



**Welcome to  
the Parish of  
Saint Michael  
Thirroul**



**PARISH BULLETIN**  
**23 / 24 DECEMBER 2023**  
**FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT ✦ YEAR B**  
**THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS**

**THIS WEEK'S READINGS**

*Listening With the Heart*

In the Gospel for this Sunday, are St Luke and the Church showing us the externals of the Advent narrative? No. They are giving the inside of it.

“Let it be done to me according to your word,” Mary says. Why? Her “inside story” is dramatically significant to the whole human race, and her words issue from the centre of who she is.

Sometimes we do not notice that there is also a parallel account to Mary’s Annunciation in Luke (Luke 1:18-25), and it is hinted at by the angel to Mary.

Thus, Gabriel makes two Annunciations, one just after the other. Each is about a child to be born. Interestingly, as things stood, neither one was feasible. Mary had no husband and she had never Elizabeth was barren, so she could not have a child.

But after this second Annunciation, Zechariah is struck deaf and mute, while Mary, initially fearful, accepts peacefully. Compare the two:

1. Zechariah: “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.”

2. Mary: “Tell me how this can be, since I have no relations with a man?”

Ponder these.

Zechariah’s reply, while realistic, is insulting. He is saying to the angel, “give me some reason to believe what you are saying. Just hearing you say it is not enough.”

This kind of doubt should never have occurred to Zechariah. God’s voice had already spoken God’s love into his heart throughout his whole life (like David’s in the first reading). His trust in God’s promise should have been the deepest meaning of his existence. In this sense, Zechariah did not receive the words of the angel (and so was deaf to it and became literally deaf), and therefore unable to speak it to his wife, Elizabeth (and therefore literally mute).

Mary on the other hand simply asked clarification. She seemed to know already that “nothing is impossible to God.” — “Just tell me how this is going to happen so I can gladly do it.”

Looking at both annunciations gives us an insight, too often hidden. It helps us immensely to understand Mary’s “inside story”: how she listened with her heart.

How much do you and I listen to the voice of God’s promise within our hearts, which is written in our hearts too, if we let it be.

Do our own words just spout out of us without reference to that unwavering love deep within? If so, we may be like Zechariah: hard of hearing when it comes to the beauties and needs of those around us, speechless when a word of love would make all the difference. Let us ask humbly on this last day of Advent for the grace to listen and to hear. The one who promised will not fail. Watch tomorrow!

Today, our Advent liturgy takes on a new focus. In the past Sundays, the theme of the Saviour’s ‘coming’ has made us aware of the unfolding of God’s plan for creation. Luke’s gospel of the Annunciation – emphasising the fact that the coming of the Saviour depended upon Mary’s consent – reminds us of the mystery that is basic to our existence as persons, that we must all play our part in the realisation of God’s final plan. Our life ‘in Christ’ is at once gift and task. All that we do, leading to eternal life, begins with the unmerited gifts of God’s ‘grace’, but these gifts bring with them the tasks whereby we realise our true personhood, as followers of Christ.

Our first reading from 2 Samuel is chosen because it contains the prophecy that the sovereignty of the House of David will last forever. This prophecy, the angel tells Mary, will be fulfilled in the Son she is to conceive, who will be given ‘the throne of his ancestor, David’, and will exercise a ‘reign that will never end’. This fascinating Old Testament text, however, reflects the ambiguities of the mystery of divine/human collaboration through which God’s designs are realised. Though David became, in retrospect, a symbolic figure in the messianic expectations of old Israel, there was much in his life that does not bear close scrutiny. And many of the kings who were his descendants were oppressors of the people, for whom the Jerusalem temple was a symbol of their centralised political power. The prophecy of Nathan, in the tradition that has developed over the intervening centuries, subtly hints at these ambiguities. God will fulfil the messianic expectations that have come to be associated with David’s name, but the prophecy distances itself from the selfish politics of the House of David – David will not build God’s ‘house’; he is reminded that he was only a shepherd boy when God made him great; when God builds up his house, and gives it a reign that will never end, the whole world will know that it is all God’s doing.

