

PARISH NEWSLETTER

St Arvans with Penterry, Itton, Devauden & Kilgwrrwg

Our Sunday Eucharist at 10 a.m. and celebration of Night Prayer on Wednesdays at 20.00 are live-streamed on the St Arvans Parish Group page on Facebook and are available to watch at any time

Please help to keep us informed of anyone who is in need or is isolated over the next weeks and months, and anyone in need of our prayer and support
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20th December 2020
The Fourth Sunday
of Advent
Year B



The Collect

God our redeemer, who prepared the Blessed Virgin Mary to be the mother of your Son: grant that, as she looked for his coming as our saviour, so we may be ready to greet him when he comes again as our judge; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **AMEN**

A reading from the second book of Samuel [7. 1 - 5, 8 - 12, 14, 16]

Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you." But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies.

Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.

Reader / This is the Word of the Lord
Response / Thanks be to God



Psalms 89 1 - 4; 19 - 26

**R/ Your love, O Lord,
for ever will I sing.**

Your love, O Lord, for ever will I sing; from age to age my mouth will proclaim your faithfulness. For I am persuaded that your love is established for ever; you have set your faithfulness firmly in the heavens.

**R/ Your love, O Lord,
for ever will I sing.**

"I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn an oath to David my servant:

"I will establish your line for ever, and preserve your throne for all generations."

**R/ Your love, O Lord,
for ever will I sing.**

You spoke once in a vision and said to your faithful people: 'I have set the crown upon a warrior and have exalted one chosen out of the people. I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him.

**R/ Your love, O Lord,
for ever will I sing.**

My hand will hold him fast and my arm will make him strong. No enemy shall deceive him, nor the wicked bring him down. I will crush his foes before him and strike down those who hate him.

**R/ Your love, O Lord,
for ever will I sing.**

My faithfulness and love shall be with him, and he shall be victorious through my name. I shall make his dominion extend from the Great Sea to the River. He will say to me, "You are my Father, my God and the rock of my salvation."

**R/ Your love, O Lord,
for ever will I sing.**

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Romans [16; 25 - 27]

Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith-- to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory for ever! Amen.

Reader! This is the Word of the Lord
Response / Thanks be to God

The Gospel

Alleluia, alleluia!
I am the handmaid of the Lord;
Be it unto me according to thy word.
Alleluia!

The Lord be with you:
And also with you

Listen to the Gospel of Christ according to St Luke **Glory to you, O Lord.**

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you."
But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.
The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."
Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"
The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be

called Son of God.
And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren.
For nothing will be impossible with God."
Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."
Then the angel departed from her.

[St Luke 1. 26 - 38]

This is the Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you, O Christ

For Your Prayers

That we may rejoice with Mary at the birth of her Son
That our spiritual communions will give us the grace to serve Christ more fully.
Those throughout the world suffering from the Coronavirus
Doctors, nurses and all medical staff, all carers, medical scientists and researchers.
All who are isolated and alone, those anxious for their health and well being and those of their loved ones.
For those in government throughout the world, that they may make informed, wise and compassionate decisions for the good of all

For the Church:

For the bishops of the Church:
John, Archbishop of Wales;
Cherry, Bishop of Monmouth, Philip, Episcopal Visitor of the Society of the Holy Cross in Wales, Jonathan, Bishop of Ebbsfleet; Justin, Archbishop of Canterbury. & for all who hold and teach the Catholic faith that comes to us from the Apostles.
All bishops, priests and deacons and all baptised Christians
For the reunion of all Christians: for Pope Francis, for Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew, & for the leaders of the Reformed traditions

For the Sick & those in need:

Roy Staples, Ralph Hamilton, Patricia Hamilton; Sylvia; The Revd Helen Rodwell; Amanda Morgan; Naomi; Kim; Elisabeth; Helen Herbert; Cliff Edwards; Dave; Philip; Eirion, John,

For the Departed:

The recently departed: Valerie Ross; our own departed relatives & friends, & those whose anniversaries of death fall at this time: Nick Hoskins; Reg Cook; Ivor Shepherd; Oliver John Gollop; Peter Ayres; Ivor Richard; Kay Richard

Thought for the Week

“The natural and the supernatural joined, when Christ was conceived in Mary by the Holy Ghost. The mystery is continued and extended in this holy sacrament. Bread and wine are made the body and blood of Christ; men, sluggish and blind as we are, seized by the creative Word, and confirmed in our heavenly being, as living parts of Christ.

*Austin Farrer (1904 - 1968)
from 'The Crown of the Year'*

The Jereboam Interview

We continue our series of extracts from the Jerusalem and Galilee Gazette, an imaginary first-century newspaper. Week by week the correspondent Jereboam interviews various people whose lives have been affected in some way by Jesus Christ and his teaching.

