

# PARISH NEWSLETTER

St Arvans with Penterry, Itton, Devauden, & Kilgwrrwg

## IMPORTANT - PLEASE NOTE

St Arvan's Church is open for worship at 10 a.m. on Sundays. Places must be booked and social distancing maintained in the building and following services. Again, we stress there is absolutely no obligation to attend in person, and that your own safety and health & those of others must remain paramount. Our broadcast services will continue as follows: Sunday Eucharist at 10. a.m., and a reflection & celebration of Night Prayer on Wednesdays at 8 p.m. are live-streamed on the St Arvans Parish Group page on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/vicaragecello1/> 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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**12<sup>th</sup> December 2021**  
**The Third Sunday**  
**of Advent**

## The Collect

O Lord Jesus Christ, who at your first coming sent your messenger to prepare your way before you: grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready your way by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at your second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in your sight; for you are alive and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **AMEN**

## A reading from the prophet Zephaniah

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! The LORD has taken away the judgements against you, he has turned away your enemies. The king of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak. The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival. I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it. I will deal with all your oppressors at that time. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time I will bring you home, at the time when I gather you; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the LORD.

[3. 14 - 20]

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

## Canticle: Isaiah 12. 2-6

**R/ Shout aloud and sing for joy,  
for great in your midst  
is the Holy One of Israel.**

Surely God is my salvation;  
I will trust, and will not be afraid,  
for the LORD GOD is my strength and my  
might; he has become my salvation.  
With joy you will draw water  
from the wells of salvation.

**R/ Shout aloud and sing for joy,  
for great in your midst  
is the Holy One of Israel.**

And you will say on that day: Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known his deeds among the nations;

proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously; let this be known in all the earth.

**R/ Shout aloud and sing for joy,  
for great in your midst  
is the Holy One of Israel.**

## A reading from the first letter of St Paul to the Philippians [4; 4 - 7]

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus

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

## Gradual Hymn

Alleluia, alleluia!  
The Spirit of the Lord  
has been given to me.  
He has sent me to bring  
good news to the poor.

**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.**

**J**ohn said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our ancestor"; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.' And the crowds asked him, 'What then should we do?' In reply he

said to them, 'Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.' Even tax-collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, 'Teacher, what should we do?' He said to them, 'Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.' Soldiers also asked him, 'And we, what should we do?' He said to them, 'Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.' As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, 'I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.' So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

[ 3.7-18]

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

### 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)

### For Your Prayers

That we may look forward in hope and joy to the coming of the Lord.  
For all migrants, refugees, and all forced to flee from their homelands  
Those who care for the environment and the natural world  
Those throughout the world who continue to suffer from the Coronavirus pandemic  
- for doctors, nurses and all medical staff,

all carers, medical scientists and researchers.

All who are 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 Church:

For the bishops of the Church:  
Cherry, Bishop of Monmouth, Philip, Episcopal Visitor of the Society of the Holy Cross in Wales, 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; Kim; Elisabeth; Helen Herbert; Dave; John; Marion Webster; Mali; Lorna

### For the Departed:

The recently departed; for Matthew Oubridge; Daniel; our own departed relatives & friends, & those whose anniversaries of death fall at this time: Edward Priddis; Nancy Stephens; David May; Derek Jones, priest; Ronald Harry.

## 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'*

*Jereboam today is based on the ordinary time Sunday readings for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday before Advent*

## Unknown Lady

**Jereboam:** Excuse me; I think I saw you speaking to John the Baptist just now?

**?** Yes, that's correct.

**Jereboam:** I'm Jereboam from the Jerusalem and Galilee Gazette. Would you be willing to tell us a little about your conversation? What were your impressions?

**?:** I've come away feeling quite hopeful.

**Jereboam:** That's good – may I ask why?

**?:** Well, when John addressed the crowd earlier, he told them that the Lord will come and baptise us with the Holy Spirit and with fire. So afterwards I approached John and said that this Holy Spirit and fire could have no effect on me – I feel so dead and empty inside.

**Jereboam:** I don't mean to be facetious, but you look very much alive to me.

**?:** I'll have to explain: my husband finally left me a few months ago, but for years he's been persecuting me relentlessly. It's been like living in a nightmare, and I've been drained of all energy.

