



Welcome to
the Parish of
Saint Michael
Thirroul

THE HOLIDAY BULLETIN 2025 – 2026



Holy Family 27/28 December
Mary Mother of God 1 January 2026



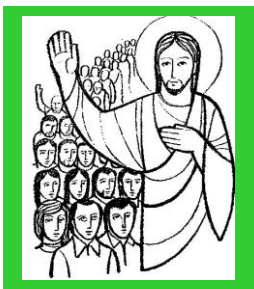
Epiphany
3/4 January



Baptism of the Lord
10/11 January



Ordinary 2 A
17/18 January



Ordinary 3 A
24/25 January



Australia Day
26 January



Ordinary 4 A
31 Jan / 1 Feb



Ordinary 5 A
7/8 February



Ordinary 6 A
14/15 February

Welcome to the "2025-2026 Holiday Bulletin" — for avid readers!
The weekly Parish Bulletin will resume on **21/22 February 2026**.
Enjoy Pope Leo's message for World Day of Peace.

Thank you to all who have worked for and been of service to our Parish
in so many, many ways over the last year. Your responsible, regular
service, **generosity**, cheerfulness, support, hospitality, courtesy, integrity and
deep faith are most appreciated. We continue to pray the Spirit will be
our guiding Star.

Christmas good wishes to all and a Joy-filled Happy New 2026 Year.

OTHER FEAST DAYS

- 1 January** Mary the Mother of God
World Day of Peace – 09:00 Mass
- 2 January** Sts Basil the Great, Gregory Nazianzen
Anointing of the Sick during 09:30 Mass
- 7 January** St Raymond of Peñafort, priest, lawyer
- 17 January** St Anthony, abbot
- 21 January** St Agnes, virgin, martyr
- 24 January** St Francis de Sales, bishop, doctor
- 26 January** Australia Day – 09:00 Mass
- 28 January** St Thomas Aquinas, priest, doctor
- 31 January** St John Bosco, priest

SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR SUNDAY MASSES

Holy Family – Year A – 27/28 December

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

Epiphany of the Lord – Year A – 3/4 January

- 1st Reading** Isaiah 60:1-6
- 2nd Reading** Ephesians 3:2-3,5-6
- Gospel** Matthew 2:1-12

Baptism of the Lord – Year A – 10/11 January

- 1st Reading** Isaiah 42:1-4,6-7
- 2nd Reading** Acts 10:34-38
- Gospel** Matthew 3:13-17

Ordinary 3 – Year A – 24/25 January

- 1st Reading** Isaiah 8:23–9:3
- 2nd Reading** 1 Corinthians 1:10-13,17
- Gospel** Matthew 4:12-23

Ordinary 4 – Year A – 31 Jan/1 Feb

- 1st Reading** Zephaniah 2:3,12-13
- 2nd Reading** 1 Corinthians 1:26-31
- Gospel** Matthew 5:1-12

Ordinary 5 – Year A – 7/8 February

- 1st Reading** Isaiah 58:7-10
- 2nd Reading** 1 Corinthians 2:1-5
- Gospel** Matthew 5:13-16

Ordinary 2 – Year A – 17/18 January

- 1st Reading** Isaiah 49:3,5-6
- 2nd Reading** 1 Corinthians 1:1-3
- Gospel** John 1:29-34

Ordinary 6 – Year A – 14/15 February

- 1st Reading** Sirach 15:15-20
- 2nd Reading** 1 Corinthians 2:6-10
- Gospel** Matthew 5:17-37

WEEKLY MASS TIMES

Church of St Michael - Thirroul

Saturday – 17:30 📺

Sunday – 08:00

Monday

Tuesday 📺 Thirroul 17:30

Wednesday Thirroul 09:00

Thursday Thirroul 09:00

Friday Thirroul 09:30

PARISH OFFICE HOURS

Tuesdays 09:00 – 15:00

Wednesdays 09:00 – 15:00

Fridays 08:30 – 15:00

Office is closed 25 Dec to 12 Jan

Patrick Vaughan • Parish Priest

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LEO, BISHOP OF ROME
59TH MESSAGE FOR
WORLD DAY OF PEACE
1 JANUARY 2026

Peace be with you all:
Towards an “unarmed and disarming” peace



PEACE BE WITH YOU ALL
**Towards an
unarmed and
disarming peace**
WORLD DAY OF PEACE 2026

“Peace be with you!”

This ancient greeting, still in use today in many cultures, was infused with new life on the evening of Easter on the lips of the risen Jesus. “Peace be with you” (*John* 20:19, 21) is his Word that does not merely desire peace, but truly brings about a lasting transformation in those who receive it, and consequently in all of reality. For this reason, the Apostles’ successors give voice every day throughout the world to the most silent of revolutions: “Peace be with you!” From the very evening of my election as Bishop of Rome, I have wanted to join my own greeting to this universal proclamation. And I would like to reiterate that this is the peace of the risen Christ – a peace that is unarmed and disarming, humble and persevering. It comes from God who loves us all unconditionally.



The peace of the risen Christ

The Good Shepherd, who gives his life for the flock and has other sheep not of this fold (cf. *John* 10:11,16), is Christ, our peace, who has conquered death and broken down the walls of division that separate humanity (cf. *Ephesians* 2:14). His presence, his gift and his victory continue to shine through the perseverance of many witnesses through whom God’s work carries on in the world, becoming even more visible and radiant in the darkness of our times.

The contrast between darkness and light is not only a biblical image describing the labour pains of a new world being born; it is also an experience that unsettles us and affects us amid the trials we face in our historical circumstances. In order to overcome the

darkness, it is necessary to see the light and believe in it. This is a call that Jesus’ disciples are invited to live in a unique and privileged way; yet it also finds its way into every human heart. Peace exists; it wants to dwell within us. It has the gentle power to enlighten and expand our understanding; it resists and overcomes violence. Peace is a breath of the eternal: while to evil we cry out “Enough,” to peace we whisper “Forever.” Into this horizon the Risen One has led us. Sustained by this conviction, even amid what Pope Francis called “a third world war fought piece-meal,” peacemakers continue to resist the spread of darkness, standing as sentinels in the night.

Sadly, it is also possible to forget the light. When this happens, we lose our sense of realism and surrender to a partial and distorted view of the world, disfigured by darkness and fear. Many today call “realistic” those narratives devoid of hope, blind to the beauty of others and forgetful of God’s grace, which is always at work in human hearts, even though wounded by sin. Saint Augustine urged Christians to forge an unbreakable bond with peace, so that by cherishing it deeply in their hearts, they would be able to radiate its luminous warmth around them. Addressing his community, he wrote: “If you wish to draw others to peace, first have it yourselves; be steadfast in peace yourselves. To inflame others, you must have the flame burning within.”

Dear brothers and sisters, whether we have the gift of faith or feel we lack it, let us open ourselves to peace! Let us welcome it and recognize it, rather than believing it to be impossible and beyond our reach. Peace is more than just a goal; it is a presence and a journey. Even when it is endangered within us and around us, like a small flame threatened by a storm, we must protect it, never forgetting the names and stories of those who have borne witness to it. Peace is a principle that guides and defines our choices. Even in places where only rubble remains, and despair seems inevitable, we still find people who have not forgotten peace. Just as on the evening of Easter Jesus entered the place where his disciples were gathered in fear and discouragement, so too the peace of the risen Christ continues to pass through doors and barriers in the voices and faces of his witnesses. This gift enables us to remember goodness, to recognize it as victorious, to choose it again, and to do so together.

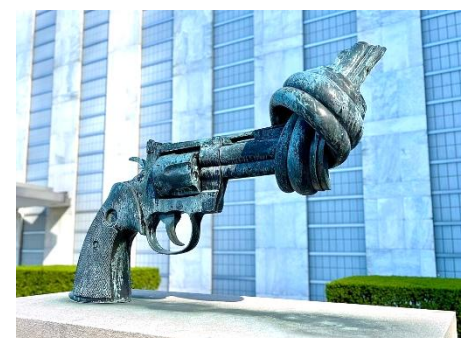
An unarmed peace

Shortly before being arrested, in a moment of intimate confidence, Jesus said to those who were with him: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.

