

Fourth Sunday of Advent, 22nd December 2019

“God-is-with-us”

At first glance, King Ahaz seems to be a good man who has complete trust in God; he refuses to ask for a sign: “I will not put the Lord to the test.” In fact, the reverse is true. Ahaz proves himself to be an evil king. Faced with invasion and imminent defeat, Ahaz turns away from the true God to worship pagan gods, even instigating child sacrifice to appease them. Ahaz doesn't want to put his trust in the Lord God and he definitely doesn't want a sign, because if the sign comes true, Ahaz will have no choice but to admit his mistake and turn back to the Lord. However, God promises a sign anyway: a maiden who is with child. And the child himself will be a sign of the very thing that Ahaz rejects: that the Lord is with his people.

This reminds us of three teenagers who were climbing Mt. Hood. When a massive blizzard struck, they made a snow cave to wait it out. For two weeks they huddled in the cave. Their only comfort was a pocket Bible, which they took turns reading aloud. Finally, on the 16th day, when they were low on food and hope, the weather broke. They crawled out of the cave, barely able to stand. Looking down the mountain, they saw a joyous sight: a rescue team. The situation of the teenagers, waiting and hoping, gives us an insight into the situation of believing Jews before Jesus' birth. They too were low on faith and hope.

Joseph also has to make a decision about whom to trust. Will he trust Mary, his betrothed? Will he believe the fantastical claim that though still a virgin she is pregnant and that this is God's doing? Joseph also has to decide whether to trust his dream in which God's angel gives him a message that harks back to that ancient promise of God to Ahaz, that the child will be the fulfilment of God's promise to be with the people. The Gospel doesn't tell us explicitly how Joseph makes the decision to trust Mary and to trust his dream. But clearly, it has to involve a process of combining his intuition and his experience both of Mary and of God. Ultimately, of course, Joseph has to trust himself and his ability to listen to both his heart and his head.

Each individual, and perhaps each generation, faces the same question that Ahaz and Joseph faced: whom do I trust? On what foundations do I build my life? The fundamental promise that God makes - to Ahaz, to Joseph and to us - is: “I am with you.” And the choice each of us then has to make is: do I trust God? Do I live my life based on the belief that through all the challenges and difficulties of life, God is with me, with us as a community? As we face our own threats and challenges in life - both as individuals and as Church - we can, like Ahaz, choose to place our trust in the false gods of our own time: materialism (money, possessions)

or power (using people for our own ends, putting popularity, status and success before principle and truth). Or, like Joseph, we can listen to the still, quiet voice of the God who speaks to our better self in the silence of our dreams and our hopes - the God who quietly yet persistently invites us to live our lives in hope and confidence, rather than insecurity and fear. To genuinely trust God - to believe that God is with us - has the most profound consequence for our lives and for our community.

What keeps me going when I am low on faith and hope and tempted to quit? Prayer infuses the weak with strength and the fainthearted with courage.

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Dates for you Diary

December

Tuesday 24th Mass at 9.15am
First Mass of Christmas 6.00pm
Midnight Mass 11.00 with Carols at 10.30pm
Wednesday 25th Christmas Masses 9.15am and 11.00am (no evening Mass)
Thursday 26th Mass at 10.00am

January 2019

Wednesday 1st Mass at 10.00am New Year's Day – Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God
Sunday 5th 9.15am Mass First Holy Communion Enrolment Mass

Welcome to Mgr Jim Overton who is covering some of the Masses this weekend. I would also like to thank him for covering our Advent Masses.

Family Carol Service and Tableaux. I would like to thank Margaret Carter, those who helped with the Carol Service and those who served the refreshments in the hall afterwards. The collection for the Shooting Star Trust raised £163.16.

Christmas Envelopes. There are Christmas envelopes in the narthex for your use if you will be away for Christmas.

St Michael's News. I would like to thank Julian Game for producing an excellent Christmas edition of St Michael's News. You will find copies in the narthex. It is also available on the parish website.

Confirmation 2020. Applications Forms are now available and should be made online ONLY. Please go to <https://parish.rcdow.org.uk/ashford/> to download and return the application form by **5th January 2020** to **ashfordconf@rcdow.org.uk** (do NOT send to ashford@rcdow.org.uk). On the parish website you will need to select Sacramental Preparation and then select Confirmation. The date of the Confirmation is Saturday 27th June at 2:30pm and will be conferred by the Episcopal Vicar Canon Paschal Ryan.

