

KART News

Dear R.E. Coordinator/Teacher/Chaplain,

Welcome to the second edition of KART news, the newsletter for the Kerry Association of Religion Teachers.

As we begin this liturgical season of Advent we mark the beginning of the Church's year. The seasons of Advent and Christmastide present an opportunity for us to discover in a new way that Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh.

Inside this edition I have included worksheets, prayer services, reflections and much more. Please forward any articles, pictures or resource material for future editions to tomaskenny@dioceseofkerry.ie.

Kind Regards,

Tomás Kenny
Post-Primary Diocesan Advisor



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Welcome by Tomás Kenny.....	1
For the Classroom — Worksheets for Advent	2
Advent Word-search.....	8
Helpful R.E. Web Resources.....	8
Advent Prayer Service	9
Advent Wreath and Jesse Tree Resource.....	12
News from Diocesan Schools.....	14
Reflection by Fr. Liam Lawton.....	15
For Teachers— Reflection	16
Christmas Traditions...	18
Liturgy Notes.....	21
Solemnities, Feasts and Memorials.....	21
Liturgical Calendar.....	24
Advent Reflection.....	24
Contact Details.....	24

INTRODUCTION TO ADVENT

Advent has a twofold character, it is a time of preparation for the Solemnities of Christmas where we remember Christ's first coming as a baby. We also look forward to Christ's second coming at the end of time. For the above two reasons, Advent is a season of expectant delight.



Spirit of the Season

A Season of Renewal:

During Advent, we express our great longing for God. Who are we without God? Apart from Christ we can do nothing (cf. John 15.5). We prepare ourselves and wait for God's coming.

Prepare the Way of the Lord. We open our hearts to Jesus in prayer, and show by our actions each day that we are his. We try to love other people more, and to be more patient and understanding. We pray for others, especially those who are close to us, and ask God to help them to grow in love.

A Time to Change. During Advent we are invited to change our lives and our hearts. God wants us to prepare for his coming by doing good. Each day we should look at our faults and weaknesses and ask our Father to help us to follow Jesus more closely.

A Season of Hope: Advent brings hope, because Jesus is always ready to help us to grow. He has conquered sin and selfishness by his obedient death and by his rising; he can help us to change our lives for the better. If we want to grow closer to him, and pray and work to improve, Jesus will help us to change for him.

A Season of Joy: Advent brings joy. We are followers of Jesus, who is the king of glory. We are happy because he is our king, and we are his brothers and sisters. We rejoice because God is our dear Father and because the Holy Spirit lives in our hearts. We are happy because Jesus wants to give us his peace and let us share his joy now and in heaven forever. Not a time of penance. Advent is not a time of penance like Lent. It is a season of renewal, when God invites us to let Jesus come into our hearts and make us more like him. It is a season of quiet expectation; we live it in the expectation of the fullness of joy to come.

Spiritual Renewal

Advent is a time for renewing our lives as followers of Jesus. We are invited to "make straight the way of the Lord" in our hearts and in our lives.



EXPLORATION OF IDEAS



What is the first thing you notice about this picture? Why do you think the artist wrote the words 'Stay Awake' on it? In your opinion what is the artist trying to communicate or depict by the various symbols? Imagine this picture was on display in an art gallery. Write the description of it that could be used in the art gallery catalogue.

Things to do for Advent:

- ◆ Create a mind map on 'Advent.'
- ◆ Which of the themes from page 2 do you most associate with Advent? Why?
- ◆ Which of the themes from page 2 do you least associate with Advent? Why?
- ◆ List ways in which (a) you, (b) your class, (c) your school community can prepare for advent.
- ◆ Select one of the above as your theme for advent. Reflect on your chosen theme and to think of ways that you can prepare for Christmas. Share your answer with your neighbour.
- ◆ Use one of the themes to prepare a class prayer service.
- ◆ Create a visual display (poster, collage) of Advent using one or all of the themes.
- ◆ Use the themes to help make an Advent Calendar.
- ◆ Think of ways that the season of Advent can be highlighted in school e.g. Posters, Sacred Space, Thoughts for the day or week....
- ◆ Make a prayer card or bookmark using one of the themes.
- ◆ Create a power point presentation on advent incorporating all of the themes.
- ◆ Prepare an input to give to first year students on Advent.
- ◆ Make posters for display in the church to help highlight the different aspects of advent.



- ◆ Create a Jesse Tree for your school.
- ◆ Make an Advent Wreath.

Left: Items from the Jesse Tree include symbols traditionally associated with figures from the genealogy of Jesus. See page 12–13 for Jesse Tree resource.

FOR THE CLASSROOM: WORKSHEET 1

The Wise Men Visit Jesus

Read the account of Jesus' birth below and use it to answer the questions on worksheet 2.

This is how Jesus Christ was born. A young woman named Mary was engaged to Joseph from King David's family. But before they were married, she learnt that she was going to have a baby by God's Holy Spirit. Joseph was a good man and did not want to embarrass Mary in front of everyone. So he decided to call off the wedding quietly.

While Joseph was thinking about this, an angel from the Lord came to him in a dream. The angel said, 'Joseph, the baby that Mary will have is from the Holy Spirit. Go ahead and marry her. Then after her baby is born, name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.' . .

After Joseph woke up, he and Mary were soon married, just as the Lord's angel had told him to do. . .

When Jesus was born in the village of Bethlehem in Judea, Herod was king. During this time some wise men from the east came to Jerusalem and said, 'Where is the child born to be king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.'

When King Herod heard about this, he was worried, and so was everyone else in Jerusalem. Herod brought together the chief priests and the teachers of the Law of Moses and asked them, 'Where will the messiah be born?' They told him, 'He will be born in Bethlehem, just as the prophet wrote. . . ' Herod secretly called in the wise men and asked them when they had first seen the star. He told them, 'Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, let me know. I want to go and worship him too.'

The wise men listened to what the king said and then left. And the star they had seen in the east went on ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. They were thrilled and excited to see the star. When the men went into the house and saw the child with Mary, his mother, they knelt down and worshipped him. They took out their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh and gave them to him. Later they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, and they went back home by another road.

