

# Dear Padre,

## Does the Bible say that Mary was in her sixth month of pregnancy at the Annunciation?

The announcement of Jesus’ birth in Luke begins, “In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph...and the virgin’s name was Mary” (Luke 1:26–27). This Scripture passage taken out of context could possibly give the impression that “in the sixth month” refers to Mary. However, it refers to Mary’s cousin Elizabeth, who was in the sixth month of her pregnancy with John the Baptist. The proper context is a few verses before this one that reads, “Elizabeth conceived, and she went into seclusion for five months” (Luke 1:24).

Regarding Mary’s pregnancy, at the Annunciation, the angel Gabriel tells her, “Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus.... The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God” (Luke 1:31, 35). Gabriel also informs Mary, “And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren” (Luke 1:36).

In general, women already in their sixth month of pregnancy would likely be aware of their condition, and it would not be easy to conceal from others. ●



Fr. Byron Miller, CSsR / DearPadre.org

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
December 15	December 16	December 17	December 18	December 19	December 20	December 21
Advent Weekday	Advent Weekday	Advent Weekday	Advent Weekday	Advent Weekday	Advent Weekday	Fourth Sunday of Advent
Nm 24:2–7, 15–17a	Zep 3:1–2, 9–13	Gn 49:2, 8–10	Jer 23:5–8	Jgs 13:2–7, 24–25a	Is 7:10–14	Is 7:10–14
Mt 21:23–27	Mt 21:28–32	Mt 1:1–17	Mt 1:18–25	Lk 1:5–25	Lk 1:26–38	Rom 1:1–7
						Mt 1:18–24



### A WORD FROM POPE LEO XIV

*There are many settings in which the Christian faith is considered absurd.... Yet, precisely for this reason, they are the places where our missionary outreach is desperately needed. A lack of faith is often tragically accompanied by the loss of meaning in life, the neglect of mercy, appalling violations of human dignity, the crisis of the family, and so many other wounds that afflict our society.*

HOMILY, ROME, MAY 9, 2025



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# Our Parish COMMUNITY

December 14, 2025

Third Sunday of Advent (A)

Isaiah 35:1–6a, 10 / James 5:7–10 / Matthew 11:2–11



Say to the fearful of heart:  
Be strong, do not fear!  
Here is your God,  
he comes with vindication;  
With divine recompense  
he comes to save you.

ISAIAH 35:4



## The Gift of Questions

FR. THOMAS M. SANTA, CSsR

**W**e sometimes imagine that a sign of a strong faith is firm conviction and freedom from doubt. However, despite our imaginings, the authentic experiences of saints and ordinary people alike seem to point in another direction. The question of John the Baptist today—“Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?” (Matthew 11:3)—suggests that John is filled with questions, and these are important questions because they are asked from the depths of King Herod’s prison, which is not exactly the place of idle musings or concerns.

If John, who is a great saint and a man who encountered Jesus and witnessed the powerful manifestation of the Holy Spirit at his baptism, can have a question, doesn’t it suggest that questions are acceptable—perhaps even needed? Perhaps questioning is an indication of faithfulness, not a lack of faith. Questions do not suggest that something is missing; rather, they confirm that something is growing and developing. The Baptist could just have easily said, “Jesus, you are doing and saying more than I ever imagined possible. Please help me to understand,” or, to quote an unnamed saint, “I do believe, help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24).

God will not shatter, and faith will not collapse, because you have questions or doubts. Experience suggests that questions and doubts strengthen our belief and our commitment to a life of faith. ●

### Reflect

*Do I welcome questions, mine and others, as a way to grow in faith?*



SCAN TO  
LEARN ABOUT  
AUTHOR  
FR. THOMAS M.  
SANTA, CSSR



"We at St. Mary & Joseph Parishes strive for a deeper encounter with Jesus Christ through Scripture and Sacraments, form missionary disciples, and send them forth to transform the world."



