

# Spirit of the Season

Liturgical Year A

# Advent 2004

[www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/SOS](http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/SOS)

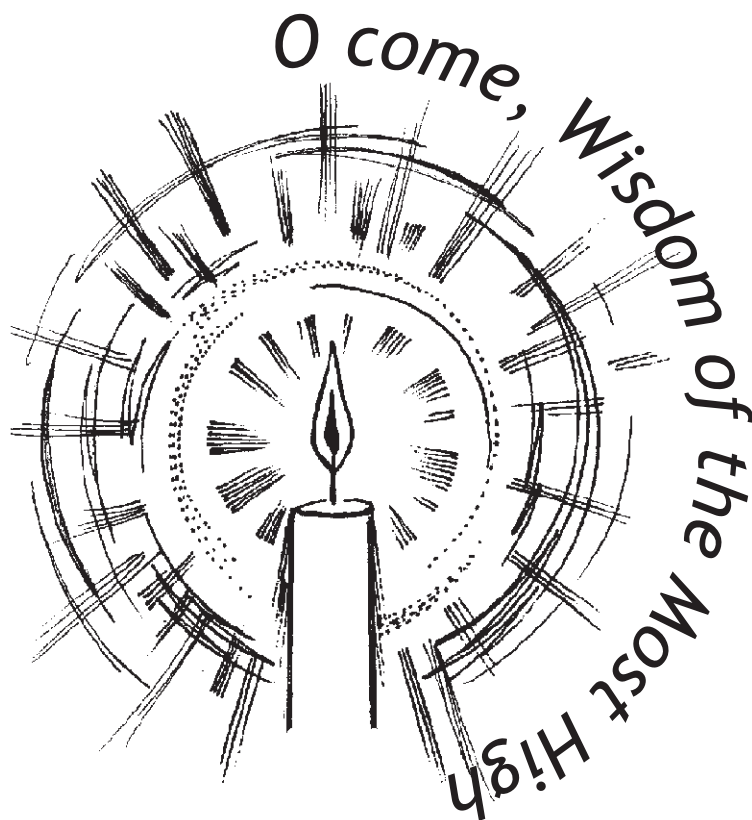
## Learning the Rite Way

In Autumn *Spirit of the Season* we looked at schools as ritual places and how the rituals of the beginning of term pass on the values of the school. Without even thinking about it the school communities has been about rituals, large and small, daily, weekly and seasonal. Rituals give pattern to each day, they also mark the turning of the year such as when we remember those who have died in November.

Rituals create identity. When we celebrate ritual we express who we are, what are our values but also in ritual we have the opportunity to learn who we are becoming. As we celebrate Advent with the wreath and Jesse Tree we learn that Advent is a time of waiting and preparation. Week by week a candle is lit on the Advent wreath; week by week the story of the Jesse Tree is added to. Week by week we wait and prepare; week by week we become Advent people.

But, meanwhile all around us Christmas rituals are happening. Carols and parties, Nativity plays and Christmas lights. If rituals create identity no wonder we feel tension at this time – are we keeping Advent or Christmas, or both?

- What are the effects of this tension?
- What are the opportunities it provides?



O come,  
Wisdom of  
the Most High,  
ordering all  
things with strength  
and gentleness,  
come and teach us  
the way of truth.



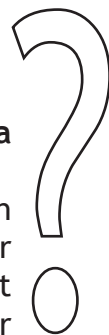
*'O Antiphon' 17 December*

### FAQ

Where can I find a Liturgical Calendar?

Many diocese publish their own Calendar (or 'Ordo') either as part of the yearbook or separately.

The Liturgy Office website ([www.liturgyoffice.org.uk](http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk)) has a complete calendar with readings and background info.



## Advent

One way of resolving some of the Advent-Christmas tensions could be to focus on Mary towards the end of the season. As the liturgy does from the fourth Week of Advent—Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> December—the liturgy focuses on Mary waiting and her place in the whole of the Christmas story.

Mary waits to give birth but can't until it is time. Is there a mum-to-be who could talk about the tension of waiting to give birth?

Simple gift wrapped boxes waiting to be opened could form a ritual action joined to a prayer. 'Lord we wait for you to come among us as... Peace, light, love etc.

The Magnificat could be prayed at the end.

