

HIGH TIDE

*Parish
Magazine*

*Weymouth
St Paul
with Fleet*

DEC 2025



<u>From the Vicar</u>	<u>4</u>
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<u>Advent preparation</u>	<u>6</u>
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A few words and a smile image to help us transform Advent into a season of spiritual preparation and Christian growth.

<u>Blessing and lighting of the Advent Wreath at home</u>	<u>7</u>
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The Advent Wreath on the first Sunday of Advent at St. Paul's and candles are lit on every Sunday of Advent. These readings and prayers will help you to "take church home" and to make sure your Advent Wreath is not a mere seasonal decoration but a centre of prayer for the whole family and an expression of your faith in the Lord Jesus.

<u>Christmas Novena</u>	<u>10</u>
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A very simple Novena prayer we also use at St. Paul's. Even if you cannot attend (our) church, you can join us in spirit by following the same Novena at home. Ideally, it is said together but the whole family in front of your Crib (nativity scene).

<u>Gossip: a "small" sin and yet a great evil</u>	<u>12</u>
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Gossip is a serious sin against truth, justice, and charity: it harms reputations, fractures communities, and corrupts relationships. Christian teaching urges vigilance over speech, avoidance of detraction, pursuit of reparation, and forgiveness, especially in Advent's call to conversion and peace.

<u>Calendar, Intentions, & Anniversaries</u>	<u>17</u>
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We prayerfully remember the dead and pray for the needs of this world.

<u>Morning and Evening Prayer</u>	<u>19</u>
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A simple, adaptable Order of Service for Morning and Evening Prayer... because without the Lord Jesus we can do nothing (John 15,5) and also so that we are (or become) united in prayer!

<u>Jeanne James: Not so unusual words you will probably know half of (4)</u>	<u>29</u>
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At a crepuscular, petrichor-filled dusk, I wandered noctivigant through a vellichor-laden bookstore, feeling numinous sonder and a pang of hiraeth. In this palimpsest calm, amid quixotic thoughts and procellous memories, a sudden eucatastrophe brought lagom clarity and brief euphoria, leaving even an agelast quirescent...

God creates us in His image, giving us a soul and identity rooted in His love. Though shaped early by influences and group pressures, we are called to resist conformity, find our worth in Christ, and live from the Spirit, whose truth brings freedom, peace, and integrity.

Feast of the month: St. Osmund32

St. Osmund, a Norman noble turned bishop of Salisbury, united scholarship, statesmanship, and holiness. He built Salisbury's first cathedral, reformed worship through the Sarum Rite, fostered learning, served the poor, and repented humbly when he erred. His legacy endures in liturgy, charity, and faithful leadership.

Know the Bible34

The book of Judith retells Israel's struggle against oppressive empires through a symbolic heroine whose courage mirrors earlier biblical leaders. Written during Greek–Syrian domination, it shows how God overturns violent rulers, highlighting faith, irony, and divine deliverance as Judith confronts Nebuchadnezzar's forces.

Psalms 55: An exploration of suffering, betrayal, and trust in God36

Psalms 55 portrays a sensitive soul overwhelmed by hostility, social corruption, and a friend's betrayal. Its rapid shifts between anguish, indignation, and fragile trust reveal the believer's inner struggle. Lament remains unresolved, yet points toward Christ, who transforms betrayal and turmoil into enduring hope.

Symbols of Early Christian Art: The SATOR Square38

The SATOR Square—an ancient, perfectly symmetrical Latin palindrome—appears from Pompeii to medieval Europe. Its meaning and origin remain debated: Christian cryptogram, Jewish puzzle, magical charm, or clever wordplay. Its geometric brilliance ensured lasting fascination across cultures and centuries.

The world before the Christmas Tree42

The Christmas tree is a late arrival: earlier European traditions centred on evergreens, holly, ivy, mistletoe, Yule logs, Nativity scenes, even boats (!), and star-shaped parol lanterns.

Many thanks to all who have contributed to this issue of the Parish Magazine.

*The next Magazine will be published on **Sunday 28th December.***

Please, send all articles etc. you wish to be published by Sunday 21st December. Thank you.

Front cover: “The Blessed Virgin Mary with the Child Jesus”
AI-generated (from online sources)

From the Vicar

Dearly Beloved,

As we are about to start a new Liturgical Year with the First Sunday of Advent and the end of the civil year is approaching as well, I invite us all to reflect on 2025.

Our first words must be of thankfulness—firstly, to God, of course. For Who He Is: for His love, beauty and majesty. Then for His gifts He so graciously and abundantly bestowed on us all in this past year: for every moment of grace, goodness and mercy. One of these gifts that brings immense joy to us all are the new members of our Congregation. As we keep praying for the future of our parish, our hearts are filled with gratitude for every sign of growth and renewal.

Secondly, we thank God for each other and for all that each one of us contributes to God's glory, to the salvation of the souls, and to the good of this parish. Sometimes it might take some effort and a lot of humility to remember that our church (any church for that matter!) is not a random collection of people but the *household* of God. Every single person who is at St. Paul's has been chosen and called by God Himself. If we ever refused to see others this way we would only exclude ourselves from this divine family. Instead, how wonderful, how reassuring it is to know that it was God's infinite love, wisdom and mercy that have gathered us together.

Our words of thankfulness, however, must be followed by words and sentiments of true sorrow over our own shortcomings. How could we forget the warnings of Our Lord (Matthew 12,25): every human community divided against itself will be laid waste and will not stand for long. Too many times we allowed the weed of division to be planted in our church and, alas, in our minds and hearts. Through gossip, through judging others, through jealousy, through unforgiveness—forgetting that it is God's *household* we are against.

At other times we did not give *due primacy* to prayer and worship, losing sight of the truth that the church is first and foremost God's own house. The *terrible place*, the *gate of heaven*. We busied ourselves with many things, placing activity before worship, forgetting that apart from the Lord Jesus we can do nothing, and that all our works must be rooted in prayer.

Finally, words of prayer must follow. May we grow into what we are called to be: living images, sacred icons of Christ Jesus whose features in this Holy Season take those of a newborn Child whose heart is filled with nothing but love, tenderness, innocence and affection. So may be ours too!

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

Fr. Gregory



In reference to Luke 10,24,
a prayer to St. Joseph says:

*“O Blessed Joseph, truly happy man,
to whom it was given to see and to hear
that God Whom
many kings longed to see, and saw not,
to hear, and heard not.”*

With this tender image
of the Child Jesus and St. Joseph
I wish you all a peaceful Christmas.

May we all come to understand
more deeply
the immense love and gift
of our God-Emmanuel
born for us.

May we, and the whole world,
find lasting joy and peace in Him!



Many thanks to all who have supported the parish magazine with articles, by subscribing to it and, most importantly, by reading it faithfully. Please see Eileen Galling to renew your subscription.

The price will stay 50p, which doesn't cover the printing expenses but we don't want to discourage anyone from reading the magazine by making it more expensive. By subscribing to the magazine, you help us with the cost as it enables us to print the right number of copies without too much waste.

