

GLORIA IN EXCELSIS!



**BRINGING THE
CHRISTMAS OCTAVE
INTO YOUR HOME**

**EIGHT DAYS OF
PRAYERS,
REFLECTIONS
& ACTIVITIES**



Produced by the
Vicariate for Education
Diocese of Leeds





Diocese of Leeds

The eight day period between the great solemnities of Christmas Day on 25th December (including Christmas Eve) and Mary, Mother of God on 1st January is known as the “Christmas Octave”. Derived from the Latin *octava* (eighth), an “Octave” can be traced back to the Old Testament when celebrations such as the Feast of Booths lasted eight days. In the Early Church the number eight was associated with the Resurrection, which happened on the eighth day after Christ's entry into Jerusalem. The Octave was introduced into liturgical calendars after the date for Christmas was settled in the fourth century.

This booklet has been compiled by Fr Henry Longbottom and Dr Gregory Stacey. Through suggestions for different ways of praying together with various activities for each day of the Octave, we hope the material will help people in their celebration of the eight wonderful days of Christmas.

Gloria in excelsis Deo et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis!

(Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will!)



25TH DECEMBER - CHRISTMAS DAY

O COME, LET US ADORE HIM

"And suddenly with the angel there was a great throng of the heavenly host, praising God and singing: 'Glory to God in the highest heaven ...'"

The Gospel for today's Mass is taken from Luke 2:1-14 and recounts the angels' appearance to the shepherds. Their chorus of praise forms the basis of the "Gloria" which we recite at every Mass during the Christmas Octave.

Today, let's simply meditate on the scene of the nativity (perhaps imagining ourselves as the shepherds) and join the host of angels as we proclaim the words of the Gloria.



Let's pray ...

**Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to people of good will.
We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King, O God, almighty Father.
Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us;
you take away the sins of the world, receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us.
For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father.**

Amen.



The Nativity by Fra Angelico (Saint Mark's Convent, Florence)

26TH DECEMBER - FEAST OF ST STEPHEN THE FIRST MARTYR

WITNESSING TO JESUS WITH ST STEPHEN



Painting of St Stephen in St Stephen's Church, Skipton

Today we celebrate the feast of St Stephen, the first martyr of the Church. The term "Boxing Day" comes from the Middle Ages, when boxes of alms were distributed to the poor. The connection between our saint and this tradition is that Stephen was one of the seven deacons responsible for distributing food to widows in the early Christian community (Acts 6). St Stephen showed his generosity through charity, as well as by witnessing to the truth of Christ's divinity.



Let's pray ...

The gates of heaven were opened for blessed Stephen, who was found to be first among the number of the Martyrs, and therefore is crowned triumphant in heaven.

Entrance Antiphon for the Mass of Feast of St Stephen

Today's Carol ...



Good King Wenceslas tells the story of another saint (St Wenceslaus, an early Christian ruler of what is now the Czech Republic), who witnessed to Christ through kindness to the poor. Reflect on its first three verses:

*Good King Wenceslas looked out
On the Feast of Stephen,
When the snow lay 'round about
Deep and crisp and even;
Brightly shone the moon that night
Though the frost was cruel.
When a poor man came in sight
Gath'ring winter fuel.*

*"Hither, page, and stand by me
If thou know'st it, telling
Yonder peasant, who is he?
Where and what his dwelling?"*

*"Sire, he lives a good league hence,
Underneath the mountain
Right against the forest fence
By Saint Agnes' fountain".*

*"Bring me mead and bring me wine
Bring me pine logs hither,
Thou and I will see him dine
When we bear him thither".
Page and monarch forth they went,
Forth they went together;
Through the rude wind's
wild lament and the bitter weather.*



The Word of the Lord ... Acts 7:54-60

But Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, gazed into Heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at God's right hand. 'I can see heaven thrown open,' he said, 'and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.' At this all the members of the council shouted out and stopped their ears with their hands; then they all rushed at him, sent him out of the city and stoned him. The witnesses put down their cloaks at the feet of a young man called Saul. As they were stoning him, Stephen said in invocation, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he knelt down and said aloud, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them'; and with these words he fell asleep.

