

# The Diocese of Banjul NEWSLETTER

*Incorporating The Catholic Newsletter*



## OUR SAVIOUR IS BORN

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## AID TO THE CHURCH IN NEED PROJECT OFFICER VISITS THE GAMBIA



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**EDITORIAL**



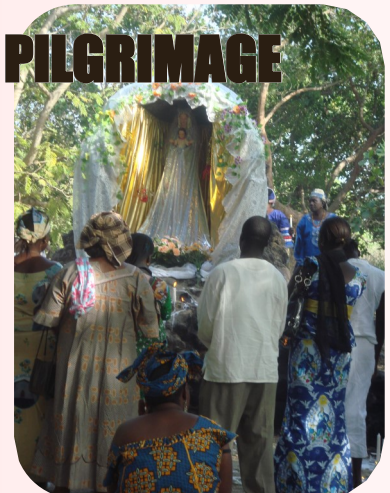
## The Beauty of this Christmas Season

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## KUNKUJANG PILGRIMAGE

**34<sup>th</sup> Annual  
Pilgrimage to the  
Shrine of our  
Lady Queen of Peace  
Saturday, 10<sup>th</sup>  
December 2022**

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# DIOCESE OF BANJUL NEWSLETTER

## *Our Mission and Vision*

**W**e entertain, we encourage, and we enlighten. More so, Diocese of Banjul Newsletter gives you the tools you need to feed your faith life, nurture our society and relationships, care for your family, and bring the light of Christ to others. We connect with our readers through personal stories of triumphs and struggles, joys and challenges, and the lighter side of Christian living.

**D**iocese of Banjul Newsletter is a source of support and encouragement for our society, especially those who love their faith, those who struggle with their faith, and those who long to learn more about the richness of Catholic tradition. More so, we strive to build a healthy society for the welfare of all.

**D**iocese of Banjul Newsletter seeks the positive in the world and in our Church. It emphasizes those things that our society is doing right and well, as a means of inspiring and encouraging others to do the same. It is hope-filled, optimistic, and forward-looking. In the main, the newsletter moves our readers beyond inspiration and toward action, and gives them the information, tools, and resources they need to answer God’s call to holiness and bring the light of Christ to others.



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*First published Palm Sunday 1976*  
**THE DIOCESE OF BANJUL NEWSLETTER**

*Incorporating The Catholic Newsletter*

DECEMBER 2022 - JANUARY 2023 Volume 46, No. 6

Published by The Gambia Pastoral Institute

33 Kairaba Avenue, PMB 296 Serrekunda,  
The Gambia, West Africa

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## EDITORIAL HINT

# The Beauty of This Christmas Season

## Message of Hope to us all who are suffering today

Every Christian in The Gambia ought to know the story that, millennia ago, a distant government ordered the census of a conquered land, so that taxes may be levied. There was also a young mother, great with child, on a difficult journey, no room in the inn and instead, a manger for a bed for the birth of the “Wonderful Counsellor,” the “Prince of Peace,” and the culmination of the prophecies of Isaiah 9:6-7.

Over the past two millennia, the story of Christ’s birth has been embellished, as the word spread across oceans and continents. Over the centuries, new cultures assimilated the story of the baby in the manger and all that it meant to mankind, into their traditions, adding to the celebration of the birth of the Savior. Stripping away the choirs of angels, the shepherds, the wise men, the brass horns and even the Christmas lobster, the story of the nativity of Christ is a story of hope especially those of us facing one manner of difficulty or the other. It is the story of a spark of light that glows brightly in the darkest of times and which calls each of us to follow its light. The light of hope is something our communities, our nation, our unemployed youth, the sick people, starving families, and even our entire world, desperately needs.

We need the annual reminder that, no matter how dark things become, there is always hope. In the cold and cloudy darkness of the coldest weather, it is easy to lose hope. When you see the news of people with no food to eat, no clothes to wear, nor shelter over them, people killed gruesomely and communities ripped apart by storms, it is easy to lose hope. When those whose calling is to lead and unify, instead bicker, fight, divide and abandon us, and day-by-day, the hours of darkness grow longer, and the future does not seem to offer anything but more of the same situation of hopelessness, it is easy to lose sight of the light. In the darkness, we stumble. In the darkness, even the smallest obstacle becomes an unclimbable mountain. In the darkness, we are all alone. “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them, hath the light shined.” (Isaiah 9:2).

The Christmas story of hope speaks to us all in The Gambia, who are facing difficult times. Whether you are a believer, celebrating the birth of the Savior, or someone who thinks it is just a nice story to tell children, it is important to remember that the message of Christmas is a message that things will get better and we cannot lose hope, no matter how cold and dark the night seems to be. Tomorrow, the sun will shine a few moments longer and the day after that, a few moments more. Astronomically, this is a certainty, something that can be measured and studied. What is less quantifiable, but equally as important, is that knowing the darkest days are behind, allows us to endure the challenges that await us on our journey forward. This is why Advent is a season of waiting and hope, and for growing closer to Jesus. The liturgical season of Christmas begins with the vigil Mass on Christmas Eve, and concludes on the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. During this season, we celebrate the birth of Christ into our world and into our hearts, and reflect on the gift of hope that is born with Him, including the fact that He was born to die for us.

**Merry Christmas!**

## THE DIOCESE OF BANJUL NEWSLETTER

### APPEAL FOR SUPPORT

**W**e have a small favor to ask. Many people are beginning to turn to the Diocese of Banjul Newsletter for vital, independent, and quality journalism. Therefore, readers around the world now need to support us financially.

We would like to invite you to join the myriad of readers who have taken the step to support us financially – keeping us open to all, and fiercely independent. In 2021, this support assisted in sustaining our work in diverse spheres. It enabled diligent, fact-checked, authoritative journalism to thrive in an era of falsehood, sensation, hype and breathtaking misinformation and misconception. In 2022, we will be no less active.

With no shareholders or billionaire owner, we can set our own agenda and provide trustworthy journalism that’s free from commercial and political influence, offering a counterweight to the spread of misinformation. When it’s never mattered more, we can investigate and challenge without fear or favour.

Unlike many others, Banjul Newsletter journalism is available for everyone to read, we do this because we believe in information equality. While others commoditize information, we seek to democratize it. Greater numbers of people can keep track of societal issues, understand their impact, and become inspired to take meaningful action.

***If there were ever a time to join us, it is now.***

Every contribution, however big or small, powers our journalism and sustains our future. Support the Banjul Newsletter for as little as any amount.

***If you can, please consider supporting us with a regular amount each month. Thank you.***

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## COVER STORY

## OUR SAVIOUR IS BORN

*Within the Christmas myst story*



Yearly, Christmas provides a perfect occasion to come together with family, or the assorted means of connecting with one another, and celebrate the birth of our savior, Jesus Christ, with lots of prayer, fellowship, food and conversation. However, there are lots more to Christmas. It is a time of year when many Christians encounter claims that pagan deities, predating Jesus Christ, were born on December 25. In popular films, Internet videos, and other media you can find long lists of gods who were supposedly born on the same day. Also, one often hear the Christians claim that the date of Christmas was intended to provide an alternative to pagan celebrations. In some ways it has become a pious legend. We all have questions about Christmas.

**Where did it come from? What is the history? Why is it when it is? What does Christmas mean?**

The word “Christmas” is derived from the Middle English word Cristemasse, which comes from the Old English Cristes Maesse, a phrase which means “Christ’s Mass” and was first recorded in 1038. Over time, it became easier for people to just say “Christmas.” And contrary to popular opinion, the even shorter version, Xmas, does not take “Christ” out of Christmas, the “X” is actually the first letter of the Greek word for Christ (chi). There are perceptions like; is Christmas not a stolen idea from an ancient pagan celebration of Sol Invictus or New Winter Solstice? In fact, the earliest reference to Christmas being celebrated on December 25 was by Hippolytus of Rome, in his Commentary on the Book of Daniel in 204 A.D., which predates any mention of a celebration honoring the pagan god Sol Invictus. It is also worth noting that, December 25

falls at the time when the ancient world celebrated the winter solstice, which historically has been important for agricultural reasons, and, therefore, an opportune time for different celebrations and rituals by many different peoples and cultures of the era. So, different celebrations around that time were common.

**Some Fundamentalist denominations refuse to celebrate Christmas for this reason.** Of all the deities of whom people make, this claim, only three can be found to come close: Saturnalia, Sol Invictus (Unconquered Sun), and Mithras.

Saturnalia was the feast dedicated to the Roman god Saturn. Established around 220 B.C., this feast was originally celebrated on December 17. Eventually, the feast was extended to last an entire week, ending on December 23. The supposed connection to Christmas is based on the proximity of the two festivals to each other.

The feast of Sol Invictus was the attempt by the Roman emperor Aurelian to reform the cult of Sol, the Roman sun god, and reintroduce it to his people, inaugurating Sol’s temple and holding games for the first time in A.D. 274. Not only was this festival not annual, it also cannot be historically documented as having been established on December 25 by Aurelian.

According to inscriptions on candle votives and other ancient works of art, there is a link between Mithras and Sol Invictus. In some cases, it appears the Mithraists believed that Mithras and Sol were two different manifestations of the same god. In others, they appear to be two gods, united as one. These connections are difficult to

understand given our limited knowledge of the Mithraic belief system, but they are important because they help to explain why skeptics claim the birthday of Mithras was celebrated on December 25.

A manuscript known as the Chronography of 354 AD shows the birth of Sol Invictus being celebrated on December 25. Given the fact that the Mithraists equated their god with Sol, in one way or another, it is understandable that they may have appropriated the date as their own.

### **The reason for choosing December 25.**

Although the date of Christ's birth is not given to us in Scripture, there is documented evidence that December 25 was already of some significance to Christians prior to A.D. 354. One example can be found in the writings of Hippolytus of Rome, who explains in his Commentary on the book of Daniel (c. A.D. 204) that the Lord's birth was believed to have occurred on that day. For the first advent of our Lord in the flesh, when he was born in Bethlehem, was December 25th, Wednesday, while Augustus was in his forty-second year, but from Adam, five thousand and five hundred years. He suffered in the thirty-third year, March 25th, Friday, the eighteenth year of Tiberius Caesar, while Rufus and Roubellion were Consuls.

The reference to Adam can be understood, in light of another of Hippolytus' writings, the Chronicon, where he explains that Jesus was born nine months after the anniversary of Creation. According to his calculations, the world was created on the vernal equinox, March 25, which would mean Jesus was born nine months later, on December 25.

Nineteenth-century liturgical scholar, Louis Duchesne, explains that, towards the end of the third century, the custom of celebrating the birthday of Christ had spread throughout the whole Church, but that it was not observed everywhere on the same day. In the West, the birth of Christ was celebrated on December 25, and in the East, on January 6. One is inclined to believe that the Roman Church made choice of the 25th of December.

The consensus among the early Church Fathers seemed to be that Jesus was born sometime between 3 and 2 B.C. Further, the tradition maintained by several of the Church Fathers is that Jesus was indeed born on December 25. As St. Hippolytus of Rome wrote in his Commentary on Daniel 4:23:3, "the first advent of Our Lord in the flesh, when he was born in Bethlehem, was eight days before the Kalends of January, the fourth day (Wednesday) ...." The Kalends was the first day of the month, and eight days before January 1st is December 25th. So, while it is hard to definitively know the exact date of Jesus' birth, the evidence provided based on historical records and early Church tradition, safely points to December 25th as the birthday of Christ.

