

St David's with St Michael's and All Angels, Mount Dinham, Exeter

Newsletter for 13 December 2020 – The Third Sunday of Advent

Dear Friends,

Welcome to this third Sunday in Advent when we think of John the Baptist 'preparing the way of the Lord'. 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 celebrating and Howard Friend will be preaching.

At St Michael's at 11am I will be celebrating and Ian Cartwright will be preaching and at 6pm we will be offering the lovely Advent Procession with the traditional readings and music from a reduced choir.

Thrive: The Advent Experience at St David's Church

Sundays at 4pm on Zoom

Do join us, if you can for Thrive this afternoon. There will be more fascinating and challenging questions to discuss and spirituality to explore.

On Zoom:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88685738289?pwd=WEh1dINCY3NRQTlCcXFjK2ZlejR0UT09>

Meeting ID: 886 8573 8289

Passcode: 159821

Services in church this week

Wednesday 16 December

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

Thursday 17 December

10.30 Holy Communion at St David's with a short address for Advent by Charlotte Townsend

Sunday 20 December

9.30am Parish Communion at St David's (live streamed) with celebrant Nigel Guthrie and preacher Ash Leighton Plom

11am Mass at St Michael's with celebrant Nigel Guthrie and preacher Ash Leighton Plom

Advent and Christmas Services

We will be celebrating Christingle outdoors this year 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: 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 15th, 9.30am Morning Prayer by Zoom.

[Join Zoom Meeting](#)

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6602261392?pwd=VzdOaU1XUFBjWk9jV0xvMDZWajZBQT09>

Meeting ID: 660 226 1392

Passcode: 196651

Wednesday 16th 10am Mass on St Michael's page

Thursday 17th 9.30am Morning Prayer on St David's page

Friday 18th 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 we now have enough crisps and wrapped chocolate bars to see us over the Christmas period. But further donation would be welcome in the new year.

Shoeboxes for Moldova

Thank you to everyone who donated a shoebox or other goods or money 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. Thank you to Ann Watts, our parish organiser, for her hard work and enthusiasm.

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.

Work at St David's Church

The work is now complete on the vestry roof and the scaffolding has been removed. Community Payback Volunteers are currently helping with maintenance in the churchyard on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons.

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!

Greetings from Jane Woodman

Jane was a very long standing worshipper at St David's who cleaned the church for more than 60 years and raised huge sums for Christian Aid clean water projects by her indefatigable cake baking. She now lives in Malvern but wishes to send her greetings to all her friends in our parish community

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...

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 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;

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

Prayers, Readings and Address for the Third Sunday of Advent, 13th December
Collect

O Lord Jesus Christ,
who at your first coming sent your messenger
to prepare your way before you:
grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries
may likewise so prepare and make ready your way
by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just,
that at your second coming to judge the world
we may be found an acceptable people in your sight;
for you are alive and reign with the Father
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

First Reading – Isaiah 61: 1-4 & 8-end

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners;
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
to provide for those who mourn in Zion— to give them a garland instead of ashes, the
oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his
glory. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former
devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.

For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing;
I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant
with them. Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring
among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom
the Lord has blessed. 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.

Gospel Reading – John 1: 6-8 & 19-28

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, ‘I am not the Messiah.’ And they asked him, ‘What then? Are you Elijah?’ He said, ‘I am not.’ ‘Are you the prophet?’ He answered, ‘No.’ Then they said to him, ‘Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?’ 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.

Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, ‘Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?’ John answered them, ‘I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.’ This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

An Address by Howard Friend, 13 December 2020 - 3rd Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 61 vs 1-4 and 8 – end & John 1 vs 6-8 and 19-28

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that true Light. So that through him all might believe.

Looking from Darkness towards Light is a powerful Advent theme, many of us appreciate the symbolism of these candles.

We always assume I think that Light is Good, and Darkness is bad. But is that right.

Is God not in the darkness too?

I want to share a little quip I heard from Mike Brearly, the former England cricket captain. He was being interviewed on Private Passions, Radio 3’s posh version of Desert Island Discs. More Monteverdi than Mantovani, but I’m sure you know that. He was a famously cerebral captain and had a second career as a Psychotherapist. In the course of their conversation he revealed to Michael Barclay, the host, that he sometimes says to his patients ‘I hope I can shed a little darkness on the subject of your problem – to make you uncomfortable – to cause you to think.’