The God who Speaks. Lee Gibson, Parish Catechist, has prepared a handout reflecting on the readings for the 4th Sunday of Advent. Please do take a copy from the narthex.

Parish Council. Meetings from the last meeting are now available in the narthex and on the parish website.

Parish Office. Please note that the parish office is closed until Monday 6th January 2019. Please leave a message on the answer phone (01784 252230, option 2) or send an email (ashford@rcdow.org.uk) and I will respond as soon as I am able to do so.

Fr Sidon Sagar FDP

<p>Offertory Collection. Last week's collection was £1,691.23 - Envelopes £523.75; Bankers Orders £600.00 (weekly average); Loose Plate £567.48</p>
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De Paul Trust Jumble Sale. Anna and Tony Hogan would like to thank all who donated goods and worked so hard on the sale and tombolas at the Antiques Fair. The sum of £441.00 was raised for the De Paul Trust UK. Many thanks to all!

Thank you from MANNA foodbank. *"Thank you all so much for your ongoing support. Without your regular donations we would be unable to provide emergency assistance to our clients throughout Spelthorne. We really do appreciate each and every donation. From everyone at Manna may we wish you a very Happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year."* Please note that there will be no requests from Manna until the first weekend in January 2020.

Readings for 29th December, The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph
Ecclesiasticus 3: 2-6, 12-14; Colossian 3: 12-21; Matthew 2: 13-15, 19-23

<p>Emergency Exits: In the event of an emergency, please note that the three fire exits from the church are the main church entrance, the side door to the left of St Joseph's Chapel, and the main entrance to the hall.</p>
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PLEASE PRAY

for all the sick and housebound in our parish.

for anniversaries in December since 2012. Marie Bouquet, Anthony Connell, Michael Cowan, Harold Crowley, Elizabeth Daley, Kathleen Day, Marion Field, Michael Horan, Otilia Jenkins, Maureen Malloy, Vincenzo Mingoia, Mary Monahan, Beryl Nicklette, Julie Pichler, Hazel Robinson, John Sheridan, Mary Stevens, Anthony Storer, Mary Stuart, Bernard Ward.

for Fr Nigel Griffin and the parishioners of St Edmund's Whitton in the Upper Thames Deanery.

for the Holy Father's Prayer Intention that every country determines to take the necessary measures to make the future of the very young, especially those who suffer, a priority.

Mass Intentions 22nd - 29th December

Sunday 22nd	Vigil Mass Saturday, 6.00pm Ann Cordery RIP 9.15am Deceased members of the Cooper, Wills and Jacob families 11.00am Joanna Andrzejak RIP 6.00pm The people of the parish
Mon 23rd	9.15am John and Mary Daly RIP
Tues 24th	9.15am A special intention (RG) 6.00pm In thanksgiving 11.00pm Petra Towns RIP
Wed 25th	9.15am The people of the parish 11.00am Terry Richardson RIP
Thurs 26th	10.00am Francoise Bouquet RIP
Fri 27th	9.15am Robin Tippell RIP
Sat 28th	9.15am Joyce Mitchell RIP
Sunday 29th	Vigil Mass Saturday, 6.00pm Mary Cunningham RIP 9.15am Gordon Pope RIP 11.00am Norman Blaber RIP 6.00pm The people of the parish

Sunday Mass

(Vigil) Saturday, 6.00pm

9.15am Family (Folk Group, Children's Liturgy of the Word)

11.00am Sung (First Sunday, Ordinary of the Mass sung in Latin)

6.00pm

Holy Days of Obligation Mass

9.15am and 7.00pm

Weekday Mass

9.15am Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday

Eucharistic Adoration and Benediction

Saturday 9.45 – 10.15am

Sacrament of Reconciliation

Saturday 10.15 – 10.45am *(and at any time by appointment)*

Sacrament of Baptism

Normally celebrated on a Saturday once a month. To arrange a Baptism contact
Baptism Catechist Lee Gibson on 07713 760281 or lee.gibson.2na@btinternet.com

St Michael's Catholic Church

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This parish is part of the Westminster Catholic Diocese Trustee Charity no. 233699

Parish Priest: Fr Sidon Sagar FDP; Assistant Priest: Fr Carlo Mazzotta FDP

Parish Secretary: Mrs Shenda Holmes

Parish Office Hours: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday 10.00am - 1.00pm
