

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

28th January 2024: Presentation of Christ in the Temple

Hazel writes:

On Friday the Church commemorated Timothy and Titus, companions of St Paul. In my Morning Prayer reflection, I noted that the Collect for them includes the line: "*grant that our fellowship in the Holy Spirit may bear witness to the name of Jesus*". This resonated with a review that led me to read one of Brian's last sermons later that day, which supported this prayer, as he talked of the kindness that had been shown to him and Rowena, making them feel surrounded by love and care. This is a clear illustration of God at work, highlighting the power of our **congregational** links and illustrating that it is the way in which we interact with each other that shows Jesus to the world – what a great vision to have at the end of this Epiphany season.

This week we have Holy Communion services at 8am in St Francis' Church, at 9.15am in St Mary's Church and at 10.45am in St Francis' Church.

Next **Sunday 4th February**, we will have Holy Communion services at 8am in St Francis' Church and a Joint service at 10am in St Mary's.

Next Sunday there will also be a **Service for Healing and Wholeness** in the afternoon at 3pm in St Francis' Church – an opportunity to come and rest in God's presence for physical healing, or to find peace with emotional, spiritual and mental matters.

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 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.

Our **women's event** will be on Tuesday 30th 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.

Our next **Action Aid Coffee morning** is on Saturday 3rd February from 10.30-11.30am at St Francis' Church.

The next **St. Mary's Community Lunch** is on Wednesday 7th February at 1.00 p.m. in St. Mary's Hall in The Avenue, West Wickham. The cost is £6 for a 2-course lunch and tea or coffee. If you would like to come along and join us for a very happy and sociable occasion, please contact Beryl Bolton on 0208 289 8097 or berylbolton@hotmail.com to reserve your place. We would love to see you and you will be made very welcome.

St. Mary's Valentine's Lunch, organised by the gentlemen from St. Mary's, will take place on Saturday 10th February at 12.30 p.m. in the hall. The cost is £12 per person and places can be booked through Beryl Bolton on 0208 289 8097 or berylbolton@hotmail.com or by signing the list in the vestibule at St. Marys. Places are limited to 40 so book early to avoid disappointment. When booking you need to state whether you wish for ham, cheese or pate with your ploughmen's and whether you wish for mushroom or tomato soup. There will be a raffle and all profits will be for church funds.

We will have three **Lent Groups meeting**, all looking at a film "Chocolat" to explore what it means to be human and to grow. There are more details in the magazines. The groups which can take additional people will both meet at St Francis' Church in the refurbished choir vestry as follows:

- Wednesday evenings at 8pm (starting on Ash Wednesday). Please contact Nicky Nightingale (nicholanightingale@hotmail.co.uk or 07771 7682914) if you'd like to join this group.
- Friday mornings at 10.15am (starting on Friday 16th February), with one exception when the meeting will be on a Thursday. If you want to join this group, please contact Debbie Adams (debadams64@icloud.com or 07943 330244).

There will also be sign-up sheets at the back of both churches if you'd prefer to sign up in this way.

The **Croydon Area Lay Conference** is on Saturday 2nd 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 11th 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 or 8916 9855) for St Francis'.

The sanctuary pedestal at St. Marys is for the family of baby Charlotte who was born prematurely and died on the 17th January.

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

Collect

Lord Jesus Christ,
light of the nations and
glory of Israel: make
your home among us,
and present us pure
and holy to your
heavenly Father, your
God, and our God.

First Reading:

Malachi 3: 1-5

See, I am sending my
messenger to prepare
the way before me, and
the Lord whom you seek
will suddenly come to
his temple. The
messenger of the
covenant in whom you
delight—indeed, he is
coming, says the LORD of
hosts. ² But who can
endure the day of his
coming, and who can
stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner's
fire and like fullers'
soap; ³ he will sit as a
refiner and purifier of
silver, and he will purify
the descendants of Levi
and refine them like

gold and silver, until
they present offerings
to the LORD in
righteousness. ⁴ Then
the offering of Judah
and Jerusalem will be
pleasing to the LORD as
in the days of old and as
in former years.