## Our Three-Parish Cluster Sts. Mary and Joseph Catholic Churches Lone Tree, Nichols and Hills

Third Sunday of Advent

December 14, 2025

Church of St. Mary, 201 Short Street, Box B, Nichols, Iowa, 52766 319-330-5324  
St. Mary Church, 216 West Jayne Street, Box 416, Lone Tree, Iowa, 52755 319-629-4225  
St. Joseph Church, 209 Brady Street, PO Box 187, Hills, Iowa, 52235 319-679-2271

Sts. Mary and Joseph Cluster Parish Office  
209 Brady Street, P.O. Box 187 Hills, Iowa 52235-0187

Father David Paintsil, Pastor; 319-679-2271; email: paintsild@diodav.org  
Mrs. Carol Kaalberg, Pastoral Associate; 319-330-5324; email: kaalbergc@diodav.org  
Lora Sieverding, Administrative Assistant & Bookkeeper; hillsstjosephfin@diodav.org  
Nancy Waldschmidt, Director of Faith Formation; 319-331-2077; email: nwaldschmidt@gwaea.org  
Cluster Website: stsmariyoseph.com Cluster Facebook: www.facebook.com/stsmariyandjoseph  
Rev. Lou Leonhardt (retired priest); PO Box 454, Lone Tree, IA 52755 319-629-4339  
Bulletin deadline: 10am Tuesday. Contact Carol Kaalberg, 319-330-5324 or Lora Sieverding, 319-530-5560  
Hills Church entry: Lora Sieverding, 319-530-5560 or Judy Stebral, 319-331-8727

**Music Ministry:** St. Joseph, Hills: Lily Westemeyer, Robynn Anderson.  
Church of St. Mary, Nichols: Jean Mengel and Rhonda Meredith  
St. Mary, Lone Tree: Steve Moore.  
**St. Joseph Prayer Line:** Lucille Duwa 679-2404; Joan Gringer 679-2406  
**Church of St. Mary, Nichols Prayer Line:** Carol Kaalberg, 319-330-5324  
**St. Mary, Lone Tree Prayer Line:** Nancy Ford, 319-430-0882

### Cluster Mass Intentions December 13 to December 21, 2025

Saturday	December 13	4:00 PM	Lone Tree	Donald Kout
Sunday	December 14	8:00 AM 10:00 AM	Nichols Hills	Jack & Helene Salemink Connie Dietsch
Monday	December 15	8:00 AM	Lone Tree R	Doris Ruth
Tuesday	December 16	8:00 AM 8:30 AM 10:00 AM	Lone Tree R Atrium PP CC	Rosella Attig Service of Prayer Cluster Parishioners
Wednesday	December 17	8:00 AM 8:30 AM	Lone Tree R Atrium	Harry Attig Service of Prayer
Thursday	December 18	8:30 AM 10:00 AM	Atrium PPCC	Shirley Streb Gayle Kaalberg
Friday	December 19	8:30 AM	Atrium	Rose Amelon
Saturday	December 20	4:00 PM	Lone Tree	Russell Hotz
Sunday	December 21	8:00 AM 10:00 AM	Nichols Hills	Gayle Kaalberg Dean & Alice Cole

Atrium , Atrium Village Chapel,  
Atrium Village, Hills.

PP CC, Pioneer Park Care Center  
located at Pioneer Park Villa,  
Lone Tree.

Lone Tree R, St. Mary Rectory in  
Lone Tree.

#### Confession Schedule

Father David is available to  
hear confessions before  
Mass at these times:

**St. Mary, Lone Tree**  
Saturday 3:30 to 3:50 pm  
**Church of St. Mary Nichols**  
Sunday 7:30 to 7:50 am  
**St. Joseph, Hills**  
Sunday 9:30 to 9:50 am

*Let us come to reconcile to God  
and others!*

## Comments from Father David Paintsil:

### SPEND THIS ADVENT WITH MARY

#### Why Spend This Advent with Mary?

Advent is a sacred season of waiting, hope, and joyful expectation. Yet at its heart stands one person who lived this mystery more intimately than anyone else: **Mary, the Mother of God**. We often say we “celebrate Advent,” but Mary *lived* Advent in her very flesh. Her entire being became the dwelling place of the long-awaited Messiah. Pope Benedict XVI beautifully summarized this truth when he said, “*To celebrate Advent means: to become Marian, to enter into that communion with Mary’s ‘Yes.’*”

Advent is therefore profoundly Marian because Mary’s journey is the Church’s first Advent. From the moment of the Annunciation, she entered a sacred time of waiting—not with fear or anxiety, but with faith, courage, and total surrender to God’s will. She teaches us how to prepare a room for Christ, not only in our homes but in our hearts.