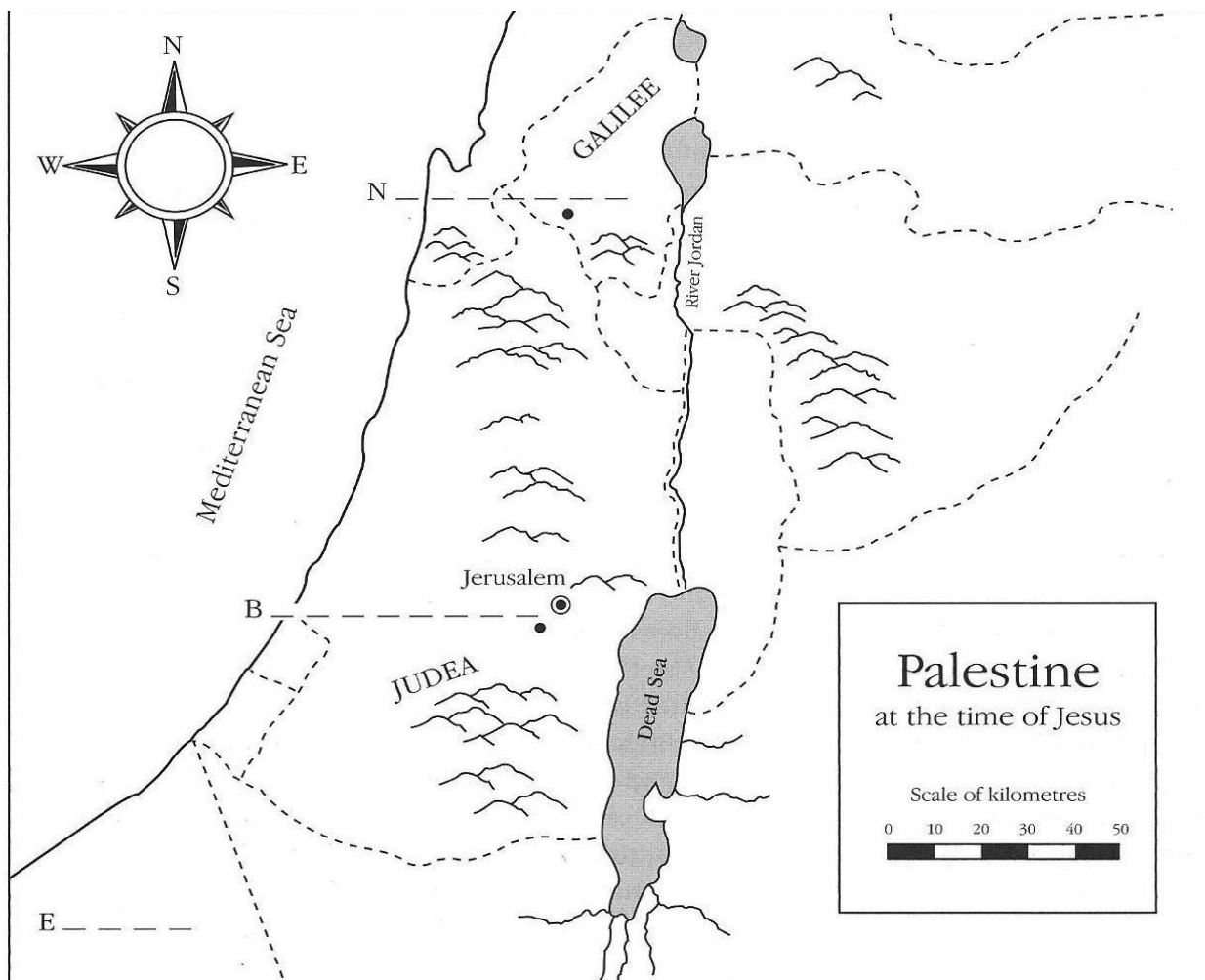
After the wise men had gone, an angel from the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up! Hurry and take the child and his mother to Egypt! Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is looking for the child and wants to kill him.'

That night, Joseph got up and took his wife and the child to Egypt, where they stayed until Herod died...

Then in a dream he was told to go to Galilee, and they went to live there in the town of Nazareth.

MATTHEW 1:18-21, 24, 2:1-5, 7-15a and 22b-23a

FOR THE CLASSROOM: WORKSHEET 2



- 1) Underline all the place names mentioned in the story 'The wise men visit Jesus'. (Worksheet 1) Now find them on the map. Fill in the letters for the towns of Bethlehem and Nazareth and the country of Egypt.
- 2) Read the story on Worksheet 3 'The birth of Jesus' and, using pencil, lightly draw a line on the map showing the journey that Mary and Joseph made. When you are sure it is right, you can go over it in colour.
- 3) Work out approximately how far the journey is, using the key.
- 4) How long do you think it would have taken Mary and Joseph:
 - To travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem? (One donkey between them.)
 - To travel from Bethlehem to Egypt? (One donkey and a baby.)
 - To travel from Egypt to Nazareth? (One donkey and a toddler.)

FOR THE CLASSROOM: WORKSHEET 3

The Birth of Jesus

Read the account of Jesus' birth below. This story is from Luke's Gospel. Compare it with the account of Jesus' birth from Matthew's Gospel on worksheet 1, 'The wise men visit Jesus'. You will see that there are many similarities, but some differences between the two versions of the story of Jesus' birth. Can you work out an order for them so that the whole story fits together? You could make a chart or use notes like this:

1. Mary and Joseph get engaged.
2. An angel visits Mary in Nazareth.
- ... and so on. . .

God sent the angel Gabriel to the town of Nazareth in Galilee with a message for a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to Joseph from the family of King David. The angel greeted Mary and said, ' . . . Don't be afraid! God is pleased with you, and you will have a son. His name will be Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of God Most High.

About that time Emperor Augustus gave orders for the names of all the people to be listed in record books. . .

Everyone had to go to their own home town to be listed. So Joseph had to leave Nazareth in Galilee and go to Bethlehem in Judea. Long ago Bethlehem had been King David's home town, and Joseph went there because he was from David's family.

