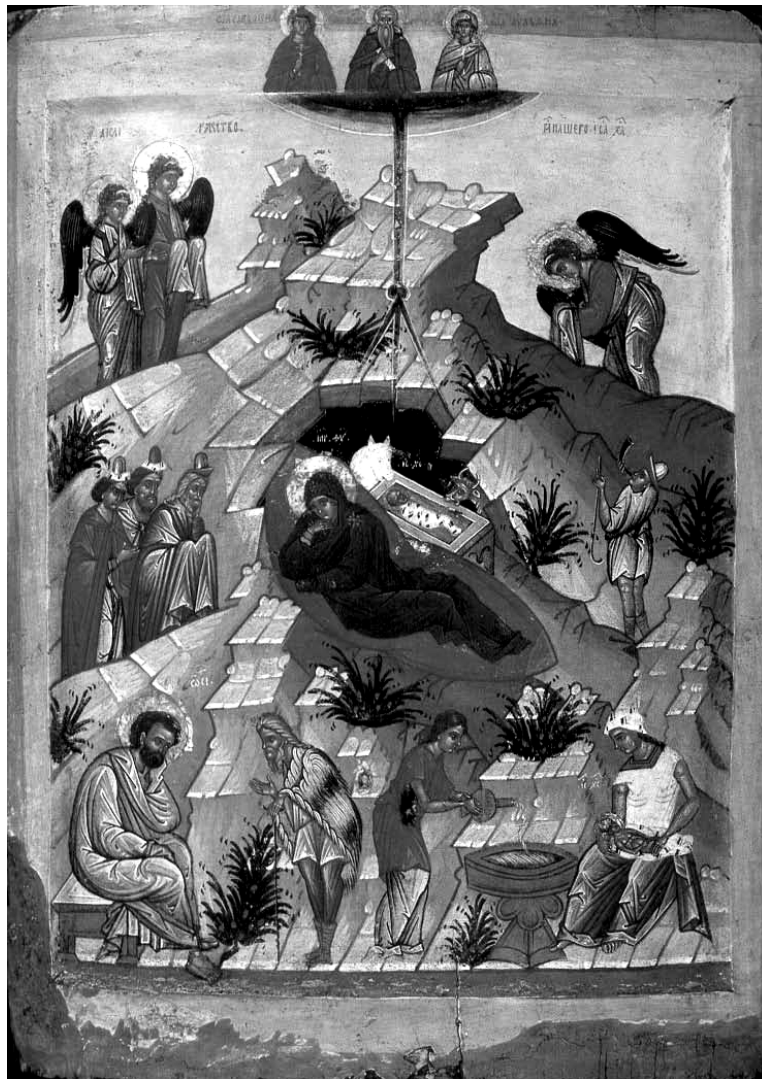


Advent Christmas Epiphany



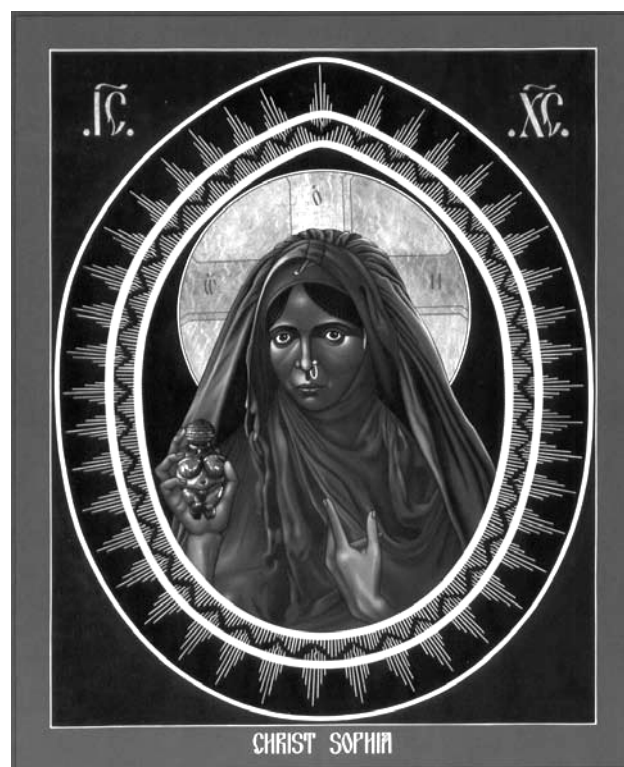
a Guide to the Season

Preparing for Christmas

Christmas is difficult to celebrate. There's just so much working against the Christian proclamation of Christ's Incarnation. The good news is barely audible above the roar of background noise that permeates our culture. The Crib has been appropriated by advertisers and traders, its deep and radical truth overshadowed by sentimentalism. By Midnight Mass the carols have already been flogged to death. The religion of the family can be overbearing – families can be crushingly demanding, or painfully absent. There's so much pressure, so much work to complete before the summer holidays, so many parties and special events, so many demands. I hear many people say they'll breathe a sigh of relief on the 26th December "when it's all over"! What a tragedy!

The clash of rhythms that Christians feel in December in particular is to be expected. This state of affairs is probably more like that which prevailed for the church in its first centuries, well before the blessing of Christianity by imperial powers. Christians should expect to be singing a different song, to be living by a different rhythm. All this is perfectly normal, for Christians live in the world, but not of the world. For Christians the Light of Incarnation transfigures all reality – our culture's ubiquitous noise, December over-consumption, the schmaltz of carols-muzak, obsessive over-work, even the demands of families.

The liturgies of Advent-Christmas-Epiphany are the sacred container in which the Christian community catch glimpses of that Light. You are warmly invited to the liturgical celebrations of Advent-Christmas-Epiphany at St John's. May the season's rich liturgies, Biblical texts, and unique symbols illumine you in the midst of noise and tension. May we all pray with the earliest disciples: Marana tha! O Lord, come!



ADVENT:

Expectation

*As Christmas trees are lighted,
as people rush to shop, and send their cards,
as Christmas songs are heard everywhere;
keep us close to You,
that the One whose coming we celebrate,
Jesus Christ,
may be honoured by all we do. Amen.*

