

ST. MARY OF NAZARETH /ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI – WEST WICKHAM

12th December: Third Sunday of Advent

Hazel writes:

Face coverings are now mandatory in all places of worship, so I am pleased that we never relaxed that recommendation. The Government's Plan B brings no change to our current practices in St Mary's and St Francis' church buildings and our Christmas services will go ahead as planned, although some of the details and the people participating may change as individuals make decisions on their own involvement.

Next Sunday 19th December, we will have a **Holy Communion service** at 8am in St. Mary's Church and **Carol Services** at 10am in St Francis' Church and at 4pm in St Mary's church which will be followed by tea in the hall.

Morning Prayer is held in St Francis' Church on Wednesday mornings at 9.30am, followed by the church being **open for private prayer** from 10.30-11.30am. It is also held at St Mary's Church on Thursday mornings at 9am.

Resources and updates for the week ahead – This week our service will be **livestreamed at 10am** on YouTube. All other files for this week have been combined and posted as a pew sheet which has been sent on paper to those who have told us that they are not on-line. Other worship and resources that you might want to listen to or look at on Sunday:

- The Church of England's national virtual service will be available on their website at www.churchofengland.org.
- The BBC have the following programmes to watch and listen to:
 - Sunday Worship at 8.10am on Radio 4 - A service of jazz carols from Highfields Church, Cardiff led by Rev. Dave Gobbett.
 - Choral Evensong at 3pm on Radio 3 from Buckfast Abbey with the choir of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge.
 - On BBC 1: Songs of Praise at 1.15 p.m. – Kate Bottley explores Lincoln's famous Cathedral and Christmas markets.

Coffee & Chat is on the first Thursday at 2.30pm on Zoom and our next in person date is this Thursday 16th December in St Francis' Church. If you would like to come and meet others for a chat, please do join us. If you would like to do this, but cannot make the date, or would like the log-in details, please let Rowena know (rowena.griff19@btinternet.com or 8777 6112).

There will be an **Action Aid coffee morning** in St Francis Church on Saturday 18th December at 10.30 – 11.30 or thereabouts. This is just a one-off event at the moment – we hope regular ones will start in due course. Hope to see some of you there.

The **London Concert Chorus** will be performing together with a live band, Firefly, and special guest, Emma Hatton, from West End shows at St Francis' Church on Tuesday 21st December at 7pm. This is a sing-along Christmas concert with tickets available at www.torchentertainment.co.uk or on 0333 666 3366.

Help a Hospice and save a tree: send your Christmas greetings to all your friends in the congregation by putting a card on the Christmas Greetings board at the back of church at St. Francis. The money you save from not sending cards can be donated to Demelza House, our local Children's Hospice. Please complete a Gift Aid envelope if you are a taxpayer. Cheques should be made payable to Demelza House.

St. Mary's could do with one or two extra volunteers to help with the Parish lunches on the first Wednesday of the month. If you feel that you might be able to help with this could you please contact Beryl Bolton on 0208 289 8097 or berylbolton@hotmail.com. Thank you.

We are looking to increase the number of in-person services held in both churches in 2022 on Sunday mornings, which we hope will create a much greater sense of regularity in our worship, with people able to feel safe in a space that they know well.

As a consequence we will be needing more volunteers to support these services. If you feel able to add any of the following roles to your schedule, please let the following people know:

- Welcomers at St Mary's - Beryl Bolton - berylbolton@hotmail.com
- Welcomers at St Francis' - Joan Burford – jandbburford@talktalk.net
- Readers at St Mary's - Kay Mussard - kay@mussard.org.uk
- Readers at St Francis' - Joan Burford - jandbburford@talktalk.net
- Intercessors at both churches - Hazel O'Sullivan - hazelos58@gmail.com
- Refreshments at St Mary's - Beryl Bolton - berylbolton@hotmail.com
- Refreshments at St Francis' - Marion Barry - whitelandm@yahoo.com
- Livestreaming and slides at St Mary's - Gifty Nortey
- office@stmarywestwickham.co.uk
- Livestreaming at St Francis' - Nichola Nightingale
- nicholanightingale@hotmail.co.uk

It has been some time now since we have had hard copies of **The Bridge**, the monthly publication on news in the Diocese of Southwark. Here is a link to the place where

electronic copies are available: southwark.anglican.org/thebridge. If anyone believes that we should re-publish individual articles as ones of interest in our own parish magazine, please let Hazel know.

St Francis and St Mary's Arts events 2022: supporting mental health.