Mary. . . travelled with him to Bethlehem. . . and while they were there, she gave birth to her firstborn son. She dressed him in baby

clothes and laid him on a bed of hay because there was no room for them in the inn.

That night in the fields near Bethlehem some shepherds were guarding their sheep. All at once an angel came down to them from the Lord, and the brightness of the Lord's glory flashed around them. The shepherds were frightened. But the angel said, don't be afraid! I have good news for you, which will make everyone happy. This very day in King David's home town a Saviour was born for you. He is Christ the Lord. You will know who he is, because you will find him dressed in baby clothes and lying on a bed of hay.'

Suddenly many other angels came down from heaven and joined in praising God. . .

After the angels had left and gone back to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see what the Lord has told us about.' They hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and they saw the baby lying on a bed of hay.

When the shepherds saw Jesus, they told his parents what the angel had said about him. Everyone listened and was surprised. But Mary kept thinking about all this and wondering what it meant.

LUKE 1:26-32; 2:1, 3-13 and 15-19

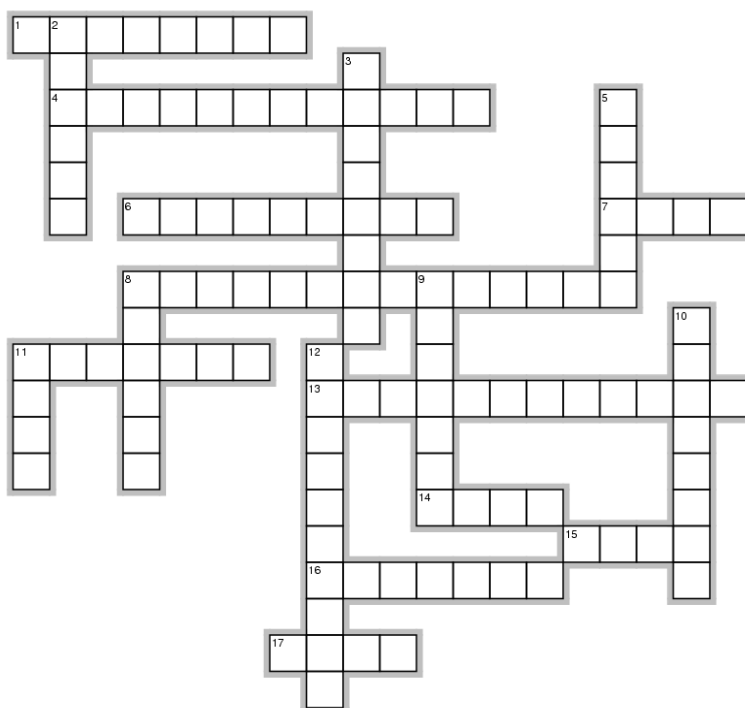
Draw a table and note the difference between Luke's Gospel and Matthews.



FOR THE CLASSROOM : WORKSHEET 4

Advent Crossword Puzzle

David Bennett, ChurchYear.Net



EclipseCrossword.com

Across

1. Famous saint, who is associated with Christmas, whose feast is celebrated during Advent
4. Popular evergreen family devotion used during Advent (2 words)
6. Church holiday right after Advent
7. "Our _____ of Guadalupe," Catholic feast falling during Advent
8. Jesus' cousin who prepared the way for Jesus (3 words)
11. Title of Jesus, meaning "anointed one," and the name of an oratorio by Handel
13. Church season immediately before Advent (2 words)
14. Title of Jesus meaning "master"
15. Pinkish color used during the third Sunday of Advent
16. "Christ _____": Church holiday celebrated the Sunday before Advent (2 words)

17. Number of Sundays during the Advent season


Down

2. One of the major Old Testament prophets
3. Month when Advent usually begins
5. Liturgical color of the Advent season
8. Foster-father of Jesus
9. What the word "Advent" means
10. Advent Hymn: "O come, O come _____"
11. Mother of Jesus
12. "The Immaculate _____": Marian holiday that falls during the Advent season

ADVENT WORD-SEARCH

H	A	E	L	H	A	D	U	J	A
E	A	T	O	T	M	B	O	W	D
L	B	I	M	E	O	Y	J	R	E
I	L	U	R	B	M	O	W	A	S
Z	E	R	O	A	L	A	T	H	S
A	S	F	E	Z	H	E	R	C	E
B	E	D	L	I	H	C	O	Y	L
T	P	A	E	L	O	T	E	A	B
M	O	T	H	E	R	S	O	Z	L
D	E	S	I	M	O	R	P	M	E

MARY	JUDAH	ZECHARIAH
ELIZABETH	CHILD	LEAPT
WOMB	BLESSED	FRUIT
MOTHER	JOY	PROMISE



USEFUL R.E. SITES

- 1) www.tes.co.uk
- 2) www.education.dublindiocese.ie/feast-of-the-immaculate-conception-of-mary/
- 3) www.education.dublindiocese.ie/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Christmas-Reflections1.pdf
- 4) www.padlet.com—Padlet is an internet application that allows people to express their thoughts on a common topic easily. It works like an online sheet of paper.
- 5) www.Appleseeds.org—Apple Seeds provides inspirational and motivational quotes and short stories from eclectic sources that promote positive attitudes, and development of holistic human dignity—from tiny seeds to ripened fruit.
- 6) www.loyolapress.com/liturgical-year-advent.htm - The Loyola Press Jesuit Ministry team have compiled a number of helpful advent resources.
- 7) www.catholic.org/clife/advent/ - Only Catholic Online, located at www.catholic.org, gives the largest and broadest population of Catholics worldwide easy access to comprehensive, educational and timely information about Catholicism. It also provides a range of easy methods to integrate their faith into their daily lives.
- 8) www.textweek.com/advent.htm— Helpful classroom resources.
- 9) www.thereligionteacher.com/advent-activities/ I highlight this site as helpful in the past. Check out their Advent materials.
- 10) www.teachingideas.co.uk/themes/christmas/ Here you will find a wide range of ideas and resources to help you when you are teaching children at Christmas time—this site may be suitable for first and second years.