What a contrast between this history, marked by human inadequacies, and the consent of Mary, opening the way to the glorious fulfilment of old Israel’s hopes. The gospel account of Mary’s encounter with God’s messenger, we should note, is not a visual description – as suggested by familiar paintings. Taking the form of a dialogue, it



✚ ✚ spells out the decision in which Mary – putting aside her puzzlement and the uncertainties associated with the future into which she was being invited – gave her wholehearted consent. This consent, it is clear, is possible through God’s ‘grace’ and favour: ‘Rejoice so highly favoured’, is the greeting brought by God’s messenger. The narrative makes it clear that this beginning owes nothing to human standing or achievement. By human standards, Mary is an insignificant slip of a girl – fourteen or fifteen was the usual age of betrothal. She comes from Nazareth, an obscure village of about 150 souls, not even mentioned in the Old Testament. But the passing of time will bring to light how great were God’s gifts, and how total was Mary’s heroic response – making her the mother of the Saviour, the model of discipleship – indeed the Mother of the whole family of discipleship.

The reading from St Paul, the concluding passage of Romans, calls us back to awareness of the place of Mary’s response – and our personal responses – in a total plan shaped by God’s gifts, and our carrying out of the tasks these gifts have brought – a ‘mystery kept secret for endless ages ... the way the eternal God wants things to be’, revealed in Jesus Christ, and to be made known to the whole human family.

## QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS SUNDAY’S SCRIPTURE READINGS

### First Reading 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16

- ✚ We find David embarrassed because he is living in a beautiful dwelling while God’s residence is in “a tent.” He makes plans to build a beautiful house for the Lord. Where might God dwell in today’s world? And in the Church?
- ✚ Compare what David wants to give God with what God has done and promises to do for David. Can you relate to “receiving much more than you give”? What happens to you when you open up to God just a bit?

### Second Reading Romans 16:25-27

- ✚ What was the “mystery kept secret for long ages”? Do you think it was really a secret or possibly was not understood fully until God came to earth? What does the Incarnation reveal to you about God?
- ✚ This letter from Paul says that God’s saving plan is for “all nations.” If these believed his message, what would happen to conflict between nations, global poverty and hunger, social injustice, and agreement of countries to care for creation? Is there anything you can do to brighten up some of this darkness?

### Gospel Luke 1:26-38

- ✚ Why would an infinite God wait for a human “yes” in order to enter the human race? Why didn’t he just come on his own? Can you relate to Mary’s unconditional “yes” to God, or is your yes conditional? Will God come take up residence in your life if you ask?
- ✚ Did Mary hesitate or ask for time to think about the situation before answering “yes” to Gabriel? Even though she was uncertain did she trust God to take care of whatever her “yes” would bring? What can we learn from that? What can we as a Church learn?

How often—let us think of ourselves no —how often our life is made up of postponements, even the spiritual life! For example, I know it is good for me to pray, but today I do not have time ... “tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow.” We postpone things: I will do it tomorrow. I know it is important to help someone—yes, I must do it: I will do it tomorrow. It is the same chain of tomorrows ... postponing things. Today, on the threshold of Christmas, Mary invites us not to postpone, to say “yes”: “Do I have to pray?—Yes—and I pray. “Do I have to help others —Yes.” “How shall I do it?”—I do it. Without putting it off. Every “yes” costs something; every “yes” does have its cost, but it still costs less than what that courageous “yes” cost her, that prompt “yes”, that “let it be to me according to your word,” which brought us salvation.

