



Celebrating Advent 2021

in the Catholic Parish of St Edward the Confessor, Romford

**Prayer, music and charitable action,
reaching out across Romford,
helping ourselves and others to
prepare for Christmas,
in peace, joy and hope.**

Do keep an eye on the newsletter for updates throughout Advent

**Throughout Advent can you deliver a Christmas card
to people in your road, or nearby?**

**From 5th December we'll have cards ready to deliver across town –
please help invite, welcome and encourage people to the
peace, joy and hope of our Christmas Masses.**

Supporting those in greatest need at Christmas

In a story where one of the features is an arduous journey by a heavily pregnant woman, only for her and her husband to be told there is “no room at the inn”, gifts that support those in difficult circumstances are a wonderful blessing. You could well be someone else’s “Christmas Angel” this year – your generosity enabling others to enjoy gifts.

Continuing to donate to the Food Bank

Families continue to need all the basics, all the staple foods – tinned items, toiletries, pasta, toilet rolls, sanitary products, tea, coffee, long life milk, cereals, etc., and for some people this winter will be harder than ever. You might also want to consider the **“reverse Advent calendar”** – buying an item a day, collecting it in a box, and bringing it in the Sunday before Christmas – ideas for this are on sheets at the back of the Church. The Food Bank donations can be offered any time the church is open, in the side chapel.

“Gifts under the tree” – during the whole of Advent

The main Christmas tree will go up in the week before Christmas, but this year we will have a tiny tree to get us under way, and encourage gifts of toys, chocolate and toiletries throughout Advent. This will mean we can get them to families who we know are in need, including those at the women’s refuge, and they will have them before Christmas Day. Items given on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day are still very welcome, of course, and these will be given where they are most needed in the New Year.

Please do not wrap gifts but simply leave them unwrapped, or in gift bags.

Alternative Christmas Gifts

“Alternative Gifts” this Christmas. St Mother Teresa of Calcutta said, “It is Christmas every time you let God love others through you.” As part of Advent, we naturally reflect on our Christmas giving. Many charities now offer inventive and wonderful ways to support their work, as a gift to others – you can buy goats or bees, support Christians in the Holy Land, help preserve sections of rainforest, and much more. You will find the Cafod “World Gifts” booklet at the back of the church, and to help in your search for such gifts online our Diocesan Caritas has brought a range of charity details all together on one page.

You will find it at: <https://www.caritasbrentwood.org/christmas/>

Fair Trade Products

Where you can, look for the Fair Trade mark – especially on chocolate, wine, tea, coffee and sugar. With a bit of an Internet search you will find Fair Trade footballs, trainers, and cotton clothing. By buying Fair Trade you are supporting companies that make sure workers are paid fairly and have decent working conditions.

The 2021 Nativity Banner. Where our “hearts of hope” rested in January and February, and next to our heart shaped flower bed, our Nativity banner will be a witness to those passing by our church, throughout the last week of Advent and on into Christmastide

Christmas Concerts

We are not ready to bring together a parish Christmas Concert this year – something to look forward to in 2022! In the meantime, there are two local possibilities:

Walsingham House at Abbotswick, Christmas Concert, 3pm and 7pm, Sunday 12th December. Talented young singers and musicians will lead the singing of Christmas carols, interspersed with Scripture readings, and Christmas reflections. Tickets are £10, including light refreshments after the concerts, and money raised supports young people attending retreats at Walsingham House, Brentwood Catholic Youth Service events, and travel to Lourdes. Book by emailing josephbeattie@dioceseofbrentwood.org or phoning 01277 373959. Walsingham House is in Navestock Side, about 20 minutes' drive from Romford.

St Edward the Confessor C of E Church, in the Market Place, have Nine Lessons and Carols (with trumpeters!) at 6pm on Sunday 19th December. All are welcome, and it is free but tickets must be booked – information at <https://www.stedwardsromford.com/events>

Reconciliation Services

Tuesday 30th November, 7.30pm, Christ the Eternal High Priest, Gidea Park

Wednesday 15th December, 11.00am, St Edward the Confessor

Monday 20th December, 7.00pm, Corpus Christi, Collier Row

Each service will include a prayerful introduction, then the opportunity for individual confession. It is nearly two years since many people will have been to Confession, so hopefully the varied times and locations help everyone to be able to attend.

As usual, Fr Dominic is available for Reconciliation **each Saturday evening, 5.45 – 6.15pm**

Share the Good News – decorative stones, across our town

On the first Sunday of Advent we will invite you to take a stone, with some decoration instructions! Then bring them back the next week, where they will be added to little bags of hay, and you can then, in the last couple of weeks of Advent, create a little crib all around town – images of Jesus to inspire others to reflect on who we are celebrating at Christmas, as well as another way to welcome people into church.

Confused? Don't worry – all will become clear!

Decorate the parish Christmas Tree

Enjoy coffee, juice and a mince pie as you help decorate the large Christmas tree in church!

Tuesday 21st December, 10.30am – 12noon. All ages welcome, especially young families.

Help with the Big Clean

Fuelled by coffee, tea and mince pies, become part of the parish cleaning team **from 10am onwards on Thursday 23rd December**, so the church is sparkling for the Christmas Masses.

Advent 2021 – Rediscovering a “lost” season

Christmas 2020 felt, for many, like a “missed” year. Families could not gather in great numbers – and sometimes could not gather at all. Christmas Masses were mainly viewed online. Before Christmas 2020 we were in tiers; after Christmas 2020 we were in lockdown.

So Christmas 2021 is different from previous years; some people are looking for a Christmas that is “bigger than ever” while others are still very fragile about large gatherings, or travelling any distance. The big shops have released their Christmas ads even earlier than usual – John Lewis and M&S put their ads out on 3rd November!

Where does that leave Advent? These four precious weeks of preparation for Christmas. Is it just a festival of hectic shopping, lasting longer than before? Is it a time of anxiety, stress or grief? This year, I would encourage you to discover and rediscover Advent by reading a small section of Chapter one and two of Luke’s Gospel, each day. You will read the story of the birth of both John the Baptist and Jesus, and reading just a few verses of each chapter, each day, will immerse you in those stories. Rest each day with a particular word or phrase, or with a particular character in the story.

In your homes, use the features of Advent, if you possibly can; create a wreath, with four candles, and light them, week by week, symbolising the journey towards Christmas. If you have a crib then bring it out slowly during Advent, starting with an empty stable, then adding the animals, and only on Christmas Eve adding Mary and Joseph, then Jesus. Pray with each new figure added to the crib.

Discover and rediscover the beautiful season of Advent – a time of waiting, in hope. It may also still be a time of difficult journeying – financial stress, and grief. If this is the case then reading Luke’s Gospel will hopefully unite you with the journey of the Holy Family – also difficult, and stressful. Please do not struggle alone; the parish is here to help. So here, too, the weeks of Advent can become precious, and hope-filled, because we do not walk the journey alone. The promise of Christmas is Emmanuel – God-is-with-us.

Fr Dominic

Christmas Mass Times

Christmas Eve Friday 24th December

- 5.00pm** Mass especially for young children (Primary School age) and families.
7.00pm Mass for all – an additional Mass for Christmas Eve
10.00pm (9.30pm Carols) Mass for all, in the beautiful stillness of Christmas Eve

Christmas Day Saturday 25th December

- 9.30am** Mass for all in the radiant joy of Christmas morning
11.30am Mass for all in the radiant joy of Christmas morning

*There will be no 6.30pm Mass on Christmas Day;
Sunday Masses will be at 9.30am and 11.30am on 26th December, the Feast of the Holy Family.*