PRAYER SERVICE FOR ADVENT

Preparing our hearts for the Lord

Opening Chant: *O Come, O Come Emmanuel (Canaimís 131)*

Leader: God's Word is spoken in time and space.

All: **Lord, give us listening hearts.**

Leader: *God's Word is always spoken in the now.*

All: **Lord, help us to be attentive to the present moment.**

Leader: God's Word became flesh that first Christmas, and wishes to be born anew in us, daily.

All: **Lord, nurture your Word made flesh in our hearts this Advent.**

Scripture Reading – Isaiah 40:3 - 5a

Reader 1: A voice cries,
 'Prepare in the wilderness a way for Yahweh.
 Make a straight highway for our God across the desert.
 Let every valley be filled in,
 every mountain and hill be laid low,
 let every cliff become a plain, and the ridges a valley;
 then the glory of Yahweh shall be revealed
 and all humankind shall see it.

Chant: *Come O Long Expected Jesus (Canaimís 44)*

Reflection

Reader 2: Loving you, of course
 I am not at all interested in how much money
 you are spending on Christmas gifts this year
 but rather, in how much blood, sweat, and tears you are shedding
 to make Christ a vital part of your life.

For you and I will never be able to erase
 the fact that he came:
 to touch lives - to break bread
 to heal hurt - to forgive sins

ADVENT PRAYER CTD.

to wash feet – to calm seas, to walk on water
– to give us the Spirit and to care immensely

Yes, to care enough to be born in our Bethlehem
to live in our land, and weep over our cities
and die and rise again.

Poor, cluttered hearts
starving for the emptiness
that makes fullness possible

It is so little that God ask of us.
Give some evidence that you want to change.
Wear lights in your hearts
instead of on your trees

(Adapted from Macrina Wiederkehr, Seasons of Your Heart)

Chant: *Behold a Virgin (Canaimís 30)*

Prayer of the Faithful

Lord, we pray for a world, where injustice has been levelled. *Lord, hear us.*

Lord, we pray for world leaders, that they may seek the common good. *Lord, hear us.*

Lord, we pray for the courage to see beyond materialism, and value the important in life.
Lord, hear us.

Lord, we pray for all who are preparing their hearts for the Lord's coming. *Lord, hear us.*

Lord, we pray that we may act for justice and peace at all times. *Lord, hear us.*

Closing Prayer

All: Lord Jesus Christ, who chose, at Bethlehem, to live among us;,
make us ready to lose and leave all that makes us proud and sufficient.

Be born again, not in a manger, but in us this Christmas.

May our hearts be lights of hope and love for all whom we meet.

We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. *Amen*

1st Sun of Advent *‘Lord, we are all the work of your hand.’*

2nd Sun of Advent 'Prepare a way for the Lord. Make his paths straight'

3rd Sun of Advent *'My soul rejoices in my God.'*

4th Sun of Advent *I will sing forever of your love, O Lord'*

[illegible]

ADVENT SYMBOLS

The Advent Wreath

By the Middle Ages, the Christians adapted this tradition and used Advent wreathes as part of their spiritual preparation for Christmas. After all, Christ is “the Light that came into the world” to dispel the darkness of sin and to radiate the truth and love of God.

(cf. John 3:19-21).

The symbolism of the Advent wreath is beautiful.



- The wreath is made of various evergreens, signifying continuous life.
- The laurel signifies victory over persecution and suffering; Pine, holly, and yew, immortality; and cedar, strength and healing; Holly also has a special Christian symbolism - the prickly leaves remind us of the crown of thorns
- The circle of the wreath, which has no beginning or end, symbolizes the eternity of God, and that everlasting life is to be found in Christ.
- Any pine cones, nuts, or seedpods used to decorate the wreath also symbolize life and resurrection.
- Three candles are purple and one is rose and they represent the four weeks of Advent.
- The purple candles symbolise the prayer, penance, and preparatory sacrifices and goods works undertaken at this time.
- The rose candle is lit on the third Sunday, Gaudete Sunday, when the priest also wears rose vestments at Mass; Gaudete Sunday is the Sunday of rejoicing, because the faithful have arrived at the midpoint of Advent, when their preparation is now half over and they are close to Christmas.
- The progressive lighting of the candles symbolises the expectation and hope surrounding our Lord's first coming into the world and the anticipation of His second coming to judge the living and the dead.
- The central white candle, the light again signifies Christ, the Light of the world.

A white candle placed in the middle of the wreath, which represents Christ and is lit on Christmas Eve. Another tradition is to replace the three purple and one rose candles with four white candles, which will be lit throughout Christmas season.

The Jesse Tree

This is a tree, or a large banner with a symbolic tree, that is decorated each week, with ornaments or objects that represent Old Testament events from Creation to the Birth of Jesus. The ornaments are traditionally handmade, and are added one each day of Advent, or a group on each Sunday, with explanations of the symbols and a brief verse of Scripture from the story represented. Some churches choose to decorate the tree with small items of warm clothing as a way to minister to the needy in the community.

ADVENT SYMBOLS

The Jesse Tree tells the Story of God in the Old Testament, and reminds us in Advent of God's faithfulness to us across 4,000 years of history. The branch is a biblical sign of newness out of discouragement, which became a way to talk about the expected Messiah, the One who was to come. It is therefore an appropriate symbol of Jesus the Christ, who is the revelation of the grace and faithfulness of God.

The image of the Jesse Tree is based on Isaiah 11:

"A Shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse and from his roots a bud shall blossom."

The roots symbolise Jesse, the Father of King David, the shoot is Our Lady, Christ is portrayed as the bud which will blossom. The people and events between Jesse and Christ are represented at different points along the tree. See the symbols below, they can be made on card, cut out and placed on the Jesse tree over the Advent Season.

