

HIGH TIDE

*Parish
Magazine*

*Weymouth
St Paul
with Fleet*

JAN 2026



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A contemplative meditation on the Holy Name of Jesus, exploring light, humility, refuge, and transforming love, inviting trust, rest, and life in Him.

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This week invites us to seek unity through prayer, repentance, and conversion, trusting unity as God's gift, not human achievement, rooted in truth and charity.

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St Agnes, barely a teenager, stunned ancient Rome by steadfast faith, proving holiness and courage depend on love, not age.

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Many thanks to all who have contributed to the Parish Magazine.

*The next Magazine will be published on **Sunday 1st February**. Please send all articles, information or news you wish to be published by Sunday 25th January.*

Front cover: "The Most Holy Family"
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From the Vicar

Dearly Beloved,

The turning of the year invites us, almost instinctively, to look both back and forward — with gratitude and with hope. It is, therefore, a fitting moment to pause together as a parish family and to give thanks: certainly for what we have done, but more importantly for what God has done among us.

As I look back over the past year in the life of St Paul's and Fleet, what strikes me most is not any single event or achievement — even if there were a few — but rather the quiet, and yet wondrous, way in which God has been at work. We have worshipped week by week. We have prayed. We have served. We have given. We have welcomed. We have persevered. How many gifts already. And through all of this, we have witnessed God's faithfulness to His promise: *"I am with you always."*

There is much for which to be thankful. Our fundraising efforts have been generous and successful — signs of a shared love for this parish and its mission. Fleet has seen strong numbers through the summer months, and here at St Paul's our Sunday congregations have remained steady and, in places, quietly increasing. Most heartening of all, we are once again hearing the voices of children among us on most Sundays — a small sign, perhaps, but a deeply hopeful one.

We have also been blessed with new faces and new stories. Charlie's forthcoming baptism is a particular joy. It reminds us of what the Church truly is: a living body into which men and women are still being gathered by God.

There were moments, too, when our trust was tested. Our Mission Day did not bear immediate or visible fruit in the way we might have hoped. There were no dramatic conversions; no sudden influx of newcomers the following Sunday. In fact, most people we tried to invite inside said no. And yet — perhaps precisely because we resisted the temptation to measure God's work by speed or spectacle — we were given something better. In time, quietly and unexpectedly, new people began to appear among us. Not as a result of strategy, but as a gift.

It is a gentle reminder that courage, faithfulness, and hope are never wasted. God's timing may not be ours, but His faithfulness never fails. And it is also a reminder that everyone in our churches *is*, indeed, a gift. If we struggle to see each other in this way, the problem lies not with the gift, but with the beholder's eye.

As we enter a new year, it is worth reminding ourselves what truly sustains a parish. Before we are anything else, we are a Christian family —

gathered not by shared interests or preferences, but by Christ Himself. The Church is not first of all a programme, a project, or a plan. It is a people: drawn together by the Lord Jesus, fed by His Body and Blood, shaped by His Word, and sent out in His Name.

If we are to remain faithful and fruitful in the year ahead, we must stay close to Him — and, through Him, close to one another. If we ever imagined that we could draw near to Him without also drawing near to others, we would be deceiving ourselves.

As for worship — *and in the See of Oswestry, St. Paul's is now rightly renowned for the beauty of its worship* — it is not an optional extra, just as prayer is not a private hobby for the especially devout. They are the lifeblood of the Church. When worship or prayer cease to be priorities, true charity soon becomes strained. But when Christ is at the centre — honoured in the Sacraments, listened to in Scripture, sought in daily prayer, served in our neighbour — then even our weaknesses are held and healed within His grace.

Charity, too, must remain at the heart of who we are. Not charity as mere activity, but charity as authentic Christian love: patient, forgiving, attentive, willing to notice those who are quiet, or easily overlooked. A parish flourishes not because it is busy, but because it is prayerful, gentle, welcoming — in one word: Christ-centred. In a world marked by division, anxiety, and loneliness, the simple witness of a community that loves one another in Christ — or genuinely tries to — is more powerful than we often realise.

January, shaped as it is by Epiphany — the revelation of Christ to the nations — reminds us that the light we have received is not meant to be hidden. We are not asked to force results, but to remain faithful. We are not called to anxiety, but to trust. The Lord has already shown us, in ways both small and significant, that He is at work among us. Our task is to remain close to Him, attentive to His voice, and generous in our response.

Finally, now that our grief is somewhat tempered by the hope of eternal life, we give thanks with grateful hearts for the life, gifts, faithfulness, and prayers of those whom we lost this past year.

As we step into this new year together, let us do so with confidence — not in ourselves, but in the One who has called us. Let us give thanks for the year that has passed, with all its joys and challenges. Let us welcome the year ahead as a gift: still unopened, yet already held in God's providence. And let us continue, day by day, to become more truly what we are called to be — a parish rooted in worship, sustained by prayer, and known by love.

Assuring you of my prayers, I am,
ever yours in Christ,

Fr. Gregory ⁵

BLESSING OF A HOME IN EPIPHANY-TIDE

The whole family, or a member of it, says: Bless, O Lord, Almighty God, this home, that it be the shelter of health, chastity, self-conquest, humility, goodness, mildness, obedience to your commandments, and thanksgiving to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. May blessing remain for all time upon this dwelling and them that live herein. Through Christ our Lord. Amen. *(Another possible prayer is printed on the following page; or it can be used as a closing prayer.)*

After each prayer the appropriate room is sprinkled with Holy Water. At the entrance: O God, protect our going out and our coming in; let us share the hospitality of this home with all who visit us, that those who enter here may know your love and peace. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

In the sitting room: O God, give your blessings to all who share this room, that we may be knit together in companionship, in peace and charity. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

In the kitchen: O God, you fill the hungry with good things. Send your blessing on us, as we work in this kitchen, and make us ever thankful for our daily bread. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

In the dining room: Blessed are you, Lord of heaven and earth, for you give us food and drink to sustain our lives and make our hearts glad. Help us to be grateful for all your mercies, and mindful of the needs of others. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

In the bedrooms: Protect us, Lord, as we stay awake; watch over us as we sleep, that awake we may keep watch with Christ, and asleep, we may rest in his peace. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

In the garden/on the terrace: Blessed are you, Lord of heaven and earth. You formed us in wisdom and love. Refresh us in body and in spirit, and keep us in good health that we might serve you. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

They all say together the Lord's Prayer and an appointed person writes the following above the entrance door (or next to it) with the blessed chalk:

20 + C + M + B + 26



Hear us, O Lord, Holy Father, Almighty and Eternal God, and send your holy Angel from heaven to watch over, cherish, protect, be with, and defend all who live in this house. We/I call upon your saints, Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar, to protect this family and this home from every harm and danger, and we/I place the marks of their holy names over the doors of this home to remain there as a constant reminder to us and to all who enter here that this house is truly a house of the Lord. O God, make the door of this house wide enough to receive all who need charity and companionship, narrow enough to shut out all envy, pride, and strife. Make its threshold smooth enough to be no stumbling block to anyone but rugged and strong enough to turn back the Tempter's power. O God, make the door of this house the gateway to your eternal Kingdom. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

“Peace to This House”:

House Blessings in the Early and Medieval Christian World

When Christians today invite a priest to bless their home, it can feel like a gentle, domestic custom—pleasant, meaningful, but perhaps peripheral to “real” Christian life. Something like a *nice extra*. Yet historically, the blessing of houses stood much closer to the centre of Christian life than we might imagine. From the first centuries of the Church through the Middle Ages, the home was understood as a contested spiritual space: a place of prayer and hospitality, yes, but also one vulnerable to disorder, illness, fear, and the unseen powers believed to afflict daily life. House blessings arose precisely at this intersection of liturgy, culture, Scripture, and popular belief.

The Early Church: the Home as sacred space — In the earliest Christian centuries, before churches were widespread, the home itself was the primary place of Christian worship. The “*house church*” was not merely a practical arrangement but a theological reality: families gathered for prayer, the breaking of bread, and instruction within their own dwellings. This already implied that the home was a space claimed for Christ.

Scripture provided a powerful foundation. In Luke 10:5, Christ instructs the disciples: “*Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’*” This blessing of peace was not polite greeting but a performative act: peace either “rested” upon the house or returned to the speaker. Early Christians took such language seriously.

By late antiquity, we find prayers and rituals explicitly directed toward homes. Bishops and priests blessed houses with prayer and the sprinkling of water, often connected to exorcism. The purpose was protection: to ask that God’s presence dwell there, and that hostile forces—whether conceived as demons, illness, or chaos—be driven away.

From Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages: protection and presence

— As Christianity spread across Europe, particularly into rural areas, house blessings became increasingly important. In societies where illness, crop failure, fire, and sudden death were constant threats, the boundary between spiritual and material danger was thin. Blessing a house meant placing it under God's protection in a precarious world.

Early medieval prayer books (7th-8th c.) from Europe contain blessings for water, salt, candles, and places, all of which could be brought into the home. Holy water, especially, was never restricted to church use. Families sprinkled it in rooms, at doors, and around beds, often accompanied by prayer. This practice was officially sanctioned and widely encouraged. The Church did not reject people's fear of unseen dangers; instead, it offered liturgical means to address them.

Anglo-Saxon England: prayer, protection, and "charms" — In early medieval England, house-blessing practices developed in a particularly vivid way. Anglo-Saxon manuscripts preserve not only Latin liturgical prayers, but also vernacular texts sometimes called "charms." Modern readers may be uneasy with this word, but many of these texts are explicitly Christian, invoking Christ, the Holy Trinity, the Cross, and the Saints.

Some prayers were intended for specific parts of the house: the threshold, the hearth, or the fields surrounding the dwelling. Others were spoken when moving into a new home, or after illness, or following a frightening event. They often combined biblical language with ritual actions: marking the sign of the cross, sprinkling water, or walking around the boundaries of the house.

What is striking is that these texts were often written by clerics and preserved in monastic scriptoria. This suggests that the Church did not simply tolerate such practices but actively shaped them. The aim was to Christianise deeply rooted anxieties, redirecting them toward prayer rather than superstition.

At the same time, the Church remained cautious. Bishops repeatedly warned against practices that treated blessings as magical techniques rather than acts of trust in God. The tension between prayer and superstition was real, but it was navigated pastorally rather than resolved by prohibition.

Medieval England: ritual books and domestic space — By the high and late Middle Ages, house blessings became more formally structured. In England, alongside the well-known Sarum liturgy, priests used ritual books containing blessings for a wide range of occasions: animals, tools, crops, and homes.

A typical medieval blessing of a new house included psalms (often Psalm 127 or 121), prayers invoking divine peace, and the sprinkling of Holy Water throughout the dwelling. Doors and walls might be traced with the sign of the cross. The language asked not only for protection from evil spirits, but for harmony among those who lived there: charity, hospitality, and order.

Importantly, these rites assumed that sin and virtue shape spaces. A house was not spiritually neutral. How people lived within it—whether in prayer or violence, fidelity or disorder—mattered. Blessing the house was a call to align domestic life with the Gospel.

Popular customs: chalk, symbols, and thresholds — Alongside official rites, medieval Christians developed popular customs connected to house blessing. One of the best-known, still practised today, is the marking of doors at Epiphany with blessed chalk.

Medieval homes often displayed crosses, holy names, or short prayers near entrances or hearths. These were not meant as talismans independent of faith, but as visible reminders that the household belonged to Christ. Problems arose only when such signs were treated mechanically, as guarantees rather than invitations to prayer.

Continental Europe: shared patterns, local variations — Across medieval Europe house blessings followed similar patterns. The same psalms recur, the same gestures appear, and the same concerns dominate: peace, protection, and God's dwelling among His people.

In monastic settings, entire buildings were ritually blessed, room by room, reinforcing the idea that space itself can be ordered toward holiness. (*Fr Gregory remembers the hours spent by chalking, incensing and sprinkling every single room in a huge medieval monastery of Nuns every year and then reading long Gospel-sections in the surrounding fields towards the four cardinal directions.*) In rural parishes, priests visited homes at certain times of year, especially around Epiphany or Easter, strengthening the bond between church and household.

Why this history matters — Studying historic house blessings reveals a Christianity deeply concerned with everyday life. The faith was not confined to church walls but extended to kitchens, bedrooms, doorways, and fields. The home was where doctrine met fatigue, fear, hospitality, and love.

This tradition also reminds us that the Church has long walked a careful path: affirming the reality of spiritual danger without surrendering to superstition; blessing material things without reducing grace to magic.

In an age often tempted to separate faith from daily life, the history of house blessings offers a gentle challenge. To bless a house is to confess that Christ desires to dwell not only in sanctuaries, but in the ordinary places where people live, struggle, and learn to love.

Identity (Part 2)

Irene Leader writes:

It is in a living relationship with Jesus that I sustain my identity. I do this by looking into the mirror of the Bible, and there I see Christ reflected back. Meditating on the Word leads from the head to the heart, shaping the truth of who I am in Him. The heart is like the thermostat of identity: it always seeks to return us to our deepest convictions, whether they are godly or not.

The world constantly offers substitutes for God's way, and so there is a battle within the flesh. The struggle is between false beliefs and the authentic teaching of Christ, faithfully handed on in the Church. St. Paul shows us in 1 Tim 6:11 what it means to have the life of one who is saved, delivered, restored, and cleansed. As true man, Jesus showed us how to face every battle and temptation. If we try to fight in a different way than He did, we seek our own substitute for His way—and every substitute leads us away from Him. When we are not firmly grounded in Christ, we are easily influenced by the spirit of the world, which Scripture calls the “*spirit of antichrist*” (1 Jn 4:3), and will try to find some substitute for Jesus and His teaching. Our understanding of Christ—our doctrine, prayer, worship—shapes our image of Him, and so must remain faithful to His Word.

At the heart of the “*spirit of antichrist*” is the desire to play God in our own daily lives (see 1 Jn 4:3). Evil can be characterised by the word “broken”: broken away from being in harmony with God. We may say our identity is in Christ but if we do not truly seek to be conformed to Him, we risk honouring Him with our lips while our hearts remain far away (Mt 15:8–9).

I will find a substitute for the truth of God's Word if I don't believe and experience my identity in Christ: when I am ashamed, afraid, making excuses, that is the moment of temptation to find a substitute. It is where my soul is fighting the battle of being the new me if I am not stable in my identity. This is the moment of grace if you want it and choose it.

Conscience is that inner witness where God's truth is inscribed on the heart; if I ignore it, I cannot live in the peace of who God says I am. That is why my behaviour matters—it either confirms or contradicts my identity as a disciple.

Every temptation begins with a sense of lack: “You are not really who God says you are; you can't really do what God says you can do; God is not going to do for you that which He has promised.” These luciferian lies and deceit are the start of every temptation. However, as God is good and only good, He wants to fulfil all my rightful desires in a way that will make me

whole, draw me closer to Him, and will manifest who He is. This glorifies Him. When I see God as He is, I can't help but be transformed (2 Cor 3:18).

God has freely given us all things in Christ. Picture yourself as accepted by Him and receiving what He gives: "*For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ*" (2 Cor 1:20). "*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us*" (Gal 3:13). The Father "*has qualified you to share in the inheritance of His holy people in the kingdom of light. He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves*" (Col 1:12-14). Then see, feel, and experience yourself as accepted in the Beloved.

"*If you seek Me, you will find Me when you seek Me with all your heart*" (Jer 29:13). When my identity is firmly rooted in Christ, I cannot be easily offended. I will still listen to others in love and discern their words but my sense of self no longer depends on their opinion. My identity is secure in Him.

Quotes from the Church Fathers for further study and meditation:

St. Gregory of Nyssa: "The one who looks to God is changed into the same image."

St. Athanasius of Alexandria: "For the Son of God became man so that we might become God."

St. Irenaeus: "Man, being a created and finite being, cannot possess uncreated things by himself; but if he receives them from God, he receives them rightly."

St. Maximus the Confessor: "Evil is the misuse of the powers given by God, when the natural desire is turned away from its proper end."

St. Cyril of Jerusalem: "The serpent deceived Eve by first making her doubt the word of God."

St. John Chrysostom: "God has placed within us a natural law, a judge which sits in our own minds."

St. Augustine: "Return to your conscience; question it... turn inward, brethren."

St. Basil the Great: "The proof of faith is not in words but in the power of one's life."

St. Clement of Alexandria: "To know God is to become like Him."

News from Beechcroft St Paul's

Sue Biles writes:

Over the summer break, the school was transformed by a £100,000 refurbishment. The purpose of the project was to make the school more accessible, improve the early years learning environment and to create a new library. The pre-school (Eden) is now based in the repurposed log cabin. The reception class has a new layout with a vibrant, engaging learning environment which has been designed to spark curiosity and foster independence. Caroline Hawker, the Headteacher said, *"With creative play zones and a cosy reading corner the new layout reflects our commitment to creating the best possible learning spaces for our children."* Most amazing for me is an accessible disabled toilet designed for small children.

