

The Catholic VOICE of Lancaster

The Official Newspaper to
the Diocese of Lancaster

Issue 325 + December '20

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A bleak mid-winter not a bit of it!



This year appears, more than most, to offer us a truly bleak mid-winter!

Light and darkness are central themes of the Advent and Christmas seasons. We even celebrate the feast of St Lucy (13th Dec) the patron saint of light and that of St John of the Cross (14th Dec) who tells us: 'The endurance of darkness is the preparation for great light.'

We use candles to count down the weeks of advent and candles have a symbolic meaning. They remind us of the person of Jesus: the wax - His physical or human nature, and the flame - His spirit or divine nature. The Two natures of Christ are highlighted during the Christmas season while advent prepares us to welcome this wondrous mystery.

Winter's days are short and its nights long. The short days represent the darkness of sin, sleep, and even death, but then, from the birth of Jesus the days lengthen; He is the true light who comes to banish darkness and in its place brings new hope and life.

Light guides us. Think of early mariners using the stars to navigate by at night, think of the Magi guided to the Crib by a star. Think of Our Lady, the Star of the Sea, guiding the pilgrim into the care of her Son.

In these weeks of Advent let us think about light (there is already enough darkness around us!) Let us pray for a deeper hope, a deeper awareness of

God's desire to visit each one of us, to love us, to heal us and to lead us more deeply into His transforming, renewing light.

So many people long for a proper family Christmas - a time of being together. This may not happen this year and that pain, in contrast to Christmas joy, will be felt all the more. So, celebrating Advent and Christmas in a different way does not mean we are distancing ourselves from our families and friends, or separating ourselves from the reality around us. Rather it means Christ's light will let us see things more clearly. It may tune us in more finely to the reality of those less fortunate than ourselves - Jesus' parents were refugees, His birth-place a dirty stable - by seeing more clearly, we will come to know more surely where to go and who we must follow.

In following Jesus our resolve will strengthen and in turning to Him more intimately our love grow deeper. By its very nature love must be shared. Just as a light coming into the darkness dispels the darkness and spreads new light, so does love. As a candle burns and gives of itself so we can see and be warm, so Jesus gave Himself that we would be set free. So, What can I give Him poor as I am?... myself, my love. With Jesus nothing is bleak because He directs us away from ourselves to see the plight of those around us. Bathed and refreshed in His light we will wonder how and why we ever tolerated the bleak mid-winter.

+ Paul Swarbrick, Bishop of Lancaster



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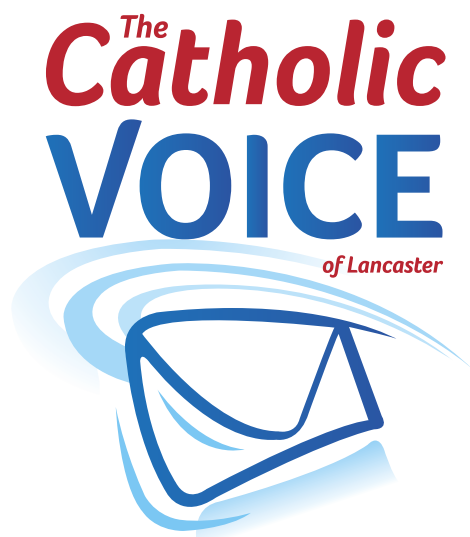
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EDITORIAL

This time last year it would have been impossible to predict the impact of the global pandemic, at every level, throughout 2020. And the anticipation that a New Year normally promises instead brings an air of uncertainty with the COVID 19 continuing to hold a steady grip as we enter 2021.

We can be thankful for the technology that has allowed many of the faithful to share in the celebration of the Mass in their own home with actual attendances in church severely restricted to maintain social distancing rules. There is no idea of knowing to what extent parishes will be affected by this monumental shift and whether physical attendances will ever return to pre COVID 19 levels. Please God they will and numbers may even exceed the 'old normal' as people crave the Sacraments and the fellowship of the Mass. But we have to face up to the possibility that things as we know it may not return or could take a very long time to recover. One may argue that we are at a watershed surrounded by uncertainty, we are with Peter and the disciples in the fishing boat being tossed and turned by a turbulent sea. Jesus beckoned Peter to come to him across the water, he did so but was disturbed by the wind and began to sink crying out Lord, save me. Jesus caught hold of him and said

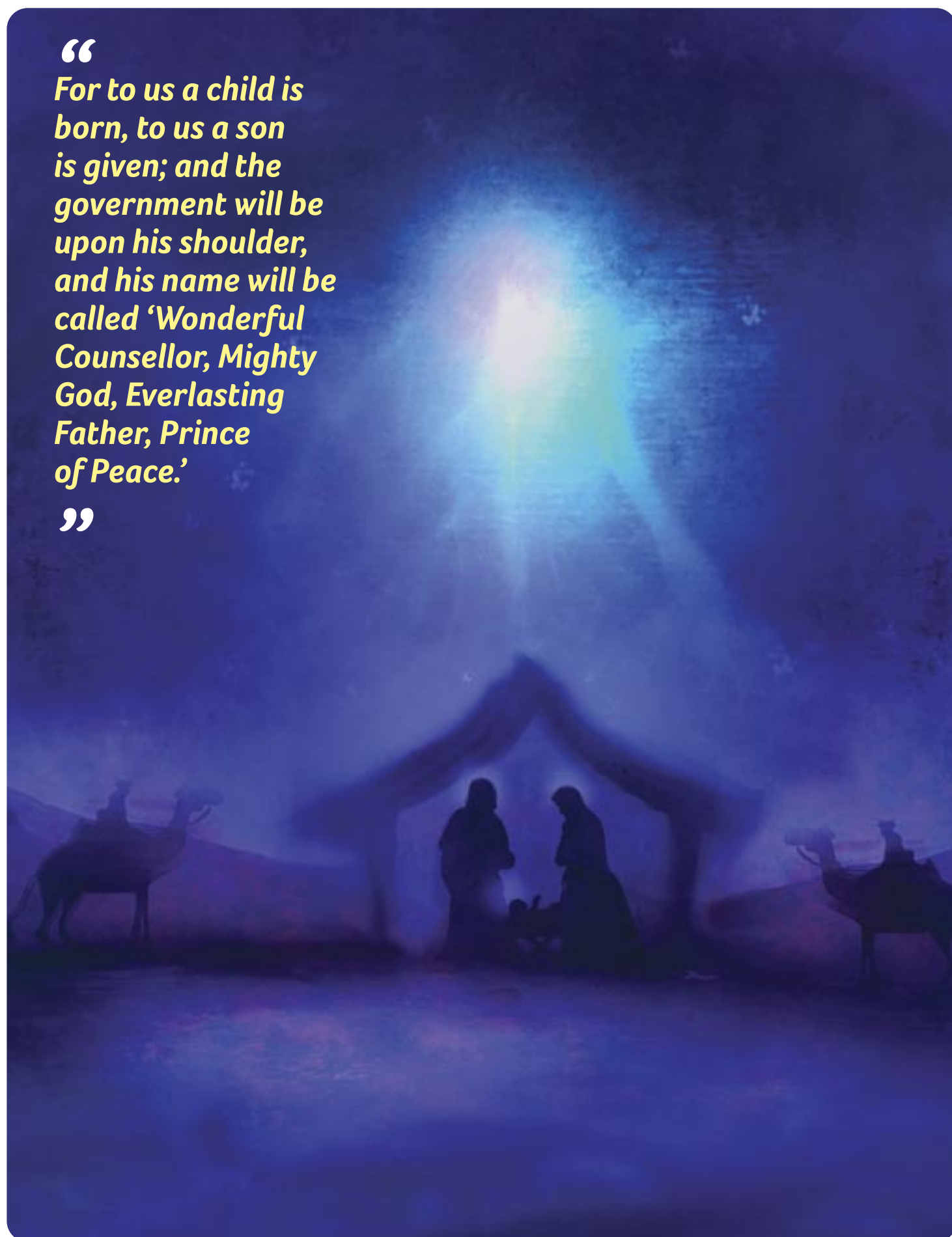
"O man of little faith, why did you doubt me." Faith is our certainty, faith is our hope that things will get better, Emmanuel – God is with us.

