

# THE ANGEL

The Magazine of Belmont Abbey Parish



CHRISTMAS 2016

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**Sunday Mass Times**

8.30am: Parish Mass  
9.30am: Conventual Mass  
11.00am: Parish Sung Mass

**Sacrament of Reconciliation**

Saturdays 10 am and at request

**Weekday Mass Time**

8.00am every day in the Abbey and  
Wednesday and Friday 12.00 noon in  
the Oratory

(Check newsletter)

### **From the Parish Priest ...**

I welcome you to our Christmas edition of the Angel.

As we come to the end of a most extraordinary year – a Year of Grace and Mercy – together with the many challenging and unpredictable events of our political world, we thank God for his continued presence in our lives and the way he comes to guide, inspire and comfort us in our need.

Our feast of Christmas is a reminder that ‘God is with us’. He came to us to help us in our need. This annual celebration of his birth is but a reminder that actually, he is always here amidst our daily lives. However, we remember that coming and that presence amongst us in a very special way at this feast. It’s truly heart-warming that whilst we celebrate (excessively?) our good fortune and joy at this time – those less fortunate, indeed those often suffering excessively in different parts of the world, join in that spiritual celebration because the feast is a feast of hope, of love and of God’s favour.

What do we celebrate?

*“The Word was made flesh, he lived among us and we saw his glory.”*

The composer of “Once in Royal

David’s City” sums it up for us when she writes, “He came down to earth from heaven, who is God and Lord of all.”

Yes, God came down to us; to lift us up and allow us to share in the future hope of eternal glory by becoming his children. Our response is simply one of adoration. When we behold the Christ child in the arms of Mary, or on the cross for that matter, we behold the fathomless Son of God. He has taken flesh for our sake. Thank you, Lord, more than we can ever say. He has even enclosed himself in the signs of bread and wine, which are transformed at Mass: in the Eucharist, once again, “he comes down to earth from heaven, who is God and Lord of all”. He is here, for us, in the tabernacle. When we come to Mass he fulfils the purpose for which he took flesh – he offers himself to the Father for us. One might say that Christmas happened so that the Mass could happen. What have we done to deserve a God who comes so close to us, who gives himself so totally for us?

“To all who did accept him he gave power to become children of God.”

The celebration of Christmas reminds us of the greatest of the gifts that we celebrate is quite simply that of

God's love for us all. A love that is so great that he sent his only Son to us, born in a manger, to bring us new hope and the promise of redemption. This indeed is worth celebrating. Of course we will use this time to share our joy with others but it's important that we bring that hope and peace to those who for one reason or another perhaps cannot share in the materialist side of our celebrations. We remember those too, that will find memories of past Christmases difficult in new and sadder times, perhaps through the loss of a loved one.

My prayer for you all this Christmas is that God may come into your hearts anew to celebrate Christ's birth. Then, reinvigorated by this holy season, may we continue to proclaim God's incarnation, his love, to all we meet. May we spare more than a thought for the lonely, the bereaved, the migrant, the poor and all those who may struggle this Christmas to understand and appreciate God's love for them.

May I take this opportunity to wish you all a very happy, peaceful and blessed Christmas

*Maranatha - Come Lord Jesus, come!*

*Fr Nicholas*

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## **An old Catholic Chapel reborn**

Many of you will be aware of the chapel at Rotherwas, even if it is only because you have passed the brown sign while on your way to the local Waste Disposal Site with the garden rubbish or an old mattress. Perhaps you have already visited it or, indeed, perhaps you were one of the many who came along to the first Mass to be celebrated there for over one hundred years. It is a great joy to report that this chapel is indeed reborn.

Rotherwas Chapel was the family chapel of the Bodenham family who inherited the estate in 1483 from the De La Barre family and whose descendants lived at Rotherwas House into the early twentieth century. The main part of the chapel was built in 1583 by Roger Bodenham, knighted by James I in 1603. The tower was added in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the old Tudor house was replaced by a Georgian mansion and the final extension to the chancel and a side chapel were built on in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the designs of Peter Paul Pugin. During almost all this period the family remained faithful to "the old religion", suffering considerable hardship at times due to having to pay the heavy recusant fines for not attending the Anglican church and because of their support for the