Scriptural Passages and Symbols for the Jesse Tree

December 1

Creation: Gen. 1:1-31; 2:1-4

Symbols: sun, moon, stars, animals, earth

December 2

Adam and Eve: Gen. 2:7-9, 18-24

Symbols: tree, man, woman

December 3

Fall of Man: Gen. 3:1-7 and 23-24

Symbols: tree, serpent, apple with bite

December 4

Noah: Gen. 6:5-8, 13-22; 7:17, 23, 24; 8:1, 6-22

Symbols: ark, animals, dove, rainbow

December 5

Abraham: Gen. 12:1-3

Symbols: torch, sword, mountain

December 6

Isaac: Gen. 22:1-14

Symbols: bundle of wood, altar, ram in bush

December 7

Jacob: Gen. 25:1-34; 28:10-15

Symbols: kettle, ladder

December 8

Joseph: Gen. 25:1-34; 28:10-15

Symbols: bucket, well, silver coins, tunic

December 9

Moses: Ex. 2:1-10

Symbols: baby in basket, river and rushes

December 10

Samuel: 1 Sam. 3:1-18

Symbols: lamp, temple

December 11

Jesse: 1 Sam. 16:1-13

Symbols: crimson robe, shepherd's staff

December 12

David: 1 Sam. 17:12-51

Symbols: slingshot, 6-pointed star

December 13

Solomon: 1 Kings 3:5-14, 16-28

Symbols: scales of justice, temple, two babies and sword

December 14

Joseph: Matt. 1:18-25

Symbols: hammer, saw, chisel, angle

December 15

Mary: Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38

Symbols: lily, crown of stars, pierced heart

December 16

John the Baptist: Mark 1:1-8

Symbols: shell with water, river

ADVENT SYMBOLS

The symbols for the Jesse Tree from December 17 to 23 are based on the "O" Antiphons.

December 17

Jesus is Wisdom: Sirach (or Ecclesiasticus in old Bibles) 24:2; Wisdom 8:1

Symbols: oil lamp, open book

December 18

Jesus is Lord: Ex. 3:2; 20:1

Symbols: burning bush, stone tablets

December 19

Jesus is Flower of Jesse: Isaiah 11:1-3

Symbols: flower, plant with flower

December 20

Jesus is Key of David: Isaiah 22:22

Symbols: key, broken chains

December 21

Jesus is the Radiant Dawn: Psalm 19:6-7
(in older Bibles this will be Psalm 18)

Symbols: sun rising or high in sky

December 22

Jesus is King of the Gentiles: Psalm 2:7-8;
Ephesians 2:14-20

Symbols: crown, scepter

December 23

Jesus is Emmanuel: Isaiah 7:14; 33:22

Symbols: tablets of stone, chalice and host

December 24

Jesus is Light of the World: John 1:1-14

Symbols: candle, flame, sun

NEWS FROM DIOCESAN SCHOOLS

KEEP FAITH, FIND HOPE AND GROW IN LOVE BY ANN-MARIE WHELAN, ADFERT RETREAT CENTRE

Pope Francis, in addressing the young people at World Youth Day in 2013, urged them to 'Go, do not be afraid, and serve'. On Thursday night 9th October last, a group of TY students from Causeway Comprehensive School played a full and active role in the Ballyheigue Parish Mission.



Students from Causeway Comprehensive

The Mission which was held all week was conducted by the Redemptorist Fathers from Limerick; Fr Derek Meskell and Fr. Brian Nolan. On Thursday evening the theme was 'Keep Faith, Find Hope, and Grow in Love'. This group of young people showed us how to keep faith, in them we find hope, and we were reminded of how to grow in love together by a very powerful ritual.

They led us in prayer, taught us the meaning of The Our Father, prayed a decade of the rosary with us, and the most humbling experience for me was when they anointed our hands with holy oil. These young people from the local area anointed the hands of family, neighbours, the local shop keeper, the farmer up the road, and all without fear or any sign of being uncomfortable with this gesture. A powerful example of service and witness. Pope Francis would be proud to know that our young people are not afraid to stand up and serve.

NEWS FROM DIOCESAN SCHOOLS

Pobailscoil Chorca Dhuibhne

Carúl na Nollag gach bliain sa paróiste agus i mbliana tá sé eagraithe againn é a chur ar siúl sa Díseart.

Chuir dalta na scoile é seo le chéile don irisleabhar na scoile.

I rith ranganna reiligiúin pléimíd ‘nascanna leis an bparóiste’ agus an tábhachtach a bhaineann leis. Foghlaimím faoi sheirbhís agus tiomantas, agus conas a chabhraíonn sé lenár gcreideamh agus ár bhféin mhuinín.



Tríd na blianta shocraíodh **Carúl na Nollag** a chur ar siúl sa séipéal Naomh Mhuire. D'oibríomar leis na múinteoirí ceoil agus múinteoirí reiligiúin chun ullmhú sa taobh istigh don Nollaig. Chuir na ceoltóirí agus cór na scoile an- chleachtadh isteach roimh ré agus bhí sé an soiléir ar an oíche mar bhí siad ar fheabhas. Gan dabht thaispeáin siad a dtallana agus a mbrontanaisí a bhronn Dia orthu. Bhí léachtaí, paidreacha agus machnaimh á léamh ag daltaí chomh maith. Bhí atmaisféar deas spioradálta ann. Bhíomar réidh don Nollag ansin.

REFLECTION BY FR. LIAM LAWTON

I couldn't imagine my life without music. It's like the air that I breathe, my language of communication, my healer and comforter and my means of expression no matter how I feel. There are also times that I love the music of silence. That might seem like a paradox but I believe that *all* music is born in silence. The beautiful songs we know, the famous melodies, the inspiring lyrics were all once born in the heart of a human being like ourselves~ perhaps due to difficult times of suffering, perhaps due to falling in or out of love or maybe just because someone was in love with life. I would go one step further and say that I believe that music is a *divine gift* ~ that is ~ a gift from God, who created us and who gives each of us some blessing or another.



For some it is the gift of music. For others it might be a great ability to write, play sports or whatever. I have been writing music for over 20 years and I still don't know where the next tune will come from, but I trust that God will place a melody in mind and heart when I need one. I try and give back a little by writing some sacred and inspirational music which I hope will be helpful to people ~ help them come closer to God, to help them pray a little more, to help them when they need music for funerals, weddings or other such sacraments. When I give a little back to God and show appreciation I am blessed so many times over by God through the people, places and situations that I never imagined in my wildest dreams.

