

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

28th November: Advent Sunday

Hazel writes:

This coming Saturday (4th December) is **The Big Christmas Sing**, when the West Wickham choir will be singing and leading us in Christmas songs and carols, together with Jacqueline Turner singing some solos. This is a great community event and raises much needed funds for Christian Aid. Do come and take part at 4pm in St Francis' Church. There is a poster attached to this pew sheet – please do circulate this widely, so that we can let others know of the community nature of this event.

Next Sunday 5th December, we will have **Holy Communion services** at 8am and 9.15am in St Mary's church and at 10.45am in St. Francis' Church.

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 9.15am** 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
 - Choral Evensong at 3pm on Radio 3 from St. Johns College, Cambridge - a service for ADVENT with carols.
 - On BBC 1: Songs of Praise at 1.15 p.m. – Aled Jones presents the boys semi-final of young chorister of the year from Salisbury Cathedral.

Coffee & Chat this week is on Thursday 2nd December at 2.30pm on Zoom. Our next in person date is on 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).

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>.

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 magazines, please let Hazel know.

Welcare in Bromley

We attended a service of Thanksgiving on Friday 19th November at Bromley Parish Church. It proved to be informative and uplifting. The Valley Primary School choir sang three joyful songs with great enthusiasm which set the tone for the whole service. Anna Khan, CEO of Welcare, spoke very positively about the support given to local families and individuals in crisis. We also heard a case history of one family who had received support through a difficult period. After the service we were all invited to a buffet lunch which had been prepared by members of the participating churches. *Merri Womack*

Matchbox Theatre are looking forward to welcoming you to their forthcoming production "ENGLAND EXPECTS" by their very own STEVE TOLMIE. Performances are on 2nd, 3rd and 4th December 8pm in St Francis Church Hall. Tickets are £8.50 children £6 and may be purchased online using debit/credit card at <http://www.ticketsource.co.uk/the-matchbox-theatre>

SATURDAY 4th DECEMBER BIG CHRISTMAS SING: REFRESHMENTS. We will need contributions of mince pies and biscuits, and there is a list at the back of church for you to sign if you can help in this way. Please bring your contributions to St Mary's or St Francis by Sunday 28th November (10am service at St. Mary's). It would be helpful if you could tick your name off the list when you have brought your donation. Donations, however small, towards other costs would also be appreciated and can be given to Kay Mussard or Margaret Bond at St Mary's or Barbara Plummer at St Francis'. Any surplus will be given to Christian Aid.

Community lunches have started again at both St Mary's and St Francis'. The Christmas Community Lunches have always been lovely occasions and will be especially so this year. The lunch at **St. Mary's** will be on **Wednesday 8th December at 12.30 p.m. and at St Francis on SUNDAY 12TH DECEMBER at 12.30pm.** The cost of both is £10 and you need to book before the beginning of December. Please contact Beryl Bolton 8289 8097 for St

Mary's and Barbara Goodchild on 8777 8782 for St Francis' as soon as possible if you wish to come as numbers will be restricted a little this year.

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 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'. There is a list to sign up in the vestibule at St. Mary's.

The flowers this week at St Mary's have been provided and arranged by Beryl for family birthdays.

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

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 Thess. 3. 9-end**

⁹ How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? ¹⁰ Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith.

¹¹ Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. ¹² And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. ¹³ And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Gospel Reading:**Luke 21.25-36**

²⁵ 'There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. ²⁶ People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in a cloud" with power and great glory. ²⁸ Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.'

²⁹ Then he told them a parable: 'Look at the fig tree and all the trees; ³⁰ as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. ³¹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. ³² Truly I tell you, this generation will not

pass away until all things have taken place.

³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³⁴ 'Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, ³⁵ like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.'

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.

Sermon – Richard Ford

So here we are, the beginning of Advent, the time of the year when the church traditionally focuses on two things: the first coming of Jesus as a baby, born in Bethlehem, and his Second Coming as king and judge.

In relation to the latter, again traditionally, the Church invites us to focus on the Four Last things: Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell, and only one of those four is really popular. I'll leave you to work which that is. But more of that later.

Let's now look at the passage chosen for our Gospel, which many regard as referring to the Second Coming – and let me say at the outset that I'm not suggesting that Luke doesn't believe in the Second Coming. There are references to it throughout the Gospel and right at the beginning of Acts, where the disciples are told that:

This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven. (Acts 1.11)

But if, as I've hinted, our Gospel isn't about the Second Coming, what is it about?

To find the answer, we need to go back to the beginning of the chapter, which describes how, just after they have come out of the Temple in Jerusalem, some of Jesus' disciples, awe-struck by its magnificence, comment on how beautiful it is.

