

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

17th December 2023: Third Sunday of Advent

Hazel writes:

I have been following an Advent prayer programme this year which has emphasised how good things often start with darkness. In Genesis 1:2 we read about how darkness covered the deep at the time of creation. Jesus was born at night. And Advent – the beginning of the church year - happens at the darkest time, with 21st December being the shortest day. So, rather than wanting to turn away from the dark towards light, I have been practicing staying with it. And allowing this space in the dark has meant that God has been able to work, showing me so much more than I would otherwise see. This week, for example, there was a beautiful sunrise, as well as a new moon.

This week we have a Holy Communion service at 8am in St Mary's Church, and Carol Services at 10.45am in St Francis' Church and at 4pm in St Mary's Church.

Next **Sunday 24th December**, we will have Holy Communion services at 8am in St Francis' Church and a joint service at 10am in St Mary's Church for the fourth Sunday of Advent. Then later in the day the normal Christmas Eve Services will happen:

- Christingle at 4pm in St Mary's Church;
- Lighting the Lamps at 6pm in St Francis' Church;
- Midnight Communion services at 11.15pm in both churches.

On **Christmas Day**, we will have one service of Holy Communion at 10am in St Francis' Church.

On **Sunday 31st December**, we will have Holy Communion services at 8am in St Francis' Church and a joint service at 10am in St Mary's Church.

On **Sunday 7th January**, we will have Holy Communion services at 8am in St Mary's Church and a joint service at 10am in St Francis' Church.

There will be **no prayers** during the week including Christmas Day. In the New Year we will recommence meeting to **pray for growth of the Church** on Tuesday mornings between 10-11am at 130, The Avenue and for **Morning Prayer** in St Francis' Church on Wednesday morning at 9.30am, followed by the church being **open for private prayer** from 10.30-11.30am. **Morning Prayer** 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.

If anyone would like to make a donation towards the cost of the **Christingles** this would be very much appreciated and enables us to send a larger amount to The Children's Society. This can be handed to either of the Churchwardens at St Mary's.

The days when we will be **preparing Christingles** are:

- making up the sticks of sweets on Friday 22nd at 2.00 p.m. and
- making up the Christingles at 2.00 p.m. on Saturday 23rd.

Do come to the hall at St Mary's on either of these days to help and have some fun. Thank you in anticipation.

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.

St John's Primary School in Shirley has a vacancy for a Foundation Governor who will help guide the school's strategic direction and promote and protect the Christian ethos of the school. It is a very rewarding experience, involving meeting attendance, training and school visits. If you are interested, please email the School Business Manager with your contact details and brief details of why you would like to join our Governing Body: sbm@st-johns.croydon.sch.uk. They would especially like to hear from you if you have experience within human resources or building maintenance and welcome applications from all sectors of the community.

Help a Hospice and save a tree: send Christmas greetings to all your friends in St Francis' congregation by putting a card on the Christmas Greetings board at the back of church. 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.

A local woman would like to have some help in improving her English and is willing to assist with shopping or gardening, etc. in return. If you would like to be introduced, please speak to Hazel.

It is time for the **St Francis Children's Society Boxes** to be brought into church for opening. I can arrange to open the boxes at home if this is more convenient. With many thanks, Christine Morton (020 8777 9213).

Terry Leggatt, who had escorted visits to St Francis' from Bethlem Royal Hospital before he returned to prison in late 2019 is now preparing for a return to living in the community, but this will be a long process and this month his mother died. One of the things that would help him is writing to people of faith who are fully engaged with the community and dealing with transport, shopping, friendships and family relationships. If you'd like to know more about what this might involve, please speak to Hazel.

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 or 8916 9855) for St Francis'.

Both churches have been decorated for Christmas by the ladies responsible for arranging the flowers. In St Francis' the flower display on the platform in church has been donated by Rowena in memory of Brian, whose birthday would have been on the 20th December and the sanctuary display has been donated by Margaret Thorne.

Any items for the joint pew sheet to Beryl berylbolton@hotmail.com and items for the websites to Gifty office@stmarywestwickham.co.uk.

A VERY HAPPY CHRISTMAS AND PEACEFUL NEW YEAR TO ALL

Collect

God for whom we watch and wait, you sent John the Baptist to prepare the way of your Son: give us courage to speak the truth, to hunger for justice, and to suffer for the cause of right, with Jesus Christ our Lord.

First Reading:**Isaiah 9:2, 6, 7**

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined.

⁶ For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom.

He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onwards and for evermore.

The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Gospel Reading:**Luke 2: 1-7**

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ All went to their own towns to be registered.

⁴ Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the

house and family of David. ⁵ He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.

⁶ While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Post Communion Prayer

We give you thanks, O Lord, for these heavenly gifts; kindle in us the fire of your Spirit that when your Christ comes again, we may shine as lights before his face; who is alive and reigns now and for ever.

