

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

5th December: Second Sunday of Advent

Hazel writes:

This week Jane Smith was interviewed for a livestreamed event held by Kintsugi Hope – an organisation that strives to make a difference to people’s mental wellbeing and which has a link with West Wickham and Shirley Baptist Church. The event was recorded and is available to view at <https://youtu.be/9OOwyFJ0yXg>. There is a one-minute clip explaining the event, beginning at around 15 minutes, another short clip about the meaning of Kintsugi at 21 minutes and an introduction to the importance of sharing stories at 35 minutes. Jane’s interview begins immediately after at 36 minutes, including the story about how she started writing poems after hearing one read out at a healing service in St Francis’. Do watch it and we will think about having it available as a shorter version in other forums.

Next Sunday 12th December, we will have **Holy Communion services** at 8am in St. Francis’ Church and at 10am in St Mary’s 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 – For the second week of Advent recorded in the Chapel of Girton College, Cambridge.
 - Choral Evensong at 3pm on Radio 3 from Her Majesty’s Chapel Royal, Hampton Court Palace.
 - On BBC 1: Songs of Praise at **12.30 p.m.** Aled Jones hosts the final of the Young Chorister of the Year Competition.

Coffee & Chat is on the first week of the month at 2.30pm on Zoom. Our next meeting in a building is on Thursday 16th December at 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).

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.

We are looking to increase the number of services held in both church buildings 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.

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

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>.

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'.

This week the flowers at St. Mary's are in memory of David's brother whose first anniversary is at this time. They are provided by Dave & Wendy and have been arranged by Merri.

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,
purify our hearts and
minds, that when your
Son Jesus Christ comes
again as judge and
saviour we may be
ready to receive him,
who is our Lord and our
God.

First Reading:

Malachi 3: 1-4

“I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the LORD Almighty.

² But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap. ³ He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will

purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, ⁴ and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 3: 1-6

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Tracónitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene— ² during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³ He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the

forgiveness of sins. ⁴ As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:
“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.
⁵ Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low.
The crooked roads shall become straight,
the rough ways smooth.
⁶ And all people will see God’s salvation.’”

Post Communion Prayer

Father in heaven, who sent your Son to redeem the world and will send him again to be our judge: give us grace so to imitate him in the humility and purity of his first coming that, when he comes again, we may be ready to greet him with joyful love and firm faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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Sermon – Debbie Adams

Imagine being transported back to Judaea 2,000 years ago. You are part of the Roman Empire, and the Romans govern with authority.

It would have been very brave, or unwise, for anyone to challenge the political and religious establishment in Judaea at the time. But this was not something that was going to deter John the Baptist.

Today's gospel reading outlines the beginning of John the Baptist's ministry.

What do we know about John the Baptist?

The popular image of him is of a wild, loud, eccentric figure, with a dishevelled appearance who lived in the desert and feasted on a diet of insects. In Mark's Gospel chapter 1 verse 6, it states that John was clothed in camels' hair, had a leather belt around his waist, and ate locusts and wild honey.

So, he didn't have the appearance of someone you would associate with status and wealth; on the contrary, he led a life of poverty.

However, there was something about him and the message he was proclaiming that made others want to listen to him. He often attracted large crowds of followers.

How would we react to John the Baptist today? Would we listen to him and want to know more?

Would we judge him solely on his appearance?

Would we reject his message because it is far too radical and controversial?

I want to cover three main points in the bible reading today: firstly, hearing God's voice and being **obedient**; secondly, prophecy and being **prepared**; and thirdly, baptism and a **new beginning**.

Firstly, I will explore hearing God's voice and being obedient to him. We read in Luke chapter 3 verse 4 that John the Baptist **heard God's voice in the wilderness**.

We do not know the words John actually heard, but we do know that as a result he began his ministry. This decision at the time was not without risk, but nevertheless he was **obedient** to God's call.

I wonder whether there have been times when we have heard God's voice speaking to us, or he has put something in our hearts that he would like us to do.

How have you dealt with this challenge?

At times it is so much easier to put it out of our minds rather than pray about it and discern what it is that God wants us to do.

I know God has been calling me for a while, and at first, I chose not to acknowledge it. It took time, and I needed to put all my trust in him in order to answer that call.

Like John, we are all called to be God's disciples and to speak about our faith to others, so that we can share the good news of God's kingdom.

In the same way, John was driven and committed to answer his specific call, beginning with listening to God and encouraging others to help those in need. (Luke 3:11).

There are many examples of people who have been driven by love and compassion for others, who have made a real difference.

For example, there is Kevin Sinfield, who raised over £1 million pounds for the Motor Neurone Disease charity by completing a 101-mile run in 24 hours; and Marcus Rashford, who has campaigned to end child food poverty. These are people who felt compelled to make a difference to help others in need.

