

BAPTISMS IN THE PARISH: If you have a child due for Baptism please let me know as soon as possible. To avoid any disappointment with dates, contact the Presbytery to book your date. If you are first-time parents, you need to contact Sharon Chalk, who will organise a Baptismal Preparation of two sessions, and then I will come and visit you in your homes. Please don't forget to collect your Baptismal Information Form.



EPHING FOREST CHRISTMAS FOODBANK DONATIONS: Thank you to all parishioners who have donated items for the Foodbank. With Christmas fast approaching the Foodbank are collecting festive items for distribution next month. Any of the items below that you can donate will spread some Christmas cheer to those in need: tinned ham, custard, jam, Christmas pudding, Christmas cake, Yule log, biscuits, savoury biscuits, boxes of chocolates, crisps, Christmas crackers Thank you! They are also in need of small boxes of washing powder or pods and men's razors. You can also keep up to date with the Foodbank via their Facebook page: www.facebook.com/EppingForestFoodbank/

LOUGHTON FOODBANK: Throughout the Sundays of Advent, as part of a charitable preparation for Christmas, we should like to encourage donations to the Loughton Foodbank. Many local families struggle at this time of year and there will be a box available on the Sanctuary for your donations. Your response has been truly wonderful, and the Food Bank is extremely grateful!



YOUR WEEKLY OFFERTORY: Just a reminder that your weekly offertory is your offering to God in thanksgiving and gratitude for so much that he gives to us in our daily lives. If you use the Parish Gift Aid Scheme, please ensure that you use your GA envelopes each week. And please keep your envelopes up to date. If you forget your envelope, there are plenty of spare ones in the porch, please put your number on the envelope, or your name. If you would like to join the Parish Gift Aid Scheme, there are forms in the porch. We can claim back 25pence in the pound, from your weekly offertory. Please think about joining. Thank you for your generosity.

IN CASES OF EMERGENCY: Tuesday is usually Fr. John's Day Off. In Cases of emergency please call one of the local parishes, either in Epping – Tel: 01992 572516, or the St. Thomas of Canterbury Friary at Woodford Green – Tel: 020 8504 1688. This would also apply if Fr. John is away for a few days break or on Retreat. All the local funeral directors have a contact number for Fr. John if a funeral needs to be arranged in his absence.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Third Sunday of Advent, Year A, 2019

Faith isn't always a bright glowing light but rather a faint flicker to which we cling. We walk by faith and by sight and perceive God as in a mirror, dimly and only in part. The truth is that, for many, faith is lived in a fog of darkness and is often put to the test. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church so eloquently expresses it: 'The world we live in often seems very far from the one promised us by faith. Our experiences of evil and suffering, injustice and death, seems to contradict the Good News; they can shake our faith and become a temptation against it'.

This was the experience of John the Baptist as he languished in Herod's prison. As he awaited his fate, this great forerunner of the Lord, the last Old Testament prophet, probably shackled and no doubt hungry and tired, succumbed to doubt and uncertainty. Needing reassurance, he sent his disciples to ask the Lord, 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else? Jesus pointed to his miracles and the power of God as signs that he is the Messiah, the Lord's anointed.



Even John the Baptist, this outstanding herald of faith, wavered as his faith was tested. Nevertheless, Jesus held him up as the greatest man ever born while in the very next breath asserting that even the very least in Jesus' kingdom is greater than this giant of faith. Clinging to Jesus through the ups and downs of life, the times of challenge and testing, the periods of darkness and near despair, is what makes even the least in the kingdom great. Faith we learn, it what most pleases God: faith in his Son Jesus.



During this holy season of Advent, we turn to the great witnesses of faith: to St. John the Baptist, to Abraham, our father in faith, who believed against hope, to Mary our Mother who often walked her pilgrimage in the night of faith, and many others.

'Come Lord Jesus, Come!'

