

# PARISH BULLETIN St Kieran's, the Catholic Church

*in Campbeltown and Islay*

*Ceann Loch Chille Chiarain*

10<sup>th</sup> December 2023

## Hymns/Music

### Processional (Sunday only)

418: On Jordan's banks the Baptist's cry (Mayhew)

### Offertory

384: O come, O come, Emmanuel (Mayhew)

### Communion

Niebiosa rosę (Heavenly dew)

### Post Communion

381: O bread of heaven (Keys)

### Recessional

201: Hark! a herald voice is calling! (Keys)



## *The Second Sunday of Advent*

St. Kieran's, Campbeltown, Kintyre

**Sunday, 10<sup>th</sup> December, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent,**  
Holy Mass, 10.00am.

Monday: No Mass

Tuesday and Wednesday, Friday: Holy Mass, 10.00am

**Devotions: Wednesday:** Mid-morning Prayer, 9.50am.

**Friday:** Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament & Mid-morning Prayer, 9.30am.

**Discussion on the Infancy Narratives:** No discussion this Friday

**Saturday, 16<sup>th</sup> December, Vigil Mass, 6.00pm**

**Sunday, 17<sup>th</sup> December, 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent,** Holy Mass, 10.00am.

St. Columba's Episcopal Church, Bridgend, Islay

**Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> December, Holy Mass, 4pm**

### **Psalm response**

*Let us see, O Lord, your mercy, and give us your saving help.*

### **Gospel acclamation**

*Alleluia, alleluia!*

*Prepare a way for the Lord,  
make his paths straight,*

*and all mankind shall see the salvation of God.*

*Alleluia!*

### **Communion Antiphon**

*Jerusalem, arise and stand upon the heights,  
and behold the joy which comes to you from God.*



## Take Five

*Invest just five minutes a day, and your faith will deepen and grow—a day at a time.*

**Monday, Dec 11, 2023**

**OPTIONAL MEMORIAL OF SAINT DAMASUS I, POPE**

**Backstory on the Bible**

The 73 books in the Catholic Bible were written hundreds, and in some cases thousands, of years before they were officially compiled. It wasn't until the late fourth century that the Catholic Church decided upon the list of sacred scripture to be included. Pope Damasus I presided over the Council of Rome of 382 that determined the scriptural canon, and he commissioned Saint Jerome to translate these texts from Greek into Latin. This collection of sacred books is the inspired word of God, reveals the truth of Revelation, and forms the core of Catholic beliefs. Pass on the Good News!

TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 35:1-10; Luke 5:17-26. "We have seen incredible things today."*

**Tuesday, Dec 12, 2023**

**OPTIONAL MEMORIAL OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE**

**Mysterious mother of the Americas**

On a wall, under glass, is the life-sized image of Our Lady of Guadalupe — enshrined in the Basilica of Guadalupe, on Tepeyac Hill in Mexico City, where Our Lady appeared to Juan Diego in December 1591. As mysterious and symbolic as the Woman of the Apocalypse described in Revelation 12, it continues to defy human explanation, including analysis from a NASA scientist. The humble cactus fibre cloak it appears on hasn't deteriorated in more than 400 years, nor has the image, which experts from Kodak likened to a photograph though photography wasn't invented yet. Countless miracles are associated with Guadalupe, but the greatest is the conversion of an entire continent. Pray for the people of the Americas with the Centre of Concern prayer to Our Lady of Guadalupe that begins: Hail Mary, Lady of Peace, We pray for the peace in our world; make us peacemakers.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 40:1-11; Matthew 18:12-14 1:39-47. "It is never the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost."*

**Wednesday, Dec 13, 2023**

**MEMORIAL OF SAINT LUCY, MARTYR**  
**Keep your eye on the divine**

Like many early Roman saints, little is known about Saint Lucy. Tradition says that her eyes were removed in an act of torture before her death for being a Christian. As such, she is the patron saint of the blind. We often take sight for granted, but Lucy should remind us, especially in hard times, to look beyond our own vision — and see with God's eyes. The reward for our faithful acts is the beatific vision. Or as Saint Paul puts it: "We see now in a glass darkly, but then face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12). Work to improve your vision.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 40:25-31; Matthew 11:28-30. "Lift up your eyes on high and see who has created these things."*

