

PARISH OF ASCOT VALE

ST MARY'S CHURCH, 123 ST LEONARDS ROAD, ASCOT VALE
ST MARGARET'S CHURCH, BARB STREET, MARIBYRNONG

Parish Priest:	Rev Fr Justin Ford
Assistant Priest / Lithuanian Chaplain:	Rev Fr Joseph Deveikis
Presbytery / Parish Office:	123 St Leonards Rd, Ascot Vale (Postal: PO Box 468 Ascot Vale 3032)
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Office Hours:	Tue & Fri, 10am – 3pm. Secretary: Carmen D'Rosario
Principal, St Mary's School:	Mr Paul Hogan T: 9370 1194
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Weekend Mass Times

Saturday Vigil:

6.00pm St Mary's

Sunday:

8.30am St Margaret's

10.30am St Mary's

6.00pm St Mary's (Spanish)

Live streaming of our 10:30

Sunday Mass is continuing,
accessible on our parish website.

Weekday Mass Times

Mon 10.00am St Mary's

Tue 9.00am St Mary's

Wed 9.00am St Mary's
7.00pm St Mary's

Thu 9.00am St Mary's

Fri 9.15am St Mary's

Sat 9.30am St Mary's

Reconciliation (Confession)

Saturday

10.00–10.30am St Mary's

5.30–5.45pm St Mary's

Baptisms at St Mary's

Our normal schedule of
Baptisms remains on hold.
However, we are resuming
Baptism ceremonies for
individual babies, with up to
two ceremonies every weekend.

We are also resuming our
Baptism Information Sessions
in St Mary's Church at 7:30 pm
on the first Thursday of each
month, re-commencing 7
January. Those interested in the
baptism of their child should
attend one of these sessions.

Weddings at St Mary's

For information on weddings
please ring the parish office.

Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord – 3 January 2021

Something one often enough hears people say, is that they don't believe that Christian faith is 'the only way': they believe that all the different religions are paths to God, and so we supposedly shouldn't say that our religion is 'better' than other religions.

Today's feast of the Epiphany has something to say to us about that, because this is when we celebrate Jesus being revealed as the light for *all* the nations – the Saviour not just of the Jewish people, but of the whole human race. In the shepherds who visit the manger on the night of Christmas, we can see a symbol of the simple poor people of Israel, who received the message of joy from the angel. But in the journey of the wise men from the East to Bethlehem, the tradition of the Church has seen a symbol of all peoples and cultures, journeying towards God and receiving the manifestation and revelation of Jesus, the Light of all Nations. The wise men weren't Jews, and so didn't have the Law or the Prophets to guide them in the same way. Yet by using the guidance that they *were* given – in particular, the light of a star – they were led to see the salvation which God had made for all of humanity.

The Second Vatican Council, speaking of non-Christian religions, said this: 'The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men. Yet she proclaims and is in duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is the way, the truth and the life (*Jn* 14:6). In him, in whom God reconciled all things to himself (*2 Cor* 5:18-19), men find the fullness of their religious life.' (Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate* 2)

It's not the case that God has given his salvation just to Christians and left everyone else wandering in complete darkness. He wills all people to be saved, and so in some way he gives to every single person the opportunity for salvation. For example, for people who never even get to hear of Jesus, or who never have the gospel fully proclaimed to them: if with the help of grace they follow God's will as they understand it through their conscience, then in some hidden way, God unites them with Christ, and so they can reach salvation.

And outside the visible boundaries of the Church, the Holy Spirit has scattered seeds of truth and goodness that help lead people towards God and towards Christ. These seeds of truth and goodness are often found in the non-Christian religions, which are human strivings towards God.

But we also believe that human strivings, by themselves, can't reach God. Humanity by itself doesn't have the power for salvation. We have to receive it as a free gift from God. So in the midst of the strivings of human wisdom and human reason – our own human religions – God, by his free gift and by his own initiative, has reached down to us, and given us the *divine* religion and the fullness of salvation, by himself becoming human in Jesus.