Dear Friends in Christ,

Third Sunday of Advent

Today is Gaudete Sunday and marks the mid-way point of the Advent Season. The word 'Gaudete' means to 'Rejoice', and we look forward with anticipation rejoicing that the Saviour Jesus Christ will be born again this Christmas. This is such a beautiful time of the year, as Christmas. We are given the great mission to be able to 'Prepare the Lord', just like John the Baptist did. We can do this in so many homes and in our lives. Don't let this Advent Season pass you by for nothing!



PENITENTIAL SERVICE: Our Parish Penitential Service takes place on Sunday 17th December at 8.00pm. There will be visiting priests to administer the Sacrament of God's Healing Love through Reconciliation. There will be a special priest if any of our Polish parishioners would like to go to the service in Polish. What more fitting way to prepare for Christmas than by making a humble Confession to the Lord. As Roman Catholics we are encouraged to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation at least once a year. If you have been away from the Sacrament for a long time now, why not make a special effort this Advent to return to the Sacrament. Please don't dismiss this notice as 'not applying to me', because the Sacrament applies to all of us!

A VERY BIG THANKYOU! I am so pleased by the wonderful response to our Parish Bazaar last weekend. With the Matched Giving promised we have raised in this year £7,464.88 my congratulations to the whole parish community for your incredible generosity! You never cease to amaze me in how you respond each year. It was truly a wonderful day and a wonderful occasion for the whole parish community. It's so good for the community to gather together on these occasions. My sincere thanks to Kelsey Howard, Lorraine Leith & Joanne Jiggins our Bazaar organisers, and all their helpers for all the hard work they put into the Bazaar. Thanks to all parishioners who generously gave Grand Draw Prizes and gifts and items for the Bazaar. Many thanks for all the Bottles donated this year, people had great fun on the Bottle stall; Grateful thanks to all those who worked so hard in the Kitchen providing food. A big thank you to those who arranged Matched Giving and worked at the Bazaar.



May God Bless You All this Advent,
APPLICATIONS FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL FOR (Reception) School place for September 2020. You have until 15th December to make your application. If you are applying for a place at St. John the Baptist Primary School, please apply online to Essex County Education Department for your child.



Roman Catholic Primary School, and you're a practicing Roman Catholic you will need a signed Certificate of Catholic Practice from your Parish Priest. CCP Forms can only be obtained from Fr. John
ST JOHN FISHER PRIMARY SCHOOL- VISIT DATES: Visit and meetings for prospective parents. Thursday 9th January at 9.15am. The visit will give parents the opportunity to view the school and ask any questions they may have. If you would like to visit the school on one of the dates please contact the school office on Tel No: 020 8508 6315 or e-mail tmcgrenra@st-johnfisher.essex.sch.uk We look forward to seeing you on the above date.

FIRST HOLY COMMUNION PROGRAMME 2019/2020: The Communion Programme continues Sunday 15th December at 10.00am in the Parish Hall. The theme of Caring will be explored, specifically through the Parables. Just a little reminder of the invitation that was given to all parents of our First Communion Children, you are most welcome to attend any or all the sessions that we have with the children. First and foremost, it allows you to see how we teach the Sacramental Programme, and secondly, you can be involved with the children preparation at a practical level.



RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS: The Journey of Faith RCIA Programme continues Thursday 12th December at 8.00pm in the Presbytery. Theme: The Sacrament of Reconciliation – Our need of God's healing love of Sacramental forgiveness. The Catechists are Fr John and Aidan Potter. If you would like to join us, we will be meeting in the Presbytery on a Thursday evening at 8.00pm.

WEDDINGS FOR 2020: If you're planning of getting married in 2020, you should kindly contact Fr. John as soon as possible. Obviously, the preparation that goes into organising a wedding. The administrative and spiritual aspect of this is extremely important, especially when getting married in Church. Marriage Preparation Days for engaged couples are organised by Marriage Care on a regular basis. If you're getting married abroad, we need at least nine months' notice. Thank you.