The Church also highlights Mary during this season through the great feast of the **Immaculate Conception**, which we celebrated on Monday, reminding us that she is the pure vessel chosen from all eternity to bear the Savior. St. John Paul II wrote in *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*: “*Among creatures, no one knows Christ better than Mary; no one can introduce us to a profound knowledge of his mystery better than his mother.*” If we truly desire to welcome Christ more deeply this Christmas, then we cannot set Mary aside. It is simply impossible to understand the mystery of the Incarnation without the woman through whom the Word became flesh.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta captured this beautifully when she said, “*No Mary, no Jesus.*” Without Mary’s courageous “yes,” there would be no Christmas, no manger, no Bethlehem night filled with angelic praise. To put it plainly: **no Mary, no Advent**. Like every expectant mother awaiting the birth of her child, Mary knows what it means to wait with love, with longing, and with trust in God. She is the perfect companion for our own waiting.

There is also a profound spiritual truth: **Jesus entrusted Himself to Mary**, and therefore we can entrust ourselves to her as well. St. John Paul II emphasized that it was the Eternal Father Himself who entrusted His Son to Mary in the mystery of the Incarnation. And at the end of His earthly life, Jesus repeated this gesture when He told the beloved disciple, “*Behold your mother.*” We are told that the disciple then took her “into his own home.” This means far more than inviting her into a physical space. He welcomed her into his inner life, his decisions, his faith journey.

Many people hesitate to draw close to Mary because they fear criticism or misunderstanding. But they are not alone. Even St. Joseph struggled at first when he discovered Mary’s mysterious pregnancy. Yet the angel reassured him: “*Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary into your home.*” When Joseph courageously welcomed Mary and the Child into his life, everything changed. This same transformation happens to us when we take Mary into our hearts and homes today.



Please pick up your yearly envelopes and 2026 calendar at our church entrances.

Bible Study

Bible Study will meet December 23 at Atrium Village, 2nd floor study/lounge at 6:30 PM. Contact Melody Hobert-Mellecker—319-936-3287, call or text — if you are interested, or just come!



The 25-26 Annual Diocesan Appeal

Parish Goals:

Hills = \$11,405.00 ... Pledged to date, \$11,745 (103% of goal).  
Lone Tree = \$10, 670.00 ... Pledged to date, \$10,865 (101.8 of goal).  
Nichols= \$8,114.00 ... Pledged to date, \$8,627 (106.3% of goal).



THANK YOU TO ALL WHO CONTRIBUTED TO HELPED MEET OUR GOALS!

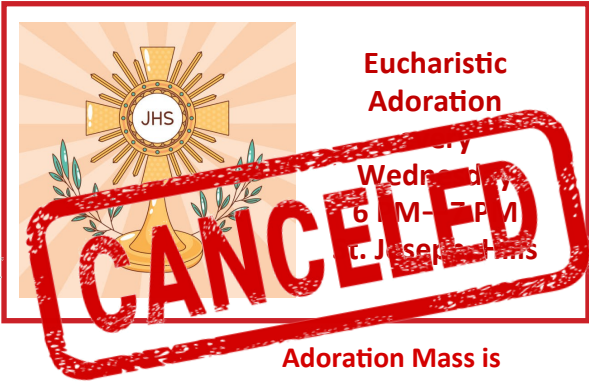
If you haven't given to the ADA yet, please do, any funds beyond our goal go back to the parish.

ST. MARY LONE TREE

From Thanksgiving through Advent, we will be collecting baby items for Birthright of Johnson County. This year, Birthright especially needs larger diapers (sizes 3 & 4), wipes, and baby shampoo and lotion. Sleepers and hooded towels are also in low supply. All items donated will be given to support expecting and new mothers.



