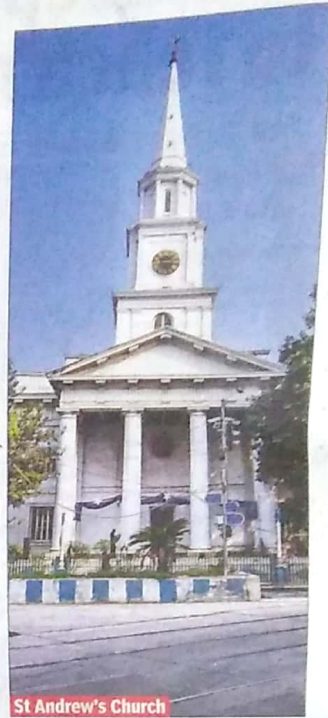


WEEKEND FOCUS

'TIS THE SEASON

With just days to go for Christmas, Kolkata's churches are pulling out all stops to celebrate the biggest day, report Antara Upadhyay & Josephine Justin



St Andrew's Church

members. The church is also celebrating its 60th year and celebrations are awaited by church members. There will be a prayer mass from 9.30pm on New Year's Eve to 12.00am.

Old Mission Church, the oldest Protestant Church in the state, will host a prayer service on Christmas morning. The church is being decorated with bright lights and Nativity scenes. "This church has witnessed several eras and turmoil but has stood its ground," said Terezena McCrahan, secretary, Old Mission Church.

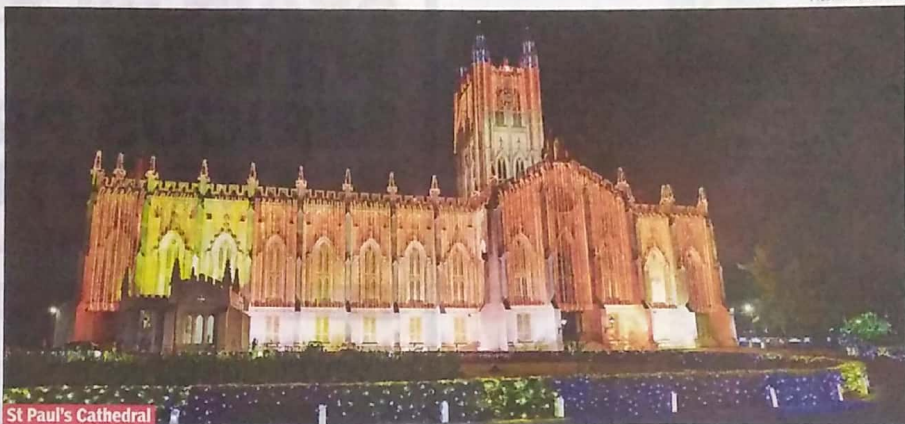


Assembly of God Church



Auxilium Parish Church

Pics: Amit Moulick



St Paul's Cathedral



Duff Church



St John's Church



St George's Church

by the distribution of food packets and clothes amongst the poor at the church. The main attraction of the day, however, will be the Nativity scene performed by children. Members of the church enjoy an evening of carol-singing and bonfire on Sunday. "There's a prayer service scheduled on Christmas

Eve, as well as on New Year's Eve, at 11.30pm," said Rev Sorajit Biswas.

Auxilium Parish Church on Seal Lane, Tangra, expects about 3,000 people this year. "We have two mass services on Christmas Eve that draw the biggest crowds. Midnight mass starting at 11.30pm in Bengali and Hindi, especially, is very popular," said Rev John. Christmas mass is scheduled for 7am.

Members of the Sacred Heart Church in Esplanade will come together this festive season to sing carols and take part in midnight mass at 11.30pm on Christmas Eve.

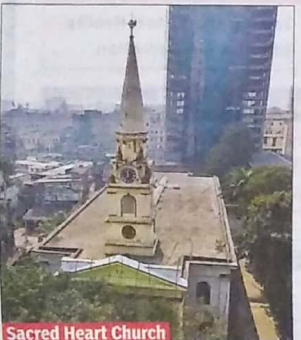
Christmas celebrations this year by the Assembly of God Church are going to be held at the Netaji Indoor Stadium, Eden Gardens, from 9.15am to 12.15pm. The church expects a staggering amount of about 10,000 people this year from their eight prominent language sections — English, Bengali, Oriya, Hindi, Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu and Nepali. Festive card-signing and song choreographies are scheduled, with a lot of singing, especially by youth

Christmas in Kolkata is synonymous with a nip in the air, pretty lights and the aroma of fresh-out-of-the-oven cakes.

But at many churches, the run-up to Christmas — or Advent (the period that begins four Sundays before Christmas) — is quite different. The mood is tranquil, with the reading of Scriptures. Advent is the time to ponder over one's action and words in the year gone by.

As Christmas, or 'Boro Din' as we know it in Kolkata, draws nearer, Kolkata's churches — some of them centuries old — are getting beautifully decked up with colourful lights, and the wafting sound of choirs practising carols.

Established in 1848, members of Duff Church — named so in memory of Scottish missionary Alexander Duff in 1910 — in Manikata pay a visit to HIV-positive patients and distribute gift boxes



Sacred Heart Church

among them. "It is heartwarming to see the smiles on their faces," says Reverend Biswajit Biswas.

On Christmas Eve, nine lessons from the Bible will be sung in a special carol-singing session from 6pm to 8pm. Christmas Day will start with mass at 9am, and the rest of the day will be spent celebrating and singing songs.

Known for its magnificent Gothic architecture, St Paul's Cathedral is set to welcome the Christmas spirit with traditional zest. "We will have midnight mass on December 24, which is attended by thousands. On Christmas Day we will have carol-singing at night, which is a huge hit among members of our cathedral," said Rev Abir Adhikari.

St Andrew's Church in BBD Bag is gearing up to celebrate Christmas with great enthusiasm this year. On December 22, a carol night will be organised at the church at 6pm. Christmas Eve will see a beautifully decorated church open all night with festive music being played for visitors. "A prayer service will be held on Christmas Day at 9.30am," informs Rev Swarup Bar.

Located at the northwestern corner of Raj Bhavan, St John's Church is one of the oldest churches in the city. Church officer Rangan Dutta said there will be a prayer service at 8am on Christmas Day, followed by offerings and donations to other churches and nearby localities.

St George's Church, founded by Bishop Foss Westcot in 1935, ushered in Christmas by putting up the Christmas tree on Saturday. It will be followed