

Good afternoon

Please find attached the Sunday Message this week from Fr Peter on the last Sunday of Advent which can also be found on our website. www.rcstortford.org.uk. There are lots of other news items and Advent resources on there too, so please do take a look.

It's been one of 'those' weeks in my household, you know the type where you find yourself worrying about things that you simply have absolutely no control over and anxiously waking up in the early hours with a million and one things ticking at supersonic speed through your mind and not being able to 'turn your head off'. Every Friday, when I sit down to type my usual 'rambling' email, I never know what is going to appear on the page, at a time when there isn't a huge amount of news about. So, since March, I have done my best to keep you mildly entertained with whatever, no matter how random, has been going on. I've probably even annoyed or bored quite a few of you, with my ridiculous anecdotes on everything from flying ants, ancient Christmas puddings and my childhood fascination with doorbells! If I have, I do apologise...

For some strange reason, at 3am this morning, I was woken up with the carol, 'O little Town of Bethlehem' rolling around my head like a thumping drum and I have absolutely no idea why! I was lying in bed trying desperately to remember the words as I tossed and turned, but the only lyrics which were soundly stuck on repeat mode in my brain were, 'the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight'. I found myself starting to try and quietly hum, then sing the words, getting frustrated with not being able to remember them from the very beginning, all the while being accompanied by the snoring percussion emanating from my blissfully unaware, harmonious husband. In the end, feeling completely annoyed with myself that I could not go back to sleep, I decided to just get up, go downstairs and sit in the softly dimmed light of my kitchen to research the words along with a comforting cup of tea. Probably suffering from a mild form of sleep deprivation, I couldn't even remember the title, so had to google the lyrics that I could recall, typing 'Hope and fears of all the years' into my now nocturnal laptop and was surprised to see quite an interesting article written all about this very well-known carol.

The carol was apparently written in 1868 by Phillip Brooks and was inspired by his visit to Bethlehem where he was struck by the stillness and darkness of the town alongside the hopes and joys of the people celebrating Jesus' birth. The article went on to talk about the fear, worry and anxiety that we are currently experiencing today in the middle of the pandemic and the uncertainty surrounding what the future holds, but also included a welcome reminder that something amazing often happens in a situation of great hardship, challenge and fear. Like many of us today, all of the key characters in the nativity scene at Jesus' birth faced fear and uncertainty too, and all received the same message from God, 'Do not be afraid' The same similar message of 'Do not be afraid' is written countless times in the Bible and is also mentioned in the Gospel reading this weekend.

Whilst drinking my tea and still feeling a tad miffed with myself and my current situation, I casually looked back through my mobile phone at the numerous texts, photos, cheeky jokes and random videos shared with me. I remembered that I had received a very kind message via WhatsApp from a much loved, close and trusted friend a few days ago. However, I was slightly taken aback a bit as I scrolled back through their message and had a closer look, because at the very end it simply read, 'Fear not!!' ...

BOOKING FOR WEEKDAY AND WEEKEND MASS - Despite now being in Tier 3, we are still currently permitted to celebrate Mass together. Our 'Booking system' can be found on our new website under the 'Events' section. Up to 2 seats can be booked on line. <https://rcstortford.org.uk/events/> All other bookings are to be made via the Parish office please (Mon-Fri 9am-3pm). Bookings are released usually 10 days in advance. If the web site shows that Bookings are 'closed', it does not mean that there are not any seats left, it means that the booking is not yet 'open'. When there are no seats left, it states, 'Booking full'. Please do not attend if you are experiencing any Covid-19 symptoms.

CHRISTMAS MASS BALLOT - The ballot was independently drawn in a very fair way last week and all available seats have now been allocated. Tickets have been created by Fr Peter, some will be hand delivered over the next few days and others already posted out today. This ticket **must** be brought with you on the night please as it shows the pew number allocated to you, along with your name and the number of seats booked. The number of Parishioners applying for Mass outweighed the limited number of places that we have available in the Church under the current Government restrictions. We know that those of you who were not successful in the ballot will be very disappointed. We too are saddened that we are not able to accommodate you this year, along with the large number of fellow parishioners and visitors that we are used to having at Christmas time. For those who have been allocated a place, if for any reason you are not able to attend, please do let us know as soon as possible so that your place/s can be reallocated to another parishioner.

If you were successful in the ballot and have not received your ticket by Wednesday, please contact the office.

MASS TIMES OVER CHRISTMAS - Please remember that all four Masses, (Christmas 'eve 5pm and 7pm, Christmas Day 9am and 11am) will also be live streamed. There will also be a special streaming only Midnight Mass at midnight too.

PRIVATE PRAYER AND A VISIT TO THE CRIB - St Joseph's will be open on Christmas 'eve from 10am till 4pm and everyone will be most welcome to come, pray quietly and to visit the Crib with their family . Between 3pm-4pm we hope to have music outside the Church also.

Fr Peter and Fr Antonio will be available during the day to hear confessions. Please contact the office to make an appointment.

