

Spiritually Speaking

Let us see your face, we shall be saved

By Fr. Thankachan Joseph

We might sometimes feel that if only we had been there when Christ was born, we would have been so fortunate, and at times we have doubts and wish we could see God and be reassured in our faith. So, Sunday's response psalm voices our plea: "Lord make us turn to you; Lord let us see your face and we shall be saved." The Lord is coming. Are we ready to see him, meet him, hear him?



Fr. Thankachan Joseph

The prophet Micah (5:1-4a), who came from Bethlehem, a contemporary of Isaiah, Amos and Hosea, preached the message of repentance, asking the people to turn away from their sins. Micah reminds the people that the Messiah will not come from the sophisticated well-known city of Jerusalem. Its people were too hardened, their kings had been oppressing the people, and the present kings were no good. He points out that the Messiah will come from the small town of Bethlehem: "Oh Bethlehem, you who are one of the little clans of Judea, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule Israel." Bethlehem means "house of bread," and this town had no importance at that time but had ancient ties to the dynasty of Jesse and his son David. Micah makes the God's great promise to His people. Between that promise and its fulfillment was a long time of waiting. Only those who waited in hope saw that promise fulfilled. As believers, we want to draw close to God, want to experience God, and we pray that we might encounter Him. We have our expectations of how God should come into our lives, but God has His own way. That He will come into our world is certain, but will we encounter Him? Perhaps we have to abandon our "Jerusalem" and look for little unknown Bethlehem, abandon our plans and wait in hope for His coming. Have I seen Jesus on the street where I live? Perhaps He does live there, but only with eyes of faith can we recognize Him.

From the Letter to the Hebrews (10:5-10), we read, "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; in holocaust and sin offerings you took no delight. Behold I come to do your will of God" (5-6). What He desires from us is our willingness to be obedient to Him and His statutes so that our sins might be forgiven, and He might come into our lives. To prepare for His coming, we have to repent, turn away from our sins, and turn to God. Often, we create barriers to His coming into our lives. If we stick to our old ways, to our sinful habits and prejudices, we will not hear His call when He knocks at the doors of our hearts.

The Gospel of Luke (1:39-45) tells of Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth, to assist her in her pregnancy. We are told that through Mary, God kept that promise announced a long time ago through the prophet Micah. Important is not only that God came into her life, but that she recognized His coming. As Mary enters Elizabeth's house, Elizabeth beholds with eyes of faith the coming of the Lord into her life. Mary could just be a younger cousin on a social visit that happens to come when Elizabeth needs help. But Elizabeth sees God's hand and the Lord's presence in what is happening. "Why has this happened to me that the mother of my Lord comes to me?" At Christmas, God keeps His promise, that Promise One is named Jesus, revealed to all who have faith and fulfilled in all who have love. We will only recognize the face of Jesus when we have love in our hearts, for God and for our neighbor. We might look for God in the high and mighty, yet He might be hidden in the small, the sick, the senile, the simple and the socially outcast.

On Christmas we remember the magnanimity of God, who shared His only son with humanity, a little babe bringing peace, joy and happiness to a suffering humanity. Just as the Father shared His Son with us and dispelled our gloom, sin, shame and suffering, so, too, we are called to dispel the gloom, suffering and shame of others. We have a beautiful example in Mary, who reaches out to the needy, who prepared herself for the first Christmas by sharing her joy with her cousin Elizabeth. We, too, can thus prepare for Christmas, as the miracle of Christmas is the miracle of sharing and reaching out.

School board to proceed with bond issue

By April Hilton-Sykes

The Morrow County School Board, at their Monday night meeting at Heppner Elementary School, voted to proceed with plans to put up a bond issue for construction and refurbishing district schools. The board chose a middle of the road plan and intends to present it to voters in February of 2022.

