

All Saints' Episcopal Church
P. O. Box 1923
Whitefish, MT 59937

Advent – Christmas
2011

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Four inches of snow on the ground at my house makes writing an Advent - Christmas letter seem more real. It feels like only yesterday when I was alerting the "Green Thumbs" to assemble for the initial spring clean-up day. Again another year has come and gone and the Church's "New Year's Day," which is the Season of Advent, is upon us.

As is always true at this time of year, we have much going on. But it is not just activity which marks late November and the month of December, it is an abundance of occasions in which we celebrate the wonder of the incarnation of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ that makes Christmas what the Church intends it to be. Through "God with us," in flesh and in time, it is no wonder that the opportunities to be with him through a variety of sacramental means are plentiful. This letter contains much of what we are doing to celebrate Christmas and I also commend to you the schedule for youth activities and those of the All Saints' Women which follows my letter.

When I was in seminary, I remember one of my fellow students gave a sermon in which he asked us to imagine riding the Boston subway, as most of us did at least several times a week, and be commuters who could break out of their usual mental fix or numbness long enough to look at the most unlikely people, huddled together for warmth in the various underground stations, as being the Holy Family searching for an inn with room to house them that night. Of course, he was trying to get us to be aware of the fact that Christ permeates all and that a full celebration of Christmas includes searching for and finding Jesus in everyone from members of our most immediate family to the stranger we wonder about walking down the street. There is good and joyful news in this discipline he shared with us. Each time we connect with another whom Christ loves, we get ever closer to completing a vivid picture of the complexion of our Incarnate Lord. *Seeing him more clearly*, to borrow words from St. Richard, the 13th Century Bishop of Chichester, allows us *to follow him more nearly and love him more dearly, day by day.*

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This week, on Wednesday, November 23rd, we will have our Thanksgiving Eve service of the Holy Eucharist at 10:00 at the Springs in Whitefish and at Noon at All Saints' Church. We are trying something new this year, that being having the service at noon rather than in the evening as many have expressed difficulty with driving in what can be difficult conditions at night.

And then on **Sunday, November 27th, we begin the new Church Year with the First Sunday in Advent. We will have the lighting of the Advent Wreath's candles each of the four Sundays and will again employ the tradition of bringing gifts to the Creche.** To help

you prepare to join in bringing comfort to those who are in need, what follows is our schedule for the season:

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| Advent 1 | November 27 th | Small teddy bears for pediatric emergency room patients at North Valley Hospital. |
| Advent 2 | December 4 th | Food for the three food banks we serve: North - Valley (Whitefish), Columbia Falls and Martin City. |
| Advent 3 | December 11 th | Pet food for the Humane Society of Northwest Montana. |
| Advent 4 | December 18 th | Warm clothing, mittens, gloves, hats, coats, and scarves for Samaritan House. |

On Thursday, December 15, I will once again do a reading of my Christmas story, *A Christmas Offertory* at 7:00 p.m. at All Saints' Church. This has developed into a tradition with a life of its own and it is an occasion to remember our four legged friends as a free will offering will be taken to benefit the Humane Society, the Flathead County Animal Shelter and the Spay and Neuter Task Force and their collective ministries to those fellow creatures of God who unfortunately find themselves vulnerable, cold and unwanted.

Our Christmas schedule is the same as last year. On Saturday, December 24th, Christmas Eve, will have the Holy Eucharist and Christmas Pageant featuring our children and youth at 4:00 p.m. At 6:00 p.m., we will celebrate the Holy Eucharist at the Springs in Whitefish. At 8:00 p.m. we will celebrate a festival Eucharist with carols starting at 7:45 and we will celebrate a festival Eucharist at 11:00 p.m. with carols beginning at 10:45. On Sunday, December 25th, Christmas Day, we will have the Holy Eucharist at 10:00 a.m. This year, on New Year's Day, Sunday, January 1, 2012, at both the 9:00 and 11:00 morning services, we will celebrate the Feast Day of the Holy Name, a commemoration that goes back to the 6th Century.

It has been our practice to give to the community the loose offering collected at all the services of Christmas. This year, the Vestry has selected the following to receive this gift from all of us: Shepherd's Hand Free Clinic, The Flathead County Animal Shelter, Samaritan House, and The Abbie / Violence Free Crisis Center. To that end, I invite you to be as generous as is possible remembering that we are asked to give out of our abundant blessings so that others in our family may know the caring embrace of God that we are so privileged to provide through ministry. Through our giving in the name of Christ, we can in turn give flesh to the hope that many who are in tough circumstances will know that they are the beloved of God's.

For those of you who are unable to make it to a Christmas service, please do not hesitate to give me a call and I will be more than pleased to bring you communion. I try and do that during the early afternoon on Christmas Eve. If that is not convenient for you, we can make other arrangements.

Following Christmas, the office will be closed for the week. However, since Mary Alice and our treasurer, Carl Thomas, have to close out the books for the year, they would deeply ap-

preciate it if all contributions and pledges which you wish to have applied to 2011 could be in the office by Tuesday, December 27th. This gives them the time to do all the necessary accounting and book work prior to the end of the year. As well, please note that during the week between Christmas and New Year's Eve, we will not have the week day services either at The Springs in Whitefish on Wednesday or at the church on Thursday. Those services will resume the first week of the new year.

Finally, I want to give you advance notification of our Annual Meeting of the Parish. It will take place following the 11:00 a.m. service on Sunday, January 15, 2012 beginning at 12:30 p.m. in Memorial Hall. This meeting is a result of Christ coming among us. It is here that we share what we have done, what we will do and how all of this is for the sake of spreading the very news we herald on Christmas Eve through hymns, word, prayer and the blessing of bread and wine.

I wish you a safe and very blessed Thanksgiving, Advent and Christmas. May it be filled with joy, peace and the newness of life found in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Faithfully yours,

Bradley S. Wirth
Rector

November and December Calendar for the Youth of All Saints' Church

Sunday, Nov. 27	Journey to Adulthood following 11:00 AM Service
Sunday, Dec. 4	Journey to Adulthood following 11:00 AM Service
Saturday, Dec. 10	<i>Toys for Tots</i> Christmas Party including the making of Christmas Cards for the residents of Whitefish Care and Rehabilitation at 1:00 P.M.
Sunday, Dec. 11	Journey to Adulthood following 11:00 AM Service
Wednesday, Dec. 14	Deliver Christmas Cards to Whitefish Care at 4:00 P.M.
Saturday, Dec. 17	Christmas Pageant Rehearsal at 1:00 P.M.
Sunday, Dec. 18	Christmas Pageant Rehearsal following 11:00 AM Service
Thursday, Dec. 22	Christmas Pageant Rehearsal at 1:00 P.M.
Saturday, Dec. 24	Christmas Pageant at 4:00 P.M.

November and December Activities of the All Saints' Women

The All Saints' Women Bake and Book Sale will again take place on Sunday, December 18th following the services.

They are raffling a quilt as part of their ongoing fund-raising efforts. The quilt is on display in Memorial Hall and tickets are \$1 each or 6 for \$5. The drawing will be on December 18th.

The All Saints' Women Cookbook is on sale for \$10. You can obtain one by getting a coupon from the basket in Memorial Hall, completing it, and giving it and \$10 to Lonnie Cunningham.