

SoulSpace

SERIES: AWAITING SOME REAL GOOD NEWS

Season colour: PURPLE

In this series, Gerard Moloney CSsR takes a deeper look at the great Season of Advent.

In 431 AD the Church gave Mary the wonderful title of *Theotókos*. It is a Greek word which means "God-bearer". It is a beautiful and profound title. Mary is God-bearer. She carried Jesus in her womb. She bore him, gave birth to him, brought him into the world, and so we honour her with the title *Theotókos*.

Mary became *Theotókos* because of her 'yes' to God. She said 'yes' to what God asked of her at the Annunciation. Troubled though she was by what the angel told her, she said, "Be it done unto me according to your word." Let God do with me what God wants. I am at God's service.

Mary said 'yes' even though she wasn't sure where it would lead or what its consequences would be. She said 'yes', and that 'yes' changed history. It brought Jesus into our world and made our salvation possible. Everything changed forever because Mary said 'yes', a yes she said not once but repeated every single day of her life.

That is our challenge as Christians. Like Mary, we are called to be *Theotókos*, God-bearer, in our time and place. In other words, by the kind of people we are, the values we hold, the love we show, the compassion we display, the forgiveness we offer - we give birth to Christ, make God visible, to all whose lives touch ours this Christmas and in 2018 and beyond.

A BIG CHALLENGE

Trying to be a God-bearer is not easy. We live in an increasingly secular society. We live in a time when to publicly acknowledge you are a Catholic can be to invite ridicule, to be dismissed as a Holy Joe or Holy Josephine, as someone easily led. We live in a society in which religion is regarded more and

more either as irrelevant or as something that one should keep strictly private. But as Christians, each of us is called to be *Theotókos*, God-bearer.

When I think of people who give witness to Jesus, I think of someone like Donal Walsh, the 16-year-old from Kerry who died in 2013. There was a wonderful documentary about him on TV the following Christmas. It showed him full of life, determined, with a message of hope for others, and a deep faith he was not afraid to show. He made a profound impression on people. You could see the impact he made on Brendan O'Connor when he interviewed him for his TV show. "He was in the state of grace," Brendan said of Donal. An extraordinary statement to make about a 16-year-old whose one great ambition was to play rugby for Munster. An extraordinary statement to make about anyone. That was the power of Donal Walsh's witness. He was *Theotókos*.

Of course, saying 'yes' to God, being a God-bearer, doesn't magically transform everything. It won't remove the financial worries and burdens so many of us carry. It won't take away the tears and the sorrow we feel when loved ones die or relationships sunder. It won't take away the problems facing the church.

But that's how it was for Mary too. Being God-bearer didn't make life any easier for her either. She struggled to make sense of God's plan for her. She worried about her son, she witnessed his passion and execution, but she knew that through every struggle, every difficulty, God was with her. Through every sorrow, every joy, every setback, God never abandoned her. She knew she was never alone. And neither are we. That is the wonderful, consoling, reassuring message of this season. God is always one with us as we bear witness to him. ■

words ends



Today's readings

2 Samuel 7:1-5.

8-12, 14,16

Romans 16:25-27

Luke 1:26-38

families had formally agreed to the betrothal and were beginning to draw up the marriage agreement. The Gospel highlights Mary's agreement to the unexpected direction her life will now take. Her child will be heir to David's throne, the one promised in the prophecy that forms our first reading today.

GOD'S WORD TODAY

The Annunciation scene has been depicted by many of the greatest painters in history. They usually depict the angel as breaking in unexpectedly and unannounced to deliver a message to a beautiful young lady. Mary is usually reading or spinning as though this was an interruption to her ordinary everyday life as the daughter of a peasant family in Galilee. She is betrothed to a man named Joseph - probably like herself a young person, looking forward to beginning married life and whose courtship had come to the point that their



BEING GOD-BEARERS

Like Mary, we are called to be God-bearers in our time and place.

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FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT
24th December 2017

God's anointed was born by the power of God's Spirit. He is the Son of God and fulfils God's promise of an everlasting kingdom for his people.

