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NOVEMBER 2024 ISSUE

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## *Advent* *Preparation*

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Who Becomes One of Us



Reclaiming Thanksgiving



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# ETP: The Magazine

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### What is The Empty Tomb Project?

*Empty Tomb Project: The Magazine* is a non-profit that exists to bring the reality and power of the empty tomb to as many people as possible. We are convinced that if men and women encounter Jesus as a real living person their lives will be radically changed.

We are an evangelization company that desires to bring relevant cultural and spiritual topics to our readers in an honest and fresh manner. We dive into topics that truly matter to people, themes that are brought up in people's homes as well as in church circles. We desire to bring uniformity in message and an increase in inspiration to Catholics across Long Island (and beyond).

Along with providing the most dynamic content we are committed to producing a product that is beautifully captivating to the eye. To do so we rely on the faithful designers at Startup Catholic so that the content can be amplified by the aesthetics of the magazine.

In order to reach as many people as possible with the critically important message of Christ we rely on donors in order to grow the mission and impact of our magazine. This will allow us to remain free and ensure that anyone who desires to meet Jesus today will have that opportunity. If you feel called to support us, please reach out via email: [EmptyTombProject@gmail.com](mailto:EmptyTombProject@gmail.com) and join us in the mission! All donations are tax deductible.



# Prepare for Advent

By Theresa Kainen

*Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus (Beloved of God), so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught (Luke 1:1-4).*

These are the first words of the Gospel of Saint Luke before the start of his famous Infancy Narrative, which describes Our Lord's earthly beginnings in the womb of a poor girl in Nazareth. Luke is the only account in the Bible from which we receive the details of the Annunciation: the Angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary that she will conceive by the Holy Spirit and bear the Son of God. It is also the only account given of the Visitation: Mary's joyful journey to see her older cousin, Elizabeth, who would also bear a miraculously conceived baby boy. Even their holy husbands (also saints) - Zechariah and Joseph - are struck mute and fearful, respectively, when news of their wives is made known to them by God. In their defense, disbelief seems the proper interior movement when considering the events at hand. Yet these humble women of faith, Mary and Elizabeth, are blessed by God precisely because they did believe that what the Lord had promised, however unlikely, he would fulfill (Luke 1:45).

We have heard these pious stories so many times that we can almost forget how silly they must sound to people who are not of the Christian tradition. These events which we are asked to believe in are unexplainable by science and human reason. Only human beings could make the events of Advent and Christmas become mundane. Perhaps, this is precisely the reason Luke begins his Gospel as he does - with an appeal to those who may not be certain of the things they have been taught. For this reason, the Advent season is an opportunity to revisit these readings with new eyes, asking the Holy Spirit to give us a fresh sense of awe as to the events surrounding the incarnation of Jesus, so that we can be convinced again of their authenticity and amazement.

The core and beautiful mystery that Saint Luke gives us to meditate with in his Infancy Narrative during each season of Advent is that of pregnancy. Mary's womb, the New Ark of the Covenant, brings God into a more deeply sacred union with us than ever before. He does this through human flesh, through biological processes which are literally known to each human personally. And with this life in utero, so much potential lies, needing only time to develop into the actual plan that God will use to save us all. And that time matters.

"The time came..." is the phrase Luke chooses to kick off each account of labor and delivery from Elizabeth and Mary. John the Baptist and Jesus are brought into the earthly story of salvation history at the proper time. It is not a mistake, an arbitrary detail or a footnote to be overlooked. The timing is everything. And with that timing, we can ask ourselves, what qualities,





traits and movements will this baby bring into the world? Why has God chosen to bring forth this particular soul at this particular time in human history? Why has he chosen this particular mother, from this particular ethnic background, and this particular socio-economic class?

Joyful waiting, busy preparation and nervous expectation characterize the weeks and months leading up to what is, for most Americans, the biggest event of their whole year. Waiting for Christmas Day to arrive during Advent is quite literally like waiting for a baby to be born. We can all relate to that period of slow and joyful expectation when we ourselves, or a loved one, had to wait to behold the littlest of people who would rock our worlds to the greatest degree. Through Mary and Elizabeth's experience of pregnancy we can learn so much about how to enter into these months of Advent while treasuring and pondering all these things in our hearts (Luke 2:19).

