

St. Mary's Catholic Church
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Third Sunday of Lent

Services this week

Day	Time	Location	Celebration
Saturday 7	4pm	Middleton	Third Sunday of Lent
Saturday 7	6.30pm	Barnard Castle	Third Sunday of Lent
Sunday 8	9.30am	Gainford	Third Sunday of Lent
Sunday 8	11.30am	Gainford (Ord.)	Third Sunday in Lent
Monday 9	6.15pm	Barnard Castle (Lat.)	<i>Lenten feria</i>
Tuesday 10	10am	Gainford	<i>Lenten feria</i>
Thursday 12	10am	Barnard Castle	<i>Family Mass with S. Mary's School</i>
Friday 13	12noon	Gainford (Ord.)	<i>Lenten feria</i>
Friday 13	5.30pm	Barnard Castle	Stations of the Cross
Friday 13	6-7pm	Barnard Castle	Holy Hour
Saturday 14	6.30pm	Gainford	Fourth Sunday of Lent
Sunday 15	9.30am	Barnard Castle	Fourth Sunday of Lent
Sunday 15	11.30am	Gainford (Ord.)	Fourth Sunday in Lent

Confessions: after Mass, by appointment, or Monday 5.30-6pm, Thursday 5.30-6pm
Saturday 10-11

Mass at Barnard Castle next Sunday morning, no Mass on Saturday evening

Mass Readings – Parish Mass Book, page 158

First Reading	<i>Exodus 17:3-7</i>
Responsorial Psalm	I that today you would listen to his voice! 'Harden not your hearts.' <i>(Ps. 94)</i>
Second Reading	<i>Romans 5:1-2, 5-8</i>
Gospel Acclamation	Glory to you, O Christ, you are the Word of God. Lord, you are indeed the Saviour of the world; give me living water, so that I will not be thirsty. Glory to you, O Christ, you are the Word of God.
Gospel	<i>John 4:5-42</i>

Rota

This week: Welcome –; Reader – Sheila

Next week: Welcome – Wynn; Reader – Jane; Bidding Prayers – John

Sirach and Ecclesiasticus

In recent weeks we've had a couple of readings from Sirach, and a couple of people asked whether this was the same as Ecclesiasticus, which made me think that looking at this book of the Old Testament would be timely. To answer the question, they are the same book simply a different title. It seems odd to have such different names for the same text, but this is a feature of different languages, as well as the fact that biblical books weren't originally given titles but these were added later. In this case, the book has the full title of 'The Wisdom of Jesus, son of Sirach' and the Greek Septuagint shortened this simply to 'Sirach'. It was very widely quoted by the early Fathers of the Church, and often read in church to the extent that it was given the nickname *Liber Ecclesiasticus* ('the church book'); this nickname stuck and is also widely used. When the English lectionary was compiled in 1970 'Ecclesiasticus' was the commonly used name among Catholics, and so was used; with the recent change to the E.S.V., it seems to have been decided to go back to the 'original' title of Sirach. In both cases, the actual book is the same.

It was originally written in Hebrew (along with most of the Old Testament); however, for a long time the Hebrew text was lost. It wasn't accepted as part of the Jewish Scriptures, and therefore there wasn't the same care to preserve that text as biblical books. More recently, several scrolls have been discovered (including among the Dead Sea Scrolls) which contain the text in Hebrew. Along with the rest of the Old Testament, it was translated to Greek as part of the Septuagint, and it is from this Greek text that most translations were made. Ironically the book has a prologue which speaks of the unique excellence of Hebrew for forming theological ideas, and which notes that any translation will always lose some element of the meaning.

As the full title mentioned above implies, it is part of the wisdom literature, mostly giving ethical teachings. It dates from around 196-175 B.C. (it refers to characters who have died, allowing a date to be implied). As noted above, it mainly contains ethical teachings, these are widely seen as written for a 'middle class' audience, they include elements of politeness and duty towards the poor and oppressed.

It also includes an influential passage which begins 'let us now praise famous men', and gives details of many of the figures from the foundation of the nation of Israel. During this passage almost all of the books of the Old Testament are referred to.

The New Testament doesn't directly quote from Sirach; however, it does have a number of cases where it repeats teachings found in it, or seems to allude to it. For example, Christ's teaching "when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases" (Matthew 6:7) mirrors "Do not babble in the assembly of the elders, and do not repeat yourself when you pray" (Sirach 7:14).

The early Church used Sirach widely, both for teaching ethics; but also seeing in it prophecies relating to the Messiah – for example, speaking of somebody who would be raised up on the throne of glory for ever (24:34-35). It has been suggested that the use of Sirach to point towards Christ was one of the reasons for its rejection when the Jewish canon of scripture was being produced.

