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25th World Congress

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Stella Maris is a Catholic charity supporting seafarers worldwide.

We provide practical and pastoral care to all seafarers, regardless of nationality, belief or race. Our port chaplains and volunteer ship visitors welcome seafarers, offer welfare services and advice, practical help, care and friendship.

Stella Maris is the largest ship visiting network in the world, working in 332 ports with 227 port chaplains around the world. We also run 53 seafarers' centres all over the world.

We are only able to continue our work through the generous donations of our supporters and volunteers.

To support Stella Maris with a donation visit www.stellamaris.org.uk/donate

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Stella Maris provides seafarers with practical support, information and a listening ear

by Euan McArthur - Scotland Development Officer

Stella Maris returned home last month to mark the 25th World Congress in Glasgow where the charity was founded.

Delegates from all over the world travelled to the Second City of the Empire for the event from October 3rd to 5th and took time to reflect on how far Stella Maris has developed from its humble beginnings on the banks of the River Clyde in 1920.

With the theme being one of moving forward 'After the Storm', time was spent reaffirming shared faith and values in order to stand with the people of the sea in the many challenges they face at sea and on shore – and much emphasis was placed on strengthening the alobal network.

Nearly 200 port chaplains, regional and national coordinators, ship visitors and volunteers from twenty-five countries, plus officials from the Holy See, were in attendance to celebrate the charity's 102nd anniversary, and for many it was the first time they'd had the opportunity to come together and share their experiences.

Mass was celebrated in St Mungo's Church in the city on the Monday night. where Bishop Hugh Gilbert, Scottish Bishop Promoter, was the main celebrant

Then, twenty-four hours later, another wonderful celebration took place in St Andrew's Cathedral close to the Clyde where Msgr.Alexander Antony Vadakkumthala, Bishop of Kannur and Stella Maris Bishop Promoter for India, was the main celebrant. This occasion on 4th October was special as it celebrated the charity's 102nd anniversary.

There was a truly international atmosphere over the two days and Stella Maris International Director, Fr Bruno Ciceri, pledged continued support for the seafarers, fishers and families affected by the atrocities of war in Ukraine.

As the atrocities escalate, Stella



Maris chaplains are working to help with the critical day-to-day needs of these seafarers and their families. Fr Alexander Smerechynskyy, the charity's National Director, is involved in providing support to

Ukrainian seafarers.

Fr Alexander and his colleague Fr Bruno said: "There is now "The platform will provide a

Rostyslav Inzhestoikov have been working alongside seafarers and are being a source of good counsel and support to their families when their loved ones are away at sea. increasing demands for mental health support from Ukrainian seafarers and their families suffering trauma, worry and fear during the ongoing war, so the charity is putting in place a new programme of medium to long-term support from professional psychologists in Ukraine.

programme of remote, ongoing psychological consultation for those most in need."

Fr Bruno added that Stella Maris is greatly encouraged by the message Pope Francis sent on the occasion of the World Congress, which urges the charity never to waver in highlighting issues affecting seafarers and fishers, and to give voice to challenges faced by the maritime community.

Martin Foley, Stella Maris UK CEO and Europe regional co-ordinator, echoed Fr Bruno's sentiments and reiterated the need for increased communication in serving seafarers, fishers and their families. He said: "This shared faith stirs us

into action.

"Stella Maris exists to love the people of the sea, its staff, volunteers, and all the people with whom the charity works.

"We strive to serve the people of the sea, the maritime sector. the Church, and all stakeholders. with integrity.

"We have great strength in the diversity of our teams globally. Being from the communities we serve, and working and living alongside them, gives us an enhanced understanding of the challenges they face.

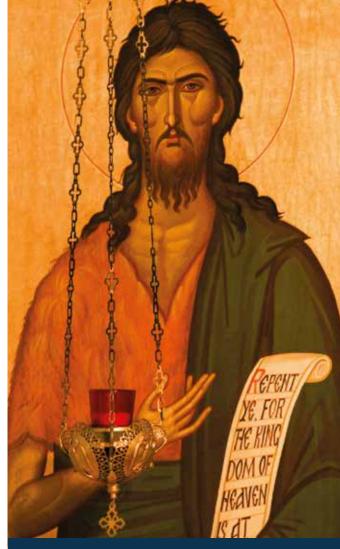
"We need to communicate the work we do more effectively, in shining the light on injustices and abuses taking place within the maritime and fisheries sectors, including abandonment of seafarers, modern slavery and trafficking.

"In order to do this, we need more than anecdotes, so we will continue efforts to promote the use of a common Stella Maris database that records our activity on ships, fishing vessels, hospital visitations, and elsewhere.

