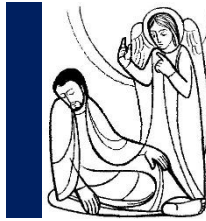


Welcome to the Parish of Saint Michael Thirroul



PARISH BULLETIN
20 / 21 DECEMBER 2025
FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT · YEAR A
WE STAND FOR PEACE AGAINST VIOLENCE

THIS WEEK'S READINGS

A dream changed Joseph's life and ours. A mere dream, like what you and I have at night. How trustworthy could this be?

And yet the safety of Mary and the child Jesus depended on it. In his dream, an angel told him that Mary's pregnancy was from the Holy Spirit of God. Mary had accepted readily but without really understanding. This angel of the Lord told him in the dream that he should not be afraid of the pregnancy, even though he was not yet married to this woman. Not be afraid? Already everyone could see that Joseph's fiancé was "in a family way." Western culture might applaud this fact, as it does when movie stars have children with whomever they please whenever they please. In Biblical culture, marriage was a sacred act [and not too long ago in our own], a participation in God's own fidelity. It seemed that Mary had broken with that fidelity, at least as far as the townspeople could see. The Blessed Mother a public sinner! No wonder Joseph was making arrangements for a "quiet divorce."

So why in the world would he trust a dream? A friend once said he dreamed one night about a kangaroo sitting on his roof in a rocking chair, smoking a pipe! Should my friend keep a rocking chair on the roof from now on, just in case? No. We take dreams for what they probably are, a mechanism of our psyche that somehow helps us but does not give us literal truth. We do not trust dreams for life-changing messages.

Why did Joseph?

The answer has to do with something St Ignatius of Loyola calls "discernment." In general, discernment is an examination of one's internal reactions to God ("movements") in prayer.

There are many different kinds of interior movements to discern, but Ignatius notes a more rare one first. There can be a time when grace is so quietly strong that the person praying has an inner assurance that the experience did not come from imagination but from God. In this case, no doubts are possible.

We have to be careful not to get carried away by this notion. Probably many of us could convince ourselves that God or an angel spoke to us this morning. We need to discern which experiences are from God and which are not. Are they quiet? Do they lead toward God or away? What is the long-term result? A spiritual director could help us sort through such questions.

Joseph's dream must have been a movement of this kind. It contained a quiet certainty of the presence of God. No doubts followed it, in a situation when doubts would surely seem called for. It was like the face of a mother to an infant. Like the voice of a close friend.

Another way to put it is that Joseph already had much trust in God's love. This trust was in no way broken into, shattered or pulled to pieces by the dream. Instead, the message fit right into the design of Joseph's life with God. And so he followed it.

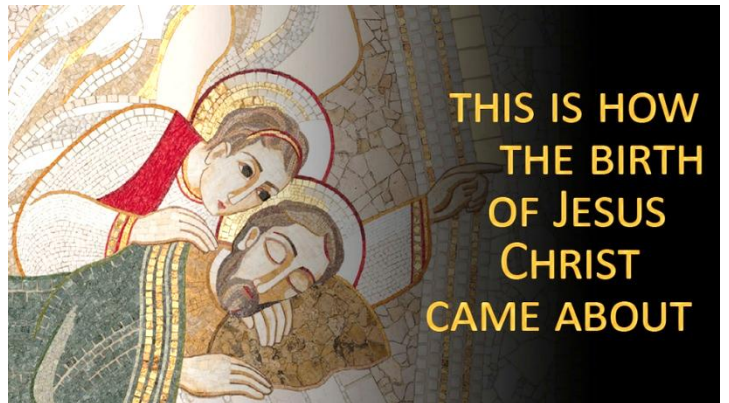
What is your internal sense of the Christmas story? Is the birth of God an impossible tale reserved for children? Or do you find the roots of trust within yourself as Joseph did? Pray for the open faith Joseph and Mary had.

The gospel readings of the coming year come from Matthew. Today's reading, concerning 'how Jesus Christ came to be born', expresses the faith in the Incarnation of the community for which Matthew wrote. This community of Jewish Christians were anxious to persuade those with whom they had shared the traditions of Israel to believe in Christ as the 'fulfilment' of 'the Law and the prophets' (Matthew 5:17).