⁵ Then I will draw near
to you for judgement; I
will be swift to bear
witness against the
sorcerers, against the
adulterers, against those
who swear falsely,
against those who
oppress the hired
workers in their wages,
the widow, and the
orphan, against those
who thrust aside the
alien, and do not fear
me, says the LORD of
hosts.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 2: 22-40

²² When the time came
for their purification
according to the law of
Moses, they brought
him up to Jerusalem to
present him to the
Lord ²³ (as it is written in
the law of the Lord,
'Every firstborn male
shall be designated as
holy to the Lord'), ²⁴ and
they offered a sacrifice
according to what is
stated in the law of the
Lord, 'a pair of turtle-
doves or two young
pigeons.'

²⁵ Now there was a man
in Jerusalem whose
name was Simeon; this
man was righteous and
devout, looking forward
to the consolation of
Israel, and the Holy
Spirit rested on him. ²⁶ It
had been revealed to
him by the Holy Spirit
that he would not see
death before he had
seen the Lord's Messiah.

²⁷ Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

²⁹ ‘Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word;

³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation, ³¹ which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.’

³³ And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, ‘This child is destined for

the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed ³⁵ so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.’

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna¹ the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ then as a widow to the age of eighty-four.

She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ At that moment she came and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

³⁹ When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

Post Communion Prayer

Lord, you fulfilled the hope of Simeon and Anna, who lived to welcome the Messiah: may we, who have received these gifts beyond words, prepare to meet Christ Jesus when he comes to bring us to eternal life; for he is alive and reigns, now and for ever.

REFLECTION – Richard Ford

It had been a strange few months. First the woman to whom I was engaged, a mere slip of a girl, twelve years old, told me that she was pregnant. I knew for a fact that I couldn't be the father and wasn't impressed when she came up with what I thought was some cock-and-bull story about God himself being the father. I'd made up my mind to end the engagement, when I had a strange dream in which an angel confirmed what Mary had told me, so I decided to give her the benefit of the doubt.

Then, to make things more difficult, the Roman Emperor decided to call a census, requiring everyone to return to their ancestral home in order to be registered. Nazareth, my home town, is 70 miles from Bethlehem where my family comes from, a good 3 days' journey on foot, and Mary was coming near the end of her pregnancy, but you don't argue with the Romans, so off we set.

When we got there, the place was crowded, and although we had family there, they could only offer us space on the ground floor, where the animals are kept – the guest room was already in use. But as Mary was close to giving birth, we didn't argue.

The next shock was when, on the night of our baby's birth, a group of shepherds turned up saying that they'd been given a message by some celestial being that the long awaited Messiah, the one prophesied by the last of our prophets, Malachi, had been born and they'd come to find him. Strange as it was, it confirmed what Mary had told me and what I'd seen and heard in my dream.

After that, we decided it would be best to stay in Bethlehem for a while, rather than embark on another three day walk with a new born baby.

Eight days later, when life seemed to be regaining a bit of normality, we had our baby circumcised, as the Law of Moses requires, and named him Jesus, as we'd been told.

Next the Law of Moses required us to take Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. Thankfully that was only about seven miles from Bethlehem, but before we could do that, Mary had to complete her 40 days of purification. Until those 40 days were up, she was regarded as unclean and so not allowed to enter the Temple.

This act of presenting the first born to God goes back to Moses' instructions set down in the book of Exodus, where we're told that every first born male, both of humans and animals, is sacred to God and should be dedicated to him (Exodus 13. 12-13). However, carrying that out would be pretty disruptive of family life, so Moses gave us a way out, known as the Redemption of the First-born: for a sum of five shekels, paid to the

priests, we can, as it were, buy back our son from God. That's about £7 in your money. (Numbers 18. 15-16)

The other thing we had to do, as part of Mary's purification, was to make an animal sacrifice. Although I'm a skilled carpenter, I don't earn that much, so we made what is known as the "Offering of the Poor," a pair of doves or pigeons. Better off people have to sacrifice a lamb and a pigeon.

