

+J.M.J.



December 2023 Newsletter

Dear SMS Families and Friends,

In late November, a teacher asked about when to start lessons and decorate for Christmas. I wanted to share my reply with you:

I'd like for you to hold off on Christmas. I really would like for the students to experience Advent this year in a more meaningful way. The Church, in her wisdom, gave us this whole season for a very special reason. It really helps to build up the anticipation and prepare hearts and minds for the true meaning of Christmas: Christ coming on Christmas and preparing for his second coming. Our kids are going to be bombarded with secular Christmas throughout December (and probably already are now!). We don't cultivate silence and patience enough in our modern world, and we so desperately need both.



We want our school to be fundamentally different from what our public-school students are receiving, and keeping the main thing the main thing is where we need to start.

There are fun Advent Saints and traditions that we'll be celebrating throughout Advent: St Nicholas, Our Lady of Guadalupe, St Lucy, our Advent prayer services (all on your December calendar). Let's please save Christmas for the week of December 18.

If you'd like to put up a tree or a manger scene at the beginning of Advent, that is ok - but build it as the weeks go on. Start with a bare tree, just a shepherd figure or the stable, and SLOWLY add to it until the last piece is put on on December 21.

Another thing our society doesn't have quite right is the timing of the Christmas season. It's assumed that the season is the month of December and the 12 days END on Christmas Day. That's actually backwards! Day 1 of Christmas IS Christmas Day. When we return from Christmas/New Year's break, we will still be in the Christmas season. It ends on the Sunday after the Feast of the Epiphany (usually the second Sunday of January). Please: do NOT take down Christmas before it's over, but also let's not jump ahead.

*I invite you, SMS Families and Friends, to join with us this Advent, in quieting your hearts, minds, and homes - building that anticipation and space in your heart to welcome Jesus in a new way this Christmas!

Are you looking for a way to pray and grow closer to Jesus this Advent? I HIGHLY recommend downloading the Hallow App for a 90 day free trial. I have been using this app close to every day for the past few years and have been so *incredibly* blessed by it! Join me in praying with the Pray25 Advent Challenge - "Pray every day this Advent as we journey through the writings of C.S. Lewis with Liam Neeson and Jonathan Roumie only on Hallow." Click here to start: hallow.com/blog/pray25/

Looking back on November. This past month, we...

- ✿ lived up All Saints Day by dressing as Saints, researching and presenting our Saints to classmates, enjoying All Saints Day cake, and participating in All Saints festivities that included Saints Memory Games, Puzzles, Bingo, St. John Bosco 4-Square, St. Peter's Feed My Sheep Cornhole, and Saints Guessing Jars: students had to estimate the number of items in clear jars: purple Hershey kisses for St. Therese whose father called her his Little Queen, candy pumpkins for St. Isidore who was a farmer, marshmallows for the Holy Souls in Purgatory, Swedish fish for St. Andrew who was a fisherman, Caramellos for Our Lady of Mount Carmel, mini alphabet cookies for St. Elizabeth Ann Seton who was a teacher, animal crackers for St. Francis of Assisi who is the patron of animals, Baby Ruth bars for St. Gianna Beretta Molla who was a doctor and is the patron of mothers and unborn babies, and 3 Musketeer bars for the Holy Trinity!
- ✿ adored Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament on First Friday,
- ✿ exercised our civic duty by voting on Election Day (in the running were Batman, Superman, and Captain America for favorite superhero - Batman won! AND chicken nuggets, pizza, and mac and cheese - pizza won!),
- ✿ completed our first grading period and passed out report cards,
- ✿ enjoyed a Spaghetti Dinner and basket raffle sponsored by the PTO,
- ✿ learned about how to best take care of our bodies and report to an adult if something is wrong with the help of our friends from AWARE,
- ✿ created Christmas ornaments and decorated a tree that is now on display at the Greenville Historical Society in the Waugh House,
- ✿ celebrated with Krystal Williams for WINNING the Patriots Pen Essay!!!
- ✿ started a schoolwide WORDLE game on an interactive bulletin board created by Mrs. Maloney,
- ✿ made crafts and Thanksgiving cards with our Saint Houses for the homebound of our parish,
- ✿ raised money for Hunters Sharing the Harvest (\$116.10), our November's Casual for a Cause,
- ✿ changed into red shirts after Mass on November 17 to participate in Homelessness Awareness Day,
- ✿ listened to and learned from alumni and son of Mrs. Sue Stanfa, our PreK4 Aide, Nick Stanfa via Zoom. Nick works with people experiencing homelessness in Boulder, CO,
- ✿ welcomed parents to parent teacher conferences - teaming with them to help their child become the best version of themselves this year,
- ✿ celebrated Thanksgiving with a friendship feast in PreK,
- ✿ raised money for our own school in an EXTRA Casual for a Cause (\$105) to benefit our Nature Studies and Science Program,
- ✿ gathered as a school family to share what we are thankful for this year (students each received a leaf that they wrote what they were thankful for and added it to a school tree),
- ✿ enjoyed a long Thanksgiving break and came back ready and renewed to learn,
- ✿ sent our K-7th Grade teachers to St. Leo's School in Ridgway to observe, collaborate and learn from and with the teachers there who have been immersed in Catholic Liberal Education (sometimes called Classical) for 8 years,
- ✿ celebrated our students with Shamrock Shoutouts,
- ✿ and, of course, continued the wondrous adventure of learning in all our subjects this year! 😊