### **So, why is Christmas celebrated on December 25th?**

Way back in the 5th century, Pope Leo I established the Feast of the Nativity to celebrate the mystery of the Incarnation. But, this did not "create" the Feast Day; we know that many Christians had been celebrating Christmas for centuries before this, too. Rather, just like the dogmas or teachings of the Church on the Eucharist or the Communion of Saints, for example, this was not the invention of a new teaching, but the formal articulation of something that was believed from

the beginning, in some cases, even predating the Bible! So, why did he settle on this date? It actually goes back to a celebration from even earlier in history: Anno Mundi, the traditional celebration of the Creation of the World. While the date of this celebration was different across many ancient calendars, March 25 emerged as the date of its celebration because of its proximity to the spring equinox. Early Christians also adopted March 25th as the date of the Annunciation, the day when an angel announced to Mary that she was pregnant with Jesus, the savior of the world. How are these dates connected? It is because both dates celebrate events when God entered the world: first through the act of Creation and again through the Incarnation. So, nine months after the celebration of this glorious conception, we celebrate Jesus Christ's birth on December 25. Also, that date also aligns with the winter solstice, which marks the time when the days begin to grow longer. How fitting that the birth of Christ, the Light coming into the world, coincides with this day of more light.

**Yes! Christianity itself was illegal across the Roman Empire until the 4th century, and it was not until the 6th century that Emperor Justinian declared Christmas to be a public holiday.** But the history gets even sillier. In a country like the United States, the Puritans objected to the celebration of Christmas because they felt it to be too unbiblical and rooted in too much lewd partying. Their disapproval went so far that Christmas was totally outlawed in Boston from 1659 until the ban was lifted in 1681. By the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, the celebration of Christmas still was not widespread in the United States. As a matter of fact, even churches were closed during Christmas! Alabama was the first state to declare it a public holiday in 1836, and it wasn't officially proclaimed a federal holiday until 1870.

**But today, the holiday is widespread and common — well over 85 percent of the U.S. population celebrates Christmas!**



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## Advent Season



## CHRISTMAS DEPENDS ON A THOUGHTFUL AND FRUITFUL ADVENT

**The four great seasons (Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter) are celebrations of the saints. The grading of these days should tell us about their meaning.**

Solemnities are like Sundays – great days of rejoicing, when the mighty mysteries of God’s love, are once more, revealed. Included as solemnities are the patrons of our own particular parish.

Next in order of festivity are feasts, when we sing *Gloria in excelsis* to remember the apostles, the great martyrs and other renowned saints.

Finally are memorials – days when we rejoice with those ‘who have done God’s will throughout the ages’.

Memorials shouldn’t interrupt our working through the Scripture, day by day, (except in certain rare cases). The saints we celebrate on these days are real and living examples of how to let the Word of God bear fruit in our lives.

### Why the colour purple?

The Church year opens with Advent, season of preparation and expectation.

Purple or violet is a colour of longing, renewal and expectation. In Advent and Lent, and in the Sacrament of Penance, purple should speak to us of what we long and yearn for.

Like a deer longing for running streams (Psalm 42:1), we long for the living God to come to us, to be with us. Our purple is a sign of our yearning for the presence of Christ, the washing clean of sin, and the resurrection of the dead. (In some places, purple is also used at funerals).

Purple is also a sign of kingship and majesty – the One who comes, the One who heals, the One who raises the dead, the King who reigns from the cross.

In Advent, the Church’s liturgy should instil a sense of waiting. On one level, we wait for Christmas and the light and joy that will burst forth in the Midnight Mass. But, on another level, we long for Christ to come again.

The unlit candles on the Advent wreath, and all our Advent celebrations, should lead us to cry in our hearts: ‘Tomorrow there will be an end to the sin of the world, and the Saviour of the world will be our King.’

**Advent is a season rich in themes and symbols.**

**We meditate on:**

- The Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming of Christ.
- The need for repentance, as preached by Christ’s forerunner, John the Baptist.
- Death, judgment, heaven and hell.
- The celebration of Christmas.
- The Second Coming of Jesus, at the end of time.

The history of God’s ancient people, the Jews, is the dominant theme of the Old Testament. The Jewish people,

buffeted by their enemies, bruised by their frequent idolatry, yearned for better times; they yearned, sometimes in desperation, for a Saviour, the promised Messiah. Such heartfelt yearnings infuse many of the Psalms, and they are a common theme of the Old Testament prophets.

During Advent, we share these yearnings as we read at our Sunday and daily Mass, the prophecies of Isaiah concerning the long-awaited Messiah. We read Isaiah and the other prophets in the light of Christ, who is for us – and, we believe, for the whole world – the fulfilment of every yearning for peace and salvation.

**The Forerunner:** The great prophet to whom we turn in Advent is John the Baptist. He is the last – and Jesus tells us, the greatest – of all the prophets. John is the link between the Old Testament and the New. He is the forerunner of Christ, born shortly before him. John is the only prophet to greet Christ in person. He points to Christ as the Lamb of God. Like Christ, he endures an unjust and cruel death.

Isaiah and John are our companions during Advent. They point to Jesus, whose birth at Bethlehem we are soon to celebrate with joy.

We should not neglect our meditation on the four last things: death, judgment, heaven and hell. Two of these ‘Things’ we shall all experience. The third questioning is to be in heaven – or will it be hell?

Christ was born to raise up the fallen human race. We are all sinners, in need of forgiveness and grace. If we want, after our death, to be close to God, to be granted eternal, inexpressible happiness, we need to prepare for Christmas by repenting our sins. That is the message of John.

Advent, like Lent, is a penitential season. What better time to avail ourselves of the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

During Advent, we think also of the Second Coming of Christ – the end of time, as this world knows it.

The first Christians thought that the end of the world was imminent. But, Christ himself tells us that we know neither the day nor the hour. (Mark 13:32)

As individuals, we do know, however, that sooner or later, for each of us, this world will end: we shall die. The prudent Christian behaves as though every day is his or her last. Like a wise maiden, (Matthew 25:1-13) he or she is always prepared.

The preacher at this time of Advent will remind us that Christ’s coming is not only marked at Christmas, but at every Mass, when Christ becomes present on the altar.

And Christ is in everyone we know or will ever know. Because He is God as well as man, He lives in every human heart, whether His presence is known and acknowledged or not. This is why every human life is sacred. Christ dwells in friend and foe, in those known to us, and in every stranger.

No one is ultimately beyond God’s love. That is why Christ was born for us, lived on earth for us, died for us, rose for us, and lives in the Church and the world for us. Acknowledging Christ’s coming, and his continuing presence with us, is what Advent is about. So, let us greet

Him anew and make Him welcome. Let the happy Christmas we look forward to, be preceded by a thoughtful and fruitful Advent.

## CHRISTMAS WREATH

The wreath symbolises truths of Jewish and Christian traditions. The circle, without beginning or end, suggests the God who was, who is, and who will be for ever. The greenery suggests life. The lighting of the candles – one the first week, two in the second week, and so on – suggests the gradual unfolding of God's saving plan for mankind.

A good time for the family to pray by the Advent wreath is just before the evening meal.

Here are simple prayers you may use. You may prefer to use your own words.

### Blessing the wreath

O GOD, by whose Word all things are made holy, bless this wreath and grant that we who use it may prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ. Amen.

### First week: one purple candle is lit.

God of Abraham and Sarah, and all the patriarchs of old, you are our Father, too. Your love is revealed to us in Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of David. Help us in preparing to celebrate His birth, to make our hearts ready for Your Holy Spirit to make His home among us. We ask this through Jesus Christ, the Light that is coming into the world.

Lord Jesus, Light of the world, born in David's city of Bethlehem, born like him to be a King, be born in our hearts this Christmas, and be born in our hearts today.

Suggested readings: Isaiah 7:10-14. Isaiah 11:1-10. Matthew 1:18-24. Luke 1:26-38.

### Second week: two purple candles are lit.

God our Father, You spoke to the prophets of a Saviour who would bring everlasting peace. You helped them to spread the joyful message of His coming kingdom. Help us, as we prepare to celebrate our Saviour's birth, to share with those around us, the good news of Your power and love. We ask this through Jesus the Lord, the Light who is coming into the world.

Lord Jesus, Light of the world, the prophets said You would bring peace and save Your people in trouble. Give peace to our hearts at Christmas time and show all the world, God's love.

Suggested readings: Isaiah 2:1-5. Micah 5:2. Matthew 2:1-2, 9-11, Matthew 3:1-6.



### Third week: two purple candles and the rose-coloured candle are lit.

God our Father, You gave to Zechariah and Elizabeth in their old age a son called John. He grew up strong in spirit, prepared the people for the coming of the Lord, and baptised them in the River Jordan to wash away their sins. Help us who have been baptised into Christ to be ready to welcome Him in our hearts, and to grow strong in faith by the power of the Spirit. We ask this through Jesus Christ, the Light who is coming into the world.

Lord Jesus, Light of the world, John told the people to prepare, for You were very near. As Christmas grows closer, day by day, help us to be ready to welcome You now.

Suggested readings: Malachi 3:1-5. Romans 8:18-25. Luke 1:5-17

### Fourth week: all four candles are lit.

God our Father, the angel Gabriel told the Virgin Mary that she was to be the mother of Your Son. Though Mary was afraid, she responded to Your call with joy. Help us, whom You have called to serve You, to share like Mary, in Your great work of bringing to our world Your love and healing. We ask this through Jesus Christ, the Light who is coming into the world.

Jesus Christ, Light of the world, blessed is Gabriel who brought good news; and blessed is Mary, Your mother and ours. Bless Your Church preparing for Christmas, and bless us Your children who long for your coming.

Suggested readings: Isaiah 52:7-10. Malachi 3:1-5. Romans 8:18-25. Revelation 21:1-4.

## The Pope's Prayer Intentions

### December 2022 - For volunteer not-for-profit organisations

We pray that volunteer non-profit organisations committed to human development find people dedicated to the common good and ceaselessly seek out new paths to international cooperation.

### January 2023 - For educators

We pray that educators may be credible witnesses, teaching fraternity rather than competition, and helping the youngest and most vulnerable, above all.

## AID TO THE CHURCH IN NEED PROJECT OFFICER VISITS THE GAMBIA

**M**r. Ulrich Kny, the Head of Section III of Aid to the Church in Need Desk responsible for The Gambia and other African Countries visited the Diocese of Banjul from Saturday, 26<sup>th</sup> November to Wednesday, 30<sup>th</sup> November. During this time, he was able to visit closed projects, as well as ongoing ones.

His visit took him to the different communities and regions of the country. At the GPI, he toured the Communications Department (Radio Veritas), and saw the different activities undertaken by the unit, against the backdrop of the challenges to evangelize, in a predominantly Muslim country.

The GPI visit provided him firsthand knowledge and information on priests, sisters, and catechists, and the opportunity to see the mini-printing press, which their office funded, a couple of years ago.