When everything around us is changing, affected by the polarisation of societies, terrorism, conflicts and wars, a global pandemic, and more and more secularisation, there is only one constant and He is *'the way, the truth and the life'*. So no matter how bleak things might seem, the *Catholic Voice* believes that if we centre our hearts on using Advent to prepare for the great celebration of the Incarnation at Christmas we will grow in faith and in turn gain the strength and fortitude to face whatever the future may hold.

'For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called "Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and for evermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.' – Isaiah 9: 6-7

**“
For to us a child is
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God, Everlasting
Father, Prince
of Peace.'
”**



Pray as you Grow!

Around fifty people were involved in a recent Zoom weekend from Boarbank Hall on the theme 'Living Laudato Si': *Your Planet and Your Parish*. It aimed to inspire, inform, connect and encourage anyone wanting to engage in practical and prayerful projects in response to the encyclical, especially through parish groups and activities. After all, the Church, with its combination of local and global networks, is the perfect structure for helping to reshape the world in its current state of crisis. We need small parish groups to be the leaven in the lump of the Church, and the Church to be the leaven in the lump of the world.

Using Zoom, for obvious reasons, enabled us to reach far more people, and led to a very lively set of conversations, and in particular the pooling of questions, information, ideas and experience. We are still busy collating the fruits of these to share with the group, and more widely.

The long weekend began and ended with encouragement from two bishops who have led from the front in their own dioceses and more widely. Bishop Richard Moth set a prayerful tone with his reflection on the importance of taking time to attend and discern. Bishop John Arnold concluded by encouraging us to respond to both Laudato Si' and Fratelli Tutti with faith and hope.

On Saturday we had three talks, well spaced to allow people to escape from their screens in between! Trish Sandbach, who worked for many years for OXFAM and is now an assessor for the LiveSimply award [<https://cafod.org.uk/Campaign/Livesimply-award>] talked us through the process of leading her own parish to the award, and added some theological reflection inspired also by the encyclical. John Paul de Quay, founder of the Ecological Conversion Group and the Journey to 2030 website, both supported by the Bishops' Conference, spoke about ecological conversion, and answered with humour imagined objections that he has frequently encountered. Sr. Margaret Atkins spoke about the way in which the power of technology can shape our mindsets, distancing us from reality and generating both pride and thoughtlessness.

Sunday afternoon and evening were dedicated to questions to our panellists, who covered a range of topics: wildlife gardening, organic gardening, tree planting and compost; energy saving and installing electric points; disinvestment and reinvestment; reducing waste; connecting with the younger

generation, and listening to the cry of the poor. The very informative and lively questions and answers were supplemented by an equally active contribution on the chat from the participants.

On the final evening, we made space for general discussion, with a focus on how to take the work of the weekend forward, in particular by benefiting from contacts with each other: various possibilities for online groups and contacts are now in process. The resources shared over the weekend by participants will also be made available in a user-friendly form, especially through the Journey to 2030 website. [<https://journeyto2030.org>]

Two other features made the weekend more than an online conference. We shared online Night Prayer, and one Morning Prayer, beautifully presented by Karen Groves and John Moffat, our online hosts. We also offered participants a screen-free activity each day, to enable them to pray, reflect and act on themes relevant to the whole weekend.

We found that there was certainly enough interest to repeat the weekend, probably more than once. If you are interested or know anyone who might be, please contact Sr. Margaret on margaret@boarbankhall.org.uk, or just keep an eye on the Journey to 2030 or the Boarbank Hall www.boarbankhall.org.uk website.

The more we can do to encourage, inform and support each other, the more hope and joy there will be in a dark and threatened world.

And one final task for you. Where are all the millions of trees we need to plant in this country going to come from? Well, how about you?

This year is a great one for acorns. Oaks have long tap roots, so the best plant pots for them are upcycled plastic drinks bottles! Simply cut the top off, and make a drainage hole or two in the bottom and plant the acorn. In a few years' time, you will have to find a good place to plant it, perhaps with the help of your Church or a local community group. Best of all, find some young people to do this with - your children or your grandchildren. They will be around to see the miracle of this little acorn growing into a majestic tree. So will their children and grandchildren Saving waste, reducing carbon, helping biodiversity, creating beauty, great exercise, and really good fun! What better way of growing hope this autumn? Not so much 'Pay as you Go', rather 'Pray as you Grow!'

Sr. Margaret Atkins, Boarbank Hall



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So, here we are again. Yawn. Another lockdown and another set of circumstances where we don't know exactly what's going to happen next. It's been a tough year for the Youth Service, that's for sure, but we take comfort from two things; firstly, that a lot of people out there have it much tougher than us, and secondly that we have a powerful God!

The name of the game this year has been adaptation. We have had all sorts thrown at us and each time we've adapted – usually pretty well. Let us tell you about some of the things we've done to adapt to the latest round of craziness:

National Youth Sunday 2020

Every year, the Church in England & Wales celebrates National Youth Sunday on the Feast of Christ the King. November 22nd this year. The retiring collection this year was due to go to Castlerigg and the Youth Service, but sadly (*at the time of writing*) it looks as though nobody is actually going to be at Mass that weekend.

With that in mind, we've taken our appeal online. If you'd like to support Castlerigg and the youth Service, head to:

castleriggmanor.co.uk/nys

Ministry Online

At the end of October, our Retreat Leaders set about constructing a studio at the top of the Castlerigg tower (*photo*).