"The database, which was set up by Stella Maris UK, and is being currently used in the UK and countries including Kenya, South Africa and in Europe, will be transformative, and help us communicate better internally and with the media, industry regulators and authorities."

The 26th Stella Maris World Congress will be held in three years' time – 2025 – in Canada.

Sunday at Sea with Fr Colum Kelly



SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT SUNDAY 4TH DECEMBER

GOSPEL MATTHEW 3:1-12

In due course John the Baptist appeared; he preached in the wilderness of Judaea and this was his message: 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.' This was the man the prophet Isaiah spoke of when he said:

A voice cries in the wilderness:

Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight. This man John wore a garment made of camel-hair with a leather belt round his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judaea and the whole Jordan district made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins. But when he saw a number of Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism he said to them, 'Brood of vipers, who warned you to fly from the retribution that is coming? But if you are repentant, produce the appropriate fruit, and do not presume to tell yourselves, "We have Abraham for our father," because, I tell you, God can raise children for Abraham from these stones. Even now the axe is laid to the roots of the trees. so that any tree which fails to produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown on the fire. I baptise you in water for repentance, but the one who follows me is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to carry his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fan is in his hand; he will clear his threshing-floor and gather his wheat into the barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that will never go out.'

THE GOSPEL AND YOU

Today Matthew introduces us to one of the most fascinating characters of the New Testament. This was the same John, the son of Zachariah and Elizabeth whose main function was to prepare a way for the Messiah.

And so he appears in the wilderness as the one who prepares the way of the Lord. In his preaching he calls for repentance because the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and he warns that baptism brings with it the call to bear fruit worthy of repentance. This preaching of John contains the identical message at the centre of Jesus's call "repent for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand" They both demand a radical conversation in expectation of the final coming of the Lord.

Like many of the Prophets of the Old Testament John appeared a bit eccentric, dressed in a garment of camel hair, similar to Elijah. He lived simply and we are told crowds flocked to hear him preach and be baptised by him

John tells them to share what they have, their clothes

and food with those who are in need. If they really want to change their lives, they will become brothers and sisters to others – even total strangers. In this way repentance becomes more than a mere use of words. John cries out for action now before it is too late

Although the message of Advent is a time of waiting and preparation, Christmas celebrations seem to start earlier each year. Already the message is that we should be having a big party, yet on the other hand some people are facing a Christmas of misery, homelessness and want.

John the Baptist called for change as he pointed the way towards Christ. Of course, our world is never going to be a paradise. It requires the prophet, the wise person to stand back and question some of the ways we consider normal.

So let our Advent be a time where we stand aside and reflect on the message of John that we produce good fruit as evidence of our repentance. The opportunities are plenty.



GOSPEL MATTHEW 11:2-11

John in his prison had heard what Christ was doing and he sent his disciples to ask him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or have we got to wait for someone else?' Jesus answered, 'Go back and tell John what you hear and see; the blind see again, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised to life and the Good News is proclaimed to the poor; and happy is the man who does not lose faith in me.'

As the messengers were leaving, Jesus began to talk to the people about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swaying in the breeze? No? Then what did you go out to see? A man wearing fine clothes? Oh no, those who wear fine clothes are to be found in palaces. Then what did you go out for? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and much more than a prophet: he is the one of whom scripture says: Look, I am going to send my messenger before you; he will prepare your way before you. I tell you solemnly, of all the children born of women, a greater than John the Baptist has never been seen; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is.'

THE GOSPEL AND YOU

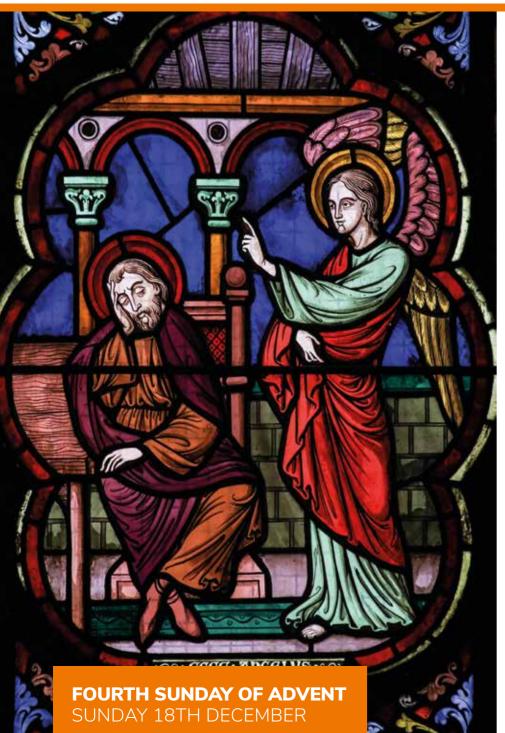
Today we celebrate the third Sunday of Advent. It is known as Gaudete Sunday when we are asked to take a moment to reioice that the coming of the Lord is very close. Lent has its Laetare Sunday, and Advent has its Gaudete Sunday – a day in the penitential seasons when all people are encouraged to stick with the message of Advent, not rush too quickly into Christmas.

