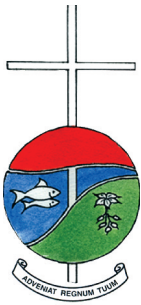


**Since 1987**  
**Gambia's national pilgrimage**  
**to Kunkujang Mariama**



# *The Diocese of Banjul* **NEWSLETTER**

*Incorporating The Catholic Newsletter*

**A faithful**  
**Advent leads**  
**to a joyful**  
**Christmas**



**Sister Dawida**  
**celebrates**  
**25 years as**  
**a Religious**  
**Sister - and 17**  
**years in**  
**The Gambia**

***Reflections, readings and prayers***  
***for every Sunday and for Christmas***





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By way of introduction

# The real Christmas

CHRISTMAS is a time of rejoicing. Parties, family get-togethers, gifts, reunions, good food and drink: all these mark the Christmas and New Year celebrations that many millions enjoy, throughout the world. It's a time, too, when differences are put aside, peace is emphasised, and good resolutions made.

Yet for the majority, all this rejoicing at Christmas has little or no relation to Christ himself, or to the Mass. Some of those who attend Midnight Mass, even, have a merely sentimental and nostalgic attachment to the songs and outward show of Christmas – they do not, in their hearts, adore the Christ Child, nor rejoice that he is the salvation of the world.

We in the Church are surely pleased that so many people, everywhere, derive pleasure from this happy feast, and all the preparations for it – all the looking forward, all the attention given to children. But if our Christmas is secular - solely devoted to family pleasure - it's soon over. If our Christmas is not focussed on Christ, we'll find that a few days into the New Year we have almost forgotten the festivities.

The true Christmas, the Christmas that Christians celebrate, expresses the joyful recognition that the Divine Child born to Mary in Bethlehem is 'Emmanuel' – God with us.

In the words of the creed, Jesus in the manger is 'the Only-Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God.'



His life among us on earth is the ultimate expression of God's love for the human race. His sacrificial death and resurrection, Christians believe, join earth to heaven, our mortal lives to life eternal. In all the joys, uncertainties and sorrows of this life, there is no comparable way to eternal joy than Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life.

This Christmas let us pray that among all those with whom we keep fellowship we put Christ first. May Jesus be, for us, the Supreme Guest.

When we, quite rightly, wish others - Christians and non-Christians - a happy Christmas, may we wish for them the peace, fellowship and mutual respect and love that Christ came on earth to establish for all mankind.

In Jesus the love of God has taken human form. Every single yearning of the human heart is known to Jesus. Every human soul can find light and peace with him, for all eternity. That - no less - is what we Christians proclaim about Christ, at Christmas and throughout the year.

So when the Christmas celebrations are over, may we retain and cherish year-round what Christmas stands for: love for the God who loves us, and the loving service of all others. That, in The Gambia and everywhere, will bring true peace.



## Why are we Christian divided?

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*We wish all our readers  
a Joyful Christmas and a Happy New Year*



# Our wonderful journey



OUR new Church Year begins on 3rd December. The year begins with Advent and ends with Christ the King (25th November 2018)

The colour and drama, variety and patterns of the liturgical year describe a wonderful journey which is never quite the same from one year to another.

As God's world-wide pilgrim people, we are invited on this journey as God is once more revealed to us, and we join all the saints in following Christ through his birth, ministry, death and resurrection.

### At the centre

CHRIST is the centre of the liturgical year, During the various seasons we come to know him more, die and rise with him, and look forward to eternity with him.

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

The liturgical year is not merely observed - it is *celebrated* as a heart-beat in the life of the diocese, the parish, and each one of us - Christ's people.

*So how do we celebrate the liturgical year?*

### The weekly Easter

**Sunday** is always 'special'.

Each Sunday commemorates the Paschal Mystery, when the community assembles, as it has since the time of the apostles, to acclaim Christ as risen Lord, to celebrate his 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 see the expected Messiah; at Christmas the Divine Child; during Lent and Easter the suffering servant and the Risen King.

As Sunday follows Sunday throughout the year, our picture of Christ deepens as we are led through the unfolding mystery of God's purpose.

### Walking with Christ

Throughout the 'Ordinary' Sundays of the year we walk with Christ in Galilee and Jerusalem. We stand on the hillsides, by the lake and in the porticoes. As he speaks to us, we learn who Christ is - so that we can declare him to others to be the Messenger, the One sent by God.

And every time we hear the story, it 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 greatest mysteries of God's love are revealed. Included as solemnities are the patrons of our own particular parish.

Next in order of festivity are **feasts**, when we sing the *Gloria in excelsis* to remember 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'. Some memorials are optional. Memorials shouldn't interrupt our working through the Scripture day by day (except in occasional 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.

*Even as each year's journey comes to an end, it begins once more, as we look to our final destination, when Christ will come again.*

## Catholic Calendar 2018

Epiphany	Sunday 7th January
Ash Wednesday	14th February
Palm Sunday	25th March
Easter Sunday	1st April
Ascension Day	Thursday 10th May
Pentecost	Sunday 20th May
Corpus Christi	Sunday 3rd June



Orthodox Lent begins	Monday 19th February
Orthodox Easter Sunday	8th April

## Jewish

Pesach (Passover)	Friday 30th - Saturday 31st March
Yom Kippur (Atonement)	Tuesday 18th September

### Muslim (approximate dates)

Ramadan begins	Wednesday 16th May
Lailat-al-Qadr ('Night of Power')	Monday 11th June
Eid-al-Fitr (Koriteh)	Friday 15th June
Eid-al-Adha (Tobaski)	Wednesday 22nd August
Al-Hijira (Islamic New Year 1401)	Wednesday 14th October
Milad-al-Nabi (Prophet's Birthday)	Tuesday 20th November



# Here & there

## NEWS FROM AROUND THE DIOCESE



### Sister Dawida celebrates her silver jubilee

ON Saturday 7th October the School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND) joined sisters from other congregations, priests and lay people at the GPI Chapel to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of the religious profession of Sr Dawida Krzempek. She has spent seventeen of her twenty-five years as a sister in The Gambia.

Sr Dawida is working as a teacher in the Parish of Mary Mother of God at Soma.

The celebrant at the Mass of Thanksgiving was Fr Anthony Gabisi, formerly Parish Priest at Soma. In his homily, Fr Gabisi reminded Sr Dawida that she is a gift of God to all, especially to the people she is called to minister to.

The Mass was followed by a dinner at which Sr Dawida expressed her joy and thanks to all who had come to celebrate with her.



### World-wide

School Sisters of Notre Dame is a world-wide religious institute of Sisters devoted to primary, secondary and post-secondary education. Their life in mission centres on prayer, community life and ministry.

The congregation was founded in Bavaria in 1833 at a time of poverty and illiteracy. Its founder, Caroline Gerhardinger, known by the religious name of Mary Theresa of Jesus, formed a community with two other women to teach the poor.

In 1847 Blessed Theresa and five sisters travelled to the United States to help German immigrants, especially girls and women. They taught at schools in three German parishes as well as opening the Institute of Notre Dame, a private school for German girls. Eventually the Congregation spread across the United States and into Canada, ultimately forming eight North American Provinces.

Today, more than 3,000 School Sisters of Notre Dame are working in 34 countries in Europe, North and South America, Asia, Africa and Oceania. Africa now produces the largest number of vocations.

The Generalate of the Congregation is in Rome.

### St Therese's Kanifing approaches its 60th anniversary

APRIL 2017 will mark the 60th anniversary of the opening of St Therese's Church in Kanifing, at the heart of the largest parish in the Diocese of Banjul.

The Church became established in the Kombos chiefly through the founding of a mission at Kanifing in 1946. Fr Francis Farrell was Priest-in-Charge of the new mission while still being Principal of St Augustine's in Banjul.

The Church of St Therese (now the parochial hall) was blessed by Bishop Prosper Dodds of Casamance on 9th April 1948.

### Red-letter day

It was a red-letter day for the Church. From early morning people were making their way from Banjul to Kanifing. By the time of the ceremony a crowd estimated at 5,000 was assembled outside the church. Some 600 were able to pack themselves inside.

Following the Mass there were festivities and food for all, organised mostly by people from Banjul. The festivities came to a close with Solemn Benediction at 4 pm.

The following Sunday, Fr Farrell baptised 42 children in the new church. He continued to run the mission from St Augustine's School until November 1948.

The priest's house was completed by March 1949.

The congregation at St Therese's grew too large for the church building, and a second, replacement, church was opened on 9th April 1972 - today's St Therese's.



*Opening of the present St Therese's Church*



## Congratulations

*During January, three Gambian priests celebrate the Anniversary of their Ordination*

<b>Fr Antony Sonko</b>	<b>21st January 1989</b>
<b>Fr James Mendy</b>	<b>24th January 2015</b>
<b>Fr Tanislaus Ndecky</b>	<b>24th January 2015</b>

## Remembering the dead of the Second World War



**West Africans  
serving in Burma**

DEAD combatants of the Second World War, particularly Gambians and soldiers of other nationalities interred at the War Cemetery in Fajara, were commemorated at the traditional Remembrance Sunday ceremony on 13th November.

In the front row of those attending were Gambian veterans of the war.

The Act of Remembrance was read by Lt-Colonel Tim Mason, British Defence Attaché, followed at 11 am by the Last Post, the Two-Minute Silence, and Reveille.

Among those laying wreaths were the British Ambassador, Sharon Wardle; the Ambassador of Qatar, Mohammed Nasser Essa Al-Kaabi, who is Dean of the Diplomatic Corps; and representatives of the Gambia National Army and the Gambian Police Force.

The Commitment was read by Gregor O'Gorman, Deputy Head of Mission at the British Embassy, and prayers were offered by the Canon Solomon Neequaye of the Anglican Mission, and a representative of the Imam Ratib.

During the Second World War (1939-45) two West African brigades took part in campaigns in East Africa and Burma; and Mrs Wardle (*left*) paid tribute to the distinguished contribution in Burma of Gambian and other West African soldiers.

During and after the war, many Gambian and British soldiers were buried throughout The Gambia, often with ten bodies to a grave. In 1949 many of these remains were re-buried in the newly-consecrated Fajara War Cemetery.

The site of the Supreme Court and Arch 22 was originally the European cemetery, where some servicemen had been buried. In the 1990s, after Christian prayers, the remains were re-interred at Fajara.

Fajara War Cemetery contains 203 graves of Second World War servicemen: 122 Gambians and other West Africans, 63 British, ten Canadians, two Australians, two New Zealanders, two Frenchmen, one Rhodesian and one Norwegian.

*Requiescant in pace*

## OBITUARY

### Man of enterprise

THE DEATH occurred on All Souls Day, Thursday 2nd November, of Roberr Thomasi, whose varied and enterprising career embraced teaching, retailing and accountancy. He was 75.

Fondly known as Robero, Roberto or Bobb, Mr Thomasi was born in Banjul on 8th February 1944 to Louis Lucien Thomasi and Marie-Michelle Sambou.

After his primary and secondary schooling, Roberr was posted by the Catholic Mission as a teacher at St George's School, Mansajang. Although he had accommodation at the mission, he was assisted domestically by his aunt, Anne-Marie Awowoye Sambou, and sister, Marian Genes Sambou.

During his three years in Basse, Roberr seized every opportunity to develop spiritually and to nurture social relationships with young and old within the Mansajang community. He became able to speak Fula fluently, and had a smattering of Serahule.

After Basse, Roberr returned to Banjul and opened a shop in Picton Street, where he sold groceries, miscellaneous items and beverages. His shop, which he named Côte Roberr, soon became popular.

Later, when business started to dwindle, he again changed course, and took up accounting under the tutorship of his father, Louis Lucien. Roberr developed skills in income-tax returns, profit-and-loss accounts, and balance-sheet preparation. He became Principal Accountant with the Afro-Atlantic Company.

After several years of service, he left the company and embarked on various enterprises. He set up a car-rental service as well as the Kabala White Lime Company. In addition, he kept records for Serahule traders, providing them with documents to show to security officials on the route to Basse.