As a season of the church's year, Advent began to emerge in the 4th century. It has undergone many reforms since, until coming to rest in much of the church today as a season of four Sundays before Christmas. For a long time Advent was associated with penitence and fasting, and its four Sundays had the sobering themes of 'death', 'judgement', 'heaven' and 'hell'.

But Advent is not Lent. In more recent times the penitence theme has been balanced by the great proclamation of the Advent gospels – hope and expectation. Advent is a call to wake up from our slumber, an invitation into consciousness, to look and listen, eyes wide open to the world, for the One who is coming, indeed the One already among us – to wake up to the call to become, with Mary, God-bearers in our time and place.

To all who feel fearful, anxious, or overwhelmed by the events of the world, the liturgical year offers the medicine of the Advent gospels. Here we find God in the midst of human crisis, decision and catastrophe. In *this* world God's promises are full of realistic and grace-filled hope. In Advent we are invited to clear enough space in our hearts and minds to listen to God's word of hope. Advent invites us into a journey of listening and looking, of entering, with Mary and Joseph, into a world of chaos, uncertainty, and promise.

Blue: the colour of Advent

The colour purple has in recent times been the liturgical colour for both Lent and Advent, both regarded as 'penitential seasons'. Thus, the theological themes of Advent have tended to be obscured by Advent's description as a 'little Lent'. But Advent is *not* Lent. It is not a 'penitential season' like Lent. It has its own characteristics and themes; watching, waiting, hope – focussed on the Coming One. The Church holds its breath in anticipation. Likening Advent to Lent meant that the colour purple came to dominate.

In fact blue also has a long association with Advent. The colour blue honours Advent's distinctiveness. The colour blue has a long liturgical tradition of association with vigilance and hope, reflected in the deep blue shawl that Mary the Mother of Christ wears in iconography. The deep blue also catches the mood of our antipodean summers (rather than the shortening days and fading light of the northern hemisphere winter).