Whereas, the more familiar story of Christ's birth, in Luke's gospel, is centred on Mary, the mother of the Saviour, Matthew's account – so remarkable in its accord is essentials with Luke's account – is told from the point of view of Joseph, the one who was destined to be the foster father of the Saviour. It is through Joseph that the Davidic lineage of the child to be born – so important in the hopes of Israel – is proclaimed. Finding his betrothed to be with child, Joseph 'being a just man' considered divorcing her quietly. Some scholars see profound significance in Matthew's reference to 'justice' (i.e. fidelity to the traditions of Israel): the implication that before the divine mystery that confronted him – probably through his being informed by Mary – Joseph's first reaction was a sense of unworthiness. His reluctance was only overcome by a divine call that led him to take up the huge responsibility that was to be his. As in Luke's account, Mary's virginal conception is clearly affirmed. Her son is not only to be 'a descendant



An Inner Assurance



of David', as our reading from Romans declares, but also the Son of God, conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit – something that our reading from Romans declares will be made manifest to the whole world 'through his resurrections from the dead'. Matthew also cites the words of Isaiah, 'a virgin will conceive'. The prophet's prediction, in fact, was that Ahaz the king was to be given a sign from God in the coming birth of a son. (There are about a dozen of these 'all this was to fulfil' citations in Matthew's gospel. They are not technical interpretations of the texts cited, but expressions – in the spirit of the rabbinical traditions – of the conviction that Christian faith's reading of the Old Testament recognises the 'fulfilment' of old Israel's hopes.)

The Davidic Messiah announced to Joseph in his dream is far more than a liberator from Roman occupation. His name – which means 'God saves' – points to his role as the Saviour. 'Saving the people from their sins', he will fulfil the true destiny of Israel, as the people chosen to bring the whole world to share in God's final blessings.

Telling of his coming as 'Emmanuel' – a name that means 'God is with us' – Matthew invites the Jewish people to recognise that the great theme of divine presence, running through the Scriptures, 'I will be your God; and you will be my people', has found a realisation beyond all their imagining. In fact, Matthew's gospel will close with the same theme from the mouth of Jesus himself: 'I am with you always; yes, to the end of time'.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS SUNDAY'S SCRIPTURE READINGS

First Reading **Isaiah 7:10-14**

- ✚ Isaiah said, "A virgin will bear a son and name him Emmanuel." How long had God planned for Jesus' birth? From the beginning of time? After Adam? If the birth of Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, was the plan from the beginning of time, what does that tell you about God??
- ✚ God gave a sign to Ahaz, who hadn't even asked for one. Does God give signs that aren't requested? Give some examples. Do you think you ever miss any of God's plans for you? Why?

Second Reading **Romans 1:1-7**

- ✚ Paul says the Gospel is about God's Son, descended from David. How can a human being from our history books be God's own self? Or is Jesus just a name in the history books?
- ✚ Can the "grace of apostleship" be different for everyone? Could everyone be "called to be holy"? Name some ways that you can take Christ into your work, home, parish, today.

Gospel **Matthew 1:18-24**

- ✚ List the obstacles God encountered in bringing Jesus into the world. Is anything obstacle-free? How can good come out of obstruction? John Shea made a statement about Joseph's hesitancy to take Mary into his home. Discuss his statement: "This foreshadows the tension of all who will be drawn to Jesus. Is he a scandal to be rejected, or a manifestation of the Spirit to be welcomed?" (John Shea 45) "When Joseph awoke ..." Did Joseph wake up in more than one way?
- ✚ Pope Francis says that St Joseph had some new horizons to navigate. What are all the new horizons in the Church and the world in general, that you think the Holy Spirit is showing us today?

At this point, Joseph trusts God totally, obeys the Angel's words and takes Mary with him. It was precisely this unshakeable trust in God that enabled him to accept a humanly difficult and, in a certain sense, incomprehensible situation. Joseph understands, in faith that the child born in Mary's womb is not his child, but the Son of God, and he, Joseph, will be its guardian, fully assuming its earthly paternity. The example of this gentle and wise man exhorts us to lift up our gaze and push it further. It is a question of recovering the surprising logic of God which, far from small or great calculations, is made up of openness towards new horizons, towards Christ and God's Word.

– Pope Francis, Angelus, Sunday, 22 December 2019

CHRISTMAS 2025 AT THE PARISH OF SAINT MICHAEL, THIRROUL

- ❖ 17:30 🛎 **Wednesday, 24 December** **Christmas Eve Mass in the Parish Church** 🛎
- ❖ 20:00 📺 **Wednesday, 24 December** **Christmas Night Mass in the Parish Church** 🛎
- ❖ 09:00 🛎 **Thursday, 25 December** **Christmas Day Mass in the Parish Church** 🛎

Everyone coming to Christmas Eve or Christmas Day Masses are invited to bring a bell, and all children are invited to dress up as angels or shepherds. 🛎🛎🛎 🛎🛎🛎 🛎🛎🛎

- ❖ 09:30 **Friday, 26 December** **Feast of Saint Stephen, the first martyr**
- ❖ 17:30 📺 **Saturday, 27 December** **Feast of the Holy Family**
- ❖ 08:00 **Sunday, 28 December**
- ❖ 09:00 **THURSDAY, 1 JANUARY 2026** **FEAST OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD**
- ❖ **WORLD DAY OF PEACE**
- ❖ 09:00 **Tuesday, 13 January 2026** **Parish Office reopens after Christmas break**

THE RABBINIC JEWISH FESTIVAL OF HANUKKAH

Hanukkah [חַנּוּכָּה] is a Rabbinic Jewish festival commemorating the recovery of Jerusalem and subsequent rededication of the Second Temple following the Jewish Maccabean Revolt against the Seleucid Empire in the 2nd century BCE.

