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of the City of Heppner and the County of Morrow

**Heppner**  
**GAZETTE-TIMES**  
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Morrow County's Home-Owned Weekly Newspaper

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**Spiritually Speaking**  
Father Thankachan Joseph  
St. Mary's Catholic Church Wasco



**REJOICE ALWAYS & PRAY UNCEASINGLY**

Last Sunday we heard and reflected on the invitation of John the Baptist calling everyone to prepare the way for the Messiah and to repent and produce the fruits of our conversion. Usually, the third Sunday of Advent is known as the Gaudete Sunday. In Latin, Gaudete would mean "Rejoice" because our salvation is very close at hand. In every Eucharistic celebration we will encounter the same empathetic Christ. Let us not be afraid to show Him the various handicaps, disabilities, and wounds that we suffer. May the Babe of Bethlehem heal these disabilities from all.

The first reading, from Prophet Isaiah (61:1-2a, 10-11), contains the thrilling message of hope for all those who may be feeling down. Isaiah says, 'Cheer up! Do not be afraid. God himself is coming to save you.' The prophet tries to bring back the hope and expectations of the people of Israel. The words of the prophet that give courage and assurance are these: "He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favour from the Lord and a day of vindication by our God" (v4). This gives them assurance of divine intervention on behalf of those who were suffering from various social injustices, rejection, separation from society, and also from all sorts of physical disabilities and deformities. The second reading, from the First letter of Paul to the Thessalonians (5:16-24, sets the tone of the week: "Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing." Actually this is what we are expected to do as we wait for the coming of the Lord. Paul urges the community to rejoice and admonishes them to pray without ceasing, give thanks to God in all circumstances, retain what is good, refrain from every kind of evil thing. In this way, we become models for everyone who is eagerly waiting to see the Lord.

John's Gospel for the third Sunday (1:6-8, 19-28) describes the character and personality of the herald of Christ, John the Baptist. Last week we reflected on his call to conversion as an essential step to encountering the Messiah. This week, John the Baptist stands for us as a facilitator who sets the pace. John worked hard and always knew what his job was. It was to prepare the way for someone else, someone greater than he. That someone was Christ. When Christ appeared, John slipped into the shadows. John believed he had been called by God to do something great - to prepare the way for the coming of the long-awaited Messiah. He knew exactly what his role was. He was only the messenger who announced the King. But he was happy to fulfil this role and fulfil it he did to the very best of his ability. He lived for it, seeking nothing for himself - neither an easy life, the flattery of the people, nor the Favor of the powers that were.

This week we read and mediate on the role of John the Baptist whose role is over once he presents Christ to the world. He is not prideful; he humbles himself and moves out of the picture. He invites every one of us as we get ready to receive Baby Jesus to our personal lives to make our hearts clean, cut down the mountains of jealousy, envy, hatred, and separation we have created to avoid our brothers and sisters of the community. Prepare the Way was the theme of last week; each one of us needs to use the privileges of Reconciliation, Eucharist, and reading of the Holy Scriptures as means to make a highway to welcome Christ into our personal mangers that we are preparing to receive Baby Jesus. Like John who heralded the Messiah, we are all called to witness Christ to the present world in which we live through our lives of humility and simplicity as John showed to the people of his time. This Sunday, John the Baptist invites us to take life seriously - as a preparation for this season of Advent. And Paul tells us to not take seriously the disappointments of life. Instead, to "rejoice always." And maybe even join those happy souls who wake up and say, "Maranatha, Come O Lord Jesus do not delay!" Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I say it, rejoice!

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**BOC meeting**

*-Continued from PAGE ONE*

offer a \$500 reward, for a total of \$1,000, for information leading to arrest and conviction, should it turn out to be a criminal act.

"I do feel for this guy," responded Morrow County Commissioner Jeff Wenzholz, but added that he would hesitate because of the lack of evidence that it was a crime.

"How do we determine whose vehicle is worthy of a \$500 reward if it catches on fire?" Wenzholz asked.

"I think the pressure came from the call that there wasn't enough of an investigation done," replied Drago.

