



Christmas is almost upon us and, and as we journey through, or perhaps ‘gallop through’, the last days of Advent we might try to direct our minds and hearts to Christ’s second coming at the end of time, and then to the anniversary of our Lord’s birth at Christmas. The final days of Advent, from December 17 to December 24, focus particularly on our preparation for the celebrations of the Nativity of our Lord (Christmas). Once again we again include information about the Christmas tree

and the Christmas crib – both of which are a familiar part of Christmas for the secular world as well as for practicing Christians. This year is the 800th anniversary of the first crib, created by St Francis of Assisi and we include a little more information below. Perhaps it is even more important today to emphasise that Christ is at the heart of Christmas, now that it seems that less than half of the population of England and Wales will describe themselves as Christian. As Christians we are called to see and give witness to what lies at the heart of our celebration. The Lord of heaven and earth, the maker of the stars has become a child for us! Rather than extending our celebrations by starting early, let us remember that the Church gives us a Christmas Octave (eight days, from 25 December to 1 January). Each day of the Octave is in itself a ‘Christmas Day’. The Christmas Season itself doesn’t end on Boxing Day, or when the decorations come down on the ‘12th night’, it ends on the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, the Sunday after the Epiphany, so why not celebrate the Epiphany in some way - maybe an Epiphany dinner or Epiphany Carol Service – or even an Epiphany Carol Service followed by an Epiphany dinner or party?

The Christmas Crib

The first nativity scene was created, in Greccio, Italy, by Saint Francis of Assisi in 1223. With an aim of promoting the worship of Christ, he designed the Christmas crib. This live scene became so popular among different communities that throughout Catholic churches this tradition became a part of Christmas celebration.

St. Francis had a special devotion to the Child Jesus, and it is believed that he was first inspired by this idea after visiting the historical place of Christ’s birth on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land – the humble stable in a Bethlehem cave. It is likely that this event deepened his devotion to the Child Jesus, who was born into the world in such poverty, humility, and simplicity. In fact, Francis founded his new religious Order to imitate these very virtues. He recreated the scene of Christ’s birth in a special ritual and Mass he held, inside a cave in Greccio, inviting both his fellow friars and the townspeople to join in the celebration. Later he told a friend why he desired to create the first nativity scene in his town:

‘I want to do something that will recall the memory of that Child who was born in Bethlehem, to see with bodily eyes the inconveniences of his infancy, how he lay in the manger, and how the ox and ass stood by.’

He set up an empty manger (the feeding trough of farm animals which served as Jesus’ crib) inside a cave, and even included a live ox and donkey beside the manger just as it was believed to have happened on that first Christmas night. Through these visual aids he wanted to impress everyone more deeply into their understanding of how Christ came into the world in such poverty and simplicity. This was a typical perspective of St. Francis’ unique charism of simple, poverty-centred spirituality.

It is also said that St. Francis – who was radically devoted to the virtue of evangelical poverty – was inspired to recreate the original nativity scene to overcome the rampant greed and materialism prevalent at that time in Italy.

The Christmas Season

You will find information on the Christmas tree and the Christmas crib [here](#) and [here](#), under the Further Resources tab along with rites for the Blessing of a Christmas Tree and a Nativity scene (some of these blessings will also be found in Appendix Seven of the Liturgical Diary), and something about the Epiphany of the Lord and the Epiphany Blessing of homes. You will also find an Epiphany Carol Liturgy and the Epiphany Proclamation. The Epiphany Proclamation may be sung, ideally by a cantor, on the Feast Day itself - you will find the music file [here](#). This Proclamation dates back to the time, before calendars were common, when most people did not know the dates for the coming Liturgical year. On Epiphany Sunday, then, the upcoming dates would be 'proclaimed' after the gospel.

Art & Architecture

The Liturgy Office is responsible for advising the bishop and our parishes on matters of liturgical Art and Architecture – building, re-ordering, alterations and additions and artistic commissions – for the churches of the diocese. Any proposed changes which affect the liturgical and devotional life of the parish or community will need to be referred to the Liturgy Office for advice and permission where necessary. This may also require diocesan approval and possibly approval from the Historic Churches Committee (in the case of a listed building).

Is Diocesan Permission Needed?