A whole-school Collective Worship continues to take place every day before school with Fr Gregory regularly leading one of the worship sessions every week. In October the Year 4 children travelled to Salisbury for the annual iSingPOP Concert in the Cathedral. ISingPOP is a project that works with schools, engaging children in Collective Worship through singing and performance. The Annual Service is a great adventure for the children—for some the first time they have left Weymouth and for many the first time on a coach—as well as giving the children an opportunity to visit the Cathedral. In November the whole school came to church for their Harvest Thanksgiving Service.

During the week beginning the 8th of December the Key Stage 1 children performed their annual Nativity Play at school. With lots of angels and sheep, the children narrated the story of the birth of Christ with words and songs. On Wednesday 10th the Key Stage 2 children came to church for a service of readings and carols and a reflection from Fr Gregory.

The SLT team and the Governors continue to work with the diocese as part of the Church Schools Flourishing programme.

The school recently received a letter from the academic leads at Dorset Council, congratulating them on their Key Stage 2 SATs results in the past 3 years. In 2024-25 97% of pupils achieved the standard in Reading, Writing and Maths against the national average of 61%. Dorset Council also recognised that 100% of SEND pupils achieved their expected standard in English and Writing. The school is to be given additional funding from the Government as part of the Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence Scheme (RISE). The monies will enable the school to provide children and their families with extra support to improve attendance.



St. Paul's Candle in Walsingham

Liz Evans writes:

St. Paul's has a perpetual candle at Walsingham. This has always been paid for by our pilgrims. In 2025 our renewal was due. While on our pilgrimage in 2025, we renewed the candle for a year. It was felt that the sponsorship should be open to all of St. Paul's family.

To this end, the monies raised from the cross from 1st January to Pentecost will go to paying for as many years as possible. Each year costs £40 and it would be great if we could raise £400 to renew for 10 years.

If we do not do a renewal, we lose the candle and would have to go on a many-year waiting list.

If you would like any further information, please speak to Shelagh Hansford.



The Monastic Nuns of Saint Paul the First Hermit: A Life of Prayer and Reparation —

This Catholic contemplative community is deeply rooted in the ancient eremitical tradition, inspired by Saint Paul of Thebes, regarded as the first Christian hermit. At the heart of the sisters' life is unceasing prayer, especially Eucharistic adoration. Literally, day and night without pause, the Blessed Sacrament is adored in their monastery, and the sisters understand their entire existence as an offering made in union with Christ. Their prayer is not private or individualistic: it is consciously

intercessory, carried out on behalf of others—priests, families, those who suffer, and those far from faith. This strong sense of “standing before God for the world” defines their identity.

The sisters live a monastic rhythm that integrates liturgical prayer, personal contemplation, simple manual work, and communal life. They profess vows of **poverty, chastity, and obedience**, together with a distinctive vow of **reparation** to Christ for sin and indifference. Their lifestyle is intentionally hidden and restrained, allowing space for interior attentiveness and availability to God.

Our Advent collection was for the linen purificators made by them. They are of excellent quality, and by purchasing them, we are also helping their monastic life.

Christmas Lunch at St. Paul's

Gill Cox writes:



Once again we hosted over thirty people to a Christmas Day lunch in the Hall. Everyone seemed to enjoy themselves and we were fortunate this year to have four external volunteer helpers.

Thanks to all who helped in any way.

Christmas Lunch at St. Paul's

Pam Winspear writes:

Early on Christmas Day, Gill and Tony came to the church having spent a lot of time shopping and preparing food to cook a Christmas lunch for people in the parish who would otherwise have been alone on Christmas Day.

Around 30 of us arrived by 1pm to an excellent meal and a very nice gift, both made and prepared by Tony and Gill.

Many thanks to both of them, and to their helpers, who postponed their own Christmas Day and looked after us so well.



Did you know these interesting facts?

Jeanne James writes:

1. Octopuses have three hearts and blue blood due to copper-based hemocyanin. Two hearts pump blood to the gills and one to the rest of the body.
2. Botanically speaking, bananas qualify as berries while strawberries do not.
3. Honey never spoils—jars found in ancient Egyptian tombs are still edible.
4. Wombat poo is cube-shaped, which helps keep it from rolling away and helps mark territory.
5. A day on Venus is longer than a year on Venus. It's true!
6. Sharks existed before trees—by about 50 million years.
7. Humans share about 60% of their DNA with bananas.
8. There are more possible games of chess than atoms in the observable universe (the Shannon number).
9. Your brain uses about 20% of your body's energy, despite being only 2% of your weight.
10. Scotland has over 400 words and expressions for snow.
11. Butterflies can taste with their feet.
12. The Eiffel Tower grows about 6 inches in summer due to heat expansion.
13. You can't hum while holding your nose closed (I bet you will try...).
14. There are more trees on Earth than stars in the Milky Way (estimated).
15. A group of flamingos is called a "flamboyance."
16. Hot water can freeze faster than cold water (Mpemba effect).
17. Your stomach gets a new lining every 3–4 days so it doesn't digest itself.
18. Sloths can hold their breath longer than dolphins—up to 40 minutes.
19. Oxford University is older than the Aztec Empire.
20. A bolt of lightning is about 5 times hotter than the surface of the sun.

**Calendar, Service Times,
and Prayer Intentions**

Anniversaries of death

Order of Morning and Evening Prayer

Calendar for January 2026

THU	1 st	CIRCUMCISION OF OUR LORD	6pm
FRI	2 nd	<i>Feria</i>	12pm
SAT	3 rd	<i>Of the Blessed Virgin Mary</i>	9.30am
SUN	4 th	THE MOST HOLY NAME OF JESUS	10.30am, 4pm
MON	5 th	Vigil	12pm
TUE	6 th	EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD	10am, 6pm
WED	7 th	<i>Feria</i>	10am
THU	8 th	<i>Feria (Monthly Requiem)</i>	6pm
FRI	9 th	<i>Feria</i>	12pm
SAT	10 th	<i>Of the Blessed Virgin Mary</i>	9.30am
SUN	11 th	THE MOST HOLY FAMILY	10.30am, 4pm
MON	12 th	<i>Feria</i>	12pm
TUE	13 th	BAPTISM OF OUR LORD	9am
WED	14 th	St. Hilary Bishop, Doctor	10am
THU	15 th	St. Paul the First Hermit	6pm
FRI	16 th	St. Marcellus I Pope, Martyr	12pm
SAT	17 th	St. Anthony Abbot	9.30am
SUN	18 th	2ND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY	10.30am, 4pm
MON	19 th	<i>St. Canute, King</i>	12pm
TUE	20 th	Sts. Fabian Pope & Sebastian, Martyrs	9am
WED	21 st	St. Agnes, Virgin & Martyr	10am
THU	22 nd	SS. Vincent Deacon & Anastasius, Mart.	6pm
FRI	23 rd	St. Raymund of Penafort (<i>Anointing</i>)	12pm
SAT	24 th	St. Timothy Bishop, Martyr	9.30am
SUN	25 th	CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL APOSTLE	10.30am
MON	26 th	St. Polycarp Bishop, Martyr	12pm
TUE	27 th	St. John Chrysostom, Bishop	9am
WED	28 th	St. Peter Nolasco	10am
THU	29 th	St. Francis of Sales Bishop, Doctor	6pm
FRI	30 th	King Charles the Martyr	12pm
SAT	31 st	St. John Bosco	9.30am

We pray for...

- 1st Priests, vocations - *Harriet & Edward Davison, Earin Dean, Hilda Everett, Ron Samways*
- 2nd Dying - *Maug Wignall, Janet Formosa, Peter Moss pr.*
- 3rd Walsingham - *Howard Butler, Thomas Sefton pr, Roger Keat pr., Dora Burgess*
- 4th Our Parish - *Phyllis Bruford*
- 5th Beechcroft - *Arthur Stonton pr, Edie Bowring, Glyn Price pr.*
- 6th Our Parish - *Fred Parsonage, Fred Palmer, John Bentley, Henrietta Cooper, Paul Sylvester*
- 7th Victims of human trafficking - *Ernest Cooper, Edna Humm, Barbara Smith*
- 8th Departed - *Ivy Waight, Sheila Colwell*
- 9th Peace in Ukraine, Gaza, Israel, & Palestine
- 10th Cell of O.L.W. - *Rbeta Mogasha*
- 11th Our Parish - *Sylvia Toop, Frank Harvey, Nora Hooper*
- 12th Families - *Irene Heasman, Bob Wray, Celia Hoskins*
- 13th Persecuted Christians - *Brian Humm, John Buffrey pr.*
- 14th People with eating disorders - *Jack Biles, Mary Buxton, John Pryer*
- 15th The elderly & lonely - *David Green pr, Norman Print pr., Helen Galling*
- 16th Westham - *Frank Uphill*
- 17th Religious vocations - *Frank Anderson, Cyril Hicks, Patrick Weavis, Alun Taylor, Ross Staddon, Mary Jackson*
- 18th Our Parish
- 19th Unity of the Church - *Martin Gibbs pr., Brian Day*
- 20th Unity of the Church - *Doris Lansdowne*
- 21st Unity of the Church - *Reginald Uphill, Leonard Toop*
- 22nd Unity of the Church - *Doris Moore*
- 23rd Sick
- 24th Unity of the Church - *John Tute pr.*
- 25th Our Parish - *Lucy Hussey, Iris Fitt, Kit Jackson, Brenda Chedzoy, Monica Tarrier*
- 26th Those with hearing problems, deaf - *Sybil Bridge, Reginald Gentle, Ivy White*
- 27th Preachers, Catechists and all who must speak the truth courageously
- 28th The homeless and deprived - *Brian Groves*
- 29th Bishop Paul of Oswestry - *John Jones*
- 30th HM The King
- 31st Young people - *Alice Wray, Olly Denman, Eric Goddard, Scott Tolman*

If there are names missing from the list or you want to add names, please, talk to the Vicar.

