

FAMILY OF FAITH



“Journey to Bethlehem,”
Joseph Brickey

Advent as Covenant

Our catechesis for December focused on covenants. Covenants are different from contracts because covenants are permanent; they are unbreakable. If one party fails to uphold their end of a covenant, it still stands; whereas if one party breaks their end of a contract, the contract is null or the breaking party can be punished. Marriage, for example, is a covenant- which is why our process for annulment is so lengthy in the Church: rather than justify the end of a marriage relationship, the Tribunal’s job is to decide whether such a covenant was ever undertaken in the first place.

God never formed contracts with humanity; he only forged covenants. Contracts are limited and temporary. This means that God intended to forge permanent, unbreakable, family bonds with us. His first covenant was with our original father Adam. Even though Adam and Eve broke their part of the covenant, God didn’t then write us off, but spent all of Salvation History chasing after us and teaching us how to be his children, how

to be his friends.

The final covenant was forged with Jesus’ incarnation and saving death and resurrection. Note that even though God continued to make new covenants, these didn’t cancel the old ones. He kept giving himself more responsibilities, and more people to call his own- first a couple, then a family, then a tribe, a kingdom, nation, and Church, his very Body, - all while knowing that humanity was incapable of holding up their end, and would fail.

My favorite example of the reality of the Old Testament covenants is the promise that God made to Abram in Genesis 15. When Abram asks God how he will know that he and his descendants will possess the Promised Land, God tells him to bring a series of animals to him, split them in half, and lay the halves opposite each other. A deep sleep fell on Abram, and when it was dark a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch appeared and passed through the pieces.

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DECEMBER FAVORITE RESOURCES

AdventAdventure.com

CatholicSprouts.com

Catholicicing.com

DID YOU KNOW?

St. Francis of Assisi created the first nativity scene in 1223, exactly 800 years ago this Christmas! Consider leaving the Infant Jesus out of your family’s nativity until Christmas Day, and keeping the Three Kings put away until Epiphany on January 7.

If we don't know the customs of the ancient peoples, the deep meaning of such an act could be lost on us. The custom that God is performing here is an ancient practice called passing between the parts. This was a way of forming contracts in antiquity, from Patriarchal times at least through Homer in Greece. The contracting parties would walk between the slain animals together. Its meaning was, simply: that if one should break the contract, then let the same treatment given to the animals be done to them- in other words, if a party breaks the contract, let them be torn limb from limb. Abram would have known this practice, he may have even witnessed it among the people of his day and place; and how touching that God uses practices and language and visuals that the man would be intimately familiar with.

What elevates this to a covenant with God is that God himself passes between the pieces, and yet he does not have Abram do the same. God knows that Abram is incapable of upholding his end of the covenant, and does not wish to punish him or his descendants when, not if, that happens. God is simultaneously making an unbreakable promise and telling Abram that if it doesn't come to pass, then he, the God of all creation, deserves to be torn apart.

With Jesus' incarnation as a helpless, poverty stricken infant, we see this self sacrifice and this unbreakable promise yet again. Christ knows he will be let down- he will be betrayed, tortured, and killed- and yet he comes. He gives himself to us in a human lifetime, then on the Cross. He knows he will be denied justice and love and yet he comes, at each Mass to be consumed by the children whom he loves unconditionally, and who he will never abandon, no matter how we disappoint him. He is always there, chasing after us with paternal love, the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Upcoming Events

You may have seen these on your Faith Formation calendar, but reminders are always helpful! [*Please note the link sent in Flocknote to registered families: The December Parish Session has been posted on Youtube for your use.*](#)

The Parish office will be closed all day on 12/22 and at noon on 12/29. Please see the parish website for Mass information over the holidays.

Dec. 15: First Eucharist family session folders available in the Gathering Space

Dec. 27: Magnify (6:30 PM)

Jan. 1: Solemnity of the BVM, Mother of God (Not a Holy Day of Obligation this year)
Mass at 9 AM

Jan. 7: Epiphany of the Lord- make sure to grab your blessed chalk!

Jan. 7 and 8: Parish Session 3 (Sun. after 9 AM Mass, Mon. at 6 PM)

Jan. 21 and 22: Community Lectio Divina prayer and card making (at your usual class time)

Congratulations!

Many of our first penitents encountered Jesus Christ in the Sacrament of Reconciliation on December 2 and 5. We want to congratulate all of them for taking this step into God's loving mercy. We pray that frequent confession becomes a holy habit for you all!

*One of the most basic suggestions of our findings is that young adults arrive at a sense of their fundamental identity and worldview not by weighing all possible intellectual arguments for and against a proposed way of life, **but rather by roughly adopting the worldview of those mentors who left the deepest impression upon them—and who loved them and cared for them the most.** It should come as no surprise, then, that the emergence of the new generation of dedicated young Catholics will rise and fall with the choices of their parents...*

The primary way by which Catholic identity becomes rooted in children's lives are the day-to-day religious practices of the family and the ways parents model their faith and share it in conversation, collaboration, and exposure to outside religious opportunities. The crucial location where young people's religious outcomes are largely decided is not the parish or Catholic school, but the home. The primary responsibility for passing on religious faith and practice to children rests with parents; religious congregations (and Catholic schools) are secondary and primarily serve to provide support.

(Bartkus and Smith, 70)