

PARISH OF ARDSTRAW WEST AND CASTLEDERG

St Mary's, Dregish · St Patrick's, Castlederg · St Francis of Assisi, Drumnabey

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SUNDAY 20 DECEMBER 2020: FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

MARY, THE ARK OF GOD'S COVENANT (GOSPEL – ST LUKE 1:26-38)

Mary, our blessed Mother, is the focus of the Gospel on this fourth Sunday of Advent, when we hear St Luke's account of the Annunciation. God, through the angel Gabriel, gradually revealed to Mary, a humble young woman, her extraordinary mission in life, a unique role in God's plan for salvation as the mother of Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah. We are told that the angel's opening words to Mary were, "Rejoice, so highly favoured! The Lord is with you." 'The Lord is with you' is an expression used in the Bible to greet those God has called to play a crucial role in His plan of salvation. Each time we attend Mass, the priest says to the congregation in the opening words of the Mass, "*The Lord be with you*". This highlights for us, as children of God, that each of us is called to a unique mission in building His kingdom. Mary is a model for us in faith: despite the enormity of God's plan for her, she was unwavering in her trust in and acceptance of His will for her. *Mary, Ark of the Covenant, pray for us.*

SUNDAY MASSES

Vigil, Saturday, 6.00pm

Sunday Morning, 11.00am, on the second and fourth Sundays of the month (13 & 27 December)

WEEKDAY MASSES

Monday, 7.30pm, preceded by Penitential Service at 7.00pm

See Christmas Mass schedule overleaf.

Parishioners intending to go to Sunday Mass in Castlederg on 26/27 December, should phone or email the Parochial House, **between 11am & 2pm on Monday or Tuesday** of this week, to book a place. If you are emailing, it is important that you include the number of people that hope to attend and, remember, a 'space' can hold up to three people.

ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI, DRUMNABEY: Sunday 27 December – 12.30pm: Listymore Park, Oakland, The Crewe, Garvetagh & Lisleen, Coolcreaghy

ST MARY'S, DREGISH: Sunday 27 December – 9.00am: Dunteague, Glassmullagh, Lisnacreight.

All Masses in St Patrick's, Castlederg, are live-streamed on our parish webcam: www.castledergparish.com

THANK YOU for your generosity in last week's collection, which amounted to £1,939. Thank you also to all who contribute by Standing Order / online. Envelopes can continue to be left through the door of the Parochial House.

When we were exchanging greetings for Christmas and the New Year this time last year, none of us could have imagined the year that lay ahead. It has been, for all of us, in all age brackets, a year like none other! As 'church', in March this year, priests, parishioners and parishes everywhere had to adapt very quickly to becoming an 'online parish community', but I am proud that, in our parish, we have been a resilient faith community, united in spirit and acclimatising quickly to the ever-changing rules and restrictions. For all your help, co-operation and patience, I am most grateful.

Christmas, as we know, may not be celebrated with all its usual traditions and trimmings this year and, in our churches, we will celebrate Christmas in smaller units than normal; this will not take away, however, from the joy and true meaning of Christmas, the great celebration of the birth of the Christ Child.

I wish you all peace and joy this Christmas. Special Christmas blessings on all the children of our parish, especially the children who were born and baptised into our parish faith community this year. Special blessings too on the couples who were united in the Sacrament of Marriage in our parish this year.

To all who are carrying the cross of sickness this Christmas, at home, in hospital or in nursing care, may the blessings of the Christ Child be a source of strength and comfort to you. Blessings on all who care for the sick. I think especially of those who have cared for Covid-19 patients this year and all in the caring profession who comforted the sick in hospital and residents in care homes who were unable to have family visiting because of the pandemic.

To the families in our parish who have suffered bereavement this year, may our prayerful support be a comfort to you at this time. May the souls of the faithful departed rest in peace.

On a personal note, I wish to thank you most sincerely for your ongoing support and kindness to me, in so many different ways, not just at Christmas but throughout the year. It is much appreciated.

We pray that brighter days are not too far away, but it is most important for all of us, in the meantime, to stay safe, create a safe environment for others and abide by the restrictions in place for our benefit.

I look forward to journeying with you in faith in the coming year and to the day when the rules and restrictions in our churches, especially for our liturgies, can be safely lifted.

May the blessings of the Christ Child be upon you all.