Open, O Lord, my mouth to bless thy holy Name; cleanse also my heart from all vain, evil, and wandering thoughts; enlighten my understanding and kindle my affections; that I may worthily, attentively, and devoutly recite this Morning Prayer, and so be meet to be heard before the presence of thy divine Majesty. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

MORNING PRAYER

V. The Angel of the Lord brought tidings to Mary.

R. And she conceived by the Holy Ghost.

V. Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

R. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of our death. Amen.

V. Behold the handmaid of the Lord.

R. Be it unto me according to thy word.

V. Hail Mary... R. Holy Mary...

V. And the Word was made flesh.

R. And dwelt amongst us.

V. Hail Mary... R. Holy Mary...

V. Pray for us, O holy Mother of God.

R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

V. Let us pray. We beseech thee, O Lord, pour thy grace into our hearts, that as we have known the Incarnation of thy Son Jesus Christ by the message of an angel, so by his Cross and Passion we may be brought unto the glory of his Resurrection; through the same Christ our Lord. R. Amen.

V. O Lord, open my lips. R. And my mouth shall proclaim your praise.

V. O God, make speed to save me. R. O Lord, make haste to help me.

V. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. R. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Alleluia!

V. Let us rejoice in the Lord; let us joyfully sing to God our Saviour! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us joyfully sing psalms to him!

R. O taste and see how sweet is the Lord!

V. For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hands are the depths of the earth; and the heights of the mountains are his.

R. O taste and see how sweet is the Lord!

V. The sea is his, for who but he made it; and his hands fashioned the dry land. O come, let us worship and fall down, and weep before the Lord who made us! For he is the Lord our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.

R. O taste and see how sweet is the Lord!

V. Today if you shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts: As in the provocation, on the day of temptation in the wilderness, where your fathers tempted me, and put me to the test, and they saw my works.

R. O taste and see how sweet is the Lord!

V. For forty years I loathed that generation, and I said: They always err in heart, they have not known my ways, so I swore in my wrath: they shall not enter my rest.

R. O taste and see how sweet is the Lord!

V. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

R. O taste and see how sweet is the Lord!

HYMN

O Jesu, King most wonderful
Thou conqueror renowned,
Thou sweetness most ineffable,
In whom all joys are found!

O Jesu, light of all below,
Thou fount of life and fire,
Surpassing all the joys we know,
And all we can desire:

When once Thou visitest the heart,
Then truth begins to shine;
Then earthly vanities depart;
Then kindles love divine.

May every heart confess thy Name,
And ever thee adore;
And, seeking thee, itself inflame
To seek thee more and more.

Thee may our tongues forever bless;
Thee may we love alone;
And ever in our lives express
The image of thine own. Amen.

The appointed Psalm(s) and Reading(s) follow:

1	Psalm 103	Genesis 17,1-13 Romans 2,17-end	3	2	Ruth 2 Colossians 3,1-11
2	1	Ruth 1 Colossians 2,8-end	4	18 v. 1-30	Exodus 3,13-16 Philippians 2,1-11

5	3	Ruth 4,1-17 Colossians 4	19	21	Genesis 6 Matthew 24,1-14
6	132	Jeremiah 31,7-14 John 1,29-34	20	23	Genesis 7 Matthew 24,15-28
7	5	Baruch 1 Matthew 20,1-16	21	27	Genesis 8,1-14 Matthew 24,29-end
8	6	Baruch 2 Matthew 20,17-28	22	28	Genesis 8,15-end Matthew 25,1-13
9	8	Baruch 3 Matthew 20,29-end	23	30	Genesis 9 Matthew 25,14-30
10	14	Baruch 4 Matthew 23,1-12	24	31	Genesis 10 Matthew 25,31-end
11	89 v. 29-34	Sirach 3,2-6 Ephesians 5,21 - 6,4	25	66	Ezekiel 3,22-end Philippians 3,1-14
12	15	Genesis 1 Matthew 21,1-17	26	32	Genesis 11 Matthew 26,1-16
13	89 v. 19-29	Isaiah 42,1-9 Acts 19,1-7	27	34	Genesis 12 Matthew 26,17-35
14	16	Genesis 2 Matthew 21,33-end	28	36	Genesis 13 Matthew 26,36-46
15	17	Genesis 3 Matthew 22,1-14	29	41	Genesis 14 Matthew 26,47-56
16	19	Genesis 4 Matthew 22,15-33	30	42	Genesis 15 Matthew 26,57-end
17	20	Genesis 5 Matthew 22,34-end	31	43	Genesis 16 Matthew 27,1-10
18	145 v. 1-12	Jeremiah 1,4-10 Mark 1,14-20	1	71	Haggai 2,1-9 1 Corinthians 3,10-17

Each reading ends with these words:

V. This is the word of the Lord.

R. Thanks be to God.

BENEDICTUS – *One of the following antiphons is used:*

Ant: He gave Himself to deliver His people, and to get Himself an everlasting Name. Alleluia.

Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel, *
 who has come to his people and set them free.
He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour, *
 born of the house of his servant David.
Through his holy prophets God promised of old *
 to save us from our enemies, from the hands of all that hate us,
To show mercy to our ancestors, *
 and to remember his holy covenant.
This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham: *
 to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
Free to worship him without fear, *
 holy and righteous in his sight all the days of our life.
And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, *
 for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
To give his people knowledge of salvation *
 by the forgiveness of all their sins.
In the tender compassion of our God *
 the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, *
 and to guide our feet into the way of peace.
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, *
 and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, *
 world without end. Amen.

Ant: He gave Himself to deliver His people, and to get Himself an everlasting Name. Alleluia.

V. Let us pray. – ***Intercessions** are offered for the Church, for the Sovereign (the world), for those in need, and for the dead. Then follows one of the Collects:*

O God, you have appointed your Only-begotten Son to be the Saviour of mankind, and have commanded that His Name should be called Jesus; mercifully grant that we who here on earth worship that most Holy Name may be made glad in heaven by His Presence. Through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. **R.** Amen.

V. Let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

V. The Lord bless us, and preserve us from all evil, and keep us in eternal life.

R. Amen. **V.** Let us bless the Lord. **R.** Thanks be to God.

V. And may the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. **R.** Amen.

Morning Prayer ends with the final Antiphon of Our Lady:

Mother of Christ, hear thou thy people's cry - Star of the deep and Portal of the sky! - Mother of Him who thee from nothing made. - Sinking we strive and call to thee for aid: - O, by what joy which Gabriel brought to thee, - Thou Virgin first and last, let us thy mercy see.

V. After childbirth thou didst remain a virgin.

R. Intercede for us, O Mother of God.

V. Let us pray. O God, who, by the fruitful virginity of blessed Mary, hast bestowed upon mankind the reward of eternal salvation: grant, we beseech thee, that we may experience her intercession, through whom we have been made worthy to receive the author of life: our Lord Jesus Christ thy Son.

R. Amen.

EVENING PRAYER

V. The Angel of the Lord brought tidings to Mary.

R. And she conceived by the Holy Ghost.

V. Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

R. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of our death. Amen.

V. Behold the handmaid of the Lord.

R. Be it unto me according to thy word.

V. Hail Mary... **R.** Holy Mary...

V. And the Word was made flesh.

R. And dwelt amongst us.

V. Hail Mary... **R.** Holy Mary...

V. Pray for us, O holy Mother of God.

R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

V. Let us pray. We beseech thee, O Lord, pour thy grace into our hearts, that as we have known the Incarnation of thy Son Jesus Christ by the message of an angel, so by his Cross and Passion we may be brought unto the glory of his Resurrection; through the same Christ our Lord. R. Amen.

