

The SPIRE 2020

The Newsletter of the
Episcopal Church of the Ascension,
Sierra Madre, California



Upcoming Events

Please see calendar on page 8 for an updated list of 'virtual' events.

Please Get Your Pledge Cards In ASAP!

Just a reminder that we still need pledge cards from several members of our parish family. Please take a moment to fill out your pledge card so that we can hear from you and complete our budget for next year. To return your card to the parish, you can mail it to the church office, drop it off at the church office (call in advance), drop it in the collection plate during the Sunday morning service, or fill out an electronic pledge card on the church website (look under "Give" about halfway down the page).

Blessings to everyone,
Gordon Tomaske, Sr. Warden



From the Rector

One of the reasons this newsletter is a little later getting to you this month is because I've been waiting for some clarity on the current health crisis and possible new governmental and diocesan guidelines. As I'm sure everyone is aware, before vaccines become available, we are in for some very challenging times. I urge everyone to take all measures to be safe and responsible. That said, it is pretty clear that we are still able to offer outdoors, in-person services as long as everyone wears a mask, keeps physical distance, and stays home if they aren't feeling well. Of course, we will continue to offer our services online. My prayer is that at the end of this experience, we may have made some sacrifices; but will we have done our part to keep our community as safe as possible.

For Christmas this year, we will have two services outdoors and in person. (This plan is always dependent on the weather being somewhat cooperative!) On Christmas Eve, we will have a Eucharist service at 4pm. There will be music, but the congregation will have to hum along in their hearts. On Christmas Day, there will an outdoor Eucharist, in-person, at 10am. Both services will be streamed on Facebook Live, and we are hoping to have them available on Zoom as well.

I hear from some of my colleagues that they have parishioners who seem buoyed by court decisions affecting religious freedom and are agitating to be inside worshipping as if there isn't a health crisis unlike anything we've ever seen in our lifetime. My response is that just because we "can" do something, doesn't mean we should. This is a time when we can model sacrificial love instead of self-centeredness. And we will get through this. We can celebrate Christ's birth wherever we are and in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. And perhaps next year we will appreciate all the more the blessings of the season.

Father Michael+

Dear Ascension Friends,

With sadness I want to let you know that long-time parishioner Diane Rhodus passed away on Wednesday, November 25th at home with some of her family with her. Diane had been in declining health for some time and more recently had been on hospice.

Diane was one of the original students at the Ascension Parish School back in the 1940's. More recently, Diane was involved with formation, working with our young people and serving as ministry coordinator. Diane's prayer life was vigorous, and she was very involved with the renewal of the Daughters of the King at Ascension.

Please keep Diane's family – her children Shelly, Brian, Debbie, and their children and grandchildren – in your prayers. A celebration of Diane's life will be held when we can all be together again.

Blessings,
MAB+



NOVEMBER 2020 Pledge Payment Snapshot



2020 Budget
\$221,000

YTD Budget: \$202,583
YTD Actual: \$182,343
Difference: \$-20,240

THE PARISH ANNUAL MEETING

At its meeting in November, your Vestry decided (after consulting the Parish Bylaws) to delay holding the Annual Meeting until the end of February at the earliest. The hope is to put off holding the meeting until a time when we can find some way to gather in person. The main work of the Annual Meeting is to elect new members of the Vestry and to receive the reports of the works of ministry. (The budget for the new year – 2021 - is passed by the Vestry in December and merely presented at the Annual Meeting.) The current Vestry members whose terms are coming to an end are willing to continue for the time being. So... Tentatively, the date of the Annual Meeting is set for Sunday, February 28th.



2021 Stewardship Update



Thank You to those who have pledged!



Christmas Flowers

Well, Christmas is right around the corner; and while celebrations will look and be different this year, they will still happen. Even though we will be worshipping outside, altar guild will still be decorating our space. We are aiming for “simple” this year, and any monetary donations towards flowers will be greatly appreciated. Please send checks to St. Anne’s Altar Guild, c/o Ascension Church. Be sure to include any “In Memory” names. Names of donors and designations will be listed in the e-mailed bulletin. Thank you in advance for your generosity.

St. Anne’s Altar Guild

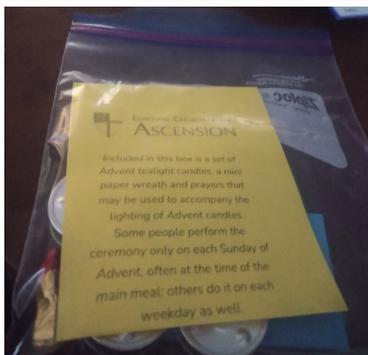
“Adopt the Fountain”

Our outdoor worship space is focused around the altar and font. For the last few years, the fountain has been maintained by a generous friend, who happened to be in the pool maintenance business. Dave has retired and moved to Ventura. As a result, we are looking for someone to maintain the fountain.

