

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

4th February 2024: Second Sunday before Lent

Hazel writes:

Thanks to all those who have sent me their good wishes following my news on Sunday - it has been really affirming and I know God's guidance in it. In brief, for those who only receive a paper copy of the pew sheet, I will be moving to Liverpool in May and, once I have settled into a new home, will be looking to work part-time in a chaplaincy role. I have found my time in West Wickham very rewarding, but this move will enable me to be nearer to my parents who are declining in health. Please be assured of my continuing prayers for you. I feel that the congregations are well supported by the ministry team and the love for one another shown within our community.

We have something different this week. Before Christmas, the Vision Group met and discussed how we might adapt our joint services to make them more of an opportunity for shared worship and increased social interaction, so developing our **congregational** focus further. Today is the first experiment with this. So, at the 10am service there will be different liturgy, some new music and only one reading, with a shorter reflection. Please do use this as an opportunity for reflection with others on what is important about our shared worship together. Added to this change in routine, this week we have two shorter reflections in the pew sheet from our newest contributors, Debbie and Carol – a real bonus!

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

Messy Church is on Friday 9th February at 3.45pm in St Mary's. Please do tell friends and neighbours with young families about this monthly congregation which meets after school on the 2nd Friday of every month.

Next **Sunday 11th February**, we will have a Holy Communion service at 8am in St Francis' Church, and non-eucharistic services at 9.15am in St Mary's Church 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 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.

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. **List will be removed after this week end's services.**

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 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.

Easter Egg Outreach 2024. Once again, I am happy to order "The Real Easter Eggs" for those who would like to buy them for their children, grandchildren, great-nephews and nieces, or even their spouses, etc. The eggs are made from FairTrade chocolate and include a copy of the Easter story in colourful book form. There are three kinds available:

- Original (milk chocolate) - £4.50
- Dark - £5.50
- Special Edition - £9.99 (includes Easter card, an extra chocolate bar and the Easter story)

Order forms will be posted in both churches from Sunday, but you can also contact me by email or phone (richard.ford73@gmail.com, 020 8289 2432). In order to get free delivery, I need orders by Sunday February 25th, at the latest. *Richard Ford*

February's edition of **The Bridge**, the Southwark Diocesan newspaper, has been published with an article about The Big Christmas Sing and the Christmas Tree Festival on page 5. Here's a link to the electronic copy: <https://southwark.anglican.org/news-events/news/the-bridge-newspaper/>. Paper copies are available in the church buildings.

The **Croydon Male Voice Choir** will be giving a concert at St. Francis Church on **Saturday 9th March at 7.30 p.m.** The choir has recently acquired a dynamic new musical team and have an extensive repertoire, including classical choruses, hymns and choral anthems so this is one not to miss. Tickets are £12 including refreshments and are available on line at <https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/StFrancis-of-Assisi/concert-by-croydon-male-voice-choir/2024-03-09/19:30/tdvxgrdn> and will also be available after services from David Wada and Valerie Hamilton.

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. Mary's 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

Almighty God,
give us reverence for all
creation and respect for
every person, that we
may mirror your
likeness in Jesus Christ
our Lord.

First Reading:

Proverbs 8: 1, 22-31

Does not wisdom call,
and does not
understanding raise her
voice?

²² The LORD created me
at the beginning of his
work, the first of his acts
of long ago.

²³ Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the
beginning of the earth.

²⁴ When there were no
depths I was brought
forth, when there were
no springs abounding
with water.

²⁵ Before the mountains
had been shaped,
before the hills, I was
brought forth—

²⁶ when he had not yet

made earth and fields,
or the world's first bits
of soil.

²⁷ When he established
the heavens, I was
there, when he drew a
circle on the face of the
deep,

²⁸ when he made firm
the skies above, when
he established the
fountains of the deep,

²⁹ when he assigned to
the sea its limit, so that
the waters might not
transgress his
command, when he
marked out the
foundations of the

earth, ³⁰ then I was
beside him, like a
master worker; and I
was daily his delight,
rejoicing before him
always,

³¹ rejoicing in his
inhabited world and
delighting in the human
race.

Gospel Reading:

John 1: 1-14, 19-28

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. 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.

¹⁹ This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' ²⁰ He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, 'I am not the

Messiah. ²¹ And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the prophet?' He answered, 'No.'