We hope many will think that what they get with the magazine is well worth £6 a year and will renew their subscription. Donations to cover the costs of the magazine are always accepted with gratitude.

If you genuinely cannot afford 50p per month, there will always be a few free copies at the back of the church.



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*)

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.

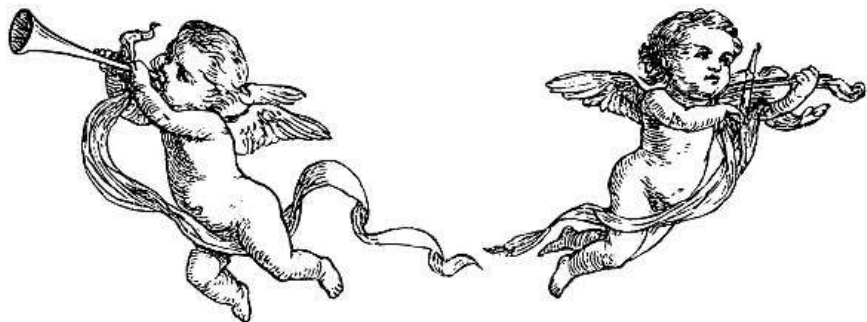
V. Blessed are you, sovereign Lord, merciful and gentle: to you be praise and glory for ever. Your light has shone in our darkened world through the child-bearing of the blessed, ever-virgin Mary; grant that we who have seen your glory may daily be renewed in your image and prepared like her for the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



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.



A “small” sin — and yet a great evil

At first glance, gossip may seem trivial: a whispered remark here, an idle comment there. But moral theology — following Scripture — teaches us to take gossip seriously: not as harmless chatter, but as a real sin.

Speech is a *gift* of God given to build communion, truth, justice and love. When we abuse it in gossip, we undermine those goods. The virtue of truth demands we speak honestly, but also with discretion, avoiding needless revelation of others’ faults.

According to St. Thomas Aquinas, gossip belongs to the class of sins of the tongue treated under the virtue of justice because gossip unjustly harms someone’s good name.

There are different forms: **Calumny** — lying about someone; **detraction** — telling true things about someone that you have no right to reveal, thereby damaging their reputation; **backbiting** or **“tale-bearing”** — speaking ill of someone behind their back.

Even when what is said is true, if it is unnecessary, malicious, or harmful, it counts as detraction. The fact that a statement is true does *not* make it automatically innocent. Hence gossip is not simply idle conversation or harmless rumour, it is, at root, a sin against justice, truth, charity, and the dignity of one’s neighbour.

Why even “innocent” gossip is toxic — It often begins lightly. A “private” comment. A “harmless” remark. A story repeated without considering the consequences. But even the smallest spark can set a great forest ablaze. *“The tongue is a world of evil among the parts of the body,”* (James 3,6) and gossip corrupts the whole fabric of relationships.

Moreover, the damage is often unpredictable and far-reaching: once a reputation is stained, it is hard — often impossible — to restore. Even if the original facts were true (or partly true), once they are spread carelessly, distorted, or amplified, the harm may grow far beyond what the original speaker intended. Thus, what begins as a casual remark can turn into detraction, calumny, scandal-mongering; and once reverberated in a community — parish (!), workplace, family — it damages the bonds of trust and charity.

This is why the Church warns us again and again: gossip is not a petty fault but a serious moral evil.

We are all implicated: speakers, listeners, passers-on — It is tempting to imagine gossip as only the fault of the one who starts it, the one who “spreads” the rumour. But Christian teaching reminds us that *all who*

participate share in the fault: those who listen, those who repeat, those who give a listening ear without challenge, those who pass it on.

Even silent acquiescence can be sinful: to hear someone's name dragged through the mud and do nothing may make one complicit. Indeed some moral theologians argue that listening to gossip without protest (or without redirecting, correcting, or refusing to engage) is itself a sin against charity and justice.

Thus gossip is not a “personal” sin only, but a communal one: it affects relationships, community trust, and the social fabric. As recent Papal teaching warns, gossip can even be considered a kind of “terrorism” — a force that destroys communion and peace.

The call to forgiveness, even when we are the victims — If gossip is so destructive, and many of us have been wounded by it, what is our proper Christian response? One might be tempted to harbour resentment, bitterness, or even hatred. But the Gospel, and deeply rooted in it, the teaching of the Church, calls us to a different path: forgiveness.

Firstly, we must remember that even those who gossip about us are persons made in the image of God, wounded and broken as we ourselves are. Holding a grudge, nursing anger, or refusing forgiveness would itself be sinful; it would allow the poison of another's sin to infect our own soul.

Secondly, *the sin of others must never justify our own sin*. Even if someone has wronged us by gossip, we are called not to repay with bitterness, envy, or fresh defamation. Rather, we are to preserve charity, uphold truth, and strive for justice, all while extending mercy. This call to forgiveness is not weak: it is precisely the strength of Christian charity. Where justice demands reparation (if possible), mercy demands that we leave room for conversion, repentance, reconciliation.

Moreover, forgiveness does not mean passive silence or denial of truth when serious harm has been done but a refusal to treat the other as an enemy, a resolution not to let their sin define them, and a commitment to pray for their conversion and return to communion.

The virtue of silence, discretion, and charity: and the path of repair — What should a Christian do to avoid gossip and to foster peace, justice, and charity around him? Catholic tradition, confirmed by St. Thomas and many other Saints, suggests several practical guidelines:

- **Guard your tongue.** Before speaking about someone, ask: *Do I really need to say this? Is it charitable? Is it true? Is there a risk this will harm his reputation?* If the answer hesitates, better to remain silent. This

discipline of the tongue is not weakness but virtue — a safeguard of justice, truth, and love.

- **If you have something serious to communicate, go directly to the person concerned.** As many confessors and spiritual writers advise: if a fault has been committed, address it in person and not by “telling a friend,” “raising concern,” or “just sharing what I heard.”
- **If necessary, involve only those with legitimate need to know:** perhaps a few witnesses, spiritual director, confessor, or legitimate authority but always with discretion. The Church teaches that we are not obliged to reveal everything to anyone who asks. Revealing private faults to those who have no right to know is often detraction.
- **If damage has been done — seek reparation.** The good name is a serious good: if someone’s reputation has been unjustly harmed, justice requires that we attempt moral (or even material) reparation, insofar as we can.
- **Cultivate prayer, humility, love.** Where gossip has been discharged, or where wounds were inflicted, respond with prayer, patience, discretion — not retaliation. Pray for those who have wronged you. Hold them in charity, entrust judgment to God.

Why Advent makes this reflection especially urgent — Advent is the Holy Season of preparation: of expectant waiting, penance, conversion, purification. It is a time to ready not only our hearts for the coming of the Saviour, but also our relationships, our communities, our inward disposition.

In this season, we are called to *interior conversion*. That includes purging our tongues of idle speech, our hearts of envy, our communities of slander. If we hope to welcome Christ with joy and sincerity, we must strive for integrity of word and deed.