Perhaps you know a person familiar with pools or fountains? Could you send them our way and see if this maintenance is something they can handle. We have funds to support this effort, but perhaps someone in the congregation would like to “adopt” the fountain and its maintenance. If you have ideas, please get in touch with the Junior Warden – Ray Smith--- or with Fr. Bamberger.



Advent in a box!
Thank You Pastor Josh & Jobi!



Christmas Outreach Project 2020

This year we will again be partnering with Hillsides for our Christmas outreach project. We will be donating supermarket gift cards in \$25 increments and Hillsides will distribute them to the families they support. Ralphs / Food 4 Less / Kroger gift cards are preferred, but Vons and Trader Joes are great too. If you prefer, you can donate via checks made out to Hillsides. **Please have donations at church by Sunday December 20, either by dropping your donation off at a Sunday outdoor service or mailing it to the Church.** Thank you so much for your help in times when needs are growing!



A Note on Financial Stewardship

You know that your financial pledge is essential to keeping the Church of the Ascension supportive and strong. It allows us to budget for the coming year and helps us determine our priorities. But you may not be aware of the many ways you can provide financial support to our parish. First off, you should be getting a pledge card in the mail or you can pick one up at church. Return the card to us in the offering plate at the 8:00 am service or drop it off at the parish office. You can also make your pledge on the parish website by going to <https://www.ascension-sierramadre.com/give.html>.

When fulfilling your pledge by check or cash, make sure your name and envelope/account number are clearly marked. To get your offering to church you can:

- ◇ Drop an envelope with cash or a check into the offering plate during the service
- ◇ Call the office and drop a donation off with Kim Lumino at any time during the week (except Wednesdays)
- ◇ Arrange on your bank's website for Ascension to receive automatic payments from your checking or savings account in the amount you designate. Simply add "Church of the Ascension, 25 E. Laurel Avenue, Sierra Madre, CA 91024" as an automatic payee in the amount and frequency you choose. When prompted for an account number, you can use your Ascension envelope/account number.



In addition, you can donate outside of your pledge by donating:

- ◇ A financial gift to support a parish project like the roof replacement or other maintenance
- ◇ Appreciated Stock. If you have appreciated stock, you may donate that to the parish and get a tax deduction while avoiding capital gains. Check with the parish office for more information and your accountant for details on the tax implications
- ◇ A car. Over the last few years, Ascension has accepted cars as donations with approximately 70% of the proceeds going to the church. Call the parish office for details
- ◇ Planned giving. When creating your will or trust, please remember your parish family in your arrangements.

From all of us at Ascension, thank you for your time, talent, and treasure. God's peace.

Gordon Tomaske, Sr. Warden



I was 4 days old when I experienced my first Christmas. I never thought of Christmas that way before – that it was my first --and now as I prepare for my 72nd, I realize the two events have something in common. I certainly didn't know what to expect then, and I don't know what to expect now.

I suspect that this Christmas will be a first for most of us. How do we celebrate when there's so much sadness? How do we celebrate when for so many families there's an empty place at the Christmas table? Virtually hugging loved ones just isn't the same. I've even heard some say: "why bother?" Often, we associate Christmas with the color white. This Christmas for many...well, let's just color it blue. We're *supposed* to be happy, joyful, full of hope, and do lots of fun things. But this year, there's just a little bit that's missing. Anxiety, disappointment, sadness, and grief have always been part of human history; and there will always be much to be blue about... that goes without saying.

But there will always be reasons to desire new "seasons of hope."

As we prepare to remember the birth of Jesus, to embrace a new season of hope, it's easy to allow the chaos and uncertainty of the last year to dampen that hope and to get lost in our anxieties. How easy it is to forget the real meaning of the incarnation – God in human form entering into our history. That is what started Christmas, and that is what keeps it going. Hope...the hope that God will always be with us.

The old testament prophets delivered messages to those around them whose fears and anxieties were as real as ours and whose need for "hope" was as strong then as it is today. On the second Sunday of Advent, the church prays: "Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen.*"

Consider who the prophets in your life have been. Who has offered you hope in your distress, who was there in time of need, who laughed and cried with you, who encouraged you to just try a little harder, who kicked you in the butt when you were wallowing in your personal dramas? All those prophets remind us that God is indeed with us, and that there's always reason to hope.

We should also see ourselves as prophets with a message to deliver, crying out in the wilderness of a hurting world. We may be approaching a new season of hope, but with that hope comes a new season of expectation that we will with God's help be both messenger and message in a world that is in pain and desperately in need of hope. The great challenge of faith in our hurting world is to remember that indeed there is hope.

