

2nd Sunday After the Nativity

Catholic Parishes of St Mary's, Bridgend, Our Lady Star of the Sea, Porthcawl
& St Joseph's of Arimathea, Kenfig Hill

www.catholicchurchbridgend.org.uk

www.catholicchurchporthcawl.org.uk

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A Parish of the Archdiocese of Cardiff: 1177272

Please note that Masses are to remain live stream only until further notice.
Please keep an eye on the website and Facebook for developments. Stay safe. Take care. God Bless.

Date	Mass Times	Mass Intention
Sat 2 nd January	Mass 4.30 pm live stream only Vigil Mass 6.00pm live stream only	Pat Whare (Mary & Gareth) <i>Golden Book & People of the Parish, our frontline & NHS workers</i>
Sun 3 rd January <i>2nd Sunday after the Nativity</i>	Mass 10.00am live stream only Mass 11.00am* Mass 6.00pm*	People of the Parish, our frontline & NHS workers Marek Juraszek (I Ford) & Josephine Greenslade Sean Connick RIP (M McAweney)
Mon 4 th January	No Mass Today	
Tues 5 th January	Mass 10.00am live stream only	Jim McGowan (Mary & Gareth)
Wed 6 th January <i>The Epiphany of the Lord</i>	Mass 7.00pm live stream only	Special Intention Benji Vista (A Quinn)
Thurs 7 th January	Mass 10.00am live stream only	Luigi Cavalli (MP Cavalli)
Fri 8 th January	<i>1.00pm Requiem Mass</i> <i>Cristina Bisagni</i>	INVITATION ONLY
Sat 9 th January	Mass 4.30 pm live stream only Vigil Mass 6.00 pm live stream only	People of the Parish, our frontline & NHS workers People of the Parish, our frontline & NHS workers
Sun 10 th January <i>Baptism of the Lord</i>	Mass 10.00am live stream only Mass 11.00am live stream only Mass 6.00pm live stream only	Ray Mackey (Ladies Guild) Mary Cousins (Pauline & John Lockett) Celia Young anniversary (Denis Gaffney)

Mass Intentions – these are now full well into next year. If you do have any queries please contact the office.

Please continue to remember all those who are sick and housebound in your prayers:

Mary Bryan, Anne Colson, Ryan Dixon, Angela Ellis, Barbara Fentham, Elsie Freeth, Catherine Grills, Margaret Jarvis, John Lewis, Mary Maguire, Robert Morrison, Maureen Pritchard, Marcus Rossini and David Watkins.

We pray for the sick and housebound of our parish, our friends, relatives and those who have

asked for our prayers: Anna, Benji Vista, Conall & Siobhan, Eddie, Emma, Erica, Garry, Helle, Jamie, Keith, Margaret, Maria, Martin Ginnelly, Mary Farndale, Mary Thornton, Mike, Peter, Vince Chapman, Lloyd Woodroff and Anthony George. (Please email bridgend@rcadc.org if you would like to add a name to the list).



'When a profound silence covered all things and night was in the middle of its course, your all-powerful Word, O Lord, bounded from heaven's royal throne.'
(Entrance Antiphon Second Sunday after the Nativity.)



Eternal Rest

In your mercy, please pray for the repose of the souls of Cristina Bisagni, Tom Sheridan, Patrick Maoloney and Anne-Marie Gwynne

Requiem Mass for Cristina Bisagni will be held at 1.00pm on Friday 8th January in St Mary's
Requiem Mass for Patrick Maoloney will be held at 12.00 noon on 13th January in Our Lady Star of the Sea.

Requiem Mass for Tom Sheridan will be held at 10.45am on 14th January in Our Lady Star of the Sea.
Due to COVID-19 restrictions, attendance is limited to family members and invited guests only.

*Please keep their families in your thoughts and prayers at this sad and difficult time.
May they rest in peace. Amen.*

Parish Prayer

Heavenly Father, who sent the ten plagues to free his children, and protected them by the blood of the Lamb, bless all those affected by the Coronavirus.

Encourage and strengthen those who seek a cure.

Protect all who care or work in the NHS.

Send your Holy Angels to guard us and bring us safely through this time of trial. May your Holy Mother care for us as she did for the sick child Jesus.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Our Lady of Lourdes. Pray for us.

St. Raphael Archangel. Pray for us.

St Luke, the Physician. Pray for us.

St. Bernadette. Pray for us.

We Can Help

Do you know of anyone who is struggling with food poverty?

