

# St. Mary of the Visitation Catholic Church NEWSLETTER

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Fr. Steve Witt

## CONTENTS

OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE P.2

RESPONDING TO THE HOLY SPIRIT P.3

BLACK CATHOLIC HISTORY P.4

STEPHEN MINISTRY REPORT P.5

THE MAGI (WISE MEN) P.6

THE HOLY FAMILY P.7

SR. THEA BOWMAN P.8

## PASTOR'S LETTER

Article By Fr. Steve Witt

**B**rothers and Sisters in Christ, Have you ever experienced what St. John of the Cross calls the "Dark Night of the Soul"? I am not too sure many people have, but that experience might be one that would be valuable to many. The Dark Night of the Soul is a look back on our life, maybe even a dream that calls to mind those times in our life when we have really failed ourselves in our commitment to do the right thing. Most of us prefer not to go there. I am fairly convinced having experienced such a night myself that it is

outside of ourselves and vow to make the changes in our lives that would make the world, even if it's just our own little corner of it, a better place to be. I realize that I am loved by God and by many, but I think that with some self-examination and a vow to make even the smallest of changes we could make life better for all of us. The task is still ours. Do we undergo that dark night or continue to live with the blind expectation that everything is alright and nothing needs to be done to make our lives better.

THE DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL IS A LOOK BACK ON OUR LIFE, MAYBE EVEN A DREAM THAT CALLS TO MIND THOSE TIMES IN OUR LIFE WHEN WE HAVE REALLY FAILED OURSELVES IN OUR COMMITMENT TO DO THE RIGHT THING.

something that may bring us to a better understanding of ourselves. That is to say not only an acknowledgement of our own failings, but an idea of the changes we need to make in our lives with God's merciful help and maybe an insight into the forgiveness that is ours in Christ.

I don't pretend to know about all of human experience, but just to feel the pain that I have caused other people in my life has made me more conscious of my actions in living my current life. Most of us try to forget the times that we have messed with other people, that we have incorrectly judged and have even taken actions to criticize before we understood the condition under which others exist. That may not be the worst of what we have done. We just don't want to think about it. Maybe that is what allows us to keep on living the way we are, but wouldn't it be better for all of us just to take some time to think about where we have gone in our lives; to acknowledge the wrongs that we have done; to take a moment to get

A musing to ponder! God's blessing to all.

Fr. Steve

## Your Input Requested

If you have any comments, concerns, suggestions, ideas, or if you would like to write for the St. Mary's quarterly newsletter, please contact Jeanette Roush-Krafka at [jeanette.roush@gmail.com](mailto:jeanette.roush@gmail.com)

# Our Lady of Guadalupe

Article By: Dan Teets



*Missionary Image of our Lady of Guadalupe*

**D**id you know that there are at least 12 images of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the worship space at Saint Mary Church? To see the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe you need to be sitting on the right side of the balcony, or be in the front 2 pews on the right side of the main church and stand up and turn around to look up at the back wall of the balcony. Fr. Steve has the best view of this image from his chair in the Sanctuary.

The framed image is a print of the Missionary Image of Our Lady of Guadalupe which is an exact replica of the original image of Our Lady which appeared on the tilma of St. Juan Diego in Mexico in December of 1531. The image was donated to St. Mary Church by Fr. Jeff Belger. Fr. Jeff has chosen to donate this image at every place that he has served as a priest in the Davenport Diocese. So, you can find the image at Prince of Peace parish in Clinton, at St. Mary Church in Oskaloosa, at St. Mary Church in Pella, and at St. Mary Church and the Newman Center in Iowa City.

I recently asked Fr. Jeff why he chose this image. He has two main reasons. First, the image is miraculous, the

original image is not made by human hands, it comes from God. Second, on October 12, 1945, Pope Pius XII decreed Our Lady of Guadalupe to be "**Patroness of all the Americas.**" Our Lady of Guadalupe is our patron saint!

Cuauhtlatoa (Talking Eagle) was born in 1474. He belonged to the tribe that was the first to be baptized by Franciscan missionaries (probably in 1524) after the conquest of Mexico in 1521. He changed his name to Juan Diego. He was walking to town one day in December of 1531 when a lady appeared to him to have him ask his bishop that a church be built in her honor on the hill where she appeared. The bishop did not believe Juan Diego and said that he would need some proof.