# ENLARGE THE SPACE OF YOUR TENT” (Is 54:2)

## Synod document calls for greater inclusion



**C**ardinal Mario Grech, centre, Secretary-General of the Synod of Bishops, speaks at a news conference at the Vatican, October 27, to present the document for the continental phase of the Synod on synodality.

Around the world, listening sessions for the Synod of Bishops gave many participants a sense of finally being listened to, but they also raised questions about how to promote greater inclusion in the Church while staying true to eternal Church teaching.

Two of the issues raised most often in reports sent to the Vatican were the need to respect and value the contributions women make to the Church and the need to face “the impact of a lack of trust and credibility resulting from the abuse crisis,” according to the working document for the synod’s continental stage.

Titled ‘Enlarge the Space of Your Tent’ – the Lord’s command to the people of Israel in the Book of Isaiah – the document said, “This is how many reports envision the Church: an expansive, but not homogeneous dwelling, capable of sheltering all, but open, letting in and out, and moving toward embracing the Father and all of humanity.”

The released document is the result of a group reflection on the syntheses of synod discussions submitted by 112 of the world’s 114 bishops’ conference, all 15 Eastern churches, 17 of the 23 dicasteries of the Roman Curia, the men’s and women’s international unions of superiors general, dozens of Catholic associations and more than 1,000 individuals, it said.

The general secretariat of the synod chose an international group of laity, religious, priests and bishops to read the submissions, pray about them and then draft a document that would help participants in the next phase reflect on the faith, hopes and concerns witnessed to in the reports. The document was approved by the cardinals and bishops belonging to the synod’s general council.

What emerged from the reports, it said, “is a profound re-appropriation of the common dignity of all the baptised. This is the authentic pillar of a synodal Church and the theological foundation of a unity which is capable of resisting the push toward homogenisation. This enables us to continue to promote and make good use of the variety of charisms that the Spirit with unpredictable abundance pours out on the faithful.”

Those who most often feel unwelcome in the Church or undervalued, it said, include: women, young people, people with disabilities, the poor, those who are divorced and civilly remarried, single parents, those in polygamous marriages and members of the LGBT communities.

Responding to experiences of exclusion and discrimination shared by Catholics with disabilities, the document said that “in spite of its own teachings, the Church is in danger of imitating the way society casts them aside.”

Reflecting the central place of the Eucharist in the life of the Church, it said most submissions included a call for greater participation by all Catholics in the liturgy, working to ensure that it is less “concentrated on the celebrant,” involves more young people and women, including in preaching, and is more reflective of local cultures.

At the same time, the document also noted that in several reports some participants in the local listening sessions “lamented” Pope Francis’ decision to limit celebrations of the Latin Mass according to the rite used before the Second Vatican Council.

“The quality of homilies is almost unanimously reported as a problem,” it said.

But the document also highlighted a common desire to find solutions to various forms of “sacramental deprivation,” including for people in remote towns and villages without a priest, as well as for civilly remarried Catholics and those in polygamous marriages.

While the reports were not “against priests or the ministerial priesthood,” the document said, many of them cited “clericalism” as an obstacle to being a “synodal Church,” one where all the baptised share responsibility for the life of the community and for its mission of spreading the Gospel.

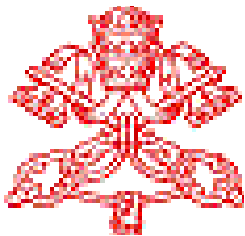
“Clericalism is seen as a form of spiritual impoverishment, a deprivation of the true goods of ordained ministry, and a culture that isolates clergy and harms the laity,” it said. Clericalism produces “rigidity, attachment to legalistic power and an exercise of authority that is power rather than service.”

In synod listening sessions around the world, participants noted that women are the majority of Catholics regularly attending the liturgy and staffing most paid and volunteer parish activities, yet it is mostly men who make the decisions in the Church.

“Many reports ask that the Church continue its discernment in relation to a range of specific questions: the active role of women in the governing structures of Church bodies, the possibility for women with adequate training to preach in parish settings, and a female diaconate,” the document said. “Much greater diversity of opinion was expressed on the subject of priestly ordination for women, which some reports call for, while others consider it a closed issue.”

Between January and March 2023, smaller groups of Church representatives are to meet on a continental or regional level; organised by bishops’ conferences, the groups are to include bishops, priests, religious and laypeople to read the document, pray about it and discuss which issues raised in it are most important and urgent for Catholics in their region to address, in order to increase participation, a sense of communion and a commitment to missionary outreach.

Each continental gathering will produce a document of about 20 pages, which will in turn form the working document for the Synod of Bishops, due to be held in Rome next October.



# SECRETARIA GENERALIS SYNODI

## Brief FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) 25.10.2022

### What is the Working Document for the Continental Stage (DCS)?

- ◆ The DCS is a text of the General Secretariat of the Synod.
- ◆ It is **the fruit of listening and discernment** that returns to all local Churches that which emerged from local/national syntheses. It is intended **to enable dialogue between local Churches** and between the local Church and the universal Church. Therefore, **it is neither a summary of the syntheses nor a mere chronicle** of the experience of listening and discernment carried out at the local/national level. **Nor is it the report of a sociological analysis or a roadmap** with goals or objectives to be achieved with precise operational indicators.
- ◆ It is a **working document** that seeks to bring out the voices of the People of God, with their insights, their questions, their disagreements. It is therefore **not to be considered a document of the Church's Magisterium**.
- ◆ This is the **new starting point** for the next stage of listening and discernment provided by the Continental Stage.
- ◆ Although **it is a theological document**, it does not intend to offer a complete theological exposition. **Nor is it a list of so-called 'sensitive' issues or topics**. Rather, the document aims **at setting out a framework** for discerning these issues in the next stages of the synod.

### How and who drafted the DCS?

- ◆ It is a **working document** produced from the Syntheses sent to the General Secretariat of the Synod following the local consultation of the People of God in the first stage of the Synodal Process (October 2021 - 15 August 2022).
- ◆ The drafting work began with invited experts reading the contributions received by the General Secretariat of the Synod. They then met for almost two weeks with the actual drafting group, comprised by the General Secretary, the Under Secretaries, members of the Coordination Committee, several officials of the Synod Secretariat together with the General Relator of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. This group was then joined by the Cardinals and Bishops, who are members of the Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat. Together, they worked in an atmosphere of prayer and discernment to share the fruits of their reading for the drafting of this Document.
- ◆ It was drafted **simultaneously in two languages** by a drafting team, which was accompanied in their work by a group of invited experts: men and women, bishops, priests, consecrated men and women, laymen and women, from all continents and with very diverse disciplinary skills.
- ◆ It was approved by the members of the Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod.
- ◆ **The DCS is rich in quotes, but not all realities (bishops' conferences, ecclesial bodies...) are represented, nor all topics. What does this choice mean?**
- ◆ The quotations were chosen because they briefly and happily condense passages that recur in many other syntheses.

- ◆ The quotations are intended to give an idea of the richness of the material received, allowing the voice of the People of God from every part of the world to resound.
- ◆ They are not to be interpreted as support for the positions of a particular area of the globe, nor as a mere representation of geographical variety, although an attempt has been made to ensure a certain balance in terms of the provenance of the sources.

### On 16 October 2022, the Holy Father announced that the celebration of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will take place in two sessions: the first from 4 to 29 October, 2023, the second in October 2024. Why this extension of the synod process?

Because the diocesan stage was really a time of true listening! At the beginning of the process, while the General Secretariat of the Synod was planning it, we did not know how the people of God would react or what they would say. Therefore, we could not have known then what the DCS would contain. Shortly before the announcement at the Angelus on 16 October, the Holy Father had the opportunity to read the DCS and discuss it with the Synod Secretariat. His decision to hold the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in two sessions instead of one, was made as a result of that meeting, taking into account the contents of the DCS.

This is because the DCS captures a deep desire on the part of the People of God around the world for a more synodal way of proceeding in the Church at all levels. In turn, this sentiment calls for a thorough review regarding the way decisions are made and the ways in which the People of God do or do not participate in the Church's life and mission. The DCS also asks the Church to consider a number of issues and questions — concerning pastoral ministries and practices — that will inevitably be the subject of disagreement and discussion.

In Church discernment processes, there is an almost proportional link between the time devoted to deliberation and reflection compared to the scope and importance of the decisions to be made. Major and complex decisions require more time than minor and relatively simple ones. Likewise, important issues require a greater level of involvement and participation by the whole Church. If discernment is too short, there is the risk that the discussions become artificially polarised and incorporate insufficient participation. A two-phase Synod, as was already experienced at the Assemblies on the Family (October 2014-October 2015), allows adequate time for honest discussion, including disagreement, but also a subsequent period of reflection and discernment at the level of particular Churches. For this reason, the Pope and the Synod Secretariat considered it right to conduct the Synod of Bishops in two assemblies.

It is very important that synod processes involve listening to all of God's people at every stage of the process, not just at the beginning. In this way, there will be plenty of time for further consultation and discussion by the local churches between the two sessions.

*(To be continued in subsequent issues)*

## A short story about Santa Claus and Vital Lessons

### *Where does Santa fit in Christmas and who is St. Nicholas?*

**S**anta Claus has been around for a while, but his popularity really increased in the first half of the 20th century, largely due to an ad campaign by Coca-Cola. Santa Claus comes from the Dutch, Sinterklass, which translates to St. Nicholas, who was a fourth-century Bishop of Myra.

He was born into a super wealthy family and used his inheritance to perform acts of charity.

The story behind Santa goes back to the third century during the time of St. Nicholas, a monk, even though some sources state that he was a bishop.

Nicholas was born around 280 A.D. in Patara, in modern-day Turkey. One story tells that he kept a widower from selling his three daughters into prostitution by tossing a bag with golden coins into their home one Christmas night. He did this for several more years, until the widower caught him and discovered it was Bishop Nicholas. St. Nicholas, one of the endearing saints revered by Western and Eastern rite Catholics and Orthodox, has many fascinating facts connected to his life that we should be aware of, to keep Christmas in our heart, throughout the year. When Nicholas was born, his parents were serving the needs of the sick. They contracted the same disease as the sick and died. Being the only child, he inherited everything. Father Marquis says St. Nicholas was the first of the saints one can consider a philanthropist, in the way he designated his wealth to be used for certain things, at certain times. Saint Nicholas's compassion for the poor, marginalized and, in particular, children, and especially providing aid anonymously to those in greatest need, became so legendary that it never faded over the centuries, but inspired others, and was imitated especially around Christmas in many countries.

He got to be Santa Claus, thanks to a corruption of the Dutch way of referring to him as "Sinterklaas." The Dutch brought "Sinterklaas" with them to North America in 1621 when they founded New Amsterdam, on the tip of Manhattan. English speaking settlers later corrupted the name, which evolved into "Santa Claus." The inspiration of St. Nicholas led French nuns, during the middle Ages, to start the tradition of bringing anonymous gifts, under the cover of night, to needy families and their children on December 5, St. Nicholas Eve. The next morning, the feast of St. Nicholas, the poor families would wake up to



discover food, clothing, food treats and some modest money assistance.

