

HIGH TIDE

*Parish
Magazine*

*Weymouth
St Paul
with Fleet*

DEC 2024



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Did you know about the three questions Socrates always asked when they wanted to pass on gossip to him? He was rather wise... are we??

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Saint of the month: St. Nicholas the Wonder-Worker **38**

Everybody knows Santa Clause. Very few know the historic figure behind it: St. Nicholas of Myra, Bishop. He didn't climb down chimneys or fireplaces, but he did give gifts to the poor. Also, he beat up another bishop... more in the article!

Know the Bible **38**

The Book of Joshua contains the well known story of the battle of Jericho when the walls of the fortified city collapsed in front of Israel. This book is the chronicle of the first decades of Israel living in the promised land and has one of the most important statements in the whole Old Testament: on whose side is God? The answer is in the article!

The Psalms: Psalms 45 **40**

Originally a wedding song for a king, this Psalm is rather unique amongst the 150 Psalms and contains some truly beautiful prophecies.

*Many thanks to all who have contributed to the Parish Magazine and to Liz Evans for the proofreading. The next Magazine will be published on **Sunday 29th December**.*

*Please, send all articles, information, news you wish to be publish
by Sunday 22nd December.*

Front cover: The Nativity (fresco, detail) by Gaudenzio Ferrari (1513)
Chiesa Santa Maria delle Grazie, Varallo (Italy)

From the Vicar

Dearly Beloved,

Our reasons to attend church are as many and varied as we are. Some will be attracted by the beauty of worship. I remember as a child I was fascinated by the sweet smokes of incense, the vibrating colours of vestments, and the mysterious words and actions. I understood little, if any, of it all but I was clearly drawn to it.

Others will have found a family in church. Many would be able to witness, I believe, to the warm and genuine welcome their (parish) churches offered them, especially in times of loneliness. There are those, too, who come in search of truth and meaning to their lives: avid readers of the Scriptures, faithful attendees of bible groups, attentive listeners of sermons. We can also find there those for whom church is a refuge from the noisiness of the world, a safe heaven from the horrors of life, a true heaven of peace and quiet. Then there are the lovers of music and arts, those fuelled by charity and compassion towards their neighbour, the ones who, blessed with various talents, are keen to put their gifts to the good of others. The list is long, the reasons, as mentioned above, are many and varied.

Above all these reasons, however, must stand high The One reason: the Lord Jesus Christ. His sacred Person, his life-giving Word, his merciful Heart. Of course we come to church because of him, we may say... but unless we remind ourselves constantly of this, our secondary reasons - worship, singing, social life, outreach, company, anything - can quickly usurp The One Reason. And this would be dangerous, if not lethal, for two reasons.

Firstly, because our secondary reasons can and, at least occasionally, will indeed fail us. Sometimes worship is not uplifting, the singing is horrible, the sermon terribly dull, and people are ... well, lets not even talk about how *some* people *can* be at times! If slowly and inadvertently these secondary causes have become for us the main reason for attending church, in that case, when they let us down, we will be tempted to come less, to get involved less, and, at the end, to stop coming at all.

Secondly - though I should have started with this really -, if the Lord Jesus is not our main reason to come to church then not only we will forget *why* we really come to church but also *what* we are really supposed to do in church! And the answer is: to become one with him. Our lives, our hearts, our feelings must conform to his. We must start resembling him so much that when we appear in front of God in prayer, in church, or in our last hour, he can look at us, recognise the features of Christ in us, and say: "*Behold my beloved child in whom I am well pleased*" (cf. Matthew 3,17).

Becoming Christ-like is our Christian vocation. After all, it is in his image and likeness that we have been created (cf. Genesis 1,27 & Colossians 1,16). Sin deeply damaged this image and likeness in us but grace, through the work of redemption, can restore them. There are, however, two main obstacles in front of us if we want to become Christ-like (and why wouldn't we as it *is* the only way of salvation...).

The first obstacle is that we can never become one with someone we do not know well enough, or we do not listen and talk to enough. Since St. Jerome insists that ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ, our starting point is the Bible: the Old Testament which prefigured and prophesied about Christ, and the New where these figures and prophecies have been fulfilled. Advent *is* very much the season of reading the Scriptures. So many never recognised him because so many never really understood the Bible.

The second obstacle is even tougher. Let's be honest, who can become like Christ? The truth is: no one. Should we then despair and give up? Never! Because while no one can *become* like Christ, anyone can be *transformed* into his likeness by his grace. He does the work, not us, but we have to let him do his job! And so Advent *is* very much the season of Confession, penance, some fasting, frequent Holy Communion, prayer, works of mercy and of fraternal charity because these are the means of grace. It is through these means of grace that Christ will reach us and slowly transform us into his likeness.

Sunday 19 November was Safeguarding Sunday in the Church of England. I long for the time when this will be the most useless Sunday in the whole year. Imagine a church, a congregation, a family where the heart of each member resembles the meek and humble Heart of Jesus; where their words resound only with the words of our Merciful Samaritan; where all touch the life of others as our Divine Physician did. Imagine a church, a congregation, a family made of walking, living Icons of Christ Jesus!

There will be no harm done or even intended; no words uttered to offend; no actions taken to hurt; no choices made to divide; no whispers passed on to judge. Only meekness, charity, patience, purity, humility, and forgiveness. Utopia? Not necessarily if we do our best and let/ask the Lord Jesus do his work in us. But it must start now, in this Holy Season of Advent. And even if we fail for now, as long as we honestly try and never give up trying, our Advent preparation will be holy and fruitful, leading to a joyful Christmas, a blessed church-life, and one day to a happy Christian death at the end of a holy Christian life. These are my Christmas wishes for ~~you~~ us all.

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

Fr. Gregory 5

Where did that phrase come from? (part 4)

Jeanne James writes:

Nightmare — In fact, the “mare” part of the word “nightmare” (a terrifying dream) comes from Germanic folklore, in which a *mare* is an evil female spirit or goblin that sits upon a sleeper’s chest, suffocating them and giving them bad dreams. In Germanic folklore it was thought that this evil spirit rode horses in the night, leaving them sweaty and exhausted next day.

Can’t hold a candle — This one dates back to the 17th century, and its meaning is related to one’s incompetence. The saying came from talking about an apprentice who was not even skilful enough to hold a candle for his master. In short, they are worthless as an apprentice.

Show your true colours — Lowering your colours aboard a ship to hide your nation’s flag is a strategic move. In a naval battle, if you hoist your flag high after hiding it, you are showing your true colours.

Big wig — In the 18th century when many men wore wigs, the most important men wore the biggest wigs. Hence today important people are called big wigs.

Bitter end — Anchor cable was wrapped around posts called bitts. The last piece of cable was called the bitter end. If you let out the cable to the bitter end there was nothing else you could do, you had reached the end of your resources.

Blue-blood — This means aristocratic. For centuries the Arabs occupied Spain but they were gradually forced out during the Middle Ages. The upper class in Spain had paler skin than most of the population as their ancestors had not intermarried with the Arabs. As they had pale skin the ‘blue’ blood running through their veins was more visible. (Of course, all blood is red but it sometimes looks blue when running through veins). So blue-blooded came to mean upper class.

To boot — If you get something to boot it means you get it extra. However, it has nothing to do with the boots you wear on your feet. It is a corruption of the old word bot, which meant profit or advantage.

Born with a silver spoon in your mouth — Once when a child was christened it was traditional for the godparents to give a silver spoon as a gift (if they could afford it!). However, a child born in a rich family did not have to wait. He or she had it all from the start.

Chock-a block — When pulleys or blocks on a sailing ship were pulled so tightly together that they could not be moved any closer together they were said to be chock-a-block.

Coals to Newcastle — Before railways were invented goods were often transported by water. Coal was transported by ship from Newcastle to London by sea. It was called sea coal. Taking coals to Newcastle was a pointless exercise.

Cock a hoop — This phrase comes from a primitive tap called a spile and shive. A shive was a wooden tube at the bottom of a barrel and a spile was a wooden bung. You removed the shive to let the liquid flow out and replaced it to stop the flow. The spile was sometimes called a cock. If people were extremely happy and wanted to celebrate they took out the cock and put it on the hoop on the top of the barrel to let the drink flow out freely. So it was cock a hoop. So cock a hoop came to mean ecstatic.

Cut and run — In an emergency rather than haul up an anchor the sailors would cut the anchor cable and then run with the wind.

What the Dickens! — This old saying does not come from the writer Charles Dickens (1812-1870). It is much older than him! It has been around since at least the 16th century. Originally ‘Dickens’ was another name for the Devil.

Dutch courage — In the 17th century, England and Holland were rivals. They fought wars in 1652-54, 1665-67, and 1672-74. It was said (very unfairly) that the Dutch had to drink alcohol to build up their courage. Other insulting phrases are Dutch treat (meaning you pay for yourself) and Double Dutch meaning gibberish.

Earmarked — This comes from the days when livestock had their ears marked so their owner could be easily identified.

