December 2024

My dear parishioners,

During these darkest and shortest days of the year, I have found myself reflecting on how important it is to hold onto hope, to keep hope alive. But to be honest, it is not always easy. Some days are better than others. Something tells me that your experience is probably much the same. There are so many things that militate against hope, aren't there? So many things can cause us to become cynical and sour. Of course, some people are naturally more inclined to be hopeful than others. Maybe you are among them. Speaking for myself, I think I am able to see the bright side most of the time, and I thank God for that.
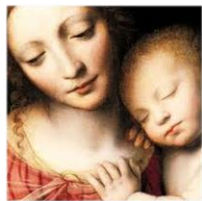
Finding Hope

However, **this past year has been a real test** for me. Wars in the Holy Land and Ukraine, violence on our streets, a man killed right in front of the Cathedral, and a drive-by shooting just feet away. Businesses along Connecticut Avenue have closed, people are working from home, offices are downsizing, and Mass attendance remains down since the pandemic. The list goes on and on.

And people—*all of us*, of course—**look for hope, and find hope, in many different places.** In the wake of a bruising national election, tens of millions of people are hopeful about a new administration taking over here in Washington. But you hardly need me to tell you that there are nearly as many millions who are disbelieving and anything but hopeful about the prospect! All this to say, it's somewhere between difficult and impossible—if we look at the world and national scenes—to come to any kind of agreement on what we have to be hopeful about.

Christ is Our Light in Darkness

But enough about the war between hope and hopelessness! Let me remind you of a reason we all have to be hopeful. We are now in the month of December and, on the Church's calendar, that means the

beginning of Advent—our great **season of expectant hope.** It's no accident that Advent comes during the very darkest days of the year. In Christian antiquity, when a date for celebrating Christmas was settled—the winter solstice, the time when pagans celebrated the feast of Sol Invictus (the Invincible Sun)—what more appropriate time to mark the coming of Christ into our world? Christ, who is the Invincible Sun (and Son!), **Christ who is our light in darkness, our hope!**

Who doesn't love Advent, with its purple vestments, its haunting melodies, its flickering candles, its ringing bells, its quiet anticipation, and its sheer—if restrained—joy? And this year, more than any I can remember, we need Advent. We really do. In 2024, more than ever before, we need a **ray of light in the darkness**; we need a rekindling of hope—**the hope that the coming of Christ at Christmas brings.**

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could anticipate His Coming with the **joy and excitement** that children have at Christmas? And wouldn't it be wonderful if we not only looked with wonder at the Christ Child—poor and vulnerable, lying in the manger—but also **looked with love at the Christ living in so many of our sisters and brothers**, **who are as poor and vulnerable as He was**?

Celebrate with Us

We are all looking forward to visiting family and friends. We want to put the darkness behind us. Wouldn't it be great to experience our beloved Advent and Christmas traditions once again? Let me offer a few suggestions on how we can enter into Advent this year, feeding our spirits and finding Christ in our brothers and sisters. Our Advent and Christmas brochures (English and Spanish), sent to you last month, can be found at stmatthewscathedral.org/Advent&Christmas. Highlights include:

~ **Come Home for Christmas** – Advent Penance Service, Tuesday, December 17 at 12:10pm, with many priests available for Confession (interpreted for the deaf)
~ **Festival of Lessons and Carols** – Sunday, December 15 at 7:30pm (*Schola Cantorum* and Festival Singers) (followed by caroling)
~ **Christmas Eve Masses** – Tuesday, December 24 at 4:30pm (4pm prelude) (Contemporary Choir) & 10pm (bilingual in English & Spanish) (9:15pm prelude) (*Schola Cantorum* and Festival Singers) (Cardinal Gregory)
~ **Christmas Day Masses** – Wednesday, December 25 at 9am, 11am & 1pm (Spanish) (Spanish Choir)

A Special Plea

You, our **parishioners**, **are key to fulfilling our parish mission** of bringing life to Jesus' command to love one another. The homeless still need food, clothing, and rental assistance. Our faith formation programs need to be sustained. Maintenance and cleaning are essential to provide a safe space for worship. Staff members deserve a just wage for the outstanding work they do. I truly appreciate your financial support.

Make a one-time gift using PayPal.

Please consider making a special gift this year. Your whole gift goes only to the parish. You may mail your offering to the rectory, drop it in the offertory basket, or give via **FaithDirect** at membership.faithdirect.net/enroll/DC284. You also may donate via **PayPal with debit and credit options.** Just scan the QR code at left or visit stmatthewscathedral.org/support. Thank you so much. *Muchas gracias.* Also, please don't forget your donation for flowers—we want a beautiful Cathedral for Christmas.

My friends, Advent is the time for us to turn to Jesus, our light, our hope. No matter how bad we may feel, **Jesus will be with us,** to lead us, to guide us, to embrace us. And remember, we can be a source of hope for others. That thought will re-charge our batteries and re-focus our energies as we reach out in love to those who have far less reason to hope than we do. Wouldn't this be the perfect way to celebrate Christmas—to capture the meaning of Christmas—during an Advent and Christmas unlike any other we've ever known!

May the birth of Christ be a time of **great hope** and God's blessing for you and your family this year and always, and may your generosity be greatly rewarded.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

W Ronald Jameson

Rev. Msgr. W. Ronald Jameson
Rector