If so we can help.

Ring 07534 095766

Act of Spiritual Communion

St Alphonsus Liguori.

My Jesus,

I believe that you are present in the Most Holy Sacrament.

I love you above all things, and I desire to receive you into my soul.

Since I cannot at this moment receive you sacramentally, come spiritually into my heart.

I embrace you as if you were already there and unite myself wholly to you.

Never permit me to be separated from you.

Amen.



Marriage Care

Despite the challenges presented by Covid-19 Marriage Care, in partnership with The Cardiff Archdiocese, continues to provide support to local couples at all stages of their relationship.

By moving both their **Counselling & Marriage Preparation Services** to webcam delivery Marriage Care have been able to continue providing both services, in a timely manner, without having to worry about lockdowns or social distancing.

Their **marriage preparation** and support service enable couples to nurture faithful and fruitful marriages that last, as they draw on Catholic teaching and contemporary research to help couples focus on the quality of their relationship with each other.

Through their **relationship counselling service**, they accompany, with compassion and practical wisdom, couples who find themselves in need of support on their journey. Recognising that the coronavirus pandemic has both increased stress and can lead to financial difficulties they remain unique in asking couples who come for counselling only to pay what they can afford, reflecting their commitment to support those most in need.

If you need to make use of, or want to know more about, either of these services please visit Marriage Care's website at www.marriagecare.org.uk

Focus on Mary – Fr Michael Hall.



The Newborn 1648, Georges de La Tour (1593 – 1652), Oil on canvas. 29.9 x 35.8 inch.
Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rennes, France. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

The Light has come: Christmas and Epiphany through Art.

And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. (Luke 2:7)

Georges de La Tour was a French Baroque artist who spent most of his professional life in the Duchy of Lorraine. He became a master painter whose works were collected by several French kings. In the 1630s La Tour began to develop his **nocturnes** or evening mood pictures. He would portray a few biblical figures, or sometimes just one person, magically caught in the light and shadow of a flickering candle flame. These religious chiaroscuro scenes are stylistically similar to Caravaggio in both his treatment of subject and colour. La Tour died in 1652, probably of the plague but his legacy is one of enduring beauty.

Scholars disagree on the meaning of this painting's title '**The Newborn**' or '**Newborn Child**' – painted in 1648. Is it a Nativity scene or a domestic scene? What we see first is a young mother gazing intently at her swaddled infant, illuminated by a candle held by an older woman. De La Tour personally suffered from a history of family infant mortality – he had 10 children and only three survived into adulthood. Perhaps it is a window onto guarded grief that we sense in this group.

There is undoubtedly an introspective mood, and there are enough signs to suggest that it is The Nativity. The artist's brushstrokes depict the sheer fragility of a newborn baby whose life still hangs in the balance, yet open up the eyes of faith in the light of the Christ. Mary's own life, given to God in one act becomes a shrine, a new Ark of a new Covenant, conveyed in her triangular form enclosing her son. Her story is one of vulnerability and self-sacrifice. She not only holds her baby boy and learns the art of motherhood, but holds God made man in her loving embrace. Here heaven and earth meet in a sacred encounter. Instead of her traditional blue, La Tour robes her in red. Red for bloodshed. Jesus is born to die, and she will witness that death.

La Tour captures a moment in time before the heartbreak. An inner realisation and reflection of the scale of this pure gift. The canvas emphasises this act of contemplation echoing Luke 2:19 '**But Mary treasured all these things in her heart...**' .. Yet who is the matronly figure with Mary? Is it St Anne her own mother? Although St Anne isn't mentioned in any of the Gospels, her name as Joachim's wife appears in the apocryphal writings from the 2nd century onwards. It was Pope Sixtus IV who introduced the devotion to St Anne in 1481. In art she is often depicted as Mary's teacher as well as her mother. Here we delight in

the maternal genealogy of Jesus joining grandmother and mother in their homage to the mystery of this new life.

The painting appears to be deceptively simple in composition. Only on close inspection do we see its complexity. The intense red of Mary's dress is achieved by tiny dots of colour of varying hue, and similarly, St Anne's lilac garment is almost pixilated in effect. Just as the ambience is concentrated on a moment of adoration and silence, so also the colours focus on a limited but concentrated palette so that the details, where we encounter them, are more powerful in their revelation. Mary's collar is elaborately decorated, her fingers beautifully defined as she carefully holds her baby, and both her and St Anne's profiles are painted with an exceptional delicacy of line. St Anne's hat is textured and her chin given weight through age.

