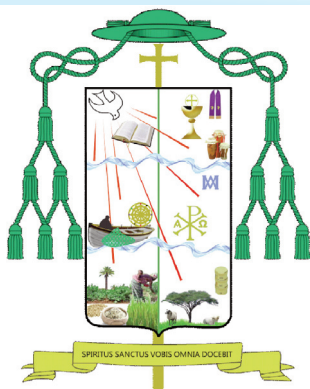


ADVENT: Our preparation for the coming of the Lord

Volume 43 No. 6

DECEMBER 2019 & JANUARY 2020

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The Diocese of Banjul **NEWSLETTER**

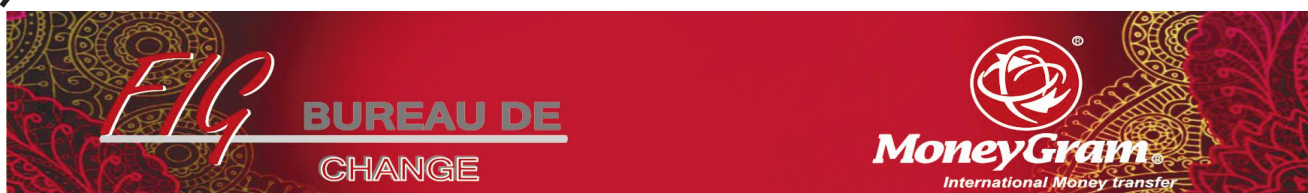
Incorporating The Catholic Newsletter

Keeping the joyful spirit of Christmas throughout the year



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& READINGS FOR MASS
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AND AT CHRISTMAS
AND NEW YEAR**





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By way of introduction

Christmas joy throughout the year

THROUGHOUT the world, in all five continents, billions are happily preparing for Christmas and New Year. It's a time for shopping and getting ready for family reunions and end-of-year parties; and for some, at least, a time to pray for peace in the family, in the nation, and across the world.

The coming festive season bears the name of Christ. But many who eat, drink, sing and dance with their family and friends hardly think of Jesus. He's not been invited to their celebrations, least of all as the Divine Guest – even if some do pay a rare visit to church to hear their favourite Christmas carols.

For active Christians, Christmas without Christ is unthinkable. Our belief is that the Babe of Bethlehem is the Saviour of the world; that in Jesus God became man, lived among us, died and rose for us.

We don't disparage those for whom Christmas is just party-time: after all, most Christians enjoy parties as much as anyone else. And we give thanks that goodwill prevails and family bonds are strengthened.

But underpinning all our celebrations should be the deeper, longer-lasting joy that comes from our acknowledgement that God, in Jesus, loves us and offers the whole world happiness and fulfilment beyond our imagining.

The season of Advent helps us to prepare for an authentic Christmas – one which will strengthen our faith and lead us to do more for the lonely, the poor, the confused and the disenchanted.

The wonder of Christmas – the Incarnation of God – is something to give thanks for every day of the year. And throughout the year 2020 we shall do well to remember Pope Francis' prayer intention for January (see page 25): that 'Christians, followers of other religions, and all people of goodwill may promote peace and justice in the world'.

During January we're invited to pray for Christian unity. How much does this mean for us? Do we think that because these days Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists and other Christians get on rather well with each other, this is enough? Is it more or less the unity that Christ prayed for - 'that they may be one' (John 17:11)? There is surely an urgent need among Christians of all denominations to seek unity by soul-searching, prayer and practical action.

What lies before us, in the coming year? Whether as a nation, a family, or as individuals, we cannot tell. But whatever may befall, we are all in God's hands. There's good advice in the second reading for the Feast of the Holy Family (Sunday, 28th December):

'Always be thankful. Let the message of Christ, in all its richness, find a home with you.' (Colossians 3:15-16).

Happy Christmas to everyone!

How to make an Advent wreath

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First published Palm Sunday 1976

The Diocese of Banjul Newsletter

Incorporating The Catholic Newsletter

DECEMBER 2019 - JANUARY 2020 Volume 43, No. 6

Published by The Gambia Pastoral Institute

33 Kairaba Avenue, PMB 296, Serrekunda, The Gambia, West Africa

Telephone 4394847 Email info@gpi.gm

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Production **Henry Gomez & Frédéric Diatta**

So much to look forward to!

The Year of Our Lord 2020

YEAR by year the Church celebrates the mystery of the world's salvation in Jesus Christ by highlighting in particular seasons his incarnation, suffering, resurrection, ascension and his sending of the Holy Spirit.

The liturgical year encompasses five seasons.

The longest lasts 50 days, and the shortest and greatest only three days.

- **ADVENT** begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas and ends on Christmas Eve. It focuses our thoughts and prayers on the coming of Christ as the Infant of Bethlehem and on his Second Coming as Judge at the end of time.

- **THE CHRISTMAS SEASON** runs from 25th December until the Baptism of the Lord (12th January).

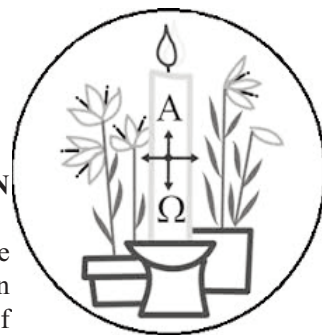
- **LENT** - the 40-day preparation of the Church and all its faithful members, in penitence, for Easter.

- **THE EASTER TRIDUUM** runs from the evening of Holy Thursday through Good Friday and Holy Saturday to the evening of Easter Sunday.

The Triduum celebrates the very core of our Christian belief: that Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, died for our sins and rose for our justification.

- **THE EASTER SEASON** last 50 days.

On the 40th day we celebrate Christ's Ascension, and ten days later the great feast of Pentecost.



The rest of the year is known as **ORDINARY TIME**.

This doesn't mean 'ordinary' in the sense of being routine or unremarkable. These many weeks are named Ordinary because they are listed in order as 1st, 2nd, 3rd and so on - the 'ordinal numbers'.

On the Sundays in Ordinary Time the Gospel readings tell of Christ's ministry of teaching and healing.

The Sunday Lectionary spreads over three years. The Gospel readings in Year A mostly come from St Matthew's Gospel, those in Year B from St Mark, and those in Year C from St Luke.

The year we are just entering is Year A. The weekday readings follow a two-year cycle, Year 1 and Year 2. This year, we have year 2.

Our friends, the Saints

On specified days throughout the year we celebrate the witness of particular saints: Our Lady, St Peter, St Paul, St John the Baptist, and feasts of the apostles, martyrs and other great saints. There are special readings for these days.

What do we think and pray about in Advent?

ADVENT is the first season of the Church's calendar. The word 'Advent' means 'coming' or 'arrival' (from the Latin, *Adventus*).

We think about the coming of Jesus as the Son of Mary, born in a stable at Bethlehem.

We think about the Second Coming of Jesus at Judge at the end of time.

We think about the Old Testament readings at Mass during Advent - which concern the yearning of God's people for the coming of the Messiah.

We pay heed to Christ's forerunner, John the Baptist, who taught the need to make way for Christ's coming by repenting of our sins.

The Old Testament

THE HISTORY of God's ancient people the Jews dominates the Old Testament. Battered by their enemies and bruised by their all-too frequent idolatry, the Jews yearned for a Saviour - the Messiah - and a 'New Covenant'. Their yearnings infuse many of the Psalms and the Prophets - above all, the Prophecy of Isaiah.

In Advent, we receive such prophecies as having been fulfilled by Our Lord Jesus Christ, the world's Redeemer.

The Forerunner

APART from Isaiah, the great prophet to whom we turn in Advent is John the Baptist. John is the link between the Old Testament and the New. He is the forerunner of Christ: 'You, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways...' (Luke 1:76). John was the only prophet to greet Christ in person, hailing him as the Lamb of God. And in advance of Christ, before Our Lord's own sacrificial death, John suffered an unjust and barbaric execution. Jesus told his disciples that John was the greatest of the prophets.



The Last Things

A CONTRASTING theme of Advent, and one which many people don't like thinking about, concerns the 'Four Last Things': death, judgment, heaven and hell.

We shall all experience the first two. But is the third to be heaven - or will it be hell?

Christ died to save the entire human race. If we want, after our inevitable death, to experience inexpressible happiness

and fulfilment, we need to prepare for Christ's coming by repenting of our sins. That was John's message. So we should bear in mind the great worth of the Sacrament of Penance.

It has been said that, in the past, the Church's focus on God's justice and punishment for sin was so pervasive that it obscured Our Lord's transforming gaze of love. But the modern focus on God's mercy should not encourage us to overlook God's judgment due to sin. The wonder of God's plan for our salvation is that the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus proclaim both God's justice and God's love.

The Second Coming

YET a further theme in Advent is Christ's Second Coming at the end of time.

In earlier centuries, many Christians thought that the end of the world was imminent. But Christ told his disciples, 'We know neither the day nor the hour' (Matthew 24:25-26). We do know, however, that sooner or later, for each of us, 'this world' will end: we shall die. The prudent Christian

treats every day as perhaps his or her last. Like a wise virgin' (Matthew 24:1-12), he or she is always ready for the end.

'God with us'

MANY a preacher at Mass this Advent will remind us that Christ's coming is not only celebrated at Christmas, but at every Eucharist, when Christ becomes present on the altar.

And Christ is present in everyone we know or will ever know. Because he is God as well as man, he dwells in every human person - whether acknowledged or not. That is why every human life is sacred.

Christ dwells in friend and foe, in those known to us, and in every stranger. No one is ultimately beyond God's love. That is why Christ was born for us, lived on earth for us, died for us, rose for us, and lives in the Church and the world for us. Acknowledging Christ's coming, and his presence always with us, is what Advent is all about.

Let our happy Christmas be preceded by a happy and fruitful Advent.

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

Here & there

NEWS FROM AROUND THE DIOCESE

Gambia hosts conference of West African priests

THE GAMBIA has recently for the first time hosted the 7th Conference of the Regional Union of Diocesan Priests of West Africa (RUPWA). Meeting from Wednesday 6th to Monday 11th November, the conference had as its theme, 'Preaching vocation in an unfettered ground: an urgent call for the Church in West Africa'.

RUPWA brings together leading West African Catholic diocesan priests for study, reflection, collaboration and faith-sharing.

The idea of breaking communication barriers and bringing all diocesan priests under one umbrella was raised in 2010, when West African English-speaking bishops met in conference in The Gambia. RUPWA was subsequently formed in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, in November 2012, at a meeting of presidents of priestly associations in West Africa - Francophone, Lusophone and Anglophone. The aim was to tackle the challenges of evangelisation and promote unity and collaboration among bishops and priests.

This year's RUPWA conference opened at the Jaama Hall, Kairaba Beach Hotel, on Wednesday 6th November, in the presence of priests, religious, members of the Gambia Christian Council, lay faithful and students. The Gambian President was represented by the Minister of Fisheries & Cabinet Affairs, James Gomez. Also in attendance were the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, members of the Diplomatic Corps and representatives of the municipalities.

The seven-day conference included daily visits to various parishes to celebrate Mass and meet the laity, talking to pupils in Catholic schools about vocations, and a trip to Makasutu.

The conference ended on Sunday 11th November with Mass at the Cathedral in Banjul. On Friday 22nd November the committee that had organised the RUPWA conference gathered in GPI chapel to celebrate a Mass of thanksgiving.

The next RUPWA conference will be held at the same time next year in the Togolese capital of Lomé.



Remembering the war dead

THE DEAD of the two world wars were commemorated on Sunday 10th November at ceremonies in Banjul and Fajara. The first was at the cenotaph in MacCarthy Square, Banjul.

The second was held at the Commonwealth War Cemetery, Fajara. At 11a.m, after the 'Last Post', the traditional two-minutes silence was observed, followed by 'Reveille'.

The ceremony was led by the British High Commissioner, Sharon Wardle, and her Defence Adviser, Lieutenant-Colonel Tim Mason.

Ms Wardle paid tribute to West African soldiers and their 'pivotal role and courage' in both World Wars. She said her father-in-law had served in Burma at the same time as the 1st Battalion Gambia Regiment, and it was a privilege to be joined by Gambian veterans from the Second World War. On behalf of Queen Elizabeth II, Head of the Commonwealth, she laid a wreath at the war memorial.

Others who laid wreaths included the Minister of Defence, Sheikh Omar Faye; the Chief of Defence Staff, Lieutenant-General Masanneh Kinteh; the Inspector-General of Police,

Alhaji Mamour Jobe; and a veteran, who was celebrating his 105th birthday that very day.

A poignant moment in the service was the contribution by children from Jofi Modern School. They read the names of three Gambian soldiers who fell during World War I, and during the wreath-laying sang the 'Flanders Fields' song.

Their contribution was part of an initiative by the Lochnagar Crater Foundation to recognise the contribution of nations around the world; in parallel, the names of the three Gambian soldiers were read out at the Remembrance ceremony at the Lochnagar Crater in northern France.

The Lochnagar Crater began the Battle of the Somme in 1916. With 75 per cent casualties, it was the scene of unprecedented carnage.

The cemetery at Fajara is modelled on war cemeteries throughout the Commonwealth. It contains 203 graves: 122 West Africans, 63 British, 10 Canadians, two Australians, two French, two New Zealanders, one Norwegian and one Rhodesian.

Inter-denominational prayers for peace at Serekunda

CHRISTIANS of different denominations gathered at Serrekunda West Mini-Stadium on Saturday 23rd November to pray for peace and unity in The Gambia, having for the past few years observed such a day for joint prayers.

Various leaders addressed the gathering. Bishop Gabriel Mendy said there are many things, including peace, that people take for granted. He declared that Christians should be active peacemakers, helping to spread the message of peace to everyone, and renouncing violence and instability.

Pilgrimage of peace

ON Saturday, 7th December great crowds of Gambian Catholics, and many others, will gather, from across the country and beyond at Kunkujang Mariama in the Western Region to mark the 33rd national pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady Queen of Peace. The first took place in 1987.

The annual pilgrimage is held on the Saturday nearest to 8th December - the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. (This year the Immaculate Conception will be observed on Monday 9th December, so as not to disturb the Second Sunday in Advent on 8th December.)

Origins

At Pentecost, every year since 1888, a Marian pilgrimage has taken place to the Shrine of Our Lady of Deliverance at Poponguine, on Senegal's 'Petite Côte'. It was not until 1986, almost a hundred years after the first pilgrimage to Poponguine, that a group of lay people suggested to Bishop Michael Cleary that a Marian shrine could - and should - be established in The Gambia.

