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*Christmas Vigil*

**DECEMBER 24**

**Christmas Eve**

  
Diocese of Erie  
ROMAN CATHOLIC



**Diocese of Erie**  
ROMAN CATHOLIC



One Christmas eve deep in the forests of Germany toward the end of WWII, it was bitter cold with snow blowing in swirls around the bleakness of war. The wind whipped the snow in sheets freezing on the sides of trees. American soldiers were huddled in the darkness, covered in the white camouflage looking for some haven in the storm. There in the midst of the woods was a small log cabin with lights shining through small pane windows. Carefully the men moved toward the cabin, looking through the frosted windows. A family was seated at a table ready to eat Christmas eve dinner. With rifles drawn, the soldiers knocked on the door. A frail man came to the door and opened it. Afraid at first, he saw how cold the men were and motioned to them to enter. The soldiers, more cold than afraid, quickly accepted his hospitality.

At the end of the war no one had much food, but Christmas was the time to bring out what food they had for the feast: cheese, beer, bread and venison. The soldiers put their rifles down and were ushered to the table. They were about to eat a real meal whose memories had been kept only in their hearts when they heard a knock at the door. The Americans dived for their rifles. The old man walked calmly to the door and opened it a crack, only to be greeted with “*Froeliche Weinachten.*” The Christmas greeting in German exposed the new arrivals as German soldiers. The old man became frightened for his family because he was harboring the Americans. He could hear the soldiers inside get their rifles and move into the dark recesses of the room. What should he do? He closed

the door and gestured to the Americans to set down their arms.

The door swung open and with a swirl of snow, the German soldiers rushed in. It was Christmas eve, and the inappropriateness of war became all the more stark. Their eyes met: the Germans and the Americans, frightened at first and then angry, set for a quick response. Then the old man gestured toward the table. “*Kommen Sie hier; meiner taffel ist fur Sie. Kommen Sie; essen Sie, bitte.*”

In an uneasy move the soldiers came to the table. “No weapons,” the man gestured with his hands. Then slowly each soldier on both sides set down his weapons and moved to the table. The old man bowed his head, the three children at the table did likewise and the mother brought a steaming tureen of soup and set it on the table. “*In namen des Vater, des Sohnes und des HeiligenGeistes, Amen. Vater ins Himmel, danken wir fur deiner Kind Jesus Christus.*” The man began praising God for the son who came into the world to give us peace. It was a long prayer, and I’m sure the Americans were wondering what it all meant, but the depth of the man’s faith and the reverence of the family let the soldiers know God’s peace had wrapped this small band of people for a time, stopping aggression and misdirected hatred. Here were the faces of the enemy, bowed in prayer. “*Stille Nacht*” was sung at the end of the meal.

Rested, warm and no longer afraid, the soldiers began to crouch in opposite corners of the cabin for the night. Early the next morning, the two groups agreed to leave, one group to the east, the other toward the West.

The old man opened the door on a bright crisp morning. The snow glints on the trees, having transformed the bleakness of the forest into silhouettes of shadow and light. The soldiers’ footsteps ran off in the snow in opposite directions.

Despite our historical reality in 2025, there is something about Christmas that makes war impossible. The words of Isaiah seem to promise that war itself is shattered and overthrown by the power of the Word made flesh – God become human – in Christ. The Prince of Peace is a child, not wandering parentless in the swollen streets of war, but standing firm, afire with God. This child came in our flesh to transform our selfishness into love. It is a child who leads us.

The miracle is this: Each child is born in the parents’ hope of peace and wholeness, for a better world in which hatred and the anonymity of war is transformed by humanity. That is our collective vision of tomorrow. But there is a price for it. Christ is sent to experience death for our sakes, setting us on a path of new innocence. The price of redemption is the death of the firstborn. Many European Christmas carols speak about the Yule that gives way to the Pascha – Christmas does lead to Easter. For the one wrapped in swaddling clothes will be wrapped again in linen bands and anointed for burial.

The mystery of God’s love is God’s movement to humanity. To be Creator was not enough, but to share our frailty was.

Revisit that log cabin in the winter woods and remember that God always invites us to a feast set in the

presence of our enemies, where we speak to one another, join hands in friendship and are restored as sisters and brothers again. *James Notebaart*

**MARK YOUR CALENDAR**

OUR LADY OF FATIMA HOLIDAY  
MASS SCHEDULE FOR DECEMBER  
2025

DEC 25 CHRISTMAS DAY

10:00AM

DEC 31 NEW YEARS EVE

4:00PM

**HOLIDAY OFFICE HOURS**

OUR OFFICE WILL BE CLOSED  
FROM DEC 22 TO JANUARY 5.

I WILL BE CHECKING MY CALLS  
DAILY, SO IF YOU NEED SOMETHING  
PLEASE LEAVE A MESSAGE AND I  
WILL GET BACK TO YOU.

**WISHING EVERYONE A VERY  
MERRY CHRISTMAS AND**

**A HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!!!!**

**PAM**

Blessed Christmas to the parish  
families of Good Shepherd and  
Our Lady of Fatima. May the New  
Year be a blessing to us all.

**Pastor and Parish Staff**