As you may know, we cancelled plans for a Festival of Arts in 2020 due to the pandemic. Instead, we would like to have two arts weekends this year, linking these to how the Arts can have a positive influence on people's mental health, which will be so important in 2022:

- The first would be a Visual Arts weekend and might include a photography exhibition, film night and art exhibitions and will be 9-10th July 2022.
- Then a Written Word weekend will be 24-25th September 2022 and might include a book exhibition, poetry and other readings.

This is all in the very early planning stage and we would like many people to contribute ideas, plan and organise these events. If you would like to get involved please contact any of us: Ken (kennethabryan@aol.com), Kay (kay@mussard.org.uk), Debbie (debadams64@icloud.com), Tim (tim.shingler@ntlworld.com), Nicky (nicholanightingale@hotmail.co.uk) and Kate (katedyer41@hotmail.com).

Please bring **Foodbank donations** to the Vicarage or St Francis' Church. Currently they need bags for life, cooking sauce, toothbrushes, children's toothpaste, and hair conditioner. They are well-stocked with pasta, cereals and baked beans and please do not bring any fresh food, or baby milk as the foodbank cannot pass this on. You can also donate financially here <https://bromleyborough.foodbank.org.uk/give-help/donate-money>.

Please continue to bring furnishings – sticks and dry leaves – for our **Messy Church Bug Hotel at St Mary's** so that the bugs feel at home. If you want to walk with a purpose, please do collect some of these on your travels, bring them to St Mary's and put them into the Bug Hotel, or leave them beside it and someone from Messy Church will put them into the structure.

If anyone would like a pedestal at either church in memory of a loved one or to commemorate a special anniversary etc., please contact Merri Womack (8777 8772) for St Mary's (or there is a list to sign in the vestibule at St. Mary's) or Nicky Nightingale (nicholanightingale@hotmail.co.uk or 8916 9855) for St Francis'.

Any items for the joint pew sheet to Beryl berylbolton@hotmail.com and items for the websites to brian.griff19@btinternet.com or Gifty office@stmarywestwickham.co.uk

Collect

God for whom we watch and wait, you sent John the Baptist to prepare the way of your Son: give us courage to speak the truth, to hunger for justice, and to suffer for the cause of right, with Jesus Christ our Lord.

First Reading:**Philippians 4: 4-7**

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵ Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Gospel Reading:**Luke 3: 7-18**

⁷ John 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?' ⁸ 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. ⁹ 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.'

¹⁰ And the crowds asked him, 'What then should we do?' ¹¹ In reply he said to them, 'Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.' ¹² Even tax-collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, 'Teacher, what should we do?' ¹³ He said to them, 'Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.' ¹⁴ 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.'

¹⁵ As the people were filled with expectation, and all

were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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.'

¹⁸ So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

Post Communion Prayer

We give you thanks, O Lord, for these heavenly gifts; kindle in us the fire of your Spirit that when your Christ comes again we may shine as lights before his face; who is alive and reigns now and for ever.

Sermon – Ken Bryan

The third Sunday of Advent focusses on challenge and joy.

For the first part of this talk I am indebted to Rev Sarah Jones for her thoughts.

The challenge comes from John the Baptist.

In this second week that we focus on John we hear him haranguing the crowd who have come to listen to him. Not a usual way then or now for getting a crowd to hear you or be convinced of your message.

‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance ... every tree, therefore, that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.’ Wow! Imagine going to see John, hoping to be welcomed into a deeper relationship with God and then being spoken to like that.

The crowds ask what they need to do to enter this deeper relationship with God. John answers with ‘Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none and whoever has food must do likewise.’

John is just as uncompromising with people who collect taxes and with soldiers; ‘Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you,’ and ‘Do not extort money from anyone.’

If I was there and was told that this is the Good News ... I am not sure I would not want to hear the bad news!

John’s challenge to the crowds is significant. Everyone must have a generous heart for those in need. That even included tax collectors and soldiers.

But how would it feel to be a tax collector and to only charge the correct amount, when everyone else was charging more? You might come under some heavy peer pressure. ‘What are you doing? You are making us all look bad.’

Soldiers have a strong loyalty to their comrades. What would happen if an individual soldier started to opt-out of extorting money when the rest of his squad were hassling the local population? He might get a very rough ride indeed. But there is more to it than that. Soldiers were reputedly paid poorly, so to make a decent wage they had to extort money from people. The system may even have been designed that way. So, it is not as straightforward as it first seems. These are serious matters for the people who heard John.

So, what about us? What difference does hearing this passage make to our lives?

God loves us. But God loves everyone. This world needs to be fair for everyone. And so, the question needs to be addressed. What is John the Baptist saying to us? You and me today.