As a Catholic, Roberr espoused an unwavering faith in his Maker. He undertook a two-year Evangelisation Course and was awarded a Certificate in Evangelism.

Roberr married Marie-Jane in 1975, and their union was blessed with three children. He is survived by his wife; his sons Jaeggan and Roberr, as well as Louis and Victor.

Mr Thomasi's funeral was held at St Therese's Kanifing on Monday 13th November, followed by interment at Old Jeshwang cemetery.



Would you like to say **Morning** and **Evening Prayer** every day, in union with Catholics throughout the world? Go to **Universalis** website and click on Morning Prayer, or Mass, or Vespers and you will find the complete Office



# Welcoming Christ this 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 about the coming of Christ
- the need for repentance, as preached by Christ's herald, John the Baptist
- death, judgment, hell and heaven
- the celebration of Christmas
- the Second Coming of Jesus at the end of time

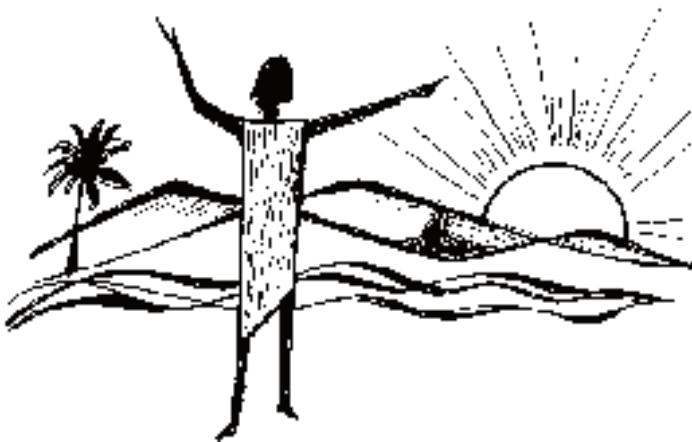
## Old Testament yearning

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 heart-felt 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 prophet to whom we turn in Advent is John the Baptist. He is the last - and Jesus told us, the greatest - of all the prophets.

John is the link between the Old Testament and the New. He was the forerunner of Christ, born shortly before him. John was the only prophet to greet Christ in person. He pointed to Christ as the Lamb of God. Like Christ, John endured an unjust and cruel death.

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

## The Last Things

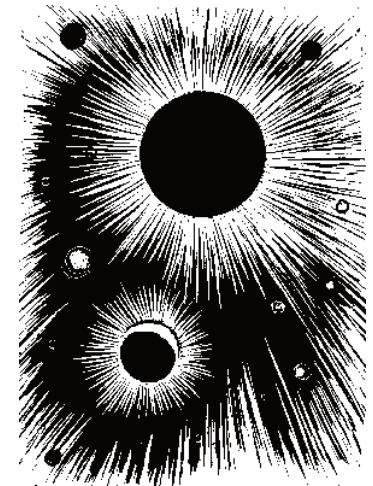
A contrasting motif of Advent - one which we may not like to think about - is the 'Four Last Things': death, judgment, hell and heaven.

We shall all experience death and judgment. But is our third experience 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? (*See End Piece, page 30*)



## The Second Coming

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 told 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.

You, O Lord, are close, and all your words are truth.

*Psalm 118:151*



## Why did Jesus call himself 'the Good Shepherd'?

AT Christmas we think of the shepherds who heard the message of the angel about Christ's birth and went to worship at the manger. Many of us have never met a shepherd, and perhaps never will. It's a pity, because

shepherds are mentioned so often in the Bible that we ought to know something about them.

Jesus knew a good deal about the work of a shepherd. He must have often seen shepherds on the hills above his childhood home at Nazareth.

It may seem odd that Jesus said that the shepherd 'goes before them, and the sheep follow him'. In most places the shepherd drives his flock from the rear, but in Palestine, to this day, the shepherd goes ahead of his flock.

The shepherd calls each by its own name, and the sheep follow.

### **Strong and courageous**

At the time of Jesus a good shepherd had to be strong and courageous. There were many dangers. Sheep stealers would stop at nothing to make a capture; and sometimes wolves, or even bears, could attack the flock.

At night the sheep were penned in an enclosure of stones or thorn hedges. The shepherd would lie across the entrance to prevent them from escaping and intruders from entering.

This is what Jesus was thinking of when he said. 'I am the door.'

Even so, a sheep might occasionally stray, especially if the flock were a large one. Many centuries before Jesus, the prophet Isaiah compared the people who turned away from God to sheep who strayed from the flock. 'All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way.'

Jesus used the same picture when he wanted to show how much God cares for his people. Perhaps he had actually gone out with the shepherds of Nazareth to search for sheep that were lost. He certainly knew what they did when this happened.

### **Searching for the lost**

Having made sure that the rest of the flock were safely penned in, the good shepherd would take a club, a crook and a lamp and set out in search of the sheep that was lost.

He would be more anxious about the lost sheep than about all the rest, and if necessary he would spend the night as well as the day looking for it. He did not give up until it was found, perhaps on a dangerous ledge to which it had jumped in search of grass and from which it couldn't get back. With his long crook the shepherd would grasp the animal and lift it to safety.

Perhaps Jesus had seen this actually happen, and knew how glad the shepherd was when the lost sheep was rescued. That is why he looked round at the people and needed his help, and told them, 'I am the good shepherd.'



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## *Since 1987*

# Gambia's National Pilgrimage to Kunkujang Mariama

ON SATURDAY 9th December great crowds of Catholics and others will gather from across the country and beyond at Kunkujang Mariama.

It will be the thirty-first pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady Queen of Peace, the first pilgrimage having taken place ten years ago - in 1987.

Every year at Pentecost since 1888, a Marian pilgrimage has been held at the shrine of Our Lady of Deliverance at Poponguine, on Senegal's Petite Côte. It was not until 1986, almost a century after the first pilgrimage to Poponguine, that a group of lay people suggested to Bishop Michael Cleary that a Marian shrine should be established in The Gambia.

Various sites were considered, including Bwiam and Juffure; and eventually it was decided to establish the shrine at Kunkujang, where Fr John Sharpe was Parish Priest.

It was intended to take the statue of Mary from the entrance to the old St Augustine's High School in Hagan Street Banjul and re-erect it at the shrine. The statue's removal was widely opposed; and it turned out to be impossible to prise it from its niche - where it remains to this day. The statue first placed in the grotto had one hand missing. It is now in the Church of Divine Mercy at Brufut.

The original shrine committee prepared the football field, transported seating, and engaged the help of the Public Works Department (PWD), the Fire Service and the Red Cross.

Fr Sharpe has described the shrine committee of those days as 'indefatigable'.

After the first pilgrimage it was realised that extended facilities were needed. Bishop Cleary provided a D50,000 loan. An outdoor altar plinth was built. Fr Sharpe designed seating around the altar. The making of slabs entailed lots of local labour.

After three years or so, the Presentation Sisters identified a new site for the grotto.



Youth groups used to arrive the evening before the pilgrimage. But their vigil involved social activities more than prayer, and it was discontinued.

For some time there were problems with the lease originally agreed with the Alkalo for a plot of some 80 by 500 metres. The lease was resented by some local farmers, but after prolonged efforts the matter was settled, and lease documents lodged with Bishop Cleary.

### The Shrine Church

The Shrine Church subsequently built at Kunkujang seats over 1,200, and cost more than D200,000. It was designed by Cyril Ashby, a retired Irish civil engineer. He did not live to see the opening of the church, which contains a plaque to his memory.

The church is distinguished by murals by Eleanor Yates, an American artist Fr Sharpe met by chance when she was decorating a village church in Ireland.

*In recent years, in addition to the December pilgrimage, a second pilgrimage to Kunkujang Mariama has been held on the first Saturday of Lent.*



Do  
you  
know?

- 1 Before the birth of Jesus, why did Mary and Joseph travel from Bethlehem to Nazareth?
- 2 By what name is Christmas known in Senegal and other French-speaking countries?
- 3 In which country did the Christmas tree originate?
- 4 Who is known as the 'Forerunner'?
- 5 Isaiah speaks of the birth to a virgin of 'Emmanuel'. What does this name mean?
- 6 Who made the first Christmas crib?
- 7 From whom is the make-belief children's character, 'Father Christmas' derived?
- 8 What words of Mary are said or sung every day at Evening Prayer?
- 9 Which martyr is celebrated the day after Christmas Day?
- 10 What is a bambino?
- 11 How many 'wise men' visited the Infant Christ?
- 12 For how many days was Christmas traditionally celebrated?
- 13 Besides Christmas, what other feast days in the English-speaking world may be given a name ending with 'mas'?
- 14 What does the name 'Jesus' mean?
- 15 Which two of the four Gospels provide accounts of the birth of Jesus?

**Answers on page 29**





## family circle

### Full members of the family

THE PRAYER intention of Pope Francis for December (see page 24) is that 'the elderly, sustained by families and Christian communities, may apply their wisdom and experience to spreading the faith and forming the new generations'.

In The Gambia and most developing countries, almost half the population consists of young people below the age of fifteen; and our schools are bursting at the seams. But we have larger numbers of older people, too. We should recognise how much we owe to older people - what they have done for us - and take loving care of them.

#### Growing older

As people grow older they become prone to increasing physical disorders. And they are likely, even if they live in a family, to feel lonely and isolated.

Elderly people often ignore the symptoms of illness because they don't want to be 'a nuisance', or they're afraid what going into hospital may mean.

When older people's health declines, we shouldn't just say, 'It's old age.' We can do a great deal to boost their spirits and enable them to live a happier, more active life. A cataract operation, for example, or providing a hearing-aid, can transform an elderly person's situation.

It's important that those who look after the elderly detect the signs of illness early. Those over the age of sixty should have regular medical check-ups.

Common causes of depression in the elderly are isolation, inactivity and a feeling of not being wanted. Elderly people can be helped by making them part of family activities.

Those who live alone can be greatly cheered by regular visits and help with shopping, cooking, cleaning or laundry.

#### Tripping and falling

Elderly people who trip or stumble are often too slow to prevent a fall. Their reflex actions are much slower than those of younger people.

Broken bones may result. Women suffer more falls than men, and fractures are more likely because women's bone strength is reduced through the calcium loss that follows the menopause.

If you find someone unconscious or in severe pain following a fall, seek medical help immediately.

To help prevent falls in the house, try to provide good lighting.



Take care that carpets are stable and not frayed, and that floors are uncluttered and free of trailing wires which could trip someone up.

Elderly people should wear suitable footwear.

*Remember that most old people are 'young in heart', and with support and encouragement are able to live as happily and positively as they did when they were young.*

### Go easy on the alcohol...

CHRISTMAS is party time, when many people drink more alcohol than usual – beer, wine or spirits. Medical opinion is that a glass or two of wine a day (red wine, especially) is good for the health. But drinking too much is definitely bad. We should beware of over-drinking not just at Christmas, but throughout the year.

Knowing something about the ill effects of excessive drinking may help us to think about it and to cut down on our consumption of alcohol.

#### Social and health problems

Alcohol is implicated in many social problems: absence from work, road accidents, violence, marital breakdown, child abuse, sexual assault and other violent crimes.

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

The perils of drinking too much alcohol are not limited to alcoholics. Many people who drink regularly or heavily are at risk of developing alcohol-related disorders.

Among heavy drinkers, liver disorders are common, including fatty liver, hepatitis, cirrhosis and liver cancer.

There's also a risk of cardio-vascular disorder such as hypertension (high blood-pressure), coronary artery disease and stroke.

Heavy drinkers often suffer from digestive disorders, including gastritis, pancreatitis, peptic ulcer, and various cancers. All these are more common than average in heavy drinkers.

People who drink heavily tend not to eat a balanced diet, and therefore suffer from nutritional disorders.

Long-term over-indulgence in alcohol leads to impairment of brain function, affecting intellectual ability and movement.

Women who drink regularly or heavily while they are pregnant are likely to damage the physical and mental development of their unborn children.