From here, we plan to do livestreams, host meetings, and run groups, including our online youth group and our online young adults group, both launching very soon!

Meeting online can't replace face-to-face contact, of course, but it's a great way to stay connected in times when it's impossible to meet in person

Stay in Touch

We've recently got ourselves a new database system. I know, boring! Not really newsworthy! But we'd love to have as many people as possible signed up for it. That way, we can let you know about events, resources, training, and other opportunities which might be interesting. Sign up at:

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National Youth Sunday

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First Sunday of Advent (Yr B)

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

A reading from the Holy Gospel
according to Mark (13:33-37)

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Be on your guard and stay awake, because you never know when the time will come. It is like a man travelling abroad: he has gone from home, and left his servants

in charge, each with his own task: and he has told the door keeper to stay awake. So stay awake, because you do not know when the master of the house is coming, evening, midnight, cockcrow, dawn: if he comes unexpectedly, he must not find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake!'

The Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ

+++ HOMILY ++++++

“Stay awake, because you do not know when the master of the house is coming.”

Advent begins, a time of eager anticipation for the “advent”, the coming of Christ. But what do we mean? We know that Christ our Lord has already come, as St. John says “*The Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us*”. So what are we waiting for that is still to come? Our annual remembrance at Christmas is still to come, certainly, but our waiting, our staying awake and staying ready is for more than the celebration of this feast. Christ our Lord has come in the flesh at a moment in past history, but for each generation and for each person it is also a present event, his coming to us, and our receiving him in eagerness and faith.

It is that desire to receive him, to welcome him into our daily lives, that is where we need to be on our toes, longing for his presence, his love and his power to change us. So, though the birth of Christ is a moment of history, his birth, his coming, his living in us, is a present fact, something to stay alert for today and tomorrow and to welcome each day of our lives. In St. Mark’s gospel today Jesus says to his disciples and to each one of us “*Be on your guard, stay awake, because you do not know when the time will come.*” He tells us we do not know when the master of the house will return and if he comes unexpectedly he mustn’t find us asleep. So our waiting, our staying awake is also for a return, the return of the master of the house, the return of Christ our Lord in glory.

How will we be ready for this “Second” coming of

the Lord? We will be ready for this meeting with our Saviour at the end of time, or for each of us at the end of our lives on earth, if we are constantly welcoming him in the here and now of our daily living. The prophet Isaiah in our first reading today shows us the right attitude that we need to really welcome the presence of God in our lives. The prophet regrets that we have strayed so much from the life that God wants for us. He asks “*Why, Lord, leave us to stray from your ways and harden our hearts against fearing you?*” And, with great eagerness, calls on God to come down to us. This is our wonderful Advent prayer from Isaiah: “*Oh, that you would tear the heavens open and come down.*” And he continues with this powerful image of our confused state: “*We have all withered like leaves and our sins blew us away like the wind.*” And what is the remedy? It’s to be found in returning to our Father, putting ourselves in his hands, willing and ready to be changed. Isaiah says “*And yet, Lord, you are our Father; we the clay, you the potter, we are all the work of your hand.*”

This Season of Advent is a time to place ourselves once more into the hands of the God who loves us, and created us, and is still working on us like the potter at his wheel. We are the work of his hands, and can be what we are meant to be if we are willing to be changed, and we ask the Father earnestly in prayer for this: “*Mould us, mould us and fashion us, into the image of Jesus your Son.*”

Fr. Patrick Hibbert, St Annes-on- Sea



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Second Sunday of Advent (Yr B)

Alleluia, Alleluia!
Prepare a way for the Lord, Make his paths straight, And all mankind shall see the salvation of God. Alleluia!

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Mark (1:1:8)

The beginning of the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is written in the book of the prophet Isaiah: Look, I am going to send my messenger before you: he will prepare your way. A voice cries in the wilderness: Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight, and so it was that John the Baptist appeared

in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. All Judaea and all the people of Jerusalem made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins. John wore a garment of camel-skin, and he lived on locusts and wild honey. In the course of his preaching, he said, 'Someone is following me, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to kneel down and undo the strap of his sandals. I have baptised you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.'

The Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ



Second Sunday of Advent

+++ HOMILY ++++++


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Advent is a time when we celebrate the coming of God. ‘Advent’ means ‘the Coming’. God wants to come and console us with His presence. The first reading begins ‘console my people, console them’ But to be consoled we must allow God to approach us, we must make a way for him into our lives. It is very personal: ‘make a straight highway for our God’. Where to? – Into my heart.

The Church during Advent wants us to remove anything that causes roadblocks into our hearts, roadblocks to Jesus that keep Him at bay. The question is ‘do we welcome Jesus and the Holy Spirit fully and wholeheartedly into our lives?’

We are so wary, so fearful of God. God knows the only way to deal with something small and timid as ourselves is by gentleness and patience.

- Gentleness. A little child is lost, cowering in fright, running away from help. The big policeman doesn’t roar at the tot, but takes off his helmet to show him that he is human; then squats down to make himself small and approachable. Gentleness.
- Patience. The little wounded animal is hiding in the undergrowth, bleeding its lifeblood. With infinite patience the animal lover coaxes the little animal into his hands, so that its wounds can be tended and it can be healed. Patience.

That is what God is doing for us in Advent.

You see there are 3 comings of God: The third and final coming in awesome power and majesty and in final judgement, when all resistance and blasphemy will be crushed. ‘The day of the Lord will come and all that the earth contains will be burnt up’ as St Paul says. We must not forget that.

Yet dwelling on the coming of God in power will not coax us into the hands of God. The others ways are God’s chosen ways of getting us to open to him.

They are:

- First in smallness and gentleness, approachable as a human being. Indeed by becoming small and helpless as a baby. We think of that later in Advent.
- But now, today, we are reminded of how he comes in patience and in a hidden way into our lives: but for a purpose. As St Paul explains God is patient so that we may change our ways for the better, so that we may repent and be forgiven.

God knows we get lost and confused and wounded by life, like that little wounded animal. Life can be so confusing and hurtful. We become defensive, and resist even the approach of a loving God. Life can so easily get into a tangle. When I take out my electric power line to do a job, somehow I find that it is always tangled, however carefully I have put it away. I have to take a long time un-knotting it patiently. Just so our lives get knotted, and need straightening out. We talk of moral mazes, concrete jungles and urban deserts, where law and order are under threat, and social and family ties break down.

But God is patient. He has literally all the time in the world for us: 1000 years one day to him as St Paul says. When he puts off judgement and the end times, he is not being slow to carry out his purpose, he’s just allowing us time. As St John the Baptist says he gives us time to repent, turn to Him and make a straight highway for him into our hearts. God is like the animal lover patiently enticing the little wounded animal into his waiting arms to receive his healing, his help, rather than allowing it to crawl off into the undergrowth to die.