Turning to the candlelight half-covered by St Anne's hands, its light becomes a blessing and protection towards her grandson revealing the Christ Child's own light. There is a double revelation here of the divine light and of the Virgin Birth. Transcendence and immanence enfolded in one small bundle. Mary's hands are so careful in their holding of Jesus, her fingers lightly embracing his weight and purpose. They reflect reverence before the incarnation, the revelation of the holy in the ordinary.

A deep calm becomes evident the more we look at this painting in the figures so focused and still. The overall impression is of a more modern style of art since no other Nativity at this time employs or arouses such exquisite gentleness of form or grace. Wonder and silence are all we can offer in return. We are invited to simply gaze – we dare not make a sound or move a muscle. Faith is wrapped up as perfect gift and tender truth.

This image helps us to draw close to Jesus, but not just at his birth. With his tight swaddling he prefigures the shroud at death. Bound like a mummy and with eyes closed, he is prepared for what is to come. Without any other symbols in this darkened room, the newborn child becomes timeless. Jesus is

Sun, moon and stars: The role of Mary in the Book of Revelation



Throughout the Christian centuries, the Apocalypse – the “Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ to John” – has been a happy hunting ground for heretics and others who wish to gain biblical backing for their predictions for the future.

It is perhaps for this reason that the Catholic Church “protects” its Mass goes by severely limiting the number of times it uses the Apocalypse in its lectionary. Safe, exhortative sections of the “Letters to the Seven Churches”, the vision of the Lamb Who Was Slain, and the All Saints’ day reading of the holy host gathered before the throne of God.

Even in this season of Advent, when one might have thought the readings about the “last things”, the second coming of Christ and the new heaven and new earth would be particularly relevant, there is an absence of the Apocalypse.

But there is one other passage that has regular – (or at least annual) – exposure. The vision of the Woman in Revelation Chapter 12 takes its place in the readings for the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in August.

Thus, any modern Catholic, hearing of the woman standing on the moon, and clothed with the sun, would immediately think of Mary. This would be a surprise to some of the teachers of the past – for example, the Venerable Bede and St Thomas Aquinas – for whom the Woman very clearly signifies the Church. Protestant interpreters of the Apocalypse, who would shy away from advanced views of either Mary or the Church, see the Woman as depicting Israel.

Like so many of the images in the Book of Revelation, the appearance of the Woman might have several layers of meaning.

Two points might support this modern Catholic view.

First, this is St John who is having this vision, and we should recall how Our Lord refers to his mother in St John's gospel. He calls her "woman" at the wedding at Cana – "woman, why are you bothering me about the wine list?" Then he speaks from the cross – "woman, behold your son" – as he hands her over to the care of St John.

Second, in that word, that pregnant word, "woman", St John indicates that we are to view Our Lady as the New Eve, the one who symbolises and sums up in herself both Israel and the Church. Since Mary is not only the Mother and icon of the Church, but also the daughter and fruition of God's people Israel, the modern Catholic interpretation includes both of the others.

Chapter 12 sits roughly in the middle of the Apocalypse, among the woes and calamities, the broken seals and trumpet blasts that the book contains. Chapter divisions were quite a late addition to the biblical text, and many feel that the last verse of chapter 11 is worth including to give the context. And so we read:

Then the temple of God in heaven opened, and the ark of the covenant could be seen inside his temple. Then came flashes of lightning, peals of thunder and an earthquake and violent hail.

And now, in heaven, appears a great portent; a woman that wore the sun for her mantle, with the moon under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars about her head. She had a child in her womb, and was crying out as she travailed, in great pain of her delivery. Then a second portent appears; a great dragon, fiery red, with seven heads and ten horns... And he stood fronting the woman who was in childbirth, ready to swallow up the child as soon as she bore it. She bore a son, the son who is to herd the nations like sheep with a crook of iron; and this child of hers was caught up to God, right up to his throne, while the mother fled into the wilderness, where God had prepared a place of refuge for her, and there ... she is to be kept safe.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us, "In Sacred Scripture, God speaks to us in a human way. To interpret Scripture correctly, the reader must be attentive to what the human authors truly wanted to affirm, and to what God wanted to reveal to us by their words." (§109) Further, "In order to discover the sacred authors' intention, the reader must take into account the conditions of their time and culture, the literary genres in use at that time, and the modes of feeling, speaking and narrating then current."