If you don't know some of the medical terms mentioned above, look them up in a dictionary; then you'll be even more wary of drinking too much!

The lesson is: *Go easy at Christmas – and throughout the year.*

*Keep up-to-date with your Diocese!*

Visit [www.banjuldiocese.gm](http://www.banjuldiocese.gm)



## O, my poor head!

HEADACHES are common. But most aren't serious and are easily treated.

In many cases you can treat your headaches at home with pain-killers such as paracetamol and ibuprofen, as well as getting more rest and drinking enough fluids.

But it's a good idea to see a doctor if your headaches aren't relieved by painkillers, or if they're so painful or frequent that they affect your daily activities or are causing you to miss work.

### Tension headaches

Tension headaches are the most common type of headache and are what we think of as normal, 'everyday' headaches. They feel like a constant ache that affects both sides of the head, as though a tight band is stretched around it.

A tension headache normally won't be severe enough to prevent you doing everyday activities. They usually last for 30 minutes to several hours, but can last for several days.

The exact cause is unclear, but tension headaches have been linked to things such as stress, poor posture, missing meals and dehydration.

Tension headaches can usually be treated with ordinary painkillers such as paracetamol and ibuprofen. Getting regular sleep, reducing stress and staying well hydrated, may also help.

### Migraines

Migraines are less common than tension headaches. They're usually felt as a severe, throbbing pain at the front or side of the head.

Some people also have other symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting and increased sensitivity to light or sound.

Migraines can stop you carrying out your normal daily activities. They usually last at least a couple of hours, and some people find they need to stay in bed for days at a time.

Most people can treat their migraines successfully with medication from a pharmacy. But if they're severe, you may need stronger medication prescribed by a doctor.

### Medication and painkiller headaches

Some headaches are a side effect of taking a particular medication. Frequent headaches can also be caused by taking too many painkillers. This is known as a painkiller or medication-overuse headache.

A medication-overuse headache will usually get better within a few weeks once you stop taking the painkillers that are causing it, although your pain may get worse for a few days before it starts to improve.



### Other causes of headaches

Headaches can also have a number of other causes, including:

- too much alcohol
- a head injury or concussion
- a fresh cold or influenza

### Could it be something serious?

In the vast majority of cases, a headache isn't a sign of a serious problem. But, rarely, it can be a symptom of a condition such as a stroke, meningitis, or a brain tumour.

A headache is more likely to be serious if:

- it occurs suddenly and is severe – often described as a blinding pain unlike anything experienced before
- it doesn't go away and gets worse over time
- it occurs after a severe head injury
- it's triggered suddenly by coughing, laughing, sneezing, changes in posture, or physical exertion
- you have symptoms suggesting a problem with your brain or nervous system, including weakness, slurred speech, confusion, memory loss, and drowsiness
- you have additional symptoms, such as a high temperature, a stiff neck, a rash, jaw pain while chewing, vision problems, a sore scalp, or severe pain and redness in one of your eyes

*If you're concerned that your headache might be serious, you should seek immediate medical advice.*

## We thank you, Lord



SAYING grace before meals, especially when the family is eating together, is a good way to remind your children of their religion and to strengthen family ties.

Some families share the saying of grace: sometimes it's father, sometimes mother, sometimes a grandparent, sometimes a child.

Grace is not made more effective by length. It is sincerity and simplicity that count.

Always begin by making the sign of the Cross. You can then use your own words to say grace, speaking in any language. Everyone should respond by saying a heartfelt 'Amen.'

Some people feel at home with a traditional, formal 'table prayer'. Here are two or three (there are many more):

- *Bless us, O Lord, and these your gifts, which we are about to receive from your bounty, through Christ our Lord. Amen*
- *Bless this food, Lord, to our use, and make us mindful of the needs of others (through Jesus Christ our Lord...)*
- *For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful (through Jesus Christ our Lord...)*

If you have visitors who may not say grace in their own homes, the saying of grace before your meal provides a simple, gentle reminder that Our Lord is always a guest at your table.

## Don't drop litter!

*Help keep your  
neighbourhood  
and the nation clean*





## Gambian Christian Anniversaries December & January

### TEN YEARS AGO: TWO REPORTS FROM THE NEWSLETTER

'THIS brings back to memory Father Meehan.' So said Alhaji A.A. Faal, Chairman of the Council of Muslim Elders, when on 19th January 2008 the Imam Ratib of Banjul, Alhaji Cherno Alieu Mass Kah, visited the Bishop of Banjul. The visit emphasised the warm relationship between Muslims and Christians that has existed for decades in this country. The Parish Priest at the Cathedral at that time was Fr Edward

Gomez.

The Imam Ratib declared: 'We are thankful to God because of the great relationship and brotherhood that exists between the people of this land. The religious peace and tolerance we enjoy in this country is a gift of God.' He thanked Bishop Ellison for initiating the visit, and spoke passionately about his desire to see people in this country live side by side peacefully, irrespective of their religious affiliation.

Bishop Ellison expressed his delight to the Imam and the Council of Elders for coming to visit him, and 'by extension visiting all Catholics in this country'. The Bishop spoke of the letter written in October 2007 by Muslim scholars, imams and clerics representing the Muslim world to all heads of Christian denominations. It stressed that 'there can be no peace in the world unless there is peace among religions'. Bishop Ellison commented: 'We Christians try to live the story of the Good Samaritan which Jesus used in the Gospel of Luke 10:25-37, to teach us who our neighbour is.'

Joseph Gaye, Chairman of the Cathedral Parish Pastoral Council, said that Fr John Meehan had been the first to welcome the Imam Ratib of Banjul, Alhaji Momodou Marie Njie, on 16th October 1919. 'What we are doing now is a continuation of what our forefathers have been doing.'

### CELEBRATIONS at BASSE

THE SISTERS of St Joseph of Annecy, who had arrived at Basse in 1982, celebrated their silver jubilee from 26th January to 2nd February 2008.

The celebrations included recreational activities, an exhibition on the Annecy Sisters, and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

A Jubilee Mass was celebrated at St Joseph's Church on Saturday 2nd February, the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord. Present were St Joseph of Cluny Sisters, who 25 years before had handed over Basse parish to the Annecy Sisters due to lack of personnel. They were joined by School Sisters of Notre Dame, Marist Sisters and Sisters of the Presentation of Mary.

Priests included Fr Jean-François CSSp, Fr Benedict Mba MSP, Fr Anthony Gabisi and the Parish Priest, Fr John Baptist Baalaboore CSSp. Bishop Ellison was represented by Fr Gabisi.

**3rd December 1834:** Laying of the foundation stone of Wesley Methodist Church, Dobson Street Banjul.

**18th January 1848 (170 years ago):** Arrival of Fr Ronarc'h, a French priest, and Fr Warlop, a Belgian, to begin a Catholic mission in Banjul.

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

**29th December 1875:** Death of Bishop Durët.

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

**3rd December 1887 (130 years ago):** Fr Massart died at the altar while saying the Last Gospel at the Mass.

*In December 1887, only Fr Massart was in residence at Hagan Street. The other priests were in Dakar, on retreat. On the feast of St Francis Xavier, patron of missions, 3rd December, Fr Massart died. At the end of Mass, when Fr Massart was saying the Last Gospel, he genuflected at the words, 'The Word was made flesh,' stood up again, and was transfixed at the altar. Officiated over by the Sisters, Fr Massart was buried before the other priests returned from Dakar.*

**During December 1823:** Arrival from England of Hannah Kilham and a group of Quaker missionaries. They opened an agricultural centre at Bakau and a school in Banjul.

**8th December 1894:** First use in Hagan Street Church of the high altar sent from the Holy Ghost Seminary in Chevilly, Paris.

**During December 1902:** Consecration by Bishop Taylor-Smith of Freetown, of St Mary's Anglican Church, Banjul (now the Anglican Cathedral).

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



**19th December 1931:** Last entry in French in the Mission Journal. Thereafter, entries were written in English, the Mission having been declared *sui juris* (self-governing).

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

**21st December 1934:** Fr Doody, who had been taken ill while travelling from Ireland to Banjul, died while returning on the same boat that had brought him.

**15th January 1935:** Fr Harold Whiteside, an English priest serving in The Gambia, took up residence at the new mission station in Bwiam.

**7th January 1939:** The first marriage celebrated at Bwiam was that of the catechist, Joseph Richards.

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

**16th December 1952:** Departure of Fr Coughlin after four years in this country. He is remembered for the painting formerly behind the altar at Star of the Sea, Bakau.

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

**24th December 1954:** Arrival of Fr Michael Flynn, who said Christmas morning Mass the following day.



**1st January 1956:** Official 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 (60 years ago):** 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

**13th January 1966:** Bishop Moloney returned from Rome following the close of the Second Vatican Council.

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

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

**16th December 1977:** Opening of the Diocesan Development Office.

**3rd January 1978 (40 years ago):** Opening of Christ the King Darsilami.

**3rd January 1978 (40 years ago):** The Gambia Christian Council called on President Sir Dawda Jawara, inaugurating what has become an annual event.

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

**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, when clergy and religious were joined by representatives of the laity.

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

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

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

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

**17th January 2010:** Blessed Sacrament Kanifing Estate became an independent parish, with Fr Peter Lopez as first Parish Priest.

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

**During December 2010:** Sr Calixte Thomas and Sr Teresa Mundow joined Cluny sisters from all over Africa at a meeting in Dakar to discuss the implementation of the Synod of African Bishops in Rome in 2010.

**29th December 2012:** Sr Calixte Thomas (*right*) returned to India, after 12 years in educational work in The Gambia. She died in India almost four years later, on 16th September 2016.

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

**22nd January 2014:** Sudden death of Archbishop Tilewa Johnson, sixth Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Gambia, who since October 2012 had also been Archbishop of the Province of West Africa.

**24th January 2016:** The Rt Revd James Yaw Odico became seventh Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Gambia.



## Why are we 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 the letters of St Paul. In the early Church, doctrinal disagreements (about the nature of Christ, for example) led to estrangement and even violence. Then in 1054 the Eastern Church split from Rome (the 'Great Schism'): a tragic split that remains to this day.

In The Gambia, as elsewhere in the world, 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. Many disagreements have been not so much theological as political, nationalistic or economic.

We may censure our Christian forebears for blinkered, intolerant and cruel attitudes towards each other. But we ourselves, it seems, are quite often arrogant or elitist about the particular Christian community we belong to. We may be ignorant about the beliefs of our fellow Christians. We may be scornful of 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 ourselves, 'What is the nature of the unity that Christ himself wants for his followers?'

In 1984 Pope St John Paul II wrote: 'The sin of disunity, which has been with us for centuries, weighs heavily upon the Church'. Vatican II declared: 'Without doubt, this disunity contradicts the will of Christ, constitutes a stumbling-block to the world, and inflicts damage to the cause of proclaiming the Good News to every creature.'

Even as we uphold the unity of the Catholic Church, we surely regret that millions of our fellow Christians - 'brothers and sisters in Christ' - see unity in different terms. Yet all Christians - Catholic or Orthodox, Anglican, 'born-again' or whatever - owe allegiance to one Lord. For him there was no outcast, no-one beyond the pale. What even now 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.

### **2018 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity: Thursday 18th - Thursday 25th January**

The theme for the 2018 Week of Prayer is 'Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power' (Exodus 15:6). The resources have been prepared by churches of the Caribbean.

*As this Newsletter goes to press, we have received no details of the 2018 Christian Unity week in The Gambia.*



***Gaudete in Domino semper; iterum dico, gaudete.  
Dominis enim prope est***

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice. Indeed, the Lord is near*

# Sunday Reflections

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



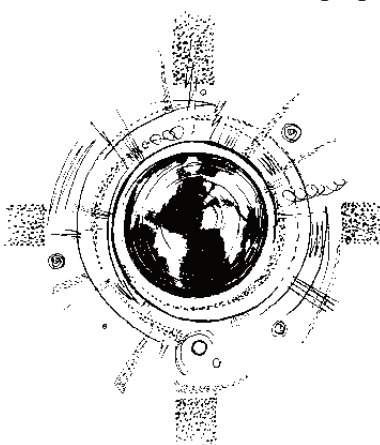
## *Sunday 3rd December* **First Sunday in Advent**

*Be prepared!*

AN exciting new beginning: this is the very first day of Advent - and the beginning of our new liturgical year.