royalist cause in the Civil War in the 1640s. The chapel remained the centre of the practice of their faith and the burial place of many members of the family. However, the last direct descendant of the family, Charles de la Barre Bodenham died, childless, in 1883 and his Polish wife, Countess Irene, left the estate to her Polish cousin, Count Louis Lubienski in 1892. Further financial difficulties forced the trustees of the estate to sell the entire property in 1913. The future of the chapel looked bleak indeed, especially when it was decided to remove the bodies from the vault in the chapel and the adjacent graveyard, an event described as an outrage and sacrilege by a tenant of the estate in a letter to the Hereford Times in Feb.1913. The Catholic Directory for 1914 still gave Mass times for the chapel but no longer listed the name of a serving priest.

During the war the house was commandeered by the army and there is some evidence that services were held for soldiers in the chapel, though there is no confirmation that these took the form of a mass. Gradually, everything belonging to the estate was sold off and the house, now derelict, was demolished in 1926. There was great danger that the same fate would befall the chapel, but it was taken into the care

of the Ministry of Works in 1928, which at least allowed for the preservation of the building, if not for its restoration as a chapel. Indeed, over a long period it was simply used as a store for local farms. However, it was made a listed building in 1967 and came into the care of English Heritage, which insured that the fabric of the building would be monitored and protected, though access remained limited as the key had to be obtained from a local service-station. It is therefore very pleasing to report that the formation of a group, Friends of Rotherwas Chapel, working in conjunction with the Hereford Archive and Record Centre (HARC) is bringing the chapel back to life, indeed restoring its historic role as a place of worship. The Friends began with a small group of local people interested in the history of their area working with Catholics researching the history of the family and their chapel. They now meet regularly to clean the building, to report any structural problems to English Heritage and to provide information about the building and its history for visitors. And the visitors have been coming in quite steady numbers which is very rewarding.

But most rewarding of all has been the celebration of Mass again in this historic Catholic chapel. The chapel

was dedicated to Our Lady of the Assumption so it was most appropriate that Abbot Paul came on 15<sup>th</sup> August to celebrate the first Mass for a century. Of course, everything required for the Mass had to be brought from Belmont and we were most grateful to Abbot Paul for organising this and for coming beforehand to plan the arrangements. We were also grateful to the other members of the Belmont community who joined him and who helped to lead the singing during mass. It proved to be a wonderful occasion. Local parishes had been notified and so we hoped for forty or fifty people and were truly astonished and delighted when about 120 turned up, in spite of the logistical problems this caused with parking and fitting everyone in the chapel. It was so pleasing to see that the revival of this age-old centre of Catholic worship mattered to so many of the local congregations. Once everyone was settled and quiet descended Abbot Paul made it a prayerful and memorable memorial of the chapel's history. We prayed for those present, but also for the Bodenham family who had kept the faith alive through all those very difficult years.

The first Mass was to be followed quite quickly by a second celebration when Dom Boniface Hill came from Downside to say Mass on 17<sup>th</sup>

September. This mass had a particular link with the family for it was a Requiem Mass for Henry Lubienski-Bodenham, the eldest son of Count Paul, who died on the Somme in September 1916. Henry had been Head-boy at Downside before going on to Trinity College, Cambridge, but left for France before completing his degree. It seemed very fitting that this centenary requiem should take place in the chapel which he would have known as a boy. Once again we had the support of Abbot Paul and some of the monks to lead the chant during Mass. After Mass we were delighted when Fr. Boniface said he would leave behind the altar cloth he had brought with him, as it fitted the altar perfectly. So together with a book stand for the altar we begin to acquire for the chapel the basic items required for the celebration of mass.

Although these two masses have been the most important elements to date in the revival of the chapel, it is planned to hold other events there from time to time. Very much in keeping with the present mood was the holding of a Wreath Laying ceremony on Armistice Day, particularly in remembrance of those who had worked in the Rotherwas Munitions factory, opened in 1916 and those who lost their lives while working there during World War II.

On a much lighter note members who have joined the Friends of Rotherwas Chapel will gather on 10<sup>th</sup> Dec. for Christmas readings and carols, followed by refreshments. While it is hoped that the Mass of the Assumption will become an annual celebration it is also hoped to make the chapel available for suitable events such as concerts, readings or exhibitions. In view of the historical Polish connection with the Bodenham family and Rotherwas the Friends are looking at ways of developing links with the Polish community in modern Hereford, something which would probably have greatly pleased Countess Irene.

