

St Mary Magdalene's Anglican Church

Moore Street, Adelaide



An open, welcoming and inclusive community
in the heart of the City of Adelaide

Keeping Community Spiritual Resources & Reflections

Thursday 24 June 2021

Dear friends,

The relaxation of Covid-19 restrictions makes it possible to once again worship on Sunday, when Mass is sung at 10 am. The church is also open for private prayer and public worship on Thursday from 11.30 am to 1 pm, and Mass is offered at 12.10 pm after the Angelus at 12 noon.

The decision to return to worship in community, even for private prayer, is not a straightforward matter, so we will continue to produce these newsletters for now.

In these Thursday newsletters, we offer ideas and opportunities for nourishing our personal and communal spiritual lives.

1. St John the Baptist – Truth without Compromise

Today, 24 June, we celebrate the Birth of St John the Baptist, the only saint — with the exception of the Virgin Mary — whose birth the liturgy celebrates and it does so because it is closely connected with the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God.

On two occasions during his pontificate, Pope Benedict XVI reflected on the importance of this celebration. He writes,

John is that “prophet”, identified with Elijah, who was destined to be the immediate precursor of the Messiah, to prepare the people of Israel for his coming (see Mt 11: 14; 17: 10-13). This Feast reminds us that our life is entirely and always “relative” to Christ and is fulfilled by accepting him, the Word, the Light and the Bridegroom, whose voices, lamps and friends we are (see Jn 1: 1, 23; 1: 7-8; 3: 29). “He must increase, but I must decrease” (Jn 3: 30): the Baptist’s words are a programme for every Christian.

John the Baptist was the forerunner, the “voice” sent to proclaim the Incarnate Word. Thus, commemorating his birth actually means celebrating Christ, the fulfilment of the promises of all the prophets, among whom the greatest was the Baptist, called to “prepare the way” for the Messiah (see Mt 11: 9-10).

All the Gospels introduce the narrative of Jesus’ public life with the account of his baptism by John in the River Jordan. St Luke frames the Baptist’s entrance on the scene in a solemn historical setting.

My book *Jesus of Nazareth* also begins with the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, an event which had enormous echoes in his day. People flocked from Jerusalem and every part of Judea to listen to John the Baptist and have themselves baptized in the river by him, confessing their sins (see Mk 1: 5).

The baptizing prophet became so famous that many asked themselves whether he was the Messiah. The Evangelist, however, specifically denied this: "I am not the Christ" (Jn 1: 20).

Nevertheless, he was the first "witness" of Jesus, having received instructions from Heaven: "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit" (Jn 1: 33).

This happened precisely when Jesus, after receiving baptism, emerged from the water: John saw the Spirit descending upon him in the form of a dove. It was then that he "knew" the full reality of Jesus of Nazareth and began to make him "known to Israel" (Jn 1: 31), pointing him out as the Son of God and Redeemer of man: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn 1: 29).

As an authentic prophet, John bore witness to the truth without compromise. He denounced transgressions of God's commandments, even when it was the powerful who were responsible for them. Thus, when he accused Herod and Herodias of adultery, he paid with his life, sealing with martyrdom his service to Christ who is Truth in person.

Let us invoke his intercession, together with that of Mary Most Holy, so that also in our day the Church will remain ever faithful to Christ and courageously witness to his truth and his love for all.

2. Daily Prayer

Most Christian denominations have forms for prayer in the morning and the evening, and at other times of the day. Morning and Evening Prayer in the Anglican church's *A Prayer Book for Australia*, are available in either a fixed form (pages 3 – 33) or a different form for each day of the week (pages 383 – 424).

Online Resources

There is a complete online version of Daily Prayer from *A Prayer Book for Australia* for each day available at Australian Daily Prayer <https://dailyprayer.ampers.x10.mx/>. There is also a free app for mobile devices from the App Store or Google Play.

The Church of England provides an online version of its orders for Daily Prayer at <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/join-us-service-daily-prayer>. This is also available as a free app. The Divine Office of the Catholic Church is available online at www.ibreviary.com and is also available as a free app (App Store or Google Play).

