

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

### 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2023: Advent Sunday

#### Hazel writes:

Today we begin the liturgical season of Advent, which begins at the latest point it can this year, with Christmas Eve falling on a Sunday. This means that the season is squeezed into just three weeks. I hope that you will be able to use this time to recognise the peace, presence and love of God that we have with us all the time and which is so obvious when we remember Jesus being born at Christmas.

This week we have Holy Communion services at 8am in St Francis' Church and a joint service at 10am in St Mary's Church.

Next **Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> December**, we will have Holy Communion services at 8am in St Francis' Church, at 9.15am in St Mary's Church (where we will be celebrating our Patronal Festival) and at 10.45am in St Francis' 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.

Our **Christmas publicity** is now available and more copies can be printed. If you would like to deliver cards in your locality and need more than you can get in the churches, please let Hazel ([hazelos58@gmail.com](mailto:hazelos58@gmail.com) or 8777 5034) know how many copies you'll need and which roads you'll be covering.

The **Guild of Church Flower Arrangers** have their next demonstration locally on Monday 4th December at West Wickham & Shirley Baptist church at 2 p.m. with entry £5. All are welcome.

We are holding a **Community Christmas Tree Festival** at St Francis Church, where we will have lots of trees to view, refreshments to enjoy and festive music to listen to. We

will be raising money for Welcare in Bromley, a charity that provides practical and emotional support and advice to families in need. The church will be open at the following times:

- Saturday 9th December – 10.00am – 1.00pm
- Sunday 10th December – 12.00noon – 3.00pm
- Wednesday 13th December – 10.30am – 1.00pm
- Friday 15th December – 10.00am – 1.00pm
- Saturday 16th December (with Treasure Hunt) – 10.00am – 1.00pm.

If you can help with being there as a volunteer at any of these times, please sign up on the sheet at the back of St Francis' Church

There is an **Advent Quiet Day** at St John's Church, Layhams Road on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> December from 11am to 3pm. Drop in any time for some prayer and reflection on the real meaning of Christmas.

The **7<sup>th</sup> West Wickham Scout Group will hold their Carol Service** in St Mary's Church on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> December at 6.30pm. Please do come and support them, as they have supported some of our Sunday services during the year. All are welcome.

The **Allegrì Singers have a concert** on Saturday 9th Dec, at St Francis' Church on Saturday 9th December at 7.45pm. They will be performing a festive programme of Christmas music with soprano and bass-baritone soloists. Tickets are available on the door or in advance at <https://the-allegrì-singers.sumupstore.com>

**St. Mary's Christmas Parish Lunch** is on Wednesday 13th December at 12.30pm in St. Mary's Hall. The list is now full but if you are unable to attend please contact Beryl Bolton on 0208 289 8097. There will be a sing-along of carols and Christmas songs after the lunch.

**St Francis' Community Christmas Lunch** is on Sunday 17th December at 12.30pm in St Francis' Church Hall. A three course Christmas lunch for £12.00 per person. If you wish to attend, please contact Barbara Goodchild on 0208 777 8782 with payment by Monday 11th December.

**Rowena, Rhys and Gareth** would like to express their grateful thanks to everyone at St Francis' and St Mary's for all the kindness and support shown following Brian's sudden and unexpected death. Thank you also for all the cards, flowers, and messages we received plus all the donations to Macmillan Cancer Care. Killick's have forwarded £880 which they received in memory of Brian, to the charity. Other kind donations were

made directly online to Macmillan, so we don't know the full amount raised at this point.

**Two very good condition two-seater settees** in grey are available for no charge (but would need to collect from an address in Shirley). If you know someone who would appreciate these, please contact Wendy Carvalho on 020 8777 7888.

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).

Recently we blessed the refurbished **Choir Vestry** at St Francis' Church and hope that it will be well used for meetings, prayer groups and other small gatherings. We would like to add a table into the space which can be used in a meeting, but which can be put to one side when the room needs to revert to being a choir vestry. Ideally a **gate-leg table** 4 that folds down. If you, or someone you know, has one of these that they are looking to donate or sell, please contact Barbara Goodchild (020 8777 8782 or [goodchild854@gmail.com](mailto:goodchild854@gmail.com)). Many thanks.

Some of you will know of **Terry Leggatt**, who had escorted visits to St Francis' from Bethlem Royal Hospital before he returned to prison in late 2019. He is now able to prepare for a return to living in the community, but this will be a long process. 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](mailto:nicholanightingale@hotmail.co.uk) or 8916 9855) for St Francis'.

