



The December 2023 SPIRE

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



Upcoming Events

Please see the calendar on page 8 for an updated list of 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

I have spent the last two Advent seasons looking forward with great joy and anticipation to two particular births. In Advent of 2021, I was waiting for the arrival of Elsie – our granddaughter who was born in January of 2022. A year ago, we learned that Jack was on the way. He was born this past July. The delight at beholding these new born babies was simply overwhelming. (Debbie and I are giving ourselves the gift of a visit to South Carolina after Christmas just to hold those babies!)

And overwhelming it should be for every Advent. We wait with joy and anticipation for the yearly celebration of the birth of Jesus. We sing the hymns of expectation and hope. We dust off the nativity sets and decorate for the season of Advent (and probably Christmas as well.)

This Advent has a painful dimension as well. With the war going on in the Holy Land, we know it will be a very subdued Feast of the Nativity in Bethlehem and throughout much of the world. Our Advent prayers must include petitions for peace and justice for all the children of Abraham.

But celebrate the Nativity we must. The birth of the Christ Child is God's sign of love for the whole world. And we can join the heavenly chorus and sing the message of Peace and Love.

Father Michael+

Holidays at Hillside 2023 Annual Christmas Appeal



Let's show our generous support by providing gifts to help those in need this holiday season.

November 2023 Pledge Payment Snapshot



2023 Budget \$210,000

YTD Budget:	\$184,375
YTD Actual:	\$175,384
Difference:	\$ - 8,991

Cards in the amount of \$25 from Vons, Food for Less, Ralphs, Target, Walmart, and Amazon will make the holidays brighter for families in need.

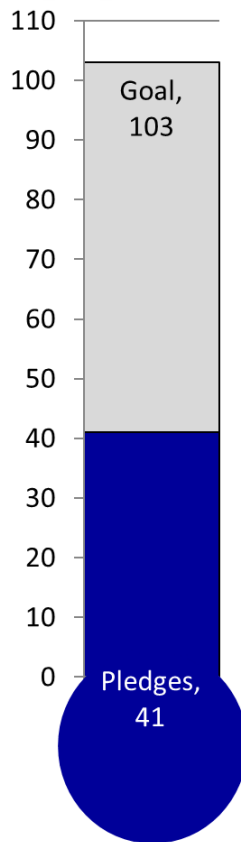
Please leave your donations on the collection plate on Sundays or drop them off in the parish office by Sunday, December 17, 2023. Deacon Ed will deliver them to Hillside. Your generosity is greatly appreciated and a blessing to those in need.



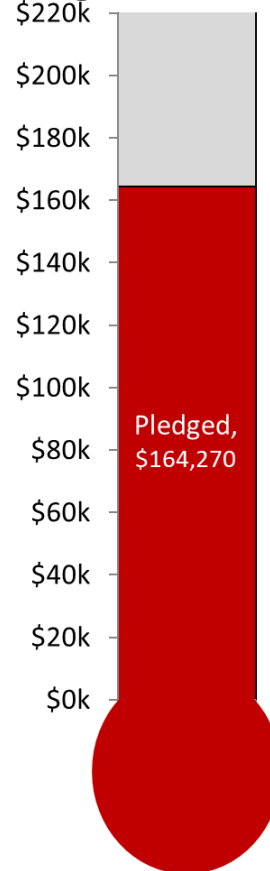
Stewardship Campaign Update

The numbers as of November 28, 2023

Pledging Households



Pledge Goal \$220,000



LESSONS AND Carols BRUNCH

On **Sunday, December 17, 2023**, we will be celebrating Lessons and Carols at the 10:15 Service. Following the Service, Church of the Ascension will provide brunch for all to enjoy. There is a sign-up sheet in Hawks Halls to get a count of how many to provide for. Please add your name and the number in your party.

If you have any questions, or need additional information, please feel free to contact Lisa Wagner at 562.710.8909 or email me at: lisawagner069@gmail.com.



Advent is a time when we prepare our hearts to welcome Jesus. Although we observe this holy season every year, the question remains baffling: How can we adequately prepare for our Messiah, for the Word made Flesh who came into the world to save us? It's a tall order, and we know that even the best preparation is only a pittance compared to what Jesus has done and continues to do for us.

The good news is that God can do amazing things with our pittance. When we approach Advent with faith, hope, and repentance, we can work toward making straight the path of the Lord. Plus, God has given us the wonderful model of the Blessed Virgin Mary to prepare for

Jesus. During that first Advent before the birth of Jesus, Mary prepared with unmatched faith, grace, and love. Here are four things we can learn from her actions during the first Advent.

1. Be willing to say, "Yes"

When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary at the Annunciation, Mary was a young, unmarried woman. She was certainly a person of great faith, and her life was a holy one. But what God was asking her to do was unprecedented—and risky. It was scandalous for a young woman to be pregnant out of wedlock. Mary trusted, however, that God would make this remarkable event happen and sustain her through it. This trust allowed her to give her "Yes" to God: "Let it be with me according to your word."