Sykes, meanwhile, said he also was concerned about the precedent it would set. He said he would prefer to get an update from MCSO and wait to see if Umatilla County moves forward with a reward.

"Do we start fielding other requests from people?" Sykes asked. "I'm still wrestling with the fact that if you do it here, how do you apply that to other things that happen?"

The board of commissioners also heard an update on the agricultural mitigation plan being formed by Pine Gate Renewables as part of its site application for its proposed 400-acre Sunstone Solar project near Hwy. 207.

Much of the proposed land is currently in dry land wheat production. Pine Gate included an economic analysis in its preliminary application to the Oregon Energy Facility Siting Council for a state site certificate.

The company also held a work session with the county board of commissioners regarding possible mitigation projects. The mitigation plan will, in part, help demonstrate compliance with Statewide Planning Goal 3 exception standards.

Goal 3 protects farmland for continued production and places restrictions on development unrelated to agriculture.

Pine Gate representative Logan Stephens said the company is holding follow-up meetings with three main stakeholder groups, including Morrow County Grain Growers and Morrow Soil and Water Conservation District, to define the scope, cost, and benefits of preferred projects.

Stephens said his "ask" at the commissioners' meeting was that county staff be allowed to continue to work with Pine Gate to craft an agricultural mitigation plan that the company can file with the Oregon Dept. of Energy as part of its application. Included with that would be a mitigation fund that would receive and distribute the mitigation funds.

Sykes referred to a letter the board received from Morrow County Extension Agent Larry Lutchter and asked if Pine Gate would take more requests for the mitigation projects.

"Is that possible, or do you want to say, 'No more,'" Sykes asked.

Stephens replied that the company is trying to move forward with the preferred projects on the list while maintaining flexibility.

"We're trying to walk that line where we provide enough detail and math behind the programs, we're proposing so the state can make a determination on whether it adequately mitigates the impacts, but also preserve that ability to consider other things in the future," Stephens said.

Pine Gate Senior Manager of Stakeholder Relations Nikki Olofson added that, when it comes to supporting county organizations, the ag mitigation plan is a separate program to offset the direct impacts of the project.

"We do also have a separate project budget for local community organizations," Olofson said, adding that the company has already supported the county 4-H program this year.

"I think we're pretty well rounded in being able to support...some other organizations locally in the community," she said. "The ag mitigation, I think of it as a bigger plan to directly help offset some of those direct impacts to the farming community."

Olofson also said Pine Gate is developing a new program for grants.

"So, it kind of depends what the ask is," she said. "I'm not saying we have a fountain of money, but we do want to support the youth in the area. We want to make sure we're a community partner and a good neighbor."

The board of commissioners agreed by consensus to have county staff continue to work with Pine Gate on the mitigation plan.

In other business, the board of commissioners:

-Approved the purchase of a 2023 CAT 150 Grader for the road department. The CAT will replace the county's 2009 CAT 140M. The value of the grader is \$438,868.62, minus trade-in value of \$92,000, and is included in the current budget.

-Adopted a comment letter on the Wheatridge Renewable Energy Facility East Request for Amendment 1. The amendment will enlarge Wheatridge's project area in Morrow County.

-Appointed Brian Evola as the Finley Buttes representative on the Solid Waste Advisory Committee for a term expiring Nov. 15, 2026.

-Appointed Brian Thompson to replace Paul Hisler as a livestock grower representative on the Wolf Depredation Advisory Committee. Sykes also mentioned that he planned to attend a wolf livestock depredation investigation training on Jan. 23 in Pendleton.

-Awarded a year-long contract for snow and ice removal services to Corey Miller Farming. Pointer said the contract is a backup plan in case the county road department gets overwhelmed by a snow and ice event. "It'll be just in the event there's a snowstorm and all our resources are being used," she said, adding that it would come into play mostly if emergency services needed to get through.

**MONDAYS AT 5:00 P.M.**

**The Great Conspiracy**

The pages of human history are filled with conspiracies. The term conspiracy is defined as, "a secret plan by a group to do something unlawful or harmful." An early example is one that unfolded in 63 BC in the city of Rome.