Be the messenger, go tell it on the mountain that God is with us and in God all things are possible. Let your every action, your every word be a statement of hope in a hurting world. Let your hope be a beacon of light.

Go then and be prophets sharing the message that yes, in God all things are possible...we just need to give God permission to be a part of our lives. With God there will always be seasons of hope. With God it's always easy to be happy, joyful, and to do fun things. Let's just color Christmas white.

Be well, be blessed, be prophets of joy, gladness, and hope.

Deacon Ed+

Thanksgiving Day Service: Thursday, November 26, 2020



NEW and **IMPROVED** flower and candle sign-ups for 2021!!!!!!!

Beginning January 2021, sign-ups for Flower Donations and sign-ups for the Sanctuary Candle will be available on Sign-Up Genius (online) as well as in person in the hallway going into HAWKS HALL.

****Payment will continue to be made by mailing a CHECK (\$40.00 (flowers) and \$15.00 (Sanctuary candle) -- **now payable to Church of the Ascension.** **** Please include a note giving the date that you signed up for and any dedication.

We are looking forward to being able to offer this new way to sign up for flowers and candles and hope it will make donations more convenient for you.

In Christ, **St. Anne's Altar Guild**



NOTES FROM THE LOFT

Embarking on the most unusual Advent/Christmas season of our lifetimes, music, although abridged, remains a constant in our celebrations. For Advent, thanks to collaboration with Charley Noecker and Carol Rasmussen, the hymns include:

December 6 ~ Advent 2

#65 ~ BEREDEN VAG FOR HERRAN, *Prepare the Way, O Zion*

December 13 ~ Advent 3

#59 ~ MERTON, *Hark! A Thrilling Voice Is Sounding*

December 20 ~ Advent 4

#56 ~ The quintessential Advent hymn, VENI, VENI, EMMANUEL *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*

For Christmas, the choir is preparing to offer virtual anthems in tandem with hymns and anthems recorded from last year's Christmas Eve service (how wonderful will it be to hear the organ again?!). As I write this column, recording is underway, so I inform you of this project with faith that it will come to fruition! The plans for Christmas Eve and Christmas 1 include:

December 24 ~ Christmas Eve

From 2019 Christmas Eve:

#83 ~ ADESTE FIDELIS, *O Come, All Ye Faithful*

Go Tell It On the Mountain, a wonderful setting by John Abdenour

Virtual Ascension choir anthem:

O, Hearken Ye by Alfred Burt

December 27 ~ Christmas 1

From 2019 Christmas Eve:

#87 ~ MENDELSSOHN, *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*

In the Bleak Midwinter by Harold Darke

Virtual Ascension choir anthem:

All On A Christmas Morning by Alfred Burt

A very blessed Advent and joyous Christmas to you and those you love!



Debora Huffman, Director of Music and Organist

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!



Forward Today: What does it mean to say, “Jesus is Lord”?

November 18, 2020; Forward Today, [scott gunn](#)

Dear friends in Christ,

On Christ the King Sunday we celebrated the kingship of Christ, as we always do on the Last Sunday after Pentecost. But what does that mean for us modern Christians?



To celebrate Jesus as our king and our Lord is to reject all others who might try to lay claim on us as our Lord. Many of the earliest Christians died for professing, “Jesus is Lord” rather than saying that Caesar was Lord. This is perhaps a poignant and necessary reminder for us coming in a time of intense political wrangling.

Neither Joe Biden nor Donald Trump has claim on us, ultimately. We belong to Jesus. We are not first Republicans or Democrats, but people who worship a savior who asks us to take up our cross and follow him, turning away from all others who might beckon us to follow.

And what kind of king is Jesus, anyway? The [Gospel reading](#) for Christ the King Sunday brings us the parable of the sheep and the goats. In the parable, the king tells us what is important and what matters in the end.

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’

Jesus shows us the way. He is a king of compassion, mercy, grace, and sacrifice. His most kingly act is his free offering of himself for our salvation on the cross.

I don’t know about you, but after listening to blustery politicians, I need to listen to another voice proclaiming a message of mercy and grace. Coming up on a pre-Christmas season when consumer spending will run amok, I need to be reminded that sacrifice rather than possessions is where we find our meaning. When our allegiance is demanded by political parties, nations, and corporations, I need to be reminded that my first and most precious allegiance is to Jesus Christ.

May we all profess Jesus as Lord, and may our lives show forth what we profess with our lips.