We need one more thing: a sense of urgency. We all know what happens when we put off our clearing up to another day: it never gets done. A voice cries to each one of us in the scriptures of this Sunday: prepare a way for the Lord, a Lord of gentleness and patience, and do it today.

Fr. Philip Smith, Grange-Over-Sands

Preparing for and celebrating the Holy Birth

It's only once a year! I have to admit that Christmas is not my favourite time of the year. My stress levels begin to rise towards the end of November, as the full thrust of the commercial hijacking of the season gets more fully underway. It strikes me that within the last 20 years or so, we have moved further and further away from the spiritual meaning and purpose of Christmas as the celebration of the coming of God among us a man.

We seem to have surrendered our souls to Santa Claus, Barclaycard, and as much hedonism as we can squeeze out of what is seen as no more than a public holiday. The irony of the poverty of the stable in

Bethlehem, in contrast to the modern levels of spending on gifts and food and drink, could not be more striking.

Indeed, it is symptomatic of the malaise of our times. The further we move away from God, the greater becomes the focus upon ourselves as the source and the summit of all that is meaningful and purposeful in our lives. Not that we should see ourselves as Christian kill joys, draining Christmas of its anticipation, its excitement and human fulfilment.

There is a common understanding that still characterises the season, that we are expected to be more charitable, more sensitive to each other, more generous

and caring. And we can take some small comfort in that abiding awareness of the value of the Lord's coming. After all, *"It is Christmas and it's only once a year!"* But if that is as far as it goes, then clearly, for us as Christians, it isn't really far enough.

There is the added danger that Christmas becomes a season almost exclusively for children, a virtual fairy story, bathed in presents and over indulgence, but with little spiritual relevance, or deep appreciation of the reality of the commemoration on the part of the adults. And, we have to acknowledge that we are as much a part of our society as everyone else, caught up in the seasonal maelstrom, and having to respond to

both its good points and its temptations. Is it possible for us to frame our own preparations and our celebration in a way that says to our family members and to our neighbours that for us Christmas is special because Jesus is special?

We begin with Him, with all that went into the actuality of his birth, and what it means for us and the conduct of our own lives. We move out from that starting point, full of joy, full of excitement and happiness and entitled to enjoy ourselves. But we do so in accordance with, and respect for, the values which Jesus lays upon us, as the infant of Bethlehem and the Saviour of the World.

Deacon Paul Marley retired, Blackpool





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Third Sunday of Advent (Yr B) – Gaudete Sunday

Alleluia, Alleluia!
The spirit of the Lord has been given to me. He has sent me to preach the good news to the poor.
Alleluia!

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to John (1:6-8, 19-28)


A man came, sent by God. His name was John. He came as a witness, as a witness to speak for the light, so that everyone might believe through him. He was not the light, only a witness to speak for the light, so that everyone might believe through him. He was not the light, only a witness for the light.

This is how John appeared as a witness. When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' he not only declared but he declared quite openly, 'I am not the Christ.' 'Well then,' they asked

'are you Elijah?' 'I am not' he said. 'Are you the prophet?' He answered 'No.' So they said to him 'Who are you? We must take back an answer to those who sent us. What have you to say about yourself?' So John said, 'I am, as Isaiah prophesied: a voice that cries in the wilderness: Make a straight way for the Lord.'

Now these men had been sent by the Pharisees, and they put this further question to him, 'Why are you baptising if you are not the Christ, and not Elijah, and not the prophet?' John replied, 'I baptise with water; but there stands among you – unknown to you – the one who is coming after me; I am not fit to undo his sandal-strap.' This happened at Bethany, on the far side of the Jordan, where John was baptising.

The Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ



Gaudete Sunday



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+++ HOMILY ++++++

“There stands among you – unknown to you – the one who is coming after me”

Thankfully, the days will soon begin to get lighter. About the same time, of course, we celebrate again the birth of Jesus, the Light of the World. How much we all need his light in these dark times!

Witnessing to Christ the Light, John the Baptist proclaims to the priests and Levites from Jerusalem that he is not the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet. The Messiah or Christ was of course long anticipated by the prophets. The prophet Malachi revealed that there would be a time when the prophet Elijah would return to purify the people in preparation for the Lord’s coming. Similarly, the coming of a Prophet in the tradition of Moses was foretold in the Book of Deuteronomy. John does not wish to be confused with any of these three figures (it was Jesus who later proclaimed John the Baptist as “Elijah who is to come”). John the Baptist is simply a humble voice in the wilderness witnessing to the One (Christ) who himself humbly stands unknown amongst his people.

How do we witness humbly to Christ? Firstly, we can remember that we are other Christs’ by virtue of our baptism.

Like Christ we can ‘stand among’ others, perhaps unknown to them and yet, by God’s grace, bring the light of Christ to them through our patience, compassion and joy. The ‘reverse’ is also true: we can notice the ‘hidden Christ’ in others and receive his light through them – often a challenging and humbling experience! However, if we persevere by God’s grace then we can experience a deep-down joy and lightness of spirit which will be a source of strength to us and others.

Today is known as Gaudete or “Rejoice” Sunday in anticipation of the celebration of Christ’s birth soon to be upon us. Wherever and however we may be able to celebrate Christ’s Nativity, let us resolve now to help others look forward joyfully to that celebration by ‘being there’ for them and letting them ‘be there’ for us even if just via the phone or internet or indeed through our thoughts and prayers. St John the Baptist was a voice crying in the wilderness but enabled many to be prepared for Christ when he came. May our voice help others be prepared to celebrate the First Coming of Christ, the Light of the World and the lighter days too!

Fr. Peter Burns, Thornton – le- Fylde

Fourth Sunday of Advent (Yr B)

Alleluia, Alleluia!
I am the handmaid of the Lord;
Let what you have said be done to me.
Alleluia!

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke (1:26-38)

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, so highly favoured! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the most

High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David: he will rule over the house of Jacob forever and his reign will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I am a virgin?' 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you' the angel answered 'and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called the Son of God. Know this too; your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God.' 'I am the handmaid of the Lord,' said Mary 'let what you have said be done to me.' And the angel left her.

The Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ

“
**The answer
Christians give
to God is
always ‘yes’.**
” Pope Francis

Fourth Sunday of Advent

+++ HOMILY ++++++

**“Listen! You are to
conceive and bear a son”**



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Speaking during his homily in 2016 Pope Francis encourages the faithful to open their hearts to God and to say ‘yes’ to his message of salvation. The Pope asked those present at Mass to ask themselves the question whether they are men and women who respond to the Lord’s call or whether they look the other way to avoid answering.

