

# Seton



# MAGAZINE

Under the Magisterium of the Catholic Church

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Every day at Seton, gathered before the altar at our noon Angelus, we offer prayers for our families and friends. We encourage you also to pray for other homeschooling families, especially those who may be suffering from illness, unemployment, or other crosses.

We are all united in the Communion of Saints, and God allows us through our prayers to uphold, support, and console other members of His Church. Let us, then, remember to pray for one another as we all walk the path of homeschooling, so that we may all join together in prayer, one day, in Heaven.





# The Presentation of the Blessed Virgin

BY DR. MARY KAY CLARK

On November 21, the Church celebrates the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. St. Anne and St. Joachim presented their long-awaited child to the holy Temple in Jerusalem. Their young daughter was a special gift, a miraculous gift from God, as St. Anne was well beyond her years to conceive a child. Their neighbors were well aware of the disappointment of Anne and Joachim that they did not have any children. According to some writings, the priests in the Temple suspected that Joachim might not have been as holy as he should be, and that the lack of conceiving a child could be a punishment from God.

The evidence that Mary was a special gift from God, however, was obvious to many, but especially to Anne and Joachim. Most obvious was that Mary never committed any sin whatsoever. Not in the slightest degree did she ever offend God.

Mary was the perfect example of a person born without Original Sin, the one so favored that not the slightest imperfection ever was observed. In fact, it was this incredible human perfection that Anne and Joachim recognized that made them realize they needed to give up Mary at a very young age.

While Mary lived for only a few years in her parents' home, her innate wisdom and perfection could not be hidden from the other family members and neighborhood community. It was Anne's and Joachim's realization that she needed to be protected from the curiosity of others, that made them decide to take Mary to the private, protective, hidden and holy life of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem.

All Catholic parents are aware of the total innocence of their newly born children, especially after Baptism. The

total trust in their parents of the very young, their total belief that they will be protected from harm by their parents, and their unspoken and unexpressed love for their parents are remarkable. Parents recognize this gift of innocence, and would like to keep it always so.

Interaction with the world, and the temptations of the flesh and the devil, bring a sense to the parents of sadness and of anxiety regarding the changes in their children as they meet the outside world. Parents realize they cannot, and should not, shelter their children in a "temple" of any kind, but rather they need to provide in the home a temple of protection as well as a temple of learning how to deal with the temptations of the world.

## *Temple of the Home*

The "temple" that parents need to provide for their innocent children is a Catholic home to protect them, and a Catholic education shaped by the graces God has given His holy Church as well as the graces given to parents through the Sacrament of Matrimony. By incorporating the truths of God and His Holy Church into the various textbooks, into every subject, parents can follow in the steps of St. Anne and St. Joachim.

The temple of the home certainly can be a goal for homeschooling parents. Surely with the help of the Immaculate Virgin Mary, Catholic parents can rely on their presentation of God's truths to be believed, accepted, and followed by their children.



Dr. Mary Kay Clark has been the Director of Seton Home Study School for more than 30 years. She writes columns for the *Seton Magazine* and is the author of *Catholic Homeschooling: A Handbook for Parents*.



# your Questions ANSWERED

BY DR. MARY KAY CLARK

## **My children resist their cleaning chores! What do you suggest?**

I had all boys, and they were not interested in cleaning the house. I would schedule cleaning or other chores between classes. This gave them activity between their lessons which made them more ready to settle down for the next schooling subject. Studies in schools have shown that children who were given activity between classes were more alert and performed better and more quickly during their academic classes. When our homeschooling classes were done at the end of the day, they had free time to go outside and ride their bikes or play football, or do whatever activities were of interest.

## **My parents were Catholic and they sent me to Catholic schools. What I am teaching my children seems so much more than I ever learned. Why is that?**

One problem that many parents had in the past, and perhaps some have today, is that they believed if they sent their children to a Catholic school, they would learn all they needed to know. Both in the past and in the present, many mothers have worked outside the home, assuming their children were being taught the Faith in the local Catholic school. The Catholic Faith, however, is not something just to be taught in textbooks. It is to be lived. With busy parents, sometimes there is little discussion of the Faith, and perhaps even little practice of the Faith, except for Sunday Mass. A particularly concerning fact many people do not know is that most Catholic schools accept public funding for non-religious textbooks. This means that there may be many instances in which Catholic Faith and facts are not even being taught, let alone lived.

We all need to pray for our families, for our children, for the Church, and for our country. Catholic homeschooling families

need to do their best to attend daily Mass, or to say the daily Mass along with the priest on EWTN, to say the daily Rosary, to say morning and night prayers, to say prayers before meals, to go to Confession at least once a month, to attend novenas at local churches, and to make the practice of the Faith a daily habit. We should include in our prayers those Catholics who need to come back to the Church, and those in many countries who have no knowledge of the Faith, as well as those who are suffering for their Faith in the Middle East.

## **My aunt is a school teacher and she is convinced that no parent can adequately teach her own children.**

Keep in mind that the main reason many of us homeschool is not because we think we are better teachers, but rather because we think that learning Catholic truths in the home is better than attending a school. Furthermore, we know that an important function of homeschooling is to build families and familial relationships.