Flash in the pan — Muskets had a priming pan, which was filled with gunpowder. When flint hit steel it ignited the powder in the pan, which in turn ignited the main charge of gunpowder and fired the musket ball. However, sometimes the powder in the pan failed to light the main charge. In that case, you had a flash in the pan.

Freelance — In the Middle Ages, freelances were soldiers who fought for anyone who would hire them. They were literally free lances.

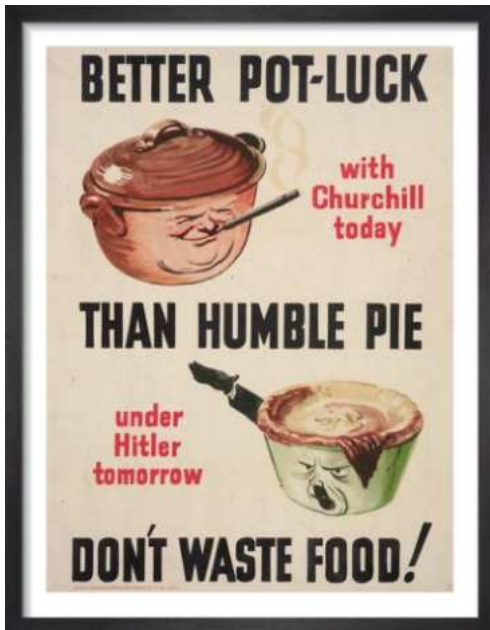
Get the sack — This comes from the days when workmen carried their tools in sacks. If your employer gave you the sack it was time to collect your tools and go.

Go to pot — Any farm animal that had outlived its usefulness such as a hen that no longer laid eggs would go to pot. It was cooked and eaten.

Hat trick — This comes from cricket. Once a bowler took three wickets in successive deliveries he was given a new hat by his club.

Hobson's choice — This means to have no choice at all. In the 16th century and the early 17th century if you went on a journey you could hire a horse to take you from one town to another and travel using a relay of horses. (That was better than wearing out your horse on a long journey over very poor roads). In the early 1600s, Thomas Hobson was a man in Cambridge who hired out horses. However, he would not let customers choose which horse they wanted to ride. Instead, they had to ride whichever horse was nearest the stable entrance. So if you hired a horse from him you were given 'Hobson's choice'.

Holier than thou — This comes from the Bible, Isaiah 65:5, the Old Testament prophet berates people who say 'stand by thyself, come not near me for I am holier than thou'.



Humble pie — The expression to eat humble pie was once to eat umble pie. The umbles were the intestines or less appetising parts of an animal and servants and other lower-class people ate them. So if a deer was killed the rich ate venison and those of low status ate umble pie. In time it became corrupted to eat humble pie and came to mean to debase yourself or act with humility.

Kick the bucket — When slaughtering a pig you tied its back legs to a wooden beam (in French "buquet"). As the animal died it kicked the *buquet*.



Advent preparation

- **Holy Confession** — as a Christmas Gift to the Lord Jesus who delights and takes dwelling in a contrite heart (*Isaiah 57,15 Psalm 51*).
- **Frequent Holy Communion** — the Lord Jesus has a deep desire to be united to us in the Holy Communion (*Luke 22,15*). Let us respond generously to his call.
- **Holy Scripture** — You can use the list on page 35, the readings of Morning or Evening prayer or of the Novena on page 10, or read one of the 24 chapters daily from St. Luke's Gospel. Whenever, however: just read the Bible and let the Lord Jesus talk to you in his own words!
- **Charity & Reconciliation** — Love is God; hate is darkness. They are both approaching and the choice is ours. (*1 John*)

Whose report do you believe?

Irene Leader writes:

Isaiah 53:1 asks who has believed our report? Do we believe God's report of Himself or what religion and tradition tell us? We are made in the likeness and image of God — but what God, do we think, we are the image of? This completely affects how we think about ourselves, our dignity and worth, and whether we live in absolute confidence and assurance of who we are in Christ and what we have in Him.

Some believe in the “doctrine of suffering” which says that God brings suffering and pain to teach you something; either by giving you something or taking something away, for the purpose of enabling you to grow and develop. This image of God is far from the one we find in the Bible.

If we think God brings illness, disaster, poverty, etc., then He is definitely not a good God. If God has not withheld His only Son from us, then why would He think it necessary to withhold lesser things from us (*see Romans 8,32*)? If in Jesus Christ He has already given His best, why would He feel it necessary to give us something awful as well?? Wouldn't He be contradicting Himself?

This vengeful God is so entrenched in our culture that it was even written into our insurance policies: we are not covered from disasters because they come under ‘an act of God.’

Man brought sin into the world, not God, and because of this the earth was cursed... God did not curse it. In his unsearchable wisdom and justice He allowed us to suffer the consequences of our own free choices. At the same time, in his immense mercy and love He never allowed those consequences to reach us in their fullness.

When we misrepresent God, such as in the above mentioned “doctrine of suffering”, we are blaspheming His Name.

Instead, God has given a report of Himself in the Scripture; a self-testimony. God, who alone knows Himself fully, is offering an otherwise inaccessible knowledge of Himself to us. The only test, if you will, he is putting us through, is the test of faith. This test can be summarised thus: “*Do you believe my word? Do you believe me?*”

So, what is the report, the self-testimony, that God has given us?

He has given us His Names. **El** – which is linked to the idea of strong shepherd who keeps his own safe. He who reveals Himself by His Name in might, strength, and power, has also revealed Himself as **Shaddai**, meaning “*The All-Sufficient God*”. Other Names God calls Himself by in the Old

Testament, are: **El Hanne'eman** - *The Faithful God* (Deuteronomy 7:9); **El Emet** - *The God of Truth* (Psalm 31:5); **El Roi** - *The God who sees* (Genesis 16:13).

All the above Names tell us something about God's essence. Then there are the so-called Covenant Names of God. These tell us something about God's relationship with us, his people. **JHWH Jireh** - *The God who provides*; **JHWH Rohi** - *God my shepherd*; **JHWH Rophe** - *The God who heals*.

Yes, when your heart is broken, God is there. But He is not there *because* he caused it but so that He can be by your side.

The Bible is written in hiphil form. This means that when Scripture says "God did this or that", often it means that He did it only by default as He had created everything. For example, I build a motorway, and it goes to the right and the left. Frank wants to go right, but he drives left. Frank suffers the consequences of his decision and ends up where he does not want to be. Frank should take personal responsibility, but he blames me because I built the motorway.

Of course, God is powerful enough to prevent Frank from going in the wrong direction. He is powerful enough to make Frank go in any direction. Indeed, His power and might are infinite. However, as mentioned above, God respects our freedom to choose what is wrong. He is calling, directing, and helping us towards what is good — but does not take away our liberty to choose what is wrong. After our wrong choice, He allows us to suffer the consequences of it, though He always mitigates them. But this belongs to another article with equally difficult topics such as human freedom, grace, providence, and predestination.

God has revealed Himself, giving us His self-testimony. Not believing Him would be a sin. Now, the deceitfulness of sin is that it leads to a hardened heart, and we cannot hear God (*see Hebrews 3:13*). If we cannot hear Him, we will never know Him and His goodness. If we never know Him, we can never believe Him. But we need to know and believe who God is in order to experience Him and His love.

You see the vicious circle sin creates even in such fundamental and essential things such as listening to God, believing Him, and knowing Him. The Catechism teaches us that "we have been created to know, to love, and to serve God in this life and to enjoy Him in the next." Advent is a great opportunity to prayerfully and attentively read and re-read important pages of the Bible where God is speaking of Himself. May He bless and open our hearts and minds as we do so and may He thus lead us to a greater knowledge and love of Him in this life and in the one yet to come.

Novena in Preparation for Christmas

We use this Novena at St. Paul's. Even if you cannot attend (our) church, you can join us in spirit by following the same Novena.

Priest: Our Lord and King is drawing near. *All: O Come, Let Us Adore Him.*

Then a short prophecy and the O-Antiphon assigned to the day is read:

16 Dec - Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel. Be glad and rejoice with all thy heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. Behold the Lord cometh. (*Zephaniah 3,14*)

O Virgin of virgins, how shall this be? For neither before thee was any like thee, nor shall there be after. Daughters of Jerusalem, why marvel ye at me? The thing which ye behold is a divine mystery.

17 Dec -Behold the Lord cometh, and there shall be a great light in that day. The mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk. (*Joel 3,18*)

O Wisdom, that proceedest from the mouth of the Most High, reaching from end to end mightily, and disposing all things sweetly! come and teach us in the way of prudence.

18 Dec - Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. (*cf. Jeremiah 23,5*)

O Adonai, and leader of the house of Israel, who appearedst to Moses in the fire of the flaming bush, and gavest him the law on Sinai; come and redeem us by thy outstretched arm.

19 Dec -Behold, the Lord and King shall appear, and He shall not deceive. Though he delay, wait for him; because he will surely come, he will not tarry. (*Habakkuk 2,3*)

O Root of Jesse, who standest as the ensign of the people; before whom kings shall not open their lips; to whom the nations shall pray: come and deliver us; tarry now no more.