**THE MIRACULOUS IMAGE ON JUAN DIEGO'S TILMA IS STILL IN THE BASILICA IN MEXICO CITY NEARLY 500 YEARS LATER.**

The next day Juan Diego's uncle was sick so he went a different route to avoid the lady and get help for his uncle. But Our Lady appeared to him again, reassured him that his uncle would be healed, and asked him what the bishop said. When he told her that the bishop wanted proof she sent him to the top of a hill to cut the roses there. It was December, so there should not have been roses there and he found Castillion roses that were native to Spain, but not to Mexico. He cut the roses and Mary arranged them in his tilma.

When Juan Diego got to town the bishop was not immediately available. He waited for hours and was finally given an audience with the bishop. When the bishop asked what he was there for Juan Diego opened his tilma to show him the proof. The roses fell to the floor and the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, just as Juan Diego had seen her, miraculously appeared on his tilma. The tilma is made from cactus fiber and should have lasted only about 25 years, but the miraculous image on Juan Diego's tilma is still in the basilica in Mexico City nearly 500 years later.

It is estimated that there were nearly

40 Catholic missionaries in Mexico in 1531, but they had not had much success in bringing the Catholic faith to the natives of Mexico. However, in the 7 years after the apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe more than 9 million native people were baptized. They came for baptism by the thousands. On one day 2 priests baptized over 15,000 people!

Our Lady appeared with a message of reassurance not only to Juan Diego, but to all of the people of Mexico, and to all the people in the world. Mary said, "**Listen, put it into your heart, my youngest and dearest son, that the thing that frightens you, the thing that afflicts you, is nothing; do not let it disturb you ... Am I not here, I who am your Mother? Are you not under my**

**shadow and protection? Am I not the source of your joy? Are you not in the hollow of my mantle, in the crossing of my arms? Do you need something more? Let nothing else worry you or disturb you."**

Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared as a mestiza, a woman of mixed race, having indigenous and Spanish descent. This was to show that she is the mother of all people and that God is the Father of all people. She is our mother and our patroness in the Americas!

To find out more about Our Lady of Guadalupe you can read the book that I consulted for this article: **Guadalupe Mysteries: Deciphering the Code** by Grzegorz Gorny and Janusz Rosikon.

The next time you are at St. Mary Church go to the front right side of the main church or to the right side of the balcony to see the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. And take some time to look for the other images of the Blessed Virgin Mary that are in our worship space. Please let me know if you find more than 12!

# *Responding to the Holy Spirit*

## *Faith Journey Questions of Deacon Ward & Gwen Thompson*

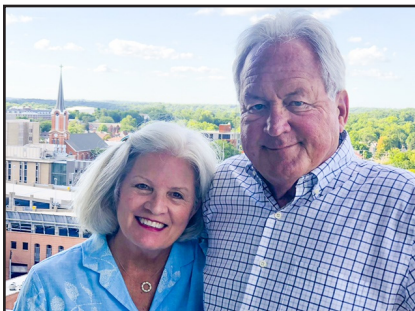
Article By: Dea. Ward & Gwen Thompson

### PLEASE DESCRIBE YOUR FAITH JOURNEY.

**Ward:** I was raised in a Protestant tradition, my parents were very faithful Christians. When I was thirty-two years old I was going through a very difficult time in my life which prompted me to get reacquainted with Jesus Christ. I had just moved to Iowa City; none of the Protestant churches were attracting me. I was introduced to the Catholic Church through a friend and realized from my experience at an Advent Mass that I had found my home. I entered RCIA and was confirmed eighteen months later. From then on I tried to be involved in ministries as much as my work vocation would allow. I found this rewarding but still something was missing. In 2002, my pastor at the time asked me to consider becoming a deacon. Gwen and I prayed about it and we entered formation. I was ordained in 2006 in the Diocese of San Diego.

**Gwen:** I was raised as a Methodist and attended church up the street from St. Mary's. My parents were good Christians, I went to bible school when I was young. We always attended church at Easter and Christmas but were intermittent otherwise. When I was in high school I had several Catholic friends and, on occasion, I would attend Mass here at St. Mary's with them. I can remember really enjoying the readings designated for each week. I appreciated that the sermon did not end the service. I also remember thinking, these people all know by heart the prayers as they recite them together. That was impressive! Also impressive, was the fact that members were allowed to receive the Eucharist each week or any day. When I met Ward, he had already been Confirmed; it was natural for us to attend Mass at St. Mary's together. I too entered RCIA and was Confirmed.

