



WELCOME TO ST PETER'S ASH



THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AT ST PETER'S IS CALLED TO CELEBRATE, LIVE AND REFLECT THE LOVE OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

20th DECEMBER 2020

ADVENT 4

<u>READINGS FOR TODAY</u>	PARISH OFFICE: Please phone or use e-mail to make contact TEL:01252 331161; e- mail: office@saint-peters-ash.org.uk BOOKINGS OF WEDDINGS & BAPTISMS – phone for an appointment on 01252 321517 or 331161 WEBSITE: www.saint-peters-ash.org.uk
2 Samuel 7 v 1 – 11, 16	
Romans 16 v 25 - end	
Luke 1 v 26 - 38	



CHRISTMAS ARRANGEMENTS

We will be putting a Nativity Themed Service online for use on Christmas Eve afternoon, as there can't be the usual Christingle Service in church this year.

There will also be NO Midnight Mass in church either. Instead we shall be posting a link to the Midnight Mass from Guildford Cathedral. Also, we shall be putting a service of Evening Worship online for you to use on Christmas Eve evening, or at any other time during Christmas.

On Christmas Day there will be an 8 am Holy Communion in St Peter's Centre and at 10 am a said Holy Communion in church. We are asking you to book in for these services as space will be limited, due to social distancing rules.

There will also be the text of a service for Christmas morning on the website for those who can't attend church.

On Sunday 27th there will be an 8 am Holy Communion in St Peter's Centre and a 10 am Holy Communion in church.

CHRISTMAS CARDS – we cannot use the usual pigeon hole system this year. Please hand your cards to a steward at the door, they will then be sorted and handed out to recipients at the next service i.e. handed in on Sunday, available on the following Wednesday or Sunday. Please don't look for them yourself, or handle other people's cards. Please do not give them to others in church personally, to keep contact down.

MOTHERS' UNION

Wishing all our members a very happy, healthy and peaceful Christmas. Looking forward to restarting our meetings as soon as we are able to meet again safely.
Barbara Ridley

CAROL SINGING

THE CAROL SINGING PLANNED FOR THIS AFTERNOON HAS HAD TO BE CANCELLED NOW THAT WE HAVE MOVED FROM TIER 2 TO TIER 3. BETTER LUCK NEXT YEAR!

FATHER KEITH AND CAROL WISH YOU ALL EVERY BLESSING FOR CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPIER AND HEALTHIER NEW YEAR!

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK – ST JOHN THE EVANGELIST

Exodus 33 v 7 – 11a; 1 John 1; John 21 v 19b - end

ST PETER'S PRAYER CHAIN - If you would like prayer for yourself or somebody else please phone: 01252 32292 or 01252 323037 This is a confidential service.

CARE AND SHARE - If you would like to donate any tins, packets, UHT milk, tea, coffee etc. for the shelves outside church, please leave items on the doorstep of the Rectory.

It would be nice to have some Christmas treats to put out this month! Thank you.

ST PETER'S CHURCH CALENDARS

Ideal Christmas presents, our calendar for 2021 has pictures of St Peter's and room for appointments. Only £5 - now available – at the back in church.

FROM ANOTHER CHURCH BULLETIN

Eight new choir robes are currently needed due to the addition of several new members and to the deterioration of some older ones.

Ladies, don't forget the rummage sale. It's a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Bring your husbands.

Please pray for the souls of all the recently Departed, among them: ELIZABETH STOKES (Liz's mother); PETER ROBERTS

SOME CHRISTMAS THOUGHTS FROM THE RECTORY

I wonder why it is that certain lines from poems first read at school, have stayed with me down the years? When thinking about what to say in this message, immediately, John Betjeman's poem 'Christmas' came to mind, as being particularly relevant, when Christmas 2020 will be scaled down and so different for all of us. These lines in particular stood out for me:

'And is it true? And is it true? This most tremendous tale of all, seen in a stained-glass window's hue, a Baby in an ox's stall? The Maker of the stars and sea become a child on earth for me?'