20 Dec - All the kings of the lands shall adore Him, and every nation shall serve Him. (*cf. Is 2,4-5*)

O Key of David, and sceptre of the house of Israel! who openest, and no man shutteth: who shuttest, and no man openeth; come, and lead the captive from prison, sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death.

21 Dec - The Lord shall come down like rain upon the fleece of Gideon. The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills righteousness. (*cf. Judges 6,38; Ps 72,3*)

O Dawn of East, splendour of eternal light, and Sun of justice! come and enlighten them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death.

22 Dec - Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and his name shall be called: "The mighty God." Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end. (*Is 9,6-7*)

O King of nations, and their desired One, and the corner-stone that maketh both one; come and save man whom thou formedst out of slime.

23 Dec - Thou, Bethlehem, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel. He shall be great unto the ends of the earth, and he shall be the peace. (*Micah 5,2-5*)

O Emmanuel, our King and Lawgiver, the Expectation and Saviour of the nations! come and save us, O Lord our God!

24 Dec - Tomorrow the wickedness of the whole world will be destroyed, and over us will reign the Saviour of the world.

O King of peace, that wast born before all ages, come by the golden gate; visit them whom thou hast redeemed, and lead them back to the place whence they fell by sin.

Priest: Let us pray. Hasten, we beseech Thee, O Lord, and delay not; and bestow upon us the help of Thy heavenly power, that they who trust in Thy goodness may be helped by the consolations of Thy coming. Who livest and reignest with God the Father, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. *All:* Amen.

All: **Hail, and blessed be the hour and moment
at which the Son of God was born of a most pure Virgin
in a stable at midnight in Bethlehem
in the piercing cold.**



Blessing and lighting of the Advent Wreath at home

Week one

V. May our hearts be filled with hope as we hear the promises God made to bless all the peoples on earth through Abraham, the father of our faith.

V. A reading from the Book of Genesis: “*Meanwhile, the Lord said to Abram, Leave thy country behind thee, thy kinsfolk, and thy father’s home, and come away into a land I will shew thee. Then I will make a great people of thee; I will bless thee, and make thy name renowned, a name of benediction; those who bless thee, I will bless, those who curse thee, I will curse, and in thee all the races of the world shall find a blessing.*” This is the word of the Lord. **R.** Thanks be to God.

V. Blessed are you, sovereign Lord, God of our ancestors: to you be praise and glory for ever. You called the patriarchs to live by the light of faith and to journey in the hope of your promised fulfilment. May we be obedient to your call and be ready and watchful to receive your Christ, a lamp to our feet and a light to our path; for you are our light and our salvation. **R.** Blessed be God for ever.

The first candle is lit. **V.** Let us pray. Almighty God, we give thanks for our father Abraham who by faith obeyed your call and became the father of many nations. Give us faith to listen to your voice that our hearts may be filled with the hope of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. **R.** Amen.

Week two

The first candle is lit at the beginning. **V.** May our hearts be filled with peace as we hear the words of the prophet Isaiah who told of Him who would be born the Prince of Peace.

V. A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah: “*For our sakes a child is born, to our race a son is given, whose shoulder will bear the sceptre of princely power. What name shall be given him? Peerless among counsellors, the mighty God, Father of the world to come, the Prince of peace. Ever wider shall his dominion spread, endlessly at peace; he will sit on David’s kingly throne, to give it lasting foundations of justice and right; so tenderly he loves us, the Lord of hosts.*” This is the word of the Lord. **R.** Thanks be to God.

V. Blessed are you, sovereign Lord, just and true: to you be praise and glory for ever. Of old you spoke by the mouth of your prophets, but in our days you speak through your Son, whom you have appointed the heir of all things. Grant us, your people, to walk in his light, that we may be found ready and

watching when he comes again in glory and judgement; for you are our light and our salvation. **R.** Blessed be God for ever.

The second candle is lit. R. Let us pray. Lord God you spoke through your prophets and promised a kingdom of peace. We welcome your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. Make our hearts long for the establishment of his kingdom of justice and righteousness. **R.** Amen.

Week three

The first two candles are lit at the beginning. V. May our hearts be filled with God's love towards all people as we consider the life of sacrifice and encouragement of Saint John the Baptist.

V. A reading from the Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew: "*In those days John the Baptist appeared, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea; Repent, he said, the kingdom of heaven is at hand. It was of him that the prophet Isaiah spoke, when he said, There is a voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the Lord, straighten out his paths.*" This is the word of the Lord. **R.** Thanks be to God.

V. Blessed are you, sovereign Lord, just and true: to you be praise and glory for ever. Your prophet Saint John the Baptist was witness to the truth as a burning and shining light. May we your servants rejoice in his light, and so be led to witness to him who is the Lord of our coming kingdom, Jesus Christ our Saviour, and King of the ages. **R.** Blessed be God for ever.

The third (rose) candle is lit. R. Let us pray. Lord Jesus, your servant Saint John the Baptist called people to prepare for your coming by caring for one another. Give us willing hearts to reach out to all people in need with your love and compassion. **R.** Amen.

Week four

The first three candles are lit at the beginning. V. May our hearts be filled with joy as we hear the song of Mary, the Blessed Mother of Jesus.

V. A reading from the Holy Gospel according to St. Luke: "*And Mary said, My soul magnifies the Lord; my spirit has found joy in God, who is my Saviour, because he has looked graciously upon the lowliness of his handmaid. Behold, from this day forward all generations will count me blessed; because he who is mighty, he whose name is holy, has wrought for me his wonders. He has mercy upon those who fear him, from generation to generation; he has done valiantly with the strength of his arm, driving the proud astray in the conceit of their hearts; he has put down the mighty from their seat, and exalted the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty-handed. He*

has protected his servant Israel, keeping his merciful design in remembrance, according to the promise which he made to our forefathers, Abraham and his posterity for evermore.” This is the word of the Lord. **R.** Thanks be to God.

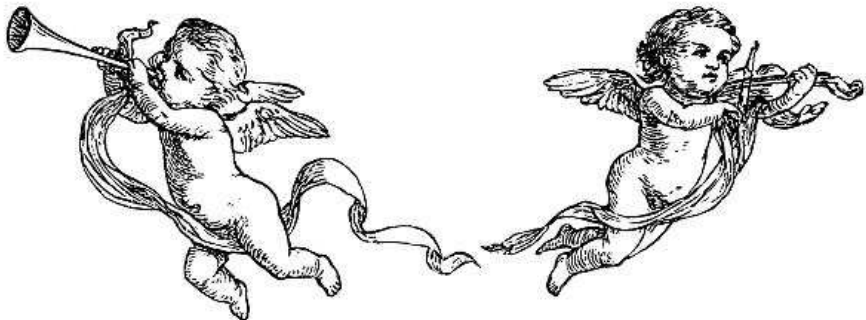
V. Blessed are you, sovereign Lord, merciful and gentle: to you be praise and glory for ever. Your light has shone in our darkened world through the child-bearing of the blessed, ever-virgin Mary; grant that we who have seen your glory may daily be renewed in your image and prepared like her for the coming of your Son, who is the Lord and Saviour of all. **R.** Blessed be God for ever.

The fourth candle is lit. **R.** Let us pray. Almighty God, you decided to take up our frail nature in the womb of Mary, virgin and mother most pure. Through her prayers and protection, preserve us from all evil and harm, now and for ever. **R.** Amen.

Before using it, you can bring your Advent wreath to church and ask the priest to bless it. Or you can bless it yourself at home with one of the following prayers. After the prayer sprinkle the wreath with Holy Water.

In the short days and long nights of Advent, we realize how we are always needing salvation by our God. Around this wreath, we shall remember God’s promise. (*A moment of silence is kept.*) O God, by whose Word all things are sanctified, pour forth Your blessing upon this wreath and grant that we who use it may prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ and may receive from You abundant graces. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Lord our God, we praise you for your Son, Jesus Christ: he is Emmanuel, the hope of the peoples, he is the wisdom that teaches and guides us, he is the Saviour of every nation. Lord God, let your blessing come upon us as we light the candles of this wreath. May the wreath and its light be a sign of Christ’s promise to bring us salvation. May he come quickly and not delay. We ask this through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.



