

Fr. Joseph's Corner

"St. Stephen"

St. Stephen was one of the first deacons to be ordained in the Church. He was also the first Christian martyr. In that sense, every Christian is called to bear witness to Jesus Christ, in both their words and their actions. Not all are asked to shed their blood.

Those who shed their blood for faith are the greatest witnesses. They have been especially honored since the very beginning of Christianity. Stephen was so aligned with Jesus in his holy life that his martyrdom was both a natural and supernatural sign of his love for the Lord. It also inspired the early believers as they faced the first wave of brutal persecution.

His behavior, even forgiving those who were taking his life while he was being stoned to death, was a beautiful reflection of how fully he conformed to the Lord, Jesus Christ.

The 6th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles describes the selection of the first seven deacons of the Church. As the Apostles continued their ministry of Jesus Christ as His leaders, some Greek-speaking widows were being overlooked in their practical needs. The Twelve decided to appoint seven deacons to oversee their care. This allowed the deacons to extend the Apostles' pastoral work, freeing them to focus more on teaching.

Great preaching and miracles were attributed to St. Stephen. The Bible records that he, "full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people." His popularity created enemies among some Jews, members of the Synagogue of Roman Freedmen. They debated with him to gather evidence against him in hopes of persecuting the early Church.

They accused Stephen of blasphemy, claiming he spoke against God and Moses. The charges angered the local people, who demanded he be tried and punished. During his trial, several false witnesses were called by the Sanhedrin to testify that he was guilty of blasphemy. He was also charged with predicting that Jesus would destroy the temple and for preaching against Mosaic law.

Stephen was filled with divine wisdom. He responded by recounting Israel's history and highlighting the blessings God had given His chosen people. He also described how disobedient Israel had become, despite God's goodness and mercy. Stephen clarified that Jesus came to fulfill,



fill, not to destroy, the law of Moses. He quoted extensively from the Hebrew Scriptures to support his case.

Finally, he warned the Sanhedrin, saying, "You stubborn people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears. You are always resisting the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors used to do. Can you name a single prophet your ancestors never persecuted? They killed those who announced the coming of the Upright One, and now you have become his betrayers, his murderers. In spite of being given the Law through angels, you have not kept it" (Acts 7:51-53).

As Stephen finished his defense, he looked up and saw a vision of Jesus standing at the right hand of God. He said, "Look, I can see heaven opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." That vision was regarded as the final proof of blasphemy by the Jews, who did not believe Jesus was the Messiah or Son of God. To them, Jesus could not possibly be beside the Father in Heaven. The crowd rushed at Stephen and took him outside the city to stone him to death.

As he was being brutally stoned, he spoke his last words, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Lord, do not hold this sin against them." Words that echoed the very words of Jesus on the Cross. Following those words, Stephen died in the Lord.

Watching the trial and execution was a Rabbi named Saul of Tarsus, a fierce persecutor of the early Church. Soon after, that Rabbi would meet the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus and experience a dramatic conversion. His encounter is documented in the ninth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. He adopted the name Paul as a sign of his new life in Jesus Christ and went on to become the great apostle to the Gentiles.

Christians buried Stephen, but the location of his tomb is not specified in the New Testament and may have been forgotten for a time. But in 415, a Christian priest claimed he had a vision of the tomb and located Stephen's remains. A name inside the tomb confirmed the find.

St. Stephen is often depicted holding stones, a Gospel Book, a small church, and a martyr's palm frond. He is the patron saint of Altar Servers, bricklayers, casket makers, and deacons, and his feast day is observed on December 26th.

—Prayer Wishes, Fr. Joseph

St. Joseph Catholic Church

150 E First St., P.O. Box 1315, Prineville OR 97754
December 14, 2025 † 3rd Sunday of Advent

Vigil Mass Saturday 5:00 p.m.
Sunday Mass (English)* 9:00 a.m.
Sunday Mass (Spanish) 12:00 p.m.
Holy Days 8:00 a.m. & 6:00 p.m.
Mondays • Tuesdays • Thursdays 8:00 a.m.
Wednesdays • Fridays 12:00 p.m.
*Coffee and Donuts are served after the 9 a.m. Mass.