**Thursday, Dec 14, 2023**

**MEMORIAL OF SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS, PRIEST, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH**  
**He wasn't afraid of the dark**

Today is the memorial of Saint John of the Cross, a Spanish Carmelite mystic, poet, and reformer who died in 1591. He may be best known for Dark Night of the Soul, which develops the idea that suffering — including the sense of God's absence — can actually lead to unity with God. "The endurance of darkness is the preparation for great light," he wrote. John came to his insights through experience, having been maltreated and even imprisoned by his own religious community. If God ever seems far away, let John of the Cross guide you to the light.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 41:13-20; Matthew 11:11-15. "Whoever has ears ought to hear."*

**Friday, Dec 15, 2023**

**ADVENT WEEKDAY**

**The secret to our success**

Damned if you do, damned if you don't. That is Jesus' complaint about public opinion. John the Baptist fasted, and they called him crazy. Jesus feasted and they called him a glutton and drunkard. We've all been there. The best response to criticism is success. What is success in the spiritual life? "In God's will, there is great peace" is the answer Saint Josephine Bakhita offers. Wise words. Ignore your critics and follow Jesus' path to peace.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 48:17-19; Matthew 11:16-19. "Wisdom is vindicated by her works."*

**Saturday, Dec 16, 2023**

**ADVENT WEEKDAY**

**The old gives way to the new**

God gives signs to show what he is about to do. John the Baptist is one such sign, who pointed to Jesus and prepared the way for his coming. John fulfilled the essential task of all the prophets: to be fingers pointing to Christ. John is the last and greatest prophet of the old kingdom, the old covenant. The Jews expected

that when the Messiah would come, Elijah would appear to announce his presence. John fills the role of Elijah and prepares the way for the coming of Christ by preaching a baptism of repentance and renewal. As watchful servants, we, too must prepare for the Lord's coming again by turning away from sin and from everything that would keep us from pursuing his will.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Ecclesiasticus 48:1-4, 9-11; Matthew 17:10-13. "Elijah will indeed come and restore all things; but I tell you that Elijah has already come."*

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## *Second Sunday of Advent*

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**Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11**

God speaks to us of comfort, expiation of sin, and good news.

**Psalms 85:9-10, 11-12, 13-14**

When salvation comes, kindness and truth will meet at last.

**2 Peter 3:8-14**

God does not delay but is patient for the sake of our salvation.

**Mark 1:1-8**

John the Baptist comes as the voice crying out in the desert.

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### *Words on the Word*

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#### **More than Good Enough**

When asked to describe himself, Pope Francis told a journalist: "A sinner." Many today would hesitate to describe themselves this way. It's easier to consider ourselves victims of society, bad parenting, unfortunate circumstances, an insensitive spouse, or lousy DNA. We may describe what we do as shortcomings, mistakes, symptoms, or even failures, but certainly not sin. Yet Jesus didn't die to save us from our shortcomings. He died to save us from our sins. That's why, in today's gospel, John the Baptist calls us to repent — to turn our lives back to God, and away from sin.

Admitting that we're sinners isn't a negative or morbid or self-hating thing to do. In fact, it can be an act of healthy self-love! When we confess that we're sinners, we accept reality, take responsibility for what we've done, and recall our fundamental need for the love and mercy of God. To call ourselves sinners doesn't mean we aren't good people. Even so, Jesus didn't call us to be good people. He called us to be holy, and that requires a serious struggle with sin. Think of it this way: If we're concerned with simply being good, it's tempting to think that all we need to be is "good enough," which very often translates into "do no harm." That can be a very passive and self-centred approach to life. If all we need to be is "good enough," it's easy to become morally and spiritually lazy. God didn't become man in Jesus at the first Christmas so we could be "good enough." He came so that we could become one of the holy ones and be counted among the saints.