In his own inimitable way Betjeman encapsulates, in those few lines, what lies at the heart of Christmas for all who do believe the 'tremendous tale' to be true. What we should be celebrating with great joy is the amazing fact that the Almighty, All powerful, All seeing, All knowing Creator of the universe loves humanity enough to come and experience for Himself the life that he has given us. And, He has done so in spite of the many times we have turned away and ignored Him. He came so that all who believe in Him can be saved and enjoy eternal life.

This Christmas will be tough, deprived, as we are of spending time with many of those we love and care about. We will miss the things that have been taken away from us – the parties, the eating and drinking together, the Christmas services that won't be possible this year, and lots, lots more. But, we *can* take comfort in the fact that the great mystery of the Incarnation, that Betjeman is talking about, will still be as true this year as it always has been.

At the heart of every Christmas is Jesus - 'Immanuel' - God with us. What that says about God's desire to be part of our lives to support and guide us towards a better future, cannot be taken from us, even by a virus that threatens us in a way that no-one alive today has experienced before. Our ancestors faced many plagues and threats from the incurable diseases of their time, to us this is a novel thing and we are all struggling to take in what is happening. But God's love for us remains constant. In Jesus He stands with us, and, because He came to us in the way that He did, as both divine and human, we know that He completely understands the emotions that we are having. Jesus experienced for Himself the pain of grief, He saw the horrors of suffering, the anxieties of the poor and the marginalised, and He challenged the self-satisfied to think again about their priorities. His command to 'Love one another, as he loves us', has taken on even more importance at this time when isolation and fear have been blighting so many people's lives in the past few months. We may not be able to hug one another to give reassurance, but we can still spend time with people on the doorstep, on the phone, or on social media. It's not the same, but all of those things can show others how much we care.

We often lament the lack of time that we have to do the things we ought to be doing, especially at this time of year. The fact that we can't do some of those things is a real opportunity for us to refocus on what is really important in life. Personally, I have realised which things are most important to me, and which are merely nice to have, if they are available – like foreign travel, trips to London for exhibitions, the theatre etc. Of course, I regret the loss of jobs and the uncertainty that so many people who are involved in providing those things face, and no doubt I will be returning to some of them when it is safe to do so. But, I

hope that if or when I do, I won't forget the lessons learned about what is more important in my life than any of that i.e. spending time with people and sharing the challenging times as well as the good ones together.

Christmas in this time of Covid is an opportunity for us to focus on, and to share with the world the simple message at the heart of the festivities. The message that transcends all those other things that, for this one year, we have lost. Betjeman again:

And is it true? For if it is, no loving fingers tying strings around those tissued fripperies, the sweet and silly Christmas things, bath salts and inexpensive scent and hideous tie so kindly meant, no love that in a family dwells, no carolling in frosty air, nor all the steeple-shaking bells can with this single Truth compare – That God was Man in Palestine and lives today in bread and wine'.

When all the other Christmas traditions are stripped away, we still have Jesus who was given to us 2000 years ago in the stable, and keeps being given to us week by week in the sacrament of Holy Communion. He really is *the gift that keeps on giving* – as the hackneyed saying puts it. Jesus will never let us down, and he gives us hope for a brighter future, not just at the end of the pandemic, but onwards into eternity. Jesus' coming into the world is a story of restoration, an opportunity for us to regain all that was lost when humanity went its' own way rather than God's way. The wonderful prologue to John's gospel is a meditation on that theme of a new creation in Jesus. He was there at the beginning of creation, and he has come as the Word made flesh, to recreate all who put their trust in Him – *'to all who received Him, who believed in His name, he gave power to become children of God'* John 1 v 12.