### HOW DO YOU VIEW YOUR MARRIAGE AS YOUR VOCATION?



*Ward and Gwen Thompson*

Our marriage is the most important gift in our life. Our life together has been guided by our exchange of consent (vows to each other). God has always been at the center of our relationship. We truly view ourselves as "one flesh". Our love for God is expressed in our love for each other.

EVERY TIME WE RESPOND TO THE PROMPTINGS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN OUR LIVES, THE SPIRIT REWARDS US WITH A SENSE OF JOY AND WELL-BEING. BY LOVING AND HELPING OTHERS WE RECEIVE GOD'S LOVE IN RETURN.

### WHAT GIVES YOU HOPE IN THIS LIFE?

The Holy Spirit remains active in the world, and we see this time and again in the faith and action of others. You see it in the response to natural disasters and other evils in the world. Our ultimate hope is for eternal life with God, through our faith and trust in him.

### HOW HAVE YOU SEEN THE HOLY SPIRIT ACT IN YOUR LIFE?

The Holy Spirit has always been an integral part of our life. He prompts us to be more holy and to grow closer in our relationship with the Lord. He guides each of us along the paths that our Lord has set for us. Specifically, during our diaconal formation ministries (hospital, hospice, and prison) we came to understand that the Holy Spirit was guiding our thoughts and actions. The Spirit, therefore, gave us the confidence to minister in

many different ways. We learned to try to be open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit because the Spirit is continuously active in our lives. We simply need to respond to those promptings.

### WHAT DO YOU WANT OTHER PEOPLE TO KNOW ABOUT THE JOYS (AND STRUGGLES) OF LIVING YOUR FAITH?

Every time we respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in our lives, the Spirit rewards us with a sense of joy and well-being. By loving and helping others we receive God's love in return. As we have grown older, we have encountered impediments to our faith created by the world. It is not easy to be a Christian in this world. However, our experiences are constantly reminding us that

there is only one true way, and that is in our Lord, Jesus Christ.

### HOW HAS THE CHURCH SUPPORTED YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS?

We have been guided by able and loving pastors. We were guided by all the instructors in our diaconal formation. We were continuously inspired by the eleven other couples in our formation class; twelve couples started and twelve finished with ordination. We have been continually blessed and strengthened through the Sacraments of the Church. Ward has been blessed to receive all seven sacraments. We have been welcomed by all parish communities of which we have been members; and we are very grateful.

WE LOOK FORWARD TO SHARING MORE OF OUR FAITH JOURNEY WITH YOU, NOVEMBER 13TH AT 3:00PM.



**BAPTISMS****ISAAC CHARLES  
WARD****FELICITY MAE  
DIGIANTONIO TATZ****DORIAN WALKER  
NASAFI****EDWARD STANLEY  
MCELENEY****WILSON KEMFUNI  
IMBAY****ALEXANDROS  
ALEGRIA KONJI  
KIABELUA****AURORA  
MARGUERITE  
MILUNZI LONGOMO****TRINITY AHOUFEA  
ZINSOU****WINNIE FELICIA  
ZINSOU****PAISLEY MARY-  
ALICE MADSEN****LIAM BRIAN  
POTTERF****MOIRA MARGARET  
BISSELL****THEODORE  
NICKLAUS SMITH****HAYES WILLIAM  
FRERICHS**

# *Black Catholic History*

November is Black Catholic History Month. Established in 1990, Black Catholic History Month helps us learn and recognize the roles many Black Catholics have played in our Church and nation. Worldwide, there are about 200 million Catholics of African descent. In the United States, there are more than 3 million African American Catholics, along with about 250 African American priests and over 450 African American deacons. This article focuses on the history of the Americas and draws on resources from the Catholic University of America at [cultural.catholic.edu](http://cultural.catholic.edu).

## BLACK CATHOLIC HISTORY MONTH HELPS US LEARN AND RECOGNIZE THE ROLES MANY BLACK CATHOLICS HAVE PLAYED IN OUR CHURCH AND NATION

Saint Martin de Porres was the first Black saint in the Americas. In 1579, he was born the son of a Spanish man and a free Black woman in Lima, Peru. He was raised in poverty but learned to provide medical care. He became a Dominican brother. St. Martin was known for his devotion to the Eucharist and constant prayer. He had great compassion for all people, helping the poor and slaves in Lima. He was friends of St. Rose of Lima and was canonized in 1962.

