



Prayer and Liturgy at St Joseph's RC Primary School Encountering God during Advent 2024



Introduction

At St Joseph's RC Primary School, we have been exploring ways that we open our hearts and minds to encountering God through prayer, liturgy, song, and art. During the seasons of Lent and Easter, we introduced pupils and our families to a variety of ways in which we can become closer to God, asking Him to guide and direct us on our journey through faith, love, and life with Him.

During Advent, we embraced this same spirit of reflection and preparation as we looked forward to the celebration of Jesus' birth. Advent is the season leading up to Christmas, marked by anticipation and preparation for the celebration of Jesus' birth. It encourages reflection on the promise of hope, peace, and salvation.

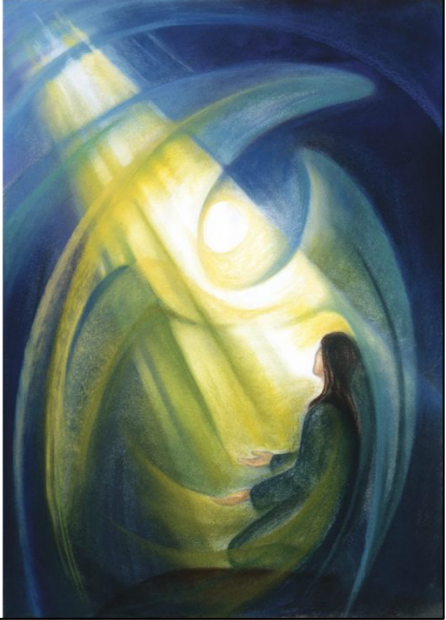
Advent emphasises moving from darkness to light, symbolising Jesus as the Light of the World. This year, during Advent, we invited pupils to encounter God through hope and renewal, aligning with the Jubilee Year's theme of being Pilgrims of Hope.

Through prayer, acts of kindness, and learning about the coming of Christ, we aimed to nurture pupils' understanding of their faith and help them deepen their relationship with God. Through spiritual reflection, we encouraged pupils to recognise God's presence in their lives and inspired them to bring hope to others. This document outlines the various ways we encountered God during Advent, celebrating moments of reflection, joy, and community as we prepared our hearts for the birth of Christ.

Encountering God during Advent

The Magnificat

During Advent, all pupils said the Magnificat at the start of each day. The Magnificat, also known as the Song of Mary, is a prayer of praise and thanksgiving that Mary proclaimed during her visit to Elizabeth, rejoicing in God's greatness and His faithfulness to His people. It is a powerful reminder of Mary's trust in God's plan and her willingness to serve Him. The Magnificat was used as part of classroom prayer and in whole school liturgies, helping pupils to reflect on the themes of joy, humility, and hope during this sacred season of preparation for the birth of Christ.

Magnificat <i>My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked upon his handmaid in her lowliness; for behold, from this day forward, all generations will call me blessed. For the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is from age to age for those who fear him. He has made known the strength of his arm, and has scattered the proud in their conceit of heart. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has exalted those who are lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, mindful of his mercy, even as he promised to our fathers, to Abraham and his descendants for ever. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.</i>	
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Spontaneous Prayer

Spontaneous Prayer is an unplanned prayer where children say a short prayer in the moment. They can pray within a theme, or it can be more open. The prayer could be silent or out loud. Prayers could also be written down and added to a class prayer journal. To support our pupils with spontaneous prayer during Advent, we prepared a simple structure to guide the children to thank God and ask for his help.

Spontaneous Prayer	
• Say Thank You to God • Say how excited you are for Christmas and waiting for Jesus. • Ask for Help • Promise to Do Good • Say Thank You Again	Dear God, • Thank you for loving us so much and for sending Jesus to be our special gift. • I'm so excited for Christmas! I'm trying to be patient while we wait for Jesus to come. • Please help me to be kind to my friends and family and to share happiness with everyone. • I promise to try my best to be good and to help others when they need me. • Thank you for always being with me and for the gift of Jesus. Amen.

Guided Meditation

During Advent, the pupils took part in Guided Meditation to deepen their understanding of the Gospel stories and their connection to God. Through meditations on the Annunciation, the Visitation, and the birth of Jesus, pupils were invited to place themselves within these sacred moments, engaging their senses and imagination to encounter the events in a personal and meaningful way. This reflective practice helped pupils to consider Mary's trust, the joy of her meeting with Elizabeth, and the wonder of Christ's birth, fostering a sense of awe and a deeper appreciation for God's presence in their lives.



Joint Gweddiwn

During Advent, older and younger classes came together in a spirit of unity and faith to prepare and participate in a joint Gweddiwn prayer service. This special time of collective worship allowed pupils of different ages to collaborate, share their reflections, and support one another in deepening their relationship with God. The Gweddiwn prayer service provided a meaningful opportunity for the school community to reflect on the themes of hope, joy, and anticipation that define the Advent season, fostering a sense of togetherness and shared purpose as they prepared their hearts for the celebration of Christ's birth.