**Calendar, Service times,
and Prayer Intentions**

Anniversaries of death

Order of Morning and Evening Prayer

Calendar for December 2024

SUN	1 st	1ST SUNDAY OF ADVENT	10.30am, 5pm
MON	2 nd	St. Bibiana, Virgin & Martyr	12pm
TUE	3 rd	St. Francis Xavier	9am
WED	4 th	St. Osmund, Bishop	10am
THU	5 th	<i>St. Sabbas</i>	6pm
FRI	6 th	St. Nicholas, Bishop	12pm
SAT	7 th	St. Ambrose, Bishop	9.30am
SUN	8 th	IMMACULATE CONCEPTION	10.30am, 4pm
MON	9 th	<i>Monthly Requiem</i>	12pm
TUE	10 th	<i>St. Melchiades Pope, Martyr</i>	9am
WED	11 th	St. Damasus I Pope	10am
THU	12 th	<i>Feria</i>	6pm
FRI	13 th	St. Lucy, Virgin & Martyr	12pm
SAT	14 th	<i>Feria</i>	9.30am
SUN	15 th	3RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT	10.30am, 4pm
MON	16 th	St. Eusebius Bishop, Martyr - <i>Novena</i>	12pm
TUE	17 th	<i>Feria - Novena</i>	9am
WED	18 th	<i>Feria - Novena (Ember Day)</i>	10am
THU	19 th	<i>Feria - Novena</i>	6pm
FRI	20 th	<i>Feria - Novena (Ember Day)</i>	12pm
SAT	21 st	ST. THOMAS AP. - <i>Novena (Ember Day)</i>	9.30am
SUN	22 nd	4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT - Novena	10.30am, 5pm
MON	23 rd	<i>Feria - Novena</i>	12pm
TUE	24 th	VIGIL OF CHRISTMAS - Novena	9am, 4pm, 11.30pm
WED	25 th	NATIVITY OF OUR LORD	9am, 10.30am
THU	26 th	ST. STEPHEN DEACON, PROTOMARTYR	10am
FRI	27 th	ST. JOHN APOSTLE & EVANGELIST	12pm
SAT	28 th	HOLY INNOCENTS, MARTYRS	9.30am
SUN	29 th	ST. THOMAS OF CANTERBURY	10.30am
MON	30 th	<i>6th day within the Octave of Christmas</i>	12pm
TUE	31 st	<i>St. Sylvester Pope (7th day of Christmas)</i>	9am, 5pm

Daily Intentions



Anniversaries of death

We pray for...

- 1st Dying - *Frances Geroghty, Ted Marshall, Sheila Smallman*
- 2nd Shrine of Walsingham - *Max Williams pr., Olive Ames*
- 3rd Our Parish - *Blessie May Martin, Robert Keat*
- 4th Chapter of St. Aldhelm: our Servers - *Sam Eades*
- 5th Our Congregation
- 6th Children living in poverty - *Trixie Babb*
- 7th Priests & vocations - *Ben Bowring*

- 8th Greater devotion to Our Lady
- 9th Cell of O.L.W. - *Shawn Tolman, Brian Smart*
- 10th Our Parish - *Herbert Rod, Olivia Harding*
- 11th Peace - *Alex*
- 12th Strong hope and faith
- 13th Homeless & destitute - *Kay Berriman*
- 14th Every conceived but endangered human life - *John Seymour*

- 15th Departed - *Ethel Teece*
- 16th The Bishop and the See of Oswestry - *Mo Palmer*
- 17th Our Parish
- 18th Families - *Edith Sibley, Michael Houghton bp.*
- 19th A spirit of penitence - *Madeline Pryer, Freda Taylor, George Winspear*
- 20th Those in prison - *Richard Harbord*
- 21st All parishes & churches dedicated to St. Thomas - *Ali Thomas*

- 22nd Sick - *Joseph Howell-Jones pr.*
- 23rd All for whom Christmas is a difficult time
- 24th Our Parish
- 25th Our Parish - *Peter Withey, Jessie Evans, Fred Semmons, Andrew Rook, Edna Sale, Margaret Hornby*
- 26th Our Parish - *Les Bugler, Audree Dandou, Ramona Yates, Josephine (Jo) Farn*
- 27th NHS & Social care workers - *John Dawson*
- 28th Children: victims of violence, abuse - *Ian Edgar, Eileen Clarey, Donald Turner pr.*

- 29th Conversion of England - *Celia Biles, Lilia Bullock*
- 30th All who lost loved ones this year - *Thelma, Stanley Waight*
- 31st God's blessing and peace for 2024 - *Don Taylor*

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. *In Advent: Today you shall know that the Lord comes and in the morning you shall see his glory.*

After Christmas: Unto us a Christ is born, O come, let us worship Him.

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. *In Advent: Today you shall know that the Lord comes and in the morning you shall see his glory.*

After Christmas: Unto us a Christ is born, O come, let us worship Him.

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. *In Advent: Today you shall know that the Lord comes and in the morning you shall see his glory.*

After Christmas: Unto us a Christ is born, O come, let us worship Him.

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. *In Advent: Today you shall know that the Lord comes and in the morning you shall see his glory.*

After Christmas: Unto us a Christ is born, O come, let us worship Him.

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. *In Advent: Today you shall know that the Lord comes and in the morning you shall see his glory.*

After Christmas: Unto us a Christ is born, O come, let us worship Him.

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. *In Advent: Today you shall know that the Lord comes and in the morning you shall see his glory.*

After Christmas: Unto us a Christ is born, O come, let us worship Him.

HYMN

In Advent:

Hark, a herald voice is calling;
Christ is nigh, it seems to say;
Cast away the dreams of darkness,
O ye children of the day.

Startled at the solemn warning,
Let the earth-bound soul arise;
Christ, her Sun, all sloth dispelling,
Shines upon the morning skies.

Lo, the Lamb, so long expected,
Comes with pardon down from heaven;
Let us haste, with tears of sorrow,
One and all to be forgiven.

So when next He comes with glory,
Wrapping all the earth in fear,
May He then as our defender
On the clouds of heaven appear. Amen.

HYMN

From Christmas Day:

From lands that see the sun arise
To earth's remotest boundaries,
The Virgin-born today we sing,
The Son of Mary, Christ the King.

The Father's Light and Splendour thou,
Their endless hope to thee that bow;
Accept the prayers and praise to-day
That through the world thy servants pay.

Salvation's Author, call to mind
How, taking form of humankind,
Born of a Virgin undefiled,
Thou in man's flesh becam'st a Child.

The heavenly chorus filled the sky,
The Angels sang to God on high,
What time to shepherds, watching lone,
They made creation's Shepherd known.

The manger and the straw he bore,
The cradle did he not abhor;
By milk in infant portions fed,
Who gives e'en fowls their daily bread.

The heavens above, the rolling main
And all that earth's wide realms contain,
With joyous voice now loudly sing
The glory of their new-born King.

And we who, by thy precious Blood
From sin redeemed, are marked for God,
On this the day that saw thy birth,
Sing the new song of ransomed earth.

All honour, laud, and glory be,
O Jesu, Virgin-born to thee:
All glory, as is ever meet,
To Father and to Paraclete. Amen.

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

1	Psalm 44	Isaiah 51,4-11 Romans 13,11-end	8	113	Genesis 3,8-15 Luke 1,26-38
2	41	Isaiah 42,18-end Revelation 19	9	54	Isaiah 45,14-end 1 Thessalonians 1
3	42	Isaiah 43,1-13 Revelation 20	10	55	Isaiah 46 1 Thessalonians 2,1-12
4	43	Isaiah 43,14-end Revelation 21,1-8	11	56	Isaiah 47 1 Thessalonians 2,13-end
5	48	Isaiah 44,1-8 Revelation 21,9-end	12	57	Isaiah 48,1-11 1 Thessalonians 3
6	50	Isaiah 44,9-end Revelation 22,1-5	13	63	Isaiah 48,12-end 1 Thessalonians 4,1-12
7	51	Isaiah 45,1-13 Revelation 22,6-end	14	68	Isaiah 49,1-13 1 Thessalonians 4,13-end

15	12, 14	Isaiah 25,1-9 1 Corinthians 4,1-5	24	45	Isaiah 54 2 Peter 1,16-end
16	70	Isaiah 49,14-25 1 Thessalonians 5,1-11	25	110	Isaiah 62,1-5 Matthew 1,18-end
17	71	Isaiah 50 1 Thessalonians 5,12-end	26	13	Jeremiah 26,12-15 Acts 6
18	73	Isaiah 51,1-8 2 Thessalonians 1	27	21	Exodus 33,12-end 1 John 2,1-11
19	146	Isaiah 51,9-16 2 Thessalonians 2	28	36	Baruch 4,21-27 Matthew 18,1-10
20	46	Isaiah 51,17-end 2 Thessalonians 3	29	3	Ecclesiasticus 51,1-8 Matthew 10,28-33
21	121	Isaiah 52,1-12 Jude	30	113	Isaiah 59,1-15 John 1,19-28
22	144	Isaiah 32,1-8 Revelation 22,6-end	31	102	Isaiah 59,16-end John 1,29-34
23	130	Isaiah 52,13-end & ch. 53 2 Peter 1,1-15			

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:*

Before Christmas: Behold, the Name of the Lord comes from far, and the whole earth is full of his glory.

From Christmas Day: Glory to God in the highest; and on earth, peace to men of good will, alleluia, 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.

Before Christmas: Behold, the Name of the Lord comes from far, and the whole earth is full of his glory.

From Christmas Day: Glory to God in the highest; and on earth, peace to men of good will, alleluia, 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:

Before Christmas: Stir up, O Lord, we pray, your strength, and come among us, that whereas through our sins and wickedness we do justly apprehend your judgment hanging over us, your bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us. Who lives and reigns with God the Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. **R.** Amen.

From Christmas Day: Grant, we beseech you, almighty God, that the new birth of your Only-begotten Son as man may set us free, who are held by the old bondage under the yoke of sin. Through the same 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

Until Christmas:

Creator of the stars of night,
Thy people's everlasting light,
O Jesu, Saviour of us all,
Regard thy servants when they call.