However, individualized instruction by parents has turned out to be the best type of academic instruction. We see that at Seton all the time when we review the standardized tests of our students who vastly outperform public school students. According to the National Home Education Research Institute, “home-educated [students] typically score 15 to 30 percentile points above public-school students on standardized academic achievement tests.” This advantage carries on to high school, where for 2013 Seton students scored 244 points above the national average on the SAT test.

Any classroom teacher will admit that there is nothing better than individualized instruction. Schooling by parents is the most individualized. Any professional teacher will agree that having all the children in a classroom proceed at the

same rate with the same instruction is not the best method. Why do you think public schools are always coming up with new plans to raise achievement? The constant next great plans for public schools show that the “factory model” of large classrooms and little individuality is fundamentally flawed.

Seton parents are encouraged to adjust the program, to adjust the lesson plans, subject by subject, to meet the learning ability of the individual child. While doing this, however, it is important never to lose sight of the fact that homeschooling parents are teaching their own Catholic values, which leads to a special relationship between parents and children as well as a special relationship among the children, who help each other in the learning process.

## **How can I incorporate “the good, the true, and the beautiful” into our daily homeschooling?**

While “the good, the true, and the beautiful” seem to have disappeared from the general American culture, here at Seton we try to preserve these values in our Catholic textbooks. Jesus is All Good and He taught All Truth! Once we recognize the goodness of God, accept the Truths taught by Jesus, and then live by these truths as handed down through Christ’s Church, the result will be a life we can easily call beautiful!

Our particular responsibility as parents is to make sure that our lives give evidence of “the good, the true, and the beautiful” through living the Christian life. Sadly, we see the disappearance of the Ten Commandments from government buildings, references to God being removed from public monuments, prevention of public witness by military chaplains, and many other anti-religious practices becoming more widespread. These anti-Christian activities and regulations

convince us of the importance of not allowing secular culture to influence our children, and of teaching clearly and strongly our Catholic Faith and values.

Practical suggestions include incorporating into your family traditions a celebration of the liturgical year and feasts of the liturgical calendar; making sure every day involves explicit practice of the faith with prayer, conversation about the faith, and development of the virtues; frequent reception of the sacraments; learning and including as much as you can about the vast historical contributions of the Catholic Church to the arts, which display so much of everything that is good, true, and beautiful; and developing a healthy appreciation for the natural world, which has always reflected the beauty and goodness of the Creator.

**I don't like to get on the phone and call a counselor. I get distracted away from watching the little ones. How can you help me?**

One thing some of us moms have learned is to do some things either later in the evening or early in the morning when the children are in bed. Many of us take this time for prayer or doing a special project. However, it may be a good time to send an email to a counselor to ask your question or talk about your situation.

Don't forget to check the Seton Message Board. Moms write in questions and answers, and you may find another mother who discovered an answer for the same issue you have.

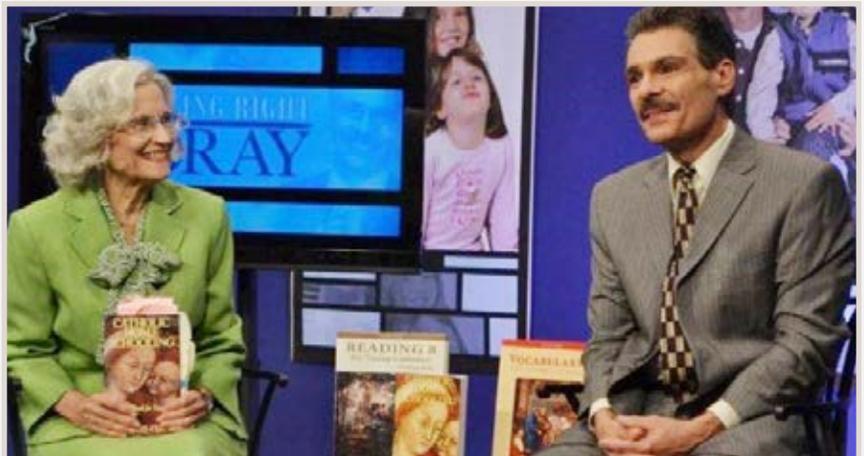
I encourage you to take some time to review the whole Seton website. It might take you several early sessions to get through it all, but there may be sections you aren't familiar with, such as the tutorial videos, which may be of help to you or to some of your children. Don't overlook the diagram videos which have been popular with parents who never had diagramming when they were in school.

## *Interviews Coming Soon!*



Dr. Clark and John Clark discuss Catholic education and homeschooling with Johnnette Benkovic, host of the popular 'Women of Grace' series.

*Visit [www.womenofgrace.com](http://www.womenofgrace.com) for airing schedule.*



Dr. Clark and Dr. Ray Guarendi discuss Catholic education and homeschooling. *Visit [www.ewtn.com](http://www.ewtn.com) for airing schedule.*

*Stay tuned for more information!*

# Head First

## Our Surprising Homeschool Journey!

BY MAUREEN STOWELL

We are the last people that you would have thought would ever homeschool. My husband, Bruce, was a school board member for several years and president for the last of those years.