Chaplaincy Team Advent Calendar

The Advent calendars in our school played an important role in helping pupils prepare spiritually for the celebration of Jesus' birth. One Advent calendar, thoughtfully designed by the Chaplaincy group, encouraged pupils to reflect on their faith each day through meaningful tasks and prompts. These tasks, such as "Look and listen. Can you hear God?" invited pupils to pause, observe, and connect with God in the ordinary moments of their lives. By fostering daily acts of prayer, reflection, and kindness, the Advent calendar became a valuable tool for helping pupils embrace the true meaning of the season and draw closer to God.



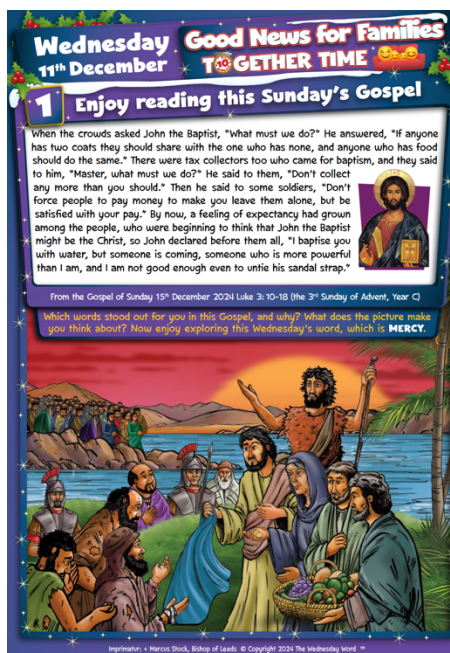
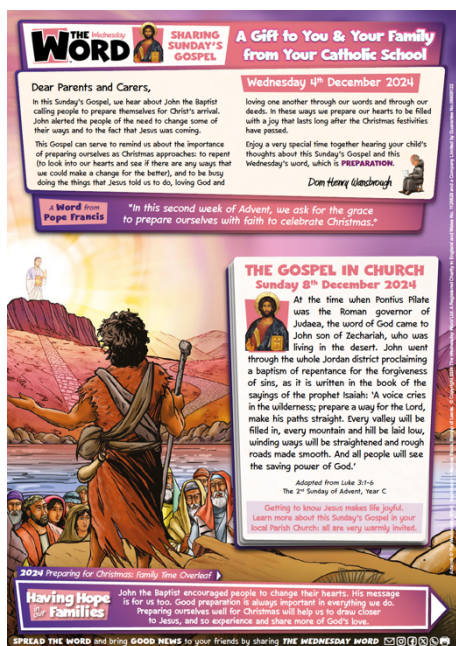
Enriching prayer foci

Each classroom has a dedicated prayer focus, providing an opportunity to enhance and support the children's prayer life during Advent. This sacred space within the classroom invites both interaction and silent prayer, fostering a deeper connection with God throughout the season of preparation. It is also a focal point for the weekly Gweddiwn prayer service. During Advent, all classes ensured that their prayer focus was in a prominent area of the classroom, reflecting the themes of hope, joy, and anticipation. Pupils took responsibility for assembling and maintaining the area, with the Bible prominently displayed and regularly used by both children and teachers to guide prayer and reflection during this special time.



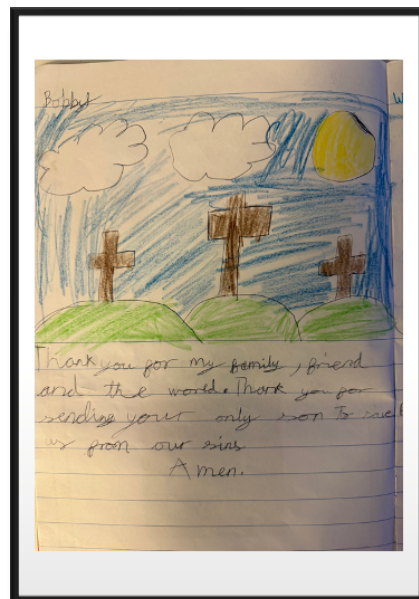
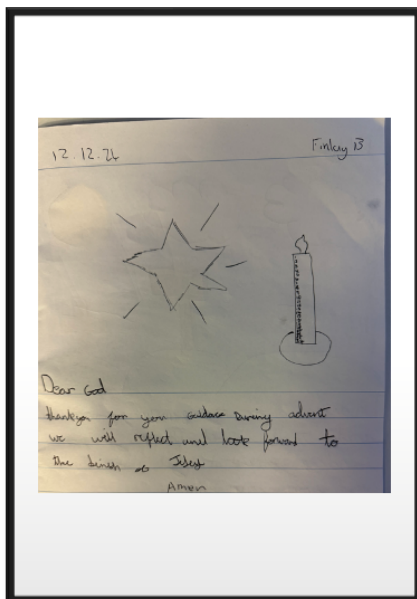
Wednesday Word

Each week, parents receive a copy of the Wednesday Word. Every Wednesday a 'word', inspired by the coming Sunday's Gospel, will be suggested for families to talk about in the home. It is designed in a family friendly fashion to ensure that all family members feel included. It aims to be informative, enjoyable, and to support families to spend a very special 10 minutes together each week in prayer.