Ways of Praying ... Walk & Talk to God!

Since the onset of the pandemic, many of us have valued the chance to exercise and appreciate the natural world by going on regular walks. Why not incorporate prayer into walking? "Prayer walking" is a good way of combining physical activity with reflection, and experiencing God's presence in nature. In your "St Stephen's Day Prayer Walk", perhaps you can reflect on the account of St Stephen's martyrdom, catching a glimpse of God's glory in the winter's sky. Why not pick up a stone to remind you of St Stephen's sacrifice?



Did you know?

IN OUR OWN DIOCESE WE HAVE A RELIC CONNECTED TO ST STEPHEN. ST STEPHEN'S CHURCH IN SKIPTON POSSESSES A ROCK (SHOWN ABOVE) WHICH IS BELIEVED TO BE FROM THE PLACE IN THE HOLY LAND WHERE ST STEPHEN WAS STONED TO DEATH. YOU CAN LISTEN TO A PODCAST ON THIS RELIC ON THE "YEAR OF THE WORD" SECTION OF THE DIOCESE OF LEEDS WEBSITE.



Activity: *Prepare a Box!*

St Stephen and St Wenceslas witnessed to their faith in Christ through giving to those in need. Is there anything you could "box up" today for others? Perhaps something for the charity shop, food bank, or for a friend or neighbour?



Let's pray ...

**For the many mercies which surround us
we give thanks to You, O Lord,
who save us through the Nativity of your Son
and gladden us with the celebration of the blessed Martyr Stephen.
Through Christ our Lord.**

Prayer after Communion for the Feast of the Mass of St Stephen

27TH DECEMBER - FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY

EXTRAORDINARY & YET ORDINARY

The feast of the Holy Family reminds us that the family home of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph was in many ways just like any other home. They would have talked, laughed, disagreed, worked, eaten, dealt with problems, and encountered everything else that makes up everyday family life. The Holy Family were not exempt from daily toil, hurt, and the challenges that face most families.



Let's pray ...

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. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen

Collect for the Mass of Feast of the Holy Family



The Gospel of the Lord ...

Luke 2:22-24

When the day came for them to be purified as laid down by the Law of Moses, the parents of Jesus took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord – observing what stands written in the Law of the Lord: Every first-born male must be consecrated to the Lord – and also to offer in sacrifice, in accordance with what is said in the Law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.



Reflect ...

- What "sacrifices" did those who brought me up make?
- How can I pass on the faith to other members of my family?



Ways of Praying ... Use Your Imagination!

Very little is recorded in the Gospels about Jesus' early life growing up in Nazareth. This is where we are invited to use our imagination to fill in the gaps. Reflecting on the wood carving opposite (which is in the chapel of Holy Family High School in Selby), imagine what was it like to live day in and day out in the household of St. Joseph. What was it like to have Jesus for a son? Mary as a wife and mother? Joseph as a father and husband?



Activity: *Family Bake Off!*

Our childhood memories are often shaped by the things our parents, grandparents and others cooked or baked for us. Preparing home-cooked food is a sign of love for those around us. In honour of today's Feast of the Holy Family, why not prepare something for other members of the family or friends which reminds you of your childhood, perhaps using a time-honoured recipe passed down from earlier generations?



Let's pray ...

Lord,

**I offer myself to you this day,
and in doing so I offer You my family.**

**I offer every relationship, good or difficult,
and I offer every challenge we face.**

**Please come and sanctify my family, making it holy in
imitation of your family in Nazareth.**

Did you know?

IN OUR DIOCESE THERE ARE FIVE CHAPELS DEDICATED TO THE HOLY FAMILY: IN CARLTON, KEIGHLEY, LEEDS (GREEN LANE & HINSLEY HALL) & SLAITHWAITE. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF HOLY FAMILY, GREEN LANE WAS INDIRECTLY THE RESULT OF THE BUILDING OF ARMLEY GAOL IN 1847 WHICH LED TO A GROWTH IN THE POPULATION OF THE WORTLEY AREA. THE FOUNDATION STONE OF THE EXISTING CHURCH DESIGNED BY JOHN KELLY (ALSO ARCHITECT OF THE ORIGINAL ST PATRICK'S, LEEDS) WAS LAID BY BISHOP GORDON ON 17 JUNE 1894.