ADVENT JESSE TREE The Jesse Tree is a way of reflecting on the key people who prefigure the coming ('adventus') of Jesus. Symbols for the Jesse Tree are:

ADVENT JESSE TREE - WEEK FOUR

The Hammer and Saw symbols represent JOSEPH,

The Crown symbol represents MARY

The Manger, Chi-Rho and Palm Tree symbols represent JESUS

ADVENT PRAYER Father, in the wilderness of the Jordan, you sent a messenger to prepare people's hearts for the coming of your Son.

Help me to hear his words and repent of my sins,
 so that I may clearly see the way to walk,
 the truth to speak, and the life to live for him,

Our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

CHOOSE LIFE

"The right to life is unique, of course, because, in the absence of that right, no other civil or natural right can be exercised, either now or in the future." Irish Catholic Bishops, *Two Lives One Love*

"It is God who gives life. Let us respect and love human life, especially vulnerable life in a mother's womb." Pope Francis

TOWARDS PEACE In 2009, at the request of survivors of abuse by Church personnel in Ireland, the Irish Bishops and the Religious and Missionary congregations established Toward Peace to provide a safe supportive space, where people who have been affected by abuse in a Church context can be accompanied as they seek their own experience of spiritual peace, one step at a time. Full details of how to access the service of Towards Peace can be found on www.towardspeace.ie

CHRISTMAS DAY OFFERTORY COLLECTION FOR SUPPORT OF THE CLERGY This collection is one of four each year for this purpose. The other three are Easter, Pentecost and Autumn. The hope is that these collections raise sufficient funds to pay the agreed monthly salary to priests. Unfortunately the three collections have fallen well short of the required figure. We thank you for your support.

SUNDAY READINGS for 31st December: 1st Reading: Gn 15:1-6. 21:1-3; 2nd Reading: Heb. 11:8. 11-12. 17-19; Gospel: Lk. 2:22-40.

BINGO, GILLOOLY HALL

There will be no Bingo tonight, Christmas Eve, Sunday, 24th December or next Sunday, New Year's Eve. The Bingo will resume on Sunday, 7th January at 9.00pm.

CATHEDRAL of the IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Upcoming **EVENTS**

THE WEEK AHEAD

Sunday, 24th December **Fourth Sunday of Advent & Christmas Eve**
 Monday, 25th December **Christmas Day**
 Wednesday, 27th December **"Wednesday Tea"** after 10.30am Mass.
 Saturday, 30th December **Confessions** from 2.00pm to 5.00pm.

CHRISTMAS GREETING

As we celebrate the Feast of Christmas - we wish to extend to each and every one of you our prayer and blessing for deep peace in your hearts and homes over these days.

We pray a blessing on the families of this parish and especially on those who are far from home; we pray for those who have been bereaved, that they may know solace; we pray for the sick - that they may know healing; we pray for the poor - that they may find in us the compassion and gentleness of Christ.

*During our celebrations here this Christmas in our Cathedral may we experience unity and strengthening with one another and please accept our sincere gratitude for your participation with us as a parish community. We hope that together we will celebrate the joy at heart of the Gospel.
 God bless you all.*

ONLINE ADVENT CALENDAR As a unique Advent prayerful resource, the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference has provided its online Advent 2017 Calendar which can be enjoyed by people of all ages. The calendar is available online, and on your smartphone, on catholicbishops.ie. This year's Advent Calendar focuses on the theme of family as we prepare together for next year's World Meeting of Families in Dublin from 21th - 26th August. Each day during Advent you are invited to click open a virtual door where you will find faith content for family, school and parish. During Advent, families are invited to take special time together to pray, to talk, and to be together. Family members are encouraged to undertake a daily act of kindness or charity - as suggested by the calendar - and by so doing reaching out to help those around us. By using the online calendar, we hope that you will be part of our journey through Advent this year. www.catholicbishops.ie

CHRISTMAS 2017
CATHEDRAL OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

SUNDAY DECEMBER 24th CHRISTMAS EVE

MASSES - 8.30a.m., 10.30a.m. & 12noon

CONFESSIONS - 1.00p.m. - 5.00p.m.

9.30 p.m. **CHRISTMAS CAROLS**

Christmas VIGIL Mass 10.00p.m.

CHRISTMAS DAY

MASSES - MONDAY - DECEMBER 25th

8.30a.m. - 10.30a.m. - 12.00noon

ST. STEPHEN'S DAY

MASS-TUESDAY-26th December

10.30a.m.