He focused his homily on the chain of affirmative answers that run through the Scriptures. He spoke of Abraham who obeyed the Lord and left his land without knowing his destination and he recalled that “humanity of men and women” – even although many were elderly like Abraham or Moses – “who said ‘yes’ to hope offered by the Lord.”

The Pope also mentioned those who initially refused or hesitated – like Isaiah or Jeremiah – but ended up saying “yes” to the Lord. And reflecting on the Gospel Pope Francis said “it marks the end of ‘this chain’ while opening the door to yet another ‘yes’.”

“Mary’s ‘yes’” – he explained – “allows God not only to look over man and walk with him, but to become one of us and take on our flesh. “Mary’s ‘yes’ opens the door to Jesus’ ‘yes’: I have come to do Your will, this is the ‘yes’ that Jesus carries with him throughout his life, until the cross” he said.

And Pope Francis pointed out that Mary’s affirmative answer contains the whole history of salvation. “Today, he said, is a beautiful day in which to thank God for showing us that path, but also for thinking about our lives”. He said “every day each one of us is called to say ‘yes’ to God”. Think about how many times you may have chosen to pretend you hadn’t heard, persevere in always listening to the Lord’s voice. It is God’s ‘yes’ that creates and re-creates the world and man: “It is God’s ‘yes’ that sanctifies us and keeps us alive in Jesus Christ”.

Thank God for all of this and pray that the Lord gives us the grace to always say ‘yes’ to His call.
Pope Francis 2016



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Our Lady of the Sign

Our Lady of the Sign is among the most revered icons of the Mother of God Theotokos – God bearer. You will notice the upraised hands in prayer: “Orans” is typical of an Old Testament prayer position that was also seen in the catacombs second century onwards, on the walls or at the bottom of sacred vessels. The priest at the Eucharist prays like this today. Our Lady has the Saviour Emmanuel on her breast. This icon brings Hebrew Scriptures & New Testament together. It highlights Isaiah’s prophecy (Isaiah 7 : 14):

“Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a Sign; behold, a virgin shall conceive in the womb, and shall bring forth a son, and he shall be called Emmanuel”

It is the sign of the divine incarnation the manifestation of the God-man who receives his human form from the Virgin Mary, (no Mary no Jesus). This icon is a wonderful example of theology in line and colour and was produced for worship of the God who becomes man, a baby, for our sake. This fourth century icon

brings to all believers the great mystery of God’s overwhelming love for us.

In the icon Our Lady has the reverse colours of her son (ref. to the Pantocrato).

She has a red cloak = humanity with blue tunic = divinity, because she is the Mother of God. The halos remind us of God’s divine presence shining out of them. Mary has three stars = Virgin before, during and after the birth of Christ. Jesus wears a cloth of gold = philosopher king, God’s wisdom and power radiating from him, the scroll also reflects his teaching ministry both in his way of life and his words.

This icon will help us to prepare for the coming of our Saviour-Emmanuel each day. Advent is all about being ready for this birth in us and the celebration of the birth at Christmas. May we like Mary who answered “Yes” at the Annunciation bear Jesus by our faith and practical help to each one especially during lockdown.
Sr. Mary Stella, Monastery of Our Lady, Hyning

Christmas Day

**The shepherds
found Mary
and Joseph
and the baby**

Christmas Day

Alleluia, Alleluia!
**Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and peace to men who enjoy his
favour.**
Alleluia

A reading from the Holy Gospel
according to Luke (2: 15-20)

Now when the angels had gone from
them into heaven, the shepherds said
to one another: 'Let us go to Bethlehem
and see this thing that has happened
which the Lord has made known to us.'
So they hurried away and found Mary

and Joseph, and the baby lying in the
manger. When they saw the child they
repeated what they had been told
about him, and everyone who heard it
was astonished at what the shepherds
had to say. As for Mary she treasured
all these things and pondered them
in her heart. And the shepherds went
back glorifying and praising God for
all they had heard and seen; it was
exactly as they had been told.

The Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ

**"A Christmas without light is not
Christmas. Let there be light in
the soul, in the heart; let there be
forgiveness to others; let there be no
hostilities, which are dark. Let there
be the beautiful light of Jesus."**

— Pope Francis

**"We desire to be able to welcome Jesus at
Christmas-time, not in a cold manger of
our heart, but in a heart full of love and
humility, in a heart so pure, so immaculate,
so warm with love for one another."**

— St Teresa of Calcutta

**"Christmas doesn't rid
the world of evil... there
will still be sickness,
senseless hurt, broken
dreams, and cold lonely
seasons when love is
far away. Christmas
doesn't promise heaven
on earth....it promises
here on earth... God's
presence in our lives."**

— Ronald Rolheiser O.M.I.


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The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph (Yr B)

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

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke (2: 22-40)