The coming feast of Christmas is about *peace, reconciliation, Love Incarnate*: the Word made flesh to draw humanity into communion. Gossip, detraction, backbiting all fracture communion. They are deeply opposed to what Christmas is about.

Advent Ember Days are millennial tradition. These days of fasting, penance, and spiritual renewal are the “opportune time” to fast from gossip, from idle chatter, from detraction. Entering Christmas with a cleansed tongue, a contrite heart, a forgiving spirit: this is the true preparation for Him who is “*the Prince of Peace*.”

In that light, gossip becomes not only a personal moral problem, but a violation of the spirit of Advent, a failure to prepare rightly for the coming of Christ: a complete failure of Christian life.

The challenge of forgiveness: refusing to let others' sin define us —

It is easy to fall into bitterness when we are slandered, defamed, maligned. We may feel desire for justice, or even a justified anger. But Christian forgiveness does not mean forgetting — it means transcending.

We cannot deny or ignore the wrong done: if slander or detraction has occurred, there may be a duty to seek reparation, to clear the record, to speak truth. Yet, we must be careful not to respond with further sin: retaliation, re-gossip, hatred, resentment.

Forgiveness is not indifference. It is charity. It requires acknowledging the dignity of every human being, even those who have wounded us. It requires trusting God's justice and mercy, rather than resorting to our own vindication.

It also requires humility: remembering that we ourselves — even if we have not committed calumny — are not free from faults, from the possibility of gossip, from the temptation to speak ill. We must constantly watch ourselves. Thus, the sin of others becomes an occasion to grow in virtue — in patience, in love, in forgiveness.

Christian Tradition: why our Lord's call to love demands it —

The Church's treatment of gossip is not a marginal add-on, but deeply rooted in her understanding of justice, charity, and the moral order. To harm someone's reputation unjustly is a theft of something precious: their good name, their dignity, their capacity for relationships.

Moreover, the virtue of truth (Latin *integritas*) requires that we balance honesty with discretion: not everything that can be said deserves to be said. The commandment "*Thou shall not bear false witness*" prohibits not only outright lies but all forms of defamation, detraction, slander, uncharitable speech, and needless disclosure. Therefore, to speak "justly" is to guard another's good name, to weigh not only what is true, but what is necessary, what is loving, what builds up.

In a season like Advent, when we remember that the Word — who said: "*I am the Way, the Truth and the Life*" — becomes flesh among us, we have a special call to reflect that truth in our very speech: to let our tongues be instruments of peace, of charity, of light and not of division, scandal, or death.

As we enter this Advent and prepare to welcome Christ at Christmas: let us make a resolve. Let us examine our speech, let us practice restraint, let us remember that we are all image-bearers of God, let us also embrace forgiveness, and let us use our speech for what it was given for: truth, justice, charity — and above all, for building up the Body of Christ.

A practical examen: **1. Before God, ask for light:** *Come, Spirit of Truth and Love, and help me see my words, my intentions, my thoughts about others with your clarity.*

2. Review the day: *How did I use my speech? Did I speak about anyone in a way that could damage their reputation? Was what I said true, necessary, charitable?*

Did I repeat something I “heard,” without certainty or without right to share it? Did I listen to gossip without redirecting or refusing? Did I allow myself to enjoy hearing something negative about another? Did I fail to defend someone when charity or justice called for it? Did I speculate aloud about others’ motives, faults, or private matters? Did I use social media in a way that contributed to gossip, detraction, anger, or division?

3. Examine the roots: *What was happening in my heart? Was there **pride** — wanting to feel superior? Was there **envy** — finding satisfaction in someone else’s faults? Was there **resentment** — using gossip as a subtle retaliation? Was there **curiosity** without charity — wanting to know what was not mine to know?*

4. Review occasions of forgiveness. *Was I gossiped about today? How did I respond interiorly? Did I stew in resentment, or turn to prayer? Did I forgive anyone who wronged me — at least in desire, even if not yet emotionally? Did I ask God for the grace not to let someone else’s sin draw me into unforgiveness?*

5. Act of contrition and resolution. *Reflect: Where did I fail in charity? Where did I fail to protect another’s dignity? Where did I fail to imitate Christ, who is Truth and Love? Then resolve one concrete act for tomorrow: To hold my tongue in a specific recurring situation. To defend someone’s reputation gently. To refrain from participating in negative conversations. To pray immediately when tempted to gossip. To forgive someone by name.*

6. Close with gratitude. *Even if the examen reveals many failures, thank God for: every moment you held your peace. Every time you chose charity. Every instance of forgiveness, even attempted. Every grace He gave to purify your speech and heart.*

Prayer. *Lord Jesus Christ, Word made flesh, in this holy season of Advent, purify my tongue and my heart. You came as Light into darkness—let no word of mine bring darkness to another. Guard my speech from gossip, detraction, rash judgment, and uncharitable talk. Teach me to love my neighbour in silence and truth. When I am tempted to repeat what is not mine to speak, give me restraint. When I am tempted to listen to gossip, give me courage to resist. When my heart grows curious about others’ faults, turn my eyes instead to your mercy. And when others speak against me, grant me the grace of forgiveness. Do not let their sin become the seed of sin in me. For you forgave your enemies from the Cross—let me forgive those who wound me with their tongue. Lord, make my words few, wise, and full of love. Let my speech prepare room for you in my soul as surely as Mary’s silence prepared for your coming. Come, Lord Jesus. Heal my heart, sanctify my speech, and make me an instrument of your peace. Amen.*

Calendar for December 2025

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

We pray for...