People sometimes speak as though all the different religions are 'rivals' – as though all the different religious founders, Jesus, and Mohammed, and Buddha, and so on,

had all 'claimed to be God', so that everyone then had to 'choose between them'. But those who know anything about the different non-Christian religions understands that really, that's a quite false picture of their various teachings. The great founders of the other religions don't even make those same divine claims that we find in the teachings of Jesus. (And of course, Jesus *proves* his claims by his miracles, above all his Resurrection.)

Because Jesus is God himself made man, he's the divine fulfilment that all the merely human religions are striving for. That means that when someone becomes a Christian after having been in another religion, they don't have to give up everything they used to believe in their previous religion.

Certainly, anything false or wrong, such as any worship of false gods, has to be left behind: Jesus purifies and frees us from error and evil. We don't say that all beliefs are equal; and obviously, when two beliefs contradict each other, only one of them can be true. So clearly, any beliefs which *contradict* the teachings of Christ have to be given up when someone becomes a Christian.

But the seeds in their previous religion of *goodness and truth* blossom when they come into contact with Christ. (This shows us yet another perspective on how our own knowledge of Christ is a special gift with which God has entrusted us – so that we can share it with others, and enable the good things they already possess to blossom by this contact with Christ. If we keep that knowledge to ourselves, we're failing those other people, who have the right to hear it from us.)

Today's gospel shows us two opposite paths a person (or a nation, or a religion) can take, once having come into contact with Christ. They can take the path of Herod, who saw Jesus as a threat, a rival, to his own kingship. (Thus someone from another religion can see Christ as a threat to what they already have.) Or, on the other hand, someone can take the path of the wise men, who realised that Jesus didn't come to *take away* the good things they already had, but to *fulfil* them. They came to Jesus offering their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. In the same way over the centuries, the different cultures have brought their own riches to Jesus and laid them at his feet; and

those cultures, within the Christian family, have risen to a new richness.

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, when still a Cardinal, was once asked by an interviewer, 'How many ways to God are there?' And then-Cardinal Ratzinger answered, 'As many ways as there are people.' That means we each have our own unique path to follow in life: no one's journey is the same as another's.

(And so it never makes sense for me to be envious of another person's path: God has planned his own way for me to reach him, with all its unique twists and turns, its different challenges, its particular joys and sufferings. The particular stars on my path by which he guides me. God is shaping me to be the particular person he planned from all eternity I would be, and I can rejoice in the special path he's leading me along.)

But Cardinal Ratzinger then went on to say to the interviewer, that all these different ways must somehow pass through Jesus Christ. Because Jesus alone is God himself made man, he alone is the one through whom humanity is united with God. But also, precisely *because* Jesus is God, he's 'large' enough to contain all our individual paths to God, and to give them their full meaning – indeed, a fuller meaning than we'd ever dared to dream. And he's large enough to contain those individual paths without those paths losing their uniqueness and their individuality.

And the same is true not just of individual people, but of all the different nations and cultures of the world. Every different culture and nation finds its special fulfilment in Jesus, perfect God and perfect man, and in the universal family of his Church, without giving up its individuality and its uniqueness. When what is human comes into union with what is divine, the human isn't destroyed – it's made perfect, it becomes fully itself.

So ever since the time of the three wise men, different people from all nations have been finding their true home in Christ, by following in their own way the light of their different stars – the various lights that God sends us to guide us on the path to Jesus. May we continue to follow the stars that God gives us, so that at the end of our lives we come home to the One the wise men found, and the Source of all our light.

Monthly Baptism Information Sessions resume this Thursday

Although we are not yet returning to our normal schedule of Baptism ceremonies, our regular monthly Baptism Information Sessions, on hold since March 2020, will resume this Thursday 7 January at 7:30 pm in St Mary's Church, and will continue to be held on the first Thursday of each month. Parents wanting their child to be baptised should attend an Information Session, and scheduling of individual baptisms will be able to be discussed.

Holy Hours of Adoration resuming

We are now resuming our weekly Holy Hours of Eucharistic Adoration at St Mary's – on Tuesdays after 9:00 am Mass (9:30 am – 10:30 am); and on Saturdays after 9:30 am Mass (10:00 am – 11:00 am).

St Vincent de Paul Helpline: 1800 305 330, Monday – Friday, 10am – 3pm

For the 150th Anniversary of Saint Joseph being named Patron of the Universal Church, Pope Francis has declared a 'Year of St Joseph', from 8 December 2020 until 8 December 2021. We continue to read his Apostolic Letter 'Patris Corde' ('With a father's heart') promulgated for the occasion.