Pope Francis, *Angelus* on the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent, 2020

## CHRISTMAS 2023 AT THE PARISH OF SAINT MICHAEL, THIRROUL

- ❖ 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

The 21:30 Mass on Christmas Eve will be ‘televised’ and the link sent out after Mass

- ❖ 09:30 Tuesday, 26 December Mass for the Feast of St Stephen, first martyr
- ❖ 09:00 Wednesday, 27 December Mass for the Feast of St John, apostle
- ❖ Usual Weekday and Weekend Mass schedules resumes
- ❖ 09:30 Monday, 1 January 2024 Mass for the Feast, Mary Mother of God

**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 – A HUGE SUCCESS – THANK YOU!

Thank you for your generosity with the Vinnies Christmas Appeal: **\$7,000+** has been donated so far, **36 HUGE** Christmas Hampers, plus **70+** toys/presents for children – **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>



## Latin Patriarchate says IDF killed women at Gaza parish ‘in cold blood’

After two women were killed and several others injured in a series of targeted attacks on a Catholic church and convent by the Israeli military in Gaza, the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa OFM, condemned the violence, especially as Christmas draws near.

In a 16 December statement, the patriarchate said that around noon that day, “a sniper of the IDF [Israeli Defence Force] murdered two Christian women inside the Holy Family parish in Gaza, where the majority of Christian families have taken refuge since the start of the war.”

More than 600 people are currently sheltering in Holy Family Catholic parish in Gaza, including most of the city’s small Christian minority, having sought refuge in convents and places of worship.

In its statement, the patriarchate said the victims were a mother and daughter, Nahida and Samar, and that one had been killed after attempting to rescue the other, who had been shot. Seven other people were also shot and wounded as they sought to protect others inside the church compound.

“No warning was given, no notification was provided. They were shot in cold blood inside the premises of the parish, where there are no belligerents,” the statement said.

According to the patriarchate, earlier that day a rocket from an IDF tank “targeted” the convent where the Missionaries of Charity, the order founded by Mother Teresa, live, which is part of the church compound and which is home to 54 disabled persons. Despite being designated as a place of worship since the beginning of the current war, the convent’s generator, its only source of electricity, and its fuel stores were destroyed, and the house itself was damaged by the “explosion and massive fire” resulting from the rocket.

“Two more rockets, fired by an IDF tank, targeted the same convent and rendered the home uninhabitable,” the patriarchate said, noting that the disabled persons living there are now “displaced” and do not have access to the respirators in the convent “that some of them need to survive.”

Additionally, three people were wounded inside the church compound Friday night as a result of heavy bombing in the area, and the solar panels and water tanks, which the patriarchate said, “are indispensable for the survival of the community,” were destroyed.

“Together in prayer with the whole Christian community, we express our closeness and condolences to the families affected by this senseless tragedy,” the patriarchate said, saying, “we cannot but express that we are at a loss to comprehend how such an attack could be carried out, even more so as the whole Church prepares for Christmas.”

The patriarchate assured believers that they are following developments in the situation “with great concern” and would provide more information as needed.

Pope Francis condemned the killing of the two women sheltering at the church, appealing on Sunday for an end to the war. At least 19,453 people have been killed in Gaza since the war began, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, including thousands of children. Pope Francis launches a heartfelt appeal for an end to the “terrorism” of war, and condemns an Israeli military attack on Gaza’s Holy Family Catholic Parish, which killed two Christian women and destroyed a convent of the Missionaries of Charity.

The current war ignited with a ground offensive in Gaza by the Israeli military following a 7 October attack by Hamas on Israeli, which claimed the lives of some 1,200 people with some 240 others being taken hostage.

Pope Francis has said he is in daily contact with Holy Family parish and its pastor, Father Gabriel Romanelli, who is currently in Rome and has not been able to return to Gaza after attending the 30 September consistory in which the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, was made a Cardinal.

In Romanelli’s absence, the parish’s associate pastor has been caring for those sheltering there, along with the priests and nuns who live in Gaza.

A previous bombing on the 12<sup>th</sup> century Saint Porphyrius Greek Orthodox Church in Gaza, where hundreds are also sheltering, left 18 people dead, including one Caritas worker along with her husband and young daughter.

