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| **Services this week** | | | |
| **Day** | **Time** | **Location** | **Celebration** |
| Saturday 13th | 4pm | Middleton | Sixth Sunday of Easter |
| Saturday 13th | 6.30pm | Barnard Castle | Sixth Sunday of Easter |
| Sunday 14th | 9.30am | Gainford | Sixth Sunday of Easter |
| Sunday 14th | 11.30am | Gainford (Ord.) | Sixth Sunday of Easter |
| Tuesday 16th | 10am | Gainford | *Easter feria* |
| Thursday 18th | 10am | Barnard Castle | **ASCENSION** |
| Thursday 18th | 12noon | Gainford | **ASCENSION** |
| Thursday 18th | 7pm | Gainford (Ord.) | **ASCENSION** |
| Friday 19th | 12noon | Gainford (Ord.) | *S. Dunstan* |
| Friday 19th | 6-7pm | Barnard Castle | Holy Hour |
| Saturday 20th | 6.30pm | Barnard Castle | Seventh Sunday of Easter |
| Sunday 21st | 9.30am | Gainford | Seventh Sunday of Easter |
| Sunday 21st | 11.30am | Gainford (Ord.) | Seventh Sunday of Easter |
| **Confessions:** after mass, by appointment or Monday and Thursday 5:30-6pm and Saturday 10-11am.  As we celebrate Our Lady’s month of May – at the end of Mass today, we will crown her statue. | | | |
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| **Mass Readings** | |
| First Reading | *Acts 8:5-8, 14-17* |
| Responsorial Psalm | **Cry out with joy to God all the earth.** *Psalm 65:1-7, 16, 20 response v 1* |
| Second Reading | *1 Peter 3:15-18* |
| Gospel Acclamation | **Alleluia, alleluia! Jesus said: If anyone loves me he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we shall come to him. Alleluia!** *John 14:23* |
| Gospel | *John 14:15-21* |

**St. Mary’s Catholic Church**

Birch Road, Barnard Castle, DL12 8NR

**Clergy Fr. Thomas Mason (Parish Priest)**

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**Rota**

This week: Welcomers-Leanne Porter/Tracy Tallentire; Reader- John Crabbe; Bidding Prayers- Sheila Crabbe

Next week: Welcomers-Fiona Bissell/Sheila Crabbe; Reader- Michael Little; Bidding Prayers- John Crabbe

Dear friends,

A few weeks ago we noted that the great theologian S. Anselm had asked the question *cur Deus homo*? (literally, why the God-man?) exploring the nature of the incarnation and atonement. This Thursday we celebrate the culmination of the incarnation, the moment when Christ (who is now both God and man) ascended into heaven, and did so as both God and man.

Since the very beginnings of the world that had been the realm in which humanity lived – the universe – and separately the realm in which God in himself lived – heaven. While God could always see our realm, indeed had created it, and would intervene in it; we had little insight into his realm of heaven. God was indeed far off, except for when he chose to draw near to us. But this all changed dramatically in the incarnation. At that moment, when a tiny child was conceived in the womb of Our Lady, God entered into our realm by becoming one of us.

The incarnation has to change how we see humanity. Humanity has always been worthy of respect and dignity, we are all made in God’s image and likeness; but since the incarnation and because of it, human nature is something which we have in common with Christ – Christ who is both God and man.

During his life on earth Christ did many great works, these reached their peak when he died for our sins and was raised from the dead. After a short 40 day period of living that resurrected life here on earth he ascended into heaven (as we celebrate on Thursday). This might make it seem as though he has done his work and no goes off to a well-earned retirement, but the ascension is a moment as profound for us as the incarnation.

The 40 days on earth were to prove his resurrection, so that those close workers of his could realise that his death was not the end. They were to prepare the leaders of his Church to carry his message out to the whole world. But once that job was completed he returned to heaven. It’s one of those highly complicated theological ideas which we can’t fully understand, but in his Godhead he had never left his heavenly throne, but in the ascension he returns to it. But the important point is that it is now as this union of God and man that he returns to heaven.

At this point you might be thinking, fair enough, that’s great for him…but how is this relevant to me and my life? We noted earlier that our ‘space’ has been totally separate from God’s; God has heaven, and we are here on earth. But in the ascension a human has entered heaven, and this changes everything for us as well. We live our lives here, and these are hopefully good lives filled with joy and happiness; but now this is not the end of the matter. After this life we have the possibility of doing what Christ has done at the ascension – of entering heaven.

