

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

10th January 2021: Baptism of Christ

Hazel writes:

This week I have been reflecting on how it is only Christ who can bring healing. Healing to the US and its divided society; healing to our own divisions over Brexit and the increasing gap between rich and poor; healing to some of our own broken relationships; healing to those currently suffering from Coronavirus through the medicines available and the care of health professionals who are working so hard. I pray that during this current lockdown you will be able to focus on Christ and so find some healing in those situations in which you find him present.

On Sunday there will be a service of Holy Communion available **on-line** from 10am. It is likely that there will be no in-person services until after the end of January at the earliest.

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 - Martin Palmer puts the extinction of 160 species in 10 years into spiritual perspective.
 - Choral Evensong at 3pm on Radio 3 from Ely Cathedral for Feast of Epiphany.
 - On BBC 1: Songs of Praise at 12.25 p.m. – Claire McCollum is in Stirling discovering the city's connections to the King James Bible.

Each week our **“coffee/tea & chat”** on Thursday at 2.30 pm is an opportunity to share with others. It is just 40 minutes and you don't need to commit to joining each week. Please let Rowena (rowena.griff19@btinternet.com /020 8777 6112) know if you would like the log-in details.

Next week **Messy Church** is on Friday 15th January at 3.45pm on the Messy Church Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/messychurchwestwickham>

Our **Bereavement Support Group** will not meet this month in view of the risks attached to indoor meetings. We plan to recommence these meetings in February.

Bromley Foodbank – Thank you so much to all our wonderful volunteers who delivered 126 bags of much needed Bromley Foodbank Christmas supplies to people in need in our area on Saturday 19th December. It was lovely that so many from both our churches and from Rotary and our wider community were able to be involved with this enterprise. A particular thanks to Kim for organising such a smooth operation.

Please bring **Foodbank donations** to the Vicarage or St Francis' Church. Currently they need UHT Milk (Urgent) Fruit Juice (Urgent), cold meat, vegetables (particularly carrots), desserts, shaving gel/razors. There are large stocks of pasta, rice, beans, soup, cereals, tea and toilet rolls and these items are politely discouraged at the present time. Thank you for your continuing support.

Message from **Rev Alison Judge** in a delayed Christmas card: It's been a challenging year, hasn't it? I've been lucky in lockdown with Peter and Kitty who are both techy – so YouTube services and Messy Church. Also lots of gardening and beekeeping! Love to those who remember me. (For those who don't remember her, Alison was our Curate with Merv McKinney and looked after both parishes before Hazel was appointed).

The Rotary Club is offering FREE **Work Club workshops** to help with a job search on-line via Zoom. They all run from 10-11am on the following dates:

- Mon 11th Jan – Getting back on your feet
- Tues 19th Jan – Sort out your finances
- Weds 27th Jan – CV writing
- Thur 4th Feb – Job search
- Fri 12th Feb – Interview skills
- Weds 17th Feb – Ace your LinkedIn profile
- Thur 25th Feb – Start your own business

To book your place, email rotaryworkclub@gmail.com

Even though we are in lockdown and possibly feeling isolated, we know that we are united in Christ with other Christians. This is celebrated in particular during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. In 2021 we will begin this week with an **on-line mini retreat** on Sunday 17th January from 6.30 to 8pm. A Zoom meeting invitation is included with this week's pew sheet. Please do join us to create a prayer space for your own week of prayer.

We are going to hold a **Burns Night event** on Saturday 23rd January at 7pm via Zoom to celebrate all things Scottish. Do bring something Scottish to share - a kilt, hat, scarf, photo, drink, meal, music, poem (anything!!). We will welcome Bill Bowman (ex-minister from Emmanuel, who is Scottish) and he will be telling us about all the Burns Night traditions and the background to why Robert Burns is so important to Scotland.

Kathleen Fletcher died peacefully this week at Coloma Court - may she rest in peace. Please do pray for her husband, Peter, and daughter, Gill. Her funeral will be on Thursday 21st January at 11am in Beckenham Crematorium. Anyone who would like to go is very welcome, but the family will understand if this is not possible, given the circumstances that we currently find ourselves in.