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

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



Developments

After the first pilgrimage, it was realised that extended facilities were needed. Bishop Cleary provided a D50,000 loan (a large sum in those days). Fr Sharpe designed seating around the altar, and local labour made lots of slabs.

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

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

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

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

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

In recent years, in addition to the December pilgrimage, a second pilgrimage to Kunkujang Mariama has been held on the first Saturday in Lent (in 2020, 29th February).

Christian Unity Week 2020

THE WEEK of Prayer for Christian Unity 2020 will be observed from Saturday, 18th to Saturday, 25th January.

The theme of this year's Unity Week is 'They showed us unusual kindness' (Acts 28:2). This relates to the shipwreck of St Paul in Malta (Acts 27:18-28), and invites reflection on St Paul's trust in divine providence and on the ecumenical virtue of hospitality.

The texts have been prepared by the churches of Malta and Gozo, together with an international committee comprising representatives of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Faith & Order Commission of the World Council of Churches.

In the reflections for the Week of Prayer, other themes are highlighted, including reconciliation, trust and generosity.

'One flock, one shepherd'

Despite doctrinal differences, all Christians accept that God's will is to unite all things in Christ. They seek to pray with Christ 'that there might be one flock and one shepherd' (John 10:16).

Christians also seek to portray their beliefs and practices as

an instrument of God's kingdom, accepting that their world-wide community can only be the Church that God wills if all churches acknowledge their mutual dependence.

By praying together, Christians experience a unity often hidden by denominational differences.

But many church-goers take scant notice of the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. They feel at home with their own traditions, and may be ignorant or dismissive of other Christians.

Dating from 1908

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity was devised in 1908.

It was given a wider remit in the 1930s through a French Catholic, Abbé Paul Courturier, who taught, 'We must pray not that others may be converted to us, but that we may all be drawn closer to Christ in the unity that Christ wills, by the means he wills.'

Catholicism in Malta

THE MALTESE constitution establishes Roman Catholicism as the state religion, although there are provisions for religious freedom.

About 94 per cent of the Maltese population of about 480,000 profess Catholicism.

There are more than 360 churches in Malta, Gozo and Comino, or one church for every 1,000 residents. The parish church is the architectural and geographic focal point of every Maltese town and village, and its main source of civic pride. This pride manifests itself during the local village *fiestas*, which mark the day of the patron saint of each parish with special Masses, religious processions, marching bands and fireworks.

10th February each year is a public holiday in Malta, celebrating the shipwreck of St Paul.

** As we go to press, we have no details of the observance in The Gambia of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.*

The Extraordinary Month for Missions, October 2019

Evangelisation and the new media

by Fr PETER S. LOPEZ, Director and Head of Communications, GPI



WHEN in the Church we speak about 'New Evangelisation', we more often than not, think of the people who come to our churches. But billions of people live in the social networks.

Such people have been

described as among the biggest countries in the world - and they are countries with no barriers. For example, 1.2 billion inhabit the world of Facebook. The majority of these people may never enter a church, but if we are to respond to the Gospel mandate given us by Christ to 'go out to the whole world', we must nowadays include the digital world and proclaim the Good News there. Our challenge as evangelisers has always been to reach out and encounter people where they are at; and nowadays, more and more are on-line.

Media and communications have an invaluable importance to the evangelisation mission of the Church and the promotion of Christian values to facilitate a just and peaceful society, for the common good of all Gambians.

The primary goal

Evangelisation is about making Christ known and promoting Gospel values; in fact this is the primary goal of the communication apostolate of the Church.

Every priest, religious, catechist and lay person should take full advantage of the new media for the propagation of the Gospel and the teachings of Christ, bearing in mind that everything must be done positively, as the media will make their work as evangelisers easier and faster.

We need to organise ourselves in a more co-ordinated

manner for the purposes of the evangelisation apostolate. The Lord is happy when we do what is right by impacting on peoples' lives positively with the promotion of Gospel values. It is paramount for us to realise the importance of this opportunity.

Great opportunity

The Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019 has given us an opportunity to use today's media to propagate the Catholic faith and promote core Christian values. The Catholic Church needs to be better propagated, to be better understood by others; and the fastest and most efficient way to do it is through the media. We are told that of the 7.7 billion people in the world, only over two billion are Christians. This calls for effective evangelisation through a wider outreach.

From the time of the Apostles to the present day, the doctrine and teachings of the Church have remained constant and consistent, while the methodology of evangelisation has changed, allowing for the adoption of new techniques of proclaiming the Word of God.

Today the trend is the new media. Now is the time to preach the Gospel beyond our parish churches and parish communities. Our priests must realise that their Sunday messages only reach those who attend Mass, whilst thousands more can be reached with the same message through the media.

Many people, after they've gone through catechism or Catholic schooling, lack further formation in their faith. We should use the media to reach out to the faithful and support them in their faith.

I end with a tweet from Pope Francis. On 5th May 2019 he tweeted @Pontifex: *What does 'evangelise' mean? To give witness with joy and simplicity to what we are and what we believe in.*

Exhortation on the National Day of Prayer for Peace and Unity – 23rd November, 2019.

Praying, Promoting, and Preserving Peace in The Gambia

IN the third verse of the hymn God Gives His People Strength, we sing

God gives his people peace when sorrow fills us to brim and courage grows dim. He lays to rest our restlessness in him. God gives his people peace. God gives his people peace because our God is a God of peace and not a God of hatred, violence and war. He is the origin and source of the peace and order that exists in the world of nature he created and he freely offers his precious gift of peace to all peoples. But he expects us to cherish and maintain his true peace that the world cannot give.

There are several things that we human beings have taken for granted because they are readily available and very common to us. They include our relation with God and neighbor, our wellbeing, the environment in which we live, the resources of the earth, our success and progress in life, our individual talents and gifts, and many other essential aspects of our lives we just assume is assured no matter what happens. All of them are naturally and regularly utilized so we take it for granted and presume we are entitled to these things without any effort, determination, and care on our part. But this tendency of taking things for granted is not only a problem but a serious danger and sin we need to bear in mind. The reason is because it ultimately leads us to lose sight of God from whom we received these benefits. Secondly, it creates in us a sense of entitlement instead of gratitude to God for his generosity to us. We also become passive and indifferent instead of positively contributing our share and quota. This is why the psalmist prayed to God in Ps. 19:12-13 and said: Who can detect all his errors? From hidden faults acquit me. From presumption restrain your servant and let it not overrule me. Then I shall be blameless and clean from grave sin, that is, the sin of presumption.

We are required to pray for peace and unity for our beloved country and Motherland, The Gambia. But what prompted me to first consider the problem and dangers of presumption or taking things for granted is because I believe we Gambians have taken peace, unity, and mutual co-existence in our country for granted for a very long time. We are, therefore, not actively involved in praying, promoting, and preserving the peace and unity God has granted us because we believe that come what may, there will still be peace and unity among us. There is almost a sense of entitlement to peace and stability that is now misleading and tempting individuals and groups to be unreasonable and insensitive in their conduct, actions, statements, and demands.

Since independence, we have generally lived in peace, stability, and mutual co-existence so we think it is bound to be the same way even if our attitudes and mentalities, core moral values and beliefs, and system of administration, government, and constitution change. But none of us can afford to take peace, unity, and stability in our country for granted no matter who you are whether you are majority or a minority, a Muslim or Christian, civilian or service man or woman, a politician, public figure, or private citizen. For peace, unity, and stability form the core pillar and foundation



**Bishop
Gabriel Mendy**

of our society on which our very existence, survival, and progress depends. If anyone decides to trivialize the value and need for peace and unity or we allow ourselves to lose the peace we have enjoyed from God for so many years, then we will never be the same again as a country and as a people. We should not equally expect anything different but disorder, instability, bitterness, and pain that we and the next generation will all live to regret if we sacrifice our peace for selfish interest, ambition, and ulterior motives.

Each and every one of us, not just religious leaders and public figures should, therefore, be seriously committed to praying, promoting, and preserving peace, unity, stability, and mutual co-existence for the good of us all.

An exemplary man of peace and patron saint of peace in our Catholic Church who was at peace and harmony with God, the world of nature, his fellow human beings, and everything that lives and breathes was St. Francis of Assisi. We all know his prayer for peace but I would like us to carefully and attentively listen to his petitions in this great and true prayer for peace.

St. Francis' prayer for peace was: "Lord make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred ... let me sow love. Where there is injury ... pardon. Where there is doubt ... faith. Where there is darkness ... light. Where there is sadness ... joy. O Divine master grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled ... as to console. (In other words, instead of others consoling me, let me be the one to console them). To be understood ... as to understand. (Instead of seeking to be understood, let me be the one to understand others around me.). To be loved ... as to love. For, it is in giving ... that we receive. (Instead of it is in receiving that I can give). It is in pardoning ... that we are pardoned. It is in dying ... that we are born to eternal life. Amen." In this prayer, St. Francis of Assisi was not only praying to God to bring about peace. He was, rather, praying to God to make him an instrument or agent of peace wherever he goes where there is hatred, injury, doubt, darkness, sadness, misunderstanding etc. There was no presumption, on his part, that peace is already guaranteed so he disposed himself to promote peace where there is hatred, injury, sadness, and misunderstanding.

St. Francis' petition was for God to enable him become a peacemaker and peacebuilder in his own day and age. This is also what we seriously need in our own country today because there are so many people and places where there is hatred, injury, pain, doubt, sadness, division, and misunderstanding and what they need is not empty promises and deceptive and misleading comments. What they truly need is love, respect, sincere apology, pardon, cooperation, joy, consolation, and understanding. As Christians and followers of Christ, we should endeavor to imitate the example of Christ and St. Francis. We should also be peacemakers, peacebuilders, messengers of peace, sons and daughters of God's peace in our families, communities, place of work, society, and nation as a whole.

In addition to our daily prayers for peace, we should also promote and create a culture of peace, unity, and stability in our country for the good of all. This is the great task and obligation we have to continue to fulfill at this critical stage of our history as a nation. Jesus' main message to his followers he sent in pairs to the places he himself was to visit in Lk. 10:1-6, was "whatever house you enter, first say peace be to this house! And if a son or daughter of peace is there, your peace shall rest upon him or her. If not, it shall return to you." He sent his followers on mission as messengers of peace and all he expected them to do was to announce the Good News of peace to homes and families that are open to receive it. As believers in Christ, our mission today in The Gambia is also to deliver his message of peace and ensure, as stated in Heb. 12:14 that we too strive for peace with all peoples regardless of their background, political affiliation, and religious beliefs.

In the spirit of unity and mutual co-existence and for the good and progress of our beloved country, I and the bishops of the Anglican and Methodist Churches humbly and kindly appeal to Gambians of all tribes, religion, and political affiliation to totally renounce violence, lawlessness, and incitement. For, violence and lawlessness only destabilizes, destroys, and impoverishes but never rebuilds and develops any country in our sub-region and beyond. We strongly plead with each and every Gambian at home and abroad not to allow himself or herself to be used by anyone to initiate and support violence, threats, lawlessness, and destruction of life and property. Please do not allow anybody to misinform, mislead, and engage you in acts of violence and lawlessness. You should not also, on your own part, cooperate and encourage the enemies of peace and the forces of disunity in our Motherland to succeed in their treacherous plans.

No one can deny that we have different political, religious, tribal, and social convictions and outstanding problems to address. But that does not legitimize or justify any use of violence that is intended to disrupt public order, peace, and national unity. We should never entertain violence and instability in any shape or form at any time if we are truly interested and concerned about our country's state of affairs and the legacy we hope to handover to future Gambian generations. Other peaceful, democratic, constitutional, and legal means like consultation, dialogue, due process of the law, and civic education can be used to address our political and national concerns. Let us first explore these peaceful provisions, respect the outcome, and allow order, rule of law, and sanity to prevail.

For majority of Gambians of my age and above, it is very obvious that our country has lost part of the absolute peace and mutual co-existence we inherited before and after independence until the horrific events we experienced in our recent history. Still, we should thank God that we have not completely lost every aspect of the peace and trust we valued in our own generation. But the relative and diminished peace we now experience is what we and every other Gambian, especially, the younger generation should cherish and endeavor to preserve, enhance, and improve. It will enable us to once again regain our enviable reputation and character we were widely known for in the sub region and beyond. Each and every one of us must do whatever it takes to ensure that we treat each other in our society and places of work with dignity, respect, care, fairness, and appreciation. We must all jealously safeguard our relative peace and unity and counteract those who deceitfully sow seeds of division, mistrust, and hatred in our society. Otherwise, we will continue to lose and weaken our peace and unity that is the core and central pillar of our human existence and national cohesion.

Let me now conclude with the three Ps of Peace I titled my

reflection and exhortation. First of all, we should always Pray for Peace and not take it granted. At the same time we pray for peace, we should also Promote Peace and become instruments and agents of God's peace in our families, communities, places of work, and the country as whole following St. Francis of Assisi's example. Finally, we should Preserve and Protect the Peace we have inherited and hand it on to our future Gambian generation. For none of us can afford to take peace, unity, and stability in our country for granted no matter who you are. St. Francis, patron of peace pray for us and may God deliver us all from the risks and dangers of presumption. "Peace is flowing like a river, flowing out of you and me, flowing out into the desert, setting all the captives free." – Carey Landry.

+ Most Rev. Dr. Gabriel Mendy C.S.Sp.
Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Banjul, The Gambia



*Fee moi
Gambia*

Mass movements

WERE you at Mass on Friday, 1st November? If you're a Catholic, you should have been, because that day was one of the five Holy Days of Obligation in our diocese - the others being Mary, Mother of God (New Year's Day), Ascension Day (always a Thursday), *Sang Marie* - and, of course, Christmas Day.

All Saints is widely neglected in terms of Mass-going, as is the wondrous feast of the Ascension.

In contrast, our churches are full to overflowing on Ash Wednesday, as indeed they are on Good Friday. Yet neither Ash Wednesday nor Good Friday is a Day of Obligation (no-one has yet told me why).

It might be commented that it's not only God who moves in mysterious ways...

Why the focus on plastics?

IN The Gambia, as in many other countries in Africa and throughout the world, there is a fast-growing awareness of 'plastic pollution' and its alarming consequences.

Mankind produces roughly its entire body weight in plastics every year. The vast majority is not recycled, or isn't re-used when it has been recycled. Increasing volumes of plastic are damaging the natural environment - and plastic can take up to 500 years to decompose.