28TH DECEMBER - FEAST OF THE HOLY INNOCENTS

PRAYING FOR THE LITTLE ONES

Today the Church sits in mourning in the midst of celebration. Yes, Jesus our Emmanuel has been born and His presence breaks into the darkness. But all is not well in the world. The Holy Family's flight into Egypt and Herod's massacre of children reminds us of the tragic reality of suffering caused by cruelty and injustice.



'Scène du massacre des Innocents' by Léon Cogniet, 1824



Let's pray ...

O God, whom the Holy Innocents confessed and proclaimed on this day, not by speaking but by dying, grant, we pray, that the faith in you which we confess with our lips may also speak through our manner of life. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

Collect for the Mass of the Feast of the Holy Innocents



The Gospel of the Lord ... *Matt 2:13-18*

After the wise men had left, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother with you, and escape into Egypt, and stay there until I tell you, because Herod intends to search for the child and do away with him.' So Joseph got up and, taking the child and his mother with him, left that night for Egypt, where he stayed until Herod was dead. This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: I called my son out of Egypt. Herod was furious when he realised that he had been outwitted by the wise men, and in Bethlehem and its surrounding district he had all the male children killed who were two years old or under, reckoning by the date he had been careful to ask the wise men.



Today's Carol ...

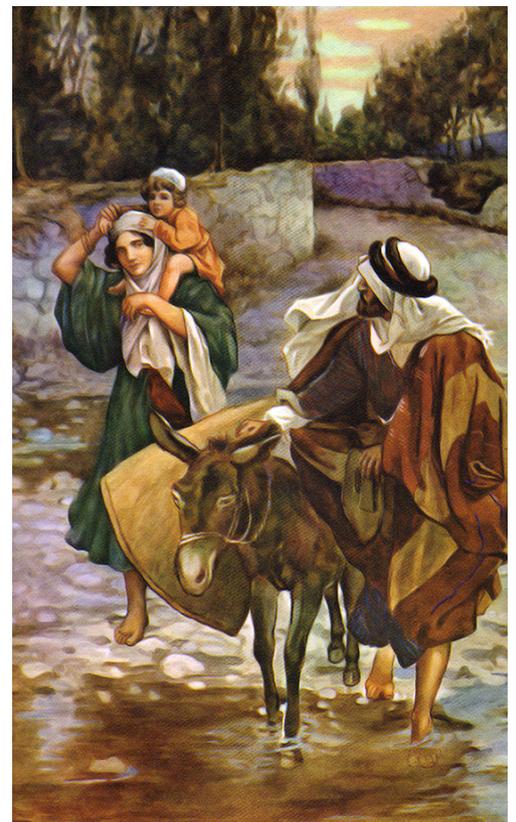
The *Coventry Carol* originated in a 16th century "mystery play" called the "Pageant of the Shearman and Tailors". In the play, this evocative lament is sung by the mothers in Bethlehem, whose children are about to be murdered through Herod's cruelty. The carol combines the sound of their weeping with the gentle cadences of a lullaby.

<i>Lully, lullah, thou little tiny child, Bye bye, lully, lullay. Thou little tiny child, Bye bye, lully, lullay.</i>	<i>Herod the king, in his raging, Chargèd he hath this day His men of might in his own sight All young children to slay.</i>
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<i>O sisters too, how may we do For to preserve this day This poor youngling for whom we sing, "Bye bye, lully, lullay"?</i>	<i>That woe is me, poor child, for thee And ever mourn and may For thy parting neither say nor sing, "Bye bye, lully, lullay."</i>
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Ways of Praying ... Intercessory Prayer

Put simply, intercessory prayer is praying for others. When we intercede we take the place of another person, or "plead their cause". Christ is our model for intercessory prayer. During His earthly life Jesus prayed for others - for the sick, for his disciples, and for future believers. In heaven, Christ is our mediator before God the Father, which is why we address our prayers to God, through Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit.



"Flight into Egypt" by William Hole, 1894

Let's close with a series of intercessions as we pray to the Lord ...

