

**BULLETIN B 4 – 20TH DECEMBER 2020
THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

My dear Brothers and Sisters,

So we have almost arrived at the Christmas feast, all this talk of cancelling was utter nonsense. We may be restricted as to where we go and who with meet, but The Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ is a reality that can never be cancelled. I truly believe that some good things have come from this pandemic, and maybe this Christmas is one of them. We get so stressed about presents and food shopping and trees and all the things that we now know are not necessary. To celebrate this Christmas well, let us concentrate on the birth of our Saviour and thank God for the gift of His Son.

I Hope to see you all at Mass over Christmas. I understand that some may still be a little fearful of being in a fuller church, but we have made sure that you will be as safe as possible. We will have to have the windows open during mass to increase ventilation, so please wrap up warm for mass – Christmas Jumpers very acceptable, and a bit of fun is very welcome! There will be a Boxing Day mass this year at 10am may be especially useful for those who prefer to be in a smaller gathering. Please note that there will not be a 6pm Mass on next Sunday.

If this year your faith has been a bit battered, if you have let slip your spiritual life then even more than ever Confession before the Feast is very important.

God Bless you and your families this Christmas
Fr. John

TIMES OF MASS AND ADORATION THIS WEEK

Sun	20	4 th of Advent	1000 Mass	People of the Parish
			1800 Mass	Connie Smith (RIP)
Tue	22	feria	1900 Mass	John Hogan (RIP)
Wed	23	feria	1000 Mass	Joseph and Mary Murphy
			1020 Adoration	
Thu	24	Christmas Eve	1800 Mass	People of the Parish
Fri	25	Christmas Day	0900 Mass	Aneurin Westrop (RIP)
			1100 Mass	Anne Hutton (RIP)
Sat	26	St. Stephen	1000 Mass	Deacon Michael (INT)
Sun	27	Holy Family	1000 Mass	People of the Parish

GOSPEL REFLECTION

How does wisdom work? It might be helpful to start with the insight of Meister Eckhart, a famous German Dominican philosopher, theologian and mystical writer of the thirteenth century. He said: "Wisdom consists in doing the next thing you have to do, doing it with your whole heart and finding delight in doing it." So how do we determine the next thing we have to do? This time last year, it may have been about making all sorts of elaborate plans and schemes to be more successful in our professional lives, or in acquiring something that we have worked hard to achieve. Now, as this momentous and, in many ways, tragic year draws to a close, we wonder what is now the next thing we have to do. How will we do it with our whole hearts and find delight in doing it?

In today's Gospel, we have the arrival of the angel Gabriel, who invites Mary to rejoice that she has been chosen to be the mother of Jesus. Classical artists tend to depict Mary as a docile young woman, often kneeling in prayer as she accepts the awesome invitation. Mary, though, is also eminently practical and asks the angel to explain how this will be possible since she has no husband. Mary is testing the wisdom of the message she has received. She is being invited to risk her reputation and perhaps even her life. The law of Moses would have classified her as someone deserving death by stoning, since she would have been regarded as an adulteress. She would also have known that her parents would have been disgraced in their community because of their

daughter's shame. The angel, in reply, is able to offer compelling evidence that the invitation to Mary is genuine. Against all the odds, Mary's kinswoman Elizabeth, well beyond the age of child-bearing, is now expecting a baby herself as a sign of God's blessing.

We, of course, know that the story of Jesus unfolded to reveal all sorts of joy and sorrow, contradictions and challenges, leading to his death on the cross of a criminal and, ultimately, his resurrection in glory. But, like the uncertainty which has been the hallmark of this year, let us simply sit with the tensions and the challenges of what Mary was asked to do and be assured that it all worked out well for her, and for us, in the end.

We use all sorts of imagery for holiness and commitment. Our readings today use the imagery of the dwelling places of God. David does not simply go off and begin his great construction enterprise without checking with his wise advisor, the prophet Nathan. As it turns out, David doesn't get to finish the work and it falls to his son, Solomon, to complete the building of the Temple in Jerusalem. God's promise to David was to make David himself the house. His family line would be forever blessed, and this was achieved through the birth of Jesus.

We use the image of the house for many aspects of our lives. Our political institutions are often named "houses". "House of David" meant the entire chosen people of God rather than a building. For us as a faith community, our house of God can be both our physical place of public worship and the house of our hearts. Are we sometimes more caught up in the trappings of the architecture and lavish liturgy than the meaning of our worship? What type of house can we make for God this Christmas, at the end of a year in which our own homes may have been places of refuge and safety but also places of restriction and confinement, away from family and friends? What did we learn about the things that make our houses good places to be? Were these physical items or ways we use our time? Should we ration our social media activity so that we can actually be present in real time to others, or do the new technologies offer us more opportunities to connect with those who are isolated and unwell? How can we be more fully the house of God as we go forth to love and serve the Lord this Christmas? We remember that the first house of Jesus was a stable and that he had to rely on the shelter offered by strangers. Are we able to take this as our model for the Christian life?

THE ASSUMPTION OF OUR LADY

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We received news this week from Fr Fiacra who writes:-

A Safe Advent... A Peaceful Christmas... A Happy New Year...to all my friends at the Assumption who I constantly remember at Mass.