My second point is to explore the **prophecy** and **being prepared**.

Luke's Gospel records events before John's birth regarding a prophecy being revealed to his elderly father Zechariah in the temple. In Chapter 1 verse 17, Zechariah is told that John would "make ready a people prepared for the Lord".

In verse 4 of our reading today, Luke refers to the prophet Isaiah and cites chapter 40 verse 3: "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." The prophet Malachi in our first bible reading, Chapter 3 verse 1, states: "I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me."

These Old Testament prophets prophesied about John the Baptist's coming, and that it would be a significant historical event.

John fulfils the prophecy by **preparing people** for the coming of the Messiah, and by proclaiming God's message. He does this by preaching throughout the region of Jordan.

John proclaims **repentance** for the **forgiveness** of sins, and points to the one who is coming after him, the one who is greater than him, and the one that we should all follow.

We know that he is talking about Jesus, and so his message is **not only** about repentance, but also about being **transformed**.

In the book “40 Stories of Hope”, an ex-offender tells the inspirational story of how his life was completely transformed by giving his life to Jesus and being baptised. He acknowledges that he committed serious crimes in the past, but believes that Jesus paid the price for his sins on the cross, and he has been forgiven. He recognises that he will have difficult days but has faith that, because he has Jesus at the centre of his life, he can rely on the strength of Jesus rather than his own.

How are we preparing to meet with Jesus during this busy Advent Season? Will we put aside much needed quiet time to really examine our lives and ourselves?

Will we open our hearts to him, so that we may be transformed?

How can we be transformed?

Jesus helps us to be transformed by **letting us know** that our sins are forgiven when we give our lives to him.

I come now to my third point, which is to explain the connection between **baptism** and a **new beginning**.

John the Baptist preached a radical message of repentance leading to baptism and a real commitment to God. Up to then, the Jews only performed baptisms for the Gentiles who wanted to follow the Jewish faith.

They believed they were the chosen people and did not need to be baptised.

However, many Jews accepted John’s teaching, and came to be baptised with many others in the River Jordan. No-one was excluded or turned away.

We can only imagine the excitement and joy experienced by those that were baptised. There must have been a real sense of being included and belonging to a large-scale movement of people wanting to make their commitment to God.

Have there been times when you have felt excluded?

Or have you unintentionally excluded others by not considering their needs, circumstances, backgrounds or abilities?

The “Living in Love & Faith” course, together with inclusive church zoom discussions and events like Black History Month, have all helped us as a church family to recognise and understand these issues better, while learning from other people’s different experiences.

Recently we witnessed a baptism service in our church community where Elisha and her daughter Sienna were baptised, not with water from the river Jordan, but with water blessed at the font.

It was a wonderful celebration where family and friends gathered, as well as our church family witnessing the baptism. The commitment was made by the candidates to turn away from sin and turn to Christ, in the same way that John the Baptist had proclaimed the message of repentance, turning away from sin, and being baptised.

Being baptised signifies a new beginning and becoming a new creation.

The season of Advent is also the beginning of a new church year. We are in a period of waiting, which is a wait of hope as we prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of our saviour Jesus Christ.

Let us take encouragement from John the Baptist’s message of repentance as he prepared people’s hearts to receive Jesus.

In the same way, God has assigned each of us a role in preparing others to trust in Jesus.

We may not experience crowds of people flocking to hear our message, but our encounters with those we meet - be that family, friends, work colleagues or neighbours – is an opportunity to spread the good news of Jesus.

John was able to fulfil the prophecy by hearing God’s voice when he spoke to him, and being obedient to what God was asking him to do. He **prepared** himself to carry out his ministry through **preaching** about **repentance** and **baptism**, for a **new beginning** of a life centred on God.

As Richard discussed in his Sermon last week, we need constantly to challenge ourselves to be watchful, to avoid distractions, and to devote ourselves to prayer and keeping the values of God’s Kingdom.

This Advent, let us listen to John the Baptist, rather than reject his message as being too radical. Today he would be telling us to reset our lives to be centred on God and put time aside to listen to what God is saying to us. It is through allowing ourselves to be **immersed** in his presence through **prayer** and **self-examination** that we will be **transformed**, **refreshed** and **renewed**.

AMEN.

Prayer Pointers

In this time of Advent pray that we may take time apart to prepare ourselves for Christmas.

Pray for all those for whom Christmas is a difficult time of year for whatever reason.

Pray for all those organisations that work hard at this time of the year to help those in need that they will have the resources they need.

Pray for the people of Yemen and the organisations trying to bring relief to so many in need.

Pray that the current conflicts in NE Africa will be resolved

Thank God for the success of St Mary's Christmas market.

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