I do not give to you as the world gives.” And he immediately added: “Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid” (*John* 14:27). Their distress and fear were certainly connected to the violence soon to befall him. But, more deeply, the Gospels do not hide the fact that what troubled the disciples was his nonviolent response: a path that they all, Peter first among them, contested; yet the Master asked them to follow this path to the end. The way of Jesus continues to cause unease and fear. He firmly repeats to those who would defend him by force: “Put your sword back into its sheath” (*John* 18:11; cf. *Matthew* 26:52). The peace of the risen Jesus is unarmed, because his was an unarmed struggle in the midst of concrete historical, political and social circumstances. Christians must together bear prophetic witness to this novelty, mindful of the tragedies in which they have too often been complicit. The great parable of the Last Judgment invites all Christians to act with mercy in this awareness (cf. *Matthew* 25:31-46). In doing so, they will find brothers and sisters at their side who, in different ways, have listened to the pain of others and freed themselves inwardly from the deception of violence.

Although many people today have hearts ready for peace, they are often overcome by a great sense of powerlessness before an increasingly uncertain world. Saint Augustine had already pointed out this particular paradox: “It is not difficult to possess peace; it is, perhaps, more difficult to praise it. To praise peace, we may find that we lack the necessary talent; we search for the right ideas and weigh our words. But to have peace, it is there, within reach, and we can possess it without effort.”

When we treat peace as a distant ideal, we cease to be scandalized when it is denied, or even when war is waged in its name. We seem to lack those “right ideas,” the well-considered words and the ability to say that peace is near. When peace is not a reality that is lived, cultivated and protected, then aggression spreads into domestic and public life. In the relations between citizens and rulers, it could even be considered a fault not to be sufficiently prepared



for war, not to react to attacks, and not to return violence for violence. Far beyond the principle of legitimate defence, such confrontational logic now dominates global politics, deepening instability and unpredictability day by day. It is no coincidence that repeated calls to increase military spending, and the choices that follow, are presented by many government leaders as a justified response to external threats. The idea of the deterrent power of military might, especially nuclear deterrence, is based on the irrationality of relations between nations, built not on law, justice and trust, but on fear and domination by force. “Consequently,” as Saint John XXIII had already written in his day, “people are living in the grip of constant fear. They are afraid that at any moment the impending storm may break upon them with horrific violence. And they have good reasons for their fear, for there is certainly no lack of such weapons. While it is difficult to believe that anyone would dare to assume responsibility for initiating the appalling slaughter and destruction that war would bring in its wake, there is no denying that the conflagration could be started by some chance and unforeseen circumstance.”



Moreover, it should be noted that global military expenditure increased by 9.4% in 2024 compared to the previous year, confirming the trend of the last ten years and reaching a total of \$2,718 billion (or 2.5% of global GDP). Furthermore, the response to new challenges seems to involve not only enormous economic investment in rearmament, but also a shift in educational policies. Rather than fostering a culture of memory that preserves the hard-won awareness of the twentieth century and the millions of victims, we now see communication campaigns and educational programs – at schools, universities and in the media – that spread a perception of threats and promote only an armed notion of defence and security.

And yet, “those who truly love peace also love the enemies of peace.” Saint Augustine thus advised not to burn bridges or persist in reproach, but to prefer listening and, where possible, engaging in discussions with others. Sixty years ago, the Second Vatican Council concluded with a renewed awareness of the pressing need for dialogue between the Church and the contemporary

world. In particular, the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* drew attention to the evolution of warfare: “The hazards peculiar to modern warfare consist in the fact that they expose those possessing recently developed weapons to the risk of perpetrating crimes like these and, by an inexorable chain of events, of urging people to even worse acts of atrocity. To obviate the possibility of this happening at any time in the future, the bishops of the world gathered together to implore everyone, especially government leaders and military advisors, to give unceasing consideration to their immense responsibilities before God and before the whole human race.”

Reiterating the appeal of the Council Fathers, and considering dialogue to be the most effective approach at every level, we must acknowledge that further technological advances and the military implementation of artificial intelligence have worsened the tragedy of armed conflict. There is even a growing tendency among political and military leaders to shirk responsibility, as decisions about life and death are increasingly “delegated” to machines. This marks an unprecedented and destructive betrayal of the legal and philosophical principles of humanism that underlie and safeguard every civilization. It is necessary to denounce the enormous concentrations of private economic and financial interests that are driving States in this direction; yet that alone would not be enough, unless we also awakened conscience and critical thought. The Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* presents Saint Francis of Assisi as a model of such awakening: “In the world of that time, bristling with watchtowers and defensive walls, cities were a theatre of brutal wars between powerful families, even as poverty was spreading through the countryside. Yet there Francis was able to welcome true peace into his heart and free himself of the desire to wield power over others. He became one of the poor and sought to live in harmony with all.” This is a narrative that we are called to continue today, and that means joining forces to contribute to a disarming peace, a peace born of openness and evangelical humility.



A disarming peace

Goodness is disarming. Perhaps this is why God became a child. The mystery

of the Incarnation, which reaches its deepest descent even to the realm of the dead, begins in the womb of a young mother and is revealed in the manger in Bethlehem. “Peace on earth,” sing the angels, announcing the presence of a defenceless God, in whom humanity can discover itself as loved only by caring for him (cf. *Luke* 2:13-14). Nothing has the power to change us as much as a child. Perhaps it is precisely the thought of our children and of others who are equally fragile, that cuts to the heart (cf. *Acts* 2:37). In this regard, my venerable predecessor wrote that “human fragility has the power to make us more lucid about what endures and what passes, what brings life and what kills. Perhaps for this reason, we so often tend to deny our limitations and avoid fragile and wounded people: they have the power to question the direction we have chosen, both as individuals and as a community.”

John XXIII was the first pope to advocate “integral disarmament,” which can only be achieved through renewal of the heart and mind. In *Pacem in Terris*, he wrote: “Everyone must realize that, unless this process of disarmament be thoroughgoing and complete, and reach people’s very souls, it is impossible to stop the arms race, or to reduce armaments, or — and this is the main thing — ultimately to abolish them entirely. Everyone must sincerely co-operate in the effort to banish fear and the anxious expectation of war from our minds. But this requires that the fundamental principles upon which peace is based in today’s world be replaced by an altogether different one, namely, the realization that true and lasting peace among nations cannot consist in the possession of an equal supply of armaments but only in mutual trust. And we are confident that this can be achieved, for it is a thing which not only is dictated by common sense, but is in itself most desirable and most fruitful of good.”

An essential service that religions must render to a suffering humanity is to guard against the growing temptation to weaponize even thoughts and words. The great spiritual traditions, as well as right reason, teach us to look beyond blood ties or ethnicity, beyond associations that accept only those who are similar and reject those who are different. Today, we see that this cannot be taken for granted. Unfortunately, it has become increasingly common to drag the language of faith into political battles, to bless nationalism, and to justify violence and armed struggle in the name of religion. Believers must actively refute, above all by the witness of their lives, these forms of blasphemy

that profane the holy name of God. Therefore, alongside action, it is more necessary than ever to cultivate prayer, spirituality, and ecumenical and interreligious dialogue as paths of peace and as languages of encounter within traditions and cultures. Throughout the world, it is to be hoped that “every community become a ‘house of peace,’ where one learns how to defuse hostility through dialogue, where justice is practiced and forgiveness is cherished.” Now more than ever, we must show that peace is not a utopia by fostering attentive and life-giving pastoral creativity.

At the same time, this should in no way detract from the importance of the political dimension. Those entrusted with the highest public responsibility must “give serious thought to the problem of achieving more humane relations between States throughout the world. This adjustment must be based on mutual trust, sincerity in negotiations and the faithful fulfilment of obligations. Every aspect of the problem must be examined, so that, eventually, a point of agreement may emerge from which sincere, lasting, and beneficial treaties can be initiated.” This is the disarming path of diplomacy, mediation and international law, which is sadly too often undermined by the growing violations of hard-won treaties, at a time when what is needed is the strengthening of supranational institutions, not their delegitimization.

