

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

### 14<sup>th</sup> January 2024: Second Sunday of Epiphany

#### Hazel writes:

It was great to continue with Christmas celebrations at Messy Church on Friday when we thought about the three gifts bought to Jesus by the Wise Men and how we also have three gifts from God: Jesus, each other in our church community and all of God's creation that we get to enjoy. We will be reflecting further on God's generosity at our morning services on Sunday as that is our theme for this week.

This week we have a Holy Communion service at 8am in St Francis' Church, Morning Praise at 9.15am in St Mary's Church and Morning Worship at 10.45am in St Francis' Church.

Next **Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> January**, we will have Holy Communion services at 8am and 9.15am in St Mary's Church and at 10.45am in St Francis' Church where David Pickering will be preaching as part of a pulpit swap for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Hazel will be leading the service at Emmanuel Church.

We meet to **pray for growth of the Church** on Tuesday mornings between 10-11am at 130, The Avenue. Please contact Jean Pogose for more information: ([dennis.pogose@ntlworld.com](mailto:dennis.pogose@ntlworld.com) or 8289-5996).

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

**Resources and updates for the week ahead** – Each week our service is livestreamed on YouTube at 10am or before. All other files for this week have been combined and included in this pew sheet which will be sent on paper to those who have told us that they are not on-line.

Rev Ian Hamlin from Coney Hill Baptist Church will be **reflecting on Martin Luther King**, following a sabbatical that he took travelling in the US to those places important in his life. This will be at Coney Hill Baptist Church on Monday night (15<sup>th</sup> January) which is Martin Luther King Day. The meeting will begin with refreshments from 7.30pm. All are welcome.

**Mary George's funeral** is on Wednesday 17th January in the chapel at Bluebell Cemetery, Old London Road, Halstead, Kent TN14 7AE at 11.15am.

**John Kinghton's funeral** is on Thursday 18th January at Beckenham Crematorium at 11am.

A **Severe Weather Protocol** is in operation in Bromley whilst the temperature is expected to be at zero or below, which means that all rough sleepers will be accommodated so they don't have to sleep on the street. If you come across a rough sleeper, please use the StreetLink website (<https://thestreetlink.org.uk/>) to generate an alert for an outreach team to go out at night and connect the rough sleeper with local support services.

We have begun a season of lay ministry during this month, culminating in a **Lay Ministry Taster Day** on Saturday 27th January from 10am-2pm in the diocesan headquarters at Trinity House. If you would like to explore whether God is calling you to some kind of ministry in the church by talking about what is involved in different ministries, do register your interest at [learning@southwark.anglican.org](mailto:learning@southwark.anglican.org).

Our next **women's event** will be on Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> January at 8pm in St Mary's Main Hall. This will focus on environmental matters, to see if there are improvements we can make to our individual carbon footprints in 2024.

The **Croydon Area Lay Conference** is on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> March from 9.30am to 5.30pm at St Bede's School, Redhill. RH1 2LQ. This is a day to celebrate what's happening in our churches and to be inspired for the future. It includes a key-note speaker, Elaine Storkey, a prominent feminist evangelical lecturer, writer and broadcaster. There will also be a variety of workshops, lunch, an address from Bishop Rosemarie and time to mingle with those from other churches in the Croydon Area. If you'd like to go, please book a £10 ticket on-line by Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> February at <https://croydonlayconference2024.eventbrite.co.uk>.

We will continue to collect items for the **Bromley Homeless Starter Pack Scheme** for those starting out in a new home with nothing. Starter packs for families in need include cutlery, crockery, duvet covers (not duvets), pillow slips, tea towels, saucepans, frying pans, bath towel, toothbrushes, etc. Please continue to bring any excess items that you have in cupboards at home.

Please bring **Foodbank donations** to the Vicarage or St Francis' Church. Currently they require tinned vegetables, hot and cold meat tins, cooking sauces, UHT milk, squash, UHT fruit juice and jam. They have plenty of pasta, cereal, tea and biscuits. Please do not bring any fresh or frozen 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>. Thank you for your continuing support.

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](mailto:nicholanightingale@hotmail.co.uk) or 8916 9855) for St Francis'.

The sanctuary pedestal at St. Mary's has been provided by Margaret Bond in memory of Richard and arranged by Beryl.

Any items for the joint pew sheet to Beryl [berylbolton@hotmail.com](mailto:berylbolton@hotmail.com) and items for the websites to Gifty [office@stmarywestwickham.co.uk](mailto:office@stmarywestwickham.co.uk).