The intertwining of ethical teaching and prophecy shows us that these are not two opposed and separate activities; rather the whole of God's message is one. It includes both how we

live a good life here on earth, and our obligations to those around us; as well as how we understand and worship God. We give thanks for all of Scripture as it leads us deeper in both of these aspects of our Faith. – Fr. Thomas.

Prayer List: Among the sick of the parish, please keep John Burgess, Anthony Cole, Norah Mackay, Izzy Herbert, Alice Musto, Diedre and Pat Estall, and David Brown in your prayers. We pray particularly for the recently departed including David Brown, and for those whose anniversaries occur at this time, including Fr. Wilfrid Elkin, and Joan Crabbe. 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.

Stations of the Cross – during the Stations will be prayed on Fridays at 5.30, followed by Holy Hour; and following Mass on Thursdays.

The Road to Emmaus during Lent, following Mass on Fridays, the Ordinariate Group will be having some reflections on the ways that Christ fulfils Old Testament prophecies. "Beginning with Moses and all the prophets he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." (S. Luke 24:27) All most welcome.

Lent Lunches will take place on three Fridays during Lent (13, 20, and 27 March), 12-1.30pm at the Parish Hall on Newgate. We are responsible for providing the meal, as well as serving, clearing up &c., on Friday 13 March – a sign-up list for volunteers is at the back of church. All welcome.

Diocesan Pastoral Strategy Following Bishop Stephen's pastoral letter last week (printed copies at the back of church if you haven't got one), we enter into a period of discernment as a parish regarding our mission and how best to fulfil it. The P.P.C. will meet shortly to reflect, and this will be followed by reflection on the part of the whole parish. Please keep this matter in your thoughts and prayers.

The diocese has material to assist with discernment on its web-site, including a webinar which took place on Tuesday evening and is open to all. <https://diocesehn.org.uk/pastoral-strategy/>

Children's Liturgy. As noted recently, we are preparing to offer a children's liturgy during Sunday Mass. Volunteers are most welcome to help with, if you are interested please speak to Fiona Bissell. Those who have already expressed a willingness will be contacted regarding D.B.S. checks.

Holy Island SVP Summer Camps 2026 Applications are now open for children in school Years 5-7 for Holy Island Summer Camps. The children spend a week in our centre on the island over the Summer holidays. Transport takes the children from Tyneside to our residential centre and all meals, accommodation and activities are included in the cost. For more information please visit our website: Holy Island SVP Vinnies Camp <https://svp.org.uk/microsite/ozanam-camp>

Do you have some spare time on your hands and want a fulfilling volunteer role? Our residential centre on Holy Island needs volunteers in 2026. There are lots of roles: Working with the children on our Vinnies Summer Camps, during the Summer holidays as a caretaker, kitchen assistants, cooks, and volunteering to work directly with the children. It's hard work, but so much fun and very worthwhile! No cost, just your time and patience for an interesting week on this beautiful island! Or perhaps you are retired or have flexible holidays and could give some time to help at our Term Time Camps. We need people who can take on a caretaking role or help in the kitchen with serving meals, cooking or operating the dishwasher! These Camps allow hundreds of children from the Diocese and further afield have a great residential holiday in our centre.

Guaranteed hard work but fantastic memories too!

To join our fabulous team or find out more information about any of the roles and to volunteer, please visit our website: Holy Island SVP Vinnies Camp <https://svp.org.uk/microsite/ozanam-camp> or contact BarbaraT@svp.org.uk

Safeguarding The Parish operates in accordance with Statutory Safeguarding Guidance and Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency (CSSA) and Diocese's policies and procedures at all times. Our Parish Safeguarding Representative is Fiona Bissell or alternatively the Diocesan Safeguarding Team can be contacted on 0191 2433305 or at safeguarding@diocesehn.org.uk

Prayer for England

As the jubilee year has finished, we return to offering the prayer for the conversion of England at the end of Mass.

O Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and our most gentle Queen and Mother, look down in mercy upon England, thy Dowry, and upon us all who greatly hope and trust in thee. By thee it was that Jesus, our Saviour and our hope was given unto the world; and He has given thee to us that we might hope still more. Plead for us thy children whom thou didst receive and accept at the foot of the Cross O sorrowful Mother. Intercede for our separated brethren, that with us in the one true fold they may be united to the chief shepherd, the vicar of thy Son. Pray for us all, dear mother, that by faith and fruitful in good works we may all deserve to see and praise God together with thee, in our heavenly home. Amen.