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**

Almighty God, as your kingdom dawns, turn us from the darkness of sin to the light of holiness, that we may be ready to meet you in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

**First Reading:****1 Corinthians 1:3-9**

<sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, <sup>5</sup> for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind— <sup>6</sup> just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you— <sup>7</sup> so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>8</sup> He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Gospel Reading****Mark 13: 24-37**

<sup>24</sup> 'But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light,<sup>25</sup> and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

<sup>26</sup> Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in clouds" with great power and glory. <sup>27</sup> Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

<sup>28</sup> 'From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. <sup>29</sup> So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. <sup>30</sup> Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. <sup>31</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

<sup>32</sup> 'But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>33</sup> Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. <sup>34</sup> It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. <sup>35</sup> Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, <sup>36</sup> or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. <sup>37</sup> And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.'

**Post Communion Prayer**

O Lord our God, make us watchful and keep us faithful as we await the coming of your Son our Lord; that, when he shall appear, he may not find us sleeping in sin but active in his service and joyful in his praise; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

## REFLECTION – Richard Ford

“I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.”

If you’ve listened carefully to this morning’s Gospel reading you may be thinking to yourself: Hang on, there must be something wrong here. We’ve just heard a very dramatic description, borrowed from the prophet Isaiah, of what the Jews called the Day of the Lord, when God would finally intervene in the history of the world, freeing Israel from occupation, righting wrongs and bringing justice and peace:

“The sun will be darkened  
And the moon will not give its light;  
The stars will fall from the sky,  
And the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”

As Christians, we believe that - in the person of Jesus - God has already begun that intervention, but that it won’t be completed until Jesus’ Second Coming.

These two events –Jesus’ birth and his Second Coming are the focus of the four weeks that we call Advent, a word that means “coming.” We are preparing to celebrate Jesus’ First Coming, as a baby at Christmas, and what it really means, and making sure that we are ready for the Second Coming, when Jesus returns as king and judge.

But if those words, “I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened,” relate to the Second Coming, as Jesus’ quotation from Isaiah that began the reading would appear to indicate, then Jesus must have got it wrong, because we are still waiting, indeed preparing for his Second Coming.

To find an answer to this problem, we need to go back to the beginning of the chapter from which our reading is taken.

Put yourselves in the place of the disciples, who had been born and brought up in Galilee. Situated in the north of the country and three days’ journey from Jerusalem, some of them may never have been to Jerusalem or seen the Temple, so it’s no surprise that as they are leaving the Temple after a day listening to Jesus teaching one of them exclaims: “Look teacher! What massive stones. What magnificent buildings.”

And the unnamed disciple is right to be impressed with what he has seen, for the Temple was indeed impressive. The contemporary Jewish historian, Josephus, tells us that the “outward face of the Temple in its front wanted nothing that was likely to

surprise men's minds or their eyes, for it was covered all over with plates of gold of great weight, and at the first rising of the sun reflected back a very fiery splendour, and made those who forced themselves to look upon it turn their eyes away, just as they would have done at the sun's own rays.... Of its stones, some of them were 70 feet in length, seven and a half feet in height and 9 feet in breadth."

Can you imagine the disciples surprise when Jesus responds: "Not one stone will be left on another; every one will be thrown down?"

A little later, four of his disciples – Peter, Andrew, James and John – ask him privately when these things will happen and what will be the sign that they are about to take place. From what I've said so far, it is clear that what they are asking about is the destruction of the Temple.

Jesus doesn't answer that straight away. Instead he warns them about what is to come – false leaders, wars, earthquakes, famines, the persecution of his followers on account of their beliefs – before adding that those who remain faithful despite what happens will be saved.

Then comes the beginning of an answer to when all this will happen, and to our question of what is meant by "I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened."

Jesus tells his disciples that when they see 'the abomination that causes destruction' standing where it does not belong, they should flee to the mountains because of the horror that is about to befall Jerusalem. What Jesus is referring to is the siege of Jerusalem that occurred when the Jews rose up against the occupying Roman forces in 66 AD. However, by 70 AD, the Jews had had to retreat to the city of Jerusalem and the Romans had begun literally to starve them to defeat. Contemporary accounts of what happened are horrifying, even to those who have witnessed on our TV screens what is happening in Gaza today.

