

EXPLORING OUR FAITH ~ FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

We moderns love Christmas with all the lights, gifts and good cheer of friends and family. It has become, in a sense, the "Feast of Relational Holism." To celebrate Christmas is to share life with another, for that is what God has done, shared divine life with created life in a simple yet profound way: the birth of a baby. It may surprise us to know that the first thousand years of Christianity likely did not celebrate Christmas with a nativity scene, for the early Church was an Easter Church not a Christmas Church. Emphasis was on the risen Christ not the birth of Jesus.

In the Middle Ages, however, a new emphasis on the Word made flesh, the Incarnation, took place, beginning in the twelfth century with Cistercian spiritual writers, such as Bernard of Clairvaux. The Cistercians were among the first to focus on the Incarnation and hence the earthly life of Jesus, drawing on the imagination and spiritual senses to identify with the miracle of God's birth in the flesh.

In the thirteenth century, Francis of Assisi celebrated Christmas in a new and profound way, as a liturgical celebration of all creation awakened to the indwelling presence of God. His biographers tell us that three years before his death, Francis decided to celebrate the memory of the birth of the Child Jesus with the greatest solemnity, in order to awaken devotion to the splendor of God among us. He petitioned Pope Innocent IV for permission to celebrate the birth of Jesus in the small mountainous village of Greccio. Francis wanted everyone to see the drama of Christ's birth, so he had a manger prepared and hay carried in; an ox and an ass were led to the spot of the manger.

Two things about the Greccio story are significant: First, Christmas is a present reality for Francis, the act of God becoming flesh. It is a drama, a dynamic reality that we are invited into. It is the story of the great marriage between heaven and earth. Second, we are to awaken to this reality and respond to God's overflowing love with an outpouring of love. As Francis himself sang: "The love of him who loved us is greatly to be loved."

His biographer, Bonaventure, wrote that as the people of Greccio arrived at the manger, all creation sang with joy: the forest amplified its cries, the night was rendered brilliant and solemn by a multitude of bright lights and by resonant and harmonious hymns of praise. The man of God stood before the manger, filled with piety and overcome with joy. He had an altar built over the manger to celebrate the Eucharist, the sacrament of the cosmic Body of Christ. Francis, dressed as a deacon, chanted the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was made flesh and dwells among us" (Jn 1:1).

Hence, our third lesson from Saint Francis is that all creation is made holy by the celebration of Christmas. The biographers tell us that Francis was "bathed in tears" as he stood by the manger because he believed wholeheartedly that God was present in the trees, the stars, the ox, the ass and the people gathered. All of heaven and earth were brought into a unity of love in the celebration of Christmas, symbolized by the Eucharist.

Perhaps this Christmas we can reflect on the way Francis of Assisi celebrated Christmas and be attentive to how we are celebrating Christmas. Are we too worried about the dinner meal? Or the gifts we did or did not buy for another? Are we too focused on ourselves? Or are we bathed in tears at the profound mystery of God bending low to embrace us, to become one of us? Christmas is the celebration of deep relationship. We are invited to realize that we are not alone in the universe. God, who is a trinity of love, swirls amidst the galaxies and stars searching for human hearts, where God seeks to dwell. Bonaventure wrote: "God bends low in love and lifts us up so that we may be where God is."

We do not have to worry about things going right on Christmas day, or any day for that matter. God has come to us, is with us, and will forever be born in us as our future, if we make space for God in our lives. Let us celebrate this Christmas with song and dance, for all creation is bubbling with the Spirit of Love, alive with the presence of God.

~Sr. Ilia Delio, OSF

Our Lady of Hope Pastoral Unit

Fourth Sunday of Advent 18 December 2022

Immaculate Conception Church, Rexton

St-Peter's Church, South Branch



Parish Office:

12 School Street Rexton, NB E4W 2E5

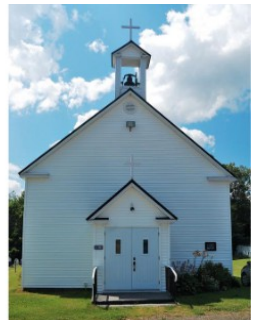
Phone: 506-523-6817

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Web: <https://ourladyofhope.weebly.com/>

Office Hours:

Tuesday 4:00 pm - 8:00 pm,
Wednesday & Thursday – 8:30 am - 12:30 pm



Priest-Moderator: Fr. Bernard Gauthier, C.Ss.R. 523-9788 Cell Phone: 889-0344

Immaculate Conception Mass Times

Sunday – 11:00 am

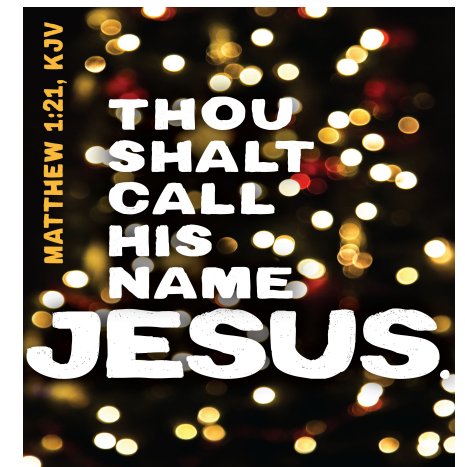
Tuesday – 4:00 pm (Sacristy)