Fr. David is on retreat this week (December 15-19). If you are in need of emergency priest services, please call Carol Kaalberg, and she will assist you.



Adoration Mass is CANCELED due to Fr. David being on retreat.

Liturgical Ministers—Lone Tree St. Mary Saturday 4:00 pm Cycle A Reading

	12/13/2025 Fr. David	12/20/2025 Fr. Lou	12/24/2025 Fr. Lou	12/25/2025 Fr. Lou	Lone Tree	Parish Support	12/27/25 Fr. David
Greeter	Bernie Lorack	Nancy Ford	Virginia Schlopko		Envelopes	\$1,893.00	Barb Dunsmore
Lector	Jill Welter	Jerry Ford	Sherry Nicola	Trudi Westfall	Offertory	\$66.00	Jill Welter
Cross Bearer	Lynn Bland	Nancy Ford	Jerry Ford				Lynn Bland
Servers	Jill Welter	Jerry Ford	Sherry Nicola	Trudi Westfall			Jill Welter
Eucharist	Sherry Nicola	JerryFord	Sherry Nicola	Trudi Westfall			Sherry Nicola
Eucharist	Judy Grothe	Nancy Ford	Judy Grothe				Judy Grothe
Collection	Glen Gerot	Joan Davis	Jerry Ford	Volunteer			Joan Davis
	Betty Gerot	Lynn Bland	Nancy Ford	Volunteer			Lynn Bland
Gifts	Betty, Glen Gerot	Joan Davis, Lynn Bland	Jerry & Nancy Ford	Volunteer			Joan, Lynn
Commentator	Jill Welter	Jerry Ford	Sherry Nicola	Trudi Westfall			Jill Welter

Liturgical Ministers—Nichols Church of St. Mary Sunday 8:00 am Cycle A Reading

	12/14/2025 Fr. Lou	12/21/2025 Fr. David	12/24/2025 Fr. David	12/28/2025 Fr. David	Nichols	Parish Support
Greeter	Joe Harper	Joe Harper	Joe Harper	Joe Harper	Envelopes	\$605.00
Lector	Renetta Burlage	Missy Lenz	Carol Kaalberg	Renetta Burlage	Offertory	\$30.00
Cross Bearer	Michael Burlage	Michael Burlage	David Ollendick	Michael Burlage		
Server	Carol Kaalberg	Carol Kaalberg	Carol Kaalberg	Carol Kaalberg		
Eucharist	Missy Lenz	Missy Lenz	Adam Gauger	Carol Kaalberg		
Eucharist	Carol Kaalberg	Carol Kaalberg	Carol Kaalberg	Missy Lenz		
Collection	Joe Harper	Dennis Truesdale	Kory Kaalberg	Joe Harper		
	Dennis Truesdale	Adam Gauger	David Ollendick	Dennis Truesdale		
Gifts	Missy Lenz	Julia Elder	David Ollendick	Brent & Meaghan Peters		
Commentator	Carol Kaalberg	Carol Kaalberg	Carol Kaalberg	Carol Kaalberg		

Liturgical Ministers—Hills St. Joseph Sunday 10:00 am Cycle A Reading

	12/14/2025 Fr. David	12/21/2025 Fr. David	12/24/2025 Fr. David	12/25/2025 Fr. David	Hills	Parish Support	12/28/25 Fr. David
Music Ministry	Lily Westemyer	Lily Westemyer	VOLUNTEERS	VOLUNTEER	Envelopes	\$635.00	Choir
Greeter	Marcia Mellecker	Gus & Lenore Manrique	PLEASE	Marcia Mellecker	Offertory	\$37.00	Liz & Rich Lockhart
Lector	Kay Evans	Wendy Berry	SIGN UP	Bob Jenn	Retired R	\$2.00	Wendy Berry
Server	Emy Rivera/Wendy Berry	Mike Sieverding/ Messi Akodegnon		VOLUNTEER			Mike Sieverding
Eucharist -host	Jolene Van Eschan	Kristee Malmberg		Jolene VanEschen			Carol Kirkpatrick
Eucharist - cup	Arlene Johnston	Emi Rivera		Bob Jenn			Kristee Malmberg
Eucharist - cup	Mike Sieverding	Carol Kirkpatrick		Kay Evans			Deanne Eden
Collection	Thom Kirkpatrick	Jim Frantz		Marcia Mellecker			Marcia Mellecker
	Carol Kirkpatrick	Hope Frantz		VOLUNTEER			Barbara Mahanna
Gifts	Family of Connie Dietsch	Family of Dean & Alice Cole		Marcia Mellecker			Family of Marvin Simon
Commentator	Carol Kirkpatrick	Carol Kirkpatrick		Joyce Gauger			Lora Sieverding