²² Then they said to him, 'Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' ²³ He said,

'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord, as the prophet Isaiah said.

²⁴ Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵ They asked him, 'Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?'

²⁶ John answered them, 'I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, ²⁷ the one who is

coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.'

²⁸ This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

Post Communion Prayer

God our creator, by your gift the tree of life was set at the heart of the earthly paradise, and the bread of life at the heart of your Church: may we who have been nourished at your table on earth be transformed by the glory of the Saviour's cross and enjoy the delights of eternity; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

REFLECTIONS

Carol Coslett, based on readings from Proverbs 8:1, 22-31 and John 1:1-14

It seems we have taken a leap back to Christmas with our Gospel reading today. Yet we are in one of two Sundays of Ordinary Time, before we begin to focus on the fulfilment of Jesus' ministry here on earth and look to the Cross, Passion and Resurrection.

So why these readings now? They both focus on "Beginnings" ... before the world began, and they point to the marvels of creation in our world. You could say we are at a beginning ... a new start, a new season soon to be upon us.

When I was in Derbyshire one of the annual traditions was the Well Dressing Ceremonies. Normally the first one would start on Ascension Day in Tissington Village and then all the other villages throughout Derbyshire would follow into July and August. The preparation for decorating the wells in each village was very much a community affair, often thematic, but it did involve finding all the wells in any village and celebrating the flow of water that had sustained life from the earliest times. If you have ever seen a dressed well, you will know that it is quite a work of art, starting with a clay base and then using seeds, flowers, berries, leaves, so a picture is portrayed that stands around the well, marking the spot. As Archdeacon I was asked every year to attend different opening ceremonies and bless all the wells in the village, starting with the one nearest to the church and a service in or outside church depending on numbers. The tradition so rooted in Derbyshire, a landlocked county, stems from the knowledge that without the well and water in the village nothing could survive. The water was there before all times, and in the very essence of the land and earth. Of course, water can be destructive too, but its absence does indeed lead to a stifling of life. For all life to begin and continue to grow there must be water.

In the reading from Proverbs, we read "I was brought forth when there were no springs abounding with water, before the mountains had been shaped, I was brought forth. ... when he made the skies above, and assigned the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, I was beside him, like a master worker, rejoicing and delighting in the human race" Reading in the knowledge of the New Testament and John's Gospel we can interpret this as God our creator, and Jesus as the "Word made Flesh/ Incarnate" before all worlds. Jesus as God was amidst the whole created world, there at the very beginning, sharing in the evolution. All creation was in Christ ... "in him was life, and the life was the light of men".

So, we should take this opportunity today to give thanks for our world. Spring will soon be upon us, new life peeping through. Our “ordinary” time should be savoured, let us live in the moment, for God is all around us, in the very heart of all creation. We need to rejoice in God and need to know in our hearts that we are never outside of him, he is with us throughout our lives in everything we think, feel and do.

There is an old story from the village of Ashford in the Water that I came across told by the locals who live near to the fast flowing river that feeds the wells. It goes like this:

There was once a little fish living in a mighty ocean, being told its whole life depended on water. One morning it set out to find water. It left its home and travelled to cold seas, and through rivers but could not find water there. It then travelled to warmer climes, still seeking, but it could not see water there. It searched all of the seas and rivers and all this time it was restless and weary. At last, it meets an old fish deep in a river-bed and asks, “Where is the water for I would like some?” “Do you not know? You live in the water, you move in the water, you exist because of the water. There is no need to look for it, you are in it. If you did not have it, you would die. Enjoy being in it, know that it is around you.” This was wonderful news for the little fish, for there was no need to seek any further, but there was a chance to enjoy the element in which it lived.

So too for us ... we need to live in the moment, celebrate our creation and be thankful. Care for it, protect it, treat it with respect, for it is this creation that gives us life, and it is through Christ ... the word with God, the word made flesh that “in him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:18).

So don't look back now to Christmas, but enjoy today, the ordinary and your everyday life, for we need not seek God, for his presence is with us always.

One of St Augustine's most famous prayers reminds us that: “*Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.*”

Debbie Adams, based on reading from John 1:6-14, 19-28.

In today's reading we are introduced to John the Baptist and his testimony about Jesus.

The image that many of us have of John the Baptist comes from the other Gospels. John is the son of elderly parents Zechariah, a priest in the temple, and Elisabeth. He is the cousin of Jesus and lives an austere life in the desert with an unusual diet of locusts and honey. John's clothing of camel hair and leather belt would probably not feature on the pages of vogue magazine. I suspect it's the wrong season!