- ***For the Church: that she may bring peace and comfort to all who suffer.***
- ***For the protection of human life: that every person may be cherished.***
- ***For mothers who have lost children: that Christ may console them.***
- ***For those who have fled their homes due to persecution: that they may find shelter.***
- ***For ourselves: that we may come to the aid of others in their need.***

***We ask these prayers through Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever. Amen.***

29TH DECEMBER - FEAST OF ST THOMAS BECKET

WITNESSING TO THE TRUTH



Today in England we celebrate the witness of St Thomas Becket, an Archbishop of Canterbury who defended the Church against attacks from King Henry II. In a burst of frustration, the king exclaimed, "Will no one rid me of this meddling priest?" Four knights who were with the king took this as an order, and murdered Becket whilst he was reciting vespers in Canterbury Cathedral. St Thomas is a role model for defending the truth; and his martyrdom is a lesson in the possible dire consequences of careless words spoken in anger.



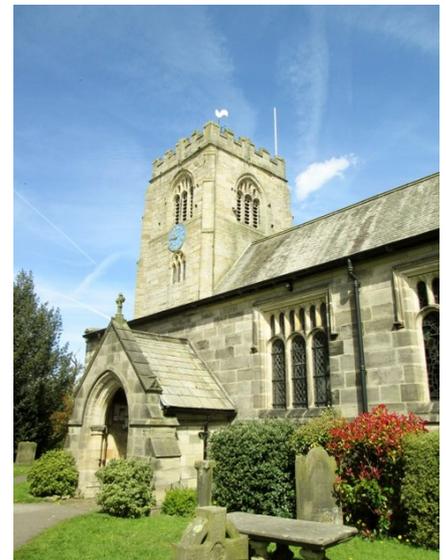
Let's pray...

O God, who gave the Martyr Saint Thomas Becket the courage to give up his life for the sake of justice, grant, through his intercession, that, renouncing our life for the sake of Christ in this world, we may find it in heaven. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

Collect for the Mass of the Feast of St Thomas Becket

Did you know?

THE ORIGINAL ST THOMAS A BECKET CHURCH (PICTURED OPPOSITE) IN THE VILLAGE OF HAMPSTHWAITE, HARROGATE WAS PROBABLY COMPLETED ABOUT 1180. IT IS BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN CONSTRUCTED BY HUGH DE MORVILLE, THE CONSTABLE OF KNARESBOROUGH CASTLE AND ONE OF THE FOUR KNIGHTS RESPONSIBLE FOR ST THOMAS BECKET'S MURDER AT CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL IN 1170 . THE KNIGHTS WERE LATER PARDONED FOR THEIR CRIME BY THE POPE WHO (IT IS THOUGHT) REQUIRED THE BUILDING AND DEDICATION OF THE CHURCH AS PART OF HUGH DE MORVILLE'S PENANCE.





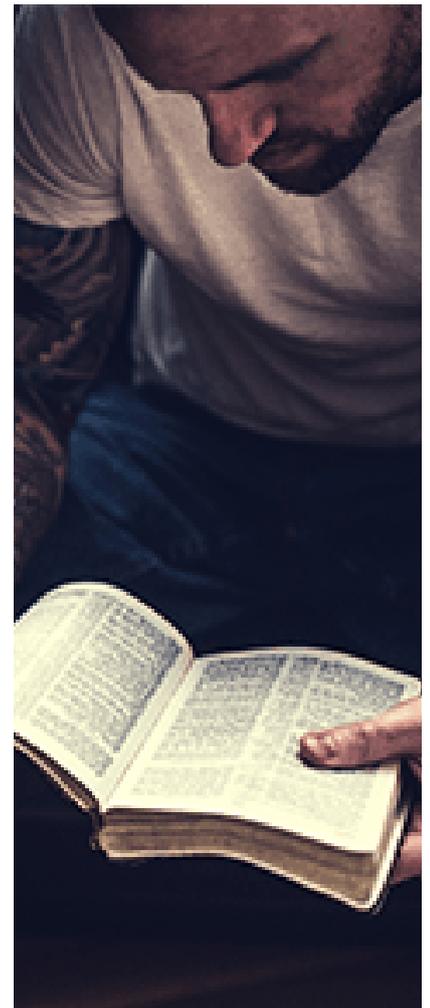
The Gospel of the Lord ... *Matthew 10:28-30*

Jesus said to his apostles: 'Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; fear him rather who can destroy both body and soul in hell. Can you not buy two sparrows for a penny? And yet not one falls to the ground without your Father knowing. Why, every hair on your head has been counted. So there is no need to be afraid; you are worth more than hundreds of sparrows.'