Pastor ♦ Very Rev. Fr. Joseph Kunnelaya T.
Secretary ♦ Darlene Counts

Parish Office Hours ♦ Monday – Thursday ♦ 9:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Parish Office Telephone: (541) 447-6475

Fr. Joseph: 9:00 a.m. – 9:00 p.m. ♦ (541) 420-4458

Parish Website: <https://stjosephsprineville.org>

Email: stjosephparish@bendbroadband.com

Pastor: fatherjoseph@bendbroadband.com / joekunel55@gmail.com

Facebook: St. Joseph Parish / Instagram: [st_josephparish](https://www.instagram.com/st_josephparish)

Director of Religious Education ♦ Barbara Dalton

OCIA ♦ Jim Friese / OCIA (Spanish) ♦ Yurizet Villasana

Parish Bulletin Designer / Editor ♦ Tina Hill



Confessions

Wednesdays: 11:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Saturdays: 3:30 – 4:30 p.m.

(other times by appointment)

Anointing of the Sick

Contact Fr. Joseph for this Sacrament

- ♦ DIVINE MERCY CHAPLET AND CENACLE GROUP: Every Monday after the 8 a.m. Mass.
- ♦ FRIDAY ROSARY at 11:30 a.m., MASS at 12:00 p.m., EXPOSITION of the Blessed Sacrament immediately following Mass, EUCHARISTIC ADORATION 1–2 p.m., BENEDICTION AND REPOSITION



Baptisms

Baptisms will be held on Saturdays.

Parents of children to be baptized must be registered members of the parish 6 months prior to baptism.

A Baptismal Preparation Class is mandatory for both parents and godparents.

For more information, call the Parish Office.

Marriages

Couples need to make an appointment with Fr. Joseph 6 months before the proposed date.

A Marriage Preparation Course is mandatory.

MASS INTENTIONS / READINGS FOR THE WEEK

The practice of requesting a Mass to be offered for loved ones, living or deceased, is a beautiful and wonderful part of our Catholic tradition.

Please Call the Parish Office to Have a Mass Intention Reserved

Day	Date	Time	Intention	Readings
Monday	12/15/2025	8:00 am	Amelia Caraveho (L)	Nm 24:2-7, 15-17a; Mt 21:23-27
Tuesday	12/16/2025	8:00 am	Sami Pedersen (D)	Zep 3:1-2, 9-13; Mt 21:28-32
Wednesday	12/17/2025	12:00 pm	Lila Gerke (D)	Gn 49:2, 8-10; Mt 1:1-17
Thursday	12/18/2025	8:00 am	Barbara Barrus (D)	Jer 23:5-8; Mt 1:18-25
Friday	12/19/2025	12:00 pm	Lila Gerke (D)	Jgs 13:2-7, 24-25a; Lk 1:5-25
Saturday	12/20/2025	5:00 pm	Howard Tocher Family (L)	Is 7:10-14; Rom 1:1-7; Mt 1:18-24
Sunday	12/21/2025	9:00 am	St. Joseph Parishioners (L)	Is 7:10-14; Rom 1:1-7; Mt 1:18-24
Sunday	12/21/2025	12:00 pm	Maria Louisa Diaz (D)	Is 7:10-14; Rom 1:1-7; Mt 1:18-24

(L) = Living ♦ (D) = Deceased

Today's Homily

TODAY'S READINGS INVITE us to rejoice at the rebirth of Jesus in our lives as we are preparing for our annual Christmas celebration.

Today is called *Gaudete* Sunday because today's Mass begins with the opening antiphon: *Gaudete in Domino semper*, i.e., "Rejoice in the Lord always."

So, to express our joy in the coming of Jesus as our Savior into our hearts and lives, we light the rose candle in the Advent wreath, and the priest may wear rose-colored vestments.

Scripture lessons: The prophet Isaiah, in the first reading, encourages the exiled Jews in Babylon to rejoice because their God is going to liberate them from slavery and lead them safely to their homeland.

In the second reading, James the Apostle encourages the early Christians to rejoice and wait with patience for the imminent second coming of Jesus.

Finally, in the first part of today's Gospel reading, Jesus encourages John the Baptist in prison to rejoice by casting away his wrong expectations about the Messiah and simply accepting Jesus' healing and preaching ministry as the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah.

In the second part of today's Gospel, Matthew presents Jesus, the true Messiah, paying the highest compliments to John the Baptist as his herald and the last of the prophets—and giving special credit to the courage of John's prophetic convictions, asking his listeners to rejoice in the greatness of his herald.



We need to learn how to survive a Faith crisis: If

John the Baptist, even after having had a direct encounter with Jesus, the Messiah, had his doubts about Jesus and His teachings, we, too, can have our crises of Faith.

On such occasions, let us remember the truth that all our Christian dogmas are based on our trusting Faith in the Divinity of

Jesus who taught them, and on His Divine authority that He gave to His Church to teach what He taught. Hence, it is up to us to learn our Faith in depth and so to remove our doubts.