- 1st Missions - *Frances Geroghty, Ted Marshall, Sheila Smallman*
- 2nd Those who struggle with alcohol - *Max Williams pr., Olive Ames*
- 3rd Conversion of England - *Blessie May Martin, Robert Keat, Bev Williams*
- 4th Priests & vocations - *Sam Eades*
- 5th Dying
- 6th Shrine of Walsingham - *Trixie Babb*
- 7th Our Parishes - *Ben Bowring*
- 8th Greater devotion to Our Lady
- 9th Departed - *Shaun Tolman, Brian Smart*
- 10th Unjustly imprisoned or persecuted - *Herbert Rod, Olivia Harding*
- 11th Physical labourers - *Alex*
- 12th Beechcroft
- 13th Cell of O.L.W. - *Kay Berriman*
- 14th Our Parishes - *John Seymour*
- 15th Peace - *Ethel Teece*
- 16th Bishop of Oswestry - *Mo Palmer*
- 17th A spirit of truth and charity in our congregations
- 18th Families - *Edith Sibley, Michael Houghton bp.*
- 19th Sick - *Madeline Pryer, Freda Taylor, George Winspear*
- 20th Forgiveness and reconciliation in our congregations - *Richard Harbord*
- 21st Our Parishes - *Ali Thomas*
- 22nd A spirit of prayer and devotion - *Joseph Howell-Jones pr.*
- 23rd All for whom Christmas is a difficult time
- 24th Our Parishes
- 25th Our Parishes - *Peter Withey, Jessie Evans, Fred Semmons, Andrew Rook, Edna Sale, Margaret Hornby*
- 26th Our Parishes - *Les Bugler, Andree Dandou, Ramona Yates, Josephine (Jo) Farn*
- 27th NHS & Social care workers - *John Dawson*
- 28th Our Parishes - *Ian Edgar, Eileen Clarey, Donald Turner pr.*
- 29th Parish clergy - *Celia Biles, Lilia Bullock*
- 30th All who lost loved ones this year - *Thelma, Stanley Waight*
- 31st God's blessing and peace for 2026 - *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 82	Isaiah 25 Matthew 12,1-21	8	113	Genesis 3,8-15 Luke 1,26-38
2	80	Isaiah 26,1-13 Matthew 12,22-37	9	56	Isaiah 30,19-end Matthew 14,13-end
3	7	Isaiah 28,1-13 Matthew 12,38-end	10	62	Isaiah 31 Matthew 15,1-20
4	42	Isaiah 28,14-end Matthew 13,1-23	11	54	Isaiah 32 Matthew 15,21-28
5	25	Isaiah 29,1-14 Matthew 13,24-43	12	86	Isaiah 33,1-22 Matthew 15,29-end
6	9	Isaiah 29,15-end Matthew 13,44-end	13	35	Isaiah 35 Matthew 16,1-12
7	80	Amos 7 Luke 1,5-20	14	68 v. 1-19	Zephaniah 3,14-end Philippians 4,4-7

15	40	Isaiah 38,1-22 Matthew 16,13-end	24	45	Malachiah 3 Matthew 19,16-end
16	70	Isaiah 38,9-20 Matthew 17,1-13	25	110	Isaiah 62,1-5 Matthew 1,18-end
17	75	Isaiah 39 Matthew 17,14-21	26	13	Jeremiah 26,12-15 Acts 6
18	76	Zephaniah 1 Matthew 17,22-end	27	21	Exodus 33,12-end 1 John 2,1-11
19	146	Zephaniah 2 Matthew 18,1-20	28	105 v. 1-11	Isaiah 35,1-6 Galatians 3,23-end
20	46	Zephaniah 3 Matthew 18,21-end	29	3	Ecclesiasticus 51,1-8 Matthew 10,28-33
21	144	Micah 5,2-5 Luke 1,26-38	30	113	Jonah 1 & 2 Colossians 1,1-14
22	124	Malachiah 1 Matthew 19,1-12	31	102	Jonah 3 & 4 Colossians 1,15-end
23	130	Malachiah 2 Matthew 19,13-15			

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	74	Isaiah 42,18-end Revelation 19	7	11	1 Kings 18,17-39 John 1,19-28
2	75	Isaiah 43,1-13 Revelation 20	8	45 v. 10-17	Micah 5,1-4 Luke 1,39-47
3	77	Isaiah 43,14-end Revelation 21,1-8	9	11	Isaiah 46 1 Thessalonians 2,1-12
4	40	Isaiah 44,1-8 Revelation 21,9-21	10	10	Isaiah 47 1 Thessalonians 2,13-end
5	17	Isaiah 44,9-end Revelation 21,22-end	11	73	Isaiah 48,1-11 1 Thessalonians 3
6	27	Isaiah 45,1-13 Revelation 22	12	90	Isaiah 48,12-end 1 Thessalonians 4,1-12

13	94	Isaiah 49,1-13 1 Thessalonians 4,13-end	23	89 v. 1-37	Isaiah 54 2 Peter 1,16-end
14	12	Isaiah 5,8-end Acts 13,13-41	24	85	Zechariah 2 Revelation 1,1-8
15	26	Isaiah 49,14-25 1 Thessalonians 5,1-11	25	8	Isaiah 65,17-25 Philippians 2,5-11
16	50	Isaiah 50 1 Thessalonians 5,12-end	26	86	Genesis 4,1-10 Matthew 23,34-end
17	82	Isaiah 51,1-8 2 Thessalonians 1	27	97	Isaiah 6,1-8 1 John 5,1-12
18	44	Isaiah 51,9-16 2 Thessalonians 2	28	132	Isaiah 49,7-13 Philippians 2,1-11
19	57	Isaiah 51,17-end 2 Thessalonians 3	29	131	Isaiah 57,15-end John 1,1-18
20	4	Isaiah 52,1-12 Jude	30	65	Isaiah 59,1-15 John 1,19-28
21	113	1 Samuel 1,1-20 Revelation 22,6-end	31	148	Jeremiah 23,1-6 Colossians 2,8-15
22	48	Isaiah 53 1 Peter 1,1-15			

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 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.

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.

Not so unusual words you will probably know half of... (part 4)

Jeanne James writes:

1. **Clinomania** – An overwhelming desire to stay in bed.
2. **Petrichor** – The pleasant, earthy smell after rain.
3. **Agelast** – A person who never laughs.
4. **Sonder** – The realization that each passerby has a life as complex as yours.
5. **Numinous** – Having a strong religious or spiritual quality; inspiring awe.
6. **Palimpsest** – Something reused or altered but still bearing traces of its earlier form.
7. **Halcyon** – Denoting a time in the past that was idyllically happy and peaceful.
8. **Vellichor** – The strange wistfulness of being in a used bookstore.
9. **Epizeuxis** – The repetition of a word or phrase in immediate succession for emphasis.
10. **Quixotic** – Unrealistically idealistic; impractical.
11. **Obfuscate** – To make something unclear or obscure.
12. **Lagom** – Not too little, not too much — just the right amount.
13. **Euphoria** – A feeling of intense happiness and excitement.
14. **Crepuscular** – Relating to twilight; dim or indistinct.
15. **Redolent** – Strongly reminiscent or suggestive of something; fragrant.
16. **Zeugma** – A figure of speech in which one word applies to two others in different senses (e.g., “He stole my heart and my wallet”).
17. **Eucatastrophe** – A sudden unexpected positive turn of events.
18. **Noctivigant** – Wandering at night.
19. **Procellous** – Stormy, turbulent (weather)
20. **Mumpsimus** – A stubborn person who insists on making an error after it's been shown to be wrong.
21. **Quiescent** – Becoming still, growing quiet.
22. **Lalozhezia** – The emotional relief gained from using profane language.
23. **Hiraeth** – A deep longing for a home that no longer exists.
24. **Oneiric** – Relating to dreams, dreamlike.
25. **Tarantism** – An uncontrollable urge to dance.

Identity

Irene Leader writes:

We read in the Book of Genesis that God spoke creation into being, but man He formed by His own hand from the natural elements of the earth. Then God breathed into man the Breath of Life, giving him a spiritual soul and making him a living being (Gen 2,7). We are not God Himself, nor copies of Him, but we are created in His image and likeness (Gen 1,27), with the capacity to know and love Him.