2. Look for the little ways you can help others.

During the Annunciation, Mary learned of another miraculous pregnancy: that of her cousin, Elizabeth. Elizabeth was much older and was believed to be barren before she carried John the Baptist in her womb. When Mary heard about her cousin, she immediately left to help her. Journeying far away to help a relative would be a challenge for anyone; but it was especially challenging for a young, pregnant woman who had just received an extraordinary vocation from God. Yet Mary did not think of herself—her first thought was to help someone in need.

3. Glorify God in all you do.

Mary also taught us a great lesson about humility that first Advent. It would no doubt be tempting to puff yourself up a bit if you have just been given the news that you are to become the Mother of God. But Mary did just the opposite. She recognized that it was God who was working in her. Her understanding and sentiments are clear in the beautiful prayer of the Magnificat when she said, "My soul magnifies the Lord" and went on to proclaim, "For the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name" and to praise all his works.

4. Make the best of what you have.

The familiar Christmas story tells us that there was no room for Mary and Joseph at the inn when it was time for Jesus to be born, and so Mary had to give birth to Jesus among the animals and lay him in a manger. This was certainly not an easy way to give birth and to welcome the Messiah into the world. Yet Mary never uttered a word of complaint, and she made the site of Jesus' birth into one we remember today in the beauty of the Crèche. Despite not having much, Mary persevered in faith and made the best of it, resulting in a gift that continues to this day.

This Advent season, may we follow Mary's example of humble faith. As Mary bore the Incarnate Word, let us also prepare a place in our hearts to carry Jesus.

Live well, live blessed, live like Mary,

Deacon Ed

VESTRY NOMINATIONS

DUE NOW

Each year at our annual meeting, we elect three new members of the Vestry, the body within the congregation that, with the Rector, leads the parish. Vestry members are elected for three year terms. Vestry meets once a month throughout the year. Additional meetings (and committee meetings) are held as needed. A Vestry member must be willing to accept the responsibility of regular attendance and be willing to serve on one or more committees.

Now is the time for the parish to nominate next year's Vestry candidates. According to the Diocesan guidelines, a Vestry nominee must be 16 years of age or older and be a confirmed communicant in good standing in the Episcopal Church. He or she must also attend church services at Ascension regularly and be a pledging contributor to the parish. A member of the Vestry may not be a member of any other church.

Names of nominees should be submitted to Father Michael or any Vestry member **by December 25th.**

The date for the annual meeting is **To Be Determined.**



It is once again the time of year to order Christmas flowers to decorate our already beautiful sanctuary and it is your generosity that makes this purchase possible.

Donation envelopes are located at the back of the Church and on the reception table in Hawks Hall. Thanking you in advance for your making this another beautiful Christmas season.

For names to be included in the Christmas bulletins, donations must be received by Tuesday, December 19th.
St. Anne's Altar Guild



An Opportunity for Giving

Please consider making a contribution to our music program for the special music we enjoy here at Ascension.

Donation envelopes are located at the back of the church and on the reception table in Hawks Hall.

For names to be included in the Christmas bulletins, donations must be received by Tuesday, December 19th.

Altar Flowers and Sanctuary Candles

We would like to remind everyone that you can now sign-up for altar flowers and sanctuary candles online through Signup Genius. You can also sign-up on the sign-up sheets in Hawks Hall.

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

Here are the sign-up genius links:

Sanctuary Candles:

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/20F0E44A4A628A7F94-sanctuary1>

Altar Flowers:

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/20F0E44A4A628A7F94-altar1>



Women's Room Thanksgiving Luncheon Monday, November 20, 2023



Thank you to Nicole Hanson for the photos.



A great big
**THANK
YOU** to all who
donated candy for our
Halloween

give-away...it was a huge success, and we had candy left to donate to the FID Women's Room Thanksgiving Luncheon, where the sweets were greatly appreciated.

**FRIENDS
IN
DEED** *

Please join in Ascension's monthly collection of specific "Gold Items" for Friends in Deed. For the month of **December** we will be collecting canned tuna/chicken, hearty soups, chilis and stews.

Look for the donation bin at the back of the church.





**Forward
Movement**
inspire disciples. empower evangelists.

Forward Today: The counter-cultural season of Advent

November 29, 2023 Advent, Forward Today, scott gunn

Dear friends in Christ,

This Sunday the season of Advent begins. Two thousand years ago, John the Baptist was a voice crying in the wilderness to call people to repentance. Today, Advent is a voice crying in the din of our time that salvation comes not from shiny things, but from Love Incarnate. In other words, the subversive call to repentance has not changed much in 20 centuries.

December can seem overwhelming. Custom demands that we spend vast sums on gifts. Invitations to parties and festive gathering might stack up. In church, folks are working hard preparing for Christmas celebrations. One might be left wondering how there will be any time for Advent.