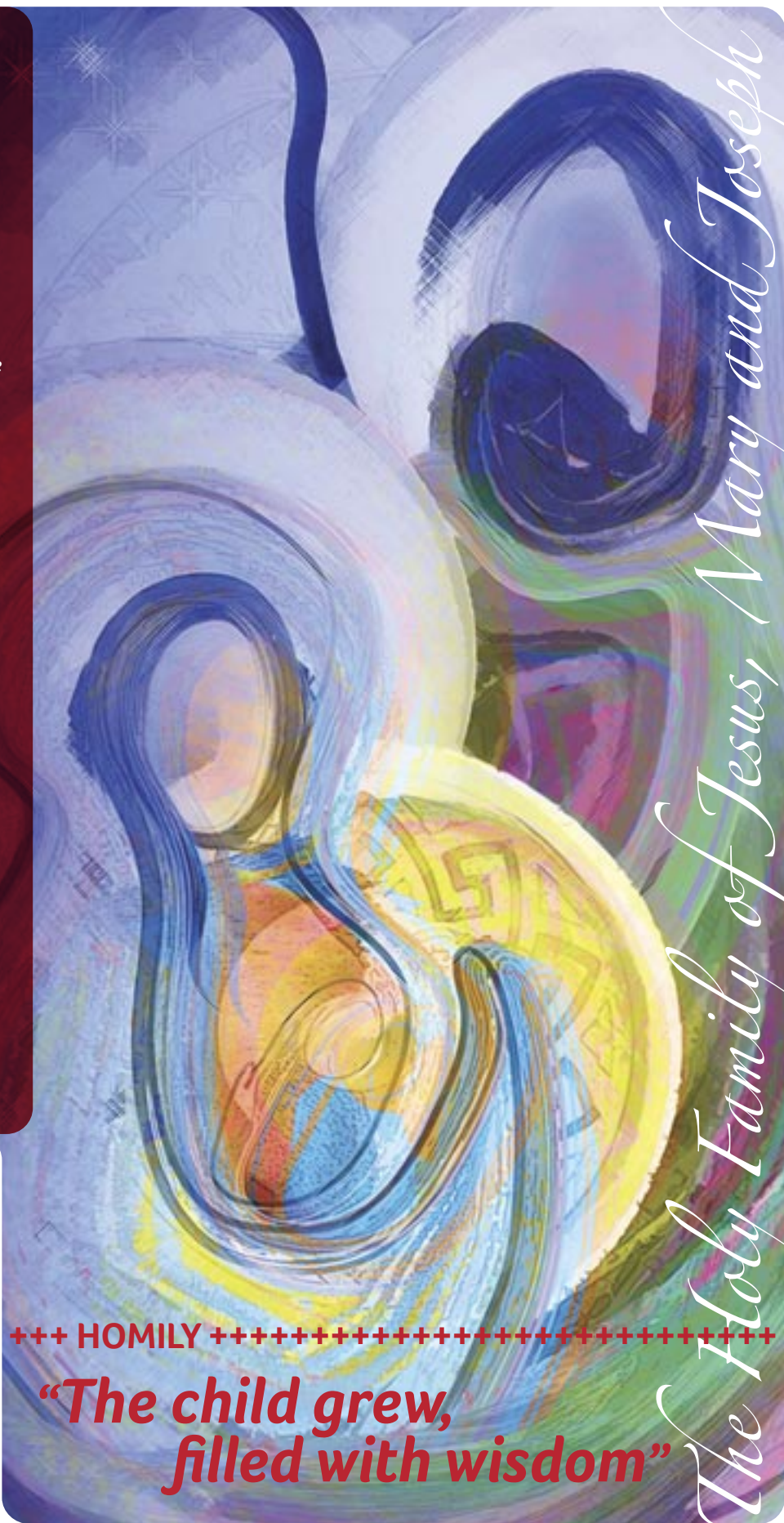
When the day came for them to be purified as laid down by the Law of Moses, the parents of Jesus took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord - observing what stands written in the law of the Lord: Every first born male must be consecrated to the Lord - and also to offer in sacrifice, in accordance with what is said in the Law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. Now in Jerusalem there was a man named Simeon. He was an upright and devout man; he looked forward to Israel's comforting and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had set eyes on the Christ of the Lord. Prompted by the spirit he came to the Temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the Law required, he took him into his arms and blessed God; and he said:

'Now, Master, you can let your servant go

in peace, just as you promised; because my eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared for all the nations to see, a light to enlighten the pagans and the glory of your people Israel.'

As the child's father and mother stood there wondering at the things that were being said about him, Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "You see this child: he is destined for the fall and for the rising of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is rejected - and a sword will pierce your own soul too - so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare." There was a prophetess also, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was well on in years. Her days of girlhood over, she had been married for seven years before becoming a widow. She was now eighty four years old and never left the temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayer. She came by just at that moment and began to praise God; and she spoke of the child to all who looked forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem. When they had done everything the Law of the Lord required, they went back to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. Meanwhile the child grew to maturity, and he was filled with wisdom; and God's favour was with him.

The Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ



As I write this reflection for the Feast of the Holy Family in December, the country is about to enter a second lockdown due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Our churches must be kept locked up apart from some time for private prayer or funerals. I thought in a moment of reverie - what if this had happened when Mary and Joseph turned up at the Temple to present their first-born to God as the Law of Moses prescribed? They would not have been able to get in! And Simeon, prompted by the Spirit or not, he could not have got in either! Perhaps Anna, hearing them banging on the door, would have let them in being as she lived there, even though they were not in the same 'bubble'. Would they, along with the Temple priests but excluding the baby Jesus, exceeded the 'rule of six'?

Looking back, as a priest, it has been extremely difficult and very painful to tell people there can be no Mass; you can't have more than six at your baby's

baptism; no First Holy Communion; no Confirmations; a handful at your wedding and thirty at loved ones' funerals. The effect of the Coronavirus on our physical Faith activity in our church buildings has certainly been a challenge, as it has in all other areas of our lives. Our encounter with Christ in the Sacraments has taken a knock over most of the past year and at times it has been very dark for all of us.

However, Christmas has just begun and just like Simeon, our eyes of Faith are beholding our salvation in the baby Jesus. We stand in wonder, like Mary and Joseph, waiting to be blessed by God for remaining steadfast in what his Will means for our own lives. The Holy Spirit, which prompted Simeon and Anna to rejoice in what they had seen, encourages us too to praise God for the revelation of his Son to us - the Light that shines in our darkness and gives us peace. May God grant us all a blessed and happy Christmas and hopeful New Year.

Fr Andrew Broster, Kirkham&Wesham



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Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God

Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God

Alleluia, 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.
Alleluia!

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke (2: 16-21)

The shepherds hurried away to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. When they saw the child they repeated what

they had been told about him, and everyone who heard it was astonished at what the shepherds had to say. As for Mary she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds went back glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen; it was exactly as they had been told. When the eighth day came and the child was to be circumcised, they gave him the name Jesus, the name the angel had given him before his conception.

The Gospel of the Lord
Praise be to you Lord Jesus Christ



+++ HOMILY ++++++

“They found Mary, Joseph and the baby...When the eighth day came, they gave him the name Jesus”

Had everyone around Mary known the facts at the time of Jesus’ conception, there’d have been a never-ending stream of well-wishers congratulating her on the immense privilege. Mother of God, goodness! What a rosy life lay ahead! - Honours, comfort and protection from ordinary life. Entitlement.

Not so. Mary’s first reaction was to put herself at the service of others; she went to help Elizabeth, and proclaimed “*he casts the mighty from their thrones*”. All the same, it must have been a sobering moment when Simeon told her to keep her feet on the ground and expect anguish: “*A sword will pierce your own soul, too*”.

Trouble there was: the journey to Bethlehem, the make-shift accommodation, the violence of Herod, the refugee existence in Egypt, the frightening, puzzling experience when Jesus, aged 12, stayed behind in the Temple.

Deep joys there were, but not the shielding a Mother of God might expect. Least of all when it came to her Son’s sufferings. To have to stand by and watch, and realise more fully that he is not just hers, her Son, but that he is to die for everyone and she must be there and offer him up! She had said to the angel Gabriel: “*Be it done to me according to your word*.”

So Our Blessed Lady knows what life can be like. She has inherited all of God’s children, to mother us. Because of her life on earth, we know she understands, she’s ‘*been there*’.

Some people reject Mary’s part in God’s care of us. They forget that the woman who gave human birth to the Person who is God the Son must therefore be Mother of God.

Have you heard of the ‘*Vulnerata, the Wounded Woman*?’ When English troops ransacked Cadiz in 1596, some of them found a statue of the Mother of God, seated, with the Child on her knee. They hacked at it, disfiguring Mary’s face

and arms; the Child was never found. The statue was ‘*adopted*’ by the British church-students in Valladolid, so that they could make up for the insult by honouring her; that continues today, 4 centuries on. The statue retains its injuries, so that we may see and know Mary’s vulnerability.