At Mass today we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ. The year is coming to an end and what an awful year it has been. A year in which Covid is still causing death in all parts of our world. A year of hunger, drought and war. I imagine many people will be glad to leave this year behind. We have a sense that we are leaving something behind. We are crossing over into something new and dare we hope that it will bring better things to us.

In the gospel today we hear of John's time in prison, which lasted about eighteen months. John must have had a lonely and bitter experience in prison. A man of freedom in the wilderness, now confined to a cramped cell. He longed to see Jesus but had to be content with hearing of his work through those of his followers who had become believers in the Son of Man. He sends some of his disciples with a question: "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" How does Jesus answer? As so often happens, he does not respond directly to the question but quotes the prophet Isaiah

"Go back and tell John what you hear and see: the blind see again, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life and the Good News is preached to the poor." The signs of God's Kingdom already present in our world through the presence of Jesus.

Our Advent invites us to journey in hope and with a joyful lightness in our step.



GOSPEL MATTHEW 1:18-24

This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a man of honour and wanting to spare her publicity, decided to divorce her informally. He had made up his mind to do this when the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.' Now all this took place to fulfil the words spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel, a name which means 'God-is-with-us'. When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home.

THE GOSPEL AND YOU

The central character in Matthew's account of Jesus's birth is Joseph. God always spoke to Joseph through his dreams. It was the angel's announcement to Joseph regarding Jesus's birth, name, and identity. Jesus's identity was that he would save his people from their sins. Joseph would have been familiar with the promise of a messiah – but he must also have been scared that he would be involved in bringing it about. Joseph is confused at what has happened to his betrothed, but trusts in God's law and in his messenger.

In our world how often do we listen to God and allow him to speak to us? It is not always easy to put our trust in God who may be asking something difficult of us.

For Matthew names are important. It is essential to note the child will be called Emmanuel. meaning"God with us". Jesus will be the very presence of God the Father in our world. God is with us and is one of us. And this presence does not end with the Resurrection.

Before Jesus leaves his disciples at the Ascension, his last words (in Matthew's Gospel) are: "I am with you always – to the very end of time". Right down to the present, Jesus continues to be Emmanuel for us. And that is why we continue to celebrate the birth of Jesus two thousand years on.

Seafarers are often many miles from home at this time and they too have their dreams. Dreams will always involve their families and their well-being. They hope that when they eventually are together the blessings of Christmas wii enrich their love and trust.

At sea there is not much sign of Christmas and crews don't often know where they will be on that great day – probably at sea, but the gifts they have on board given by chaplains in a previous port remind all that this is a season of love and generosity. Indeed – God with us.

CHRISTMAS DAY SUNDAY 25TH DECEMBER

GOSPEL JOHN 1:1-18

In the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God and the Word was God.

He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things came to be, not one thing had its being but through him.

All that came to be had life in him and that life was the light of men, a light that shines in the dark, a light that darkness could not overpower. A man came, sent by God. His name was John.

He came as a witness, as a witness to speak for the light, so that everyone might believe through him. He was not the light, only a witness to speak for the light.

The Word was the true light that enlightens all men; and he was coming into the world.

He was in the world that had its being through him, and the world did not know him.

He came to his own domain and his own people did not accept him. But to all who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to all who believe in the name of him who was born not out of human stock or urge of the flesh or will of man but of God himself.

The Word was made flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory that is his as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.

John appears as his witness. He proclaims: 'This is the one of whom I said: He who comes after me ranks before me because he existed before me.'

Indeed, from his fullness we have, all of us, received – yes, grace in return for grace, since, though the Law was given through Moses, grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is nearest to the Father's heart, who has made him known.



THE GOSPEL AND YOU

Christmas Day is such a wonderful celebration but one that we can glamorise and even sanitise. The events of that night in Bethlehem may look pretty on a card splashed with tinsel but the reality is that of a baby born to be a king but cradled in a manger since his parents couldn't find a room to stay.

