

Bring faith to life. Find life in faith.



## Impact this month

As we prepare to mark the ending of the calendar year, 2017, we also begin a new liturgical year with the season of Advent.

In this time of endings and beginnings, reflect back and look ahead.

Talk to God about all that has taken place in the year that is now ending, and look forward to the new year with hope in God's loving presence.

Place your life, mind, heart, and action in God's tender care. Be assured that God is with you, and will be with you, in every circumstance.

## The year in review

When you reflect back on this year, where do you see the face of God?

**The year in review.** An annual tradition, in which we recall newsworthy events, remember people who have died, and call to mind the highlights or challenges of the year that is ending. Often, the stories are told through the perspective of the ones who tell it – sports channels tell the stories of athletes, news outlets recall the events they have covered.

**Many will look back on 2017** and see sorrow, loss, and grief. Some will, from this moment on, mark time as "pre-disaster-tragedy / post-disaster-tragedy." Alongside the moments of loss have been signs of new life – babies have been born, couples have gotten engaged or married, hearts have been moved by the service, care, and compassion of others.

**Through it all, we are assured that God is with us**, in every moment of every day, in the times of tragedy and loss, and those that shine with the glimmer of possibility and hope.

**This is the point of Advent:** we have reason to **hope** because God wants to be with us, and wants us to be with him. In Advent, we **watch** for signs of God's love, especially when the demands of daily life are great. We **watch**, too, attentive to those who do not know the depths of God's love, and for the ways we may bring Christ's presence to them. In Advent, we **prepare** the way of the Lord in our hearts and minds. We **wait**, not only for Christmas, but for the full expression of God's kingdom on earth in the future. Like those who precede us in faith and those who will follow, we **long** for the peace, consolation, encouragement, and mercy that only God can give. We **turn toward God** in trust, and grow to rely on his constant presence with us, at all times, in all seasons.

**What about your own personal year in review?** What were your greatest moments of joy, peace, and hope? In what times did you experience loss, grief, and disappointment? When you look back at the year that is ending, where do you see the face of God?



## Becoming vessels of hope

“Yet, O Lord, you are our father; we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands.” (Isaiah 64:6-7)

Have you ever worked with clay? It takes a while for clay to become pliable in the hands of the potter. The longer the potter works with the clay, the more responsive the clay becomes to the potter’s touch.

If we are to be clay in the hands of God who is the potter, we must allow ourselves to become pliable, responsive in the hands of the One who created us and fashions us in his image. We each have moments in which we are more like clay that has hardened, impervious to the potter’s touch. We are sometimes stubborn, selfish, hard-hearted. We fail to see the hands of God at work in our lives because we do not watch for him. We fail to act as we know we ought, and instead go our merry way, alone.

The season of Advent is a perfect time to return to the firm, yet gentle guidance of the potter. When you feel you are being thrown about by the difficult and demanding moments of life, remember that clay is first thrown onto the potter’s wheel before it is shaped. When you sense that you have become dry and brittle, immerse yourself in the certainty of Christ’s love in prayer.

Renew your baptismal commitment as you enter church and bless yourself at the font. Allow the water there to remind you to be soft in the potter’s hands. Participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Watch for Christ in your interactions with others and in the quiet space of your heart. Know again, or more deeply than ever, the hope that is God’s love for us in Christ Jesus.

In the hands of the potter, clay becomes a beautiful vessel, able to function as the potter envisions. In the hands of the potter, we become vessels of the hope of God in Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit.



What does God hope you will become? What does God envision you doing, as the vessel of the Holy Spirit, as one who is charged with carrying the hope of God’s love in the course of your daily life?

## Watching for Christ

**They watch for Christ who are sensitive, eager, apprehensive in mind, who are awake, alive, quick-sighted, zealous in honoring him, who look for him in all that happens, and who would not be surprised, who would not be over-agitated or overwhelmed, if they found that he was coming at once...**

**This, then, is to watch: to be detached from what is present, and to live in what is unseen; to live in the thought of Christ as he came once, and as he will come again; to desire his second coming, from our affectionate and grateful remembrance of his first. – John Henry Newman**

**Look for Christ where there is love.** In the care of family members for one another; among friends; when you are compelled to greet a stranger or care for someone in need; in word and sacrament in the Mass; in the healing of Reconciliation.

**Look for Christ in quiet.** When your heart is filled with peace, especially when nothing can explain the calm you feel. When you find resolution in conflict; healing of body, mind, and spirit.

**Look for Christ during difficulty.** When simple things are hard; when life seems insurmountable; when your heart aches.

**Look for Christ in others.** Those who need care and those who give it. In the eyes of a friend who is in pain. In the lonely neighbor; the homeless person on the street; the sick and dying.

**Look for Christ in unexpected places.** When you least expect to experience God, remember, God is there!