

Welcome to the Parish of Saint Michael Thirroul



PARISH BULLETIN
16 / 17 DECEMBER 2023
THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT + YEAR B
BLESSING OF THE CHRISTMAS CRIB

THIS WEEK'S READINGS

Darkness terrifies us and sometimes consumes us. Sometimes.

But the right kind of darkness can give us peace – a moonless night under the stars [safe on a back veranda]. A night of good sleep, for instance. Or a “lovely soft day,” as the Irish call those shady, rainy, drizzling days, the ones that make Ireland green.

In Sunday's Gospel, the people hungered for light in their darkness. “Are you the light?” they shouted to John the Baptist. Will you “bring good news to the oppressed, bind up the broken-hearted, and proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners” as recorded in the book of the Prophet Isaiah?

The Baptist said, I am only pointing you toward the light. It —he—will be here soon. Hold on to my arm.

Have you found an arm to hold onto? What is your experience of darkness? Maybe it is the opposite of quiet. Maybe terror is its name. Know that, however unrelieved your night may be, there is still, always, the promise of light. When you have been deprived for a long, long time, even one speck of light will change everything.

A tiny child might provide that on Christmas Eve!

The good news brought by Jesus is of God's love reaching out to the poor, to those closed in with nowhere to go, to the blind who cannot see their way and to the oppressed who are weighed down under the burdens of life and who have lost hope. To all who feel this way, Jesus is a source of joy, and it is the feeling that pervades all today's readings.

The Entrance Antiphon of today's Mass is taken from Paul's letter to the Philippians: ‘Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say rejoice! The Lord is near’(Philippians 4:4-5). The opening word ‘Rejoice’ is ‘*Gaudete*’ in Latin – and so today has traditionally been called ‘*Gaudete* Sunday’. This is also why we have a rose-coloured candle and hanging. Our joy flows from the realisation that Christmas is very near. God is coming with special graces for all who cry out to God in their distress.

Usually, the response to the first reading is taken from the Psalms, but today we have the canticle of Mary, the *Magnificat* – a cry of joy from a young woman who has been loved by God. God has covered her with glory, taken her into God's embrace and breathed God's Spirit into her, and the fruit of their love is the Messiah, conceived in her womb.

Saint Juliana of Norwich, England (1342–c.1429): ‘It is God's will that we have true delight with God in our salvation, and in it God wants us to be greatly comforted and strengthened, and so joyfully God wishes our souls to be occupied with grace. For we are God's bliss, because God endlessly delights in us; and so with God's grace shall we delight in God’ (*Showings*, chapter 23).

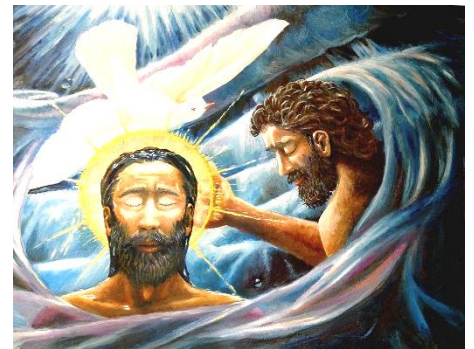
Ultimately, the source of our joy is the realisation that we do not have to be strong on our own. We are surrounded by love. This is highlighted in today's Gospel. The focus is on John the Baptist, whose mission from God was to point people towards Jesus. The Baptist was not trying to shed light himself. Rather, he pointed to Jesus. He never forgot that Jesus is the light of the world, the one who shows us God's face. Later in the Gospel, Jesus will say of the Baptist: ‘He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light’ (John 5:35). His lamp shone so beautifully, because he reflected to others the light he himself received from Jesus.

Genuine Christian faith does not make us long-faced; it should make us enthusiastic and happy. Even in Lent, the most serious season of the Church's year, the Sunday at the midpoint of the journey to Easter has a theme of rejoicing. In the same way, on this third Sunday of Advent, our liturgy takes up a joyous theme.

In our first reading, from Isaiah, the prophet is filled with joy. He has the anointing of the Spirit to bring, in the name of God, ‘good news’ of encouragement, healing, freedom, and an outpouring of God's special favour. This message is especially for ‘the poor’ – those who have no security except in God. Originally addressed to God's people in their exile – this proclamation was read by Jesus in the synagogue of Nazareth. And he added, ‘This text is being fulfilled today, even as you listen’. As the text continues, the prophet ‘exults for joy’, using marriage themes to express the covenant bond of love between the chosen people and their God; and he looks forward to their renewed life becoming an inspiration to all the nations of the world.

