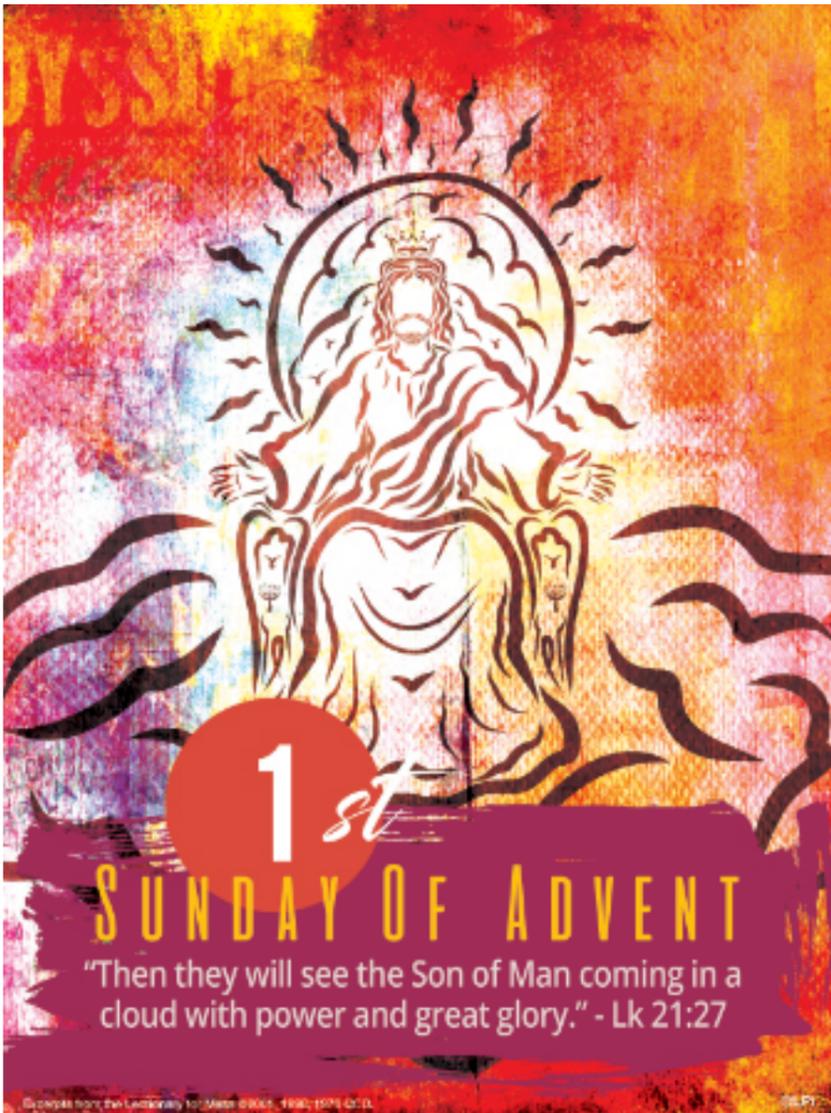




Reflecting on the Gospel



Staying awake can often be a challenge, especially when we are exhausted. Life's demands have a way of zapping every last bit of energy out of us. When we are tired it affects us not only physically, but psychologically and spiritually as well. All of our senses are dulled and diminished. We can overlook details, become disinterested, lethargic and apathetic, and detached. Getting sufficient

physical rest only helps so much. We need to be rejuvenated, refreshed, and reenergised in other ways. If we are psychologically exhausted, we need to understand what is draining our emotions and taxing our relationships. If we are spiritually tired, we need to find the necessary "shot in the arm" to put us back in touch with God. Unfortunately, exhaustion is seldom limited to just one part of who we

are. When we lack energy and zeal it is usually the case that everything suffers. We are not only affected physically, but psychologically and spiritually as well. In short, when we run out of gas the engine stops.

