

St. Mary's Catholic Church
Birch Road, Barnard Castle, DL12 8NR
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Fourth Sunday of Lent - *Lætare*

Services this week

Day	Time	Location	Celebration
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
Monday 16	6.15pm	Barnard Castle (Lat.)	<i>Lenten feria</i>
Tuesday 17	10am	Gainford	S. Patrick
Thursday 19	10am	Barnard Castle	S. JOSEPH
Friday 20	12noon	Gainford (Ord.)	S. Cuthbert
Friday 20	5.30pm	Barnard Castle	Stations of the Cross
Friday 20	6-7pm	Barnard Castle	Holy Hour
Saturday 21	6.30pm	Barnard Castle	Fifth Sunday of Lent
Sunday 22	9.30am	Gainford	Fifth Sunday of Lent
Sunday 22	11.30am	Gainford (Ord.)	Passion Sunday

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

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

Mass Readings – Parish Mass Book, page 164

First Reading	<i>1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a</i>
Responsorial Psalm	The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want. (<i>Ps. 22</i>)
Second Reading	<i>Ephesians</i>
Gospel Acclamation	Praise and honour to you, Lord Jesus. I am the light of the world, says the Lord; whoever follows me will have the light of life. Praise and honour to you, Lord Jesus.
Gospel	<i>John 9:1-41</i>

Rota

This week: Welcome – Wynn; Reader – Sheila

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

Assyrian Christianity

It is with great sadness that our minds are taken, yet again, to a war in the Middle East. We are used to thinking of this as a complex area with various tribal groups and affinities; but for the most part we think of it as a place of Islamic culture and religion, while this is the clear majority there are also ancient Christian communities there, though sadly they sit under great strain and stress with many having fled the region to find calmer environments. One of these is the Assyrian Church whose homelands spread across modern-day Iraq Iran, but which was also the source of missionary efforts which spread as far as India, China, and even Mongolia.

The Assyrian Church, or the Church of the East, traces its foundation back to some of the earliest evangelists the Church sent out. According to tradition, S. Thomas preached the Gospel in modern-day Iraq (before continuing to India); additionally S. Addai of Edessa is believed to have been one of the seventy disciples of Christ and along with his disciple S. Mari of Edessa are venerated as the Apostles of Persia.

Those parts of the Church which were outside of the Roman Empire were inevitably somewhat distinct after Constantine (which led to a close working relationship between the Church and Empire). When the Christological debates began, these eastern parts of the Church were sympathetic to the position of Nestorius and when this was repudiated by the First Council of Ephesus in 431 they split away. This separation actually helped the Church of the East, the Sasanian (Persian) Empire recognised that they were not agents of the Romans and gave them greater freedom. This also led them to face towards the East when it came to missionary work.

When the Islamic Conquest replaced the Sasanian Empire the Church was given 'dhimmi' status – this involved fewer rights than for Muslims, but not outright persecution. They were prohibited from seeking to evangelise Muslims, but were left free to work among non-Muslims in India and China.

In the sixteenth centuries some groups within the Church of the East were reconciled to the Catholic Church, being recognised as Pope Julius III in 1550; eventually these groups became the Chaldean Catholic Church, one of the Eastern Catholic Churches and today the largest Christian community in Iraq. Some of the Indian parts of the Church were also united to the Catholic Church, becoming the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church. Among those who stayed separated from the Catholic Church, there were a number of internal splits which greatly weakened it; however, it continues to operate in its traditional homeland of Iran, Iraq, and Syria; as well as in diaspora communities mostly in the West. The term 'Assyrian' encompasses both this strand of Christianity, as well as an ethnic identity based in that homeland.

Unlike other apostolic parts of Christianity, the Church of the East does not use icons; however, there is historical evidence that this is a more recent development under pressure from Islam. It uses ritual life known as the 'East Syrian Rite', one of its most striking elements is the 'anaphora of Addai and Mari' which does not include the description of the last supper which we recognise as consecrating the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ.

In more recent times, the Church has grown close to the Catholic Church. The debates over Christology have been continued, and a Common Christological Declaration was issued by the Church of the East and the Catholic Church in 1994; there are circumstances when the faithful of each are allowed to receive the Sacraments in the other body.

The Church of the East has a long and rich history, in its homeland it forms an embattled minority; we pray that its members are aware of the presence and closeness of God, and that their faithfulness is rewarded by peace and safety. – 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. 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.

To assist with our reflections, the children at school have prepared a new set of stations to replace the ones which were becoming a little tatty. Thank you to everybody who helped to produce these, I'm sure that they will help to deepen our experience of Lent each year.

This week (Thursday 19th) some of the children will be helping to lead the Stations – if you are able to come (shortly following Mass), this will help to deepen your reflection of Christ's Passion, and at the same time encourage the children in their own faith journeys.

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. All welcome.

Thank you to everybody who helped with the lunch last Friday, this was a great success raising £245 for Christian Aid.

Diocesan Pastoral Strategy Following Bishop Stephen's recent pastoral letter (printed copies at the back of church if you haven't got one), we are in a period of discernment as a parish regarding our mission and how best to fulfil it. There will be an important

announcement at the end of Mass regarding this process, as well as a summary document to take away and help your personal reflections. Please listen carefully, and take the time to provide your reflections and thoughts. For written feedback, there is a post-in board at the back of church, and a dedicated e-mail address for thoughts and comments: stmarysfuture@gmail.com

The diocese has material to assist with discernment on its web-site, including a webinar which took place recently 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.

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.