Preparing at home

How can we prepare ourselves so that Christmas is not merely a relief to have out of the way? One way is to keep Christmas out of Advent, as much as that is possible in our culture. The booklet **Taking Advent Home** offers suggestions for making and using an Advent wreath, and for keeping Advent prayer-full.

It helps to wait until the week before Christmas, or, better still Christmas Eve, before setting up the Christmas Tree and Crib. Mark Advent using a prominently-placed Advent Wreath. An Advent Wreath has four coloured candles (preferably blue), one for each of the Sundays of Advent, and a large white candle in the centre for Christ. The daily lighting of candles, and the gradual increase in light as each week arrives, can be a source of great excitement, prayerfulness and anticipation – for children and adults alike. Christmas Eve can then be the long-awaited moment for lighting the Christ Candle.

Other possibilities include Advent Calendars and Jesse Trees. The Advent Calendar helps to remind us that it's not the number of 'shopping days to Christmas' that makes this an important time, but the days of grace that prepare us for Incarnation. A Jesse Tree depicts David (the son of Jesse) at the root of a tree whose branches hold the prophets and saints who prepared for the birth of Jesus, son of Mary. It recalls us to the fact that Jesus did not 'spring from nowhere', but stood on the shoulders of a long line of God's kings, priests, prophets, women and men who took great risks for God. These people for centuries had been proclaiming God's justice and speaking God's words. The use of blue ribbon around the Wreath is a way of making Advent distinctive. Come Christmas, bring out gold or white ribbon or cloth to surround the Wreath. Wreath and Crib can remain the focus for the whole of Christmas-Epiphany time.

Making space to pray

By December most people are feeling under a great deal of pressure. So many things to do. So many people to catch up with. So many cards to post. So many work parties. How can we possibly notice the Lord's coming when we have filled every minute of every day with activity? Make time and space during Advent. Set aside time each day for reading, prayer and reflection. Or if you are becoming too busy, just be silent and still. Consider praying at home using the parish's *Journal of Scripture & Prayer*, or one of the 'daily offices' from the Prayer Book – Morning and/or Evening Prayer for each weekday, A Service of the Light, or

Prayer at the End of the Day. Or, when possible, join with the parish community for the midweek liturgies – see back page.

A Service of the Light

For the faithful Jew the day begins at sundown; Sabbath worship begins on Friday evening with the tradition of a blessing over lighted candles. The Service of Light is an ancient form of Christian prayer, probably a sign of the originally close link between the worship of synagogue and church. Primarily a thanksgiving for the light, a celebration of Christ the Light, it was prayed in homes as well as in church. The blessing of God over the lighting of evening lamps may have been the ‘evening prayer’ of the people of God in the early centuries. Its principal elements are the lighting of candles, meditation on the Word, silence, and prayers. A Service of the Light is a lovely way of preparing ourselves for the Sunday Eucharist. You will find this short liturgy in *A Prayer Book for Australia*.



Reconciliation

‘All may, none must, some should’. So runs the Anglican approach to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the confession of sin to God in the presence of a priest who is given authority to declare God’s forgiveness, on behalf of the church. It may be that you have not made a ‘confession’ for many years. It may be that you have never experienced the blessing of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, or are suspicious of the idea. It may be that you have been carrying a burden for many years, and you just don’t seem to be able to get free. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is available to help us lay our burdens at the foot of the cross, find forgiveness and experience newness of life. Advent, with its themes of hope, penitence and expectation, is a good time to attend to reconciliation. If you would like to make an appointment or discuss Reconciliation, please speak to one of the clergy.

CHRISTMAS: ENFLESHMENT

*Loving Word of God,
you have shown us the fullness of your glory
in taking human flesh.
Fill us, in our bodily life,
with your grace and truth;
that our pleasure may be boundless
and our integrity complete;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Christmas is so familiar to us that it is hard to imagine our world without it. Beginning with a 3rd century appropriation of the old pagan mid-winter solstice festival, celebrating not the sun but the ‘unconquered Son’, Christmas is perhaps the most successful example of ‘syncretism’ (the appropriation of others’ religious or philosophical practices). Given these origins, perhaps we ought not be surprised in this Post-modern era that Christmas is no longer *only* a Christian festival. Worship of ‘God with us’ jostles for a place alongside worship of ‘the family’, ‘the market’, globalism, ‘nation state’, technology, sport, ‘celebrities’. So it’s not surprising that by December 26 the commercial world is packing away the Christmas decorations, already gearing itself up for January sales, setting off for holidays at the beach. Why keep with Christmas Crib and carols?

