

The Diocese of Banjul NEWSLETTER

Incorporating The Catholic Newsletter

Volume 39 No 6

DECEMBER 2015 / JANUARY 2016

D50

The Holy Year of Mercy

*8th December 2015
- 20th November 2016*



Bishop Ellison asks:
'What kind of world do we want to hand
over to those who come after us?'

No well-spent Advent,
no true Christmas!



*Meditations, Mass readings
and prayers for Sundays,
Christmas and New Year*



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By way of introduction

No room at the inn

IT'S hard to believe that there was no room for Jesus in the inn, that first Christmas. When Joseph and Mary arrived in Bethlehem from Nazareth, Mary had to give birth to Jesus in a stable. Imagine the long way that she and Joseph had travelled. They were no doubt very tired, and looking forward to a meal and a good night's sleep.

The inn-keeper didn't know, of course, that the baby about to be born was the Son of God. Mary and Joseph certainly knew. Mary's cousin Elizabeth knew. The shepherds, the wise men, Anna and Simeon in the temple knew.

Perhaps the inn-keeper was so busy he didn't have time. His rooms were full, and his purse was full. Like many of us, he was occupied with other things. He had no room for the Jesus.

Today there is still little room for Our Lord Jesus Christ. All of us in one way or another are distracted by irrelevant things. I think the inn-keeper was like many of us: indifferent or preoccupied – neglecting the things that really matter.

Where was the inn-keeper's heart? Was he blind? Did he not see that Mary was about to give birth?

Some assert that in today's fast-moving world there's no room for God. The world says it doesn't need God's law any longer, nor his love, nor the sacrifice he made for us. Some say they don't need God's promises, because they are doing fairly well without him.

Is there room for Jesus in your Christmas? Are we any

different from the inn-keeper?

When we see roadside banners about Christmas celebrations and hear adverts for Christmas parties, it's easy to forget to make room for Jesus. Our children are anxious about getting new clothes and shoes and clothing. Do they make room for Jesus?

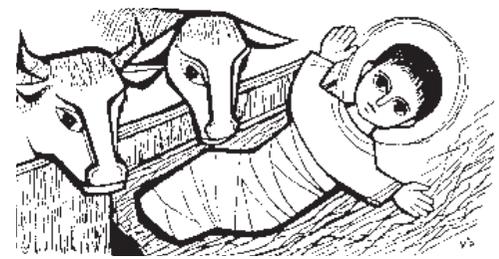
Let us decide today. Before the buying, before everyone has eaten and the food is cleared away – let us make sure to make room for Jesus.

Whether it's reading the Christmas story (Luke 2:1-20) or making time for everyone to share what Jesus has done for us over the past year, let us find some way to make room for Jesus this Christmas. It is, after all, his birthday party.

Mary and Joseph probably comforted themselves with the thought of a warm bed waiting for them in Bethlehem. But that was not to be the case. When they finally arrived that night, they found that every place was full. The inn-keeper told them, 'There is no room here,' and sent them out to a stable, possibly a cave, where the Saviour of the world was born.

Christmas is a time for giving, and as we reach out to family and friends, I hope we'll also open our hearts to those who are lonely and in need, people less fortunate than ourselves.

Fr Peter S. Lopez



Which Gambian was the longest-serving member of any colonial legislature in Africa?

Fee-moi Gambia page 10



Guilt, trauma, and addiction: the plight of former child soldiers

page 34



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IN THIS ISSUE

- 4 Let's celebrate the New Liturgical Year
- 5 No Advent, no real Christmas
- 6 The Advent Wreath
- 7 Here & there: Bishop Ellison's postings
Obituaries *John Songdeh Joof, Pierre Monty Mendy*
- 8 New Presentation Sisters; new Bishop for Anglicans
- 10 *Fee moi Gambia*
- 11 Donations to the Diocesan Food Campaign
- 12 Family Circle: *repainting your house*
- 14 O come, Emmanuel: *the Advent Antiphons*
- 15 Sunday Reflections *29th November - 31st February.*
- 23 Why are Christians divided?
- 24 From beyond: *Francis' first visit to Africa*
- 26 What kind of world for our children? *Bishop Ellison*
- 27 Question box: *making a spiritual communion*
- 29 Anniversaries: *Bishop Moloney returns from Vatican II*
- 30 Pope Francis and the Extraordinary Year of Mercy
- 32 Some weekday commemorations: *St Francis Xavier*
- 33 Daily Mass readings for December & January
- 34 End Piece: *the plight of Liberian child soldiers*
- 36 Child Jesus in the temple: *illustration and Gospel*

Let's make the most of the new liturgical year!



CHRIST is the centre of the Liturgical Year. During the year we follow Christ, come to know him more, die and rise with Christ, look forward to eternity with Christ.

The liturgical year enables us to be members of Christ, whose body is the Church.

The year should be *celebrated*, not merely observed. It should be a heartbeat in the life of our diocese, our parish, and of each one of us, as Christ's people.

So how do we celebrate the liturgical year?

We should see it as a journey through the mysteries of faith - a journey with Christ, with Mary and with the saints whose days shine like guideposts on the way.

The colours, images, symbols, prayers and themes of the liturgical year can transform our 'everyday' into 'holyday'.

The weekly Easter

Sunday, the weekly Easter, is at the very heart of the meaning of the liturgical year.

Each Sunday commemorates the Paschal Mystery, Each Sunday the community assembles, as it has since the time of the apostles, to acclaim Christ as risen Lord, to celebrate our victory over sin and death, and to be renewed as the body of the risen Christ.

As we come together on the 52 or 53 Sundays of each year we are presented with the whole mystery of salvation. In **Advent** we hear of the expectations of the coming of the long-awaited Messiah. At **Christmas** we celebrate his birth.

In **Lent** we are called to renew our membership of Christ given in baptism and renewed at **Easter**, when we hear once more of his triumphant victory.

Throughout the '**Ordinary**' **Sundays** of the year we walk with Christ in Galilee and Jerusalem. As he speaks to us, we learn who Christ is - the One sent by God. And the story is sealed by the sacramental gift of Christ himself - his Body and Blood given to the people who are his Body.

Our friends in heaven

Punctuating Ordinary Time and 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. What are waiting for? One clue is the colour we use in the liturgy.

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 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 wreath, page 6*)



No Advent, no real Christmas!

Why a truly happy Christmas depends on a thoughtful and fruitful Advent

ADVENT (in Latin, *adventus*) refers to the 'coming' or 'arrival' of Christ in the flesh at Christmas, and his Second Coming on the Day of Judgment.

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

Old Testament yearning

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

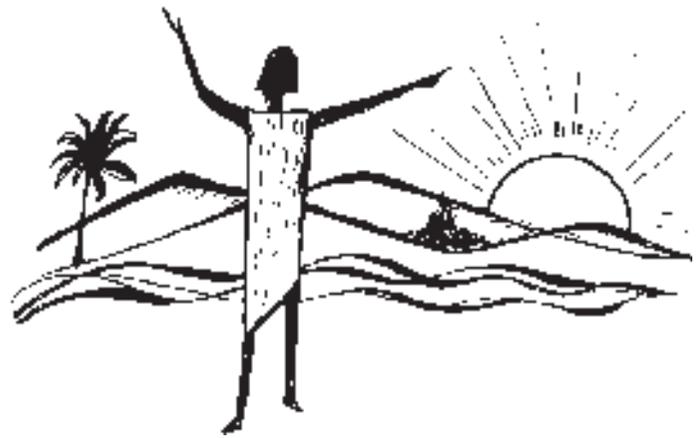
Apart from Isaiah, the great prophet to whom we turn in Advent is John the Baptist. He is the last - and Jesus tells us, the greatest - of all the prophets. John is the link between the Old Testament and the New. He is the forerunner of Christ, born shortly before him. John is the only prophet to greet 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.

The Last Things

A contrasting theme of Advent - one which we should not neglect - is our meditation on the Four Last Things: death, judgment, heaven and hell. Two of these 'Things' we shall all experience. Is the third to be heaven - or will it be hell?

We do well to keep in mind that 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 is always prepared.

'God with us'

Many a preacher this 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.

The Editor and Staff

of *The Diocese of Banjul Newsletter*
wish all readers

a well-spent Advent and a Happy and Holy Christmas





At home and in church, the Advent Wreath

IT'S difficult beneath our warm sunny skies to imagine pre-Christian Germany, where in the midst of cold, dark winter people made wreaths and lit bonfires to express their longing for the light and growth of the coming spring.

When Christianity came, people continued this tradition by making wreaths and lighting candles to celebrate the Advent hope in Christ. By the 16th century, both Catholics and Protestants were making Advent wreaths, and the custom has since spread to many parts of the world.

The wreath symbolises truths of Jewish and Christian tradition. 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 Jerusalem, 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.

How to make an Advent wreath

YOU need four candles, candle-holders and some greenery – real or artificial. Living foliage looks best, but it will wither and have to be replaced from time to time. If you use artificial foliage (easily obtainable in supermarkets) make sure that it is non-flammable.

Traditionally, three of the candles are purple or dark blue, and one is pink. But if you can't find these colours, any candles may be used. Some wreaths have an additional white or gold candle at the middle, which is lit on Christmas Eve.

Warning: Do not allow candles to burn down into the base of the candle-holders on the wreath. Do not allow children to play with the wreath. Candles should never be placed near curtains or anything that catches light easily. Candles should not be left alight in an empty room.



Here & there

NEWS FROM AROUND THE DIOCESE



Fr Sonko



Fr Toupan



Fr Ndecky

Diocesan Appointments October 2015

IN ADDITION to appointments made by in September, Bishop Robert P. Ellison CSSp has announced appointments concerning five other priests.

- **Fr Joseph Karbo:** Counselling Training at St Anselm's Institute, England (third year).
- **Fr Gabou Secka:** part-time ministry at the Cathedral Parish, Banjul.
- **Fr Peter Gomez:** Assistant Priest, St Anthony's Parish, Kololi.

- **Fr Peter Laast CSSp:** Assistant Priest, Star of the Sea Parish, Holy Family.
- **Fr Anthony Sonko:** Spiritual Director, St Paul's Major Seminary, Freetown.

Bishop Ellison notes that Fr Sonko has agreed to return to the ITCABIC Major Seminary as Spiritual Director, and asks God 'to guide and protect him in circumstances that are demanding. *Bon voyage.*'

Fr Peter Laast CSSp is a Ghanaian who has been Spiritan Superior in West Africa and a professor in Kenya.

Appointments made earlier by the Bishop, with effect from 1st October, were:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| • Fr Anthony Gabisi | St Therese Kanifing |
| • Fr Pascal Mendy | St Therese (assistant) |
| • Fr Bruno Toupan | Holy Spirit Banjul |
| • Fr Michael Gomez CSSp | Holy Family Fajara |
| • Fr Michael Ndecky | Holy Cross Brusibi |
| • Fr Victor Ndecky | St Kizito Bakoteh |
| • Fr Pius Gidi CSSp | St Martin Kartong |
| • Fr Matthew Mendy | St Michael Ngongon |
| • Fr Benedict Mba MSP | St Peter Lamin |
| • Fr Godwin Nnabazie MSP | St Peter (assistant) |
| • Fr Dominic Asare CSSp | Sacred Heart Bansang |
| • Fr Tanislaus Ndecky | Our Lady of Fatima Bwiam |

Fr Dominic Asare is a newcomer to the diocese.

OBITUARY

Devoted parishioner

THE DEATH occurred on Thursday 19th November at the age of 73 of John Songdeh Joof, widely known as 'Pa Joof' or 'Honey', a devoted parishioner of Blessed Sacrament Church, Kanifing Estate.

Pa Joof was born in July 1942 in Banjul, son of Kora Peter Songdeh Joof and Era Kaindeh Harding.

He attended St John's Infants' School and St Augustine's Primary School, gaining a Standard Seven School Leaving Certificate in 1958 before becoming an apprentice car-mechanic with Erustus Joiner, then joining the Gambia Public Transport Corporation (GPTC) in 1974.

Between 1981 and 1984 Pa Joof studied in England. On his return he was promoted to Assistant Superintendent Mechanic, a position he held until his retirement in 1996.

Pa Joof was a staunch Catholic with a particular devotion to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary. He was a parishioner at the Cathedral until the opening of the Church of the Blessed Sacrament.

He loved Catholic hymns, singing them by heart with emotion, and every morning attended Mass. A duty he took to himself was to ensure that the holy water stoups in the church were refilled every Saturday before the 6:45am Mass.

The parishioners at Blessed Sacrament will miss his encouraging words: 'Keep it up!'

In 1972 Pa Joof Honey married Lilian Joof (née Njie). Their marriage was blessed with eight children – three girls and five boys. He is survived by his wife and children.



Devotee of Catholic music

PIERRE Mendy, devoted Catholic and family man, and leading chorister in Banjul and Bakoteh, died on 9th November at the age of 64.

Mr Mendy was born in Kuntaur on New Year's Day 1951. He attended St Joseph's Convent School and St Augustine's Primary School in Banjul before taking up employment with the UAC (United African Company Ltd) at their candle factory in the then Wellington Street. When the factory closed, he worked with Uncle Sang Joof in the carpentry department at the PWD (Public Works Department) in Half Die. He also worked for Gambia Distributors Ltd, the Babarow Company and the Gambia Shipping Agency.

In December 1985 he married Martha Njie-Mendy, a loving partnership that ended when Martha died in May 2010.

Pierre Mendy was known to everyone as 'Monty', a man who loved company. As a dedicated Catholic he was a founder member of the *Baati Linguere* Choir, and took part in visits to sister choirs in Senegal and Rome.

Monty moved to Bakoteh Housing Estate in 1985, and in 1992 became the first Choir-master at St Kizito's Church. He was an assiduous member of the Parish Council, helping to build up what is now a vibrant parish.

In 2003 Monty left for the United States, where he became a pillar of the Gambia Christian Community in Atlanta, Georgia, and a founder and Choir-master at the *Sang Marie* celebrations held there every year.

He returned to The Gambia in 2010.





Sr Marie Gibba

Sr Marie Louise Moussa



Presentation family welcomes new Sisters

TWO young Gambians took their first vows as Novices of the Presentation of Mary Sisters at a joyful Mass celebrated by Fr Moses

Drammeh on Saturday 21st October, Feast of the Presentation of Mary.

The new Sisters are Marie Gibba and Marie Louise Moussa, both from the Parish of the Resurrection, Brikama.

Fr Drammeh is the Vocations Director of the Diocese of Banjul.

Gambian pilgrims in Jordan

THIS year's pilgrimage to the Holy Land between 7th and 21st October included a 'first' for Gambian pilgrims: a visit to Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John baptised Jesus, and the summit of Mount Nebo, from where Moses, before his death, was granted a view of the Promised Land.

Led by Fr Peter Lopez, the 26 pilgrims also visited holy places in Israel, including Nazareth, Cana, Capernaum, Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Bethany. Their pilgrimage took them also to Mount Sinai, in Egypt, where Moses received the Ten Commandments.



In the steps of Moses on Mount Nebo
The monument represents the serpent set up on a pole by Moses at the Lord's command (Numbers 2:8-9)

House of worship

St CECILIA'S CHURCH Busumaballa, which is attached to St Peter's Parish Lamin, programmed an event on the First Sunday of Advent, 29th November: 'Operation Build a House of Worship'.