If you are unavailable for the above ministry assignment, please find your own replacement. Thank you.

Father Bill Kneemiller's Land's End Rugs

To support our local food pantries!

JoAnn Montgomery has made 100 rugs, from scrap materials. Your goodwill donation to purchase rug(s) will go towards our local food pantries. Rugs can be found in parish hall. Please put your donation for rug(s) in an envelope marked RUG DONATION, and put in collection basket at Mass. Make checks payable to St. Joseph Church or St. Mary Church. Funds will be dispersed to appropriate food pantry.



Cluster Parish Announcements

Bulletin deadline **Tuesday at 10:00 am.** Contact Lora Sieverding at 319-530-5560, hillsstjosephfin@diodav.org or Carol Kaalberg at 319-330-5324 or kaalbergc@diodav.org.

St. Joseph Church, Hills.

St. Joseph Food Pantry is open each Wednesday morning from 10 am to noon. Mike and Lucy Parker direct our food pantry and can be reached at 319-679-2420.

Hills Parish Council: Next meeting: January 19, 6:30 PM.

Parishioners are welcome to attend council meetings. Please see a council member if you have agenda items. Members include: Rick Cole, Kay Evans, Karen Karr, Thom Kirkpatrick, Kristee Malmberg, Shelagh McDonald, Brian Moran, and Jim Schneider (President). Minutes are at church entry.



We will have limited office hours the next two weeks, with bulletins being printed much earlier than typical. If an announcement misses the bulletin we will have it in the announcements at Mass. Additionally, every effort will be made to update the electronic versions of the weekly bulletin. Thank you for your patience during this holiday season.



Following Mass on Sunday, December 21, we will be decorating our church. We are need of lots of helping hands. It shouldn't take more than an hour. Thank you in advance for your help.



Annual Altar & Rosary Parish Potluck

TODAY, SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14,

St. Joseph Parish Hall, Following Mass

Please bring a dish to share.

A&R will provide meat, rolls, drinks and table service.

ALL ARE WELCOME!



St. Mary Church, Lone Tree and Nichols

Lone Tree Food Pantry is open each Wednesday afternoon from 3:30-5:00 PM. For more information, please call 319-629-4900.

Nichols Parish Council & Finance Council: Next meeting will be Sunday, January 25, following Mass at the church.

Lone Tree Parish Council: Next meeting will be Monday, January 26 at 6:00 PM, NOTE: this is a new date and time.



SECRET SANTA

During Advent, St. Mary Lone Tree will be collecting for our SECRET SANTA project.

Please be generous!

During our Ecumenical Thanksgiving Service \$251.00 was donated to SECRET SANTA!

LONE TREE & NICHOLS FOOD PANTRY

During November & The Season of Advent, we will be collecting food items and non-perishables for our local food pantry. The need is increasing so we are asking for your help. Baskets are at both church entrances for your donations.



Following Mass on Saturday, December 20, we will be decorating our church. We are need of lots of helping hands. It shouldn't take more than an hour. Thank you in advance for your help.

Rest in Peace: Our parish sympathy is extended to the family of Dale Johnson, who passed away last week. Dale was a resident of Pioneer Park. Eternal rest grant unto him O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him. May his soul and all the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.



For your convenience Parish Council Minutes are now being posted on the bulletin board at the church entry.