Plastic is now almost everywhere, and often deadly. It kills sea creatures that eat it but cannot digest it. It gets into the human food chain by contaminating the fish that we eat. It is even in tap water.

There is no science about the long-term impact of humans ingesting plastic. But taxing the use of plastic bags - or even banning them outright, as Kenya has done - is, at last, beginning to change consumer and producer behaviour.

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Family circle



Why not make a family Advent wreath?

NOT only in churches, but in families, too, December sees the use of the Advent wreath as an aid to prayer and understanding in preparation for Christmas.

Centuries ago, in the cold, dark winters of pre-Christian Germany, people made wreaths and lit bonfires to express their longing for the light and growth of the coming spring. With the coming of Christianity, they continued this tradition to celebrate the Advent hope in Christ.

By the 16th century, both Catholics and Protestants were making Advent wreaths - and the custom has since spread to many parts of the world.

* The wreath symbolises both Jewish and Christian tradition. The circle without end suggests the God who was, who is, who will be forever.

* The greenery suggests life.

* The lighting of candles - one the first week, two in the second week, and so on - suggests the gradual unfolding of God's saving plan for mankind.

A good time for the family to pray together by the Advent wreath is just before the evening meal.

Why not, this Advent, make an Advent wreath for your own home?

Making the wreath

You need four candles, candle holders, and some greenery, real or artificial. Living foliage looks best, but it will wither and have to be replaced from time to time. If you use artificial foliage (easily obtainable in supermarkets), make sure that it is non-flammable.

Traditionally, three of the four candles on the wreath are purple or dark blue, and the fourth candle is pink. But if you can't find these candles, any candles can be used. At the centre of the wreath, you may place a fifth candle, white or gold, to be lit on Christmas Eve.

An important warning! Do not allow candles to burn down into the base of the candle-holders. Do not allow children to play with the wreath. Candles should never be placed near curtains or anything that catches alight easily. Candles should not be left alight in an empty room.

Praying by the wreath

Here are simple prayers that you and your children may use. You may prefer to use your own words.

Blessing the wreath

O GOD, by whose Word all things are made holy, bless this wreath, and grant that we who use it may prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ.

First week

(one purple candle is lit)

O GOD of Abraham and Sarah, and all the patriarchs of old, you are our Father, too. Your love is revealed to us in Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of David. Help us in preparing to celebrate his birth to make our hearts ready to make your Holy Spirit to make his home among us. We ask this through Jesus Christ, the Light that is coming into the world. Amen.

Suggested readings: Isaiah 7:10-14. Isaiah 11:1-10. Matthew 1:18-24. Luke 1:26-38.



Second week

(two purple candles are lit)

GOD our Father, you spoke to the prophets of a Saviour who would bring everlasting peace. You helped them to spread the joyful message of his coming kingdom. Help us to share with those around us the good news of your power and love. We ask this through Jesus Christ, the Light that is coming into the world. Amen.

Suggested readings: Isaiah 2:1-5, Micah 5:2. Matthew 2:1-2,9-11, Matthew 2:1-6.

Suggested readings: Isaiah 2:1-5, Micah 5:2. Matthew 2:1-2,9-11, Matthew 2:1-6.

Third week

(two purple candles and the pink candle are lit)

GOD our Father, you gave to Zechariah and Elizabeth in their old age a son called John. He grew up strong in spirit, prepared the people for the coming of the Lord, and baptised them in the River Jordan to wash away their sins. Help us who have been baptised into Christ to be ready to welcome him in our hearts, and to become strong in the faith by the power of the Spirit. We ask this through Jesus Christ, the Light that is coming into the world. Amen.

Suggested readings: Malachi 3:1-5. Romans 8:18-25. Luke 1:5-17.



Fourth week

(all four candles are lit)

GOD our Father, the angel Gabriel told the Virgin Mary that she was to be the Mother of your Son. Help us whom you have called to serve you to share like Mary in your great work of bringing to our world your love and healing. We ask this through Jesus Christ, the Light that is coming into the world. Amen.

Suggested readings: Isaiah 52:7-10. Malachi 3:1-5. Romans 8:1-25. Revelation 21:1-4.



Darkness cannot drive out darkness.

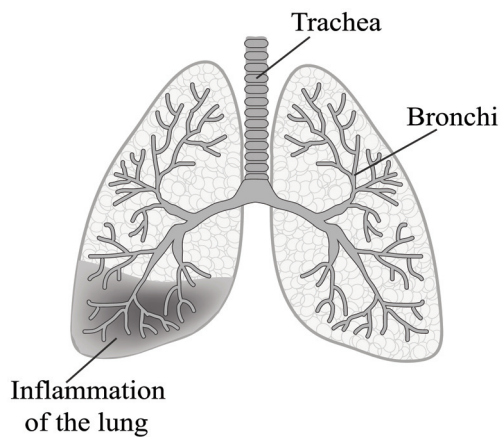
Only light can do that.

Hate cannot drive out hate.

Only love can do that.

Martin Luther King

Pneumonia: serious infection of the lungs



PNEUMONIA is swelling of the tissue in one or both lungs. It's usually caused by a bacterial infection.

At the end of the breathing tubes in your lungs are clusters of tiny air sacs. If you have pneumonia, these tiny sacs become inflamed and fill up with fluid.

Symptoms

The symptoms of pneumonia can develop suddenly over 24 to 48 hours, or they may come on more slowly over several days.

Common symptoms include:

- a cough
- difficulty in breathing - your breathing may be rapid and shallow, and you may feel breathless
- rapid heartbeat
- high temperature
- sweating and shivering
- loss of appetite
- chest pain

Seek urgent medical attention if you're experiencing severe symptoms, such as rapid breathing, chest pain or confusion.

Pneumonia can affect people of any age, but it's more common in certain groups of people, such as the very young or the elderly.

Causes

Pneumonia is usually the result of infection caused by bacteria called *Streptococcus pneumoniae*. But many different types of bacteria can also cause pneumonia, as well as viruses.

Risk

Some groups have an increased risk of developing pneumonia:

- babies and very young children
- elderly people
- people who smoke
- people with other health conditions, such as asthma, cystic fibrosis, or a heart, kidney or liver condition
- people with a weakened immune system - for example, as a result of a recent illness, or having HIV or AIDS.

Diagnosis

A doctor may be able to diagnose pneumonia by asking about your symptoms and examining your chest. Further tests may be needed in some cases.

You may need a chest X-ray or other tests if your symptoms have not improved within 48 hours of starting treatment.

Treatment

Mild pneumonia can usually be treated at home by

- getting plenty of rest
- taking antibiotics
- drinking plenty of fluids

If you do not have any other health problems, you should respond well to treatment and soon recover, although your cough may last for some time.

Complications

Complications of pneumonia are more common in young children, the elderly and those with pre-existing health conditions, such as diabetes.

After starting treatment, your symptoms should steadily improve. How quickly you improve will depend on how severe your pneumonia is.

Cough medicines are not recommended, as there's little evidence they are effective. A warm honey and lemon drink can help relieve discomfort caused by coughing.

Your cough may persist for two to three weeks after you finish your course of antibiotics, and you may feel tired for even longer as your body continues to recover.

Drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration, and get plenty of rest to help your body recover.

If you smoke, it's more important than ever to stop, as smoking damages your lungs.

Pneumonia is commonly caused by viruses or bacteria passed from one person to another. But healthy people are normally able to fight off these germs without pneumonia developing. So, it's usually safe for someone with pneumonia to be around others, including family members.

Treatment in hospital

If your symptoms are severe, you may need treatment in hospital. You'll be given antibiotics and fluids intravenously through a drip, and you may need oxygen to help breathing.

Prevention

A healthy lifestyle can help prevent pneumonia. For example, you should avoid smoking, as it damages your lungs and increases the chance of infection.

Excessive and prolonged alcohol misuse also weakens your lungs' natural defences against infections, making you more vulnerable to pneumonia.

Be careful....

FOR many people, Christmas and the New Year mean party-time. And party-time means alcohol.

People who are usually moderate drinkers may over-indulge themselves, with unpleasant results. Here are a few tips to avoid misbehaviour, embarrassment, headaches and hangovers.

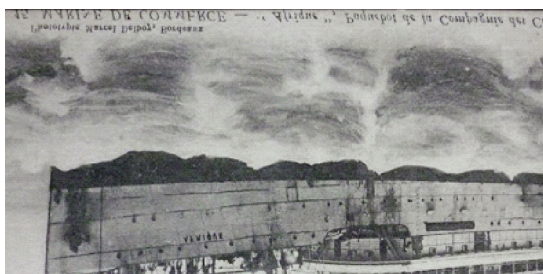
- Drink slowly.
- Keep to one kind of alcoholic drink – don't mix beer, wines and spirits.
- Take soft drinks between alcoholic ones.
- Before and after parties, drink water.

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Gambian Christian anniversaries: December & January



ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO TRAGEDY AT SEA

ON 10th January 1920 the French vessel *Afrique* sailed from the Gironde estuary in France with 609 passengers and crew on her usual route bound for Dakar and other ports on the West Coast. It was her 58th voyage. At almost midnight on 12th January the *Afrique* lost engine power in a gale. The weather made it hard to repair the engines, and the *Afrique* drifted onto a reef and went aground. The hull started to break up. The severe weather hampered rescue ships responding to her distress calls, and at 3am on 13th January, 1920 the *Afrique* lost all contact with the other ships and sank soon after. There were only 34 survivors from her 135 crew and 474 passengers. Most of the passengers were *tirailleurs* - riflemen from Senegal and other French territories in West Africa - being repatriated following fighting in the First World War. Also drowned were Bishop Hyacinthe-Joseph Jalabert, returning to Dakar with 18 missionaries. One report described the incident as 'the biggest disaster in the history of the French mercantile marine'.

See Fee moi Gambia, page 20

During December 1823: Arrival of Hannah Kilham and English Quaker missionaries. They opened an agricultural centre at Bakau and a girls' school in Banjul.

3rd December 1834 (185 years ago): Laying of the foundation stone of Wesley Church in Dobson Street, Banjul (now known as the Methodist Cathedral)

18th January 1848: Arrival of Fr Ronarc'h, a French priest, and Fr Warlop, a Belgian, who inaugurated the Catholic Mission.

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

29th December 1875: Death of Bishop Durët (born 1824), who had become Prefect of Senegal in 1856 and Vicar-Apostolic, with the rank of Bishop, in 1873.

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

3rd December 1887: Fr Massart died at the altar while saying the Last Gospel at the end of Mass.

8th December 1894: (125 years ago, Feast of the Immaculate Conception): First used in the Hagan Street church of the high altar sent from the Holy Ghost seminary in Chevilly, Paris.

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

19th December 1931: Last entry in French in the Mission journal, the Mission in Banjul having been declared *sui-generis* (self-governing).

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

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

15th January 1935 (85 years ago): Fr Harold Whiteside, an English priest serving in The Gambia, took up residence at the new mission in Bwiam.

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

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

16th December 1952: Departure of Fr Coughlin, after four

years in the country. He is remembered for the wall painting formerly behind the altar at Star of the Sea Bakau.

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

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

1st January 1956: Official opening of the convent at Kanifing, with Mother Angela, Sr Magdalene and Sr Anne-Marie in residence, all teaching at St Therese's School.

24th December 1957: Fr Michael Moloney CSSp was appointed first Bishop of Banjul. The announcement was not made locally until 12 days later.

8th January 1964: Bishop Moloney blessed St Martin's, Kartong.

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

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

21st January 1977: Fr Edward Grimes became first Director of the Gambia Pastoral Institute (GPI), originally at St Augustine's High School Banjul.

16th December 1977: Opening of the Diocesan Development Office (now CaDO).

3rd January 1978: Opening of Christ the King, Darsilami.

3rd January 1978: The Gambia Christian Council called on President Sir Dawda Jawara (*right*), inaugurating what was to become an annual event.

30th December 1985: The first Pastoral Assembly for priests and religious opened at Shalom, Fajara.

5th December 1987: First National Pilgrimage to Kunkujang Mariama.

21st January 1989: Ordination at Kanifing of Fr Anthony Sonko.

28th December 1989 (30 years ago): The second Pastoral Assembly opened at St Peter's Technical High School Lamin, where clergy and religious were joined by representatives of the laity.

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



1st January 1995 (25 years ago): Death in Ireland of Fr Michael Flynn.

9th January 1998: Death in Banjul of Mrs E. Senghore, aged 113.

29th December 2005: Abbé Blaise Malou and a group from Balandine, Casamance, began a four-day visit to Fatima Parish, Bwiam.

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

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

26th December 2007: Death in Suffolk, England, of Sir Philip Bridges (*right*), former Chief Justice of The Gambia. He was a stalwart of St Paul's Anglican Church Fajara.

19th January 2008: The Imam Ratib of Banjul, Alhaji Cherno Alieu Mass Kah, visited the Cathedral of the Assumption.

17th January 2010 (10 years ago): Blessed Sacrament Kanifing Estate became an independent parish, with Fr Peter S. Lopez as the first Parish Priest.

12th December 2010: Sr Josephine of Senegal and Sr Mary of Ghana took their final vows as Marist Sisters.

During December 2010: Sr Calixte Thomas and Sr Teresa Mundow joined Cluny Sisters from all over Africa at a meeting in Dakar to discuss the implementation of the programme approved by the Synod of African Bishops earlier that year.



29th December 2012: Sr Calixte Thomas departed for India, her home country, after 12 years educational work in The Gambia. She died in India almost four years later, on 16th September 2016.

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

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

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

28th December 2018: The Presentation Sisters held a vigil to mark their 50 years of prayer and service in Gambia, followed the next morning by a Mass of thanksgiving.

Congratulations

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

21st January	Fr Anthony Sonko 1989
24th January	Fr James Mendy 2015
	Fr Tanislaus Ndecky 2015

O JESUS, our great High Priest, hear our prayer for the priests of the Diocese of Banjul and priests everywhere. Give them a firm faith and a love that will ever increase in the course of their earthly life. Show them that they are needed by the Church, they are needed by souls, they are needed for the work of redemption.



Pious practices



Many devotional practices in the Church are so habitual that we don't think about them. But whenever we make the sign of the Cross, for instance, or dip our fingers into holy water, we should do so in awareness of what the action means.

We shouldn't perform such actions to impress others or to tell ourselves how holy and good we are.

We perform them to honour God and our membership of his Church.

Praying privately in church

CATHOLIC churches are built for the celebration of Mass. In urban churches the Mass may be celebrated every day; but it is on Sunday, in particular, that Catholics gather to celebrate Our Lord's Resurrection.

