



parish newsletter

27 November 2022 | First Sunday of Advent (A)

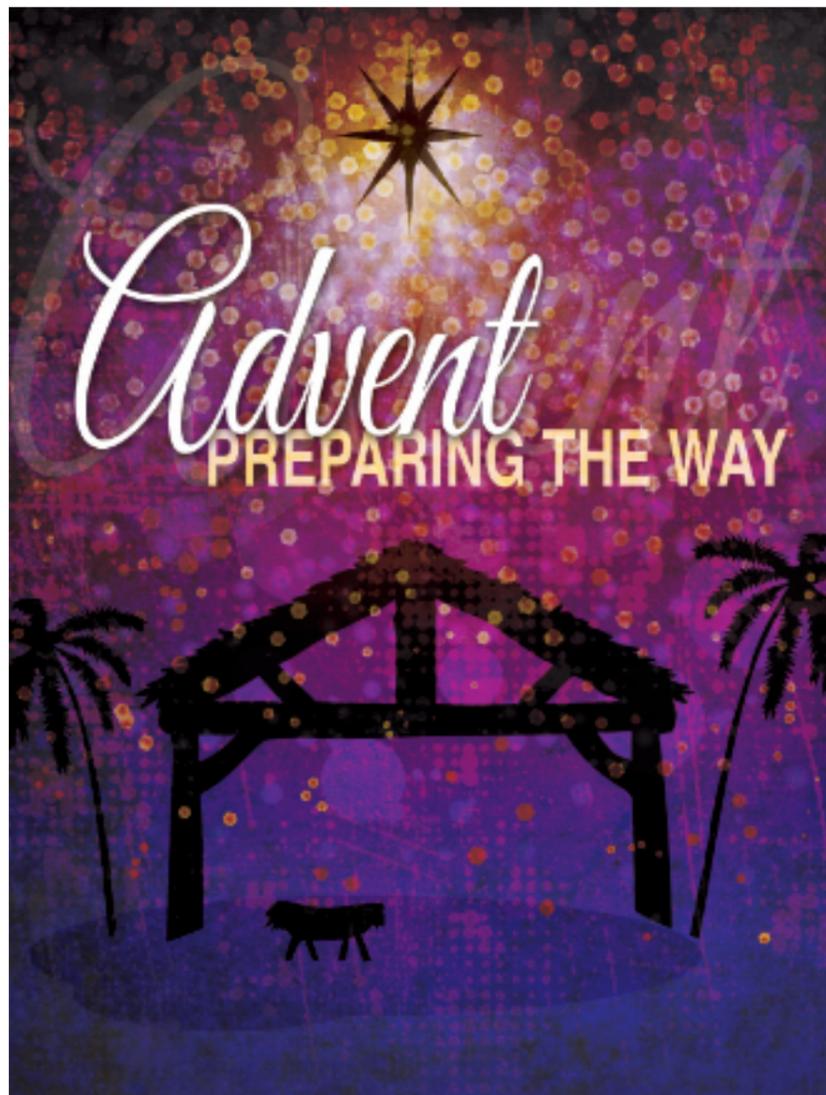
Stay Awake!

We can embrace and relish each moment of our lives as a sacred sacrament or nonchalantly and robotically attend to what life presents. We have our feet in two worlds. One is holy and sacred, and the other is profane and secular. Which one has the greater claim on us? To what do we devote most of our energy? We can easily be consumed with the particular demands and essentials of daily life: family, work, obligations, and the like, that we don't really notice anything more than what is right before us. We become masters at "doing" and neglect our need to "save."

While certain things require our daily attention, we cannot become so consumed with them that we fail to see the larger picture of what is

coming. For the Christian, Advent is the time to pause, reflect, and savour. It is a time to see life as a sacrament of the moment and not just an investment in secular interests, pleasures, and personal obligations. It is easy to get distracted, lazy, preoccupied, and tired. Apathy can quickly wreak havoc on the most dedicated of souls. Whatever we can do this Advent season to be more attentive, focused, alert, and watchful will serve us well. It will make us eager and well-prepared to meet our Lord when he comes. It is for certain that he will come.