Christians do not just commemorate a single historical moment, but an *eternal mystery*. The depths of the mystery of Incarnation cannot be packed away conveniently on ‘Boxing Day’. When Christmas is merely a historical commemoration, Incarnation is emptied of its transformative power, the impact of the saving event is removed from the present. The mystery is relegated to the realm of make-believe, of tinsel, shop windows, children’s pantomimes, and songs that trivialise. But Jesus’ “birthday” only has meaning when it has a reference point in the *present* and ongoing time, God taking human flesh in the *here and now* – enfleshment-in-the-making in us.

The Paschal mystery is the backdrop for Christmas. From the first moments of the Christ child’s human existence, we see in flesh redemptive love that will be fully revealed on the cross. This child who ‘was born for us’, also confronts us with choice – acceptance or rejection of the call to become God-bearers.

In Christmastime the liturgical calendar surprises us with the feast days it gives us in the days following Christmas day – Saint Stephen, the first martyr, on December 26; the Holy Innocents on December 28. This flesh-taking is full of risk and danger! ‘God with us’ is a risk-taking God!

Crib

Christmas Cribs have been popular ever since Saint Francis ‘invented’ them, at Assisi in the 13th century – complete with a real, live baby! We all know about cribs. They are everywhere. Some are even quite ‘realistic’. Actually, no one knows what the Bethlehem scene would really have looked like. In any event, the celebration of Incarnation is not an exercise in historical re-enactment. The Crib is neither mere historical data nor sentimental art. Crib scenes used to help make the “Christmas trading atmosphere” have nothing to do with Christ. The point of making a Christmas Crib is not so that we can fondly remember childhood. We do not look at it to admire its beauty, or prettiness, or detail. The point is not that we look at the Crib at all, in fact! The Crib is really more like an icon, which is not ‘art’ in the popular sense of the term. Rather than *us* looking at the Crib, the *Crib* looks at us. An icon looks at us, asking us: where do we stand in this sacred space? We cannot remain *passive* spectators: the icon invites *active participation*. Rather than the household Crib being a decoration, it needs to be a place of prayer and contemplation, a place that invites us into the sacred story of the birth of God in human form.

Christmas Bowl

The Christmas Bowl is the Christmas appeal of Act for Peace, the international aid agency of the National Council of Churches in Australia and a member of the global ACT Alliance. The Christmas Bowl is an ecumenical church appeal, with more than 2000 churches from 19 denominations involved around Australia. Together, churches raise almost \$2.5 million annually through the Christmas Bowl, which provides much needed assistance to people affected by conflict and poverty around the world. Your gifts to the Christmas Bowl help rebuild the lives of people in some of the most conflict- and disaster-affected countries in the world. Envelopes for the Christmas Bowl will be available during Advent. Please consider offering completed appeal envelopes at the Altar at St John’s as part of your Advent-Christmas offering. For more information:
<http://actforpeace.org.au>

Children

Children love Christmas, of course. Stars, Magi, miraculous birth and angels are no big surprise to children. Yet they need to know that these things are the work of the loving God whose Son Jesus Christ comes among us, not the work of Myer, Coca Cola, and the purchasing power of dollars. They need to know that ‘the Christmas spirit’ is not something you can buy for them, nor a matter of being ‘good enough’ to deserve presents, nor even a mere family occasion. As adults we can help our children by making Advent central in our homes. We can do this with Advent candles and wreath, calendars, Jesse Trees, and daily prayer – by letting Advent be Advent – and by preparing them for the Midnight Mass. Children also have an amazing endurance and stamina when it comes to the *big*

events of life. The Midnight Mass is a *great* event - the first Eucharist of Christ's Incarnation! We see and feel Christ's dazzling light penetrating the darkness of the first hour of Christmas Day. Why deprive children of this great experience! Creative approaches to present opening can help. Bringing pillows, special toys, cuddly blankets and the like to Midnight Mass can not only help children feel more at home, but also help anxious adults relax!