This Advent, let us reconsider the miraculous and unlikely nature by which we ourselves were brought forth into the world. However "normal" or seemingly mundane our entry into life may seem to us, it was when "the time came" that we too were written into the narrative of God's salvific work and intertwined with the ancient Infancy Narratives which we read in the Gospel account of Luke. We are the Christian lineage that others will read about someday. The talents, traits, historical circumstances and choices we make today will write a chapter of the Christian narrative that is essential to the telling of the story as God wants it told.

Advent is the pregnant pause God gives us to meditate on what this all means. What is God growing right now through the labors of our lives? What is God bringing forth this Advent season for his glory and our good? This season is the perfect time to ask Him so that we too can become eyewitnesses and servants of the word as God brings forth His life today through us.

*Theresa Kainen is a New York native who has served the Catholic Church throughout her twenties in various ministry capacities. Currently a middle school Religion Teacher, she has also worked in high school campus ministry, music ministry, mission work and parish settings.*





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Church teaching insists that cremated remains must be given the same respect as the body, including the manner in which they are carried, and the attention given to their appropriate transport and placement. The cremated remains of a body are to be buried or entombed, preferably in a Catholic cemetery, and using the rites provided by the Order of Christian Funerals. The following are not considered to be reverent dispositions that the Church requires: scattering cremated remains, dividing cremated remains and keeping cremated remains in the home.



All too often, families do not immediately select a final resting place for cremated remains. If you are among those who may still have your loved one's cremated remains at home, now is the time to ensure a safe, respectful final resting place. With Catholic Cemeteries of Long Island, your loved one will be in a place that reflects their Catholic beliefs and values, a place that reminds us that death is a step to a new and eternal life with the risen Lord.

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# Reclaiming Thanksgiving

By Thomas Salerno

Amid the frantic rush of our twenty-first century consumerist culture, Thanksgiving seems more and more like a forgotten holiday. Wedged between the secularized retail spending frenzies of Halloween and Christmas, the traditional role of Thanksgiving as a day set aside for gratitude, family, and friendship doesn't stand a chance. Black Friday sales and shopping sprees largely overshadow the day itself. And in the "always online" life of the internet age, Cyber Monday has risen to prominence, only to be eclipsed by an entire "Cyber Week" of online shopping promotions. The traditional gratitude and generosity of Thanksgiving have been swallowed up by the ravenous beast of "Thanksgetting."

I write this not to be some kind of curmudgeon, but to encourage an examination of conscience. In what ways am I cooperating with the all-pervasive ritual of extravagant consumerism? All too often, instead of giving thanks for what I already have, I eagerly set my eyes on the next gadget, toy, or "must-have." The siren call of "Buy now! Limited time offer! Exclusive deal!" has as much effect on me as anyone else. My painful credit card bill tells the tale.

But that's enough brooding on the problem. How do we solve this? How do we reclaim Thanksgiving from the jaws of "Thanksgetting"? Opting out of the rush of Black Friday sales is a start. But, as they say, nature abhors a vacuum. We need to replace bad habits with healthy and virtuous alternatives. Here are three simple practices we can all try this year:

Devote time for family prayer of gratitude. Thanksgiving should be a day of prayer. Praising God for all the blessings of the past year should be uppermost in our minds. Many parishes offer a morning Mass on Thanksgiving. Participating in the sacred liturgy, which Pope St. John Paul II called "the source and summit of the whole Christian life" can be a wonderful way to sanctify the Thanksgiving holiday. After all, the word Eucharist means "thanksgiving." Even if you cannot make it to Mass, you could organize a special family prayer time before the customary Thanksgiving meal (and before the inevitable televised football games). You could pray the Holy Rosary together or do some other sacred devotion such as the Litany of Thanksgiving. Remember the words of St. Paul: "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." (1 Thess. 5:18)

Give back to your parish community. Catholic parishes are always in need of a few extra pairs of helping hands to support their charitable work, especially around the holiday season, when the needs of the poor and disadvantaged become more acute. Does your parish run a soup kitchen or a food pantry? Perhaps you could find a way to get involved, donating your time and talents as a tangible way to thank God for your own prosperity. Remember Christ's famous admonition; "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.” (Matt. 25:40) Perhaps your parish is running a clothing drive? You could use this as an opportunity to empty your closets as an act of prayer and gratitude to God.