There is much work to be done, because old buildings need constant care, but much progress has already been made. To attend Mass here and know that this is reviving a practice which goes back for several hundred years is a tribute to the Bodenham family and is in itself the reward.

*Brenda Warde*

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### **An Underground Catechism**

We are all familiar with the Christmas song, "The Twelve Days of Christmas". To most it's a delightful nonsense rhyme set to music, but it had a quite serious purpose when it was written. During the period 1558

to 1829, Catholics in England were prohibited from any practice of their faith, by law whether in private or in public. It was a crime to be a Catholic. Parliament finally emancipated Catholics in England in 1829.

"The Twelve Day of Christmas" was written in England as one of the "catechism songs" to help young Catholics learn the tenets of their faith as at that time it was a crime punishable by death to be caught with anything in writing that might point to you being a Catholic. The song's gifts are hidden meanings to the teachings of the faith. The "true love" mention in the song doesn't refer to an earthly suit, it refers to God Himself. The "me" who receives the presents, refers to every baptized person. The partridge in a pear tree is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In the song, Christ is symbolically presented as a mother partridge which feigns injury to decoy predators from her helpless nestlings. This is in memory of Christ's expression of his sadness over the fate of Jerusalem: "Jerusalem! Jerusalem! How often would I have sheltered thee under my wings, as a hen does her chicks, but though wouldst not have it so ..."

The other symbols have the following meanings:

Two Turtle Doves: the Old and New

Testaments

Three French Hens: Faith, Hope and Charity, the theological virtues

Four Calling Birds: the four Gospels and/or the four Evangelists.

Five Golden Rings: the first five books of the Old Testament, The Pentateuch, which gives the history of man's fall from grace.

Six Geese a-laying: the six days of creation

Seven Swans a-swimming: the 7 gifts of the Holy Spirit, the 7 sacraments

Eight Maids a-milking: the eight Beatitudes

Nine Ladies Dancing: the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit

Ten Lords a-leaping: the Ten Commandments

Eleven Pipers Piping: the eleven faithful Apostles

Twelve Drummers Drumming: the twelve points of doctrine found in the Apostles' Creed.

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### **World Youth Day**

As part of WYD 2016 in Poland, 37 pilgrims from the Archdiocese of Cardiff including 5 Herefordians made a group that wanted to strengthen our belief and trust in God in a world wide gathering and a once in a lifetime pilgrimage. Over

**1.5 million** young people gathered to do just this in a most fantastic place. After packing and preparing ourselves we said our good-byes on Tuesday, 19<sup>th</sup> July and set-off on a 2 day journey to the Salesian Youth Retreat in the North East corner of Poland.

After our travels the sight of our beds in Bialostock was a welcome one! The bus journey provided plenty of time for reflection, what we hope to gain from WYD and what our roles are as young Catholics? Here we were already with hundreds of other pilgrims from across the world. There were so many different languages and flags. It provided our group the opportunity to mix with all the other pilgrims and begin to get a sense of the global scale of this festival, and trying to explain where Wales is!

One of the most memorable activities in preparation for WYD was the same boat tour Pope John Paul II took in 1999 and we stopped at a local statute dedicated to his visit. All pilgrims kissed the hand and ring of the statue as locals believe this brings luck and blessings.

We also attended Mass at the city cathedral delivered by the Archbishop. It began with a parade of all the different nations' flags. The Mass was delivered in a number of different languages reminding us of how global and multi national this WYD

celebration was.

We also had plenty of fun and games including a game of football against the local altar servers, so Wales vs. Poland (what should've happened in Euro 2016), we did lose and we did pick up injuries like grazed knees, fractured wrists etc, nonetheless we had a great time, and we got to know them in a different way.

On Monday, 25<sup>th</sup> July we departed for Krakow stopping off at Auschwitz where we had a tour of the camps and were reminded of man's inhumanity to man. We departed the camps and carried on to Krakow arriving at our University accommodation. This marked the start of the second week.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Mass in Krakow took place on one of the many surrounding beautiful fields. The sheer size and scale was hard to comprehend and it wasn't until our group arrived at the site that it became obvious how large the scale of this event was. During the service the crowd was silent and reflective. Listening to every word and learning from all the different speakers. The Mass was traditional and delivered in Polish, however, there were moments when other languages were used and it acted as a reminder to us of the reach of this festival and the Catholic Church across the world. There was a beautiful image of different nations'

pilgrims offering each other the sign of peace in different languages and with different actions.