It's time for a new start, for repentance, for seeking the Lord.

The reading from Isaiah expresses the yearning of God's people. Aware of their backsliding, the people longed for God's presence and his salvation.



Isaiah declared, 'Lord, you are our Father; we the clay, you the potter.' We are in God's hands, come what may, and Christ tells us in today's Gospel, 'What I say to you I say to all: Stay awake!'

As Advent progresses, we need to be in a state of readiness: not simply to rejoice at the celebration of Christ's birth, but to pray that he will be born anew in our hearts, and that we may truly yearn for the establishment of his Kingdom for all eternity.

St Paul has words of encouragement for us: 'You are waiting for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed, and he will keep you steady and without blame until the last day... because God by calling you has joined you to his Son, Jesus Christ - and God is faithful.'

The time to be ready to welcome Christ is now. 'See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!' (2 Corinthians 6:2)

*The colour for Advent is purple or violet*

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

### **Collect**

GRANT your faithful, we pray, almighty God, the resolve to run forward 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:** Isaiah 63:16-17 & 64:1,3-8. 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. 1 Corinthians 1:3-9.

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

**Gospel:** Mark 13: 33-37

### **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 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...

## *10th December* **Second Sunday in Advent**

*Preparing the way*

IN the wilderness - the emptiness - of his people's lives, the prophet Isaiah called on them to prepare for the Lord. His message is paralleled by Christ's apostle Peter, who advocated holy living while 'waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God'.

In Mark, whose Gospel will be read on most Sundays in the coming year, the good news is stated in the very first words of the Gospel: 'The beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, Son of God.'

Isaiah's message is underlined by John the Baptist: while waiting to welcome Christ, we must repent.

### **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:** Isaiah 40:1-5,9-11, Psalm 84:9-14. Response: Let us see, O Lord, your mercy, and give us your saving help. 2 Peter 3:8-14.





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

**Gospel:** Mark 1:1-8

**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...

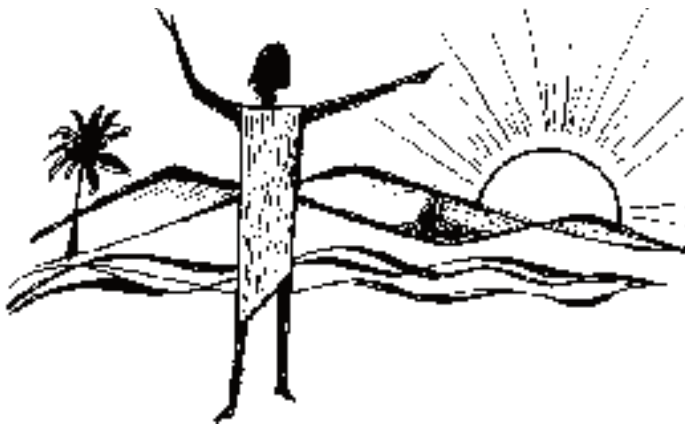
**Preface**

...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 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...

*17th December*  
**3rd Sunday in Advent**  
*Herald and Forerunner*



Today we begin the second part of Advent. The Advent Antiphons are said at evening prayer every day.

John the Baptist links the Old Testament and the New. He was the last and greatest of the many prophets who had foretold the coming of Christ. John recalled Isaiah's words, 'He has sent me to bring good news.' He identified himself with the voice in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord!' John the Baptist was the only prophet to acknowledge our Saviour in the flesh.

As we busy ourselves preparing for the party season, we should not forget John's message.

Making straight the way of the Lord is in one way simple: we don't need material possessions, just a clean heart and a love of others. But in another way it is dauntingly hard: we are to put Christ, his coming to the world, his birth and presence in our hearts, at the centre of our lives.

St Paul insisted: 'Pray without ceasing... hold fast to everything that is good.... May your spirit and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

*Today is known as Gaudete Sunday, from the entrance antiphon, Gaudete in Domino semper (Rejoice in the Lord always). Rose-coloured vestments may be used instead of purple.*

**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 always with solemn worship and great rejoicing...

**Readings:** Isaiah 61:1-2,10-11. Cantic: Luke 1:46-50, 53-54. Response: My soul rejoices in my God. Thessalonians 5:16-24

**Gospel acclamation:** Alleluia... The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor.

**Gospel:** John 1:6-8,19-28

**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 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**

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

*Morning of 24th December*  
**Fourth Sunday in Advent**

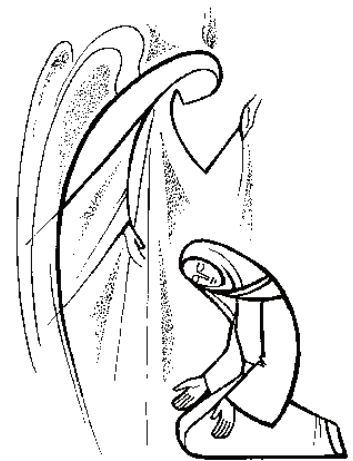
*Born of the house of David*

IN today's First Reading the Lord tells David that he will not be the one to build the house of God - the Temple - in Jerusalem. Yet we know that David's own house - that is, his family and lineage - were in course of time to provide something infinitely more precious than a building. From the house of David was born Jesus (the Greek form of 'Joshua', which means 'God saves').

We dwell in Christ as our living Temple, the Word made flesh.

No passage in the Gospels is better loved than Luke's account of the appearance of Gabriel to Mary. Gabriel told Mary that the Son to be born to her would inherit the throne of her ancestor David, and that his reign would have no end. When Mary asked, 'How can this be?' Gabriel assured her that the Holy Spirit would descend upon her, and that her Son would be called 'Son of God'.

Mary said 'Yes' to the angel's message. And so should we. Let our Christmas not just be 'Yes' to family get-togethers, parties and gifts, but - much more important - a joyful 'Yes' to the Son of God.



**Collect**

POUR forth, we beseech you, O Lord, your grace into our hearts, that we, to whom the Incarnation of 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:** Samuel 7:1-5,8-12,14,16. Psalm 88:2-5,27,29.

**Response:** I will sing for ever of your love, O Lord. Romans 16:25-27.

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

**Gospel:** Luke 1:26-38

**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...

**Celebrating the Nativity**

SINCE the earliest days of the Church, priests, philosophers, poets and artists have sought to express their wonder and joy at the great mystery of Christ's birth: Emmanuel, God-with-us, in the manger at Bethlehem. They inspire us; but no-one can fully understand, nor give adequate thanks for what God has done for us in the birth, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus.

As we party at Christmas, let us not lose sight of the

Gospel message: that Christ, Prince of Peace, Lamb of God, calls us to his side in this life and the next.

*The colour throughout Christmas Time is white or gold.*

*During the creed at Christmas Mass we genuflect (bend the knee) at the words, '...and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man'.*

**For Christmas, the Church provides four Masses**

- \* **Mass of the Vigil** (Christmas Eve, Sunday 24th December)
- \* **Mass of Midnight**
- \* **Mass of the Dawn** (early Christmas morning)
- \* **Mass of the Day** (later on Christmas morning)

*The colour for Christmas Time is white or gold.*

**Evening of Sunday 24th December:****Christmas Eve****Christmas Mass of the Vigil**

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, so we may 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 1:1-25 (or 18-25)

**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 provided for Christmas: see box on the opposite 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...

**Monday 25th December:****Christmas Day****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.

**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 with yours...

**Preface:** *the priest may use any one of the three Prefaces provided for Christmas: see box on the opposite page.*

**Prayer after Communion**

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

**Venite adoramus**

*O come, let us adore 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.

### 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 confer on us what is divine...

**Preface:** *the priest may use any one of the three Prefaces provided for Christmas: see box below.*

### 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 even more and more...

## Mass of the Day

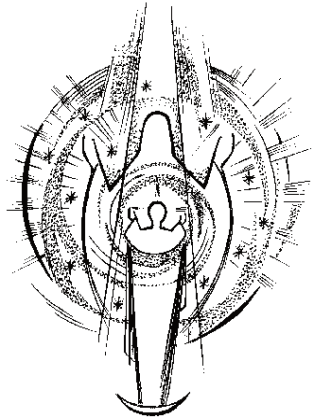
### Collect

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 humiliated himself to share our humanity...

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

**Gospel acclamation:** Alleluia... A hallowed day has dawned upon us. Come, you nations, worship the Lord, for today a great light has shone down upon the earth.

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



### Prayer over the Offerings

MAKE acceptable, O Lord, our oblation on this solemn day, when you manifested the reconciliation that make 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 provided for Christmas: see box below.*

### 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 even the giver of immortality...

## Sunday 31st December

### The Holy Family

#### *Everything we pray for*

CHRISTMAS and New Year's Day were only a few days ago, and we are surely still in party mood.

But already, following the song of the angels, 'Peace to his people on earth', there's a darker note. Jesus was scarcely born, when his life was under threat. To protect Mother and Son, Joseph took them to Egypt; and at the outset of his life Jesus became a refugee. Only after the death of King Herod did Joseph, Mary and Jesus return home.



The Gospels tell us next-to-nothing about the life of Jesus for the following thirty years. But, as related in today's Gospel, Luke says that when Jesus was about twelve years old Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem, where they lost him because he'd stayed in the Temple to talk to the elders (Luke 2:14-51). He goes on to tell us that Jesus was 'obedient to his parents'. But what kind of daily life did the Holy Family experience?

It was certainly loving; but that doesn't mean it was trouble-free. Did Jesus learn and practise Joseph's craft? Before his public ministry did Jesus live entirely with his parents?

Jesus is our model in everything that's important to us. The mutual love of Jesus, Mary and Joseph is what we pray for in our own family life.

## Prefaces for Christmas

### Preface of Christmas I

...For in the mystery of the Word made flesh a new light of your glory has shone on 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...

### Preface of Christmas II

...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...

### Preface of Christmas III

... For through 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...

**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 rewards...

**Readings:** Genesis 15:1-6 & 21:1-3. Psalm 104:1-6,8-9. Response: He, the Lord, is our God. He remembers his covenant for ever. Hebrews: 11:8,11-12,17-19.

**or Alternative Readings:** Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) 3:3-7,14-17. Psalm 127:1-5. Response: O blessed are those who fear the Lord and walk in his ways. Colossians 3:12-21.

**Gospel acclamation:** Alleluia... May the peace of God reign in your hearts; let the message of Christ find a home in you.

**Gospel:** Matthew 2:13-15,19-23.

**Prayer over the Offerings**

WE offer you, O Lord, the sacrifice of conciliation, 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 your peace...

**Preface:** *the priest may use any one of the three Prefaces provided for Christmas: see box on the precious page.*

**Prayer after Communion**

BRING those you refresh with 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...

## Monday 1st January (New Year's Day)

**Mary, Mother of God**

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 our 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 Friday 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 heavens, and on earth, peace to men of goodwill!'



We need to feel that peace in our hearts, practise it in our lives, and pray for peace in The Gambia and throughout 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 ever-Virgin Mary Mother of your Son and Mother of the Church...



## THE EPIPHANY of THE LORD

**Where is life heading? Where do we worship?**

A PILGRIMAGE is a journey of faith. Most pilgrims follow in the footsteps of others. But the magi, the 'wise men', did not know where they were heading, nor what they would find. They eventually found the world's Saviour in a manger, an animal feeding trough. They recognised him, and offered him gold (symbolising his kingship), frankincense (his Godhead), and myrrh (his death).

Today, we too often prefer to worship at the altar of money and social standing rather than at the manger.

What can we offer Christ? Can we not offer him, as the saints before us, our very lives? The magi and the saints witness to their steadfastness as pilgrims seeking Christ - and having found him, their eagerness to respond to his love. That is the invitation, the adventure and the imperative of our faith in our Lord.