Who made me? What is my purpose? What will happen to me when I die? These are pivotal questions that, in life's busyness, we hardly find time to ask and answer. They define who we are, and the answers we provide serve as guideposts and anchors in the seas of our lives. Advent is the perfect time to make friends with our souls. It is a time to perk ourselves up, open our eyes, ears, and hearts and seek God's presence in the simple moments of our lives. God is with us. Ask God to grant you a deeper



appreciation for His presence and the gift of attentiveness.

Everyday Stewardship

Being Surprised by Christ

Some people hate surprise parties. There are those who are uncomfortable with a last-minute vacation or even an unexpected travel upgrade. If it wasn't part of the plan, it's a cause for consternation.

There is a temptation to view these folks as curmudgeonly — sticks in the mud, obsessed with predictability. But I think if we're being honest, there's a little bit of the surprise-averse in all of us.

Deep within the very heart of the element of sur-

prise is a kernel of shock. And shock, in the moment, can feel similar to trauma. If we reflect on the most traumatic occurrences of our lives — a loss, an accident, a calamity — it is likely that we will say this: "It was the shock more than anything that got to me." Grief or fear, those feelings were overwhelming as well, but they came later. In the first moment, all we knew was we were going about our lives on one path until we were thrust on a different one and then the whole future changed.

This is the natural rhythm

of our life here on earth. We never know what is coming — which is to say, in a beautiful way, we always know what is coming. More importantly, we know Who is coming.

Like the early riser who sets the "pre-alarm" (the one on which he knows he's going to hit snooze just to take the edge off the disappointment of waking up), we are always being given a heads-up in Scripture. From the earliest prophecies of the Messiah to the very last words of Revelations, God has communicated to His stewards: You know the time. The time is now. We are called to constant vigilance, perpetual renewal, steadfast accountability.

In the end, the coming of Christ may be the only event in history that was a surprise, but not a shock — and so it will only be beautiful, even for those who hate surprise parties.

— Tracy Earl Welliver, MTS



Living the Paschal Mystery

Many of us during the weeks of December prepare for the coming of guests into our homes at Christmastime: we clean, hang decorations, bake goodies, buy gifts, prepare meals. What we can easily miss is that these preparations are our way of "coming" to our guests. Our very preparations are a kind of pres-

ence to, attentiveness to, our guests even long before they arrive on our doorstep. The care with which we prepare for Christmas celebrations is indicative of the care we have for our family and guests and our desire to be truly present to them. It is also practice in how we "stay awake" for God's comings to us and how we

Live the Liturgy

Whether it is the surgeon performing an operation or the pilot directing a flight, one expects them to be alert. When we entrust our lives to someone, we presume that they will attend to them with the utmost care and vigilance. If we have this expectation of others, why would we not have it of ourselves? Our lives are precious vessels on an eternal journey. We can only stay afloat and on the course because of God's love and mercy. It is easy to get distracted, lazy, preoccupied,

and tired. Apathy can wreak havoc on the most dedicated of souls. God's word transforms all that it touches, even a lukewarm heart. Let us seek God's grace this Advent season so that we can walk more fully in His light. Then, finding ourselves more attentive, focused, alert, and watchful, we will be eager and well prepared to meet our Lord when He comes. Why would we not want to be ready, awake, and watchful for the One we have waited for so long?

Gospel Reflection

A few days ago, my iPhone gave me a weekly message: "Last week, your total screen time was down 17%." I thought, good for me! But the message continued: "You averaged 5 hours and 23 minutes of screen time." Yikes!

Where do we place our attention? The Prophet Isaiah

says, "For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." God wants us to be His learners, people who grow through a steady stream of divine instruction. But if you're like me, you spend way too much time at the feet of the wrong teachers.

prepare ourselves to come to God. Attentiveness is an essential ingredient of presence. This is no less true of our discerning God's Presence in our midst than it is of anticipating the presence of family and friends.

