

## Unveiling Our New Statue of Mary on Dec. 8!

**Surprise!** We will unveil our new statue of Our Lady of Fatima in our church at the beginning of the 9 am Mass on Saturday, December 8, the Feast Day of The Immaculate Conception, the Patroness Saint of our country! Everyone is invited: December 8, which falls on a Saturday this year, is a Holy Day of Obligation (the 5 pm Mass that day counts only for our Sunday obligation).

Last year, 2017, we celebrated the 100th anniversary of Mary's apparition to three young shepherds in the small village of Fatima near Lisbon in Portugal. Just prior to our parish pilgrimage to Fatima and then Marian sites in France, our Parish Council approved a fund-raising to secure our own statue of Our Lady of Fatima (the current one we have had the past few years was on loan from one of our parishioners). You will recall that we organized a 2-mile walk. The fundraising was the easy part. What proved much more difficult was the procuring of the statue. The recommendation was to have a special order. As in the past, we looked for Italian artists (as for the Statue of the Holy Family and the large Crucifix in the sanctuary). Once we placed the order, we became aware that our specifications (particular dimensions, carving in wood, special painting) implied a much more stretched out schedule. At times, we thought we would never see the final product! **Praise the Lord!** The statue finally made it to Waldorf! We hope that you will find it beautiful and inspirational. A small group of parishioners made the design of a large pedestal and "celestial" lighting arrangements.

This project will complete the Marian images inside our church. While Mary has appeared at many sites over the world, **there is only one Mary, one Saint Mary**, the greatest Saint of all times. Two of the most famous apparitions have been at Fatima and at Guadalupe. The apparition at Guadalupe is celebrated every year on December 12. It is the most ancient apparition in the Americas—it happened in 1531, nearly 400 years ago. It is also the only accurate image of Our Lady, as it miraculously appeared on a tilma (a rough cloth worn by St. Juan Diego). Every December 12, we now have the tradition of the Mañanita, 5 am Mass with Mariachis, followed by breakfast. Everyone is invited! Last year, on May 13, the 100th anniversary of the first apparition at Fatima, our parish was chosen to launch a first Marian initiative of all parishes in Charles County. We had a wonderful outdoor Eucharistic procession followed by Rosary and Mass, with great participation. Then, for each of the following months until October 13, this celebration moved from parish to parish, and many of us went to all the other parishes. Mary must have been smiling in heaven! Earlier this year, on the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, Oct. 7, we had the honor and the privilege to host the International Pilgrim Virgin Statue of Our Lady of Fatima, and our parish received many blessings, including the visit of Bishop Dorsonville, who led the outdoor Eucharistic Procession, and was the main celebrant at our evening Mass.

As we continue our Advent journey, we can meditate on the central role played by Mary in our salvation history. From the very beginning, the Almighty Father, our Creator, planned that Mary will be the one through whom God will become man: this is the mystery of the Incarnation we celebrate every Christmas! The mystery which changed the whole world, once for all. First, Mary was conceived in the womb of Ann without any sin (unstained by the original sin of Adam and Eve): this is the mystery of the Immaculate Conception we celebrate on December 8. Second, Mary said "yes" to the Angel Gabriel and conceived Jesus through the Holy Spirit—the mystery of the Incarnation.

Mary could have said "no" to the Angel. Her faith, obedience, and humility are virtues God invites us to imitate in this time of Advent. Apart from the absence of original sin, Mary was a human being like all of us. In this Advent, let us accompany Mary and Joseph on their journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Let us spend some prayer time in reflecting on what was going on in Mary's heart and mind on this difficult journey for a young pregnant girl (perhaps 16 years old). She already knew that the child she was bearing in her womb would change the whole world.

Come, Holy Spirit! Help us to ponder on the mysteries of the Immaculate Conception and the Incarnation. Come, Holy Spirit! Help us to open our hearts to the joy of Jesus' Birth! Come, Holy Spirit!

One in Christ,  
*Father Alain*