After trying out multiple career areas, I landed in a special education teaching assistant position and felt like I had come home. I loved those kids, crazy as it sounds, and the middle-school, behaviorally challenged students were actually my favorites.

We ourselves have 5 children, the three oldest of whom are public school success stories, long since grown, out of the house, and now raising their own children (well, the two oldest, anyway). Our two youngest, Haylee (12) and Molly (10) remain at home and are now on this surprising homeschool journey we've been called to take.

### Forging Ahead

In the beginning, we were very lucky to have an incredible preschool for our daughters, so lucky, in fact, that both of them ended up extremely ahead of other children their same age. We entered Haylee in Kindergarten, where she did very well but academically was very far ahead of the game. Her strengths lay in Language Arts, though she also excels in math, science and history. She attended public school through the end of 2nd grade.

Molly had delightful preschool teachers, who believed that if she got a concept she should move on, so she ended up starting kindergarten being able to add, subtract, multiply, do fractions, etc. She also had and still has the strongest faith in and knowledge of God that I have ever seen in a child, a faith about which she's never been quiet.

So with all apparently going so well, what could possibly go wrong? Well, the combination of Haylee's severe allergies, anti-Catholic bullying at school, recent run-ins with poor-quality teachers, and the fact that our two daughters were academically very advanced caused us to consider alternatives.

In addition to the academic issues, Haylee ended up being picked to attend a school for acting in Washington, DC. She had been dancing since she was not even 2 and had started to compete, and Molly had recently joined her.

What with one thing and another, homeschooling ended up being our best option. Our family was all in New York, but we needed to move to the DC area for the girls' activities. We needed to eliminate some negative influences that were cropping up in the public schools. We needed to keep our lives Catholic, and we also needed to ensure that our daughters would be able to progress at their own rates academically. Homeschooling would take care of all that.

### Head First

That first year I jumped in head first with curriculum and virtually no support. It was hard but thanks to good friends, some of whom were teachers, we did very well and our children advanced incredibly.

In our search for end of the year testing, we discovered Seton. Hurray! It was an amazing collection of everything we needed, with full support and lesson plans. We had found what we had been searching for. Our daughters were covered under a real school, where they could learn at home at their own rate and then graduate, again, from a real school. The wonderful support of the



counselors, the curriculum, and having it all planned out for us removed the stress from me, even while allowing me to retain flexibility for tailoring to the needs of each of my daughters. Most importantly, Seton's curriculum "kept it Catholic," which meant we could too.

Today, we are homeschooling in Clarksville, Tennessee. Haylee and Molly both love Seton's material and are learning amazing things, all in the Catholic tradition. We have time for all of the doctors' appointments that we have, and we just turn them into field trips.

Actually, we pretty much turn everything and every place we go into a field trip, even dance competition trips. We love visiting cathedrals and shrines. We often check out historical places, which Virginia, New York and Tennessee all have in great abundance. We find historical sites or science museums, art museums, etc. when we are away on trips for dance. Even amusement parks offer a multitude of science and math lessons these days, and many also have historical sections.

There are many days during the school year when we just take a day off for exploring the parks in the area or the library. Both girls enjoy baking and, more importantly, both regularly volunteer help to members of the community in need. Seton gives us tons of family time, and allows time for the girls' activities. Seton being fully Catholic helps us to keep our family Catholic and to learn more about our Lord, our faith and our Church every day.

## A Day in the Life

One of the important things Seton has made possible is time for the girls to make crafts, which they sell to help fund their dance lessons and competition fees. This has taught the girls important financial and life lessons, as they learn about the costs of things and managing money, while also realizing the expense and sacrifice that their mom and dad undergo so that they can continue to expand their talents.

Our typical school day at home begins

with daily preparations and breakfast; then we go up to the classroom. Nothing else happens in the classroom until we've said morning prayers, made the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag, and done some singing, usually one Catholic song, one patriotic and one "fun". Right now, we are using songs to memorize the books of the Bible. We've found that as often as not, facts, dates, names, and lists are memorized more easily if they are put to music.

After these initial activities, we dig in to the academics, and it's here that I see the huge benefit to Seton. First, Seton keeps it Catholic. Second, if either of the girls has already mastered the material in any subject, she simply takes the test. This ensures that Haylee and Molly are each moving at their own pace, not going back over things they already know but moving forward appropriately. They don't have a chance to become bored.

Molly is in 5th grade but has progressed through 7th grade Math. Haylee finished 6th grade last year while doing 7th grade Language Arts and has gone directly to 8th grade. Our normal school day usually ends by lunch time or shortly after. Then there is outside time, baking time, television programming that ties in with what we are learning, or just quiet time until the girls go to dance and I go to work.

Thinking over these past few years with Seton, I am so glad we discovered homeschooling and so glad we discovered Seton. I hear a lot of parents say that Seton is very hard to keep up with, but I disagree.

I think if you look at Seton as a whole, allow the counselors to help you, and realize that the lesson plans are a guide instead of being set in stone, you and your children will do very well. If your child has mastered something, move on; if he or she hasn't, then allow more time. My girls have tested out of a significant amount of the material.