In today’s world, justice and human dignity are at an alarming risk amid global power imbalances. How can we live in this time of destabilization and conflict, and free ourselves from evil? We need to encourage and support every spiritual, cultural and political initiative that keeps hope alive, countering the spread of “fatalistic terms, as if the dynamics involved were the product of anonymous impersonal forces or structures independent of the human will.” For, as has been suggested, “the best way to dominate and gain control over people is to spread despair and discouragement, even under the guise of defending certain values.” Against this strategy, we must promote self-awareness in civil societies, forms of responsible association, experiences of nonviolent participation, and practices of restorative justice on both a small and large scale. Leo XIII had already made this clear in his Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*: “The consciousness of his own weakness urges the human person to call in aid from without. We read in Scripture: ‘Two are better than one, for they have the advantage of their society. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him

up’ (*Ecclesiastes* 4:9-10). And further: ‘A brother that is helped by his brother is like a strong city’ (*Proverbs* 18:19).”

May this be one of the fruits of the Jubilee of Hope, which has moved millions of people to rediscover themselves as pilgrims and to begin within themselves that disarmament of heart, mind and life. God will surely respond to this by fulfilling his promises: “He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord” (*Isaiah* 2, 4-5).

From the Vatican, 8 December 2025
LEO PP. XIV



SUNDAY, 27/28 DECEMBER 2025 HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH

Two different sermons on the Holy Family:

One praised the Holy Family as the absolute model of Christian family life. This was the perfect family, always fulfilling the Father’s will, always in perfect harmony with the will and one another. The message was clear: Go home and make that model your own. Live that way!

The second image is somewhat later. Now the Holy Family has become the world’s most dysfunctional family: Jesus as the troubled youth trying to figure out who he is, Mary as encouraging and distant, Joseph as still trying to cope with not finding a room in Bethlehem. The message here was more: “Go home and try to make the best of it!”

Neither approach was very helpful.

This feast seems to have to focus either on the “family” aspect [reflecting the image of families today] or the “holy” aspect [the call to live the way that piety has decided must have been the case for Jesus, Mary and Joseph].

But there may be another way: Remembering the season. We are still celebrating Christmas [in fact it is still Christmas week]. The traditional Twelve Days of Christmas is when Epiphany is celebrated on 6 January. It is about the mystery of the God who

not only comes to us but lives with us – in all aspects of the human condition.

Jesus’ family is not incidental to the Christmas mystery but is one of its most powerful aspects. In whatever family life means, in whatever age, God in Jesus has become a part of it, has taken it to himself, has redeemed it and raised it up.



The image must be the image of the family. But not exactly as we might first see it. We speak of the Church as family, as the local church as family, the parish as family – usually without taking in just what that means. Yes, it means a group of people related [in this case] by grace and faith [if not by blood]. Thus, it is a gathering with joys and sorrows, with cooperation and occasional confusion and discord. But it is also the place where God continues to dwell. It is the place where the world sees the continuing incarnation and activity of God’s presence and gifts. We are called to holiness, not just for ourselves but as sign to the world.

Christmas continues. And so, to return to the Christmas gospel “who were born, not of blood or will of the flesh or the will of mortals, but of God.” [John 1:13]

Our experience of Eucharist is through this community, this family. While we still celebrate the beginning of our salvation, we do so in the making present of its completeness, in the paschal mystery. Many of the older Christmas hymns keep the continuity of the mystery before us; they would sing of the birth, but always reference Jesus’ eventual death and resurrection. The celebration of Jesus’ birth must always lead us to the hope of this glorious return.

Families encompass a variety of relationships. These can include the interactions between spouses, between parents and children, between siblings and

perhaps even members of an extended family over multiple generations. Sometimes those relationships are harmonious and sometimes they are not. If we want to ensure good relationships in our families then we have to love, care for and, especially forgive one another. This applies not just to our individual human families, but to the Christian family with whom we worship. Today's Scriptures give us plenty of guidance on how to do that.

Take some time today as a family, and read and reflect together on today's second reading, taken from Saint Paul's Letter to the Colossians (3:12-21). How you and your children think you are living the values expressed there?

1 JANUARY 2026

MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

"Let it be done unto me according to your will," Mary had said.

A real Archangel had appeared, handing out shocking news. What a jolt the Annunciation must have been for someone so unassuming, so self-effacing as Mary. Did she flinch?



No. She reacted with calm. She said simply, "I accept. Tell me how this wonderful birth will happen."

But the series of events that followed do not seem to warrant calm. Mary became a betrothed woman found pregnant. Her husband-to-be had been about to divorce her until an angel explained things in a dream.

And since walking was the usual mode of transportation in those days, sometimes for astonishing distances, the census call did not make her promise easy. It was the last part of her pregnancy—the most difficult time of all to travel from Nazareth in the far north of Israel down to Bethlehem, which is south of Jerusalem. Not an impossible distance, but in the last month of pregnancy, a real challenge. This was God's will, and she had accepted it. Joseph in his kindness got a donkey for Mary to ride.

When they finally got to Bethlehem, a very small village, the inn had no room for them. And there is nothing in Scripture about a cave. The most likely place would have been some kind of barn or stable for domestic animals, since the infant was "lying in a manger." This birth was not bathed in satin finery, not luxurious. Jesus was born into poverty and discomfort.

Today, we see Mary just days after the gruelling journey and the amazing birth (Gospel). She is carrying out the promise she made to Gabriel. All is well. The child is healthy and cute, and the angels, unable to contain their joy, have once more danced into Mary's life. Even the animals understand. It is breathtaking.

It would seem that Mary's calm would now seek some quiet and rest after all that had happened. But no. Unkempt shepherds, straight from the fields, "went in haste" to the shelter, announcing in their craggy voices that they knew who this baby is. Angels had told them. Wise men, or as we now say, kings, found the holy shelter and barged right in, bearing royal gifts.

Does this all impinge on Mary's peace? No. She is good to her word. The Gospel says that she quietly "kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart."

How could she do this? Part of it was her personality, of course, but even more, it was the presence of God deep within her, so deep that she let her life become one with his and produced a son. Life on this earth is never free from hazards and setbacks and stunning difficulties, but as Mary let her heart reflect, and as she watched each movement of the newborn baby, she breathed in a holiness, a degree of holiness that even she had not known before.

"May it be done unto me according to your will." Her acceptance was complete. As we witness this calm, within a crowded, difficult, surprising stable, as we keep the picture of it within our own hearts, may each of us be able to echo her words, "May it be done unto me according to your will."

As persons and as a community we are asked to give only the love that God gives us to give. Let us renew our commitment to listen as Mary listened and to say Yes as she said Yes to what God asks of us. It will mean experiencing much sorrow, but it will mean, here and forever, knowing the wonder of the most wonderful love for which our hearts yearn.

After a Mother has smiled for a long time at her child, the child will begin to smile back; she has awakened love in its heart, and in awakening love in its heart, she awakes also recognition.

Awakening love and recognition within a child's heart is a result of more than just the mother's smile, her voice is also important. Mothers don't just cuddle babies and smile at them; they also speak to them. It's this, hearing the mother's voice beckoning the child to come outwards towards a bigger world even when there isn't yet any real understanding of what's being said, that's vital in bringing a child to self-awareness and speech. We come out of the darkness and chaos of infancy precisely to the extent that we are called out by voices that cajole, caress, reassure, and keep forever luring us beyond ourselves.

During the early critical months of a child's life, it's the mother's voice that does most of this. That's why the first language we learn is called our "mother tongue." There are no "father tongues." It's the mother's voice that first caressed us and lured us out of unthinking, inarticulate darkness. An infant's journey into human awareness depends upon the mother's voice displacing "the surging abyss."

3/4 JANUARY 2026

EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

The Magi appear at the Crib

The Wise Men, or "Magi," cross into one more kingdom in their long journey.

Courteously they visit the monarch of that kingdom, not knowing he was the infamous Herod, whom they could have avoided. I suppose every amenity took place: formal welcome, diplomatic over-do, huge meals, fine drinks. Such excesses had to take place even in a commonplace kingdom.

Finally, when the moment arrives, they pose their question. "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We have read the signs and know of his birth." They trust Herod for truth, since, obviously, this infant will be the next in line from Herod.