The middle option which specifies a bond amount of \$138 million with a \$2.67 tax rate calls for:

- 1) Educational needs-modernizing learning environments and administration area, improve technology and add ADA Improvements.
- 2) Safety and Security-securing entry vestibules, card access control, fire sprinkler upgrades and adding cameras.
- 3) Building system upgrades-heating, ventilation, electrical and plumbing-addresses most urgent needs and replaces some aging equipment;
- 4) Traffic Flow and Parking Improvements at Sam Boardman Elementary, Heppner, Jr./Sr. High School, Irrigon Elementary and Irrigon Jr./Sr. High School;
- 4) Athletics and Activities-a full gym, locker and wrestling room at Riverside Jr./Sr. High School, a full gym and locker room at Irrigon Jr./Sr. High School and an auxiliary gym and locker room at Heppner Jr./Sr. High School.
- 5) Boardman Capacity-Four elementary classrooms and four junior/senior classrooms. Boardman schools currently have room for 276 more students.

A lower and a higher bond amount were also presented, with the lower at \$105 million and a \$2.03 tax rate which includes: the educational needs and safety and security options, addresses most urgent needs in building system upgrades, makes traffic flow improvements at SBE, HJSHS and IES, provides auxiliary gyms at RJSHS, IJSHS and HJSHS, but does not include added capacity for Boardman Schools.

The higher option, at \$154,000,000 with a \$2.99 tax rate, includes the educational needs, safety and security options; major system upgrades and replacements; traffic flow and parking improvements at SBE, HJSHS, Irrigon Elementary, IJSHS and A.C. Houghton Elementary; a full gym, locker and wrestling room at RJSHS, a full gym and locker room at IJSHS, and an auxiliary gym and locker room at HJSHS; eight elementary classrooms and four junior/senior classrooms at Boardman schools.

A graph of levy rates of surrounding districts places the Hermiston School Dis-

trict the highest at nearly \$3.50; Pendleton School District at a little over \$2; Athena-Weston and Condon at around \$1.75; and Umatilla at nearly \$1. Morrow County School District was one of the lowest, along with North Wasco School District, Ukiah SD, South Wasco County SD, Arlington SD, Black Butte SD and Ashwood SD.

Superintendent Dirk Dirksen told the board that the first order of business was to recruit members for a screening committee. He suggested a board of around 15-20 people from the three different communities, Boardman, Irrigon and Heppner areas.

Concerning growth in the three areas, Dirksen reported that Boardman schools gained 33 students over the past year. He said he had expected that area to have gained more students this year.

He presented the following enrollment report for December: A.C. Houghton Elementary, Irrigon-217; Sam Boardman Elementary, Boardman-334; Heppner Elementary-176; Irrigon Elementary-249; Windy River Elementary, Boardman-249; Heppner Jr./Sr. High School-162; Irrigon Jr./Sr. High School-371; Riverside Jr./Sr. High School, Boardman-488; Morrow Education Center, Irrigon-76; Total-2,254.

Boardman area schools gained 33 students from 1,038 in December of 2020 to 1,071 in December 2021; Heppner schools gained 27 students from 311 in December 2020 to 338 in 2021; Irrigon schools gained 10 students from 759 in 2020 to 769 in 2021; the Morrow Education Center lost 46 students, from 122 in 2020 to 76 in 2021; the district gained 24 students from 2,230 in 2020 to 2,254 in 2021.

Dirksen reported that the district has started receiving taxes for the current year and said, "They are coming in higher" than budgeted. Total revenue for 2021-2022 shows \$32,187,062 in total resources, \$23,325,543 in revenue year-to-date, \$9,422,589 anticipated, for a total of \$32,748,132. Concerning Superintendent Dirksen's retirement at the end of the school year and the upcoming superintendent search, the board received a superintendent salary comparison by region. Dirksen said that he would stay on, if necessary to assist with the bond issue.

