# Christmastide 2026/27

## Advent,

## Christmas,

## &

## Epiphany




The Church of The Holy Innocents
Paddenswick Road W6 0UB

## Charity

Throughout the season we are collecting for Grow to Know, a Community Interest Company raising awareness of social and environmental injustice. Its community garden, Hands Off Mangrove (RHS Chelsea Flower Show, 2022) was followed by The Hands Off Mangrove garden launch in Tavistock Gardens, All Saints Road, W11 on 4th October 2026 and unveiling of the Mangrove Nine plaque, honouring the nine reformers: Barbara Beese, Rupert Boyce, Frank Crichlow, Rhodan Gordon, Darcus Howe, Anthony Carlisle Innis, Altheia Jones-LeCointe, Rothwell Kentish and Godfrey Millette.



# Christmastide 2026/27 - Services and Programme

## Advent

### Eve of Advent, Saturday 28th November

5.00pm Advent Carol Service at St Paul's Cathedral, EC4M 8AD

### First Sunday of Advent, 29th November

8.30am Holy Communion (BCP)
10.10am Parish Eucharist

### Monday 30th November, Andrew the Apostle

7:30pm Parish Eucharist

### Tuesday 1st December

6:30pm Oppidan Foundation Carol Concert

### Friday 4th December

5.00pm Brackenbury Residents Association Lighting of the Christmas Tree outside The Daily Shot, 22 Aldensley Road W6 0DH

### Saturday 5th December

10.30am - Calligraphy, Scripture & Faith,
12.30pm Talk and Workshop
Jane Sullivan, Professional Calligrapher & Author

### Second Sunday of Advent, 6th December, Saint Nicholas of Myra

8.30 am Holy Communion (BCP)
10:10am Parish Eucharist

### Tuesday 8th December,
### The Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

7:30pm Parish Eucharist

### Third Sunday of Advent, 13th December, Saint Lucy of Syracuse

8.30am Holy Communion (BCP)
10.10am Parish Eucharist

### Wednesday 16th December

7.00pm Carols at The Crown & Sceptre, 57 Melina Road W12 9HY
Raising funds for The Upper Room

### Saturday 19th December

10.00am Morning Prayer
Nativity Tableau I – The Shepherds
Decorating the Church

### Fourth Sunday of Advent, 20th December

8.30am Holy Communion (BCP)
10.10am Parish Eucharist

### Wednesday 23rd December, O Emmanuel

7.30pm Advent Lessons & Carols
Seasonal music by the English Consort of Voices
Mulled wine with mince pies after the service

# Christmas

### Thursday 24th December, Christmas Eve

5:00pm Family crib service- Nativity Tableau II – The Birth
11.00pm Midnight Mass of the Nativity

**Friday 25th December, Christmas Day**
10.10am Parish Eucharist

**First Sunday of Christmas, 27th December,**
**John the Apostle & Evangelist**
10.10am Parish Eucharist

**31st December New Year's Eve**
11.15pm Watchnight Service at St Paul's Cathedral, EC4M 8AD

**Second Sunday of Christmas, 3rd January**
10.10am Parish Eucharist

# Epiphany

**Wednesday 6th January, The Epiphany**
7:30pm Parish Eucharist – Nativity Tableau III- The Magi

**First Sunday after the Epiphany, 10th January,**
**The Baptism of Christ**
8.30am Holy Communion (BCP)
10:10am Parish Eucharist

**Monday 11th January, Feast of The Holy Innocents**
7:30pm Parish Eucharist and Feast of Title Celebration

**Second Sunday after the Epiphany, 17th January**
8.30am Holy Communion (BCP)
10.10am Parish Eucharist

**18th - 25th January, Week of Prayer for Christian Unity**

**Third Sunday after the Epiphany, 24th January,**

8.30am Holy Communion (BCP)
10.10am Parish Eucharist

**Monday 25th January, The Conversion of Paul**

7:30pm Parish Eucharist

**Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany, 31st January**

8.30am Holy Communion (BCP)
10.10am Parish Eucharist

**Tuesday 2nd February,**
**The Presentation of the Lord/ Candlemas**

7:30pm Parish Eucharist
Nativity Tableau IV – The Presentation

**Friday 5th February**

7:30pm Southwest Brass & Clariphonics Concert
In aid of UNICEF

# Advent is…

…from sunset on 28th November to sunset on 24th December.