Make a small sacrifice and act of kindness for someone in your life. Little acts of generosity and love can have a big impact, especially during the holidays when so many people in our society are lonely and demoralized. This practice could take many forms. Find something that fits your life circumstances and family situation. Perhaps you could spend quality time with an elderly neighbor who lives alone. Or, maybe you’re able to offer an acquaintance who doesn’t drive a ride to church or to work. Something as simple as a sincere word of kindness or even a smile to a coworker who is cranky or gets on your nerves could be a transformational moment of grace. There doesn’t even need to be a reciprocal reason for sending out a card or handwritten note. You could just use the season of gratitude as an opportunity to tell someone “I love you, and I’m glad you’re a part of my life.”

I’m sure you could think of many more ways to reclaim Thanksgiving for Christ. As the year draws to its close, let’s push back against the cult of consumerism with an attitude of gratitude.

*Thomas Salerno is an author, freelance essayist, podcaster, and museum educator from Long Island.*



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# Cling to the Andrew Spotlight

By Matthew Chicavich

Mark's Gospel tells us that Andrew was one of the first disciples Jesus called. He was with his brother, Simon Peter fishing when Jesus beckoned him. Andrew's response was simple and bold: "They abandoned their nets and followed him" (Mk 1:18). Matthew's account is similar. Jesus invites the brothers to follow Him and become "fishers of men" (Mt. 4:19). Matthew's account has an additional phrase that is worth considering: "at once" (Mt 4:20). Their response was immediate.

In the Gospel of John, more details emerge about Andrew. He had a previous encounter with Jesus prior to the one at the shore with his brother, Simon Peter. Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist and was present when the Baptist identified Jesus as "the Lamb of God" (John 1:36). Andrew and another disciple were motivated by their teacher's words and actively trailed after Jesus as he passed by. Jesus notices Andrew and his unidentified friend and asks this deep question: "What are you looking for?" (John 1:38).

They respond with their own question: "Rabbi...where are you staying" (John 1:38). Similar to Mark and Matthew's account, Jesus invites: "Come, and you will see" (John 1:39). The two accepted his invitation and stayed with Jesus that day. Next, we read in John's Gospel that Andrew went first to his brother, Simon Peter, to witness that "we have found the Messiah" (John 1:41). The short time they spent with Jesus had convinced Andrew that Jesus was the Son of God.

If nothing else, we can extrapolate from the first chapters of Mark, Matthew, and John that Andrew was one of, if not the first Apostle to follow Jesus. Perhaps "follow" does not properly emphasize the depth of Andrew's commitment. One could claim that Andrew was the first Apostle to give up everything because he believed Jesus was the fulfillment of Sacred Scripture as the promised Messiah. In addition to characterizing Andrew as one of the first Apostles from his inclusion in the first pages of Matthew, Mark, and John, we can similarly point to his exclusion from the "inner circle" of the Apostles.

Although Andrew was one of the first to accept Jesus' invitation to follow him, he was not invited to witness several significant manifestations of Jesus' divinity. Only Peter, James, and John were invited to witness the Transfiguration in Matthew 17 and Mark 9 and the raising of the synagogue official's daughter from the dead in Mark 5. Andrew was not invited to witness Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Why was Andrew left out? What can we learn from Andrew's initial prominent role in Christ's calling of the Apostles without further specific mention thereafter?



One answer could be the lesson of humility. In *Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of Saint Therese of Lisieux*, she writes of how Jesus revealed to her the mystery of His garden: “He willed to create great souls comparable to Lilies and roses, but He has created smaller ones and these must be content to be daisies or violets destined to give joy to God’s glances when He looks down at his feet. Perfection consists in doing His will, in being what He wills us to be” (14). Maybe Andrew was specifically called by God to be out of the spotlight. Perhaps that is what Jesus explained to Andrew during the precious moments he first spent with Jesus. I am reminded of the words of the Father to the Older Son in the Parable of the Prodigal Son: “You are here with me always; everything I have is yours” (Luke 15:31).