It has been decided by the Parish Pastoral Council, that the 2022 Christmas Day collection – which was **\$4,139.95** – is being given in full to assist Palestinian refugees from Gaza.



# SCRIPTURE READINGS THIS WEEK

Sundays Year B • Weekdays Year II

Monday	25 Dec	Christmas Day Mass	Isaiah 52:-10	Hebrews 1:1-6	John 1:1-18
Tuesday	26 Dec	St Stephen, the first martyr		Acts 6:8-10, 7:54-59	Matthew 10:17-22
Wednesday	27 Dec	St John, apostle, evangelist		1 John 1:1-4	John 20:2-8
Thursday	28 Dec	The Holy Innocents, martyrs		1 John 1:5-2:2	Matthew 2:13-18
Friday	29 Dec	5 <sup>th</sup> Day in the Octave of Christmas		1 John 2:3-11	Luke 2:22-35
Saturday	30 Dec	6 <sup>th</sup> Day in the Octave of Christmas		1 John 2:12-17	Luke 2:36-40
Sunday	31 Dec	THE HOLY FAMILY • YEAR B – <i>Scripture Readings are listed below.</i>			

## THIS WEEK'S RECIPE: Cranberry and Brie Wreath!

½ cup whole cranberry sauce; 1.5 tbsp red wine vinegar; 1 small red onion, sliced; 1 sheet puff pastry, thawed; 125g double brie, cubed; rosemary sprigs; 1 egg, beaten.

In a small saucepan, combine the cranberry sauce, vinegar, red onion and ¼ cup of water over medium heat. Season with salt and pepper and cook until onions are tender, and sauce has slightly reduced. Take off heat then set aside to cool. Preheat the oven to 180°C. Lay the pastry on a tray on baking paper. Cut the edges of the square pastry to make a rough circle, then mark a circle with a smaller plate or bowl to make an inner circle. Make 4 cuts in the inner circle, like you are marking an asterisk. Spread the cranberry onion jam around the outer circle leaving a 1-2cm border around the outside, then arrange the slices of brie and rosemary sprigs on top. Take one point of the centre star over the filling as well as bringing the outer edge of pastry inwards. Press the two together and continue until you have a wreath. Brush top of the wreath with egg then place in the oven for 15-20 minutes or until puffed and golden brown.

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

## CCD ADMINISTRATION AND SUPPORT OFFICER – JOB VACANCY

Suitably experienced and qualified persons are encouraged to apply for this position. Appropriate skills and a passion for the work of SRE Catechists in State schools is essential. Applications close on Wednesday, 10 January 2024. For more information and a detailed role description, please go to: <https://dow/sh/ccdadminpv> For enquiries contact [helen.bennett@dow.org.au](mailto:helen.bennett@dow.org.au)

## FORTHCOMING PARISH EVENTS

✦ 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 The Parish Office is closed this week and reopens Tuesday, 2 January
✦ 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
✦ Tuesday, 2 January	17:30	Mass for Feast of Sts Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen
✦ Parish Office will be closed from Tuesday, 16 January 2024, and reopens on Tuesday, 6 February 2024		
✦ Tuesday, 30 January	09:00	Mass with Parish School Staff – all welcome
	17:30	Usual Parish Mass

### THIS Sunday's Readings – on website

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

### NEXT Sunday's Readings – on website

THE HOLY FAMILY • YEAR B	
1 <sup>st</sup> Reading	Genesis 15:1-6, 21:1-3
2 <sup>nd</sup> Reading	Hebrews 11:8,11-12,17-19
Gospel	Luke 2:22-40

### 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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### USUAL WEEKDAY MASSES

Monday	_____
Tuesday	17:30
Wednesday	09:00
Thursday	09:00
Friday	09:30
Anointing of the Sick 1 <sup>st</sup> Friday	