What goes on in the church for the rest of the week? There may be Mass, other services, such as the Holy Hour; there may be meetings, catechism or choir practice.

In many churches and parishes there is renewed devotion to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, not just at Mass but at services of Adoration and Benediction.

When not in use by groups of people, some churches are locked for security reasons. Others may be left open as places for quiet, private prayer.

We can, of course, pray almost everywhere and at any time - even in bed. Christ is always with us when we pray to him. For regular daily prayer, it's good to use a quiet corner of the home. But, it's better still to pray in church, whether on a regular basis or when we happen to be passing.

A church has an atmosphere conducive to prayer. It is hallowed by the prayers of all who have used it.

In church, we may find the shrines or statues of the saints - particularly of Our Lady - where prayer seems particularly valid; and we may light a votive candle. We feel companionship not only with the saints but with our fellow Christians, if others are quietly and privately praying in church at the same time as we.

Above all, in church is the Lord's tabernacle, where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved. There is nowhere better to pray than before the tabernacle, where Christ himself is present in a particular and unique way.

Mindful of all that Christ does for us, particularly in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, we feel particularly close to him when we pray before the tabernacle, and our prayers are enriched. Those who make their own prayers before the tabernacle, at any hour when the church is open, are helping not just themselves, but the prayer life of the whole parish.

Your local church is your family home. Visit it as often as you can.

Et verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14)

Sunday Reflections

for Christmas, New Year,
and all the Sundays in December & January



During the liturgical year 2019 - 2020 the Sunday readings are those for Year A - 'the Year of Matthew'.

Throughout Advent the priest wears purple- or violet-coloured vestments.

The Gloria in Excelsis is not said or sung at Mass.

1st December

First Sunday of Advent

'Stand ready'

THIS morning, at the very beginning of a new Church year, our first reading is a noble passage from Isaiah. He prophesies universal peace, when all will acknowledge the God of Jerusalem as King of all the earth.

Alas: every day, every news broadcast reminds us that Isaiah's vision is far from being fulfilled. Our world is as unhappy and divided as it has ever been.

Is there anything that we can do, as individuals? St Paul advises us to live as decent people, in the light. We should 'stay awake'. And today's Gospel recounts how Jesus told his followers to stay awake, to 'stand ready'.

A recurrent theme in Advent is that we should always be prepared for the Great Day - for judgment. An ancient collect expresses this memorably:

ALMIGHTY God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness and put on the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; so that at the Last Day, when he will come again in his glorious majesty to judge the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and for ever...

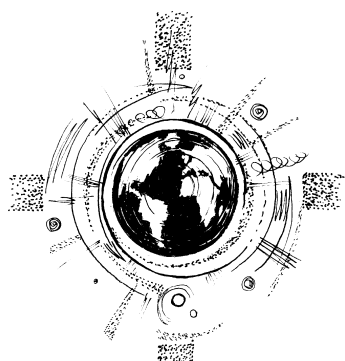
Collect

GRANT your faithful, we pray, almighty God, the resolve to run forth to meet your Christ with righteous deeds at his coming; so that, gathered at his right hand, they may be worthy to possess the heavenly kingdom...

Readings: Isaiah 2:1-5. Psalm 121:1-2,4-5,6-9. Response: I rejoiced when I heard them say, 'Let us go to God's house.' Romans 13:11-14.

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

Gospel: Matthew 24:37-44



Prayer over the Offerings

ACCEPT, we pray, O Lord, these offerings we make, gathered from among your gifts to us, and may what you grant us to celebrate here below, gain for us the prize of eternal redemption...

Preface

.... for he assumed at his first coming the lowliness of human flesh, and so fulfilled the design you formed long ago, and opened for us the way to eternal salvation; that, when he comes again in glory and majesty and all is at last made manifest, we who watch for that day may inherit the great promise in which we now dare to hope...

Prayer after Communion

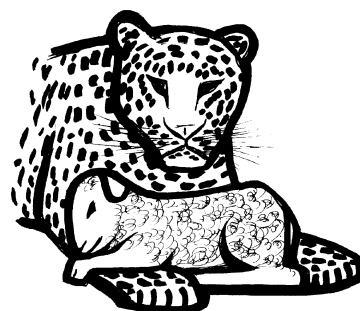
MAY these mysteries, O Lord, in which we have participated, profit us, we pray; for even now, as we walk amid passing things, you teach us by them to love the things of heaven, and hold fast to what endures...

8th December

2nd Sunday of Advent

Time of challenge

OUR Sunday and weekday readings during Advent remind us of the yearning of the Hebrew people for Christ.



Christians interpret the prophecies of Isaiah in the light of our faith in Jesus as the fulfilment of the deepest needs not just of the Jews, but of all the world. This is why the Old Testament is so important to us.

St Paul writes in today's Second Reading: 'Everything that was written long ago in the scriptures was meant to teach us something...'

In the Gospel we hear John the Baptist's proclamation of Christ. John is the link between Old Testament prophecy and the New Testament proclamation of 'God-with-us' in the person of Christ.

John was the greatest of the prophets. His way of living and preaching was austere. His message was simple and uncompromising.

John's message didn't go down well with those whose aim in life was affluence and ease. Today, we too are attached to self-indulgence, and we may not like being told to repent - nor warned of the consequences if we don't.

Whatever our circumstances and inclinations, we should listen to what John is urgently telling us.

Advent is a time of challenge!

Collect

Almighty and merciful God, may no earthly undertaking hinder those who set out in haste to meet your Son, but may our learning of heavenly wisdom gain us admittance to his company.

Readings: Isaiah 11:1-10. Psalm 71:1-2,7-8,12-13,17. Response: In his days justice shall flourish, and peace until the moon fails. Romans 15:4-9.

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

Gospel: Matthew 3:1-12

Prayer over the Offerings

BE pleased, O Lord, with our humble prayers and offerings, and, since we have no merits to plead our cause, come, we pray, to our rescue with the protection of your mercy...

Preface as 1st December, First Sunday of Advent (opposite page)

Prayer after Communion

REPLENISHED by the food of spiritual nourishment, we humbly beseech you, O Lord, that, through our partaking in this mystery, you may teach us to judge wisely the things of earth, and hold firm to the things of heaven...

15th December

Third Sunday of Advent

Gaudete: Rejoice!

He is coming...

IN today's readings we're confronted again by those two great prophets, Isaiah and John the Baptist.

Isaiah told his people to be joyful: their God was coming.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus, when questioned about John, said that no greater man had ever been seen - which surely means that John's urgent call for repentance should be heeded by everyone. Then Jesus enigmatically added: 'Yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he'.

Jesus meant that John, who had been unjustly imprisoned and was soon to be beheaded, would not in this life experience the kingdom soon to be inaugurated by Jesus.

Ever since the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the apostles following the Lord's ascension, Christians have been privileged to know that the hopes and prayers of Isaiah, John the Baptist and all the prophets have become reality in the person of Jesus Christ.

For today's second reading, we have St James' advice: 'For your example, brothers, in submitting with patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.'

Collect

O GOD, who see how your people faithfully await the feast of the Lord's Nativity, enable us, we pray, to attain the joys of so great a salvation and to celebrate them always with solemn worship and glad rejoicing...

Readings: Isaiah 35:11-6,10. Psalm 145:6-10. Response: Come, Lord, and save us. James 3:7-10



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

Gospel: Matthew 11:2-11.

Prayer over the Offerings

MAY the sacrifice of our worship, Lord, we pray, be offered to you unceasingly, to complete what was begun in sacred mystery, and powerfully accomplish for us your saving work...

Preface as 1st December, First Sunday of Advent (opposite page)

Prayer after Communion

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

22nd December

Fourth Sunday of Advent

'Emmanuel'

ADVENT has two parts. The first, which ended on Monday 16th December - six days ago - concerned the coming of Christ not only as the great teacher who shared our earthly life, but as the supreme Judge of the living and the dead who will come again at the end of time.

Since Tuesday 17th December the emphasis in Advent has shifted to the imminent celebration of Christmas, the feast of Jesus' birth. Many of us have actually been preparing for Christmas for some time: contacting family and friends, arranging travel, planning parties, buying presents, looking for new clothes. Much of this is commendable. But it's not the kind of preparation that our Church is concerned with.

Consider Isaiah's prophecy: Emmanuel is at hand: 'God with us'. We believe that God is with us in Jesus' birth, death, resurrection and ascension. Jesus is 'God with us' through the Holy Spirit, in the Mass, in every aspect of life. Our faith in Jesus, 'God-with us', calls for more than Christmas parties. It calls for much deeper joy, a joy which suffuses every day of our life. Through Jesus, Paul tells us, we have received grace and our apostolic mission to preach the good news.

Today's reading from Matthew tells us that an angel revealed to Joseph that the Son to be born to Mary would save his people from their sins. What better news could there be than that?

Let's make every day of the year a celebration of 'God-with-us'.

Collect

POUR forth, we beseech you, O Lord, your grace into our hearts, that we, to whom the Incarnation of your Son was made known by the message of an angel, may by his Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of his Resurrection...

Readings: Isaiah 7:10-14. Psalm 23:1-6. Response: Let the Lord enter! He is the king of glory. Romans 1:1-2.



Gospel acclamation: Alleluia... The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Emmanuel, a name that means 'God-is-with-us'.

Gospel: Matthew 1:18-24.

Prayer over the Offerings

MAY the Holy Spirit, O Lord, sanctify these gifts laid upon your altar, just as he filled with his power the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary...

Preface:

..For all the oracles of the prophets foretold him, the Virgin Mother longed for him with love beyond all telling, John the Baptist sang of his coming and proclaimed his presence when he came. It is by his gift that already we rejoice at the mystery of his Nativity, so that he may find us watchful in prayer and exultant in his praise...

Prayer after Communion

HAVING received this pledge of eternal redemption, we pray, almighty God, that as the feast day of our salvation draws ever nearer, so we may press forward all the more eagerly to the worthy celebration of the mystery of your Son's Nativity...

For today's Gospel and an illustration, see back page.

CHRISTMAS TIME



The Nativity of the Lord

The colour for Christmastide is white or gold

For the Feast of the Nativity, the Church provides four Masses:

- * **Evening Mass of the Vigil** (Christmas Eve, Tuesday, 24th December)
- * **Mass of Midnight**
- * **Mass of the Dawn** (early Christmas morning)
- * **Mass of the Day**

CHRISTMAS MASS of the VIGIL

Collect

O GOD, who gladden us year by year as we wait in hope for our redemption, grant that, just as we joyfully welcome your Only-Begotten Son as our Redeemer, so we may merit to face him confidently when he comes again as our Judge...

Readings: Isaiah 62:1-5. Psalm 88:4-5,16-17,27-29. Response: I will sing for ever of your love, O Lord. Acts 13:16-17,22-25.

Gospel acclamation: Alleluia... Tomorrow there will be an end to the sin of the world and the Saviour of the World will be our King.

Gospel: Matthew 1:1-25 (or 18-25)

Prayer over the Offerings

AS we look forward, O Lord, to the coming festivities, may we serve you all the more eagerly for knowing that in them you make manifest the beginnings of our redemption...

Preface

... For in the mystery of the Word made flesh a new light of your glory has shone upon the eyes of our mind, so that, as we recognise him as God made visible, so we may be caught up through him in love of things invisible...

This is Preface I of Christmas. Instead, the priest may use Preface II (see below, Mass of Midnight) or Preface III (see opposite page, Mass of the Dawn).

Prayer after Communion

GRANT, O Lord, we pray, that we may draw new vigour from celebrating the Nativity of your Only-Begotten Son, by whose heavenly mystery we receive both food and drink...

MASS of MIDNIGHT

Collect

O GOD, who have made this most sacred night radiant with the splendour of the true light, grant, we pray, that we, who have known the mysteries of his light on earth, may also delight in his gladness in heaven...

Readings: Isaiah 9:1-7. Psalm 95:1-3,11-13. Response: Today a Saviour has been born to us; he is Christ the Lord. Titus 2:11-14.

Gospel acclamation: Alleluia... I bring you news of great joy: today a Saviour has been born to us, Christ the Lord.

Gospel: Luke 2:1-14.

Prayer over the Offerings

MAY the oblation of this day's feast be pleasing to you, O Lord, we pray, that through this most holy exchange we may be found in the likeness of Christ, in whom our nature is united with yours...

Preface

...For on the feast of this awe-filled mystery, though invisible in his own divine nature, he has appeared visibly in ours, and begotten before all ages, he has begun to exist in time; so that, raising up in himself all that was cast down, he might restore unity to all creation, and call straying humanity back to the heavenly Kingdom...

This is Preface II of Christmas. Instead, the priest may use Preface I (see above, Mass of the Vigil) or Preface III (see Mass of the Dawn, opposite page.)

Prayer after Communion

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

MASS of THE DAWN

Collect

GRANT, we pray, almighty God, that as we are bathed in the new radiance of your incarnate Word, the light of faith, which illumines our minds, may also shine through in our deeds...

Readings: Isaiah 62:11-12. Psalm 96:1,6,11-12. Response: This day new light will shine upon the earth: the Lord is born for us. Titus 3:4-7.

Gospel acclamation: Alleluia...Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace to men who enjoy his favour.

Gospel: Luke 2:15-20.

Prayer over the Offerings

MAY our offerings be worthy, we pray, O Lord, of the mysteries of the Nativity this day; that, just as Christ was born a man and also shone forth as God, so these earthly gifts may confer on us what is divine...

Preface

...For through him the holy exchange that restores our life has shone forth today in splendour; when our frailty is assumed by your Word not only does human mortality receive unending honour, but this wondrous union we, too, are made eternal...

This is Preface III of Christmas. Instead, the priest may use Preface I (see opposite page, Mass of the Vigil) or Preface II (opposite page, Mass of Midnight).

Prayer after Communion

GRANT us, Lord, as we honour with joyful devotion the Nativity of your Son, that we may come to know with fullness of faith the hidden depths of this mystery, and to love them even more and more...



MASS of THE DAY

Collect

O GOD, who wonderfully created the dignity of human nature and still more wonderfully restored it, grant, we pray, that we may share in the divinity of Christ, who humiliated himself to share our humanity...

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

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

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

Prayer over the Offerings

MAKE acceptable, O Lord, our oblation on this solemn day, when you manifested the reconciliation that make us wholly pleasing in your sight and inaugurated for us the fullness of divine worship...