Thanks to the Parish of St Catharine's Chipping Campden & to the author for permission to reproduce 'Jereboam'

Benaiah

Jereboam: Is it true that you once met Jesus?
Benaiah: That's right: Jesus and his mother Mary.
Jereboam: Really – you met them both together?
Benaiah: Yes: it was one afternoon when we all happened to be free. We went for a long walk together, up in the hills near my home.
Jereboam: What a privilege! Many people would have given anything to spend time with either of those holy people, but you enjoyed the company of both of them for a whole afternoon! What did you talk about?
Benaiah: You'll be surprised about this: we didn't really talk about anything in particular. We had the same

sort of conversation that anyone might have up on the hills – we admired the scenery and the wildlife, we discussed what each other had been doing recently...nothing extraordinary. Mind you, it was still a very special walk. I came away full of life; there was something very refreshing and wholesome about it all. Walks usually give me that feeling, but on that day I sensed it more than ever.

Jereboam: But otherwise there was nothing unusual?

Benaiah: There was one moment that I remember above all. I told you that I felt full of life; well, that feeling seemed to be concentrated into this one invigorating moment.

Jereboam: What happened?

Benaiah: Well, we'd come to a rather steep section of the path, where the rocks formed a series of steps. Jesus went first and then helped his mother onto a sort of ledge just below where he was standing. Then Mary stretched her hand out towards me and helped me up. Just for a moment we were all linked, Jesus holding Mary's hand, and Mary holding mine. I remember looking up towards Mary; she smiled at me and turned her head back towards Jesus. I followed her gaze, and he smiled at me too.

Jereboam: It's a lovely image.

Benaiah: Somehow I felt drawn into their lives. It's hard to explain.

Jereboam: I don't think you need to explain it. Thank you for telling us about your memorable experience.

A Prayer of Spiritual Communion

My Jesus, I believe that you are in the Blessed Sacrament. I love you above all things, and I long for you in my soul. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. As though you have already come, I embrace you and unite myself entirely to you; never permit me to be separated from you. Amen.

(The Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament)

This Week

Today, the Fourth Sunday of Advent, we hear in St Luke's Gospel about Annunciation, the moment when a troubled Mary is told she has found favour with God and that she will conceive and bear a son. She questions: "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" Then declaring herself the handmaiden of the Lord, she accepts: "*May it be done to me according to your word.*"

This week we hear readings from the Song of Songs, Hannah's prayer and of Mary's visit to Elizabeth and her song, the *Magnificat*. We hear from the prophet Malachi of the foretelling of John's birth, and his birth story in St Luke's Gospel. David promises to build a temple and Zachariah's song prepare us for Christmas.

Friday is Christmas Day this year.

The first celebration of The Nativity of the Lord is the Mass at Midnight. The first reading is from the prophet Isaiah: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone." This powerful reading deserves a slow contemplation. The Gospel is from St Luke: the journey to Bethlehem, the birth, the angels announce the birth to the shepherds.

On Christmas Day itself the Gospel is from the beginning, the prologue, of St John's Gospel: "And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth."

Saturday is the Feast of Saint Stephen, the first public witness who gave his life for his faith.

Next Sunday, the First Sunday after Christmas, is always kept as the Feast of the Holy Family. This year it displaces St John's Day which usually falls on 27th December.

In St Luke's Gospel is the story of the teen aged Jesus teaching in the temple while his parents searched for him. Jesus goes back home with his family. "He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favour before God and man."



A Reflection for The Fourth Sunday of Advent

+ After the other Advent gospels about John the Baptist appearing in the Judean desert as the prophet who will point out Jesus as the Christ, today's Gospel goes back to the beginning of the mystery of God's coming among us, with the Annunciation: the message Gabriel brings to Mary.

There are many human experiences of the divine recounted throughout the Scriptures and in the history of the Church, but nothing resembling this. This is of a quite different order.

We find it very difficult to believe that the Incarnation, an event so momentous as to concern the future destiny of the human race, should be announced so quietly, so obscurely to a young girl in an out of the way province of the ancient world. But we shouldn't be that surprised, because here we see the consistency and truth of the divine nature. It's an illustration - *the* illustration of the God whose greatness, whose power and authority consists in the renunciation of all that goes to make up those concepts in our own human thinking.

We might think, 'what a strange corner of the world in which to bring about Salvation; what an odd, our-of-the-way nation to pick as the principal recipients of his message to the human race!' But it's really not odd at all - but consistent - God continues to choose the odd, the despised and ignored, the obscure, the poor and the downtrodden: they put up fewer barriers; they have less to lose. They have fewer pretensions.