V. O God, make speed to save me. R. O Lord, make haste to help me.

V. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

R. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Alleluia!

HYMN

Jesu, the very thought of thee
With sweetness fills my breast;
But sweeter far thy face to see,
And in thy presence rest.

Nor voice can sing, nor heart can frame,
Nor can the memory find,
A sweeter sound than thy blest Name,
O Saviour of mankind!

O Hope of every contrite heart,
O Joy of all the meek,
To those who fall, how kind thou art!
How good to those who seek!

But what to those who find? Ah! this
Nor tongue nor pen can show:
The love of Jesus, what it is
None but his loved ones know.

Jesu, our only joy be thou,
As thou our prize wilt be;
Jesu, be thou our glory now,
And through eternity. Amen.

The appointed Psalm(s) and Reading(s) follow:

1	Psalm 115	Deuteronomy 30,1-10 Acts 3,11-16	6	98	Baruch 5 John 2,1-11
2	4	Isaiah 60,1-12 John 1,35-42	7	10	Isaiah 63,7-end 1 John 3
3	7	Isaiah 60,13-end John 1,43-end	8	11	Isaiah 64 1 John 4
4	45	Deuteronomy 30,11-end Acts 3,1-10	9	12	Isaiah 65,1-16 1 John 5,1-12
5	97	Isaiah 49,1-13 John 4,7-26	10	13	Isaiah 65,17-end 1 John 5,13-end

11	18	Baruch 4 Matthew 21,12-17	22	38	Amos 9 1 Corinthians 7,25-end
12	100	Amos 1 1 Corinthians 1	23	39	Hosea 1 1 Corinthians 8
13	46, 47	Isaiah 55,1-11 Romans 6,1-11	24	149	Hosea 2 1 Corinthians 9,1-14
14	22	Amos 2 1 Corinthians 2	25	119 v. 41-56	Ecclesiasticus 39,1-10 Colossians 2,1-7
15	24	Amos 3 1 Corinthians 3	26	40	Hosea 3 1 Corinthians 9,15-end
16	25	Amos 4 1 Corinthians 4	27	49	Hosea 4 1 Corinthians 10,1-13
17	26	Amos 5 1 Corinthians 5	28	52	Hosea 5 1 Corinthians 10,14-end
18	96	Ezekiel 2 Galatians 1,11-end	29	53	Hosea 6 1 Corinthians 11,1-16
19	96	Amos 6 1 Corinthians 6,1-11	30	58	Hosea 7 1 Corinthians 11,17-end
20	35	Amos 7 1 Corinthians 6,12-end	31	59	Hosea 8 1 Corinthians 12,1-11
21	37	Amos 8 1 Corinthians 7,1-24	1	118	1 Samuel 1,19-end Hebrews 4,11-end

Each reading ends with these words:

V. This is the word of the Lord. **R.** Thanks be to God.

MAGNIFICAT

Ant: You shall call his Name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins, alleluia.

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,+
my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour;+
he has looked with favour on his lowly servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed;+
the Almighty has done great things for me*
and holy is his name.

He has mercy on those who fear him,*
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm*
and has scattered the proud in their conceit,
Casting down the mighty from their thrones*
and lifting up the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things*
and sent the rich away empty.
He has come to the aid of his servant Israel,*
to remember his promise of mercy,
The promise made to our ancestors,*
to Abraham and his children for ever.
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, *
and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, *
world without end. Amen.

Ant: You shall call his Name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins, alleluia.

*V. Let us pray. – **Intercessions** are offered for the Church, for the Sovereign (world), for those in need, our Benefactors, and for the dead. Then one of the following Collects is said:*

O God, you have appointed your Only-begotten Son to be the Saviour of mankind, and have commanded that His Name should be called Jesus; mercifully grant that we who here on earth worship that most Holy Name may be made glad in heaven by His Presence. Through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. **R.** Amen.

V. Let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

All: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen.

V. Let us bless the Lord. R. Thanks be to God.

V. And may the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. R. Amen.

Optional private prayer to be said after Evening Prayer: To the Most Holy and undivided Trinity, to our Lord Jesus Christ Crucified, to the fruitful Virginity of the most blessed and most glorious Mary, always a Virgin, and to the holiness of all the Saints be ascribed everlasting praise, honour, and glory, by all creatures, and to us be granted the forgiveness of all our sins, world without end. Amen.

Litanies of the Most Holy Name of Jesus

*To be used in times of temptation, in joy, or in sorrow;
and to be meditated upon for an increase of faith, hope, and love.*

Jesus, splendour of the Father.

Jesus, brightness of eternal light.

Jesus, King of glory.

Jesus, sun of justice.

Jesus, Son of the Virgin Mary.

Jesus, most amiable.

Jesus, most admirable.

Jesus, the mighty God.

Jesus, Father of the world to come.

Jesus, angel of great counsel.

Jesus, most powerful.

Jesus, most patient.

Jesus, most obedient.

Jesus, meek and humble of heart.

Jesus, lover of chastity.

Jesus, lover of us.

Jesus, God of peace.

Jesus, author of life.

Jesus, zealous lover of souls.

Jesus, our God.

Jesus, our refuge.

Jesus, father of the poor.

Jesus, treasure of the faithful.

Jesus, good Shepherd.

Jesus, true light.

Jesus, eternal wisdom.

Jesus, infinite goodness.

Jesus, our way and our life.

Jesus, joy of Angels.

Jesus, King of the Patriarchs.

Jesus, Master of the Apostles.

Jesus, teacher of the Evangelists.

Jesus, strength of Martyrs.

Jesus, light of Confessors.

Jesus, purity of Virgins.

Jesus, crown of Saints.

Lord Jesus Christ, You have said, 'Ask and you shall receive; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you'; mercifully attend to our supplications, and grant us the grace of Your most divine love, that we have loved You with all our hearts, and in all our words and actions, and never cease to praise You.

*Make us, O Lord, to have a perpetual fear and love of Your holy name, for You never fail to govern those whom You establish in Your love. You, Who live and reign forever and ever.
Amen*

Saints' meditations on the Most Holy Name of Jesus

Jesus, splendour of the Father — Your Name is light, yet it does not wound the eyes. It shines with a gentleness that draws rather than overwhelms. In Your Name, the hidden glory of the Father is made near and merciful. When I pronounce it with love, my heart learns that divine splendour is not distant majesty, but beauty that bends down to heal what is broken.

Jesus, most amiable — Your Name awakens love because it is filled with sweetness. It does not force the soul; it invites it. When I linger over Your Name, my restless heart finds its true centre. All other loves grow pale beside this one, for in Your Name I discover not only truth, but delight. You make Yourself lovable so that I may dare to love You without fear.

Jesus, meek and humble of heart — Your Name carries within it the mystery of Your descent. You are mighty, yet You choose humility as Your dwelling. In calling upon Your Name, I am gently instructed: power is perfected in lowliness, and glory is revealed through obedience. Your humility does not diminish You; it reveals who You truly are. Teach my heart to learn this wisdom, written into Your Name.

Jesus, our refuge — When fear presses in and my thoughts scatter, Your Name becomes a shelter. I hide within it, not to escape the world, but to be gathered back into peace. In Your Name there is room for weakness, space for wounds, and rest for the weary. It is a refuge not of distance, but of closeness—where sorrow is held and transformed by love.

Jesus, our way and our life — Your Name is not merely spoken; it is walked. To remain in Your Name is already to be on the path that leads to life. Even when I do not see clearly, Your Name guides me forward. It does not promise ease, but it promises presence. Where Your Name is honoured, life quietly unfolds.

Jesus, crown of saints — All holiness finds its fulfilment in Your Name. Every faithful desire, every hidden sacrifice, every long perseverance is gathered there. The saints are crowned because they have learned to rest in Your Name, to love it, to trust it, and to praise it without ceasing. Let my heart be trained in the same devotion, until loving Your Name becomes my joy now and my glory forever.

Jesus, let Your Name be my prayer, my refuge, and my hope.

(From the writings of St. Bonaventure, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Bernardin of Siena and St. John Henry Newman.)

Christmas Day: 7 January

Source: BBC Newsround

At the start of January as you head back to school, the Christmas tree's packed away and mince pies are a distant memory. But for millions of people around the world, 7 January is Christmas Day. Orthodox communities in Europe, Africa and the Middle East, which make up more than 12% of all Christians according to the Pew Research Center, celebrate the big day weeks after most of the Western world. It's because they use a different calendar, called the Julian calendar, to work out when Christmas should be.

So where has this date difference come from?