Josephus records that during that siege over a million perished by slow starvation and the sword. He writes, "Then did the famine widen its progress and devoured the people by whole houses and families. The upper rooms were full of women and children dying of starvation. The lanes of the city were full of the dead bodies of the aged. The children and young men wandered about the market places like shadows, all swelled with famine and fell down dead wheresoever their misery seized them." Some, we're told, in their desperation were driven to eating their own children.

The Romans then entered the city and set it and the Temple ablaze, leaving only the western wall of the Temple standing, as it still does today.

As Jesus had prophesied, all this took place within the generation, or lifetime, of those listening to him, and thus is the answer to the question I posed at the beginning: if all that is written in this chapter refers only to the Second Coming, then did Jesus get it wrong when he said, “This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened”?

But what about the earlier paragraph referring to the “Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory?” This description derives from the prophet, Daniel, who, in a vision, sees “One like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days (God) and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power.... His dominium is an everlasting dominium that will not pass away, and his kingdom will never be destroyed.”

In describing himself as the “Son of Man,” Jesus is claiming this title for himself and the authority that goes with it; an everlasting authority. Last Sunday, we celebrated the feast of Christ the King, and Hazel preached on the parable of the sheep and the goats, a parable in which Jesus clearly shows that he will reappear at the end of time – what we refer to as the Second Coming.

When that will be is also implied in the disciples’ question at the beginning of the chapter, “When will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?”

“About that day or hour, no one knows,” says Jesus, “neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” In other words, “That’s not your (or indeed, our) business.”

But Jesus then goes on to say that it *is* our business to keep alert, for we do not know when the time will come, a point which Jesus emphasises at the end of this morning’s gospel, when he relates the short parable of the householder and the gatekeeper, concluding:

Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.’

Now this does not mean that we should endure sleepless nights worrying about whether or not we'll be ready for Jesus' return. It may have been the doorkeeper's job to be on duty all night, but he would have been off-duty at other times.

Our responsibility is, as it were, to be on duty when we're meant to be on duty.

Or to put it another way, to live lives that are authentically Christian.

One way in which we can do that is to avoid falling into the trap which led to the destruction of the Temple. The Temple authorities rejected Jesus and his teaching. As Christians we embrace Jesus, we welcome him into our lives, we accept him as our Saviour, and we seek to become more like him by putting into practice both his teaching and his actions.

The Temple authorities isolated themselves from other nations, refusing to share their knowledge of God with the nations around them. We are called to share our faith with those around us, and what better time to do that than at Christmas.

The Temple authorities declared as unclean the outcasts of society. We are called by Jesus to feed the hungry, to welcome the stranger, to clothe those in need, to care for the sick and to visit those in prison.

Advent is the opportunity to take stock of our lives as Jesus' followers, to recognise that we shall one day have to give an account of how we have used time on this earth. But that judgement is not something to be feared.

The message of the fig tree in our reading this morning is one of hope. The putting forth of its leaves is a sign that summer is coming, it's a sign of new life, it's a sign that all will be well as we put our trust in the one who went to the cross for us in order to free us from the consequences of our wrongdoing and who is now our judge, but a judge who has, in his first coming, soon to be celebrated at Christmas, lived a human life, and who consequently knows the temptations and pressures under which we live, and who is therefore ready to extend to us forgiveness if only we will seek it.

So this Advent, do take the opportunity to see what needs to be done in your lives to prepare for the Second Coming, remembering that we are called to be ready for that meeting with Jesus at any time.

Amen

## **Prayer Pointers**

Pray for families in the Holy Land who are bereaved, fearful, homeless, hungry and stateless.

Pray for those in Ukraine and Russia who are suffering because of the ongoing war and are unable to live in peace and harmony with each other through the violence that prevents them from living the life they would wish.

Pray for the national health service in the UK which is under so much pressure meaning that many people with illness and injury cannot get the help and healing they need, and staff are not able to give the help and healing they would like to.

Pray for those who need God's comfort and peace at this time, remembering by name Vicky Pearce, Jane Smith, Graham Stone, Rowena Griffiths, Daphne Dack, John Dack, Barbara Goodchild, Jack Bramwell, Sue Jones, Tina Hamilton and Daphne Hurlstone.

Pray for those who will be spending their first Christmas without a treasured loved one; for those who will be stepping into Advent with sadness, loneliness and uncertainty.

### **A prayer for Advent:**

Holy God, as we unearth our Christmas treasures in our decorations box, we think of those who have nothing to unearth, no happy memories, nothing to pass on. May they find someone and something that gives this Advent a meaning and a memory worth passing on to the next generation.