St Mary's Cathedral
Banjul

New Bishop for Anglicans

THE ANGLICAN Diocese of Gambia has a new Bishop-elect: the Revd Canon James Yaw Odico, who will be consecrated according to Anglican rites in January.

Canon Odico will be the seventh Bishop of the Diocese of Gambia, which was founded in 1935, and the second Gambian to lead the diocese. He succeeds Bishop Tilewa Johnson, who was also Archbishop of the Anglican Province of West Africa, and who died suddenly in January last year.

The Anglican Mission in this country began in 1821 – 27 years before the founding of the Catholic Mission. During frequent vacancies in the post of Anglican chaplain due to illness or death, the duty was supplied by the Methodist Mission. For many years there was no settled Anglican congregation or place of worship. In 1869 a church school was established, and in 1890 the Government provided a site for a church - the present Cathedral. The 400-seat building was consecrated in 1901.

The Anglican mission in The Gambia was part of the Diocese of Sierra Leone, created in 1852. In 1935 the present Diocese of Gambia was constituted. The first Bishop was the Rt Revd John Daly (1935-51).

His successors were 'Roddy' Coote (1951-57), St John Pike (1960-63), Timothy Olufosoye (1965-70), Jean Rigal Ellisée (1972-86) and Archbishop Tilewa Johnson (1986-2014).



Rt Revd John Daly
first Anglican Bishop
of Gambia





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LIST OF BRANCHES & IMPLANTS

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|-----------------------------|---------|---------------------------------|---------|
| 1. Bakau New Town | 6868820 | 20. Kairaba Avenue | 6868801 |
| 2. Bakoteh | 6868816 | 21. Kaw Junction L/Kunda | 6868861 |
| 3. Barra, North Bank Region | 6868858 | 22. Kololi Highway | 6868832 |
| 4. Banjul Leman Street | 6868806 | 23. Lamin Village Opp Galp | 6868815 |
| 5. Bansang | 6969915 | 24. Latrikunda Sabiji | 6868847 |
| 6. Basse Santa Su | 6868839 | 25. London Corner | 6868807 |
| 7. Basse Highway | 6969865 | 26. Old Jeshwang | 6868831 |
| 8. Brikama Nyambai | 6968874 | 27. Old Yundum Market | 6868843 |
| 9. Brikama Hawla Kunda | 6868810 | 28. Sanyang | 6868824 |
| 10. Brusubi Mini Market | 6868819 | 29. Sayer Jobe Avenue | 6868808 |
| 11. Brusubi Galp Station | 6969873 | 30. Serrekunda Bartess | 6868836 |
| 12. Bundung | 6868821 | 31. Serekunda Mosque Road | 6868814 |
| 13. Busumballa | 6868827 | 32. Soma | 6868837 |
| 14. Churchill's Town | 6868817 | 33. Sukuta | 6868856 |
| 15. Cooperative | 6868822 | 34. Tabokoto | 6868813 |
| 16. Dippakunda | 6868812 | 35. Tallinding | 6868809 |
| 17. Fajara | 6868825 | 36. Westfield Opp. World Mobile | 6868910 |
| 18. Farafenni | 6868838 | 37. Westfield Next to Church | 6868864 |
| 19. Kanifing Estate | 6868842 | | |



Time for pilgrimage

ON SATURDAY 5th December large numbers of Catholics and others will converge at Kunkujang Mariama for the 23rd December 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 Poponguine 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 describes the shrine committee of those days as indefatigable.

The Shrine Church at Kunkujang, opened by Bishop Ellison in February 2007, seats 1,200 and cost more than D200,000. 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 has taken place on the first Saturday of Lent.

Bishop's message

Bishop Robert Ellison has sent a message for this year's pilgrimage booklet:

'Welcome once again to our annual pilgrimage to Kunkujang Mariama. This year, it will be an important occasion. Pope Francis will launch a special 'Year of Mercy' on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception on Tuesday

8th December, in Rome.

'There are several reasons for choosing such a theme at this time:

- It is no coincidence that the theme of mercy follows almost immediately on the second Synod on 'Marriage and Family Life'.

During the two synods on this topic we have been made aware of the difficulties and struggles which Catholics have to live between the ideals of our Christian faith and the realities of life which they have to face in the world of today.

- In his recent encyclical on the environment [*Laudato Si'*], Pope Francis highlights his profound concern about the way in which the gifts of God's creation are being consumed by minorities to the detriment of the majority of poor people. And he asks us: 'What kind of world do we want to hand over to the children of this generation...and their children's children?'

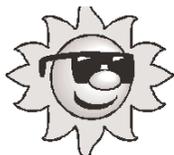
8th December this year marks the 50th anniversary of the closure of the Second Vatican Council on 8th December 1965. On that day, the last document of the Council was approved. It was the 'Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the World'.

This year, our annual pilgrimage to the Shrine of our Lady Queen of Peace will take place on Saturday 5th December. On this day, we as a diocese will launch the Year of Mercy at the feet of our Lady Queen of Peace, in communion with all other dioceses around the world.

The Almighty works marvels for me and holy is his name; his mercy is from age to age. (Luke 1:49)

Sincerely in Christ,

+ Robert P. Ellison CSSp, Bishop of Banjul.



Fee moi Gambia

Gambia and the Great War

ONE hundred years ago, from 1914 to 1918, the First World War - the 'Great War' - raged in Europe. Very few Gambians who were alive then are still with us.

The nearest fighting to The Gambia was in the Cameroons, part of which was then a German colony. When the war began, the company of the West Africa Frontier Force in The Gambia was about 180 strong. Some signallers were sent in September 1914 to take part in the Cameroons campaign. Half the company followed in January 1915 and the remaining half in September of that year, leaving the police to garrison the colony. In 1917 the whole company was sent to German East Africa (now Tanzania), and in the course of the next twelve months two drafts followed as reinforcements.

In all over 400 Gambians served in the frontier force. Thirty-seven lost their lives.

At the beginning of the war there was a big drop in revenue because of difficulties in selling the groundnut crop. But after the first year things began to return to normal, and by 1917 the revenue had returned to pre-war figures. In 1914 the French had taken 78 per cent of the groundnut crop and Britain only 9 per cent. During the war four English firms entered the business, and in 1919 Britain took 91 per cent and France only 2.5 per cent of the crop.

At the Catholic Mission, the Superior, Fr John Meehan, was

answerable to the Vicariate, based in Dakar. But Fr Meehan could not look to France for more priests, because priests and seminarians were subject to military service. During the war 320 French Spiritans were mobilised to serve in the forces as chaplains or hospital orderlies. The horror of the war was brought home to Catholics in Banjul when news arrived that Fr Sanneh had been killed on 15th April 1916 in northern France while serving as a chaplain to Senegalese forces fighting in Europe.

The work of the Mission was almost confined to Banjul. Since 1910 Fr Meehan had devoted himself to the building of a new church. The new church was consecrated by Bishop Hyacinthe Jalabert in March 1914. Stations of the Cross were erected in 1918.

A census taken three years before the war gave the total population of Banjul as 7,700, with 3,288 Christians, 3,957 Muslims, and 455 adherents to traditional beliefs.

There's no space to more than mention the leading Gambian in public life in those war years: Samuel John Forster, who had been appointed to the Legislative Council in 1906, and who was to become the longest-serving member of any colonial legislature in Africa - serving for 33 years until his death in 1940. Mr Forster had been educated at Wesley Boys' High School in Banjul, CMS Grammar School in Freetown, Epworth College in Wales, Liverpool Institute and Merton College, Oxford, before being admitted to the Bar at the Middle Temple, London. His father, a rice merchant, had preceded him as a member of the Legislative Council: Foster father and son were the leading public figures in The Gambia from 1886 until 1920. In February 1919 Mr Forster organised a Grand Victory Ball in Banjul.

DONATIONS TO THE DIOCESAN FOOD CAMPAIGN

| | | | |
|-----------------------|------|---|------------------|
| 16/12/2014 | 4114 | Eugenija Ent. - Donation towards Jalokoto Community | 3,750.00 |
| 16/12/2014 | 4115 | Bishop Ellison - Donation towards Jalokoto Community | 2,500.00 |
| 24/12/2014 | 4119 | P M Sisters Regional - Donation towards Jalokoto Community | 3,750.00 |
| 12/01/2015 | 4164 | FIG Bureau de Change Co. Ltd - Donation towards Jalokoto Community | 5,000.00 |
| 22/01/2015 | 4178 | New Vision Insurance Company - Donation towards Jalokoto Community | 12,500.00 |
| 02/02/2015 | 4182 | Gamcel Co. Ltd - Donation towards Jalokoto Community | 6,250.00 |
| 13/03/2015 | 4225 | Christine Faye - Donation towards Jaloko Community | 1,000.00 |
| 01/04/2015 | 4241 | Benigna G. Able Thomas - Donation towards Jalokoto Community | 7,500.00 |
| 21/04/2015 | 4266 | Eustace Cassell - Balance of funds from Fulabantang's official trip | 975.00 |
| 05/05/2015 | 4278 | Fr Celestin Badji - Balance of funds from rice bought | 190.00 |
| 10/06/2015 | 4322 | DYC - Donation towards Jalokoto Community | 25,000.00 |
| 18/08/2015 | 4359 | GPA - Donation towards Jalokoto Community | 10,000.00 |
| TOTAL RECEIVED | | | 78,415.00 |

PAYMENTS

| | | | |
|---------------------------|----------|--|------------------|
| 22/12/2014 | 1678400 | Fr Peter Jammeh - Funds for Jalokoto Cummunity deposited into BB's a/c | 6,250.00 |
| 12/01/2015 | 1678437 | Fr Peter Jammeh - Funds for Jalokoto Cummunity deposited into BB's a/c | 3,750.00 |
| 16/02/2015 | 1678605 | Fr Peter Jammeh - Funds for Jalokoto Cummunity | 2310 5,000.00 |
| 30/03/2015 | 1679338 | Fr Peter Jammeh - Funds for Fulabantang Cummunity | 2310 5,000.00 |
| 09/04/2015 | 1679371 | Fr Celestin Badji - Funds for Kaur and Kuntaur Cummunities | 2310 5,000.00 |
| 15/04/2015 | 1679396 | Eustace Cassell - Expenses for an official trip to Fulabantang | 2310 5,000.00 |
| 16/06/2015 | 1679602 | Fr Joseph Colley - Cost of 4 bags of rice for the rural poor | 2310 5,000.00 |
| 08/07/2015 | 1679649 | Fr Tanislas Ndecky - Cost of 4 bags of rice for the rural poor | 2310 5,000.00 |
| 23/07/2015 | 10304244 | Fr Celestin Badji - Cost of three bags of rice for the rural poor | 2310 3,750.00 |
| 23/07/2015 | 10304245 | Fr Joseph A Colley - Cost of three bags of rice for the rural poor | 2310 3,750.00 |
| 23/07/2015 | 10304246 | Fr Fredrick Agame - Cost of two bags of rice for the rural poor | 2310 2,500.00 |
| 23/07/2015 | 10304247 | Fr Peter Jammeh - Cost of four bags of rice for the rural poor | 2310 5,000.00 |
| 23/07/2015 | 10304248 | Fr Pascal Mendy - Cost of three bags of rice for the rural poor | 2310 3,750.00 |
| 05/10/2015 | 1937327 | Fr Tanislas Ndecky - Cost of 4 bags of rice for the rural poor | 2310 3,750.00 |
| 05/10/2015 | 1937327 | Fr Celestin Badji - Cost of three bags of rice for the rural poor | 2310 3,750.00 |
| 05/10/2015 | 1937327 | Fr Joseph A. Colley - Cost of three bags of rice for the rural poor | 2310 3,750.00 |
| 05/10/2015 | 1937327 | Fr Fredrick Agame - Cost of two bags of rice for the rural poor | 2310 3,750.00 |
| 05/10/2015 | 1937327 | Fr Peter Jammeh - Cost of four bags of rice for the rural poor | 2310 3,750.00 |
| TOTAL PAID OUT | | | 77,500.00 |
| BALANCE IN ACCOUNT | | | 915.00 |

BAGS OF RICE DONATED BY KNIGHTS OF ST PETER AND ST PAUL

| | PARISH OR VILLAGE | AMOUNT OF BAGS |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|
| Apr-15 | Jalo Koto | 5 |
| 27/05/2015 | Njongon - Fr Pascal Mendy | 2 |
| 27/05/2015 | Bansang - Fr Peter Jammeh | 4 |
| 27/05/2015 | Basse - Fr Fredrick Agame | 2 |
| Jun-15 | Fajara - Haddy Colley | 1 |
| 05/06/2015 | Farafenni - Fr Celestin Badji | 1 |
| TOTAL OF BAGS | | 15 |



family circle

Repainting?

THE long and humid rainy season didn't do paintwork any good. And these days, with Christmas and the New Year in mind, you may be considering repainting your house, inside or out, and repainting compound walls.

Whether you pay a painter or do the painting yourself, you should first think about the sort of paint best suited to the job you want doing.

Before you start painting, make sure that all surfaces to be painted are smooth and free of cracks and defects. Fill cracks with 'do-it-yourself' plaster. Clear off old flaking paint. You may need to give a first coat or 'primer' – that is, a paint specially made to provide a good foundation. The use of a primer is essential on newly-plastered surfaces.

Type of paint

Paints can be divided into those that are **water-based** and those that are **oil-based**.

The cheapest is the locally-produced white lasso. If you need a quick white repaint to brighten up your house it does a reasonable job. But the surface doesn't last long. It discolours, becomes dirty, flakes easily. Before long, if you like your walls to look smart, you'll need to paint again. So though lasso is cheap, it doesn't represent value for money.

If you have the means, consider other paints. They will cost more but last longer.

EMULSION PAINT is water-based. It works well on interior and exterior walls and masks imperfections in wall surfaces. A fairly wide selection of colours is available. Some shops can mix a special colour for you, which you choose from a card.

The cheapest emulsion paints are not really washable. If you choose a latex or plastic emulsion paint you pay more but get better value, because such paints are washable (useful if you have small children!)

What's often locally called **OIL PAINT** is the toughest paint. It's harder to put on and take longer to dry. Shiny or 'gloss' oil paint is useful in the kitchen and bathroom and on wooden doors and window-frames. But it shows up imperfections in walls. Some paints are specially made for use on metal surfaces.

Paints come in various 'finishes': matt, satin, eggshell or gloss.

Some wooden surfaces, including furniture, are varnished.

VARNISH dries quickly. Brown varnished ceilings used to be popular; but they make a ceiling look lower, and a room darker.

Most ceilings are better painted with white emulsion paint.

WOOD STAINS are increasingly popular. They soak into wood, and some protect against insect infestation.

Harder to find are paints which guard against salt-damage: really useful if your premises are near the sea.

Which colour?

If you're uncertain about which colour will look best in which area, remember that white reflects the light best of all, and so is suitable in dark rooms and often best in kitchens and bathrooms.

Pale greens and blues make a room look cool and restful. Yellows are cheerful. Red and darker colours can make a room seem smaller and hotter.

