

**St. Aloysius Religious Education**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> week of Advent**



**The Christmas Crèche and Nativity**

St. Francis is said to have initiated the tradition of erecting nativity scenes for Christ's mass ("Christmas"). In 1223 in Greccio, Italy, he created a living nativity staged with live animals and people. Pope Honorius III thus gave approval of the exhibit on behalf of the Vatican, and within the century every Catholic church in Italy followed Francis by displaying a nativity scene for Christ's mass.

With the passing of time, living nativities were replaced by statues and figurines. In the 1600's the tradition spread to Germany, and both Catholics and Protestants in various countries began to accept and adapt to the practice. Since 1960, the Pope has held a special ceremony in St. Peter's Square to "bless" the mangers and figurines of the baby Jesus of the children of Rome.

Additionally, since 1982, under the mandate of Pope John Paul II, the Vatican has annually placed a nativity scene in front of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Some of the statues used in the display are antiques from a nativity that was created for Pope Gregory XVI in 1842.

*<http://www.glencairnmuseum.org/nativity-visualelements/>  
(Show the children the Nativity in the prayer box)*

## The Christmas Star:



Whatever its form, the star reminds us of God, who caused the light to shine out of darkness and of the light which is the life of humanity. It reminds us of the promise of Abraham that his descendants would be more numerous than the stars; we are reminded of the star that pointed to the "great and heavenly light from Bethlehem's manger shining bright." ***The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*** This is the message of the Advent star, which also points to Jesus, who said, "I am the bright and Morning Star." ***It is the star of promise, the star of fulfillment, and the star of hope.***

## Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe December 12th



In 1531 a "Lady from Heaven" appeared to a humble Native American, Juan Diego, at Tepeyac, a hill northwest of what is now Mexico City. Speaking to him in Nahuatl, the local language, she asked that a church be built at that site, in her honor; she identified herself as the Virgin Mary. Juan Diego told his story to the Spanish Archbishop, Fray Juan de Zumárraga, who instructed him to return to Tepeyac Hill, and ask the lady for a miraculous sign to prove her identity. The Virgin Mary told Juan Diego to gather flowers from the top of Tepeyac Hill. Although December was very late in the growing season for flowers to bloom, Juan Diego found at the usually barren hilltop Castilian roses, not native to Mexico, which the Virgin Mary arranged in his peasant *tilma* cloak. When Juan Diego opened the cloak before Bishop Zumárraga on December 12, the flowers fell to the floor, and in their place was the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, miraculously imprinted on the fabric.

God has chosen Mary to lead us to Jesus with her message of love and compassion, and her universal promise of help and protection to all mankind. In 1999, Pope John Paul II proclaimed the Virgin Mary *Patroness of the Americas*, *Empress of Latin America*, and *Protectress of Unborn Children*. Entrusting the cause of life to her loving protection, and placed under her motherly care the innocent lives of children, especially the unborn.

The icon is now displayed in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico, one of the most visited Marian shrines.