Collect

Eternal God,
as Mary waited for the birth
of your Son, so we wait for
his coming in glory; bring us
through the birth pangs of
this present age to see, with
her, our great salvation in
Jesus Christ our Lord.

First Reading:**2 Samuel 7: 1-11, 16**

Now when the king was
settled in his house, and
the LORD had given him rest
from all his enemies around
him, ² the king said to the
prophet Nathan, 'See now, I
am living in a house of cedar,
but the ark of God stays in a
tent.' ³ Nathan said to the
king, 'Go, do all that you
have in mind; for the LORD is
with you.'

⁴ But that same night the
word of the LORD came to
Nathan: ⁵ Go and tell my
servant David: Thus says
the LORD: Are you the one to
build me a house to live
in? ⁶ I have not lived in a
house since the day I
brought up the people of
Israel from Egypt to this day,
but I have been moving
about in a tent and a
tabernacle. ⁷ Wherever I
have moved about among all
the people of Israel, did I
ever speak a word with any

of the tribal leaders of Israel,
whom I commanded to
shepherd my people Israel,
saying, 'Why have you not
built me a house of cedar?'

⁸ Now therefore thus you
shall say to my servant
David: Thus says the LORD of
hosts: I took you from the
pasture, from following the
sheep to be prince over my
people Israel; ⁹ and I have
been with you wherever you
went, and have cut off all
your enemies from before
you; and I will make for you a
great name, like the name of
the great ones of the earth.

¹⁰ And I will appoint a place
for my people Israel and will
plant them, so that they may
live in their own place, and
be disturbed no more; and
evildoers shall afflict them
no more, as formerly, ¹¹ from
the time that I appointed
judges over my people Israel;
and I will give you rest from
all your enemies. Moreover,
the LORD declares to you that
the LORD will make you a
house.

¹⁶ Your house and your
kingdom shall be made sure
for ever before me; your
throne shall be established
for ever.

**Gospel Reading: Luke 1:
39-45**

³⁹ In those days Mary set out
and went with haste to a
Judean town in the hill
country, ⁴⁰ where she
entered the house of
Zechariah and greeted
Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth
heard Mary's greeting, the
child leapt in her womb. And
Elizabeth was filled with the
Holy Spirit ⁴² and exclaimed
with a loud cry, 'Blessed are
you among women, and
blessed is the fruit of your
womb. ⁴³ And why has this
happened to me, that the
mother of my Lord comes to
me? ⁴⁴ For as soon as I heard
the sound of your greeting,
the child in my womb leapt
for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she
who believed that there
would be a fulfilment of
what was spoken to her by
the Lord.'

Post Communion Prayer

Heavenly Father, who chose
the Blessed Virgin Mary to
be the mother of the
promised saviour:
fill us your servants with
your grace, that in all things
we may embrace your holy
will and with her rejoice in
your salvation;
through Jesus Christ our
Lord.

Collect

Eternal God, in the stillness of this night you sent your almighty Word to pierce the world's darkness with the light of salvation: give to the earth the peace that we long for and fill our hearts with the joy of heaven through our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

First Reading:**Isaiah 52: 7-10**

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'

⁸ Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy; for in plain sight they see the return of the LORD to Zion.

⁹ Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem.

¹⁰ The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations;

and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

Gospel Reading:**John 1: 1-14**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. ⁴ What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own, and his own people

did not accept him. ¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Post Communion Prayer

God our Father, in this night you have made known to us again the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: confirm our faith and fix our eyes on him until the day dawns and Christ the Morning Star rises in our hearts. To him be glory both now and for ever.

Or, for Christmas Day:
God our Father, whose Word has come among us in the Holy Child of Bethlehem: may the light of faith illumine our hearts and shine in our words and deeds; through him who is Christ the Lord.

Collect

God in Trinity,
eternal unity of perfect
love: gather the nations
to be one family, and
draw us into your holy
life
through the birth of
Emmanuel, our Lord
Jesus Christ.

First Reading:

Isaiah 61:10 – 62: 3

I will greatly rejoice in
the LORD, my whole being
shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me
with the garments of
salvation, he has covered
me with the robe of
righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks
himself with a
garland, and as a bride
adorns herself with her
jewels.

¹¹ For as the earth brings
forth its shoots and as a
garden causes what is
sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord GOD will cause
righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the
nations.

For Zion's sake I will not
keep silent, and for
Jerusalem's sake I will not
rest, until her vindication
shines out like the dawn,
and her salvation like a
burning torch.

² The nations shall see
your vindication, and all
the kings your glory;
and you shall be called by
a new name that the
mouth of the LORD will
give.