In 1693, Spain offered freedom in Florida to slaves who convert to Catholicism. Most of these freed slaves lived in a community outside of St. Augustine called Fort Mose. Established in 1738, Fort Mose became the first free Black town in the U.S. Similarly, in 1781, Governor de Neve (of the area currently California), recruited 11 families to settle on the Porciuncula River, which is now Los Angeles. All these settlers were Catholics, a mix of Africans, Spanish and American Indians.

In 1829, black women in Baltimore formed the Oblate Sisters of Providence to serve Haitian refugees. Archbishop St. John Neumann helped them spread their work to Philadelphia and New Orleans. In 1889, a black journalist named Daniel Rudd, led a group of about 100 black men to meet with President Grover Cleveland. The men, delegates at the first Black Catholic lay congress in U.S. history, called for schools for Black children, appealed to labor unions to admit Black people, advocated for better housing and praised religious orders for aiding Black people. Thus, Black Catholics helped make our social justice teachings into a primary feature of the faith. This was a new and bold approach for the time. In 1920, the

Article By: Bill Doucette

Society of the Divine Word, in Greenville, MS opened St. Augustine Seminary, the first Catholic seminary for Black people in the U.S. The seminary moved to nearby Bay Saint Louis, MS in 1923.

In 1965, many Catholic clergy and women religious joined the march in Selma, AL, adding their voices to the call for equal rights for all people. In 1987, the National Black Catholic Congress (NBCC) renewed the

tradition of gathering Black Catholics from across the country. These congresses are held every five years. The next NBCC is scheduled to be held in 2023.

A couple of Black Catholics on the path to sainthood are Servant of God Thea Bowman and Venerable Pierre Toussaint. Thea Bowman, born in MS, joined the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration becoming their only African American member. Her early work was to become a teacher in LaCrosse, WI. She later moved back to MS, and became active in the civil rights struggle. In her role as consultant for intercultural awareness, Sister Thea gave presentations across the country. These were lively gatherings that combined singing, gospel preaching, prayer and storytelling. Her programs were intended to break down racial and cultural barriers. She encouraged people to communicate with one another so that they could understand other cultures and races. She died in 1990 and was declared a Servant of God in 2018.

Born in Haiti, Pierre Toussaint was brought to New York City (NYC) as a slave. When his master died, Pierre supported his master's family through his work as a hairdresser. He was later freed and was active in NYC's Catholic community. He was very devout and charitable, helping to raise funds to build St. Patrick's Cathedral in NYC. Pierre Toussaint was declared Venerable in 1996.

This brief history illustrates how many Black Catholics have lived for others and have been involved with the struggle for equality in this country. Black Catholics have also been leaders in putting the social justice teachings of the Church into action. Let us all stand together in love as Jesus taught us.

# Stephen Ministry

## First Year Report

Article By: Bill Doucette & Julia Blake



*St. Mary Stephen Ministers with Fr. Steve Commissioning*

St. Mary's has had active Stephen Ministers for more than a year. While the parish ministry is just getting started, two Stephen Ministers have also been trained as Stephen Leaders to begin laying the foundation for the parish program. This article provides a brief update on our parish Stephen Ministry and describes what we can expect as Stephen Ministers and as care receivers.

During the past year our Stephen Leaders trained our first cohort of Stephen Ministers. These weekly classes took place in St. Mary's Parish Hall from January to May. The Stephen Ministers learned about the approach followed by Stephen Ministry to provide one-on-one Christian care delivered by laypeople to people experiencing difficulties in their lives. We learned about active listening and distinctively Christian caring, as well as paying attention to, affirming and validating the feelings of our care receivers. Stephen Ministers walk with these individuals for months or even longer, depending on the needs of each care receiver. What is shared with a Stephen Minister is kept confidential. The unbiased confidential caring relationship provides a safe interaction space for the person experiencing difficulty. The time spent together is a process of the person moving through his/her challenges with the support of the Stephen Minister.

St. Mary's currently has five Stephen Ministers. Since their

commissioning this past summer, these people have provided care to six people in need. The Stephen Ministers meet weekly for about an hour with their care receivers to talk about and listen to the concerns facing their care receivers. Being fully present and listening in a non-judgmental manner can provide healing to those in need. Stephen Ministers focus on the process of care and leave the outcomes up to God. We say that we are the caregivers, while God is the Curegiver.