My first thought on hearing that surprising admission was: Well he would say that wouldn’t he? - a psychotherapist has a vested interest in not shedding too much light

on his patients mental processes, less he cures him too quickly and loses his weekly fee. But that's possibly a very uncharitable thought.

And then I thought to myself – concerning our own spiritual journey, - are we not just as likely to find God in the Darkness as in the Light. Perhaps even more so?

When we are up against it in our lives for whatever reason, it's then we ask the important questions – like:- Where are you God ? And let's be honest many of us have had plenty of time and opportunity to ask just that sort of question recently. Maybe you're stuck in your own particular darkness right now – and the answers don't come easily do they?

John the Baptist didn't exactly have an easy time of it, himself, did he, preparing the way for Jesus, the True Light of the World? He was put in prison for speaking out against Herod Antipas and his marital shenanigans. It was while he was in prison – a very dark place by anybody's reckoning - that he sent that extraordinary delegation to Jesus – asking - Are you really the Messiah? He had already on several occasions proclaimed him so.

So - even in the presence of The Light of the World, even then he had his doubts.

And – it didn't end well for him did it?

Note that another Gospel account records that Jesus affirms John despite his question. Doesn't condemn or ridicule his doubt. Calls him great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

However Jesus didn't organise John's escape from prison did he? And that fact illustrates the difficulty of this subject, which I certainly can't fully explain in the 10 mins I've got this morning. There is no entirely satisfactory answer yet as to why Bad things happen to Good people, why sometimes we find ourselves in Darkness not of our own making. But a lifetime's experience has taught me that you often discover a lot about yourself and a bit more about God in the dark places of life

We cannot, I suggest, separate God from darkness any more than we can from light.

In Genesis 1 we read 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep and the Spirit of God was hovering there. God was in the darkness from the very beginning.

The other compelling reason we have from Scripture to suggest that God is with us in our darkness is that God the Son, endured the darkness of the cross for our sakes. My God, my God why have you forsaken me.

So darkness is part of the creative expression of God - and on the cross Jesus experienced a terrible darkness in order to procure our salvation. He understands and is with us in our darkness.

So – it's not cricket – but perhaps the Mike Brearley approach – spreading a little darkness, is not as crazy as it sounds. Causes us to think.

And while we're in thinking mode. We should think clearly about what our responsibilities are in helping others in their darkness.

I wasn't surprised last week when Nigel announced that we had collected 70 shoe boxes for Moldovan folk this Christmas. This congregation - I have learned - has a big heart for the disadvantaged, for those who find themselves in a dark place.

The writer of our passage from Isaiah felt a clear imperative from God to bring the good news to those who most needed it. Jesus himself adopted those words for his ministry of announcing the Kingdom of God – and so, I suggest, should we. May I encourage you - as I do myself - to continue to :

Bind up the broken hearted

Comfort all who mourn

Provide for those who despair.

There's plenty of opportunity for us at the moment for us to reach out to others who are not doing so well in the darkness – to stand with them in their troubles is usually what is most appreciated. Best I suggest to avoid the mistakes of Job's comforters and not give unsolicited advice.

Finally – a bit of Psalm 139, which I know many of you love , as do I.

And if I may add a small but important caveat. The first line 'Where can I go from your Spirit' and the following thoughts are not an expression of his being confined but his comfort that God is there for him anywhere and everywhere.

Where can I go from your Spirit?

Where can I flee from your presence?

If I go up to the heavens you are there.

If I make my bed in the depths, you are there also.

If I rise on the wings of the dawn

If I settle on the far side of the sea

Even there your hand will guide me

Your right hand will hold me fast

If I say surely the darkness will hide me

And the light become night around me

Even the darkness will not be dark to you

The night will shine like the day

For darkness is as light to you.

Closing Prayers

We give you thanks, O Lord, for these heavenly gifts;
kindle in us the fire of your Spirit
that when your Christ comes again

we may shine as lights before his face;
who is alive and reigns now and for ever.

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

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