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of the City of Heppner and the County of Morrow

**Heppner**  
**GAZETTE-TIMES**  
U.S.P.S. 240-420

Morrow County's Home-Owned Weekly Newspaper

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



**WE ARE CALLED TO COLLABORATE WITH GOD'S PLAN**

All of us keep trying to find what we believe would really make us happy. Deep in our hearts we really know, but perhaps are not focused on obtaining, that happiness we crave. Have we tried finding our happiness in God? God's word invites us and challenges us to seek the Lord and find our happiness in Him. As believers we feel that if God were to tell us exactly what He wanted of us and how He wanted us to act, we would gladly do His will. But are we doing His will daily? Are we collaborating with His plans? In this week's scripture readings, King David and our Blessed Mother Mary collaborate with God's plan.

In the Second book of Samuel (7:1-5, 8-16), King David aspires to build a dwelling place, a temple, for Yahweh. But God has no need of the temple. The Lord reminds David that it was always Yahweh who made David victorious in battle, gave him power and fame, made possible all David's achievements and successes. Rather than David building a temple, the Lord will make David a house and establish his dynasty that will stand secure forever. We are not called to build a temple to the Lord; we are asked to let God establish His Kingdom in us and through us.

The letter to the Romans (16:25-27) concludes with an exhortation for all the people of God to be faithful to the Gospel, the wisdom of God made known to Christians. God's plan of salvation for Jews and Gentiles has come to fulfillment in Christ. The good news must be broadcasted; their role is to be obedient in faith to God's plan.

Matthew focuses on Mary and her role in God's plan of salvation. Mary collaborated with God's plan by saying "yes." God had made a promise to David that he would build his dynasty that would be great and a source of blessing. With Mary's "yes," that promise was realized and brought to fruition. God came to dwell in the Ark of the Covenant in David's time, and David danced before the ark, expressing his joy in Yahweh. So, Mary welcomed the Lord into the new ark of the Covenant, her body, and glorified God in her song of praise, the Magnificat. Mary is a role model for Christians. Mary, like every young woman, had plans and dreams. She was surprised by the angel's revelation of God's plan for her. "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" Accepting the message led her on a totally different path.

1) Mary ardent listener of the word of God: As we prepare for Christmas, Mary should inspire each of us to be more open to the Word of God in our lives, too. How do we spend our lives? Like Mary, do we spend time listening to the prompting of Christ?

2) Hail Full of Grace: The angel said, "Do not be afraid, Mary for you have found favor with God." To be addressed as God's favored ones what do we need to leave aside?

3) She Bore Him in her Heart: I think Mary inspires all of us to bear Jesus in our hearts always. She had the privilege of bearing Jesus, but before she bore Him in her womb, she carried Him in her heart. She invites everyone to do the same.

4) Behold, I Am the Handmaid of the Lord (Lk. 1:38): Mary knew as a good Jewish woman what the repercussions would be of her "yes." Her surrender teaches us that we need to surrender to God's plan. When pains come, we should remember Mary; surrender ourselves and our plans to the mighty hand of God.

So, what must we need to do to be collaborators with God's plan as did King David and Mary, a real model of simplicity and humility? Mary remained humble in the sight of God, reminding me of the words of Paul: "Who made you so important? What have you got that was not given to you? And if it was given to you, why are you boasting as though it were your own?" (1Corinthians 4:7). King David and Mary, examples to us, remained the most favored ones, and collaborated with the plan of God; they demonstrate that we can actually approach God and follow Him if we fix our eyes on Him. When He becomes our priority, takes first place, becomes the center of our lives, we are led to a deep and profound relationship with Jesus.

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**Morrow County to expect new bus route**

By Annalynn Black

The residents of Morrow County will soon have a new transit option at their disposal as the Loop on-demand transportation service expands its offerings. In January, a free, fixed-route bus will be introduced to connect the towns of Heppner and Boardman, as well as provide a loop service within Boardman. To improve connectivity between Morrow County and larger regions with higher populations, such as Hermiston or Tri-Cities, the public transit department has partnered with Kayak Public Transit, the free regional transportation bus system operated by the Confederated Tribes of Umatilla Indian Reservation.