A few years ago, a group of abused women heard about the Vulnerata, and requested a copy of the statue. The Mother speaks to other women, the Vulnerata to vulnerable people.

Pray for us, O holy Mother of God, that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Canon Bob Horn, Preston

New School and Chapel in Carlisle

It has taken nearly 5 years to rebuild what was New School in Carlisle, devastated by the floods and Storm Desmond in December 2015. But in September 2020, the pupils filed into the new St John Henry Newman Catholic School at the start of a new era at this well-established place of learning in Carlisle.

Due to COVID restrictions, a formal opening ceremony had been postponed; however, in October, the Bishop Paul visited the school to bless the new School Chapel contained behind the large cross at the front of the building.

Much of the cost of the Chapel has had to be met by donations and fundraising – a

project coordinated by Council 60 of the Knights of St Columba.

Readers can help to raise funds by donating £30 or more to a “*Donate-a-Brick*” scheme. These personalised engraved bricks will be mounted within the school on a wall adjacent to the Chapel.

Details of the scheme are at: www.facebook.com/NewmanSchoolChapelFund and bricks can be ordered direct with KSC Member Mike March by phone or text on 07731 835 4545 or via pilgrimphotography@outlook.com

Tony Parrini

Bishop Paul Swarbrick at the foot of the Cross outside the School.

Blessing of the School.

Icons of St John Henry Newman were blessed and circulated to every classroom.



The Epiphany of the Lord

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

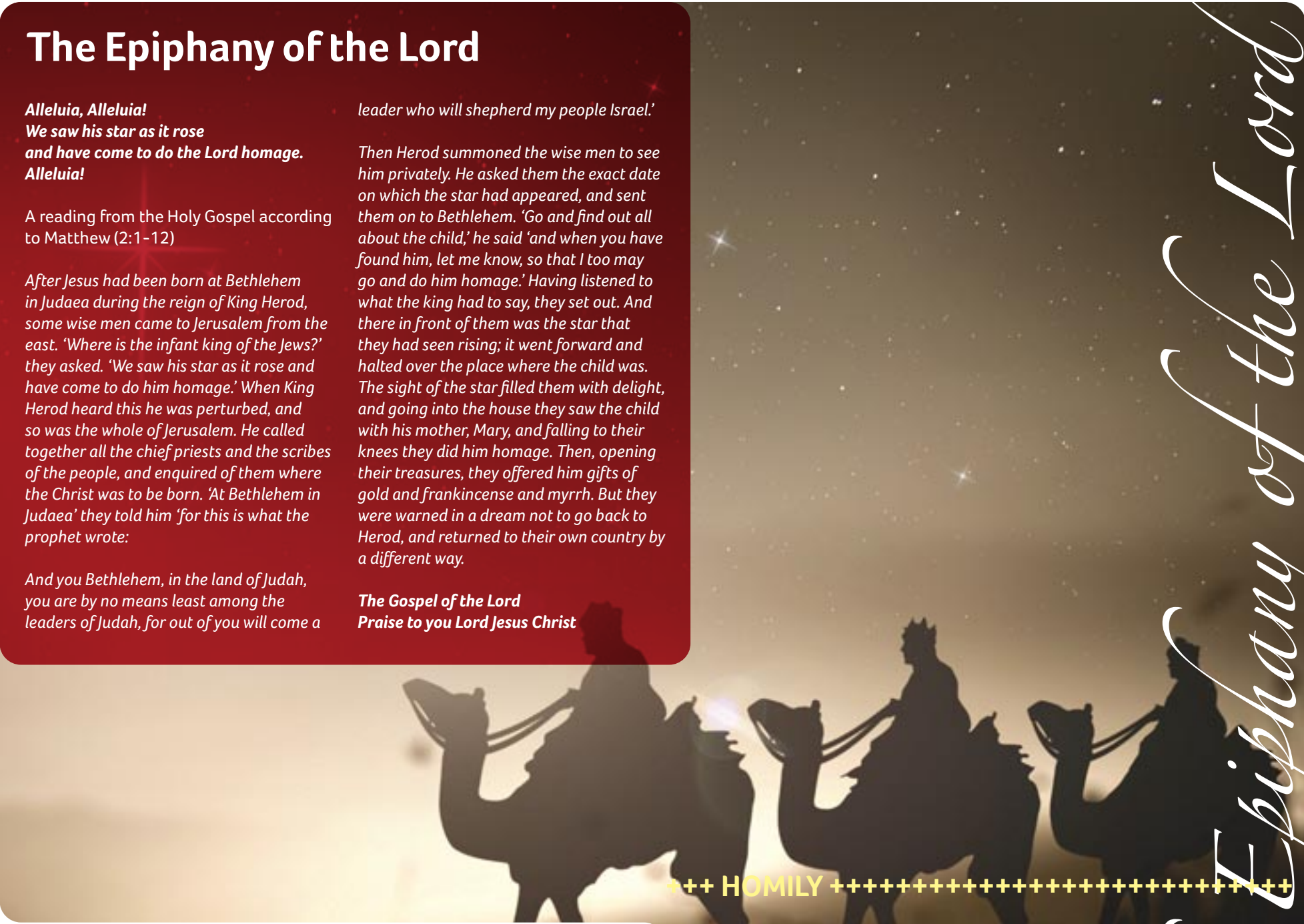
A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew (2:1-12)

After Jesus had been born at Bethlehem in Judaea during the reign of King Herod, some wise men came to Jerusalem from the east. 'Where is the infant king of the Jews?' they asked. 'We saw his star as it rose and have come to do him homage.' When King Herod heard this he was perturbed, and so was the whole of Jerusalem. He called together all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, and enquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 'At Bethlehem in Judaea' they told him 'for this is what the prophet wrote:

And you Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, you are by no means least among the leaders of Judah, for out of you will come a leader who will shepherd my people Israel.'

Then Herod summoned the wise men to see him privately. He asked them the exact date on which the star had appeared, and sent them on to Bethlehem. 'Go and find out all about the child,' he said 'and when you have found him, let me know, so that I too may go and do him homage.' Having listened to what the king had to say, they set out. And there in front of them was the star that they had seen rising; it went forward and halted over the place where the child was. The sight of the star filled them with delight, and going into the house they saw the child with his mother, Mary, and falling to their knees they did him homage. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. But they were warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, and returned to their own country by a different way.

The Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ



The Epiphany of the Lord

+++ HOMILY +++

"We saw his star and have come to do the king homage"

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At Epiphany it is fun to ask the children at Mass how many kings are there in the story of the birth of Jesus? Of course they all say three however it is something of a trick question as there are references to 7 kings in total, Jesus, the Infant King of the Jews, Caesar Augustus, Herod, King David and the three kings who came bearing gifts.

Why this seeming obsession with Kingship? The birth of Jesus sets in motion a conflict that runs throughout the Gospel of Luke - the Kingdom of Caesar is one imposed by military might, earthly power and the suppression of freedom. In contrast Jesus' Kingdom is one of gentleness and mercy that absolutely respects our freedom.

This Kingship of Jesus is the one that is revealed in the Epiphany and it is the Kingdom that we are called to embrace and proclaim to the whole world.

His Kingdom is one of sacrifice and love; hence the words on the Cross, Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews. His throne is not in some palace, he is enthroned upon the Cross revealing to the world that his Kingdom is not of this world but points to a different realm, the Heavenly Kingdom.

This child was born to die that we might have life. The gifts brought to the child by the kings point to this truth. Gold a symbol of kingship, Myrrh a symbol of his death, Frankincense symbolising his Priesthood. He is the eternal High Priest who leads us to his Father.

Luke's Gospel is a journey to Jerusalem and then in the Acts of the Apostles (attributed to Luke) - the journey concludes with Paul in Rome, before Caesar. It begins with the Census called by Caesar and it all ends with Martyrdom in Rome. But of course that is not the end - The church, founded on the successor of Peter and the Apostles is born to proclaim the Kingdom of the infant king of the Jews. A kingdom where gentleness prevails over cruelty, where sacrifice prevails over selfishness and where life prevails over death.

Two thousand years later Caesars kingdom has gone, the might of the Roman Empire has passed but the Church continues today and we continue to strive to be a light to the world and pray to the Lord "Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in Heaven." Amen.

Fr. Emmanuel Gribben, Barrow in Furness

Ashes to Ashes

by Julia Beacroft

Once again it's that time of the year when we scratch our heads and desperately try to think what we can buy our loved ones for Christmas. I don't know about you, but I find that not only does this seem to become more and more difficult, but I also struggle when asked what I too would like..!

Taken Aback

When I recently visited a glassworks and was thinking what lovely Christmas presents some of the objects there would make, I became aware of a lady standing near me who was in conversation with the glass-blower. It transpired that he was custom-making a paperweight for her. Interested in this, I whispered to my husband about what was happening, but as usual I must have been a bit loud because the lady in question turned around and looked at me. Feeling rather embarrassed at appearing so nosey, I immediately said, "Sorry, but I just overheard that you were having your paperweight made especially for you while you wait." With this, the lady smiled and came over to me. "It's going to go on my dressing table", she said. My dear friend has just recently died, and I've had some of her ashes put in to the paperweight." Now if ever there had been a moment when I could not only have offered her sympathy, but also the consolation of the Lord (*evangelized*), this was one of them! But I was so taken aback, what did I say instead? "Er...oh, that's lovely!"

Since then I've been doing some work on evangelization – an activity which sadly gets so much bad press – but in this broken world is so very necessary. Jesus told us to 'Go out and make disciples of all people' and to spread the Good News, so we have actually been given our apostolic mission, which of course, the first apostles initiated.

Seeds of Faith

So as well as trying to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ in my everyday encounters with others, I will also be trying to evangelize in the giving of my presents to friends and family this Christmas. I have just sent two shoeboxes to Europe for under privileged children, but this year I have also enclosed two children's crosses in my shoeboxes. In each of my Christmas gifts I intend to include a prayer card, because who knows what seed of faith and enlightenment this may just plant?

I'm not really sure about the notion of having ashes incorporated into an ornament, but I am one hundred percent sure about introducing others to the Lord and helping them to come to know him and love him.

Copyright ©2020 Julia Beacroft. All rights reserved. Julia Beacroft is an author, editor, workshop leader and presenter in Catholic faith formation. Her book 'Sanctifying the Spirit' is available to buy from AMAZON, www.waterstones.com or Book Depository. Her first children's book 'Monsieur Claude's Great French Adventure' is also out NOW! Follow Julia on Facebook & Twitter.



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Seafarers – The Invisible Workers

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about huge changes and challenges to those of us who live on land. But seafarers, who move everything from oil and vital medical supplies to food and computers around the world, have, arguably, faced an even tougher time.

“The main concern of many seafarers is their loved ones back at home and when they will be reunited with them,” said Ann Donnelly, Stella Maris (Apostleship of the Sea) port chaplain in Plymouth and Teignmouth.

“A great number of seafarers are now working beyond their original contract with little hope of being able to return home in the immediate future,” explained Ann. *“I was speaking with a Filipino cook who has now worked 15 months on a vessel. Although he is glad that his family are receiving his salary, he told me how tired he was and he just wanted to return home as soon as possible.”*

Like all Stella Maris port chaplains in the UK, Ann has not been allowed to go on board any vessels since the beginning of the pandemic. Instead she has had to conduct conversations with seafarers from the bottom of the gangway.

“This is not ideal, but the seafarers are pleased to chat with us and any requests they have, for example, for phone cards, top-ups, or medication from a pharmacy, can be arranged,” she said.

Some seafarers in Teignmouth have been able to leave their ship and relax for a few hours in a room in the port made available to them 24/7. Here they can have a much needed change of scenery and use free WiFi to contact their families back home.

Elsewhere, Peter Barrigan, Stella Maris port chaplain on the Tees, put out an appeal for rosaries, medals, statues, and holy water containers, as lots of the



Peter Barrigan,
Port Chaplain.

seafarers are Catholic. *“They appreciate having religious items with them as they sail the seas. Many of the statues we give end up going home with them either for their houses or into their local churches in India, the Philippines, Cape Verde,”* he said.

“They always tell us to thank the people who give the gifts, their kindness is greatly appreciated by the crews.”

We tell the crews that the gifts we give are in a small way a thank you for them bringing all the items we need to live, we often take for granted that without these seafarers our supermarkets would be empty.”

Steve Willows, a port chaplain in Immingham, Lincolnshire, has even been making rosaries with twine for seafarers, after watching a You Tube video explaining how to do it.

Ann admitted that it has been frustrating

for the Stella Maris port chaplains not to be able to carry out their ministry to seafarers in the usual way.

“There is only so much you can do to support seafarers through this challenging time.”

She thinks there is a lack of awareness among the general public about how important the work of the seafarer is during the pandemic. Without them we would have no PPE and no vital medicines. They have kept everything moving delivering cargo around the world. They really are the invisible workers.

“The majority of seafarers come from developing countries, such as the Philippines or India, and are paid very little, but work extremely hard and often in dangerous conditions. They send all their pay back to their families. The pandemic has made their job even more difficult and it has taken a toll on their mental health.” **Greg Watts**

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