## Saturday evening 6th January Vigil Mass of the Epiphany

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

**Gospel acclamation:** 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, these 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 shine always bright in our minds, and that our true treasure may ever consist in our confession of you...

## Mass of the Day Sunday 7th January

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

**Gospel acclamation:** 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, by 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 God, always and everywhere, that we may perceive with clear sight and revere with true affection the mystery in which you have will us to participate...

*'We have come to worship him'*

## 14th January 2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time



### 'Behold the Lamb of God'

ORDINARY Time has begun, and at Sunday Mass until Lent (which begins on 14th February) we shall follow Christ in the early days of his public ministry, seeking to learn from him as his first hearers did.

We begin Ordinary Time with a reading from St John's Gospel: his account of John the Baptist hailing Jesus as the Lamb of God.

To the Jews, a lamb signified sacrifice. And Jesus' entire ministry pointed to the offering of himself on the cross as the sacrificial lamb for the sin of all mankind.

In today's Gospel, we are told that Andrew was attracted to Christ, and took his brother Simon to him; and that the two brothers accepted Jesus' invitation to follow him.

The response of Andrew and Simon to the call of God is foreshadowed in the First Reading, when the boy Samuel is called by name. We too, if we are worthy of the name 'disciple', should respond to God's call. True faith is a call to follow the Lamb of God.

The priest at Mass, holding high the sacred Host, declares, *Ecce Agnus Dei, ecce qui tollit peccata mundi. Beati qui ad cenam Agni vocati sunt* - 'Behold the Lamb of God. Behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those who are called to the supper of the Lamb.'

If we only partly grasp the truth of this, we see how thrilling it is, and how indispensable Christ the Lamb of God is for us and all mankind. We should seek daily to grow closer in love and understanding to the God who sacrifices himself for us. Then, like John the Baptist, we shall be able to say to everyone we encounter, 'This Jesus is the Lamb of God'.

### 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:** Samuel 3:3-10,19. Psalm 39:2,4,7-10. Response: Here I am, Lord! I come to do your will. 1 Corinthians 6:13-15,17-20.

**Gospel acclamation:** Alleluia... Speak, Lord, your servant is listening; you have the message of eternal life.

**Gospel:** John 1:35-42

### Prayer over the Offerings

GRANT us, 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...

### Prayer after Communion

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

21st January  
3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time



*'Follow me'*

THE BOOK of Jonah is one of the shortest in the Bible. It concerns everyone's need of repentance and forgiveness.

The pagan people of Nineveh responded to God's message, brought to them by Jonah, telling them to repent. And because they did indeed repent, God did not destroy their city. Instead, he forgave them. This is a foretaste of the message of the New Testament: that God in Christ reaches out to save the people of all the world, if they hear his call and repent.

In today's Gospel reading we are told that Jesus began his ministry in Galilee by calling Andrew and Peter, James and John. His message was as simple as that of John the Baptist: 'The time has come, and the Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News.'

Until time ends, men and women will need to hear the call of Jesus, to accept him, to repent and to live the life of the Gospel. So we should endeavour to pass on the Good News to our neighbours. They'll only take note, of course, if they recognise that what we profess with our lips we practise in our lives.

'Follow me,' says Jesus. Let us not delay in answering his call.

**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:** Jonah 3:1-5,10. Psalm 24:4-9. Response: Lord, let me know your ways. 1 Corinthians 7:29-31.

**Gospel acclamation:** Alleluia...The kingdom of God is close at hand; believe the Good News.

**Gospel:** Mark 1:14-20

**Prayer over the Offerings**

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

**Preface:** *the priest may use any 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 new life, we may always glory in your gift...

***Kaadu Dunda Gi - the Living Word***  
Every Sunday at 1pm, GRTS

28th January  
4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

*Amazing authority*

THE FIRST Reading for today comes from the Jewish book called Deuteronomy, the fifth and last Book of the Law.

At the time of Jesus, Deuteronomy and the Psalms were regarded as the foremost books of the Old Testament. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy when he was tempted by Satan in the desert (Matthew 4) and when he told a lawyer about the greatest commandment (Matthew 22).

Today's reading from Deuteronomy relates that Moses told his people that God would raise up from among them a prophet like himself.

To us, that prophet is Jesus, the fulfilment of the Law. Jesus amazed everyone. He spoke and acted with authority, showing that the Law, as Hebrews 4:12 says, is 'living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword'.

**Collect**

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

**Readings:** Deuteronomy 18:15-20. Psalm 94:1-2,6-9.

**Response:** O that today you would listen to his voice! Harden not your hearts. 1 Corinthians 7:32-35.

**Gospel acclamation:** Alleluia...Blessed are you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for revealing the mysteries of the kingdom to mere children.

**Gospel:** Mark 1:21-28

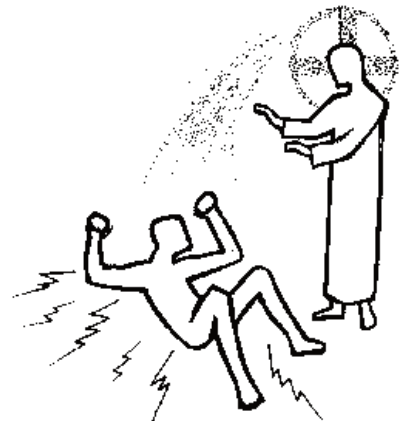
**Prayer over the Offerings**

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 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...



**The Real Presence**

LET us always take care to safeguard the gift of our faith in the Real Presence of Christ in all our churches.

All the great religions of the world cherish and protect the sacred character of their places of worship... But none of these religions is able to believe in the presence of a God who is so close to them as Catholics have always believed he is in the Real Presence.



*Bishop Robert Ellison at the ordination of Fr Victor Ndecky, November 2009*





## Pious practices

**MANY** devotional practices in the Church are so habitual that we don't think about them. But whenever we make the sign of the Cross, for instance, or dip our fingers into holy water, we should do so in awareness of what the action means. We shouldn't perform such actions to impress others or to tell ourselves how holy and good we are. We perform them to honour God and our membership of his Church.

### What is the purpose of a pilgrimage?

A PILGRIMAGE is a journey to a shrine to gain divine help, or as an act of penance, thanksgiving or devotion.

The visit of the wise men from the East to the Infant Jesus in Bethlehem is a New Testament example of a pilgrimage. Many centuries earlier, as recounted in the Old Testament, Moses led the Jewish people through the desert on a 40-year journey to the Promised Land.

In mediæval times, Christian pilgrims stayed in hospices. On their return journey they wore on their hats the badge of the shrine they'd visited. The chief attractions were Rome, the Holy Land and Santiago de Compostela (the shrine of St James in Spain). But there were hundreds of other pilgrimage sites in Europe, including that of St Francis of Assisi in Italy and of St Thomas à Becket in Canterbury, England.

More recent shrines include Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mexico (1531) Lourdes, France (1855) and Fatima, Portugal (1917).

The first pilgrimage to Poponguine, on the Petite Côte of Senegal, 70 kilometres south of Dakar, took place at Pentecost in 1888. In 1992 the shrine was visited by St John Paul II.

The first pilgrimage to the Gambian National Shrine of Our Lady Queen of Peace took place ten years ago, in December 1987.

Before the destruction of the Temple, Jewish people were obliged to visit Jerusalem to offer sacrifices, especially during festivals. Nowadays they visit the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem's Old City, which is the only remnant of the Temple.

The pilgrimage or *hajj* to Mecca is one of the Five Pillars of Islam which all Muslims who have the opportunity and means are obliged to undertake. Other holy places for Muslims are the *Al Quds* Mount and the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. Thus Jerusalem is a holy city for Jews, Christians and Muslims.

Adherents of many other religions make pilgrimages, including Hindus and Buddhists.

### Our Catholic responsibilities

#### *Important reminder this Christmas*

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

For them, and for all Catholics, here is a reminder:

- To remain in good standing in the Church, all Catholics must attend Mass every Sunday and Holyday of Obligation, unless they are genuinely unable to do so.
- All Catholics must receive Holy Communion at least once a year, during Easter Time – though they are encouraged to receive Communion more frequently.
- Holy Communion may only be received at Mass by Catholics who are in a state of grace in respect to attendance at every Sunday Mass, and in every basic moral regard.
- If you have not been regular at Sunday Mass, or are aware of any grave sin, you must make confession before a priest and receive absolution. Then - and only then - may you receive Holy Communion in faith and with joy. *See page 30.*
- Non-Catholics are most welcome at every Mass. But they should not receive Holy Communion, because by their own choice they are not in communion with the Bishop of Banjul, the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church.



# ?


### Question Box

**After Mass, a group of my friends meet to chat. One of us is nearly always complaining. 'I could see Father's trousers beneath his vestments.' 'Mr So-and-So always arrives in a big car, but do you see how little he puts in the collection?' 'Why does the organist so often hit wrong notes?' And so on. How can we discourage her?**

Ideally, Mass should enlighten and uplift all who take part. But the Church is catholic - that is, universal - so it's bound to include all sorts of people, including habitual grumblers!

Almost certainly, your friend looks for things to complain about not only in church, but in her family and everywhere else. So don't be too concerned; although you should sometimes try to steer her into more positive reactions. And you might suggest that if she doesn't like this or that, what has she herself done to help improve matters?

Of course, some of her comments may be justified. No-one at Mass should be slapdash; everyone present should offer their best participation of mind and heart.



## from beyond the diocese

### Pope Francis praises Wesley

THE FOUNDER of Methodism, John Wesley, brought many people to Christ through prayer and Bible reading, Pope Francis has said.

Speaking to leaders of the World Methodist Council, Francis praised 50 years of dialogue between the Catholic and Methodist churches. 'We are no longer strangers,' he said, but rather, through our shared baptism, 'members of the household of God'.

Speaking about John Wesley, the 18th-century Anglican clergyman who founded the Methodist movement, the Pope said his example converted many people to God.

'We cannot fail to rejoice' when the Holy Spirit works through other Christian denominations, Francis added, because they 'also help us grow closer to the Lord'.

But he said that Christians cannot grow in holiness without 'growing in communion... Let us prepare ourselves with humble hope and concrete efforts for that full recognition which will enable us to join one another in the breaking of bread together.'

Money never stays with me.  
It would burn me if it did.  
I throw it out of my hands as  
soon as possible, lest it  
should find its way into my  
heart.

**John Wesley**



### Catholic numbers are growing everywhere - except Europe

THE NUMBER of Catholics in the world increased by 12.5 million in 2015 to a total of nearly 1.3 billion people.

Figures reported by the *Fides* News Service show an increase on all continents except Europe. Africa saw 7.4 million new Catholics, North and South America 4.8 million, Asia 1.6 million and

Oceania 123,000.

Europe's Catholic population decreased by 1.3 million.

Despite the rise, the world percentage of Catholics decreased by 0.05 per cent to 17.72 per cent, due to the total world population growing at an even faster rate.

Oceania had the highest percentage increase at 0.24 per cent. The percentage of people in North and South America identifying as Catholic decreased by 0.08 per cent, despite a rise in the total number.

The percentage of Europeans identifying as Catholic decreased by 0.21 per cent.

### In Nigeria, is the Catholic Church losing ground?



A NIGERIAN bishop has declared that the influence of the Catholic Church in his country is slowly being reduced.

Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah of Sokoto, north-east Nigeria (*left*) told *Catholic News Service*: 'The Arab world is pouring money into Nigeria.

Pentecostal pastors in America are doing the same, and the Catholic Church is now becoming the weakest in terms of access to resources.'

The bishop was referring to a decline that some of the Catholic hierarchy have noted in a country whose population is made up of 50 per cent Muslims and 50 per cent Christians, including 20 per cent who are Catholic.

Bishop Kukah said the West has 'turned its back' on Christianity. 'It is no longer possible for bishops to address the historically Catholic countries to request aid.' As an example, the bishop referred to the visit to Nigeria in January 2015 by the then US Secretary of State, John Kerry. Mr Kerry is a Catholic, but he failed to visit to Cardinal John Onaiyekan of Abuja, though he did meet the Sultan of Sokoto, the leader of the Muslim community.