Fr Paul

ADVENT PENITENTIAL SERVICE: I invite you to join with me tomorrow night, Monday (21 December), on our parish webcam, at 7.00pm (before 7.30pm Mass in St Patrick's, Castlederg) for our Advent Penitential Service, as part of our spiritual preparation for Christmas. During this Penitential Liturgy, you will have the opportunity to pray an Act of Perfect Contrition. I look forward to joining with as many of you as possible. As you know, we are not in a position to facilitate the Sacrament of Confession at this time. However, if anyone feels they would like to receive the Sacrament, you can do so by individual prior arrangement with me. I will do my best to facilitate you.

CHRISTMAS MASSES

The Christmas Mass schedule will be as follows:

CASTLEDERG	DRUMNABEY	DREGISH
C H R I S T M A S E V E		
7.30pm and 9.00pm	6.00pm	5.00pm
C H R I S T M A S D A Y		
9.00am and 11.30am	9.00am	10.00am

As at time of printing of the newsletter, the 'spaces' remaining are:

Castlederg: 9.00am: 18 spaces; 11.30am: 15 spaces (Vigil Masses fully booked)

Drumnabey: 9.00am: 20 spaces (Vigil Mass fully booked)

Dregish: 5.00pm Vigil: 5 spaces, Morning Mass, 10.00am: 13 spaces.

Please remember that a space can accommodate up to three people from the same household or 'bubble'

Stewards will take bookings for the remaining spaces at the Masses in each of our churches this weekend (as they did last weekend). One ticket will be allocated to each available 'space'. You should only book a space in the church you usually attend. Please note that you cannot make a booking on behalf of another family or group and, if you have booked and realised you cannot attend, you should return your ticket to the Parish Office. This is important, both to ensure the fair allocation of spaces and to enable contact tracing information to be recorded accurately. If any spaces remain after this weekend, bookings can be taken by email or telephone on Monday or Tuesday of this week (21/22 December), between 11am and 6pm. Email: castledergparish@derrydiocese.org, Tel 028 8167 1393. You should not come to the church for a Christmas Mass unless you have booked a space as, regrettably, we can only accommodate those who are on the contact tracing list.

As always, the Masses from Castlederg will be live-streamed for the benefit of parishioners who are vulnerable, symptomatic or unable to book a space at Mass.

I deeply regret having to place these limits and restrictions on our celebrations, but I hope you will appreciate that the health and safety of parishioners is our guiding principle and is of paramount importance. At the end of each of our Masses, the churches will be thoroughly sanitised and ventilated. Christmas Masses will be shorter than normal this year, as we have to minimise the amount of time people spend in the church. I encourage you, however, to return to the church, if you can, at a quieter time over the Christmas Season to pray at the Crib.

THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS: A booklet with prayer resources suitable for the Season of Christmas, entitled *The Twelve Days of Christmas*, will be available at Christmas for you to pick up in our churches, to facilitate prayer, scripture and reflection in your home, with family, or during quiet time in the church. In particular, you might like to pick one up for family members who are not able to come out to Mass. It will also be available online, on www.derrydiocese.org. I very much hope that it will be a helpful prayer resource for families this Christmas.

THANK YOU: We are grateful to the children of St Patrick's PS who continue to help us in our Advent journey with their lovely prayers, drawings and thoughts for Advent, which are being posted each day on our parish Facebook Page.

THE 3A's CHARITY CHRISTMAS DRAW for an 'Irish Goods' Hamper worth £200 will take place on Christmas Eve, 24 December. Tickets still available online on aaafrica.org and Facebook Anawim Adonai Africa. Tickets £10. All support greatly appreciated.

CHILDREN IN CROSSFIRE ADVENT APPEAL 2020: Advent Boxes can be returned to the Parochial House in the coming weeks. Your generosity to this worthy cause will be greatly appreciated.

'CAROLS BY CANDLELIGHT': An online Carol Service will take place tonight, Sunday, at 8.00pm, from the Basilica at Knock Shrine. Livestreamed on knockshrine.ie. A wide range of classic Christmas carols will be sung, including 'O Holy Night', 'Joy to the World', 'In the Bleak mid-Winter' and many more well-known favourites.

NEXT SUNDAY, Feast of the Holy Family, the Gospel we will listen to is St Luke 2:22-40: *Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple*. You can access the Readings on catholicbishops.ie/readings