Another lesson we can extract from Andrew’s story is the gift of faith. We can imagine Jesus saying, “Andrew, I have called you first. You have been given the gift of deep faith.” The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines faith as “the theological virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that he has said and revealed to us” (CCC 1814). The Catechism continues to unpack our understanding of faith by quoting the Second Vatican Council document, *Dei Verbum*, that by faith, “man freely commits his entire self to God” (DV 5).

St. Therese also ponders this great question. Why does the Lord see fit to give the great saints no obstacle to faith in Him and others souls struggle to believe? Perhaps it is these obstacles that bring us to a deeper faith. Although Andrew’s brother, Peter was part of the inner circle, he had a very arduous journey to faith, full of obstacles. We can imagine Peter’s brother, Andrew, being by his side throughout, reminding Peter, “We have found the Messiah”. As we celebrate the Feast of St. Andrew on November 30th, let us ask him to help us deepen our own faith in Jesus and our humble devotion in following after him with our entire lives, whether we are in or out of the spotlight.”

*Matthew Chicavich teaches religion and physics at a Catholic high school on Long Island where he lives with his wife and four children. He has a masters degree in theology and a bachelor's degree in physics.*



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# The First Millennial Saint

By Louis Cicalese

*"We are all born originals, but many of us die as photocopies."  
-Blessed Carlo Acutis*

Soon to be Saint Carlo Acutis is a refreshing sign of contradiction in our modern world. Many of us are often enslaved by scrolling social media, mindlessly buying more possessions online, or caught in the trap of comparison to others. Blessed Carlo was a relatively normal teenager, attended a Jesuit high school in Milan, but understood that to be holy was to focus on God and not oneself.

Carlo collected Pokemon, played Playstation, enjoyed soccer, loved animals (he had four dogs and two cats!) and was a skilled computer programmer even as a young teen. He was a regular kid with regular interests. Carlo was not a monk or a mystic or a martyr, but he is indeed a saint, who radiated holiness in the quotidian, boring, and banal moments that compose most of our lives. He is appropriately entombed in Assisi wearing jeans and Nike sneakers.

Born in 1991 to a wealthy and nominally Catholic Italian family living in London, Carlo would be baptized into the Catholic faith not out of the burning and pious desire of his parents, but out of tradition. Thank God for tradition! Eventually Carlo and his family moved back to Italy and settled in Milan. The future saint's mother describes that after Carlo received his first Holy Communion he was given an "unexplained devotion."

Young Carlo became a daily communicant, prayed the Rosary often, spoke to and greeted everyone he met with great dignity, and was unashamed about loving Jesus. His simple holiness would bring his mother, Antonia, back to attending Mass and embracing the sacraments. Carlo's humble presence and conversations with Rajesh Mohur, a Hindu man his parents employed in their house, would lead to Mr. Mohur's decision to be baptized into the Catholic Church.

Mr. Mohur's friend, Seeven Kisten would similarly choose to be received into the Catholic Church after meeting and speaking with Blessed Carlo. Even Mr. Mohur's mother, while visiting from Mauritius and after attending Mass with Carlo and her son, asked to be baptized as well.

One of the things people might know already about Blessed Carlo was his skill and comfort with computer programming and the internet. Indeed, he may very well be officially declared the patron saint of the internet when he is canonized in the Jubilee year of 2025. Carlo created a website before his death from leukemia in 2006 that chronicled all the Eucharistic miracles he could find and organized them in one place online.

Carlo knew what we should all embrace: the internet is mission territory! Let us engage online with civility, order, and respect and attempt to imitate Blessed Carlo's digital sanctity in a virtual landscape is often lacking the presence of God.

I have a deep devotion to Carlo Acutis as a dad, a teacher, and a 21st century Catholic. I pray through his intercession that my daughters understand it's cool to be Catholic and that prayer and sacraments refresh our souls. I pray through his intercession that my own students (attending a Jesuit high school as did Carlo), seek God in all things and are unashamed of their faith and willing to not fit into the prevailing culture of wealth acquisition, ease, and immodesty. Lastly, I pray through his intercession that the internet becomes a way to evangelize rather than corrupt the billions of people that use it everyday.

Blessed Carlo Acutis, Pray for Us!

*Louis Cicalese is a theology teacher at Regis High School in Manhattan and a parishioner of Curé of Ars in Merrick, where he lives with his wife and two daughters.*



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