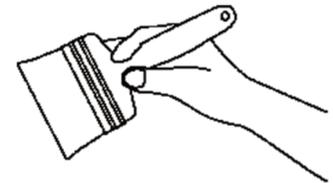
If you want to change the colour of a room, you may have to apply two or more coats of paint.

Always stir paint thoroughly. Do NOT add water, unless the instructions on the pot say you should. Watering paint to make it go further and save money is a false economy: the paint won't cover nearly as well, and will fade and deteriorate faster.

Choose brushes carefully. The cheapest tend to lose their bristles.

The width of the brush is important. The larger the area you want to paint and the bigger the paint pot, the bigger brush you'll need. But some painters are happier with a brush a little smaller than usual.

If you have awkward spots to paint, you may need a smaller brush for those places. Hold the brush as shown in the diagram (*right*).



Don't dip the brush too deeply into the paint pot, and don't overload the brush with paint – this will cause drips (on the wall, on the floor, and on your clothes).

Rubbing petroleum jelly (Vaseline) on your hands before painting makes it easier to remove any paint from them afterwards.

Instead of brushes you may wish to try a paint-roller – especially suitable for ceilings and other large areas. But rollers require a particular technique and are more wasteful of paint.

If you want to take a short break from painting you can leave your brush in water to keep the bristles soft, or cover it with kitchen foil.

Cleaning up

When you've finished painting for the day, clean your brush or roller carefully and without delay. If you've been using emulsion paint you can clean the brush with water and washing-up liquid, followed by a thorough rinsing in cold water.

Brushes you've used for applying oil paint must be cleaned with white spirit or a product made specially made for brush-cleaning.

Clean a paint roller by rolling it over newspaper to remove excess paint before removing the sleeve and washing the roller thoroughly.

Don't forget to close your paint tin carefully. You can prevent a skin forming on the surface of oil paint by pouring a thin layer of white spirit on top of the paint before closing the lid.

If you have only a small quantity of paint left in the tin, transfer it to an old jar with a screw-top lid and keep it to cover any scratches that may occur on your walls later.

It's said that lemon slices placed round a newly-painted room will banish paint smells. But it's better if possible to leave windows open until the smell's gone.

If you employ a man to paint for you (very few women work as painters!) take a look at his working clothes. If they're covered with paint splodges he's not much good at his job. The paint should go on the walls – not on his clothes or on the floor!

Note that whether open or closed, your paint tins should never overflow like those in the illustration on the opposite page!

Do you sometimes suffer from a boil?

A BOIL is an infection deep in the skin. Another name for a boil is a skin abscess.

Many people suffer from boils from time to time. Boils are a nuisance, usually painful and sometime disfiguring. They can be worrying, and should not be neglected.

A boil usually starts as a tender area. It becomes firmer until the centre of the abscess softens as fills with infection-fighting white blood cells which the body sends from the bloodstream to fight the infection.

The collection of white blood cells, bacteria and proteins is known as 'pus'. The pus eventually 'forms a head'.

Many single boils can be treated at home. You should begin treatment as soon as you notice a boil. The treatment for most boils is heat-application: a hot-water pack pressed against the boil. The heat increases the circulation to the area and helps the body to fight off the infection by bringing anti-bodies and white blood cells to the site.

As long as the boil is small and firm, opening the area and draining the boil is not helpful. But when the boil becomes soft or 'forms a head' it may be ready to drain. Once drained, pain relief may be dramatic.

With warm soaking, most boils drain by themselves. Sometimes, and especially with larger boils, the boil may need to be drained, or 'lanced'.

Don't try to do this yourself, as you may introduce further infection. The draining should be done by a qualified health practitioner: a doctor or nurse.

Antibiotics?

Your doctor may prescribe antibiotics to eliminate the infection that accompanies boils. But antibiotics are not always needed.

If you have a long-term illness such as diabetes, or are taking medicines that impair the immune system, you should see your doctor. Any boil associated with a fever should also be brought to your doctor's attention.

Good hygiene, including the frequent use of soap and water, can help prevent bacteria from building up on the skin. But boils are not completely preventable.



Go easy on the alcohol

AT CHRISTMAS, many people drink more alcohol than usual, whether beer, wine or spirits.

For your own sake and that of others, it's sensible to stick to safe drinking habits.

Over-drinking often results in absence from work, traffic accidents, domestic violence, marital breakdown, child abuse, sexual assault and other violent crimes.

People who drink too much risk developing alcohol-related disorders such as liver-damage and cardio-vascular disorders (high blood-pressure, coronary artery disease and stroke).

Heavy drinkers frequently suffer digestive disorders such as gastritis, pancreatitis, peptic ulcer and cancer of the mouth, tongue, pharynx, larynx or oesophagus. And they tend not to eat a balanced diet.

Young people who drink heavily are likely to experiment with other addictive drugs.

Pregnant women who drink alcohol regularly or heavily are likely to damage the physical and mental development of their unborn children.

Long-term alcoholic over-indulgence leads to impairment of the brain, affecting intellectual ability and movement.

The lesson is: Go easy on alcohol at Christmas – and throughout the year!

Test your brain cells

HERE are three questions to test your perception and logic. Answer them quickly, and by yourself.

1 Do the following sum in your head. Take 1,000 and add 40 to it. Now add another 1000. Now add 30. Add another 1000. Now add 20. Now add another 1000. Now add 10. What's the total?

2 Mary's father has five daughters: 1 Nana. 2 Nene. 3 Nini. 4 Nono. What is the name of the fifth daughter?

4 A deaf and dumb man goes into a shop to buy a toothbrush. By imitating the action of brushing his teeth he succeeds in expressing himself to the shopkeeper, and the purchase is made. Next, a blind man comes into the shop to buy some sunglasses. How does he indicate to the shopkeeper what he wants?

Turn upside-down to see how you've done

1. Did you get a total of 5,000? You are wrong. The answer is 4,100. (If you don't believe this, use a calculator.)
 2. Did you answer Nunu? Wrong! The fifth daughter's name is Mary. Read the question again!
 3. The blind man opens his mouth and tells the shopkeeper what he wants.
 After answering these simple questions, can you describe yourself as a perceptive, quick-thinking and logical person?



O come, O come, Emmanuel

The Great Advent Antiphons come from the Old Testament. They reflect the Hebrew people's yearning for the coming of the Messiah. For us, too, they are a call for Christ to come among us.



O Wisdom



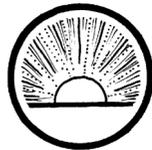
O Adonai



O Root of Jesse



O Key of David



O Rising Sun



O King of the Nations



O Emmanuel

SINCE the 7th century, as Advent draws to a close, the Great Advent Antiphons have been recited daily at Evening Prayer before and after the Song of Mary (the *Magnificat*).

Each antiphon addresses God with a Biblical name, and concludes with a call for the coming of the Saviour.

The antiphons feature in the hymn, 'O come, O come, Emmanuel'. *In the days leading up to Christmas, why not use the Great Advent Antiphons in your private prayers?*

Wednesday 17th December

O WISDOM, you come forth from the mouth of the Most High. You fill the universe and hold all things together in a strong yet gentle manner. O come to teach us the way of truth.

Readings: Ecclesiasticus 24:1-9. 1 Corinthians 1:1-13

Thursday 18th December

O ADONAI and Leader of the House of Israel, who appeared to Moses in a burning bush, and on Sinai gave him the Law: come to redeem us with outstretched arm.

Readings: Exodus 3:1-6. Acts 7:20-36

Friday 19th December

O ROOT of Jesse, you stand as a sign for the people. Kings stand silent before you, whom the nations will worship. Come to set us free, and do not delay.

Readings: Isaiah 11:1-10. Romans 15:7-13

Saturday 20th December

O KEY of David and Sceptre of the House of Israel, what you open, no one can close; and what you close, no one can open. Come to lead the captive from prison, seated in darkness and in the shadow of death.

Readings: Isaiah 22:20-33. Revelation 3:7-13

Fourth Sunday in Advent: 21st December

O RISING SUN, splendour of eternal light and Sun of Justice: come and shine on those seated in darkness and in the shadow of death.

Readings: Numbers 24:15b-19. Revelation 22:10-21

Monday 22nd December

O KING of the Nations, whom all the people desire: you are the Keystone which makes all one. Come and save mankind whom you formed from clay.

Readings: Jeremiah 30:7-11a. Acts 4:1-12

Tuesday 23rd December

O EMMANUEL, our King and our Judge, the One awaited by the gentiles, and their Saviour: Come and save us, Lord our God

Readings: Isaiah 7:10-14. Matthew 1:18-23

Lord Jesus,
teach us the way of truth and set us free

The Pope's Prayer Intentions

December

- That all may experience the mercy of God, who never tires of forgiving.
- That families, especially those who suffer, may find in the birth of Jesus a sign of certain hope.

January

- That sincere dialogue among men and women of different faiths may produce the fruits of peace and justice.
- That by means of dialogue and fraternal charity, and with the grace of the Holy Spirit, Christians may overcome divisions.



Sunday Reflections

Reflections, readings and prayers
for all the Sundays in December & January
and for the Immaculate Conception, Christmas and New Year's Day



29th November First Sunday of Advent

Today we begin a new liturgical year.

Until 20th November 2106, the Sunday readings are those for Year C, and weekday readings are those for Year 2.

The colour for Advent is purple or violet.

The Gloria in excelsis is not said or sung on Sundays in Advent.

Come, Lord Jesus!

TODAY's three readings embrace the main theme of Advent: the coming of Christ and our need to be ready to meet him.

Speaking in God's name, the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah declared, 'The days are surely coming... when I shall cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David.' This 'Branch' is Jesus Christ.

In today's Gospel we hear Jesus warning his followers that they should stay awake so that when the Son of Man comes again 'with power and great glory' they may be able to stand with confidence before him.

In the meantime, Paul wrote to the Thessalonians (in today's second reading) that they should lead holy lives, 'blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.'

So it is that Jeremiah foretells Christ's birth in Judah, while Jesus and Paul speak of the Second Coming, when God in Christ will judge the living and the dead.

The Second Coming will be devastating and marvellous: devastating for unrepentant sinners, marvellous for those who have sought God.

Most of us are hazy and lazy about the Second Coming. We don't often think about it. Yet our personal end on this earth may come at any time. We should be awake to our need to lead decent and kindly lives, 'as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ'.

Throughout the year, this very prayer is offered at Mass, following the Our Father. It reminds us that we should always 'be prepared' - whatever the time or season.

Collect

GRANT your faithful, we pray, almighty God, the resolve to run forth to meet your Christ with righteous deeds at his coming, so that, gathered at his right hand, they may be worthy to possess the heavenly kingdom...

Readings: Jeremiah 33:14-16. Psalm 24:4-5,8-10,14. Response: To you, O Lord. I lift up my soul. Thessalonians 3:12 - 4:2.

Gospel acclamation: Alleluia...Let us see, O Lord, your mercy, and give us your saving help...

Gospel: Luke 21:25-28,34-36.

Prayer over the Offerings

ACCEPT, we pray, O Lord, these offerings we make, gathered from among your gifts to us, and may what you grant us to celebrate devoutly here below, gain for us the prize of eternal redemption...

Preface

...for he assumed at his first coming the lowliness of human flesh, and so fulfilled the design you formed long ago, and opened for us the way to eternal salvation, that, when he comes again in glory and majesty and all is at last made manifest, we who watch for that day may inherit the great promise in which we now dare to hope...

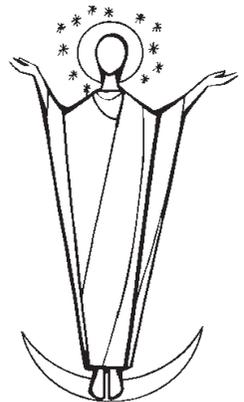
Prayer after Communion

MAY these mysteries, O Lord, in which we have participated, profit us, we pray, for even now, as we walk among passing things, you teach us by them to love the things of heaven and hold fast to what endures...

Saturday 5th December
Pilgrimage Mass at Kunkujang
Mariama
and
Tuesday 8th December
Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

(Opening of the Year of Mercy)

See pages 10 & 32



Collect

O GOD, who by the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin prepared a worthy dwelling for your Son, grant, we pray, that, as you preserved her from every stain by virtue of the Death of your Son, which you foresaw, so, through her intercession, we, too, may be cleansed and admitted to your presence...

Readings: Genesis 3:9-15,20. Psalm 97:1-4. Response: Sing a new song to the Lord, for he has worked wonders. Ephesians 1:36,11-12.

Gospel acclamation: Alleluia...Hail, Mary, full of grace; the Lord is with thee! Blessed art thou among women.

Gospel: Luke 1:26-38.

The Creed is said.

Prayer over the Offerings

GRACIOUSLY accept the saving sacrifice which we offer you, O Lord, on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and grant that, as we profess her, on account of your prevenient grace, to be untouched by any stain of sin, so, through her intercession, we may be delivered from all our faults...

Preface

...for you preserved the most Blessed Virgin Mary from all stain of original sin, so that in her, endowed with the rich fullness of your grace, you might prepare a worthy Mother for your Son, and signify the beginning of the Church, his beautiful Bride without spot of wrinkle. She, the most pure Virgin, was to bring forth a Son, the innocent Lamb who would wipe away our offences. You placed her above all others to be for your people an advocate of grace and a model of holiness...

Prayer after Communion

MAY the Sacrament we have received, O Lord our God, heal in us the wounds of that fault from which in a singular way you preserved Blessed Mary in her Immaculate Conception...

6th December
**Second Sunday
 of Advent**

Glory in the wilderness

'BE prepared' – that's the call to each of us during Advent, highlighted last Sunday and repeated today. The first reading, ascribed to the prophet Baruch, secretary to the prophet Jeremiah, was written during the desolate exile of the Jews in Babylon. Yet it is full of joyous expectation. Baruch told the exiles to put on 'the diadem of the glory of the Everlasting...for God will lead Israel with joy, in the light of his glory.'

The colour for Advent is purple. We walk now in darkness. But the Great Light - Christ - is coming to show us the path to glory. In the reading from Philippians, Paul, hoping for this same glory, prays 'with joy'. And in today's Gospel we are presented with the declaration of John the Baptist. Echoing Baruch, John spoke of mountains being laid low, and all mankind - not just Israel - seeing the salvation of God.

We are now in exile, in the wilderness - the wilderness of the sins of the world and our own sins. But the light is there, plain to see with the eyes of faith. Let us 'be prepared'.

Collect

ALMIGHTY and merciful God, may no earthly undertaking hinder those who set out in haste to meet your Son, but may our learning of heavenly wisdom gain us admittance to his company...

Readings: Baruch 5: 1-9. Psalm 125: Response: What marvels the Lord worked for us! Indeed we were glad. Philippians 1:4-6,8-11.

Gospel acclamation: Alleluia...Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight, and all mankind shall see the salvation of God...

**Gospel:** Luke 3:1-6**Prayer over the Offerings**

BE pleased, O Lord, with our humble prayers and offerings, and, since we have no merits to plead our cause, come, we pray, to our rescue with the protection of your mercy...

