
English Christian Churches' initiatives leading up to Christmas

A classical music CD at the top of the charts, a short film that restores the religious dimension of Christmas at the heart of celebrations, virtual Advent calendars and resources for families and parishes to revive British traditions such as Christmas carols and the preparation of a laurel wreath to hold the candles that are lit every Sunday. *These are some of the initiatives proposed by the Christian Churches in the UK at this time of preparation for the birth of Jesus, available not only on websites but also on social networks: Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.* The website of the [Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales](#) offers a full version of the [Gospel of Luke](#), available for download in audio format, together with a series of meditations. The same section dedicated to Advent season features a [virtual calendar](#) relating to the pandemic, reminding the faithful of the importance of the Eucharist in the months when many Catholics have yet to return to church. The calendar displays images of different Catholic churches in England every day, starting on December 1st: two photos of the same internal area of the church *on the left, black and white and empty, as it was during the lockdown, and, on the right, in full colour, and filled with the faithful praying, with priests celebrating Mass as they did before the pandemic.* The two images can be widened or narrowed by means of a toolbar, thereby prompting users to reflect on the importance of attending Mass in person, as the Bishops of England called for a few days ago in a document entitled ["Honouring Sunday"](#). Clicking on the right of the toolbar enlarges the colour frame with a close-up of churches filled with praying faithful, nourishing the hope of a new rebirth, a Christmas with Christ at its centre. To the left, the image returns to black and white, picturing a deserted building with nobody but the priest. Same Catholic Church and same Advent. The National Office for Vocations has created a [Video Advent Calendar](#) on the theme: *"Keeping Christ in Christmas" namely, to restore an inherently religious dimension to this season, frequently characterised by office parties and purchases.* Clicking on the 5 December box, for example, we encounter Pippa Baker, a lay missionary in the Diocese of Hallam. "It is no coincidence that God chose to be born in a stable and in an ordinary family," she enthusiastically explains. "It means that the circumstances in which we find ourselves this Christmas - be it a happy time or one marked by hardship - are sacred to God, reaching out to us in the very place we are at this moment. Our world matters to God and He shows us that He cares about us." *The Church of England has released a classical music CD that reached no. 1 in the UK classical charts.* It's a newly composed setting of "In the bleak midwinter", a poem written by Christina Rossetti in 1800, and one of the most popular Christmas carols in the UK, sung during Advent in school and church concerts. The new rendition, in collaboration with BBC classical music station "Classic FM", was composed by Rebecca Dale, one of Britain's most acclaimed young composers, for the [choir of St Martin-in-the-Fields Church in London](#). All proceeds from the sale of the CD will be donated to charities that support people who are homeless in the UK. The same music is featured in a four-minute [video](#) with testimonies from people who suffered during the pandemic, or who were on the forefront of battling the epidemic. The Church of England has developed an app called #AtTheHeartOfChristmas with daily reflections for Advent, available as a booklet, by email or in audio format on Amazon's Alexa voice assistant and Google's voice assistant Google Home.

Silvia Guzzetti