In other business, the board:

- heard a presentation by Andrea Perry-Nelson, on the STEM classrooms.
- heard a presentation by students attending the FFA convention.
- approved the following employment action

for December: resignations-Briggette Campos, IJSHS CARE coordinator, November 17, 2021, Tina Crowell, RJSHS assistant cheerleading coach, Taylor Davis, IJSHS junior high assistant girls' basketball coach, Jason Dunten, IJSHS assistant high school football coach, Rhonda Fox-Brennan, RJSHS junior high head volleyball coach and DART/TAG coordinator, Bruce Krug, IJSHS special education teacher, January 30, 2022, Eric Solis, IJSHS ed assistant and junior high head football coach, December 16, 2021, Hilaree Vanderpas, RJSHS junior high assistant girls' basketball coach; employment/promotions/transfers-Angela Hanson, HJSHS ed assistant, Mariah Stephens, HJSHS library tech; extra duty contracts-Ken Grieb, HJSHS c-team boys' basketball coach, Michael Hughes, RJSHS head golf coach, Kacee Lathrop, HJSHS junior high head girls' basketball coach, Dan Locey, IJSHS temporary high school assistant boys' basketball coach, Gustavo Madrigal, RJSHS assistant high school wrestling coach, Richole Osborne, IJSHS head tennis coach, Paulina Pena, RJSHS assistant junior high girls' basketball coach, Albert Phillips, IJSHS C-team boys' basketball coach, and Teiko Villegas, RJSHS junior high head girls' basketball coach.

-approved the following for the first reading of rescinded, new or revised policies: All Students Belong-rescinded, All Students Belong, Bidding Requirements and Graduation Requirements.

-adopted rescinded, new or revised policies on Nondiscrimination, Individual Board Members' Authority and Responsibilities, Board Meetings,

Public Comment at Board Meetings-rescinded, Public Comment at Board Meetings, Compliance and Reporting on Standards, GBE Equal Employment Opportunity, Workplace Harassment, Suspected Sexual Conduct with Students and Reporting Requirements, Suspected Abuse of a Child Reporting Requirements, Instruction Goals, Freedom of Expression, Alternative Education Programs, Bilingual Education, Instructional Resources-Instructional Materials, School Counseling Program, Assessment Program, Equal Education Opportunity, Educational Equity, admission of Non-resident Students, Student Conduct, Hazing-Harassment-Intimidation-Bullying-Menacing Cyberbullying-Teen Dating Violence or Domestic Violence-Student, Weapons in Schools, Suspected Abuse of a Child Reporting Requirements and Suspected Sexual Conduct with Students and Reporting Requirements.

-adopted new, revised or rescinded ARs on Discrimination Complain Procedure, Public Comment at Board Meetings, Suspected Sexual Conduct Report Procedures and Forms, Hazing, Harassment, Intimidation, Bullying, Menacing or Cyber Bullying Report Procedures-Staff, Suspected Sexual Conduct Report Procedures and Form, Reporting of Suspected Abuse of a Child, Reporting of Suspected Abuse of a Child, and Reporting of Suspected Abuse of a Child.

-heard the following announcements: winter break from December 17-January 2; board work session January 10, 6 p.m. at the North District Office; Morrow Education Center, Irrigon; next board meeting, Monday, January 10, 7 p.m. at the North District Office.

Christmas at Ione Community Church

470 E Main Street, Ione, Oregon

Church School & Adult Study at 10:00 am

Advent Worship at 11:00 AM with Lighting of the Advent Candles each Sunday until Christmas.

Children's Christmas Program Dec. 12th as a part of morning worship -with potluck following.



Christmas Candlelight Worship Christmas Eve - Dec. 24th at 7:00 pm.

Tom & Jerry Party
December 17th
5:00 pm
Steak Dinner
6:30 pm
Music
 Elks Members and Guests only

HEPPNER ELKS 358
 "WHERE FRIENDS MEET"
 541-676-9181 142 N MAIN ST

Pastors Invited to Submit Christmas Messages
 The Heppner Gazette-Times will publish Christmas messages from area pastors on **Wednesday, December 22nd**
 The deadline to submit messages is **Monday, December 20th at 5 p.m.**

Happy Holidays to Our Heroes **THANK YOU** for your DEDICATION and SERVICE to our Country

Morrow County Veterans Services 541-922-6420

Send out your Christmas wishes to your customers and the community! The Heppner Gazette-Times will publish our special Holiday edition on December 22nd. The Christmas section will be full color and is a great way to thank your customers for their support throughout the year. Contact Giselle at the Heppner Gazette-Times for more information on how to have your advertisement included.

Deadline for the December 22nd issue is **Monday, December 20th at 5pm**
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