Preface

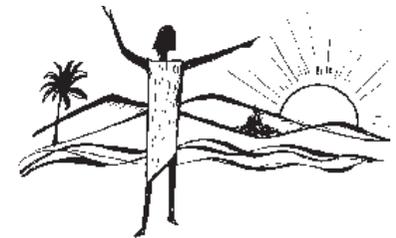
...for he assumed at his first coming the lowliness of human flesh, and so fulfilled the design you formed long ago, and opened for us the way to eternal salvation, that, when he comes again in glory and majesty and all is at last made manifest, we who watch for that day may inherit the great promise in which we now dare to hope...

Prayer after Communion

REPLENISHED by the food of spiritual nourishment, we humbly beseech you, O Lord, that, through our partaking in this mystery, you may teach us to judge wisely the things of earth and hold firm to the things of heaven...

13th December
**Third Sunday
 of Advent**

*Instead of purple or violet,
 rose-coloured vestments
 may be used today.*

**The message of John**

THE PROPHET Zephaniah wrote during the reign of King Josiah, a time of degradation and idolatry. He foretold disaster, but ended on a note of joy. A remnant of the people would be renewed by God's love.

Today's Gospel relates how John the Baptist was also preaching at a time of depression and uncertainty. The Jews were living under Roman rule, and many of their religious leaders were haughty hypocrites. John was the last of the prophets, the forerunner of Christ. He preached to the common people, even to despised tax-collectors and soldiers. His message was 'Repent!' because 'one who is more powerful than I is coming'. That 'one' was Christ.

If we today, in The Gambia, accept John's message, we shall share that feeling of 'expectation' which John inspired.

The second reading, from Paul, should similarly inspire us: 'The Lord is near... The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.'

Collect

O GOD, who see how your people faithfully await the feast of the Lord's nativity, enable us, we pray, to attain the joys of so great a salvation and to celebrate them with solemn worship and glad rejoicing...

Readings: Zephaniah 3:14-18. Isaiah 12:2-6. Response: Sing and shout your joy, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel. Philippians: 4:4-7.

Gospel acclamation: Alleluia...The spirit of the Lord has been given to me. He has sent me to give good news to the poor.

Gospel; Luke 3:10-18**Prayer over the Offerings**

MAY the sacrifice of our worship, Lord, we pray, be offered to you unceasingly, to complete what was begun in sacred mystery and powerfully accomplish for us your saving work...

Preface

...for he assumed at his first coming the lowliness of human flesh, and so fulfilled the design you formed long ago, and opened for us the way to eternal salvation, that, when he comes again in glory and majesty and all is at last made manifest, we who watch for that day may inherit the great promise in which we now dare to hope...

Prayer after Communion

WE implore your mercy, Lord, that this divine sustenance may cleanse us of our faults and prepare us for the coming feasts...



20th December
**Fourth Sunday
of Advent**

All prophecy fulfilled

THREE days ago, on Thursday 17th December, we began the second part of Advent, what we might call the lead-in to Christmas. (See *Advent Antiphons*, page 14)

In today's first reading, the prophet Micah, like Baruch, last Sunday, begins with reproach and warns of punishment, but ends on a note of hope.

Our own Advent hope stems from what the prophets told their people and what they tell us: that God, the God of integrity, forgives and redeems. This was the message of John the Baptist, who as the last of the prophets ushered in the New Testament.

Today, with Christmas at hand, we turn to Mary, the God-bearer, who by the Father's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit brought God uniquely into our world.

'Blessed is the fruit of your womb!' cried Elizabeth, Mary's cousin. May we echo Elizabeth's joy and recognise that what the whole world needs and is waiting for has been given us in Christ.

Jesus is the Child of Bethlehem, the Christ of all our joys and sorrows, the Christ in the Mass, the Christ at our side.

Lord Jesus, open our hearts to receive you.

Collect

POUR forth, we beseech you, O Lord, your grace into our hearts, that we, to whom the Incarnation of your Christ your Son was made known by the message of an angel, may by his Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of his Resurrection...

Readings: Micah 5:1-4. Psalm 79: 2-3,15-16,18-19. Response: God of hosts, bring us back; let your face shine on us and we shall be saved. Hebrews 10:5-10

Gospel acclamation: Alleluia... I am the handmaid of the Lord, let what you have said be done to me...

Gospel: Luke 1:39-45

Prayer over the Offerings

MAY the Holy Spirit, O Lord, sanctify these gifts laid upon your altar, just as he filled with power the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary...

Preface

...for all the oracles of the prophets foretold him, the Virgin Mother longed for him with love beyond all telling, John the Baptist sang of his coming and proclaimed his presence when he came. It is by his gift that already we rejoice at the mystery of his Nativity, so that he may find us watchful in prayer and exultant in his praise...

Prayer after Communion

HAVING received this pledge of eternal redemption, we pray, almighty God, that, as the feast day of our salvation draws ever nearer, so we may press forward all the more eagerly to the worthy celebration of the mystery of your Son's Nativity...

Thursday 25th December
Nativity of the Lord

Christmas Day: Holyday of Obligation

The Church provides four Christmas Masses:

- **Mass of the Vigil**
(Thursday evening)
- **Mass of Midnight**
- **Mass of the Dawn**
(early on Christmas Day)
- **Mass of the Day**



The colour for Christmas Time is white or gold.

SINCE the beginning of the Church, priests, philosophers, poets and artists have sought to express their wonder at the great mystery of Christ's birth – Emmanuel, God-with-us = in a humble manger at Bethlehem.

The greatest artists may inspire us, but no one can fully understand, nor ever give adequate thanks, for what God has done for us in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

In a Christmas homily in 2003, St John Paul declared, 'The Child lay in a lowly manger. This is God's sign. The centuries pass, but the sign remains, and it remains valid for us, too, the men and women of the third millennium. It is a sign of hope for the whole human family. A sign of peace for those suffering from conflicts of every time, a sign of freedom for the poor and oppressed, a sign of mercy for those caught up in the vicious circle of sin, a sign of love and consolation to those who feel lonely and abandoned. A small and fragile sign. A humble and quiet sign, but one filled with the power of God, who out of love became man.'

MASS of the VIGIL**Collect**

O GOD, who gladden us year by year as we wait in hope for our redemption, grant that, just as we joyfully welcome your Only Begotten Son as our Redeemer, we may also merit to face him confidently when he comes again as our Judge...

Readings: Isaiah 62: 1-5. Psalm 88: 4-5, 16-17, 27-29. Response: I will sing for ever of your love, O Lord. Acts 13: 16-17, 22-25.

Gospel acclamation: Alleluia... Tomorrow there will be an end to the sin of the world, and the Saviour of the world will be our King.

Gospel: Matthew 1:(1-17),18-25.

During the creed, all kneel at the words, 'and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate...'

Prayer over the Offerings

AS we look forward, O Lord, to the coming festivities, may we serve you all the more eagerly for knowing that in them you make manifest the beginnings of our redemption...

Preface: *the priest may use any one of the three Prefaces for Christmas (see bottom of this page)*

Prayer after Communion

GRANT, O Lord, we pray, that we may draw new vigour from celebrating the Nativity of your Only Begotten Son, by whose heavenly mystery we receive both food and drink...

MASS of MIDNIGHT

Collect

O GOD, who have made this most sacred night radiant with the splendour of the true light, grant, we pray, that we who have known the mysteries of his light on earth, may also delight in his gladness in heaven...

Readings: Isaiah 9:1-7. Psalm 95:1-3,11-13. Response: Today a saviour has been born to us; he is Christ the Lord. Titus 2:11-14.

Gospel acclamation: Alleluia...I bring you news of great joy: today a saviour has been born to us, Christ the Lord.

Gospel: Luke 2:1-14.

During the creed, all kneel at the words, 'and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate...'

Prayer over the Offerings

MAY the oblation of this day's feast be pleasing to you, O Lord, we pray, that through this most holy exchange we may be found in the likeness of Christ in whom our nature is united to you...

Preface: *the priest may use any one of the three Prefaces for Christmas (see the bottom of this page)*

Prayer after Communion

GRANT us, we pray, O Lord our God, that we, who are gladdened by participation in our Redeemer's Nativity, may through an honourable way of life become worthy of union with him...

MASS of the DAWN

Collect

GRANT, we pray, almighty God, that, as we are bathed in the new radiance of your incarnate Word, the light of faith, which illumines our minds, may also shine through in our deeds...

Readings: Isaiah 62:11-12. Psalm 96:1-6,11-12. Response: This day new light will shine upon the earth: the Lord is born for us. Titus 3:4-7.

Gospel acclamation: Alleluia...Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace to men who enjoy his favour.

Gospel: Luke 2: 15-20.

During the creed, all kneel at the words, 'and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate...'

Prayer over the Offerings

MAY our offerings be worthy, we pray, O Lord, of the mysteries of the Nativity this day, that, just as Christ was born a man and also shone forth as God, so these earthly gifts may bestow on us what is divine...

Preface: *the priest may use any one of the three Prefaces for Christmas (see bottom of this page)*

Prayer after Communion

GRANT us, Lord, as we honour with joyful devotion the Nativity of your Son, that we may come to know with fullness of faith the hidden depths of this mystery, and to love them ever more and more....

MASS of the DAY

And the Word was made flesh...

THE GOSPEL readings for the three earlier Masses of Christmas (last evening, last night and early this morning) gave us accounts from Matthew and Luke of the birth of Christ. But St John's Gospel begins in a very different way.

John doesn't tell us how Mary and Joseph experienced the birth of Jesus; instead, he declares what the birth of Jesus means for the whole world. Jesus is 'the Word' who existed 'in the beginning' and is Life and Light.

All the Old Testament is a preparation for Christ, as was the testimony of John the Baptist. But not everyone among Jesus' contemporaries, the Jews, saw him as the Light of the world. Neither does everyone in today's world. The Kingdom of God has to contend with the darkness of sin, indifference and ignorance. May the light of Christ as proclaimed in the Gospel dispel our doubts, invigorate our hopes, and show us and the whole world the way to the Father. We can make no better New Year resolution than to show in every aspect of our lives that we are Christ's missionaries of light and love.

Collect

O GOD, who wonderfully created the dignity of human nature and still more wonderfully restored it, grant, we pray, that we may share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity...

Readings: Isaiah 52:7-10. Psalm 97:1-6. Response: All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of God. Hebrews 1: 1-6.

Gospel acclamation: Alleluia... A hallowed day has dawned upon us. Come, you nations, worship the Lord.



Prefaces provided for use at Christmas Time

- 1 ...for in the mystery of the Word made flesh a new light of your glory has shone upon the eyes of our mind, so that, as we recognise in him God made visible, we may be caught up through him in love of things invisible...
- 2 ...for on the feast of this awe-filled mystery, though invisible in his own divine nature, he has appeared visibly in ours; and begotten before all ages, he has begun to exist in time; so that, raising up in himself all that was cast down, he might restore unity to all creation and call straying humanity back to the heavenly kingdom...
- 3 ...for in him the holy exchange that restores our life has shone forth today in splendour: when our frailty is assumed by your Word, not only does human mortality receive unending honour but by this wondrous union we, too, are made eternal...

Gospel: John 1:1-18 (or John 1:1-5, 9-14)

During the creed, all kneel at the words, 'and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate...'

Prayer over the Offerings

MAKE acceptable, O God, our offerings on this solemn day, when you manifested the reconciliation that makes us wholly pleasing in your sight, and inaugurated for us the fullness of divine worship...

Preface: *the priest may use any one of the three Prefaces for Christmas (see bottom of the opposite page)*

Prayer after Communion

GRANT, O merciful God, that just as the Saviour of the world, born this day, is the author of divine generation for us, so he may be the giver even of immortality...

Sunday 27th December
The Holy Family

Everything we pray for

WHAT do the Gospels tell us about Jesus as a child, an adolescent and a young man? There's nothing about his birth and childhood in the Gospels of Mark and John. Matthew tells us something about Jesus' birth, and how as an infant he was taken as a refugee to Egypt; but then he leaps ahead thirty years to the beginning of Jesus' ministry.



It's only Luke who relates an incident in Jesus' childhood, when he was about 12 years old, as told in today's Gospel reading. Jesus was found by his parents in the Temple at Jerusalem, talking with the elders. *(See back-page illustration)*

Apart from this, the Gospels tell us nothing of Jesus' life with Mary and Joseph as a boy, teenager or young adult in his home town. These thirty years of obscurity are sometimes referred to as the 'hidden years'. But they cannot have lacked incident and challenge. We may be sure that for Jesus they were formative years, a necessary preparation for his short ministry of teaching and healing which lead inexorably to his death and resurrection and his return to the Father.

The family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph is our ideal, the perfect family of mutual love and care. In our families today - the household with parents and children, the family of the Church, the family of the nation, the family of mankind - we pray for a measure of the love that unites Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

Today we pray especially for the priests and people of the Church of the Holy Family Fajara.

Collect

O GOD, who were pleased to give us the shining example of the Holy Family, graciously grant that we may imitate them in practising the virtues of family life and in the bonds of charity, and so, in the joy of your house, delight one day in eternal awards...

Readings: 1 Samuel 1:20-22,24-28. Psalm 83:2-3,5-6,9-10. Response: They are happy who dwell in your house, O Lord. 1 John 3:1-2,21-24.

or **Alternative Readings:** Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) 3: 3-7, 14-17. Psalm 122: 1-5. Response: O blessed are those who fear the Lord and walk in his ways! Colossians 3:12-21.

Gospel acclamation: Alleluia...Open our heart, O Lord, to accept the words of your Son...

Gospel: Luke 2:41-52

Prayer over the Offerings

WE offer you, Lord, the sacrifice of reconciliation, humbly asking that, through the intercession of the Virgin Mother of God and St Joseph, you may establish our families firmly in your grace and in your peace...

Preface: *the priest may use any one of the three Prefaces for Christmas (see bottom of the opposite page)*

Prayer after Communion

BRING those you refresh through this heavenly Sacrament, most merciful Father, to imitate constantly the example of the Holy Family, so that, after the trials of this world, we may share their company for ever...

Friday 1st January

Mary, Mother of God

Holiday of Obligation
God's Mother, God's peace

TODAY is the eighth day after Christmas. In Jewish tradition, on the eighth day after a boy's birth his mother would take him to be circumcised and give him his name.

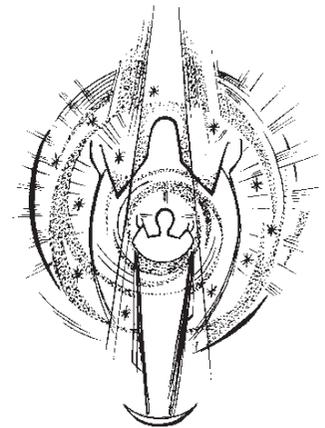
This is proclaimed in today's Gospel reading, and for centuries the first day of January was celebrated as the Feast of the Circumcision or the Holy Name of Jesus.

But now the Church gives this feast the title, 'Mary, Mother of God'. There is no contradiction. In becoming man, Jesus became subject to every aspect of the human condition. Like us, he needed his mother to feed him and take care of him. And Mary, we may be sure, fulfilled the role of mother fully and faithfully. She conformed to her people's traditions by having Jesus circumcised on the eighth day; and on the fortieth day she presented him in the Temple (a feast we shall celebrate on Tuesday 2nd February, 40 days after Christmas Day).