The second reading from 1 Thessalonians – the earliest writing of the Christian Scriptures – is chosen for our Advent liturgy, no doubt, because it rises to a climax with its reference to ‘the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ’. But it is a good choice, because it takes up today's theme of joy. Paul's reference to those things that unite that early Christian community provides a useful check list as we evaluate the life of our own communities: ‘constant prayer’,

Holy Darkness



✚✚ thankfulness to the Father, offered in and through Christ; an openness to the promptings of the Spirit that comes through members who are in tune with God's ways ('the gift of prophecy'); and the 'peace' that is the fruit of all these shared blessings. True joy comes with the experience of what we are made for; the joy brought by Christian faith, the joy all true believers have experienced, the joy that only God can give, comes through the things Paul speaks of.

John the Baptist is again our Advent guide, in today's gospel reading from John's Gospel. Because he has revived the ways of Israel's prophets, he has caused quite a stir, and the authorities of Jerusalem send interrogators who ask him to give an account of himself. His selfless response is disarmingly frank: he is not the messiah; he is not one of the old prophets come back to life; he is not the New Moses of Israel's expectations. His role is that of a herald, 'a voice crying in the wilderness', that announces one who stands among the crowd, still 'unknown' to them. The description of his witness in this passage leaves his hearers hungry to know more of the one to whom this great figure shows such reverence – a prelude to a great theme of John's gospel, 'the true light' that is going to transform a darkened world.

Today's liturgy can serve to remind us of today's call to a 'New Evangelisation' – bringing the true joy of the light of Christ to a world in which there is so much darkness and pain. When the task seems beyond us, let us remember with the old prophet, that we are working for God's future; let us understand with Paul that it is first and foremost the quality of our lives together that will bring people to share our faith; and let us learn from the Baptist that the effectiveness of our outreach will depend upon the unselfish commitment we have made to the Saviour and what he stands for.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS SUNDAY'S SCRIPTURE READINGS

First Reading Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11

✚ Why does Pope Francis say we can "experience" God when we do the things Isaiah suggests in the First Reading: "... to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release the prisoners"? What can you yourself do for the poor, the millions of children who are hungry right now, the broken-hearted, the prisoners or captives?

Allow me to ask expressly of all of you who join me in the service of the Gospel for the Christmas gift of your generous and whole-hearted cooperation in proclaiming the Good News above all to the poor (Matthew 11:5). Let us remember that they alone truly know God who welcome the poor, who come from below in their misery, yet as such are sent from on high. We cannot see God's face, but we can experience it in his turning towards us whenever we show respect for our neighbour, for others who cry out to us in their need. For the poor, who are the centre of the Gospel. – Pope Francis, *Address to the Roman Curia*, 21 Dec 2020

✚ Isaiah is the first to tell us "to bring glad tidings. ..." Jesus quotes Isaiah next (Luke 4:18-19) and Pope Francis repeats it again. How important is that message to you? Should the fact that we have "mistakes and infidelities" hinder us? How could those mistakes help us to help others?

Second Reading 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

✚ How can you ensure that the Spirit has opportunities to work in you? How can anyone "rejoice always" when they are suffering? Do you know people who seem to do that? Do you find that all things work together for you if you love God? If you realize such a thing, could that be "praying without ceasing"?

✚ Is there a relationship between the Holy Spirit working in the depths of your spirit and God's peace that is applied to your body, soul and spirit?

Gospel John 1:6-8, 19-28

✚ In the First Reading the Lord sends Isaiah with a message, and in the Gospel God sends John to testify to the light of Christ. If you decide to "testify to the light" could that be "praying without ceasing"— or by helping someone or looking for Christ in the poor all the time? Does God send you?

✚ The Gospel has John the Baptist saying to the questioners, "There is one among you whom you do not recognize ..." How about you? Do you recognize Christ in all the different faces and manners he comes to you each day?

CHRISTMAS 2023 AT THE PARISH OF SAINT MICHAEL, THIRROUL

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|---------|---------------------|---|
| ❖ 18:30 | Sunday, 24 December | Christmas Eve Mass in the Parish School |
| ❖ 21:30 | Sunday, 24 December | Christmas Night Mass in the Parish Church |
| ❖ 09:00 | Monday, 25 December | Christmas Day Mass in the Parish Church |

Children coming to any Christmas Mass – bring a BELL, and dress as Shepherds or Angels

**PLEASE BRING IN ... ANY NON-PERISHABLE ITEMS EACH WEEK
TO HELP THE NEEDY IN THE LOCAL ILLAWARRA AREA:
drop items in the special plastic bins near the church entrances.**

VINNIES CHRISTMAS APPEAL – RESULTS SO FAR!

Thank you for your generosity with the Vinnies Christmas Appeal: **\$5,220** has been donated so far, plus **35** Christmas Hampers, plus **24** toys/presents for children, plus, from our parish school, **50+** Christmas presents for the needy – **PLUS** heaps of food!