I pray that in the still difficult months that lie ahead, we can all hold onto that single Truth, and allow Jesus to guide us through. He told us that he is with us always, until the end of time, he is *'the light that shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it'* John 1 v 5. In Jesus we see the glory of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth, and from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. So, wherever we are, whoever we can be with this Christmas, we can celebrate that, and rejoice in Jesus' presence with us whatever 2021 will bring.

I pray that you will all stay safe and that we will be able to be together much more by this time next year.

With my love and prayers, Father Keith.



Morning Prayer at 10 am on Sunday

If there is more than one person present, someone may wish to read the parts marked (L), everyone says the rest together. You can say alternate verses in the Psalm and in the Canticles. Please have a Bible to hand.

(L) O Lord, open our lips

All: and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

(L) Reveal among us the light of your presence

All: that we may behold your power and glory.

The fourth candle on the Advent Wreath, (or another candle,) is lit, and this prayer is said, reminding us of the Blessed Virgin Mary:

Blessed are you, sovereign Lord, merciful and gentle:
to you be praise and glory for ever.

Your light has shone in our darkened world
through the child-bearing of blessed Mary;
grant that we who have seen your glory
may daily be renewed in your image
and prepared like her for the coming of your Son,
who is the Lord and Saviour of all.

Blessed be God for ever.

This hymn is said or sung:

1. The angel Gabriel from heaven came
His wings as drifted snow his eyes as flame
"All hail" said he "thou lowly maiden Mary,
Most highly favoured lady," Gloria!

2. "For know a blessed mother thou shalt be,
All generations laud and honour thee,
Thy Son shall be Emmanuel, by seers foretold
Most highly favoured lady," Gloria!

3. Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head
"To me be as it pleaseth God," she said,
"My soul shall laud and magnify his holy name."
Most highly favoured lady. Gloria!

4. Of her, Emmanuel, the Christ was born
In Bethlehem, all on a Christmas morn
And Christian folk throughout the world will ever say:
"Most highly favoured lady," Gloria!

(L) The night has passed, and the day lies open before
us; let us pray with one heart and mind:

All: As we rejoice in the gift of this new day,
so may the light of your presence, O God,
set our hearts on fire with love for you;
now and for ever. Amen.

(L) A voice cries out in the wilderness,
'Make straight the way of the Lord.'
So let us listen, and turn to the Lord
in penitence and faith.

All: Turn to us again, O God our saviour,
and let your anger cease from us:
Lord, have mercy.

Show us your compassion, O Lord,
and grant us your salvation:
Christ, have mercy.

Your salvation is near for those that fear you,
that glory may dwell in our land:
Lord, have mercy.

All: May God our Father have mercy on us, forgive us our
sins, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

We now say together:

All Surely I am coming soon.
Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

- 1 'Behold, I am coming soon', says the Lord,
'and bringing my reward with me, ♦
to give to everyone according to their deeds.
- 2 'I am the Alpha and the Omega,
the first and the last, ♦
the beginning and the end.'
- 3 Blessed are those who do God's commandments,
that they may have the right to the tree of life, ♦
and may enter into the city through the gates.
- 4 'I, Jesus, have sent my angel to you, ♦
with this testimony for all the churches.
- 5 'I am the root and the offspring of David, ♦
I am the bright morning star.'
- 6 'Come!' say the Spirit and the Bride; ♦
'Come!' let each hearer reply.
- 7 Come forward, you who are thirsty, ♦
let those who desire take the water of life as a gift.

All To the One who sits on the throne and to the Lamb ♦
be blessing and honour and glory and might,
for ever and ever. Amen.

All Surely I am coming soon.
Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

We now say the collect for today Advent 4:

God our redeemer,
who prepared the Blessed Virgin Mary
to be the mother of your Son:
grant that, as she looked for his coming as our saviour,
so we may be ready to greet him
when he comes again as our judge;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

*Read 2 Samuel 7 v 1 – 11 & 16 followed by Psalm 89 v
1 – 4, 19 - 26 concluding with:*

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as
it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.