Hanukkah is observed for eight nights and days, starting on the 25th day of Kislev according to the Hebrew calendar, which may occur at any time from 28 November to 27 December in the Gregorian calendar. The festival is observed by lighting the candles of a candelabrum with nine branches, commonly called a menorah or hanukkiyah. One branch is placed above or below the others and its candle is used to light the other eight candles. This unique candle is called the shammash. Each night, one additional candle is lit by the shammash until all eight candles are lit together on the final night of the festival. It is the only Jewish holiday to begin in one month (Kislev) and end in another (Tevet) on the Hebrew calendar.

Other Hanukkah festivities include singing Hanukkah songs, playing the game of dreidel and eating oil-based foods, such as latkes and sufganiyot (similar to jelly donuts), and dairy foods. Since the 1970s, the worldwide Chabad Hasidic movement has initiated public menorah lightings in open public places in many countries.

Originally instituted as a feast “in the manner of Sukkot (Booths)”, it does not come with the corresponding obligations, and is therefore a relatively minor holiday in strictly religious terms. Nevertheless, Hanukkah has attained major cultural significance in North America and elsewhere, especially among secular Jews, due to often occurring around the same time as Christmas during the festive season.

Hanukkah is a festival built around the act of kindling light in public, as a declaration that Jewish life will endure despite attempts to extinguish it. As we decorate Christmas Trees with lights, as well as our houses with many lights, let us stand in solidarity with all who seek the path of light and peace. Let us pray in hope for healing.



BAPTISMS THIS WEEKEND – WELCOME TO THE TWO CHILDREN

WELCOME to **CLELIA FITZGIBBONS** and **HARVEY VIRET** baptised on Saturday evening and Sunday morning. Welcome and thank you to parents, godparents, family and friends from our Parish.

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. If you want your infant son or daughter (under 7 years) to receive Baptism, the next Baptisms to be held in our Parish will be during Masses on **Saturday, 17 January / Sunday, 18 January 2026**. *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.



VINNIES CHRISTMAS APPEAL 2025

Thank you for your generosity with the Vinnies Christmas Appeal.

Our local Vinnies members made up **35 HUGE hampers incl. toiletries, 13 presents for children, 14 gift vouchers for older children PLUS four full baskets of food and other items were delivered to Coniston shelter on Monday, 15 December.** Deliveries were made around the district the next day.

It is still not too late to make a donation online by using the QR Code. → → → → →
The following food items always come in handy, so please bring them along at any time: **tinned fish, tinned meat dishes, tinned vegetables, spreads, sweet biscuits.**

Thank you for your generosity in supporting the needy in our local area.

\$8,127 was donated so far over the last few weekends



RITE OF ACCEPTANCE INTO THE ORDER OF CATECHUMENS

This weekend, the rite of acceptance into the order of catechumens is being celebrated for our six catechumens: **Danny Kennedy; Eva Kenny; Liam Kennedy; Jarrah Robinson; Joshua Berry; and Kymberlea Heffernan.** These six declare their intention to join the Church, and the Church, accepts them as persons who intend to become its members. Since they manifest their desire publicly, this celebration marks their reception and first consecration by the Church. They are signed with the Sign of the Cross on their foreheads, and they are presented with a cross and a Bible. They will prepare for the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil, Saturday, 4 April 2026. Please pray for these six catechumens regularly during this time of the catechumenate, their preparation for initiation.

BE SAFE ON OUR BEACHES – SURF LIFESAVING NSW ...

Our surf clubs have, and should always be, places of safe haven and Sunday's tragedy will no doubt galvanise our members to come together, support each other and their community in solidarity against terror and fear. Our beaches are to be safe places, free of prejudice, bigotry and division. We stand together as **one**.