# We await a new earth



**In Advent, the Church invites and encourages us to sustained and joyful waiting for a meeting with the Lord.**

Advent is watchfulness, expecting God's promise. Advent is a time of hope, an "already" leaning towards "not yet". And we live in a visible world that has its beginning, but also an end. Reaching that boundary, which will be announced by the Parousia of Jesus. However, it doesn't mean an encounter with some undefined wall, an unknown obstacle that will block the path, at the end of which the "end" of heaven and earth will be found, in the version as we know it. Such categories of viewpoint and reasoning flatten out meaning, bring it to the level of sensual sensations, sensations that don't reach into the substance of things.

In the morass of questions from the category of the "most important", we touch upon a reality that exceeds the limit of human reasoning. Everything so as to immerse yourself and find fulfilment in the invisible, which inhabits the *unapproachable light*. Everything becomes (and will be) new, exceeding the barriers of time and space. The beginning of the world is the creation of heaven and earth – and the end is a revelation of the "new earth", which is an echo of the Old Testament journey of Abraham from Ur of Chaldea towards God's fulfilment in the Promised Land. Newness can therefore be associated with freshness, with prudently following into the unknown with the burning lamp of faith, which enlightens everything around the with the splendour of goodness, love, tenderness, sensitivity and the New Justice. A lamp, whose flames break through indifference, mediocrity, egoism, corruption and the land of dark fears of what is still invisible and unknown.

When we look with hope for the time that begins, it is worth reaching to the thought of Benedict XVI, who teaches: "Advent is a time in which Christians should awaken in their heart the hope that with God's help they can change the world." Not alone, but everything is possible with him. Not only in us, but also around us. And he reminds us, referring to the conciliar constitution of *Gaudium et Spes* (No. 39): "The expectation of a new earth should not weaken, but rather arouse zeal in improving this earth" (*Angelus*, 27.11.2005). Therefore, waiting for Jesus, who is the source of hope, is an encouragement to nurture holiness and piety, active concern for the needs of others.

Running after novelty, which everyday life brings, the constant search for sensation, scanning gossip blogs and living someone else's life, indulging in pointless activities weakens our vigilance, discourages expectation for the New Earth. Since it leads astray to a confused perspective and takes away the joy of life, depriving us of proper assessment of the situation. On the other hand, persistent listening to the Word of God, meditation on biblical signs and introducing them into everyday life allows us to trust in the past, because we are called to participate in the glory of God and His perfection. To patiently follow the Lord and not give up, in anticipation of the Lord's Day. And not allow yourself to be robbed this valuable time, which brings us closer to eternity with each moment. *Marana Tha!*

## An event that gave meaning to everything



Historians state that in the years, when Jesus was born, there was a particularly vivid, widespread expectation for the greatest event in the history of the world. For the Chosen People, this was to be the coming of the Messiah, and for pagan peoples – the birth of the ruler of the world. Everyone was convinced that this would happen in Judea in the 6-7 years BC.

### **Historical fact of widespread expectation**

Josephus Flavius, a Jewish historian, writes that in the nation of Israel at that time (1<sup>st</sup> century) it was considered obvious that the Messiah, the ruler of the world, would soon be born.

This belief was the most important motive of the armed outbreak by the Jews against the Roman Empire, the greatest military power of the world at that time (66 - 70).

The Israelites expected the coming of the Messiah in the first century, therefore the time in which Jesus was born. The approximate date of His arrival was determined by two texts of the holy Scriptures of the Old Testament.

1. The text of the prophets, which appealed most to Jewish consciousness, and pointed to the date of the arrival of the Messiah, comes from the Book of Daniel (7:13-14; 9:24).

We find in this prophecy (9:24) the only specific indication in the Old Testament of the fulfilment of this announcement. From this prophetic text we learn that the Messiah is to be born after "seventy weeks".

It is obvious to all commentators that this is not about weeks, but about seven years. In Hebrew, the word *Shabhuim* means "seven years".