Read Romans 16 v 25 - end

(L) Alleluia, alleluia.
Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.
All: Alleluia.

Now read Luke 1 v 26 - 38

*Here are some thoughts on today's readings from Revd.
Carol:*

'What would have happened if Mary had said no'? That's a
question I have heard several times, indeed one of the
Curates at the Church of the Ascension, where I worshipped
for 20+ years, would ask that very question. Other questions
he asked were: Were there others God had asked before
Mary? Did God have anyone else in mind after Mary if her
response had been negative? All these questions are great
perhaps for a theological debate, but quite frankly they are
not really relevant, because Mary did say 'yes' to God.
Indeed, there is no doubt that Mary was the chosen one, and
to my mind, the only chosen one to carry and give birth to

the Son of God.

How do we know that for sure? Well, we only need to take a look at Joseph's family tree to see that he was a direct descendent of David. In fact, if verses 12 & 13 had been included in the Samuel reading this morning, you would have picked up on a promise that God had made to David about his future lineage: 'When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever.' So, by virtue of Mary's betrothal and subsequent marriage to Joseph, she was the chosen one.

As we heard in today's Gospel reading, Mary was betrothed to Joseph who it is thought to have been older than she. In fact, it was likely their impending marriage was arranged. Nevertheless, it's clear that Joseph did have a deep affection for Mary, as we can see from his response to her pregnancy. Though unsettled by it, he did not want to bring her shame, hence the idea of 'divorcing her quietly' – meaning he would just break off the engagement without making a big fuss about it. The reason for this is that Joseph was fully aware of what would happen to Mary and the impact it would have on, not only themselves, but also their wider family too, because they lived in a time when being pregnant outside of marriage – let alone the idea that anyone else other than the betrothed was involved - was really shameful and dishonouring to the family. Honour and shame wasn't something that could be brushed aside with a shrug of the shoulders saying 'let them say what they want to say, I'm keeping this baby anyway!' The kind of shame we are talking about would have meant that Mary would most certainly have faced being publicly stoned - probably to death. And her family would have been shunned by the rest of the community they lived in - probably for several generations. Joseph's feelings for Mary, I believe, is why he initially thought about going about things in this quiet way, and of course it could be that he too felt the shame and some dishonour too giving him cause for his reticence in 'going public'!

Some people would say it was Mary's destiny, it was her fate, it was in the cards, her life was planned out for her, and although we accept she was God's chosen one, just like Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, she could have simply said no. But she didn't and what this shows us is that Mary was indeed a young woman who had a deep faith and trust in the God whom she worshipped. We have to remember that it's widely thought that Mary was as young as 13 or 14 years old when all this happened – though there is no real evidence of this – which means she had to make a pretty big grown up decision that would affect the rest of her life.

So, what do we make of Mary saying 'yes' to God? Was she taken up in a moment of euphoria by being in the presence of the messenger from God? Was she so petrified that she thought she had better accept whatever lay ahead? Because we know she was most definitely frightened by the experience. Yet, in her fear was an acceptance, and obedience to what God was asking of her. Although there was uncertainty and life was not turning out how she thought it would, she would find joy in her life experiences. In fact, we know that Mary was so moved and joyful in her experience that when she later visits her cousin Elizabeth, she bursts into song, the song that we call the Magnificat. To get a flavour of the joy she felt here is a reminder of the opening sentences: 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for He has looked with favour on the lowliness of His servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is His name. His mercy is

for those who fear Him from generation to generation.' We also know that when Jesus was an adult, she was fearful for her Son, for what lay ahead in the path He was taking. Yet Mary receives joy in knowing that she has been blessed to have been the woman chosen to give birth to Him and nurture Him.