However, a Canadian political scientist, Ruth Marshall, who is a specialist in religion in Nigeria, believes that this analysis does not hold up. Clearly, she says, some Muslim governments have invested in the country, but it would be 'too easy' to blame any decline of Catholicism on this factor.

She commented: 'Since the 1980s there has been a radicalisation of a small fringe of Muslims, including the recent problem of Boko Haram, but the great majority have remained moderate, and the balance has not really changed. The violence that has broken out in several parts of the country remains circumscribed, and it has not affected religious co-existence at national level.'

#### Pentacostalist 'meteoric rise'

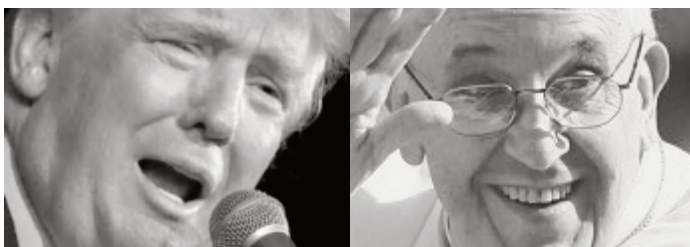
In Ms Marshall's view, Catholicism's loss of strength is mainly a result of the meteoric rise of Pentecostalist churches in Nigeria, as elsewhere in Africa. The Anglican Church, which according to statistics is in the majority among Nigerian Christians, has experienced a similar phenomenon.

Ms Marshall says that Catholics who are 'more involved in social justice and development issues' have lost ground, as have 'so-called historical churches. This decline at social level has been very clear, particularly over the last fifteen years... The numbers that leave Nigeria from the evangelical churches to found churches overseas are much greater than the numbers that enter'. Thus, the largest Nigerian churches have 'affiliates' in several countries. One of these is the Redeemed Christian Church of God, with up to 600,000 members and a city of its own built with Nigerian money.

This religious evolution, Ms Marshall says, also has political consequences. In a country where the presidential election requires two-thirds of the vote, no candidate can win solely with Christian or Muslim support, roughly divided between the Christian south and the Muslim north. Thus, the current President, Muhammad Buhari, a Muslim, chose a Christian Vice-President in order to win the election: Yemi Osinbajo, who is an evangelical pastor.



## 'Second only to Donald Trump'



THE PAPAL Twitter accounts, in nine different languages, have grown by over 9 million followers in the past 12 months. The Vatican Secretariat for Communications says that such growth represents the interest of 'the people - ordinary people, Christians and non-Christians, political leaders - for the Holy Father's tweets', and is a way for Pope Francis to personally connect with people around the world.

'Every day, through his tweets, Pope Francis makes himself available to men and women through social media, at times offering a spiritual thought,' says the secretariat, 'and at other times sharing with his followers a reflection on events of great significance for the international community.'

The Prefect of the Secretariat, Mgr Dario Vigano, told Vatican Radio that 'the Pope takes great care of his social profiles, to such an extent that he closely and carefully checks all the tweets, which are then published.'

In a recent report on Twitter by Twiplomacy.com, which ranks world leaders' impact on the social media platform, the @Pontifex accounts had the second-most followers among world leaders, only 200,000 followers behind the US President, Donald Trump. Twiplomacy ranked the Pope as coming in third among world leaders with the most interactions and being the most influential because of his average of 41,000 retweets.

The Pope also communicates digitally via Instagram, the social image channel. His account, @Franciscus, is approaching five million followers since its creation in March 2015. The majority of Instagram followers are aged 25 to 34, with the United States and Brazil being the countries where it is most followed.

## Francis holds vigil for South Sudan

POPE Francis on Thursday 23rd November led a prayer vigil for South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

'We want to sow seeds of peace in the lands of South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo, and in all lands devastated by war,' the Pope said.

The Pope had planned to visit South Sudan earlier this year, accompanied by the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby. Due to safety concerns, their visit was postponed.

South Sudan has been suffered a brutal civil war for the past three-and-a-half years.

Some four million citizens have fled the country, in the world's fastest growing refugee epidemic.

Many internally-displaced persons are seeking refuge in churches - fearful to stay in their homes because they could be killed, tortured, raped or forced to fight.

Despite partnerships between the local Church, aid agencies and the government, many refugees still need a proper supply of food.

## Giant statue of Lebanese saint

A GIANT statue of St Sharbel Makhlof has been dedicated in Lebanon.

Located in Faraya, a tourist area 27 miles north of Beirut, the statue is 88.6 feet tall, 30 feet wide and weighs nearly 60 tons.

Cardinal Bechara Rai, the Patriarch of Maronite Catholics, blessed the statue on Holy Cross Day, 14th September.

St Sharbel was born Joseph Antoun Makhlof in the northern Lebanese village of Beqa-Kafra in 1828. The youngest of five children, his parents were devout Maronite farmers. At the age of 23 he joined the monks at the Monastery of St Maron in Annaya, choosing the name Sharbel after a second-century martyr.

In 1898 Fr Sharbel was struck by paralysis while celebrating Mass. He died eight days later, on Christmas Eve, at the age of 70.

Sharbel was beatified on 5th December 1965 and canonised on 9th October 1977 - Lebanon's first saint.

Blessed Pope Paul VI remarked at the beatification: 'What a symbol of union between East and West! ... His whole existence was completely centred on the celebration of Mass, on silent prayer before the Blessed Sacrament and in the heroic practice of the virtues of obedience, poverty and chastity. ... May he make us understand, in a world largely fascinated by wealth and comfort, the paramount value of poverty, penance and asceticism, to liberate the soul in its ascent to God.'

St Sharbel's feast day is 24th July.

The fibreglass and resin statue, designed to withstand wind, rain and snow, is 6,070 feet above sea-level. It was designed by a Lebanese sculptor, Nayef Alwan.



## Notre Père

FROM the First Sunday of Advent (3rd December) French Catholics are using a revised version of the Lord's Prayer.

The new version replaces a translation in place since the reforms of the Second Vatican Council.

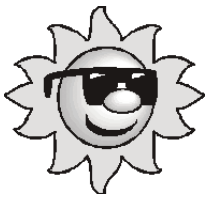
In the 1966 French version of *Notre Père*, the sixth request to God, rendered in the Authorised Version as 'Lead us not into temptation,' was 'Do not submit us to temptation' (*Ne nous soumetts pas à la tentation*).

The new version, agreed by French bishops in March, reads 'Do not let us enter into temptation' (*Ne nous laisse pas entrer en tentation*).

Bishop Guy de Kerimel, who oversees liturgical matters for the French bishops, has said the previous version was ambiguous.

The new translation of the Latin *ne nos inducas in tentationem* has also been approved by French-language Protestant churches.

It was introduced in Belgium and Africa in June.



## Fee moi Gambia

### They do things differently there...

WHEN, every morning, I visit my village shop to buy bread, it's wrapped in a piece of old newspaper – perhaps from Britain, Spain or the United States. If I can understand the language, it gives me something to read at the breakfast table!

Recently I came across a report from a middle school in the United States:

*The annual Back-to-School Picnic will be held 4.30-7pm Oct. 2. Students can dunk the principal and teachers in a dunk tank. Games and activities include a triple bungee challenge, giant trike race and wrecking ball. There will be free cotton candy and popcorn, and food trucks will include Tender's, Jets Pizza, Philly Pretzel Factor and Carolina Ice Cream.'*

And from an elementary school:

*'K.I.S.S. (Kids Inviting Someone Special) – 7.45-8.45 am – Sept. 30. Parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, older siblings and more can join their students for a Chick-fil-A breakfast and shopping.'*

Apart from these - to me – bizarre goings-on, the first report suggests that the school concerned doesn't worry about its pupils eating 'junk-food'.

We may sometimes complain that we're becoming too Americanised. But reports such as these suggest that we have a long way to go.

There are a few examples of American practice in our country. We usually call schoolboys and schoolgirls 'students' rather than 'pupils'. And we speak of 'graduation' not just from university but from school – even from the kindergarten.

Some schools, wishing to glamorise their 'graduation day', even dress their school-leavers in cap and gown, as though they were graduating from Oxford University!

### Francis overlooked

A REPORT on the internet in praise of a certain US bishop claims that he has many of the qualities required for the next Pope, and thus may become the very first American Pope.

But we already have an American Pope: Francis, who comes from South America - a region as much 'American' as the United States.

This reminds me that in the days of the old Soviet Union,

British newspapers used to refer to all Soviet citizens as 'Russians' – even those who came from other Soviet republics such as Armenia, Estonia and Ukraine. Citizens of such countries rightly objected to being called Russian, preferring 'Soviet'.

Younger readers may need to be told that the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was dissolved on Christmas Day 1991 – having been founded in 1922.

### In darkness

WITH Nawec so often going 'off' and 'on', I recall a story about Fr Matthias Murphy, for so long Parish Priest at Holy Spirit Church (and no doubt still well-remembered there).

Fr Murphy liked a few extra ceremonies – for instance, processing into the empty church to mark the beginning of Advent.

One Ash Wednesday, about to celebrate Mass before daybreak, he burned palms from the previous Palm Sunday to make ashes, explaining the significance to his congregation.

Suddenly the lights went off, plunging the church into darkness, apart from the burning palms.

'Good,' said Fr Murphy, 'that's a useful reminder that we are living in the darkness of sin.'

This was in the days when electricity was provided by the GUC – officially, the Gambia Utilities Corporation, but popularly known as 'Gambia Uses Candles'.

As I write this, we're in Advent, which reminds me of another 'Murphyism'. Fr Murphy declared that during a visit to Ireland he'd spent some time and trouble choosing replacement figures for a crib. But when the shop assistant was painstakingly wrapping them up, he suddenly said: 'Stop! I don't want to buy them!'

'Why not, Father?' asked the exasperated assistant.

'Because I've just noticed that Baby Jesus has the same colour hair as Joseph, and I don't want any of the good people at Holy Spirit to think that Joseph was the father!'

*Overheard: 'If people spent even half the time talking to God that they spend chatting on their mobile, they'd really benefit...'*

### Rejoicing at the right time

ONLY now (I write in late November) have some of our shops begun to put up Christmas decorations. But in western Europe, and many other places, the commercial 'Christmas season' began in October.

This makes many tired of Christmas well before it actually arrives.

Here, we're spared such blatant 'cashing in' - so our true Christmas celebrations will be - I hope - a real pleasure.

## The Pope's Prayer Intentions

### December

That the elderly, sustained by families and Christian communities, may apply their wisdom and experience to spreading the faith and forming the new generations. (See *Family Circle*, page 10)

### January

That Christians, and other religious minorities in Asian countries, may be able to practise their faith in full freedom.





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# 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 of 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 of 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 of 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 of 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.