WEDNESDAY 27th - FRIDAY 29th DECEMBER

MASSES DAILY AT 10.30a.m.

SATURDAY DECEMBER 30th

MASS AT 10.30a.m., VIGIL at 7.30p.m.

NEW YEAR'S EVE - SUNDAY DECEMBER 31st

MASSES - 8.30a.m, 10.30a.m, 12noon & 7.00p.m.

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament 10.30pm

Special New Year's Eve Mass at 11.30pm.

SLIGO CATHEDRAL PARISH - 2200 FAMILIES

Sunday, 17th December **PARISH ENV: € 2,360 PL/STAND. ORD: €1,411**

THANK YOU for your contribution.

ST MARY'S PRESBYTERY ☎ 071 9162670 SACRISTY ☎ 071 9161261

✉ email us at info@sligocathedral.ie We welcome your comments.

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS FROM BISHOP KEVIN

Bishop Kevin's Christmas message is available to watch or read on www.elphindiocese.ie

PARISH OFFICE at St. Mary's Presbytery ☎ 071 9162670

Please note that the parish office will be closed until Tuesday, 2nd January 2018 and will be open to the public at the following times: Tuesday - Thursday 9.30am - 4pm & Friday 9.30am - 2pm.

DATES TO REMEMBER

ROTARY REMEMBRANCE CHRISTMAS TREE COLLECTION in aid of S.V.D.P. and Sligo Hospice will take place in O'Connell Street, Sligo today Sunday, 24th December. An Interdenominational Service of Thanksgiving will be arranged in the New Year.

ANNUAL GOAL MILE takes place on Wednesday, 27th December at IT Sligo Athletics Track from 12noon - 1pm. Please come along to run, walk or jog and support this very worthy cause.

FAMILY RETREAT DAY "LIVING FAMILY" will host a retreat day for all families on Saturday, 6th January in Summerhill College, from 10am-5pm. Bishop Kevin will celebrate Mass at 10.30am. Booking essential. Contact Therese on 086 8228174 or info@livingfamily.ie

ELPHIN DIOCESE YOUNG ADULT PILGRIMAGE TO ASSISI AND ANCIENT CHRISTIAN ROME 23rd June - 1st July, 2018 OPEN TO YOUNG ADULTS BETWEEN THE AGES OF 18 AND 35. Cost €599. see www.elphindiocese.ie

WMOF2018 PETITION BOX The Petition Box given to the diocese from the World Meeting of Families will visit each parish from now until August 2018. For schedule see www.elphindiocese.ie

SLIGO SOCIAL SERVICES are looking for volunteers to help in their Meals on wheels kitchen for 1.5 hours per day on a rota basis. If you are interested please contact Lorna on 071 9145682 for further information.

AND YOU SHALL BE MY WITNESS FR MICHAEL SHIELDS from Magadan, Russia will be visiting Sligo Holy Cross Friary, High Street for a night of prayer and healing on Thursday, 4th January 2018. Fr Michael has appeared on EWTN and has been requested to give many talks and missions around the world. His testimony and witness is very powerful and he will be speaking about the importance of family life and healing. The Night will begin at 7pm and will include the Holy Rosary, Mass and a Eucharistic Healing Service and music. All are welcome to come along and join us on this very special night. Please bring along a friend.

ANNIVERSARY & REMEMBRANCES

DAY	10.30 a.m. Mass
MON 25 th	CHRISTMAS DAY
TUES 26 th	NED KILFEATHER & MAUREEN CALLAGHAN
WED 27 th	MAI & CHARLIE MULLIGAN
THURS 28 th	THOMAS & MARY MCNIFFE
FRI 29 th	PADRAIG BURKE & deceased family members
SAT 30 th	BERNARD & TERESA LYDON

MONTH'S MIND MASS for WILLIAM CRUMMY will be celebrated at the 7.30pm Vigil Mass on Saturday, 30th December.

Rest in peace Your prayers are asked for the repose of the souls of: ROSE FOCKER, sister of Bridie Crawley, Jinks Ave and BERNARD DEVINS, Sea View Park, First Sea Road. *May God grant them eternal rest and comfort and console their bereaved families and friends.*