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

Collect

Heavenly Father, at the Jordan you revealed Jesus as your Son: may we recognize him as our Lord and know ourselves to be your beloved children; through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

First Reading:**Acts 19: 1-7**

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the inland regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. ² He said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?' They replied, 'No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.' ³ Then he said, 'Into what then were you baptized?' They answered, 'Into John's baptism.' ⁴ Paul said, 'John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.' ⁵ On hearing this,

they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied — ⁷ altogether there were about twelve of them.

Gospel: Mark 1: 4-11

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop

down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸ I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

Post Communion Prayer

Lord of all time and eternity, you opened the heavens and revealed yourself as Father in the baptism of Jesus your beloved Son: by the power of your Spirit complete the heavenly work of our rebirth through the waters of the new creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

REFLECTION for the Baptism of Christ - Ken Bryan

Today we are thinking about new beginnings and also endings.

Here we are at the beginning of a third lockdown. Back to putting our Sunday services only online and recording sermons and prayers. We feel it is the right thing to do at this difficult time. The numbers of people catching the virus is growing at an alarming rate and the number of people hospitalized is just overwhelming for the NHS. And I think we all know people who have caught the virus, many of whom testify to its debilitating effects and for some this has been long lasting.

We don't want to put members of our congregations at risk but we want to continue to demonstrate that we are the people of God and we are the church, not just the building.

Today's readings are about new beginnings. New beginnings for Jesus and for the new Christians at Ephesus. This is very appropriate at the beginning of a new year. We have come to the end of a year that many of us want to forget. So many plans thwarted, so much that we wanted to do stopped and so much disappointment. We want to look forward to a new year, a new beginning.

For the crowd watching as John was baptizing people in the river Jordan they must have been thinking about how their lives had been under Roman rule, and how the Jewish people had suffered not just now but down the centuries through exile and oppression by other nations. They believed that they were the chosen people of God but it didn't feel like it at that time. They had come to listen to John who was asking people to come forward for baptism, which was not a usual thing for the Jews. He wanted each individual to turn away from the way they have been acting and to let God into their lives in a new way. To repent. He had been declaring that there would be someone coming after him who would baptise with the Holy Spirit. Most listening to him would not have understood what he was talking about.

Many people stepped forward to be baptised by John. The crowd would then have seen Jesus join the queue to be baptised. I wonder if at that moment the atmosphere changed. Did the birds stop singing? Did the murmur of the crowd die away? Even from a distance John could be seen to be on edge. He was saying that he shouldn't be baptising this man in front of him. That soon changed when Jesus was pressed into the water and as he came up he looked up to the skies as if speaking to someone. A bright

light in the shape of something like a bird seemed to rest on him. There was a sound but could they make out what it was?

Did they realise that this was the new beginning that they had been promised. Not the end to political and social struggle.

Not the end to Roman rule but the beginning of a new relationship with God the creator. And it was not to be just a new beginning for those sitting on the riverbank watching the events unfold but for the wider population, both Jew and Gentile. And for people alive then and for all generations to come. Truly an earth-shattering event.

It wasn't long before there were new followers of Jesus spreading far and wide. Travellers and traders took the new ideas with them around the Mediterranean. The city of Ephesus was no exception. A thriving city and a major trading port was ready to receive new thoughts and new ideas. A group of Jews who had believed in what John had been saying had not heard of the baptism of Jesus. But when Paul explained what had happened and what it meant, they received the Holy Spirit and became followers of The Way, as they were first called. Paul in fact stayed in Ephesus for more than two years evangelising.

It is also interesting to note that just like the disciples that Jesus chose, Paul had a small group in Ephesus of about twelve disciples. From small beginnings amazing things can happen. We should never be downhearted at low numbers where God is concerned. He has a way of making them very fruitful in their work.