Thus, the prophecy says that the Messiah will be born after the end of seventy seven years (490 years) from the release of the decree of King Artaxerxes I (458 - 457 BC) or, as others say – from the decree of Cyrus in 538.

One thing is certain: that this prophecy indicates the coming of the Messiah in the years in which Christ lived. It is an amazing thing that only once in the Old Testament the date of the arrival of the Messiah was given and it actually became the beginning of the Messianic era for Christians.

Excavations in Qumran confirm that such an interpretation of Daniel's prophecy was preached by Jewish monks from the Dead Sea, who had great authority in all of Israel in the field of translating the holy Scriptures.

Also, other influential sources in Israel calculated the time of the coming of the Messiah, ruler of the world, in a similar way and this fact explains why in the times of Christ, the waiting for the coming of the Messiah was so vivid and widespread among the Jews.

According to these beliefs, the messianic time was to start about 20 years before the birth of Christ. It was during this period that Jews expected a mysterious Messiah to come.

It should also be remembered that Jesus Christ, calling himself "the Son of Man", repeatedly indicated that this prophecy was fulfilled in His person.

2. The second prophetic text is in the Book of Genesis:

"The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples." (Gen 49:10).

The sceptre was taken away from Judah during Christ's time; at that time, Herod the Great was the last Jewish king, and after his death Israel lost all autonomy until 1948.

Jews from the time of Christ strictly associated the loss of independence and the reign of the Romans with the text of Jacob's prophecy (Gen 49:10).

For Jews who believed in Christ, it became obvious that He was the expected Messiah. On the other hand, those who rejected Him changed the interpretation of this prophecy, claiming that it talks about the entire Israeli nation, not a specific person.

Is it not puzzling that the Jews finally determined the canon of 24 books of the Old Testament Bible, without the possibility of expanding it, in Jesus' times? In this way, they decided that God's revelation achieved its fullness.

In addition, the Jerusalem Temple was completely destroyed in 70. Therefore, the Old Testament priesthood and the sacrifice of offerings ended. After Jewish uprisings against the Roman occupation in 70 and 132, Jews are completely dispersed around the world.

### **The mystery of the star of Bethlehem**

In the Gospel of St. Matthew we read:

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him." (Mt 2:1-2).

In December 1603, the famous German astronomer Johannes Kepler noticed (a conjunction of) Saturn and Jupiter gave a much stronger light. After accurate calculations, Kepler stated that a

similar phenomenon could have taken place in 7 BC.

To his amazement, this astronomer discovered a commentary on the Holy Bible. Written by Rabbi Abarbanel, which shows that the Jews believed that the Messiah would be born exactly when the light of Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation of Pisces would be in conjunction.

As it turns out, such a belief was common in the nation of Israel. This is confirmed by a medieval Hebrew commentary on the Book of Daniel.

It is scientifically stated that the famous ancient Babylonian Astrological School from the city of Sippar on the Euphrates taught that from 7 BC the "Lord of the World" should be expected in Palestine.

Finding and reading the cuneiform writings of the Star Calendar from Sippar in 1925 is evidence that Babylonian astronomers stated that in 7 BC, the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn (29/5, 1/10 and 5/12) was exceptionally visible on three occasions.

This kind of super-imposition of these two heavenly bodies occurs only once every 794 years. The credibility of this data is confirmed by modern astronomy.

The so-called planetary table is stored in Berlin. It is a papyrus where Egyptian astronomers have precisely written all planets' movements from 17 BC to 10 AD.

These observations confirm the calculations of Kepler, that in 7 BC the conjunction of Jupiter with Saturn was most visible in the Mediterranean area.

Historians are amazed by the fact that at that time when Christ was born, there was a widespread expectation of the coming of the Messiah not only among the Jewish people, but other nations were also expecting the birth in Judea of the Lord of the World to come soon.

It is therefore a historical fact that in the time of Jesus, the whole pagan world also focused on Palestine in a widespread expectation that the ruler of the world would appear in Judea. Roman historians from the turn of the first and second century have written about it: Tacitus in *The History* and Suetonius in *The Life of Vespasian*.