When the poor tried to find out who their benefactor was, they got the answer, "It must have been St. Nicholas." St. Nicholas's simple act of anonymously delivering those three bags of gold coins that night long ago, became an annual tradition that spread rapidly throughout Christian Europe. Since the beloved bishop Nicholas was the Patron Saint of Children, the gifts weren't limited to the poor, but included good girls and boys. Oranges, a popular treat as a stocking filler even in North America, into the

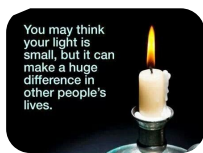
later part of the 20th century, was traditionally given by Sinterklaas to children in Holland. The oranges recall the three round purses containing gold coins

St. Nicholas threw into the window of the destitute family on those three consecutive nights to deliver them from poverty. The same event was recalled in the chocolate coins wrapped in gold foil that were given to children, and still can be seen today in North America. Candy canes have also been a staple in America and are associated with Santa Claus because they really derive from the crozier, the bishop's staff, of Sinterklaas, or St. Nicholas.

St. Nicholas spent seven long, hard years, tortured and imprisoned for his faith in Christ, under the Diocletian Persecution, until the first Christian emperor, Constantine issued the Edict of Milan in A.D. 313 that gave religious liberty to all Christians. The Emperor of Constantinople's niece, Princess Theophano, is considered by historians to be the person most responsible for bringing St. Nicholas to the heart of the Western Roman Empire. She brought a mosaic icon of St. Nicholas for her future husband, Emperor Otto II, as a wedding gift, when they were married by Pope John XIII on April 14, 972, in old Saint Peter's Basilica, Rome. The holy icon of St. Nicholas that she brought with her for the gift is now kept at St. Johann Baptist Church in Burtscheid, Aachen, Germany.

One wonderful reminder to us about St. Nicholas is that, while the Christmas Spirit is commonly associated with him, Christians should recognize that the Spirit of Christmas is actually the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity: the Holy Spirit. Because a humble maiden in Nazareth was open to the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14);

a reality that was proclaimed by “a multitude of the heavenly host” (Lk. 2:13) on that first Christmas. Faith-filled ‘St. Nicholases’ and Santa Clauses should recognize that we too must be open to the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit in order that God may take on a human nature within each one of us, who have been clothed with Christ’ (Galatians 3:27) at Baptism: No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and His love is brought to full expression in us’ (1 John 4:12).



So, let your light shine before others that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven’ (Matthew 5:16).



## THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

by *Giovanni Battista Tiepolo*

**The Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary is one of the most prominent Marian feasts in the Catholic**

**Church, but also a tricky one, when it comes to relationships with other Churches. Even the other traditions that venerate the Mother of God are hesitant to refer to her conception as “immaculate,” although there is a long history of this teaching within western Catholicism. The origins of this teaching, and the solemn feast associated with it, are complicated. Different traditions have varying interpretations about Our Lady and her relationship to sin, but they all share the view that the woman chosen to be the Mother of God was exceptionally pure and holy.**

In 1854, Pope Pius IX declared the teaching about Our Lady’s immaculate conception to be dogma, giving it the highest level of authority by making it an infallible teaching. This seems rather late in the course of Church history, but the Assumption of Our Lady wouldn’t become dogma until 1950, nearly a century later. Important theological teachings are sometimes present in the Church for a long time before they become official doctrine. The idea that the Blessed Virgin Mary was conceived without sin has existed for centuries, but it was not necessarily present from the earliest days of Christianity. It developed over time in relation to other theological teachings, in particular, the teaching of original sin.

A feast day celebrating the conception of the Mother of God is thought to have begun in the East from around the 7th or 8th centuries. It was not specified at this point that Our Lady’s conception was “immaculate,” meaning that she was without original sin from the moment she was conceived in her mother’s womb. St. Augustine of Hippo and his understanding of original sin is not nearly as prominent in Eastern Christianity as it is in the West, so it wasn’t until the feast day made its way into the Western Church that the notion of the Immaculate Conception began to develop.

According to the 1962 St. Joseph Daily Missal, the Feast of the Conception of Our Lady entered the Western Church around the 11th century, when it first appeared in England. From there, it spread to France, Germany, and throughout Europe. By the 14th century, it was on the calendar of the Universal Church. I don’t know exactly

when Our Lady’s conception began to be thought of as “immaculate” in the West, but it’s safe to assume it developed out of the influence of St. Augustine and the idea that the Mother of God was exempt from the hereditary sin originating from Adam’s disobedience.

Since the Eastern Church doesn’t share the same view of original sin as being a stain on the soul that is biologically transmitted, they don’t refer to the Virgin Mary’s conception as “immaculate.” As Bishop Kallistos (Timothy) Ware explains in his book, *The Orthodox Church*, the Mother of God is called All-Holy, Immaculate, and Spotless in Eastern Orthodoxy, which seems to come close to Catholic Marian dogma. The Orthodox Church rejects the official Catholic teaching on the Immaculate Conception only because it seems to separate the Virgin Mary from the rest of humanity and the other righteous men and women from the scriptures in the way God preserved her from sin. In the Eastern view, identifying Our Lady’s conception as “immaculate” isn’t heretical, just unnecessary.

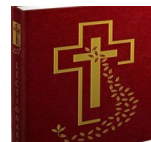
One of the most influential events that affirmed the teaching of the Immaculate Conception in the Catholic Church was the apparition of Our Lady of Lourdes to Bernadette Soubirous in 1858. In one of her appearances, Our Lady declared, “I am the Immaculate Conception,” a statement Bernadette did not really understand, but it seemed to confirm the validity of her visions, considering she was thought to be a simple-minded girl without much knowledge of Church teaching. Since the Immaculate Conception had become a recognized dogmatic teaching only a few years before the Lourdes apparitions, it is possible that Bernadette had had some awareness of it and subconsciously internalized it somehow. Or perhaps, as most Catholics believe, Our Lady really did speak to St. Bernadette.

The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary breaks with the penitential simplicity of the Advent season to give us a chance to celebrate the Mother of God, through whom the incarnation of the Word of God was made possible. It celebrates her nature as a holy and sinless woman from the time of her conception, and Our Lady gives us a model of a life without sin in conformity with God’s will. As she is such an important figure in the Advent and Christmas seasons, the feast of her conception allows us to honour her as we prepare for the coming of her Son.

*Source: Wikimedia Commons*

## Daily Mass Readings

## December 2022 &amp; January 2023

**Thursday, 1 December, 2022**

Advent Weekday

First Reading: [Isaiah 26](#): 1-6Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 118](#): 1 & 8-9, 19-21, 25-27aAlleluia: [Isaiah 55](#): 6Gospel: [Matthew 7](#): 21, 24-27**Friday, 2 December, 2022**

Advent Weekday

First Reading: [Isaiah 29](#): 17-24Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 27](#): 1, 4, 13-14Gospel: [Matthew 9](#): 27-31**Saturday, 3 December, 2022**

Francis Xavier, Priest, Missionary Obligatory Memorial

First Reading: [Isaiah 30](#): 19-21, 23-26Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 147](#): 1-2, 3-4, 5-6Alleluia: [Isaiah 33](#): 22Gospel: [Matthew 9](#): 35 – 10: 1, 5a, 6-8**Sunday, 4 December, 2022**

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading: [Isaiah 11](#): 1-10Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 72](#): 1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17Second Reading: [Romans 15](#): 4-9Alleluia: [Luke 3](#): 4, 6Gospel: [Matthew 3](#): 1-12**Monday, 5 December, 2022**

Advent Weekday

First Reading: [Isaiah 35](#): 1-10Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 85](#): 9ab & 10, 11-12, 13-14Gospel: [Luke 5](#): 17-26**Tuesday, 6 December, 2022**

Advent Weekday / Nicholas, Bishop

First Reading: [Isaiah 40](#): 1-11Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 96](#): 1-2, 3 & 10ac, 11-12, 13Gospel: [Matthew 18](#): 12-14**Wednesday, 7 December, 2022**

Ambrose, Bishop, Doctor Obligatory Memorial

First Reading: [Isaiah 40](#): 25-31Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 103](#): 1-2, 3-4, 8 & 10Gospel: [Matthew 11](#): 28-30**Thursday, 8 December 2022**

IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE Blessed Virgin MARY Solemnity, Holy Day of Obligation

First Reading: [Genesis 3](#): 9-15, 20Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 98](#): 1, 2-3ab, 3cd-4Second Reading: [Ephesians 1](#): 3-6, 11-12Alleluia: [Luke 1](#): 28Gospel: [Luke 1](#): 26-38**Friday, 9 December, 2022**

Advent Weekday / Juan Diego, Hermit

First Reading: [Isaiah 48](#): 17-19Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 1](#): 1-2, 3, 4 & 6Gospel: [Matthew 11](#): 16-19**Saturday, 10 December, 2022**

Advent Weekday

First Reading: [Sirach 48](#): 1-4, 9-11Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 80](#): 2ac and 3b, 15-16, 18-19Alleluia: [Luke 3](#): 4, 6Gospel: [Matthew 17](#): 9a, 10-13**Sunday, 11 December, 2022**

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First Reading: [Isaiah 35](#): 1-6a, 10Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 146](#): 6-7, 8-9a, 9bc-10Second Reading: [James 5](#): 7-10Alleluia: [Isaiah 61](#): 1Gospel: [Matthew 11](#): 2-11**Monday, 12 December, 2022**

Our Lady of Guadalupe Feast

First Reading: [Zechariah 2](#): 14-17 or [Revelation 11](#): 19a; 12: 1-6a, 10abResponsorial Psalm: [Judith 13](#): 18bcd, 19Gospel: [Luke 1](#): 26-38 or [Luke 1](#): 39-47**Tuesday, 13 December, 2022**

Lucy, Virgin, Martyr Obligatory Memorial

First Reading: [Zephaniah 3](#): 1-2, 9-13Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 34](#): 2-3, 6-7, 17-18, 19 and 23Gospel: [Matthew 21](#): 28-32**Wednesday, 14 December, 2022**

John of the Cross, Priest, Doctor Obligatory Memorial

First Reading: [Isaiah 45](#): 6c-8, 18, 21c-25Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 85](#): 9ab and 10, 11-12, 13-14Alleluia: [Isaiah 40](#): 9-10Gospel: [Luke 7](#): 18b-23**Thursday, 15 December, 2022**

Advent Weekday

First Reading: [Isaiah 54](#): 1-10Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 30](#): 2 & 4, 5-6, 11-12a & 13bAlleluia: [Luke 3](#): 4, 6Gospel: [Luke 7](#): 24-30**Friday, 16 December, 2022**

Advent Weekday

First Reading: [Isaiah 56](#): 1-3a, 6-8Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 67](#): 2-3, 5, 7-8Gospel: [John 5](#): 33-36**Saturday, 17 December, 2022**

Advent Weekday (O Sapientia)

First Reading: [Genesis 49](#): 2, 8-10Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 72](#): 1-2, 3-4ab, 7-8, 17Gospel: [Matthew 1](#): 1-17**Sunday, 18 December, 2022**

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT (O Adonai)

First Reading: [Isaiah 7](#): 10-14Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 24](#): 1-2, 3-4, 5-6Second Reading: [Romans 1](#): 1-7Alleluia: [Matthew 1](#): 23Gospel: [Matthew 1](#): 18-24

**Monday, 19 December, 2022**

Advent Weekday (O Radix Jesse)  
 First Reading: [Judges 13](#): 2-7, 24-25a  
 Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 71](#): 3-4a, 5-6ab, 16-17  
 Gospel: [Luke 1](#): 5-25