'Advent' means 'coming' or 'arrival' so is not just a spiritual-sounding word for the busy weeks preparing for 25 December. It is the start of a new liturgical year (in a three-year cycle: this one is Year B) which begins once again the continual story of God's plan of salvation for us personally and the whole of

creation. We are getting ready to celebrate Jesus' birth and incarnation in fulfilment of what is written in scripture, which fuels our hope of his promised return to complete God's Sacred Plan.

It is a time to look back at what has passed and acknowledge the uncertainty of what lies ahead, while reflecting on what we are truly longing for and our hopes for our future. The birth of Jesus reminds us to trust in all God's promises and live in expectation and hope - strengthened by God's promise to sustain us and to renew our lives once again on our pilgrim journey.

Advent is an invitation to watch and wait, to pause and ponder the mystery of the incarnation and make room for something new in our understanding of God's salvation love story. It is time to take a breath and prepare our hearts and minds for what is about to come, when the light and life of the world will be born anew and where we find our hope for the work of waiting.

## Four Sundays of Advent

Advent may be a short season, but it has a rapid progression in the readings over its four Sundays.

The first focuses on the Second Coming of Christ, while the second and third Sundays focus on John the Baptist's warning to prepare for the coming Messiah, who he recognises in Jesus whose sandals he says he is not fit to tie.

The fourth Sunday precedes the year's longest night and its focus is the young unmarried woman risking a scandal by bearing a child. She does not proclaim the Word of God coming in judgement, but through her 'yes' comes to embody that Word made flesh and is the bearer of the Lord, the light shining in the darkness.

## Five Advent Wreath Candles

We also use an Advent Wreath, with its five candles – four blue and one gold – for our reflections and prayers this season.

Blue or purple are the liturgical colours for Advent, because the black cloth of the vestments symbolising grief and penitence faded over time to these colours. Blue is also the pure heavenly colour for Mary in the Western tradition.

The first blue candle is lit on Advent Sunday and then the remaining three on each of the following Sundays, with the gold candle lit on Christmas Eve.

There are several traditions about the meaning or theme of each candle and the one we usually follow reminds us of who prepared for the Coming of Christ, as follows:

Advent 1 - The Patriarchs – such as Abraham, our Father in Faith, and David, our ancestor in whose city, Bethlehem, Jesus was born.
Advent 2 – The Prophets – when we reflect on all the ways the birth of Jesus was foretold.
Advent 3 – John the Baptist – who proclaimed the coming saviour.

Advent 4 – The Virgin Mary – who bore Him in her womb.

## Four Nativity Tableaux

In churches and cathedrals across the world you find nativity scenes on display which encapsulate the entire Advent, Christmas and Epiphany stories, and so the star, angel Gabriel, shepherds, Holy Family, sheep, oxen and the Magi are all present at the same time. We take a different approach and have four Nativity Tableaux reflecting the unfolding story from the announcement to the shepherds (appearing at O Sapientia – 8 days before Christmas) all the way to the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. It means our final Tableau is taken down in early February, way beyond the traditional 12 days of Christmas (rather the 40th Day of Christmas).

Tableau I includes the star, angel Gabriel, shepherds and their sheep. Tableau II includes Mary, Joseph and Jesus in a manger beneath the star and in front of Gabriel, surrounded by the shepherds and their sheep, oxen and, of course, a donkey. In Tableau III the shepherds and sheep have been replaced by the Magi arriving on camels bearing their gifts (remembering that Scripture tells us Jesus is about 2 years old now and the family are living in a house). Tableau IV

shows just the Holy Family with Simeon and Anna who have recognised the Christ child at the Temple.

We are blessed to have all these characters and animals which are made in reconstituted stone by the monks and nuns of the Family of Bethlehem, of the Assumption of the Virgin, and of Saint Bruno in France. Many of these figures have been purchased (in Walsingham, Paris and Lourdes) by members of our church family, past and present, who are therefore always with us and in our thankful prayers when the figures come out of storage each year and the scenes presented once again.

## Andrew the Apostle – 30th November

Andrew, a fisherman, was first a follower of John the Baptist, listening to him preach when Jesus appeared, and John declared that he was not fit to tie the laces on Jesus' sandals, before agreeing to baptise him. Andrew asked Jesus where he was staying and Jesus said 'Come and you will see' and so he became the first Apostle to be called and respond to Jesus' call. He then recruited his brother Peter when he declared that 'we have found the Messiah'.

According to tradition, Andrew travelled extensively and founded the Church in Byzantium (which later became known as Constantinople, currently Istanbul), and so one brother, Peter, founded the Church in the West and the other, Andrew, in the East.

His life is said to have ended in Patras, Greece, where he was crucified at his request on an X shaped cross and upside down, as he did not consider himself worthy to be crucified as Jesus was.

