Church News Ireland



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Image of the day - Advent St John



On December 15 past, the Third Sunday of Advent, the Gospel reading appointed was about St John the Baptist, who preached repentance to the Judeans ahead of Jesus's ministry.

Today Church News Ireland highlights one of the spaces in Westminster Abbey named after this New Testament saint. The front page photo is a view of the west side of the Chapel of St John the Baptist.

The Chapel of St John the Baptist is one of the ambulatory chapels, which are situated in two semi-circles around the Shrine of Edward the Confessor. During the medieval period, this would have been a chapel with an altar where

mass was prayed daily. After the Reformation in the 16th century, they were less frequently used. In the 17th century, many of the ambulatory chapels in the Abbey became places for burials, with many tombs and memorials being constructed during this time.

Visitors to the Abbey today can enter this chapel, and see the many tombs and monuments within. Each person buried here - largely from well-to-do families of the period - was buried here because of a desire to be laid to rest in a holy space, alongside the kings and queens, saints, and bishops who rest nearby.

You may learn more about the people who are buried or memorialised in this chapel on the Abbey's website.

News

Famous Christmas service in historic Kings College Chapel will be powered by solar this year

This year's world-famous Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols service at Kings College Chapel in Cambridge will have one significant difference: it will be powered by solar panels.

Some 438 were installed on the roof of the historic building earlier this year after the roof was restored. They now provide all the chapel's electrical needs, with the excess being used in other college buildings.



Image by Leon Hargreaves, courtesy of King's College Cambridge.

Head of Capital Projects at the college, Shane Alexander, said: "Even though it's not been the sunniest summer, we have beaten the proposed targets. The PVs have produced enough energy to power 80 average homes, so more than enough for the chapel, and the rest for the college.

"So, the service will be powered by the PVs... I have to pinch myself to see how we are changing this historic building for the right reasons. More at

[https://www.churchofengland.org/about/environment-and-climate-change/famous-christmas-service-historic-chapel-will-be-powered-solar-year]



At last year's Christmas fast were Bishop Ger Nash, Cllr Maura Bell, Reverend Norman McCausland and Fr Billy Swan ADM Wexford.

Catholic and C of I members four day Wexford Christmas Fast

While Christmas is a time of indulgence for many of us, members of the Catholic and Church of Ireland communities in Wexford will spend at least part of this festive season fasting entirely, Simon Bourke writes in the Wexford People

This year's annual Christmas Fast will run from Saturday, December 21 to Tuesday, December 24 and will see four members of each community fast for 24 hours.

During their fast they will be present outside St Iberius' Church on Wexford's Main St, available to meet and greet Christmas shoppers and hoping for another generous response from the people of the town.

This year's fast is in aid of six local charities and, for the first time, members of the public will be able to pay by card as well as cash.

"The annual Christmas fast this year will be different in that we are returning to four days instead of one day; but these four days of fasting will be undertaken by four members of each community, with pairs fasting for each of the four days," said Father Billy Swan.

"On Christmas Eve, which is the last day of the fast, Rev Kieran Kavanagh and myself will be fasting and present outside St Iberius. For the first time this year, we will be able to accept 'Tap card' payments as well as cash.

People can also donate online at https://www.idonate.ie/cause/wexfordchristmasfast

Festive fun in children's ministry outreach to local and Ukrainian families

Festive fun was very much on the agenda in 'the Wee Hall' in Culdaff on an afternoon where the parish celebrated the joy of Christmas with its children's ministry outreach to local and Ukrainian families.

There was a fantastic turnout of children for the Christmas party, with fun and games, lots of refreshments and a special visit from Santa Claus and his helpers.

The Bishop's Curate-in-charge of the Moville Group, Revd Alan McCracken, thanked all the volunteers who made the day possible and special for the young children who came along.