I guess what I mean is that I think we can all take time to relax and have a little fun. After all, family togetherness is one of the best things about homeschooling with Seton.





# A Wedding Toast

Marriage, the only  
Sacramentalized Relationship

This year, Lisa and I attended two weddings. Two of my nieces kicked off the Clark wedding cycle that—considering the gaggle of nieces and nephews—is likely to last for many years to come. I'm glad I attended. They were joyful reminders that marriage is good. Not that I needed a reminder. Lisa and I have a wonderful and happy marriage. But in so many ways in our society, marriage seems to be growing decreasingly joyful. That's a shame. But maybe it's also an opportunity for Catholics to re-examine the good of Matrimony. Maybe it's time to ponder the good of Christian marriage, and offer it a toast.

We should appreciate Christian marriage for many reasons, but perhaps the most obvious one is that God views marriage as a great good. Think for a moment about six of the sacraments: Baptism, Communion, Confirmation, Holy Orders, Anointing of the Sick, and Penance. Each of these six sacraments pertains directly to our relationship with God. And then you have Matrimony. At first, it might seem out of place, yet there it is. Jesus was not required to raise marriage to this level, yet He did. Marriage could have been an institution without being a sacrament, but Jesus made it a sacrament.

Is that a big deal? That is the biggest of big deals. Marriage is the only human relationship that is, or will ever be, sacramentalized. The grace that flows from the sacrament is a powerful assistance to husbands and wives.

It's uniqueness notwithstanding, Matrimony shares a striking similarity with the other sacraments. As much as marriage involves the relationship of man and wife, it

is—like the other sacraments—definitively intended to deepen our relationship with God. More to the point, marriage is about God. It is when people forget this fact that marriages often crumble. As Pope Francis wrote in *Evangelii Gaudium*, “Marriage now tends to be viewed as a form of mere emotional satisfaction that can be constructed in any way or modified at will”(EG, 66). As Pope Francis suggests, married love, meant to be contracted on Earth as it is in Heaven, seems to have an ever-expanding list of contingencies. But love has no disclaimer.

Marriage must be lived, not according to our own wills, but according to the will of God. That is why a man cannot rationally expect his marriage to be stronger than his faith. They are inseparable realities. In particular instances, it's often impossible to know what causes a marriage to break down. But we can conclude that, in general, marriages are often lacking what Pope St. John Paul II called the “gift of self.”

As Pope St. John Paul II put it, in his *Letter to Families*:

*“By its very nature, the gift of the person must be lasting and irrevocable. The indissolubility of marriage flows in the first place from the very essence of that gift: the gift of one person to another person. This reciprocal giving of self reveals the spousal nature of love. In their marital consent, the bride and groom call each other by name: “I... take you... as my wife (as my husband) and I promise to be true to you... for all the days of my life..”*

Marriage is about the giving of self, but this giving goes beyond the beloved; the gift of self is ultimately a gift to God. Yes,

marriage is about the giving of self, but that serves as a reminder that all the sacraments are about the giving of self. That necessary ingredient of irrevocable self-giving is a reminder of the majesty of marriage.

The critics of Christian marriage argue that such permanence is too much to ask, but we know that the giving of self in marriage is designed by God to make us happy. We believe that while living for oneself is an unpleasant pursuit, love is the most fulfilling imitation of our Creator.

None of this is meant to suggest that marriage is always easy; for many people, marriage is extremely trying, to say the least. God confers grace in marriage, but men and women can—and often do—refuse to cooperate with that grace. Even in the best of marriages, we need grace to see us through. Lisa and I have been blessed with a happy marriage, full of children's laughter.

I sometimes feel guilty that I married Lisa. I feel like I won a marriage lottery and opted for the lifetime payout option. But that doesn't mean it's always easy. Like every marriage, ours experienced difficulties that needed to be overcome. We are just blessed that these difficulties made us closer. With the sacramental grace of God, may it be so for brides and grooms everywhere.

Read John Clark's weekly blog at  
[setonmagazine.com/johnclark](http://setonmagazine.com/johnclark)

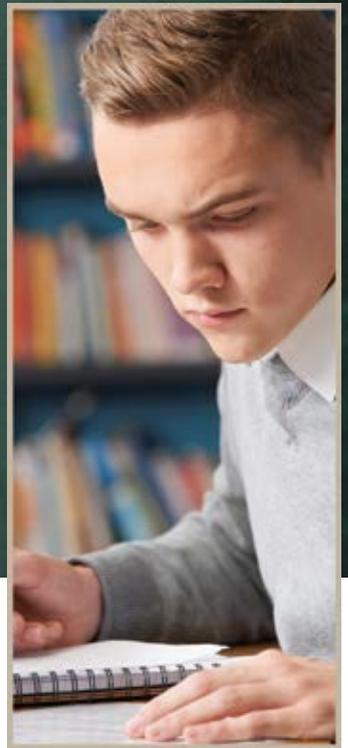


**John Clark**, a Christendom College graduate, holds a degree in Political Science and Economics. He is a popular writer and speaker at family and homeschooling conferences.