Historically, John's role was an important one because he was the first prophet to foretell the coming of Christ and to witness personally the fulfilment of that prophecy.

I wonder what John's message would be to us today?

We read in John's Gospel verses 6-8 that John is sent from God as a **witness** to testify to the light, so that all would believe through him. John is divinely commissioned to be a witness. We can learn so much from John the Baptist because he knew what his purpose was, and he was completely focussed on it.

The sending of John to be a witness formed the basis of his **calling** in proclaiming Jesus as the light of the world, and the coming of the Messiah. John's calling led him to be brave and courageous in telling others about Jesus. He went against cultural norms at the time and baptised Jews in the river Jordan for the forgiveness of sins. Up to then, the Jews only performed baptism for Gentiles who wanted to follow the Jewish faith.

As Christians, we are all **called** to be **witnesses** of our faith, which can be challenging and at odds with the people around us. At times, speaking about our faith can be difficult and can raise a few eyebrows, and may even expose us to ridicule, as John the Baptist and Jesus experienced. In some parts of the world, it can lead to persecution and threats of violence. We can take courage from the example of John the Baptist to live a life fulfilling our calling by using our gifts and talents to serve others.

We can take comfort that we are called, just as we are, 'warts and all', to serve God and our communities. We are blessed with so many examples in both our churches of serving our communities, such as Messy Church and offering warm spaces, as well as being generous in supporting various charities that care for others, such as Christian Aid and foodbanks with donations.

In verse 8, it's clear that John the Baptist is not the light but came to testify to the light. John was a charismatic preacher and attracted a huge following, many of whom were

baptised in the river Jordan. His popularity caused many to hold him in high esteem and to give him status. Perhaps the phrase `be careful what you worship` comes to mind, as it highlights the danger of congregations focussing too much on the preacher rather than the message about Christ. God needs to be centre of our lives and in all we do.

The Priests, Levites and Pharisees question John about `who he is` (verses 19-28). His answer reveals that he is not the light, the Messiah, or Elijah. John cites Isaiah, chapter 40 verse 3, a scripture that they already knew well, saying that he is `the voice crying out in the wilderness`, to `make straight the way of the Lord`, and that this prophecy is about to be fulfilled.

John's **purpose and mission** is to point people to Jesus, and he reveals his humility by acknowledging that Jesus must become greater, and he must become less (John 3:30).

So, what's John's message to us today? We too can be witnesses of our faith and encourage others to trust in Jesus. This is so much easier if we are certain of our calling and purpose, Just as John the Baptist was. Drawing nearer to God and putting time aside to pray and read the Bible can help us to see those opportunities to witness to our faith and encourage others. This is how our time with God becomes fruitful, rather than us being consumed by the busyness of our lives.

So, do take courage from John the Baptist and how he lived out his calling. He remained a witness to testify to the light of Christ rather than himself, and to prepare people's hearts to receive Jesus. Let's go and do the same.

Amen.

Prayer Pointers

We pray for those working so hard to bring peace. When they are discouraged, come close to them. We pray for the people of Gaza and Ukraine, forced from their homes because of war. We pray for the people of Israel losing hope over the return of their loved ones held hostage and mourning the loss of family and friends. We pray for those who need new energy to keep serving in places of despair.

Lord, you came to bring a new way of living. Show us deeper ways of being Your hands and feet, your eyes and ears in every situation we find ourselves. May our lips always speak uplifting words of encouragement and kindness.

We pray for:

- all who work to keep our community running. Give them the energy they need.
- those who leave our community every day to work elsewhere. Travel with them, Lord.
- those who are house-bound. May they know the support of neighbours and friends.
- those who are celebrating this week: a birthday, an anniversary, a successful application, or exam result. May their joy be infectious and lighten everyone around them.
- those who work in the health and caring services as well as those who care for people at home, young or old. May they find the strength to continue on.
- those in our congregation who are sick, sad, sorrowful or dying: Vicky Pearce, Jane Smith, Graham Stone, Rowena Griffiths, Daphne Dack, John Dack, Jack Bramwell, Sue Jones, Tina Hamilton, Daphne Hurlstone, Tim Curtis, Barry Burford, Pam Tabner and Mark Christy.