### Advent Wreath

There can be few sights that have the ability of filling us with awe and wonder that to gaze up and through a suspended advent wreath. Literally we are able to 'peep heaven.' They are ancient. During the winter months as the ground turned to mud, the precious wooden wagon wheels were hung to protect them. They were hung horizontally—to keep the shape—from the rafters. Come the winter solstice evergreen branches and candles celebrating the coming of the sun and a new year, were placed upon them.



The song *Christmas is coming* (Iona) records that each candle recalls an Advent theme:

- Week 1: God's promise,
- Week 2: Prophets,
- Week 3: John the Baptist
- Week 4: Mary.

These themes are closely related to the Sunday readings.

Attempt a whole school wreath or a classroom one. While it will involve some work, you'll have it for years to come. As there maybe health and safety problems with the use of candles — how about purple ribbon decorated with silver glue? Eg: Try the themes: JOHN THE BAPTIST.

[Download *SOS Advent 2000* for a Wreath Blessing]

## Glossary



**Advent:** (Latin *advenire*—to come close) celebrate two 'comings' of Christ. It begins with his coming at the end of time to judge the world, then turns to the events and people who prepared the way for his human birth. The third Sunday is known as *Gaudete Sunday* — from the Latin of the Introit chant 'Rejoice' (Philippians 4: 4). The last week of Advent is a time of special preparation for Christmas.

**Prophet:** (Greek *prophetes* — one who speaks out or foretells) The Old Testament prophets were speakers of God's word and judgements on the people of Israel and Judah. They flourished from the time of the divided kingdom (c. 9th century BCE) until the exile (6th century BCE) and after. The term is used more generally to refer to all the great figures of the Old Testament, such as Moses and Samuel.

**Incarnation** (Latin *caro* — flesh, so *incarnatio* — enfleshment) The term denoting the coming of the eternal Son of God into this universe in human form, by the agency of the Holy Spirit and birth from the Virgin Mary.

from *A Basic Catholic Dictionary* © Alan Griffiths published by Canterbury Press, Norwich. [www.scm-canterburypress.co.uk](http://www.scm-canterburypress.co.uk)

## The Classroom in Advent

While the desire is to be always creative in liturgical displays — Advent' call us to be ritual in what we do: the Advent Wreath, the Jesse Tree. Having done these there can often seem to be little time or space to do anything else.

How about drapes of joyful purple? Straw 'baled' with raffia — animal fodder — can hint at the forthcoming crib/manger scene — you could even distribute the straw for use at home when end of term arrives.

The simple gift-wrapped boxes of the Collective Act of Worship (see column 1) could remain part of the display. Point towards the coming feast, Advent is about laying foundations of expectation.

If you are in school for the 4th week of Advent, or even just at the end of the 3rd week — add blue intertwined with white in the display.

*Waiting - Expectation - Emmanuel - God with us.*

## Seeing and Believing

One of the key things to remember when it comes to the liturgy is that there is usually more to things than at first meets the eye. What we first see is important, and has got its own value. But there is almost always something deeper there too, that we can't see directly, but can 'see' with the eyes of faith.

For example, at the beginning of Mass what do we see? We see a group of people there: some we might know, and some we might not; some - like the priest, for example, will be on the sanctuary and others will be sitting around us. We see all these people, but they don't look too different from the people we would see anywhere else.

But there is a difference, because these people are the Church present in this place. We want to know what the Church looks like - it is like this group of people, gathered in prayer and song. And there is more too. Jesus said whenever two or three are gathered in my name I am there with them. But when the Church gathers it is not just that Jesus is there with us. He is there with us, but he is also there as us. For in baptism, we each become members of the Body of Christ. And when we come together, that Body is re-membered, made one in us and in what we do.

We see each other, but in our assembly we 'see' Christ. This is what Christ looks like in this place and at this time - us. In a school celebration Christ is seen in the young (as well

as in the old!). In a parish celebration Christ is seen in much greater diversity - in the very young and the very old, and everyone in-between.

Christ is present. We participate in that presence, not just by being there, nor by just taking his presence for granted, but by letting what we see and know and understand move us to prayer. To recognise Christ in the vulnerability of a child, (however they are behaving!); to recognise Christ in a colleague (however *they* are behaving!) - this is to participate in this deeper reality of the liturgy. *And* to know that Christ is present in me too.