Thou, grieving at the bitter cry
Of all creation doomed to die,
Didst come to save a ruined race
With healing gifts of hea'nly grace.

Thou camest, Bridegroom of the Bride,
As drew the world to evening-tide,
Proceeding from a virgin shrine,
The Son of Man, yet Lord Divine.

At thy great name, exalted now,
All knees must bend, all hearts must bow;
All things in heaven and earth shall own
That thou art Lord and King alone.

To thee, O Holy One, we pray,
Our Judge in that tremendous day,
Preserve us, while we dwell below,
From every onslaught of the foe.

All praise, eternal Son, to thee,
Whose Advent sets thy people free,
Whom with the Father we adore,
And Spirit blest, for evermore. Amen.

From Christmas: either the hymn from Morning Prayer or a suitable Christmas Carol may be used.

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

1	9	Joel 3,9-end Revelation 14,13 - 15,4	7	60	Isaiah 29,15-end Matthew 13,44-end
2	49	Isaiah 25,1-9 Matthew 12,1-21	8	45 v. 10-17	Micah 5,1-4 Luke 1,39-47
3	52	Isaiah 26,1-13 Matthew 12,22-37	9	61	Isaiah 30,1-18 Matthew 14,1-12
4	53	Isaiah 28,1-13 Matthew 12,38-end	10	62	Isaiah 30,19-end Matthew 14,13-end
5	58	Isaiah 28,14-end Matthew 13,1-23	11	64	Isaiah 31 Matthew 15,1-20
6	59	Isaiah 29,1-14 Matthew 13,24-43	12	66	Isaiah 32 Matthew 15,21-28

13	67	Isaiah 33,1-22 Matthew 15,29-end	23	89 v. 1-37	Malachi 1 Matthew 19,1-12
14	69	Isaiah 35 Matthew 16,1-12	24	85	Zechariah 2 Revelation 1,1-8
15	62	Isaiah 35 Luke 1,57-66	25	8	Isaiah 65,17-25 Philippians 2,5-11
16	72	Isaiah 38,1-8 Matthew 16,13-end	26	86	Genesis 4,1-10 Matthew 23,34-end
17	74	Isaiah 38,9-20 Matthew 17,1-13	27	97	Isaiah 6,1-8 1 John 5,1-12
18	80	Isaiah 39 Matthew 17,14-21	28	128	Isaiah 49,14-25 Mark 10,13-16
19	57	Zephaniah 1 Matthew 17,22-end	29	126	Wisdom 4,10-15 Revelation 12,10-12
20	4	Zephaniah 2 Matthew 18,1-20	30	65	Jonah 2 Colossians 1,15-23
21	84	Zephaniah 3 Matthew 18,20-end	31	90	Jeremiah 23,1-6 Colossians 2,8-15
22	123	Isaiah 10,33 - 11,10 Matthew 1,18-end			

Each reading ends with these words:

V. This is the word of the Lord.

R. Thanks be to God.

MAGNIFICAT

Before Christmas: In that day the mountains shall drop down sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk and honey. Alleluia.

From Christmas Day: When the sun shall have risen from heaven, you shall see the King of kings proceeding from the Father, as a bridegroom from his chamber.

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.

Before Christmas: In that day the mountains shall drop down sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk and honey. Alleluia.

From Christmas Day: When the sun shall have risen from heaven, you shall see the King of kings proceeding from the Father, as a bridegroom from his chamber.

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:*

Before Christmas: Stir up, O Lord, we pray, your strength, and come among us, that whereas through our sins and wickedness we do justly apprehend your judgment hanging over us, your bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us. Who lives and reigns with God the Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever.

R. Amen.

From Christmas Day: Grant, we beseech you, almighty God, that the new birth of your Only-begotten Son as man may set us free, who are held by the old bondage under the yoke of sin. 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 Virginitly 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.

Prayer before the Crib — God, our Father, God of every nation and people, from the very beginning of creation you have made manifest your love: when our need for a Saviour was great, you sent your Son to be born of the Virgin Mary. You sent him as a little Child to love and save us. To our lives, he brings joy and peace, justice, mercy and love. Lord, bless me and all who look upon his manger. May it remind us of the humble birth of Jesus and raise our thoughts to him, who is God-with-us and Saviour of all. Fill our homes with hospitality, joy, gentleness and thanksgiving and guide our steps in the way of peace. Amen.

Blessing of a Christmas Tree — Lord our God, we praise you for the light of creation: the sun, the moon, and the stars of the night. We praise you for the light of the Old Testament: the Law, the prophets, and the wisdom of the Scriptures. We praise you for Jesus Christ, your Son: he is Emmanuel, God-with-us, the Prince of Peace, who fills us with the wonder of your love. Lord God, let your blessing come upon this tree (*the tree can now be sprinkled with Holy Water*) and upon us as we illumine it. May the light and joy it gives be a sign of your grace and eternal joy that fill our hearts. May all who delight in this tree come to the knowledge and joy of salvation brought about by your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary: The Church of England & a Novena

CofE — In the 1970's Archbishop Michael Ramsey and Pope Paul VI set up a group with the task of examining doctrinal questions. It was this group that established that according to the Church of England “*the Immaculate Conception of Mary can be said to be consonant with the teaching of Holy Scripture and the Early Christian Church.*” While this very CofE wording leaves, as usual, everyone free to believe what they want, it also states that one can accept the Immaculate Conception *and* still be a good, old fashioned, CofE, *real* Anglican.

What is it? — But what is the Immaculate Conception about? Everyone is born with original sin. This is not a personal sin, we did not do anything wrong, it simply means that when we are born, we are in need of God's restoring grace. Hence the necessity of Baptism.

The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception teaches that Mary was conceived in a state of grace (“*full of grace*”), that is she was free from original sin. Her relationship with God was never damaged. The Gospels affirm that “*all generations shall call [her] blessed.*” Without accepting the Immaculate Conception, the prayer *Hail Mary* makes very little sense...

Anglican tradition — The Book of Common Prayer in the Christmas collect and preface refers to Mary not simply as “virgin” but as “a pure virgin.” The great Anglican divine, Lancelot Andrewes in his *Preces Privatae* calls Mary “the all-holy, immaculate, more than blessed mother of God and ever-virgin Mary.” John Pearson, Bishop of Chester, in “An Exposition of the Creed” (1659) teaches: “We believe the mother of our Lord to have been not only before and after his nativity, but also for ever, the most immaculate and blessed virgin.” Thomas Ken, Bishop of Bath and Wells (1685), writes in his poem “*Sion: or, Philothea:*” “The Holy Ghost his Temple in her built, / Cleans'd from congenial, kept from mortal Guilt; / And from the Moment that her Blood was fired / Into her Heart celestial Love inspir'd.”

What is it not? — Mary isn't a super-human or semi-divine. She is not a super-creature. She is not halfway between us and God. Her fulness of grace is God's free and spontaneous gift without any merit on Mary's part. So was made Immaculate by God in preparation for her Divine Motherhood.

Mary was as much in need of redemption as any of us. The only difference is that while we are washed clean in the Sacrament of Baptism, Mary received the same “cleansing” grace in the moment of her conception because of her special role in the history of salvation.

Baptism, Immaculate Conception, and holy life — What Mary received in the Immaculate Conception is what we received in Baptism: a full communion with God, the fullness of grace. She never lost it during her life, while we damage and sometimes lose it because of our sins. She preserved this precious gift, to us it is restored in Confession, and will be restored perfectly, and for ever, in heaven.

The Bible — A privileged position in the history of salvation is not unheard of in the Bible. Adam and Eve received special gifts from God such as special grace and knowledge, physical immortality, immunity from illness. Why? Simply because of the unique and important role they had in the history of relationship between God and mankind. God, in his infinite wisdom bestowed these gifts on them so they could more promptly serve God's plans. We know they did not - but that is a different story. Our Lady equally had a special role in the history of salvation, being the Mother of Jesus Christ, Mother of God. It is not difficult to see then how necessary and fitting it was for the Mother of Jesus to be preserved from original sin; that is, to be as pure, as much full of grace, as it is possible for a creature.

Jesus Christ — Mary didn't receive this special gift for her own, personal glory, or out of some merit on her part. This special gift is not about her, but about her unique role and even more about Jesus Christ who, being the Eternal Wisdom of the Father, prepared a fitting dwelling place for himself in Mary's preserved, purified human nature and body.

God — We could say that the Immaculate Conception makes Mary's role less significant. It shows that it was not her courage, her bravery, her wisdom that made her what she is, but God only. What we celebrate in the Immaculate Conception is not how wonderful Mary is, but how wonderful our God is.

