

Weekly Message from Fr William for Fourth Sunday of Advent 20th December 2020

Dear People of St Mary's

On this Fourth Sunday of Advent we stand on the threshold of Christmas. And Bishop Marcus invites us to be more aware than ever this year not just of Christmas Day, but of the full season of Christmas, that begins on Christmas Day and extends for many days of joyful celebration.

In particular he's inviting us to be more aware than ever of what we call the Christmas Octave – the Eight Days of Christmas that begins on Christmas Day and culminates on the Eighth Day, the Feast of Mary, Mother of God (1st Jan each year).

The Christmas Octave is full of special Feast Days, like the Feast of Stephen (26th December), and the Feast of the Holy Innocents (28th December). What each of these days has in common is that they are all a continuation of the celebration of the Christ's birth. Bishop Marcus is inviting us to celebrate the full Christmas Octave.

To help us celebrate the Christmas Octave this year, and to give more information on the Christmas Octave, he has commissioned two publications that I've put on the website. *Gloria in Excelsis* – 'eight days of prayers and reflections and activities bringing the Christmas Octave into your home', and a Christmas Octave booklet for younger parishioners. You'll find both of these via links on the home page.

The promotion of the Christmas Octave this year is to give parishes the scope to spread the celebration of Christmas across all eight days due to the reduced capacity in our churches, for those who want to celebrate mass in-church. So you'll see on the bulletin three opportunities to celebrate Christmas Mass in-church across the octave, spaced out across the octave to allow the church to recover from any possible covid contamination on surfaces or in the air. And if there's demand for in-church mass I'll put on a fourth in-church celebration on the Twelfth Day of Christmas.

I personally encourage you to celebrate Christmas Mass online and from home this year. There'll be no singing at in-church masses this Christmas to reduce risk of viral transmission (by aerosol). At the livestream-only masses we'll be able to sing the usual Christmas carols. The music group are putting recordings together to lead us. And celebrating mass online and at home is the safest way of celebrating mass this Christmas, keeping you safe, and keeping other people safe. See bulletin for the full Octave of Christmas calendar, and how each mass will be celebrated. Every mass will be a Christmas mass.

So as Christmas breaks upon us with our Midnight Mass let's celebrate a big Christmas this year, not just on Christmas Day but right through the Octave.



Fourth Sunday of Advent – Sunday 20th December 2020