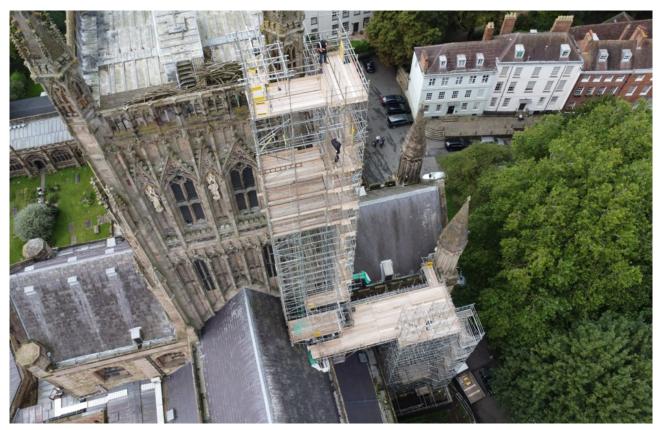
Laity praised as review says Irish Church 'has good story about safeguarding of children'

An independent major external review has said that "the (Irish) Church has a good story to tell about what it has implemented and achieved in relation to the safeguarding of children over the last 20 years...

and "it is now regarded by some commentators as an exemplar in the Catholic Church globally". The review evaluated all aspects of safeguarding and outreach to survivors, including the impact and effectiveness of it.

Quakers worldwide leave X over harmful content

Quakers in Britain are joining other Quaker bodies across the world in disengaging from the social media platform X, formerly Twitter, mid December.



Worcester Cathedral

The move comes due to concerns over changes under Elon Musk's ownership, including increased levels of disinformation and hate.

X's role in spreading harmful content and the erosion of journalistic integrity and public discourse directly contradict Quaker principles of truth and integrity, the faith group said.

Musk has allowed far-right groups back on X and weakened moderation and the platform's algorithm has increased the spread of harmful content.

These include false narratives that have led to real-world violence. Quakers have worked for peace since their inception in the 17th century.

Engagement with their posts has sharply decreased, alongside an increase in negative and abusive commentary, Quakers in Britain said.

In addition, target audiences have started leaving the platform.

Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC, the global body which connects Quakers) and FWCC Europe and Middle East Section, Quakers in Ireland, Friends Committee on National Legislation (USA), Canadian Friends Service Committee, Quaker Council for European Affairs the Friend (Quaker magazine), and Woodbrooke (Quaker learning organisation) are also leaving X on 16 December.

Paul Parker, recording clerk for Quakers in Britain, said: "Quakers are led by their faith to work to make the world more equal and more peaceful. This engagement inevitably includes some compromise, talking and listening to others.

"We seek to answer that of God which is to be found in every person. It seems that X is no longer a forum where this can happen. When the bad outweighs the good, it is time to seek other methods of engaging where it easier to find common ground with our fellow human beings."

Tim Gee, FWCC general secretary, said: "If X was a town square today, it would be one where you pay to be heard, where you'd risk abuse spending time in it, and where you aren't quite sure if the people you do talk with are actual people or robots.

"And now also, it would be a square owned by a close friend of the mayor, liable to be used to amplify his messages.

"In other words, not much like a town square at all. More like a private online dystopia, and not one we're willing to spend our time on anymore."

Quakers in Britain said their X account would be archived to provide information and support. They can be found on Instagram, Facebook, Threads and BlueSky.

Armagh Archbishops Christmas message



The light shines in darkness...

A message for Christmas from Archbishop John McDowell and Archbishop Eamon Martin Archbishops of Armagh

"...and the Light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it". John 1:5

Someone once said that ninety percent of life is "just turning up", and probably ninety percent of most of our lives is indeed spent in a kind of routine. The routine may vary depending on our stage in life and our changing circumstances but we are creatures of habit who like settled patterns and are wary of change. Certainly it would be extremely wearying to live at a high pitch of excitement and constant change for ninety percent of the time.

Yet, occasionally in all our lives (and more frequently for some) life's circumstances will bring us face to face with some of the great unavoidable facts of existence – evil, sin, suffering and death. In many parts of the world today, not least in the places where Jesus was born and "went about doing good", they are a persistent daily reality, often in their most gruesome and demoralising forms.

What we call, sometimes rather lamely, "the Christmas story" brings another of the great unavoidable facts of existence, to set alongside the irrefutable fact of the darkness of evil. The fact of the bright mystery and love of God. It is one of Bible's great strengths that it doesn't pretend that the world is other than how it is experienced by men and women. It doesn't pretend that the mystery of evil and the mystery of God are easy to understand or come to terms with. It may have fallen into disuse but one



remembers when those who offered simple, trite or baseless reassurance about life's bitterness were called "Job's comforters", after the group of his friends who offered false hope to that long suffering man.