It's thought to date all the way back to the year 325 AD, when a group of Christian bishops met to agree a standard date for the Church's most important holiday, Easter. To do so, they decided to base it on the Julian calendar, a calendar which Roman ruler Julius Caesar had adopted in 46 BC - basing a year on the time it takes the Sun to go around the Earth.

However, the calculations overestimated the length of the solar year by about 11 minutes. As a result, the calendar and the solar year became increasingly out of sync. The Gregorian Calendar was created by Pope Gregory in 1582 to fix some of the glitches in the Julian Calendar as astronomy became more accurate. The majority of the Christian world adopted it and Great Britain changed to the Gregorian calendar in 1752.

However some believers - known as Orthodox Christians - felt this was wrong and stuck with the Julian Calendar. By 1923, there was a 13-day difference between the two calendars, putting Orthodox Christmas 13 days after December 25, on 7 January.

Orthodox Christmas traditions — All members of the Orthodox Church begin a period of fasting 40 days prior to Christmas. No meat is allowed during the entire fasting period. After Christmas Eve Mass on January 6th, many people will gather with their family and friends to host a giant feast to celebrate the last day of their fast.

People in the Ukrainian and Russian Orthodox faiths will have 12 traditional dishes during Christmas Eve, representing Christ's Apostles - they can include cabbage soup, baked apples, vegetable stew and bread. A well-known dish is Kutia or kutya, made with wheat berries or grains, honey and poppy seeds. It is meant to represent family and a good year of harvest.

Other Orthodox traditions in Ukraine include decorating the house and dinner table with a sheaf of wheat called a *didukh*, taken from the autumn harvest.

The end of the 12 days of Christmas: Plough Monday

In medieval England, January was not a quiet month in the life of the Church. One of its most distinctive and revealing observances was Plough Monday, kept on the first Monday after Epiphany. Long forgotten today, it was once among the most important customs linking the Christian calendar with the daily labour of ordinary people.

Plough Monday marked the formal end of the Christmas season and the return to agricultural work after the Twelve Days of Christmas. For farming communities, this was not merely a practical moment but a spiritual one. The plough symbolised livelihood, survival, and dependence upon God's blessing. Beginning the year's work without prayer would have seemed unthinkable.

In many parishes, a parish plough was kept and ceremonially brought into church or carried in procession through the village. This plough was often decorated with ribbons or greenery and represented the shared labour of the community rather than any one farmer's property. The procession was led by ploughmen, sometimes accompanied by parish clergy, who went from house to house collecting alms. These offerings were used primarily to support the church—especially for the purchase of candles, which were essential for worship in the long winter months.

The custom had a clear religious purpose. By blessing the plough and associating it with the church, medieval Christians affirmed that manual labour belonged within God's providence. Work was not a distraction from faith but a participation in it. The ploughman's toil was understood as a vocation, sanctified by prayer and ordered toward the common good.

There were also moral expectations attached to Plough Monday. Refusing to contribute to the parish collection was frowned upon, and later folklore remembers playful threats of "*ploughing up*" the doorsteps of those who declined—though such actions were usually symbolic rather than destructive. At its heart, the day reinforced communal responsibility: work, worship, and charity belonged together.

By the late Middle Ages, Plough Monday celebrations could include music, simple drama, and festive elements, sometimes drawing criticism from reform-minded clergy. Yet the core meaning remained intact. The Church did not invent rural labour, but it gave it spiritual shape, marking its beginning with prayer rather than mere necessity.

Plough Monday quietly expresses a theology that remains relevant. It reminds us that God's grace is not confined to holy days alone but extends into ordinary work which, when offered to God, becomes prayer.

“Fasting” in January: simple dishes of Christian traditions

By the time January arrives, most of us feel it instinctively: after the rich meals, sweets, and heavy feasting of Christmas, we long for food that is lighter, simpler, and restorative. This desire for a “diet” or reset is not merely modern. Across Christian cultures, January has traditionally marked a return to simplicity and restraint. The Church’s calendar gently moves us from celebration to reflection, and the kitchen follows.

Here are three traditional January dishes that are simple to prepare in the UK, modest in ingredients, and rich in meaning.

Fasolada = Humility and nourishment after Theophany



Fasolada is a classic Greek bean soup traditionally eaten during winter fasting periods, especially after Theophany (Epiphany). In Orthodox spirituality, fasting is not about deprivation but about clarity of heart. Beans—humble, nourishing, and sustaining—symbolise God’s quiet provision. Fasolada reflects a faith that trusts in simplicity.

Ingredients (serves 4): 250 g dried white beans (soaked overnight); 1 onion, chopped; 2 carrots, sliced; 2 celery sticks, chopped; 2 cloves garlic; 400 g tin chopped tomatoes; 3 tbsp olive oil; salt; pepper; bay leaf; parsley.

Method: Drain soaked beans and rinse well. Boil beans in fresh water for 45 minutes until tender; drain. In a large pot, gently sauté onion, carrot, celery, and garlic in olive oil.

Add tomatoes, beans, bay leaf, and enough water to cover. Simmer for 30 minutes. Season and serve with olive oil and bread.

Kutia = Life, death, and hope held together

This wheat, honey, and poppy seed pudding is eaten in Eastern Europe during Theophany and at memorial meals. It brings together Epiphany joy and remembrance of the departed. Wheat symbolises resurrection (dying to bring life), honey symbolises God's sweetness, and poppy seeds abundance.

Ingredients (serves 4): 200 g pearl wheat (or barley); 3 tbsp honey; 2 tbsp ground poppy seeds; handful of raisins or chopped dried fruit; handful of chopped nuts.

Method: Soak wheat overnight. Boil in fresh water for 45–60 minutes until tender; drain. Gently warm honey (do not boil). Mix wheat with honey, poppy seeds, fruit, and nuts. Serve at room temperature.



Orange and Fennel Salad = Light after feast, clarity after excess



This simple salad appears in southern Italy during Epiphany-tide, when rich foods give way to lighter fare. Oranges—bright and sun-like—echo Christ's manifestation to the nations, while fennel aids digestion and refreshes the body. It is a quiet bridge between feast and fasting.

Ingredients (serves 2–3): 3 large oranges; 1 fennel bulb; olive oil; salt; olives (optional).

Method: Peel oranges and slice into rounds. Thinly slice fennel. Arrange on a plate, drizzle with olive oil, season lightly. Add olives if desired.

18-25 January: the week of prayer for Christian unity

Every January, often rather quietly, the Church observes the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, from 18 to 25 January. It is often mentioned briefly in churches, yet few Christians know how it began, why it is held at this particular time of year, or what kind of “unity” it truly seeks. Far from being a modern invention or a gesture of polite compromise, this week is rooted in prayer, repentance, and a deep theological vision of the Church.

The origins of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity lie in the early 20th century, a time when divisions between Christian denominations were often marked by suspicion or even hostility. In 1908, an Anglican priest, Paul Wattson, proposed a focused period of prayer for unity among Christians. At first, his intention was explicitly for unity with the Roman Catholic Church, but the idea soon developed into a broader ecumenical movement centred on prayer rather than debate.

By the mid-20th century, the Catholic Church had officially embraced the Week, especially following the Second Vatican Council, which emphasised that true unity must be sought first and foremost through spiritual means. Since then, Christians of many traditions have taken part each year, united not by agreement on every issue, but by shared prayer to Christ, “*that they may all be one*” (John 17:21).

The dates of the Week are not arbitrary. 18 January was traditionally the feast of the Chair of St Peter, symbolising the Church’s call to unity and pastoral authority. 25 January marks the Conversion of St. Paul, one of the most dramatic moments of transformation in Christian history.

Between Peter and Paul, the Church places the call to unity within the framework of conversion. This is deliberate and profound. Christian unity is not achieved by negotiation alone, but by hearts continually turned toward Christ. Paul’s conversion reminds us that the Church is renewed not by human strategies, but by God’s grace breaking into ordinary lives and redirecting them.

January itself reinforces this symbolism. As the Church moves beyond the joy of Christmas into the light of Epiphany and the Baptism of the Lord, believers are invited to see more clearly who Christ is—and who they are called to be in Him.

One of the greatest misunderstandings about Christian unity is the fear that it means watering down doctrine or pretending that real differences do not exist. The Church has consistently rejected this idea. Authentic unity is not compromise at the expense of truth, nor is it uniformity.

Instead, unity begins with conversion of heart. It requires humility, repentance for past divisions, and a willingness to be purified by the Gospel. The Church teaches that divisions among Christians are a scandal, not because disagreement exists, but because such divisions contradict Christ's explicit desire for His followers.

Prayer is central here. We do not pray for unity because we already possess it, but because we acknowledge that unity is ultimately God's gift, not our achievement. The Week of Prayer reminds us that before asking others to change, we must allow Christ to change us.