We spent a day at the St Pope John Paul II Sanctuary. This included looking at the various paintings depicting the life of the late Pope. The group also visited the Divine Mercy where we spent time in collective prayer and worship.

For the first official address from Pope Francis he spoke about young people who lead boring and sinful lives and how encouraging it was to see so many engaged and joyful young pilgrims. His message was about living the best life we can, the most holy life and a life of compassion and honour against injustice. The sight of seeing all pilgrims listening to the talk on radios or phones was another reminder of the global reach of the church and the worldwide community we are all a part of.

The highlight of the Pilgrimage was the Vigil on Saturday, 30<sup>th</sup> July. The Vigil began with reflection and prayers for sufferers in the world. This was done through a number of dance routines and testimonies. It included prayers for those who are hurt in the world and those who cause pain. Each dance reflected an action or scenario that reflected each prayer. It reminded us that there are still problems in the world and

people who still need our help and prayers.

Next Pope Francis delivered his message for the young pilgrims. He spoke about the broken and war torn world and about the need to continue to pray for and help those in need. He spoke about the closeness of the world through the internet and news channels and because we can see these disasters we should now help. His Holiness encouraged us to continue to challenge ourselves, our faith and to leave a lasting mark on this world.

After the Vigil we got back to our accommodation and packed our bags for our journey home. The Herefordians were dropped off at Magor services at about 9 in the evening on Monday 1<sup>st</sup> August. This was a great but sad time as we all said good bye and we all headed home and told our families and friends about our time in Poland.

We all made great new friends and made a special bond between God and us and we all enjoyed it so much none of us wanted to leave Poland.

This was a truly amazing time in Poland. It reminded me that there are still problems in the world and people who need our help and prayers. Even if you give a pound a month to charity we are still helping people in need and if we pray for five minutes for those people in need, we

are still helping them through their tough times. We are helping them every day when we pray for them.

If I take one thing from this event it is to keep praying for these people as they deserve the same life we live, but they are finding it harder than us to find it. With our prayers we can help bring them back on the right track to a safe and loving life like ours.

There is just one other thing I have to add and that is a big thank you so much to those who supported me spiritually and financially. This was a truly an amazing experience and I couldn't have done it without you.... So a huge THANKS!!

*Nathan Morawiecki*

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### **Hereford Catenians**

Brother Terry Savage continues to lead the Hereford Catenians through another successful year. In the last few months we have continued to meet socially, to care for our widows and pray and visit those who are sick.

In August we celebrated our annual Clergy Night where we entertained the clergy from the Deanery as a thank you for all they do in our parishes and beyond.. This year we welcomed Deacon Peter Tibke, a brother of Province 6 who spoke

about the Catenian National Vocations Initiative which he has chaired for a number of years. The Catenians are major financial contributors to the Office of Vocations and each year Circles have an annual Mass said for vocations; Hereford's is held on the first Sunday of December ensuring that Mass is said for this intention on almost every day of the year.

The Catenians support young people through the Bursary Fund and practically by stewarding national events such as CYMFed. Locally, we were pleased that another speaker this year was Nathan Morawiecki who gave a very interesting and informative talk about his trip to Poland for World Youth Day. Catenians supported Nathan both financially and through their prayers. For many years the Circle has provided a prize consisting of a shield and cheque to a pupil at St Mary's RC High School for Sustained Endeavour.

In addition to supporting the Catenian Charities, Hereford Circle has recently raised funds for the Archbishop's Cornerstone project in Cardiff, contributing to the Sensory Garden which is being planned and for Marie Curie Nurses.

In December, we welcomed a new Brother to our Circle, Dr John Goodall-Copestake and his wife Cecilia. We trust they will have a long

and happy association with us.

*Chris Moore*

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### **Extracts from the Funeral Eulogy for Abbot Jerome Hodkinson**

Abbot Jerome hated long sermons. He'd say, "What can't be said in five minutes, isn't worth saying." I hope he'll forgive me this afternoon.