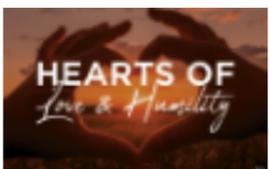
And yet, our Lord's directive is clear, "Be vigilant at all times." Even Jesus knew what "the anxieties of daily life" can do to us. One day pours into another and time quickly flies by. Any one of

us can take a moment and reflect on how many wonderful, creative opportunities we miss because there is always so much "stuff" to do and so little time to do it. Usually these are missed moments of love, and if we are missing love encounters we are also missing God. Sleepwalking through life, we check the boxes next to our list of "must and have to dos" and justify it all by convincing ourselves that tomorrow is another day and there'll be more time. It may surprise us, but tomorrow is here, and time is running out. While we may like to believe that we have an "eternity" of time to do all those things that require the focus, energy, and desire we do not currently have, we don't. We're on a limited ride and time is short.

Jesus is also clear on another point. "That day [will] catch you by surprise like a trap." If we are going to be judged on love and so easily justify not having all that much time to do so, then it seems we must shift focus a bit. St. Teresa of Calcutta tells us, "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, a heart so pure, so immaculate, so warm with love for one another." Getting to this place doesn't "just happen." It requires vigilance and discipline both with a knowledge of what is really of importance and what really needs to be the focus of our energy and time. Pray, starting now and not tomorrow, that we can stay alert, be strengthened in our faith, and prepared for whatever will come. Don't miss another opportunity to love.

Everyday Stewardship

Recognise God in your everyday moments



Where do you fall in the "Christmas-songs-in-November" debate — do you like them, tolerate them, or outright hate them? There's no theological problem with Christmas songs in November outside of worship, even if it's not everyone's cup of

tea. But there is a problem with getting so caught up in the baggage of the season — the trimmings, the gifts, the celebrations, all of which are marvellous in their own way — that you forget to prepare the manger.

Every good Catholic knows that Lent is a penitential season. It's hard to miss that point — Lent doesn't even have any fun songs you can groove to on

the radio. We are pretty good at recognising that Lent calls us to examine ourselves. To deny ourselves. To give of ourselves. And most of all, Lent calls us to prepare, as a good steward does, for the return of our master.

It's harder for us to remember that with Advent, but Advent is just as much of an opportunity for penance, preparation, and reconciliation to God — and just as much reason, too. The very name of the season — "advent" — encourages

us to focus on what is coming, not what is already here. Be on guard, the readings tell us today, "so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and (the coming of the Lord) catch you unexpectedly, like a trap."

So let us not forget — our master's advent is upon us. And let us ask ourselves: how can we prepare the manger?

Parish Mission Statement

Last week we launched the draft Parish Mission Statement and explained how it was the fruit of six weeks of prayer by the Parish Pastoral Council.

This week, the first Sunday of Advent we are inviting all parishioners to take part in a consultation process by committing to do two things. First, by committing to pray 10-15 minutes during Advent about the Mission Statement; second, by committing to share on one of the different listening exercises.

On the right, we've prepared a simple guide to help you pray with the Mission Statement. As you read and pray, ask yourself, is this the sort of parish I want to belong to? Does this statement reflect my values and my priorities for the parish? What would the parish look like if it lived out fully this statement? What would change and how would I change with it?

This Mission Statement needs to be for the whole parish, not just the PPC. That's why your feedback is important. During Advent there'll be different opportunities for you to share the fruits of your prayer.

On the parish website there is a feedback form you can fill in, anonymously if you wish.

Members of the PPC will be visiting different prayer and action groups in the next few weeks to listen to

I find 10 mins where I can be alone to pray undisturbed.

I might repeat these words a few times so I can really hear Jesus speaking to me.

I settle myself down... become still ... come to quiet before God. I let God love me as I am, right now ... I listen as Jesus speaks these words to me:

With God, I remember all the different communities of our parish: the people and places. I sit and think about our Parish Mission statement below. I notice what I like about it ... what I don't like about it ... how it speaks personally to me of my ways of sharing in our parish Mission in my daily life ... or what might be missing ...

'I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last.' [Jn 15:16]

Draft Parish Mission Statement

Our Lady of Mercy Parish is formed of the Catholic communities of St Cecilia's and St Patrick's Church, St Mary's Church, the Sisters of Mercy, St Mary's RC Primary School, St Anthony's Girls Catholic Academy, St Aidan's Catholic Academy and the Sunderland University Catholic Chaplaincy.