APOSTOLIC LETTER PATRIS CORDE OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS

ON THE 150th ANNIVERSARY OF THE PROCLAMATION OF SAINT JOSEPH AS PATRON OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

An obedient father

As he had done with Mary, God revealed his saving plan to Joseph. He did so by using dreams, which in the Bible and among all ancient peoples, were considered a way for him to make his will known. (Cf. *Gen* 20:3; 28:12; 31:11, 24; 40:8; 41:1-32; *Num* 12:6; *1 Sam* 3:3-10; *Dan* 2, 4; *Job* 33:15)

Joseph was deeply troubled by Mary's mysterious pregnancy. He did not want to "expose her to public disgrace", (In such cases, provisions were made even for stoning (cf. *Deut* 22:20-21)) so he decided to "dismiss her quietly" (*Mt* 1:19).

In the first dream, an angel helps him resolve his grave dilemma: "Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (*Mt* 1:20-21). Joseph's response was immediate: "When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him" (*Mt* 1:24). Obedience made it possible for him to surmount his difficulties and spare Mary.

In the second dream, the angel tells Joseph: "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him" (*Mt* 2:13). Joseph did not hesitate to obey, regardless of the hardship involved: "He got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod" (*Mt* 2:14-15).

In Egypt, Joseph awaited with patient trust the angel's notice that he could safely return home. In a third dream, the angel told him that those who sought to kill the child were dead and ordered him to rise, take the child and his mother, and return to the land of Israel (cf. *Mt* 2:19-20). Once again, Joseph promptly obeyed. "He got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel" (*Mt* 2:21).

During the return journey, "when Joseph heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. After being warned in a dream" – now for the fourth time – "he went away to the

district of Galilee. There he made his home in a town called Nazareth" (*Mt* 2:22-23).

The evangelist Luke, for his part, tells us that Joseph undertook the long and difficult journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem to be registered in his family's town of origin in the census of the Emperor Caesar Augustus. There Jesus was born (cf. *Lk* 2: 7) and his birth, like that of every other child, was recorded in the registry of the Empire. Saint Luke is especially concerned to tell us that Jesus' parents observed all the prescriptions of the Law: the rites of the circumcision of Jesus, the purification of Mary after childbirth, the offering of the firstborn to God (cf. 2:21-24). (Cf. *Lev* 12:1-8; *Ex* 13:2)

In every situation, Joseph declared his own "fiat", like those of Mary at the Annunciation and Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

In his role as the head of a family, Joseph taught Jesus to be obedient to his parents (cf. *Lk* 2:51), in accordance with God's command (cf. *Ex* 20:12).

During the hidden years in Nazareth, Jesus learned at the school of Joseph to do the will of the Father. [cf. 'Catechism of the Catholic Church' nn. 471-74, on the mystery of the human knowledge of Christ. In his divine nature he had infinite knowledge, and in his human nature his human soul always had the beatific vision of the divine essence; yet in body and soul he also acquired knowledge in the natural human way.] That will was to be his daily food (cf. *Jn* 4:34). Even at the most difficult moment of his life, in Gethsemane, Jesus chose to do the Father's will rather than his own, (Cf. *Mt* 26:39; *Mk* 14:36; *Lk* 22:42) becoming "obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (*Phil* 2:8). The author of the Letter to the Hebrews thus concludes that Jesus "learned obedience through what he suffered" (5:8).

All this makes it clear that "Saint Joseph was called by God to serve the person and mission of Jesus directly through the exercise of his fatherhood" and that in this way, "he cooperated in the fullness of time in the great mystery of salvation and is truly a minister of salvation." (Saint John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Custos* (15 August 1989) 8)

Hymns:

Entrance	–	CWB 281	We three kings
Offertory	–	A child is born in Bethlehem	
Communion	–	CWB 280	The first Nowell
Reflection	–	Let our praise to you be as incense	
Recessional	–	CWB 265	Joy to the world!