So let us look more closely at how this woman is described in this first-century text: clothed in the sun, standing on the moon, and with a crown of twelve stars on her head. We might suggest that this speaks, both then and now, of the triumph of Our Lady and her Divine Son, over all that is natural and supernatural. It speaks powerfully of Mary's role in the Incarnation, and offers a theological counterpoint to our beloved "Christmas Story", highlighting not only the glory of Mary, but also the intense vulnerability of the Woman and Child as he is born into the world.

Somebody picking up this book in the first century and reading these verses would have heard a little bell ringing in their head – perhaps a whole peal of bells. And depending on their background, they would have understood different things.

If their background was Jewish, they would immediately have thought of the first few chapters of the book of Genesis – the ones that deal with the creation of the world. Because we read there that when God created light, he gathered some of it together to make a great light to shine by day, and a smaller light to rule the night – the sun and the moon. (And, by the way, he made the stars as well.)

The first chapter of Genesis tells God's people in their sixth-century BC captivity that however bad their current circumstances, their God is in control. Their captives, the Babylonians, were ruled by the sun, moon, and stars. Well, our God made them!

And now this heavenly revelation in the Apocalypse says that there is a woman, and her child, who share in this divine mastery over the cosmic powers.

If the reader came from a Greek or Roman background, different bells would have rung. Listen to this account of the birth of Apollo, the god traditionally associated with the sun:

“Leto had become pregnant by Zeus. The dragon Python foresaw that this child, a son, would replace him as ruler over the oracle at Delphi. He sought to kill the child at birth, but the north wind and Poseidon came to help Leto. She gave birth to Apollo and Artemis, and Apollo slew the dragon.”

That first-century Hellenist would have got the message. Here is a woman who, because of the son she bears, is greater than the gods of the sun and the moon. What has happened in history – the incarnation of the Word of God – has brought into our history what previously only existed in myth. The glory of the noonday sun is now a fitting mantle for this heavenly woman. And this woman stands on the moon. Archbishop Fulton Sheen said that Our Lady is like the moon, because her glory is reflected glory. But this passage goes even further. The moon is the great symbol of Artemis, whom the Romans called Diana. And one of the most famous shrines to Artemis in all of the ancient world was at Ephesus, which just happens to be the place that St John had gone, with the woman entrusted to him by Our Lord on the cross.

And the 12 signs of the Zodiac, which for the Jews symbolised the 12 tribes of Israel; and for the pagans spoke of the astrology that ruled their lives; which formed the crown of stars worn by Juno, the Roman queen of heaven, they now adorn the brow of the one who truly is Regina Caeli.

Bells, and peals of bells.

But if this is to be more than just of academic interest, then we need to hear the Gospel that speaks from this passage, adding weight and perspective to our songs of “Maranatha” and “Unto us is born a Son”.

What, for us, do the sun, moon and stars symbolise? What are the powers, heavenly or otherwise, that dominate our lives?

One modern pop group has a science song for children, which starts, “The sun is a mass of incandescent gas, a gigantic nuclear furnace”. Later in the same album they present a different perspective: “The sun is a miasma of incandescent plasma, the sun’s not simply made out of gas, no, no, no!”. Science, as these songs exemplify, teaches us that the world is not as simple as it seems.

We live in a world governed by science, and we rightly thank God for that. But when scientists (as some of them do) exalt their job to a god-like status, and say of the world, “this is all there is”, we need to think of the woman with child, clothed with the sun.

If we started listing songs which have “moon” in the title, this article would turn into a booklet. The moon for us is not just a satellite; it is mystery, and romance; hopes and dreams. Again, we rightly thank God for those things that enrich our lives. But when they take over, and become our master, our mistress, then we need to think of the woman with child, standing on the moon.

Astrology itself has never gone away. But neither has politics – how fascinating that the flag of the European union has twelve stars. And for many of our young people, and some old enough to know better, their dream, their motivation, is to become a celebrity, to be a star.

There is one, says the Book of Revelation, who wears those stars in her crown. Mary, the New Eve, the fulfilment of Israel, the mother of the Church; Mary, even now playing a cosmic role of bringing Christ to the world; Mary, assumed into heaven, who, with her divine Son, completes and transcends the dreams and desires of every man and woman, every race and nation – including our own.

Fr Michael Hall is a parish priest in the Leeds Diocese. For over 20 years he was also a teacher and school leader in secondary education. He is Lead Associate of Barnabas Education Services.