

December 4th, 2011 Second Sunday in Advent

St. Stephen's Church	Rev. Tom Kuffel	207 N. Union Ave.	Exeter, NE 68351
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Date	Time	Place	Intention	By	Feast Day
Mon. Dec 5	7:30 AM	Exeter	Gene Dumpert	Joan Dumpert	
Tues. Dec 6	7:30 AM	Exeter	Richard E. Erdkamp	John & Peg Becker	
Wed. Dec 7	6:30 PM	McCool	Connie White		Immaculate Conception
Thu. Dec 8	10:30 AM	Care Center			Immaculate Conception
Thu. Dec 8	6:30 PM	Exeter	Bill Cudaback	The Family	Immaculate Conception
Fri. Dec 9	7:30 AM	McCool	Bill Cudaback	The Family	
Sat. Dec 10	8:00 AM	McCool	Ted & Emma Rerucha	Jan Otoupal	
Sat. Dec 10	5:00 PM	Exeter	John Noler	Doug Anderson	
Sun. Dec 11	8:30 AM	Exeter	Shelly Billerbeck	Laurie Noltmier	
Sun. Dec 11	10:00 AM	McCool	For the Parish		

December Ministers

Sat 10	A-Mark	L-Rick	S-Kirby & Jack	U – Bob & Pat	G – Bob & Pat Becker
Sun 11	A-Brad	L-Children	S-Spencer & Caleb	U & G – Children's Mass – Children will fill in.	
Sat 17	A-Gerry	L-John B	S-Elliot & Mitchell	U – Peg B.	G-Matt Harre Family
Sun 18	A-Roger	L-Kathy	S-Spencer & Caleb	U – Doug & Dacel	G-Doug Thomsen Family
Sat 24	6PMA-Mark	L-Pat R.	S-Evan & Jack	U – Don & Elaine	G-Don & Elaine Krejci
Sat 24	11PMA-Brad	L-Rick	S-Theron & Cameron	U – Marion	G-Angels
Sun 25	A-Rusty	L-Doug	S-Sam & Max	U – Darleene	G-Roger Johnson Jr. Family

Pray For: David Kenneth from St. Rupert, Newburgh, IN. He is in Theology 3 and is studying at St. Gregory the Great. He graduated HS in 2005 and he was home schooled.

Prayer Intentions: Richard Perkins, Bill Hays, Joanna & Daniel Webster Family, Ann Pospisil, Jean Hoffman, Irene Petrucek, Dawn Welch, Kelley Champion, Bernard & Lorene Zeleny, J.J. Dinneen, Taylor Thomas, Steve Lawson, Tim Becker, Joe Huber Jr., Patrick Hoarty, Carol Smith, Cindy Hogman, Zach Johnson, Lauren Dick, Stephanie Salyer, Mark Thomsen, Noah Lambrecht, & Military Personnel Jason & Lacey Hood, Rob Coffey, Jacque Erks, Zac Hartmann, Anthony & Alex Due.

St. Stephen's Church Support 11-28-2011

Adult Envelopes	\$1288.00	Loose Plate	\$39.00	Children	\$2.00	Total	\$1329.00
Number of Envelops	\$1 - \$5 [1]	\$6 – 10 [7]	\$11 - \$20 [12]	\$21 - \$40 [10]	\$41 & Up [10]		

** The actual budget for collections is \$85,305 for this fiscal year. It includes envelopes, loose plate, children, and special collections (i.e. Christmas, Easter, etc). On average, we need to collect \$1640 weekly in order to balance our budget. Check here weekly to see the actual collections compared to the budget. **Fiscal Year-to-Date we are at \$32,338 and we should be at \$36,080.**

Announcements

Immaculate Conception Mass Schedule: Wed. December 7th at 6:30PM in McCool. **Thurs. Dec. 8th at 10:30 AM in Exeter at the Care Center and 6:30PM in Exeter.**

Birthdays: Linda Becker – Dec 7th, Joni Harre – Dec 7th, Monica Bristol – Dec 9th, Deidre Stevens – Dec 11th, Layla Whitford – Dec 11th

Anniversaries: Mark & Starlene Benorden – Dec 10th

CCD: Dec 4th – Practice at Hall for Program. Youth Choir & Angel Practice after Class at Church. **Dec 11th** – Class at Church to Practice Program. Children's Mass. Christmas Program at 4PM at the church. Potluck to follow at Hall. K, 1st, & 2nd – Veggie & Fruit dishes. 3rd, 4th, & 8th – Desserts. 5th 6th, & 7th – Meat dishes. Remember your \$1. **Dec 18th** – Class Parties at Hall. Angel Practice at church after class.