What seems to them like a sincere question strikes terror into the Herodian heart. He maintains his diplomatic balance, temporizing, but with a promise to find the answer. He skilfully ends the meeting for that night. But, within him are the words, Newborn King? "No! No, No, No! I AM THE

KING!” My lineage is the answer to this menacing child. Herod’s insides shout for him to do something!

Do something!

He goes to the chief priests and scribes and charms them with what he presents as an idle interest, an “honest” question. Do you experts, busy studying day and night, do you know anything about the predicted Messiah figure we used to hope for? I wonder, if he were to be born today, where that would be?

“In Bethlehem of Judea,” they respond, where the great King David was born. These experts know the scriptures well, as Herod does not. This Messiah will be David’s successor, shepherd of the people Israel, fulfillment of everything the Hebrew people had awaited for centuries.

The Herodian head swirls. At last, he forms a plan. Find him and kill him.

Herod will designate the town for these Magi, and they will search out and find the baby!

He makes his way across the halls and utters the words, “Bethlehem is the place! The child is in Bethlehem! All you have to do is find him. Oh, and of course, let me know where he is. Why? So that I too may do him homage.”

The homage Herod has in mind is death. His lust for power will banish the command of love in order for him to stay in control. He is most willing to compete directly even with God and with the newborn Christ. *Notice, he is accepting the same deal Satan will offer to Jesus in the desert thirty years later. That offer was, “you can control the whole world if you will only fall down and worship me. Help me defeat God.” Satan too was a power-monger.*

The funny thing is that, for Jesus, “power” is not at all the same thing Herod and Satan are grabbing for. For their part they want to become bigger and bigger, to stretch beyond infinity. His goal is to become less and less, to become transparent, just as love is.

Heavy selfish greed is being offered, but it cannot demolish this heavenly plan. It surely can seem to. To Herod it certainly seems to.

The child’s weakness shows what God has in mind as an answer to evil: *tender, unfearing openness to love.*

In our sinfulness, we scoff at such a plan. Mary, Joseph, and Jesus will never win, will they? Evil will triumph in the end, won’t it? The cross will do what Herod could not, but that Satan could.

Will it? Maybe Christmas is our down-payment on the cross! God’s love is made known at Christmas and in God’s love we are known and have our home.

10/11 JANUARY 2026

BAPTISM OF THE LORD

The baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist was an embarrassment to the early Church. John, after all, was the precursor to Jesus: why should Jesus be baptized by him?

And Jesus was sinless: how could he be “washed” of any sinfulness? Only Mark presents the event in a simple and straightforward way. Matthew and Luke soften its impact in their versions, and John leaves it out completely.

The scholarly consensus is that the baptism actually took place and was preserved by the early Church in spite of its misgivings.

One way to understand the baptism of the Lord would be to see it as a link between the exodus passage through water to the promised land and the sacramental passage through the water of baptism to salvation in Jesus Christ.

Jesus acted out the same passage through water that has been undertaken by others since the beginning of salvation history.

The world must be washed of all that makes it unclean: alienation from God and from each other; attacks against life and against the author of life; the oppression of God’s children and the destruction of God’s creation.

The world must pass through the same waters of salvation that Jews and Christians have passed through.

“The Church, now sojourning on earth as an exile, is necessary for salvation. For Christ, made present to us in his Body, which is the Church, is the one Mediator and the unique Way of salvation. In explicit terms he himself affirmed the necessity of faith and baptism and thereby affirmed also the necessity of the Church, for through baptism as through a door men enter the Church.”

– Vatican II, *Constitution on the Church* (1964) 14



Our Christmas season’s celebration ends with the theme of ‘Epiphany’, or ‘Manifestation’ – reminding us that in the coming of the eternal Son, ‘the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour has appeared among us’ (Titus 3:4). During the final week of

Christmas time, the liturgy recalls three moments of ‘manifestation’ – to the Magi, representing the peoples of the world; through the ‘first sign’ worked by Jesus as the marriage at Cana; and in the dramatic moment when Jesus was baptised by John.

It is not surprising that Christ’s entering into the waters of repentance – a fact referred to all four gospels – was difficult for the first Christian believers to square with their faith in Jesus as ‘the Lord’ himself, author of all holiness. Matthew echoes this bewilderment in the hesitations of John the Baptist. In the reply of Jesus – that this is something ‘for the time being’, in order that ‘all righteousness may be fulfilled’ – Matthew summarises the essential theme of his gospel. He is writing, as we know, for an audience with a Jewish background. In Jesus, the true spirit of Israel (‘righteousness’) will recognise the ‘fulfilment’ of all that was foreshadowed and promised in the Old Testament.

The Paschal Mystery has brought home to those Matthew is writing for the full significance of this moment that was the immediate prelude to the public life of Jesus – when he went down with the crowds into the waters of repentance. Our gospel passage expresses the fruits of their prayerful reflection. It was something appropriate ‘for the time being’, as Jesus showed that he identified with the traditions of his people, giving honour to the last prophet of old Israel (see Matthew 11); but at that very moment the new order of fulfilment was being inaugurated by the words of the eternal Father himself. ‘This is my Son, the Beloved’ – these words echoed the theme whereby the kings of the Davidic line were seen as adopted ‘sons of God’: called to rule in God’s stead (see Psalms 2, 110 etc). The words, ‘My favour rests on him’, are an echo of today’s first reading from Isaiah, in which the Lord describes his ‘Servant’ as ‘my chosen one in whom my soul delights’. This passage is one of the Servant Songs, as they are called, written at the time of the Exile, pointing to the hopes that old Israel should cling to in their time of humiliation – hopes to be realised through someone who would give expression to all that Israel was called to be. In other words, Matthew’s community is called to recognize – in the Risen Lord of the Paschal Mystery – the roles of Messiah-king and Suffering Servant. What is more, looking back they can recognise that these roles were already foreshadowed in his baptism. The baptism of Jesus in the Jordan was a foreshadowing of his ‘baptism’, as he called what lay ahead of him. In the greatest of the Servant Songs we are told, ‘ours were the sufferings he was

bearing, ours the sorrows he was carrying' (Isaiah 53). We share in Christ's mystery by being baptised in the name of the Trinity. Just as the Father, Son and Spirit were to be the great protagonists in the drama of the Paschal Mystery, so too they were present in this moment of anticipation on the banks of the Jordan.

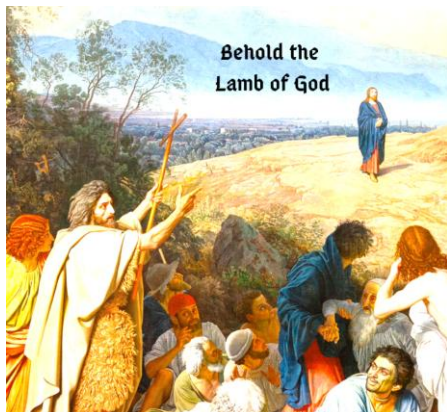
17/18 JANUARY 2026

2ND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME • YEAR C

Scattered among Ignatius Loyola's prayer methods is a device called "repetition." If a praying session went particularly well, or maybe if it did not, Ignatius would instruct the retreatant to repeat the exact same topic for their next session.

This is a method many dislike, mostly when they first make the Spiritual Exercises. "Oh no, not again," some would groan if the retreat director assigned it.

Only later do they begin to understand what repetition was about. It was not that we should try to re-create each and every feeling from the first time. Not even that we should expect to meet God in the same manner. Nor rack our brains more vigorously trying to figure it out.



Repetition meant simply that we should go to the same shady spot in the forest, the homey place where God and we had met in the previous meditation. Maybe God would find us there again, or show us depths we had missed. If not, our privilege would be to remember what happened then, like Mary "pondering these things in her heart."

This week we find another reference to the Baptism of the Lord, this time by John. The Church has prescribed a Gospel reading that we could easily take as a repetition. As in the Exercises, such a repetition must have a purpose. Let us look.

What do you notice in the Gospel reading? Pause here if you want to consider it.

Many are struck by what John the Baptist said as he saw Jesus, words that were not included in Matthew's

description: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world."

