

### **The Feast (in England) of St Thomas a Beckett – Mon. 29<sup>th</sup> December 2025:**

As Chancellor and loyal friend of the King, Thomas a Beckett enforced Royal Privilege wherever possible. He was nominally in Holy Orders, but his skills were that of an administrator than a holy monk. The King saw an opportunity to align the Church to the State and had Thomas appointed Archbishop of Canterbury. At his episcopal consecration, Thomas has some form of spiritual conversion, becoming a true servant of the Church, enforcing the Church's privilege with full vigour, much to the King's dismay. The King wanted compromise, but when it failed Thomas exiled himself to France. When the Archbishop of York, supported by the Bishops of London and Salisbury presided over the King's coronation they received a strong rebuke from Thomas to the level of excommunication because Coronation fell within the privilege of Canterbury. Some compromise was reached allowing Thomas' return to England. The King remained discontent with the archbishop and although we are not sure what he muttered, with artistic licence, we have it as '*who will rid me of this troublesome priest?*'. These words were carelessly uttered as they were taken as a Royal command and four knights set out to compel Thomas to come to Winchester to see the King. When he refused, he was slain in his midst of his own Cathedral. The King deeply moved with contrition in Thomas's death did penance, founding a shrine at Canterbury.

### **6<sup>th</sup> Day in the Christmas Octave – Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> December 2025:**

St John writes to the Church because he wants them to know that Jesus' death and resurrection, has taken away the sins of the world and is applied to each of us in baptism. The devil, the evil one, wishes to convince us to stay loyal to him, by giving into the desires of the flesh, of the eyes and of the pride of life. The devil tries to convince us that reconciliation is not possible nor indeed needed. We must not listen to him; the devil is the enemy of the children of God. Jesus has shown us that humanity's *ancient servitude that bound us under the yoke of sin* is over. By grafting ourselves onto the sacrifice of the cross and striving to do the Lord's will in all things, we overcome the devil, and press forward to heaven, along the path of grace.

### **7<sup>th</sup> Day in the Christmas Octave – St Sylvester I Pope – Wed. 31<sup>st</sup> December 2025:**

St Sylvester was the 33rd Pope, coinciding with the Council of Nicaea and would have signed off on its articles of faith. It is believed; therefore, he was the Pope who baptised the Emperor Constantine, even, perhaps, curing him of a nasty infection.

### **The Octave Day of Christmas – Holy Mary Mother of God: 1<sup>st</sup> January 2026:**

The new year begins with the priestly blessing: *'May the Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace'*. No-one has received the Lord's priestly blessing more than Mary. She who is *'full of grace'* is well placed to be there for us, now and at the hour of our death. She shows us how to be an effective discipleship: She contemplates the wonderful things she has experienced, studies them, ponders them, and stores them in the silence of her own heart. She is a true teacher of prayer, and when the time came, she had the strength to stand at the foot of the cross. May her intercession inspire us to say: *'Let it be done unto me, according to God's Word'*.

### **The Mem. of Sts Basil the Great & Gregory Nazianzen: 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2026:**

These two Cappadocian Fathers, Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen played a significant role in helping to formulate the great symbol of our faith, the Nicene Creed we pray on Sundays, especially outside of Lent and Eastertide. We can measure a theologian's greatness by whether what they teach is still in use today. They gave us our doxology: ***'Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen'***. From the Creed and doxology, we see Trinity's unity, that despite the diversity of roles they have - *creator, redeemer and sanctifier* - they share an equality of majesty and glory.

### **The optional memorial of the Holy Name of Jesus: 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2026:**

When Jesus was circumcised, his parents gave him the name *'Jesus'*, as previously instructed by the angel. We are commanded not to take the Lord's name in vain but instead have respect and reverence for it. Traditionally, we bow our head *'at the name of Jesus'*, remembering St Paul's exhortation to the Philippians who states, *'at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow'*, acknowledging Him as the Lord. This practice of bowing our head at the name of Jesus, was decreed by Pope Gregory X at the Second Council of Lyon in 1274. Sadly, it is a devotion that many in Western Europe have forgotten about. We know that the name Jesus means, *'God saves'*, and it has a deep significance. How, then, does Jesus save? In Aramaic, Jesus' name is *'Jeshua'*, a derivative of the Hebrew name for *'Joshua'*, and it was Joshua who led the people, after their wandering, into the Promised Land. By His death and resurrection Jesus Christ removes from us the obstacle of sin which prevents us reaching heaven.