St. Mary's Catholic Church

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First Sunday of Advent

Services this week

Day	Time	Location	Celebration
Saturday 28	6.30pm	Gainford	**First Sunday of Advent**
Sunday 29	9.30am	Barnard Castle	**First Sunday of Advent**
Sunday 29	11.30am	Barnard Castle (Ord.)	**First Sunday of Advent**
Sunday 29	4pm	Middleton	**Churches Together Vespers**
Monday 30	6.15pm	Barnard Castle (Lat.)	**S. Andrew**
Thursday 1	10am	Gainford	*Feria*
Thursday 3	10am	Barnard Castle	S. Francis Xavier
Friday 4	12noon	Barnard Castle (Ord.)	Ember Day
Friday 4	6-7pm	Barnard Castle	Holy Hour
Saturday 5	4pm	Middleton	**Second Sunday of Advent**
Saturday 5	6.30pm	Gainford	**Second Sunday of Advent**
Sunday 6	9.30am	Barnard Castle	**Second Sunday of Advent**
Sunday 6	11.30am	Barnard Castle (Ord.)	**Second Sunday of Advent**

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

Second Collection – World Youth Sunday. The second collection for the church's work with young people remains open this week.

Mass Readings – Parish Mass Book, page 82

First Reading	*Isaiah 63:16b-17; 64:1, 3b-8*
Responsorial Psalm	**Bring us back, O God, let your face shine forth, and we shall be saved.** *(Ps. 79)*
Second Reading	*1 Corinthians 1:3-9*
Gospel Acclamation	**Alleluia, alleluia. Show us, O LORD, your mercy, and grant us your salvation. Alleluia.**
Gospel	*Mark 13:33-37*

Rota

This week: Welcomer – Wynn; Reader – Fiona

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

The Light Shines in the Darkness

With the first Sunday of Advent we start to journey towards another Christmas, each year we do this knowing what we're going to find at the end of it…but at the same time, able to make a fresh journey, because the Lord is always new. At the heart of the Christmas message is that stunning opening of S. John's Gospel which, among many other beautiful elements, tells us that "the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." That light is, of course, the light of Christ and we look eagerly towards that coming.

At this time of year light becomes much more noticeable precisely because there is more darkness. The nights are far longer than a few weeks ago, and so we do spend part of our waking hours with darkness around us – in such times the presence of even a small light can be quite striking. I often go through to church to pray Compline at the end of the day, knowing the texts well I don't turn on a light, and simply having the sanctuary lamp – just one small candle – somehow casts a wide light in such darkness.

Advent, the time looking for the coming of Christ, is a time to embrace that light. We are clear that we don't jump straight into Christmas, but have this time to prepare ourselves. More than just the practical preparations of preparing special food, buying presents, and so forth; but more deeply preparing our hearts. It is in those hearts that the light of Christ should be burning, and should be growing especially during this season of Advent. We are not called to sit and watch that light, but rather to become that light.

So much of the liturgy of Advent reminds us of this. It gives us glimpses of the light starting out as a small flicker, but then growing stronger and stronger as we get towards Christ's birth. The Old Testament prophets, who spoke about Christ, were given a foretaste of his light, and by writing about it they allow us to start to recognise the light and to move towards it. Then we are given three great figures: S. Joseph, S. John the Baptist, and of course, Our Lady – each of these worked in their own ways to give us a vision of the light which was coming. S. Joseph through his silent trust in the Lord's plans; S. John who came (as his namesake wrote in the Gospel) 'as a witness, to bear witness about the light'; and Our Lady who literally bore that light inside herself for nine months, and then nurtured Him throughout his childhood.

This is a busy time, there are lots of preparations to make – and they need to be made if there is to be a worthy celebration of the coming feast. But let us all seek to mark Advent as an important step towards Christmas. A time when we can think about the light which shines out, very small at first, but then growing in power and intensity. A light which calls us to come close to it, and even to make it part of us. A light which shines out all the more when there is so much darkness. A light which reflects in the face of every Christian who seeks to present Christ to the world.

We hear, rightly, about making sure that we keep the Christ in Christmas; one of the best ways to do so, is to make sure that we keep that expectation of Christ in Advent. That we reflect on his coming 2000 years ago, that we anticipate his return in glory, and that we welcome him as he comes to us in Mass every week. – 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, Thomas Savage, and William Evans in your prayers. We pray particularly for the recently departed including Harry Holmes, and for those whose anniversaries occur at this time, including Pete Marshall. 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).

October 2026: Loose plate (giving at the offertory during Mass) - £707.90
Weekly envelopes and monthly standing orders - £579.67
Total: £1287.57 Many thanks for your generosity.

Advent Vespers at Middleton. As today is the fifth Sunday of the month, Upper Teesdale Churches Together has shared worship and it's our turn to host at S. Aidan's. There will be Vespers of the First Sunday of Advent at 4pm, all most welcome.

Christmas Tree. If you would like to contribute to the cost of buying a Christmas Tree for church, there is a collection box at the back. As in previous years, our school children will be making decorations.

Men's Group – Advent Reflection. The next meeting of our men's group will be a reflection for Advent on Saturday meeting in church on Saturday 19 December at 11am.

***Rorate* Mass.** The Ordinariate Group will be celebrating a *Rorate* Mass on Saturday 12 December at 7am. This custom is a votive Mass or Our Lady, celebrated by before dawn by candlelight during Advent – a beautiful devotion to prepare for Christmas. There will be breakfast available after. All most welcome.

School Classes at Mass As a class from school is coming to Mass each Thursday during term, it would be helpful if volunteers were willing to help to walk the children down from school and back again after. Anybody who is willing to help should speak to Leanne Porter.

Flower Arrangements Week by week the church is beautified by flower displays, if anybody would be happy or willing to take on this role in whole or shared with others that would be most welcome.

Contactless Payments The parish is now able to accept donations by card/contactless. There is a card reader close to the West door, with the option to select donation amount. As always, your generosity is greatly appreciated.

Advent Lunches 2026 Christian Aid Advent Lunches are again taking place at the Parish Hall, Newgate Barnard Castle DL12 8NQ on three consecutive Fridays commencing 27th November, 4th December and 11th December served between 12:00 - 1:30 pm, with arrival by 1.00pm.
This year St Mary's Catholic Church team will be preparing the lunch on Friday 4th December. We have a few volunteers already, but it is always good to welcome new faces and/or familiar faces. The more the merrier to lighten the load. We will need a number of people to make soup but there are also many other jobs you can help with: setting up tables and chairs; serving soup, cheese and biscuits, mince pies and tea and coffee; washing and drying up and, tidying away table and chairs at the end. Please do sign up on the list at the back of church. Thank you. For further information please contact Fiona Cooper: ftcooper@hotmail.co.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.