In a fragmented world, Christian disunity can easily appear as just another form of division. Yet the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity quietly witnesses to something different: a hope that goes deeper than politics, culture, or personal preference.

This week invites Christians to rediscover what they already share: baptism in Christ, reverence for Scripture, prayer, and the desire to follow the same Lord. It also encourages honest patience. Unity unfolds slowly, through faithfulness rather than force.

Perhaps most importantly, the Week teaches that unity begins locally. It starts in parishes that pray sincerely, in Christians who speak charitably of one another, and in hearts willing to place Christ above all lesser loyalties.

Between Peter's confession and Paul's conversion, the Church spends these January days asking not for an easy unity, but for a holy one — shaped by truth, sustained by prayer, and born of conversion.

A Prayer for Christian Unity

Lord Jesus Christ,
You prayed that all who believe in You may be one.
Purify our hearts, heal our divisions,
and lead us into the unity that comes from truth and love.
Teach us humility, patience, and faithfulness to Your Gospel,
so that the world may believe through the witness of Your Church. Amen.

Here at St. Paul's...

...daily votive Mass will be offered for the unity of the Church or, on days when liturgical rules do not allow a votive Mass, a second Collect will be added at Mass to the Collect of the day. Morning and Evening Prayer (said in church or at home) contain the intention of Christian unity, and our readers are encouraged to use daily the above prayer (or any similar prayer) for the unity of the Church.

Saint of the month: St. Agnes, Virgin & Martyr

21 January



When we picture the martyrs of the early Church, we often imagine adults: seasoned believers, hardened by experience, ready to make the ultimate sacrifice after years of faith. What we rarely imagine is a child. And yet one of the most famous and beloved martyrs of Christianity was barely more than a girl.

St Agnes of Rome was probably only twelve or thirteen years old when she was put to death for her faith around the year 304, during the persecution under Emperor Diocletian. Her age is not a marginal detail. It is precisely what made her martyrdom so shocking—to her contemporaries, and to us.

Agnes lived in a world where children, especially girls, were expected to be quiet, compliant, and easily shaped by adult

authority. Yet when pressured by Roman officials to renounce Christianity and conform to pagan expectations, Agnes did something astonishing: she refused. Calmly and firmly, she insisted that she belonged to Christ alone.

Early Christian writers never tired of stressing this contrast between her youth and her courage. St Ambrose, bishop of Milan, marvelled that a girl who was scarcely old enough to understand physical pain could stand unafraid before executioners. He noted that she was young enough to tremble at a stern look, yet strong enough to face death without flinching. Her bravery was not the result of stubbornness or recklessness, but of deep faith.

According to ancient accounts, Agnes was denounced as a Christian by a rejected suitor and brought before a Roman magistrate. She was urged to

deny Christ and to marry in accordance with social expectations. When she refused, she was threatened with public humiliation and violence. What makes these stories particularly disturbing is that they were aimed at a child—someone legally and socially vulnerable, expected to be easily broken.

And yet she was not.

Christian tradition holds that attempts to shame her failed, that she was protected by God even in moments of extreme danger, and that she ultimately gave her life rather than betray her faith. Whether every detail of these accounts is historical or symbolic, the core truth remains clear: Agnes stood firm, and she did so at an age when most people today are still considered too young to make serious moral decisions.

That is what unsettled the ancient world. It is also what unsettles us.

Agnes forces us to reconsider how we think about faith, maturity, and strength. We often assume that deep conviction requires long experience, intellectual sophistication, or worldly wisdom. Agnes reminds us that faith can be wholehearted and uncompromising even in childhood. Her witness suggests that young people are not merely “future Christians,” but capable of genuine holiness now.

This is one reason why the Church has always held Agnes in such high esteem. Churches were built over her tomb in Rome. Her name entered the Roman Canon of the Mass. She became a symbol of purity, courage, and fidelity—not in a sentimental sense, but in the demanding, costly sense that the Gospel itself requires.

Her name itself became a symbol. “Agnes” echoes both the Greek word for purity (*hagnē*) and the Latin word for lamb (*agnus*). In Christian art she is often shown holding a lamb, not to emphasise fragility, but innocence freely offered to God. She is a reminder that innocence is not weakness, and that purity can be a form of strength.

There is another reason her story still matters. Agnes exposes a modern blind spot. We are rightly protective of children, yet we often underestimate their spiritual seriousness. We delay trust, responsibility, and expectation, assuming that faith will become “real” later. Agnes stands as a quiet rebuke to that assumption. She shows that a young person, formed in love and truth, can recognise Christ as worth everything—even life itself.

St. Agnes did not change the world by political power, argument, or force. She changed it by witness. A child stood before the might of Rome and would not move. That image, preserved and retold for centuries, helped shape the Church’s understanding of sanctity.

She reminds us that holiness is not a matter of age, but of love—and that sometimes the smallest voices speak the most enduring truths.

Know the Bible! - The Book of Judith (2)

Here is where we finished last month's article: as Nebuchadnezzar's army is marching towards Jerusalem, a small village, Bethulia, stands in their way. They are ready to surrender, rather than trusting God, when Judith, a widow appears on the scene and says one of the most beautiful prayers in the Old Testament. She asks God to grant her success, she also reveals her secret plan and from here on, the story is full of creative ironies and reversals.

A crafty plan — Judith dresses up like a queen, and she marches down into the army camp to speak with Holofernes, the general of Nebuchadnezzar's army. When the powerful general sees Judith, he is overpowered by his desire, and he is easily taken in by her crafty plan.

Judith tells Holofernes that he cannot defeat the Israelites unless their God allows it, and God will allow Holofernes to win as long as he lets Judith leave the camp every night to pray. Then she will tell him when to attack.

Judith says, with deep sarcasm, "*God has sent me to do something with you that will astonish the whole world,*" and Holofernes has no clue. But he is thrilled, and he agrees to her plan.

Then he invites Judith to a great feast.

Remember the story of Esther and Haman? The wine is flowing, and Holofernes gets so drunk that this master of armies is unable to master his own passions. He sends everyone out of the tent except Judith in the hopes of getting into bed with her, but then he promptly falls asleep.

Judith sees her chance. And just like the biblical stories of Jael and Sisera, or David and Goliath, in the darkness of Holofernes' tent, she takes his sword and chops off his head.

The irony is rich. Instead of Holofernes taking Judith to bed, Judith takes off Holofernes' head. Then Judith sneaks out of the camp with Holofernes' head in a bag, and she goes to Bethulia. After showing his head to everybody, she orders the Israelite troops to get ready for battle.

In the morning, when the armies discover that Holofernes is dead, they scatter in disarray and are easily defeated by the Israelites.

A new Moses — The book concludes with a victory parade and a long poem celebrating Judith and praising Israel's God for saving them.

The poem portrays Judith as a new Moses who brought about a new exodus from slavery and oppression. In a great reversal, this lone widow brought down an imperial army through her shrewd wisdom and her trust in God.

The poem's final line sticks out as the words of the people around Judith become the words of the book's author, asking God to vindicate his people before all corrupt and violent nations. And so the story ends.

A pattern of hope — The book of Judith was written after the Israelites had suffered for centuries under the oppressive rule of ancient empires. The author was immersed in the Hebrew Scriptures, and he saw within them a pattern of hope.

For him, the biblical Babylon was an image of all arrogant human kingdoms that will one day fall by their own corruption. And Judith is a symbol of the way God raises up unlikely deliverers like Moses, Deborah, David, or Esther.

The author of Judith read the Hebrew Scriptures as a pointer to future hope, that one day God would send the ultimate unlikely deliverer to rescue God's people and overcome the evil that lurks behind violent human empires. And that is what the book of Judith is all about.

The *Deuterocanon*—often called the *Apocrypha* by Protestants—refers to a collection of Jewish writings included in Catholic and Orthodox Bibles but omitted from most Protestant ones. While all Christian Bibles share the same New Testament and the core books of the Old Testament, differences emerged from how Scripture developed in ancient Judaism and was received by the early Church.

The Hebrew Scriptures (Torah, Prophets, and Writings), took their definitive shape between the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC. These books were formed from a wider body of Israelite literature and were revered as the primary witness to God's revelation. During the Second Temple period, however, many additional Jewish texts were composed—historical narratives (*Judith*, for example), wisdom writings, prayers, and apocalyptic works—that closely engaged with Scripture and shaped Jewish faith and expectation.

As Greek became the common language of the Jewish world, the Scriptures were translated into Greek in the Septuagint, along with many of these other writings. This Greek Bible formed the scriptural world of Jesus and the apostles. The New Testament reflects not only deep immersion in the Hebrew Scriptures but also the reception of deuterocanonical books as part of the living tradition through which God revealed himself.