What we have in today's Gospel can only have been originally handed down to us through the witness of Mary herself in the earliest days of the Church; so what we have here in St Luke's account isn't a detailed account of the meeting between the heavenly messenger and Mary, the daughter of Zion, but essentially a remembered, much pondered on, message of good news and of joy. The atmosphere is both one of a kind of sacred excitement in the face of the hidden mystery of God and the resulting peace which comes from Mary's willing acceptance of the archangel's message. And the importance of this acceptance, this "yes" to God's purpose for humanity shouldn't be underestimated. It underlines Mary's importance as a kind of representative of the entire human race, in that here we don't have God in some way forcing his will upon us, but always seeking our assent and our co-operation in his vision for our future, a vision of love, redemption and infinite possibilities. Mary's "yes" makes that future possible, she's not just a replaceable pawn in God's game (because that's not the way of the God in whom we believe acts – we are each of infinite value, not objects to be used and then discarded) but, Mary is filled with God's grace, a willing and joyful participant in the bringing about of the birth of the Incarnate Son.

In this story we see God once again operating by means of what's called a covenant relationship - a solemn and sacred agreement between God and his people. A covenant is an agreement not an imposition. This isn't a re-telling of that frighteningly violent classical myth of Leda and the swan. No, the conception of Jesus is a *merger* of the human and the divine and it depends entirely upon Mary's willing cooperation: it takes two to make any *agreement* and it's appropriate that the Good News should be given in this way. We see a God who always respects the autonomy and free will of his creatures, who works by persuasion and grace rather than through coercion, power, might and terror. The God whose Covenant relationship with Israel is frequently flouted and ignored, yet who always remains faithful, is the God who seeks a willing co-worker in Blessed Mary, and is the God who in her Son goes to suffering and death, whose power is in weakness and vulnerability, whose rising to new life

occurs obscurely in the early morning in a deserted graveyard. The God who is love works through love, that is his nature. And today we see the divine love of God finding a response in the human heart of Mary; in those very familiar words of St Augustine Mary conceives and gives birth to the Christ in her heart before ever she does so in her body. In faith: that's how she becomes our example and the Mother not only of Jesus, but of us all. And the God of love often acts quietly, operating in the silences of the world and the neglected corners of human experience and the poverty of the human heart. The events of today's Gospel take place in the obscurity of a fairly humble Jewish home in Roman - occupied Palestine.

"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" That cynical comment of the Apostle Nathaniel before his calling by Jesus is answered in today's Gospel with a resounding 'Yes' And this incident - the Annunciation - the most liberating act of creative energy for the whole human race is in human terms a non-event - it doesn't take place at the seats of power at the heart of an empire or with a fanfare of trumpets human or divine. In our contemporary terms there is very little publicity, there are no first century equivalents of flashing cameras or a scrum of reporters. The message is first delivered to wandering, socially undesirable shepherds on a Palestinian hillside. Only quite a bit later does it reach the ears of the rich and powerful and with predictably brutal and cold-hearted results. Their servants come to Bethlehem not on their knees but with drawn swords and a clear set of instructions. But for the moment, at the very end of this Advent Season, here in poverty, silence and obscurity the world is turned upside down. But this is the mysterious nature of the Word of God among us and even today he operates in the same way to reassure us, to free us, to inspire us and give us life. But only if we let him; if we don't let the noise of our hot-blooded and intemperate, but often cold-hearted and callous, world drown him out. +



Saint of the Week

St Stephen: *December 26th*

St Stephen is regarded as the first Christian martyr. We find his story in chapters 6 and 7 of the Acts of the Apostles. He was chosen to be among the first seven Deacons in the Church. Through his witness to Jesus, his work and teaching he was persecuted and was accused of blasphemy. During his trial he made a speech that denounced the Jewish authorities who were sitting in judgement of him. They condemned him to death and he was stoned to death. Those who stoned him laid their cloaks at the feet of a man named Saul – this man would persecute the Church, but would have a conversion experience and become Paul, who we know for his letters in the New Testament and his zeal for the Church he once persecuted. As Stephen was being stoned, he prayed that Jesus would receive his spirit. He also prayed that those who were stoning him would be forgiven. Stephen died: falsely accused; brought to an unjust condemnation because he spoke the truth fearlessly; he died with his eyes fixed on God, and with a prayer of forgiveness on his lips – just like Jesus.

Gracious Father, who gave the first martyr Stephen grace to pray for those who took up stones against him: grant that in all our sufferings for the truth we may learn to love even our enemies and to seek forgiveness for those who desire our hurt, looking up to heaven to him who was crucified for us, Jesus Christ, our mediator and advocate, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**