**Tuesday, 20 December, 2022**

Advent Weekday (O Clavis David)  
 First Reading: [Isaiah 7](#): 10-14  
 Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 24](#): 1-2, 3-4ab, 5-6  
 Gospel: [Luke 1](#): 26-38

**Wednesday, 21 December, 2022**

Advent Weekday (O Oriens) / Peter Canisius, Priest, Doctor  
 First Reading: [Songs 2](#): 8-14 or [Zephaniah 3](#): 14-18a  
 Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 33](#): 2-3, 11-12, 20-21  
 Gospel: [Luke 1](#): 39-45

**Thursday, 22 December, 2022**

Advent Weekday (O Rex Gentium)  
 First Reading: [First Samuel 1](#): 24-28  
 Responsorial Psalm: [First Samuel 2](#): 1, 4-5, 6-7, 8abcd  
 Gospel: [Luke 1](#): 46-56

**Friday, 23 December, 2022**

Advent Weekday (O Emmanuel) / John of Kanty, Priest  
 First Reading: [Malachi 3](#): 1-4, 23-24  
 Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 25](#): 4-5ab, 8-9, 10 & 14  
 Gospel: [Luke 1](#): 57-66

**Saturday, 24 December, 2022**

Advent Weekday  
 First Reading: [Second Samuel 7](#): 1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16  
 Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 89](#): 2-3, 4-5, 27 & 29  
 Gospel: [Luke 1](#): 67-79

**Sunday, 25 December, 2022**

THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD Solemnity / Vigil  
 First Reading: [Isaiah 62](#): 1-5  
 Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 89](#): 4-5, 16-17, 27, 29  
 Second Reading: [Acts 13](#): 16-17, 22-25  
 Gospel: [Matthew 1](#): 1-25

**Sunday, 25 December, 2022**

THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD Solemnity / Midnight  
 First Reading: [Isaiah 9](#): 1-6  
 Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 96](#): 1-2, 2-3, 11-12, 13  
 Second Reading: [Titus 2](#): 11-14  
 Alleluia: [Luke 2](#): 10-11  
 Gospel: [Luke 2](#): 1-14,

**Sunday, 25 December, 2022**

THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD Solemnity / Dawn  
 First Reading: [Isaiah 62](#): 11-12  
 Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 97](#): 1, 6, 11-12  
 Second Reading: [Titus 3](#): 4-7  
 Alleluia: [Luke 2](#): 14  
 Gospel: [Luke 2](#): 15-20

**Sunday, 25 December, 2022**

THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD Solemnity / Day  
 First Reading: [Isaiah 52](#): 7-10  
 Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 98](#): 1, 2-3, 3-4, 5-6  
 Second Reading: [Hebrews 1](#): 1-6  
 Gospel: [John 1](#): 1-18

**Monday, 26 December, 2022**

Stephen, proto Martyr Feast  
 First Reading: [Acts 6](#): 8-10; 7: 54-59

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 31](#): 3cd-4, 6 & 8ab, 16bc & 17  
 Alleluia: [Psalms 118](#): 26a, 27a  
 Gospel: [Matthew 10](#): 17-22

**Tuesday, 27 December, 2022**

John, Apostle, Evangelist Feast  
 First Reading: [First John 1](#): 1-4  
 Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 97](#): 1-2, 5-6, 11-12  
 Gospel: [John 20](#): 1a & 2-8

**Wednesday, 28 December, 2022**

Holy Innocents, Martyrs Feast  
 First Reading: [First John 1](#): 5 – 2: 2  
 Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 124](#): 2-3, 4-5, 7b-8  
 Gospel: [Matthew 2](#): 13-18

**Thursday, 29 December, 2022**

Christmas Weekday / Thomas Becket, Bishop, Martyr  
 First Reading: [First John 2](#): 3-11  
 Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 96](#): 1-2a, 2b-3, 5b-6  
 Alleluia: [Luke 2](#): 32  
 Gospel: [Luke 2](#): 22-35

**Friday, 30 December, 2022**

John, Apostle, Evangelist Feast  
 First Reading: [Sirach 3](#): 2-6, 12-14 or [Colossians 3](#): 12-21 or [Colossians 3](#): 12-17  
 Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 128](#): 1-2, 3, 4-5  
 Alleluia: [Colossians 3](#): 15a, 16a  
 Gospel: [Matthew 2](#): 13-15, 19-23

**Saturday, 31 December, 2022**

Christmas Weekday / Sylvester I, Pope  
 First Reading: [First John 2](#): 18-21  
 Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 96](#): 1-2, 11-12, 13  
 Alleluia: [John 1](#): 14a, 12a  
 Gospel: [John 1](#): 1-18

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**Sunday, 1 January, 2023**

Mary, Mother of God Solemnity (Octave of Christmas)  
 First Reading: [Numbers 6](#): 22-27  
 Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 67](#): 2-3, 5, 6, 8  
 Second Reading: [Galatians 4](#): 4-7  
 Alleluia: [Hebrews 1](#): 1-2  
 Gospel: [Luke 2](#): 16-21

**Monday, 2 January, 2023**

Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen, Bishops, Doctors Obligatory Memorial  
 First Reading: [First John 2](#): 22-28  
 Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 98](#): 1, 2-3ab, 3cd-4  
 Alleluia: [Hebrews 1](#): 1-2  
 Gospel: [John 1](#): 19-28

**Tuesday, 3 January, 2023**

Christmas Weekday/ Holy Name of Jesus  
 First Reading: [First John 2](#): 29 – 3: 6  
 Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 98](#): 1, 3cd-4, 5-6  
 Alleluia: [John 1](#): 14a, 12a  
 Gospel: [John 1](#): 29-34

**Wednesday, 4 January, 2023**

Elizabeth Ann Seton, Religious Obligatory Memorial  
 First Reading: [First John 3](#): 7-10  
 Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 98](#): 1, 7-8, 9  
 Alleluia: [Hebrews 1](#): 1-2  
 Gospel: [John 1](#): 35-42

**Thursday, 5 January, 2023**

John Neumann, Bishop Obligatory Memorial

First Reading: [First John 3](#): 11-21Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 100](#): 1b-2, 3, 4, 5Gospel: [John 1](#): 43-51**Friday, 6 January, 2023**

Christmas Weekday/ André Bessette, Religious

First Reading: [First John 5](#): 5-13Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 147](#): 12-13, 14-15, 19-20Alleluia: [Mark 9](#): 7Gospel: [Mark 1](#): 7-11 or [Luke 3](#): 23-38**Saturday, 7 January, 2023**

Christmas Weekday/ Raymond of Peñafort, Priest

First Reading: [First John 5](#): 14-21Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 149](#): 1-2, 3-4, 5 & 6a & 9bAlleluia: [Luke 7](#): 16Gospel: [John 2](#): 1-11**Sunday, 8 January, 2023**

Epiphany of the Lord Solemnity

First Reading: [Isaiah 60](#): 1-6Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 72](#): 1-2, 7-8, 10-11, 12-13Second Reading: [Ephesians 3](#): 2-3a, 5-6Alleluia: [Matthew 2](#): 2Gospel: [Matthew 2](#): 1-12**Monday, 9 January, 2023**

Baptism of the Lord Feast

First Reading: [Isaiah 42](#): 1-4, 6-7Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 29](#): 1-2, 3-4, 9-10Second Reading: [Acts 10](#): 34-38Alleluia: [Mark 9](#): 7Gospel: [Matthew 3](#): 13-17**Tuesday, 10 January, 2023**

Ordinary Weekday

First Reading: [Hebrews 2](#): 5-12Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 8](#): 2ab & 5, 6-7, 8-9Alleluia: [First Thessalonians 2](#): 13Gospel: [Mark 1](#): 21-28**Wednesday, 11 January, 2023**

Ordinary Weekday

First Reading: [Hebrews 2](#): 14-18Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 105](#): 1-2, 3-4, 6-7, 8-9Alleluia: [John 10](#): 27Gospel: [Mark 1](#): 29-39**Thursday, 12 January, 2023 –**

Ordinary Weekday

First Reading: [Hebrews 3](#): 7-14Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 95](#): 6-7c, 8-9, 10-11Alleluia: [Matthew 4](#): 23Gospel: [Mark 1](#): 40-45**Friday, 13 January, 2023**

Ordinary Weekday/ Hilary, Bishop, Doctor

First Reading: [Hebrews 4](#): 1-5, 11Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 78](#): 3 & 4bc, 6c-7, 8Alleluia: [Luke 7](#): 16Gospel: [Mark 2](#): 1-12**Saturday, 14 January, 2023**

Ordinary Weekday/ Optional Memorial of the Bl. Virgin Mary

First Reading: [Hebrews 4](#): 12-16Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 19](#): 8, 9, 10, 15Alleluia: [Luke 4](#): 18Gospel: [Mark 2](#): 13-17**Sunday, 15 January, 2023**

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: [Isaiah 49](#): 3, 5-6Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 40](#): 2, 4, 7-8, 8-9, 10Second Reading: [First Corinthians 1](#): 1-3Alleluia: [John 1](#): 14a, 12aGospel: [John 1](#): 29-34**Monday, 16 January, 2023**

Ordinary Weekday

First Reading: [Hebrews 5](#): 1-10Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 110](#): 1, 2, 3, 4Alleluia: [Hebrews 4](#): 12Gospel: [Mark 2](#): 18-22**Tuesday, 17 January, 2023**

Anthony, Abbot Obligatory Memorial

First Reading: [Hebrews 6](#): 10-20Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 111](#): 1-2, 4-5, 9 & 10cAlleluia: [Ephesians 1](#): 17-18Gospel: [Mark 2](#): 23-28**Wednesday, 18 January, 2023**

Ordinary Weekday

First Reading: [Hebrews 7](#): 1-3, 15-17Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 110](#): 1, 2, 3, 4Alleluia: [Matthew 4](#): 23Gospel: [Mark 3](#): 1-6**Thursday, 19 January, 2023**

Ordinary Weekday

First Reading: [Hebrews 7](#): 25 – 8: 6Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 40](#): 7-8a, 8b-9, 10, 17Alleluia: [Second Timothy 1](#): 10Gospel: [Mark 3](#): 7-12**Friday, 20 January, 2023**

Ordinary Weekday/ Fabian, Pope, Martyr/ Sebastian, Martyr

First Reading: [Hebrews 8](#): 6-13Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 85](#): 8 & 10, 11-12, 13-14Gospel: [Mark 3](#): 13-19**Saturday, 21 January, 2023 –**

Agnes, Virgin, Martyr Obligatory Memorial

First Reading: [Hebrews 9](#): 2-3, 11-14Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 47](#): 2-3, 6-7, 8-9Alleluia: [Acts 16](#): 14bGospel: [Mark 3](#): 20-21**Sunday, 22 January, 2023**

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: [Isaiah 8](#): 23 – 9: 3Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 27](#): 1, 4, 13-14Second Reading: [First Corinthians 1](#): 10-13, 17Alleluia: [Matthew 4](#): 23Gospel: [Matthew 4](#): 12-23 or [Matthew 4](#): 12-17**Monday, 23 January, 2023**

Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children Obligatory Memorial

First Reading: [Hebrews 9](#): 15, 24-28Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 98](#): 1, 2-3ab, 3cd-4, 5-6Alleluia: [Second Timothy 1](#): 10Gospel: [Mark 3](#): 22-30