³ You shall be a crown of
beauty in the hand of
the LORD and a royal
diadem in the hand of
your God.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 2: 15-21

¹⁵ When the angels had
left them and gone into
heaven, the shepherds
said to one another, 'Let
us go now to Bethlehem
and see this thing that has
taken place, which the
Lord has made known to
us.' ¹⁶ So they went with
haste and found Mary and
Joseph, and the child lying
in the manger.

¹⁷ When they saw this,
they made known what
had been told them about
this child; ¹⁸ and all who
heard it were amazed at
what the shepherds told
them. ¹⁹ But Mary
treasured all these words
and pondered them in her
heart. ²⁰ The shepherds
returned, glorifying and
praising God for all they
had heard and seen, as it
had been told them.

²¹ After eight days had
passed, it was time to
circumcise the child; and
he was called Jesus, the
name given by the angel
before he was conceived
in the womb.

Post Communion Prayer

Heavenly Father,
whose blessed Son
shared at Nazareth the
life of an earthly home:
help your Church to live
as one family, united in
love and obedience, and
bring us all at last to our
home in heaven; through
Jesus Christ our Lord.

Collect

Creator of the heavens,
who led the Magi by a star
to worship the Christ-child:
guide and sustain us,
that we may find our
journey's end in Jesus
Christ our Lord.

First Reading:**Isaiah 60: 1-6**

Arise, shine; for your light
has come, and the glory of
the LORD has risen upon
you.

² For darkness shall cover
the earth, and thick
darkness the peoples;
but the LORD will arise upon
you, and his glory will
appear over you.

³ Nations shall come to your
light, and kings to the
brightness of your dawn.

⁴ Lift up your eyes and look
around; they all gather
together, they come to you;
your sons shall come from
far away, and your
daughters shall be carried
on their nurses' arms.

⁵ Then you shall see and be
radiant; your heart shall
thrill and rejoice, because
the abundance of the sea
shall be brought to you, the
wealth of the nations shall

come to you.

⁶ A multitude of camels shall
cover you, the young
camels of Midian and
Ephah; all those from Sheba
shall come.

They shall bring gold and
frankincense, and shall
proclaim the praise of
the LORD.

2nd Reading**Ephesians 3: 1-12**

This is the reason that I Paul
am a prisoner for Christ
Jesus for the sake of you
Gentiles— ² for surely you
have already heard of the
commission of God's grace
that was given to me for
you, ³ and how the mystery
was made known to me by
revelation, as I wrote above
in a few words, ⁴ a reading
of which will enable you to
perceive my understanding
of the mystery of Christ.

⁵ In former generations this
mystery was not made
known to humankind, as it
has now been revealed to
his holy apostles and
prophets by the Spirit: ⁶ that
is, the Gentiles have
become fellow-heirs,
members of the same body,
and sharers in the promise

in Christ Jesus through the
gospel.

⁷ Of this gospel I have
become a servant according
to the gift of God's grace
that was given to me by the
working of his
power. ⁸ Although I am the
very least of all the saints,
this grace was given to me
to bring to the Gentiles the
news of the boundless
riches of Christ, ⁹ and to
make everyone see what is
the plan of the mystery
hidden for ages in God who
created all things; ¹⁰ so that
through the church the
wisdom of God in its rich
variety might now be made
known to the rulers and
authorities in the heavenly
places.

¹¹ This was in accordance
with the eternal purpose
that he has carried out in
Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹² in
whom we have access to
God in boldness and
confidence through faith in
him.

Gospel Reading:

Matthew 2: 1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ² asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.'

³ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

⁶ "And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel."

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸ Then he

sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.' ⁹ When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was.

¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹ On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

¹² And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Post Communion Prayer

Lord God, the bright splendour whom the nations seek: may we who with the wise men have been drawn by your light discern the glory of your presence in your Son, the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ our Lord.

REFLECTION – Debbie Adams

How are your Christmas plans going? Are you all prepared?

I know these questions can bring on feelings of anxiety and stress for a lot of people. It's hardly surprising because Christmas can be a difficult time for so many of us.

We are bombarded with adverts, messages, and television programmes of how to achieve the perfect Christmas. The perfect Christmas lunch, at least in the adverts, appears effortlessly on time to a happy family gathering, with perfectly crispy roast potatoes and a perfectly cooked turkey (apologies to those of you who are vegetarians!) In the background is a beautifully decorated Christmas tree with perfectly wrapped Christmas presents underneath. If we are not careful, we can easily believe that Christmas can only be enjoyed if everything we do is flawless and goes perfectly. These images portray everyone as happy and having fun all the time.

Of course, the reality is quite different!

Sometimes these expectations can weigh heavily on our shoulders. So, no wonder that for some, the lead up to Christmas can seem like an endurance test.

