

We want to make it loud and clear that we could not be more grateful and appreciative of the time, talents and treasures everyone in our parish families share! We want everyone to feel welcome and try to communicate effectively through weekly bulletins and online (Facebook and aoolsa.org website). Lately, we've felt there is room for improvement. Don't hesitate to let us know how we can serve everyone better.

Your generosity keeps our ministry vibrant! Offertory envelopes are the most efficient way we have of tracking contributions. If you want to start using them, please let the office know. The 2026 boxes should be in both churches next week. For those who prefer direct pay via their financial institution, we can provide you with a list of the special/second collection dates for the coming year.



A Christmas Letter from Jesus

*When you look for me at Christmas,
You won't need a special star.
I'm no longer just in Bethlehem,
I'm right here where you are.
You may not be aware of me
amid the celebrations.
You'll have to look beyond the stores,
and all the decorations.
But if you take a moment
from your list of things to do,
To close your eyes and say a prayer,
I'm waiting here for you.
You're the one I want to be with,
You're the reason that I came!
And you'll find me in the stillness
Where I'm whispering your name.*

Third Sunday of Advent, **December 14, 2025**, known as **Gaudete Sunday**, is a day to rejoice with pink vestments and the pink "Shepherd's Candle" candle lit on the Advent wreath, signaling that Christmas is near. Joy is a key theme as prophecies of healing and salvation are fulfilled. This Sunday marks a shift from the penitential purple of earlier Advent to a brighter anticipation, focusing on the joyful fulfillment of God's promises through Jesus's coming.

The Advent wreath has its roots in an ancient pre-Christian European tradition, which involved lighting candles during the winter to invoke the return of the sun and warmth. The Church transformed this gesture into a sign of waiting for the true Light, Christ. Its circular shape signifies the love of God, which is eternal, infinite, and perfect. It reminds us that God has neither beginning nor end and is always present in our lives. The evergreen branches, often pine or fir, recall eternal life, hope, and the living presence of Christ among us. During Advent, they invite us to grow in grace, faith, and inner preparation.

In 1963, the famous Trappist monk and writer Thomas Merton published an essay titled "Advent: Hope or Delusion". He focused on challenging Christians to reflect more deeply on the meaning of authentic Christian hope, especially when many have mistaken such hope for superficial optimism or wishful thinking. Arguing that Advent is the season of hope, when we await the coming of Christ not with the naïveté of wishing for a "helicopter god" who will dash in and immediately solve all the world's problems, but with faith in the true God who enters our world as it is and meets us in divine solidarity.

He writes: "The fact remains that our task is to seek and find Christ in our world as it is, and not as it *might* be. The fact that the world is other than it might be does not alter the truth that Christ is present in it and that his plan has been neither frustrated nor changed: indeed, all will be done according to his will.... What is uncertain is not the 'coming' of Christ but our own reception of him, our own response to him, our own readiness and capacity to 'go forth and meet Him.'"

Today's gospel illustrates what authentic Christian hope looks like in practice. John the Baptist, whom the Christian tradition has long held to be one of the greatest prophets given his proximity to Jesus, faces an existential crisis, in prison, awaiting execution, when he begins to doubt whether Jesus is indeed the Christ, for whom he has been preparing a way. He sends his followers to confront Jesus directly and ask: "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" (Matt 11:3). Jesus's response is simple: look around and see for yourself what I am doing!

Merton suggests that John the Baptist and his followers, with their doubts in the face of fear and crisis, serve as stand-ins for our brothers, sisters, and other siblings in the world today. Amid crisis, suffering, violence, ecological catastrophe, inequality, and discrimination, the world is asking us — those who profess to be followers of Christ — whether we are serious, whether we are the ones we say we are by virtue of our baptismal promises, or should the world look for another?

When we are faced with the needs and cries of our siblings and neighbors, can we say with our words and actions that we are bearing witness to authentic Christian hope by being Christ for others? Or are we merely talking the talk without walking in practice?

The truth is that Christ continues to come into this messed up and broken world as it is, but he does so today through his mystical body, which is all the faithful. During this season of Advent, of authentic Christian hope, it is up to us to demonstrate that hope through our deeds, so that we may, like Jesus before us, confidently ask the world: "what do you see and hear?"

Christmas is right around the corner, but the world still waits for us to give birth to Christ through our words and deeds.

