

**St. Mary's Catholic Church**  
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**Clergy Fr. Thomas Mason (Parish Priest)**

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**Seventh Sunday of Easter**

**Services this week**

<b>Day</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Celebration</b>
Saturday 16	6.30pm	Gainford	Seventh Sunday of Easter
Sunday 17	9.30am	Barnard Castle	Seventh Sunday of Easter
Sunday 17	11.30am	Gainford (Ord.)	Sunday after Ascension
Monday 18	6.15pm	Barnard Castle (Lat.)	<i>S. John I</i>
Tuesday 19	10am	Gainford	<i>S. Dunstan</i>
Wednesday 20	7pm	Barnard Castle	Churches Together Service
Thursday 21	10am	Barnard Castle	<i>S. Godric of Finchdale</i>
Friday 22	12noon	Gainford (Ord.)	<i>S. Rita of Cascia</i>
Friday 22	6-7pm	Barnard Castle	Holy Hour
Saturday 23	6.30pm	Barnard Castle	Pentecost
Sunday 24	9.30am	Gainford	Pentecost
Sunday 24	11.30am	Gainford (Ord.)	Pentecost

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

**Second collection** there will be a second collection today for World Communications Day.

**Mass Readings – Parish Mass Book, page 275**

First Reading	<i>Acts 1:12-14</i>
Responsorial Psalm	<b>I believe I shall see the LORD's goodness in the land of the living.</b> <i>(Ps. 26)</i>
Second Reading	<i>1 Peter 4:13-16</i>
Gospel Acclamation	<b>Alleluia, alleluia. I will not leave you as orphans, says the Lord. I am going away and I will come to you and your hearts will rejoice. Alleluia.</b>
Gospel	<i>John 17:1-11a</i>

## Rota

This week: Welcome – Wynn; Reader – Michael

Next week: Welcome –; Reader – Andrew; Bidding Prayers – John

### **Delving into the Scriptures - Esther**

Last month we looked at the book of Judith, in which a woman's actions saved the people of Israel from a fierce invasion; the next book in the bible has a related theme, with Esther saving the people again, this time from an attempted massacre.

The book of Esther is set during the time when the Israelites were in exile, this would place it chronologically between 2 Kings and Ezra. As it is set during the time of the exile, the story takes place in Susa, the Persian capital. The events take place in and around the royal court with King Ahasuerus – scholars variously identify him as Xerxes I, Artaxerxes I, or Artaxerxes II, giving a potential date between 486 and 358 B.C.

The book opens with Ahasuerus giving a banquet for his leading nobles, when he asks his queen to join him so that he can show her off she refuses to attend, and is then deposed in case other women hear and start to disobey their husbands. A large group of unmarried women is then gathered for him to choose a replacement, among these is Esther, a Jewish orphan of great beauty, she is chosen and becomes the new queen. Her uncle, Mordecai, who raised her overhears a plot against the king, and by reporting it saves the king – his actions are recorded but no reward is given, and his link to Esther is unknown.

A Persian noble, Haman, is appointed Viceroy; however, Mordecai refuses to bow before him. This leads Haman to plan the extermination of all of the Jews within the empire; he convinces the King to allow him to proceed with his plot. Mordecai hears of this and manages to smuggle the information to Queen Esther, telling her to intervene. All of the Jews hold a 3-day fast, at the end of which Esther goes to see the king. Going into the king's presence without being summoned held an automatic punishment of death; however, the king shows favour and instead asks Esther what she wants. She asks to host a dinner for the king and for Haman over the next two nights.

In the meantime, Haman is building a large gallows to hang Mordecai; he sees the invitation to dine with the queen and king as a great honour. During the second dinner, Esther reveals that she is a Jew and that Haman is planning to kill her along with the rest of her people; The king leaves angrily, at which point Haman starts to beg Esther, when the king returns he assumes that Haman is assaulting her. Haman is then hanged from his own gallows, Mordecai is given a great reward for saving the king, and the Jews are saved.

The style of the book is very typical of a semitic story-telling tradition, particularly with the way that various elements come together at the end (e.g., Mordecai being the king's saviour). Notably the book does not directly reference God; however, his presence is constant, especially when the people fast before Esther acts, seeking His assistance in their project.

Esther is the clear star of the book, it is striking that she is shown taking such an active role; especially given the opening and the deposition of her predecessor queen. She places her trust in God, even when called to take the dangerous step is going into the king's company. The saving of the people is marked annually in the Jewish calendar with the feast of Purim. As well as eating and general merrymaking, this involves reading the story, when Haman's name is mentioned rattles are used to drown it out. We can see in the book a story of God's care and providence over his people, which combines with his inspiration for us all to work for good. – 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 in your prayers. We pray particularly for the recently departed, and for those whose anniversaries occur at this time, including Eddie Kelly. 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.

**Monthly giving** As part of making financial matters clear and transparent, from now on we will publish the giving to the parish on a monthly basis (as this allows standing orders to be included).

April 2026: Loose plate (giving at the offertory during Mass) - £536.15

Weekly envelopes and monthly standing orders - £909.67

Total: £1445.82

Many thanks for your generosity.

**Bishop's Visitation** Bishop Stephen will be visiting Barnard Castle and Gainford for the weekend of 30/31 May. Since arriving in the Diocese he has been working his way round the various parishes so that he gets a chance to see each church and meet each community. He will celebrate both parish Masses over that weekend.

**Knit and natter – following Mass on Thursday** a group to spend some time in fellowship together, whilst engaging in knitting, crochet, embroidery...or indeed any other similar craft.

### **Message from Bishop Stephen – Pastoral Strategy**

Thank you to all parishes who have completed and returned their reflections as part of our diocesan pastoral strategy. I, together with others, look forward to reading and praying through your discernments in the Spirit.

We next move to a second phase as we invite local parishes to discern together in their partnerships, or with others in their neighbouring area. Information and updates will be shared on our website.

Please keep this discernment in your prayers as we seek to respond to the Lord's call to worship Him and serve our communities in a flourishing and sustainable manner.

### **Diocesan Pilgrimage to Rome and Assisi**

Led by Bishop Stephen

22nd – 29th October 2027

£1725 per person

Places are limited to 50 pilgrims and places are allocated on a first come first served basis with payment of the deposit securing your place.

The itinerary and booking details can be found on the diocesan website ([www.diocesehn.org.uk](http://www.diocesehn.org.uk)).

### **SVP Camp – Holy Island**

Calling all young adults 18+. Do you have a week to spare to spend on Lindisfarne this Summer helping out at the Holy Island SVP Camp? Volunteers are needed to work alongside the children who stay in the SVP purpose-built centre on the island. Weeks, 3, 5 and 6 of the Summer have 60 children ready to have a great time rock pooling, walking, arts and crafting and enjoying outdoor activities but we need more helpers to ensure they have the best time!

- Week 3 Sat 1st August - 8th August
- Week 5 Sat 15th August - 22nd August
- Week 6 Sat 22nd - 29th August

If you are interested have a look at the website <https://svp.org.uk/microsite/ozanam-camp> or email Barbara Taws [barbarat@svp.org.uk](mailto:barbarat@svp.org.uk)

All helpers receive training and will need to be DBS checked.

**Wycliffe Bible Translators** a presentation on the work of Wycliffe Bible Translators will be offered at the Church of England church. Wednesday 13 May, 7-815pm.

**Churches Together Service** The annual churches together service will take place on Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> at 7pm, here at S. Mary's – all are most welcome.

**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](mailto: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.