For many people this year, it will not be the perfect Christmas, with the economic pressures and mounting debt they face as they struggle to make ends meet. They will be wondering if there is light at the end of the tunnel. There are also those facing the challenge of spending Christmas alone, as they are unable to travel to visit family and friends. There are the bereaved who face the heartache of getting through Christmas without their loved one, and those suffering with ill-health, who dread being confined to a bed at Christmas. And there are families where there have been disagreements and there is a strained relationship with other family members. For so many, this Christmas period will be less than perfect and full of challenges. None of us are perfect people and we do not live in a perfect world.

When we reflect on the Christmas story and the birth of Jesus, we enter into an imperfect setting. The baby Jesus was not born in a dwelling place that was spotlessly clean or luxurious, but in a dirty barn or stable where animals were kept. Jesus was not born into a perfect world, but one that was brutal and harsh. It was a world full of poverty, with poor health prospects for many women and babies. It was a world dominated by Rome, and fraught with danger, political power struggles, and unrest. It was an environment where rulers thirsted for power and dominance at any cost. The world that Jesus was born into over 2,000 years ago was far from perfect, but his birth

was still a miraculous and joyous occasion. Today we live in a world where war and conflicts, for so many, is a way of life. We have recently witnessed the devastating effects of war on the people of Ukraine, the Middle East, and many other countries.

In our bible reading, the Prophet Isaiah foretells the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem as `a great light` coming into the world to shine on the people who have walked in darkness, and to bring justice and peace. This was God`s promise that he would come to earth as one of us. We can become part of God`s story when we allow God`s light to shine through us and transform the darkness in our world into light. Let us shine that light on others. This isn`t a light of perfect Christmas decorations and wonderful food, but one of a presence with someone who finds themselves in a dark and difficult place. We can reach out with kindness and respect to those who are alone and in need just as God came to an earth that was hurting and in need through the birth of Jesus. We can also show our concern for the weak and vulnerable by donating financially to a charity, or by volunteering to help at a food bank to deliver much needed food, and not just at Christmas, but all through the year.

The true meaning of Christmas is not about achieving material perfection or what we see portrayed in the adverts but sharing our gifts with others and those in need as a community, as a nation, and as a world.

As we look forward to celebrating Christmas in different ways with family and friends, let us remember that the perfect part of Christmas is the miraculous and joyous gift of Jesus to us all. So let us share his hope, peace, joy and love with those around us and so bring a great light into the dark.

Amen.

Prayer Pointers

Pray for those who are unaware of what Christmas is all about; for those who know nothing of your nativity, who haven`t felt your presence, experienced your love, or shared that joy.

For those who do know you and strive to follow you but who feel overwhelmed by all that is going on around them and find it hard to share the joy we have in you.

For those who are uncertain of themselves, of their worth, their direction in life and purpose. For those who think they have nothing to offer to anyone.

For those who inflate their own importance to the neglect of what is right, loving and caring to those around them.

For those for whom Christmas will come and go with violence, injury and death all around them; for those who have no home, safety or security. We pray especially for those living in the Holy Land, which seems so far from that as we look on and feel their pain. Remember too Ukraine and the violence meted out by the Russian regime, and so many other war-torn countries.

For the leaders of the nations who met at the COP28 climate change conference - may they act on the agreements they made. And may they and we, engage with the reality of global warming and the danger to life in all its forms.

For those who are frightened of the weeks to come because of debt that burdens them, because of no or not enough work, or insufficient income. For those who must choose between eating or heating. For those upset that they can't give the gifts they want to those they love and care for.

For those who are re-experiencing pain and anguish as a result of the Covid enquiry. For all those involved in decision-making and in caring, and now in investigating and probing. May there be honesty, transparency, care and concern for all involved.

For those who will work over Christmas to keep us safe and cared for. Those who will work to keep the shops open to meet our needs, who will drive vans loaded with cards and parcels to bring us gifts and news of friends. We pray for those who will work to keep our electricity flowing, our gas pumped and water flowing from our taps.

For those who are laid low with illness, physical or mental, who can see no improvement nor a path to better health. Pray by name for Vicky Pearce, Jane Smith, Graham Stone, Rowena Griffiths, Daphne Dack, John Dack, Barbara Goodchild, Jack Bramwell, Sue Jones, Tina Hamilton, Daphne Hurlstone and Tim Curtis.

For those who will be spending their first Christmas without a treasured loved one: sad, lonely and uncertain. We remember also the families of Jennifer Cooper and Mary George who died recently.

A prayer for Welcare, who we have been raising money for at the Community Christmas Tree Festival:

Living God, you have made us in your image, and we live and grow best in companionship with others. Bless the work of Welcare with parents, carers and children. May Welcare staff, volunteers and supporters continue to provide places and spaces where trust is grown, understanding enabled, relationships developed, new confidence found, and potential released. Amen