By becoming human in the incarnation, God has shared everything which is proper to our human nature; he became one of us, he experienced what we experienced; exactly like us in all things except sin. Through the ascension, he offers to share with us some of what it is to be like him. He has entered heaven as one of us, as a human, he never left that humanity behind; and this shows us that there is now a pathway by which we can enter into heaven too.

As we approach this great feast, and then celebrate it, let us keep that in mind. As with everything that he did, Christ’s ascension was done for us. May we all join with him in due course, so that we can enjoy his presence and those eternal joys of heaven.

Fr. Thomas.

**Q.R. Code for donations:** As you arrived today you may have noticed a number of Q.R. codes on display. These take you to a donations page for the church, which you may find more convenient than bringing cash or a cheque.

**Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes 2023:** Can you help the Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes next year? We need nurses, healthcare assistants, doctors and volunteers to provide care to the assisted pilgrims who travel with us. Previous helpers have found it is a rewarding and spiritually uplifting week. We plan to travel on Friday 28th July. If you would like to find out more information please email or look at our website <https://www.hexhamandnewcastlelourdespilgrimage.co.uk/> or email [lourdes@rcdhn.org.uk](mailto:lourdes@rcdhn.org.uk)

**Prayer List:** Among the sick of the parish, please keep Pat G., Mary Robertson, Pauline Traynor, John Burgess, and Anthony Cole in your prayers. If you know of others who would like to be added to the parish prayer list, please let Fr. Thomas know.

You may find the following prayer useful as a way of drawing our parish ever closer together round Our Lord. It is through his grace that we are turned from a gathering of people in the same place, into a parish, into a genuine community.

Loving Father, we the people of St Mary's Parish offer ourselves to you, to be your people in this place, to be your Church in our community, and to be instruments of peace, forgiveness and love. Help us grow in gratitude so that we can recognise and thank you for all our blessings.

Instil in us a deep sense of generosity so that we are willing to share our gifts, our talents, our time and our resources. Help us face whatever the future holds and to make new beginnings in your name.

We ask this through Jesus Christ, your Son our Lord. Amen.

**Shrine Lamps:** We are all familiar with the practice of lighting a votive candle as a means of praying for our various intentions. An old tradition is for people to sponsor a sanctuary lamp which burns for a week. We have six locations where such lamps can burn – in each case the lamp will burn for a week, with a sign by it indicating the intention for which it burns. The main sanctuary lamp is the one in the centre, which indicates the presence of the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle; we also have the Lady Chapel, the Martyrs’ Altar; along with the statues of the Sacred Heart, Our Lady, and S. Joseph. If you would like such a lamp to burn, please complete one of the forms at the back or by the side door – indicate where you would like the lamp to burn, which week, and the intention for which you would like it to burn – and then return to Fr. Thomas or stick it through the presbytery letterbox. Each lamp costs £5.

**First Communion:** The parish first communion preparation began recently. Please keep Alfie, Amber, Edward, Robbie, and Tomek in your prayers as they progress towards making this important step in their relationship with Christ; as well as Amelia, Eleanor, and Max who are preparing with them from S. Osmund parish.

**Cost of living - Food Bank:** There is shocking new research that reveals how the cost of living crisis is affecting every single area in Britain.Here's how people living close to us are struggling: 36% couldn't afford to turn the heating on when cold in the past month.

17% missed a rent payment in the last 6 months.

31% are worried about having to use a food bank in the next year

44% of people's mental health has continued to worsen during the cost of living crisis

Please continue to make donations in the food bank box at the back of church

Or alternatively please give cash donations either to Father or to Andrew Heron.

Many thanks

**Sign of Peace:** During the pandemic this was suspended for obvious reasons. If members of the congregation would like to begin sharing it again, there will be a pause before the ‘Lamb of God’ is begun. A number of parishes have suggested that a bow to neighbours rather than a handshake is both prudent and a more sacred manner of doing so.

**Our Lady’s month:** As we are now into May, we mark this as Our Lady’s month and so increase our devotions to her throughout this month. A lamp burns in front of her statue

**Eamon Duffy lecture:** The lecture by Professor Eamon Duffy advertised last week has sadly had to be postponed due to bereavement. It is planned that it will now take place later this year.

**Job Vacancies:** St Mary’s Catholic School, Barnard Castle, are looking to appoint an Early Years Educator, Level 3 Apprentice. More details, including the application process, can be found at <https://bhcet.org.uk/vacancies/>

The Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle is looking to appoint a Fundraising Manager to lead on the development and implementation of a Diocesan Fundraising Strategy to include trusts, foundations and legacies. The role is full-time and permanent.

Please visit [www.diocesehn.org.uk](http://www.diocesehn.org.uk) for full details or contact us on 0191 243 3301.