Midnight Mass

When the time is ripe, when we have prepared our hearts and minds, we keep the ancient feast of Christ's Mass – the first eucharist of the Incarnation. Gathered in darkness to greet the coming Light, our eyes see things we do not notice in broad daylight. We process to the Christmas Crib. Dazzled in the darkness, our hearts are opened to unexpected Presence. This is THE Christmas liturgy – there is no substitute! Surely it is worth the effort - why miss out! If you need transport or assistance call us.

11.00pm Carols by Candlelight
sung by the Choir

11.30pm Midnight Mass



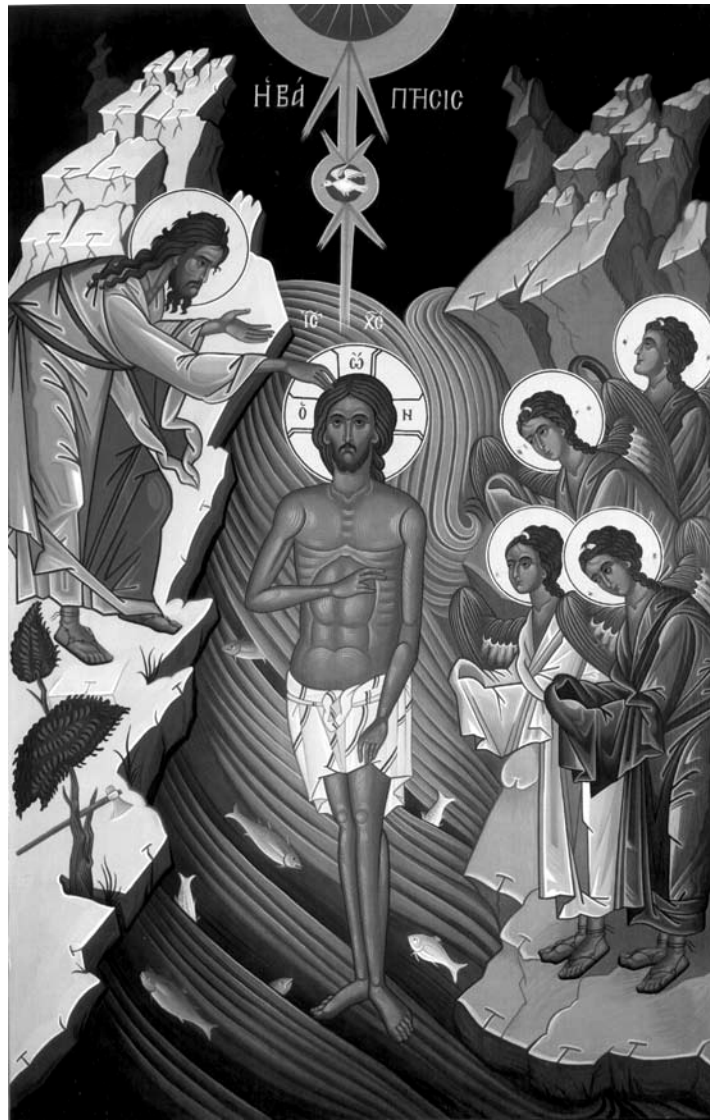
EPIPHANY: MANIFESTATION

*O God, the source of all insight,
whose coming was revealed to the nations
not among men of power but on a woman's lap:
give us grace to seek you where you may be found,
that the wisdom of this world may be humbled,
and discover your unexpected joy. Amen.*

The birth event remains an 'in-house' affair until foreigners and outsiders are drawn to the Christ. The Feast of the Epiphany – 'the manifestation of Christ' – in the Western church recalls the visit of the Magi to pay homage to the Christ child at Bethlehem. In the church of the East, however, Epiphany is more revered than Christmas, and is focussed around the Lord's baptism, the manifestation of Jesus as God's well-beloved Son. Nevertheless, in both East and West it is *Christology* that matters – *Who* is this 'Christ'? *Where* has he come from? *What* is he for? To what does he invite us? The Christmas tree and other decorations are removed on the Feast of the Epiphany, 6 January (the twelfth day of Christmas). The Crib, however, remains our central seasonal symbol until Candlemass (2 February).