Preface... For in the mystery of the Word made flesh a new light of your glory has shone upon the eyes of our mind, so that, as we recognise him as God made visible, so we may be caught up through him in love of things invisible...

This is Preface I of Christmas. Instead, the priest may use Preface II (see opposite page, Mass of Midnight) or Preface III (above, Mass of the Dawn).

Prayer after Communion

GRANT, O merciful God, that just as the Saviour of the world, born this day, is the author of divine generation for us, so he may be even the giver of immortality...

*Sunday, 28th
December*

The Holy Family

WHAT do the Gospels tell us about Jesus as a child, an adolescent and a young man?

In the Gospels of Mark and John there's nothing about Jesus' birth and childhood. Matthew does tell us something about Jesus' birth, and how as an infant

Mary and Joseph took him as a refugee to Egypt - as related in today's Gospel. Matthew then leaps ahead thirty years to the beginning of Christ's ministry.

It's only Luke who relates an incident in Jesus' childhood, when he was about twelve years old, and he was found by his parents in the Temple at Jerusalem, talking with the elders.

Apart from these, the Gospels tell us nothing of Jesus' life with Mary and Joseph as a boy, teenager or young adult in his home town. These thirty years of obscurity are sometimes called 'the hidden years'. But they cannot have lacked incident and challenge. We may be sure that for Jesus they were formative years, a necessary preparation for his short ministry of teaching and healing which led inexorably to his death and resurrection, and his return to the Father.

The family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph is our ideal, the perfect family of mutual love and care. In our families today, and in the family of the Church, the nation and all mankind, we pray for a measure of the love of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

Today we pray for the priests and people of the Church of the Holy Family, Fajara.



Collect

O GOD, who were pleased to give us the shining example of the Holy Family, graciously grant that we may imitate them in practising the virtues of family life and in the bonds of charity, and so, in the joy of your house, delight one day in eternal rewards...

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

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

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

Prayer over the Offerings

WE offer you, Lord, the sacrifice of conciliation, humbly asking that, through the intercession of the Virgin Mother of God and Saint Joseph, you may establish our families firmly in your grace and your peace...

Preface: *The priest may use any one of the three Prefaces for Christmas.*

Prayer after Communion

BRING those you refresh with this heavenly sacrament, most merciful Father, to imitate constantly the example of the Holy Family, so that, after the trials of this world, we may share their company for ever...

Wednesday, 1st January

(New Year's Day)

Mary, Mother of God

God's Mother, God's peace

TODAY is the eighth day after Christmas Day. In the Jewish tradition, on the eighth day after a boy's birth his mother would take him to be circumcised and to be given his name.

For centuries the first day of January was celebrated as the Feast of the Circumcision, or the Holy Name of Jesus. But now the Church gives this day the title 'Mary, Mother of God'. There is no contradiction. In becoming man, Jesus became subject to every aspect of the human condition. Like us, as an infant he needed his mother to feed him and take care of him. And we may be sure that Mary fulfilled the role of mother fully and faithfully.

Mary conformed to her people's traditions by having her Son circumcised on the eighth day. On the fortieth day she presented him in the Temple (a feast we shall celebrate on Sunday 2nd February, 40 days after Christmas Day).

From the early days of the Church, Mary was given the Greek title *Theotokos* - Mother of God. This title honours Mary as the most blessed of all women. But more importantly, the title tells us that Mary's Son is divine - true God and true man.

No wonder the angels sang, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace to men who enjoy his favour!' We need to feel God's peace in our hearts, so that we can express it in our way of life, and pray for peace in The Gambia and throughout the world.

Collect

O GOD, who through the fruitful virginity of Blessed Mary bestowed on the human race the grace of eternal salvation, grant, we pray, that we may experience the intercession of her, through whom we were found worthy to receive the Author of life, Our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son...

Readings: Numbers 6:22-27. Psalm 66:2-3,5-6,8. Response: O God, be gracious and bless us. Galatians 4:4-7.

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

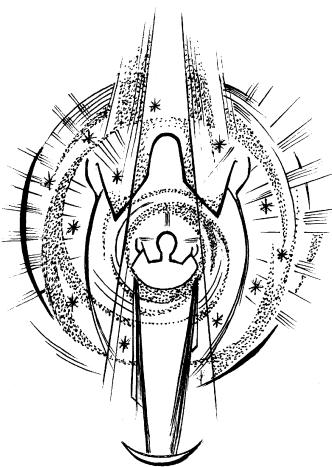
Gospel: Luke 2:16-21.

Prayer over the Offerings

O GOD, who in your kindness begin all good things and bring them to fulfilment, grant to us, who find joy in the Solemnity of the Holy Mother of God, that, just as we glory in the beginnings of your grace, so one day we may rejoice in its completion...

Preface

...For by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit she conceived your Only-Begotten Son, and without losing the glory of virginity, brought forth into the world, the eternal Light, Jesus Christ our Lord...



Prayer after Communion

WE have received this heavenly Sacrament with joy, O Lord; grant, we pray, that it may lead us to eternal life, for we rejoice to proclaim the ever-Virgin Mary, Mother of your Son and Mother of the Church...

THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD



Where are we heading?

A PILGRIMAGE is a journey of faith. Most pilgrims follow in others' footsteps, just as we do when we make the pilgrimage to Kunkujang Mariama. But the magi, the 'wise men', did not know where they were heading, nor what they would find.

They eventually found a baby in a manger - an animals' feeding-trough. They recognised him as the world's Saviour; and offered him gold (symbolising his kingship), frankincense (his Godhead), and myrrh (his death).

The witness of the magi and of all the saints shows their steadfastness as pilgrims seeking Christ - and having found him, their eagerness to respond to his love.

In contrast, we often worship at the altar of self-worth and social standing - rather than worship him who came among us as the Babe of Bethlehem, and is ever-living for us.

Let us rejoice that 'O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!' is a thrilling invitation, nothing less than the imperative of our faith in our Lord.

Vigil Mass of the Epiphany

Saturday evening, 4th January

Collect

MAY the splendour of your majesty, O Lord, we pray, shed its light upon our hearts, that we may pass through the shadows of this world and reach the brightness of our eternal home...

Readings: Isaiah 60: 1-6. Psalm 71:2,7-8,10-13. Response: All nations shall fall prostrate before you, O Lord. Ephesians 3: 2-3, 5-6.

Gospel acclamation: We saw his star as it rose, and have come to do the Lord homage.

Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

Prayer over the Offerings

ACCEPT, we pray, O Lord, these offerings in honour of the appearing of your Only-Begotten Son and the first fruits of the nations, that to you praise may be rendered and eternal salvation be ours...

Preface... For today you have revealed the mystery of our salvation in Christ as a light for the nations, and, when he appeared in our mortal nature, you made us new by the glory of his immortal nature...

Prayer after Communion

RENEWED by sacred nourishment, we implore your mercy, O Lord, that the star of your justice may shine always bright in our minds, and that our true treasure may ever consist in our confession of you...

Sunday, 5th January**Collect**

O GOD, who on this day revealed your Only-Begotten Son to the nations by the guidance of a star, grant in your mercy that we, who know you already by faith, may be brought to behold the beauty of your sublime glory...

Readings: Isaiah 60:1-6. Psalm 71:2,7-8,10-13. Response: All nations shall fall prostrate before you, O Lord. Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6.

Gospel acclamation: We saw his star as it rose, and have come to do the Lord homage.

Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

Prayer over the Offerings

LOOK with favour, Lord, we pray, on these gifts of your Church, in which are offered now, not gold or frankincense or myrrh, but he who by them is proclaimed, sacrificed and received, Jesus Christ...

Preface

...For today you have revealed the mystery of our salvation in Christ as a light for the nations, and, when he appeared in our mortal nature, you made us new by the glory of his immortal nature...

Prayer after Communion

GO before us with heavenly light, O Lord, that we may perceive with clear sight and revere with true affection the mystery in which you have willed us to participate...

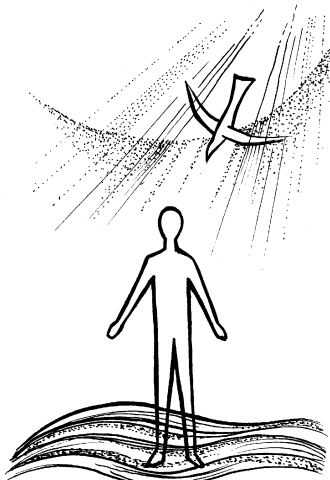
Sunday, 12th January**The Baptism of the Lord****Jesus begins his ministry**

After thirty years as boy and man, presumably in quiet preparation within the Holy Family, Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness, followed by his baptism at the hands of John the Baptist.

Jesus' baptism marked the beginning of his public life - his short ministry of teaching, healing and proclaiming his Kingdom.

In the sacrament of Baptism, we have been admitted to the Church. As St Paul teaches us, baptism washes away our sins, and we are born again into new life. But why did our Master, Jesus, submit to baptism? Surely he, the Sinless One, had no need of baptism?

What Christ's baptism signified was the consecration of his coming ministry to the Father, to enlighten and redeem his followers and all mankind. We may consider, also, that at his baptism, Jesus sanctified the waters of baptism for all those who were to follow him.



Jesus' baptism, as the Gospels tell us, was ratified by the Father and the Holy Spirit. That is why each of us was baptised in the name of the Most Holy Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Collect

ALMIGHTY ever-living God, who, when Christ had been baptised in the River Jordan, and as the Holy Spirit descended upon him, solemnly declared him your beloved Son, grant that your children by adoption, reborn of water and the Holy Spirit, may always be well-pleasing to you...

or

O GOD, whose Only Begotten Son has appeared in our very flesh, grant, we pray, that we may be inwardly transformed through him whom we recognise as outwardly like ourselves...

Readings: Isaiah 42:1-4,6-7. Psalm 28:1-4,9-10. Response: The Lord will bless his people with peace. Acts 10:34-38.

Gospel acclamation: Alleluia... The heavens opened and the Father's voice resounded: 'This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him'...

Gospel: Matthew 3:13-17

Prayer over the Offerings

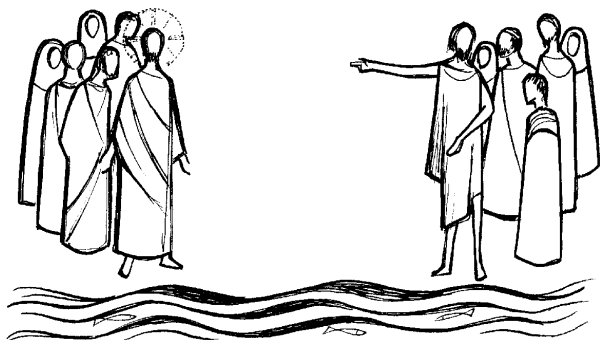
ACCEPT, O Lord, the offerings we have brought to honour the revealing of your beloved Son, so that the oblation of your faithful may be transformed into the offering of him who willed in his compassion to wash away the sins of the world...

Preface:

...for in the waters of the Jordan you revealed with signs and wonders a new Baptism, so that through the voice that came down from heaven we might come to believe in your Word dwelling among us, and by the Spirit's descending in the likeness of a dove we might know that Christ your Servant has been anointed with the oil of gladness and sent to bring the good news to the poor...

Prayer after Communion

NOURISHED with these sacred gifts, we humbly entreat your mercy, O Lord, that, faithfully listening to your Only Begotten Son, we may be your children in name and in truth...

19th January**2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time****The Lamb: Our salvation**

'BEHOLD, the Lamb of God!' cried John the Baptist when he saw Jesus. The Jews were familiar with the offering of a sacrificial lamb. But this Lamb, Jesus Christ, was to die for the sins of all the world. John the Baptist's mission was to point to Christ as Lamb of God and Son of God.

‘Behold the Lamb of God!’ proclaims the priest at Mass when he lifts up the Host and invites us to Holy Communion. How wonderful our Christian faith is! We are invited to intimate contact with none other than the Author of all life.

This year, from next Sunday, the Gospel reading is taken from the Gospel of Matthew. Let us resolve to be open to God’s Word so that it may take root in our hearts and fill our lives with peace and purpose.

Collect

ALMIGHTY ever-living God, who govern all things both in heaven and on earth, mercifully hear the pleading of your people, and bestow your peace on our times...

Readings: Isaiah 49: 3, 5-6. Psalm 39: 2, 4, 7-10. Response: Here I am, Lord. I come to do your will. 1 Corinthians 1:1-3.

Gospel acclamation: Alleluia... Blessings on the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heavens.

Gospel: John 1:29-34

Prayer over the Offerings

GRANT us, O Lord, we pray, that we may participate worthily in these mysteries, for whenever the memorial of this sacrifice is celebrated the work of our redemption is accomplished...

Preface: *the priest may use any one of the eight Prefaces provided for Sundays in Ordinary Time.*

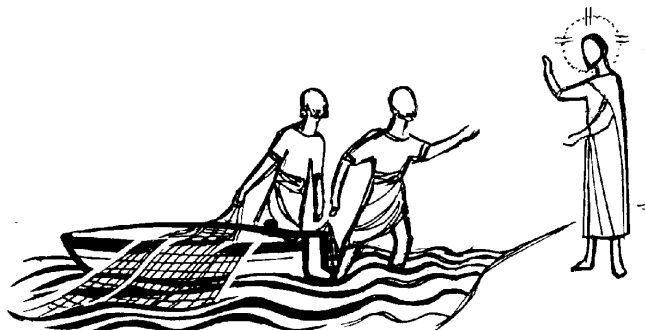
Prayer after Communion

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

26th January

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Following the Leader



TODAY we begin our Sunday Gospel readings from St Matthew; and we hear how Christ began his ministry in Galilee by telling his hearers, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!’

When the fishermen Peter and Andrew heard this call of Jesus, they ‘immediately’ followed him. Then, James and John ‘immediately’ abandoned their nets and followed him, too.

Are we, today’s followers of Jesus, ready to put our trust in him as Peter, Andrew, James and John did? Are we ready to follow him ‘immediately’? Or, are we waiting for tomorrow - ‘the day that never comes’?

A further thought. In this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, let us bear in mind Paul’s injunction to the people of Corinth: ‘Let there be no dissensions among you, but be united...’ True followers of Christ don’t squabble; their eyes are fixed on him, the source of all human unity.

Collect

Almighty and ever-living God, direct our actions according to your good pleasure, that in the name of your beloved Son, we may rejoice in good works...

Readings: Isaiah 8:23 - 9:3. Psalm 26: 1-4, 13-14. Response: The Lord is my light and my help. 1 Corinthians 1:10-13,17.