**Collect**

Eternal Lord,  
our beginning and our end:  
bring us with the whole  
creation to your glory,  
hidden through past ages  
and made known in Jesus  
Christ our Lord.

**First Reading:****Genesis 14: 17-20**

<sup>17</sup> After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet Abram at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). <sup>18</sup> And King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. <sup>19</sup> He blessed Abram and said, 'Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; <sup>20</sup> and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand! And Abram gave him one-tenth of everything.

**Gospel Reading:****John 2: 1-11**

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. <sup>2</sup> Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.

<sup>3</sup> When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' <sup>4</sup> And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.' <sup>5</sup> His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.'

<sup>6</sup> Now standing there were six stone water-jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. <sup>7</sup> Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. <sup>8</sup> He said to them, 'Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.' So they took it.

<sup>9</sup> When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the

bridegroom <sup>10</sup> and said to him, 'Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.'

<sup>11</sup> Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

**Post Communion Prayer**

God of glory,  
you nourish us with your  
Word who is the bread of  
life: fill us with your Holy  
Spirit that through us the  
light of your glory may  
shine in all the world.  
We ask this in the name of  
Jesus Christ our Lord.

## REFLECTION – Hazel O’Sullivan

The miracle of changing water into wine is a bit problematic because it’s not clear why Jesus did it:

- It’s not about healing. In fact, there would be undesirable side effects created by this amount of wine being available!
- It’s not about inclusion and looking out for the poor or the oppressed. These people had all had an exclusive invitation to the wedding.
- Jesus didn’t give any teaching as part of this miracle and there’s no moral to the story. In fact, it might suggest that the guests are too greedy, the hosts too stingy, or Jesus too showy.

So, why is this his first miracle? Was it just a first attempt to try out his gifts, but it’s actually completely pointless because the outcome didn’t really matter?

John tells us in v11 that this sign revealed Jesus’ glory (that’s why it’s part of Epiphany). It shows Jesus’ glory in four ways:

- The sign is performed at a wedding. Jesus will later in his ministry tell parables about weddings, and he talks about himself as a bridegroom, as well as this being the imagery in the Book of Revelation about the end time. And so, this sign signifies the coming of the messianic age. Jesus is subtly saying that he is the Messiah.
- This sign is also about new life, which is part of the glory that Jesus can bring. Notice at the start of the passage that this happened on the third day. That’s a clear reference forward to the day of resurrection. This sign signifies that God is doing something new in Jesus.
- The six water jars were used in the ritual cleansing that was required when people came to visit. They are an outward sign of cleansing, which is replaced by an inward sacrament when their contents are turned into wine. Wine is later used by Jesus as a symbol of his own blood, given once for all on the cross and received by us in communion. This sign is therefore about ritual being replaced by something better – an inner joy.
- And finally, this sign shows God’s generosity. The six water jars would hold the equivalent of nearly a thousand bottles of wine. That is a vast quantity, especially for a humble village wedding. So, the message is about superabundance, God’s generosity overflowing beyond limit through Jesus.

And so, this sign is a revelation of Jesus’ glory: as the Messiah, as one who brings new life, as something better than a ritual and as a super-generous gift of God. The generous

creative power shown in turning water into wine is not a pointless incidental, but it's an essential characteristic of God.

This generosity demonstrates Jesus' compassion for this particular family – their running out of wine on day three of a seven-day feast risks huge shame. It's also a reference to Israel which was supposed to be hosting a party for all the world to see the goodness of God, but they had been so worn down by the constant oppression of richer nations that they had shrunk back into simply surviving. Their wine had run out.

I wonder if you feel as though your wine has run out. The news of global conflicts and the resultant cost of living crisis could easily lead us to despondency. Add to that the NHS (on which many of us and our families are dependent for our health) is struggling, and problems continue in dealing with backlogs in the justice system (exemplified by the time it has taken to deal with the Post Office scandal). Oh, and January is always seen as a miserable time of year. Tomorrow is Blue Monday – said to be the most depressing day of the year.

The story of this miracle of turning water into wine couldn't come at a better time. It points forward to the wedding feast of the lamb, and is a reminder to us that Jesus is here. He is the true master of the feast where the great, vast reservoir of God's joy, the wine is now freely flowing.