Jesus Christ unites and inspires us through his Word and the sacraments to share the good news with the people of Sunderland. Together with others working for the common good, we welcome everyone in a spirit of friendship and service so that all people may know

I talk with the Lord about whatever is on my heart from this time of prayer. I

end my prayer with a sign of the cross.

their feedback.

After each Mass on Fourth Sunday of Advent, (18/19 December) we're inviting you to join us for a cup of tea and a mince pie and a chance to share your feedback.

Finally, you're welcome

to speak to any member of the PPC or one of the clergy at any time.

As part of your preparation for the birth of Jesus this year, please spend time asking God what his plans for his parish are.

Live the Liturgy



Any human success requires vigilance. Opportunities and powerful moments of encounter can easily be missed when we are not attentive. It is all too easy today to live distracted and preoccupied lives. There is so much vying for our attention that it can be hard to be selective and really focus. Caught up in this whirlwind of busyness and anxiety, we become tired and almost sleepwalk through life. Advent is a time to selectively focus. These beautiful four short weeks are a time to

look backward and forward and be attentive to the human journey and God's revelation. From the beginning of time, God has been seeking our attention. He constantly reminds us of the justice he desires to bring and the promise of his abiding unconditional love. Understanding and growing in these truths requires alertness so that we can be strengthened in our faith and prepared for whatever will come.



First Reading

I will raise up for David a just shoot; he shall do what is right and just in the land. (Jer 33:15)

Psalm:

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. (Ps 24)

Second Reading:

Strengthen your hearts, to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones. (1 Thes 3:13)

Gospel Acclamation

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

Gospel:

Stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand. (Lk 21:28)

This Week

28 FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT (C)

Jer 33:14-16/1 Thes 3:12-4:2/Ps 25:4-5, 8-9, 10, 14 [1b]/Lk 21:25-28, 34-36
10:30 **Mass** St Mary's In Thanksgiving (Candelon Family)
17:00 **Mass** St Mary's People of the Parish

29 Monday

Is 2:1-5/Ps 122:1-2, 3-4b, 4cd-5, 6-7, 8-9/Mt 8:5-11
08:00 **Breakfast with God** St Mary's
12:05 **Mass** St Mary's Pat Rutter (RIP)
18:30 **Alpha** St Mary's Catholic Centre
20:00 **Prayer Group** St Cecilia's Hall

30 St Andrew

Rom 10:9-18/Ps 19:8, 9, 10, 11 [10]/Mt 4:18-22
12:05 **Mass** St Mary's Renée White (RIP)
12:45 **Over 60s** St Mary's Catholic Centre
16:00 **Confirmation Class** St Mary's Catholic Centre

1 Wednesday

Is 25:6-10a/Ps 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6 [6cd]/Mt 15:29-37
11:00 **Upper Room** Open from 11am
12:05 **Mass** St Mary's Ints of Hazel & Glen Daroczy

2 Thursday

Is 26:1-6/Ps 118:1 and 8-9, 19-21, 25-27a [26a]/Mt 7:21, 24-27
10:00 **Confessions** St Cecilia's
10:30 **Open House** St Mary's Catholic Centre
10:30 **Mass** St Cecilia's Agnes & James Mullen (RIP)
12:05 **Mass** St Mary's Ints of Bridget & Tom Larkin

3 Friday

St Francis Xavier

Is 29:17-24/Ps 27:1, 4, 13-14 [1a]/Mt 9:27-31
12:05 **Mass** St Mary's Alice Agnes Cheal (RIP)

4 Saturday

Is 30:19-21, 23-26/Ps 147:1-2, 3-4, 5-6 [cf. Is 30:18d]/Mt 9:35-10:1, 5a, 6-8
10:15 **Confessions** St Mary's
11:00 **Mass** St Mary's Steve Daroczy (RIP)
11:45 **Confessions** St Mary's
12:00 **RCIA** St Mary's Catholic Centre
18:00 **Vigil Mass** St Cecilia's Pat Smith (RIP)

5 SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT (C)

Bar 5:1-9/Ps 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6 [3]/Phil 1:4-6, 8-11/Lk 3:1-6
10:30 **Mass** St Mary's Charles Rattton (RIP)
17:00 **Mass** St Mary's Liz Rodwell (RIP)

Announcements

Pilgrimage to Fatima

Bishop Séamus is leading a pilgrimage to Fatima next July. 14 nights half-board and flights from Manchester is £1,100. Full details are available at the back of the church.