In this gospel for the First Sunday of Advent, Jesus admonishes us to "stay awake." While he is directly speaking to the future event of the coming of the Son of Man (actually, he himself in all his glory) at the end of time, we can also understand staying awake as related to present events. We know that many people recorded in the gospels could not accept who Jesus was, could not see him for the divine Person he was, in spite of all the wonders he performed, all the incredible teachings he presented, all the invitations to embrace something greater that he represented. These people were not awake at all to the signs of divine Presence.

"As it was in the days... so it will be"—with these words Jesus points to patterns in human conduct. Humans have been both unfaithful and faithful to God's ways; have not paid attention, have paid attention to God's instructions; have not been awake, have stayed awake to God's comings. The people in the days of Noah did not know that the flood was coming; Jesus' hearers did not know when the Son of Man would come. We, however, do know that Jesus has come, has taught us the way of faithfulness, has brought us salvation. We need only to "stay

awake." Advent is about our coming to God. Our staying awake is a matter of preparing well for the divine Guest who dwells in our hearts always.

We largely remain oblivious to the deeper movement within us of the unfolding of time, unaware that in the midst of daily, mundane activities—like eating, drinking, marrying, grinding at the mill, etc. (see gospel)—God's work of salvation is drawing nearer (see second reading). Thus, time is not a "container" of mundane events, but is advancing toward something new—Christ's definitive coming and the fullness of salvation.

Our belief in Christ's Presence compels us to "stay awake" by conforming our lives now to the ways of God. It is meeting God on "the mountain of the Lord" that brings us to faithfulness. Staying awake, vigilance, is about faithfulness. It is about coming to the Lord, welcoming him into our hearts, encountering his instructions to us. All of this unfolds in the ordinary circumstances of our daily living as we welcome not only our family members but also the poor and needy into our Christmas preparations, as we extend our love and care for our family and friends to those who are alone and without family, as we root out whatever robs us of the kind of serenity and silence that enable us to prepare for Christ's coming. Yes, Gospel living is a matter of staying awake in order that we may come to God.



Congratulations and welcome to everyone who entered the Order of Catechumens this weekend!



First Reading:

They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again. (Is 2:4)

Psalm:

I rejoiced when I heard them say: 'Let us go to God's house.' (Ps 121)

Second Reading:

It is the hour now for you to awake from sleep. For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed; the night is advanced, the day is at hand. (Rom 13:11-12)

Gospel Acclamation:

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

Gospel:

"Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come." (Mt 24:42)

27 FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT (A)

8.00 Morning Prayer Mercy Chapel
 9.00 MASS Convent Ints of Sr M Assumpta
 10.30 MASS St Mary's Charlie 7 Jimmy Dickinson (RIP)
 5.00 MASS St Mary's People of the Parish
 6.30 Parish Pastoral Council Upper Room

28 Monday

8.00 Morning Prayer Mercy Chapel
 9.00 Arise Mercy Chapel
 12.05 MASS St Mary's Special Intention
 12.45 Chaplet of Divine Mercy St Mary's
 17.15 Evening Prayer Mercy Chapel
 6.30 Catholicism St Mary's Catholic Centre

29 Tuesday

8.00 Morning Prayer Mercy Chapel
 12.05 MASS St Mary's Billy Close (RIP)
 1.00 Over 60s St Mary's Catholic Centre
 4.30 Chaplaincy Tuesdays Upper Room

30 Wednesday Saint Andrew, Apostle

8.00 Morning Prayer Mercy Chapel
 12.05 MASS St Mary's Thomas Hourigan (RIP) & family
 5.15 Evening Prayer Mercy Chapel
 6.30 RCIA Upper Room

1 Thursday

8.00 Morning Prayer Mercy Chapel
 10.00 Open House St Mary's Catholic Centre
 10.15 Confessions St Cecilia's
 10.30 MASS St Cecilia's Florence Davies (RIP)
 12.05 MASS St Mary's Ellen & John O'Neill (RIP)
 5.00 Restore Mercy Chapel