Jesus' response is to tell them that the time "will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down." (21.6). And this is a prophecy which was fulfilled in 70AD, when, following a rebellion, against the Romans by the Jews, the Temple was razed to the ground. Much of the rest of the chapter up to the beginning of our Gospel is taken up by describing what will happen to the disciples when they start to spread the gospel, the good news of what God has done for us through Jesus, and the persecutions that they will face, including death. Again, we know from reading the Book of Acts that this was a prophecy that came to fulfilment - it is sometimes said that the church was built on the blood of the martyrs. But there is also a detailed description of the suffering that will be experienced by those caught up in the rebellion against Rome if they don't, literally, run for their lives:

Jesus' final words before our gospel reading are: "For there will be great distress on the earth and wrath against this people (the Jews); they will fall by the edge of the sword and be taken away as captives among all nations and Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled."

So that's the context in which we have to read today's gospel. And at this point it would be helpful to have the reading in front of you.

The opening words, referring to signs in the sun and the other heavenly bodies and then to earthly confusion, were a picturesque and almost conventional way in Jesus' day of referring to great events on earth, such as the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple. And for Jesus' disciples the idea of the Temple being destroyed was almost unimaginable, almost literally out of this world.

But what comes next is a little different. When Jesus prophesies that they will see "the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory," he is drawing his words and imagery from the prophet Daniel (Daniel 7.13). In a vision, Daniel is taken into the Court of Heaven and sees "one like a son of man coming on the clouds of heaven." The passage goes on to describe how God then gives this figure, the son of man, dominion over the whole earth, his kingship being one that shall never be destroyed. (7. 14)

But note that Jesus tells his disciples, when he uses this illustration, that this is not something to fear, rather they should "stand up and raise their heads, because their redemption is near." (21.28)

So why is that? The answer takes us back to the destruction of Jerusalem. Throughout his ministry, Jesus' teaching had been opposed to that of the religious authorities, the High Priest and his associates who were responsible for the Temple and its worship. We can see this demonstrated physically in Jesus' turning over the tables of the money changers and the animal sellers in the Temple courtyard and accusing the authorities of having turned God's house into a den of thieves (Luke 19.45-46). Their response is to have him put to death by the Romans.

At this point it seems that the religious authorities have triumphed, and even after Jesus' resurrection, they are still in control of the Temple and the religious life of the nation. But the destruction of the Temple and most of Jerusalem in 70AD and the dispersion of the Jews from Jerusalem, coupled with the growth of Christianity, shows that Jesus is vindicated and that the ultimate triumph is his.

It also makes sense of Jesus' comment, with regard to these prophecies that we have been looking at, that "this generation will not pass away until these things have taken place." If it is a reference to the Second Coming, there clearly Jesus has got it wrong; but if it refers to the destruction of the Temple, then given that this is only 40 years after Jesus' death, it is well within the lifetime of "this generation."

So what does this have to say to us today? At this point we need to look at v34-35:

³⁴ “Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, ³⁵ like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth.

These words are addressed to Jesus’ followers left behind after he returns to heaven to take his place at his Father’s side, those awaiting the Second Coming and living under Roman rule in a Jerusalem in which revolt is in the air. For them, there is a real risk of being distracted by the cares of this world and turning to drink and other vices for escape.

So Jesus warns those living in Jerusalem to be on guard, looking for signs of the coming destruction of the Temple and the city. And he warns us, waiting for the Second Coming, to be watchful, to avoid distractions. For in both cases, we cannot know when it will take place. As Jesus tells his disciples in Matthew’s Gospel (Matt. 24.36): “But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” And the same point is made in Paul’s letter to the church in Thessalonica, “For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.” (1 Thess. 5.2)

Jesus concludes his comments to his immediate disciples by encouraging them not only be on their guard but to “Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

To stand before Jesus, the Christ, the Son of Man, confident that they, too, have conquered and can share in his victory.

And that is the challenge to us, not just in Advent, but throughout the year, to be watchful that we keep to the values of God’s kingdom and through being constant in prayer avoid the distractions of the world around us.

And in the weeks leading up to Christmas it is very easy to fall foul of the distractions of the world and to give way to the secular festival of commerce, as I’ve suggested in the letter in the new editions of the parish magazines. And as the Church suggests in its invitation at this time of the year to meditate on the Four Last Things: Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell. But if, in our watchfulness, we can keep to the values of God’s kingdom, then we don’t need to worry about the three more unpopular aspects of the Four Last Things, we can focus on Heaven.

And if there are occasions when we fail, we know from what Jesus said to Peter, when he asked him how many times he should forgive his brother, that there is no limit to God's forgiveness, if we are truly sorry, determined to change our ways and seek his forgiveness.

One way of avoiding the worldly distractions I've just mentioned is to make our own the prayer with which Paul prays for the members of the church in Thessalonica:

And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. ¹³ And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. Amen

Prayer Pointers

Now the Climate Change conference of Cop26 has finished please continue to pray that the decisions made will be acted on in the months to come. Give thanks for the agreements that were made.

Continue to pray for Afghanistan. Pray that all those needing food and medical aid and other assistance will receive it, especially those in isolated communities. Pray for the safety of all aid personnel. Pray that girls of over 12 years will be able to return to school and women will be able to resume employment.

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

Pray for all the preparations for the Big Christmas Sing.

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.

We remember those who have lost their lives through acts of violence, especially the young couple in Somerset and the young man recently stabbed in Croydon and for their families and friends.