Gospel acclamation: Alleluia...Jesus proclaimed the good news of the kingdom and cured all kinds of sickness among the people.

Gospel: Matthew 4:12-17 (18-23)

Prayer over the Offerings

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

Preface: *the priest may use any one of the eight Prefaces provided for Sundays in Ordinary Time.*

Prayer after Communion

GRANT, we pray, almighty God, that, receiving the grace by which you bring us to new life, we may always glory in your gift...

*Next Sunday, 2nd February: Candlemas
- The Presentation in the Temple*

*O God, who bestow light
on all the nations,
grant your peoples the gladness of
lasting peace, and pour into our hearts
your brilliant light.*

The Editor and Staff
of
The Diocese of Banjul Newsletter
extend
Best Wishes to all our Readers
for a HAPPY CHRISTMAS & NEW YEAR

Lighten our darkness, O Lord

The Great Advent Antiphons come from the Old Testament. They reflect the Hebrew people's yearning for the coming of the Messiah. For us, too, they are a call for Christ to come among us.



O Wisdom



O Adonai



*O Root
of Jesse*



*O Key
of David*



*O Rising
Sun*



*O King of
the Nations*



O Emmanuel

SINCE the 7th century, as Advent draws to a close, the Great Advent Antiphons have been recited daily at Evening Prayer before and after the Song of Mary (the *Magnificat*).

Each antiphon addresses God with a Biblical name, and concludes with a call for the coming of the Saviour.

The antiphons feature in the popular hymn, 'O come, O come, Emmanuel'.

In the days leading up to Christmas, why not use the Great Advent Antiphons in your private prayers?

Saturday 17th December *O Sapientia*

O WISDOM, you come forth from the mouth of the Most High. You fill the universe and hold all things together in a strong yet gentle manner. O come to teach us the way of truth.

O Sapientia, quae ex ore Altissimi produisti, attingens a fine usque ad finem fortiter, suaviterque disponens omnia. Veni ad docendum nos viam prudentiae.

Readings: Ecclesiasticus 24:1-9. 1 Corinthians 1:1-13

Sunday 18th December *O Adonai*

O ADONAI and Leader of the House of Israel, who appeared to Moses in a burning bush, and on Sinai gave him the Law: come to redeem us with outstretched arm.

O Adonai et Dux Domus Israel, qui Moyse in igne flammae rubi apparuisti et ei Sina Legem dedisti: veni ad reimendum nos in brachio extento.

Readings: Exodus 3:1-6. Acts 7:20-36

Monday 19th December *O Radix*

O ROOT of Jesse, you stand as a sign for the people. Kings stand silent before you, whom the nations will worship. Come to set us free, and do not delay.

O Radix Jesse, qui stas in signum populorum, sine quem continebunt reges os suum, quem gentes deprecabuntur: veni et liberandum nos, jam noli tardare.

Readings: Isaiah 11:1-10. Romans 15:7-13

Friday 20th December *O Clavis*

O KEY of David and Sceptre of the House of Israel, what you open, no one can close; and what you close, no one can open. Come to lead the captive from prison, seated in darkness and in the shadow of death.

O Clavis David et Sceptrum Domus Israel, qui aperis et nemo claudit; claudis et nemo aperuit: veni, et educ vinctum de domo carceris, sedentem in tenebris et umbra mortis.

Readings: Isaiah 22:20-33. Revelation 3:7-13

Saturday 21st December *O Oriens*

O RISING SUN, splendour of eternal light and Sun of Justice: come and shine on those seated in darkness and in the shadow of death.

O ORIENS, splendor lux aeternae et sol justitiae: veni et illumine sedentes in tenebris et in umbra mortis.

Readings: Numbers 24:15b-19. Revelation 22:10-21

Sunday 22nd December *O Rex*

O KING of the Nations, whom all the people desire: you are the Keystone which makes all one. Come and save mankind whom you formed from clay.

O REX gentium, et desideratus earum, lapsique angularis qui facis utroque unum: veni et salva hominem qui tu limo formasti.

Readings: Jeremiah 30:7-11a. Acts 4:1-12

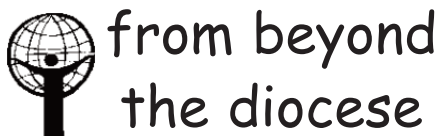
Monday 23rd December *O Emmanuel*

O EMMANUEL, our King and our Judge, the One awaited by the gentiles, and their Saviour: Come and save us, Lord our God

O Emmanuel, Rex et Legifer noster, expectatio gentium at Salvator arum: veni et salvandum nos, Domine Deus noster.

Readings: Isaiah 7:10-14. Matthew 1:18-23

Lord Jesus,
teach us the way of truth,
and set us free.



Francis visits Thailand and Japan

ON his 32nd apostolic journey abroad, Pope Francis has visited two Asian countries where Catholics constitute less than two per cent of the population.

He was in Thailand from Tuesday 20th November, in the footsteps of Pope St John Paul II, who visited in May 1984. The Holy Father praised the small Catholic community of Thailand 'in their faith and in the contribution they make to the whole of society', and sought to 'strengthen the bonds of friendship that we share with many Buddhist brothers and sisters'.

On Saturday 23rd November the Pope left the Thai capital, Bangkok, for a four-day visit to Japan.

In Japan, Catholics make up only 0.42 per cent of the population, or around 600,000 faithful. In Japan, as in Thailand, migrant workers make up an increasing portion of the Catholic population, as Japan eases its immigration laws.

On Sunday 24th November the Pope paid a whirlwind visit to Nagasaki and Hiroshima, which were devastated by the dropping of nuclear bombs at the end of the Second World War. He described the manufacture of nuclear weapons as 'immoral'.

The Holy Father returned to Rome on Tuesday 26th November.



London police pay-out after 'wrongful arrest'

A STREET preacher in London who had his Bible confiscated as police handcuffed him has been awarded £2,500 (D147,500) for wrongful arrest.

Footage of the arrest of Oluwale Ilesanmi pleading with police to not 'take my Bible away', was subsequently viewed online almost three million times.

Mr Ilesanmi was detained outside Southgate Underground station in north London in February after a 999 emergency call claimed he was being Islamophobic.

A video posted online shows Mr Ilesanmi, 64, telling police: 'Jesus is on the way.'

An officer who arrested him for breach of the peace can be heard replying: 'I appreciate that - but nobody wants to listen to that. They want you to go away.'

When Mr Ilesanmi tries to keep hold of his Bible, an officer says: 'You should've thought about that before being racist.'

Mr Ilesanmi admitted describing Islam as an 'aberration', but said he was expressing his point of view as a Christian rather than denigrating Muslims.

On 30th July Mr Ilesanmi handed a petition to the Home Office signed by 38,000 people, asking for greater protection for street preachers.

Scotland Yard agreed to pay Mr Ilesanmi £2,500

(D147,500) for wrongful arrest and 'humiliating and distressing' treatment.

Mr Ilesanmi said: 'I am glad that the police have recognised that it was not right to arrest me for preaching from the Bible. It was traumatic, being arrested. But I'm determined to get back to Southgate and start preaching the Gospel again.'

Superintendent Neil Billany, of the Metropolitan Police said: 'The Met respects and upholds the rights of all individuals to practise freedom of speech, and this includes street preachers of all religions and backgrounds. However, if the language someone uses is perceived as being a potential hate crime, it is only right that we investigate.'

'That is the role of the police, even if a decision is subsequently made that their actions are not criminal. In this case, it was deemed appropriate to remove the man from the area.'

Americans becoming less Christian as over a quarter follow no religion

THE UNITED States is becoming a less Christian country, and the decline in religious affiliation is particularly rapid among younger Americans, recent figures show.

The proportion of US adults who describe themselves as Christian has fallen to two-thirds, a drop of 12 percentage points over the past decade, according to data from the Pew Research Center.

Over the same period, the proportion of those describing themselves as atheist, agnostic or 'nothing in particular' has risen by 17 percentage points to more than a quarter of the adult population.

Although churches and faith movements continue to exert strong political influence on the Trump administration and at the local state level, the proportion of American adults attending religious services has declined.

The proportion of US adults who are white born-again or evangelical Protestants - the religious group which strives hardest to see its political agenda adopted - is now 16 per cent, down from 19 per cent a decade ago.

The number going to church at least once or twice a month has fallen by seven percentage points over the past decade. More Americans now say they attend religious services a few times a year or less (54 per cent) than say they attend at least monthly (45 per cent).

The fall in religious identification and activity has affected both Protestant and Roman Catholic churches. According to Pew, 43 per cent of adults identify with Protestantism, down from 51 per cent in 2009. And 20 per cent are Catholic, down from 23 per cent in 2009.

Fewer than half of millennials (49 per cent) describe themselves as Christians; four in 10 are 'no religion', and nine per cent identify with non-Christian faiths.

As many millennials say they never attend religious services (22 per cent) as those who say they go at least once a week.

The Pew Research Center Report, released in October, says the decline of Christian communities is continuing at a rapid pace.

Although the religiously unaffiliated are on the rise among younger people and most groups of older adults, their growth is most pronounced among young adults.

The share of US adults who identify with non-Christian faiths has increased from five per cent in 2009 to seven per cent in 2019. Two per cent of Americans are Jewish, one per cent are Muslim, one percent are Buddhist, one per cent are Hindu, and three per cent identify with other faiths, including people who say they abide by their own personal religious beliefs, and people who describe themselves as 'spiritual'.

Pew's data are based on telephone surveys in 2018 and 2019.

Controversy over UN Nairobi summit

ELEVEN nations, including Senegal and Uganda, have issued a joint statement criticising procedures at a summit in Nairobi from 11th to 14th November.

The summit, sponsored by the UN Population Fund and the governments of Kenya and Denmark, marked the 25th anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994.

On the sidelines of the Nairobi Summit, the US and ten other nations delivered a joint statement indicating their concern over its content.

'We are... concerned about the content of some of the key priorities of this summit,' read the statement from the US, Brazil, Belarus, Egypt, Haiti, Hungary, Libya, Poland, Senegal, St Lucia and Uganda.

The 11 countries affirmed the 'key foundational principles' of the Cairo Conference, but added, 'There is no international right to abortion; in fact, international law clearly states that everyone has the right to life, and that the Cairo Conference said that countries should 'take appropriate steps to help women avoid abortion, which in no case should be promoted as a method of family planning' and to 'reduce the recourse to abortion'.'

The 11 countries stressed that they could not 'support sex education that fails to adequately engage parents and which promotes abortion as a method of family planning.'

Dutch anti-racism activists protest over blackface character

ANTI-RACISM campaigners have been protesting in cities across the Netherlands as Dutch children anticipate the annual arrival of St Nicholas and a blackface character who traditionally accompanies him.

In recent years, the character of 'Black Pete', usually portrayed by white people in black face-paint, has provoked intense discussion, and sometimes violent clashes.

Campaigners against racism say exposure to such imagery is hurtful to black people and damaging to children. But a shrinking majority of Dutch people say there is no reason to change a holiday tradition they consider to be harmless fun.

The UN has repeatedly called on the Dutch government to rid pre-Christmas festivities of any racist elements, but it has so far declined to take a stance.

A recent opinion poll showed that 59 per cent of Dutch people wanted to keep *Zwarte Piet* in blackface, while 26 per cent said the tradition needed to be changed. In 2011, when the protests started, only seven per cent wanted the tradition to change.

Since then, major cities such as Amsterdam and Rotterdam

and the national public broadcaster have decided to ditch black-face in favour of figures smeared with soot - from the chimneys they are said to go down to bring children their presents.

About 15 per cent of the 17.3 million population of the Netherlands, which was for centuries a major colonial power, are from minority ethnic groups.

Disagreement over restoration



of Notre Dame

TEMPERS have been raised over the restoration of the world-renowned Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, which in April was badly damaged by fire.

The army general overseeing the restoration of Notre Dame has said the building's chief architect should 'shut his mouth'.

General Jean-Louis Georgelin and the architect, Philippe Villeneuve, disagree over whether the cathedral's new spire should look modern or mediaeval.

The fire destroyed Notre Dame's spire, roof and many artefacts – though the walls and stained glass windows remain intact.

The French President, Emmanuel Macron, has set a five-year dead-line for completing the huge restoration project.

Some experts warn that this target may be too ambitious, and M. Villeneuve has previously said the only way it can be met is if the spire is a replica of the one that was destroyed. But President Macron and General Georgelin both believe that the new spire should be 'contemporary'.

A public argument over the spire's design broke out at a meeting of the French National Assembly's cultural affairs committee on Wednesday 13th October.

'As for the chief architect, I have already explained that he should shut his mouth,' General Georgelin snapped, prompting gasps, the AFP news agency reported.

He later said that all involved ought to 'move ahead in wisdom so that we can serenely make the best choice for Notre Dame, for Paris, for the world'.

A final decision on the spire would be settled on in 2021, he added.

In September, M. Villeneuve told the broadcaster RTL: 'Either I restore it identically... or they make a contemporary spire and it will be someone else [doing it].'

Within 24 hours of the fire on 15th April, hundreds of millions of euros were pledged to help fund the rebuilding

Some weekday celebrations - December & January

Friday, 6th December: St Nicholas *bishop*

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



Saturday, 7th December: St Ambrose *doctor*

AMBROSE is one of the four great 'Latin Doctors' of the Church (the others being Augustine, Jerome and Gregory). He was born in Trier (modern-day Italy), and became a celebrated lawyer. When the bishopric of Milan fell vacant around 374 he was acclaimed bishop – though still a catechumen and not yet baptised. Ambrose's statesmanship and theological skills enabled him to convert many pagans. He combatted Arianism (the heresy that denies the Holy Trinity). He imposed a public penance on the Emperor Theodosias I for condoning a massacre. He converted and baptised St Augustine. Ambrose died in 397. His bishop's throne may still be seen in Milan.

Monday, 9th December: The Immaculate Conception

(transferred from 8th December)

THE DOCTRINE of the Immaculate Conception was proclaimed as infallible by Pope Pius IX in 1854. It teaches that Mary, Mother of Christ, was conceived without sin: she was 'full of grace'. She received God's grace from the moment of her conception, and spent her earthly life in a perfect relationship with Him. God filled her with grace so that she would be worthy to become Mother of God. Mary is perceived as being the perfect example of the redeeming action of God's grace; she was only able to receive this grace because Christ would later redeem all humanity through His death on the cross.