Behold the Lamb of God. We hear the phrase at every Mass, but most of us never really think about it very much. The Baptism story gives us a chance to do so.

Lambs held a special place in the Jewish temple of those days. An offeror would bring one (or another animal) with them in order to sacrifice it. Sacrifice? Why sacrifice? One belief was that since the innocent creature would be released from this world by dying, and thus would go up to God's pure heaven as a gift. But because its roots were thoroughly of the earth, it became a sign of the union between God in heaven and the people down below.

Jesus, by being baptized, was offering himself like a lamb, surrendering himself at the table of sacrifice. And, like the lambs, his roots as a human being were of this earth, with death releasing him to be the complete union of God with the people that he was also. Symbolically, he was showing us that he belonged to both realities, heaven and earth.

So, this Second Sunday of Ordinary Time, like a prayer repetition, yields deeper understanding of baptism, Jesus' baptism, and his name, Lamb of God. He was already united with God, but he was also an innocent member of the people. He carried this people's lives and even their sins right into God's forgiving bosom.

Phew. This is a lot of yield for one Sunday's readings. Much of the above consists of "understanding," but it provides material galore for meditation, both during the week before Sunday's Mass and then during that Mass.

24/25 JANUARY 2026

3RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME • YEAR C

A single candle, placed in a darkened Winter window, will charm us – well, people in the northern hemisphere.

Picture it in your mind and then compare it to a room with powerful fluorescent or LED lights. In the latter, every nook and cranny gets equal light, lots of it. There are no shades of grey. The wrinkles and imperfections of a human face want to run and hide because all their mess is made very obvious.

Jesus is a great light after all. He is relief from the dark that we all walk in.

Now think of a room lit by several candles. Somehow the better parts of each face are brought out, and the flaws are left kindly in the background. Such lights pardon our imperfections and grant us a kind of glow.



Jesus is that kind of light. Not a searchlight from which no flawed, fumbling thing can escape. He came as a simple candle, a forgiver of souls, a quiet lover of human faces.

There is a passage in the first reading for Sunday that is quoted word for word in Sunday's Gospel.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone.

Here, Jesus is a great light after all. He is relief from the dark that we all walk in. He is divine brilliance.

But the Gospel has him ambling along by the Sea of Galilee like an ordinary person. Strolling. How can this illustrious beam of light be dim, like the rest of us?

Some speculations:

Maybe he is especially vital, the type that people are attracted to. Maybe he is someone you and I would automatically want to follow. After all, on Sunday we will hear about two sets of brothers who drop everything and go after him: Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, and then James and John—the sons of Zebedee, or "sons of thunder," as Jesus will call them later. None of these men are fools. They would not follow just anyone. Jesus must have been a very appealing person.

So, did they see him as a "great light"? Did they somehow acknowledge that grave darkness would be dispelled by him? They probably had heard from the Baptist that Jesus was "The Messiah," the one that the Jews had been awaiting for such a long time.

Yet this Sunday we learn that Jesus' light did not infringe on every precious cranny of people's lives, as a searchlight might do. He was like a quiet glow, a candle in the window. His armies did not savage all in their path. His light was not a huge bolt of lightning. It was, impossibly, a quiet flicker that hurricane winds tried and tried to put out, but could not. Seen in this way, Christ's light was indeed great, but in a new way, in an ordinary, diffused way. One that could suffer on our behalf.

Pope Benedict XVI put it like this:

God's sign is simplicity. God's sign is the baby. God's sign is that he makes

himself small for us. This is how he reigns. He does not come with power and outward splendour. He comes as a baby—defenceless and in need of our help. He does not want to overwhelm us with his strength. He takes away our fear of his greatness. He asks for our love: so, he makes himself a child.

MONDAY, 26 JANUARY 2026 AUSTRALIA DAY

Reflect: on the complete history, including the impacts of colonization and the resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, alongside the nation's achievements and ongoing challenges like domestic violence and refugee issues.

Respect: for the oldest continuous cultures on Earth, acknowledging First Nations' survival and contributions, and respecting diverse experiences, with some advocating for a date change to show this respect more fully.

Celebrate: the vibrant multiculturalism, community spirit, and achievements of modern Australia, often through community events, citizenship ceremonies, and family gatherings.

Stand: against extremism, racism, discrimination, prejudice, bigotry, intolerance, xenophobia.

Focus: on unity, shared stories, and the "Reflect, Respect, Celebrate" motto, encouraging meaningful participation for everyone, from new citizens to Indigenous Australians.



First Nations Perspective: for many, January 26th is a day of mourning (Survival Day/Invasion Day) due to its significance as the start of colonization, bringing pain and exhaustion, while others celebrate their enduring culture.

Calls for Change: a growing movement seeks a new date that unites all Australians, acknowledging the historical pain

and fostering genuine reconciliation, moving beyond a divisive narrative.

Listen: with open ears and not a closed mind ... reflect, respect, celebrate.

Educate yourself through resources like the "Pride and Pain" timeline to understand the complexities. Have conversations about the day's meaning with family and friends to build understanding.

Australia Day provides us all with the opportunity to Reflect, Respect, Celebrate.

Australia Day is about so much more than the events of one day – it is about who we are as a nation and what we aspire to be.

Australia Day is a day to connect with family, friends and community – to celebrate the freedoms we share and the values and beliefs we hold.

Australia Day is about the ever-evolving story of our nation – our history, our identity and, above all, our people.

Australia Day reminds us of the common bond we share as Australians, connected by a desire for unity, and the promise of safety, stability and prosperity.

We can be proud of who we are as a nation - our democracy, the strength, diversity and generosity of our people and our beautiful natural environment.

With Christ our head and cornerstone, we'll build our Nation's might, whose way and truth and light alone can guide our path aright. Our lives, a sacrifice of love, reflect our Master's care. With faces turned to heaven above, Advance Australia fair. In joyful strains then let us sing, Advance Australia fair!

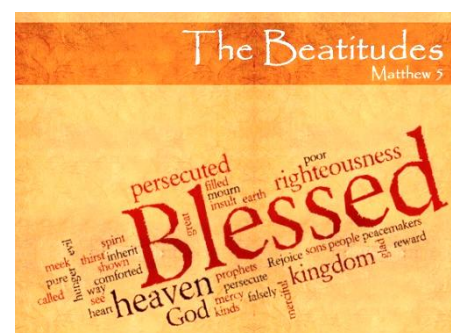
31 JANUARY / 1 FEBRUARY 2026 4TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME • YEAR A

Jesus took special notice of the "disadvantaged" people, as our culture likes to call them. On Sunday we will hear him explain that the most blest people are the poor [in spirit], the ones who grieve, the ones who are meek, the ones hungry and thirsty for fairness ["righteousness"], the merciful, and the peacemakers.

It is easier to see why the peacemakers and the merciful and the ones hungering for fairness deserve blessedness. These are people we already admire. But the poor? And those who grieve? Oh, and I forgot about the ones whom people insult and persecute and utter every kind of evil falsely against because of Jesus.

Ouch.

Most of us would have compiled just the opposite list. Blest are you if you are rich. Blest are you if never have to grieve over losing someone you love.



Blest are you if you are admired and free of enemies and spoken well of at all times. Don't these sound much more like the good life we want for ourselves and our friends?

Yes, in a way. But isn't there a danger in these wonderful sounding states of life. Riches and honour can be lures that lead away from love. If I am rich I am tempted to let that be my identity, external though it is. If I am highly admired I might well be enticed to believe that I actually am what people say about me. Either of these can lead to pride, which in this case means paying attention only to myself and what pleases me.

If this happens, and if it leads to the bad kind of pride, still a quiet voice inside us will cry, "I am your real self, and you have covered me over. You are smothering me. Help!"

God loves each of us in this "real self." It is the part of us that God knows best and loves most. God calls us to be what we really are, persons who are loved as we are, and who love in return. What we own, how honoured we feel, how swollen up with pride we are—these are undependable. They get in the way, sometimes tragically. God's Spirit dwells deeper within us, and if we learn to live from that inner spot we will find we are living lives of peace and fruitfulness.