SCRIPTURE READINGS THIS WEEK

Sundays Year C • Weekdays Year I

Monday	15 Dec	Monday of the 4 th Week of Advent	1 Samuel 1:24-28	Luke 1:46-56
Tuesday	16 Dec	Tuesday of the 4 th Week of Advent	Malachi 3:1-4,23-24	Luke 1:57-66
Wednesday	17 Dec	Wednesday of the 4 th Week of Advent	2 Samuel 7:1-5,8-12,14	Luke 1:67-79
Thursday	18 Dec	Christmas Day – the Birth of the Lord	Isaiah 52:7-10 Hebrews 1:1-6 John 1:1-18	
Friday	19 Dec	St Stephen, the first martyr	Acts 6:8-10	Matthew 10:17-22
Saturday	20 Dec	St John, apostle, evangelist	1 John 1:1-4	John 20:2-8
Sunday	21 Dec	THE HOLY FAMILY • YEAR A – <i>Scripture Readings are listed below</i>		

FORTHCOMING PARISH EVENTS

- ✦ Weekend, 20/21 December Enrolment in the Order of Catechumens
Baptisms – one on Saturday, one on Sunday
- ✦ Sunday, 21 December 17:03 Summer Solstice – the longest day of the year
- ✦ Wednesday, 24 December Christmas Eve Masses at 17:30 and 20:00 – bring a bell 🔔 🔔
- ✦ Thursday, 25 December Christmas Day Mass at 09:00 – bring a bell 🔔 🔔
- ✦ Friday, 26 December Feast of Saint Stephen (first martyr) – Boxing Day
- ✦ Saturday, 27 December 17:30 Usual Sunday Mass – Feast of the Holy Family 📺
- ✦ Sunday, 28 December 08:00 Usual Sunday Mass - Feast of the Holy Family
- ✦ Thursday, 1 January 2026 09:00 Mass for Feast of Mary, Mother of God – World Day of Peace
- ✦ Tuesday, 13 January 09:00 Parish Office reopens

RECIPE: ASIAGO CHICKEN PASTA

500g boneless skinless chicken breasts; 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil; ½ teaspoon salt; ¼ teaspoon black pepper; ¼ teaspoon paprika. Pasta: 200g spaghetti noodles; 3 tablespoons unsalted butter; 2 teaspoons garlic, minced; 1 tablespoon plain flour; 1 teaspoon Italian seasoning; ½ teaspoon salt; ¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes; 250ml whole milk; 80g asiago cheese, grated, plus more for garnish; 6 g fresh spinach leaves; parsley, for garnish.

Chicken: Pat chicken breasts dry with a paper towel. Season on all sides with salt, pepper, and paprika. To a medium skillet over medium heat, add oil. Once hot, place the seasoned chicken into the skillet and cook for 4 to 5 minutes, or until golden brown. Flip and repeat on the opposite side, until cooked through. Chicken is fully cooked when it reaches an internal temperature of 75°C. Remove from the pan and tent to keep warm.

Pasta: Boil pasta in salted water according to package directions. Reserve 1 cup of pasta water and drain the rest. Set the noodles and reserved pasta water aside while you prepare the asiago sauce. In the same skillet used to cook the chicken, melt butter over medium heat. Add garlic and cook for 1 minute. Whisk in the flour, Italian seasoning, salt, and red pepper flakes. Cook until golden brown, about 1 minute. Slowly pour in milk, whisking constantly. Add in asiago, spinach, and ¼ cup of pasta water or as needed if the sauce is too thick. Cook until the spinach is wilted, stirring frequently for 1-2 minutes. Add cooked pasta, tossing to coat. Slice chicken into strips. Top the pasta with the sliced chicken. Garnish with asiago cheese and parsley. Serve immediately.

PLEASE BRING IN ... ONE NON-PERISHABLE ITEM PER FAMILY EACH WEEK

TO HELP THE NEEDY IN THE LOCAL ILLAWARRA AREA – FOOD ITEMS ARE ALWAYS NEEDED

tinned fish, tinned meat dishes, tinned vegetables, spreads, sweet biscuits

Thank you for your great generosity!

THIS Sunday's Readings – on website

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT ♦ YEAR A

1 st Reading	Isaiah 7:10-14
2 nd Reading	Romans 1:1-7
Gospel	Matthew 1:18-24

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

NEXT Sunday's Readings – on website

THE HOLY FAMILY ♦ YEAR A

1 st Reading	Sirach 3:2-6,12-14
2 nd Reading	Colossians 3:12-21
Gospel	Matthew 2:13-15,19-23

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Parish School of St Michael

James Bryce Principal ☎ 4267 2560

SUNDAY

MASS TIMES

Saturday 📺 17:30

Sunday 08:00

📺 Saturday Mass is recorded.

THIS WEEK'S LITURGIES

Monday

Tuesday 📺 17:30

Wednesday 09:00

Thursday 09:00

Friday 09:30

Anointing of the Sick 1st Friday