# Daily Mass Readings



Sunday readings Year B Weekday readings Year 1

## December & January

Celebrations in brackets ( ) are optional

**Sun 3rd Dec** Isaiah 63:16-17; 64:1,3-8. Psalm 73:2-3,15-16,18-19. 1 Corinthians 1:3-9. Mark 13:33-37 **1st SUNDAY of ADVENT**  
 Mon 4th Isaiah 4:2-6 (or 2:1-5). Psalm 121:1-9. Matthew 8:5-11 (St John Damascene)  
 Tue 5th Isaiah 11:1-10. Psalm 71:1-2,7-8,12-13,17. Luke 10:21-24 (St Nicholas)  
 Wed 6th Isaiah 25:6-10. Psalm 2. Matthew 15:29-3, (St Ambrose)  
 Thu 7th Isaiah 26:1-6. Psalm 117:1,8-9,19-21,25-27. Matthew 7:21,24-27 IMMACULATE CONCEPTION  
 Fri 8th Genesis 2:9-15. Psalm 97:1-4. Ephesians 1:3-6,11-12. Luke 1:26-38 (St John Diego Cuahtlatatzin)  
 Sat 9th Isaiah 30:19-21,23-26. Psalm 146:1-6. Matthew 9:35- 10:1,5-8

**Sun 10th** Isaiah 40:1-5,9-1. Psalm 84:9-14. 1 Peter 3:8-14. Mark 1:1-8 **2nd SUNDAY of ADVENT**  
 Mon 11th Isaiah 35:1-10. Psalm 84:9-14. Luke 5:17-26 (St Damasus I)  
 Tue 12th Isaiah 40:1-11. Psalm 93:1-3,10-13. Matthew 18:12-14 (Our Lady of Guadalupe)  
 Wed 13th Isaiah 40:25-31. Psalm 102:1-4,8,10. Matthew 11:28-30 St Lucy  
 Thu 14th Isaiah 41:13-20. Psalm 144:1,9-13. Matthew 11:11-15. St John of the Cross  
 Fri 15th Isaiah 48:17-19. Psalm 1:1-4,6. Matthew 11:16-19 *abstinence*  
 Sat 16th Sirach 48:1-4,9-11. Psalm 79:2-3,15-16,18-19. Matthew 17:10-13

**Sun 17th** Isaiah 61:1-2,10-11. Psalm Luke 1:46-50,53-54. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24. John 1:6-8,19-28. **3rd SUNDAY of ADVENT**  
 Mon 18th Jeremiah 23:5-8. Ps 71:1-2,12-13,18-19. Matthew 1:18-24  
 Tue 19th Judges 13:2-7,24-25. Psalm 70:3-6,16-17. Luke 1:5-25  
 Wed 20th Isaiah 7:10-14. Psalm 23:1-6. Luke 1:26-38  
 Thu 21st Song of Songs 2:8-14 or Zephaniah 3:14-18. Psalm 32:2-3,11-12,20-21. Luke 1:39-45 (St Peter Canisius)  
 Fri 22nd 1 Samuel 1:24-28. 1 Samuel 2:1,4-8. Luke 1:46-56 *abstinence*  
 Sat 23rd Malachi 3:1-4,23-24. Psalm 24:4-5,8-10,14. Luke 1:57-66 (St John of Kanty)

**Sun 24th** 2 Samuel 7:1-5. Psalm 88:2-5,27,29. Romans 16:25-27, Luke 1:26-38 **4th SUNDAY of ADVENT**

### Sunday evening 24th & Christmas Day, 25th December: full details on pages 16-17

Tues 26th Acts 6: 8-10; & 7: 54-59; Psalm 30: 3-4,6,8, 16,17. Matthew 10:17-22. St STEPHEN  
 Wed 27th 1 John 1:1-4. Psalm 96:1-2,5-6,11-12. John 20:2-8 St JOHN the EVANGELIST  
 Thu 28th 1 John 1: 5-2, 2 ??? Psalm 123: 2-5,7-8. Matthew 2:13-18. HOLY INNOCENTS  
 Fri 29th 1 John 2,3-11. Psalm 95:1-3,5-6. Luke 2:22-35. (St Thomas Becket)  
 Sat 30th 1 John 2:12-17. Psalm 95:7-10. Luke 2:36

Sun 31st Sirach 3:2-6,12-14. Psalm 127:1-5. Colossians 3:12-21. Luke 2:22-40 **HOLY FAMILY**  
 Mon 1st Jan Numbers 6:22-27. Psalm 66::2,3,5,6,8. Galatians 4:47. Luke 2:16-21. **MARY, MOTHER of GOD**  
 Tue 2nd 1 John 2:22-28. Psalm 97:1-4. John 1:19-28 St Basil the Great & St Gregory Nazianzen  
 Wed 3rd 1 John 2:29 - 3:6 Psalm 97:1,3-6. John 1:29-34 (Holy Name of Jesus)

Thu 4th 1 John 3:7-10. Psalm 97:1,7-9. John 1:35-42  
 Fri 5th 1 John: 3:11-21. Psalm 99:2-5. John 1:43-51 *abstinence*  
 Sat 6th 1 John 5,5-13. Psalm 147:12-15,19-20. Mark 1:7-11 or Luke 3:23-38.

**Sun 6th** Isaiah 60:1-6. Psalm 71:1-2,7-8,10-11-13. Ephesians 3:2-3,5-6. Matthew 2,1-12 **EPIPHANY of THE LORD**  
 Mon 8th Isaiah 42:1-4,6-7. Psal 28:1-4,9-10. Acts 10:34-38. Mark 1:7-11. BAPTISM of THE LORD

### Ordinary Time begins

Tue 9th 1 Samuel 1:9-20. Psalm 1 Samuel 2:1,4-8. Mark 1:21-28.  
 Wed 10th 1 Samuel 3:1-10,19-20. Psalm 39:2,5,7-10. Mark 1:29-39  
 Thu 11th 1 Samuel 4:1-11. Psalm 43:10-11,14-15,24-25. Mark 1:40-45  
 Fri 12th 1 Samuel 8:4-7,10-22. Psalm 88:16-19. Mark 2:1-12 *abstinence*  
 Sat 13th 1 Samuel 9:1-4,17-19,10.1.Ps 20:2-7. Mark 2:13-17 (St Hilary, Bishop and Doctor)

**Sun 14th** 1 Samuel 3:3-10,19. Psalm 39:2,4,7-10. 1 Corinthians 6:13-15,17-20. John 1:35-42 **2nd SUNDAY of YEAR**  
 Mon 15th 1 Samuel 15:16-23. Psalm 49:8-9,16-17,21,23. Mark 2:18-22  
 Tue 16th 1 Samuel 16:1-13. Psalm 88:20-22,27-28. Mark 2:23-28  
 Wed 17th 1 Samuel 17:32-33,37,40-51. Psalm 143:1-2,9-10. Mark 3:1-6  
 Thu 18th 1 Samuel 18:6-9;19:1-7. Psalm 55:2-3,9-14. Mark 3:7-12 *15th-25th January: Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*  
 Fri 19th 1 Samuel 24:3-21. Psalm 56:2-4,6,11. Mark 3:13-19. *abstinence*  
 Sat 20th 2 Samuel 1:1-4,11-12,17,19. Psalm 79:2-3,5-7. Mark 3:20-21 (St Fabian or St Sebastian)

**Sun 21st** Jonah 3:1-5,10. Psalm 24:4-9. 1 Corinthians 7:29-3. Mark 1:14-20. **3rd SUNDAY of YEAR**  
 Mon 22nd 2 Samuel 5:1-7,10. Psalm 88:20-22,25-26. Mark 3:22-30.  
 Tue 23rd 2 Samuel 6:12-15,17-19. Ps 23:7-10. Mark 3:31-35  
 Wed 24th 2 Samuel 7:4-17. Psalm 88:4-5,27-30. Mark 4:1-20. St Francis de Salles  
 Thu 25th Acts 22: 3-16 or Acts 9: 1-22. Psalm 116:1-2. Mark 16:15-18 St PAUL  
 Fri 26th 2 Timothy 1:1-8 or Titus 1:1-5. Psalm 95:1-3,7-8,10. Luke 10:1-9 St Timothy & St Titus *abstinence*  
 Sat 27th 2 Samuel 12:1-7,10-17. Psalm ??12-17. Mark 4:35-41

**Sun 28th** Deuteronomy 18:15-20. Psalm 94:1-2,6-9. 1 Corinthians 7:32-35. Mark 1:21-28 **4th SUNDAY of YEAR**  
 Mon 29th 2 Samuel 15:13-14, 30:16,5-13. Psalm 3:2-8. Mark 5:1-20  
 Tue 30th 2 Samuel 18:9-10,14, 24-25,30 &19,3. Psalm 85:1-6. Mark 5:21-43  
 Wed 31st 2 Samuel 24:2,9-17. Psalm 31:1-2,5-7. Mark 6:1-6 St John Bosco



## Some weekday celebrations

### Wednesday 6th December 2017: St Nicholas *bishop*

IN the fourth century, Nicholas was Bishop of Myra, in Lycia (now Turkey) renowned for his good works. He became patron saint of Russia and Greece, and of children. After the Reformation his cult disappeared in all the Protestant countries of Europe except the Netherlands, where he was known as *Sinterklaas*. Dutch colonists brought the tradition to New York City, and English-speaking Americans adopted him as the fairy-tale Santa Claus, reputed to bring gifts to children at Christmas.

### Thursday 7th December: St Ambrose *doctor*

AMBROSE is one of the four great Latin Doctors (or teachers) of the Church (the others being Augustine, Jerome and Gregory). Ambrose was born at Trier (in modern-day Italy) in 339, and became a celebrated lawyer. When the see of Milan fell vacant around the year 374, Ambrose was acclaimed bishop - though he was still a catechumen, and not yet baptised.

His statesmanship and theological skills enabled Ambrose to convert many pagans. He vigorously combated Arianism (the heresy which denies the Holy Trinity). Ambrose imposed a public penance on the Emperor Theodosius I for condoning a massacre. He converted and baptised St Augustine. He died in 397. His bishop's throne may still be seen in Milan.

### Saturday 8th December: The Immaculate Conception

THE IMMACULATE Conception of the Virgin Mary is the first great feast of the Church's year, which starts with Advent.

In a broadcast address for *Sang Marie*, Bishop Ellison reminded us of the significance of today's feast. He said: 'From the very beginning of her life Mary was a unique member of the human family. We believe that she was preserved free from all sin at the moment of her conception in the womb of Anna, her mother. This special privilege was given to Mary by God since she was destined by him to become the Mother of his only Son.'

*In The Gambia we particularly rejoice that the annual pilgrimage to Kunkujang Mariama began on this day in December 1987.*

### Tuesday 26th December: St Stephen *first martyr*

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 himself was born to suffer and to die. (See Acts chapters 6 and 7).



### Wednesday 27th December: St John the Evangelist

ST JOHN'S Gospel is written in the simplest Greek of the New Testament. Yet it is one of the most profound books ever written. John depicts Christ in symbolic power as the Word made Flesh, the Bread from Heaven, the Good Shepherd, the True Vine. Tradition suggests that the Gospel was written in the old age of the disciple who was especially close to Jesus. 'These things are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.' (John 20:21)

### Thursday 28th December: The Holy Innocents

THE SUFFERING of innocent people challenges our faith. If Jesus had not been born, the infants of Bethlehem slaughtered by Herod would have lived into adult life. Why does God not act to prevent such hideous incidents of injustice? The answer lies in the life that awaited the Divine Child. He was saved from Herod by the flight of Mary and Joseph into Egypt - but saved in order that he might embrace the sin and suffering of the whole world, and die on the cross. By his wounds we are healed.

### Tuesday 2nd January: St Basil the Great & St Gregory Nazianzen *doctors*

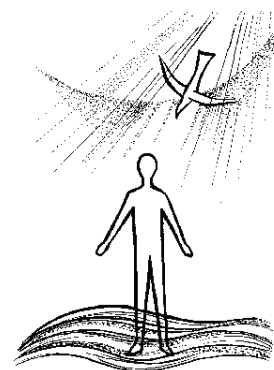
BASIL and Gregory were close friends and illustrious members of the Eastern Church in the fourth century. Basil had a brilliant academic career, but longed for a life of solitude. After extensive travels, he gave away almost all he possessed and devoted himself to founding religious communities. Basil wrote a strict monastic 'rule' which is still observed today. For his part, Gregory became Bishop of Constantinople (Istanbul). Because of his great learning, he was known as 'Gregory the Theologian'. He eventually retired to his monastery. Gregory summed up his life, and that of Basil in these words: 'Our great desire, our great name, was to be Christians, and to be called Christians.'

*Omnes sancti et sanctae Dei, intercedete pro nobis - All holy men and women of God, intercede for us*



### Monday 8th January: The Baptism of The Lord

CHRIST'S baptism marked the beginning of his public ministry of teaching, healing and suffering that offers salvation to us all. Jesus was sinless, and didn't need the washing away of sin as we do. But his submission to baptism at the hands of John signified his role as the servant of all – he did everything on our behalf, as the living image of the love of God among us. As Peter, after the resurrection, wrote: 'God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed... All the prophets testify about him, that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.'