A dynamo gives out energy without being diminished; likewise, the dynamic life of the Breath of God keeps flowing through every human being without God Himself being lessened. Each person receives this life from God—but always as a creature, receiving from the Creator. Our dignity is not in our biology alone but in our soul which bears the image of God and makes us capable of relationship with Him.

As human beings, we are a unity of body and soul, created to live in communion with God. The spirit gives the body the ability to live life. And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead, will also give life to your mortal body because of His Spirit who testifies with our spirit that we are children of God (Rom 8,11,16). This is the deepest truth about our identity: we are created for God, redeemed by Christ, and called to share His life.

The various experiences and influences a baby is exposed to in the womb partly preconditions our emotional response. In this sense, how we start life is not our choice. However, as we grow up, we become more and more capable to use our free will which God gave us to choose and to make decisions.

The need to be accepted and approved of is strong. We gravitate to people who give us acceptance: join a group, a gang, a political party, a church, etc. We start acting like the group and speaking like them. We start to give up a lot to be accepted and approved by that group. This is group-think and it comes from having a party spirit, which looks to something else instead of Jesus. We take on the doctrines of the party we have given allegiance to, and fight for them because we don't want to be proved that we are wrong. If this is who I am - that justifies my behaviour! I become more ungodly and less content as I normalise ungodliness when they are the model; it seems ok because everyone around is doing it, too. Then our identity is no longer in "I am a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ."

It is challenging not to conform to the ways of the world. But if my life is in Christ, my behaviour does not define my identity. When I act outside of the righteousness Jesus died to give me, I invite disharmony into my life and cause the same disharmony in the lives of others. The Old Testament gives us the example of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11,1–9). Instead of having their identity in who they were as God’s people, they made bricks and built a tower “*to make a name for ourselves lest we be scattered.*” They were relying on safety in numbers.

Our deepest need is to be loved. Many remain in unhealthy or abusive relationships because they long for acceptance. But when I see myself as God sees me—redeemed, beloved, adopted in Christ (Eph 1,5)—my life begins to change. Our thinking will not change until the belief of our heart changes. My source needs to be God: His love leading my life. God poured out his Love, the Holy Spirit, to guide and lead us. Should we not “be ready” for this, we still have His written Word to guide us. Peace and joy are the fruit of righteousness (Gal 5,22); compromise does not bring them.

What is it that makes me the most vulnerable to compromise? Is it work, family, relationships, rejection, feeling unsafe? What would life look like if I were never vulnerable to compromise?

Some related quotes from the Church Fathers for reflection:

St. Irenaeus (Against Heresies): “The glory of God is man fully alive; and the life of man consists in beholding God.” “For it was for this end that the Word of God was made man... that man, having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the son of God.”

St. Athanasius (On the Incarnation): “He became man so that we might become God.”

St. Basil the Great (Homily on Psalm 1): “The human mind, when it is not secured by the love of God, is easily drawn away by deceptive appearances.”

St. Gregory of Nyssa (On the Beatitudes): “The soul is stamped with the beauty of the divine image; if we wipe away the filth that has been smeared on our hearts, then we will behold in ourselves the radiant form of God.”

St. Anthony the Great (Sayings): “A man’s life is shaped by his thoughts. When the mind is set on God, the whole person is changed.”

St. Gregory of Nazianzus (Orations): “The Spirit comes gently and makes Himself known by His fragrance; He is not felt as a burden, for He is light.”

St. Macarius the Great (Homilies): “The soul that is filled with the Holy Spirit is changed into another nature.”

Feast of the month: St. Osmund, Bishop & Confessor

4 December

The Diocese of Salisbury has the special joy of claiming a canonised saint as its second bishop: St. Osmund. His story is a wonderful mixture of scholarship, statecraft, architectural imagination, humble holiness and a few delightful quirks besides.

A Norman noble with a heart turned toward God — St. Osmund was born in Normandy into a distinguished family. In fact, his father was Count of Séez and a leading figure in the ducal court of Rouen. Though of “Germanic blood,” Osmund was shaped by the Latin Christian culture of monastic learning. He received a superb education in literature, philosophy, theology, and even music.

Raised in a devout household, Osmund learned early the habit of generous almsgiving. When he inherited his father’s estates, he devoted an astonishing proportion of his revenues to the poor and to the Church. This generous spirit never left him.

Knight, counsellor — and then something unexpected — Like many nobles of his age, Osmund joined Duke William’s expedition to England in 1066. He served William the Conqueror with both courage and intelligence, earning high favour. William rewarded him first with the Earldom of Dorset, then made him Chancellor of England. Osmund meticulously administered royal affairs, choosing good men for vacant offices and working tirelessly for order in the newly conquered land.

And yet, in an almost “Gospel-like” twist, the man who had risen to such worldly influence increasingly felt his heart drawn not to the court, but to the Church.

William, perceptive as ever, saw this. In 1078 he appointed Osmund Bishop of Salisbury, placing him at the heart of the renewal that the Church in England desperately needed. The older Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical structures had decayed after decades of war and upheaval; William needed reformers, and he found in Osmund one of the best.

Builder of a cathedral, founder of a school — As bishop, Osmund undertook the completion of the first Salisbury Cathedral at Old Sarum. He devoted fifteen years to this labour of love, and when it was finally consecrated in 1092, the celebration was dazzling.

But then came one of the most memorable (if tragic) quirks of his story: five days after the consecration, lightning struck the cathedral. The roof and towers burst into flames. One can only imagine the bishop’s feelings.

And yet Osmund did not despair. He set to work immediately, supervising repairs until the church was restored to its full dignity. His perseverance became a model of episcopal steadiness: when the work of God seems to collapse, begin again — patiently and faithfully.

Not content with stones alone, Osmund built up a renowned cathedral school. He encouraged his canons to excel not only in the divine office but also in learning. He welcomed scholars from across England and the Continent, assembled a fine library, and personally copied and illuminated manuscripts. Under his care, Salisbury became one of the intellectual centres of Norman England.

Father of the Sarum Rite — Perhaps Osmund's most lasting contribution was his work on the Sarum Rite: the liturgical use of Salisbury. When he became bishop, liturgical practice in England was in disarray: nearly every church had its own variant. After careful study, Osmund compiled liturgical books, drawing especially on the traditions of Rouen. This unified, dignified, and pastorally sensitive liturgy spread rapidly and for centuries shaped the worship of England, Ireland, and even parts of Scotland. Many medieval English spiritual writers considered the Sarum Rite the most beautiful expression of Western liturgy in the north. Through Osmund's work, Salisbury became a liturgical heart for an entire nation and for many cathedrals in Europe.

A shepherd more than a lord — Though he guarded the Church's goods with vigilance, Osmund never sought personal gain. He lived modestly, visited the poor, preached tirelessly, heard confessions readily, comforted the sorrowful and, in a particularly touching detail mentioned by contemporaries, he personally accompanied condemned prisoners to the place of execution, praying with them to the end. A bishop who fashioned his life after that of the Good Shepherd.

