

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

29th November 2020: Advent Sunday

Hazel writes:

For those who are on-line, in addition to our video, which will include a 15-minute time of gathering and sharing of news from 9.45am, we will have a Zoom meeting after the service from 11am – rather like chatting after a service, which is an important part of being an inclusive church community for some people. An invitation to this Advent Sunday event is included as a separate document. I look forward to 'speaking' with you on Sunday morning.

Next week we will be able to return to our in-person services, but the on-line video and paper resources will continue to be available.

This week the church buildings will be open as follows:

- **Private prayer** at St Francis on Wednesday from 10.30am to 11.30am
- **Advent Quiet Time** at St John's, Layhams Road on Friday from 3pm to 7pm
- **Holy Communion** at St Mary's on Sunday at 8am
- **Holy Communion** (including a Commissioning of Church Wardens for both churches) at St Francis' on Sunday at 10am.

We also have a number of special on-line events happening this week:

1. **Disabled or Differently-abled? at 8.00.p.m. on Tuesday December 1st 2020.** Have you ever wondered how you would cope if you were disabled? If you haven't, or even if you have, this is your opportunity, 25 years after the passing of the Disability Discrimination Act, to hear from those who have lived with this condition and to ask any questions you may have either in advance or on the night. Speakers include Revd Tim Goode, Diocesan Disabilities Officer; Rowena Griffiths and Julia Cernoch. Questions can be sent to Richard Ford; richard.ford73@ntlworld.com. If you wish to remain anonymous, just let Richard know or put them through his letterbox: 7 Sylvan Way, West Wickham, BR4 9HA.
2. It is not possible for members of the congregation to attend **Margaret Marsh's funeral** in person due to the current coronavirus restrictions. There will be an on-line link available for the service at Beckenham Crematorium which will start at **2.45pm on Thursday 3rd December**. You can log on at <https://www.obitus.com/> and use the following to gain access: username- Kefo8769; password- 851680. The video can also be viewed for 28 days afterwards using these details. You can pick up an order of service in advance on Wednesday morning when the church is open between 10.30 – 11.30am.

3. **Evening talk by the Curator of Bethlem Gallery** to brighten your evening with art. Lockdown may have dampened our spirits, but art can help to lift them. On **Thursday 3rd December 8-9pm**, Sam Curtis from Bethlem Gallery will be talking about the Gallery and introducing the work of some of its artists. This is an open meeting of the Men's and Women's Groups which will take place on zoom (separate invitation attached) and **all** are welcome to join.

The Bethlem Gallery, established 1997, is situated on the grounds of The Bethlem Royal Hospital. Managed by a small, artist-led team, the gallery provides a professional space for high-quality artwork and fosters a supportive artist-focused environment.

"Pills are ok, counselling is ok and it will get you back on the streets, but what keeps your mind alive is what you learn here. That's what it's about – keeping your spirit alive." – Lee, Bethlem artist.

Contact Kate Dyer (katedyer41@hotmail.com) for further information.

4. **NOT the Big Christmas Sing** is going on-line this year. A video will be premiered on YouTube at **4pm on Saturday 5th December**, including material from members of our congregations, as well as our friends from the Matchbox Theatre, songs from the London Concert Chorus and some information on Christian Aid's Climate Justice Campaign. The team organising this event do hope that you'll join us at this time. Here's a link to our YouTube channel to use on Saturday:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCq1RdXl27bTlompT6lCPoGQ/videos>

Other resources and updates for the week ahead – A video of the service has been posted to the websites for today. All other files 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: Gilbert Markus introduces the first of an Advent series on the eve of St. Andrew's Day.
 - Choral Evensong at 3pm on Radio 3 with carols for Advent from the Chapel of St. Johns College, Cambridge.
 - On BBC 1: Sunday Worship at 10.30am - the Very Rev. Dr. Paul Shackerley leads a service from Brecon Cathedral and Songs of Praise at 12.20 pm – Boys' semi-final of young chorister of the year presented by Aled Jones.

Our “**coffee/tea & chat**” on Thursday will not happen this week as many of those who normally show up would like to watch Margaret Marsh’s funeral which will be happening at the same time.

We have been working on some **Advent** resources together with St John’s church in Layhams Road, where the church building will be open for some **quiet time on Friday 4th December from 3pm to 7pm** enabling reflection on the Advent theme of hope. Hope in your life may have been hidden by the difficulties that we have all faced over the past few months. Advent is a time to uncover that hope and prepare for our celebration of Christ’s birth.