As Christianity spread beyond its Jewish roots, Greek and Latin-speaking churches inherited this broader collection. Disagreements appeared at the Reformation, leading to the Protestant communities rejecting these books as part of divine revelation.

The Psalms

Psalms 56: Trust in God in the midst of fear

Psalms 56 is a lament born from danger, fear, and persecution. It opens with a brief cry for help and then unfolds the reasons for that cry: the psalmist is surrounded by enemies who pursue him relentlessly. They are many, confident, and seemingly secure in their power. Yet the psalm does not remain a mere complaint. From its opening lines, it becomes clear that fear and trust are locked together in a dynamic struggle at the heart of the prayer.

The enemies are described using the imagery of warfare. Their threat is constant, and the danger is real. The psalmist does not minimise his fear or pretend courage where there is none. On the contrary, he looks steadily at both the external danger and his own inner weakness. Faith, in this psalm, is not the absence of fear but the refusal to surrender to it. The worshipper chooses, again and again, to place his trust in God rather than in human strength or strategy.

A key insight of the psalm is that trust in God does not instantly eliminate fear. The poet is not “cured” of anxiety by an act of belief. Instead, trust gives him firm footing precisely when everything else seems unstable. Faith becomes a deliberate act, a bold venture, in which the psalmist throws himself into the arms of God at the very moment he feels most likely to collapse. This courage is not self-generated; it is rooted in confidence in God’s Word and promises.

The psalm draws a sharp contrast between the fear of human enemies and the fear of God. Trust in God robs fear of its power, not by denying danger, but by placing it in its proper proportion. Human threats lose their absolute status when set against the sovereignty and faithfulness of God. Yet this does not lead to pride or spiritual self-assurance. True faith involves the renunciation of all forms of self-reliance, even religious ones. It is the humble surrender of the whole person to God, recognising that only His Word provides a secure foundation.

The psalmist repeatedly returns to the Word of God as the warrant for his confidence. God’s promises are not abstract ideas but living realities that give strength, hope, and perspective. Through them, the worshipper learns to judge life rightly. Left to himself, a person evaluates events through fear, prejudice, and distorted emotion. Seen from the standpoint of faith, however, human power is revealed as fragile and limited—mere “flesh”—while God alone remains the true source of security.

Despite this knowledge, the psalmist again relapses into lament. This is not a failure of faith but part of its process. The psalm recognises that trust

must be continually re-won through inner struggle. Even the faithful are not spared this battle. Yet the struggle is not aimless. It is sustained by a deep personal relationship with God, in which suffering is not ignored or dismissed.

One of the most moving images in the psalm is the assurance that God counts every restless night and gathers every tear. Suffering is not wasted or forgotten. It is “recorded” by God, treasured rather than dismissed. This conviction transforms anguish into prayer and grief into hope. The psalmist trusts that his suffering has meaning because it is held within the knowledge and care of God.

As the psalm moves toward its conclusion, confidence begins to outweigh fear. The psalmist speaks as one whose prayer has already been answered, even if the outcome is not yet fully visible. The assurance likely comes from God’s promise spoken in worship—a reminder that communion with God is itself a form of deliverance. Remembering his earlier profession of trust, the worshipper now confirms its truth through lived experience.

The psalm ends with thanksgiving and renewed dedication. The psalmist prepares to offer what he had promised: gratitude, worship, and faithful living. Delivered from death, he resolves to walk before God “*in the light of life*.” This image suggests a life lived openly in God’s presence, no longer dominated by darkness or fear. What began as lament concludes as confident hope rooted in communion with God.

Reflective Questions

1. Where do I recognise the struggle between fear and trust in my own life?
2. Do I expect faith to remove fear immediately, or do I allow it to grow through honest struggle?
3. Do I believe that God truly notices and treasures my suffering, even when nothing seems to change?
4. What would it mean for me to “walk before God in the light of life” this week?

*Lord God,
When I am afraid, teach me to trust in You.
You know my weakness, my restless nights, and my hidden tears.
Help me not to rely on myself, but to stand on Your Word alone.
Deliver me from the power of fear,
and lead me to walk before You in the light of life.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Symbols of Early Christian Art — The Tetramorphon: the fourfold Gospel and its living symbolism

Based on prof. László Vanyó's book



From the Middle Ages onward, Christians have become accustomed to associating each of the four evangelists with a living creature: Matthew with the human figure, Luke with the ox, Mark with the lion, and John with the eagle. These images are so familiar that they can easily seem decorative or merely conventional. Yet their origins are ancient, with deep theology and symbolism behind them.

The roots of these evangelist symbols lie not in medieval imagination, but in the visionary world of Scripture itself—above all in Ezekiel and in the Book of Revelation. Ezekiel's vision of the four living creatures, later echoed in Revelation 4, provided early Christianity with a rich symbolic vocabulary for expressing the mystery of the Gospel. These figures were not invented to represent the evangelists;

rather, the evangelists were understood through them.

Early Christian art already reflects this symbolic framework. In mosaics and catacomb frescoes, the four living creatures appear in cosmic and paradisiacal settings, often alongside images of rivers flowing from Eden. In some compositions, the heavenly realm is marked by the four living beings, while the earthly sphere is symbolised by the four rivers of paradise. Together they express a unified vision: heaven and earth ordered by divine revelation.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons, writing against various heresies, insists that the Church possesses *one* Gospel in *four* forms—not four competing gospels, nor a single text distorted by selective reading. He criticises groups who isolate one Gospel to support their theology: the Ebionites clinging solely to Matthew, the Marcionites adopting a shortened Luke, others appealing primarily to Mark or John according to their doctrinal preferences. For Irenaeus, this fragmentation betrays the Gospel's true nature.

Instead, he argues, the Gospel is inherently fourfold, corresponding to the four corners of the world, the four winds, and the cosmic order itself. Just

as creation is structured and harmonious, so too is revelation. The fourfold Gospel is not accidental but necessary, held together by the one Spirit.

In the *Tetramorphon*, each living creature expresses a particular dimension of Christ's saving work. The lion signifies royal authority and power; the ox evokes sacrifice and priestly service; the human figure reveals the mystery of the Incarnation; and the eagle, soaring heavenward, speaks of divine transcendence and grace descending from above. Together they proclaim the fullness of the Gospel.

Later Christian tradition elaborated these associations in relation to the evangelists themselves. Matthew (*human figure*), beginning with Christ's human genealogy, emphasises the Incarnation. Luke (*sacrificial ox*), with his priestly themes and sacrificial imagery, opens with the temple and the priest Zechariah. Mark (*lion*), dynamic and prophetic, announces the Gospel with urgency and power. John (*eagle*), whose Gospel begins "in the beginning," lifts the reader into contemplation of the eternal Word. Each evangelist contributes a distinct voice, yet all speak the same truth.

In the early centuries, however, the Church had not yet fixed these symbolic correspondences definitively. What mattered most was not assigning animals to authors, but recognising the spiritual unity of the Gospel. The key theological category was pneumatological: the incarnate Word, having become human, sends the Holy Spirit into all the world, protecting and guiding the Church "with His wings." The fourfold Gospel thus mirrors the great covenants of salvation history—Adam, Noah, Moses, and the new covenant in Christ—recapitulated and fulfilled in the Gospel.

The winged creatures also belong to the realm of angelology. In Byzantine iconography, they are frequently placed within the mandorla surrounding the glorified Christ. There they serve as visual theology: Christ, the incarnate Word, moves through history borne upon the fourfold Gospel, which Irenaeus memorably describes as His "vehicle."

Early Christian art reflects this understanding. Some of the earliest surviving depictions show not four evangelists, but four witnesses gathered around Christ. In the frescoes of the *Pietro e Marcellino* catacombs, dating from the early 4th century, Christ stands with four scrolls at His feet.

Thus the *Tetramorphon* is far more than an artistic convention. It is a theological confession rendered in image: the unity and fullness of revelation, the harmony of Scripture, and the cosmic scope of the Gospel. In the four living creatures, the Church recognises not only the evangelists, but the living Word proclaimed to the four corners of the world—one Gospel, fourfold in form, held together by the one Spirit.

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*The Vicar's day-off is Tuesday. With enquiries about Baptisms, Weddings, Banns, or Funerals, please, contact the Vicar. **If you are in hospital, live in a care home, or are house-bound and you wish to receive Holy Communion and/or Anointing, or to make your Confession, please let the Vicar know and he will be very happy to visit you.***

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A priest is always available for Confession, spiritual direction, or for a simple chat half an hour before every Service, or at any other time by appointment! For service times and other information about our churches and services, please visit our website: ***stpaulsweymouth.org***