This episode in God's drama is probably the best known, and a cause for reioicing. We know the characters:

Mary who willingly accepts God's plan for her to bear his Son. **Joseph**, a man of integrity and faith betrothed to Mary knowing she's pregnant with a child that's not his. The baby

The shepherds, told by a whole company of angels that, in the city of David, they will find a Saviour who is the Messiah. the Lord.

They would be the first witnesses of the Messiah and yet were not allowed to visit the Temple as they were considered unclean and certainly unworthy. A night when a new understanding of what is meant by a "God among us"

We have a chance to embrace the child amongst us but has this episode in God's great story made us want to know more about him and what happens next? It's an important question because we're not spectators of this drama. We're the people this baby was born for. We're the people this baby grew up to heal, to teach and renew.

At sea, crew will be sailing in all parts of the world, but wishing they could be at home with loved ones to celebrate as a family. But wherever we celebrate, on land or at sea, this is a time to help to appreciate the God who loves us so much; who loves us in body and in soul; a God who is found in barns as well as in churches, in kitchens as well as in cathedrals.

This is a Feast of Good News. a Feast of Wonder and of Beauty.

It is the Feast of God inside us. A feast of Love.

May this Christmas give us the gift of wonder: to be in awe of the child in the manger.

St Joseph's Role in the Christmas Story

Donal Anthony Foley

We know so little about St Joseph, we don't even have a record of what he said. Yet though his role was quiet and in the background, we can be sure that he played an important role as the foster-father of Jesus and the spouse of Our Lady. Here is what we know about his marriage to Mary, his role in the birth of Jesus and in the life of his Foster Son.

What we know of St Joseph in historical terms is found in the opening chapters of the Gospels of St Matthew and St Luke. Other information has come down to us via the apocryphal writings – that is, writings that were ultimately not accepted by the Church – which were in circulation during the early centuries. But while some of what they contain about him may be true, it is only in the Gospels that we have absolute certainty, since the Church has accepted only them as canonical.

And what is in the Gospels about him is so little! We would love to know more. But we do not even have any record of what he said. St Joseph played a very important role as the foster-father of Jesus and the spouse of Our Lady, but he did so quietly, remaining in the background.

Joseph was of the House of David, and the tribe of Judah, and from the Gospels we learn that he was born in Bethlehem, the City of David near Jerusalem. His genealogy is given in both the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. At the time when he entered into his great role as head and protector of the Holy Family, he was living in Nazareth in Galilee, far to the north of Bethlehem. The reason for this move is uncertain, but perhaps it was due to the necessity of finding work there as a carpenter. It was probably in Nazareth that Joseph became betrothed to Mary, and then their marriage ceremony would have taken place after the Annunciation, about a year later. In the Jewish culture of the time, betrothal was considered to be the equivalent of marriage in everything but name.

It is from the apocryphal writings that the idea of Joseph being an old man originated, and these also give details of the story that Joseph was chosen to be Our Lady's spouse in a miraculous way. But given the difficulties he



had to endure, it is unlikely that he was very old, and it is more probable that he was in his thirties or perhaps his forties when Jesus was born.

The marriage of St Joseph and Our Lady

According to St Augustine (354-430) and St Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), who have been regarded as amongst the foremost Catholic thinkers, although the marriage of Our Lady and St Joseph was a true marriage, it was a chaste and virginal one.

The distress of St Joseph on finding out that Our Lady was with child, following the Annunciation of the birth of the Christ Child to her by the Angel Gabriel, was thus considerable, and his faith in her was certainly put to the test. From this we can already gain an idea of Joseph's holiness and greatness, in that his reaction was very different from what might have been expected. Instead of reacting angrily, to spare Our Lady any embarrassment he resolved to send her away guietly. For this reason St Matthew described him as a "just man". Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said: "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. for he will save his people from their sins" (Mt 1:20-21).

The birth of Jesus at Bethlehem

St Joseph did not delay, but when he awoke he firmly resolved to make Mary his wife, and then, some time later, when the baby was due, it became necessary for them to go to Bethlehem in order to comply with the order from the Roman Emperor, Caesar Augustus, for a census. This must have been a difficult journey for both of them, but their distress was compounded when, on arriving in Bethlehem, they could find nowhere to stay, even though the birth was imminent. Here, too, was a strong test of Joseph's faith. The holy couple eventually found some lodging, traditionally located in caves outside Bethlehem, and it was here that Our Lady gave birth

to Jesus without the usual pains of childbirth. What a mysterious and wonderful event that must have been for Joseph to be part of such a marvel.