The Men’s Group of St Francis’ and St Mary’s is holding a special collection for the **Bromley Borough Foodbank** on Saturday 5th December at the corner of Ravenswood Avenue and the High Street and we need your help. We will be collecting between 10am and 3pm – volunteers welcome. The Foodbank is under great pressure at this time and needs all the help it can get to provide essentials to families at Christmas. As well as all the normal items kindly donated, the Foodbank particularly needs:

Long-life Fruit Juices	Custard
Rice Pudding	Squash
Packets of Mashed Potatoes	Jam
Tins of cold meat	Biscuits
Men’s Deodorant	Shampoo
Washing Detergent	Nappies sizes 5 & 6
Sweets	

Thank you for your support and please do tell your friends and neighbours. If you can’t make it to the High Street on Saturday, the drop-off points outside the main door of St Francis’ church and at the vicarage are always available for use. Tim Shingler.

Joan Rees died peacefully on Wednesday this week having been on end-of-life care at Glebe Court Nursing Home for several weeks.

Many of our congregation and friends have supported the **Good Shepherd Mission to the Homeless** inspired by Sr Joan nearly 40 years ago. Sadly, the current restrictions have meant that their work is not able to continue. The charity is being wound up and we have been asked to pray that street homeless people will be housed during and after the pandemic.

The Southwark Diocesan Board of Education are hoping to recruit **Foundation Governors** to support their schools. If you are interested in finding out more, please contact Penny Cox at beablessing.sdbe@gmail.com.

We need 6 helpers for the service of **Lighting the Lamps** on Christmas Eve to be available from 3.30pm. Please contact David Wada if you feel able to help.

Bromley Borough Foodbank Christmas Hampers

On Saturday 19th December, St Francis is acting as a distribution centre for Bromley Borough Foodbank Christmas Hampers. We need a team of drivers to deliver these hampers. Ideally each driver will take a passenger with them to help with the delivery as parking at some of the homes might be difficult. We are going to have 150 hampers to deliver. If this is something you think you can help with please contact Kim Teare (kim_teare@hotmail.com), Cheryl Davies (bc14-dav@ntlworld.com) or Kate Dyer (katedyer41@hotmail.com).

Thank you in advance to anyone that can spare a few hours to help those less fortunate than ourselves.

St. Mary's Christmas card table – it looks increasingly unlikely that we will be able to arrange to have this facility this year so Kay and Geoff have very kindly offered to act as postmen, as it was felt receiving cards might be even more important for some people than normal years. If you can put all your cards in a large envelope or a carrier bag in a bundle (with the surname and address if you know it) and deliver this to **35 Oakfield Gardens by Monday December 7th** Kay and Geoff will then sort them out after leaving for a couple of days and deliver them during the following 2 weeks. If anyone is unable to get someone to deliver them or deliver them themselves to Kay and Geoff, arrangements can be made to pick them up.

Christmas decorations. If anyone would like a table decoration please call Merri on 0208 777 8772. Prices will range from £5 to £15 depending on the size and let Merri know when you would like to pick it up. Proceeds to St. Mary's Christmas Market.

Any items for the joint pew sheet to Beryl bbolton@ntlworld.com and items for the websites to brian.griff19@btinternet.com.

Collect

Almighty God, as your kingdom dawns, turn us from the darkness of sin to the light of holiness, that we may be ready to meet you in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

First Reading:**1 Corinthians 1: 3-9**

³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴ I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵ for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind— ⁶ just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you— ⁷ so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁸ He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gospel:**Mark 13: 24-31**

²⁴ 'But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, ²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

²⁶ Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in clouds" with great power and glory. ²⁷ Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

²⁸ 'From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁰ Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Post Communion Prayer

O Lord our God, make us watchful and keep us faithful as we await the coming of your Son our Lord; that, when he shall appear, he may not find us sleeping in sin but active in his service and joyful in his praise; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

TALK: Brian Griffiths

One of the familiar, enduring signs of Advent is the Advent Wreath with five candles – four around the outside and one in the middle. Usually our outside candles are red and the inner candle is white.