HOW TO GET AN

# ELITE PREP SCHOOL EDUCATION

on a  
Homeschooling  
Budget



**M**aster educator, John Taylor Gatto, abandoned the New York City government school system in the early 1990s stating that he was no longer willing to “hurt children.” He has devoted his life since then to articulating a different vision of education that turns children into lifetime learners.

Interestingly, Gatto examined the curricula taught in our nation’s most prestigious prep schools, where the wealthy and powerful groom their children to assume positions of leadership, and identified fourteen themes that they hold in common. As I reviewed these themes, it struck me that Catholic homeschoolers are in a unique position to inculcate these characteristics into our own school day.

Our nation – indeed our world – desperately needs leaders committed to Catholic values, and these future leaders need to be thoroughly prepared. Catholic home education can be the equivalent of an expensive prep school education, at a tiny fraction of the price. Let’s make the most of it.

## *The First Theme*

Taylor’s first theme is that students must develop a “theory of human nature as embodied in history, philosophy, theology, literature and law.” If graduates will be assuming positions of influence, they must understand what provokes others to act the way they do, and how they can be motivated to think and act differently. This theme should be natural for Catholic homeschooling families who base their theory of human nature on the teachings of Holy Mother Church.

To Catholics, human beings are creatures made in the image and likeness of God, who exist to know, love and serve God and one another in this world and to be happy with Him in the next. This philosophy will help students develop a personal code of conduct, but also give them a firm grasp of the motivations and actions of others.

Our goal must be to deepen our students’ understanding of the Christian view of humanity through the agencies that Mr. Gatto mentions: history, philosophy, theology, literature and law. While our religion classes (theology) must inculcate virtuous habits and pious practices, they must also awaken our students’ interest in how God revealed Himself and His Divine Plan, first to His Chosen People, the Israelites, and then through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Accurate history allows students to understand how mankind’s cooperation, or lack of cooperation, with God’s laws affects nations and peoples. Philosophy deals with the problems humanity faces as it struggles to grasp the reality of existence, reason, and knowledge.

An example of this theme in action is found when our students study a document like the Declaration of Independence. In the very first paragraph, Jefferson states that the occupants of the colonies are entitled to a

“separate and equal station” by the “Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God,” and claims that their fundamental rights are “inalienable” because they receive them, not from a benign or even benevolent government, but directly from their Creator.

Carefully considered, this document is worthy of study for more than its historical or legal significance; it reveals essential aspects of the human condition.

Great fiction will accomplish the same purpose. By reading great works that have stood the test of time, students gain insight into what motivates human thoughts and actions. Sometimes these are virtues like courage, loyalty, honesty, as well as faith in God and charity towards neighbor. Other times, human actions can be attributed to avarice, concupiscence, materialism, and disordered ambition. Hesitation or lack of action can be the result of indolence or despair.

These virtues and vices, and many more, are the heart of great story telling.

The next time your students crab about a book analysis, a history quiz, or memorizing the catechism, remind them that they are being prepared for greatness.

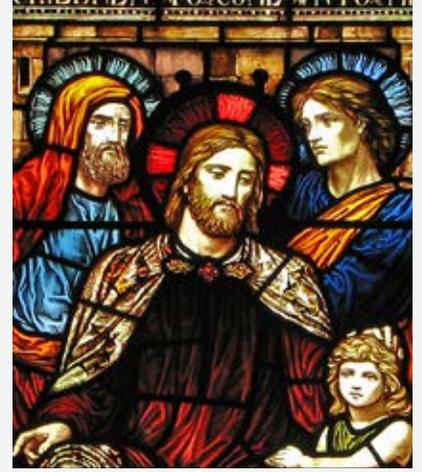


**Ginny Seuffert** has been a leading writer and speaker about homeschooling and family management for more than two decades. She has given hundreds of talks at conferences and has written scores of articles on everything from discipline to home management.

This is the first in a 14-part series, available online at  
[www.setonmagazine.com/elite-prep](http://www.setonmagazine.com/elite-prep)



# Celebrating Advent in a World that Can't Wait for Christmas



## Focusing on Christ

While the rest of the world chases tinsel, rushing from one 'winter' party to another, as Catholics, our Advent activities place Christ firmly front and center. Many people pray the St. Andrew Novena, which is a short but powerful meditation on the actuality of Christ's birth, the fact and glory of Christ being born to us at a very real time and place.

Prayed 15 times a day in conjunction with a series of Glory Be's from the feast of St. Andrew through Christmas Eve, this novena is a gentle way of keeping Christ at the center of our thoughts during Advent.

Some families craft a Jesse tree, a special Advent tree that is decorated a little at a time each day beginning December 1st and ending on Christmas Eve. Every new day, the Jesse tree decorations focus on a different aspect of man's history and Christ's genealogy, right up to the final few days when they shift to representations of Christ's various titles fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies.

Combined with special prayers and Scripture readings, a Jesse tree is the perfect way to journey toward Christmas.

Before any important event in human life, there is generally a period of preparation. Before First Communion, before Confirmation, before Marriage, we prepare ourselves through study and works. Before going on a vacation, we prepare and plan for weeks or months.