2 Friday

8.00 Morning Prayer Mercy Chapel
 12.05 MASS St Mary's Tony & Sal Schofield (RIP)
 12.45 Holy Rosary St Mary's
 5.15 Evening Prayer Mercy Chapel

3 Saturday

Saint Francis Xavier, Priest

8.00 Morning Prayer Mercy Chapel
 10.30 Confessions St Mary's
 11.00 MASS St Mary's Alice Agnes Cheal (RIP)
 11.45 Confessions St Mary's
 6.00 VIGIL MASS St Cecilia's Helen Witte (RIP)

4 SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT (A)

8.00 Morning Prayer Mercy Chapel
 9.00 MASS Convent Ints of Clare Barrett
 10.30 MASS St Mary's Jean Rowe
 5.00 MASS St Mary's People of the Parish



Bernadette, Jean Maureen, Christopher, Paula, Peter, Emilia, Jean, Teresa, Cath, the sick sisters at Oaklea, David, Marion, Dave, Neil, Paul, Andrew, Jacob, Stella, David, Alisa, Susan, Mary, Jack, Richard, Margaret, Moira, Gerry, Nick, Maur- een, Stella, Rose, Keith, Kelly, Kitty and Terry



Dominic English, Miriam Rogers, Florence Isabella Davis, Alan & Maureen

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

Announcements

Advent & Christmas 2022

Make sure you pick up a Christmas Card from the parish with your copy of the newsletter this week. In addition to the Christmas Mass times, you can see details of all the activities we're putting on in addition to our usual busy parish program.

SORT Code: 40-34-18
 ACC No: 84456955

Catholicism

Bishop Robert Barron's acclaimed series on the Catholic faith is on Monday at 6.30pm in St Mary's Hall. Filmed all over the world, the series looks at beauty of our faith.

Bank Details & Offerings

So few of us carry cash any more, so do you want to make your offering by direct debit? Please use the reference 'Offering' so we know where to account for it. Our bank details are:
 Name: DHN Sunderland Our Lady of Mercy

Mass for the Deceased of the Parish

Thank-you everyone in the Bereavement Ministry and at St Cecilia's for organising such a beautiful Mass for our deceased parishioners last Thursday.

Gift Aid

Thanks to the generosity of our 77 GiftAid parishioners who gave £34,270 last financial year, we were able to claim from HMRC £8,567.52. There are letters at the back of the church from the diocese for all GiftAiders detailing your contributions.

GiftAid is free money for the parish! All you have to do is be a taxpayer and register with the parish. We can then claim back 20% extra on top of your offering, at no cost to yourself. There are forms at the back of the church to fill in and return. Make your contributions to the parish go even further in 2023!

Questions for the Week

First Reading: The prophet Isaiah foresaw a time when all nations would unite in peace over their common belief and worship of Israel's God. What do you think a world totally at

peace looks like?

Second Reading: Paul taught the believers in Rome that salvation and the end of time were closely connected. Thus,

he encouraged avoiding immoral behaviour such as drunkenness, promiscuity, envy, or jealousy. What motivates you to live a moral life?

Gospel: Jesus taught his disciples that no one knows

when the Son of Man will return to earth, so "be prepared" at all times. As we begin the season of Advent, how might you be better prepared for welcoming Jesus into your life?

Why do we do that?



Question: The Church teaches that, through our baptism, we are made priest, prophet, and king like Christ. What does it mean for us to be prophets in the world today?

Answer: We are indeed

sharers in the threefold mission of Christ. We live our "kingship" when we serve others in justice, work for the common good in society, and overcome sin in our own lives. Our "priestly" mission is lived when we unite our lives to Christ's sacrifice on the cross, offering them up as a gift of love. We are also called to be prophets. Our lives may not look like Isaiah and Jeremiah of old — and perhaps desert living and locust eating like St. John the Baptist might feel out of reach — but this

doesn't nullify our invitation and obligation.