From the early days of the Church, Mary was given the Greek title *Theotokos*, or 'Mother of God'. This title honours Mary as the most blessed of all women. But more importantly, the title tells us that Mary's Son is divine - true God and true man. No wonder the angels sang, 'Glory be to God in the highest heaven, and peace to men who enjoy his favour!' We need to feel that peace in our hearts, practise it in our lives, and pray for peace in The Gambia and in all the world.

Collect

O GOD, who through the fruitful virginity of Blessed Mary bestowed on the human race the grace of eternal salvation, grant, we pray, that we may experience the intercession of her through whom we were found worthy to receive the author of life, our Lord Jesus Christ your Son...



Readings: Numbers 6:22-27. Psalm 66:2-3,5-6,8.
Response: O God, be gracious and bless us. Galatians 4:4-7.

Gospel acclamation: Alleluia...At various times in the past, and in various different ways, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets; but in our own time, the last days, he has spoken to us through his Son.

Gospel: Luke 2:16-21

Prayer over the Offerings

O GOD, who in your kindness begin all good things and bring them to fulfilment, grant to us, who find joy in the Solemnity of the holy Mother of God, that, just as we glory in the beginnings of your grace, so one day we may rejoice in its completion...

Preface

...for by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit she conceived your Only Begotten Son, and without losing the glory of virginity, brought forth into the world the eternal Light, Jesus Christ our Lord...

Prayer after Communion

WE have received this heavenly Sacrament with joy, O Lord; grant, we pray, that it may lead us to eternal life, for we rejoice to proclaim the blessed ever-Virgin Mary, Mother of your Son and Mother of the Church...

Sunday 3rd January

**The Epiphany
of the Lord**



Seeing and believing

THE EPIPHANY is a feast older than Christmas. Among Orthodox Christians, today's feast (always kept on its traditional date of 6th

January) celebrates the manifestation of the Infant Jesus to the wise men, and then his baptism and his first miracle, when he turned water into wine at Cana in Galilee.

In the Catholic Church, the Epiphany focuses principally on the wise men.

The story of the wise men's pilgrim visit to the Infant Jesus is told only in the Gospel of St Matthew. Unlike the shepherds, the wise men – or maji – didn't come from nearby: they were 'from the east'. And they weren't Jews, but Gentiles.

Matthew's narrative is simple, but rich in symbolism. The wise men's long, difficult journey stands for the yearning and struggle of all mankind to seek and find light and meaning in life. That the wise men weren't Jews illustrates that Christ is the Saviour of all peoples, wherever they come from. The wise men offered gold for a king, frankincense for a priest and myrrh for the anointing of a body. These gifts symbolise why we, too, worship him: he is our King and our High Priest who died for us.

Unlike the wise men, we cannot, except in a spiritual way, visit the manger. But we do, like them, hope to encounter Jesus face-to-face after making a journey. That journey is our pilgrim life on earth. Through prayer, through our participation in the Mass, despite struggle, doubt and temptation, we are making our way towards Jesus. Even now we have knowledge of him. We travel on life's way in the joyful hope of coming to know him as Mary, Joseph and the saints now know him – in the glory of his heavenly kingdom.



MASS of the VIGIL

Saturday evening

Collect

MAY the splendour of your majesty, O Lord, we pray, shed its light upon our hearts, that we may pass through the shadows of this world and reach the brightness of our eternal home...

Readings: Isaiah 60:1-6. Psalm 71:1-2,7-8,10-13.
Response: All nations shall fall prostrate before you, O Lord. Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6.

Gospel acclamation: Alleluia... We saw his star as it rose, and have come to do the Lord homage.

Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

Prayer over the Offerings

ACCEPT, we pray, O Lord, our offerings in honour of the appearing of your Only Begotten Son and the first fruits of the nations, that to you praise may be rendered and eternal salvation be ours...

Preface

...for today you have revealed the mystery of our salvation in Christ as a light for the nations, and, when he appeared in our mortal nature, you made us new by the glory of his immortal nature...

Prayer after Communion

RENEWED by sacred nourishment, we implore your mercy, O Lord, that the star of your justice may always shine bright in our minds and that our true treasure may ever consist in our confession of you...

MASS of EPIPHANY SUNDAY

Collect

O GOD, who on this day revealed your Only Begotten Son to the nations by the guidance of a star, grant in your mercy that we, who know you already by faith, may be brought to behold the beauty of your sublime glory...

Readings: Isaiah 60:1-6. Psalm 71:1-2,7-8,10-13.
Response: All nations shall fall prostrate before you, O Lord. Ephesians 3:2-3,5-6.

Gospel acclamation: Alleluia... We saw his star as it rose, and have come to do the Lord homage.

Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

Prayer over the Offerings

LOOK with favour, Lord, we pray, on these gifts of your Church, in which are offered now, not gold or frankincense or myrrh, but he who by them is proclaimed, sacrificed and received, Jesus Christ...

Preface

...for today you have revealed the mystery of our salvation in Christ as a light for the nations, and, when he appeared in our mortal nature, you made us new by the glory of his immortal nature...

Prayer after Communion

Go before us with heavenly light, O Lord, always and everywhere, that we may perceive with clear sight and revere with true affection the mystery in which you have willed us to participate...

Full texts for Mass every day of the year
at Universalis.com

Sunday 10th January The Baptism of the Lord

THE FEAST of the Baptism of the Lord marks the end of the Christmas Season and ushers in Ordinary Time.

After about thirty years as boy and man, presumably in quiet preparation within the Holy Family, Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness, followed by his baptism at the hands of John the Baptist.

Jesus' baptism marked the beginning of his public life: his short ministry of teaching, healing and proclaiming the Kingdom.

In the sacrament of baptism we have been admitted to the Church. As St Paul teaches us, baptism washes away our sins, and we are born again into new life.

But why did our Master, Jesus, submit to baptism? Surely he, the Sinless One, had no need of baptism?

What Christ's baptism signified was the consecration of his forthcoming ministry to the Father, to enlighten and redeem his followers and all mankind.

Jesus' baptism, as the Gospels tell us, was ratified by the divine presence of the Father and the Holy Spirit. That is why each of us was baptised in the name of the Most Holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Collect

ALMIGHTY ever-living God, who, when Christ had been baptised in the River Jordan, and as the Holy Spirit descended upon him, solemnly declared your beloved Son, grant that your children by adoption, reborn of water and the Holy Spirit, may always be well-pleasing to you...

Readings: Isaiah 40:1-5,9-11. Psalm 103:1-4,24-25,27-30. Response: Bless Lord, my soul! Lord God, how great you are! Titus 2:11-14 & 3:4-7.

Alternative readings (from Year A): Isaiah 40:1-4,6-7. Psalm 28:1-4,9-10. Response: The Lord will bless his people with peace. Acts 10:34-38.

Gospel acclamation: Alleluia...Someone is coming, said John, someone greater than I. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

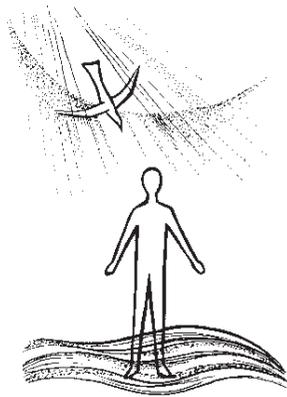
Gospel: Luke 3:13-16, 21-22.

Prayer over the Offerings

ACCEPT, O Lord, the offerings we have brought to honour the revealing of your beloved Son, so that the oblation of your faithful may be transformed into the sacrifice of him who willed in his compassion to wash away the sins of the world...

Preface

...for in the waters of the Jordan you revealed with signs and wonders a new Baptism, so that through the voice that came down from heaven we might come to believe in your Word dwelling among us, and by the Spirit's descending in the likeness of a dove we may know that Christ your Servant has been anointed with the oil of gladness and sent to bring the good news to the poor...



Prayer after Communion

NOURISHED with these sacred gifts, we humbly entreat your mercy, O Lord, that, faithfully listening to your Only Begotten Son, we may be your children in name and in truth...

The Baptism of the Lord is the last day of Christmas Time

18th January 2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

'Do whatever he tells you'

ORDINARY Time has begun. At Sunday Mass until Lent (which will begin on Wednesday 10th February) we shall follow Christ in the early days of his public ministry, seeking to learn from him as his first hearers did.

This is Year C in the Sunday lectionary, and most of our Gospel readings will come from the Gospel of St Luke. But on this one Sunday, the Gospel reading comes from St John. It concerns Jesus' first miracle, at a wedding at Cana in Galilee.

Cana is probably what is now Kef Kenna, seven kilometres north-east of Nazareth. The first wedding-guest mentioned is Jesus' mother, Mary. There's no mention of Joseph, which some commentators take to mean that he had already died.

Wedding celebrations in the East last a long time. Relatives and friends come to greet the newly-weds, and even passers-by are made welcome. The women look after the catering. Wine is regarded as indispensable in creating a party mood. Mary probably lent a hand, which was how she realised that the wine was running out.

The presence of Jesus at the wedding may be taken as a sign that he blesses the love between a man and a woman joined in marriage. God instituted marriage at the beginning of creation (Genesis 1:27-28) and Jesus raised it to the status of a sacrament (Matthew 19:6).

In St John's Gospel, Mary is mentioned only twice: at the wedding, and at her Son's crucifixion (John 19:25). Cana comes at the beginning of Christ's ministry, and the Cross comes at the end, as though to show that Mary is present in everything that Jesus does.

We should take what Mary says to the servants as words addressed to us: 'Do whatever he tells you.' If we do whatever Jesus tells us, we may be sure he will be generous in his response - as generous as when he turned water into wine.

The colour for Ordinary Time is green

Collect

ALMIGHTY ever-living God, who govern all things both in heaven and on earth, mercifully hear the pleading of your people, and bestow your peace on our times...

Readings: Isaiah 62:1-5. Psalm 95:1-3,7-10. Response: Proclaim the wonders of the Lord among all the peoples. 1 Corinthians 12:4-11.

Gospel acclamation: Alleluia... Your words are spirit, Lord, and they are life: you have the message of eternal life.

Gospel: John 2:1-11



Prayer over the Offerings

GRANT us, O Lord, we pray, that we may participate worthily in these mysteries, for whenever the memorial of this sacrifice is celebrated the work of our redemption is accomplished...

Preface: *the priest may use any one of the eight Prefaces provided for use in Ordinary Time.*

Prayer after Communion

POUR on us, O Lord, the Spirit of your love, and in your kindness make those you have nourished by this one heavenly Bread one in mind and heart...



24th January
**Third Sunday
in Ordinary Time**

In the synagogue...

AT every Sunday Mass until next November, except during Easter Time, we are to hear readings from the Gospel of St Luke. We begin today with Luke's short prologue. It is addressed to a certain Theophilus (which means 'lover of God'). But Luke seems to be aiming his Gospel, and the Acts of the Apostles (which he also wrote) at Christian converts from paganism, to show how well-founded are the Church's teachings about Christ, the compassionate Son of God.

From the prologue we move to chapter 4 of Luke's Gospel, to the synagogue in Jesus' home town of Nazareth. Jesus had already made a name for himself, and everyone was praising him. In the synagogue, Jesus read aloud from the scroll of the Old Testament (the Hebrew scriptures). The text he chose was Isaiah 61:1-2. 'He has anointed me...He has sent me to bring the good news...to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

Jesus applied this prophecy to himself. He asserted: 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'

We Christians believe that Jesus is indeed the fulfilment of everything promised in the Old Testament – the fulfilment of the yearnings of all mankind.

'This is my Son; listen to him!' (Luke 9:36). This is the message we need to pass on to our neighbours and the world, that Jesus is God in man made manifest.

Collect

ALMIGHTY ever-living God, direct our actions according to your good pleasure, that in the name of your beloved Son we may abound in good works...

Readings: Nehemiah 8:2-6,8-10. Psalm 18:8-10,15. Response: Your words are spirit, Lord, and they are life. 1 Corinthians 12:12-30.

Gospel acclamation: Alleluia...The Lord has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives...

Gospel: Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21

Prayer over the Offerings

ACCEPT our offerings, O Lord, we pray, and in sanctifying them grant that they may profit us for salvation...

Preface: *the priest may use any one of the eight Prefaces provided for use in Ordinary Time.*

Prayer after Communion

GRANT, we pray, almighty God, that, receiving the grace by which you bring us to new life, we may always glory in your gift...

This Sunday falls within the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. See page 23.

31st January

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time***Rejection!***

TODAY'S reading from Jeremiah reminds us that prophets cannot count on popularity: instead, they may encounter enmity.

The Gospel reading continues from where last Sunday's Gospel left off. Christ had earned praise, and in the synagogue the people 'were amazed by the gracious words that came from his mouth'. But these very people were proud and protective of their own particular culture and traditions, and when Jesus began to speak of outsiders receiving God's approval, they turned against him. They ejected Jesus from the synagogue and attempted to throw him down a cliff.

Fallible human nature hasn't changed. In so many places, misplaced nationalism and even religious belief engender intolerance, violence and oppression.

Jesus' teaching is seamless. We cannot pick and choose between the teachings we like and reject or ignore the rest. Jesus is the great Reconciler, making peace by the blood of the cross (Colossians 1:20). In his name, we must always seek the way of peace: 'Blessed are the peace-makers' (Matthew 5:9).

Collect

GRANT us, Lord our God, that we may honour you with all our mind, and love everyone in truth of heart...

Readings: Jeremiah 1:4-5,17-19. Psalm 70:1-6,15,17. Response: My lips will tell of your help. 1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13.

Gospel acclamation: I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, says the Lord; no one can come to the Father except through me.

Gospel: Luke 4:21-30

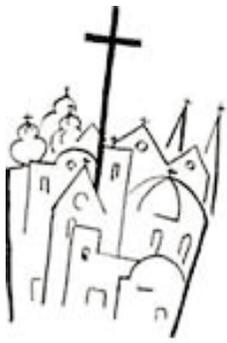
Prayer over the Offerings

O LORD, we bring to your altar these offerings of our service; be pleased to receive them, we pray, and transform them into the Sacrament of our redemption...

Preface: *the priest may use any one of the eight Prefaces provided for use in Ordinary Time.*

Prayer after Communion

NOURISHED by these redeeming gifts, we pray, O Lord, that through this help to eternal salvation true faith may ever increase...



Why are Christians divided?

WHY are we Christians divided, when Christ prayed that his followers might be one? (John 17:20-21).

There were strains between Christians even in apostolic times, referred to in the Acts of the Apostles and in Paul's letters. In the early Church, doctrinal disagreements (about the nature of Christ, for example) led to estrangement, bitterness and even violence. Eventually, in 1054 the Eastern Church split from Rome (the 'Great Schism'): a tragic split that remains to this day.

In The Gambia, as elsewhere, we still experience the effects of the 16th-century Reformation in Europe, when Protestant groups split from the Catholic Church and then continued to sub-divide.

Politics and nationalism

Many disagreements have been not so much over doctrine as for political, nationalistic or economic reasons. We may censure our Christian forebears for being blinkered, proud, intolerant and cruel to each other. But we ourselves may be complacent or arrogant about the particular Christian community we belong to. We may be ignorant about the

beliefs of fellow Christians. We may scorn them because, unlike us, they don't belong to the 'right' group. In such ways we may well be compared to the Pharisees of Christ's day.