STEWARDS OF THE GOSPEL: Our Diocesan initiative in planning for the fourth year, will consider the next phase as they prepare Partnership reports by the beginning of Advent. Our Partnership, Epping & Waltham Abbey has been working hard for the past three months to prepare this report. We have now sent off the report and await a response from the Co-ordinators. On behalf of the Parish and the Partnership I would like to express my sincere and grateful thanks to



Maureen Perry & Mark Poulter our Stewards of the Gospel who prepared the report. A great deal of hard work went into over these past months.

THE GOD WHO SPEAKS – THE YEAR OF THE WORD, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales have designated 'The God Who Speaks': A Year of the Word to celebrate the 10th anniversary of *Verbum Domini* - Pope Benedict XVI's Apostolic Exhortation on the Word of the Lord', and the 1600th anniversary of death of St Jerome who translated the Bible into Latin.



Therefore, 2020 will be a year of celebrating, living and sharing God's word, through a range of events, activities and resources, available across the Diocese of Westminster.

We are invited to listen afresh to the word of God as did Our Blessed Lady at the Annunciation, to encounter anew the presence of that word, and to proclaim it afresh in the Church and the World.

EUCHARISTIC MINISTERS: It is the responsibility for every Eucharistic Minister to find a substitute if they are unable to exercise their ministry at mass. Of late there have been a lot of EM's missing from the Rota leaving us short. I would ask all Eucharistic Ministers to be conscientious in their responsibility. It is a true and wonderful honour to give the Eucharist to the faithful people of God. Your personal preparation and attendance at holy Mass is essential for the Rota to function efficiently. Please consult your Rota regularly, keep it on your Notice Board at home. Also please check in at the Sacristy before mass so we know that you're in church. Obviously, it goes unsaid that all Ministers should be practicing Roman Catholics attending weekly mass! If there are any problems whatsoever, please see Fr. John or Ferdi Tisi (Chair of our Liturgy Committee).



FLOWERS FOR CHRISTMAS: We always try to decorate the church beautifully for our Christmas Masses. This weekend we'll have a voluntary retiring collection at the end of all masses for Christmas. Also, if any parishioners would like to donate a poinsettia in remembrance of a deceased loved one, please drop them off in the sacristy. Please put the name of the person/persons you would like to be remembered at Christmas. Thanking you all in anticipation!



CHURCH CLEANING FOR CHRISTMAS: Thursday 19th December 9.30am onwards. Could I make a special appeal to all members of the Altar Society, and all our parishioners for some extra help to get the Church ready for Christmas. We will give it a grand clean and polish. If you can give an hour

or so to come along and help it would be most appreciated. I think there will be a cup of coffee and a mince pie for all. We are also in great of some new members for the Altar Society, if you would like to join please see Sharon Fitzmaurice or Fr. John.

CHILDREN'S SUNDAY LITURGY, CHRISTMAS TABLEAU: We invite our children at the First Vigil Mass of Christmas help us to appreciate the Christmas Story by sharing with us a Tableau. We invite all children, especially all those who regularly attend the Children's Liturgy sessions to come for two rehearsals after the 11.00am Masses on 19th & 22nd December. We need Angels, shepherds, kings, Mary & Joseph, animals. If there are any queries please contact Claire on 07876 710251 clairefabb@googlemail.com Many thanks from Children's Liturgy Team!



THE PAPISH CRIB: Throughout the Christmas Season until the Feast of the Epiphany of the Lord, the Crib will remain in the Church. Any donations for the Crib will always be given to the Brentwood Catholic Children's Society in their ongoing work with some children and families in the Diocese. In the Feast of the Epiphany there will be a Special Crib for the BCCS.



MASS INTENTIONS: Unfortunately, we are getting fewer and fewer Mass Intentions. There is a lot of availability and vacancies for masses from January 2020. If you would like a mass for a special occasion, anniversary, birthday, or any other occasion please complete Mass envelope in the porch with your offering and drop it off at the Presbytery. Thank you!