The first candle is the Candle of Hope, reminding us of the coming of the Messiah. And we can have hope because God is faithful and will keep the promises made to us. The second candle is the Candle of Love. God kept his promise of a Saviour who would be born in Bethlehem. It reminds us of our need to prepare our souls for his coming. On the third Sunday the Candle of Joy is lit. This candle is sometimes known as the Mary Candle, reminding us of the Virgin Mary, remembering that she was soon to bear the Son of God in a lowly stable. Finally, on the fourth Sunday of Advent, just a few days before the birth of Christ, the final Candle of Peace is lit. This candle reminds us God sent his only Son to earth to save us, because he loves us! On Christmas Day, the Christ Candle is lit, celebrating the birth of Christ. The white candle reminds us that Jesus is the spotless lamb of God, sent to wash away our sins!

So today we have lit the first candle – The Candle of Hope. 2020 has been a really difficult year because of the coronavirus crisis. It really has seemed to be a year of endless waiting and hopelessness. For much of the time, especially during the first lockdown back in March there was a feeling of hopelessness. None of us knew how long the lockdown would last or what the true effect of the lockdown would be. Businesses closed, hundreds of thousands of jobs were lost meaning many people ended up in poverty, having to rely on agencies like foodbanks to survive. There wasn't much hope. This second lockdown has felt different as we knew that it would end on 2nd December and there was great hope that a vaccine would be available within weeks. That hope seems to be coming to fruition now as we are promised a mass vaccination programme planned to start in January. However, for many Christians it seems as if God has by and large been silent during this crisis year of 2020. Many are questioning 'Where has God been in all of this?'

In Advent we are called to another period of waiting, but this waiting is a wait of hope. We're waiting for the signs of the Incarnation in our own lives. We're waiting to see the new and next way that God will be manifest in our own individual time and place. God is with us, but where and how? Patience is a hard-earned virtue, and many of us are deeply wearied by all the waiting we've had to do, all the times we've had to say no to ourselves and our children and grandchildren this year in order to stay safe and keep others safe. It might feel like 2020 is a year out of time, a wasted and empty expanse

that consisted of nothing but life on hold. But is that true? Was this time of waiting really wasted? Was it really hopeless? I wonder what has been blossoming and growing in our hearts during this time of waiting? What new thing is ready to be born in St Mary's and St Francis'? We have been forced to slow down and really ask what is most important about church? How have we found new strengths and graces by the call to adapt?

It's been almost 9 months since the first lockdown in March and I was thinking that it's the same length of time that Mary waited and hoped for the birth of Jesus. Mary's time of waiting was to a purpose. It had a goal and an end, and she faithfully pursued it with God's help. So as we reflect on our waiting and hoping this year, what has God been teaching us? Is this time of waiting and hoping going to change us?

As we begin a new church year on this First Sunday of Advent, we turn to the Gospel of Mark. Much of our teaching this year will be focussed on Mark's account of the life and person of Jesus. Mark was writing around 70AD. Israel was under the heel of the Roman empire and the ruthless regime had put down a serious Jewish revolt. In our reading today we can see that Israel was waiting and hoping expectantly for a new Messiah who would save the nation from Roman oppression. There is a very real sense of urgency, but Jesus warns his disciples of disasters, calamities and persecutions to come. Yet they are not to give up hope. These things are bound to happen before the Kingdom of God comes to fruition. We couldn't think of much more of a disaster than the Covid 19 pandemic. Not just a national, but a global catastrophe – a time when for many Christians it seems as if God has been hidden and very silent indeed. It's been a disturbing and faith-shaking time.

Clearly this pandemic has changed our world. Has it changed the church? Has it changed St Mary's and St Francis'? Has it changed our individual faith? A lot of news headlines recently have focussed on the word 'reset'. There's been Boris Johnson resetting his advisers in No 10 Downing Street. Many have suggested that the 'Track and Trace' system needs a reset. This week of course, there has been a resetting of the Covid control tiers. I wonder if we at St Mary's and St Francis need a reset? Are we desperate to get back to normality – to our old patterns of services and worship, our old ways of thinking, back to what we see as comfortable and traditional – the way it was before the virus struck?

Hopes and Dreams go together. At Christmas we'll sing that lovely carol 'O Little Town of Bethlehem' with the words 'The Hopes and Dreams of All The Years are met in Thee Tonight'. I have been dipping into a book by Sam Wells, the vicar of St Martin in the Fields, Trafalgar Square. The book is called 'Learning to Dream Again – Rediscovering the Heart of God'. The book is essentially about renewal, identity and the hopeful shape of the Christian Life. It encourages readers to lift their sights and to dream again – even to dream the dream of God. The book got me thinking. What's my dream – my hope – for St Mary's and St Francis' in the 'new normal' when this pandemic is brought under control and there are no restrictions on worship again.