However, the Christmas story as we will encounter it at Midnight worship on Christmas Eve or on Christmas morning will include the words "...and the light shines in darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it". Before the invention of either printing or the spread of literacy those words would have been heard by believers rather than read by them. Perhaps in modern terms they might even be called "a spoiler" because it's as if the writer or editor of John's Gospel doesn't want people to have to wait until the end of the drama to know the outcome of what it means for the world and for the believer when Word became flesh.

And the outcome is that the Father's love follows Jesus into the darkness of the world and that light has the last word

and not darkness. And that for all of life's obscurity and complications and suffering, that Jesus Christ and his love for the cosmos is the foregone conclusion of all things.

The hope-filled Canticle of Zechariah, which is prayed at Lauds every morning, speaks of the dawn from on high "breaking" upon us, "to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death". At Christmas time we should never forget that this same light guides our feet "into the way of peace". The light of Christ breaks into our daily routine, just as it did for the watchful shepherds and wandering Magi on the first Christmas night.

Our responsibility is to pass it on, as if to say in the words of 1 John 1:5: "This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him is no darkness."



We are called to ensure that the light of Bethlehem continues to stream out across the world, from Gaza to Ukraine, from Sudan to Syria, and on into our own homes, communities and workplaces across the island of Ireland. Where hatred, war and violence abound, the world falls deeper and deeper into darkness. Where the light of Christ is shared, love and peace shall be found. Happy Christmas.

Cathedral Calls

Christmas Eve Nine Lessons and Carols from St Patrick's Cathedral RTÉ Radio 1

In a special seasonal fixture, RTÉ Radio 1 will broadcast the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols from St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, on Christmas Eve (24th December) from 4.00pm to 5.15pm.

Dean William Morton leads the annual re-telling of the Christmas story through scriptural readings and Christmas music, performed by the Choir of St Patrick's Cathedral, conducted by The Master of the Music, Stuart Nicholson.

Christmas in Kildare on RTÉ One

'Christmas in Kildare' is a major new television and radio broadcast from Saint Brigid's Cathedral, Kildare,

on Christmas Eve on RTÉ One (9.25pm) and RTÉ lyric fm (7.00pm), called 'Christmas in Kildare'.

RTÉ's annual Christmas show is presented by Marty Whelan and Celine Byrne. This year the Cathedral is marking the 1,500th anniversary or Ireland's female patron saint. This special seasonal programme features the RTÉ Concert Orchestra conducted by Gavin Maloney, with musical guests including Bell X1's Paul Noonan, Lisa Hannigan, Rhiannon Giddens, Méav Ní Mhaolchatha with Colm Mac Con Iomaire, Kingfishr, Dulciana, and star soprano Celine Byrne.



Notre-Dame is full of light and life again

Mark Osborne was at the opening mass of the restored cathedral. Chaplain of St George's, Paris, he writes in the Church Times -

Do you have memories of Notre-Dame? It is Paris's most visited site and, as the Royal British Legion Paris discovers annually during its Armistice ceremonies on 11 November, the endless stream of 12 million visitors a year can feel overwhelming.

On a fine day, you can stand outside, caught up in the intricate stories of the carved portals. Inside, the great windows are stunning, with the south rose restored by Eugène Viollet-le-Duc in the 19th century, and the west a crowded web of symbols. There are the altar, displaying that peculiar French passion for asymmetry, and the 1966 windows by Jacques Le Chevallier. If you are lucky, someone is practising on the magnificent Cavaillé-Coll organ — or perhaps you find yourself joining in one of the seven daily acts of worship. There is so much history that it is often easier to head outside again to a calmer mathematical "point zero": the small marker placed in front of the cathedral, from which all distances are measured in France.

As Chaplain of St George's, Paris, I had the huge privilege of being at the heart of Paris, participating in the first two ceremonies of the reopening, having sat in front of my television in 2019 and watched and waited with the world, horrified as the flèche, the arrow pointing up to heaven, crashed down into the roof of the cathedral.

