



St Joseph's Catholic Church
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RC Archdiocese of Birmingham charity
(No 234216)



Holy Family (B) 27.12.2020

Sat 26 Dec 6.00pm Elaine Barry GE
St Stephen, first martyr
Sun 27 Dec 9.00am (Bampton) Phil Rice GE
Holy Family 10.15am Olive Harcourt & Marie Drew RIP
Mon 28 Dec 12.00noon
Holy Innocents
Tue 29 Dec 12.00
St Thomas Becket (850 years)
Wed 30 Dec 12.00
Thu 31 Dec 12.00
Fri 1 Jan 2021 12.00 (Carterton)
6.00pm (Burford)
Sat 2 Jan 6.00pm
Sun 3 Jan 9.00am (Carterton)
10.15am

The **assisted suicide** lobby have launched a large campaign to put pressure on the Government to reconsider the legalisation of assisted suicide. It is vital that it is clear to the Government that the public want them to continue to hold strong **against** this pressure from assisted suicide campaigners and **reject** their demands. Right To Life UK have set up an easy to use tool which enables you to email your MP. It only takes 30 seconds to email your MP by visiting the link below:
<https://righttolife.org.uk/StopAssistedSuicide>

There is NO OBLIGATION to come to Mass at present. In view of the move to tier 4 or the greater infectiousness of the new strain of the virus or for some other reason, you may judge it would be inadvisable to do so. If so please stay at home.

Thank you for so many cards and gifts, (many alcoholic), and your Christmas offerings. 2021 better be good! Happy New Year!

Please pray for those who have died: Phil Hocknell, Bridget Valentine, Rodney Forder, Joe Lambe, Pauline Leverett, Olive Harcourt, Christopher Murphy, Joan Clements, Monica Owen, Kate Gargan, Anne Jennings, Angela Overton, Marie Drew, John Robinson, John Joseph O'Neill, Michael Jackson, Rose Lane, Mary Hannah, Robert Eszenyi, David Gotelier, Sue Hand.
Anniversaries: May & Hubert Fowler, Mary & Jim Fleming, Sonia Bilozir, Gertrude Davis, Olive Arnold, Anthony Roca, Samuel Justin.
Please pray for the sick, housebound and those in the armed forces suffering mentally and physically from the effects of war: Pat Hay, Anne Gillick, Wendy Murray, Catherine Robinson, Peter Garfoot, Peter Doran, Lukasz Konieczny, Brendan Reynolds, Marie Whelan, Brendan Farrow, Dominic Martin, Phil Rice, Natalia Romanek, John Middleton, Pat Haddock, Mario Bugeja, Justin Family, Dom Michael Phillips, Kathleen Fagan, Jen Thomas, Ann Heaton, Celia McCauley, Pat Hand, Elaine Barry, Rodrigo Bantug, John Pollock, Bernard Curtin, Richard, Nkechi, Celia Fairbrother, Annette Steele.

Parish Bank details for Standing Orders
Natwest, 23 High Street, Witney, OX28 6HW
Account: St Joseph's Catholic Church
Account No: 43009530 Sort code: 60 24 60

Aluminium and metal cans
There remains a substantial parish debt of about £160,000 to pay off. We can sell alu tins (and non-alu tins) if you collect them: we need sackfuls. **All** metal tins can be turned to good use, but please separate them into alu and non-alu to save us sorting them!

No homily this weekend in view of the Archbishop's Pastoral Letter

Christmas Homily

The Oxen, Thomas Hardy.

Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock.

“Now they are all on their knees,”

An elder said as we sat in a flock

By the embers in hearthside ease.

We pictured the meek mild creatures where

They dwelt in their strawy pen,

Nor did it occur to one of us there

To doubt they were kneeling then.

So fair a fancy few would weave

In these years! Yet, I feel,

If someone said on Christmas Eve,

“Come; see the oxen kneel,

“In the lonely barton by yonder coomb

Our childhood used to know,”

I should go with him in the gloom,

Hoping it might be so.

Thomas Hardy’s poem The Oxen appeared on the 24 December 1915 in The Times. Not just any Christmas Eve. The second Christmas of a war supposed to have ended more than a year previously. The suffering of those in the misery and mud of trench warfare was the context for Hardy’s contemporaries, even though the only reference to the war is in the phrase *in these years*. Hardy’s mother had told him the well-known folk tale about how the descendants of those first animal witnesses to the birth of Jesus would kneel every year on Christmas night on the stroke of midnight in reverent homage and remembrance. If the first readers of the poem were predisposed by the bad news from the front to hope and believe in the mystery and sanctity of this night (a long English literary tradition going back at least to Shakespeare and Milton), despite the rigours of 2020 we may believe too. Beyond harsh economic times, beyond philosophies and psychologies claiming that human minds are programmed to know themselves better than things and can never get to things in themselves, we might accept with Hardy the invitation to come and see the oxen kneel. Perhaps the clarity that belongs to clear and distinct ideas comes from God’s light being shed upon them? Under the wrapping paper we may hope to find something tangible; and the best part of a gift is the loving intention which lies behind it.

Each of us in different ways have been on a testing journey **in this year**, a year many of us would not want to repeat. A year in its way, as testing of resilience, even as 1915. The presence of an ox or ass is not mentioned in the Gospels. It is Isaiah’s prophecy that places them at the scene. ‘An ox knows its owner, and a donkey its master’s crib.’ (Isa 1:3). But they are now definitely part of the scene in popular imagination. The word “crib” is the same word used by Luke for the place where Mary lays her firstborn.

Children disclose the meaning of Christmas in the breadth of their capacity to wonder and imagine. What lies behind human creativity and inventiveness is imagination and wonder,

perhaps the supreme human talents. We may permit imagination and wonder free rein at Christmas. Children help us in that. Dreams energise us and make life worth living. Imagination has a role in our prayers and can energise them too.

God's imagination leads his Son to become a human being. In doing homage to him like the shepherds, the wise men and yes the very animals around the manger, we begin to open up a world which we have only dreamed about so far. Adults may feel a little self-conscious kneeling at the crib. You don't have to kneel there, but do reach out to Jesus at his nativity.

This difficult year has brought worry and sickness to many; pain, deprivation and depression of isolation to others. The Holy Family knew painful experiences including being isolated in a foreign country when fleeing King Herod. May we experience, even if we are sadly separated geographically, the healing love of families and friends this Christmas.

