



## SCHOOL UPDATES & REMINDERS

### ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS AT ST MARY'S:

Dear Parent/Carer,

This Sunday is the 1<sup>st</sup> of the season of Advent and marks the start of a new Liturgical year in the Catholic Church. In spite of one or two rogue Christmas trees arriving early across Whickham and the surrounding areas, we have intentionally waited to share our plan for Advent and Christmas with you until such a time that we had a stronger understanding of the rules and restrictions imposed upon us as a school and wider community this season. We all desperately want our children to enjoy a faith-filled, joyous Advent and Christmas, and our plan at St Mary's aims to ensure we can all join in the festivities in a safe and appropriate manner. It is essential that, at school, we stick consistently and firmly to the system of controls we have in place so as to give our pupils, staff and families the best possible opportunity to stay healthy and isolation-free during this special time of year. As ever, our focus is on the experience of the children, and on safeguarding our staff taking in to consideration the additional workload they have all taken on throughout this term; I hope you can see that the tweaks and adaptations made this year strike the right balance with regards these shared priorities.

Our theme for the season is, *a Christmas like no other* – an apt reminder that this year will pose for us all a variety of challenges to our 'normal service'. It is, however, humbling to remember that this very Christian festival, above all, serves to remind us of the less-than-ideal start to life faced by our savior, Jesus Christ: born to an unmarried mother, into a family of modest standing, seeking refuge at a time of great need. Inspired by the plight of the Holy Family some two thousand years ago, this season, we will encourage our children to look ahead with hope and optimism, in spite of the obvious limitations currently imposed, safe in the knowledge that Jesus Christ was born to show them how special they are.

We would encourage you all to see this weekend as a marker on which to begin in earnest your preparations towards the wonderful Feast Day of the Nativity of our Lord. At a time when attendance at Mass is restricted, please do all you can to 'stay in touch' with the stories of Advent and to pray daily with your child(ren) – alongside all the other important festive trappings of the man in the red suit – in order that they may learn and live the true meaning of Christmas. We will certainly do our best in school to do the same!

I trust that you will receive the below plan for Advent and Christmas with encouragement, and I look forward to sharing with you some of what we get up to throughout the season over the coming weeks.

Yours in faithful optimism,

Mr J Wheatley  
Headteacher



## PLAN FOR ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS 2020:

“A Christmas like no other.” At a time of uncertainty, isolation, hardship and despair, the story of Jesus’ birth offers for us all a glimmering light of hope. We aim to spread the joy of this message as we journey towards the wonderful feast of Jesus’ Nativity – Christmas Day – on which, we believe, we will each receive the gift of His love anew in our lives. Let us be a beacon of His glorious light in our communities, and the world over, this Christmas. Amen.

### Prayer Garden

With support from the Friends of St Mary’s, we will be transforming our school prayer garden into a Christmas ‘wonderland’ with a stable, nativity scene, Christmas tree and lights. Children will have the opportunity to ‘pay homage’ as part of special class collective worship activities throughout Advent.

### ‘Live the Nativity’

All children in KS1 will spend a day learning about and re-enacting the Nativity story. Classes will take part in a special collective worship and pay homage to our infant king in our Christmas prayer garden. Photos of the children will be shared with parents as a memento of the experience. Our travelling cribs will also be visiting each class in school to help share the joyous story of Jesus’ birth with all our children.

### Christmas Carols

In the last week of term, all our pupils will take part in an ‘open-air’ carol service on the school grounds. All of our classes will record one carol to share with parents/families via the school website as an early Christmas gift to help us all get into the festive mood.

### Christmas Dinner/Christmas Jumpers/Party/Panto Day

Pupils will take part in a day of merriment on **Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> December** with Christmas jumpers (own clothes), classroom parties, Christmas Dinner and a virtual visit to the Panto (hosted by the Northern Stage).

### Christmas Cards and Presents

We would ask that, this year, children do not bring in Christmas cards or presents for friends or staff. Instead we would ask that you consider, as a family, supporting our school Advent appeal.

### Advent Appeal

This season, we will be supporting some wonderful charitable causes funded by the Parish Gift for Life group. One such cause is the Diocesan Refugee project, which provides food and financial aid to individuals and families currently residing in Gateshead and Newcastle as they await notification of an application for asylum. The majority of these members of our communities have fled war, conflict and political unrest – not unlike the Holy Family after Jesus’ birth. Unlike UK citizens, these individuals are not supported by the Government, and rely upon charities such as this one for food and shelter.

We have set a target of £1000, and will be asking for online donations (please no cash or cheques) via SIMS Pay (<https://www.simsagora.co.uk/Home>) ‘Events’ – the system used for dinner money/trips etc. If you need help setting up your SIMS Pay account (especially families in Reception Class who may have not used the system before, please contact Mrs Noble in the school office. *Please note, there is a very small service fee for payments (example: for a £20 donation, there would be a fee of 26p).*

In order that we may raise as much as possible for this wonderful cause, all the events planned this year will be free of charge, and we will not be asking for donations to the school fund or the Friends of St Mary’s.

**OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD:**

Completed shoeboxes for the Operation Christmas Child appeal can now be sent into school from Monday – and must be in school by **Friday 4<sup>th</sup> December**. Please don't forget – where possible – to pay for the postage of the shoebox via an online donation (<https://www.samaritans-purse.org.uk/what-we-do/follow-your-box-donation/>).

**REMINDER – PARISH GIFT FOR LIFE APPEALS:**

The Parish Gift for Life is an umbrella group which oversees a number of charitable projects supported by the Parish of Our Lady and St Philip Neri – both abroad (Kenya, India) and at home. This year they are selling some beautiful Christmas cards and 2021 calendars showcasing the photography skills of members of the parish. Cards are priced at £3.50 for a pack of 8 and calendars at £4 – both with free delivery to your door by one of the GfL team! To order, please email [giftforlife20@gmail.com](mailto:giftforlife20@gmail.com) or phone 07896096747. Please do consider supporting the charitable aims of the group by making an order, and feel free to tell your friends and family to do so too! Thank you!