The restored Notre-Dame seemed filled with light, just as the Abbé Suger dreamt of in his rebuilding of the Basilica of St-Denis to the north of Paris. Its genius is to appear at once both monumental but also welcoming, as if you have come into your own parish church to pray. The side chapels have

been cleaned and restored, making the accumulated art and devotion of the centuries much more accessible and comprehensible.

One of the most moving parts of Sunday was the consecration of the new altar. The Archbishop of Paris, Mgr Laurent Ulrich — who demonstrated a fine singing voice as he presided among the bishops and clergy of France — placed deep in the altar relics of five saints: three women and two men. He took off his vestments, and, putting on a plain apron, poured the oil of chrism over the whole altar. We watched while the choir sang and the oil spread over the top of the altar, darkening every square inch.

The procession of representatives of the parishes and congregations of the archdiocese of Paris, carrying banners that identified each one, moved through the congregation in Notre-Dame.

Those five holy women and men, each profoundly connected to Paris, represent the way in which, through our baptism, we, in Christ, become a sweet perfume to both believers and unbelievers (2 Corinthians 2.14-15). Last month, one of the 5000 who have restored Notre-Dame, Azzedine Hedna, a scaffolder, died at home suddenly, aged 64. He could have retired at 62, but, passionate about what Notre-Dame represented to France, he wanted to finish the project.

Celebrations continued all week: on Monday, the cathedral celebrated the Immaculate Conception, with a mass for the priests and deacons of the diocese of Paris. Each day, a different group were invited to celebrate: religious men and



From left: the organists Olivier Latry, Vincent Dubois, Thibault Fajoles, and Thierry Escaich, who played for the sung mass at Notre-Dame, on Sunday

women, and consecrated virgins in mission in Paris; the patrons and donors; the charitable associations and those they assist in Paris; the employees and volunteers of the Diocesan House, diocesan services, and the Notre-Dame Workshop; schoolchildren and the faithful; and the Paris firefighters, artisans, and those who worked on the reopening project.

Today, there is to be a procession to return the cathedral's Crown of Thorns relics — the crown of thorns, a fragment of the wood of the cross, and a nail from the Passion — to a new reliquary designed by the artist Sylvain Dubuisson. In this, the crown is "the focus of a halo of quadrangular"

cabochons with a gold background, radiating the motif of the Cross, at the centre of a wooden rack set with bronze thorns". The wood is of cedar, to recall the humility of Christ.

Notre-Dame, its fire, and its subsequent restoration have occupied acres of space in French magazines, newspapers, and TV coverage over the past five years. Its loss has felt like a death in the family. The determination to rebuild has been one of the few things that the French have consistently shared with their President through the gilets jaunes riots, the uproar over pension reform, Covid-19, extreme right-wing popularism, the 2024 Olympics, and the current "hung parliament" in the Assemblée Nationale.

Notre-Dame Chapter resists government proposal for an entry fee

The Chapter of Notre-Dame de Paris have rejected government plans to introduce an entry fee when the restored cathedral officially reopened.

Commentators have compared the loss of Notre-Dame to the loss of a mother: when what has been left unsaid or is now unsayable constricts and confines the human spirit, because the recipient of confidences, the holder of memory, the source of life, is no longer there to play her part. Without Notre-Dame, where can we go to unburden ourselves?

The rebuilding began with all the élan that the French State brings to major civil-engineering projects. But, this time, the focus was on the nearly 400,000 individual donors (most of whom gave less than €100), the 60 woodsmen who cut down nearly 20km of wood, and the more than 20 different

trades each bringing their skill to share with the whole, so that the whole might be something more perfect.

The historian Dominique logna-Prat writes of Gothic as a 19th-century "democratic" style through which Viollet-le-Duc translated into stone a social ideal: the happy inclusion of the many in one, the individual seen as part of the whole. This may be why there was a real sense of a coming-back-to-life last weekend, as the organ roared forth, and presidents and princes crowded into Notre-Dame to be part of history. The cathedral becomes again a space where "the art of being French" — an image that President Macron has used since his election in 2017 — can be remembered and remade.