Even before the arrival of guests, we prepare by cleaning and straightening our homes. Such preparations move our thoughts and our souls toward the things we anticipate. It would make sense, then, that before such an awesome mystery as the Birth of Our Lord, we need time for quiet contemplation.

In a poetic meditation on the meaning of Advent, the mystical 20th-century writer Caryl Houselander contemplated this need for quiet preparation before Christmas. She described Advent as "*the season of the seed. . .the season of the secret, the secret of the growth of Christ, of Divine Love growing in silence.*"

As Catholics, we recognize that Advent is a time when our joy is muted; we remember a pre-Christian era, a time when Christianity was but Mary's seed, hidden deep in her womb. Advent recalls to us our deep need to work within ourselves, to prepare anew the soil of our souls, so that at Christmas, Christ's light and love may burst to full life in our hearts and homes.

Around the world, many of the best Advent traditions carry forward the idea of the hidden seed, a hidden seed of faith and charity that we nurture quietly in preparation for our Lord's arrival. Some of our readers shared with us their favorite Advent activities, and we share them with you in the hopes that this year's Advent will be inspired and fruitful for you and your family.

*For other Advent ideas, see page 15.*



Christine Smitha holds a B.A. in English and Literature from Christendom College. She has taught Literature for nine years, and enjoys dabbling in journalism when she gets a chance. She is currently Seton Home Study School's Accreditation Manager.

*Thank you to everyone who shared their Advent traditions with us on Facebook. Your suggestions helped craft this article!*



## Hidden Acts of Kindness

In keeping with the quiet, humble nature of Our Lord's arrival among men, many Advent traditions focus on secret charitable actions and good works.

Laurie, one of Seton's homeschooling mothers, discusses the family tradition of placing straw in the manger to make a soft resting place for baby Jesus. "At the start of Advent," she says, "there is no straw. As good deeds are done, a construction paper strip is added, so by Christmas the manger is full." People may use real straw, yarn, feathers, or anything else that works, and when the manger is full on Christmas Eve, a figure of the Christ-child is laid amongst the soft strands provided by kindness and virtue.

Another Seton friend, Debbie, talks about her family's new tradition of making charity chains. She says, "Everyone has their own paper chain to make. Each day we all try to do at least one thing charitable and selfless for someone else. At the end of the day, we write on a strip of paper what we have done that day and attach it to the link from the previous day.

"On Christmas Eve, before Mass, we put our chains on the tree as our birthday gifts to Jesus." The more good deeds accomplished, the longer the chains that decorate the tree.

Following such traditions as these keeps virtue at the forefront of Christmas preparations and teaches children that what God values most are the quiet sacrifices we make for the good of others.



## Being Present

So much energy and effort are devoted to the getting and giving of presents that oftentimes, we forget the value of actually being present. Simply taking time out from the rush to be present to Christ and to each other might be the best Advent activity of all. Many families make a Holy Hour for the weeks of Advent, going to the stable, as it were, to await the birth of their King. Other families stay away from the stores during Advent, choosing instead to work together at home on crafting hand-worked gifts.

Some families take extra time away from work, school, and extracurriculars during Advent just to stay at home and be with one another.

Kelly C. tells of her family's peace-filled Advents, saying "We take the entire Advent season off and concentrate on celebrating the season as a family. Everyone participates. . . . We decided long ago to keep the emphasis on Christ at Christmas and this tradition has allowed us to keep the days separate. We light the Advent wreath at every dinner [served on special dinnerware only used between the 1st Sunday of Advent and Epiphany] and... spend a lot of the season making items to share with friends and family."

Such simplicity and quiet togetherness fosters the opening of hearts and ears to one another and to grace, so that the way of Christ into our souls is made more smooth and straight.



## Carrying the Light

For those among us who do not have the luxury of taking all of Advent away from work or school, who may be caring for the sick and dying this year, or who mark their days on a battlefield, Caryl Houselander provides a worthy perspective on living Advent in less than perfect circumstances. In her book, *The Reed of God*, she reminds us that,

*"Christ lays a great trust upon us. During this tender time of Advent we must carry Him in our hearts to wherever He wants to go, and there are many places to which He may never go unless we take Him to them.*

*"None of us knows when the loveliest hour of our life is striking. It may be when we take Christ for the first time to that grey office in the city where we work, to the wretched lodging of that poor man who is an outcast, to the nursery of that pampered child, to that battleship, airfield, or camp. . .*

*"Sometimes it may seem to us that there is no purpose in our lives, that going day after day for years to this office or that school or factory is nothing else but waste and weariness. But it may be that God has sent us there because but for us Christ would not be there. If our being there means that Christ is there, that alone makes it worthwhile."*

Perhaps our resolve this year should be that whatever else we may or may not be doing for Advent, we will become Christ's candles, lighting His way into the world around us. One candle is a relatively small and hidden thing, but when many are lit, the whole world glows. May God grant us all a blessed and holy Advent!"

# The Gift of a Visit

## *An Advent Meditation*

BY DR. MITCHELL KALPAKSIAN

In the ancient world, the Greek and Roman deities visited men in disguise, often appearing in the form of beggars or suppliants to see if mortals honored the sacred laws of hospitality. In Ovid's myth of Baucis and Philemon retold by Hawthorne in "The Miraculous Pitcher," two Greek gods travel through a village dressed as paupers to test the kindness of the people: Do they offer welcome only to the rich but none to the poor?