Times of Prayer

Many people find it helpful to make a particular time daily for prayer and reflection. One option might be to join your prayer with those of the wider world at some special times during the day. While we cannot attend at the church at the present time, you may like to join the wider community in praying the Angelus at 9 am, 12 noon and 6 pm.

3. Reflections and Meditations

Fr Gwilym and others within our community will continue to prepare Reflections for Sundays and Holy Days for posting on the web page. Fr Philip Carter's meditations and spiritual reflections are presented on our blog, <https://stmarymagdalenesadelaide.org/>.

To access these meditations, simply go to the blog and select the "Spirit matters" tab on the top. If you would like to receive an email update when there is a new posting on the blog,

whether for a Sunday or weekday service, or for meditations and other supports for prayer, please subscribe to the blog using the box on the right-hand side of the page.

Service booklets as PDF files are still available for Sunday and weekday services on the web site and on the Parish's Facebook page.

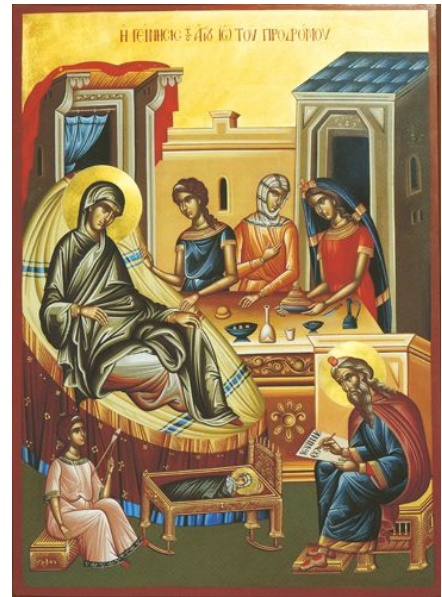
4. In the Church's Calendar

This week we celebrate three great saints from the earliest days of the church, St John the Baptist, St Peter and St Paul, and the 5th century theologian St Cyril of Alexandria.

The Birth of St John the Baptist

Ordinarily, the day of a saint's death is usually celebrated as his or her feast day, because it marks his or her *dies natalis*, or "birthday", into eternal life. To this rule there are two notable exceptions: the birthday of the Blessed Virgin Mary and that of John the Baptist.

Christians have long interpreted the life of John the Baptist as a preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ, and the circumstances of his birth, as recorded in the New Testament, are miraculous. John's pivotal place in the gospel is seen in the emphasis given in St Luke's Gospel to the announcement of his birth and the event itself, both set in prominent parallel to the same occurrences in the life of Jesus.



In the Eastern Christian Churches, St John the Baptist is usually called St John the Forerunner, a title sometimes also used in the West. This title indicates that the purpose of his ministry was to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus Christ.

St Cyril of Alexandria

Saints are not born with halos around their heads. Cyril, recognized as a great teacher of the Church, began his career as archbishop of Alexandria in Egypt, with impulsive, often violent, actions. He pillaged and closed the churches of heretics, participated in the deposing of Saint John Chrysostom, and confiscated Jewish property, expelling the Jews from Alexandria in retaliation for their attacks on Christians.

Yet he was one of the great writers of the early church. He wrote seventeen books "On Adoration in Spirit and in Truth", and commentaries on the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. Fragments of his many other writings survive, other works on the Old Testament, commentaries on the Gospels, and theological works including one of the earliest treatises on the Holy Trinity.



The life of St Cyril is a reminder that saints often grow out of immaturity, narrowness, and selfishness. It is because they—and we—do grow, that we are truly saints, persons who live the life of God.

St Peter and St Paul

The New Testament clearly shows Peter as the leader of the apostles, chosen by Jesus to have a special relationship with him. With James and John he was privileged to witness the Transfiguration, the raising of a dead child to life, and the agony in Gethsemane. His mother-in-law was cured by Jesus. He was sent with John to prepare for the last Passover before Jesus' death. His name is first on every list of apostles.

Yet Peter also has his human weakness, even in the presence of Jesus.

Paul's central conviction was simple and absolute: Only God can save humanity. No human effort—even the most scrupulous observance of law—can create a human good which we can bring to God as reparation for sin and payment for grace. To be saved from itself, from sin, from the devil, and from death, humanity must open itself completely to the saving power of Jesus.