Here in Malawi, the virus is still at a low level, thank Goodness. A small number of people have died. We hope it keeps that way as the 'health service' could not possibly cope. So life goes on, with its joys and sorrows. Of course, social distancing and lock downs are also part of the scene and large church gatherings are not possible. However, schools have reopened and at least that makes things feel a little normal.

During 2020 we have been busy with various things: --

1. H/Aids suffers ... Malaria suffers Forestry Project (planting trees) goes well; even if we did have a small fire some months back.
2. Our firewood saving project is continuing. We bought another 20 'stoves' during the year and have distributed them to more local people. In a survey we conducted after some months, we got good reports of these firewood-saving devices.
3. Education: -- We are helping two Secondary School students with school fees. One is in Form Two and the other in form Three. The lock down in schools earlier in the year upset things but now it is more or less back to normal.

YOUR CARE AND CONCERN HAS GREATLY HELPED

A Few incidents from our Daily Life here in Malawi Recently on a road journey we came across an accident. Eleven people injured, some seriously. We loaded 6 of them into the back of our pickup and brought them to a local clinic, expecting an ambulance to be called from the district hospital. We were told that one was not available!_The clinical officer asks us to bring three of the most seriously injured cases to the hospital about 40 miles away. So, we got some mattresses and laid them down on the back of our pickup and off we went. Not long after we started, we found that two big Lorries blocking the road. In an effort to pass another in a narrow section they got stuck. So, there we were with three seriously ill people in the back under the hot sun and the road blocked. After some time, the road was cleared and on we went. We got them to hospital where they are making a good recovery.

I found a black mamba (snake) in my room, recently / found a scorpion in my bed about a month ago / never a dull moment!

It's the end of the dry season and the mango trees are full of fruit. Troops of baboons come down from the higher country for the mangoes and to search for other foods._They have a taste for chicken, *our chickens*. The baboons have already eaten three of them. Now we have to be on guard until the mango season ends (about six weeks). At the moment there is plenty of shouting and noise-making to keep the baboons away.

Looking forward to seeing you during the summer.

Fr. Fiacra

A Message from Maureen Potter

I am writing to inform you all that I will be standing down as Local Secretary of Missio at the end of 2020.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all box holders, past and present, for their prayers and generous support of the missions over the years.

Although 2020 has been a difficult year for everyone you were not deterred in your generosity to those less fortunate.

With all good wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

Maureen.

A Message from Fr. John on your behalf to Maureen.

Maureen we are deeply grateful to you for all the effort and hard work you have put in, over many years, you will be a hard act to follow – God Bless you Missio total this year was £320-67 thanks to all who contributed. This work is so important. I'm looking for someone to volunteer could you help?

Padre Pio wrote his Christmas meditation, which contains the following passages:

Far into the night, at the coldest time of the year, in a chilly grotto, more suitable for a flock of beasts than for humans, the promised Messiah – Jesus – the saviour of mankind, comes into the world in the fullness of time. There are none who clamour around him: only an ox and an ass lending their warmth to the newborn infant; with a humble woman, and a poor and tired man, in adoration beside him. [...] He had been expected for forty centuries; with longing sighs the ancient Fathers had implored his arrival. The sacred scriptures clearly prophesy the time and the place of his birth, and yet the world is silent and no one seems aware of the great event. Only some shepherds, who had been busy watching over their sheep in the meadows, come to visit him. Heavenly visitors had alerted them to the wondrous event, inviting them to approach his cave. [...] The heavenly babe suffers and cries in the crib so that for us suffering would be sweet, meritorious and accepted. He deprives himself of everything, in order that we may learn from him the renunciation of worldly goods and comforts. He is satisfied with humble and poor adorers, to encourage us to love poverty, and to prefer the company of the little and simple rather than the great ones of the world.

Prayer before the Crib

I ADORE Thee, O Word Incarnate, true SON of GOD from all eternity, and true Son of Mary ever Virgin in the fullness of time. When I adore thy divine Person, and the Humanity united to thy Divinity, I venerate the poor manger which welcomed Thee when an Infant, and which was truly the throne of thy love. I prostrate myself before it with the simplicity of the shepherds, with the faith of Joseph, with the love of Mary. I bow down in veneration of this precious memorial of our salvation with the same spirit of mortification, poverty and humility with which Thou, though the LORD of heaven and earth, didst choose for thyself a manger wherein to lay thy tender infant limbs. And Thou, O LORD, who in thine Infancy didst deign to lay thyself in this manger, vouchsafe also to pour into my heart a drop of that joy to which the sight of thy lovely Childhood, and the miracles which accompanied thy Birth, gave rise. By that holy Birth, I now implore Thee to grant to all the world peace and goodwill, and in the name of the whole human race I render thanks and honour to GOD the FATHER, and to GOD the HOLY SPIRIT, who with Thee live and reign one GOD world without end. Amen.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph,
in you we contemplate the splendour of true love;
to you we turn with trust.

Holy Family of Nazareth,
grant that our families too
may be places of communion and prayer,
authentic schools of the Gospel
and small domestic churches.

Holy Family of Nazareth,
may families never again experience
violence, rejection and division;
may all who have been hurt or scandalized
find ready comfort and healing.

Holy Family of Nazareth,
make us once more mindful
of the sacredness and inviolability of the family,
and its beauty in God's plan.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph,
graciously hear our prayer. Amen.