Recognizing the need for transportation alternatives in the area, Morrow County Transit Manager Ben Tucker explained "There's a huge, underserved population that do not have vehicle or only have one vehicle" "Then when someone takes it to work all day, that leaves everybody else without transportation."

A recent study conducted by the Rural Engagement and Vitality Center (REV) and Euvalcree further supports Tucker's assessment of public transit in the county. Euvalcree is a Hermiston-based community organization focused on engaging underserved populations, especially Latino communities, in the region.

Sponsored by the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development, the study aimed to make rural transportation more accessible and inclusive. The survey, which received responses from around 300 individuals across the county, revealed a lack of awareness and utilization of existing services. Respondents "expressed a strong desire" for more information about available service options and a need for more consistent modes of transportation. The introduction of the new bus service aims to fulfill these needs. "Its goals were really to find out if those traditionally underserved populations knew about transit and had what they need to use transit.", Morrow County Planning Director Tamra Mabbot said.

However, establishing a transit route in a rural area presents unique challenges. The lack of infrastructure, such as sidewalks, can complicate the establishment of bus stops. Additionally, the greater distances between communities in the county can impact the efficiency and coverage of the service. Finding qualified bus drivers who reside in the area or are willing to relocate nearby can also be demanding. Furthermore, unpredictable weather conditions across the vast coverage area pose a potential obstacle and require careful planning. "There's no public transit that serves this area," Tucker said. "It fits into the local need as well as plays into the bigger picture of transit network through the state."

The success of this project relies heavily on effectively disseminating information about the new service and other public transit options available in the county. The REV Center and Euvalcree study emphasized the importance of communication and public engagement. To achieve this, various strategies and channels will be explored, including direct messaging, collaboration with employers and the local chamber of commerce, and relying on the curiosity sparked by the sight of the bus itself. Additionally, recognizing the significant Spanish-speak-

ing population in the area, the messaging will be offered in both English and Spanish to ensure inclusivity. "When we are looking for public involvement, we need to do more than we have historically done," Mabbott said. "We may need to work with some other groups to get more public involvement."

The new buses, designed specifically for the Loop service, resemble typical transit buses rather than the city buses found in larger metropolitan areas. The bus traveling along Highway 74, between Heppner and Boardman, can accommodate 32 passengers, with space for two wheelchair users and three bikes. The smaller bus operating within Boardman can seat 16 passengers, accommodating two wheelchair users and two bikes. Two additional 16-seater buses will be kept in reserve, with the potential to expand the service as a second bus on the route, thereby reducing wait times.

The exterior of the buses proudly displays a logo specifically designed for the Loop service, incorporating elements that reflect the unique features and industries of Morrow County, such as mountains, wheat fields, cows, wind turbines, and industrial buildings.

The introduction of this new transit option in Morrow County signifies a step towards addressing the transportation needs of the underserved population. While challenges exist in establishing and operating the service, the commitment of the county and its partners to address these issues is evident. By providing accessible and inclusive transportation options, the Loop service aims to improve the quality of life for residents and enhance connectivity within the region.

**Wyden to hold town hall in Morrow County Jan. 4<sup>th</sup>**



U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden announced he will begin his 2024 town hall schedule with seven in-person town halls the first week of January in Jefferson, Sherman, Morrow, Umatilla, Union, Baker, and Malheur counties.

Heading into these initial town halls of the new

year, Wyden has held a total of 1,065 town halls throughout Oregon.

"I'm very much looking forward to starting 2024 with these open-to-all town halls in the ongoing spirit of the 'Oregon Way' where anybody can ask questions, share opinions, and suggest ideas," Wyden said. "Heading into a new congressional year, these open-to-all town halls are especially timely because Oregonians in these counties can help shape legislative priorities for the next 12 months and beyond."

The schedule for the upcoming town halls is as follows:

-Morrow County, 9 a.m., Thursday, Jan. 4, Riverside Jr./Sr. High School, 210 Boardman Ave NE, Boardman.

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**To your health?**



At this time of year, in many different cultures, we toast to our health. Yet, heavy drinking raises our risk for liver disease, breast cancer and depression. This holiday season, give some thought to how much you drink and consider drinking less. It could make a big difference...to your health.

**Reth!nk the drink**

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