

Weekly Message from Fr William for Third Sunday of Advent 2021

Dear People of St Mary's, excuse a 2-page message this week – a lot to convey.

Parish take-up on Wednesday was fantastic for our day in Synod 2021-2022. I was so pleased at our turnout. The facilitators were also really impressed by our turnout and how well we responded to the questions, how well we took in each other's responses, and how well we engaged with the whole process. I was really proud of our parish. I understand there will be feedback in due course, and there are links on the website homepage about what happens next. Although it still goes by its original title Synod of Bishops 14th General Assembly, this synod has been opened up to the whole church – a first! I took photos of the event – engagement and responses – and might try and get some up on the website. Let me know if you'd rather your photo wasn't published.

I began these weekly messages to you in March 2020 when churches were closed, to keep in touch with you, and to keep you posted about what's happening in the parish, especially Mass provision. We took it one week at a time due to the unpredictability of the pandemic. But just now I think I need to look two weeks ahead, and get Mass provision in place for Christmas, primarily to give the music department something to go on, and time to plan and rehearse.

Following consultation with the PPC, I want to continue with the recommendation from Bishop Marcus last year that we celebrate the birth of our Saviour throughout the Christmas Octave, celebrating the Eight Days of Christmas as a continuation of Christmas Day itself. This is a good thing to do in itself, and an ancient tradition, and very Catholic.

But it means also that we can spread in-church participation across the whole Eight Days, instead of packing everybody into church on the 25th, which is no longer ideal and no longer safe. So please consider opting for any of the Christmas Masses in the Octave as an alternative to 25th December, bearing in mind that the 10am Mass on 25th December will probably still be packed out. I'm not intending to re-introduce advance registration for this or any of the Christmas Masses, so there is still a risk that you might be coming into a packed church if you opt for the 10am Mass on the 25th.

There will in total be eight Christmas Masses in the Christmas Octave, all *L-IC* (Livestream + In-Church). I'll be putting them at a variety of different times during the Octave to hopefully suit everybody. See below for a preview, which I will confirm next Sunday.

There will be no Children's Mass on Christmas Eve. Children are welcome at any of the Christmas Masses throughout the Octave. See below.

Since the last shift in the pandemic I've been making face coverings optional but recommended, especially when singing. From this Sunday 12th December face coverings will be mandatory in all places of worship. Guidance from the Bishops' Conference recommends that the worship leader continues to be exempt, and also Ministers of the Word when proclaiming the Word. I will continue to accept this guidance. And obviously those who are unable to wear a face covering are exempt.

The choir have valiantly continued with face coverings and I'm sure not everybody finds that easy to sing. So I'm v. grateful for this, and how it has helped to keep everybody safe. The guidance says there is a 'reasonable excuse' for choirs and soloists to remove their face coverings, but I don't think I can accept this guidance for St Mary's. We've known for many months now that singing increases the aerosol transmission of the virus. It's why I've consistently kept my own face covering on whenever I am singing. Recorders and other wind instruments exempt.

Everything else included in this latest guidance from the Bishop's conference I fully accept and we're already following, but it's well worth a read. I'm putting a copy on the website homepage on the link 'Guidance for Churches – December 2021'. It includes 'clarification on the Sunday obligation'. The document referred to as *Honouring Sunday* is already there on the website homepage.

Keep safe! Keep each other safe! And together let's help keep the wider community safe, and the NHS, and the economy, by minimising the risk of viral.

Wilson

Third Sunday of Advent 12th December 2021

OCTAVE OF CHRISTMAS			
Sat 25 Dec	FIRST DAY – NATIVITY OF THE LORD	00.00 Midnight Mass: *L-IC*	
		08.00 Dawn Mass *L-IC*	
		10.00 Day Mass *L-IC*	
Sun 26 Dec	SECOND DAY – HOLY FAMILY	10.00am Mass	*L-IC*
Mon 27 Dec	THIRD DAY – ST JOHN	5.00pm Mass	*L-IC*
Tue 28 Dec	FOURTH DAY – HOLY INNOCENTS	<i>No service</i>	
Wed 29 Dec	FIFTH DAY – ST THOMAS BECKET	7.00pm Mass	*L-IC*
Thu 30 Dec	SIXTH DAY	<i>No service</i>	
Fri 31 Dec	SEVENTH DAY	9.00am Mass	*L-IC*
Sat 1 Jan 2022	OCTAVE DAY – MARY MOTHER OF GOD	10.00am Mass	*L-IC*