Abbot Jerome was a man of simple faith, who was often heard to say, "Why can't we just believe what Jesus said and do what he asked of us?" He believed without questioning in the word of Jesus.

James Anthony Hodkinson was born at Colwyn Bay on 28th March 1929, the third of four sons born to Stephen and Jane Hodkinson. Although he never learnt Welsh himself, he was proud of the fact that his father, originally from Lancashire, was a fluent Welsh speaker. He was educated at St Joseph's Primary School, Colwyn Bay Grammar School and with the Oblates of Mary Immaculate at St Mary's College. In 1945 he took the School Certificate and passed the Civil Service examination. He received an appointment, but decided instead to try his vocation at Belmont, where he arrived on 18th September 1946. He was clothed on

Christmas Eve by Abbot Aidan Williams and made his first Profession at Midnight Mass on 25th December 1947. That same year he was called up for National Service, which was deferred pending a chest examination. He made his Solemn Profession under Abbot Anselm Lightbound on 29th December 1950. His priestly formation was all done at Belmont, as was often the case then, and in October 1949 he went up to Oxford to read English. He graduated in June 1952. In July 1953 he was ordained a Subdeacon and in April 1954 a Deacon by Archbishop Michael McGrath of Cardiff. Then, on 3rd July 1955, together with Fr Stephen, he was ordained a priest. It couldn't have been easy trying to study Philosophy and Theology while, at the same time, taking a degree at Oxford and teaching in the school, but that was how it was done and you were expected to cope.

Fr Jerome's teaching career spanned 43 years, from September 1952 to June 1994. He began by teaching English and Scripture, was put in charge of Cricket, which he adored, and also taught French, Latin, Chemistry and helped with theatricals. From 1953 to 1955 he was school choirmaster. For many years Fr Jerome was a first cantor, ruining his voice by singing the high notes of Gregorian chant when he was naturally a bass-baritone. In

1957 he was appointed Phillipps Librarian, in 1958 Infirmarian and in 1959 Coach to the 2nd XV. If Cricket was his first love, then Rugby came a close second and these remained with him to the end. His small stature and youthful good looks gave rise to the nickname "Teddy Bear" and the boys would sing Elvis Presley's song when he walked into the room. In 1960 he was appointed Junior Master in the monastery by Abbot Maurice Martin and, in his own words, "having given up cricket, rugby, etc., I took to working in the woods and learning Chinese." Nevertheless, from 1962 to 1965 he taught Classics and in September 1965 became Head of English. He dedicated himself to teaching "A level" English to the delight of his students, instilling in them a lasting love for the great English poets, in particular the Bard himself and Gerard Manley Hopkins and, of course, for the greatest novelist who ever lived, Jane Austen.

In 1966 he was elected Delegate to General Chapter and appointed Prior by Abbot Robert Richardson. This was a particularly difficult time for Belmont, what with adapting to the changes in monastic life encouraged by the Second Vatican Council and the financial crisis affecting Belmont because of excessive investment in the school. There was an Extraordinary Visitation and, in

October 1969, Fr Jerome was appointed Bursar in an attempt to bring things under control. Tragically, Abbot Robert was diagnosed with cancer and died on 25th October 1970. An abbatial election was held and, on 18th November, Fr Jerome was elected 8th Abbot of Belmont, a position he held until July 1986, when Abbot Alan Rees was elected.

To begin with Abbot Jerome didn't take to liturgical innovation and wouldn't concelebrate at the daily Conventual Mass, preferring to say a private Latin Mass, albeit in the new rite. He asked Br Alan and me to work together on a revised English Office: I worked on the texts, while Alan composed the music. It's essentially the Office we still use today. The interior of the beautiful abbey church had been torn apart in 1967, to seat more people and so that Mass could be celebrated "facing the people." It was a shambles: the high altar had been destroyed and replaced by a concrete wall, gone were St David's Chapel and the magnificent choir screen. The altar was a refectory table resting on orange boxes. Abbot Jerome decided that something had to be done, if not to restore what was lost, at least to make a decent job of what was left. This was done in 1978 and the result is what we have today. Abbot Jerome often said, "I did the best of a bad job," a rather

harsh judgment on himself. Although at times he could appear to be proud, even pompous as some thought, he was in fact a realist and preferred to call himself a cynic. He enjoyed reading and loved the sound of his own voice, practising his homilies before a mirror until they were perfect.