CYO: Dec 7th - Starts with mass at 6:30PM in McCool.

Altar Society: Doug Anderson won the Savings Bond. Connie Horne & girls donated the Dec Basket – Winter Safety Kit.

- Meeting/Christmas Party will be **Wed, Dec. 21st at 7PM**. Shut-in gifts will be available & we will play bingo.

Christmas Flowers: If you would like to donate in memory or honor of a loved one, please put your intentions and donation in the collection plate or give to Kathy Erdkamp (Altar Society).

Dec 4 at 3PM at the church: "Acoustic Christmas" - A Musical Journey from Advent to Epiphany".

Dec 11th Penance Service: 3-4PM at the church. The CCD Christmas Program will follow.

Dec 11th CCD Christmas Program: 4PM at the church. Covered dish to follow at the Hall

Donations for Birthright: The Altar Society is collecting baby items for Birthright. Please leave your baby items in the back of the church. Thank you for donating to this very worthy cause.

Bishop Bruskewitz Stewardship Appeal: St. Stephen's had 67 people pledge \$11,665. We have paid \$9,350 of our pledge with \$2,315 outstanding. We have received \$1,440 from the rebate and will receive close to \$2,000 if everyone pays their pledges. I thank everyone who supports this worthy cause which benefits not only our parish, but also the entire diocese of Lincoln.

Prayer: Come, long-expected Jesus. Excite in me the joy and love and peace it is right to bring to the manger of my Lord. Raise in me, too, sober reverence for the God who acted there, hearty gratitude for the life begun there, and spirited resolution to serve the Father and Son.

Quote: When you give gifts for Christmas, do not give only to those who will give to you in return, but give to those who receive from no one and who cannot give you anything back. -- Pope Benedict

Humor: Put your problems on probation; Run your troubles off the track; Throw your worries out the window; Get the monkeys off your back.

Please do not put any salt on the new steps.

Everyone should have received a letter explaining our building project. During this Month please reflect on you commitment to our building project. I ask everyone to return their pledge cards signed, by Jan 1st.

Think on These Things

We usually think of the middle years of the Christian life as a time of acquiring better habits and their accompanying virtues. But inviting Jesus into the "aching abyss" of our heart, perhaps has more to do with holding our heart hopefully in partial emptiness in a way that allows desire to be rekindled.

"Discipline imposed from the outside eventually defeats when it is not matched by desire from within," said Dawson Trotman. There comes a place on our spiritual journey where renewed religious activity is of no use whatsoever. It is the place where God holds out his hand and asks us to give up our lovers and come and live with him in a much more personal way. It is the place of relational intimacy that Satan lured Adam and Eve away from so long ago in the Garden of Eden. We are both drawn to it and fear it. Part of us would rather return to Scripture memorization, or Bible study, or service-anything that would save us from the unknowns of walking with God. We are partly convinced our life is elsewhere. We are deceived.

"We are half-hearted creatures," says Lewis in *The Weight of Glory*, "fooling about with drink and sex and ambition and gossip and greed when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

Character Building

Released in 1990 after the dismantling of the system of segregation, Mandela went on to serve as first president of the new South Africa from 1994 to 1999. And after retiring, he continued to serve his people. He's now 93 years old, and one of the leaders that I admire most who I haven't been able to meet. We had an appointment set up last year, but Mr. Mandela had a health problem that forced us to cancel. I don't know if I'll ever get to meet him, but I can tell you the lessons I've learned from him. This is what I took away from my visit to his prison:

- Our surroundings need not control our spirit.
- People who devalue us do not determine our value.
- Dreams can be birthed during the daily grind.
- Out of our brokenness, we can be made whole and bring healing to others.

A writer in the Bible's book of Proverbs wrote, "A man's gift makes room for him." Nelson Mandela had no room in his cell, but his gift could not be contained. In time, his gift made room for him to lead and bless his country.

Pope Benedict

God's sign is simplicity. God's sign is the baby. God's sign is that he makes himself small for us. This is how he reigns. He does not come with power and outward splendor. He comes as a baby – defenseless and in need of our help. He does not want to overwhelm us with his strength. He takes away our fear of his greatness. He asks for our love: so he makes himself a child. He wants nothing from us other than our love, through which we spontaneously learn to enter into his feelings, his thoughts and his will – we learn to live with him and to practice with him that humility of renunciation that belongs to the very essence of love. God made Himself small so that we could understand Him, welcome Him, and love Him.