As we wrestle with such thorny questions as 'What do we mean by 'Church' and 'unity'? We need also to ask, 'What is the nature of the unity that Christ himself wants for his followers?'

Allegiance to one Lord

We uphold the unity of the Catholic Church, while many other Christians see unity in different terms. But whether Catholic or Orthodox, Anglican, Methodist or evangelical, we owe allegiance to one Lord. For him there was no-one beyond the pale. What can bring us closer together is a personal and common closer union with Christ - with Love Incarnate, who gave himself up to death to redeem human sin and disunity.

Vatican II declared: '... This disunity contradicts the will of Christ, constitutes a stumbling-block to the world, and inflicts damage to the high cause of proclaiming the Good News to every creature.'

In 1984 Pope St John Paul II wrote: 'The sin of disunity, which has been with us for centuries, weighs heavily upon the Church'.

'You are God's people'

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Monday 18th - Monday 25th January 2016

DURING the week of Monday 18th to Monday 25th January, in The Gambia and far beyond, Christians of varying denominations will meet in common worship to pray for unity.

Materials for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 2016 have been prepared by Christians in Latvia, north-eastern Europe. They focus on the call 'to proclaim the mighty acts of the Lord', as in the First Letter of St Peter:

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10)

Each year's choice of Christians of a particular country to provide materials for Unity Week is made by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, together with the Commission on Faith & Order of the World Council of Churches.

The Christian faith in Latvia

Most accounts date Latvia's Christian origins to the 12th and 13th centuries and the work of German missionaries. In the 16th century the capital, Rīga, was one of the first cities to adopt the ideas of the protestant reformer, Martin Luther.

In the 18th century Moravian missionaries revived the Christian faith throughout the country. Their descendants

played a central role in laying the foundations for national independence in 1918.

Over the centuries Latvia has been a religious and political battleground. Past sufferings have noticeable consequences for Christian life in Latvia today. Latvia is a crossroads where Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox regions meet. It is home to Christians of many different traditions, where no single one is dominant.

The three largest Christian confessions are roughly equal in size. According to data from 2011, 34 per cent of Latvians are Lutheran, 25 per cent Roman Catholic, 19 per cent Orthodox, and one per cent belong to other churches. Twenty per cent of Latvians identify themselves as of other religions or no religion.

Due to the fraternal relationship between the heads of the Catholic and Lutheran churches in Latvia, the consecration of the present Catholic Archbishop took place in Riga's Lutheran Cathedral.

The Catholic Youth Centre of Rīga has offered this prayer: *Lord Jesus, you have always loved us from the beginning, and you have shown the depth of your love in dying for us on the cross and thereby sharing our sufferings and wounds. At this moment, we lay all the obstacles that separate us from your love at the foot of your cross. Roll back the stones which imprison us. Awaken us to your resurrection morning. There may we meet the brothers and sisters from whom we are separated. Amen.*



from beyond the diocese

Defend family life, says Pope Francis at Nairobi Mass



AT his first public Mass on a six-day visit to Africa, Pope Francis called for Kenyans to support families and welcome children as a blessing, and urged them to resist practices 'which foster arrogance in men, hurt or demean women, and threaten the life of the innocent unborn'.

He also called for Kenyans to shape a more just society that cares for the poor and to 'reject everything that leads to prejudice and discrimination, for these things are not of God'.

Many thousands attended the Mass on the rain-soaked campus of the University of Nairobi.

Rapturous welcome

Francis received a rapturous welcome from the crowd as he circled the grounds in his pope-mobile, with some 10,000 police on hand for security.

In his homily, the Pope continued: 'We are called to respect and encourage one another, and to reach out to all those in need. Christian families have this special mission: to radiate God's love, and to spread the life-giving waters of his Spirit. This is especially important today, for we are seeing the growth of new deserts created by a culture of materialism and indifference to others.'

Francis declared: 'We need these gifts of grace! Our world needs these gifts! Kenya needs these gifts! They strengthen us in fidelity amid adversity, when we seem to be walking "in the valley of the shadow of death". But they also change our hearts. They make us more faithful disciples of the divine Master, vessels of mercy and loving kindness in a world wounded by selfishness, sin and division.'

Before the Mass, Pope Francis told Christian and Muslim leaders that they had little choice but to engage in dialogue to guard against the 'barbarous' attacks that have struck Kenya.

Pope Francis later went to the UN regional headquarters in Nairobi where he spoke on the environment.

About 30 per cent of Kenyans, including President Uhuru Kenyatta, are Catholics. One of Kenya's main newspapers, *The Standard*, welcomed him with headlines in Latin, *Grata Franciscus Pontifex*, and Swahili, *Kariba Papa Francis!*

A leading Muslim cleric in Kenya welcomed the visit,

saying it gave hope to the 'down-trodden in the slums'.

As this *Newsletter* went to press, Pope Francis was continuing his six-day trip to Kenya, Uganda and the Central African Republic – his first visit to Africa since he became Pope.

Uganda and the Central African Republic

From Kenya the Pope went to Uganda for the 50th anniversary of the canonisation of St Charles Lwanga, St Kizito and 20 other Ugandans martyred in 1886.

Forty per cent of Ugandans are Catholics.

The Pope's African visit was due to finish in the Central African Republic, including a visit to the main mosque in Bamako, attending an inter-faith meeting with Catholic, evangelical and Muslim representatives, celebrating Mass and going to a prayer vigil.

The Central African Republic has in recent years been plagued by inter-religious controversy and violence. The Pope hopes that his visit will foster dialogue and peace between Christian and Muslim communities.

Catholics urged to go to Confession once a month

WITH the Year of Mercy set to begin on the feast of the Immaculate Conception (Tuesday 8th December) Bishop Philip Egan of the English Diocese of Portsmouth has urged Catholics to attend Confession more often, and called upon the clergy to preach about God's mercy.

The bishop said: 'I wish to encourage our clergy over these next months to preach often about the tender love of God for frail humanity.'

'I wish, too, to encourage all our people to respond to God's mercy, to undertake a review of life, to acknowledge sins and to receive more frequently – say, once a month – the Sacrament of Reconciliation.'

He added: 'There's nothing like a good Confession with the joy of meeting one-to-one our Saviour, Jesus Christ!'

Bishop Egan said the Holy Father was asking us 'to develop further the virtue of mercy' and to do this through 'charitable actions that put mercy into practice'.

Works of mercy

The Bishop of Portsmouth described the Church's seven corporal and seven spiritual works of mercy.

The corporal include feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, burying the dead, visiting those in prison and, most importantly, giving alms to the poor.

The spiritual works involve giving instruction, advising the doubtful, comforting the sorrowful, admonishing sinners, bearing wrongs patiently, praying for others and forgiving those who insult us.

Bishop Egan added his own acts of mercy, in caring for animals and creation and the support of human life from conception to natural death.

'Parishes and schools are the two principal agencies of the diocesan mission and so I wish to ask our schools especially, within and beyond their existing charitable works, to help us all reflect more deeply on the meaning for today of these works of mercy,' he said.



Jubilee of youth

TWO and a half million people are expected to attend the World Youth Day from 26th to 31st July next year. It will be held in the Archdiocese of Krakow, Poland, which is the former diocese of Pope St John Paul II and home to the Shrine of Divine Mercy, to which John Paul was greatly devoted.

St John Paul established World Youth Day in 1986.

Pope Francis became the first person to sign up for the World Youth Day when in late July he registered using an iPad during his Sunday blessing of pilgrims and tourists gathered in St Peter's Square. 'Today we open registration for the 31st World Youth Day to be held next year in Poland,' the Pope declared. 'I invite the youth of the world to live this pilgrimage that will be going to Krakow.'

The Pope said the World Youth Day would be 'a jubilee of youth' and called on the faithful to reflect on its theme: 'Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy' (Matthew 5:7)

The logo for World Youth Day 2016 features a red and blue flame of Divine Mercy flowing from a gold cross surrounded by an outline of the map of Poland. A gold dot represents Krakow and symbolises youth.

The last international celebration of World Youth Day, which Pope Francis celebrated in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in July 2013, concluded with a Mass attended by three million people.

Pope to German bishops: the faith in your country is being eroded

POPE Francis has offered a blunt assessment of Germany's ailing Church during an audience with the country's bishops.

To remedy the crisis, the Pope called for a revival of Confession, a better understanding of the Eucharist, and for the German Church to model itself on the early Christians rather than place its faith in institutions.

In a speech to the bishops, the Pope said he hoped the Year of Mercy might revive the sacraments of Confession and the Eucharist in a country where 'one can truly speak of an erosion of the Catholic faith'.

In Confession, the Pope said, 'is the beginning of the transformation of each individual Christian and the reform of the Church'.

On the German Church's decline Francis said: 'Whereas in the 1960s the faithful almost everywhere attended Mass every Sunday, today it is often less than 10 per cent. 'The sacraments are always approached less often. The Sacrament of Penance is often missing. Fewer and fewer Catholics receive the Sacrament of Confirmation or contract a Catholic marriage.'

The Pope continued: 'The number of vocations to the ministerial priesthood and to the consecrated life has significantly diminished. Given these facts, one can truly speak of an erosion of the Catholic faith in Germany.'

'Avoid over-centralisation'

Pope Francis said Germany's bishops should be inspired by the biblical couple, Priscilla and Aquila, who travelled with St Paul and strengthened the early Church.

'The example of these "volunteers" can help us reflect... We always inaugurate new facilities, from which, in the end, the faithful are missing. It is a sort of new Pelagianism [a heresy which denied original sin] which puts its trust in administrative structures... Excessive centralisation, rather than helping, complicates the life of the Church and her missionary dynamics.'

Francis also told the bishops: 'The Church must never get tired of being the advocate of life, and should never step back from proclaiming that human life must be protected unconditionally from conception to natural death.'

Vatican Christmas tree unveiled early for Year of Mercy



A CHRISTMAS tree has been erected in St Peter's Square, Rome, more than a month before Christmas.

The 82-foot spruce fir comes from Bavaria, Germany, and was installed early to be ready for the Year of Mercy, which opens on 8th November, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

The tree decorations will include ceramic ornaments made by children in Italian hospitals. The tree will be lit up on the evening of Friday 18th December.

The nearby Nativity scene has been donated by the northern Italian province of Trent. It features 24 life-sized wooden figures including the Baby Jesus, Mary, Joseph, the three magi and a man bending over to help an elderly man in an act of mercy.

In preparation for the opening of the Holy Year, workmen have broken through the masonry that walled off the Holy Door in St Peter's Basilica. Cardinal Angelo Comastri, Archpriest of the basilica, led prayers before four workmen used a pickaxe to break through a portion of the wall that covers the Holy Door from inside the basilica.

They removed a sealed metal box that, in keeping with tradition, had been embedded in the wall at the end of the Jubilee Year of 2000. The zinc box, which was opened with a blow-torch, contained keys and handles for opening the Holy Door, as well as commemorative medals and a papal gold coin marking the last Holy Year.

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What kind of world do we want to hand over to those who come after us?



The message of Bishop ROBERT P. ELLISON for the Pastoral Year 2015-2016

OUR new Pastoral Year begins in the shadow of Pope Francis' visit to the USA. It was a very intense week; as he spoke in Washington to the US Congress and then a day later to the UN, where some 127 leaders from the whole world attended. The topic of his talks: his profound concern for the future of the world in which we all live.

We stand at a critical moment in the history of planet Earth when the human family must choose its future, for better or for worse.

And the clock is ticking away. The Pope's words remind me of a harsh warning given by God to the prophet Moses for the chosen people: 'See today, I set before you life and prosperity, or death and disaster' (Deuteronomy 30:15)

'All peoples and nations must join together to create a sustainable common home founded on four pillars: respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice and, finally, a culture of peace.'

The Pope's message was based on his encyclical *Laudato Si'* - 'Praise be to...(God)', a title taken from the Cantic of Creation of St Francis of Assisi.

A man of peace, St Francis' life was immersed in the gifts and the beauty of God's creation. He speaks about 'Mother Earth' as the common home for all mankind, and a mother who opens her arms to embrace all people and nations.

Our pastoral needs

As a diocese, we are one living cell in the one Body of Christ, the universal Church, under the leadership of Pope Francis. As we begin this new pastoral year, he is calling his entire flock around the world to give our attention to a number of special pastoral needs. They are as follows:

- The Year of Consecrated Life, which continues until 2nd February 2016.
- The second phase of the Synod on 'Marriage and Family Life'. We should pray fervently for some common understanding to the complex questions presented. (One cardinal was open enough to admit that the synod process shows that the Church doesn't have all the answers.)

On Tuesday 8th December this year the Pope will proclaim a Year of Mercy, a very demanding challenge to each one of us personally.

- Lastly, there is the Pope's concern about 'respect for the environment'.

'The Environment'

Our Holy Father is keeping us on our toes....but then I ask myself: where does he get the energy at the age of 78 years to attend to and to be responsible for these key pastoral topics – one of which he considers to be critical, not just for our Church, but for the entire human family – the 'environment'.

This word refers to those influences all around us - material and spiritual - that touch our lives and which we are often helpless in trying to reverse. For example, the constant movement southward of the Sahara desert, causing more frequent drought during the usual rain seasons.

Climate change, the destruction of forests as far away as the Amazon in Brazil, and even changes in our own country affect the annual farming season. Those most affected are the poor and most vulnerable: women and children.

'Thinking globally and acting locally'

We begin by 'thinking globally and acting locally'. How can our diocese take some simple steps to reach out to some of these pastoral needs at various levels: the deanery, the parish, the school, the many Church societies, the religious communities...?

Remember, very often we may discover that each of the four topics are not separate entities: mercy can flow easily into marriage and family life; an environment where the poor lack shelter, food and health, family life suffers; and consecrated life could learn a lot from the challenges of marriage and family life.

Laudato Si'

Laudato Si': praise be to God for the gifts of his creation.

We listen to the story of creation every year at the Easter Vigil. God created all, and 'He saw that it was good'. The sin of our first parents became a major consequence for the chaos of the world in which we live in today. But thanks be to God, who has given us the victory over sin through Jesus Christ, the Lord, who told his disciples: 'Be the salt of the earth; the light of the world' (Matthew 5:13)

St Paul wrote to the Romans: 'We are well aware that the whole creation has been groaning in one great act of giving birth. And we too are groaning inside ourselves waiting for our bodies to be set free.' (Romans 8:22) In these solemn words, Paul perhaps foresaw the huge struggle which the

human family would have to make before we could achieve the ‘new heaven and the new earth’ (the Kingdom of God). The war between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Satan is alive and active: in our own hearts, in the Church, in society in general.

This is precisely the challenge that Pope Francis puts before the whole human family today – ‘the critical moment in the history of Mother Earth’:

‘An ethical and cultural decline has accompanied the deterioration of the environment. Men and women of our present world run the risk of rampant individualism...and a self-centred culture of instant gratification. We see this in the crisis of family and social ties...parents prone to impulsive and wasteful consumption which then affects their children to acquire a home and build a family of their own.’ (162)

And so: what kind of world do we want to hand over to those who come after us, to our children who are now growing up?