A moment of weakness and a saint's repentance — Osmund was a peacemaker by temperament. Once, at the Rockingham synod, he initially sided with the tyrannical King William II against St. Anselm, the great Archbishop of Canterbury. But his conscience quickly tormented him, and he publicly sought Anselm's forgiveness. From that moment, the two saints became close friends. Osmund teaches us that saints are not those who never err, but those who repent quickly and wholeheartedly.

Death, canonisation, and legacy — After a long period of suffering, St. Osmund died on 4 December 1099. His sanctity was recognised locally for centuries, but he was formally canonised in 1457 by Pope Callixtus III. May he pray for our diocese and parish that we may imitate his love for God and the truth, for the souls and the poor, and for the beauty of liturgy.

Know the Bible! - The Book of Judith (1)

The book of Judith is the thrilling story of an Israelite woman's courageous faith in God that topples an evil empire. The story is set in Israel of the 7th and 6th centuries B.C., when Jerusalem was threatened and attacked by the empires of Assyria and then Babylon. But the anonymous author who wrote the book lived hundreds of years later when Jews around Jerusalem were under the oppressive empires of Greece and then Syria.

In the author's recent memory is the Syrian king Antiochus who declared that he was a god. He attacked Jerusalem and then defiled the temple. This resulted in the famous Maccabean revolt (for the whole story see the books of 1 and 2 Maccabees). The author of Judith wanted to help people understand the meaning of these recent events, and so he wrote a parallel story inspired by ancient biblical events.

This explains a number of unique features about the book. For example, the story opens by introducing the bad guys, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Assyria, and his military general, Holofernes. But Nebuchadnezzar was the king of Babylon, not Assyria, and Holofernes was a general in the empire of Persia, which came long after Assyria. But this is not a mistake by the author. Rather, he's intentionally combined three of the most oppressive empires from the biblical story into one mega-enemy. They have become a symbol for any prideful and violent ruler that acts like they are God, just like Antiochus of recent memory.

Nearly every scene and character in the book of Judith has symbolic meaning based on earlier biblical predecessors, even Judith herself. Her name in Hebrew means "Jewish Woman," and almost all of her words and actions are patterned after courageous figures in the Hebrew Scriptures who also had showdowns with foreign leaders. Judith is Deborah, Jael, Esther, Moses, David, and Daniel, all combined into one mega-heroine.

Through this showdown of mega-characters, the author of Judith is reflecting on a key theme in the whole biblical story about the surprising ways that God's Kingdom overturns the violent empires of our world.

The book of Judith was not considered part of the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) in Jewish tradition or in later Protestant tradition, but in the early centuries of the Christian movement, the book's Greek translation was widespread and really popular. And so today, it's part of the Catholic and Orthodox Bible.

Let's dive into the story. It begins with King Nebuchadnezzar, who is full of himself one day, so he declares war on his eastern neighbour, the Medes. And so he forces the smaller kingdoms around him in the east to help

him fight. But then he also summons the western kingdoms that include the Israelites. They all refuse to join Nebuchadnezzar's alliance, and this makes him really mad. So he declares that when he's done crushing the Medes, he'll destroy these rebellious western nations.

He appoints his second-in-command, Holofernes, as a military general to go defeat and enslave these rebel nations to make them worship Nebuchadnezzar as a god. And most of the nations do surrender, but not the Israelites. When they hear about Holofernes and his armies, they fast and pray, asking God to show mercy, to save their temple, and to keep them from ending up in exile again. And while we read that God hears their prayer, we are not told how he is going to deliver them. You have to keep on reading.

Holofernes and his armies arrive to confront the rebel Israelites. He asked the neighbouring kings, "*Who are these Israelites and who's their ruler?*" It's Achior, the king of the Ammonites, who speaks up. He retells the biblical story of how Israel's God defeated Egypt and saved them in exodus and how he handed Israel over to defeat and exile in Babylon because of their sins. Achior warns Holofernes that he will not be able to overcome these people unless Israel's God allows it. Notice the irony. This is a non-Israelite king giving Holofernes a Bible study lesson on God's power. But Holofernes is not amused. He honours King Nebuchadnezzar as the all-powerful god, and so he banishes Achior to the hills of Israel to be killed in the coming attack.

Holofernes' army assembles at the foot of a mountain pass so they can gain entry into Israel, but there's one thing standing in their way, the Israelite hill town of Bethulia. When the Israelites living there see this massive army, they panic. And they test God by saying if they're not saved within five days, they're going to surrender... And right as things look totally helpless, the author introduces Judith.

She's an Israelite widow in Bethulia who trusts God with radical faith. She hears of this plan to surrender to Holofernes, and she confronts the town leaders saying that Nebuchadnezzar's army is nothing compared to God's power and wisdom. She recalls how God tested the Israelites' faith in the past. This is one more chance to trust God in the face of evil.

The leaders asked Judith to pray for all of Israel, and so she does. It's a majestic prayer, combining phrases from poems all over the Old Testament about how God helps the weak and how he loves to overturn the power structures of our world: God exalts the humiliated and humiliates the exalted.

Judith asks God to grant her success, and then she announces to her people that she has a secret plan to turn the destructive power of this great empire back onto itself. And from here on, the story's full of creative ironies and reversals... *(to be continued)*

The Psalms

Psalms 55: An exploration of suffering, betrayal, and trust in God

Psalm 55 is one of the most affecting psalms of lament, yet its interpretation raises various difficulties. Its swift movement from grief to indignation, from remembrance to prayer, and from despair to a flickering trust gives it a character that is, as it were, impulsive and emotionally unsteady. But this very unsteadiness belongs to its deepest meaning. The psalm opens a window into the heart of a sensitive soul who breaks down under the weight of inner agony, whose thoughts shift rapidly because the trial he suffers refuses to be neatly contained or explained.

The psalmist, of a gentle and inherently peaceful disposition (King David), finds himself overwhelmed by the enmity of violent opponents and the toxic influences which surround him. His longing is simply to flee, to escape the bustle of the city and hide in desert solitude, “to wander afar” as Jeremiah once longed to do. Emotional exhaustion drives him to that most human of impulses: wishing he were anywhere other than where he stands. The imagery he uses is vivid; the impressions upon him are “*like a raging tempest*,” turmoil without cease.

Disgusted by the oppression and fraud that have overtaken the marketplace, he prays that such wickedness might be overtaken by divine judgment. Some have understood his remark that “*day and night they go around its walls*” as a description of siege conditions, but the psalm itself offers no real support for this. It is more fitting to read the phrase figuratively: the plague of vice and sin moves through the city as though in procession, creating an atmosphere so charged with corruption that the psalmist no longer knows which way to turn. These verses are not a historic account of Jerusalem but a moral and spiritual diagnosis: evil is everywhere, it unsettles and infects.

Yet the deepest wound in this lament is not inflicted by enemies but by a friend. What grieves him most is the painful breach of trust by one with whom he had shared hours of intimate fellowship. This betrayal is not merely a matter of danger but of heartbreak. The psalmist recalls their companionship with a mixture of tenderness and bitterness, for these memories now stab rather than soothe. Understandably agitated, he finds the thought of this treachery almost unbearable.