If you feel as though you are scraping the bottom of the barrel of faith at the moment, can I suggest the following possible responses:

- If you're something of an introvert and prefer to keep your faith private, prayer can bring you closer to Jesus. If you want to talk about your own personal prayer, do let me or Richard know, or we can add you to our Morning Prayer circulation, where you get a reflection on God's character each day (Monday to Saturday).
- If you feel comfortable being part of this community of faith, do join in with whatever you can. I know that many people find that being part of the worship, either here or at home, is very uplifting. Maybe our generosity will be in spending more time with each other, supporting one another. This is the season of lay ministries and Carol talked about the opportunities that this presents last week. Or maybe you'd like to commit to joining a home group for Lent.
- In a wider context, we want to show others the abundant life that Jesus brings. We can do this much better when we're together with our other brothers and sisters in Christ. Our Week for Christian Unity is coming up and we have opportunities to celebrate with the Methodists this afternoon, to share with the Baptists in an event tomorrow evening and to hear David Pickering from Emmanuel URC preach next Sunday.

So, for us today, the miracle of turning water into wine shows that Jesus provides in abundance. If we want to show God to others, we too need to be generous.

If the world ran on such an economy of blessings, we could all be very rich. However, our world runs on an economy of money instead. I'd like to show how our Old Testament reading illustrates how these two economies can go hand in hand.

Prior to the reading, there was a war where Abram's nephew, Lot, was kidnapped from Sodom, together with many others. Abram went to rescue him and brought Lot (and lots of goods and other people) back. On their return, they were met by the King of Sodom and by Melchizadek, the King of Salem, who was also a priest. The King of Sodom wanted to take the people and goods back to Sodom where they came from. Melchizadek, on the other hand, brought bread and wine and a blessing for Abram. Abram responded with generosity to this blessing and gave a tenth of the goods to Melchizadek, leaving 90% for King of Sodom (which is still much more than he had before Abram returned). No one compelled Abram to give anything to Melchizadek, but he was thankful for the blessing and responded with generosity.

I wonder what you are thankful for that God has given you. If you can't think of anything, can I remind you that Jesus with us here, now, providing an abundance of blessings.

I wonder how you respond to this abundance provided by God. Do you meet his generosity with your own generosity, or by keeping something back? Are you like Abram, entering into the blessing economy freely, cheerfully, and with a thoughtful, planned, proportionate approach?

The story from the Old Testament suggests giving 10% of our income as a model. So, if you get £1,000 each month, 10% would be a £100 donation to the church. Now, you might already donate £50 to other charities in response to God's provision. If those charities are already showing God's glory to others, then you may decide that donating £50 to the church will be sufficient.

If we look at what we as a congregation donate in regular giving, the average monthly donation in the united benefice is £74 per month. Some are donating under £20, others over £200 per month. Others donate on an ad hoc basis, and they are not included in these figures. The average for the Diocese of Southwark is £87 and nationally it's £65. Having an annual review of the amount that you give to all charities, including the church, is a helpful way of understanding how you are responding to God's generosity.

God's greatest gift to us is Jesus, who is always with us and provides blessings in abundance. How can we show that to others and reveal God's glory – that's the Epiphany mission. This has to start with gifts that we give – in our time, in our gifts, in our financial support for the church.

## **Prayer Pointers**

God of glory and hope, your wide and generous love extends to all creation. May we your people extend the same generosity, welcoming others into the community you seek to build among us, where we see others as you see them, and no-one is too small or insignificant, too young, or too old to be a part of your plans. May we learn to trust that you are always with us and will generously give us what we need.

We pray for:

- all who are struggling with God's call to them because the message is tough or because they feel inadequate.
- children and young people in our community and for the adults who accompany them in their journey of faith, in Messy Church, in school and at home.
- places where critics of the status quo are silenced, where protest is prevented and the cries against injustice go unheard.
- journalists in Gaza and Israel: may their stories shine a light into suffering.
- all the Post Office workers who were wrongly accused and convicted; for their families who were often financially ruined and for decision-makers in the search for a speedy resolution.
- all who have lost homes and livelihoods in recent floods.
- the sick and the dying and for everyone who has asked for prayer, including Vicky Pearce, Jane Smith, Graham Stone, Rowena Griffiths, Daphne Dack, John Dack, Barbara Goodchild, Jack Bramwell, Sue Jones, Tina Hamilton, Daphne Hurlstone, Tim Curtis, and Barry Burford.
- those who have recently lost loved ones, including the families of John Knighton, Mary George and Jennifer Cooper.

## **Prayer for the Season of Lay Ministries**

Lord Jesus, we give you thanks that you consider us worthy to serve you and have called us into ministries of many different kinds.

We pray for all those who are exploring what God's call means in their lives.

Help them to know God's peace and guiding as they listen for God's voice.

And we pray for those already in ministry that, as they carry out your work, you will help them to demonstrate your love, your compassion and your truth so that others may see your beauty and embrace you as Lord and Saviour.

We ask this in the name of your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.