There will be a special meeting on Friday, 3 December in the church hall after the 1205 Mass. If you're interested in going and would like to learn more please come along.

Children's Liturgy needs more helpers

Can you help with children's liturgy on Sunday mornings? We're limited to 8 children for every adult and we're almost at our capacity. We're not asking for volunteers because Jesus never did: we're asking for ministers who can give their time and their talents so that God's children can hear his word and grow in his love. You'll need to do a safe-

guarding check, but we'll help you with that. Can this be your Christmas gift to Jesus this year?

Entry into the Catechumenate

This Sunday at the 10.30 Mass we're having a special ceremony to welcome formally our brothers and sisters who started the journey of faith in September.

The Catholic Church recognises valid baptism in any Christian Church. Therefore, Christians who wish to be received into the Catholic Church do not need to be baptised. We formally welcome them, encourage them on their journey and support them with our prayers. Reception into the Catholic Church involves them making a formal profession of faith and receiving the sacraments of confirmation and eucharist.

Adults who have not been baptised are first wel-

comed into the order of catechumens. A catechumen is a person who has declared publicly their desire to receive baptism. At the Mass in which they make their declaration they receive several blessings and the whole community prays for them. For them to become Catholic they are first baptised and then celebrate the sacraments of confirmation and eucharist.

Sometimes we, who were born into the faith, can take it for granted. Our brothers' and sisters' desire to believe what we believe, to celebrate what we celebrate and to join us at the altar to celebrate the eucharist reminds us. May God fulfil their desire and, as we pray for them, increase in us the love we have for our faith.



Bernadette, Jean Maureen, Christopher, Paula, Peter, Emilia, Jean, Teresa, Cath and Norman, the sick sisters at Oaklea, David, Marion, Dave, Neil, Paul, Andrew, Jacob, Stella, David, Alisa,



Thomas Russell, Matt Jackson, Mary Cooke, the Faithful Departed

Let us know if you would like a name added to our prayer list.

Why do we do that?



Question: How are the feasts of the baptism of Jesus and the account of the wedding feast of Cana related to the Epiphany celebration?

Answer: The Epiphany season focuses on revealing Jesus to the world. Following the Christmas

celebration, the liturgical year lays out a series of manifestation points in which Jesus is made publicly known. From its very beginning, the Christian community highlighted three events in the life of Jesus. These are the Epiphany, the Baptism of the Lord and the wedding feast at Cana.

The Epiphany discloses Jesus to the world of the Gentiles, represented by the magi from the East. The ac-

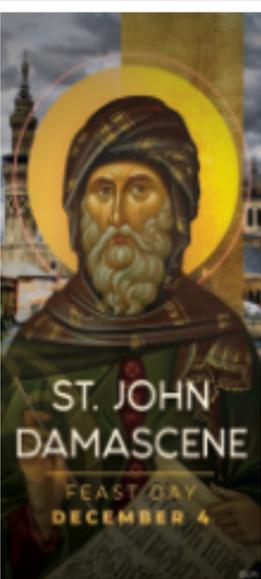
Questions for the Week

First Reading: The prophet Jeremiah speaks of God's promise to fulfil the covenant made with King David, four hundred years earlier in 1000 B.C. As we enter into the season of Advent, how might you show your fidelity to God?
Second Reading: Paul's prayer for the believers in Thessalonica is to abound in love and strength for one another in preparation for

the return of Christ. How do you think communities of faith can support each other during the Advent season?
Gospel: In Jesus teaching the disciples about the coming end times and judgement day, he warns them not to be too distracted by the stresses and anxieties of daily life. How do you keep focused on your spiritual life amongst the many daily challenges we face?

counts of Jesus' baptism reveal his identity and mission, along with exposing him to those to whom he was sent to minister. The miracle of turning water to wine at the wedding feast of Cana, unique to John's Gospel, is the first public sign that Jesus performs, thus manifesting his public identity and his powers.