And here we are as followers of Jesus having been baptised into his family. At that moment of baptism and at our confirmation we were changed. We became a new creation. But change was not to stop there. We were called to be new people and begin a new life in Christ. This didn't mean that life would not be difficult. As the first Christians found out, the Romans were still there subduing them. And even for Jesus himself if we read the very next verse after our passage, Chapter 1 verse 12 says 'And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness'.

As we know he was there forty days and was tempted by the devil.

So for us life will continue to be a challenge but with confidence in God, knowing that He is with us at all times, we can go forward in faith.

We are living in changing times. It is a new year, we now have a new relationship with our neighbouring countries and with the world as Brexit has happened. There are new opportunities as well as challenges ahead.

We have been almost overwhelmed by the covid virus but there is a new beginning with the vaccines starting to be administered across the country.

We have changed the way we worship. It is not always in a building but we embrace the new with the ability to come together through technology.

There is no denying that times are painful and many people have suffered physically, mentally and economically. As Christians we must look forward. We must believe that God is with us, that He is a caring, loving God and has plans for each one of us.

Through our lives we have received so much it is time for us to give. To look outwards for where there are needs and see how we can in our own small way serve those needs.

We are a community and we meet and work together in new ways through the benefits of technology and by continuing to keep in touch with each other through phone calls, letters, emails, paper copies of sermons and prayer pointers and through all the forms of social media.

And we look out into the wider hurting world where God wants us to make a difference, just as Jesus and his small band of disciples and Paul with his small group on Ephesus did.

Let us always look for guidance from the Holy Spirit in all we do.

At Jesus baptism he lifted his eyes up to heaven so at the beginning of this new year may we follow the example as it says in Psalm 121

- ¹ I lift up my eyes to the hills—
from where will my help come?
- ² My help comes from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.

And from Psalm 29 which is the psalm designated for today

¹⁰ the LORD sits enthroned as king for ever.

¹¹ May the LORD give strength to his people!

May the LORD bless his people with peace!

Amen

Prayer Pointers

As we remember the baptism of Jesus, we thank God for our baptism and pray that we may know that we are a child of God, loved and valued by him. We thank God for the fellowship of all baptised people. May we not be afraid to show that we are followers of Jesus and lights for the world around us.

As many churches across the country and in our locality have made the decision not to open their buildings for worship during this current phase of the pandemic, pray for those for whom this will be especially difficult – the lonely and isolated who need the social contact and those who will miss receiving the sacrament of Holy Communion. Pray for all on our ministry team who will be involved in preaching and leading the online worship.

Pray for peace in our world – especially this week for peace and harmony in the USA in the build-up to the inauguration of their new President and Vice-President. Pray for all world leaders in the difficult decisions they have to make. For our own Government as they deal with measures to control the Covid pandemic. May they know the wisdom that the Magi found in the Christchild – the wisdom that seeks peace, dignity and a special concern for the poor.

Pray for our country as we have entered the third national Covid lockdown. Pray for all those who have been asked to shield yet again – that they may not feel isolated and afraid – and thank God for all those in our congregations who keep in touch and care for those who live alone. Pray for the people of Zimbabwe as that country enters lockdown and especially for our link parish of St Andrews in Gweru and for Bishop Ignatius.

Pray for all those who are ill and for those who have had surgery or treatment recently – especially for Mavis Page-Wood and Sam Hand. Hold before God our NHS as the medical professionals deal with the large numbers of Covid patients on the wards of our local hospitals. Pray especially for those doctors and nurses who are emotionally drained and struggling to cope. Pray and give thanks for all those who are involved in the vaccination effort especially for those delivering vaccine supplies to G.P's, hospitals and vaccination centres.

Ever present God, be with us in our isolation, be close to us in our distancing, be healing in our sickness, be joy in our sadness, be light in our darkness, be wisdom in our confusion, be all that is familiar when all is unfamiliar, that when the doors reopen we may with the zeal of Pentecost inhabit our communities and speak of your goodness to an emerging world.