One thing has been clear for me during this Covid Crisis – it's that we as a congregation are, by and large, only comfortable with the familiar and the traditional. The Covid crisis has forced us to change and we are resisting. Not long after Mark wrote his Gospel, the Temple in Jerusalem was completely destroyed. Maybe being forced out of our buildings for some months has felt like 'Temple Destruction' for us. Church buildings remained intact, but rituals, rhythms and patterns were significantly altered. So we have had to reimagine and work out what it means to live without the physical assembly in the physical space. We've had to master how to do church without actually being physically gathered in our buildings. In the midst of all this disruption we have learned to watch, wait and hope. What of the future? Can we learn to dream again? Do we have hopes and dreams for the future of St Mary's and St Francis'.

My dream is that we can become one congregation in two buildings – that we can worship, pray and serve as one community. I know from talking to others in both churches that I'm not the only one who has this hope and dream. I also know that for others this dream is unsettling and maybe even threatening. The reason people are upset by this dream is a fear of change – a fear of leaving our comfort zone – maybe a fear of losing identity. Hazel mentioned 'the survival of the fittest' in her sermon last week. There is another way of looking at this – 'the survival of those who can adapt'. The world has changed and the church has changed in 2020. Adapting to and embracing this change can be scary, but it is something we can achieve if we go forward together – as one community – in hope and expectation.

To link in to last week's sermon again, Hazel quoted Leonard Cohen – 'There is a crack in everything – that's how the light gets in'. I want to add to that using a quote from a

new poem by Jane Smith called 'Where The Concrete Breaks'. Some of you may know Jane as she has a strong link with St Francis.

***Look out for the growth
where the concrete breaks.
Never fail to notice
early signs of change.***

***A dandelion poking through
as a sign of hope.
The promise of new life
when you need it most.***

***Always acknowledge
when you're feeling grey,
but never give up hope
for a brighter day.***

Let us pray that we can embrace change and dream big – dream and hope the dream of God – the dream that God has for St Mary's and St Francis'. There are early signs of change in the air. There is a promise of a new way of worshipping and serving together. We should never give up hope for a brighter future together. One congregation in two buildings.

And so together we light one candle on our Advent wreath, we stay awake, and we watch. We watch for any signs of God, we listen for the stirrings of the Spirit, we dare to hope and dream. We are ready to catch the flame of this one candle and gently carry it wherever we go, taking hope and dreams with us to share.

Amen

Prayer Pointers

Thank God for the hope we have in Christ that all will be well and his kingdom may be established here on earth. Pray for a new vision as we dream about how St Mary's and St Francis' can be refreshed and renewed at the end of the pandemic – that we may become one congregation in two buildings, worshipping, sharing and serving as one. Pray that more in West Wickham may be drawn to worship with us and may they feel that they are welcomed and belong to our community.

As we hear about more jobs being lost in local authorities near West Wickham, pray for all those facing redundancy, especially in Croydon, Lewisham and Bexley Councils. Pray for local councillors and managers who have to make difficult and critical decisions about financial cutbacks and job losses while maintaining essential services. Pray that those who lose their jobs may not lose hope and for all those in Job Clubs and Government Job Centres who help them find new work.

Continue to pray for all who serve in the NHS as they prepare for a mass vaccination programme. For all healthcare professionals who are working on Covid wards that they may be kept safe to care for the sick. For all patients who are beginning harsh treatment regimes in the coming days and weeks. May they too not lose hope, but trust in God's comfort and care.

Pray for all those who will receive the Christmas food parcels to be delivered from our local Foodbank. May they be encouraged and find hope in the knowledge that they are not forgotten and that they are cared for. As the Apostles called the church to select from their number those who would see that food was fairly distributed to those in need, we give thanks for those who continue this work in Foodbanks up and down the country. Pray especially for the staff and volunteers at the Bromley Borough Foodbank and give thanks for all the volunteer drivers who will help distribute the food parcels from St Francis church building at Christmastime.

Prayer for Hope and New Life – “Where the Concrete Breaks” written by Jane Smith

Look out for the growth where the concrete breaks. Never fail to notice early signs of change. A dandelion poking through as a sign of hope. The promise of new life when you need it most. Always acknowledge when you're feeling grey, but never give up hope for a brighter day.