I asked each teacher to share something fun they did in November with our students.

Here's a little peek into our classrooms:

- ✿ PreK3 with Mrs. Forsythe learned what nocturnal animals are, talked about what they were thankful for, and learned the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000 with the five loaves and two fish.
- ✿ PreK4 with Mrs. Dorio measured, mixed, and made mac and cheese! They also shared what they were thankful for and thanked God for their blessings.
- ✿ PreK4 with Mr. Neral learned about the history of Thanksgiving and the Bible story of Jesus feeding the 5,000.
- ✿ Kindergarten with Mrs. Toy learned about the history of the first Thanksgiving! They also learned all about Mama Mary (the Blessed Mother) in Religion with Miss Zgonc.
- ✿ 1st Grade with Mrs. Maloney started reading *Frog and Toad*, learned all about Greek mythology, explored nature using our 5 senses, and started learning about the human body. They also started decomposing their pumpkin from Halloween, so stay tuned to find out what happens!
- ✿ 2nd Grade with Miss Zuschlag celebrated Thanksgiving with Balloons on Broadway. They also learned the Ten Commandments and Act of Contrition with Deacon Marty in Religion.
- ✿ 3rd Grade with Mrs. Endicott read *Squanto* and *The Miracle of Thanksgiving*. In Math, they started multiplication and in Religion, they read the book *Who Was Jesus?*.
- ✿ 4th Grade with Mrs. Knicely studied Good Habits in Religion and learned that exercising our conscience is a gift from God. In Science, they became Petrologists; exploring, identifying, and categorizing (igneous, metamorphic, and sedimentary) rocks!
- ✿ 7th Grade with Deacon Marty removed flags from the graves of veterans and held a flag burning ceremony. In Literature, they finished reading *The Hobbit*! They also explored the world of negative and positive integers, decimals, fractions, and mixed numbers in Math!
- ✿ Music classes with Mrs. Giffone sang and learned songs about thankfulness and pumpkin pie! Choir and band classes also marched along!
- ✿ Gym classes with Mrs. Giffone played turkey games!
- ✿ 4th Grade Art classes with Mrs. Cawley finished some beautiful watercolor leaf observations.



See what's happening this December!

December Jeans Day

Thursday, December 7, is the only Jeans Days in December. The other 2 Thursdays are special dress days. Please follow the dress code in our [handbook](#) for what is permissible for Jeans Days.

School Masses

Each Friday, a different Saint House provides greeters and gift bearers. For October, the following Houses will serve at Mass:

- December 1: Badano House
- December 8: Frassati House (*This is also the feast of the Immaculate Conception: a Holy Day of Obligation!*)
- December 15: Acutis House
- December 21: Galgani House

Students love when their parents and other family members and friends attend Mass!

Advent Activities

Each Monday in Advent, our entire student body will gather in the church to light our parish's Advent wreath, sing, pray, and experience the miraculous stories leading up to the birth of Jesus, including the Annunciations to Zechariah and Mary, Mary's Visitation to Elizabeth, Joseph and Mary's journey to Bethlehem, and the great mystery of Jesus' Nativity. The 7th Graders serve as actors to bring the stories to life. Featured are Jacob Henry as Zechariah, Mason McEwen as Gabriel, Krystal Williams as Elizabeth, Zariah Klawinski as Mary, and Braeden Sellards as Joseph.

Mary on the Mantle

Keep an eye on our ClassDojo School Story and our Facebook page to catch glimpses of what Mary might be doing to prepare for the birth of her Son! Using the *Mary on the Mantle* book, program, and dolls from [Be A Heart Designs](#), students will see the Mary doll moving from classroom to classroom, doing such things as setting out the Advent wreath, reading the Bible, cleaning up toys, reading a letter from Elizabeth, putting her feet up, and planning her trip to Bethlehem with Joseph. *Mary on the Mantle* is a fun alternative to *Elf on the Shelf*, putting the emphasis back on the greatest story of all time! *Mary on the Mantle* is also

featured on the Hallow App, along with a TON of wonderful content for kids!