The Gospel of Luke then outlines how local shepherds, alerted to the miraculous birth by hosts of angels, came to reverence the child, and also how Mary pondered on all these things in her heart, an attitude of awe and contemplation surely shared by her silent spouse. St Joseph was also with Our Lady when she went to the Temple for the Presentation of the baby Jesus, but he remained in the background as the aged Simeon spoke to Mary and prophesied how her child was destined to be a sign of contradiction for many in Israel, and spoke about how a sword of sorrow – the crucifixion – would pierce her soul (Lk 2: 34-35).

St Joseph and the Holy Family

Joseph had an important role to play following the visit of the Wise Men, and the hurried departure of the Holy Family to avoid the wrath of King Herod. Once again, an angel appeared to him in a dream and instructed him to flee to Egypt with Mary and the child, because Herod wanted to kill him. Joseph arose that same night in obedience to this command and the Holy Family departed for Egypt, where they stayed until Herod was dead.

Joseph was told about this event through another dream in which God's angel told him to go back to his own country. But on their return, following another dream they went to live in Nazareth in Galilee (Mt 2).

We hear nothing about the everyday life of the Holy Family in Nazareth, and must assume that St Joseph's life henceforth was entirely focused on providing for Mary and Jesus, living a simple life with them, and supporting them by means of his work as a carpenter while remaining faithful to the religious practices of his ancestors.

The last time Joseph is mentioned in the Bible, though not by name, occurs during the narration of the finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple when he was twelve, after he had been lost for three days. But once again the focus of this account is on Mary, although she does refer to St Joseph touchingly as Jesus's father (Lk 2:41-52).

We are not told anything about Joseph's death, but presumably this happened before the beginning of the public life of Christ, since further on in the Gospels we hear of Jesus's mother and brothers (Mt 12:46), but never of Joseph, although Jesus was known as the son of Joseph (Jn 1:45). And it is certain that if Joseph had still been alive at the time of the crucifixion, then Jesus would have entrusted Mary to him while on the cross, rather than to St John. We do not know where he was buried, and no cultus has been attached to any bodily relics of his. Given the fact that St Joseph surely died in the arms of Jesus and Mary, and surrounded by their love, he has come to be recognised as the patron of a happy death.



Blessing of a Christmas Tree

When you put up your Christmas tree board this Advent, pray this blessing together as a crew before turning on the lights, asking that all who enjoy it may come to knowledge and joy of salvation.

All make the sign of the cross as the leader says:

Blessed be the name of the Lord.

All respond: Now and for ever.

One of those present reads a text of sacred Scripture, for example:

Brothers and sisters, listen to the words of the apostle Paul to Titus: 3: 4–7

But when the kindness and love of God our saviour for mankind were revealed, it was not because he was concerned with any righteous actions we might have done ourselves; it was for no reason except his own compassion that he saved us, by means of the cleansing water of rebirth and by renewing us with the Holy Spirit which he has so generously poured over us through Jesus Christ our saviour. He did this so that we should be justified by his grace, to become heirs looking forward to inheriting eternal life.

Other texts may be read instead, for example Gn 2:4-9 or ls 9:1-6.

A lay person says the following prayer with hands joined.

Lord our God, we praise you for the light of creation: the sun, the moon, and the stars of the night. We praise you for the light of Israel: the Law, the prophets, and the wisdom of the Scriptures. We praise you for Jesus Christ, your Son: he is Emmanuel, God-with-us, the Prince of Peace, who fills us with the wonder of your love. Lord God, let your blessing come upon us as we illumine this tree. May the light and cheer it gives be a sign of the joy that fills our hearts. May all who delight in this tree come to the knowledge and joy of salvation. We ask this through Christ our Lord. All respond: Amen.

or:

Holy Lord,

we come with joy to celebrate the birth of your Son, who rescued us from the darkness of sin by making the cross a tree of life and light. May this tree, arrayed in splendour, remind us of the life-giving cross of Christ, that we may always rejoice in the new life that shines in our hearts. We ask this through Christ our Lord. All respond: Amen.

The lights of the tree are then turned on.



CHRISTMAS ANTICIPATION PRAYER

Hail and blessed be the hour and moment in which the Son of God was born of the most pure Virgin Mary, at midnight, in Bethlehem, in the piercing cold. In that hour, O God, hear my prayer and grant my desires, through the merits of Our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of His blessed Mother.

Amen.



Stella Maris is the largest ship-visiting network in the world. We improve the lives of seafarers and fishers through our network of local chaplains and seafarer centres, expert information, advocacy and spiritual support.



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