Liam Lawton's latest Liturgical Cd is called 'Eternal' and his new collection of songs ~ 'Under a Thousand Stars' ~ will be available in December.

FOR TEACHERS

**‘HIT THE PAUSE BUTTON!’ CALLING ON ALL R.E. TEACHERS TO
TAKE TIME OUT TO REFLECT** BY ANNA MALONEY, D.A. DUBLIN DIOCESE.
ANNA SERVES 181 SCHOOLS IN THE DUBLIN ARCHDIOCESE

Staff meetings, lesson preparation, copies waiting to be corrected, whole school liturgical celebrations, extra-curricular activities, Croke Park Hours... In recent years, it seems that school life increasingly asks the R.E. teacher to perform as much of a juggling act, as that of a very impressive, highly skilled circus performer! Or perhaps I'm wrong?



Recent educational publications promote the theory that our students ought to engage in reflective practice more frequently. With that in mind, I've come to the conclusion that we might all do well to take time out once in a while... Don't have time? Well, try it this once and see if I can convince you. What I'm suggesting is that we should take time out to reflect... to hit the pause button... yes even going as far as to pull back from the laptop, tablet, smartphone, the tower of copies, the to-do lists and to truly be still, be silent, even if only for a few moments. I am sure you have had some experience of facilitating meditation with your students so when you have settled in a comfortable chair, become conscious of your in breath and out and so on... Here are just a few ideas to mull over as potential sources of Food for Thought during your time out to reflect:

"Be still and know that I'm with you..."

If music is your thing and you don't recoil at the suggestion of something mainstream, The Fray's *Be Still and Know*, albeit a lay song might be worth a listen here, as a source of reflection – YouTube link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5nUuBjz4Vhc>

I find the mood of the song particularly soulful and the title always calls to mind the beautiful psalm: *"Be Still and Know that I am God"* Ps 46:10. These words also feature on a poster in my room. Consider the following for a moment: As R.E. teachers we spend most of our day *teaching* about faith, it has the power to inspire, nourish and restore when we listen to the words we deliver and avoid where possible, being solely caught up in the completion of projects and classroom management. What have you said today/this week that can teach *you* as well as those in your classroom?

When I meet R.E. teachers for the first time during a school visit, I normally begin by asking: 'What do you like about teaching R.E.?' So now I ask you to consider for a moment... What would your answer be? Would you say your answer has changed over the weeks/months/years/decades that have passed since you first began teaching this challenging subject? Do you find that today and every day, R.E. and in particular, non-exam Senior R.E. often requires more energy and preparatory research, than any of your exam groups? What fuels you for the challenge?

Some years ago, I was at an in-service where we were asked to reflect on our 'little losses' and our 'little gains'. If you cast your mind back over the course of your time in the classroom, what has changed? This trip down memory lane needn't be confined to your life in the classroom. What are the things you've been sad to let go of over that time? What joys have you encountered along the way? What has shaped who you are today?

Another phrase that has long inspired me is Michelangelo's '*Ancora Imparo*'; it roughly translates to 'I am still learning' and he is believed to have said this in his 80's. I first saw a version of this sentiment presented as a humorous poster hung on an inspiring lecturer's office door with a monkey smiling and scratching his head beneath the phrase 'We're never finished learning' and the phrase has continued to revisit my life's path in a variety of forms over the years. As a teacher, I have come to understand that sometimes it is better for me to say 'I don't know', to realise that it's okay to admit that I don't have all the answers and that I have as much to learn as my students.

YouTube Link: Drama Students from The Marquette University read Mary Oliver's '*What I have Learned So Far*': https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_9Fx_hRr54

Finally, I will leave you with a quote I found in *Grace Abounds*, a recommended read by Sr. Edith Prendergast R.S.C. I often read it to begin a meeting with R.E. Teachers. See if it speaks to you when you take time to hit the pause button:

"Bishop Howard Hubbard stated: Remember, your ministry as a catechist arises from the need of the community, and what the community most needs today in those who minister is not a walking theology manual, but sensitive and caring human beings who are willing to share their humanity with others by being there in the thick of things, in the midst of their struggles, and by paying loving attention to them...' Sr. Edith goes on to say 'We are called to be jubilant, carefree ministers who can laugh at the power of darkness. Children laugh at least five hundred times a day; adults maybe only three times.' St. Ephraim wrote, "I will give praise during my lifetime, I will not be a dead person among the living." Our presence, our body language, must radiate the message that we are delighted to be here, delighted to be bearers of good news. That is why it's important to step back to gain the balance and perspective."

CHRISTMAS SYMBOLS

We all know, or think we know, the Christmas story – how Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem, how there was no room at the inn, how Jesus was born in a stable, and how he was visited by shepherds and wise men. But what has this got to do with the strange traditions we have today? Why is Christmas celebrated in the middle of winter? Why do people stand fir trees in the corner of their living rooms? Why do they hang up branches of holly and wreaths of ivy? Why do couples kiss under the mistletoe? Why does Santa Claus come down the chimney? And what have robins got to do with it?

Before Christianity began, there was often a winter solstice festival to cheer everyone up when it was cold, dark and depressing. This fell around the 21st December when the days are at their shortest and the nights are at their longest. Offerings were given to the pagan gods, asking for light to return to the days and for crops to start growing again. Houses were decorated with evergreen plants which people believed had magical powers because they remained green throughout the winter. Each plant had its own meanings: holly was supposed to bring good luck, ward off evil spirits and protect a house from lightning; ivy was supposed to bring fertility to women; mistletoe was used in medicines, and again, it was believed to bring fertility and to scare off evil spirits. The custom of kissing beneath sprigs of mistletoe was a way of wishing for fertility (or to put it another way - babies). The deep green leaves and the bright red berries also added some welcome colour at a time when most of nature seemed dead.

The Romans had a festival called Saturnalia which started on the 17th December and lasted a week. The god Saturn was worshipped because they believed he would help the crops to grow. It was a time to eat, drink and be merry with your friends and family. Presents were exchanged and this is possibly when the tradition began.