Perhaps you have had similar experiences to Mary, in that you had been wanting, or planned, to go in one direction, yet felt a strong sense of being pulled in another. Perhaps you felt that God has called upon you to do something that you really were not sure about, but because of your faith in Him you said 'yes' too. When these sorts of things happen, it can be both a lonely and frightening experience, but one thing is for sure, God does not abandon us, He is with us every step of the way and, ultimately, we too can experience the joy of His presence in our lives. Our obedience to God will always result in something good and better for us, and hopefully those around us too.

This week, we have lit the 4th Advent candle when we have been thinking about Mary, the mother of our Lord and Saviour. This candle is also known as the candle that represents joy and we have seen how, despite the challenges, fears and difficulties she faced, because of her faith and trust in God, Mary was able to still know joy in her heart. This joy was in the main given to her through Jesus. So, I would say to you, if you feel God calling (or pulling) you in a direction you may not want to go in, have faith, put your trust in Him, be obedient to Him. And together with Jesus, He will walk alongside you and you will know the peace and joy of His love as Mary did. AMEN

Now pause for your own reflections.

(L): We now affirm our faith in the words of the Creed:

All We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
was incarnate from the Holy Spirit
and the Virgin Mary and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son
is worshipped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic
and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism
for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.
Amen.

(L) Now it is time to awake out of sleep,
All: for the night is far spent and the day is at hand.

(L) Now is our salvation nearer than when we first
believed,
All: for the night is far spent.

(L) Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness
and put on the armour of light,
All: for the day is at hand.

(L) Put on the Lord Jesus Christ
and make no provision for the flesh,
All: for the night is far spent and the day is at hand.

We now say 'The Benedictus' together:

All: Look towards the east, O Jerusalem,
and see the glory that is coming from God.

- 1 Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel, ♦
who has come to his people and set them free.
- 2 He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour, ♦
born of the house of his servant David.
- 3 Through his holy prophets God promised of old ♦
to save us from our enemies,
from the hands of all that hate us,
- 4 To show mercy to our ancestors, ♦
and to remember his holy covenant.
- 5 This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
- 6 Free to worship him without fear, ♦
holy and righteous in his sight
all the days of our life.
- 7 And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the
Most High, ♦
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
- 8 To give his people knowledge of salvation ♦
by the forgiveness of all their sins.
- 9 In the tender compassion of our God ♦
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
- 10 To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the
shadow of death, ♦
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

All Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.

All: Look towards the east, O Jerusalem,
and see the glory that is coming from God.

*Now we turn to God in a time of prayer, adapted from
Common Worship by Fr Keith:*

As we pray to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
we say with Mary:

Lord, have mercy on those who fear you.
Holy is your name.

Your prophet of old foretold a day when a virgin would
Conceive and bear a son who would be called
God-with-us.
Help us to look forward to your deliverance
and to seek the fullness of your kingdom.

Lord, have mercy on those who fear you.
Holy is your name.

Your angel declared to Mary that she was to be
the mother of the Saviour.
Help every Christian person to be open to your word
and obedient to your will.

Lord, have mercy on those who fear you.
Holy is your name.

Mary rejoiced with Elizabeth and sang your praise,
'My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord.'
Help us to live joyful lives that sing your praise.

Lord, have mercy on those who fear you.
Holy is your name.

Mary bore a son of David's line,
a king whose reign would never end.
Bless all the nations of the world with Christ's gift of
peace. Be with all who are caught up in wars and acts of
terrorism, change the hearts of the violent to embrace
reconciliation and understanding.

Lord, have mercy on those who fear you.
Holy is your name.

The child Jesus grew in wisdom and stature
in the home of Mary and Joseph.
Strengthen our homes and families,
and keep under your protection all those whom we love.
This Christmas help us to be considerate to others in
what we do, so that we do not endanger those who are
close to us, especially the very vulnerable.

Lord, have mercy on those who fear you.
Holy is your name.

At the foot of the cross of Christ stood his mother,
and from the cross she received his lifeless body
in her arms.
Give comfort and healing to all who suffer, especially
those who have been infected with the Covid virus.
Be close to all who watch the suffering of those they
love.