Advent Prayer Bags

During Advent, we sent home Prayer Bags to help families prepare spiritually for the celebration of Jesus' birth. Each pupil had the opportunity to take the Prayer Bag home for two nights to pray with their family, before passing it on to another family in their class. Each Prayer Bag contained several meaningful items, along with a list of contents provided on the front of the 'Journey with Jesus' Class Prayer Book. This prayer book allowed families to contribute their own prayers, drawings, or photographs, creating a beautiful and personal record of prayer shared at home. We hope that families found joy and peace in this special opportunity to come together in prayer during the Advent season.



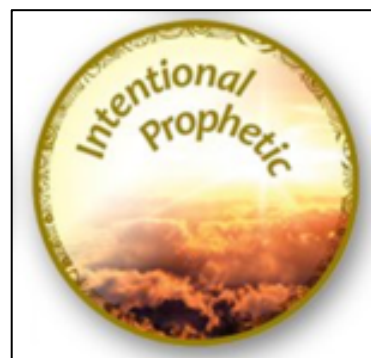
Pupil Profile Virtues – Intentional and Prophetic

During Advent, we focused on the virtues of ‘intentional and prophetic’ as part of our on-going work to develop the St Joseph’s Pupil Profile.

Pupils in St Joseph’s RC Primary School are growing to be intentional in the way they live and use the resources of the earth, guided by conscience; and prophetic in the example they set to others.

When we are INTENTIONAL we deliberately choose to live in a certain way. We don’t just follow the crowd. We listen to God’s voice deep inside us and choose to live by the values of Jesus.

When we are PROPHETIC we show by our words and actions that we choose to live the Good News of Jesus.



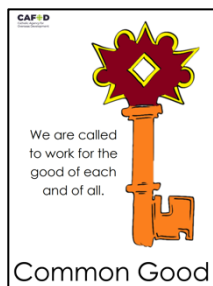
Examples of the pupils’ learning can be found here on our school website:

<https://www.stjosephsrc.com/st-josephs-pupil-profile-1/>

Catholic Social Teaching – Common Good

During Advent, we learnt about the Catholic Social Teaching principle:
the Common Good.

The common good means working together for the benefit of everyone, ensuring no one is left behind. It’s about respecting the rights and responsibilities of all people and recognising that we’re all connected.



This reminds us that while each person’s well-being is important, the health and happiness of our communities are equally essential. When we make choices, we’re called to think about how our actions impact everyone, not just ourselves.

Every little act of kindness contributes to the common good, and together, our actions can make a big difference. By working together in our homes, school, and community, we live out Jesus’ call to care for one another and to serve the whole body of Christ.

Pray together:

Lord Jesus,

You call each one of us to belong to one people, the family of God.

Help us, together with our brothers and sisters to work together, to share your love and serve for the good of everyone. Amen

Examples of the pupils learning can be found here on our school website:

<https://www.stjosephsrc.com/catholic-social-teaching/>

Come and Pray - Growing in Hope During Advent

During our 'Come and Pray – Growing in Hope Advent' liturgy for pupils and their parents or family members, we reflected on the season's themes of hope, love, and light. Centred around the Advent wreath, we lit candles symbolising Christ's growing light and prayed for God's guidance to share His hope with others. A reading from Isaiah reminded us of God's promise of a Saviour, bringing peace and joy even in challenging times. Families contributed prayers, kind actions, and intentions on leaves or stars to create a shared "Hope Tree," symbolising our collective faith and trust in God's promises. We encouraged everyone to continue spreading hope through prayer, kindness, and reflection at home during Advent.



Advent Service

On Gaudete Sunday, Years 3 and 4 led us in our school-parish Advent Service at St Joseph's RC Church. The liturgy was a beautiful reminder of the Christmas story and the birth of Jesus. The pupils helped us to understand the meaning of Advent and led us through the scriptures of Isaiah in the Old Testament, who looked forward joyfully to the coming of the Promised One, to the Annunciation and Visitation, the importance of John the Baptist, who prepared a way for the Lord, and the story of Jesus' birth. Through scripture, drama, song and prayer, the pupils helped us all to celebrate the true meaning of Christmas.



Christingle Service

In our final week of term, our Chaplaincy Team led us in a beautiful Christingle service. We gathered together in the darkness of winter days, to celebrate the light - the light that always overcomes the darkness. The orange of the Christingle symbolises the world. The candle is the light of Christ and the red ribbon reminds us that Jesus came to earth, died on the cross and rose again. The sweets and fruit represent all the good things that the world produces for us.

When we lit our Christingles, we remembered that God loved the world so much that he sent his only Son Jesus to show us what God's love is like. We remembered that Jesus is the light of the world and that he is with us.



Year 1 and 2 Nativity

The pupils in Years 1 and 2 were truly wonderful in sharing the story of the birth of Jesus in their Christmas Concert, 'It's a Baby!' Through their singing, dancing, and acting, they beautifully told the story of God's gift to the world, filling the performance with joy, wonder, and love and helped us all to reflect on the true meaning of Christmas.