Photo by [KaLisa Veer](#) on [Unsplash](#)

And this is the point. Keeping Advent isn't easy, and that is exactly why we do well to try to keep this season of preparation and repentance.

I'm not here to yell at you for playing Christmas carols or putting up a few decorations. Avoiding Christmas festivity isn't the fundamental point of Advent. Though I think waiting to celebrate Christmas until it's Christmas has virtue, I also think people can do two things at once. We can enjoy some holiday festivity and find ways to keep Advent.

What does this look like? Presumably, your church celebrates the liturgy a bit differently this time of year—Advent music and a different focus. This season might be a good time to curl up with the scriptures. As we're beginning Year B in the three-year lectionary cycle, you might want to read the Gospel of Mark in its entirety. Maybe you'll spend a few more moments in prayer each day. An Advent wreath can help to create a prayerful environment at home.

Mostly though, the point of this season is to prepare our hearts to meet Jesus. One day, we will all meet him when he comes in glory to judge the world. Will we, as the Advent preface suggests, be ready "without shame or fear rejoice to behold his appearing"?

What parts of your life need to change? What practices in your life do you want to increase or decrease? Who can you invite to know the Good News of Jesus Christ, who offers redemption to all? These are the matters for us to focus on this Advent season, and I hope you'll find practices that aid in your reflection and repentance.

A blessed Advent to you.

Yours faithfully,

Scott Gunn
Executive Director



Blood Drive **The Episcopal Church** **of the Ascension**

Location: Parish Hall
25 E Laurel Ave
Sierra Madre, CA 91024

Wednesday, December 20, 2023
12:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Come give Dec. 18 thru Jan. 5 for NEW long-sleeved Red Cross Tee, ltd qty!

Please visit RedCrossBlood.org and enter: ECTA to schedule an appointment.



Scan to be directed to
RapidPass®

Streamline your donation experience and save up to 15 minutes by visiting RedCrossBlood.org/RapidPass to complete your pre-donation reading and health history questions on the day of your appointment.



Scan to schedule
an appointment.

Schedule your blood donation appointment today!

1-800-RED CROSS | RedCrossBlood.org | Download the Blood Donor App

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

DECEMBER 2023

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					1	2
3 <u>8am Worship w/Eucharist</u> *Facebook Live* 9am Between the Masses Discussion Group 9am Choir Rehearsal <u>10:15am Worship w/Eucharist</u> *Facebook Live*	4 8:30am Yoga/Hall Fr. Bamberger Out of Office / Clergy Support Group	5 6pm Tuesday Night Dinner Group Meets	6 8:15-9:45am Gooden Chapel 8:30am Yoga/Hall 5:30pm Yoga/Hall Men's Group Luncheon Nano Café Noon—RSVP to Fr. Michael	7 8:15am Mass 9am Rector's Forum 10:15am Staff Mtg	8	9
10 <u>8am Worship w/Eucharist</u> *Facebook Live* 9am Between the Masses Discussion Group 9am Choir Rehearsal <u>10:15am Worship w/Eucharist</u> *Facebook Live*	11 8:15am Gooden Chapel 8:30am Yoga/Hall	12 6pm Tuesday Night Dinner Group Meets	13 8:15-9:45am Gooden Chapel 8:30am Yoga/Hall 5:30pm Yoga/Hall	14 8:15am Mass 9am Rector's Forum	15	16 Church Greening 5:00pm—8:00pm SMM Winter Recital Hawks Hall Private
17 <u>8am Worship w/Eucharist</u> *Facebook Live* 9am Between the Masses Discussion Group 9am Choir Rehearsal <u>10:15am Worship w/Eucharist</u> *Facebook Live* Lessons & Carols at the 10:15 Service followed by a reception in Hawks Hall. Please RSVP for brunch. 7pm-SM Candlelight Walk	18 8:15am Gooden Chapel 8:30am Yoga/Hall	19 6pm Tuesday Night Dinner Group Meets Vestry Meeting 7pm/Hall	20 8:15-9:45am Gooden Chapel 8:30am Yoga/Hall 5:30pm Yoga/Hall BLOOD DRIVE Hawks Hall NOON—6PM	21 8:15am Mass 9am Rector's Forum 10:15am Staff Mtg	22	23
24 <u>9:30am Worship w/Eucharist</u> *Facebook Live* 4:30pm Hymns & Carols <u>5:00pm Worship w/Eucharist</u> *Facebook Live*	25 Christmas Day Service 10:00am *PARISH OFFICE CLOSED*	26 6pm Tuesday Night Dinner Group Meets	27 8:30am Yoga/Hall 5:30pm Yoga/Hall	28 8:15am Mass 9am Rector's Forum	29	30
31 <u>9am Worship w/Eucharist</u> *Facebook Live*						
Father Michael Vacation—SC						
Father Michael Vacation—SC						
Spire Creator: Kim Lumino, Parish Administrator						