As a member of the worldwide Anglican Sodality of Mary, Mother of Priests, I am as happy as a skylark to see Notre-Dame de Paris urging us again to "do what he tells you" (John 2.5). Roman Catholicism in France has been rocked by unfolding stories of abuse, physical, sexual, and spiritual. In French, the word often used is fragilisé, but out of that fragility God is doing amazing things.

Over the past ten years, the number of adults baptised has more than doubled, 36 per cent being between 25 and 36 years old, and 38 per cent coming from the working classes. The number of ordinations is slowly growing. There is no crowing, because it is the unshowy stuff of ordinary church life. France continues to be a very secular state.

The restoration and reopening of Notre-Dame, both secular and spiritual, is a wonderful aroma, enchanting and re-

enchanting Parisians, the French, and all those who love Paris. Notre Dame de Paris, priez pour nous!

The Revd Mark Osborne is the Chaplain of St George's, Paris.

Clergy and ministry

New Rector for Conwal with Gartan

The parishioners of
Conwal with Gartan have
been finding out the name
of their new Rector. He's
the Rev Adrian Dorrian,
currently Vicar of the
Lecale Area Mission
Partnership (LAMP
parishes) in the Diocese
of Down & Dromore and a



former president of Church Mission Society Ireland.

A date has yet to be arranged for his institution when Rev Dorrian will succeed Rev David Houlton, who retired last June.

Adrian is a native of Groomsport, in County Down, where he was a Sunday School teacher, a Church Warden and a BB officer. He attended Bangor Grammar School before

studying at Queen's University, Belfast, graduating with a degree in Theology and Drama.

Before his ordination in 2006 (at the age of 24), he had been working as a youth drama worker with the Christian outreach Youth Initiative. When he was first instituted as a rector, in the Parish of St Peter and St James, Belfast in June 2009, he was believed to be the youngest rector in Ireland. Five years ago he was instituted as Vicar for the LAMP Parishes – a group of more than a dozen small parishes supporting each other in the Downpatrick area.

In addition to his CMS Ireland work, Rev Dorrian has served on a number of high profile committees including the Church of Ireland's Northern Ireland Community Relations Working Group and the Church's Mens' Society. He has sat on the Liturgical Advisory Committee for most of his ordained life. "I teach liturgy for the OLM [Ordained Local Ministry] programme," he points out, "and provide liturgy training for Diocesan Reader candidates at central Church level."

Rev Dorrian said it would be a wrench for him and his wife Anne to leave the LAMP Group of Parishes, having enjoyed their nine years' ministry in East Down, but he said they were looking forward to the move to Letterkenny.

"We enjoyed nine wonderful years in Downpatrick – me in ministry and Anne working as a teacher in two local schools. I was responsible for developing the work among children and young people, which was incredibly fulfilling." He built warm relationships with other churches in Downpatrick and looks forward to continuing that work in the Diocese of Derry and Raphoe. "Everywhere I've been," he says, "ecumenical

worship has been a big part of my ministry. It's very important to me and Anne.

"It'll be a wrench to leave East Down, but Anne and I are looking forward immensely to this new challenge in Conwal and Gartan. We love Donegal – I have family roots there – and we know Letterkenny, in particular, quite well. We've stayed there frequently in the past. We've good friends in the county, too, so we're excited about this next step in ministry and eager to find out what God has planned for us."

Webinars, music, resources, broadcasts, and books

Three million+ people engaged with C of E Christmas video campaign so far

The Church of England says more than three million people have engaged with its Christmas video campaign so far.

The 2024 campaign called 'Follow the Star - Calm and Bright' encourages people to pause amidst the busy-ness of December, find moments of calm, and celebrate the true meaning of Christmas at their local church.

The campaign, which can be viewed across social media, features a series of videos shot using a time lapse technique, which places the subject at the heart of hectic, familiar Christmas scenes.

It draws inspiration from the carol 'Silent Night' and contrast the bustle of the season and the stillness depicted in nativity scenes where Mary cradles the new-born Jesus.