Novena Prayer (29 Nov - 7 Dec) in preparation for the Feast:

O Most Holy Virgin, who wast pleasing to God and didst become His Mother. Immaculate in your body, in your soul, in your faith and in your love, we beseech thee to look graciously upon the wretched who implore thy powerful protection. The wicked serpent, against whom the primal curse was hurled, continues nonetheless to wage war and to lay snares for the unhappy children of Eve. Ah, do thou, our blessed Mother, our Queen and Advocate, who from the first instant of thy conception didst crush the head of our enemy, receive the prayers that we unite single-heartedly to thine and conjure thee to offer at the throne of God, that we may never fall into the snares that are laid for us, in such wise that we may all come to the haven of salvation; and in the midst of so many dangers may holy Church and the fellowship of Christians everywhere sing once more the hymn of deliverance, victory and peace. Amen.

From the Book of Common Prayer

The Collect for Purity: *ALMIGHTY God, unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

This Prayer was already popular at least 200 years before Cranmer. It was part of the Sarum, Hereford, and York rites (medieval liturgies of England), and is attributed to St. Gregory, Abbot of Canterbury (around 780). It is probably a prayer of the early Church but preserved almost solely by the Church in/of England.

The Collect for Purity is a preparatory prayer for what follows. We are not confessing “*our manifold sins and wickedness*” (yet) — we are simply preparing our hearts and minds to worship almighty God. So, “*meekly kneeling upon our knees*”, this collect is uttered.

Note the double reference to the heart. First, the collect acknowledges that the heart is “open” and fully “known” by God and that there can be no question of hiding any “secrets” from him. Second, the collect asks for a cleansing of the heart by the Holy Spirit. A clear reference to “*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me*” (Psalm 51,10) but also to Jesus’ words in Matthew 5,8: “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*”

In the light of this Beatitude, we can see how the Collect for Purity is indeed fitting for the beginning of Mass or Though only in his veiled form, but we do see Christ in the Eucharist!

However, not only is it a prayer of preparation but also as daily, private prayer the Collect for Purity should be high on our list. It was specifically designed to help us keep the great commandment of love for God. When asked “*which is the great commandment in the Law,*” Jesus answers by quoting Deuteronomy 6,4: “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.*” Without loving God, all else is in vain.

This reaffirms the Collect’s intimate connection with the Eucharistic service and worship. In the celebration of Mass and in the reception of Holy Communion we commemorate the perfect love of Christ and return perfect love to God in the power of the Holy Spirit. As Saint John puts it: “*We love because he first loved us*” (1 John 4,19).

This Holy Season of Advent, when we are preparing our hearts to receive Him Who has loved us so much, can be the right time to make the Collect for Purity part of our daily prayers.

Advent is a call to holiness and transformation in Christ

by Fr. Charles Fox (originally for *The Dispatch*, 7 Dec 2023)

“The only real sadness, the only real failure, the only great tragedy in life, is not to become a saint.” The French Catholic author Léon Bloy wrote these words in 1897. To share in Christ’s life more fully and perfectly is the aim of the Season of Advent. This liturgical season is a time of renewal in knowing, loving, and imitating Jesus Christ.

A distinguishing feature of Advent is the attitude of vigilant anticipation to which the season calls us. We prepare to celebrate the coming of Christ at Christmas and we look forward to His coming in glory at the end of time. The coming of Christ into the world and into our hearts is the basis for the very possibility of our personal holiness. Without Emmanuel, “God-with-us,” we could never hope to become like God.

According to Blessed Columba Marmion, an Irish monk, there are three reasons Christians celebrate Advent:

- 1) *“God wishes to be praised and blessed in all His works”*, including the works by which He prepared the world for the coming of Christ;
- 2) *“God wishes us to find a confirmation of our faith”*;
- 3) *“The Church wishes to prepare us for the coming of Christ within us. It is a coming that is wholly interior, mysterious, taking place in faith, but full of fruitfulness.”*

It is essential to the life of holiness that we see the marvellous works God has performed for our salvation. Only in seeing the riches of the Old Covenant, the Covenant of patriarchs and prophets, of judges and kings, of ordinary people called to extraordinary missions on God’s behalf, can we put our faith in the Lord who prepared the way for the coming of His Son.

Without knowing the journey of faith recounted in the Old Testament, it is difficult to appreciate the full weight of the Archangel Gabriel’s words to Mary at the Annunciation. Mary is a daughter of Israel but she is blessed beyond all others because God has prepared her to receive the Gift of His Son who would also be her Son.

We do well during Advent to read and pray with the texts of the Old Testament and the beginnings of the Gospels in order to see and put our faith in God’s preparations for the coming of His Son.

We also need to welcome Jesus into ourselves, into our hearts and souls. This is not just a pious sentiment. This coming of Christ into believers is invisible but nevertheless real. And it has a powerful effect not only on the individual who receives Christ but on everyone.

Christ is the Word of God and comes to us in His word of Sacred Scripture. God plants His word in our hearts, and that word works powerfully to make us a fit dwelling place for the Word, God's only Son (cf Isaiah 55,10-11). Having been prepared by hearing God's word and putting our faith in Him, we become ready for the coming of the Word of God, Jesus Christ, to live in us and to speak and act through us. We receive Christ most completely in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. The Sacrament fills us with His presence and transforms us so that we become more like Him.

To become like Christ is the irreplaceable key to holiness. As St. Athanasius taught, God has become human so that humans could become divine. Participating faithfully in Mass and the Sacrament of Penance (confession) is essential to celebrating Advent and welcoming Christ.

At Baptism candidates are asked: What do you ask of God's Church? Faith. What does faith offer you? Eternal life.

There are lots of things that are not mentioned in this rite. Nothing is said about faith (joining the Church) offering great music or captivating preaching, friendly people, beautiful buildings, fun activities, etc. They do not claim that becoming Christians will bring them perpetual euphoria, good health, financial prosperity, or any other personal gain. Eternal life is the promise God has made, and that is the hope of all who follow Christ.

Holiness not only brings life-saving power to the individual believer, however. The gift of Christ in each believer brings a blessing for all people.

As a member of the mystical body of Christ, we either enrich or impoverish it through our prayer of faith. In order to have an effect on others, prayer does not have to have the character of clear intercession for someone. It is enough that faith, hope, and charity grow in us at the same time as our prayer life intensifies, and the Church, the Mystical Body of Jesus, will be able to feel the beneficial, saving influence of our prayer.

Part of becoming holy is to exert a saving influence on others. Many Christians are at a loss about how to address the myriad problems of the world, in the Church, and in their families. The way of the saints is to see, in the evils around us, a summons not first to reform the world, or the Church, or my family members and friends, but to reform myself. A call to repentance and conversion. A call to holiness. By responding to God's call and becoming holy, I will be changed and then through me God will change others for the better.

Advent is the perfect time to deal constructively with anger, hurt, and other negative feelings. This Holy Season calls us to welcome Christ, allowing Him to transform us from within. And our transformation makes us better instruments for drawing others closer to Himself.

The story of Socrates and the three sieves: on dealing with gossip

Socrates, the great Greek philosopher (+399 BC), was once stopped by an acquaintance as he passed through the markets.

“I’ve something important to tell you,” he said. “It’s about your friend.”

“That’s very kind of you,” Socrates said. “But, don’t tell me just yet. I run all information through the Three Sieves Test to ascertain if I want to know it.”

The man looked somewhat puzzled as Socrates continued, “First is the sieve of Truth. Whatever you want to tell me, have you seen or witnessed it first-hand? Are you hundred percent sure it is true?”

“Umm...I actually heard it from someone,” the man said, “and, it is from a trusted source.”

“Alright. But that does not pass my first test,” Socrates added, “since you don’t know whether it’s true.”

“Second is the sieve of Goodness. Is that a good statement you want to make about my friend?”

“Not really. That’s the reason I wanted—”

Socrates interjected, “I see. So, you want to tell me something bad about someone.”

“The last is the sieve of Utility.” He continued, “Your statement about my friend, is that going to be useful to me? Is it necessary that I know, is it necessary that you tell me?”

“Not really as such. I just wanted to share.”

When the man bowed his head in shame, Socrates smiled and said “Well, if the information is not necessarily true, it is not good, and, it is of no use,” Socrates concluded, “please, just forget it and don’t bother me with it.”

The story about the three sieves is something we can apply to our lives. Before you tell a story or pass on a rumour, ask yourself whether it is true, kind and/or necessary. Often we pass on gossip we’ve heard to keep the conversation going or talk negatively about somebody we know. Why not focus on “*uptalking*” others, concentrating on their strengths, sharing good stories, spreading what is true and useful?

Let us pray. Lord, I ask that you forgive me for every time I have dishonoured you and those you have created with my words. I ask that you alert me when I am being hurtful. Show me how to use my mouth to bless and not curse, to heal and not to divide. May my mouth be filled with truth, grace, and compassion. Give me wisdom on when to speak and when to be silent. I thank you for your mercy toward me in this area. Amen.

The subtle snare of gossip

by Caleb French (originally for growingfathers.com)

We want our families, natural or church, to enjoy being together. Conversations we have are essential activities for robust family culture. Yet those talks bring with them temptations. One such is gossip.