He was an able teacher, but no great lover of our schools. He did, however, encourage the monks who dedicated themselves to running them, as he did those who worked on the many parishes Belmont served at that time. He wasn't keen on travel and would rather stay at home than go anywhere: any visit was sure to be short. He preferred to drive up to Whitehaven, a journey of six hours, and return as soon as the Mass or other function was over. He hated going to Rome for the Abbots' Congress and never took a proper holiday. He felt more at home in his cell and choir stall or on the squash court. Nevertheless, he did find time for outside engagements. He enjoyed regular discussions with his doctor-clergy group and was always in demand as an after dinner speaker, such was his store of jokes and stories. He had a phenomenal memory and was a good mimic. He took part in ecumenical activities and celebrated Pontifical High Mass in Hereford Cathedral for the Sesquimillennium of the Birth of St

Benedict, at which Dean Rathbone of Hereford preached.

Long before the phrase "common good" came into fashion, Abbot Jerome believed that ecumenism should extend beyond the narrow confines of pew and pulpit for the good of society. He was instrumental in founding the Samaritans in Hereford and, later on, St Michael's Hospice. He had a rare gift for listening to those in trouble or in pain without feeling the need to find easy answers. He knew that healing comes about through listening and allowing the other to speak. You could tell Fr Jerome anything: nothing shocked or scandalised him, nothing could destroy his peace and that peace helped calm an anxious soul. He developed, without wanting to, an extraordinary ministry to people all over the country and much further afield. Christ's compassion moved his heart and guided his life and in it others found hope.

The Lord works in mysterious ways: who could have imagined that Abbot Jerome would found a monastery in Peru? It came as a great surprise to everyone, when in 1979, influenced by Mother Mary Xavier McGonagle of Tyburn, he responded positively to the invitation of the Archbishop of Piura, Mgr Fernando Vargas S.J., for Belmont to make a foundation. "Go out and see what this joker wants,"

was what he said.

In 1986, no longer abbot, he didn't move away, but continued teaching in the school and took pastoral care of Broad Oak and Llanarth. In 1989 he became Parish Priest of Bromyard and in 1992 of Belmont. This was a new departure for him. He enjoyed the contact with parishioners but not the bureaucracy of parish administration. In 1994 he more or less retired except for a few retreats and became monastery archivist, having served for a year as Prior to Abbot Mark. "I retired to a life of idleness," he wrote, his way of translating the monastic term "otium," when the monk gives himself wholly to God. In many ways, the last 22 years of his life became the most fruitful, for he was able to dedicate himself to reading and prayer and to the spiritual direction of many souls, most of them women. Fr Jerome always said that men don't understand women, and he was right, we don't, but somehow he did.

The onset of his debilitating illness was painful and difficult for him to accept: the man who had been so agile in his youth, a fine sportsman, now found himself unable to walk or even wash. To begin with, there were times when he appeared impatient and angry, but the move to the infirmary and the help of carers enabled him to be more comfortable

and so dedicate time to his telephone ministry. For the last four years of his life he retired to his room, not wishing to leave it even for Mass. At long last he was able to live the eremitical life for which he had always longed. Mercifully, the end came very quickly, just a month after the death of Fr Luke, his fellow novice and friend. He was undemanding, always grateful and infinitely kind, gentle and polite. When you visited or rang him, her never spoke about himself, but always wanted to know how you were and what you'd been up to. He was focused on Christ and was already looking into eternity.

Abbot Paul

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### **Christmas Evergreens**

Christmas is traditionally a time when we bring evergreens into our homes and decorate with them, adding twinkling lights, tinsel and streamers. Along with the Christmas tree and mistletoe, holly and ivy are probably the most popular evergreens that we use.

The tradition of bringing holly and ivy into the house for the Festive Season began in Europe far back in pagan times. Because both the holly and the ivy are very hardy, it was believed that their ability to survive harsh conditions would somehow

help the household to make it through the winter. They were also believed to keep away evil spirits. Moreover, the colours of the holly and ivy, green and red, are the two colours that are most traditionally associated with the Festive Season. The evergreen leaves of these two plants were also supposed to represent the hope that the spring would return, as they stayed green while the rest of the landscape was dead and barren.

