

Saint Mary's Newsletter: December

Vicar: David Smithson 027 4213200 Fridays

07 8492761 Afterhours

Peoples Warden: Sally-Ann Riddell 07 8243850

Vicars Warden: Roger Jennings 07 8243712



SERVICES FOR DECEMBER

Sunday 4th:

10:00am Advent 2 Family Communion.
Children's Church & Junior Youth

Refreshments - Adrienne Calderwood

Sunday 11th:

10am Advent 3 Family Communion

Refreshments - Majella Heaton

Sunday 18th:

10am Advent 4 Family Communion
Children's Church and Junior Youth

Refreshments - Sally-Ann Riddell

Saturday 24th:

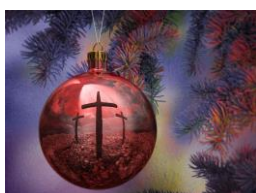
11pm Midnight Mass by candlelight

Sunday 25th:

9:30am Christmas Day Communion

Jan 1st to Feb 5th:

NO SERVICES. Services resume Sun 12th
Feb 2017



Children's Church/Junior Youth:

This month -Children's church/Junior Youth is on 4th and the 18th Dec.

Youth Group (Year 9+): Combined churches youth Meet Fridays 7pm at Oaks Church Gordonton.

Parish Office Hours

The Parish Office (normally open Fridays 9:00am to 3pm) will be closed during January, and will re-open Fri 10 Feb

Some important Dates:

Sat 3rd Dec: 7:30am set up for Christmas Fair which begins 9am

Sat 10th Dec: Church open to public to see our decorated church and a stall to sell any remaining crafts & preserves left over from the Christmas Fair

JANUARY 2016: Please note that there will be no services during the month of January, and the 1st Sun of Feb. The Vicar can be contacted for *urgent* situations. Services will resume Sun 12th Feb 2017.

THE CHRISTMAS TREE: Not until the Renaissance are there clear records of trees being used as a symbol of Christmas—beginning in Latvia in 1510 and Strasbourg in 1521. Legend credits the Protestant reformer Martin Luther with inventing the Christmas tree, but the story has little historical basis.

The most likely theory is that Christmas trees started with medieval plays. Dramas depicting biblical themes began as part of the church's worship, but by the late Middle Ages, they had become rowdy, imaginative performances dominated by laypeople and taking place in the open air. The plays celebrating the Nativity were linked to the story of creation—in part because Christmas Eve was also considered the feast day of Adam and Eve. Thus, as part of the play for that day, the Garden of Eden was symbolized by a "paradise tree" hung with fruit.

These plays were banned in many places in the 16th century, and people perhaps began to set up "paradise trees" in their homes to compensate for the public celebration they could no longer enjoy. The earliest Christmas trees (or evergreen branches) used in homes were referred to as "paradises." They were often hung with round pastry wafers symbolizing the Eucharist, which developed into the cookie ornaments decorating German Christmas trees today.

The custom gained popularity throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, against the protests of some clergy. Lutheran minister Johann von Dannhauer, for instance, complained (like Tertullian) that the symbol distracted people from the true evergreen tree, Jesus Christ. But this did not stop many churches from setting up Christmas trees inside the sanctuary. Alongside the tree often stood wooden "pyramids"—stacks of shelves bearing candles, sometimes one for each family member. Eventually these pyramids of candles were placed on the tree, the ancestors of our modern Christmas tree lights and ornaments.

It also took a long time for trees to become associated with presents. Though legend connects the idea of Christmas gifts with the gifts the Magi brought Jesus, the real story is more complicated. Like trees, gifts were first a Roman practice—traded during the winter solstice. As Epiphany, and later Christmas, replaced the winter solstice as a time of celebration for Christians, the gift-giving tradition continued for a while. By late antiquity it had died out, although gifts were still exchanged at New Year's.

Gifts were also associated with St. Nicholas, bishop of Myra (in modern-day Turkey), who became famous for giving gifts to poor children. His feast day (December 6) thus became another occasion for gift exchanges. During the early Middle Ages, Christmas gifts most often took the form of tributes paid to monarchs—although a few rulers used the holiday season as an opportunity to give to the poor or to the church instead (most notably Duke Wenceslas of Bohemia, whose story inspired the popular carol, and William the Conqueror, who chose Christmas 1067 to make a large donation to the pope).

Like trees, gifts came "inside" the family around the time of Luther, as the custom of giving gifts to friends and family members developed in Germany, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia. Often these were given anonymously, or hidden. One Danish custom was to rewrap a gift many times with different names on each wrapper, so that the intended recipient was only discovered when all the layers were opened.

In the English-speaking world, the union of gifts, trees, and Christmas was due to the influence of Queen Victoria and her husband Prince Albert, a native of Saxony (now part of Germany). German immigrants had brought the custom of Christmas trees with them in the early 1800s, but it spread widely after Victoria and Albert set up an elaborate tree for their children at Windsor Castle in 1841. At this point, Christmas presents were usually hung on the tree itself.

German and Dutch immigrants also brought their traditions of trees and presents to the New World in the early 1800s. The image of happy middle-class families exchanging gifts around a tree became a powerful one for American authors and civic leaders who wished to replace older, rowdier, and more alcohol-fuelled Christmas traditions—such as wassailing—with a more family-friendly holiday. This family-centred image was widely popularized by Clement Moore's 1822 poem, known today as "Twas the Night Before Christmas" (which also helped give us our modern picture of Santa Claus).

As many of us make trees and gifts the centre of our own Christmas practice, we would do well to remember that they are ultimately symbols of the One who gave himself to unite heaven and earth, and who brings all barren things to flower.

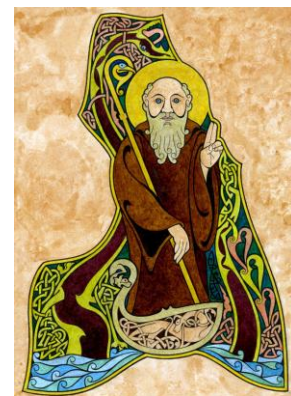
A Prayer for this month:

Lord, in this holy season of prayer and song and laughter, we praise you for the great wonders you have sent us: for shining star and angel's song, for infants cry in lowly manger. We praise you for the Word made flesh in a little Child. We behold his glory, and are bathed in his radiance.



This Month in Christian History:

Dec 7th 521: Birth of Columba, Irish Celtic priest and the "apostle of Scotland". In 563 he left his native Ireland and set up a monastery on Iona Island. From there he sent missionaries out to modern day Holland, France, Switzerland, Germany and Italy! He later made forays to Scotland where he won the native pagan Pict tribe, to the Faith.



ARTWORK BY DANIEL MITSUJI
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Parish Bank Account:

02 0410 0103053 00

Thanks for your weekly A/P contributions to keep our Parish running!