You can donate online to the Thirroul Vinnies Christmas Appeal:

<https://my.fundraise.vinniesnsw.org.au/fundraise-your-way-conference/vinnies-thirroul-2023-christmas-appeal-page/donate>



800TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CHRISTMAS CRIB

In 1223, near the little town of Greccio, about 100km northeast of Rome, St Francis of Assisi journeyed from Rome on foot to spend Christmas with the people of the little town of Greccio. Francis explained his desire: he would like to receive a donkey, an ox – real, live animals – and a manger containing an image of the Christ-child, and to place everything in a cave near the town. This simple representation was to be the centrepiece of the Christmas celebrations that year. The first representation in history of the crib of the Christ Child was born!

The story of St Francis and the Christmas Crib at Greccio focuses on what was really important to Francis – the poverty of Jesus and his mother, and the discomfort felt by the little baby. The emphasis is on the three virtues of simplicity, poverty, and humility, and leads us to understand that the poverty of Francis is in imitation of the poverty of Jesus. For Francis, the external poverty of Christ's birth at Bethlehem is representative of the radical poverty of the Incarnation – the God of all becoming human like us. Francis had the desire to represent the Nativity in a way that everyone could experience and take in with a glance the concrete reality of God made human.

Reflection question: what is the place of poverty – simplicity - humility in my life?

The narrative stresses the importance of “memory”, which also means “ensuring that we do not forget.” Francis wished “to enact the memory of that babe who was born in Bethlehem.” This is an essential duty of our faith— a faith that, according to the Bible, can be summed up as “remembering the deeds of the Lord.”

Reflection question: where do we enact “memory” in our lives? Are we able to re-read the events of our lives and perceive the Lord's presence in them?

For all Christians, the “memorial” of the Lord par excellence is the Eucharist that we celebrate daily. The parallel between the Incarnation and the Eucharist is often expressed in Francis' thought and writings. At Greccio, the nativity scene does not have crib figures to evoke the mystery of the Incarnation, instead the Eucharist is celebrated as the supreme memorial.

Reflection question: what truly is the place of the Eucharist in my life, in the course of my day?

Making memory in this way, however, is not merely an intellectual operation. In the account of Greccio all of the senses are involved. The sight of the scene, with countless images of light; hearing songs and Francis' own fine voice; the touch of the baby who awakes and is held in his arms; the sweet taste that has Francis licking his lips! All this speaks of a healthy relationship with the senses, which are part of our relationship with God and part of proclaiming the Gospel. There is an interplay between the bodily and spiritual senses in the Christian tradition, and this can serve as a warning against excessive intellectualism. The senses are seen as an avenue to God.

Reflection question: what is the place of the senses in my relationship with God, and in how my faith is expressed?

Francis invites us to make room for creativity, which opens us up to the new. We're invited to give space to feelings, to joy, to songs, to festive celebration. He also calls us to enjoy the beauty of poverty, which in the story of Greccio is characterized by a dignity and beauty that become a source of joy.

Reflection question: how open am I to the new and to what challenges me? How can I grasp the beauty of poverty?

“Standing before the Christmas crèche, we are reminded of the time when we were children, eagerly waiting to set it up. These memories make us all the more conscious of the precious gift received from those who passed on the faith to us. At the same time, they remind us of our duty to share this same experience with our children and our grandchildren. It does not matter how the nativity scene is arranged: it can always be the same or it can change from year to year. What matters is that it speaks to our lives. Wherever it is, and whatever form it takes, the Christmas crèche speaks to us of the love of God, the God who became a child in order to make us know how close he is to every man, woman and child, regardless of their condition.

“Christmas crèche is part of the precious yet demanding process of passing on the faith. Beginning in childhood, and at every stage of our lives, it teaches us to contemplate Jesus, to experience God's love for us, to feel and believe that God is with us and that we are with him, his children, brothers and sisters all, thanks to that Child who is the Son of God and the Son of the Virgin Mary.” – Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter, at Greccio, 1 Dec 2019

BLESSING OF THE CHRISTMAS CRIB

Blessed are you, Lord God, ruler of all creation, we thank you because you love us so much. From the dawn of creation, you have shown us your love: you sent your only Son to bring us joy, peace and eternal life. Bless ✦ this crib. Let the crib remind us of Jesus, Son of God and Son of Mary. Let the crib remind us of the poor and humble birth of Jesus. Father, we praise you through Christ our Lord. Amen.