Christmas Schedule for 2019

CHRISTMAS MASSES: As we continue in the Holy Season of Advent people always like to know in advance the times of Masses at Christmas.

Christmas Eve Masses on Tuesday 24th December

Family Mass with Nativity Tableau at 5.00pm

Vigil Mass at 7.30pm preceded by Carols at 7.00pm

Christmas Night Mass at 11.00pm preceded by Carols at 10.30pm concluding at Christmas Midnight

Christmas Day Masses on Wednesday 25th December

9.00am Christmas Morning Mass

11.00am Christmas Morning Family Mass

Feast of St. Stephen Thursday 26th December

Mass at 11.00am with enrolment into the Guild of St. Stephen. All welcome!

New Years Day, Wednesday 1st January

Family Mass at 11.00am. A beautiful way to begin the New Year 2020

Please put these times in your diaries.



NAC SEMINARIANS FOR CHRISTMAS: Several seminarians from the Pontifical North American College will come to spend Christmas & New Year with us. You are always so kind and hospitable to our seminarians, who aren't allowed home at Christmas. I have always tried to give them a 'home from home' experience at this special time of the year when they are so far away from home. If you can help in anyway whatsoever, I'd be truly grateful. They all love desserts and sweet goodies; also, my experience of their 'tipple' over several years is wine, whiskey, gin & port. The first group arrive on 21st December.

PARISH REPOSITORY: Thank you to all our parishioners who supported the Parish Repository at the Bazaar last weekend. We made a staggering £800.00 which is a wonderful effort! There is a wonderful range of new Christmas items; Christmas Cards, Christmas books for children, Christmas Candles, Advent Calendars, Statues, Medals, Rosaries, Children's Religious Bracelets, Cribs, Crucifixes & Crosses, Beautiful worded Wall Plaques. My thanks to Theresa Wallace and her helpers for kindly stocking the Repository over the past 18 months. I'm pleased to say that more of our parishioners are certainly investing in some beautiful religious items. Theresa is always willing to order religious items for you if you need them.



ADVENT CHALLENGE: I would like to invite every parishioner to seriously think about our brothers and sisters who no longer attend Holy Mass. They may be your children, or friends or neighbours; they may be people that you work with. At this time of the year when everything seems to be focused on the material aspect of the season, it takes a great deal of courage to talk about the real meaning of Christmas. Parents, I encourage you to invite your non-practicing children back to Church; this can be done gently and lovingly. Helping young people to realise that the Church is a place of beauty, love and faith, can be a great challenge, especially when there are so many other things on offer to them. The future of the Church is very dependent on how these young people will become the responsible adult Catholics of tomorrow! If little or no encouragement is placed on the practice of the



faith, then the likelihood is that the young person will choose nothing! I'm more and more alarmed at how many parents these days attend mass without their children; once a child has received Holy Communion, the obligations to participate in the Sunday Eucharist is compulsory. Attending Holy Mass is not an optional exercise; it is a reflection for one hour on a Sunday morning how to be committed in faith. **COME HOME FOR CHRISTMAS!**

FOR PURCHASE: The Parish Diaries have arrived and are 50pence each. Also The Brentwood Diocesan Year Book with all up-to-date entries of everything that exists in the Diocese. Names of Clergy & Parishes, Commissions, addresses & contact details for all. Price £2.75

FORMING INTENTIONAL DISCIPLES: At our meeting last Monday our core team were able to evaluate the past twelve months work on Parish Evangelisation. We were also able to discuss various events both social and spiritual for 2020. The object of this initiative is to encourage the whole parish community to become more involved with the life of faith and the Church. IN an age that is far less conscious of the spiritual and more concerned with the secular, it is certainly an up hill struggle to keep faithful to God and the practice of their Catholic Faith. This is the real challenge of the Twenty-first century! If everyone does a little a lot gets done! Come and join us. **Our next meeting in 2020 will be on Monday 13th January at 8.00pm in the Parish Hall. Everyone is welcome to these meetings!**