St. Nicholas Day

Wednesday, December 6, is the feast of St. Nicholas! In certain homes around the world (this happened at my house growing up!), on the night of December 5, children hang their stockings or put out their shoes for St. Nicholas to fill. Read more about St. Nicholas [here](#).

Santa Land

Santa Land will be offered to all SMS students on the morning of Wednesday, December 6, to coincide with the feast of St. Nicholas! Parents may send in money and a list of people for their child to shop for. Thank you in advance to the parent volunteers who make this possible!

Picture Retake Day

Didn't like your child's picture or your child was absent on the original Picture Day? Have them retaken on Picture Retake Day: Wednesday, December 6.

Choir Sings for Young at Heart

Our 3rd-7th Grade Choir will be singing for our parish's Young at Heart group on Monday, December 11, at 12:30pm.

Our Lady of Guadalupe

Each class has a patron saint, and 1st Grade's patron saint is Our Lady of Guadalupe! Our Lady of Guadalupe is another title for Mary, the Blessed Mother. Just as one person has many names they go by, so does Mary. Our Lady of Guadalupe happens to be my favorite title of Mary. Learn more about this title of Mary, her apparition to St. Juan Diego, and a scientific study of the miraculous tilma imprinted with her image with [this video](#) (it will really blow your mind in the best possible way!) and celebrate with us on Tuesday, December 12.

December Hot Lunch

December's Hot Lunch on Thursday, **December 14** is a FREE Hot Lunch (Breakfast for Lunch), sponsored by the PTO!

December Casual for a Cause

The Cause we'll be adopting on Thursday, **December 14**, Bringing Hope to the Caribbean (www.bhctransformlives.org bhctransformlives.org). This non-profit was started and is run by SMS students, Rachel and Daniel's parents, Raguel and Danielle Belony. "Bringing Hope to the Caribbean, Inc. is a Bible based Christian organization created to meet the Spiritual and physical needs of the poverty-stricken people in the Caribbean; specifically focusing on the area of Hispaniola. We provide families in the Dominican Republic with goats, chickens and share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We also build a relationship with the families and mentor them both on how to raise the goat and the chickens in order that they can create a sustainable income for their family." In order to participate, students and staff need to bring in *at least* \$1 on that day. See our [handbook](#) for what is permissible for Casual for a Cause days.

Parents Night Out

Parents of children of St. Michael School and Parish, are you looking for a babysitter to watch your child while you enjoy a date night out, have a few hours to yourself, or shop for your Christmas presents? SMS PTO moms have you covered! Drop your child(ren) off at Lateran Hall on Friday, December 15, from 5-9pm. Children will enjoy supper, activities, and games. Cost is \$20 for one child and \$30 for a family.

NO SAFE Afternoons

There will be NO SAFE on Tuesday, December 19 (due to our annual Staff Christmas Dinner), and Thursday, December 21 (a noon dismissal day).

Christmas Family Night

Please plan on coming to our annual Christmas Family Night at 6pm in the church on Wednesday, December 20! ALL classes (PreK3 – 7th Grade) will be featured in song this night. Enjoy their performance as well as the true and first story of Christmas. Mrs. Giffone will be sending out letters with more information including the songs your child will be singing and the little pieces they'll need for their costumes. Cookies and punch, compliments of our PTO, will be served after.

Happy Birthday, Jesus! Christmas Parties

Children may come to school dressed in Christmas-themed clothes on Thursday, December 21. Since we are really focusing on the true meaning of Christmas, rather than the secular model, students will enjoy Christmas parties with Jesus at the center!

12pm NOON Dismissal

Classes will end for our Christmas Vacation on Thursday, December 21, at 12:00pm NOON. There will be NO SAFE offered that afternoon!

SMS Christmas Vacation

Our Christmas Vacation will begin at NOON on Thursday, December 21, and continue through Tuesday, January 2. Classes will resume as normal on Wednesday, January 3. Please join us for Christmas and New Years Masses at St. Michael Church! Stay tuned for times on our parish's website: www.stmichaelgreenville.com

**May God richly bless you, your child, and your family!
Mary, Cause of our Joy, pray for us! St. Michael, pray for us!**

Love,

Miss Emily Zgonc, Principal :)

*"Open wide the doors of your heart to Christ! Do not be afraid!"
-St. John Paul the Great*