From here his emotions flare. His soul, wounded and restless, bursts into a helpless rage. He utters words of judgment: that such adversaries might be swallowed by sudden calamity, as in the fate of Korah. But even this fierce

outcry is soon spent. The psalm slides once more into lamentation, its energy dissipating into sorrow.

But again, though his thoughts churn, there is a turning—however faint—toward God. He lifts his eyes to the One enthroned “*from of old*,” the Judge of the world. He trusts, however weakly for now, that the prayers of the godly will be heard and that the wicked will be humbled. But this moment of faith is fragile. Almost immediately, disappointment and indignation take its place as he considers the disloyalty of the friend whose hypocrisy has robbed him of his last shreds of human confidence. It is as if the psalmist feels the very ground shifting beneath him, leaving him grasping for stability.

Then, clutching at a remembered saying, he steadies himself. Here the psalm gives us a rare glimpse into the spiritual struggle at the heart of a believer: the oscillation between resentment and trust, between vindictiveness and surrender, between the impulse to lash out and the longing to rest in God. His better self admonishes him to trust, even as darker impulses tug at his mind.

Psalm 55 does not end with resolution but with openness. No final triumph of serenity is achieved; no neat moral conclusion is offered. Instead, we witness the ongoing battle between human frailty and faith, a battle unresolved in the psalm. However, that very incompleteness becomes for us a signpost. It points beyond itself to the fuller answer given in Christ, who bears betrayal without sin, meets violence with peace, and transforms lament into hope.

In this way Psalm 55 becomes deeply relatable. It does not speak from a position of lofty detachment but from the rawness of a wounded heart, offering companionship to all who have felt disappointment, confusion, or abandonment. It gives us permission to come before God precisely as we are: agitated, conflicted, weary, yet still capable of reaching—however shakily—toward trust.

Reflective Questions: Where in my life do I experience the “raging tempest” of inner agitation or distress? Have I, like the psalmist, been wounded by someone I trusted? How do I bring that pain honestly before God? What would it look like to allow God to steady my heart? Can I recognise in my own spiritual struggle Christ?

Lord God, in moments of turmoil and confusion, when my heart wavers between hurt and hope, draw me close to you. Heal the wounds of betrayal, quiet the storms within me, and teach me to trust your steadfast love. When I cannot find resolution, be my peace; when I cannot see the way ahead, be my light. Hold me in your mercy, now and always. Amen.

Symbols of Early Christian Art

The SATOR square: A Christian mystery or Ancient puzzle?

Based on prof. László Vanyó's book



Among the many inscriptions preserved from the ancient world, few have generated as much interest, speculation, and fascination as the so-called **SATOR Square**. This five-word Latin palindrome, arranged in a perfect square of twenty-five letters, has been found in church walls, Roman ruins, medieval manuscripts, and European village houses. Its enigmatic structure and uncertain origin have made it a subject of study not only in archaeology and linguistics but also in the history of early Christianity.

Its five words, set in five lines of five letters each, can be read in multiple directions: horizontally, vertically, forwards, and backwards. Such a degree of symmetry is unique in the surviving textual material of antiquity. The precise meaning of the text and its original function have long been debated. What follows is an overview of its discovery, the known archaeological evidence, and the principal interpretations offered by scholars.

1. The words and their literal meaning

The individual words are Latin: **SATOR** – “sower,” “planter,” or “founder.” **AREPO** – a word unattested elsewhere (so-called *hapax legomenon*); usually treated as a proper name. **TENET** – “holds,” “keeps,” “controls.” **OPERA** – “works,” “efforts,” “labours.” **ROTAS** – “wheels.” The literal translation most often proposed is: “*The sower Arepo holds the wheels with effort.*”

Since *Arepo* appears nowhere else in Latin, this reading is uncertain and is generally regarded as unsatisfactory. Some have proposed that *Arepo* might be a non-Latin personal name, possibly Celtic or Egyptian, inserted to make the word square work. Others suggest it may be an invented word, serving only its role within the palindrome. In any case, the literal meaning of the sentence has never been the primary reason for scholarly interest.

2. Archaeological discoveries

The SATOR Square has been found in various places across Europe and the Mediterranean. The most important early examples include:

Pompeii (1st c.) — One version of the square was discovered on a house wall in Pompeii, buried by the eruption of Vesuvius in 79. This is the earliest

securely dated example. If the inscription indeed predates AD 79, it indicates that the formula was already in circulation in the 1st century. Because Pompeii had communities of Jews and Eastern religious groups, the presence of the square here suggests early cultural exchange, and has led some to propose an early Christian or Jewish origin.

Dura-Europos (3rd c.) — A fragment found in this cosmopolitan frontier town on the Euphrates suggests the square was known across the Roman world. Dura-Europos was home to one of the earliest known churches and one of the earliest known synagogues.



Roman Britain — Examples from Cirencester (Corinium) and Manchester indicate that the inscription reached even the northern provinces.



Medieval Europe — By the Middle Ages the square appears in churches, monasteries, manuscripts, and household inscriptions throughout France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, and Spain. Medieval Christians frequently employed it as a protective charm against fire or illness, though it is unclear whether this reflects its original use or later reinterpretations.

3. The SATOR Square as a palindrome

What makes the SATOR Square remarkable is not the plain meaning of the words but the palindrome formed by them. Arranged as a square, the text reads identically: left to right, right to left, top to bottom, bottom to top. Additionally, the central word *tenet* forms a cross-shape when read horizontally and vertically. Medieval writers often noticed this feature and gave it symbolic significance.

Furthermore, the words at the corners—*sator* and *rotas*—are themselves reversible forms (*sator* reversed is *rotas*). This internal mirroring adds another layer of symmetry.

4. Early interpretations and debates



a) *A Christian cryptogram* — Beginning in the 1920s, scholars observed that the SATOR Square can be rearranged into a cross-shaped acrostic of the phrase **PATER NOSTER** (“Our Father”), written twice in a grid shape. When these letters are used, the only letters left unused from the square are: **A** and **O**. These were read as **Alpha and Omega**, the title used for Christ in the Book of Revelation. This led to the hypothesis that

early Christians may have used the SATOR Square as a secret symbol during times of persecution. The argument is strengthened by the discovery in Pompeii, which predates the Constantinian tolerance of Christianity.

The resemblance of the central cross formed by *tenet*, combined with the PATER NOSTER rearrangement, was persuasive enough that many 20th-century scholars supported a Christian interpretation. However, not all accept this view. Critics argue that the PATER NOSTER derivation may be a later Christian reinterpretation of an originally non-Christian puzzle.

b) *Jewish origin* — Some suggest a Jewish origin, noting similarities between the square’s structure and letter-manipulation traditions in Jewish mysticism (such as notarikon and gematria). Pompeii had a Jewish community, and the Jews of the Diaspora sometimes used coded inscriptions. The ambiguity of the Latin words might have appealed to Jewish groups wishing to avoid overt identification.

c) *Magic Square or Protective Charm* — Many scholars think the SATOR Square originally belonged to the realm of Greco-Roman magic. Ancient magical texts include palindromes and reversible formulas used for protection, healing, or invoking divine favour. Because medieval Europeans used the square as a charm against fire or disease, it is possible that the magical interpretation is older than the Christian one.

d) *A word puzzle with no hidden meaning* — A minority theory holds that the SATOR Square is simply a clever literary game, a demonstration piece designed to show verbal symmetry rather than to convey a message. Ancient graffiti and manuscripts often include puzzles or games, and this may have originally been one such example. The later religious interpretations could then be secondary.