Twice a month the Stephen Ministers meet at supervision sessions. During these meetings the Stephen Ministers provide support to each other. Caring for people who are hurting can have its own challenges. The supervision group supports the individual Stephen Ministers with empathy and constructive suggestions from our training or our own experiences. We also pray for and with each other to ensure that we are inviting God into our process as well. Having colleagues listen and give feedback is helpful to the Stephen Ministers in providing the best care to their care receivers.

The Stephen Ministers continue to learn about topics that will support the quality of their care. This continuing education expands their skills and knowledge about providing care to their care receivers. For example, they may learn about the grieving process after the death of a loved one. With this knowledge they can patiently accompany people through such a loss. In addition, St. Mary's Stephen Ministers participate in educational opportunities at other Iowa City churches with Stephen Ministry. One example, a program on Loss and Resilience delivered at St. Andrew Presbyterian Church, helped attending St. Mary's Stephen Ministers learn about the importance of resilience in healing after a serious loss. Those who attended also shared their experience and what they learned during the next supervision meeting.

Even though Stephen Ministry at St. Mary's is somewhat established, there is need for more Stephen Ministers. There are many people experiencing difficulties in their lives who could benefit from the care of a Stephen Minister. The types of challenges people face varies widely, including major medical crises, illness, job loss, death of a loved one, divorce, moving, caring for a loved one who is ill or dying and many more. Knowing that you can receive support through challenges like this can be comforting. Also, as a Stephen Minister, providing support to another person is a way to have a positive impact on someone's well-being. Being a Stephen Minister can be rewarding, as God made us to feel His joy when we help others. This winter we will participate in another Stephen Minister training program, likely coordinating with other Stephen Ministries in Iowa City. We ask you to examine your interests in being trained and serving as a Stephen Minister or Stephen Leader. We welcome inquiries and questions about becoming a Stephen Minister or Leader, or being a care receiver.

We also want to remind you that Stephen Ministers are always open to helping those in need. If you or someone you know is in need of support during a time of difficulty, please contact Julia (phone 319-541-1906, email [frecklegirl@yahoo.com](mailto:frecklegirl@yahoo.com)) or Bill (phone 319-541-9814, email [wrdoucette77@gmail.com](mailto:wrdoucette77@gmail.com)). We will follow-up with everyone who contacts us about Stephen Ministry. On behalf of all St. Mary's Stephen Ministers, thank you for your continued prayers and support of our parish Stephen Ministry. We look forward to another successful year.



## MARRIAGES

JAMES KIMANI  
GACHERU  
AND LILIAN NGIGI

MILES TAYLOR  
AND KARI KRAMER

COLIN KENNEY  
AND ASHLYN  
MULCAHEY

JOSEPH WEISKAMP  
AND MAKENZIE MEYER

CASEY CUNNINGHAM  
AND MOLLY  
ANDERSON

JAMES LAREW  
AND JORI COLARUSSO

BUDDIKA SARANATH  
GODAGAMA  
AND SHEVONNE CRUZ

NOAH CUTLER  
AND KYLEE  
HOMEWOOD

BRANDON SHULISTA  
AND RACHEL AHERN

PAOLO MARILIM  
AND HANNAH DEHNER

GABRIEL PORRAS  
SANCHEZ  
AND ANNA SALINO-  
HUGG

## FUNERALS

PAUL C. SUEPPEL

ELAINE LANGENBERG

JERRY JENSEN

MARY ANN PARK

PATRICIA KRON  
BOETTGER

PHYLLIS HOPP

# The Magi (Wise Men)



Article By: Robert Tomanek

These men were not kings, but rather advisors to kings, because they were well educated and proficient in mathematics, astronomy, astrology and medicine. Magi were a highly regarded priestly class of ancient Persia, Assyria and Babylonia (now Iran and Iraq). Moreover, Matthew 2 notes that coming from the East means they came from these countries, all of which had a Magian priesthood. The Old Testament states that the coming of the Messiah will be marked by a star advancing from Jacob and a scepter (staff of a king) arising from Israel (Num 24:17), and that Gentiles will come bearing gifts and will worship the Messiah (Psalm 72, Isaiah 60). Non-biblical evidence supports the claim that the Magi were a sacred caste of the Medes who provided priests for Persia. It was the sudden appearance of a new and brilliant star that suggested to the Magi a birth of an important person. This star, like other celestial stars, “rose” in the East and moved to the West, which is why the Magi traveled West to Bethlehem.