Ways of Praying ... *Lectio Divina*

Lectio Divina (which simply means "divine" or "sacred" reading) is attentively listening to the voice of God speaking to us in the Scriptures. **Lectio Divina** traditionally comprises five steps. Using today's Gospel passage, let's try these ...

1. **Lectio:** slowly read the passage, asking yourself - what does this Biblical text say? Perhaps focus on a particular image, sentence, or word.
2. **Meditatio:** now meditate on the passage, or part of it you are drawn to, and ask - what does the text say to me?
3. **Oratio:** next, ponder - what might I say to the Lord in response to reading His Word?
4. **Contemplatio:** based on the text, consider - what conversion of mind, heart and life is the Lord asking of me?
5. **Actio:** how might I put into action and live out any experiences I've just gained?



Activity: *Watch an inspiring film about a saint !*

Why not watch the 1964 film *Becket* starring Richard Burton, Peter O'Toole, and John Gielgud? Films about saints (often available on YouTube) can be entertaining and inspiring. Other classics you could watch are: *The Song of Bernadette* (1943), *Joan of Arc* (1948), *A Man for All Seasons* (1966), *Romero* (1989), *Molokai: The Story of Father Damien* (1999), *Saint Philip Neri: I Prefer Heaven* (2010), & *Thérèse* (1986).

30TH DECEMBER - 6TH DAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF CHRISTMAS

A HOPE THAT IS NEVER EXTINGUISHED

Sometimes, good news takes forever to arrive. This year, how many of us have tuned into the news each evening or refreshed our social media with the hope of finding some encouragement? In today's Gospel, we meet someone who waited at least fifty years for the good news she was expecting. But her waiting time was not wasted time, because she spent it in prayer and hope.



“Prophetess Anna” by Rembrandt, 1639



Let's pray...

When a profound silence covered all things and night was in the middle of its course, your all-powerful Word, O Lord, bounded from heaven's royal throne.

Entrance Antiphon for today's Mass



The Gospel of the Lord ...

Luke 2:36-38

There was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was well on in years. Her days of girlhood over, she had been married for seven years before becoming a widow. She was now eighty-four years old and never left the Temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayer. She came by just at that moment and began to praise God; and she spoke of the child to all who looked forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem.



Reflect ...

- What has given me hope this year?
- Even in this difficult time, has God given me gifts for which I can praise Him?



Today's Carol ...

O Little Town of Bethlehem was written by the Episcopalian minister Phillips Brooks in 1868 after a visit to the Holy Land. The text speaks of the same kind of fulfilment of hope that Prophetess Anna felt in the Temple when she saw the Christ child. How does it speak to you today?



*O little town of Bethlehem
How still we see thee lie;
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.*

*How silently, how silently
The wondrous gift is given;
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of His heaven.
No ear may hear His coming,
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive him, still
The dear Christ enters in.*

*For Christ is born of Mary
And gathered all above
While mortals sleep, the angels keep
Their watch of wondering love.
O morning stars together
Proclaim the holy birth
And praises sing to God the King
And Peace to men on earth.*

*O holy Child of Bethlehem
Descend to us, we pray.
Cast out our sin and enter in
Be born to us today.
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Emmanuel.*



Activity: *It's good to talk!*

Is there anyone you know who might welcome a message of support and encouragement today? Perhaps a person who is lonely, or struggling to find hope right now? Why not write them a note or give them a call?



Let's pray...