### **A singular and unique phenomenon**

The uniqueness of Judaism and Christianity is due to the fact that the coming of the Messiah was predicted by the Prophets of the Old Testament during the twenty centuries before His birth in Bethlehem.

Muhammad, Buddha, Confucius and all other founders of religion were not announced and expected.

The Messiah – Jesus Christ – announced in the prophecies is the most important figure of the Old and New Testament. So, from the very beginning of the history of the Chosen People, Jesus was announced and to this day He is worshiped as the Saviour God-Man.

The fact that He has been worshiped as the Messiah for 40 centuries goes beyond all historical accuracy. Judaism and Christianity are the singular and unique phenomenon in the history of all religions.

To recognise that the expected Messiah in the Child Jesus, could be born in total poverty in a Bethlehem stable, was exceptionally difficult. However, to recognise Him as the true God who became man was humanly impossible.

It should be remembered that the Jews worshiped Yahweh, who was transcendent, inexpressible; He could not be imagined, and even less represent Him in images or say His

name.

For the Israelites to state that a man is God was the greatest sacrilege and blasphemy. That's why the main reason for the condemnation of Christ to death was that as a man He considered Himself God (cf. Mt 26:63-66).

Also, Muhammad and the religion of Islam, which he initiated, is an expression of this Semitic scandal, protest and rebellion against Christianity, which says that the man Jesus is God. Around the dome of the Jerusalem Mosque of Omar, which is one of the most important for Muslims, there is an inscription that makes Christians aware that:

"The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a Messenger of God, and His Word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him. [...] Far be it removed from His transcendent majesty that He should have a son."

Belief that Jesus the man is a true God, that He began in the womb of the Virgin Mary and was born like any other person, was something so absurd for the mind and beliefs not only of the Israelites, but also pagans, that no one healthy in the mind would be able to allow himself to think about Yahweh being in a specific place and a specific moment of history.

The widespread expectation in the time of Jesus for the coming of a messiah, who as a man will be the messenger of God, caused many to appear announcing that they were the messiahs.

Among them were Barabbas, Theudas, Bar Kokhba and others, who organized armed rebellions against the Romans, but after their death and the suppression of uprisings, no followers remained after them, and the memory of them quickly passed away.

However, after the shameful death of Jesus Crucified and within the backdrop of Judaism, faith in His resurrection was immediately born, as well as being a true man He is also the true God.

Faith in the resurrection and the deity of Christ was expanding with incredible dynamism throughout the Roman Empire through the first followers who were Jews.

The truth that Jesus is a true God was proclaimed at risk of life right after His death and resurrection, which is expressed by the texts of the converted Jew Saint Paul:

"Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"(Phil 2:9-11).

For the researcher open to the truth it becomes obvious that the formation of Christianity is undoubtedly one of the greatest miracles in history and that it can only be the work of God Himself, who was born as a real man in the Bethlehem stable, so that through His life, passion, death and resurrection He gives the chance of salvation for every person. Only people "who by their wickedness suppress the truth" (Rom 1:18) are closed to the acceptance and recognition of this fact.

### **When was Jesus born?**

Of the numerous Jewish and Christian texts, as well as the writings of Roman historians: Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, Suetonius, and Jewish historian Josephus Flavius, the result is the obvious fact of the historical existence of Jesus.

Of all the historical figures of antiquity, Jesus Christ has the richest and most documented biographical material.

Jesus was born when the ruler of the Roman Empire was Emperor Octavian August (30 BC – 14



AD), and Herod the Great was the king of Judea (37 BC – 4 AD).

In 525, Pope John I ordered the Scythian monk Dionysius the Humble (Dionysius Exiguus) to determine the exact year of the birth of Jesus Christ.

According to Dionysius, Jesus was born in Bethlehem in 754 after the founding of Rome. However, contemporary calculations have shown that the monk had been mistaken in his counting by 6-7 years. Jesus was born in 747/748 since the foundation of Rome, i.e. in 7/6 before the new era.