**Jereboam:** Assuming you have somewhere to live, maybe it's not so bad now he's left...

**?** It's even worse now: he uses our children as a means to bully me. Look, do you mind if I don't say any more about it?

**Jereboam:** Of course! I don't mean to pry. But anyway, you feel more hopeful after speaking to John.

**?:** John looked me straight in the eye and asked me to visualise a fire. Then he asked which part of the fire reminded me of myself. I said it was the dry, lifeless twigs. He replied that that the dry, lifeless twigs give really strong, warm flames, and that the Lord will make good use of my dry and lifeless feelings.

**Jereboam:** Did he give you any other advice?

**?:** Yes: he told me to remain aware of those feelings, but not to struggle with them. When the Lord comes, he said, we shall not need to struggle.

**Jereboam:** So life will be easy?

**?:** That's just what I asked. He said, no, life won't be easy, but the Lord won't need me to struggle. He told

me to think of the time when my children were babies: life then was certainly not easy, but I knew clearly enough what I needed to do. It will be like that when the Lord comes, or so John said.

**Jereboam:** So you felt pleased with the conversation?

**?:** I felt accepted by John - in my position you get used to being excluded from so many things. And he also managed to encourage me, without telling me to pull myself together. I can't tell you how welcome that is.

**Jereboam:** That's good. One more thing: you've told me some fairly personal information. Are you sure you're happy for us to include all of it in the Gazette?

**?:** I think perhaps I'd prefer that you didn't mention my name.

**Jereboam:** Of course.

### Thought for the Week

"Religion is best when it points beyond itself, like Isaiah or John the Baptist. It is worst when it gives you just enough of the forms to inoculate you against the substance, when it substitutes rituals for reality, the container for the contents, the wineskins for the wine."  
*Richard Rohr*

### This Week

The readings on this *Gaudete Sunday* begin with the Prophet Zephaniah's proclamation of liberation, and God's presence among the people, after decades of their own infidelity. In St Luke's Gospel, John the Baptist is the focus of the expectation in the people who come to him asking what to do. He exhorts them to integrity and charity and announces the one who is to come: "*He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.*"

Monday is the feast day of Saint Lucy, Martyr, and Tuesday that of Saint John of the Cross, Priest and Doctor of the Church, the sixteenth century Spanish mystic and poet.

We continue this week to focus on the first readings in what is still the first part of Advent. From the Book of Numbers, we have the proclamation that "a star shall

advance from Jacob..." Zephaniah is the prophet of impending doom, if the people don't abandon their idolatry. But this week we read about consoling healing, "on that day," when the Lord comes. Isaiah's message is full of promise: "Turn to me and be safe ... for I am God; there is no other!" But on Thursday, we reach December 17th and in these last eight days of Advent the focus returns to the gospels with stories from Jesus' family in the time before he was born. St Matthew's gospel offers the genealogy of Jesus' family. On the 18th we read Matthew's account of the nativity: Joseph decides to divorce the pregnant Mary until an angel appears to him in a dream, saying, "It is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her."

**Next Sunday** begins the last week of Advent, which takes us to Christmas Day on Saturday. The reading from the prophet Micah reminds us that of the seemingly unimportant town of Bethlehem, "from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel." St Luke's gospel offers again the story of the Visitation: Mary's going to visit her cousin in the hill country of Judea. Elizabeth understands immediately Mary's situation, and praises God saying, "*How does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy.*"

### A Reflection for the Third Sunday of Advent

+ On this third Sunday of Advent, 'Gaudete Sunday,' we get the distinct impression that we are already getting into the home straight before Christmas. And the mood of Advent shifts a little today away from the liturgy's themes of preparation and judgement, and more towards hope and joyful anticipation. And we do have to be a bit careful, I think, during Advent not to give the impression of being too censorious about all the pre-Christmas glitz and hysteria going on around us. It would be an odd thing to do to turn this Advent message of liberation and freedom into a grouchy message about poor timing. Having said, starting to anticipate Christmas half-way through November purely for the sake of selling

