

St. David's Church Exeter and S. Michael's and All Angels, Mount Dinham, Exeter.

Newsletter for 27 December 2020 – The First Sunday of Christmas

Dear Friends,

Welcome to this first Sunday of Christmas. We will be live streaming the 9.30am service from St David's Church on our Facebook page and it should appear later on our websites.

Today at 9.30am at St David's Belinda Speed Andrews will be celebrating and Bill Pattinson will be preaching.

At St Michael's at 11am Fr Robin Eastoe will be celebrating and preaching.

Our Recorded Carol Service is still available on Youtube at this link:

<https://youtu.be/yUbSIGIPw3I>

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to it and especially to Bill Pattinson who organised the readings and Nigel Walsh who masterminded the music and put it all together. Do find time to share in this beautiful service.

Forthcoming in church

Thursday 31 December

10.30 Holy Communion at St David's

Sunday 3 January

9.30am Parish Communion for Epiphany at St David's (live streamed) with celebrant Nigel Guthrie and preacher Belinda Speed-Andrews

11am Mass at St Michael's for Christmas 2 with Fr Dominic Cyrus

Wednesday 6 January

7.30pm Sung Mass for Epiphany at St Michael's

Advent and Christmas Services

Thank you to everyone who contributed to our services online and in person and to those who decorated and cleaned our churches.

Covid-19 Safe

These are the provisions we are making to keep worshippers as safe as possible. Please avoid touching door handles – Thank you.

Hand sanitizer must be used on entering and leaving church.

We should now wear face coverings in church. There are important exemptions which can be found at

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/COVID%2019%20advice%20on%20face%20coverings%20v3.0.pdf>

and which include those with a hearing impairment.

At St David's we are encouraging people to wear face coverings to come forward to receive Holy Communion and then to consume the host after moving away from the altar rail.

Seating will be distanced to approximately 2 metres. Please sit on the seats where service books are placed. Seating is also marked by white labels at St Michael's, with notices on the pews that should be kept clear.

Please observe appropriate distancing from others at all times.

Services should be 'no longer than necessary'; and congregational singing is still not permitted indoors.

Toilet facilities will be available and please follow the instructions for use.

Please do not attend church if you are feeling ill or are shielding. Although we will do all we can to make the church safe you attend at your own risk.

Online Daily Prayers

There will be no online daily prayers this week.

Thank you

Thank you to all of you who have continued in your financial support for our churches during this difficult year. St David's, in particular, has lost a lot of letting income. But we have managed our money carefully at both churches and finish the year with much gratitude for your generosity in supporting our ministry and mission.

Food for vulnerable community housed at the Great Western Hotel

A huge thank you for the help and donations that have been given towards making our Tuesday packed suppers. The scheme is running well and we now have enough crisps and wrapped chocolate bars to see us over the Christmas period. We were able to send a small bag of gifts last week as well as the usual supper. But further donations would be welcome in the new year.

Work at St David's Church

Community Payback Volunteers are continuing to help with maintenance in St David's churchyard on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. Their supervisor, Keith, is always happy for us to stop and chat (at a safe distance) with the group.

Traidcraft Stall & Bountiful Table

At our stalls please just approach one by one, keeping safely distanced, and do not touch products before buying. If at all possible please bring notes and coins that can be handed over without needing lots of change. Thank you for your support - and for taking care! Traidcraft will continue on the fourth Sunday of most months next year.

Magazine

Our magazine for December and January is still available, and it's a fabulous bumper edition to keep you interested and entertained. Paper copies are available in church and it is accessible through both our websites. A massive thank you to our contributors and editorial team for their creativity and hard work.

Phone Networks

Many of you have appreciated phone calls from other members of the church community. If you would like to be phoned by someone and haven't had any contact please let me know at nigel.guthrie1@gmail.com

or by ringing me on 01392 660226 or Ash on 07855305519.

Your Prayers are asked for...

In the Parish Cycle of Prayer please pray for the Men's Breakfast and Parish Lunches (when they can happen again).

Please also pray for:

Christian people everywhere celebrating the festival of Christmas;

all refugees;

those people here, and around the world, suffering from Covid-19, and those who are feeling anxious or afraid;

our Government, local and national, in the difficult decisions they have to make and implement, our police service, those carrying out the vaccination programme;

those who have to implement new trade and travel arrangements with Europe;

those working in care homes and hospitals - giving thanks for their commitment and courage;

those who are facing unemployment or economic hardship;

May God bless you and those you care for,

Nigel Guthrie

Prayers, Readings and Address for the First Sunday of Christmas, 27th December

Collect

Almighty God, who wonderfully created us in your own image and yet more wonderfully restored us through your Son Jesus Christ: grant that, as he came to share in our humanity, so we may share the life of his divinity; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

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.
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.
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.
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

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.' So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

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.