Peter is a striking example of the simple fact of holiness. Jesus says to us as he said, in effect, to Peter: "It is not you who have chosen me, but I who have chosen you. It is not human wisdom that makes it possible for you to believe, but my Father's revelation. I, not you, build my Church." Paul's experience of the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus was the driving force that made him one of the most zealous, dynamic, and courageous ambassadors of Christ the Church has ever had. But persecution, humiliation, and weakness became his day-by-day carrying of the cross, material for further transformation. The dying Christ was in him; the living Christ was his life.



5. St John the Baptist -from a Sermon by St Augustine of Hippo

The voice of one crying in the wilderness

The Church observes the birth of John as a hallowed event. We have no such commemoration for any other fathers; but it is significant that we celebrate the birthdays of John and of Jesus. This day cannot be passed by. And even if my explanation does not match the dignity of the feast, you may still meditate on it with great depth and profit.

John was born of a woman too old for childbirth; Christ was born of a youthful virgin. The news of John's birth was met with incredulity, and his father was struck dumb. Christ's birth was believed, and he was conceived through faith.

Such is the topic, as I have presented it, for our inquiry and discussion. But as I said before, if I lack either the time or the ability to study the implications of so profound a mystery, the Spirit who speaks within you even when I am not here will teach you better; it is the Spirit whom you contemplate with devotion, whom you have welcomed into your hearts, whose temples you have become.

John, then, appears as the boundary between the two testaments, the old and the new. That he is a sort of boundary the Lord himself bears witness, when he speaks of "the law and the prophets up until John the Baptist." Thus he represents times past and is the herald of the new era to come. As a representative of the past, he is born of aged parents; as a herald of the new

era, he is declared to be a prophet while still in his mother's womb. For when yet unborn, he leapt in his mother's womb at the arrival of blessed Mary. In that womb he had already been designated a prophet, even before he was born; it was revealed that he was to be Christ's precursor, before they ever saw one another. These are divine happenings, going beyond the limits of our human frailty. Eventually he is born, he receives his name, his father's tongue is loosened. See how these events reflect reality.

Zechariah is silent and loses his voice until John, the precursor of the Lord, is born and restores his voice. The silence of Zechariah is nothing but the age of prophecy lying hidden, obscured, as it were, and concealed before the preaching of Christ. At John's arrival Zechariah's voice is released, and it becomes clear at the coming of the one who was foretold. The release of Zechariah's voice at the birth of John is a parallel to the rending of the veil at Christ's crucifixion. If John were announcing his own coming, Zechariah's lips would not have been opened. The tongue is loosened because a voice is born.

When John was preaching the Lord's coming he was asked, "Who are you?" And he replied: "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness." The voice is John, but the Lord "in the beginning was the Word." John was a voice that lasted only for a time; Christ, the Word in the beginning, is eternal.

6. From a letter by St Cyril of Alexandria

Defender of the divine motherhood of the Virgin Mary

That anyone could doubt the right of the holy Virgin to be called the mother of God fills me with astonishment. Surely she must be the Mother of God if our Lord Jesus Christ is God, and she gave birth to him! Our Lord's disciples may not have used those exact words, but they delivered to us the belief those words enshrine, and this has also been taught us by the holy fathers.

In the third book of his work on the holy and consubstantial Trinity, our father Athanasius, of glorious memory, several times refers to the holy Virgin as "Mother of God." I cannot resist quoting his own words: "As I have often told you, the distinctive mark of holy Scripture is that it was written to make a twofold declaration concerning our Savior; namely, that he is and has always been God, since he is the Word, Radiance and Wisdom of the Father; and that for our sake in these latter days he took flesh from the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and became man."

Again further on he says: "There have been many holy men, free from all sin. Jeremiah was sanctified in his mother's womb, and John while still in the womb leaped for joy at the voice of Mary, the Mother of God." Athanasius is a man we can trust, one who deserves our complete confidence, for he taught nothing contrary to the sacred books.

The divinely inspired Scriptures affirm that the Word of God was made flesh, that is to say, he was united to a human body endowed with a rational soul. He undertook to help the descendants of Abraham, fashioning a body for himself from a woman and sharing our flesh and blood, to enable us to see in him not only God, but also, by reason of this union, a man like ourselves.