Christmas Eve - 5pm Mass - *Ticketed event*

Christmas Eve - 7pm Mass - *Ticketed event*

Christmas Eve Midnight Mass with Readings starting at 11.30pm - *Livestreamed only*

Christmas Day 9am Mass - *Ticketed event*

Christmas Day 11am Mass - *Ticketed event*

St Stephens Day - 26 December

10am Mass - Seats can be booked via the website

Sunday 27 December

9am Mass - Seats can be booked via the website

11am Mass - live streamed only

5pm Mass at Holy Cross

Monday 28 December

10am Mass- Seats can be booked via the website

Tuesday 29 December- Thursday 31 December

9.30am Mass - Seats can be booked via the website

Friday 1 January 2021

10am Mass -Seats can be booked via the website

CHILDRENS CRIB REFLECTION - From 3pm this Sunday we shall have the start of our 'Children's Crib reflection' beautifully presented by Sophie. This has been recorded and the video uploaded to our livestream link. If you visit www.churchservices.tv/bishopsstortford or visit via our web site, please scroll down the page to 'Watch videos' section and you will see a tab entitled ' featured videos'. Each day at 3pm a new video will be uploaded when a figure is added to our nativity scene especially for the Children. There will also be a series of reflections for adults on our website too.

VIRTUAL CAROL SERVICE WITH READINGS

On Tuesday 22nd December at 6pm we will be uploading our pre-recorded ' Virtual Parish Carol service' onto our live stream video section and also on to our website. It features Parishioners from St Joseph's, Holy Cross and Most Holy Redeemer with singing, reading and reflections. You are in for a treat!

This has been an extraordinary year and one that we could never have expected. Please God, this time next year, we will be able, once again, to gather together as we have always done before. Thank you for your understanding.

THANKYOU VERY MUCH - to the Dad's group for hosting the last session of the Sycamore Advent course on Wednesday and to our fab team at Holy Cross who organised the Ecumenical Journey to Bethlehem on Saturday for the Children of our parish supported by Fr Peter and Rev Steve Bate at St Andrews.

ST JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL ADMISSIONS 2021-22 - If your child was born between 1st September 2016 and 31st August 2017, you can apply for a Primary School place to start in September 2021. The application process opens **2nd November 2020** and closes on the **15th January 2021**.

CERTIFICATE OF CATHOLIC PRACTICE- Applicants for St Joseph's School for RECEPTION places in 2021/22 should download an application for a Certificate of Catholic Practice which can be found on the parish website. Once completed it should then be posted through the letter box of No 3 Windhill marked for Fr Peter's attention **with a stamped addressed envelope please**. The certificate will then be posted to you. No personal collection of the certificate is permitted. The school deadline is 15/1/2021

ZOOM - Our 9am Sunday Zoom session still continues this week for those unable to attend Mass with singing from 8.45am. Thank you to everyone who still continues to generously give their time and talents to make this happen each week.

Topic: Family Mass via Zoom during lock-down (music starting at 8:45am)

Time: December 20 2020 08:30 AM London

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89508074176>

Meeting ID: 895 0807 4176

Link to Calendar invite is parishioners want to add it to their diary.

One tap mobile:

+442030512874,,89508074176# United Kingdom

Dial-in by phone:

0203 051 2874

The numbers are standard rate numbers (not free unless you have inclusive minutes), but they are not premium numbers.

PARISH E- CHRISTMAS CARDS - It's still not too late to use our Christmas E-cards. We have 6 different designs available on line. Thank you to our creatives, Fr Peter, Mike Carroll, Martin Curran and Monica Jacobs for kindly donating their creations and to Fr Antonio and Sophie Sullivan for helping to choose the final 6 cards. Please do take a look! Thank you to everyone who has supported us so far.

<https://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/RCStortfordChristmasCards>

ST JOSEPH'S SCHOOL - hope to raise £100k towards the new school building and need your help please! Click on the link below to donate any amount from £5 to £1k. St Joseph's school began in 1909. Your contributions will benefit the many children who will continue to pass through its doors now and in the future. Thank you.

[St. Joseph's New School \(virginmoneygiving.com\)](https://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/StJosephsNewSchool)

PARISH OFFICE HOURS OVER CHRISTMAS - The Parish Office will be closed from Christmas Day until Monday 4th January 2021 and all emails/ non urgent requests will be responded to upon Debbie's return. If your enquiry is urgent please leave a message on the answerphone 01279 654063 which will be listened to daily. Thank you

PARISHIONERS OF THE WEEK - A huge thank you to Alison, Charlotte, Joel Sophie and Tessa who have helped to steward and clean after morning Mass this week at extremely short notice. Thank you SO much! x

To finish off, it seems only right to leave you with every verse of my insomniacs' top ten of favourite carols ' O little Town of Bethlehem', just in case you might need it too...! The words of which are rather poignant and lovely..

*O little town of Bethlehem
How still we see thee lie
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting Light
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight*

*For Christ is born of Mary
And gathered all above
While mortals sleep, the angels keep
Their watch of wondering love
O morning stars together
Proclaim the holy birth
And praises sing to God the King
And Peace to men on earth*

*How silently, how silently
The wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of His heaven.
No ear may hear His coming,
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive him still,
The dear Christ enters in.*

*O holy Child of Bethlehem
Descend to us, we pray
Cast out our sin and enter in
Be born to us today
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell
O come to us, abide with us
Our Lord Emmanuel*

I hope that you all have a very happy and healthy week.

Best wishes
Debbie