The Fathers of the Church, in their Greek translation of the Old Testament, found a passage from the prophet Isaiah that Paul also quotes in order to show how God's new ways had already been foretold in the Old Testament. There we read: "God made his Word short, he abbreviated it" (*Is 10:23; Rom 9:28*). The Fathers interpreted this in two ways. The Son himself is the Word, the *Logos*; the eternal Word became small – small enough to fit into a manger. He became a child, so that the Word could be grasped by us. In this way God teaches us to love the little ones. In this way he teaches us to love the weak. In this way he teaches us respect for children.

The child of Bethlehem directs our gaze towards all children who suffer and are abused in the world, the born and the unborn. Towards children who are placed as soldiers in a violent world; towards children who have to beg; towards children who suffer deprivation and hunger; towards children who are unloved. In all of these it is the Child of Bethlehem who is crying out to us; it is the God who has become small who appeals to us.

Let us pray this night that the brightness of God's love may enfold all these children. Let us ask God to help us do our part so that the dignity of children may be respected. May they all experience the light of love, which mankind needs so much more than the material necessities of life.

Homily

When we find ourselves in darkness, spiritual and emotional, what do we do? How do we respond? Some of us respond with fatalistic resignation, others of us with anger and despair that has led them into alcoholism or medicine-cabinet drug addiction. Our psyches and souls can fill up with bitterness causing others to distance themselves from us, driving us into bitter isolation and feelings of abandonment.

Our national soul, our American spirit is presently being tested with the economic malaise that has infected us all. We live in a time of economic gloom, an economic depression that has affected not only our pocket books but our national spirit as well. Our dysfunctional government is symptomatic of how sick we are. Where do we look for hope? In economic indicators or elsewhere? Where are the first lights of a dawning new day? To what horizon do we look?

Has God abandoned us or is God bidding us to look beyond what presently imprisons us in darkness?

Advent begins with us looking toward the end of the world. It is right that we should be anxious and concerned about the judgment of God on the Day of Judgment. But we should not be held in the grip of fear. Why? Because God's judgment is that we are worth saving. God's judgment comes to us with His grace and mercy... His grace and mercy given to us in His Son, Jesus Christ.

God tells Isaiah to comfort His people. "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem," He tells Isaiah, and proclaim to her that her time of trial is coming to an end. Every valley shall be filled in; every mountain and hill shall be made low; the rugged land shall be made a plain and the rough country made a broad valley. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed." Isaiah was speaking God's word to Israel, His people who had been driven from their homeland and who were living in captivity in Babylon. And Isaiah speaks to us as well, in our time.

Tenderly God speaks to those captive Israelites through His prophet Isaiah. "Comfort, give comfort to my people... Speak tenderly to Jerusalem." Tell them that their trails are about to end and that their guilt is expiated. In the desert God's power will make things gentle for them. Valleys will be filled, mountains will be leveled, and rough ways will be smoothed. God will care for them like a shepherd to guide them and nourish them, gathering them in His arms and speaking tenderly to them. God cares for us also.

We need to note, however, that all this will all not come about unless we do our part, unless we repent, change our ways, and prepare to meet God on His terms, not ours. The comfortable will be afflicted and the afflicted will be comforted. The way back home to God is not automatic... it not simply handed to us on a silver platter. The situation of the Israelites differs from the situation in which we presently find ourselves. As challenging as theirs was, ours is more challenging.

To provide for us in our challenge God sent us His only Son to work *with* us, not simply for us. We often find ourselves praying to God to do things for us without at the same time offering God what we will do for Him. Therein in found our challenge. What DO we actually do for Him? How do we work *with* Him?

If we think God has afflicted us with various sufferings, ought we not reflect on the reality that we afflicted His Son, *grievously* afflicted Him? Once having reflected on that, what have we done to comfort Him? Have we repentant hearts, hearts opened with love so that His love can enter our hearts?

When we have broken away from those who love us, when we have alienated ourselves like the Prodigal Son was alienated from his father and his home, what path do we take to return to them? When we have hurt those who we love, how do we get back into their hearts? For those, however, who live apart from God's love the path is difficult, daunting, and perhaps not possible to find. For those who live in God's favor, the valleys will be filled, the mountains leveled, the rough ways will be made smooth, and the trip back will be gentle.

Life is filled with afflictions, many of them severe. The Evil One will use them to drive our hearts further away from God. The tools of the devil are doubt, disillusionment, discouragement, depression, defeat, despair, and spiritual death. Living under those clouds can imprison our souls in the devil's captivity.

Here is your God! He comes with power the Lord God who rules by his strong arm; here is His reward. Like a shepherd He feeds His flock; in His arms He gathers His lambs, carrying them next to His heart, leading them with care.