## HOW MANY MAGI VISITED THE BABY JESUS?

Eastern tradition favored the idea that there were 12, whereas, in the West several early Church fathers, e.g., St. Leo the Great, Origen, St. Maximus of Turin, held that there were three. Consistent with Christian tradition and legends, St. Bede wrote in the 8th century that the three were Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar. Whether more than three Magi journeyed to visit the new-born king is not clear, but certainly possible. However, knowing the number of Magi is not important, but their mission is.

## THE VISIT, THE GIFTS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE.

As written in Mathew’s gospel, the gift of gold was to honor the king. Frankincense is

a gift for a priest, in this case frankincense is a sign of Christ’s divinity. Myrrh, a burial ointment, signified that Christ, consistent with his mission, would die.

## WHEN DID THEY VISIT JESUS?

Considering the long distance from Persia to Jerusalem (1,000 miles or more), their trip by camel, and its preparation, would require at least one year. The three visited the holy family in a house, not a stable, and their visit occurred many months after Christ’s birth. Jesus was a “child” when the Magi visited him, as expressed in Matthew 2:13, which indicates that he was at least one year old. After the magi departed, an angel instructed Joseph to take Jesus and Mary to Egypt where they remained until the death of Herod (Matthew 2:13). Herod’s order to kill all the males up to the age of two is consistent with his belief that Jesus could be as old as two. The feast of the Epiphany (January 6th), a celebration of the Magi’s visit, is a date of convenience rather than the actual date, because the visit occurred much later.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MAGI VISIT.

First, as noted above, the visit of the Magi was prophesied in the old testament, a point that their visit was not by chance, but rather by the influence of the Holy Spirit. Second, a lack of details of the Magi’s visit does not negate the fact that they were sent on a very long journey to recognize, honor and worship the Messiah. Third, the Magi, who were Gentiles, were the first to receive the word that Jesus is the savior, and that salvation is offered to all men (the call to Gentiles). Pope Benedict XVI wrote that the magi anticipated St. Paul’s teaching that Jesus Christ is the Lord of the cosmos as well as Lord of history.

# The Holy Family

## Of Jesus, Mary and Joseph

Article By: Jeanette Roush-Krafka

**I**t's nearly that time of year again, where we're called to bear in mind not only the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but also His Holy Family.

Pope Francis established March 2021 through June 2022 the Year of the Family to help strengthen faith and live God's joy more fruitfully in family life. As that year has recently concluded and with the feast day of the Holy Family just around the corner it seems apropos to reflect on the Holy Family and to examine how their journey is still relatable to this day, about 2028 years later.

The feast day of the Holy Family has been celebrated on the Sunday after Christmas since 1969 so that the feast day would fall within the Christmas season. Formerly the feast day of the Holy Family was observed on the Sunday after Epiphany since its institution in 1961 by Pope Benedict XV. This year the feast day of the Holy Family will be observed on Friday December 30th rather than that Sunday because Sunday January 1st is the day we observe the solemnity of Mary.

The story of the Holy Family is an epic saga, which has stood the test of time, not only because theirs is the origin story of Jesus whose life we all seek to emulate, but also because their journey encapsulates the trials and tribulations that true familial love entails.

The Journey begins when the Gospel according to Luke tells us that Mary was visited by the angel Gabriel who told her that she would conceive and bear a son, whom she should call Jesus, that he would be great, called Son of the Most High and the Lord God would give him the throne of David his father and he would rule over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom there would be no end.

Mary asked the angel Gabriel how this could be true since she had no relations with a man. Gabriel explained to her that Jesus would be of the Holy Spirit. Mary's response was, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." At the time, adultery would have been

punishable by a death of stoning. Mary would have known that. She also would have known that her pregnancy out of wedlock and not a product of relations with her betrothed, Joseph, would be widely perceived as illegitimate. Mary knew that accepting her call to be the mother of Jesus could cost her her life, but she chose to be a vessel of the Son of the Most High. I can only imagine the gravity of the prayers she must have prayed, pleading that Joseph would believe her.

According to the gospel of Matthew, Joseph was initially unwilling to expose Mary to shame, but also evidently unwilling to believe Mary's story entirely because he had decided to divorce her quietly. That is, until the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" Thankfully Joseph was convinced and took Mary into his home in the city of Nazareth in the region of Galilee.

According to the gospel of Luke at the time a decree to enroll the "whole world" went out from Caesar Augustus, so Joseph took Mary who was with child to the city of Bethlehem in the region of Judea so they could all be enrolled. While they were there Mary gave birth to Jesus, whom she wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn.