Lord, have mercy on those who fear you.
Holy is your name.

The apostle John saw a vision of a woman in heaven,
robed with the sun.
Bring us with Elizabeth Stokes, Peter Roberts and all
those who have died in the faith of Christ
to share the joy of heaven with Mary and all the saints.

Lord, have mercy on those who fear you.
Holy is your name.

Almighty and everlasting God,
your handmaid Mary magnified your name
and rejoiced in your saving love:

Merciful Father, accept these prayers, for the sake of
your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

As Jesus taught us, so we pray: Our Father in heaven....

Evening Prayer for this week

This hymn may be said or sung:

For Mary, Mother of the Lord
God's holy name be praised,
Who first the Son of God adored
As on her child she gazed.

The angel Gabriel brought the word
She should Christ's mother be;
Our Lady, handmaid of the Lord,
Made answer willingly.

The heavenly call she thus obeyed,
And so God's will was done;
The second Eve love's answer made
Which our redemption won.

She gave her body for God's shrine,
Her heart to piercing pain,
And knew the cost of love divine
When Jesus Christ was slain.

Dear Mary, from your lowliness
And home in Galilee,
There comes a joy and holiness
To every family.

Hail, Mary, you are full of grace,
Above all women blest;
And blest your Son, whom your embrace
In birth and death confessed.

Let us pray:

Almighty God,
give us grace to cast away the works of darkness
and to put on the armour of light,
now in the time of this mortal life,
in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us
in great humility; that on the last day,
when he shall come again in his glorious majesty
to judge the living and the dead,
we may rise to the life immortal;
through him who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

God our Father,
the angel Gabriel told the Virgin Mary
that she was to be the mother of your Son.
Though Mary was afraid,
she responded to your call with joy.
Help us, whom you call to serve you,
to share like her in your great work
of bringing to our world your love and healing.
We ask this through Jesus Christ,
the light who is coming into the world.
Amen.

(L) May Christ the Sun of Righteousness shine upon us
scatter the darkness from before our path,
and make us ready to meet him when he comes in glory;
And the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us, and
remain with us, today and always. Amen.

(L) Let us bless the Lord.
All: Thanks be to God.

All: May the souls of the faithful departed, through the
mercy of God, rest in peace, and rise with Christ in glory.
Amen.

O Lord open our lips,
and our mouth shall show forth your praise.

O God make speed to save us.
O Lord, make haste to help us.

Reveal among us the light of your presence
that we may behold your power and glory.

A lamp or candle may be lit.

Blessed are you, Sovereign God,
creator of light and darkness,
to you be glory and praise for ever.
As evening falls, you renew your promise
to reveal among us the light of your presence.
May your word be a lantern to our feet
and a light upon our path
that we may behold your coming among us.
Strengthen us in our stumbling weakness
and free our tongues to sing your praise.
Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Blessed be God for ever.

This hymn may be said or sung:

Shall we not love thee, Mother dear,
whom Jesus loves so well?
And to his glory year by year
thy joy and honour tell?

Bound with the curse of sin and shame
we helpless sinners lay,
until in tender love he came
to bear the curse away.

And thee he chose from whom to take
true flesh his flesh to be;
in it to suffer for our sake,
by it to make us free.

Thy Babe he lay upon thy breast,
to thee he cried for food;
thy gentle nursing soothed to rest
the incarnate Son of God.

O wondrous depth of grace divine
that he should bend so low!
And, Mary, O what joy 'twas thine
in his dear love to know!

Joy to be Mother of the Lord,
and thine the truer bliss,
in every thought and deed and word
to be for ever his.

And as he loves thee, Mother dear,
we too will love thee well;
and to his glory year by year
thy joy and honour tell.

Jesus, the Virgin's holy Son,
we praise thee and adore,
who art with God the Father One
and Spirit evermore.