Previous Christmas campaigns include a new version of 'In the Bleak Midwinter' in 2021 which reached number one on the classical chart. Last year, the 'Join the Song' campaign saw thousands of singers up and down the country join for performances of a brand-new setting of 'The First Nowell'.

The campaigns seek to engage creatively with existing and new churchgoers, staying true to the heart of the Christmas message and serving as a reminder that in a world of constant activity, churches are places of stillness and connection with communities and with Jesus.

The Church of England says the campaign has already reached 3.4 million impressions on social media, with over 66,000 engagements.

More than 5.4 million page views have been recorded on AChurchNearYou.com, the Church of England's church-finder website, with over 20,000 users adding services to their calendars or sharing them with friends.

Collaborations with clergy and influencers—including Rev Kate Bottley and Rev Pat Allerton—have brought the campaign to new audiences, collectively engaging more than 750,000 Instagram followers.

The Bishop of Stockport, Rt Rev Sam Corley, said:

"In the busyness of Christmas preparations, it's easy to lose sight of the peace and hope at the heart of the season.

"This year's campaign is a timely reminder that the story of Christmas invites us into something deeper - moments of reflection, joy, and connection as we celebrate the arrival of a saviour in the reality of our world.

"Churches across the country are opening their doors to welcome everyone to experience that peace and discover that hope this Christmas."

Perspective

Ireland: Archbishop asks for prayers for new government

Archbishop Dermot Farrell, Archbishop of Dublin and Primate of Ireland, issued the following message, ahead of the commencement of the 34th Dáil Éireann:

Our Wednesday next, 18 December, the 34th session of Dáil Éireann will assemble, and our country's elected representatives will begin to seek ways to realise their vision of a shared future for all who dwell in our land.

We know that it may take some weeks before the shape and focus of a new government becomes clear, but at this moment it is appropriate to give thanks for the blessings of living in a society where differences are addressed through public debate, and power transfers peacefully on the basis of the rule of law.

Politics - for all that we say about it - is, in the end, "a lofty vocation and one of the highest forms of charity, inasmuch

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as it seeks the common good", to cite Pope Francis. While wise political leadership and good government is necessary in every age, our age, with increasing political polarisation across the globe, with greater inequality between - and within - rich and poor nations, and with the deepening climate crisis, is in profound need of wise and prudent governments. Therefore, it is right that should pray for the members of Dáil Éireann, as our TDs begin to exercise their political office.

Even if our land is experiencing a time to unprecedented revenue flows, our expectations of politics and government must be tempered with realism. That said, we can expect from our politicians a commitment to the highest standards of public life, a sincere commitment to serving the common good and a prioritisation of the needs of the most vulnerable. Further, and especially at the beginning of a period of government, we need to draw attention to those long-term, strategic projects, vital for the flourishing of our land, and for the wellbeing of all who live here. Few of these are 'vote-getters': water, transport infrastructure, sustainable healthcare, the security of our nation, the 'green transition.' Even if they are not always to the fore of political debate, that does not render them any less vital for everyone in our country. Gan amhras, tagann na Teachtaí Dála go dtí Teach Laighean chun fadhbanna a gcomhludair áitiúla a rêiteach ach guímid go mbeidh leas an phobail i gcoitinne an tosaíocht is mó acu.

For our own part as Christians, and as citizens, this is also a moment to reflect on our own responsibilities to support what is right and assert what is good. Active citizens in a flourishing civil society are no less important than the

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institutions of government in securing the well-being of the people.

As we prepare for Christmas, the celebration of our Saviour's birth, we take heart from the hope that His birth heralds (see Eph 1:8), and the confidence of our God in "what his hand has made." (see Isa 66:2). Each day we pray the Our Father; we pray each day for the coming of God's Kingdom, a way of living in which "justice shall flourish and peace till the moon fails," (Psalm 71(72):7). May we pray then that our civic institutions may be open to God's Holy Spirit in their service of justice and peace.

In that spirit, I ask that parishes and faith communities include a prayer for those who will form the new Dáil among the prayers of intercession at Masses next weekend, and that all of us who trust in God's providence and closeness, may continue to keep our public representatives before the Lord as they perform their important public duty in the years ahead.

Speaking to the soul

Short reading and a prayer - daily on this site

Church News Ireland

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