The word 'epiphany' means 'a *showing* of God's presence', and so the revealing to the Magi at the Crib was really just one of many epiphanies. Therefore, during the Sundays of Epiphany we reflect on this revealing of God's presence, meditating upon the significance of the 'light that is coming into the world' – through the visit of the Magi; in Jesus' baptism in the Jordan; in John's declaration that there is one who is coming who will baptise with Holy Spirit and fire; in Jesus' first sign at Cana; in Jesus' declaration in his hometown synagogue that Isaiah's prophecy has been fulfilled; and, finally, in the presentation of the child Jesus in the Temple at Jerusalem, on the last Sunday of Epiphany, CandleMass.

Epiphany reflections remain focussed around the Crib. The white and gold colours of Christmas adorn our worship area. We continue to sing Christmas songs, because in these Sundays of Epiphany we are reflecting on the *implications* of Incarnation. Epiphany is not merely an exercise in history, however interesting that may be. Epiphany reminds us that God reveals God-self to *us*, here and now, by many and varied ways. Like the Magi, we are to use knowledge and reason in order to find the Christ child, yet in the end the journey that leads to Christ can only be completed by risk – which is the gift of faith – offering to Christ *the gold of our love, the incense of our prayer, and the myrrh of our willingness to bear the cross.*



CandleMass

Advent-Christmas-Epiphany concludes with the bittersweet Feast of CandleMass (2 February), haunted by the prophet Malachi's question: 'Who can endure the day of the Lord's coming?' We rejoice with Anna and Simeon at the revelation of the Christ, yet Simeon hints at where this leads. Candlemas turns our faces from womb and crib to tomb and cross. We celebrate Christmas only because of Easter. Old Simeon holds in his hands the Light of the world – so at CandleMass we kindle our own lamps from the Light, rejoicing in the Light who is coming into our world.

*What good is it to me
if Mary is full of grace
and I am not full of grace?
What good is it to me
for the Creator to give birth to his Son
if I do not also give birth to him
in my own time and my culture?*

Meister Eckhart, 15th century

Christ's Mass

5pm Children's Service

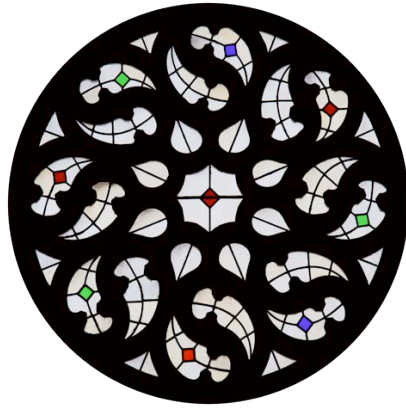
11pm Carols by Candlelight

11.30pm Midnight Mass

10am Christmas Day Eucharist



MOTHER OF THE STREETS



st john's
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CAMBERWELL

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St John's is an Anglican church in the contemporary catholic tradition.
Our mission is to bring people into communion with God and with each other.
You are always welcome to join us for worship:

Sunday:	8am	Eucharist
	10am	Sung Eucharist
	6pm	Liturgy of Light
Tuesday	12noon	Eucharist
Wednesday	6.30pm (1 st)	Eucharist
	7pm (2 nd)	Eucharist
Tues-Thurs:	9:30am	Morning Prayer
	5pm	Evening Prayer

November 2017

Resources drawn from:

The Promise of His Glory: Services and Prayers for the Season from All Saints to Candlemas,
London: Church House Publishing, 1991;

Perham M, Stevenson K, *Welcoming the Light of Christ*, London: SPCK, 1991;

Prayers by Janet Morley, *All Desires Known*, London: SPCK, 1992;

Icons by Robert Lentz, *Christ in the Margins*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2003.