Despite this mistake, the date of the birth of Jesus given by Dionysius became the beginning of counting the time of the "new era". Jesus Christ is the greatest figure in human history. His birth caused the division of history into the "old era" – before Christ and the "new era" – after Christ.

### **The shocking truth of Christmas**

What radically distinguishes Christianity from other religions is the shocking truth of Christmas: the true God has become a true man.

Giving birth as a defenceless child in Bethlehem, God overcomes the infinite distance dividing us from Him, caused by our sins. Guided by selfless love, the Creator becomes a real man, takes on the sins of all people and resurrected He accomplishes the final victory over Satan, sin and death, enabling us to unite with Him in love.

Saint Gregory Nazianzen does not hesitate to write that God becomes man to allow every man to become God.

Love between God and us will never be born in a situation of necessity or coercion, but only if there is complete freedom of choice. That is why God, manifesting Himself in Jesus Christ, remained "hidden" out of respect for human freedom.

He did not want to enslave us with the omnipotence of divine beauty, and therefore Jesus' deity remained "hidden" in His humanity, and it was only possible to recognise it by faith. The Baby Jesus is therefore a revelation of humble love and the Triune of God and at the same time a tribute to human freedom.

His divine, almighty love is expressed in the vulnerability of the infant in Bethlehem and in the humility of the servant who washes feet (cf. Jn 13:8), and to open our way to heaven He takes the sins of all people, experiencing the resulting terrible suffering and death.

In Jesus' humanity, we can discover the mystery of God, who is one, but in three persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This mystery is only available by faith, "which works through love" (Gal 5: 6). Then Jesus' words become understandable: "And he who sees me sees him who sent me" (Jn 12:45); "I and the Father are one" (Jn 10:30).

In the mystery of Christmas, we also discover the joyful truth that by becoming a true man, God "has united Himself in some fashion with every man" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22).

Thanks to the mystery of incarnation, every human being has the infinite dignity of God's child and the inalienable right to life from the moment of conception to natural death and the right to freedom of conscience.

The dignity and value of man is not determined by the social class from which he comes, the colour of his skin, his IQ or the state of his health, but only his humanity, which is holy, because God himself identifies with him: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40).

So, Jesus is always united with every person, whom He wants to lead through all life's

experiences to full happiness in heaven. The problem is only on the side of man whether he will agree to this and accept the difficulties of life each day with faith.

The mystery of Christmas is constantly renewed. Jesus Christ – the Incarnate God – constantly comes to "his own" but, unfortunately, there are still those today who – as in Bethlehem – do not want to let Him in (cf. Jn 1:11).

Only in the person who takes up the difficulties of life according to the principles of the Gospel, continues in daily prayer, rises from every fall in the sacrament of confession and accepts Jesus in the Eucharist as his daily bread, sees "the miracle of the Holy Night renewed upon altars bedecked with lights and flowers: 'And the Word was made flesh.'" (Saint Edith Stein).

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## A Christmas Tree in the church, or not?

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Does the priest ever listen to what his parishioners say?

Here's one example of an answer to this question:

*In our church it has become the custom in recent years to have a large lighted Christmas tree at the side of the sanctuary during the Advent and Christmas season. It is quite easily seen in the church. Because the tree is large and the lights twinkle in phases, it is quite distracting during holy Mass. An approach to the parish priest to turn off the lights has been unsuccessful, as it is seen opposing the spirit of the season.*

*(Zenit, Rome, 11 Dec. 2012)*



It looks very nice and will surely draw your eyes to the decoration. But have you noticed the Nativity scene in front of the altar? Which should have more significance?

Okay, so twinkling lights in the sanctuary (or even near it) may not be a good idea, and indeed would be distracting for most people during Holy Mass. 2/10 for this parish priest, who believes the spirit of Christmas has more significance than the presence of God in the Eucharist.

What about this question:

*In the church I worship, there has been a Christmas tree in the church usually near the Nativity scene. Is the Christmas tree a religious symbol like the Nativity scene? I have asked our priest to explain its proper place in the celebration of the season, but I've never felt convinced by his answer that it has been appropriated from common use or even pagan origin to be a Christian symbol.*

Well, this question is a little more . . . well controversial for people with different personal opinions. So let us consider it calmly and carefully.