Yours faithfully,
Scott Gunn
Executive Director

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Photo by [K. Mitch Hodge](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Blue Christmas: A Service of Comfort & Light ~ December 15th – 7:00 p.m. Saint Mark’s Episcopal Church ~ 626-798-6747

Christmas is not a joyous season of celebration for everyone. If you’ve experienced the loss of a loved one, your health, a relationship, your job, or a deeply held dream, if you are far from those you love or feeling the weight of isolation, or if you have painful memories of Christmas in years past, the holidays can be an especially hard time. 2020 has been a challenging year in our nation and world as well, and you may be feeling weary or discouraged.

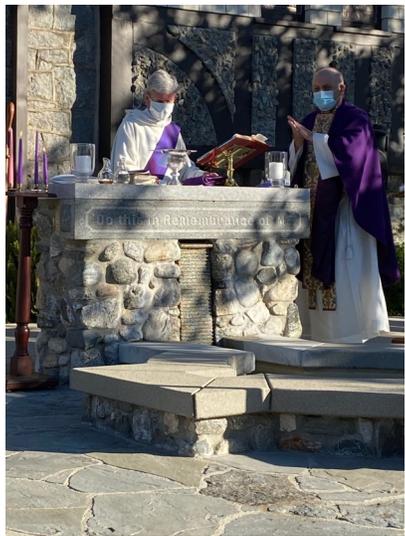
You are invited to join us for an online “Blue Christmas” service at 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday, December 15th. Our worship will be quiet and reflective, with prayers, music, and readings, a time to acknowledge the hurts we bear and offer the hope of comfort and healing in our lives and in our world.

“The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness did not overcome it.”

Log in here: bit.ly/BlueChristmasStM



Episcopal Visit with Bishop John H. Taylor Sunday, December 6, 2020



Our vision is that *The Episcopal Church of the Ascension* serves Christ today for those who will come to know Christ tomorrow.

WORSHIP, FORMATION, PASTORAL CARE, FELLOWSHIP, OUTREACH, PRESENCE
 25 E. Laurel Avenue, Sierra Madre, CA 91024 ~ 626-355-1133 www.ascension-sierramadre.com

DECEMBER 2020

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1 Communion under Special Circumstances 8:30am—10am *By Appointment Only*	2 Communion under Special Circumstances 8:30am—10am *By Appointment Only* Evening Prayer 7:30pm Facebook LIVE	3 9am Forum Zoom Call 10:30am Staff Mtg Zoom Call	4	5
6 <u>8am Outside Worship w/Eucharist-Rite I</u> <u>9am Sunday Worship-Rite II</u> Facebook Live & Zoom Call <u>Virtual Coffee Hour after service</u> *Zoom Call* <u>Between the Masses Discussion Group after coffee hour</u> *Zoom Call*	7	8 Communion under Special Circumstances 8:30am—10am *By Appointment Only*	9 Communion under Special Circumstances 8:30am—10am *By Appointment Only* Evening Prayer 7:30pm Facebook LIVE	10 9am Forum Zoom Call	11	12
13 <u>8am Outside Worship w/Eucharist-Rite I</u> <u>9am Sunday Worship-Rite II</u> Facebook Live & Zoom Call <u>Virtual Coffee Hour after service</u> *Zoom Call* <u>Between the Masses Discussion Group after coffee hour</u> *Zoom Call*	14	15 Communion under Special Circumstances 8:30am—10am *By Appointment Only* Vestry Meeting 7:30pm Zoom Call	16 Communion under Special Circumstances 8:30am—10am *By Appointment Only* Evening Prayer 7:30pm Facebook LIVE	17 9am Forum Zoom Call 10:30am Staff Mtg Zoom Call	18	19
20 <u>8am Outside Worship w/Eucharist-Rite I</u> <u>9am Sunday Worship-Rite II</u> Facebook Live & Zoom Call <u>Virtual Coffee Hour after service</u> *Zoom Call* <u>Between the Masses Discussion Group after coffee hour</u> *Zoom Call*	21	22 Communion under Special Circumstances 8:30am—10am *By Appointment Only*	23 Communion under Special Circumstances 8:30am—10am *By Appointment Only* Evening Prayer 7:30pm Facebook LIVE	24 Christmas Eve Mass at 4pm *weather permitting* Facebook LIVE & Zoom Parish Office Closed	25 Christmas Day Mass at 10am *weather permitting* Facebook LIVE & Zoom	26
27 <u>8am Outside Worship w/Eucharist-Rite I</u> <u>9am Sunday Worship-Rite II</u> Facebook Live & Zoom Call <u>Virtual Coffee Hour after service</u> *Zoom Call* <u>Between the Masses Discussion Group after coffee hour</u> *Zoom Call*	28	22 Communion under Special Circumstances 8:30am—10am *By Appointment Only*	23 Communion under Special Circumstances 8:30am—10am *By Appointment Only*	31 9am Forum Zoom Call Parish Office Closed		