In his letter to the Hebrews, St. Paul also refers to the virtue of hospitality due to all visitors: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." The story of Advent is a similar but greater event in which a divine guest comes in humble appearance to a modest place and brings a great surprise and a precious gift.

The story of Christmas is the drama of surprising visits in the midst of ordinary life. An angel surprises Mary with an unexpected visit and speaks startling words, "Hail, full of grace." Mary surprises Elizabeth in an unannounced visit that makes Elizabeth exclaim, "And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"

The surprising visit of the angel to Mary and Mary's unexpected visit to Elizabeth causes yet another wonder. Amazed once, Elizabeth marvels a second time as she tells Mary, "For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy." Christmas, the miracle of the Incarnation, is the astonishing visit of God to man as He assumes flesh, comes as a baby, and dwells among men in the most unassuming way.

This historical occurrence is the greatest of all surprises. As St. Augustine said, nothing like this unprecedented event ever occurred in all of history: "Christ died



Image: © Dr. Mitchell Kalpakian, OP, O.S.A. (www.opos.org)

for us but once; He will die for us no more.” An unexpected visit renews life and lifts human existence out of the drabness of monotonous living. Because God desires man to enjoy an “abundant life,” He comes as the unexpected visitor that no one anticipated on this given day or time.

While the custom of spontaneous, unexpected visits has disappeared from much of modern life, it remains a traditional, old-world practice that expresses an act of charity, an expression of kindness, and a gracious social act. It is the most natural offer of good will not only during the Advent season but also for all times.

At one time, Sundays were normal occasions when friends and relatives spontaneously paid visits without calling to receive permission or waiting for invitations. To pay a visit honors a person’s importance, dignity, and goodness. It demonstrates that someone has found the time and effort to please and recognize others. It affirms the enjoyment of other people’s company, conversation, and presence as one of life’s most exquisite pleasures.

## The Lord of Surprises

Just as the angel’s visit lifted the heart of Mary and made her proclaim, “My soul doth magnify the Lord” and just as Mary’s visit lifted the heart of Elizabeth in joy because “the mother of my Lord should come to me,” a personal human visit is a special, thoughtful gift that brings a delicious taste of life’s sweetness and dispels sadness. It is a gift that God not only personally brings during Advent but also wishes for all seasons.

The Incarnation reveals that God is not only a mysterious spirit and a divine person but also a human being who comes as a guest and forms intimate relationships—a unified bond with His Holy Mother, with St. Joseph, with the beloved disciple St. John and all the disciples whom he called his “friends,” and with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. The Lord of surprises who pays unexpected visits is the God who seeks hearts to love where He can dwell.

This lost art of visiting needs to be recovered in the impersonal and dehumanized modern world that afflicts many people with loneliness. Many people spend more time before television screens and in front of computers than in interaction

and exchange with human beings. Just as no person can be fully human without a home and family, no one can live an abundant life without the many relationships and friends that visits cultivate among human beings. Homes should be places that welcome visitors, invite friends for hospitable occasions, and rejoice the human spirit.

Just as sleep and food nourish and renew the human body, the social occasions of visits refresh the heart and soul. If people stop welcoming guests or visiting one another in homes, they soon will stop visiting God in church and stop letting God become a guest they receive into their souls and lives.

As Christmas teaches, God comes as a visitor who wants to be welcomed into human lives and not told “There was no room for him in the inn.” God also wants man to visit Him in His Holy Church and experience His friendship and know His great love that comes in the Sacraments. A spontaneous visit reveals a personal touch, a beautiful courtesy, and an expression of charity. Christ often visited the home of Mary and Martha, and St. Paul was always visiting the communities of the early Christians, as his letters reveal.

Without the custom of visits, how can God, angels, and gifts from above enter human life? These visits establish human relationships and create lifelong bonds of affection that sensitize the heart. The incarnate God, first and foremost, chooses marriage and the home as the setting of His revelation. He comes during the betrothal of Mary and Joseph.

He comes in the form of a child to greet the world and identify the home and family as the natural place for God’s first appearance in the flesh—an ideal atmosphere for the formation of the indissoluble bonds of intimate love among family members that prepare the soul for union with God in his visits.

During this Advent season, let us prepare our hearts and our homes for the coming of the Christ Child, and also for the coming of friends and family—through whom we often receive the graces which God desires to bestow upon us.



The son of Armenian immigrants, Dr. Kalpakian has taught at Simpson College, Christendom College and Wyoming Catholic College. He has authored several books and written for many Catholic publications.

