

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

Newsletter for 6 December 2020 – The Second Sunday of Advent

Dear Friends,

It is good to be back in church this Sunday but if you are not able to join us in person do join in online if you can. We will be live streaming the 9.30am service from St David's Church on our Facebook page and it should appear later on the websites.

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

At St Michael's at 11am we welcome Fr Robin Eastoe to celebrate and preach.

Thrive: The Advent Experience at St David's Church

Sundays at 4pm on Zoom

We had 20 something screens (probably 30 or so people), including several St David's Primary families, log in for Thrive last week. Following direction from pupils from across the year groups, we mainly explored questions around "Why is there something, rather than nothing?", and wondered if the existence of Creation itself points to a Creator, who makes us because he wants us to live.

This weekend, we'll ask questions like "If God is good and powerful, why doesn't he stop evil, viruses, and wars?"

Don't miss this opportunity to explore spirituality, questions and more.

On Zoom:

[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88685738289?
pwd=WEh1dINCY3NRQTICcXFjK2ZlejR0UT09](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88685738289?pwd=WEh1dINCY3NRQTICcXFjK2ZlejR0UT09)
Meeting ID: 886 8573 8289 Passcode: 159821

Services in church this week

Wednesday 9 December

9.30am at St Michael's (live streamed) Mattins followed by 10am Mass

Thursday 10 December

10.30 Holy Communion at St David's with a short address for Advent by Ash Leighton Plom

Sunday 13 December

9.30am Parish Communion at St David's (live streamed) with celebrant Belinda Speed Andrews and preacher Howard Friend

11am Mass at St Michael's with celebrant Nigel Guthrie and preacher Ian Cartwright

6pm Advent Procession at St Michael's

Advent and Christmas Services

We have decided to make our Christingle an outdoor service (not on Zoom) so that those who come can join in singing the carols. In addition to our regular weekday and Sunday services we are also planning to offer the following:

At St David's: a Youtube Carol Service of readings and Christmas music; an Outdoor Christingle on Christmas Eve at 4pm - wrap up warm! A Christmas Day Parish Communion at 9.30am (but no midnight mass).

At St Michael's: an Advent Procession with music by a small group of singers on Sunday 13th December at 6pm; Midnight Mass at 11.30pm on Christmas Eve (but no Christmas Day Mass); An evening Mass for Epiphany at 7.30pm on Wednesday 6 January.

Covid-19 Safe

These are the provisions we are making to keep worshippers as safe as possible.

After consultation we have decided to encourage people to use both exits to get out of church rather than having a one-way system which doesn't work very well in our buildings. 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

Why not join our virtual community of prayer? We will hold a Zoom Morning Prayer on Tuesday at 9.30am this week and the order of service will be based on

that in the Common Worship Daily Prayer book or on the corresponding 'Daily Prayer' app of the Church of England.

Tuesday 8th, 9.30am Morning Prayer by Zoom.

Join Zoom Meeting

[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6602261392?](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6602261392?pwd=VzdOaU1XUFBjWk9jV0xvMDZWajZBQT09)

[pwd=VzdOaU1XUFBjWk9jV0xvMDZWajZBQT09](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6602261392?pwd=VzdOaU1XUFBjWk9jV0xvMDZWajZBQT09)

Meeting ID: 660 226 1392 Passcode: 196651

Wednesday 9th 10am Mass on St Michael's Facebook page

Thursday 10th 9.30am Morning Prayer on St David's page

Friday 11th 9am Morning Prayer on St David's Page

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 if you would be willing to provide small bags of crisps or individually wrapped chocolate bars towards this outreach work then please bring them to church or leave them in the Vicarage porch.

Shoeboxes for Moldova

Thank you to everyone who has donated a shoebox or other goods for the appeal by CREE (Christian Response to Eastern Europe) for Moldova. We have a magnificent collection of over 70 boxes and several other bags of gifts as well as generous donations of Winter Fuel Allowance. The boxes were collected for transport on Tuesday. Thank you to Ann Watts, our parish organiser, for her hard work and enthusiasm.

Work at St David's Church

The work is now complete on the vestry roof and the scaffolding should come down shortly. Community Payback Volunteers are currently helping with maintenance in the churchyard on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons.