## Saint Nicholas of Myra – 6th December

Bishop Nicholas is associated with the early Greek Church in both Patara, Türkiye and Bari, Puglia, Italy. He was a 3rd/4th Century Christian leader known for his miracles, intercession and works of wonder. His reputation for giving secret gifts led to the folk story of Santa Claus (Sinterklaas). His Feast Day is the day he died in AD 343, a peaceful death at a good age, though he

had in his life suffered imprisonment, torture and persecution in the times of the Emperor Diocletian.

## The Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary – 8th December

This celebration of Mary's conception in her mother Anne's womb is a reminder of her special place in Christian theology and devotion as 'Theotokos' the God Bearer. Our Anglican tradition emphasises Mary's honour and veneration and 'Our Lady's sinlessness' has been part of our worship since the Reformation.

We commemorate Anne and Mary in one of the carvings on the right-hand side of our Baldacchino surrounding the altar. It is the lowest of four carvings and shows Anne holding the Blessed Virgin Mary with her right hand and the Bible in her left. The Bible is open at the text of Psalm 45:2 and the Latin inscription reads: 'diffusa est gratia in labiis, propterea benedixit te deus'. In the King James Version, this verse (14) is translated: 'Grace is poured upon your lips; therefore God has blessed you forever.'

## Saint Lucy – 13th December

Lucy of Syracuse, also known as Santa Lucia, was executed during a period of persecution as a Christian martyr in Syracuse, Sicily in 304 A.D. According to tradition, she consecrated her virginity to God and hoped to distribute her marriage dowry to the poor but was reported to the authorities and arrested. It is said that when they came to arrest her she was immovable, even by a cart pulled by oxen, and that when she was set on fire she did not burn and finally met her death by sword.

Her feast day was once celebrated at the Winter Solstice, the shortest day of the year, and so it became a festival of light, particularly in Scandinavian countries with such long dark winters. It is said that to celebrate St Lucy vividly will help us live long winter days with enough light. Her Feast Day is still the traditional day the Christmas Lights are turned on in Italy.

## Saint John of the Cross – 14th December

A 16th century Spanish priest and Carmelite friar, John was born near Avila and, greatly influenced by Saint Teresa, he was instrumental in the founding of a more strictly observant Order known as the Discalced Carmelites because one observance was to be barefoot. Under their Rule, the focus day and night was on the Liturgy of the Hours reciting set prayers, study, devotional reading, celebration of Mass and solitude, although friars like John could spend time evangelising outside the monastery.

John's commitment to reform and his spiritual insights made him enemies within the traditional Carmelite Order, which led to his imprisonment in a tiny cell for nine months. During this period of isolation and suffering he experienced what he later described as a 'dark night of the soul' - a profound spiritual crisis leading to a deeper union with God. His most famous work of the same name is a poem which, together with his other writings, are together considered among the height of Spanish literature.

His feast day commemorates the date of his death, which falls during our Advent preparation for the coming of Christ, and so particularly reminds us of the importance of preparing our hearts for the Lord through prayer and contemplation, recognising John's example. As we reflect on the meaning of Christmas and the coming of the Light into the world, it is an ideal time to reflect on John's teachings about finding God in the darkness, helping us to trust in God's love even when we cannot feel His presence.

## Seven Advent O's - O Antiphons, 17th to 23rd December

St Benedict called humility the chief of all virtues, and it is said that living in awe of God is the beginning of wisdom. Wise is the person who looks at all living things – from snowflakes to galaxies - and is filled with awe at the mystery that lies beyond, behind and within them all – the mystery of God. This is the God known throughout the ages, who comes as a baby born in Bethlehem, who dwells among us, dies for us but rises again, allowing us to see in Jesus the fullness of the character of God in whom all our hopes rest.

What it means to hope in Christ was set down by at least the 6th century in what are commonly called the Advent O's, because each Antiphon or verse starts with 'O'. They are meditations on the scriptures below speaking of God's nature that were sung at Vespers - the monastic equivalent of Evensong – in the seven days leading up to Christmas.

We traditionally celebrate them all at our Advent Lessons & Carol service on 23rd December. In reverse order, the first letter of each antiphon also forms the acrostic, Ero Cras, meaning 'Tomorrow I will come', as follows:

O **E**mmanuel, O **R**ex Gentium, O **O**riens, O **C**lavis David, O **R**adix Jesse, O **A**donai, O **S**apientia.