stuff, undermines the message of the season and we're right to resist it. not because, like the Puritans under Cromwell who ended up trying to ban Christmas, we don't ever want people to enjoy themselves, but simply because, if we start too early, what is there left to celebrate when Christmas itself arrives? "We've already done that! Let's move on to think about New Year!" And I know some people can't see the point of celebrating Christmas, but I'm really at a loss to say why we should celebrate something which is literally just a random, convenient date on a calendar! But Advent is a time of hope and joy, and in looking forward without jumping the gun. When we delay the singing of Christmas carols (the sacred songs of this time of year) for a week or so, all we are saying is to ourselves "is hold on a minute; I need time to get ready for all this. The idea of Advent is that we try to find joy & hope precisely in the waiting, in the hope that we may rediscover within us the joy of God's coming to us as one of us. We can find joy in a certain amount of deliberate simplicity. Much of the joy and meaning of a great deal of human experience comes through the expectation of it. And we find the meaning and the joy of Christmas in the waiting and expectation of Advent. If we examine the readings of the liturgy over these few short weeks before Christmas we can see a longing which overflows in joy. The penitential themes of Advent always give way to salvation. That's the point of our Advent austerity, all our reflection and prayer on the ultimate meaning of life and death. In the Incarnation we see the meaning of life and that meaning is love. Today, then, is also called *Gaudete* or *Rejoice Sunday*, the liturgy gives us a kind of head start in beginning to think about what is to come, to make our path straight for rejoicing, to liberate us from the deep-down unhappiness and sense of pointlessness of much of modern life. And that's our opposition to much of the secular idea of Christmas, not because we hate to see people enjoying themselves, far from it, but because so much of it lacks that vital element of hope and meaning. The world throws itself into early celebration, in order to forget it's feelings of insignificance, the Church celebrates in

order to remember something profoundly significant.

Advent is here for us to learn again to be joyfully expectant, and to learn again to share our joy with others. It's about rediscovering *the reason* for the joy, and that's what our readings today bring home to us : God has come to be with us.

We are being told in no uncertain terms in the today's Gospel that our faith and our daily lives have to be in sync with one another. St John the Baptist who makes his second appearance in the Sunday readings this Advent doesn't mince his words when he tells the crowds that if they genuinely want to draw close to God, they must share with those in need, abandon corruption, greed, lies and sharp practice. They are being warned about the kind of separation between a public profession of faith and a personal, public or business career which stands out in stark contradiction to it. His message holds true today. I'll say no more. I probably don't need to...

This year it will be good to be able to get together again – we hope - over the next few weeks after last year's pandemic lockdown, and to celebrate. That's not a turning of our backs to turn our backs on the problems of the world, and the difficulties, pain and suffering of others, but much of the problem with the entirely secular model of Christmas is that that's exactly what it tries to do, and it can all too easily set up an world of fantasy and make-believe centred around the advertisers' dream of "the perfect family Christmas" (*whatever that is*) which can ironically make what should be a time of happiness and relaxation seem unbelievably pressurised, and make worse the inner wounds of exclusion and isolation many people have at this time of year. Whatever the faults of the Christian Church may be - and there are many, depending on your point of view - we don't do *that*, and, I'm sorry, but we shouldn't collude in it...

The Gospel looks reality in the face without trying to ignore it or prettify it. The child who will be born in the stable is the man who will die on the cross, and if we follow him, doing what he did, and trying to live with love, openness, compassion and generosity, we can't but be involved in reality, the only reality there is. That essentially is the Advent and Christmas message of the Church.

And for a week or more while Advent continues, we look forward to the Lord's return in glory, the glory of truth, justice, peace and love. But, of course, the coming of Christ into our lives can be at whatever time we want. Advent is a good time to consider and reflect on that, and what its implications are for each one of us. This week is a chance to give ourselves the space, while we can, to recognise our need, and to ask for the grace to try to live more fully according to the Gospel of hope and joy. +

## **Saint of the Week** **St John of the Cross** 14<sup>th</sup> December

John was born in Avila in Spain in 1542. His family were poor because his father had chosen to marry a poor woman from a lower class, and his employer disowned him. The early years of John's life were difficult as his father died when he was 3 and his brother died two years later, probably from malnutrition.