The answers to this question are manifold; some examples would be:

- In general: what values do we want to instil into our children at home and in school? We have abundant opportunities to avail of this in our schools: Christian and Muslim.
- The witness to our Christian faith that we – the elders - try to give them and to one another as we go about our daily encounters.
- The beatitudes that Jesus gave his disciples at the start of his ministry (Matthew 5). These few verses of the Gospel are so rich in content...

Four important values

In the Diocesan *Newsletter* for October we were reminded about a very simple practice: ‘grace before meals’. It teaches us four important values:

- Our dependence on God for life/food
- Our gratitude for the gifts of creation
- The labour of those who provide us with food (the life of a farmer)
- The need for solidarity with those who go hungry each day.

In the same *Newsletter* we read about ‘the growing communal feeling that everyone needs to help keep our environment clean and healthy’.

‘All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures.

You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.

Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty.

Fill us with peace that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

O God of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes.’

‘Fill us with the Spirit of wonder and awe in your presence’

This is the seventh gift of the Holy Spirit which we received on the day of our Confirmation.

The Spirit of wonder and awe: I think of this every year on the occasion of the first heavy rains. On the fourth or fifth day later, a fresh, green carpet of grass appears where there has been a dry sandy soil empty of all vegetation...Eventually, the whole environment becomes alive.

May the Spirit of God touch our hearts and renew the face of the earth. Amen.

+ **Robert P. Ellison CSSp**

Bishop of Banjul

12th October 2015



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Question Box

AT Mass last Sunday I intended, as usual, to receive Holy Communion. But something the priest said in his sermon made me think it would be better not to receive Communion that day. I was not conscious of having committed a serious sin, but I realised I had been inattentive to the Mass until that point and was not really ready for Communion.

Afterwards, a friend remarked that she hoped I had made a ‘spiritual communion’.

What did she mean?

EVERYONE, Catholic or otherwise, is welcome to the celebration of Mass. But only Catholics may receive Holy Communion, and every Catholic who receives Communion must be in a state of grace – that is, free of serious sin.

Catholics are encouraged to receive Communion regularly. But those who have committed serious sin must first seek forgiveness in confession to a priest before they may again receive Holy Communion.

Catholics who habitually and wilfully miss Sunday Mass should bear this in mind if they intend to make a fresh start.

We need to remember, too, that everyone except the old and those receiving medication must have fasted for at least an hour before receiving Communion.

At Mass those who cannot or do not wish to receive Communion may make a ‘spiritual communion’.

Here is an ‘Act of Spiritual Communion’ which you may say while others are receiving Communion:

MOST loving Lord Jesus, I adore you in faith. In your power, wisdom and goodness you are present in this Sacrament. Conscious of my infirmities, I cannot now receive you sacramentally; but all my hope is in you. I love you with all my heart, as you have loved me. I wish to receive you now, spiritually. Come, therefore, Lord, and heal my soul. Feed me and strengthen me. Enliven and sanctify me with your Body and Blood. Deliver me from sin, and make me always obedient to your commands. Let me never be separated from you, my Saviour, who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. *Amen.*

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Gambian Christian anniversaries

December and January



50 YEARS AGO: On 13th January 1966 Bishop Michael Moloney returned from Rome following the close of the Second Vatican Council, which had opened by Pope John XXIII in October 1962 and closed in December 1965 by Pope Paul VI. Changes instituted by the council included the renewal of consecrated life, dialogue with other religions, a simplified Order of Mass and the fuller involvement of the laity.

In March 1966 the high altar in the Cathedral in Banjul was moved forward so that Mass could be celebrated facing the people. The following month Bishop Moloney set up three commissions: the liturgy, headed by Fr Hugh Fagan; ecumenism, Fr Michael Flynn; and the laity, Fr Seán Little.

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)

29th December 1875 (140 years ago): Death of Bishop Durët (born 1824), who became Prefect of Senegal in 1856 and Vicar-Apostolic, with the rank of Bishop, in 1873.

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.

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 was to remain for 7 years.

24th December 1954: Arrival of Fr Michael Flynn.

1st January 1956 (60 years ago): 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.

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

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

21st January 1977: Fr Edward Grimes (pictured right with Pope Benedict XVI) 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.

3rd January 1978: The Gambia Christian Council called on President Jawara, inaugurating what was to become an annual event.

10th December 1985 (30 years ago): 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 by members of the laity.

31st December 1991: Death in Ireland of Bishop Moloney.

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

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

29th December 2005 (10 years ago): Abbé Blaise Malou and a group from Balandine, Casamance, began a 4-day visit to Fatima Parish Bwiam.

19th December 2006: Death of the Very Revd Philippe Champetier de Ribes OSB, former Abbot of the Benedictine Abbey at Kerr Moussa, Senegal.

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 this country.

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

The Extraordinary Holy Year of Mercy

8th December 2015 – 20th November 2016

SINCE his election in 2013, Pope Francis has become known to many as the 'Pope of Mercy', and last March he announced an Extraordinary Holy Year of Mercy, declaring that he wanted to make it evident that the Church's mission is to witness to God's compassion. 'Let us not forget that God forgives, and that God forgives always.'

Having already described his papacy as a *kairos* of mercy, meaning a privileged moment in God's plan of salvation, Francis said that the time was ripe for this message.

The Church's need of mercy

The Pope continued: 'I am convinced that the whole Church - which has much need to receive mercy, because we are sinners - will find in this jubilee the joy to rediscover and render fruitful the mercy of God, with which we are all called to give consolation to every man and woman of our time.'

Traditionally, every 25 years the Popes proclaim a holy year, which features celebrations and pilgrimages, calls for conversion and repentance, and offers opportunities to experience God's grace through the sacraments, especially Confession.

Extraordinary holy years, like the Holy Year of Mercy, are less frequent, but offer the same opportunities for spiritual growth.

The jubilee begins on Tuesday 8th December, when Catholic Christians celebrate the Immaculate Conception, and



which this year will mark the 50th anniversary of the ground-breaking Second Vatican Council.

The Holy Year of Mercy will end on Sunday 20th November 2016, Feast of Christ the King.

On 8th December Pope Francis will open the Holy Door in St Peter's Basilica, which is normally bricked up. The last one to do so was St John Paul II, who opened it in 2000.

'Don't be afraid to approach a priest'

Francis says people shouldn't be afraid to approach a priest and confess their sins, because in Confession one has 'the certainty of being welcomed in the name of God and understood, despite our misery. The greater the sin, the greater the love, which the Church must express toward those who convert.'

The biblical theme for the jubilee year is 'Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful' (Luke 6:36) - something that Francis says applies especially to confessors. The Holy Year of Mercy is being organised by the Vatican's Pontifical Council for the New Evangelisation, and designed to widen access to the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

700-year tradition

The tradition of Holy Years started 700 years ago. Since then, the Catholic Church has celebrated 26 jubilees. Of these, only three have been 'extraordinary' (including this one, called by Pope Francis). The last was called by Pope St John Paul II in 1983 to mark 1,950 years after the death of Jesus.

Jubilee Year: a living experience of the tenderness of the Father

IN SEPTEMBER, in an open letter to the President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelisation, Pope Francis declared:

'With the approach of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, I would like to focus on several points which I believe require attention to enable the celebration of the Holy Year to be for all believers a true moment of encounter with the mercy of God.'

'It is indeed my wish that the Jubilee be a living experience of the closeness of the Father, whose tenderness is almost tangible, so that the faith of every believer may be strengthened and thus testimony to it be ever more effective.'

'My thought first of all goes to all the faithful who, whether in individual dioceses or as pilgrims to Rome, will experience the grace of the Jubilee. I wish that the Jubilee Indulgence

may reach each one as a genuine experience of God's mercy, which comes to meet each person in the Face of the Father who welcomes and forgives, forgetting completely the sin committed.'

The Door of Mercy

'To experience and obtain the Indulgence, the faithful are called to make a brief pilgrimage to the Holy Door, open in every cathedral or in the churches designated by the diocesan bishop, and in the four Papal Basilicas in Rome, as a sign of the deep desire for true conversion.'

'Likewise, I dispose that the Indulgence may be obtained in the shrines in which the Door of Mercy is open and in the churches which traditionally are identified as Jubilee Churches. It is important that this moment be linked, first and foremost, to the Sacrament of Reconciliation and to the

celebration of the Holy Eucharist with a reflection on mercy...

The sick and suffering

‘Additionally, I am thinking of those for whom, for various reasons, it will be impossible to enter the Holy Door, particularly the sick and people who are elderly and alone, often confined to the home. For them it will be of great help to live their sickness and suffering as an experience of closeness to the Lord - who in the mystery of his Passion, death and Resurrection indicates the royal road which gives meaning to pain and loneliness. Living with faith and joyful hope, this moment of trial, receiving communion or attending Holy Mass and community prayer... will be for them the means of obtaining the Jubilee Indulgence.

Prisoners

My thoughts also turn to those incarcerated, whose freedom is limited. The Jubilee Year has always constituted an opportunity for great amnesty, which is intended to include the many people who, despite deserving punishment, have become conscious of the injustice they worked and sincerely wish to re-enter society and make their honest contribution to it. May they all be touched in a tangible way by the mercy of the Father who wants to be close to those who have the greatest need of his forgiveness. They may obtain the Indulgence in the chapels of the prisons....

Concrete signs

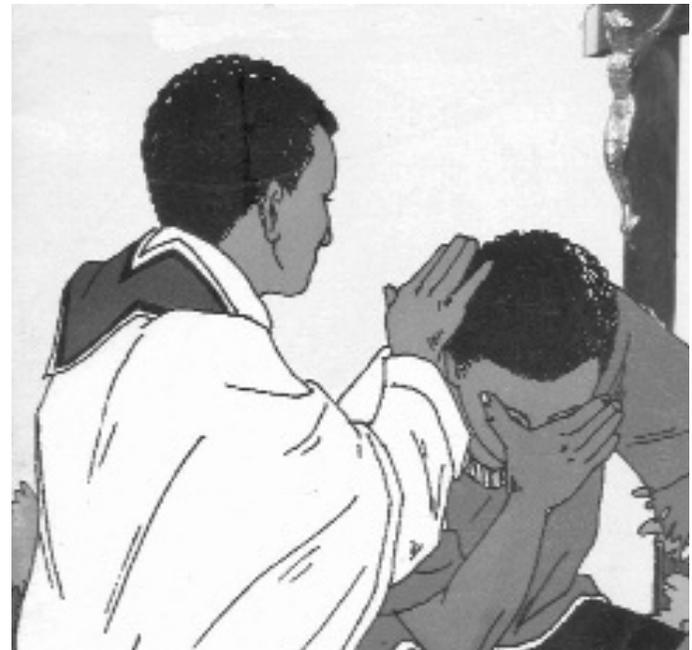
‘I have asked the Church in this Jubilee Year to rediscover the richness encompassed by the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. The experience of mercy, indeed, becomes visible in the witness of concrete signs as Jesus himself taught us. Each time that one of the faithful personally performs one or more of these actions, he or she shall surely obtain the Jubilee Indulgence...

The departed

‘Furthermore, the Jubilee Indulgence can also be obtained for the deceased. We are bound to them by the witness of faith and charity that they have left us. Thus, as we remember them in the Eucharistic celebration, we can, in the great mystery of the Communion of Saints, pray for them, that the merciful Face of the Father free them of every remnant of fault and strongly embrace them in the unending beatitude.

The tragedy of abortion

‘One of the serious problems of our time is clearly the changed relationship with respect to life. A widespread and insensitive mentality has led to the loss of the proper personal and social sensitivity to welcome new life. The tragedy of abortion is experienced by some with a superficial awareness, as if not realising the extreme harm that such an act entails.



‘The forgiveness of God cannot be denied to one who has repented, especially when that person approaches the Sacrament of Confession with a sincere heart’

Many others, on the other hand, although experiencing this moment as a defeat, believe that they have no other option. I think in particular of all the women who have resorted to abortion. I am well aware of the pressure that has led them to this decision. I know that it is an existential and moral ordeal. I have met so many women who bear in their heart the scar of this agonising and painful decision. What has happened is profoundly unjust; yet only understanding the truth of it can enable one not to lose hope.

‘The forgiveness of God cannot be denied to one who has repented, especially when that person approaches the Sacrament of Confession with a sincere heart in order to obtain reconciliation with the Father. For this reason I have decided... to concede to all priests for the Jubilee Year the discretion to absolve of the sin of abortion those who have procured it and who, with contrite heart, seek forgiveness for it. May priests fulfil this great task by expressing words of genuine welcome combined with a reflection that explains the gravity of the sin committed, besides indicating a path of authentic conversion by which to obtain the true and generous forgiveness of the Father who renews all with his presence.’

Priests, sisters and parishioners plan diocesan activities

PRIESTS, reverend sisters, catechists and representatives of the laity were due to meet at GPI on Thursday 3rd December to discuss the celebration of the Year of Mercy in the Diocese of Banjul.

Three nominated members of each Parish Council were to represent the laity at the symposium.

The meeting was convened by Fr Bruno Toupan, President of the Association of Gambian Pastoral Clergy.

Some weekday celebrations in December & January



Thursday 3rd December: St Francis Xavier priest

FRANCIS was born in Spain in 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 while trying to secure entry to China. 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.

Monday 7th December: 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.

Tuesday 8th December: The Immaculate Conception: Opening of the Holy Year of Mercy

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.

Saturday 26th December: 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).



Saturday 2nd January: 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.'

Thursday 28th January: St Thomas Aquinas doctor of the Church



BORN in Aquino, Sicily, in 1224-5, 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').