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Numbers 6:24-26

31ST DECEMBER - COMMEMORATION OF ST SILVESTER

OUR TRIUNE GOD

Today we commemorate St Sylvester (d. 335), a Pope at a time when the Church was settling important questions about the status of Jesus. At the Council of Nicaea in 325 (which drew up a version of the **Nicene Creed** which we recite every Sunday and on Solemnities) the Church affirmed that as the second person of the Godhead, Jesus is "consubstantial" with the Father. Rejecting the notion that Jesus was a "creature", the Council affirmed that at the Incarnation, God Himself became human. Reason indeed to rejoice at Christmas!



Let's pray...

Almighty ever-living God, who in the Nativity of your Son established the beginning and fulfilment of all religion, grant, we pray, that we may be numbered among those who belong to him, in whom is the fullness of human salvation. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

Collect or today's Mass



Fresco of the Council of Nicaea from the Sistine Chapel, Vatican (1590)



The Gospel of the Lord ...

John 1:1-3

In the beginning was the Word: and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things came to be; not one thing had its being but through him. All that came to be had life in him, and that life was the light of men: a light that shines in the dark, and light that darkness could not overpower.



Reflect ...

- Who do I say Jesus is?
- If I believe that God Himself became human, does this change how I think about my own value?

Ways of Praying ... *Praying the Creed*

It's easy to forget to reflect on what we affirm when we pray the Nicene Creed. The Creed tells the story of the early Christians' growing understanding of God, but is it your story too? Grab a pen and underline words and phrases that strike you, console you, or challenge you. Make the Creed your prayer for today.

I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

AMEN.



Activity: Going deeper ...

There are many excellent online resources which can help us to understand the Church's teaching about Jesus. Bishop Robert Barron gives a thoughtful and accessible explanation of the Creed in this podcast:

<https://www.wordonfire.org/resources/homily/begotten-not-made/5157/>



Let's pray...

**Glory Be to the Father,
and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, is now,
and ever shall be, world without end.
Amen.**



1ST JANUARY - SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

ENTERING THE NEW YEAR WITH THE QUEEN OF PEACE

Mary pondered the shepherds' news that Jesus is our Saviour, who brings "peace to people of goodwill". On the threshold of a new year we too ponder what Christ's peace might look like in our lives. True peace which Christ brings is not just an absence of conflict but comes from a desire to serve in love. May our Lady shows us this peace in 2021.



Statue of the Madonna in the Parish of Mary, Mother of God, Bradford



Let's pray...

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 her intercessions, through whom we were found worthy to receive the author of life, our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

*Collect for the Solemnity of Mary,
Mother of God*



The Gospel of the Lord ...

Luke, 2:16-19

The shepherds hurried away to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. When they saw the child, they repeated what they had been told about him, and everyone who heard it was astonished at what the shepherds had to say. As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.



Reflect ...

- Over the past 12 months what have I learnt to treasure in my heart?
- For this year ahead, in what areas of my life do I pray for peace?



Today's Carol ...

Although *The Holly and Ivy* is a Victorian hymn, its roots go back to Medieval times when holly began to be associated with the Christ child, and ivy with Our Lady. The fact that these plants do not die in winter adds to the symbolism.

*The holly and the ivy
When they are both full grown,
Of all trees that are in the wood
The holly bears the crown.*

*The holly bears a berry
As red as any blood,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
To do poor sinners good.*

*Refrain:
O, the rising of the sun
And the running of the deer,
The playing of the merry organ
Sweet singing in the choir.*

*The holly bears a prickle
As sharp as any thorn,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
On Christmas Day in the morn.*

*The holly bears a blossom
As white as lily flow'r,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
To be our dear Saviour.*

*The holly bears a bark
As bitter as any gall
And Mary bore,
sweet Jesus Christ
For to redeem us all.*



Ways of Praying ... *The Rosary*

Why not conclude this Octave by simply talking to God, telling him your hopes for 2021, and asking Him to give you the grace to face challenges ahead, and to follow Christ, Prince of Peace. Conclude with a decade of the Rosary, uniting your prayers with those of Our Lady, Mother of God and Queen of Peace.



Let's pray...

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of mercy, hail, our life, our sweetness and our hope. To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve: to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears. Turn then, most gracious Advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us, and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus, O merciful, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary! Amen.

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