SCRIPTURE READINGS THIS WEEK

Sundays Year B • Weekdays Year II

Monday	18 Dec	Monday of 3 rd Week of Advent	Jeremiah 23:5-8	Matthew 1:18-24
Tuesday	19 Dec	Tuesday of 3 rd Week of Advent	Judges 13:2-7,24-25	Luke 1:5-25
Wednesday	20 Dec	Wednesday of 3 rd Week of Advent	Isaiah 7:10-14	Luke 1:26-38
Thursday	21 Dec	Thursday of 3 rd Week of Advent	Song of Songs 2:8-14	Luke 1:39-45
Friday	22 Dec	Friday of 3 rd Week of Advent	1 Samuel 1:24-28	Luke 1:46-56
Saturday	23 Dec	Saturday of 3 rd Week of Advent	Malachi 3:1-4,23-24	Luke 1:57-66
Sunday	24 Dec	FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT • YEAR B – <i>Scripture Readings are listed below.</i>		

THIS WEEK'S RECIPE: Chicken Thigh á la king!

800g chicken thighs; honey; 3 cloves garlic, chopped; salt; black pepper; paprika; 2tbsp soy sauce; parsley.
 Put oil into a pan then the chicken thighs. Pour honey over the chicken, the amount is to taste. Cover the pot and let the chicken cook. Then mix it all up. Add the garlic, 1tsp salt, ½tsp black pepper, 1tsp paprika. Mix. Cover the pot and let it cook again. Add the soy sauce and 150ml water. Cover the pan and let everything cook for 15 minutes. Sprinkle on top the chopped parsley (amount to taste). Serve hot with your favourites, rice, vegetables ...

Please send in your favourite recipe so it can be shared in the Bulletin – we need more recipes!

BAPTISMS THIS SUNDAY – WELCOME TO DOMINIC AND FELIX!

WELCOME to **DOMINIC AND FELIX DILLEY** baptised in our Parish this Sunday during the 08:00 Mass: welcome and thank you to their parents, godparents, family and friends for bringing them to our Parish community.



The next Baptisms to be held in our Parish will be during Easter Sunday Masses, **Sunday, 31 March 2024**, then on **20/21 April 2024**. The next Baptism meetings for parents will be in the presbytery on **Thursdays, 25 January or 29 February at 19:15**. Call in to the Parish Office to collect the Baptism Enrolment Forms.

Baptism is the first Sacrament of Christian Initiation, followed by Confirmation and Eucharist. In most of the Eastern Catholic Churches, the three Sacraments are celebrated together as is done in the Latin Catholic Church with adults and children over the age of reason – that is 7 years or older.

Thanks to Austinmer surf lifesavers for the after-hours rescues Monday!



FORTHCOMING PARISH EVENTS

✦ Friday, 15 December	09:30	End of Year Whole School Mass School summer holidays begin for students
✦ Friday, 22 December	14:27	Summer Solstice [longest day]
✦ Sunday, 24 December	09:00	After 08:00 Mass setting up Christmas Eve Mass
✦ Sunday, 24 December	18:30	Christmas Eve Mass in the school grounds – bring a chair Children dress as shepherds or angels ... and bring a bell
	21:30	Christmas 'Midnight' Mass in the church – will be 'televised'
✦ Monday, 25 December	09:00	Christmas Day Mass – bring a bell, dress as angels or shepherds
✦ Tuesday, 26 December	09:30	St Stephen's Mass – Boxing Day – public holiday
✦ Wednesday, 27 December		Usual Mass Schedule resumes
✦ Weekend, 30/31 December		Feast of the Holy Family – usual Mass times 17:30 and 08:00
✦ Monday, 1 January 2024	09:30	Mass of the Feast, Mary, Mother of God – World Day of Peace

THIS Sunday's Readings – on website

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT • YEAR B
 1st Reading Isaiah 61:1-2a,10-11
 2nd Reading 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24
 Gospel John 1:6-8,19-28

NEXT Sunday's Readings – on website

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT • YEAR B
 1st Reading 2 Samuel 7:1-5,8-12,14,16
 2nd Reading Romans 16:25-27
 Gospel Luke 1:26-38

SUNDAY

MASS TIMES

Saturday 17:30
 Sunday 08:00
 Saturday Mass recorded

Parish of St Michael – Thirroul

One of the four Northern Illawarra Parishes
 Moving forward as a Parish Family

Patrick Vaughan • Parish Priest

Andrew Granc ofm, Ken Cafe ofm • Assisting

Kerry Fabon • Parish Secretary

Tues, Wed 09:00-15:00; Fri 08:30-15:00

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Parish School of St Michael

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USUAL WEEKDAY MASSES

Monday
 Tuesday 17:30
 Wednesday 09:00
 Thursday 09:00
 Friday 09:30
 Anointing of the Sick 1st Friday