Thursday, 26th December: St Stephen *first martyr*

STEPHEN, 'full of faith and the Holy Spirit' (Acts 6:5) was unjustly condemned by the religious authorities. Before his agonising death by stoning, he prayed, like his Master, Jesus, that his enemies might be forgiven. He was granted a vision of the risen Christ. 'Look,' he said, 'I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.' Coming immediately after Christmas Day, St Stephen's Day reminds us that the Babe of Bethlehem himself was born to suffer and to die. (See Acts, chapters 6 & 7).

Friday, 27th December: St John *evangelist*

THE Gospel attributed to St John is written in the simplest Greek of the New Testament. Yet, it is one of the most profound books ever written. John depicts Christ in symbolic power as the Word made Flesh, the Bread from Heaven, the Good Shepherd, the True Vine. Tradition suggests that the Gospel was written in the old age of the disciple who was especially close to Jesus. 'These things are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing, you may have life in his name.' (John 20:30)

Saturday, 28th December: The Holy Innocents *martyrs*

THE SUFFERING of the innocents (Matthew 2:16-18) challenges our faith. If Jesus had not been born, the infants of Bethlehem would not have been slaughtered by Herod. Why does God allow such injustice? The answer lies in the life that awaited the Divine Child. He was saved from Herod by the flight of Mary and Joseph into Egypt – saved in order that on the cross He might embrace the sin and suffering of the whole world. By His wounds we are healed.

Thursday 2nd January: St Basil the Great & St Gregory Nazianzen

BASIL and Gregory were friends and great figures of the Eastern Church of the 4th century. Basil had a brilliant academic career, but longed for a life of solitude. After extensive travels, he gave away most of his possessions and devoted himself to founding religious communities, writing an austere 'rule', which is still observed today.

Gregory was Archbishop of Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey). Because of his great learning, he was known as 'Gregory the Theologian'. He eventually retired to return to his monastery. He summed up his own and Basil's life thus: 'Our great concern, our great name, was to be Christians, and to be called Christians.'



Friday, 17th January: St Antony of Egypt abbot

ANTONY was born in Memphis, Egypt, in 251. He is known as 'the father of monasticism'. When he was 20, he sold all he possessed and began a solitary life in the desert, where he was joined by others. He died in 356.

Friday, 24th January: St Francis de Sales doctor

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

Tuesday, 28th January: St Thomas Aquinas doctor

Born in Aquino, Italy 1224, Thomas studied in Naples and taught in Paris. With the arrival of Aristotelian science, newly-discovered in Arabic translations, Thomas integrated Aristotle's philosophy into Christian thought. He held that the theologian starts with faith and proceeds through reason.

This was controversial, as was Thomas' belief in the religious value of nature. He died in 1274. In 1567, he was named *ea* Doctor of the Church, and in 1879 was proclaimed by Pope Leo XIII as a champion of orthodoxy. Thomas wrote over 80 works, including the *Summa Theologica*. He was pre-eminent as a writer of liturgical texts which combine clarity with poetic beauty. Many Gambians are familiar with Thomas Aquinas' hymns used at Benediction: *O salutaris Hostia* ('O Saving Victim') and *Tantum Ergo* ('Therefore, we before him bending'), as well as *Panis Angelicus* ('Bread of Angels').

Friday, 31st January: St John Bosco priest

JOHN BOSCO was born of poor parents in Piedmont, northern Italy, in 1815. His father died when he was only two. He became a shepherd, but in 1835 entered a seminary. He was ordained in 1841, and after seeing the appalling conditions of children in prisons set up an 'oratory', which by 1846 was looking after more than 400 youngsters, as well as organising night school for young workers. Eventually, he founded the religious order known as the Salesians.

John Bosco declared that a teacher should be 'father, adviser and friend' and 'try to gain love before inspiring fear'. In his 'rule', he wrote: 'Frequent confession, frequent communion, daily Mass – these are the pillars which should sustain the whole of education.'

When John Bosco died in 1888, there were about 250 houses of the Salesian Society in all parts of the world, containing 130,000 children; and over 6,000 priests had gone forth from the Salesians.

In 1934, John Bosco was canonised by Pope Pius XI.

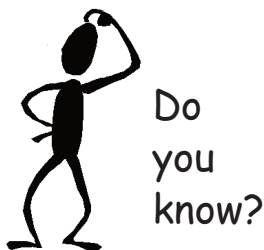
We pray especially today for the Salesian priests serving at Kunkujang Mariama, that God will bless their work.

**The Pope's Prayer Intentions****December**

That every country resolutely commits to taking the necessary measures to make the future of the very young, especially those who suffer, a priority.

January

We pray that Christians, followers of other religions, and all people of goodwill may promote peace and justice in the world.



- 1 Who, in the Old Testament, was the son of Nun, servant of Moses, and eventually successor of Moses in the advance of the Israelites on Canaan?
- 2 Which is the world's largest Christian denomination?
- 3 What are the names of the parents of John the Baptist?
- 4 What, in the Mass, is the *Confiteor*?
- 5 Name the deacon pictured on the right.
- 6 Which is the oldest church building in The Gambia?

Answers on page 28



AVAILABLE AT GPI

*Bibles, prayer-books, and a selection of rosaries
and other devotional items*

‘Zacchaeus, come down!’

The amazing encounter that can change our lives

POPE FRANCIS delivered the following homily to many thousands of young people gathered in July 2016 at Kraków, Poland, for World Youth Day

*We apologise that in our October issue only half of this article was printed.
Some readers have asked us to reprint it in full.*

ST Luke’s Gospel speaks to us of a meeting between Jesus and a man named Zacchaeus, in Jericho (Luke 19:1-10).

Jesus does not simply preach or greet people; as Luke tells us, he passed through the city. In other words, Jesus wants to draw near to us personally, to accompany our journey to its end, so that his life and our life can truly meet.

An amazing encounter took place with Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector.

Zacchaeus was a wealthy collaborator of the Roman occupiers, someone who exploited his own people, who because of his ill-repute could not even approach the Master.

His encounter with Jesus changed his life – just as it has changed, and can still change, each of our lives.

But Zacchaeus had to face a number of obstacles in order to meet Jesus. At least three of these can also say something to us.

The first obstacle: ‘Too little’

The first obstacle was smallness of stature.

Zacchaeus couldn’t see the Master because he was little. Even today we can risk not getting close to Jesus because we don’t feel big enough, because we don’t think ourselves worthy.

This is a great temptation; it has to do not only with self-esteem, but with faith itself. For faith tells us that we are ‘children of God... that is what we are’ (1 John 3:1). We have been created in God’s own image; Jesus has taken upon himself our humanity, and his heart will never be separated from us; the Holy Spirit wants to dwell within us.

That is our real ‘stature’, our spiritual identity: we are God’s beloved children, always. So you can see that not to accept ourselves, to live glumly, to be negative, means not to recognise our deepest identity. God loves us the way we are; and no sin, fault or mistake of ours makes him change his mind.

As far as Jesus is concerned – as the Gospel shows – no one is unworthy of, or far from, his thoughts. God counts on you for what you are, not for what you possess. In his eyes the clothes you wear or the kind of mobile telephone you use are of absolutely no concern. He doesn’t care whether you are



stylish or not; he cares about you! In his eyes, you are precious, and your value is inestimable.

At times we aim lower rather than higher. At those times it is good to realise that God remains faithful in his love for us. He loves us even more than we love ourselves. He believes in us even more than we believe in ourselves.

He is there for us, waiting with patience and hope, even when we turn in on ourselves and brood over our troubles and past injuries.

But such brooding is unworthy of our spiritual stature: it is a kind of virus infecting everything; it closes doors

and prevents us from getting up and beginning afresh.

God believes that we can always get up, and hates to see us gloomy. We are his beloved sons and daughters. Let us be mindful of this at the dawn of each new day. It will do us good to pray every morning: ‘Lord, I thank you for loving me; help me to be in love with my own life!’

The second obstacle: the paralysis of shame

Zacchaeus faced a second obstacle in meeting Jesus: the paralysis of shame. We can imagine what was going on in his heart before he climbed that sycamore tree. It must have been quite a struggle – on one hand, a healthy curiosity and desire to know Jesus; on the other, the risk of appearing ridiculous.

Zacchaeus knew that in trying to climb that tree he would become a laughing-stock to all. Yet he mastered his shame, because the attraction of Jesus was more powerful.

The paralysis of shame did not have the upper hand. The Gospel tells us that Zacchaeus ran ahead, climbed the tree, and then, when Jesus called him, hurried down. He took a risk; he put his life on the line.

For us too, this is the secret of joy: not to stifle a healthy curiosity, but to take a risk. When it comes to Jesus, we cannot sit around waiting with arms folded.

Don’t be ashamed to bring everything to the Lord

in confession, especially your weaknesses, struggles and sins. He will surprise you with his peace. Don't be afraid to say 'Yes', to respond generously and to follow him! Say a firm 'no' to the narcotic of success at any cost and the sedative of worrying only about yourself and your own comfort.

The third obstacle: the judgment of others

After his small stature and the paralysis of shame, there was a third obstacle that Zacchaeus had to face. It was all around him - the grumbling of the crowd, who blocked him and criticised him. How could Jesus have entered the house of a sinner!

How truly hard it is to welcome Jesus, how hard to accept a 'God who is rich in mercy' (Ephesians 2:4). People will try to block you, to make you think that God is distant and insensitive, good to the good and bad to the bad. Instead, our heavenly Father 'makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good' (Matthew 5:45). He demands of us the courage to be more powerful than evil by loving everyone, even our enemies.

People may laugh at you because you believe in the gentle power of mercy. But do not be afraid.

People may judge you to be dreamers, because you believe in a new humanity, one that rejects hatred between peoples, one that refuses to see borders as barriers and can cherish its own traditions without being self-centred or small-minded.

Don't be discouraged: with a smile and open arms you proclaim hope, and be a blessing for our one human family.

Looking up

The crowd looked down on Zacchaeus. But Jesus did otherwise: he gazed up at him.

Jesus looks beyond the faults and sees the person. His gaze

remains constant, even when it is not met; it seeks the way of unity and communion. It does not halt at appearances, but looks to the heart.

With this gaze of Jesus, you can help bring about another humanity, without looking for acknowledgement but seeking goodness for its own sake, content to fight peaceably for honesty and justice.

Don't stop at the surface of things. Distrust the worldly cult of appearances, cosmetic attempts to improve our looks.

Let us listen to Jesus' words to Zacchaeus, which seem meant for us today: 'Come down, for I must stay at your house today'.

Jesus extends the same invitation to you.

In our homes

It is in our homes that Jesus wants to meet us. He wants to enter your homes, to dwell in your daily lives: in your studies, your work, your friendships and affections, your hopes and dreams.

How greatly he desires that you bring all this to him in prayer! How much he wants his word to be able to speak to you day after day, so that you can make his Gospel your own, so that it can serve as a compass for you on the highways of life!

In asking to come to your house, Jesus calls you, as he did Zacchaeus, by name.

Trust the memory of God: his memory is not a 'hard disc' that 'saves' all our data, but a heart filled with compassion.

May we try to imitate the faithful memory of God. Let us preserve the memory of the presence of God and his word, and listen once more to the voice of Jesus as he calls us by name!

This is a lightly-abridged translation of Pope Francis' homily.



Question Box

**AT MASS, my attention tends to wander.
How can I worship more attentively?**

PERHAPS, in church and elsewhere, you're someone who is often inattentive or distracted.

As far as Mass is concerned, here are a few suggestions.

Before Sunday, read the three Scripture readings that will be used in the Sunday Mass. Details are given in 'Sunday Reflections' in this *Newsletter* (pages 14 to 20). Think about these readings, pray about them, and perhaps discuss them with others.

Arrive at church unhurried, and in good time. Don't spend time chatting outside.

In church, before Mass begins, kneel and pray. Ask God that he will keep your mind on the prayers, the readings, the homily, and all that follows in the Mass.

Throughout the Mass, join fully in the prayers and the singing. Do not look around, but keep your gaze on the priest, the readers and the altar; or indeed, close your eyes.

Receive Holy Communion reverently. It is better not to receive Communion if you are not disposed to do so in a devout way.

We don't mark ourselves 'out of ten' for our prayers or devotion. God accepts us for what we are. But we should always 'lift up our hearts' during the Mass, in company with the congregation.

At the very least, your attendance at Sunday Mass is in accord with what the Church requires. Pray to God that you may make good use of this privilege - the summit and source of our beloved Faith.

THE MASS

Your questions answered

THE MASS is proclaimed by the Church as the 'source and summit' of the Catholic faith. Catholics should fully understand and appreciate the Church's teaching concerning the Mass, so that their life of faith and witness may benefit from this great gift of Christ to his Body, the Church.

This is the second in a series of verbatim extracts from a document on the Mass issued by the Bishops' Conference of the United States, in the form of questions and answers.

Why does Jesus give himself to us as food and drink?

JESUS gives himself to us in the Eucharist as spiritual nourishment because he loves us. God's whole plan for our salvation is directed to our participation in the life of the Trinity, the communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Our sharing in this life begins with our Baptism, when by the power of the Holy Spirit we are joined to Christ, thus becoming adopted sons and daughters of the Father. It is strengthened and increased in Confirmation. It is nourished and deepened through our participation in the Eucharist.

By eating the Body and drinking the Blood of Christ in the Eucharist we become united to the person of Christ through his humanity. 'Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him' (John 6:56).

In being united to the humanity of Christ we are at the same time united to his divinity. Our mortal and corruptible natures are transformed by being joined to the source of life. 'Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father,

so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me' (John 6:57).

By being united to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, we are drawn up into the eternal relationship of love among the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As Jesus is the eternal Son of God by nature, so we become sons and daughters of God by adoption through the sacrament of Baptism.

Through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation we are temples of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us, and by his indwelling we are made holy by the gift of sanctifying grace. The ultimate promise of the Gospel is that we will share in the life of the Holy Trinity. The Fathers of the Church called this participation in the divine life 'divinisation' (*theosis*). In this we see that God does not merely send us good things from on high; instead, we are brought up into the inner life of God, the communion among the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In the celebration of the Eucharist (which means 'thanksgiving') we give praise and glory to God for this sublime gift.

In our February issue:

Why is the Eucharist not only a meal but also a sacrifice?