That is why the beatitudes make deep sense. If we do learn to live from the home within us, we will find God's love there. And we will find also love of others, comfortably dwelling with it. This will be true even if poverty and insults are our external condition.

It takes a while to learn, sometimes a great while. Watch Jesus if you want to know what it is like.

7/8 FEBRUARY 2026 5TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME • YEAR A

In the Gospels of the last four Sundays, we have been following the story of Jesus' early career. He went to be baptized. Then he moved to Capernaum from Galilee when John the Baptist was killed, and there he chose his apostles (who somehow knew him as the one to follow). Last Sunday we heard part of his "inaugural address," the beatitudes.



Now he begins to instruct the disciples about how to be his followers.

In this week's Gospel Jesus says: be what you are. If you are salt then don't lose your flavour of salt. If you are a lamp then don't put a basket over yourself so no one can see your light. Give savour. Give light.

This is consoling advice. You get to be yourself.

But would the disciples have followed Jesus if they had known what it really means to "be yourself"? The first reading gives a hint. It says to share your bread with the hungry. Shelter the oppressed and the homeless. Clothe the naked. Do not turn away from your own. This is how you let your light shine in the darkness. This is how Jesus enlightened the world. He even went to death for it. Isn't this the meaning of "becoming yourself"?

A big assignment. Today the definition of "being me" can sound like selfishness. "I get to do whatever I want to do." "Take care of number one." "If it feels good, do it." And so on.

In today's western culture, one of the classic songs made popular by Frank Sinatra is "I Did It My Way," co-written by Sinatra and Paul Anka.

I planned each charted course, each careful step, along the byway, and more, much more than this, *I did it my way*. And so on. The main message is that "I" have succeeded in life as long as I did everything "my way." There is a backdrop of fear here, something about not being free to be myself; to have to do everything according to someone else's design. The world and its population are very, very large and it is no surprise that mass production and mass advertising and mass purchasing give us the feeling that we are just cogs in a giant, international, industrial wheel, worth nothing in ourselves but contributing to the market as long as we do and buy what we are supposed to. So, "to do it my way" is a statement about facing down the great machine and defying it outright.

But the scriptures assume the opposite. They suppose that every human being is created with an unrepeatable, deep, interior shape. Rather than fighting to do my own will no matter what, I need to allow the Spirit of God to find a home deep within my space. This is the Spirit of loving, of respect, of

forgiveness. It is God. You and I are built to be at one with this presence. Becoming myself means becoming what I was built to be: a home for the Spirit of Jesus, of God.

God's love will become us. It will help us find ourselves as what we really are deep down: givers of food, helpers to the homeless, forgiving and loving members of society. In other words, we will become truly ourselves.

15/16 FEBRUARY 2026

6TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME • YEAR A

The focus of today's liturgy is "obedience to God's word." We are challenged to "keep the commandments, to walk in the law of the Lord."

In order to keep the commandments, we must first know what they are and then we must understand them correctly. Jesus deals with this problem in the Gospel. The Jews had a law about murder, but they had misread it to mean that one was in the clear as long as one was not actually, personally killing someone. Jesus challenged his Jewish followers to follow the correct interpretation of the law, which meant that they were not to be the kind of people who would kill or would do anything that leads to someone else's death.

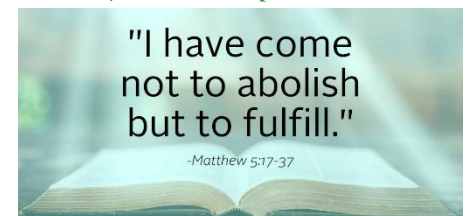
We Christians believe that God's "command of perfect love" obliges us to do what is just and right. It is not good enough to stay out of trouble; we must work at setting things right in the world. It is not good enough to give food to the hungry; we must work at making ours a society in which people do not go hungry.

"Give me discernment, that I may observe your law and keep it with all my heart."

The responsibility for alleviating the plight of the poor falls upon all members of society. As individuals, all citizens have a duty to assist the poor through acts of charity and personal commitment. But private charity and voluntary action are not sufficient. We also carry out our moral responsibility to assist and empower the poor by working collectively through government to establish just and effective public policies.

In today's long gospel reading we continue the 'Sermon on the Mount'. As we have seen, in this discourse Matthew gathers fundamental teachings of Jesus which constitute a charter for the 'Kingdom'. Since Matthew's gospel was written for a community of Jewish converts, it is not surprising that this charter includes teaching concerning the attitude of Jesus to the traditions of old Israel. Understanding this teaching

is important for Christians of later generations if we are to understand how we, as the new people of God, are related to the old Israel, and how we should understand the scriptures of the Old Testament. During his earthly life, Jesus was a faithful observer of Old Testament customs – though he was critical of the narrow interpretation given them by the leaders of the Jewish people. Clearly, the challenge he brought to the scribes and Pharisees led to confrontations in which he made it clear that he did not seek an abolition of the traditions of old Israel: his words, 'not one dot, one little stroke, shall disappear from the Law' were spoken, no doubt, in such a debate. But the words which follow – 'until its purpose is achieved' – help us to understand what he meant when he declared, 'I have not come to abolish the Law and the prophets (i.e. the Old Testament scriptures and the traditions they fostered), but to complete them'.



The Old Testament was an expression of the Word of God, but it was an expression that was to give way to the absolutely final expression of the divine Word, in the life, death and resurrection of the one who was the divine Word Incarnate. The Old Testament gave witness to the eternal truth of God and God's designs for humanity, but it was only a witness in hints and shadows, giving rise to boundless expectations concerning the future. These expectations were fulfilled in Jesus Christ; but as Paul tells us in the second reading, this fulfilment was to be a stumbling block to those whose hopes were shaped by expectations of an earthly triumph of God's people – God's final self-expressions in the Saviour's Paschal Mystery was something greater, a 'hidden wisdom that God predestined to be our glory before the ages began'. The New Law, that 'completes' and 'achieves the purpose' of the Old Testament's hints and shadows, must, of course, be promulgated by the divine Lawgiver himself. Jesus intimates this in the remarkable series of instructions he gives to his followers. Referring to the divine commands of the Old Law ('you have learnt how it was said to our ancestors') he goes on to declare, as a Lawgiver of the same authority, 'But I say this to you'. The first Christians loved the Old Testament – its hints and shadows gave them a fuller understanding of what God did for the world in Christ.

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

This year, **Year A** of the three-year cycle of Scripture readings, the Gospel of **Matthew** is read.

Of all the four gospels, the gospel of Matthew was the one most used and most quoted in the early centuries of the church. While each gospel has its own beauty and its own power, there is something quite special about Matthew that may account for its early popularity. This is the way Matthew presents the teaching of Jesus. This gives us many insights into the mind and heart of Jesus, and also into what it means to be Jesus' disciple.

Matthew's gospel was particularly attractive as a handbook for instruction.

The gospel we have is written in Greek. Some verses are quoted in works by Christian writers of the second and third centuries. Also, from the third century we have parts of Origen's commentary on Matthew. Our earliest complete text, however, is found in two fourth century books, *Codex Sinaiticus* (so named because it was discovered in the nineteenth century in the monastery of Saint Catherine on Mount Sinai) and *Codex Vaticanus* (so named because it is preserved in the Vatican library).

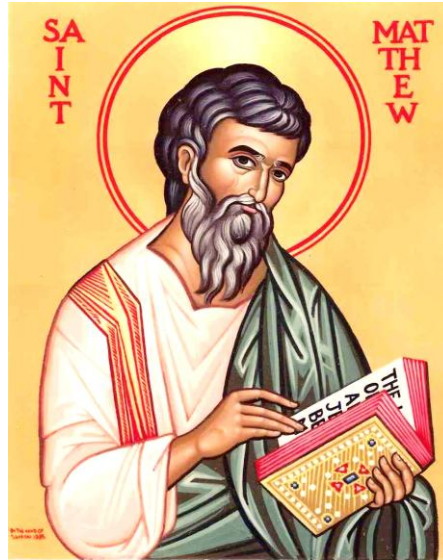
They, and all subsequent manuscripts, refer to this gospel as being 'according to Matthew', thus linking it with the name of the disciple who was called by Jesus while sitting at the tax booth (Matthew 9:9). He is mentioned in all the lists of the apostles (Matthew 10:3, Mark 3:18, Luke 6:15 and Acts 1:13). The same connection between this gospel and Matthew is made by all the early commentators. However, the precise relationship between the apostle Matthew and the gospel associated with his name is, unfortunately, still not clear in spite of over a hundred years of intense scholarly research.