After St. Patrick brought Christianity to Ireland in the 5th century it was still very difficult to persuade everyone to stop their pagan traditions, so they were adapted to suit Christian beliefs. “The Light of the World” is one of Jesus’ titles in the Bible, so the mid-winter festival was chosen to celebrate Jesus’ birth because the slowly lengthening days were seen as a symbol of “The Light” coming into the world. Decorations of evergreen plants became a symbol of the eternal life that Christians are promised in Heaven. Holly symbolised Jesus’ crucifixion – the red berries represent the blood he shed on the cross and the prickles represent the crown of thorns he was forced to wear. One story said that the cross itself was made from a holly tree.

Ivy clings to walls and trees for support so this was seen as a symbol of humanity’s need to depend on God. Kissing beneath the mistletoe became a symbol of peace and Christian love.

Christmas trees were made popular in Ireland by Queen Victoria’s German husband, Prince Albert, who brought the tradition from his homeland. There are several stories to explain how the custom began. Some say that bringing an evergreen into the house was another pagan symbol of fertility.



CHRISTMAS SYMBOLS

A different explanation comes from a story about St. Boniface, an early Christian missionary who lived from 672 to 754 AD. St Boniface travelled from Devon to northern Germany where most people still worshipped the traditional Norse gods. He cut down an oak tree that was sacred to Thor, the god of thunder, and a fir tree grew in its place.



St. Boniface said that the fir tree was a symbol of Christianity, taking the place of the old religion. He suggested that Christians should have a fir tree in their houses as a sign of their faith in Jesus. When the Protestant Church began in the 16th century, a leader called Martin Luther said that Protestant Christians should have a Christmas tree instead of the nativity scene that was traditional in the Roman Catholic Church.

Father Christmas or Santa Claus was originally St Nicholas who lived from 270 to 346 AD. He was the bishop of Myra, which is in modern day Turkey. He used to give money to the poor, but tried to keep his generosity secret. He would go out at night to put coins in the shoes that people left on their doorsteps. If there were no shoes outside, he would drop some coins down the chimney. One story tells of a man who could not afford to look after his three daughters. St Nicholas threw three purses of money down the chimney which fell into the stockings that the daughters had washed and hung to dry by the hearth. This is where the tradition of hanging up a stocking comes from, and possibly why children believe that Father Christmas comes down the chimney. His red clothes are possibly an echo of a bishop's red robes, although in Ireland, early pictures of Father Christmas have him dressed in green to go with the evergreen leaves. The belief that he flies through the sky on a sleigh is a Christianised version of a story about the Norse god Odin, who was supposed to lead a hunting party across the sky during the mid-winter festival. This might also be why Father Christmas is believed to live in the snowy North. In Ireland, he was usually called Father Christmas and he lived in Lapland. In America he was called Santa Claus and he lived at the North Pole. This version of the story has become more popular in Ireland because of American films and books.

Robins are more common in the winter because their numbers are swelled by robins migrating to Ireland from Northern Europe. They were associated with the Norse God Thor and were a sign that bad weather was coming. Robins have now become a symbol of Christmas. There is a legend that when Jesus was on the cross, a plain brown robin settled on his shoulder and sang to comfort him in his suffering. Blood dripped from the crown of thorns onto the little bird and ever since then all robins have had a red breast.

The exchanging of presents has several meanings. Firstly, it remembers the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh that the Magi gave to Jesus. Secondly, it remembers the gifts that St. Nicholas gave to the poor. Thirdly, and most importantly for Christians, it remembers the gift of Jesus to the world.

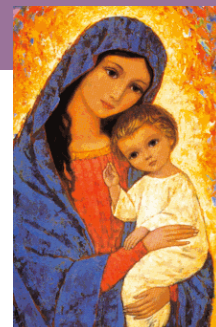
FOR YOU TO DO: COMPLETE THE TABLE BELOW

Christmas Tradition	Original Meaning	Christian Meaning
Celebrating in the middle of Winter		
Holly		
Ivy		
Kissing under the Mistletoe		
Christmas Trees		
Santa Claus		
Christmas Robins		
Giving Presents		

LITURGICAL NOTES FOR SCHOOL

Notice Mary, Mother of God in Advent

Although centred on the person of Christ, Advent is also, in a certain sense, a natural season of Mary. She is the model disciple. The coming to birth within her of Christ. Perhaps these weeks are a time for some additional decoration at the Marian shrine in your oratory or sacred space.



Develop some traditions for an Advent Service

Advent so easily gets swallowed up in the pre-Christmas rush. The darkness of winter opens up possibilities of doing something visual with candles. The use of incense for the main gospel reading will add a dimension. Include familiar prayers and songs. A blessing of Christmas food could be a nice idea?

An Advent Carol Service

Christmas songs begin playing in the shops as early as Halloween. As Christmas does not begin until Christmas Day (Dec. 25th), why not celebrate an Advent Carol service. An Advent carol service is one way that can help people regain a better sense of focus on the season. Readings, prayers and songs can strike a chord within the heart, opening up that deep longing for God's presence and deepening our sense of hope amid the difficulties of life.

SOLEMNITIES, FEASTS AND MEMORIALS

Celebrations of the Church are distinguished according to the importance assigned to them. The celebrations are ranked as follows:

- 1) The most important are the **Solemnities**—Solemnities are usually preceded by Vespers on the evening before.

Some solemnities have their own Vigil Mass. The two greatest solemnities are Easter and the Nativity (Christmas). The feast of Epiphany and St. Patrick's Day are solemnities also.

- 2) **Feasts** are second in order of importance. They have no Vespers or Vigil Mass preceding them. St. Stephen's day is a Feast-day for example as is the Feast of Baptism of Our Lord.
- 3) **Memorials** are either obligatory or optional. The memorials normally commemorate saints and martyrs of the Church.

John the Baptist as an important Advent figure

John the Baptist was a second cousin of Jesus and knew him from childhood. John began his mission of preaching and baptising on the banks of the River Jordan in about AD. 24. He lived as a hermit, living on 'locusts and honey' and his message was a message of repentance. He also urged people to mend their ways for the coming of the Messiah. To prove their repentance, people underwent a simple ceremony of immersion in the river Jordan and John became known as the baptiser.