"Go and tell others what you hear and see." We rejoice at the thought that Jesus is going to be reborn in our lives, deepening in us His gifts of love, mercy, forgiveness and the spirit of humble and sacrificial service during this Christmas season. Hence, let us joyfully share God's bountiful grace, forgiveness, and mercy with others. What Jesus commanded John's disciples, He commands us as well: *Go and tell others what you hear and see*. This means that we have to share with others our experience of the rebirth of Jesus within us.

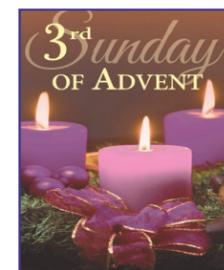
We need to open our hearts and let God transform our lives: Today's readings remind us that our lives can also be transformed if we are patient and place our trust in God. The message of Advent is that God is present among us, in our everyday lives. We must prepare our hearts to recognize and welcome Him by allowing a *metánoia* (a change of thinking about God, ourselves, and the world) to take place in us during Advent.

December—Month of the Immaculate Conception

ADVENT MASS SCHEDULE

Day	Date	Mass Times	Event
Wednesday	12/17/25	6 p.m.	Advent Penance Service
Wednesday	12/17/25	4 p.m.	Nativity Play by our Religious Education Students
Wednesday	12/24/25	6 p.m.	Christmas Vigil Bilingual
Thursday	12/25/25	9 a.m.	Christmas Mass
Thursday	01/01/26	8 a.m./6 p.m.	Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God

The 3rd Week of Advent—The Candle of Joy



The third candle to be lit is the pink candle, which symbolizes Joy. This candle reminds us that Jesus' arrival is near as we reach the midpoint of Advent. The third Sunday of Advent is also known as Gaudete Sunday, representing the closeness of Christ's return.

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Religious Retirement

This weekend, there will be a special collection to support the Retirement Fund for Religious. Please donate to help the more than 24,000 senior religious who have dedicated their lives to service to retire with dignity. Donations will provide essential care, medicine, and daily needs for senior sisters, brothers, and religious order priests who have served for decades—often for little or no pay.

Show your appreciation by supporting those who have given a lifetime of service.

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Live Nativity

Please come to see our Religious Education students perform "The Savior's Birth—A Nativity Skit" on **Wednesday, December 17th, at 4 p.m.**, in the Parish Hall. There will be cookies and cider with Santa after the program. We would appreciate donations of cookies from our parishioners.

You can leave them in the kitchen in the days leading up to the play. Thank you!



Advent Penance Service

Our Advent Penance Service is on **Wednesday, December 17th, at 6 p.m.** All students who have received Communion are expected to attend with their parents.



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Las Posadas



Join the Hispanic Ministry as we prepare for the birth of Jesus from, **Tuesday, December 16th, to Wednesday, December 24th at 6 p.m.** Our Hispanic Ministry would love to invite anyone who would like to attend our evening events as we prepare to celebrate Christmas.

For more information, please call **Ruby** at (541) 350-8833 or **Yuri** at (509) 910-6798 or contact the Parish Office.

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Christmas Brunch

Father Joseph is hosting a Christmas Potluck Brunch on **December 25th at noon**. If you're spending the holiday alone and would like to join us, you're warmly invited. We aim to ensure that no one is alone this Christmas.

Please bring a favorite dish to share, and we will provide the ham. Please call the Parish Office at (541) 447-6475) or email stjosephparish@bendbroadband.com. Come and celebrate with our parish family!

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Save the Date!

The Chesterton Academy of Mater Dei Catholic High School invites you to our **Annual Vision Dinner —"A Joyful Adventure"** on **Saturday, February 7th**, at the **Bend Elks Lodge**. Enjoy an evening of fellowship and inspiration! Learn more at chestertonmaterdei.org.

PLEASE PRAY FOR THOSE ON OUR PRAYER LIST:

David Leonard ♦ Steve Forrester ♦ Carl Johnson ♦ Dolores Koivisto ♦ Anita Marquez ♦ Ben Guyer
Georgia Fitzgerald ♦ Chuck Renwick ♦ Barbara Gadotti ♦ John Huthmacher ♦ Ed McNamara
Brittany ♦ Duncan Osgood ♦ Julie Bither ♦ Mary Bither ♦ Lyn Rodgers ♦ Fred Vandehey ♦ Ralph Lee
Mary Lee Jeanne Hackett ♦ Peggy Holtz ♦ Michael Kuenzi ♦ Mary Ellen Marquez ♦ Barbara Hopla
Gilbert Marquez ♦ Sam LeFevre and the LeFevre family ♦ Joanie Holland ♦ Kerry Loving ♦ Tara Lamb