Permission is required for all works that affect the liturgical and devotional life of the parish or community. This is wide-ranging and may range from the construction of a new church building to a major re-ordering or even provision of works of sacred art. It may also extend to the grounds of the church especially where this area includes the approach to the building, its use for the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy (burials, Palm Sunday Liturgy, Eucharistic processions etc), devotional areas and where such grounds are the context for works of sacred art.

The interior of the church or chapel includes the narthex, nave, sanctuary, baptistery, Blessed Sacrament chapel, sacristy, places for the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, shrines, galleries and other places. This will include such things as

1. the overall liturgical environment;
2. the provision of altar, ambo, font, presidential chair, place for the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament and Holy Oils, musical instruments, seating, altar rails, confessionals and also substantial brass and silverware;
3. décor, lighting schemes, furnishings, floor coverings, glazing, sound systems, heating, memorial plaques etc;
4. works of Sacred Art including stained and etched glass, statuary, Stations of the Cross, icons, paintings, mosaics, murals, banners etc;
5. any item that is intended to be a permanent fixture. 'Permanent' is understood to refer to placing of an object, whether fixed or moveable, in the church for a continuous period exceeding three months;

6. the restoration, removal or disposal of any work of art, historic vestments, plate and furnishings from a church or chapel belonging to the Clifton Diocese.

Early Consultation

It often saves time and frustration if you approach the Liturgy Office at the outset, before submitting a formal application. Please do contact the Liturgy Office for comments and advice about your plans as early on in the project as possible. The Liturgy Office seeks to serve our communities and offers a consultancy service on the various aspects of sacred space and the general liturgical environment.

Site Visits

It may be that the Liturgy Office will wish to send a member or a small group to discuss your proposals on site or to meet with the parish priest, members of the PPC and other parishioners or members of your community. It will help if you can send as much information as possible, such as sketch plans, brief etc. in advance if you have reached such a stage of development.

Please remember

Any works carried out without approval may have to be reversed. Furthermore, no work is to be commenced in a listed church until a faculty has been received from the Historic Churches Committee.

For further information please contact liturgy@cliftondiocese.com

New Translation of the Lectionary

We are advised by CBCEW that the New Translation of the Lectionary will come into use on 1 December 2024, the First Sunday of Advent. It is important to remember that this is a new **translation**, not a new Lectionary, in the same way that the new Translation of the Roman Missal was a new translation and not a completely new Missal. The readings will have the same references, but the translation we encounter will be different.

The English Standard Version: Catholic Edition is seen as fulfilling the qualities the Church seeks.

The Lectionary texts will be set out in 'sense' lines – rather like St John's Prologue – and will consequently take up more space. There will therefore be four volumes, not three, namely

- Sundays, Solemnities, Feasts of the Lord
- Weekdays: Advent, Christmas, OT 1-9, Lent, Easter + Saints (December–May) & Commons
- Weekdays: OT 6-34 + Saints (June–November) & Commons
- Ritual Masses, VNO, Votive Masses, Dead

There will also be a Book of the Gospels, and all of these will be published by the CTS. The ESV Catholic Edition of the Bible is available to buy from SPCK Publishing and People's Missals, Missalettes and Annual Missals will be available in plenty of time for the first use in Advent 2024.

Dates for your diary:

Some reminders of important dates for your diary for the coming year: Ash Wednesday, which is a day of fasting and abstinence, will be on 14 February and the Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion - when the bishop meets with all those who will be baptised or received into full communion with the Catholic Church at Easter and their names entered into the Book of the Elect – will be held, in the cathedral, on Saturday 17 February at 11am. Easter Sunday, the Sunday of the Resurrection, will be celebrated on 31 March and the Celebration of Family and Married Life Mass on 25th May.

Diary

The Liturgical Diary is now available in parishes and online. The cost remains unchanged and, at £6.50 per copy, is excellent value. It contains, in addition to all the information about Liturgical texts for Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours each day, little hagiographies of the saints celebrated throughout the year. There are explanatory items about the liturgical seasons and feasts celebrated and a number of blessings for use throughout the year along with a year planner for 2025.

...and finally.

Please keep an eye on what is happening on the Liturgy Office section of the website: <https://cliftondiocese.com/liturgy-office/>. There is a mine of information here on all things liturgical, including suggested Bidding Prayers for each Sunday and Holy Day under the 'Prayer of the Faithful' tab. If there is something on liturgy that you would like to see on these pages, but can't find, please just email liturgy@cliftondiocese.com

Wishing you a very blessed Christmas season