As the years passed, Christian meanings were given to the significance of both the holly and the ivy at Christmas. Holly leaves, because of the fact that they are prickly, have been associated with the crown of thorns that Jesus was made to wear at the time of his crucifixion. And the berries are said to represent the drops of blood that Jesus shed due to the thorns of the crown piercing his scalp.

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### **Did you know...**

In 1644 the Puritan parliament first sat on Christmas Day setting a trend of 'no Christmas', and in 1645 they declared Christmas a working day. Christmas was banned! Anyone found making Christmas pies was in severe trouble, and often arrested as an example to others.

At this time many customs began to



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die out, because anyone found celebrating was similarly chastised. Priests were in hiding, and few people managed to attend the old 'Christe-Masse.'. No 'Waits' sang in the streets; people were compelled to work on Christmas Day, and there was no feasting or decorating of houses or streets.

If we go back into history, to the time people refer to as 'pagan', we find that is where most of our Christmas customs come from. But like many things in our social culture, they have evolved. We are NOT practicing a pagan custom when we decorate our homes for Christmas, because that was 'Christianised' by the early

missionary monks of St Benedict, under St Augustine himself, following the rules set down by Pope St Gregory. He told the monks to encourage the people of Britain to decorate their temples for the 'nativities of the saints' rather than to their earlier deities; and to celebrate likewise, eating the animals they had slain, for food for themselves, rather than for making sacrifices.

St Gregory was a man way ahead of his time. He realised that the Church would make more converts by 'adding on' to what was already an inherent practice, rather than trying to eliminate everything as 'wrong' or

'bad', or as we are now inclined to phrase it, 'pagan'. However, the focus of these new joyous and innocent celebrations was to be the knowledge that God had sent His Son to us.

So all of these things which we enjoy doing - house decorating, carol-singing, celebrating, giving gifts, remembering the poor - they are all part of an attempt by peoples for thousands of years, to do the right thing, to 'be good' and so celebrate the presence of Christ in our lives.

The Christmas cake as we know it today comes from two customs which became one around 1870 in Victorian England. Originally there was a porridge, the origins of which go back to the beginnings of Christianity. Then there was a fine cake made with the finest milled wheat flour, this was baked only in the Great Houses, as not many people had ovens back in the 14th century.

Originally people used to eat a sort of porridge on Christmas Eve. It was a dish to line the stomach after a day's fasting, which people used to observe for Christmas Eve, or the 'Vigil' as it was called long ago. Gradually, they began to put spices, dried fruits, honey etc. in the porridge to make it a special dish for Christmas. Much later it was turned into a pudding because it got to be

so stiff with all the fruits and things. They would tie it in a cloth, and dunk it into a large cauldron of boiling water and boil it for many hours. This turned into Christmas pudding.

Later around the 16th century, it became popular to add butter, replace the oatmeal with wheat flour, add eggs to hold it together better. This became boiled plum cake. So boiled plum pudding and boiled fruitcake existed side by side depending on which ingredients the housewife used.

Only big houses had proper ovens to bake in. In the castles and fine homes, people would make a special cake for Easter, which was a rich fruitcake recipe with a topping of what we now call marzipan or almond paste. A similar cake was baked for the Christmas festivities, but whereas the Easter one was a plain cake with almonds, the Christmas one had dried fruits in season and spices. These represented the exotic spices of the East, and the gifts of the Wise Men. Such things were first brought to Europe and Britain particularly, by the Crusaders coming back from the wars in the Holy Land in the 12th century.

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### **Baptisms 2016**

Jacob James Wilson	20th August
Joseph William Wilson	20th August
Beatrix Elsie Hazell	16th October
T Arthur Cutter	23rd October
Arthur Nikola Cheery Bulmer	27th November

### **First Communion 2016**

Margaret O'Connor	16th August
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### **Weddings 2016**

Agnieszka Chepa & Roberto DegilInnocenti	3rd September
Natalie Sadler & Michael Paiano	9th September
Bryony Barling & Victor Lamarque	17th September
Rebecca McKenzie & Thomas Green	15th October
Emma Holder & Joel Grisman	5th November

### **Deaths 2016**

Margaret O'Connor	16th August
John Bindon	11th September
Christopher Mason	21st September
Beryl Lonergan	28th October
John McComish	21st November
Brian Holberry	29th November

May they rest in Peace. Amen.

A Nativity scene to colour in