As baptised Christians, we have accepted the Gospel in faith. We're also called to proclaim the Gospel as well. This may mean by giving Christ-centred advice to another person or defending truth when it's threatened. It also means living our faith in deeds.

St. John Paul II writes that we are "called to allow the newness and the power of the Gospel to shine out every day in [our] family and social

life" (On the Lay Members of Christ's Faithful, 14). A prophet points to a higher truth beyond himself or herself. We live prophetically when we treat others as Christ treated people and when we arrange our schedule to prioritise those to whom we have the greatest obligation, including our families, as well as the poor and vulnerable around us. We live prophetically when we think critically about the culture around us and we allow our faith to inform our public life.

Saint of the Week

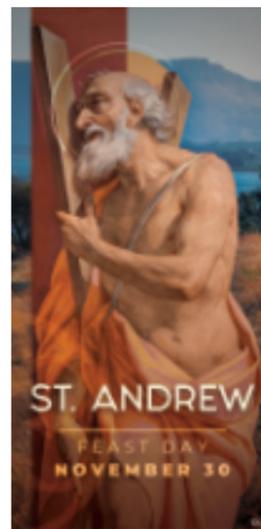
Saint Andrew was a fisherman in Galilee, along with his brother, Peter, when they were called by Jesus to leave their boat and become fishers of men. John's Gospel also places him as a follower of John the Baptist before he came to be one of Jesus'

twelve Disciples. Beyond the scant references in the Gospels, not much is known of Saint Andrew's life.

According to Christian tradition Saint Andrew, like many of his fellow Disciples, went out into Greece and Turkey to preach the Good News. A 4th century account of the saint's life tells of his martyrdom by crucifixion in Patras. Medieval accounts describe the cross used as X-shaped

because Andrew said he was not worthy to die on the same style of cross as Jesus.

Famously, Saint Andrew is the patron Saint of Scotland, the country's flag bearing the X-shaped cross associated with him. Legends claim that the saint either traveled to Scotland to spread the Gospel or that his relics were brought there by St. Regulus who had a vision telling him to take the bones to the end of the earth. Regulus set out and was shipwrecked on the coast of Scotland. Today relics of St. Andrew which had been held by the Vatican are now at a shrine in Patras.



ST. ANDREW ADVENT PRAYER

Hail and blessed be the hour and moment in which the Son of God was born of the most pure Virgin Mary, at midnight, in Bethlehem, in the piercing cold. In that hour vouchsafe, I beseech Thee, O my God, to hear my prayer and grant my desires, [here mention your request] through the merits of Our Savior Jesus Christ, and of His blessed Mother. Amen.

Flock Notes

I think Advent is my favourite time of the year. I love the colour, the liturgies, the prayers. I love the hymns and the scripture readings. Above all, I love the joyful expectation. Advent is a season of hope.

It is almost a cliché, but when a politician makes a promise even a bucket of salt isn't enough. That, however, can never be said of God.

Over the next four weeks we'll read the great prophecies about the coming of the Messiah. We'll read how, over the course of thousands of years, God prepared the

people of Israel for the keeping of his promise: the coming of his Son.

Advent teaches us that God is worthy of our trust: God keeps his promises! The proof of that will be found lying in a manger on Christmas morning.

That's why Christians always have hope and always have room for joy, even when life is particularly hard. We know that we can trust God. He has done it before for Israel and he will do it again for us. He has promised us to free us once and for all from sin; he has promised to bring us to be with him in paradise; he has promised to give us rest and peace. The good news is that we don't have to wait until the end of time to experience it!



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 • Parish Priest • christopher@sunderlandcatholic.com
 Fr Emmanuel Nuh Mbeh MHM • Assistant Priest • emmanuel.mbeh@diocesehn.org.uk
 Rev Eddy Barker • Parish Deacon

Rebecca Leighton • Lay University Chaplain • rebecca@sunderlandcatholic.com
 Canon Alec Barrass • Bishop Séamus Cunningham