What Is Gossip? In Scripture, a gossip is a person who “*reveals secrets*” (Proverbs 11:13, 20:19) and thereby “*separates close friends*” (16:28). This “*tale-bearer*” (King James) tells stories about others that are not his to tell. Gossip keeps the “*fire*” of conflict burning when silence would douse the drama (Proverbs 26:20). The gossip is not so much dishonest—saying things that aren’t true—as tactless: she shares things about others that are better kept secret.

A vice related to this juicy-story-telling is *slander*: bad-mouthing other people. Leviticus 19:16 forbids God’s people from “*spreading slander among [them]*.” Slander makes one unworthy to set foot on God’s “*holy hill*” (Psalm 15:3), and the slander-spreader “*is a fool*” (Proverbs 10:18). According to Jesus Himself, slander is one of the verbal sins coming “*out of the heart*” which “*defiles a person*” (Matthew 15:19). Paul calls us to “*put [it] away*” as a vestige of our former fallen nature (Ephesians 4:31; Colossians 3:8).

Both gossip and slander, and the people who chronically engage in them, are categorically condemned in Scripture. Although their biblical usage is distinct, gossip and slander are so often intertwined that we lump them together in our modern usage of the term, *gossip*: telling one-sided stories as negative commentary on others.

Defining gossip requires discernment. Sometimes problems must be pointed out and discussed in honesty. Gossip, however, is the kind of people-talk that stems from the flesh and not the Spirit. The classic definition for gossip is still a good one: “*sharing a fact or story with someone who is neither a part of the problem nor a part of the solution.*”

What makes gossip gossip is not so much its topic—people’s shortcomings—as its motives. When we share gossip, it’s usually for one of several sinful motivations:

1. *Sympathy Gossip* — The gossip subject has hurt or displeased us in some way, and we want to be vindicated by our hearers’ agreement or sympathy. For example, Person A mistreats you, and you rehash it to Person B in hopes that they will reinforce your side in the conflict.

2. *Earning Gossip* — We deride the gossip subject to earn our hearer’s approval. We want to prove we belong in his or her “*inner circle*,” and the

juicy story is our currency. This gossip is not really about the subject, who is usually oblivious to the interchange; the story is just an entrance fee.

3. *Tribal Gossip* — This third kind of gossip reinforces our group's identity and values, not by careful positive defence, but by smear stories and soundbites about people on the Other Side. "Cheap shots" are very much allowed in this gossip style, and everyone in the tribe takes a turn. Each story reiterates the clear lines between Us and Them.

Now, to be clear, God's Word does make just such important distinctions: we are either redeemed or condemned, in truth or in error, walking in the flesh or walking in the Spirit. Lines worth drawing. At best, tribal gossip can turn legitimate distinctions between groups into petty nit-picking. At worst, this style of gossip is enlisted to reinforce "tribal" distinctions that are non-essential, ungodly, and harmful.

Yet in every gossip style, we are trying to "gain altitude" on others. We want to push ourselves above the offender, the outcast, the Other Side, by pushing them down. Gossip is arrogance, talking. The humble "*mind of Christ Jesus*" stands in stark contrast to this "*selfish ambition or conceit*" (Philippians 2:3, 5) underneath all gossip. It should have no place on our tongues or in our homes.

Let us end by noting some of the negative consequences of gossip in the home/church among family/church members.

It burdens the weak — You may be able to absorb the force of some negative people-facts without it affecting your mindset and behaviour toward that person. But it might not be so easy for someone else to dismiss that knowledge—especially when the gossip subject has wronged someone that person loves. Choose carefully the information burdens you lay upon others; what for you could be a passing graceless comment could become in someone else a (permanent) root of bitterness.

It encourages hypocrisy — Deriding others in private can encourage hypocrisy in public. Those who look up to us will learn from us how to keep up a polite façade to veil "what we really think about those people." We must never encourage feigned " *blessing*" and private "*cursing*" to come "*out of the same mouth*" (James 3:10).

It counters gospel grace — Gossip is by nature one-sided; it presents the worst of a person without context or caveat. God's forgiving love to us in the gospel should produce discretion regarding the flaws of others; we ourselves "*have been forgiven much*" more (Luke 7:47). "*Love covers a multitude of sins*" (Proverbs 10:12; 1 Peter 4:8), but gossip uncovers them—parading them for ridicule and self-righteous comparison. Gossip announces others flaws without owning our own. Gossip runs counter to the gospel.

Saint of the month: St. Nicholas the Wonder-Worker, Bishop

6 December

Stuffing chimney-hung stockings is an ancient tradition that pre-dates the American Santa. Chucking gold into people's wet socks is a custom started by a young man named Nicholas who lived in Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey, around 300 AD.

His wealthy, pious parents, Theophanes and Nonna, read to him the Holy Scriptures and faithfully taught him his prayers, but apparently died while he was still young. His uncle, Bishop Nicholas of Patara, ordained young Nicholas and made him his personal assistant. He showed great kind-heartedness and generosity by distributing his inheritance to the poor. During this time, the three grown daughters of a formerly rich inhabitant were in danger of being sold into slavery because of their father's pennilessness. Hearing of this, young Nicholas secretly visited the man's house at night and threw gold in at the window to provide a dowry for one of the girls. The eldest daughter was soon married, and Nicholas again made clandestine donations for the other two daughters, with equally felicitous results.

Modern children who awake to an orange or to gold-foiled chocolates in their stockings reenact this story because, by all accounts, one of Nicholas' gifts landed in a sock that was hanging by the fire to dry.

Nicholas was made archbishop of Myra in what became very difficult years for him and his flock. They were forced underground by the Roman Emperor Diocletian's brutal, expansive persecution of Christians. During this time the good archbishop often miraculously appeared to imprisoned members of his flock until the day he too was discovered in hiding. In jail Nicholas continued to sustain and exhort his fellow believers to endure torture and death for the love of Christ.

After Diocletian's death, Nicholas was released and returned to his duties. He attended the first Ecumenical Council at Nicaea (325), where in the middle of his hearing, the heretic Arius stood up on his seat in order to be better heard. Enraged by Arius' denial that Jesus Christ is true God and true man, Archbishop Nicholas strode quickly over to Arius, pulled him down by his beard, and punched him in the face. The scandalized council fathers sprang upon Nicholas, stripped him of his episcopal vestments, and threw him in prison.

That night Nicholas was visited by the Holy Family who loosed his bonds and vested him again in his apostolic garb. The bishops were astonished by this miracle and realized that Nicholas' anger was righteous. He

was honourably restored to his chair—where the aged prelate slept through much of the remaining proceedings...

During one of these naps, the holy bishop was miraculously raptured in spirit to save some sailors at sea. When he awoke from this rapture back in Nicaea he was resentfully charged with sleeping through the entire council, whereupon the venerable Nicholas is said to have answered, “While you were talking, I was busy rescuing a disaster-driven ship at sea.” Some of the pious brethren took the ship to be an analogy of the Church. Others dismissed his words as the babbling of an old man. But not long after the council, the rescued sailors returned safe home and, traveling through Myra, recognized Nicholas as their deliverer.

Archbishop Nicholas peacefully fell asleep in the Lord on 6 December 343. He was immediately recognized as a saint and as the patron of travellers. He is called upon by Christians round the world for deliverance from flood, poverty, or any misfortune. He has especially promised to help those who remember his parents, Theophanes and Nonna.

St. Nicholas’ incorrupt body was venerated for centuries in the local cathedral church of Myra. When the Turks conquered Asia Minor, solicitous for the safety of St. Nicholas’ venerable remains, Italian sailors plotted to steal the body and bring it back to their home village. St. Nicholas’ relics were thus taken from Myra to the city of Bari, where the saint’s body continues to exude holy myrrh (called “*sacra manna*” in Italian) 17 centuries after his death.

A thousand years later, Italians are still hardcore devotees. Once a year they commemorate the pirating of jolly ol’ San Nicola’s bones, sailing around the harbour at Bari with giant statues of the saint in their boats followed by a solemn harvesting of his tomb oils. Fireworks, processions, reenactments, fire-eaters, and Holy Mass are held every 7-9 May. After High Mass on the 9th, the rector of the basilica crawls into a small opening in the crypt to drain the *sacra manna* out of St. Nicholas’ tomb into a glass vial. The manna is diluted with water and serves as an anointing sacramental and souvenir for pilgrims to Bari from across the globe.

So what about our American-style Santa Clause? Isn’t telling children “Santa doesn’t live at the North Pole. He sleeps by the Adriatic Sea sweating off myrrh for lame pilgrims.” will spoil their fun? Telling the truth is not being a spoil-sport, it is spreading the good news. St. Nicholas’ deeply loved Our Lord and confessed him even at the risk of his own life.

We celebrate what we believe. If we help children to celebrate the real St. Nicholas on 6 December, his life, by God’s grace and St. Nicholas’ prayers, may well inspire them to imitate this Saint’s virtues of love, charity, generosity, courage, justice, and evangelism.

Know the Bible! - The Book of Joshua

After the first five books of the Old Testament, called Torah or Books of Moses, the sixth book, that of Joshua, opens a new group of writings called “*the prophets*” or “*books of history*”. Joshua is about how Israel played out its relationship with God after entering into the promised land.