Traidcraft Stall & Bountiful Table

This Sunday, 6th December, there will be Traidcraft Stall at St David's where a seasonal products will be available as well as the more usual items.

At St Michael's there will be a Bountiful Table including Christmas cards featuring photographs by Matt Clark and produced by Oliver Nicholson.

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!

"A Christmas Messenger" - December 12th, 2 & 5pm at St Mark's Church

Oddments, a professional, full time Christian Theatre company, are bringing A Christmas Messenger to Exeter. This production runs for 1 hour and is an all-round family show which takes a comedic look at the nativity story. This light-hearted Christmas production is narrated from the point of view of a very special character who is told there is no part for her in this year's nativity play.

Join us as we travel back to the time of Mary and Joseph on a mission to prove that Christmas, and the Nativity story, is for everyone!

This event is taking place at St. Mark's Church, Pinhoe Road, EX4 7HU. Pre-booking is required but tickets are free.

Book for the 2pm showing

here <https://stmarksinexeter.churchsuite.com/events/qnd0dbgf>

Book for the 5pm showing

here <https://stmarksinexeter.churchsuite.com/events/4kuhemic>

Or call the Reverend Tanya Hockley-Still on 01392 423311.

Magazine

Our magazine for December and January is now published, 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...

Please remember Philip Richards who has died, and those who have died in recent accidents and disasters.

In the Parish Cycle of Prayer The Children's Society and their work with vulnerable children and young people.

Please also pray for:

the people of Ethiopia, Nagorno-Karaback and Yemen; 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 planning the vaccination programme;

Those negotiating a trade deal with the EU;

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

those who are facing unemployment or economic hardship;

A Prayer for use during the Covid outbreak

Loving God, your Son Jesus Christ came that we might have life and have it abundantly;

pour out your blessing upon our nation;

where there is illness, bring your healing touch;

where there is fear, strengthen us with the knowledge of your presence;

where there is uncertainty, build us up in faith;

where there is denial, lead us into truth;

where there is discord, may we know the harmony of your love;

this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

May God keep you in peace and good health, Nigel Guthrie

Service for the Second Sunday of Advent Sunday, 6th December

Collect

**O Lord, raise up, we pray, your power and come among us,
and with great might succour us;**

that whereas, through our sins and wickedness

we are grievously hindered in running the race that is set before us,

your bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us;

**through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, to whom with you and the Holy
Spirit,**

be honour and glory, now and for ever.

First Reading – Isaiah 40: 1-11

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her

that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid,

that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

**A voice cries out: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.**

Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low;

the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.

**Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'**

A voice says, 'Cry out!' And I said, 'What shall I cry?'

All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field.
The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it;
surely the people are grass.
The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand for ever.
Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings;
lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,
lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, 'Here is your God!'
See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him;
his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.
He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms,
and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

Gospel Reading – Mark 1: 1-8

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,
'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way;
the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

“Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight” ’,

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

An Address by Belinda Speed-Andrews, 6 December 2020

Are you sitting comfortably? OK, so this is not Jack-a-nory but I want to invite you all to sit comfortably, with both feet flat on the floor and your head in line with your spine. Shut your eyes and breathe in deeply hold your breath briefly and breathe out; breathe in and breathe out.....Listen to the words I am about to speak; you may not be a word person so what picture do you imagine as you listen? If you are a word person what are those words saying to you? What emotions are you feeling right now in this moment?

'Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.....See, the Lord comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them to his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.' 'The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. He does not grow faint or weary; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their

strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint'

When I read the reading from Isaiah in preparation for this sermon I immediately saw in my imagination a long road, not winding, but straight, leading upwards and I imagined that when I got to the top there was just glory all around; there were hundreds of other people there too; but there was total silence, but not an intimidating silence; but it was the light, not dazzling, but just a glorious light, comforting with an over-whelming sense of peace, of coming home; I was home where I belonged. "Prepare the way of the Lord, makes his paths straight".

I would like to place our reading from Isaiah this morning in context, because sometimes when we read sections of a book like Isaiah it can mean very little. The Israelites through centuries of disobedience and a breaking of their covenant relationship with God are in captivity in Babylon; they have lost everything; they have lost their temple, where for them God resides, they have lost their homeland and now they are living under the rule of a foreign power. In light of this, they are wondering whether there is any source of comfort left for them, a people stripped of self-defence and of soul as they mourned in a foreign land; vulnerable before their captors.