St. Peter's Mass Time

Saturday – 4:00 pm

Scripture Readings for Upcoming Week

Mon	Judges 13:2-7	Psalms 71	Luke 1:5-25
Tue	Isaiah 7:10-14	Psalms 24	Luke 1:26-38
Wed	Song of Songs	Psalms 33	Luke 1:39-45
Thu	I Samuel 1:24-28	1 SM 2:1-7	Luke 1:46-56
Fri	Malachi 3:1-24	Psalms 25	Luke 1:57-66
Sat	2 Samuel 7:1-16	Psalms 89	Luke 1:67-79
Sun	Isaiah 62:11-12 Romans 1:1-7	Psalms 97	Luke 2:15-20



PARISH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM LAST WEEK

Immaculate Conception

Loose: **\$160.00**; Envelopes: **\$700.00**;
 Christmas Envelopes: **\$20.00**; Mass Stipends: **\$27.00**;
 Misc. Donation: **\$25.00**; Hall Rental: **\$115.00**;
TOTAL: \$1,047.00

Immaculate Conception Cemetery

Memorial Tree: **\$120.00**

Regional Mass Account

Masses: **\$240.00**

St. Peter's

Loose: **\$25.00**; Envelopes: **\$280.00**;
 Mass Stipends: **\$12.00**;
TOTAL: \$317.00

St. Peter's Cemetery

Donation IMO Margeurite Little: **\$20.00**;
 Memorial Tree: **\$40.00**;
 Perpetual Care: **\$100.00** **TOTAL: \$160.00**

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED GENEROSITY!

MASS INTENTIONS FOR UPCOMING WEEK

Sat	17	SP	4:00 pm	David Harnett†	Dale and Debbie Harnett
Sun	18	IC	11:00 am	Deceased Members of the Kincaid Family†	Stephen Kincaid
Tue	20	IC	4:00 pm	Timmy O'Brien†	Mina Richard
Sat	24	IC	9:30 pm	~	~
Sun	25	SP	11:00 am	~	~

LITURGY SCHEDULE FOR UPCOMING WEEK

				Lectors	Eucharistic Ministers	
Sat	24	IC	9:30 pm	1 st Reading & Psalm 2 nd Reading & Intentions	Gloria / Donna Vina	Adona
Sun	25	SP	11:00 am	1 st Reading & Psalm 2 nd Reading & Intentions	Lois	Stella

ROSARY SCHEDULE FOR IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

				Leader	Intentions
Sun	18	IC	10:30 am	Gail	1 st Decade: For our clergy 2 nd Decade: For our parishioners 3 rd Decade: For our youth 4 th Decade: For peace in our world 5 th Decade: For the intentions of parishioners
Sun	01	IC	10:30 am	Gail	
Sun	08	IC	10:30 am	Vina	

WE PRAY FOR STRENGTH FOR THOSE WHO ARE SICK:

Alverie Robichaud, Roger Mazerolle and all residents living in special care homes.

PART-TIME CARETAKER POSITION AVAILABLE (REXTON) The position of caretaker plays a critical role in the ongoing maintenance of the church building, hall, and cemetery. It is part-time (15 hours/week) and offers both flexible hours and a competitive wage. There is also some flexibility required on behalf of the person serving in the role (i.e., burials, snow removal, emergencies, etc.) If you are interested, please contact the parish office. If you know of someone who might be suitable for the role, please pass along this information.

DONATIONS FOR KENT COUNTY FOOD BANK can be placed in the basket at the back of the church. We have been told they are in particular need of dry cereal, canned goods and pastas, although any non-perishable food item will be accepted. Thank you for your ongoing generosity in helping those in need.

THE PARISH OFFICE WILL BE CLOSED THE WEEK BETWEEN CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR'S (between December 22nd and January 3rd) Please note that donations received after December 31st will be included on your 2023 tax receipt.

Conversations Around Death and Dying (Rexton) Since 2016, a diocesan committee has been offering formation and information sessions in response to the

legalization of medical assistance in dying (MAiD). One theme arising from these sessions was that many of us are uncomfortable discussing the subject of death. However, honest conversations (about values, good palliative care, or advanced care planning) can help to improve the care we receive at the end of our lives. In response to this, the diocesan Committee looking at End of Life Pastoral Care is planning a session for **Saturday, January 28th at Immaculate Conception Church in Rexton (10 School Street) from 10:30 am – 12:00 pm.** The session will be led by Pam Driedger, member of the Adult Faith Commission and a Director of Spiritual Care at the Moncton Hospital with Horizon Health Network. The aim of this session will be to help families start conversations about death and dying before circumstances force them to. How can families and loved ones accompany those who find themselves struggling with illness, pain and difficult medical circumstances? Register with Karen LeBlanc at 387-4198, karen.diocese@gmail.com or online at www.diomoncton.ca → Pastoral Offices → Adult Faith → Formation Opportunities.

2022 Christmas Week Mass Schedule

December 24th

Elsipogtog.....6:30 p.m.
 Rexton.....9:30 p.m.
 Indian Island.....Midnight

December 25th

South Branch...11:00 a.m.

December 27th

Rexton.....4:00 p.m.

December 28th

Elsipogtog.....9:00 a.m.

December 29th

Indian Island.....4:00 p.m.

December 31st

South Branch.....4:00 p.m.
 Elsipogtog.....6:30 p.m.**

**Time of Adoration 30 minutes following mass

January 1st

Indian Island.....9:00 a.m.
 Rexton.....11:00 a.m.