A senator by the name of Catiline sought to mount an uprising against The Republic. He recruited a rebel army and planned to attack the city, murder its nobles, and claim power for himself. The problem was that his suspicious political opponents caught wind of his conspiracy. What became of Catiline's plan? It was found out, that his army was routed, and he and many of his fellow conspirators were killed.

Now, we could travel throughout all of antiquity and explore many more examples, but for the sake of time, I'd rather just skip to the greatest of them all. Are you familiar with the most vicious conspiracy of all time? And do you know how it ended? Unless you are well acquainted with the pages of Scripture, then you are not well acquainted with the pages of history.

Shortly after God created the heavens, the earth, and all that is in them; he declared all His work, "very good" (Gen. 1:31). But soon after this declaration, the vilest of all conspirators entered the scene and turned that which was, "very good," into that which is very miserable.

The prophet Ezekiel records God's historical account of that incident. God speaks of an exalted angel, "[the] anointed cherub [angel] ... You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created until unrighteousness was found in you" (Ez. 28:14-15). God says of that angel (Satan), "Your heart was lofty" (v. 17). The prophet Isaiah expands this, "But you [Satan] said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God ... I will make myself like the Most High'" (Is. 14:13-14).

The greatest conspiracy of all time was that of Satan's attack upon God's rule. Satan recruited an army to march unlawfully into God's domain and take the throne for himself. Did the conspiracy succeed? Jesus records an eye-witness account, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning" (Lk. 10:18). Satan's plans were foiled. He and his army of angels were cast out of heaven. But unfortunately, the conspiracy did not die. Matter of fact, it grew. Satan simply expanded his recruitment program to include the human race, to which the first couple he convinces to join his mutinous military force was Adam and Eve. This conspiracy is the greatest, most unlawful, and most harmful conspiracy of all time. It is the conspiracy that gives fuel to every other conspiracy that can be found on the timeline of human history. It is that which has brought all the suffering, misery, and death into the world.

But what will be its end? That really is the question that is most important when discussing conspiracies, is it not? Will the unlawful plan succeed? Will Satan recruit enough of an army to take God's throne? Will things just get worse and worse?

We do not have to travel far in God's word for the answer. At the very moment in time when Satan recruits his first trainees and sin enters the world, God definitively declares what will come of his conspiracy. Yahweh says to Satan, "And I will put enmity between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel" (Gen. 3:15). Translation, "There is one coming that will crush you. Out of the very populace you seek to recruit from, will come one mightier than you. Your defeat is definite."

That promise made by God in Gen. 3:15 has been fulfilled. Two thousand years ago, that "seed" came in the person of Jesus Christ. He was birthed through the power of the Holy Spirit through a young virgin mother named Mary. Being both truly God and truly man, He went on to crush Satan's conspiracy through His vicarious death on the cross. He rose on the third day, defeating sin, death, and Satan. He has ascended to the righthand throne of God and holds all authority in heaven and earth. He is currently putting all His enemies under His feet and will continue to do so until every conspiracy is routed.

Here then is the question, "Do you believe that?" Or do you chalk it up as a conspiracy theory? Senator Catiline gives mankind a shining example of what will come to all those who do not repent of their rebellious and lawless living. To those who choose to follow in the footsteps of Satan, and war against God, will one day find themselves under the feet of the King of kings, Jesus Christ. Turn from sin and trust in the finished work of Christ. Scripture is clear, the greatest of all conspiracies has failed. The outcome is sealed. Do not be deceived into thinking that your lesser rebellion has any chance of success.

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**Morrow County Compensation Board**  
**Morrow County has three vacancies to start on January 1, 2024**  
**Board's Purpose:**

The Compensation Board annually reviews the compensation of County Elected Officials and by majority vote, recommends a compensation schedule to the Board of Commissioners. The Board shall consist of members who are knowledgeable in personnel and compensation management. Members are appointed to four-year terms. If you are interested in serving, please visit <https://www.co.morrow.or.us/bc-cb> and send application to HR at [lgrogan@co.morrow.or.us](mailto:lgrogan@co.morrow.or.us)