Isaiah is bringing words of hope and comfort to those discouraged by years of exile. There are no platitudes in this reading as is the way of the Old Testament about a quick solution to the pain and suffering of the people. In the Book of Job and Ecclesiastics there is no simple answer to suffering in fact the questions asked in these to books of scripture, sharpened the truth and reality of suffering and the fact that we have strayed far from God's love; our reading this morning reminds the people that they are not innocent but that 'your iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins'".

What then for us? We hear these words spoken from Scripture every year at this time and I want to ask are we in danger of making them a part of the comfort that Christmas is; a time for good food and family celebrations; singing carols, warm log fires, and good old Christmas movies; have we lost the ability to yearn, to really get under the skin of a deep longing for the comfort that God offers us.

I want to perhaps be controversial this morning and suggest that with the offer of a vaccine are we in danger of looking past the events of this last year and really taking stock of where we are? Are we in danger of moving on to the fact that there is now a light at the end of the tunnel and life can get back to normal, whatever normal is?

I want to challenge each of us to think about what are we going to cry out this season? I know I feel over-whelmed by the depth of some people's current suffering and a feeling of a deep inability to do anything that will make a difference. For those who have lost loved ones to Covid, the vaccine means nothing. To those who have lost their jobs and are waiting for Universal credit to kick in are in debt with the DWSP from loans from the DWSP to tide them over till they get their first payment and then not only are they unemployed but they are now in debt as well. There are people still on furlough and businesses that have been a part of our High street for years and small individual businesses are closing left right and centre - for these people the vaccine means nothing. These people are like the Israelites in the desert, like those in exile who have lost hope of an end to their suffering and will wonder from where their help will come. And for some people they are just waiting to fall into the big black hole in front of them - and sadly some have succumbed.

What about the Church in all of this? We too are all wondering about our future - the shape of our life together, what our worship practices will be and the nature of our witness - as we experience a high degree of discomfort brought about by the pandemic and restrictions upon restrictions on how we interact with each - that in itself is an exile for an embodied people; then the IISCA report and now the release of the Living in Love & Faith material which have highlighted the suffering of many many people in our church families across the globe.

In order to recognise the hope that God offers us we have to recognise our duplicity in all that is wrong with this world, only then can we begin to yearn as the Israelites yearn to return home and only then do we hear this offer of hope from God. And in hearing this offer of hope, what shall we cry? Because what we cry is not just for us but for all people and the message we want to cry to all those who are suffering in this present time, whether it is from loss of life, loss of job, loss of all that makes any sense or meaning, is the message Isaiah cries out in our reading today. "Every valley shall be lifted up and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level and the rough places made plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed".

But it is not that easy is it? "Take a look at our own world, and see how preposterous the message we carry will sound. It does indeed seem that the God of Israel and of Jesus Christ has little power against those elements that seem to control our lives; money, power, consumerism, greed, hate, discrimination. Consumerism demands more of the worlds resources which threatens our environment. The conduct of war robs us of precious lives and international respect. Religious zealotry pits one image of God against another, leaving our

human communities fractured and cynical. How then can we speak of a God who promises to become present in a way that ‘all people shall see it together’?

This though is what we as faithful people of God are being called to do. In the face of derision, and indifference, we are called to speak of this God whose fierce compassion and care for humanity, trumps all other gods who seem to reign in our lives.

Advent then is a time to hear these promises again and then to sit with them through this season. It’s also a time for our community to find our own voice, overcome our objections and speak words of comfort and assurance to anyone who feels separated or abandoned by God, that God will arrive and will come in gentle power.’

I go back the image I had at the beginning. This road that leads us home which God has widened and flattened is now open for us who believe to start walking that path through and with the grace of God in Jesus Christ. And as we walk the path let us ‘lift up our voice with strength...lift it up, [and not] fear....[for God] will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather them in his arms, and carry them in his bosom and gently lead the mother sheep’. Amen

Closing Prayers

**Father in heaven, who sent your Son to redeem the world
and will send him again to be our judge:
give us grace so to imitate him in the humility and purity of his first coming
that, when he comes again, we may be ready to greet him
with joyful love and firm faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

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