## 17th December – O Sapientia

O Wisdom, coming forth from the mouth of the Most High, reaching from one end to the other mightily, and sweetly ordering all things:
Come and teach us the way of prudence.

cf Ecclesiasticus 24.3; Wisdom 8.1

## 18th December – O Adonai

O Adonai, and leader of the House of Israel, who appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush and gave him the law on Sinai:
Come and redeem us with an outstretched arm

cf Exodus 3.2; 24.12

## 19th December – O Radix Jesse

O Root of Jesse, standing as a sign among the peoples;
before you kings will shut their mouths,
to you the nations will make their prayer:
Come and deliver us, and delay no longer.

cf Isaiah 11.10; 45.14; 52.15; Romans 15.12

## 20th December – O Clavis David

O Key of David and sceptre of the House of Israel;
you open and no one can shut;
you shut and no one can open:
Come and lead the prisoners from the prison house,
those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.

cf Isaiah 22.22; 42.7

## 21st December – O Oriens

O Morning Star,
splendour of light eternal and sun of righteousness:
Come and enlighten those who dwell in darkness
and the shadow of death.

cf Malachi 4.2

## 22nd December – O Rex Gentium

O King of the nations, and their desire,
the cornerstone making both one:
Come and save the human race, which you fashioned from clay.

cf Isaiah 28.16; Ephesians 2.14

## 23rd December – O Emmanuel

O Emmanuel, our King and our law-giver,
the hope of the nations and their Saviour:
Come and save us, O Lord our God.

cf Isaiah 7.14

# Christmas is…

from sunset on 24th December to sunset on 5th January.

We celebrate the Incarnation - birth of Jesus - on a particular dark night when a brilliant star shone over Bethlehem. Since then, on Christmas Eve whose dawn brings Christmas Day, candles have burned in homes and places of worship not just to provide illumination, but to remind us 'The light shines on in the darkness and the darkness has never quenched it' (John 1.5), as we celebrate the central truth that 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us' (John 1.14), fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah (7.14) that 'a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son.'

At Christmas we gather as believers that in this baby we can see the human face of God, that in Jesus God is speaking to us in the simplest language possible, that he has come to be among us, be on our side and with us in our living and dying. So, to celebrate Christmas is to refuse to be dragged down by the sin and evil of this world, and instead to renew our trust in God revealed in Jesus Christ.

What it is that draws us to church at Christmas? Is it the story of a baby in a manger with angels and shepherds? Or is it more like homesickness for the wholeness we cannot seem to grasp fully however hard we try? Perhaps it is the need to know we are truly loved. Whatever our motivation, one of the challenges for Christians is to continue the celebration of Christmas beyond the traditional 12 days of Christmas and long after the rest of the world turns its attention elsewhere.

## Christmas Eve – 24th December

In the traditional manger, such as the one in our Nativity Tableau III, we ponder the innocence of God, recognising that birth is dangerous and painful and newborn babies cannot always be assured of a welcome and place of safety. Yet this is the process that God incarnate submits to, avoiding none of

the inherent dangers or putting up special protections. Instead, the coming of God among us is in complete vulnerability.

In churches bathed in light all over the world on Christmas Eve, people gather to celebrate this most ordinary and extraordinary of events, the birth of a child. How can that change anything? It cannot, unless in the birth of Jesus we sense the power of the light of the Child who claims to be the True Light of the World, and illuminates for all time the true nature of God and true purpose of mankind.

## Christmas Day – 25th December

The greatest love story ever told is the one the church tells at Christmas. It begins: once a child was born in a remote place first greeted by lowly shepherds. And it ends: nothing can ever be the same again. The meaning of the story is revealed in one of the names given to the child: Emmanuel - God with us.

It is a story about our seeing the human face of God for a short time, but enough to reduce us to silent awe. Once again at Christmas we hear that a child was born and deep within us we become still as a spirit of yearning for God is born again in our hearts and in the dark violent world that we are part of.

Jesus was born into an equally dark and violent world, and those who first told the Christmas story surely knew that they were contrasting dark and light, evil and good, despair and hope, when they wrote of the source of the world's True Light lying in that manger.

## Stephen, First Martyr – 26th December

Stephen, the First Martyr, is one of the many people whose lives and faith we commemorate during these 12 days of Christmas. He had to defend his faith in Christ before a court and was stoned to death because of it, and is

remembered for his final prayer of forgiveness for his attackers: “Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (Acts of the Apostles 7.60).

