

Advent Traditions: Advent Wreath

'The Light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it': so writes St John in his Gospel of the coming of Christ into the world. This is symbolised by the increasing light on the Advent wreath, or Advent crown, as more candles are lighted, and the celebration of the Lord's Nativity draws ever closer. The origins of the wreath are obscure and possibly pagan, reminding us of the universal need for light at this darkest time of the year, a need that Christ came to fulfil in an eternal rather than an earthly sense. By the Middle Ages, the wreath had developed into its present form: five candles, one for each Sunday of Advent and one for Christmas; three purple, one pink and one white, following the liturgical colours of each of these days. The circle of the wreath symbolises the unending love of Christ, and perhaps the ever-circling year until his return. The evergreen decorations are a reminder of eternal life that Christ promises to those who live in the light of his love.

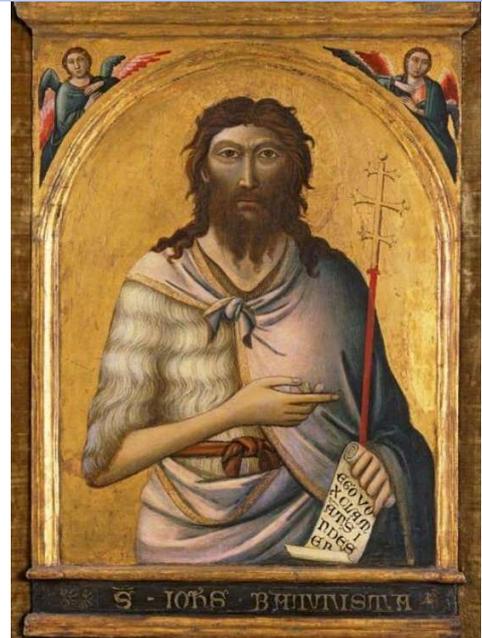
Saints & Heroes: 8th December

The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Even well-catechized Christians often get confused about the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, thinking that 'conception' refers to Jesus being conceived in the womb of his mother, the Virgin Mary. Instead, the 'Immaculate Conception' is a title used to describe the conception of the Virgin Mary herself, in the womb of her mother, St Anne: it was Mary who was conceived 'immaculately'. Indeed, in this feast we celebrate that great and unique privilege by which Mary was preserved from original sin, which is otherwise common to the human race – she was preserved from sin right from that first moment of her life. In Mary, God therefore did for the second Eve what he had done for the first. This time, however, he did it in order that eventually Mary might bear within herself the author of her salvation, Our Lord Jesus Christ. So we give thanks for the role of Mary, Jesus' mother and ours, without whom our own salvation would simply not have happened.

5th December 2021
Second Sunday of Advent

Fixed in History



Luke in his Gospel is pedantic in making sure the reader knows exactly where and when John the Baptist began his ministry. We know who were Emperor, Governor, High Priest and Tetrarchs; we know exactly what year John appeared. John the Baptist, Luke is telling us, is a history-maker. John and his message is a world-changing and time-changing one. His appearance is one that fulfils the prophecies of Isaiah. John is the one who is 'levelling up' the relationship between God and humanity. He comes to proclaim the possibility of new life, a new beginning. Into the unfolding pages of history God's eternal purpose is breaking in. He opens us the possibility of a New Testament, a New Covenant with God. It is a message of forgiveness for those who turn away from their sin and turn to God. John is the baptiser, the 'washer', the 'cleaner of souls,' he is opening up a whole new humanity with its own new history.

Today's Gospel: St. Luke 3: 1-6