### Wednesday 17th January: St Antony of Egypt abbot

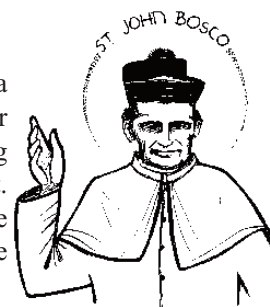
ANTONY is the African saint, born at Memphis, Egypt, in 251, known as the father of monasticism. When he was twenty he sold all he possessed and began a solitary life in the desert, where he was joined by others. He died in 356.

### Wednesday 24th January: St Francis de Sales doctor


FRANCIS, born at Annecy in Savoy (present-day France) in 1567, was a spell-binding preacher and famed for his skills in spiritual direction. He was an accomplished writer - for example, in his 'Introduction to the Devout Life'. Francis became Bishop of Geneva in 1602 and did much to counteract the Protestantism that had taken root the previous century. He died in 1622 and was canonised in 1664. Francis is revered as the patron saint of the blind and of journalists and writers.

### Wednesday 31st January: St John Bosco priest

JOHN BOSCO, was born to a farm-labouring family in Piedmont, northern Italy, in 1815. It was a time of famine. His education didn't really start until he was 15, supported by an old priest. After his ordination, John Bosco dedicated his life to the betterment and education of disadvantaged young people. He advocated the use of love and encouragement in the classroom, rather than punishment. John Bosco founded the Society of St Francis de Sales – the Salesians. During his lifetime he accumulated great influence, not least in his writings. He died in 1888 and was canonised by Pope Pius XI in 1934.



### Answers to Do You Know? page 9

- 
- 1 Joseph was obliged to go to Nazareth, his home town, to take part in the census ordered by the Emperor Augustus (Luke 2: 1-5)
  - 2 Noël
  - 3 Germany
  - 4 John the Baptist (the herald of the Lord): see, for example, John 1:19-28.
  - 5 A spelling of *Immanuel*, Hebrew for 'God is with us', the name prophesied to be that of the Messiah, and later given to Jesus (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23)
  - 6 At Christmas 1223 at Greccio, Italy, St Francis of Assisi erected a representation of the scene of Christ's birth. The word 'crib' means a basket, referring to the manger for cattle food in which the Infant Jesus was laid (Luke 2:7). In Middle English 'crib' was also used for a child's cradle. In the US, the crib is known as a crèche.
  - 7 Father Christmas is a fictional figure said to bring presents to children on the night before Christmas. He derives from St Nicholas, 4th-century Bishop of Myra in Asia Minor. Father Christmas (Santa Claus) is a 19th-century American invention. See page
  - 8 The *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55: *Magnificat anima mea Dominum* (My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord). This canticle is used daily at Evening Prayer (Vespers) in the Roman rite, also at Anglican Evensong and Orthodox Lauds.
  - 9 St Stephen, the first martyr. (Acts chapters 6, 7 and 8:1)
  - 10 A model of the Infant Christ, placed in the manger in a crib. *Bambino*, in Italian, means 'child'.
  - 11 The account of the visit of the wise men (magi) is given in Matthew 2:12. They are traditionally known as the 'three wise men', but Matthew does not say how many wise men there were, nor does he call them 'kings'.
  - 12 Christmas festivities traditionally lasted 12 days, from 25th December to 'Twelfth Night', the Feast of the Epiphany (6th January). The Epiphany is now celebrated in some places, including The Gambia, on the nearest Sunday to 6th January. The Christmas season ends with the celebration of the Baptism of the Lord (this year, Monday 8th January).
  - 13 Candlemas (2nd February, the Presentation of the Lord); Michaelmas (29th September, feast of St Michael, St Gabriel & St Raphael); Martinmas (11th November, feast of St Martin of Tours). In mediæval times, people spoke also of 'Crouchmas' (14th September, feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross),
  - 14 A Jewish boy is given his name at the time of circumcision, seven days after his birth. Luke 2:21 says that Mary's Child was to be named 'Jesus' - the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name, 'Joshua', meaning 'the Lord is salvation'.
  - 15 Matthew and Luke.



# Making your Confession before Christmas

ADVENT and the coming celebration of Christmas should concentrate our thoughts on our need to love God more faithfully – especially if we have neglected our prayers and the need to serve our neighbour. We turn for grace to the Sacrament of Reconciliation – otherwise known as Penance, or Confession. *See page 21: Our Catholic responsibilities.*

It's a good idea to examine your conscience every day.

Try to go to confession regularly. Going to Confession once a month is good practice. Even if you are not aware of any serious sins, you will receive God's grace and strength every time you go.

We should confess any mortal sins as soon as possible. A mortal sin is an offence against God made deliberately, knowing it to be wrong. ((See 'Catechism of the Catholic Church' section 1857)

## A prayer before Confession

LORD Jesus, open my mind and my heart to your Holy Spirit. Help me to remember my sins, to be sorry for them, and to try hard never to sin again.

## A simple examination of conscience

*Jesus says: 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart.'*

- Have I been loyal to Jesus and his Church?
- Have I betrayed my faith, or put it at risk?
- Am I faithful in daily prayer?
- Have I put my trust in superstitions?
- Have I cursed, sworn, or broken my word?
- Have I missed Mass on any Sunday or Holyday of Obligation through my own fault?
- Have I fulfilled my Easter duties (going to Confession and Communion during the Easter period?)

*Jesus says, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'*

- Have I respected my parents and those in authority?
- Have I been angry, hateful or proud to others?
- Have I neglected my family responsibilities?

- Have I been drunk, or been greedy or lazy?
- Have I been impure in thought, word, looks or action?
- Have I cheated, stolen, or gambled beyond my means?
- Have I told lies to excuse myself or injure others?

If it has been a long time since your last Confession, or if you are not sure what to say, ask the priest to guide you. He will be happy to help.

## Making your Confession

*You begin by saying:*

BLESS me, Father, for I have sinned.

It is a week (month, or however long you think it has been) since my last Confession.

*Then tell the priest all the things you are sorry for.*

*When you have finished, you may say:*

I am very sorry for these sins and all the sins of my past life.

*The priest may then give you some brief words of advice. He will give you your penance (some prayers to say or some action to do, to say that you are sorry).*

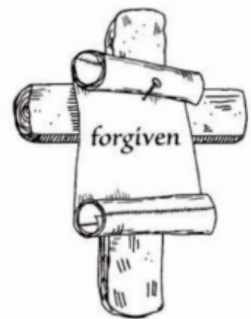
*He will then ask you to say the Act of Contrition:*

O MY God, because you are so good, I am sorry that I have sinned against you, and by the help of your grace I will not sin again.

*The priest then gives you absolution:*

GOD, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son, has reconciled the world, and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins.

Through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace; and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen



## Bringing our broken world to the promise of Christ's mercy

THE CHRISTMAS story holds treasured memories reaching back to our childhood. But Christmas can never be based on past memories alone.

Beyond the sentimentality that the Christmas story evokes, let us not lose sight of the truths it proclaims for a broken world. Christ was not born in the mansions of the powerful and rich. His parents, Mary and Joseph, lived the simple life of labourers. Mary gave birth to her child in the poverty of a stable. Mary and Joseph were strangers in Bethlehem, far from their home to the north. Almost certainly the local populace would have treated them as outsiders.

The Christmas story is the overture to the Gospel, prefiguring the themes to be developed in the ministry of

Jesus. St Luke tells us about Simeon, an upright and devout man on whom the Holy Spirit rested. Only through that Spirit was he enabled to recognise his Saviour in the Child presented to him in the temple by Mary and Joseph. 'Now, Master, let your servant go in peace, because my eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared for all the nations to see.'

May that same Spirit open our eyes to the Christ who comes to fill our days.

May we, with Mary, treasure these things in our hearts, pondering their meaning for our own lives.

*Bishop David McGough, Auxiliary of Birmingham, England*

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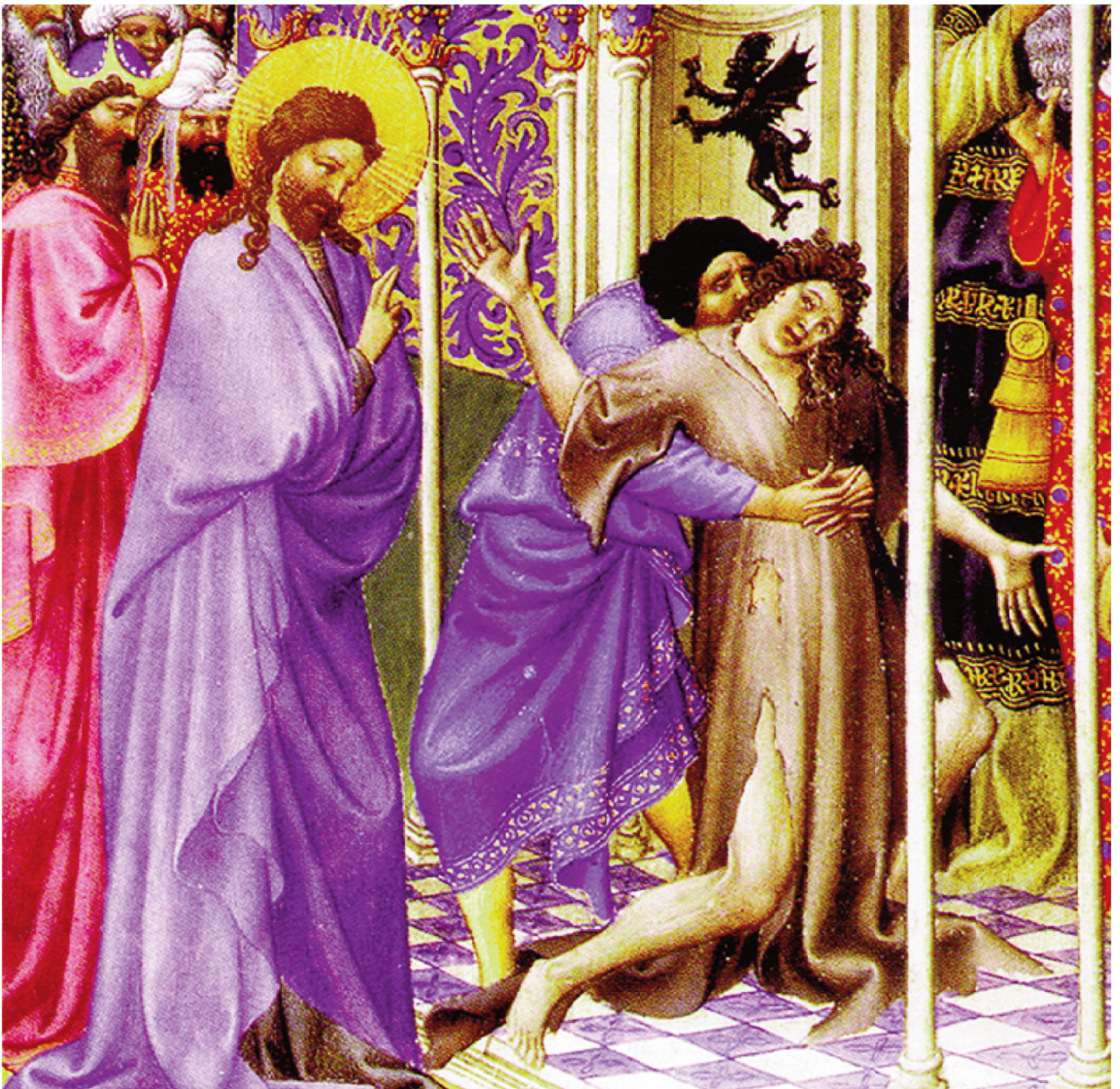


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## Jesus heals the man with an unclean spirit

Jesus and his disciples went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

Just then there was in the synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, 'What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.'

But Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be silent, and come out of him.' And the unclean spirit, throwing him into convulsions, and crying with a loud voice, came out of him.

They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, 'What is this? A new teaching - with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.'

At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

*Mark 1:21-28*

*Gospel reading for the 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time*

*28th January 2018*