## John, Apostle the Evangelist - 27th December

John was a Galilean fisherman and with his brother, James, was among the first disciples called by Jesus. He ended up playing a leading role in the early church in Jerusalem. John is known for his close relationship with Jesus and was the only one of the twelve Apostles who stood faithfully at the cross when Jesus was crucified, and who Jesus then declared was to become the guardian of his Mother Mary. John is the patron saint of love, loyalty, and friendships which are central to our Christian ministry of mutual support.

## The Holy Innocents – 28th December

While today is Feast of The Holy Innocents, we will be celebrating it as our Feast of Title on 11th January, as we traditionally do each year. It is still a day to remember the children of Bethlehem put to death by King Herod, whose goal was to kill the Christ Child and preserve his own power.

Forewarned by the Magi, Joseph and Mary flee and so ensure Jesus escapes the intended massacre of all boy children, as vividly depicted in 'The Flight into Egypt', our most recent panel by John Afflick and used for the cover of this booklet.

## The Naming and Circumcision of Jesus – 1st January

We celebrate the circumcision of Jesus in accordance with Jewish tradition, when a child is formally given their name. According to Luke’s Gospel, “when eight days were fulfilled to circumcise the child, his name was called Jesus, the name called by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.” (Luke 2:21)

# Epiphany is …

from sunset on 5th January 5 to sunset on 2nd February

Epiphany is the season which recognises Jesus to be the Son of God. The word 'epiphany' means 'manifestation' or 'appearance' (literally making known) and so marks the recognition of the newborn Jesus by the world.

Epiphanies draw us to stop what we are busy doing, to 'turn aside and see' in a way that the experience becomes a clear window into God.

## Epiphany of the Lord – 6th January

Matthew's is the only Gospel to mention the Magi who are also known as wise men or kings from 'the East'. They are the first to give up everything to follow Jesus Christ. They brought all their wisdom and skills together to follow a star and find the Christ Child and lay their gifts at his feet. Our Tableau III also joyfully includes the camels they are said to have travelled on for so many miles.

These wise men are the first Gentile witnesses, the first to signal that this is a birth for all, not just insiders in the know, and they are 'overwhelmed with joy' when they finally reach their destination.

## Baptism of the Lord – 10th January

Today we remember and celebrate the Baptism of Christ by John, when a voice from heaven declares and reveals Jesus to be God's beloved Son. This moment in his life marked the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry and is recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

In Jesus, God has come to reclaim his Creation in an act of such faithful love that nothing can stop it, not even death. The heavenly voice and words of love affirm Jesus' identity and what he receives he passes on, as we find our identity as God's beloved children in Him.

## The Conversion of Paul – 25th January

Few Bible stories are as thrilling as Paul's road trip to Damascus and his encounter with the risen Jesus, as told in the Acts of the Apostles. In one moment of fear and enlightenment, Paul understood that Jesus was the true Messiah and that he now knew the truth about God and was obliged to obey him. Paul shines the light of his conversion into our own Epiphany and shows us that God can call and transform anyone he chooses, even the most hard-hearted.

## Presentation of the Lord – 2nd February

Today the season of Epiphany ends with the Feast of the Presentation. Jesus is brought to the Temple by his parents according to the law of Israel. The traditional service for this feast includes a procession of candles, which is why it is also known as Candlemas.

Jesus is brought to the Temple for Mary's ritual purification 40 days after giving birth, according to the law. There they encounter Simeon and Anna, two strangers who, like the shepherds and the Magi, appear to have been chosen by God as they instantly recognise who Jesus is. Simeon declares Jesus to be 'a light to lighten the gentiles and the glory of God's people Israel'. We do not know how old Simeon was, but his response suggests his death may be close, as he says his life's purpose has been fulfilled. We do know Anna's age, as she is said to be 84, having dedicated her life to God after being widowed from a short marriage.

Each year as we set out our final Nativity Tableau IV, we remember that the figures we have of Simeon and Anna are due thanks to our own elder, Monica Krall (100 years old this year), who bought them in memory of her late brothers, David (who died in India in childhood) and Hugh (1924 -2020).

# And then…..

We enter the Feria Weeks, the short period of Ordinary Time that takes us to Ash Wednesday on 10th February.

In the liturgical context, 'Ordinary' does not mean 'mundane' or 'boring'. It originates from the Latin 'tempus ordinarium', which refers to measured or ordered time.

The liturgical colour for this season is green, symbolising hope, spiritual growth, and life, and focuses on the ministry of Jesus among the people; the need for discipleship, routine and mystery in the grace of the everyday. It is a time to embody, live incarnationally and prepare for the sacrifices of Lent (the season when the days lengthen).

Further details about services and events will be available on the noticeboard and on our website: www.hisj.co.uk

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