5. Medieval Usage

By the medieval period the SATOR Square was commonly used in popular devotion and folk practice. Medieval manuscripts preserve it in prayerbooks, liturgical books, and collections of blessings. Village churches sometimes carved it near entrances or in cloisters. Its common uses in medieval Europe included: protection against fire; blessing of fields; inscriptions on bread ovens; healing formulas; inscriptions at church thresholds. Whether these practices reflect an ancient tradition or simply medieval creativity is uncertain.



The arrangement of the letters fascinated medieval monks, who produced decorative versions and sometimes interpreted the palindrome allegorically. Because medieval culture often did not sharply distinguish between the symbolic, the artistic, and the devotional, the square's interpretations multiplied.

6. The Square in Modern Scholarship



Most scholars today agree that the square predates Constantine (early 4th century) and that its exact origin cannot be firmly established. The Christian PATER NOSTER derivation is possible but not provable. The palindrome's structure is its most distinctive feature and likely the reason for its preservation.

The SATOR Square remains one of the most intriguing textual relics of the ancient world. Whether originally a Christian cryptogram, a Jewish puzzle, a Roman magical charm, or an accomplished piece of wordplay, it exhibits an extraordinary degree of linguistic and geometric sophistication. Its presence in sites from Pompeii to medieval parish churches testifies to its enduring appeal across cultures and centuries and continues to invite study, interpretation, and wonder.

Images: 1) A modern online poster; 2) The oldest known SATOR square in Pompeii; 3) The Dura-Europos stone; 4) PATERNOSTER interpretation; 5) Sator square on the 8th century facade of a monastery in Abruzzo, Italy; 6) Sator Square found in an educational book on language by Erasmus.

The world before the Christmas Tree

4 December

If you were to step into a European home or church before about the 1800s, you would almost certainly find Christmas greenery, a blazing log on the hearth, or a Nativity scene – but no Christmas tree. The tree, as we know it, is a relatively recent arrival in the long history of Christmas symbols.

Historians generally trace the decorated Christmas tree to 16th-century German-speaking lands, where Christians set up fir trees or simple wooden pyramids inside their homes and hung them with candles and sweets. From there the custom spread slowly. In Britain, it only became fashionable in the mid-19th century, popularised at court by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. Before that, Christmas looked rather different.

Evergreens, holly, ivy and mistletoe — Long before trees came indoors, people in Europe dressed their houses and churches with evergreen plants. By the late Middle Ages, church accounts in England routinely recorded money spent on holly and ivy each winter.

Holly, ivy and other green plants had already appeared in Roman and pre-Christian winter festivals, symbolising life that endures through the dark months. Christians adopted them, adding new meanings: holly came to signify Christ's passion: sharp leaves recalling the crown of thorns and red berries the drops of blood; while ivy could symbolise faithfulness and charity.

From this greenery developed more structured decorations. In Tudor and later England, one of the most popular was the *kissing bough* – a ball or globe made from ash or willow hoops, thickly covered in holly, ivy and other evergreens, often with mistletoe at the bottom. It was hung over a doorway or in the centre of a room as a gesture of hospitality and good cheer. Many historians see it as the forerunner of the modern Christmas wreath.

Fire and the Yule log — Another major symbol was not a plant at all, but fire. Across much of Europe a specially chosen log – the *Yule log* – was brought into the house and burned at Christmas or over the Twelve Days. The earliest firm written evidence comes from the 12th century, describing a “Christmas log” granted as part of a feudal obligation. The name “Yule log” appears in English sources from the 17th century, but the custom is probably older and seems to have been strongest in northern and western Europe, including the Nordic countries, France, parts of Germany and the British Isles.

The log was often large enough to burn slowly for days. In several regions a piece of it was kept to light the next year's log or for protection

against lightning or misfortune. In France and Italy, prayers or blessings accompanied the lighting of the log; in Provence and parts of Tuscany the ceremony was an important family moment on Christmas Eve. By the 19th century the real log was increasingly replaced in France by a log-shaped cake, the *bûche de Noël*, which has survived as a popular dessert even where the original hearth tradition has faded.

Nativity scenes and cribs — A very different kind of decoration grew from the desire to represent the birth of Christ directly. In 1223, St. Francis of Assisi organised what is widely regarded as the first live Nativity scene at Greccio in Italy. From this developed the use of cribs or Nativity sets which became central to Italian Christmas piety and decoration, especially in regions like Naples where elaborate scenes with many figures are still crafted today. (*Fr Gregory and Kris' little village, Montefegatesi, still has over 100 nativity scenes in the streets in December, more than the number of people who live there...*)

From Italy the custom spread widely. In Spain the Nativity scene, known as the *belén* or *pesebre*, has a particularly strong tradition and is displayed not only in churches but in homes, town halls and public squares. The same is true in much of Latin America and Mexico, where the *nacimiento* in the home is often more important than any tree. In many such places, especially in rural areas, you can still find houses that put up a crib and lights but no Christmas tree at all, or only a small one introduced recently under global influence.

Boats instead of trees — In Greece, the Christmas tree was introduced only in the 19th century, when the Bavarian-born King Otto decorated one in his palace; the custom spread more widely only in the 20th century. Older Greek practice, especially on the islands and in coastal regions, was to decorate a boat (*karavaki*), reflecting the seafaring life and the return of sailors at Christmas and New Year. Small illuminated model boats, sometimes hung in homes or set up in squares, are still used today, sometimes alongside a tree and sometimes instead of one.

Stars and lanterns — In the Philippines, a country with a strong Catholic heritage, the most characteristic Christmas decoration is the *parol*, a star-shaped lantern made traditionally from bamboo and paper. It represents the star of Bethlehem, and *parols* of every size hang in windows, streets and churches. While Christmas trees are now common, especially artificial ones, many Filipinos still see the *parol* as the real symbol of the season; in poorer areas where a tree would be costly or impractical, families may have *parols* and a Nativity set but no tree at all.

Vicar

Fr Gregory Lipovsky - vicar@stpaulsweymouth.org - 07796 963703 - The Vicarage, 58 Abbotsbury Road, Weymouth, DT4 0BJ

*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.***

Assistant Priest

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

Fr James Baker - james.baker15971@gmail.com - 07512 591254

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> 07356 256800 (<i>calls, texts, Whats.App</i>) stpweymouth@gmail.com	<u>Parish Office</u> 01305 782757 geofftaylor919@btinternet.com

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