**ST. JOSEPH’S PARISH, CLARKSTON.**

**ADVENT AND CHRISTMASTIDE - 2022.**

*Bethlehem in the land of Judah, you are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a ruler to be the shepherd of my people Israel. - ( Matthew 2 : 6 )*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Another Advent and Christmastide is upon us. May something of this Holy Season enter into us and remain with us. It is a season that can be made beautiful when we watch, wait, listen and look forward. It is an opportunity to set aside time for reflection and preparation. So, what are we watching and waiting for, what are we reflecting upon and preparing for ? Nothing less than the coming into the world on Christmas Day of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, the one true shepherd with His loving and joyous message of resurrection and salvation. His birth is our re-birth as children of God. This Holy Season is a time to lift up our hearts and minds toward heaven, to bring our lives into alignment with God’s plan and purpose through repentance and prayer, and to prepare ourselves by living to the full the precious gift of our Catholic faith in readiness for Christ’s return in majesty and glory.

As members of the Catholic faithful we can recognise immediately the significance of the place where Jesus entered the world, Bethlehem. *Bethlehem – Arabic: Bayt Lahm (House of Meat) and Hebrew: Bet Lehem (House of Bread).* How appropriate these translated place names become when we consider that Christ continues to feed us with his own flesh in the form of bread each time we gather at God’s Table to celebrate the Eucharist. Mass is the summit of our sacred liturgical worship of God. A most profound truth of our faith is that during participation at every Mass, through the power and working of the Holy Spirit, we are privileged to attend the re-presentation of the Son’s perfect sacrifice to the Father at Calvary. What better or more beautiful Christmas gift can there be than to witness the Son’s most excellent way of love. I ask you to make Mass the main event of Christmas for you and your family; let us also use the Christmas season to return more fully to our sacramental and liturgical life and to resolve to attend Mass and the other sacraments and liturgies regularly throughout the coming year. Christmas itself is more than a Day. It is a Season. Beyond Christmas Day, the season includes the wonderful feasts of the Holy Family, of Mary, Mother of God, of the Epiphany and the Baptism of the Lord.

**Christmas Day Mass arrangements –** To allow all parishioners to attend their preferred Christmas Day Mass, I ask that you book your preferred Mass via. Eventbrite. To prevent overcrowding please ensure you reserve spaces for all of those attending with you. The link to the booking page will be on the parish website, and on our Facebook page at 7 p.m. on **Sunday 4th December**. If you know anyone who is not online and would like to book please telephone 07528655783.

We all know that life in recent years has been difficult and challenging, and continues to be so. The news is full of concerning reports relating to the war in Ukraine, political discord at home and abroad, the plight of migrant and displaced peoples (being mindful that the Holy Family were displaced people when forced to flee into Egypt), the cost of living crisis, the climate emergency and numerous other distressing social and environmental upheavals. Many wonder what the solution to mankind’s problems might be ! We Christians know that lasting peace, truth and justice can ultimately be found only in the Christ-child -the Word made flesh- the loving ruler and shepherd who came into the world at Bethlehem on the first Christmas Day.

On a practical note, I would like to suggest four things. I would like first, each Catholic home to have a crib at the heart of their Christmas decorations. Secondly, I would like each of us to try and do something this Christmas, no matter how small, to alleviate suffering, hardship or injustice in any form. Thirdly, I ask you to think deeply and seriously about your Catholic faith and the priority it has in your life. In doing so I ask you to pray for, and to stand in solidarity with, those brothers and sisters of ours, both at home and around the world who pay a heavy price for their faithfulness, often unknown and in isolation from other Christians. There are many who are being ostracized, condemned and alienated because they hold firmly to their believe in Christian teaching and morality. Finally, I ask you to pray for unborn children. They are children of God, present in the world, just as Jesus was present in the womb of Mary for those nine months prior to His birth.

In closing, I would again like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone who has helped in any way during the past year. Thank you for all your prayers, practical assistance and financial support to myself and to the wider parish community. Let us continue to pray in a spirit of thanksgiving for all that God has given us, and continue to hope for the many gifts that God has yet to give.

I wish you and your families a happy, holy and blessed Christmastide.

Father Stephen.