Having given birth to our first child within the past year, I can only imagine the stress the entire family would have been experiencing under those circumstances. There was no ambulance, no hospital, no modern medicine for pain or delivery and I'm sure Joseph was frantically searching for a safe, sanitary environment for Mary to birth Jesus. Meanwhile Mary would have been in labor, likely in excruciating pain and would have little choice but to be carted around town on a donkey by Joseph in search of an inn. At long last the best they could find was likely the lower floor of a peasant's

house where the animals were kept, and there Jesus was born and laid to rest in a manger. What a harrowing tale. As we know their story doesn't end there though.

According to the Gospel of Matthew an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him." Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt. He stayed there until the death of Herod. When Herod had died the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph again and said to him, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." He rose, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go back there. And because he had been warned in a dream, he departed for the region of Galilee. He went and dwelt in a town called Nazareth.

Joseph had come to trust the angel of the Lord and decided to risk everything, to leave their home and become refugees in Egypt. For the safety of his family he uprooted them and took them to safety in Egypt. When the angel of the Lord declared it safe he moved them back to Nazareth.

This is the family journey we are called to emulate. When we are summoned to action by the Holy Spirit to accept the Christ within us we are called to respond in faith as Mary did by saying, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." When we are confronted with difficult truths we are called to respond as Joseph did when he welcomed the pregnant Mary into his home. When danger is nigh we are called to act as Joseph did when he took his family to seek refuge in Egypt. We are called to hold the love and faith of the Holy Family as our ultimate objective and live not only as they did in our immediate families but as Christ's worldwide family.



# St. Mary of the Visitation Catholic Church

302 E. Jefferson St. Iowa City, IA 52245



ST. MARY'S NEWSLETTER VOL. 21

## Servant of God, Sr. Thea Bowman, 1937-1990

Article By: Julia Blake



"We unite ourselves with Christ's redemptive work when we reconcile, when we make peace, when we share the good news that God is in our lives, when we reflect to our brothers and sisters God's healing, God's forgiveness, God's unconditional love."

These would be the final public words of Sister Thea Bowman, F.S.P.A. who dedicated her life to spreading the joy of the Gospel and promoting cultural awareness

and racial reconciliation.

Thea Bowman, was born in 1937 in Canton, Mississippi. As a child she converted to Catholicism through the inspiration of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration and the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity who were her teachers and pastors at Holy Child Jesus Church and School in Canton.

Growing up, Thea listened and learned from the wisdom of the "old folks," the elders of her community. These skills proved essential as she navigated through the experiences of blatant racism, segregation, inequality, and the struggle for Civil Rights in her native Mississippi. At an early age, Thea was exposed to the richness of her African-American culture and spirituality, especially the history, stories, songs, prayers, customs and traditions. Moreover, she was cognizant that God loved and provided for the poor and the oppressed. Her community instructed her, "If you get, give—if you learn, teach."

For Thea Bowman, her conversion to Catholicism was rooted in what she witnessed: she was attracted by the example of how Catholics seemed to love and care for one another, especially the poor and needy, and by how Catholics put their faith into action. At age fifteen she joined the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration in LaCrosse, Wisconsin where she would be the only African-American member of her religious community. She was trained to become a teacher at all grade levels, eventually earning her doctorate and becoming a professor of English and linguistics.

The late 1960's was a time of transformation. The liturgical renewal of the Second Vatican Council encouraged Sister Thea to rediscover her African-American religious heritage and spirituality. She became a highly acclaimed evangelizer, teacher, writer, and singer sharing the joy of the Gospel and her rich cultural heritage throughout the nation. She accepted an appointment by Bishop Joseph Bernard Brunini to direct the Office of Intercultural Affairs for the Diocese of Jackson in 1978. In this position Sister Thea continued to assail racial prejudice and promote cultural awareness and sensitivity. She was a founding faculty member of the Institute for Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University in New Orleans.

Sister Thea Bowman's life was always one of Gospel joy, enduring faith, and persevering prayer even in the midst of racial prejudice, cultural insensitivity, and debilitating illness. Her personal holiness witnessed to the faith and endurance of her ancestors, the hope expressed in the Spirituals, compassion for the poor and marginalized, and the radical love embodied by St. Francis of Assisi.

<https://www.sistertheabowman.com/biography/>