However I am, Christ is in me, and he invites me to find the fullness of my life in his. Participation is about more than 'just' Mass.



## Gathering

If we are to acknowledge Christ in one another then we must be able to **see** one another, not just the backs of heads. The choice of layout for liturgy deeply affects what we see and how we feel about one another. Think about how the seating arrangement could focus on a central area while allowing participants to see one another's faces. Consider where the adults sit so that they too feel fully part of the celebration and not merely spectators. Sometimes it may be appropriate to have 'free seating' where all choose where to sit. It is a very powerful symbol of equal participation when a teacher chooses to kneel or sit on the floor.

The gathering begins the moment the first group enters the space for liturgy. A candle can be used to lead a class in and be lit from a main paschal candle. Singing can start with the first arrivals and continue to build as each class processes in. The final procession may be of those with a special ministry in the day's liturgy - reader, server, priest, cantor. In many schools it can take up to ten minutes for all to gather, so a song is needed that can bear lengthy repetition, *e.g. Uyai' mose, We Come to Share, Don't be Afraid*. Alternating between a sung verse and hummed verse allows everyone the stamina to continue the gathering until all are present.

# Respect for others

The last issue explored the diversity of our school congregations - how they are often made up of people from a range of Christian denominations and rites, from a variety of cultures, with differing experience of connection with the parish, and of different ages. In the liturgy this diversity of peoples is invited to become one in Christ.

How do we begin? Perhaps by listening to each other's stories. Each of us knows, more or consciously, how 'we' are Church. But we need to listen to others to learn how 'they' are Church. How an Orthodox liturgy can last for 3 hours or more and is all sung. How different Churches keep Christmas and Easter at different times. How baptism is celebrated differently in different Churches. Often the children and their families will have resources they can share – family videos and photos, prayer books, catechetical materials. And there may be customs and foods that can be introduced to the school or a class by way of celebrating our differences and helping them to become a source of unity.

One way of valuing national cultures is to celebrate the feast of patron saints in class or school liturgies. The school liturgical calendar should basically be that of the diocese, but it is appropriate to adapt it to reflect the make-up of the school's membership.



It is common when the school has a major event to invite the clergy from the local Catholic parishes. Inviting the clergy of other churches and chaplaincies attended by children and their families is a way of deepening relationship and recognising their importance.

It is easy for our working assumption to be that the 'good' Christian is the one that goes regularly to church. But we know that is not always the case. Sometimes the child who is most in touch with the language and practice of their religion is the child rarely taken to church, but who is part of a family that prays together at home, celebrating the seasons in the 'domestic church'.

Faith can be nurtured in a wide variety of ways. Part of the challenge for the class teacher and the RE Coordinator is to become sensitive to the ways this is happening with particular children, and how what is nourishing faith in them can become a resource for the building up of faith in the rest of the school community.

We need to ask ourselves

- Who is there in our school?
- What is there in the experience and culture of those in the school community for us to draw on?
- Are there choices to be made about what we celebrate in liturgy, because of our diversity?

Lord,  
perfect your Church in faith and love.

Open our eyes to the needs of all;  
inspire us with words and deeds  
to comfort those who labour and are burdened;  
keep our service of others  
faithful to the example and command of Christ.

Let your Church be a living witness  
to truth and freedom, to justice and peace,  
that all people may be lifted up  
by the hope of a world made new.

*Eucharistic Prayer for Masses for Various Needs and Occasions:  
D Jesus the Compassion of God*



## Getting in touch

Martin Foster, **Liturgy Office**,  
39 Eccleston Square, London SW1V 1PL.  
020 7901 4850 (tel) 020 7901 4821 (fax)  
lifeworsh@cbcew.org.uk  
www.liturgyoffice.org.uk

Anne Dixon  
**National Project Co-ordinator**,  
Catholic Education Service,  
39 Eccleston Square, London SW1V 1BX  
0207901 4880 (tel) 020 7901 4893 (fax)  
general@cesew.org.uk  
www.cesew.org.uk

**Spirit of the Season** is put together by  
Paul Varey, Trinity & All Saints College,  
Leeds, LS18 5HD.  
0113 283 7201 (tel) 0113 283 7200 (fax)  
p\_varey@tasc.ac.uk

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