

Advent Retreat Day

Bringing people closer to Jesus Christ through His Church
Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth



At the beginning of the Jubilee year, we set out on pilgrimage to reflect on the true Jubilee, Jesus Christ himself. Every Jubilee Year is a time when we are given the opportunity to renew our relationship with Jesus, to receive the graces of his forgiveness and love. We remember that just as in the Jubilee of old, slaves were set free from bondage so they may be reunited with their families and homeland, Jesus sets us free from the bondage of sin and death, and unites us with our true family (the church) and our true home (heaven.) Throughout the year we have also been given the opportunity to visit one of the six Jubilee shrines in the Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth, St John Cathedral, Portsmouth, St Edmund's, Southampton, St James, Reading, Bournemouth Oratory, St Thomas, Jersey, and St Joseph's, Guernsey. Here we have been given the chance to receive the Jubilee indulgence. In addition to visiting a Jubilee shrine, by celebrating the sacrament of confession, attending mass, praying the creed and praying for the Holy Father's intentions, this special indulgence is imparted to us. The Jubilee indulgence has also been extended to the sick and housebound who can receive the indulgence at home. The Jubilee year is a time of mercy, praying for our loved ones, praying for and helping those in need, and also praying for the souls in purgatory, by receiving the Jubilee indulgence, in these acts of prayer and devotion, we have been given the chance to follow in Christ's example and extend God's mercy to others too.

As we enter the season of Advent and the Jubilee Year draws to a close, we have one final opportunity to reflect upon the theme of pilgrimage. The Advent season is full of pilgrimages made by both the Holy Family and others who travelled many miles to visit Jesus. The first journey begins after the annunciation. The angel Gabriel tells Mary that her cousin Elizabeth, in her old age, is also pregnant with child. Mary sets out to meet her cousin and stays with her for three months and ministers to her. In the story of the annunciation and visitation, Mary displays perfectly the command to love God and to love neighbour. Following God's will, she accepts the role of Mother of God, and by going out to meet her cousin Elizabeth she displays great love for neighbour. Advent is also a time for us to reflect upon our own relationship with God and neighbour. May the blessed Virgin Mary be an inspiration to us all.

In the Gospel of Luke, Caesar Augustus orders a census of the Roman empire. Mary and Joseph journey from Nazareth in Galilee to Joseph's hometown of Bethlehem. This journey is estimated to be between 70-90 miles and would be approximately four days journey. Of course, Mary was heavily pregnant at this time, so the journey would not have been easy. In the Book of Micah, it was prophesied that the Messiah would come from the town of Bethlehem. In Bethlehem, Jesus is born in a manger because there was no room in the Inn. Jesus's birth in Bethlehem fulfils Micah's prophecy and confirms he is the Messiah. This journey also reminds us that the journey of faith is not always easy, even though there was no room in the inn, God does not always provide in ways we expect. We must trust in his providence.





After Jesus is born, some angels appear to shepherds in a field, the glory of the Lord shines all around them. The angels tell them not to be afraid; they tell the shepherds the Good News of the birth of the saviour who is wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. The angels call the shepherds to pay homage to him, singing, "Glory to God in the highest and earth among them with who he is pleased." The shepherds visit Jesus telling Mary and Joseph what had happened. They leave praising God for what they have both seen and heard. Throughout this Jubilee year, has the Lord been calling me in any particular way to follow him more closely as he calls the shepherds to visit his Son? Through the gift of prayer, we are called to constantly discern God's will for our lives and his will for our loved ones. Let's pray that we may carry the gift of discernment in our lives beyond the Jubilee year.

After Jesus's birth, three wise men from the East see Jesus's star rise and also visit him to pay him homage. They bring with them the gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh. Gold represents Jesus's kingship, frankincense his priesthood and divinity, myrrh foretells his death and burial. The gifts show us that Jesus is both King, God and man. Throughout this Jubilee year, have there been any particular graces or gifts that the Lord has given to me which have benefited me or been an answer to my prayers. As we journey through the season of Advent, is the Lord calling me to give back to him by offering my gifts and talents to the church or to others?

After Jesus's birth, seeing Jesus as a threat to his throne, Herod decides to kill all male children under 2, hoping in the process to kill Jesus. An angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream and tells him to flee with Mary and Jesus to Egypt saving Jesus from the massacre. After Herod dies, the angel of the Lord appears to Joseph and tells him to return to Israel with his wife and child. Reflecting on the Jubilee year and even further back, has there been any times throughout this year or throughout my life where I have also felt the intervention of God which has protected me in unexpected ways or circumstances as he does the Holy Family? Or, has he intervened and stopped me from making any wrong decisions in my life? Has his intervention changed my life for the better? If we can think of any such event, let's thank the Lord for his protection. Let's also pray to the Holy Family, that through their intercession our own family, parish community, and diocese may always feel the protection of the Lord. As we journey through the Advent season and towards the end of the Jubilee Year, reflecting on the theme of pilgrimage and the pilgrimages of the Holy family, the shepherds, and the wise men, we have one final chance to reflect upon the graces we have received throughout the year. We also have the opportunity to reflect upon the mystery of the Incarnation remembering the prophet Isaiah's words, 'Emmanuel', God is with us. Remember that each time we come to mass, the Lord is with us in the Eucharist. This Advent season let's also take the opportunity to pray for those especially those in need, especially those affected by war, the homeless and those who may be spending Christmas day on their own. And finally, if we have not had the opportunity to visit a Jubilee shrine, let's take this last chance to do so where we can also receive the Jubilee indulgence.