It is held, therefore, that there are in Emmanuel two entities, divinity and humanity. Yet our Lord Jesus Christ is nonetheless one, the one true Son, both God and man; not a deified man on the same footing as those who share the divine nature by grace, but true God who for our sake appeared in human form. We are assured of this by Saint Paul's declaration: When the

fullness of time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law and to enable us to be adopted as sons.

7. St Peter and St Paul – From a Sermon by St Augustine of Hippo

The martyrs realized what they taught

This day has been made holy by the passion of the blessed apostles Peter and Paul. We are, therefore, not talking about some obscure martyrs. *For their voice has gone forth to all the world and to the ends of the earth their message.* These martyrs realized what they taught: they pursued justice, they confessed the truth, they died for it.

Saint Peter, the first of the apostles and a fervent lover of Christ, merited to hear these words: *I say to you that you are Peter*, for he had said: *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.* Then Christ said: *And I say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church.* On this rock I will build the faith that you now confess, and on your words: *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,* I will build my Church. For you are Peter, and the name Peter comes from *petra*, the word for "rock," and not vice versa. "Peter" comes, therefore, from *petra*, just as "Christian" comes from Christ.

As you are aware, Jesus chose his disciples before his passion and called them apostles: and among these almost everywhere Peter alone deserved to represent the entire Church. And because of that role which he alone had, he merited to hear the words: *To you I shall give the keys of the kingdom of heaven.* For it was not one man who received the keys, but the entire Church considered as one. Now insofar as he represented the unity and universality of the Church, Peter's preeminence is clear from the words: *To you I give*, for what was given was given to all. For the fact that it was the Church that received the keys of the kingdom of God is clear from what the Lord says elsewhere to all the apostles: *Receive the Holy Spirit, adding immediately, whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven, and whose sins you retain, they are retained.*

Rightly then did the Lord after his resurrection entrust Peter with the feeding of his sheep. Yet he was not the only disciple to merit the feeding of the Lord's sheep; but Christ in speaking only to one suggests the unity of all; and so he speaks to Peter, because Peter is the first among the apostles. Therefore do not be disheartened, Peter; reply once, reply twice, reply a third time. The triple confession of your love is to regain what was lost three times by your fear. You must loose three times what you bound three times; untie by love that which your fear bound. Once, and again, and a third time did the Lord entrust his sheep to Peter.

Both apostles share the same feast day, for these two were one; and even though they suffered on different days, they were as one. Peter went first, and Paul followed. And so we celebrate this day made holy for us by the apostles' blood. Let us embrace what they believed, their life, their labours, their sufferings, their preaching and their confession of faith.

8. For your prayers

We continue to pray throughout the week for the world and the church. These intentions may be helpful in your private or family prayers.

For the world. The leaders of the world as they seek to respond to the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic. For refugees and asylum seekers, that they may find places of safety and welcome.

For the church. For all those who are challenged to be church in a different and unfamiliar way. In the Anglican Cycle of Prayer, pray for the Diocese of Chubu (Japan). In our national church, pray for the Diocese of The Murray; and within our own Diocese, for the Parish of Henley and Grange.

For our local community. For the Collective and its ministry in the local community. For the Magdalene Centre, as it deals with the need to change the way it delivers services in order to safeguard the health of customers, staff and volunteers.

For those in need. For all those who are sick in body, mind or spirit. For all those affected by the COVID-19 coronavirus and all who care for them. For those who are commended to our prayers, especially Paull, Valerie, Sym, Dulcie, Jasmin, Henry, Fr Gary Priest, Fr Bart O'Donovan, Beth, Linda, and Fr Peter Garland.

For those who have died. For those who have worked and worshipped in this place before us; all those who have died recently, including Graham Pater, those who have died as a result of COVID-19; and those whose anniversaries of death occur at about this time. ✠ Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them.

For the saints. For the Blessed Virgin Mary, St Joseph, St Mary Magdalene, St John the Baptist, St Cyril, St Peter, St Paul, and holy women and men of every time and place.

This newsletter will normally be distributed weekly on Thursday. Any appropriate items should be emailed to the Parish Office, omarymag@anglicaresa.com.au, by Tuesday evening at 5 pm.