As a child John had a great interest in religion and even whilst at school he volunteered to help at the local Jesuit hospital. In 1563 he joined the Carmelite Order and was ordained a priest four years later. He longed for a simpler and quieter life and he considered joining the Carthusian Order. It was at this point in his life that he met Teresa of Avila, a charismatic and influential Carmelite nun. John was attracted to the strict regime of life that she lived. Teresa was trying to reform the Carmelite order and asked John to assist her in this work. In 1572 he became Teresa's spiritual guide and he remained with Teresa for five years.

During this time he had a vision of Jesus and made a sketch of this vision. The sketch remains to this day and shows a vision of Jesus on the cross but looking down on Jesus from above.

As the work of the reform of the Carmelite order continued, a rift arose and John was summoned back to his monastery. He refused, but was taken by force and imprisoned. To pass the time whilst imprisoned he wrote poems and he became a remarkable poet, and his works remain very influential right to this day. During his imprisonment, and

revealed in his poetry, he came to know the cross very well and experienced acutely the death of Jesus. But it was in this darkness that he found light and that the cross leads to Resurrection; agony to ecstasy.

He died aged 49 in 1591.

O God, the judge of all, who gave your servant John of the Cross a warmth of nature, a strength of purpose and a mystical faith that sustained him even in the darkness: shed your light on all who love you and grant them union of body and soul in your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

## **Services in the Group today** **Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> December 2021**

Sung Eucharist at St Arvans at 10 a.m.

Liturgy of the Word at St Deiniol's, Itton at 11.30 a.m.

## **Advent Book** **Recommendation** **'Surviving Christmas** **by Loving Advent'** by Roy Uprichard

Available as an ebook (*Kindle etc*) from Amazon.co.uk - either free for a few days, or thereafter at 79p  
*"Feel the ebb and flow of a season in this fresh look at our star-bright stories.*

*Told with a Celtic, Northern Irish twist, the author imagines not only the untold range of emotions coursing between the lines of our Nativity tales, but also, how we might today navigate our way through this festival full of ambiguity. Perhaps by the final pages you might also sense that one way to survive our commercialised Christmas is, paradoxically, by falling in love with Advent"*

A real bargain and highly recommended for Advent reflection – and not just for the nice things he says in the acknowledgements!

## All our Christmas Services

### Friday 17<sup>th</sup> December

6 p.m. Carols around the Christmas Tree in St Arvans Churchyard with Chepstow Town Band

### Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> December: *The Fourth Sunday of Advent*

9 a.m. Morning Prayer at St James, Devauden

10 a.m. Sung Eucharist at St Arvans

11.30 a.m. Holy Eucharist (or Liturgy of the Word) at Holy Cross, Kilgwrrwg

### Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> December:

7 p.m. Nine Lessons & Carols at St Deiniol's, Itton

### Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> December:

6 p.m. Nine Lessons & Carols at St Arvans

### Friday 24<sup>th</sup> December :

*Christmas Eve*

4.30 p.m. Carols by Candlelight at St Mary's, Penterry

6.30 p.m. Christmas Eve Carol Service on Devauden Green

11 p.m. Midnight Mass  
*(The first Eucharist of Christmas)*  
at St Arvans  
*This is the midnight celebration for all our parishes*

### Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> December: *Christmas Day*

9 a.m. Holy Eucharist with Carols at St James, Devauden

10.30 a.m. Holy Eucharist with Carols at St Deiniol's, Itton

### Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> December *The First Sunday of Christmas* *(The Holy Family)*

10 a.m. Sung Eucharist at St Arvans

*The Eucharist will be said in the Lady Chapel at St Arvans Church at 10 a.m. each day of the Christmas Octave*

## Ministry Area Prayer

Dear Lord, we thank you for the opportunity to work together as a Ministry Area.

May we engage with each other with faith and encouragement.

May we manage each situation with wisdom and mutual respect.

May we serve with integrity, creativity and purpose.

May we speak with openness and gentleness.

May we offer our gifts, time and finances with generosity....

May we face each challenge with courage and the desire to grow through it.

May we all be drawn deeper into our relationship with You and be known as your disciples.

Help us to show your love, proclaim your Good News and grow your Kingdom in this place.

We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. **AMEN**