An Address by Bill Pattinson for Christmas 1 (27.12.2020):

Dancing in the Light of Christ: transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary.

One of the joys of Christmas is that we always do the same sort of things every year - the family round the table, the games we play, the food we eat, the TV programmes we watch, the church services we attend - we create our own traditions. As Steve Turner writes:

“The thing about Christmas

I always think that

Is that it stays the same

Always like that

And that’s why I love it

I love it like that

Everything else changes

But we always do that.”

Well, not this year! This year, as the politicians constantly told us in the run up to Christmas, was completely different, a Christmas like no other - and we shall all have our own stories of how we coped during Christmas 2020, the year of the pandemic.

One thing however did not change, nor will it ever. As John Betjeman writes:

“The maker of the stars and sea

Became a child on earth for me.... and you.”

That wonderful story, of which we never tire, the birth of the Saviour of the world in a simple stable in Bethlehem, remains the same. And let me tell you immediately that the tweet on social media that there was indeed room at the inn, but the stable was more ventilated, is fake news. There has indeed been many jokes on the media about the pandemic - it’s a very British way of coping. One of my favourites is a rewording of the lyrics for Good King Wenceslas.

“Yonder peasant who is he?

He’s not from tier 4 is he?”

We are treated this morning with two readings especially for those, at this time, who feel their backs are against the wall. Isaiah's jubilant words capture our attention and stir our imaginations as he foretells that the one who is to come will be:

**“a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.”**

and there will be celebration

**“as with the bridegroom and his bride
as with nature's growth and transformation.”**

The Gospel Reading tells us once more of the angels' wonderful message of good news - and we all need a lot more of that - and the shepherds' visit to the manger and their return, glorifying and praising God.

But why shepherds, such ordinary folk? Why were such smelly farm workers given the privilege of being the first witnesses, after Mary and Joseph of course, to see the infant Jesus? In the first century, and probably for many centuries after, shepherds did not enjoy a good reputation. Their semi nomadic lifestyle meant that they were regarded by many, at that time, as disreputable, untrustworthy, outsiders, certainly outside tight knit communities like Bethlehem. But Jesus was to make himself known to outsiders and many such people became his ardent disciples. Luke, in his Gospel, highlights the story of disciples of Jesus who were regarded as outsiders and sinners by Jewish society and its religious leaders.

The shepherds also contrast vividly with the other visitors from the East - the wise men with grand gifts, rich clothing, wisdom of the stars and perhaps servants compared to the local yokels with torn working clothes, simple gifts, if any in fact, and ignorant with little knowledge, except of sheep. Does this stark comparison signify that Christ comes to the whole world in its diversity, to everyone whoever and wherever you are? If so, where were the women visitors. Or perhaps one of the shepherds was a woman. Certainly there are female shepherds in the Holy Land today - could there have been any 2000 years ago?

Perhaps it's time to discard those stereotypes, those caricatures of shepherds being rough, smelly yokels - simple, ordinary, anonymous people. Not only does God dance in the ordinary making it extraordinary but good shepherds today

and, no doubt then, are held in high esteem. Consider, for example, Gabriel Oak in Thomas Hardy's "Far from the Madding Crowd". Here is a skilful, hardworking, resilient and honest shepherd who acts wisely when the Autumn storm arrives or when the sheep suffer from bloat. Hardy gave careful consideration to his name for he was like an oak firmly planted and rooted, strong and faithful. Shepherds have handed down experience, learning not discovered in books and close connections to the land, loyalty to a place which is their working environment. The shepherds were not random guests but carefully chosen for the qualities they distinctively and instinctively possess. One of the strongest images of Christ is of the Good Shepherd, who cares for his flock, every single one. Magdalen Smith in her book "Unearthly Beauty: through Advent with the Saints" sees the shepherds as Christmas Saints "continuously dealing with the essential and important things of human existence- life, death, love and loyalty" and as "having a natural sense of the transcendent." Shepherds have much to say to the world and those shepherds who first heard the good news of our Lord's birth prove excellent role models for us all. Having heard the angels' song, they searched and found Jesus, they shared their good news and they praised and glorified God. We are asked to do the same.

So at this very difficult Christmas we can celebrate once more Jesus' birth, realising we are dancing in the light of Christ who transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary, bringing hope and joy into our troubled world. Like the shepherds we are his Saints. His story is for all, especially for the outsider, for the ordinary. Barbara Brown Taylor in her book 'Mixed Blessings: Being the People of God' emphasises my message this morning:

"every ordinary, created thing has become transparent with his glory. There is gold in the straw and myrrh in the dung on the floor. Let us revel in the light of that star beneath which the ordinary becomes holy and the holy ordinary, beneath which it becomes exceedingly clear that there is nothing more we must do or be to be loved by God."

Closing 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.

Do join us next week for our services in church or on Facebook!