Anniversaries: Orazia Guglielmino

Feast Days: 7 January: St Raymond of Penyafort

Readings Next Week: Feast of the Baptism of the Lord: Is 55:1-11; 1 Jn 5:1-9; Mk 1:7-11

St Vincent de Paul Christmas Appeal

You are encouraged to donate, either by using the envelopes at the church doors, by calling 13 18 12, or online at vinnies.org.au (A button on the home page of our parish website will take you to the donation page.)

THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD – READINGS

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON *(if no hymn is sung)*

Behold, the Lord, the Mighty One, has come;
and kingship is in his grasp, and power and dominion.

FIRST READING

Is 60:1-6

A reading from the prophet Isaiah

Arise, shine out Jerusalem, for your light has come,
the glory of the Lord is rising on you,
though night still covers the earth
and darkness the peoples.

Above you the Lord now rises
and above you his glory appears.
The nations come to your light
and kings to your dawning brightness.

Lift up your eyes and look round:
all are assembling and coming towards you,
your sons from far away
and daughters being tenderly carried.

At this sight you will grow radiant,
your heart throbbing and full;
since the riches of the sea will flow to you;
the wealth of the nations come to you;
camels in throngs will cover you,
and dromedaries of Midian and Ephah:
everyone in Sheba will come,
bringing gold and incense
and singing the praise of the Lord.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Ps 71

R. Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

1. O God, give your judgement to the king,
to a king's son your justice,
that he may judge your people in justice
and your poor in right judgement. (R.)

2. In his days justice shall flourish
and peace till the moon fails.
He shall rule from sea to sea,
from the great River to earth's bounds. (R.)

3. The kings of Tarshish and the sea coasts
shall pay him tribute.
The kings of Sheba and Seba
shall bring him gifts.
Before him all kings shall fall prostrate,
all nations shall serve him. (R.)

4. For he shall save the poor when they cry
and the needy who are helpless.
He will have pity on the weak
and save the lives of the poor. (R.)

SECOND READING

Eph 3:2-3, 5-6

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Ephesians

You have probably heard how I have been entrusted by
God with the grace he meant for you, and that it was by
a revelation that I was given the knowledge of the
mystery. This mystery that has now been revealed
through the Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets was
unknown to any men in past generations; it means that
pagans now share the same inheritance, that they are

parts of the same body, and that the same promise has
been made to them, in Christ Jesus, through the gospel.

The word of the Lord.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Mt 2:2

Alleluia, alleluia!
We have seen his star in the East;
and have come to adore the Lord.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Mt 2:1-12

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

After Jesus had been born at Bethlehem in Judaea during
the reign of King Herod, some wise men came to
Jerusalem from the east. 'Where is the infant king of the
Jews?' they asked. 'We saw his star as it rose and have
come to do him homage.' When King Herod heard this
he was perturbed, and so was the whole of Jerusalem.
He called together all the chief priests and the scribes of
the people, and enquired of them where the Christ was to
be born. 'At Bethlehem in Judaea', they told him 'for
this is what the prophet wrote:

And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
you are by no means least among the leaders of Judah,
for out of you will come a leader
who will shepherd my people Israel.'

Then Herod summoned the wise men to see him
privately. He asked them the exact date on which the star
had appeared, and sent them on to Bethlehem. 'Go and
find out all about the child,' he said 'and when you have
found him, let me know, so that I too may go and do him
homage.' Having listened to what the king had to say,
they set out. And there in front of them was the star they
had seen rising; it went forward and halted over the place
where the child was. The sight of the star filled them
with delight, and going into the house they saw the child
with his mother, Mary, and falling to their knees they did
him homage. Then, opening their treasures, they offered
him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. But they
were warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, and
returned to their own country by a different way.

The Gospel of the Lord.

MEMORIAL ACCLAMATION

We proclaim your Death, O Lord,
and profess your Resurrection, until you come again.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON *(if no hymn is sung)*

We have seen his star in the East,
and have come with gifts to adore the Lord.

SPIRITUAL COMMUNION

(for those unable to receive sacramentally)

My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the Most
Holy Sacrament. I love you above all things, and I desire
to receive you into my soul. Since I cannot at this
moment receive you sacramentally, come at least
spiritually into my heart. I embrace you as if you were
already there and unite myself wholly to you. Never
permit me to be separated from you. Amen.