As I said earlier, life had regained a bit of normality, but everything changed again once we entered the Temple to offer our sacrifice.

We were approached by a couple of elderly people who belong to a group known as *the Quiet in the Land*. They were people who had a rather different idea of what the Messiah would be like when he eventually came. For most people, their idea of a Messiah was a warrior, a leader who would free us from the Roman occupation and make us a great nation once again – a rather frightening figure, like the one described by Malachi. But that wasn't the case with these two, Simeon and Anna, and their like. They had no time for violence and power-seeking. Instead they waited, constant in prayer and on the watch for when God would come to comfort us, his people – what you might call "the consolation of his people."

Clearly, when Simeon saw us walk in with Jesus, he recognised him as the Messiah, something which left us absolutely gobsmacked, but which confirmed what we had already been told.

The way that he put it was to describe Jesus as "God's salvation," which reminded me of what the angel had said to me when I discovered that Mary was pregnant: "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save the people from their sins."

As you can see, that's a very different kind of Messiah from one who is a warrior king. Rather than being concerned with the fate of the nation, our son is going to be concerned with the individual, with how sinful human beings can be reconciled to the perfection that is God, for as one of psalms, Psalm 5 to be precise, puts it:

For you are not a God who is pleased with wickedness;
with you, evil people are not welcome.
The arrogant cannot stand
in your presence.

You hate all who do wrong;
you destroy those who tell lies.

Simeon then went on to say that Jesus was to be:

a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.

By that I understand him to mean that Jesus will help the non-Jews, people like you, to understand the nature of God, what his will is for those whom he created, and that's all of us.

As for "being the glory of your people Israel," I think that takes us back to God's promise to Abraham, when he called him to leave his own land and go where God directed him. God told him that "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Genesis 12.2-3). Our son will be the fulfilment of that promise.

Simeon then blessed us and went onto say something to Mary that I didn't quite understand, and I'm not sure that she did either:

'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

So maybe it's time for us to try to help Joseph.

"The falling and the rising of many," I think, is defined by where people stand in relationship to God, and that in Simeon's terms is determined by how they responded to Jesus when he walked the earth. John says something similar in the Prologue to his Gospel:

Jesus "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..." (John 1. 11-12)

An example of this division can be seen in the response of the religious authorities who rejected Jesus' teaching and his claim to be the Messiah, in contrast with his disciples and many who were regarded by the religious authorities as outcasts and sinners, such as tax collectors, including Matthew, one of the disciples, and prostitutes.

But Jesus presents us with the same challenge today – do you accept him as the saviour he is portrayed to be in the pages of the Bible and base your life on his teaching? Or do

you reject out of hand his claim to be the Son of God and his teaching, and go your own way, separated from God?

As for Simeon's prophesy with regard to Mary, that "a sword will pierce your own soul too," I think that that takes us forward to the crucifixion, where we see Mary standing at the foot of the cross, watching as her son goes through the most agonising of deaths. Our salvation was not achieved without suffering! And that is still true for many today.

And what about that other elderly person who recognises Jesus as the long awaited Messiah, what can she teach us?

We're told that "she began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem."

Need I say more?

Amen

Prayer Pointers

Pray that we may not forget the greatness of God's work in creation; that we can be joyful because of his generosity that sustains our lives and see his image reflected in other people.

Pray that we will keep our eyes fixed on long-running conflicts across the Middle East, in Gaza and in Ukraine, and that there is a response made to the cries of hungry children and displaced people.

Pray that there will be systems in place to ensure the well-being of children and spaces for outdoor play accessible to all. May we challenge health inequalities and press for a reduction in poverty, water pollution and poor air quality.

Pray for protection from all that threatens us and disturbs our security in Jesus; from the darkness of despair at the brokenness of our world; from our sickness and suffering and from anxiety for the pain of those we love, remembering all who are in mental or physical pain today especially 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.

Pray for courage to shape our actions and choices as we seek to serve God in the world.