If we have more than we need, we know what we should do.

John is saying 'Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none and whoever has food must do likewise.' We can all look around us and see the inequalities of the world and we are well aware of where the needs are. Yet it is easy enough to make excuses for ourselves. Like saying we need to plan for our future and our family's future. There will be rainy days and we need to have some savings and resources put by for that rainy day. All very true.

Or we can busy ourselves so that we don't have time to consider the challenge that John gives us. And yet John's challenge is there whether we want to think about it or not.

And what is the equivalent of the soldiers whose pay structure relied on them extorting money from people? What systems are in place today which encourage or force people to cheat and steal? If we have institutional or structural systems which do this, we need to change those systems. The emphasis is on 'we'. The system will not change itself. We have to change it. If you know about that system, you have to help change it. So, there is a choice before us. We can let this scripture fall aside or we can hear the challenge that John is making to us.

Advent is a time for preparation for Christmas and so we can choose to take on John's challenge as part of our preparation for welcoming Jesus into our hearts and homes this Christmas.

Now I'm going to do something rather unusual during a sermon. I am going to stop talking. I'm going to give us all a moment of silence to ask ourselves a question and to think of an honest answer. We are not going to share our answers – so be honest with yourself. The question is 'What is John's challenge to us and what will we do to embrace it?' Are we going to ignore it, are we going to do a little more, or are we going to do much more? And where are the areas that we feel we can help most?

(Silence)

Let us now remember that we can have the reassurance that God, despite all our faults and failings, loves us. If he loves everyone that must include us and for that we should be eternally grateful.

The third Sunday of Advent can also focus on Joy and our Philippians reading talks of rejoicing in the Lord: 'Rejoice in the Lord always; again' I will say, Rejoice'.

Paul was writing these words whilst held in prison. So, he was not thinking of temporary happiness, but he was focussing on Jesus and the joy he felt of being loved by God.

If we believe we are a chosen people, if we put our faith in God through Jesus Christ there is every reason for us to be joyful. Not just temporary happiness but a deep-seated joy in knowing that we are loved by God.

The theologian Henri Nouwen described the difference between joy and happiness. While happiness is dependent on external conditions, joy is "the experience of knowing that you are unconditionally loved and that nothing – sickness, failure, emotional distress, oppression, war, or even death - can take that love away." Thus, joy can be present even in the midst of sadness.

Pope Francis said that Gaudete Sunday is known as the "Sunday of joy", and that instead of fretting about all they still haven't done to prepare for Christmas, people should think of all the good things life has given you.

Joy is after all, one of the fruits of the Spirit we read in Galatians 5:22. We experience more joy when we spend time with God. We have to keep in mind that joy only comes from God, but when we spend more time with him, we allow him to fill us with it.

So, like a child brings everything to a loving parent knowing that they are interested in every detail of their life, so we put worry to one side and take all we are concerned about to God in prayer.

So let us end with a prayer:

Heavenly Father

This third week of Advent, we hear the challenges of John the Baptist together with the reassurance that you love us as we remember that our joy doesn't come from our jobs, our family, our relationships, our finances, or our success. Our joy doesn't come from what we have on earth or who we are with. Our joy is a gift. It is the gift that you gave us that first Christmas in Jesus Christ. Our joy is encompassed in our Saviour, Jesus. Flood our heart with joy this Advent season as we reflect on the good news of Jesus' birth. And may the peace of God guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen

Prayer Pointers

Pray for wisdom for all political leaders and their advisors as the numbers of people with the Covid variant Omicron increases. Pray that the vaccines will be easily available to all who need them but particularly in the poorest countries.

Pray for the New German Chancellor Olaf Scholz

Pray for Afghanistan and Yemen that all those needing food and medical aid and other assistance will receive it. Pray for the safety of all Aid personnel as they work to prevent humanitarian disasters in these and other places.

Pray for all refugees that they will find a safe and welcoming place to live. Pray that the Governments in Europe will work together to enable this, so that there is an end to tragedies like the recent one in the Channel.

Pray that the current conflicts in NE Africa will be resolved.

For all those who are ill and for their friends and relatives – especially for Vicky Pearce, Julie Bailey, Carole Hubbard, Robert Davis, Linda Keynes and Brian Griffiths – and those unknown to us but known to God.

Pray for Barbara Plummer on the death of her son Chris, pray for Karen his wife and for his sister Kati, and all the family. May Chris rest in peace and rise in glory.

An Advent prayer from the Bishop of Woolwich that you might like to use:

God of our expectation,
fill us with pregnant hope
as the day draws near,
that we may birth
Advent hope into
Christmas joy. Amen.