**Tuesday, 24 January, 2023**

Francis De Sales, Bishop, Religious Founder, Doctor  
Obligatory Memorial

First Reading: [Hebrews 10](#): 1-10

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 40](#): 2 & 4ab, 7-8a, 10, 11

Alleluia: [Matthew 11](#): 25

Gospel: [Mark 3](#): 31-35

**Wednesday, 25 January, 2023**

Conversion of Paul, Apostle Feast

First Reading: [Acts 22](#): 3-16 or [Acts 9](#): 1-22

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 117](#): 1bc, 2

Alleluia: [John 15](#): 16

Gospel: [Mark 16](#): 15-18

**Thursday, 26 January, 2023**

Timothy and Titus, Bishops Obligatory Memorial

First Reading: [Second Timothy 1](#): 1-8 or [Titus 1](#): 1-5

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 96](#): 1-2a, 2b-3, 7-8a, 10

Alleluia: [Psalms 119](#): 105

Gospel: [Mark 4](#): 21-25

**Friday, 27 January, 2023**

Ordinary Weekday/ Angela Merici, Virgin, Religious Founder

First Reading: [Hebrews 10](#): 32-39

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 37](#): 3-4, 5-6, 23-24, 39-40

Alleluia: [Matthew 11](#): 25

Gospel: [Mark 4](#): 26-34

**Saturday, 28 January, 2023**

Thomas Aquinas, Priest, Religious, Doctor Obligatory  
Memorial

First Reading: [Hebrews 11](#): 1-2, 8-19

Responsorial Psalm: [Luke 1](#): 69, 70-72, 73-75

Alleluia: [John 3](#): 16

Gospel: [Mark 4](#): 35-41

**Sunday, 29 January, 2023**

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: [Zephaniah 2](#): 3; [Zephaniah 3](#): 12-13

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 146](#): 6-7, 8-9a, 9bc-10

Second Reading: [First Corinthians 1](#): 26-31

Alleluia: [Matthew 5](#): 12a

Gospel: [Matthew 5](#): 1-12a

**Monday, 30 January, 2023**

Ordinary Weekday

First Reading: [Hebrews 11](#): 32-40

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 31](#): 20, 21, 22, 23, 24

Alleluia: [Luke 7](#): 16

Gospel: [Mark 5](#): 1-20

**Tuesday, 31 January, 2023**

John Bosco, Priest, Religious Founder Obligatory  
Memorial

First Reading: [Hebrews 12](#): 1-4

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 22](#): 26b-27, 28 and 30, 31-32

Alleluia: [Matthew 8](#): 17

Gospel: [Mark 5](#): 21-43



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## The Gambia Programme

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## December & January

**14th January, 1972:** Presentation of Mary Sisters 'Shalom Retreat Centre' was established.

**21st January, 1977:** Fr. Edward Grimes became first Director of the newly-formed Gambia Pastoral Institute (GPI).

**16th December, 1977:** Opening of the Diocesan Development Office (*now CaDO*).

**3rd January, 1978:** Opening of Christ the King, Darsilami.

**30th December, 1985:** The first pastoral assembly for clergy and religious opened at Shalom, Fajara.

**5th December, 1987:** First pilgrimage to Kunkujang Mariama.

**21st January, 1989:** Ordination at Kanifing of Fr. Anthony Sonko.

**28th December, 1989:** The second pastoral assembly opened at St. Peter's Technical High School, Lamin and included participation of the laity.

**1st January, 1995:** Death in Ireland of Fr. Michael Flynn.

**9th January, 1998:** Death in Banjul of Mrs. E. Senghore, aged 113.

**31st December, 1999:** The death of Bishop Michael Maloney C.S.Sp.

**29th December, 2005:** Abbé Blaise Malou and a group from Balandine, Casamance, began a 4-day visit to Fatima Parish, Bwiam.

**During January 2007:** 'Working with the poor' was the focus of a 10-day meeting at Shalom of 43 Presentation Sisters from 10 countries.

**19th January, 2008:** Alhaji Cherno Alieu Mass Kah, Imam Ratib of Banjul, visited the Cathedral of the Assumption.

**17th January, 2010:** Blessed Sacrament, Kanifing Estate, became an independent parish.

**12th December, 2010:** Sr. Josephine of Senegal and Sr. Mary of Ghana, took their final vows as Marist Sisters.

**29th December, 2012:** Sr. Calixte Thomas left for India, her home country, after many years in educational work in The Gambia.

**3rd January, 2014:** Bishop Robert Ellison received the keys of Centenary House, the new commercial building at Kairaba Avenue.

**24th January, 2015:** Ordination of Fr. James Mendy and Fr. Tanislas Ndecky.

**14th January, 2021:** Death of Thomas Gregory George Senghore 'TGG', a renowned Gambian Catholic.

**20th January, 2021:** First Christian radio, Radio Veritas, inaugurated in The Gambia at GPI.

**23rd - 30th January, 2022:** The ITCABIC Bishop's Conference took place in GPI. The conference comprised of 5 Bishops, 4 from Sierra Leone and our own Bishop, 2 secretaries, 2 rectors, 4 and the Nuncio.

**During December, 1823:** Arrival of Hannah Kilham and English Quaker missionaries, who opened an agricultural centre at Bakau and a girls' school in Banjul.

**18th January, 1848:** Arrival of Fr. Ronarc'h from France, and Fr. Warlop from Belgium, to begin the Catholic mission.

**26th December, 1873:** Blessing by Bishop Durët of Dakar of the school in Hagan Street (*now Daniel Goddard Street*).

**9th January, 1881:** Death, from pneumonia, of Fr. Samba, first Gambian priest. He had been ordained in 1869.

**3rd December, 1887:** Fr. Massart died while saying the Last Gospel at the conclusion of Mass.

**12th January, 1920:** The SS *Afrique*, en route to Dakar from Bordeaux, sank at sea. Among the 563 who perished were Bishop Jalabert of Dakar and 18 missionaries.

**19th December, 1931:** Last entry in French in the Mission Journal, the Mission having been declared self-governing.

**10th January, 1932:** Fr. John Meehan was named first Ecclesiastical Superior of the self-governing Mission.

**21st December, 1933:** Fr. Doody, who had been taken ill while travelling from Ireland to Banjul, died while returning on the same boat that had brought him.

**15th January, 1936:** Fr. Harold Whiteside inaugurated Bwiam mission.

**1st December, 1948:** St. Therese's Elementary School, Kanifing opened with 114 pupils.

**16th December, 1952:** Departure of Fr. Coughlin after four years in The Gambia.

**3rd December, 1953:** Arrival from Nigeria of Fr. Michael Frawley to be Principal of St. Augustine's High School, Banjul, where he remained for 7 years.

**24th December, 1954:** Arrival of Fr. Michael Flynn.

**1st January, 1956:** Opening of the convent at Kanifing, with Mother Angela, Sr. Magdalene and Sr. Anne-Marie in residence, all teaching at St. Therese's School.

**24th December, 1957:** Fr. Michael Moloney was appointed first Bishop of Banjul; the announcement was not made locally until 12 days later.

**10th January, 1962:** Arrival of Fr. Vincent Comer CSSp.

**8th January, 1964:** Bishop Moloney blessed St Martin's Church, Kartong.

**13th January, 1965:** Bishop Moloney returned at the end of Vatican II.

**25th December, 1968:** The Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Mariani, blessed and opened Holy Spirit Church, Banjul.

The Editor and Staff of The Diocese of Banjul Newsletter

wish all readers a well-spent Advent, a Happy and Holy Christmas

and a prosperous New Year.

## Weekday Celebrations

## December &amp; January



### 3rd December, Feast Day *St Francis Xavier priest*

FRANCIS was born in Spain on 7th April, 1506. In Paris, he met Ignatius Loyola and became one of the first Jesuits. He was ordained in 1537, and in 1542, embarked on a three-year mission to India, and also established missions in Malaysia. In 1549, he went to Japan, and in 1551 returned to India. He died on 3 December, 1552, suffering from fever on the island of Sancian (Shangchuan, off the Chinese coast) as he attempted to secure entrance to the country, then closed to foreigners. Francis is believed to have baptised about 30,000 converts. His success was partly due to his adaptation of Christianity to local cultures. In 1927, he was named patron of all missions.



### 7th December, Feast Day *St Ambrose doctor of the Church*

AMBROSE is one of the four great Latin Doctors of the Church (the others being Augustine, Jerome and Gregory). He was born in Trier (in modern-day Italy) in 339 and became a celebrated lawyer. When the bishopric of Milan fell vacant around 374, he was acclaimed bishop – though still a catechumen, and not yet baptised. Ambrose's statesmanship and theological skills enabled him to convert many pagans. He combated Arianism (the heresy which denies the Holy Trinity). He imposed a public penance on the Emperor Theodosius I for condoning a massacre. He converted and baptised St. Augustine. Ambrose died in 397. His bishop's throne may still be seen in Milan.

### 8th December, Feast day *The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary*

THE DOCTRINE of the Immaculate Conception was proclaimed as infallible by Pope Pius IX in 1854. It teaches that Mary, Mother of Christ, was conceived without sin: she was 'full of grace'. She received God's grace from the first moment of her existence, and spent her earthly life in a perfect relationship with Him. He filled her with grace so that she would be worthy to become Mother of God. Mary is perceived as the perfect example of the redeeming action of God's grace; she was only able to receive this grace because Christ would later redeem all humanity through His death on the cross.

### 26th December, Feast Day *St Stephen first Christian martyr*

LIKE his Master, Jesus, Stephen was unjustly condemned by the religious authorities. And like Jesus, before his agonising death, Stephen prayed that his persecutors might be forgiven. He was granted a vision of the risen Christ. 'Look,' he said, 'I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. Coming immediately after Christmas Day, St. Stephen's Day reminds us that the Babe of Bethlehem was born to suffer and to die. (See Acts, chapters 6 and 7).

### 2nd January, Feast Day *St Basil & St. Gregory Nazianzen, doctors of the Church*

BASIL and Gregory were close friends and great figures of the Eastern Church in the 4th century. Basil had a brilliant academic career, but longed for a life of solitude. After extensive travels, he gave away most of his possessions and devoted himself to founding religious communities, writing an austere 'rule' which is still observed today.

Gregory was Bishop of Constantinople (now Istanbul). Because of his great learning, he was known as 'Gregory the Theologian'. Gregory eventually retired and returned to his monastery. He summed up his life and Basil's thus: 'Our great concern, our great name, was to be Christians, and to be called Christians.'

### 28th January, Feast Day *St. Thomas Aquinas, doctor of the Church*

BORN in Aquino, Sicily, in 1225, Thomas studied in Naples and taught in Paris. He integrated the teaching of the Greek philosopher Aristotle into Christian thought, asserting that the theologian starts with faith and proceeds through reason. He died in 1274. In 1567, he was named a Doctor of the Church, and in 1879 was proclaimed by Pope Leo XIII as a champion of orthodoxy. Thomas wrote more than 80 works. He is pre-eminent as a writer of liturgical texts, which combine clarity with beauty. Gambian Catholics are familiar with Thomas' Benediction hymns, O salutaris Hostia ('O saving Victim') and Tantum ergo sacramentum (Therefore, we before him bending').



