the finance committee were determined to keep the pledge to the parish and get the washroom work approved.

This spring, the office, on the guidance and support of the finance and building committees, made the request to the diocese to approve the funds necessary to do these renovations. This dialogue also involved changing architects from Allan Avis to a local architectural firm, Cornerstone. To date, working with Cornerstone has been quite a positive experience, with a relationship built on effective communication, respect for requests, and understanding expectations.

The project was put out to tender and the successful contracting firm was Bronnenco. We are quite pleased to work with Bronnenco, as they did the HVAC renovation work last year. Bronnenco have proven themselves able to provide quality work and to be respectful of both the environment and the people of St. Michael’s.

The project was planned to be considerate of our busy community, and was to be completed in stages in order to keep one ladies and one gentlemen’s washroom available for use.

While this approach may have lengthened the time the contractors were on-site, it would have ensured that there was as little disruption as possible. We anticipate that all the work will have been wrapped up by the time you are reading this article, and that you will be pleased with the results.

The next project on the radar is to address the delamination of the paint and to make overall improvements in the Parish Hall.

While the work was long overdue, it was the success of the Give to Grow Capital Campaign that got the ball rolling on updating the washrooms. It was because of you, the people of our parish family, the wonderful supporters of St. Michael’s who made this investment.

To those who dedicated rooms, became ‘Archangels’ and ‘Angels’ and to all of our donors, we are grateful for your support.

Thank you to those who have made and continue to fulfil their multi-year pledges. Gifts to the Capital Fund are always gratefully accepted and are still needed. A donation to Give to Grow is an effective way to reduce your taxes, and a thoughtful way of investing in the future of our church building for our children and others who will make St. Michael’s their parish.

Donations can be made by using a Give to Grow envelope or on the parish website: www.stmichaelslondon.ca, in the “donate” area.

Thank you and bless you for your support of our parish, our church and our home.
Parish Photos

Our Newsletter Team:
Carmen Gicante, Keith Rodrigues, Louanne Henderson, Carolyn Johnston, Angela Townend, Giacomo Barone, Doug Manners.

Newsletter Design: Joanne Tremblay
Parish Information

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Office Hours: Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. to noon and 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Sunday Masses
Saturday: 5:00 p.m.
Sunday: 8:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 12:30 p.m.

Weekday Masses
Tuesday & Thursday: 12:00 noon
Wednesday & Friday: 8:00 a.m.
Saturday: 9:00 a.m.

African Caribbean Catholic Community Mass
(St. Josephine Bakhita)
4th Sunday of each month at 2:30 p.m.

Pastoral Team
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Rod Tramble, Facilities Coordinator
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Parish Council Chairperson
Wayne Wolanski

Children’s Ministries
Sunday: 10:30 a.m. Mass
Liturgy of the Word: Grades 2, 3 and 4
Sunday School: Aged 3 to Grade 1
Babysitting: Infants to age 3

Calendar of Events
Christmas Day Dec 25
Feast of Mary Mother of God Jan 1
Feast of the Epiphany Jan 6
Wedding Anniversary Celebration Feb 10 & 11
Ash Wednesday Feb 14
Family Day Feb 18
Marriage Prep Weekend Feb 23-25
Easter Confessions - All Day Mar 21
Mass of Chrism Mar 26
Easter Sunday Apr 1

Sacrament of Reconciliation
Saturday: 9:30 – 10:30 a.m. and 4:00 - 4:30 p.m.

Free Bus Service to 10:30 a.m. Mass
The route . . .
9:35 a.m. (new time)
• 64 Wyndham
• Blackwater east of Adelaide - bus stop
• Grenfell just east of Blackwater
• Fanshawe/Trossacks - bus stop on corner
• 770 Fanshawe Park Rd east of Fremont - bus stop
• Fanshawe Park Road - west of Fremont
• Adelaide/Fanshawe - bus stop south of Fanshawe
• Kipps Lane/Adelaide - bus shelter just east of Adelaide
• Kipps Lane/Barker
• Kipps Lane - bus stop east of Barker
• Kipps Lane/Kenmore Place - bus stop
• 295 Briarhill
• Cheapside/Boullee
• Huron Street - bus stop east of Wedgewood Drive
10:15 a.m.
• Royal Oak Apartments - 3 stops
go to St. Michael’s Church

The bus will stop at regular bus stops or wherever it is hailed along the route.