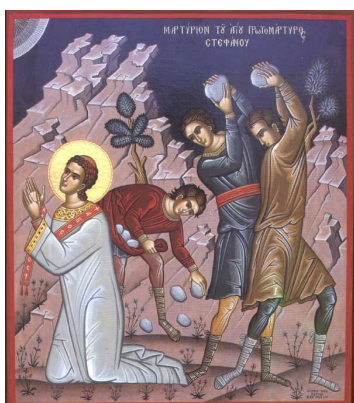


IMPORTANT FEASTS AND SOLEMNITIES OF CHRISTMAS

The Season of Christmas begins on December 25th. Christmas time runs from First Vespers (Evening Prayer I) of the Nativity of the Lord up to and including the Sunday after Epiphany or after the 6th of January. The Vigil Mass of the Nativity is used on the evening of the 24th of December, either before or after First Vespers. On the day of the Nativity of the Lord, following ancient Roman tradition, Mass may be celebrated three times, that is, in the night, at dawn and during the day.

At Christmas time we realize that the prophecy by an angel is fulfilled. God is born of a woman. Jesus is one of us forever. We can trace his ancestry in the history of Israel. From now on no human being should be named 'forsaken' or 'abandoned.' The real motive of our joy and celebration is Jesus. He is one of us, in darkness and poverty, and in our hardships and discomforts.

The celebration of the anniversary of the Lord's Birth seems to have been observed since the fourth century.



St. Stephen

Stephen was one of seven deacons who were appointed by the Apostles to help in the distribution of charity to the needy. He was a Jew of Greek culture which enabled him to see Christianity in the wider context of the world outside Israel. His preaching led to conflict with traditional Jews. Stephen was stoned to death for his belief in Jesus. According to an old tradition, the stoning of Stephen took place outside the Damascus Gate of Jerusalem. In parts of England, St. Stephen's Day is known as wrenning day as wrens were stoned in honour of St. Stephen. Stephen is the patron saint of casket makers, deacons, coffin makers, horses, headaches, masons and stone masons.

Feast of the Holy Family

The Holy Family is seen as a model for the human family, the religious community and the church itself. In the Holy Family we see the ordinariness of the life of Jesus, the simple acceptance by Mary and Joseph of the marvels of God. The Holy Family helps us to learn how to respect each other and be centred towards God. This feast became popular in the 17th century.



IMPORTANT FEASTS AND SOLEMNITIES OF CHRISTMAS



Feast of the Epiphany

The Epiphany is the 'showing forth' or manifestation of Jesus to the gentiles. The Three Wise men or Magi traditionally represent the gentiles. The wise kings came from afar. Again, tradition tells of one of the kings travelling from Europe, one from the orient and one from Africa.

The word *mágos* (Greek) and its variants appears in both the Old and New Testaments. Ordinarily this word is translated "magician" in the sense of illusionist or fortune-teller, and this is how it is translated in all of its occurrences except for the Gospel of Matthew, where it is rendered "wise man".

The Magi also had names, there was Balthasar, the youngest magus. He came bearing frankincense and represents Africa. To the left stands Caspar, middle-aged, bearing gold and representing Asia. On his knees is Melchior, oldest, bearing myrrh and representing Europe.

Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord

The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord not only recalls the Baptism of Jesus but also celebrates our identification with him through our own Baptism. This Feast also marks the end of the Christmas and the return to Ordinary Time.

Suggestions:

- 1) The preparation and celebration of a service around the subject of Baptism and Water could work well in your school.
- 2) We associate with the symbol of water by using it more at our school liturgies.
- 3) Have the blessing and sprinkling of water at the beginning of Mass or liturgy as an alternative to the Penitential Rite.
- 4) Teach the students about RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults).



- 4) Connect with other Baptismal Symbols—Light, White Robe, Godparents.

Source: Columba McCann, *101 Liturgical Suggestions, Practical Ideas for those preparing the Liturgy*, (Dublin: Veritas) 2014.



Liturgical Calendar for December

Sun. Nov. 30th:	First Sunday of Advent
Wed. Dec. 3rd:	St. Francis Xavier
Thurs. Dec. 4th:	St. John Damascene, Priest and Doctor of the Church.
Sat. Dec. 6th:	St Nicholas, Bishop
Sun. Dec. 7th:	Second Sunday of Advent
Mon. Dec. 8th:	The Feast of the Immaculate Conception
Thurs. Dec. 11th:	St. Damasus I Pope
Fri. Dec 12th:	Our Lady of Guadalupe and St. Finian, Bishop
Sat. Dec. 13th:	St. Lucy, Virgin and Martyr
Sun. Dec. 14th:	Third Sunday of Advent
Thurs. Dec. 18th:	St. Flannan, Bishop
Sat. Dec. 20th:	St. Fachanan, Bishop
Sun. Dec. 21st:	Fourth Sunday of Advent
Tues. Dec. 23rd:	St. John of Kanty, Priest
Wed. Dec 24th:	Christmas Eve
Thurs. Dec. 25th:	The Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ
Fri. Dec. 26th:	St. Stephen, First Martyr
Sat. Dec. 27th:	St. John, Apostle and Evangelist
Sun. Dec. 28th:	The Holy Family, Jesus, Mary and Joseph
Mon. Dec. 29th:	St. Thomas Becket, Bishop and Martyr
Wed. Dec. 7th:	St. Sylvester, Pope
Thurs. Jan. 1st:	Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God

ADVENT REFLECTION

We are the people of Advent, for Advent is now, and not just back then. Therefore we can see all the characters of the Advent that was 'then' in our Advent which is 'now.' Where in our lives is John the Baptist, provoking us to become aware of new things happening in our lives? Where is Zachariah in our lives, not immediately open to what is so new, so hard to understand? Where is Elizabeth, so ready, through the wisdom of living, to appreciate the coming of the Lord? Where is Joseph, so gracious when all was so strange? And where is Mary in us, trusting in the providence given to her, welcoming the word in her heart?

For, where we find Mary in ourselves, there we find Christ being born in our souls.



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