Today in the Roman Church, these are usually celebrated on three successive Sundays: Epiphany, the Baptism of the Lord which is usually the next Sunday, and the wedding feast of Cana, which is proclaimed on the 2nd Sunday of Ordinary Time in lectionary year C. These feasts connect around the concept of epiphany, public manifestation of Jesus to the world. They help us get to know more intimately who Jesus is and what he is about. Spend some time delving more deeply into your understanding of who Jesus is. Continue to cultivate these "epiphany" moments in your life.



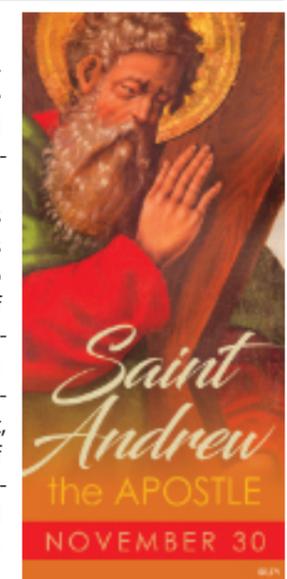
Saint of the Week

St. John Damascene | Feast Day December 4

St. John Damascene (676 - 749) was the son of the chief of the revenue department in the city of Damascus. Through his father, he received a classical and theological education and attempted to follow in his footsteps by serving in a government position. However, the Lord was calling him to a different life, and a few years later he resigned from his position and went to the Monastery of St.

Sabas, where he wrote books and composed hymns along with his adopted brother, Cosmas.

St. John Damascene is best known for his writings against the iconoclasts, who opposed the veneration of images; his treatise, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, a summary of the Greek Fathers; and his work as a poet, one of the two greatest of the Eastern Church. His devotion to the Blessed Mother and his sermons on her feasts are well known.



Flock Notes

O come, O come, Emmanuel! I like Advent. It's my favourite time of the church year. At the risk of being controversial, Lent is too long and all that penance becomes tiresome after a while. Easter, likewise, wears thin with all those alleluias for seven weeks. Christmastide, while lovely, never quite seems to live up to the hype and Ordinary Time is just... ordinary.

Advent, however, I love. I love the music, the liturgies, the readings from scripture. I love the hope and expectation, the waiting, the anticipation. Advent thrusts us back into our ancient past as wait with joyful expectation with the prophet Isaiah for the coming of the Messiah. It also takes us back 2,000 years to that stable in Bethlehem as we wait for the birth of a baby. Advent takes us into the future and the coming of Christ in glory at the end of time when he will judge the living and the dead.

Advent is all about recognising Jesus Christ, not just in

the prophecies of the past, or at his final coming in glory, but also learning to recognise him when he comes to us each and every day. Christ comes to us in so many ways, but how often do we recognise him? He comes to us in the poor, the suffering, the homeless and the hungry. He comes to us in the Eucharist, when we are gathered for Mass. He comes to us in our prayers and when we read the scriptures. He also comes to us in all those little acts of love and sacrifice we offer each day.

In a sense, Advent is about the three comings of Christ: his coming in the past as the promised Messiah; his coming in majesty and glory in at the end of time; and his coming to us each and every day in the big and small events of our life and the people with whom we share it. I think if we ever hope to recognise Jesus in that baby freezing in a manger in Bethlehem, or even when he comes on the clouds at the end of time to judge the living and the dead, then Advent is the time to learn to recognise him coming to us every day.



Our Lady of Mercy Parish •

27 Bridge Street, Sunderland, SR1 1TQ • (0191) 567 5354 • sunderland.ourladyofmercy@rcdhn.org.uk www.sunderlandcatholic.com

St Mary's Church • 27 Bridge Street • Sunderland • SR1 1TQ •

St Cecilia's Church • Ryhope Road • Sunderland • SR2 7TG

Fr Christopher Hancock MHM JCD, Parish Priest • christopher@sunderlandcatholic.com

Fr Emmanuel Nuh Mbeh MHM, Assistant Priest • emmanuel.mbeh@diocesehn.org.uk

Fr Philip Amek Adede MHM, Assistant Priest • philip.adede@diocesehn.org.uk

Rev Eddy Barker, Parish Deacon

Canon Alexander Barrass, Priest in Residence