## Our Religious Obligations

### ATTENDING EVERY SUNDAY MASS AND HOLY DAY

**A**t Christmas, many Catholics who have been slack at attending Sunday Mass, would like to receive Communion.

For them, and for all Catholics, here are reminders below:

- To remain in good standing in the Church, all Catholics must attend Mass every Sunday and Holy day of Obligation, unless they are genuinely unable to do so.
- All Catholics must receive Holy Communion at least once a year, during Easter Time – though they are encouraged to receive Communion more frequently.
- Holy Communion may only be received at Mass by Catholics, who are in a state of grace with respect to attendance at every Sunday Mass, and in every basic moral regard.
- If you have not been regular at Sunday Mass, or are aware of any grave sin, you must make confession before a priest and receive absolution. Then - and only then - may you receive Holy Communion, in faith and with joy.
- Non-Catholics are most welcome at every Mass. But, they should not receive Holy Communion, because, by their own choice, they are not in communion with the Bishop of Banjul, the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church.



“Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of Your Son, Jesus, whose entry into our world we celebrate today. Fill our hearts with the peace that only He provides. Amen.”

## KUNKUJANG PILGRIMAGE

34<sup>th</sup> Annual

Pilgrimage to the Shrine of our Lady of Peace

Saturday, 10<sup>th</sup> December, 2022



### The act of pilgrimage

On this day, 10th December, 2022, large numbers of Catholics and others, converge at Kunkujang Mariama for the 34th pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady Queen of Peace, held annually on the Saturday nearest to the Immaculate Conception (8th December).

In Senegal, since 1888, a pilgrimage at Pentecost has been held to Our Lady's shrine at Popoungine on Senegal's Petite Côte. It wasn't until almost a century later, around 1986, that a group of lay people suggested to Bishop Cleary that a Marian shrine should, likewise, be established in The Gambia.

It was eventually decided to locate the shrine at Kunkujang. Organising the first pilgrimage was a tremendous challenge. The shrine committee prepared the football field and engaged the help of the Public Works Department (PWD), the Fire Service and the Red Cross. After the first pilgrimage in 1987, it was realised that extended facilities were needed. Bishop Cleary provided a D50,000 loan. After three years or so, the Presentation Sisters helped identify a new site for the grotto. Fr. John Sharpe described the shrine committee of those days as indefatigable.

The Shrine Church at Kunkujang, opened by Bishop Ellison in February 2007 and costing more than D200,000 seats 1,200. The church features murals by Eleanor Yates, an American artist Fr. Sharpe met by chance in Ireland.

In recent years, in addition to the December pilgrimage, a second pilgrimage to Kunkujang Mariama takes place on the first Saturday of Lent.



December 2022 &amp; January 2023

Saviour of the world, by Your Cross and  
Resurrection You have set us free.

# Our Sunday Readings

## December 4, 2022 Second Sunday of Advent, Year A

**1st Reading:** Isaiah 11:1-10  
**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17  
**2nd Reading:** Romans 15:4-9  
**Alleluia:** Luke 3:4, 6  
**Gospel:** Matthew 3:1-12

**Homily Theme:** Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand! – *Matthew 3:1-12, Mark 1:1-8, Luke 3:1-6*

**Reflections:** On this, the Second Sunday of Advent, we are given the person of St. John the Baptist to ponder. What a gift he is! Jesus Himself stated that “among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist” (Matthew 11:11). What a compliment! What is it that made John so great? We can point to two things in particular. The first has to do with his calling and the second has to do with his virtue. But John was great not only because of his unique calling, but also because of the virtue he had in his life. And, it is this gift that is worth pondering for our own inspiration more than any other. John was not in it for praise and honor; rather, his mission was to point everyone to the Savior of the world. He could have sought the honor and praise of many and he would have certainly received it. They may have even made him king. Reflect, today, upon this humility in your own life. Do you tend to point to yourself or to Christ? Do you seek the praise of others or do you humbly point all praise and glory to God? Humility is the path that St. John the Baptist took and it’s the path we must strive for each and every day.

**Prayer:** Lord, thank You for the gift of St. John the Baptist. May his witness of humility inspire me in my Christian walk. Help me, Lord, to always point others to You rather than to myself. Jesus, I trust in You. Amen.

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## December 11, 2022 Third Sunday of Advent, Year A

**1st Reading:** Isaiah 35:1-6A, 10  
**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10  
**2nd Reading:** James 5:7-10  
**Alleluia:** Isaiah 61:1  
**Gospel:** Matthew 11:2-11

**Homily Theme:** Blessed is the One Who Takes No Offense at Jesus – *Luke 7:18-23*

**Reflections:** Jesus speaks here of those who are “blind, lame, lepers, deaf, dead and poor.” Each one of these

people are identified as being blessed by the ministry of Jesus. Jesus also says something quite interesting. He says, “And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me.” Why would we be offended by Jesus? What is this all about? Jesus is perfectly direct and honest. In fact, He obviously speaks nothing but pure truth. The hard part is that, at times, the truth can hurt. We can go through life thinking that we are healthy and well, spiritually speaking, and as a result, we can tend to think that we do not need the truth Jesus came to preach. In that case, when we are confronted with our sin or any truth we struggle with, we can be offended by Christ.

**Prayer:** Lord, help me in the Advent season to continue to prepare my heart for You. Help me to listen to Your Word and to heed all that You have to say. May I follow You in all things and above all things and never be offended by Your Word. Jesus, I trust in You. Amen.

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## December 18, 2022 Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year A

**1st Reading:** Isaiah 7:10-14  
**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 24:1-2, 3-4, 5-6  
**2nd Reading:** Romans 1:1-7  
**Alleluia:** Matthew 1:23  
**Gospel:** Matthew 1:18-24

**Homily Theme:** Joseph, Do Not Be Afraid To Take Mary as Your Wife – *Matthew 1:18-25*

**Reflections:** Saint Joseph is a man whom we know little about, but think about the importance of his role in salvation history. He was entrusted with the Son of God as his little child. At first, he was confused about how Mary could have gotten pregnant, but upon receiving the words of the angel in a dream, he accepted this Child as his own and cared for Him with a father’s love. It’s significant to note that Saint Joseph embraced the Christ Child because of a dream. But was it only a dream? We all have many dreams and some of them are strange and nonsensical. So why did Saint Joseph rely upon the authenticity of this dream?

**Prayer:** Lord, I long to hear Your sweet voice. I long to know all that You command of me and all that You inspire me to embrace in life. Give me the grace I need, to follow every inspiration in life so that I may fulfill Your perfect and holy will. Jesus, I trust in You. Amen.

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## Christmas Vigil Mass

December 24, 2022  
*The Nativity of the Lord*

**1st Reading:** Isaiah 62:1-5

**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 89:4-5, 16-17, 27, 29

**2nd Reading:** Acts 13:16-17, 22-25

**Gospel:** Matthew 1:1-25

**Christmas Vigil Mass Homily Theme:** Joseph, Do Not Be Afraid To Take Mary Your Wife – *Matthew 1:18-25*

**Reflections:** We begin, today, an “octave” of immediate preparation for the birth of Christ. After this octave, we enter into the glorious Solemnity of Christmas! On this day, we are presented with the long genealogy of Jesus’ ancestors. *Verses 2-16 of Chapter One of Matthew’s Gospel* present us with three series of fourteen ancestors. Abraham begins the genealogy and Jesus concludes it. Though there are many interesting facts that a Scripture scholar could take from this genealogy and all who are named in it, the heart and soul of its meaning is found in Verse One: “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the son of Abraham.” This shows the direct link from the promise God made to Abraham, to its fulfillment in the person of the Son of God. One thing we see in the fulfillment of this promise, is the fact that God is faithful. True, it took centuries for His promise to Abraham to be fulfilled, but it happened nonetheless and there is little doubt that Abraham rejoiced, greatly, as he witnessed the glorious birth of one of his descendants as the Savior of the World. This also tells us that God’s timing and His ways are often different than what we may at first conceive. We can come up with many “good” ideas and hope they will come to pass. But, all too often, when they do not turn out immediately as we had hoped for, we can get discouraged. Learn the lesson, today, of God’s perfect “long-term” plan. He knows what He is doing and He is bringing about His plan for us all.

**Prayer:** Lord, I know Your ways are perfect and that Your plans are so often not my own. Help me to let go of my own ideas and desires and to surrender more deeply, in trust, to all that You have prepared for me. Lord, Your wisdom is perfect. Help me to believe that with all my heart. Jesus, I trust in You. **Amen.**

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## Christmas Day Mass

December 25, 2022

**1st Reading:** Isaiah 52:7-10

**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 98:1, 2-3, 3-4, 5-6

**2nd Reading:** Hebrews 1:1-6

**Gospel:** John 1:1-18

**Homily Theme:** Glory to God in the Highest! – **MERRY CHRISTMAS!**

**Reflections:** Glory to God in the highest! The celebration of the glorious birth of Christ the Lord has begun... Merry Christmas! As they were gathered, an angel of God appeared to them announcing “good news of great joy!” They must have been stunned. But that’s only the beginning. The angel announced that the Savior of the

World had been born and then, much to their surprise, they witnessed the whole host of heavenly angels singing praises: “Gloria in excelsis Deo!” “Glory to God in the highest!”

These humble shepherds were the first to be called by God to go and greet the newborn King. What’s amazing is that God did not first call the “important” of the age to come worship. He called these poor shepherds.

“Do not be afraid,” as the angel said, to come and behold the Christ who came as your Savior. Do not be afraid to come to meet Him, love Him, adore Him and get to know Him, whom God has given to us, today, as an infant, small, weak, fragile and innocent. Do not be afraid to gaze upon His humble presence and to give glory to God for His blessed coming.

**Prayer:** Lord, I love You and adore You. I thank You for the unfathomable gift of Your divine presence among us. I thank You, especially, for the invitation You offer me to join the poor shepherds as they come to adore You. May this Christmas celebration be one in which I understand, more deeply, the incredible love You have for all Your children. May I know that You came for me, to save me and to invite me to worship. May I, this day, enter into that worship and adoration with all the Heavenly Host. Jesus, I trust in You. Amen.

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## January 1, 2023

*Mary Mother of God Solemnity  
(Octave of Christmas)*

**First Reading:** Numbers 6: 22-27

**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 67: 2-3, 5, 6, 8

**Second Reading:** Galatians 4: 4-7

**Alleluia:** Hebrews 1: 1-2

**Gospel:** Luke 2: 16-21

**Homily Theme:** Blessed Virgin Mary kept all these things in her Heart – *Luke 2:41-51*

**Reflections:** Today, we honor our Blessed Mother. In particular, we honor her Immaculate Heart just as we honored Jesus’ Sacred Heart, yesterday. The two go hand in hand. The Heart of our Blessed Mother is a sign of her perfect love for us. It is “Immaculate” in that it is spotless and perfect in love. When reflecting upon the perfection of love, we also acknowledge that her love is the perfection of a mother’s love. This is a unique love of the highest order. A mother’s love is not just love of neighbor or a friendship. Rather, a mother’s love is such that it is completely invested, nurturing, sacrificial and total. This is the love our Blessed Mother has for us. The Immaculate Heart, and, therefore, the Immaculate love of our Blessed Mother, is a glorious gift from God. She is the instrument through which Salvation Himself came into our world. God does not change His mind today. He chose her as the instrument of salvation over 2,000 years ago and He continues to choose her today. He continues to pour forth His grace on the world through her and she continues to distribute His love and mercy through her Immaculate and motherly Heart. Reflect, today, upon the beauty and perfection of the love radiating from her life for you. Run to her and make an act of faith in her motherly care. Consecrate yourself to her and let her be the instrument God wants her to be.