Christian observances 2016

| | | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Epiphany | Sunday 3rd January | Ascension | Thursday 5th May |
| Christian Unity Week: Monday | 18th-Monday 25th January | Pentecost | Sunday 15th May |
| The Presentation (Candlemas) | Tuesday 2nd February | Corpus Christi | Sunday 29th May |
| Ash Wednesday | 10th February | Sacred Heart | Friday 3rd June |
| Palm Sunday | 20th March | Assumption | Monday 15th August |
| Holy Thursday | 24th March | All Saints | Monday 1st November |
| Good Friday | 25th March | 1st Sunday of Advent | Sunday 27th November |
| Holy Saturday | 26th March | Christmas Day | Sunday 25th December |
| Easter Sunday | 27th March | | |
| Annunciation (transferred) | Monday 4th April | | |

For Orthodox Christians, Lent begins on Monday 14th March, and Easter Sunday is 1st May

Daily Mass Readings



December 2015 & January 2016

Sunday readings Year C Weekday readings Year 2

Memorials in brackets are optional

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Sun 29th Nov Mon 30th Tue 1st Dec Wed 2nd Thu 3rd Fri 4th Sat 5th</p> | <p>Jeremiah 33:14-16. Psalm 24:4-5,8-10,14. Thessalonians 3:12 - 4:2. Luke 21:25-28,34-36. Romans 10:9-18. Psalm 18:2-5. Matthew 4:18-22 Isaiah 11:1-10. Psalm 71:1-2,7-8,12-13,17. Luke 10:21-24 Isaiah 25:6-10a. Psalm 22:1-6. Matthew 15: 29-37 Isaiah 26:1-6. Psalm 117:1,8-9,19-21,25-27. Matthew 7:21,24-27 Isaiah 29:17-24. Psalm 26:1,13-14. Matthew 9:27-31 Isaiah 30:19-21,23-26. Psalm 146:1-6. Matthew 9:35 - 10:1,5-8</p> | <p>1st SUNDAY of ADVENT St ANDREW</p> <p>St Francis Xavier (St John of Damascus) <i>abstinence</i> (Pilgrimage to Kungkujang Mariama)</p> |
| <p>Sun 6th Mon 7th Tue 8th Wed 9th Thu 10th Fri 11th Sat 12th</p> | <p>Baruch 5:1-9. Psalm 125:1-6. Philippians 1:4-6,8-11. Luke 3:1-6 Isaiah 35:1-10. Psalm 84:9-14. Luke 5:17-26. St Ambrose Genesis 3:9-15,20. Psalm 97:1-4. Ephesians 1:3-6,11-12. Luke 1:26-38 Isaiah 40: 25-31. Psalm 102:1-4,8,10. Matthew 11:28-30 Isaiah 41:13-20. Psalm 144:1,9-13. Matthew 11:11-15 Isaiah 48:17-19. Psalm 1:1-4,6. Matthew 11:16-19 Sirach 48:1-4,9-11. Psalm 79:2-3,15-16,18-19. Mark 17:10-13</p> | <p>2nd SUNDAY of ADVENT IMMACULATE CONCEPTION</p> <p>(St Damasus) (Our Lady of Guadalupe)</p> |
| <p>Sun 13th Mon 14th Tue 15th Wed 16th Thu 17th Fri 18th Sat 19th</p> | <p>Zephaniah 3:14-18. Psalm Isaiah 12:2-6. Philippians 4:4-7. Luke 3:10-18 Numbers 24:2-7,15-17. Psalm 24:4-9. Matthew 21:28-32 Zephaniah 3:1-2,9-13. Psalm 33:2-3,6-7,17-19,23. Matthew 21:28-32 Isaiah 45:6-8,18,21-25. Psalm 84:9-14. Luke 7:19-23 Genesis 49:1-2,8-10. Psalm 71:1-4,7-8,17. Matthew 1:1-17. Jeremiah 23:5-8. Psalm 71:1-2,12-13,18-19. Matthew 1:18-24 Judges 13:2-7,24-25. Psalm 70:3-6,16-17. Luke 1:5-25</p> | <p>3rd SUNDAY of ADVENT St John of the Cross</p> <p><i>O Sapientia</i> <i>O Adonai</i> <i>O Radix</i></p> |
| <p>Sun 20th Mon 21st Tue 22nd Wed 23rd Thu 24th morning:</p> | <p>Micah 5:1-4. Psalm 79:2-3,15-16,18-19. Hebrews 10:5-10. Luke 1:39-41 Song 2:8-14 or Zephaniah 3:14-18. Psalm 32:2-3,11-12,20-21. Luke 1:39-45 1 Samuel 1:24-28. Psalm 1 Samuel 2:1,4-8. Luke 1:46-56 Malachi 3:1-4,23-24. Psalm 24:4-5,8-10,14. Luke 1:57-66. 2 Samuel 7:1-5,8-12,14,16. Psalm 88:2-5,27,29. Luke 1:67-79</p> | <p>4th SUNDAY of ADVENT <i>O Clavis</i> [St Peter Canisius] <i>O Oriens</i> <i>O Rex</i> [St John of Kenty] <i>O Emmanuel</i></p> |

CHRISTMAS EVE VIGIL, MIDNIGHT MASS & CHRISTMAS DAY: *full details, pages 17-19*

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| <p>Sat 26th</p> | <p>Acts 6:8-10 & 7:54-59. Psalm 30:3-4,6,8,16-17. Matthew 10:17-22</p> | <p>St STEPHEN</p> |
| <p>Sun 27th Mon 28th Tue 29th Wed 30th Thu 31st Fri 1st Jan Sat 2nd</p> | <p>1 Samuel 1:20-22,24-28. Psalm 83:2-3,5-6,9-10. 1 John 3:1-2,21-24. Luke 2:41-52 or Sirach 3:3-7,14-17. Psalm 127: 1-5. Colossians 3:12-21. Luke 2:41-52. 1 John 1:5 - 2:2. Psalm 123:2-5,7-8. Matthew 2:13-18 1 John 2:3-11. Psalm 95:1-3,5-6. Luke 2:22-35 1 John 2:12-17. Psalm 95:7-10. Luke 2:36-40. 1 John 2:18-21. Psalm 95:1-2,11-13. John 1:1-18 1 Numbers 6:22-27. Psalm 66: 2-3,5-6,8. Galatians 4:4-7. Luke 2:16-21 1 John 2:22-28. Psalm 97:1-4. John 1:19-28</p> | <p>HOLY FAMILY HOLY INNOCENTS (St Thomas Becket)</p> <p>MARY, MOTHER of GOD St Basil & St Gregory</p> |
| <p>Sunday 3rd Mon 4th Tue 5th Wed 6th Thu 7th Fri 8th Sat 9th</p> | <p>Isaiah 60:1-6. Psalm 71:1-2,7-8,10-13. Ephesians 3:2-3,5-6. Matthew 2:1-12 1 John 3:22 - 4:6. Psalm 2:7-8,10-11. Matthew 4:12-17,23-25 1 John 4:7-10. Psalm 71:3-4,7-8. Mark 6:34-44 1 John 4:11-18. Psalm 71:1-2,10-13. Mark 6: 45-52. 1 John 4:19 - 4:6. Psalm 2:7-8,10-11. Luke 4:14-22 1 John 5: 5-13. Psalm 147:12-15,19-20. Luke 5:12-16 1 John 5:14-21. Psalm 149:1-6,9. John 3:22-30</p> | <p>The EPIPHANY of THE LORD</p> <p>(St Raymond of Penyafort) <i>abstinence</i></p> |
| <p>Sun 10th Mon 11th Tue 12th Wed 13th Thu 14th Fri 15th Sat 16th</p> | <p>Isaiah 40:1-5,9-11. Psalm 103:1-4,24-25,27-30. Titus 2:11-14 & 3:4-7. Luke 3:15-16,21-22. or Isaiah 42:1-4,6-7. Psalm 28:1-4,9-10. Acts 10:34-38. Luke 3:15-16,21-22</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Christmas Time ends; Ordinary Time begins</p> <p>1 Samuel 1:1-8. Psalm 115:12-14,17-19. Mark 1:14-20 1 Samuel 1:9-20. Psalm 1 Samuel 2:1,4-8. Mark 1:21-28 1 Samuel 3:1-10,19-20. Psalm 39:2,5,7-10. Mark 1:29-39 1 Samuel 4:1-11. Psalm 43:10-11,14-15,24-25. Mark 1:40-45 1 Samuel 8:4-7,10-22. Psalm 88:16-19. Mark 2:1-12 1 Samuel 9:1-4,17-19 & 10:1. Psalm 20:2-7. Mark 2:13-17</p> | <p>The BAPTISM of THE LORD</p> <p>(St Hilary)</p> <p><i>abstinence</i> (of the BVM)</p> |
| <p>Sun 17th Mon 18th Tue 19th Wed 20th Thu 21st Fri 22nd Sat 23rd</p> | <p>Isaiah 62:1-5. Psalm 95:1-3,7-10. 1 Corinthians 12:4-11. John 2:1-11 1 Samuel 15:16-23. Psalm 49:8-9,16-17,21,23. Mark 2:18-22 1 Samuel 16:1-13. Psalm 88:20-22,27-28. Mark 2:23-28 1 Samuel 17:32-33,37,40-51. Psalm 143:1-2,9-10. Mark 3:1-6 1 Samuel 18:6-9 & 19:1-7. Psalm 55:2-3,9-13. Mark 3:7-12 1 Samuel 24:3-21. Psalm 56:2-4,6,11. Mark 3:13-19. 2 Samuel 1:1-4,11-12,19,23-27. Psalm 79:2-3,5-7. Mark 3:20-21</p> | <p>2nd SUNDAY of YEAR (Christian Unity Week begins)</p> <p>(St Fabian or St Sebastian) St Agnes (St Vincent) <i>abstinence</i> (of the BVM)</p> |
| <p>Sun 24th Mon 25th Tue 26th Wed 27th Thu 28th Fri 29th Sat 30th</p> | <p>Nehemiah 8:2-4,5-6,8-10. Psalm 18:8-10,15. 1 Corinthians 12:12-30. Luke 1:1-4 & 4:14-21. Acts 22:3-16 or Acts 9:1-22. Psalm 116:1-2. Mark 16:15-18 2 Timothy 1:1-8 or Titus 1:15. Psalm 95:1-3,7-8,10. Luke 10:1-9 2 Samuel 7:4-17. Psalm 88:4-5,27-30. Mark 4:1-20. 2 Samuel 7:18-19,24-29. Psalm 131:1-2,311-14. Mark 4:21-25 2 Samuel 11:1-10,13-17. Psalm 50:3-7,10-11. Mark 4:26-34 2 Samuel 12:1-7,10-17. Psalm 50:12-17. Mark 4:15-41</p> | <p>3rd SUNDAY of YEAR The CONVERSION of St PAUL St Timothy & St Titus (St Angela Merici) St Thomas Aquinas</p> <p>(of the BVM)</p> |
| <p>Sun 31st</p> | <p>Jeremiah 1:4-5,17-19. Psalm 70:1-6,15,17. 1 Corinthians 12:31 - 13:13. Luke 4:21-30</p> | <p>4th SUNDAY of YEAR</p> |

End
Piece

Guilt, trauma, addiction and horror

Fr GEORGE OKORO says we must do more to help former child soldiers
- or someone will turn them into killers again

LIBERIA and the international community have failed to truly rehabilitate youngsters who committed unimaginable atrocities

His real name was Kollie, but everybody called him Polio. He told me his real name after many months of asking, but he never told me his surname or where he came from. He earned the nickname because he derived fun from shooting people on their kneecaps and crippling them.

The Liberian civil war had brought him from the hinterland to Bong Mines, where I worked from 2010 to 2012. He came as one of the rebels loyal to Charles Taylor and chose to remain when the war was over. He told me he dropped out in fifth grade (aged 10 to 11).

Glee and shame

An excellent conversationalist and story-teller, Polio could verbally re-enact battle scenes that he took part in to the point that one could begin to see them. He vividly told me how he smashed his 'first cockroach', a euphemistic term for killing a human being. He also gave me a step-by-step account of how the rebel fighters planned, invaded and raided towns. He recounted some of the war events with glee, while some filled him with shame and regret.

According to him, he was lured into becoming a rebel fighter by promises of wealth, position and prestige. Unfortunately, all he got from child soldiering were shame, lack of self-trust, addiction to drugs and a terrible nightmare.

Polio's story is the same as the stories of many ex-child soldiers who took part in the Liberian civil war. These children joined to fight for different reasons. While some were forced by the rebel leaders to join their groups, some were lured by promises of wealth and glory. Some took up arms to avenge their families, some to settle personal vendettas. Some of these children were even encouraged by their parents to become child soldiers. Their reasons for taking up arms notwithstanding, these children were generally treated as pawns by their adult commanders.

Horrendous acts

Since their consciences were not fully formed at the time of the war, the child soldiers were sent to carry out horrendous acts. Most of them were sent to cut open the wombs of pregnant women to find out whether the foetuses were male or female; many were encouraged to rape old women to death. Polio told me he had a friend who took pleasure in smashing the heads of infants on walls. For every person he killed, a child soldier was given \$50 as a bonus.

Now that the war is over, most of them cannot live with what they did. Some have committed suicide. A great deal of them are mad, some have gone rogue and some are serious drug addicts.

As if this were not gruesome enough, some of these former child soldiers are cannibals. A great deal of cannibalism took place during the war. The rebels relished consuming the hearts



**Days of chaos and brutality:
flash-back to Liberia's civil war**

and livers of their adversaries with the belief that they could gain their strengths as a result. Some of these rebels still yearn for the 'delicacy'. There was the case of a young man, an ex-child soldier, who murdered his stepmother while she was taking a siesta and was in the process of chopping off parts of her body for lunch when he was caught.

Back to school

After the war, the United Nations made concerted efforts to rid the country of weapons by encouraging the fighters to turn in their weapons in exchange for money. The UN and other agencies also paid the young fighters to go to school; they were paid for each day they stayed in class. However, there was little or no effort to rehabilitate them psychologically, emotionally and spiritually. It could be that the powers that be believed that if these child soldiers were meant to get a formal education their sordid past would be obliterated and their future would be secured.

This has not been the case. One school in Bong County was burnt down by these former child soldiers because their daily allowance did not come on time, and another group of ex-child soldiers beat up the priest of a parish school and threw him over the fence because he dared to discipline one of them.

According to recent statistics taken by an NGO, more than 80 per cent of former child soldiers have dropped out of school after the war. Either they were expelled for violent conduct which often involved beating up a teacher, or they simply stopped going to school.

Overwhelming traumas

The former child soldiers have overwhelming traumas which prevent them from making out something good for themselves. Sadly, they are treated as outcasts by their own people who knew what they did in the war. Many of them are treated worse than lepers, and not many people want to hear

them out. As a result, they live with their guilt, trauma, pain, addictions and horrors.

Some former child soldiers, however, are doing something about their situation. They are offering themselves as assassins and thugs for politicians. Many of them have become fighting hands for many rebels groups all over Africa. It is on record that many Liberian former child soldiers were actively involved in the recent conflicts in Côte d’Ivoire, Mali and Libya. This goes to show that the existence of unrehabilitated former child soldiers is a regional if not a global menace. Sending them to school without hearing their stories, without giving them the opportunity for psycho-spiritual healing will be mere window-dressing.

The government of Liberia is not making a significant effort towards the recovery of these individuals. The government simply banned them from joining the armed forces and the police and also from joining the national soccer team. Sadly, they have made little effort to re-integrate them into society. Ironically, the government officials who made these policies were the same people who encouraged these youngsters to fight for the cause they championed.

Counter-culture

These former teenage fighters are forming a clandestine counter-culture in Liberian society. All they need is another Charles Taylor, a charismatic organiser who would forge them into a deadly fighting force that they once were. All he needs to do is give them money, pretend to care about them and tell



Former child soldiers, including ‘Polio’

Photograph by Fr George Okoro

them that the government hates them – and the rest is history.

However, the government and the stake-holders in Liberian society could be pro-active and begin to rehabilitate these young men before they fall into the wrong hands.

Polio may seem harmless and fun to be with at present, but I know that he is a raw material waiting to be refined. Being formed into a healing agent or a killing machine depends on the person who gets to him first.

Fr George Okoro is a priest of the Missionary Society of St Paul of Nigeria. He is currently working in Liberia.

This article is taken from the Catholic Herald, London

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The Child Jesus in the temple

Now every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival.

When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travellers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

When his parents saw him they were astonished, and his mother said to him, 'Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.'

He said to them, 'Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?' But they did not understand what he said to them.

Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour.

Luke 3:41-52

Gospel reading for Holy Family Sunday, 27th December