In the document *Built of Living Stones* the bishops advise that:

The tradition of decorating or not decorating the church for liturgical seasons and feasts heightens the awareness of the festive, solemn, or penitential nature of these seasons. Human minds and hearts are stimulated by the sounds, sights, and fragrances of liturgical seasons, which combine to create powerful, lasting impressions of the rich and abundant graces unique to each of the seasons.

(...)

Objects such as the Advent wreath, the Christmas crib, and other traditional seasonal appointments proportioned to the size of the space and to the other furnishings can enhance the prayer and understanding of the parish community. (124,127)

Well, we can see here that there's no mention of Christmas trees either in or out of the sanctuary. So, the next question is:

*Is it a religious (Christian) symbol or not?*

It depends on how *religious symbol* is defined. If it means anything to which religious significance can be attached, then yes. Many Christians have attached religious significance to the Christmas tree (e.g., the Tree of Life, both in Eden and on Calvary). But if a religious symbol of a holy season is an object attached to that season or feast, and without which the feast wouldn't be the same, then no. Because the celebration of Christmas does not require Christmas trees. Christmas trees are a decoration that Christians incorporated into their celebration of the holiday over the centuries.

They didn't become widespread in the English-speaking world until German relatives of our Royal Family brought the custom to Great Britain in the 18th and 19th centuries. Christians justified the custom on religious grounds by explaining that the evergreen tree can symbolize eternal life, and the triangular shape the Trinity. But really?! Today traditionally Catholic countries should be placing far more emphasis is on the much older Christian custom of erecting the Nativity scene.

And so, the response of Legionary of Christ Father Edward McNamara, professor of liturgy at the Regina Apostolorum university summarises the discussion:



*Christmas trees are preferably located outside the sanctuary and church proper and are best left in vestibules or church grounds. This has been the practice in St. Peter's Square from the time of Pope John Paul II. ... Within the church proper, apart from the crib, Christmas may be evoked by using, for example, traditional poinsettias, holly, evergreens and other traditional elements according to the culture.*

Wait and see what your parish priest does this year!



## Prayer



**Please pray for those who are sick, in need or have asked for our prayers:** Connie Graham, Lilian Cox, Sarah Carmichael, Ailsa Stewart, Meg Douglas (Mull), Doleen Durnin, and Russell Carroll.

**Please remember in your prayers all whose anniversaries occur at this time.**

## News and Events

**Tea and coffee** in the hall after Sunday Mass. Our visitors are most welcome to join us. Please do come.

**Thanks for the evergreens** donated for the decoration of the church.

**Advent Taizé Service for Peace:** the world in is a state of disorder and conflict. Pray for peace together: 2.30pm, Tuesday the 12<sup>th</sup> of December at St Kiarans Episcopal Church, Argyll Street.

**This week we begin to adorn the church** with evergreens, especially those with berries. Why does holly have special place in the religious symbolism of the first coming of Christ? Can you tell me? Ivy and mistletoe also have a similar symbolism, but not as profound as holly. And there's more than one reason.

Fr. Tony

**Dedication of the altar:** the bishop is able come on **8<sup>th</sup> January**. This is a Monday, and the Mass and Dedication of the Altar will be at **6.00pm**. This is a special event in parish life, the altar cannot be used for the Eucharist until this has taken place, and I am sure you will all prioritise this event in your calendars. We should also organise a gathering afterwards with some seasonal fare – both solid and liquid.

**Advent and Christmas liturgies:**

**Rorate Mass (Vigil Mass)**, Saturday December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 6.00pm

Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> December, Holy Mass: 10.00am

**The "Shepherd's Mass"**, Christmas Eve, Sunday 24<sup>th</sup>, 9.00pm

**The Mass of Christmas Day**, Monday 25<sup>th</sup>, 10.00am

**The second day of Christmas, Feast of St. Stephen**, Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup>, 10.00am



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