The gospel of Matthew, although placed chronologically first in the New Testament, is most likely a revised and expanded version of Mark. By supplementing Mark's writing with accounts of the life of Jesus he himself has heard, (among them the Infancy narrative and the Sermon on the Mount), Matthew writes a Gospel with a new focus and flavour. For many years Matthew was believed to be the tax collector named in the Gospel as Matthew; indeed, the Gospel is named after this man, but scholars now believe that the actual composition of this Gospel took place well after the lifetime of Jesus and through a complex process.

Who did Matthew write for?

In the absence of a definitive answer, who this work might have been written for is deduced by examination of the

work itself; by the interests which dominate the writing, by writing style, terminology and explanation of cultural events and practices the author uses and by the way they allude to other texts and events. By examining Matthew scholars are able to propose the following:



Matthew's community were Jewish. An important feature of Matthew's Gospel is his presentation of Jesus as fulfilment of scripture, a recurring phrase throughout this Gospel). Matthew sprinkles his infancy narrative with quotes from the Old Testament, making it clear that the expectations of the messiah have now been fulfilled. In following Jesus then, Matthew's community were not abandoning their heritage but discovering its full meaning.

Matthew wrote around 85-90AD. This dating places the gospel after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70AD, in the midst of conflict between the Jewish synagogue leaders and the emerging community, interested in who Jesus was. The earliest community practised their Jewish faith as they explored their memories and recollections about Jesus. Increasingly, there were a number of Jews wondering about who Jesus was, and their growing claim to be the inheritors of the promises of the Hebrew scriptures led to a sharp divide and animosity with the local Jewish community in the 80s. While it seems that the majority of members of Matthew's community had come to believe in Jesus, they had not set aside their Jewish heritage. These 'Jewish Christians', under attack from their former Jewish community members, were asked to decide – would they continue their faith within or outside traditional Judaism. This Gospel attempts to reconcile the community's Jewish heritage with the reality of Jesus' life.

Who is Matthew's Jesus?

First and foremost, Matthew's Jesus is the promise messianic fulfilled. Jesus is the messiah that Judaism had waited

for, the one who ushers in the Kingdom of God. Matthew has more parables of the Kingdom (Matthew calls it the Kingdom of heaven out of reverence for the name of God than Mark, thus reassuring his community that, in Jesus, God's reign has come; the Kingdom has been restored.

Matthew adds to his case by showing Jesus as a new Moses, a new leader for the Jewish people. Matthew writes to show how Jesus imitates the key actions of his ancestor in faith; being kept from an untimely death as an infant, being called out of Egypt as an adult, and being the bringer of a new law on a mountain, this time beside Lake Galilee.

In his Infancy narrative, Matthew bookends his view of Jesus calling him 'God with us', the child who will be known as 'Emmanuel'. At the end of the Gospel, the risen Christ continues this promise to be with his people always, 'to the end of the age'.

Finally, Matthew adds greatly to Mark's account, of Jesus as teacher by including many teachings of Jesus that Mark was not aware of. A significant example of this is the 'Sermon on the Mount' where Matthew collects 18 lessons into one teaching scene. For Matthew, Jesus is powerful in both word (as teacher), and deed (as the divine God present in the miracles).

What about the disciples?

The disciples are presented more kindly in Matthew than in Mark, with Jesus responding more gently to their failures. Although they sometimes struggle to understand him, they follow Jesus faithfully. In the end they are commissioned by the risen Christ and sent on mission. Notable among the disciples are a number of women disciples. Four women appear in the genealogy, along with Mary of Nazareth. Women are noted as having followed Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem in the Passion, and of course women disciples are the first to come to the tomb, receive news of the resurrection and take this 'Gospel' to the others.

Matthew reflected on Jesus' life and teaching in a way that will guide him and the community in resolving their differences and living the life of love shown them by Jesus.

By contemplating Jesus of Nazareth and by listening to him, we can become more sensitive to the presence and inspiration of the risen Christ speaking to us now through the inspired words of Matthew. May we learn to be faithful disciples of Jesus in our obedience to God and in carrying out the commission given us to 'make disciples of all nations' (28:19), building communities of faith that will reveal the true God in today's world.

THIRROUL PARISH



THIRROUL: a Wodi Wodi Aboriginal word, 'Thurrural' meaning 'the valley of the cabbage tree palms'.

It all started with a meeting at Mrs McGrade's shop in Main Street, Thirroul, on 28 August 1918. The Parish Priest of Bulli, Fr Peter Power, had decided there was a need for a Thirroul Church in the Bulli Parish, which stretched from Corrimal to Clifton. It was decided to buy land as the site for the present church, and the cost was £300 (\$32,000 today – *that's just based on inflation, not on land values!*). Collections were sought at Austinmer, Thirroul East and Thirroul West!

Archbishop Kelly in Sydney had approved a name for the proposed Thirroul Church, St Kevin's. Later he suggested another name, because St Kevin was already the patron of a church at Eastwood. Fr Power got most enthusiastic with St Molua, "one of the great early Irish saints" and proposed it as the church name. On 8 May 1921, Archbishop Kelly blessed the foundation stone under the joint patronage of St Michael and St Molua.

The money for the new church did not roll in at first, but after collections, bazaars (*what are they?*) and concerts, a meeting was held on 21 July 1920 at Mrs Ryan's Hotel, when it was decided to seek a loan of £2,500 from the ESA (now ANZ) Bank at 6% interest.

In the meantime, Mass was celebrated every second Sunday in the local School of Arts (which became the RSL Club, now 'The Bowlo' or Club Thirroul) – with an annual rental of £6/10/–.

At their February 1921 meeting in Ryan's Pub, members of the committee had eight tenders before them, but four of those were above £3,000 and were passed over. The lowest tender was from Winley Brothers and was accepted – *Fr Power did not disclose the figures in his notes.*

About 500 people turned out for the opening of Thirroul's Catholic Church on 30 October 1921. Bishop Hayden, Bishop of Wilcannia-Forbes, blessed and opened the church, as Archbishop Kelly was unable to attend.

Two years later, on 31 October 1923, the Thirroul Parish was established with the arrival of Fr O'Donnell from Araluen as Parish Priest. For a short time, he lived in a rented cottage in George Street. The current presbytery was opened on 10 October 1924.

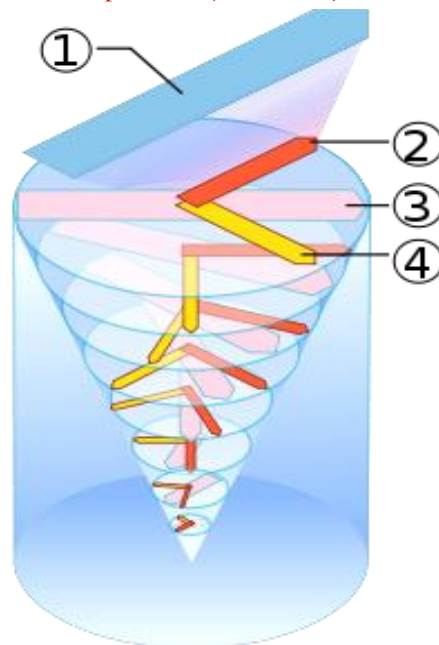
THE EKMAN SPIRAL

Ever wondered why the wind from the northeast brings in a cold current in the surf ... and a southerly brings in a warm current?

The Ekman spiral, named after Swedish scientist Vagn Walfrid Ekman (1874-1954) who first theorized it in 1902, is a consequence of the Coriolis effect.

The Ekman Spiral is a consequence of the [Coriolis effect](#) which causes objects to move to the right of applied forces in the northern hemisphere and to the left in the Southern Hemisphere. Thus, when the wind blows on the ocean surface in the northern hemisphere, the surface current moves to the right of the wind and in the southern hemisphere, the surface current moves to the left of the wind.