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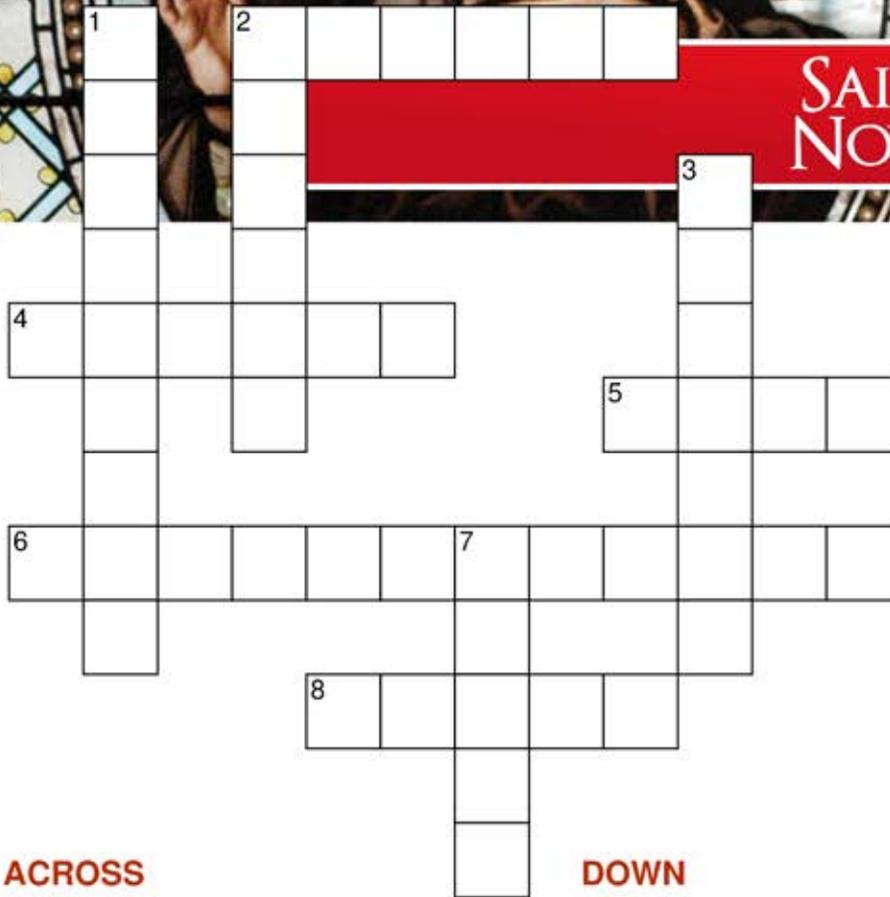


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**CATHOLIC  
CROSSWORD**

**SAINTS FOR  
NOVEMBER**



**ACROSS**

**DOWN**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>2 This Apostle was the brother of St. Peter.</p> <p>4 All ___ Day is November 1st.</p> <p>5 The feast of Christ the ___ is celebrated at the end of the liturgical year.</p> <p>6 The feast that commemorates St. Joachim and St. Anne taking the Blessed Virgin to the Temple is known as the ___ of Mary.</p> <p>8 All ___ Day is November 2nd.</p> | <p>1 In November, Catholics pray in a special way for the souls in ___.</p> <p>2 ___ is the liturgical season when Catholics prepare for Christmas.</p> <p>3 She is the patron saint of musicians.</p> <p>7 St. Martin of ___ cut his cloak in two and gave one half to a beggar; later, Christ appeared to St. Martin in a dream and said he had given his cloak to Him.</p> |
|--|---|

# Enter the Mystery of Advent

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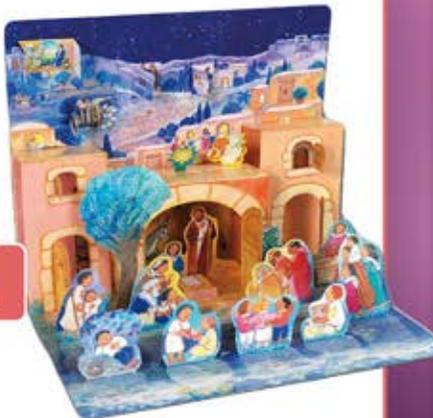
**Madeline** | I won First Place for my knitted Curly Swirly scarf. Homeschooling gives me time for knitting lessons with my Nana.



**Elena** | August 2-3, 2014, I competed in the State FITA archery competition. I won 1st place in the freestyle limited Recurve, cub division.

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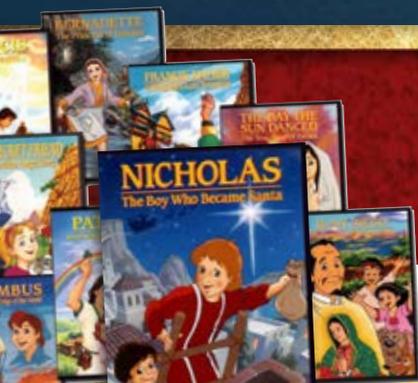
## PAPAL WISDOM



How do we keep our faith as a family? Do we keep it for ourselves, in our families, as a personal treasure like a bank account, or are we able to share it by our witness, by our acceptance of others, by our openness? We all know that families, especially young families, are often “racing” from one place to another, with lots to do. But did you ever think that this “racing” could also be the race of faith? Christian families are missionary families.

*Pope Francis, Homily of Mass for Day of the Family, Oct 27, 2013*

Pope Francis Image Credit: Catholic Church (England and Wales)



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