Joshua starts with the death of Moses and the whole book can be divided into two main sections: chapters 1-12 (conquest) and ch. 13-24 (covenant). Both can then be further divided into two subsections each.

Chapters 1-5 — Israel is finally entering Canaan. God recommissions Joshua and we meet someone of great importance (*both for this story and for future promises*), Rahab. Not only is she not part of Israel but she is a prostitute. Though she is obviously not part of the covenant between God and Israel, she heard about the miracles God had performed to aid Israel. Because of this powerful God, she helps the two Israeli spies in Jericho by hiding them.

God parts the river Jordan in two so that Israel can pass through. This clear reference to Moses and the Red Sea is a reaffirmation of God’s promise to his people: I am with you, I will give you this land. In response, the people rededicate themselves to God: the men are circumcised and Israel celebrates the Passover. It is with these two great “liturgical” actions that the conquest of the promised land starts.

As Israel starts eating what the land produces in Canaan, the manna stops but something even more important happens. Joshua sees a man with a sword and he asks him: are you on our side or our enemy’s side? The man replies: on neither because I am the commander of the Lord’s army. This is a key moment to understand correctly the Old Testament, especially the prophets. God does not take sides, not even Israel’s. We are called, all of us, to take God’s side, not the other way around.

Chapters 6-12 — Most of the action happens in these chapters, Jericho is taken: Israel simply walks around the city walls in the way prescribed by God and the walls fall. God wins the victory, not Israel. The message is clear: those who choose God are always protected, regardless what side they belong to. Rahab, the Canaanite prostitute is spared. Achan, on the other hand, an Israelite who rejected God’s command, dies. If you oppose God, you are defeated. Another example are the Gibeonites who, out of fear and using some trickery, get Israel not to destroy them and they ally with the chosen people. At the same time, all thirty-one kings who choose to fight Israel instead of submitting, lose and are wiped out.

A side note on wiping out people... There is a lot of hyperbolic language in the Old Testament. “All have been wiped out; not one was left

living” etc. but in later chapters we often see those people reappearing so we should not take these statements literally. There is less blood in the Old Testament than we think.

Israel, or rather God on their behalf, has won the victory... but not only over human forces. As God rescued Israel from both the nation and the gods of Egypt, so now He is overthrowing the spiritual forces and gods of Canaan. We will see more of this in the book of Samuel (*the famous Nephilim and Anakim, results of sexual relations between angels and women*). The book of Joshua, as the whole Old Testament, is not only happening on human but also on divine stage.

The next main part with its two subsections focuses on the covenant.

Chapters 13-22 — Admittedly, these are not the most exciting chapters but their importance is great. The land is divided into twelve parts and is given to the tribes. Jacob, whose name was changed by God to Israel and who was the son of Isaac and the grandson of Abraham, had twelve sons and the land was promised to him. Now the promise is being finally fulfilled. The descendants of the twelve sons, the twelve tribes of Israel, take possession of the lands East and West to the river Jordan. However, the priestly tribe of Levi, whose inheritance is maintaining the Tabernacle, gets no land (*they must be looked after by the other 11 tribes through tithes and offerings*) and so Joseph’s tribe is divided into two, based on his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, and they get a land each, to have twelve tribes possessing lands.

Chapters 23-24 — Joshua renews the covenant God had made with Moses and Israel and reminds the people: “your ancestors served many gods and were under captivity of Egypt’s gods; now you live in a new land with new gods. Who do you want to serve? God who brought you here or other gods?” Israel’s choice is renewed yet again and this is a great theological reminder: it is not God who chooses (excluding others) but it is Israel to whom God allows, as privilege, to choose Him without excluding other nations from (future) covenants.

Joshua’s last words to Israel are to choose between life and blessings or death and curses. When Joshua dies, no successor is named. It is up to the people now to serve God, without a strong leader. The patriarch Joseph’s bones are brought to Canaan from Egypt (he wanted to be buried there). Phineas, grandson of Aaron, great-nephew of Moses, is the new high priest and we will see him briefly in the next book. Israel is now faithful to the covenant ... as long as the contemporaries of Moses and Joshua are alive.

What happens after? We will see it in the next book. Stay tuned! 😊

The Psalms

Psalms 45: The royal wedding song (1)

Most of these articles examine a psalm, verse by verse, trying to explain expressions, theological concepts, or liturgical use. In other words, we make an attempt to understand what the human authors of a psalm may have meant when they wrote it under divine inspiration, led by the Holy Spirit, and we also try to discover the importance of these prayers in the life of Old Testament Jews.

This time, however, our approach will be slightly different. The text of Psalm 45 is not theologically complicated: it is a love song. It has a language universally understood. Like in the case of the Songs of Solomon, the question is more: what is this text doing in the Bible? To answer this question, we must examine two questions. Firstly, that is the historical or cultural background of this song. Secondly, who is the king for whose wedding this song was written. Hopefully, once these two points are explained, we will be able to read this Psalm in a new light.

There will be a second article in next month's magazine dedicated to Psalm 45. In this first article, as mentioned above, we will learn about the historic and cultural context while in the second one we will have a closer look at the text.

Historic background and context — Psalm 45 is unique as it was not composed for a sacred ceremony in the Temple but for a wedding and, indeed, it is (seemingly!) not focusing on God but on the bride and bridegroom. This psalm could easily be part of the Songs of Solomon.

The title, or inscription, of Psalm 45 has two notable expressions: “*according to the Lilies*” and “*love song*”. The former refers to spring and indicates that the psalm, in the context of worship, was started to be used for or around Passover. The latter, having the word “*love*” in plural in Hebrew (meaning *loveliness, amiable, loved ones*), is an expression used of those whom God loves.

A few words about Jewish weddings 3000 years ago... On the wedding day, the attendants and friends of both the bride and the groom arrived at their respective homes to help them dress for the occasion. When the bridegroom was ready, he went with his attendants in a grand procession through the city streets to fetch the bride. This was followed by a second procession of the entire wedding party, and both the bride and groom's entourage from the bride's home back to the bridegroom's. And at this home, there would be a wedding feast that could last as long as a week or two.

Whose wedding? — Most biblical commentators speculate that this wedding song was written for the marriage feast of Solomon either to the princess of Egypt or to the princess of Tyre. This would easily explain the verses where the king's wealth, might, military success, and general greatness is praised. Solomon was indeed the greatest king Israel ever had. The bride is encouraged to forget her own land, her own past and family because of the excellence of her new husband.

It is now the bride's turn to receive words of praise and admiration for her purity, beauty, strength, and splendour. Surrounded by virgins, the only company fitting to such a pure creature, the king cannot resist her, and he falls desperately in love with her.

The language of Psalm 45 is so *exaggeratedly* splendid that it points to a Jewish king much more exalted than Solomon and to a bride whose perfection exceeds of any woman. So either we have here a poetical exaggeration far beyond the limits of poetic license, or - and there is the key to understand Psalm 45 properly - "*greater than Solomon is here*" (Matthew 12,42).

A prophecy — Indeed, it is in this clear Christological (and ecclesiological) context that we find the true meaning of Psalm 45. Psalm 45 has always been seen by the church fathers as the allegory of the mystical wedding between Christ and the Church.

We then have a psalm, a wedding song which points to Christ, the Divine Bridegroom of the Church, who celebrates his wedding feast on the day of Passover (remember the lilies!). On the Cross from the side of the new Adam, opened by a lance, under the symbols of blood and water, the Church and her Sacraments are born — just as Eve was brought forth from Adam's side in the first creation. Fruitful as the union between Adam and Eve was, and populated the earth, even more fruitful, in spiritual terms, is the union between Christ and his Church, giving birth to a renewed, re-created mankind.

The lavishly exaggerated language of Psalm 45 now makes sense. It is about the glorious victory not of an early king but of the King of kings. We see the excellency of Christ's person, the equity of his Rule, the eternity of his Throne, and the ecstasy of his Heart.

Next month we shall have a closer look at the text - the king's "beautiful lips" on which grace is poured out; the word "anointed" which, in Hebrew, becomes the root of the word "Messiah"; the deep links with the Book of Revelation; and also who else can be this beautiful Queen whose grace and purity captured the heart of the king.

Vicar

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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 or/and Anointing, or to make your Confession, please let the Vicar know and he will be very happy to visit you.

Assistant Priest

Fr Tony Ball - tonyball2019@icloud.com - 07899 027710

St. Paul's	Fleet
<u>Churchwardens</u> Jeanne James jeannejames@uwclub.net 07854 275895 Sharon Waight sharonwaight3@gmail.com 07879 681900	<u>Churchwardens</u> John Coombe john@seabarn.co.uk Anthea Spearing antheasp@googlemail.com
<u>Parish Office</u> 01305 771217 stpweymouth@gmail.com	<u>Parish Office</u> 01305 782757 geofftaylor919@btinternet.com

S.P.O.T. (*our charity shop*) — 01305 750951; we are always looking for volunteers!

Parish Hall & Activities — With enquiries about hiring the Parish Hall, joining the Munch Club or the Choir, please, contact the Parish Office.

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***