The deflection of surface currents was first noticed by the Norwegian oceanographer [Fridtjof Nansen](#) during the Fram expedition (1893-1896).



The diagram shows the forces associated with the Ekman spiral in the north hemisphere. The force from above is (2) (beginning with the wind blowing over the water surface), the Coriolis force (at right angles to the force from above) is (4) and the net resultant water movement is (3). (3) then becomes the force acting on the layer below it, accounting for the gradual clockwise spiral motion as you move down. The classic Ekman spiral has been observed under sea ice, but is not found in most open-ocean conditions.

Thus, Ekman transport away from the eastern Australian coast (caused by prolonged northerly winds) results in the rise of colder, deep ocean waters along a coast due to the movement of surface water away from the coast. Conversely a prolonged southerly moves the warm top layer onshore.

SURF SEASON 2025-2026

Getting ready for a day at the beach:

- ♦ check the tides and the sea condition, waves etc.
- ♦ download the **Beachsafe** app ... <https://beachsafe.org.au/apps>
- ♦ is the beach patrolled by lifesavers today? what times?
- ♦ what hazards are at the beach?
- ♦ how strong is the sun today?
- ♦ pack items to keep you safe at the beach: good sunscreen; swim clothes [don't swim in ordinary clothes]; leave the alcohol at home but take plenty of water.
- ♦ swim between the red and yellow flags; look for beach safety signs; speak to a lifesaver – ask how to recognize a rip!
- ♦ never swim alone.
- ♦ where waves are breaking is safer than where no waves are breaking – "white is right, green is mean".
- ♦ if you get into trouble in the water, stay calm and raise one arm.
- ♦ in an emergency call **000**.

With over **198,000** members and **315** affiliated Surf Life Saving clubs, Surf Life Saving Australia represents the largest volunteer movement of its kind in the world.



Stay safe and swim between the flags.

SACRAMENTS IN 2026

The **Sacrament of Confirmation** for **Year 6** students or older will be celebrated on **Thursday, 2 July 2026**. Enrolment forms are available on the Parish website, and enrolments close on **Monday, 11 May 2026**.

The **Sacraments of First Penance and First Communion** are celebrated after a child turns seven – usually from Year 2 or older. In 2026, the Sacrament of **First Penance** will be celebrated on **Wednesday, 28 October**, and **First Communion** on the weekend **28/29 November OR any later weekend**. Enrolment forms are available on the Parish website, and enrolments close on **Tuesday, 8 September 2026**.

All families in our Parish are welcome to enrol their children. Enrolment forms are on our Parish website.

PARISH OFFICE HOURS

The Parish Office will be **closed** from 25 December until 12 January 26. The Office will **reopen** on **Tuesday, 13 January** for the usual hours – **Tuesdays and Wednesdays 09:00 to 15:00** and **Fridays 08:30 to 15:00**.

A Merry Christmas Season from Kerry Fabon, our Parish Secretary.

A Joyful and Peace-filled Christmas Season to one and all from Andrew and Ken, Franciscan Friars.

Happy 2026 to all our Readers



BAPTISMS IN 2026

Baptism, the **first sacrament of initiation**, prepares us to celebrate the Eucharist. Families wishing to prepare their infants (7 years or under) for initiation are asked to contact the Parish Office. Baptisms are held on the **third weekend** of each month [except **Lent**], usually during either of the weekend [Saturday or Sunday] Masses. Baptism enrolment forms are obtainable from the Parish Office.

At least one parent is required to attend a **Baptism Preparation Class** before the child's baptism. Classes are usually held at **19:15**, usually on the **last Thursday of each month** [except December] in preparation for baptisms the following month.

The next scheduled baptisms in 2026 in our Parish are on **Saturday/Sunday 18/19 January** – after that, then next baptisms will be on **Saturday/Sunday 14/15 February 2026**, and after that, on **Easter Sunday, 5 April 2026**.

If you wish to have your child baptised in January, February or April, then you need to collect the enrolment forms from the Parish Office.

If you want your child baptised in **January**, call the Parish Office to organize a time to meet **before 18/19 January**.

Otherwise, **at least one parent** needs to attend the **Baptism Preparation Class, 19:15** on **Thursday, 22 January or Thursday, 26 February or 26 March 2026**. Bring the completed enrolment form and photo to the preparation class [or email a photo to the Parish Office].

VINNIES IN OUR PARISH

Thank you to the members of the St Vincent de Paul Thirroul Conference for your efforts of helping the needy in our area – a wonderful job! *Thank you to all parishioners who support Vinnies.*

JULIAN OF NORWICH

Julian of Norwich is a renowned English mystic (1342–1430). Aged 30, during an illness, she received 16 revelations on the love of God – and made the radical choice to become an anchoress. She chose to live in a cell beside the church of St Julian in the city of Norwich. Pope Benedict XVI recently spoke about her: “Anchoresses, or ‘recluses’, dedicated themselves to prayer, meditation and study within their cells. In this way they came to acquire a very delicate human and religious sensibility – men and women of all ages and conditions, in need of counsel and comfort, devotedly sought them out.”

“Women and men who chose to withdraw and live in the company of God acquire, precisely because of this choice, a great sense of compassion for the suffering and weakness of others. Friends of God, they enjoy a wisdom which the world they have left does not possess, and they willingly share this with those who knock at their door. Thus, I think with admiration and gratitude of the monasteries of cloistered women and men which, today more than ever, are oases of peace and hope, a precious treasure for the entire Church, especially inasmuch as they recall the primacy of God and the importance that intense and constant prayer has for the journey of faith.”

Julian's teachings begin and end in joy. She knew that this was our origin, and this was our destiny. Yet she lived in the middle of incredible suffering and instability:

- the Black Plague killed 50% of Europe;
- the Hundred Years War killed even more;
- Heretics were regularly burned at the stake (and her cell was within smelling distance of her town's stake!);
- the economy was in depression and there were huge labour strikes and riots

Yet unlike many who panicked in her time and either blamed the plague on their sins (and set up flagellation clubs to beat themselves for their sins) or scapegoated the Jews and “heretics,” Julian stayed deeply grounded in her intimacy with God.

Some of Julian's sayings are:

- ‘Pray inwardly, even if you do not enjoy it. It does good, though you feel

nothing. Yes, even though you think you are doing nothing.’

- ‘Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance. It is laying hold of God's willingness.’
- ‘Prayer is a new, gracious, lasting will of the soul united and fast-bound to the will of God by the precious and mysterious working of the Holy Spirit.’
- ‘The goodness of God is the highest object of prayer, and it reaches down to our lowest need.’

SANTA'S REINDEER

According to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, while both male and female reindeer grow antlers in the summer each year, male reindeer drop their antlers at the beginning of winter, usually late November to mid-December.

Female reindeer retain their antlers until after they give birth in the spring ... Therefore, according to every historical rendition depicting Santa's reindeer, every single one of them, from Rudolph to Blitzen had to be a female. We should have known ...

Only women would be able to drag a fat man in a red suit all around the world in one night and not get lost!

UK CHRISTMAS HOSPITAL STATISTICS

Tree-related accidents account for over **1,000** injuries. **350** people every year suffer injury from Christmas-light related incidents. **18% of people claiming they have received cuts** to themselves while chopping vegetables and a further **11% suffering burns from hot fat**. Around **700,000** injuries occur during post-Christmas shopping rushes.

Roughly **2.6 million** people report falling off ladders or stools decorating their homes during the season.

Eye injuries from party items such as exploded corks are not uncommon. One study cited **144 significant eye injuries** annually from festive causes.

Accidents related to festive packaging, including careless scissor use, send about **27%** of people to A&E around Christmas, so pack those presents with precision!

46% of Christmas cooks don't always check use-by dates before cooking or preparing food at home.

During the festive period alone, more than **80,000** people attend A&E in hospitals across the UK, with up to **6,000** people being admitted due to a range of reasons often including domestic accidents, cooking mishaps and seasonal illnesses.

While the holidays are meant to be joyful, it's clear that a little extra caution can go a long way.