**Prayer:** Hail Mary, full of Grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen. Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for us. Jesus, I trust in You. Amen.

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**January 8, 2023**

*The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, Year A*

**1st Reading:** Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7

**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 29:1-2, 3-4, 3, 9-10

**2nd Reading:** Acts 10:34-38

**Alleluia:** Mark 9:7

**Gospel:** Matthew 3:13-17

**Homily Theme:** This is My Beloved Son With Whom I Am Well Pleased – *Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:7-11*

**Reflections:** Today's Feast marks the conclusion of the Christmas Season and the beginning of Ordinary Time. It's a feast of transition from Jesus' hidden life to that of His public ministry. It also echoes the theme of the Epiphany in that the Baptism of the Lord is another manifestation announcing Jesus' divinity to all of His first followers and to the disciples of John the Baptist. As we prepare to begin Ordinary Time, reflect, today, upon these words of the Father at the Baptism of Jesus. Hear the Father speaking to you about the divinity of His Son. Turn your eyes to Jesus and prepare yourself to follow Him and to heed every word He speaks. He was sent into this world to draw us to the Father, allow Him to fulfill that mission in your own life.

**Prayer:** Lord, I believe that You are the Son of the Eternal Father and the Savior of the World. I believe that You have brought about a new era of grace and truth and that I am called to follow You wherever You lead. As we begin this liturgical season of Ordinary Time, may it be a time of extraordinary grace in which I daily heed Your voice. Jesus, I trust in You. Amen.

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**January 15, 2023**

*Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A*

**1st Reading:** Isaiah 49:3, 5-6

**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 40:2, 4, 7-8, 8-9, 10

**2nd Reading:** 1 Corinthians 1:1-3

**Alleluia:** John 1:14A, 12A

**Gospel:** John 1:29-34

**Homily Theme:** Lamb of God Who Takes Away the Sin of the World – *John 1:29-34*

**Reflections:** Wow! the insight that St. John the Baptist had regarding Jesus is quite inspiring, mysterious and amazing. He sees Jesus coming toward him and he immediately states three revealed truths about Jesus:

- Jesus is the Lamb of God;
- Jesus ranks ahead of John;
- Jesus existed before John.

How would John know all of this? What was the source of such profound statements about Jesus? Most likely John would have studied the Scriptures of the time and would have known the many statements about the coming Messiah spoken by the prophets of old. He would have

known the Psalms and the Books of Wisdom. But, first and foremost, John would have known what he knew by the gift of faith. He would have had true spiritual insight granted by God. John was clearly filled with Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Knowledge, Fortitude, Reverence and Wonder. These Gifts of the Spirit gave him an ability to live a life sustained by the grace of God. John knew things and understood things that only God could reveal. He loved and revered Jesus with a passion and submission of his will that could only be inspired by God. Most evidently, John's holiness came as a consequence of his union with God.

Reflect, today, upon this exceptionally insightful statement from John regarding Jesus. John knew what he knew only because God was alive in his life, leading him and revealing these truths. Commit yourself, this day, to an imitation of John's deep faith and be open to all that God wants to speak to you.

**Prayer:** My precious Lord Jesus, give me insight and wisdom so that I may know You and believe in You. Help me, each and every day, to discover more fully the great and awe-inspiring mystery of who You are. I love You, my Lord, and I pray that I may come to know and love You all the more. Jesus, I trust in You. Amen.

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**January 22, 2023**

*Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A*

**1st Reading:** Isaiah 8:23-9:3

**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 27:1, 4, 13-14

**2nd Reading:** 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17

**Alleluia:** Matthew 4:23

**Gospel:** Matthew 4:12-23 or Matthew 4:12-17

**Homily Theme:** I Will Make You Fishers of Men – *Mark 1:14-20, Matthew 4:18-22*

**Reflections:** Christmas season is now completed and we enter into the First Week of Ordinary Time. It's time to return to the "ordinary" of life. But, is the Christian life ordinary? Is there anything truly "ordinary" about following Jesus?

Today's Gospel reveals the extraordinary and radical call from Jesus to follow Him. Simon and Andrew are the two who respond to the call in this passage, but their response is also an invitation to all of us to step out of the ordinary and into the extraordinary.

This passage especially reveals two things:

- the immediate response of these Apostles, and
- their complete response. They clearly did not hold back or hesitate in responding to the invitation from Jesus to follow Him.

Reflect, today, upon the fact that you, too, have been called to an extraordinary life of grace which requires total abandonment and commitment. You have been called to respond immediately and freely to Jesus' invitation. As you begin this liturgical season of Ordinary Time, jump into the extraordinary life of grace and embrace it with your whole heart.

**Prayer:** Lord, I love You and thank You for the extraordinary life of grace You have called me to live. Help me to respond to Your invitation with complete submission of my mind and will. Jesus, I trust in You. Amen.

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**January 29, 2023**  
*Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A*

**1st Reading:** Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12-13  
**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10  
**2nd Reading:** 1 Corinthians 1:26-31  
**Alleluia:** Matthew 5:12A  
**Gospel:** Matthew 5:1-12A

**Homily Theme:** The Beatitudes Explained – Luke 6:20-26, Matthew 5:1-12

Blessed are you who are poor...  
 Blessed are you who are now hungry...  
 Blessed are you who are now weeping...  
 Blessed are you when people hate you...  
 Rejoice and leap for joy on that day!

**Reflections:** Jesus frames these Beatitudes such that they promise a glorious outcome at the end. He says that if you

persevere those hardships while Loving, Serving, Praising and Glorifying God, then you will be blessed with the promise at the end of each Beatitude. So, being poor means that you are not interested in amassing earthly wealth. This earthly wealth blinds one from doing the will of God. So if you are contented with what God has given you and remain poor in earthly terms, then the Kingdom of God is yours. Being hungry may mean normal hunger or the constant hunger for knowing God more. Jesus assures us that we will be satisfied. This one is self-explanatory, "Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude and insult you, and denounce your name as evil on account of the Son of Man, rejoice and leap for joy on that day! Behold, your reward will be great in heaven. For their ancestors treated the prophets in the same way. Prayer: Dear Lord, give me the fortitude to persevere the hatred and ridicule from others as I continue knowing, loving, serving, praising and glorifying you. Help me to identify my blessings in the challenges and hardships I face in life. Help me to see your moulding hand in the crosses I experience in life. Amen.

**ANNOUNCEMENT**

**The National Catholic Pilgrimage Committee**  
**is Please to inform you that**  
**Air Travel and Tours Agency Limited in Collaboration with Fly Travel Agency Ltd.**  
**Will take intending pilgrims to**  
**Two Nations Christian (Holy Land) or (Holy Sites) in Israel and Jordan.**  
**from 15th October to 30th October 2023.**

**The two weeks Spiritual package includes:**  
**Air fares, Hotels Accommodation (Half Board), Tours, Visas, and Travel Insurance.**

**Payments and deposits should be made to our Eco Bank Account, detailed below:**  
**Account Name: Air Travel and Tours Agency Limited - Pilgrimage.**  
**Account No: 6274013238**

**For more information,  
 please contact:**

**Fr. Peter Lopez, 7006955**  
**Mary Owens Adams,**  
**7790298**  
**Elizabeth Joof-Mendy,**  
**9300007.**

*The foot steps of Jesus  
 Christ, seeing is  
 believing.*



# THE NEW MEDIA AND EVANGELIZATION IN THE DIOCESE OF BANJUL

**W**hen in the Church we speak about new Evangelisation, we more often than not think of the people who come to our churches, but billions of people live in the social networks. These have been described as among the biggest countries in the world – and they are countries with no boundaries. For example, 1.2 billion inhabit the world of Facebook. The majority of these people may never enter a Church, but if we are to respond to the Gospel mandate given us by Christ to ‘go out to the whole world’, then, we must, nowadays, include the digital world in proclaiming the Good News. Our challenge, as evangelisers, has always been to reach out and encounter people where they are at, and nowadays, more and more are online.

Media and communications have an invaluable importance to the evangelization mission of the Church and the promotion of Christian values, to facilitate a just and peaceful society, for the common good of all Gambians. Evangelization is about making Christ known and promoting Gospel values; in fact, this is the primary goal of the communication apostolate of the Church. Every Priest, religious, catechist and lay faithful, should positively maximize the advantage of the new media for the propagation of the Gospel and the teachings of Christ, bearing in mind that everything must be done rightly and positively, as the new media will make their work as evangelizers, easier and faster. We need to organize ourselves in a more coordinated manner, for the purpose of communication evangelization apostolate. The Lord is happy when we do what is right, by imparting peoples’ lives positively, with the promotion of Christ’s Gospel

values. It is paramount for us to realize the importance of this assignment.

The team has given us an opportunity to use the new media to propagate the Catholic faith and promote core Christian values. The Catholic Church needs to be better propagated, to be better understood by others, and the fastest and most efficient way to do it is through the media. We are told that of the 7.7 Billion people in the world, only over 2 billion are Christians. This calls for an effective evangelization methodology for a wider outreach.

Since the time of the Apostles to the present day, the doctrine and teachings of the Church have remained constant and consistent, while “the methodology of evangelization has changed, allowing the adoption of new techniques of proclaiming the Word of God”. Today, the new trend is the new media. Now is the time to preach the gospel beyond the borders of our parish churches and parish communities. Our priests must realize that their Sunday messages can reach those in attendance, as well as thousands, through the new media.

Many people, after they’ve gone through Catechism or Catholic school, lack further formation on their faith. We believe in the power of new media to reach out to the faithful and support them in their faith lives. I end with a tweet from Pope Francis. On 5 May, 2019 Pope Francis tweeted: What does “evangelise” mean? To give witness with joy and simplicity to what we are and what we believe in.

*Fr. Peter S. Lopez*  
*Head of Communications*  
*GPI*

## RADIO VERITAS PRESENTS KIDS BOXING DAY FUN AND SPELLING BEE COMPETITION.

**Radio Veritas Presents**

**KID'S BOXING DAY FUN**

**REGISTRATION D 200**

**SPELLING BEE, TALENT SHOW, GAMES, MUSIC, ETC**

Come and have a beautiful Christmas experience through story telling, games, talent showcase, etc

**26TH DEC 2022**

**GAMBIA PASTORAL INSTITUTE (GPI)**

Contact 3783711

The outing will be held on the 26th of December, 2022 at the Gambia Pastoral Institute.

There will be a talent showcase, various indoor and outdoor games, such as bouncing Castle, treasure hunt, trampoline, etc.

The spelling bee will be for children in grades 3,4,5 and 6.

The winner, first runner up, and second runner up will go home with a cash prize and stationery.

To register for the event you can pick up a form at the Gambia Pastoral Institute or call 3783711 or 7006955.

The cost of each form is D200.

Rush now and get your child registered for this great event.