Answers to 'Do you know?' page 25

- 1 Joshua. See Exodus 17:9-16, and many references in Numbers and Joshua.
- 2 The Roman Catholic Church is the world's largest Christian denomination. There are around 1.1 billion Catholics, 300 million Orthodox, and 590 million Anglicans and Protestants. Worldwide, Protestants constitute about 27 per cent of Christians.
- 3 Zechariah and Elizabeth. See Luke 1:5-23, 57-79.
- 4 The general confession ('I confess...') in the Penitential Rite at the opening of Mass.
- 5 The Revd Richard René Mansal.
- 6 Wesley Church, Maccoumba Jallow Street (Dobson Street) Banjul, 1834. Now known as the Methodist Cathedral.



What do we understand by the Incarnation?

IN CHRISTIAN theology, the Incarnation is the belief that Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity, also known as God the Son or the *Logos* (Greek for 'Word'), was made flesh by being conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary, also known as the *Theotokos* (Greek for 'God-bearer'). The doctrine of the Incarnation entails that Jesus is fully God and fully human.

In the Incarnation, as defined by churches that adhere to the Council of Chalcedon, the divine nature of the Son was united with human nature in one Divine Person, Jesus Christ. This is central to the faith held by most Christians. Alternative views have been proposed throughout the centuries, but all have been rejected by mainstream Christian bodies.

Controversy

In the Early Church, while all Christians believed that Jesus was indeed the Son of God, the divinity of Christ was controversial. Debate during the first four centuries of Christianity involved Jewish Christians, Agnostics, followers of Arius of Alexandria, and adherents of Pope Alexander of Alexandria, among others.

St Ignatius of Antioch taught: 'We have also as a Physician, the Lord our God, Jesus the Christ, the only-begotten Son and Word, before time began, but who afterwards became also man, of Mary the Virgin.'

Justin Martyr argued that the incarnate Word was pre-figured in Old Testament prophecies.

The Apostles' Creed includes the article of faith, 'He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.' According to Pope St John Paul II, by his incarnation Jesus has united himself to every human being, including the unborn at the moment of their life at conception.

The most-widely accepted definitions of the Incarnation were made by the First Council of Nicaea in 325, the Council of Ephesus in 431 and the Council of Chalcedon in 451.

These councils declared that Jesus was both fully God, begotten from, but not created by the Father; and fully man, taking his flesh and humanity from the Virgin Mary. These two natures, human and divine, were united into the one personhood of Jesus Christ.

The Incarnation implies three facts: the Divine Person of Jesus Christ; the human nature of Jesus Christ; the union of the human with the Divine Nature in the Divine Person of Jesus Christ.

Without diminishing his divinity, Christ added to it all that is involved in being human. The body of Christ was therefore subject to all the bodily weaknesses to which human nature is universally subject, such as hunger (Matthew 4:2), thirst (John 19:28), fatigue (John 4:6), pain and death. They were the natural results of the human nature that Christ assumed.



Hymns and prayers

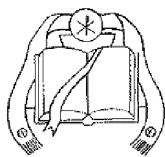
The significance of the Incarnation has been extensively discussed throughout Christian history, and is the subject of countless hymns and prayers. For instance, the Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom (circa 400), as used by Eastern Orthodox Christians and Byzantine Catholics, includes this 'Hymn to the Only-Begotten Son':

*O only-begotten Son and Word of God,
Who, being immortal,
Deigned for our salvation
To become incarnate
Of the holy Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary,
And became man without change;
You were also crucified,
O Christ our God,
And by death have trampled Death,
Being one of the Holy Trinity,
Glorified with the Father and the Holy Spirit.
Save us!*

Like the Nicene Creed, the later Athanasian Creed (5th century) contains a definition of the Incarnation. The Incarnation is central to Catholicism. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* gives paragraphs 461-463 to the Incarnation, and cites several Bible passages to assert its centrality: Phillipians 2:5-8, Hebrews 10:5-7, 1 John 4:2, 1 Timothy 3:16.

*Almighty God,
grant that in professing the true faith
we may acknowledge
the Trinity of eternal glory
and adore your Unity.*

Daily Mass Readings



December & January

Sunday readings Year A

Weekday readings Year 2

Memorials in brackets are optional.

Sun 1st Dec

Mon 2nd
Tue 3rd
Wed 4th
Thu 5th
Fri 6th
Sat 7th

Isaiah 2:1-5. Psalm 121:1-2,4,9. Romans 13:11-14. Matthew 24:17-44
Isaiah 2:1-5. Psalm 121:1-9. Matthew 8:5-11
Isaiah 11:1-10. Psalm 71:1-2,7-8,12-13,17. Luke 10:21-24
Isaiah 25:6-10. Psalm 22. Matthew 11:29-37.
Isaiah 26:1-6. Psalm 117:1,8-9,9-21,25-27. Matthew 7:21,24-27
Isaiah 29:17-24. Psalm 26:1-4,13-14. Matthew 9:27-31.
Isaiah 30:19-21,23-26. Psalm 146:1-6. Matthew 9:2-35 – 10:1,6-8.

1st SUNDAY of ADVENT

St Francis Xavier
(St John Damascene)

(St Nicholas) *abstinence*
St Ambrose

Sun 8th

Mon 9th
Tue 10th
Wed 11th
Thu 12th
Fri 13th
Sat 14th

Isaiah 11:1-10. Psalm 71:1-2,7-8,12-13,17. Romans 15:4-9. Matthew 3:1-12. **2nd SUNDAY of ADVENT**
Genesis 2:9-15. Psalm 97:1-4. Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12. Luke 1:26-38. **IMMACULATE CONCEPTION**
Isaiah 40:1-11. Psalm 95:1-3,10-13. Matthew 18:12-14
Isaiah 40:25-31. Psalm 102:1-4,8,10. Matthew 11:28-30
Isaiah 41:13-20. Psalm 144:1,9-13. Matthew 11:11-15
Isaiah 48:17-19. Psalm 1:1-4,6. Matthew 11:16-19
Sirach 48:1-9-11. Psalm 79:2-3,15-16,18-19. Matthew 17:10-13

(St Damasus)
(St Jane Frances de Chantal)
St Lucy *abstinence*
St John of the Cross

Sun 15th

Mon 16th
Tue 17th
Wed 18th
Thu 19th
Fri 20th
Sat 21st

Isaiah 35:1-6,10. Psalm 145:6-10. James 3:7-10. Matthew 11:2-11.
Numbers 24:2-7,15-17. Psalm 24: 4-9. Matthew 21:23-27.
Genesis 49:2,8-10. Psalm 71:1-4,7-8,17. Matthew 1:1-17
Jeremiah 23:5-8. Psalm 71:1-2,12-13,18-19. Matthew 1:18-24
Judges 13:2-7,24-25. Psalm 70:3-6,16-17. Luke 1:5-25
Isaiah 7:10-14. Psalm 23:1-6. Luke 1:26-48
Song of Songs 2:8-14 or Zephaniah 3:14-18. Psalm 32:2-3,11-12,20-21.

3rd SUNDAY of ADVENT

O Sapientia
O Adonai
O Radix
O Clavis *abstinence*
O Oriens (St Peter Canisius)

Sun 22nd

Mon 23rd
Tue 24th (morning):

Micah 5:1-4. Psalm 79:2-3,15-16,18-19. Hebrews 10:5-10. Luke 1:39-45.
Malachi 3:1-4,23-24. Psalm 24:4-5,8-10,14. Luke 1:57-66.
2 Samuel 7:1-5,6-12,14,16. Psalm 88:2-5,27,29. Luke 1:67-79.

4th SUNDAY of ADVENT O Rex
O Emmanuel (St John of Kanty)**Christmas Eve & Christmas Day: full details on pages 16 & 17**

Thu 26th
Fri 27th
Sat 28th

Acts 6:8-10; 7:54-59. Psalm 30:3-4,6,16-17. Matthew 10:17-32
1 John 1:1-4. Psalm 96:1-2,5-6,11-12. John 20:2-8.
1 John 1:5 - 2:2. Psalm 123:2-5,7-8. Matthew 2:13-18

St Stephen
St John
Holy Innocents

Sun 29th

Mon 30th
Tue 31st

Sirach 3:3-7,14-17. Psalm 122:1-5. Colossians 3:12-21. Matthew 2:13-15,19-23. **THE HOLY FAMILY**
1 John 2:12-17. Psalm 95:7-10. Luke 2:36-40

Wed 1st Jan

Thu 2nd
Fri 3rd
Sat 4th

1 John 2:18-21. Psalm 95:1-3,5-6. Luke 2:22-35 (St Sylvester)
Numbers 6:22-27. Psalm 66:2-3,5-6,8. Galatians 4:4-7. Luke 2:16-21
1 John 2:22-28. Psalm 97:1-4. John 1:19-28
1 John 2:29 – 3:6. Psalm 97:1.3-6. John 1:29-35
or for Name of Jesus: 1 Philippians 2:1-11. Psalm 8:4-9. Luke 2:21-24
1 John 3:7-10. Psalm 97:1,7-9. John 135-42

MARY, MOTHER of GOD

St Basil the Great & St Gregory Nazianzen

(Holy Name of Jesus) *abstinence*

Sun 5th

Mon 6th
Tue 7th
Wed 8th
Thu 9th
Fri 10th
Sat 11th

Isaiah 6:1-6. Psalm 71: 1-2,7-8, 10-13. Ephesians 3:2-3,5-6. Matthew 2:1-12. **THE EPIPHANY of THE LORD**
1 John 3:22 – 4:6. Psalm 2:7-8,10-11. Matthew 4:12-17,23-25
1 John 4:7-10. Psalm 71:1-4,7-8. Mark 6:34-44
1 John 4:11-18. Psalm 71:1-2,10-13. Mark 6:45-52
1 John 4:19 – 5:4. Psalm 71:1-2,14-15,17. Luke 4:14-22
1 John 5:5-13. Psalm 147:12-15,19-20. Luke 5:12-16
1 John 5:14-21. Psalm 149:1-6,9. John 3:22-30

(St Raymund of Penyafort)

*abstinence***Sun 12th**

Mon 13th
Tue 14th
Wed 15th
Thu 16th
Fri 17th
Sat 18th

Isaiah 42:1-4,6-7. Psalm 28:1-4,9-10. Acts 10:34-38. Matthew 3:13-17
Ordinary Time begins - 'the Green Season'
1 Samuel 1:1-8. Psalm 115. Mark 1: 14-20
1 Samuel 2:9-20. Psalm 1 Samuel 2:4-8. Mark 1:21-28
1 Samuel 3:1-10. Psalm 39:2,5,7-10. Mark 1:29-39
1 Samuel 4:1-11. Psalm 43:10-11,14-15,24-25. Mark 1:40-45
1 Samuel 8:4-7.10-22. Psalm 88:16-19. Mark 2:1-12.
1 Samuel 9:1-4,17-19 – 10:1. Psalm 20:2-7. Mark 2:13-17
18th-25th January: Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

THE BAPTISM of the LORD

(St Hilary)

St Antony of Egypt *abstinence*
(of the BVM)

Sun 19th

Mon 20th
Tue 21st

Isaiah 49:3,5-6. Psalm 39:2,4,7-10, 1 Corinthians 1:1-3. John 1:29-34
1 Samuel 15:16-23. Psalm 49:8-9,16-17,21,23. Mark 2:18-22
1 Samuel 16:1-13. Psalm 88:20-22,27-28. Mark 2:23-28

2nd SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

(St Fabian or St Sebastian)
St Agnes

Wed 22nd 1 Samuel 17:32-33,37,40-51. Psalm 143:1-2,9-10. Mark 3:1-6.
 Thu 23rd 1 Samuel 18:9; 19:1-7. Psalm 55:2-3,9-14. Mark 3:7-12
 Fri 24th 1 Samuel 24:3-21. Psalm 56: 2-4,6,11. Mark 3:13-19
 Sat 25th Acts 22:3-16 or Acts 9:1-22. Psalm 116:1-2. Mark 16:15-18

(St Vincent)

St Francis de Sales
 CONVERSION of St PAUL

Sun 26th Isaiah 8:23 – 9:3. Psalm 26:1-4,13-14. 1 Corinthians 1:10-13,17. Matthew 4:12-23.
 Mon 27th 2 Samuel 5:1-7,10. Psalm 88:20-22,25-26. Mark 3:22-30
 Tue 28th 2 Samuel 6:12-15,17,19. Psalm 23:7-10. Mark 3:31-35
 Wed 29th 2 Samuel 7:4-17. Psalm 88:4-5,27-30. Mark 4:1-20
 Thu 30th 2 Samuel 7:18-19,24-29. Psalm 131:1-5,11-14. Mark 4:21-25
 Fri 31st 2 Samuel 11:1-10,13-17. Psalm 50:1-5,8-9. Mark 4:26-34

3rd SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

(St Angela Merici)
 St Thomas Aquinas

St John Bosco *abstinence*

Giving Hope to a World in Need

The Gambia Programme
Health, Nutrition, Agro-enterprise, Food Security
40 Atlantic Road, Fajara. Telephone 4498000

Seasonal Malaria Chemoprevention (SMC) Campaign in CRR & URR in 2017

CRS, in partnership with the National Malaria Control Programme (NMCP) of the Ministry of Health, have been implementing SMC strategy targeting children (3 to 59 months) in Upper and Central River regions from 2014 to 2016, supported by UNITAID ACCESS-SMC project. In 2017, with the support of the Global Fund, this high-impact intervention is being implemented again in the two regions to prevent children from getting malaria. The two regions have been identified due to their relatively high malaria transmission.



SMC is achieved by administering anti-malarial medicines (*sulfadoxine-pyrimethamine* (SP) and *amodiaquine* (AQ)) up to four monthly doses to children. It is administered during the peak of the rainy season (August – December) when the incidence of malaria is high. In total, an estimated 90,925 children are targeted through door-to-door strategy to administer the antimalarial medicine.

Information Communication for Development (ICT4D) uses android devices to enhance data collection, management and rapid analysis for effective decision-making. Despite challenging conditions in accessing communities during the rains, The Gambia is consistently able to reach over 80 per cent of the children targeted since the inception of the project. This is largely due to the commitment, perseverance and hard work of the health staff and volunteers and strong collaboration between the NMCP with CRS.

Would you like to say **Morning** and **Evening Prayer** every day, in company with priests and lay-people throughout the world?



Go to **Universalis** website and click on Morning Prayer, or Mass, or Vespers – as you wish – and you will find the complete Office



Emmanuel

‘The child is from the Holy Spirit’

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.'

All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him "Emmanuel", which means "God is with us".'

When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife.

Matthew 1:18-24. Gospel for the 4th Sunday in Advent, 22nd December