That this evening may be holy, good and peaceful,
we pray with one heart and mind:

Silence is kept.

As our evening prayer rises before you, O God,
so may your mercy come down upon us
to cleanse our hearts
and set us free to sing your praise
now and for ever. Amen.

A Psalm is said: Mon 84; Tue 48; Wed 89 v 1 - 37; Thurs 85; Fri 8; Sat 86 ending with:

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever.
Amen.

Two Scripture Readings now follow (see below). Between the two readings until 23rd December we say:

All Let us rejoice and exult
and give glory and homage to our God.

- 1 Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, ♦
whose judgements are true and just.
- 2 Praise our God, all you his servants, ♦
all who fear him, both small and great.
- 3 The Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns: ♦
let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory.
- 4 For the marriage of the Lamb has come ♦
and his bride has made herself ready.
- 5 Blessed are those who are invited ♦
to the wedding banquet of the Lamb.

All To the One who sits on the throne and to the Lamb ♦
be blessing and honour and glory and might,
for ever and ever. Amen.

All Let us rejoice and exult
and give glory and homage to our God.

From Christmas Eve onward we say:

All Christ is the image of the invisible God,
the firstborn of all creation.

- 1 The Father has delivered us from the dominion of
darkness, ♦
and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved
Son;
- 2 In whom we have redemption, ♦
the forgiveness of our sins.
- 3 He is the image of the invisible God, ♦
the firstborn of all creation.
- 4 For in him all things were created, ♦
in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.
- 5 All things were created through him and for him, ♦
he is before all things and in him all things hold
together.
- 6 He is the head of the body, the Church, ♦
he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead.
- 7 In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell; ♦
and through him God was pleased to reconcile all
things.

All Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.

All Christ is the image of the invisible God,
the firstborn of all creation.

Readings:

Monday Malachi 1 v 1 & 6 - end; Matt. 19 v 1 - 12
Tuesday Malachi 2 v 1 - 16; Matthew 19 v 13 - 15

Wednesday: Malachi 2 v 17 to 3 v 12; Matt. 19 v 16 - end
Thursday: Zechariah 2; Revelation 1 v 1 - 8
Friday: Isaiah 65 v 17 - 25; Luke 2 v 1 - 20
Saturday: Genesis 4 v 1 - 10; Matt. 23 v 34 - end

After the second reading we say:

My soul is waiting for you, O Lord:
in your word is my hope.

All My soul is waiting for you, O Lord:
in your word is my hope.

There is forgiveness with you,
so that you shall be feared.

All In your word is my hope.

Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit.

All My soul is waiting for you, O Lord:
in your word is my hope.

Gospel Cantic: The Magnificat (The Song of Mary)

At the beginning and end of the Magnificat we say on

Monday 21st December – O Oriens

O Morning Star,
splendour of light eternal and sun of righteousness:
Come and enlighten those who dwell in darkness
and the shadow of death.

Tuesday 22 December – O Rex Gentium

O King of the nations, and their desire,
the cornerstone making both one:
Come and save the human race,
which you fashioned from clay.

Wednesday 23 December – O Emmanuel

O Emmanuel, our King and our lawgiver,
the hope of the nations and their Saviour:
Come and save us, O Lord our God.

Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Boxing Day

When peaceful silence lay over all,
and night was in the midst of her swift course:
from your royal throne, O God, down from the heavens,
leapt your almighty Word.

1) My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit
rejoices in God my Saviour; he has looked with favour on
his lowly servant.

2) From this day all generations will call me blessed; the
Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his
name.

3) He has mercy on those who fear him, from generation
to generation.

4) He has shown strength with his arm and has scattered
the proud in their conceit.

5) Casting down the mighty from their thrones and lifting
up the lowly.

6) He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the
rich away empty.

7) He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, to remember his promise of mercy.

8) The promise made to our ancestors, to Abraham and his children for ever.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.

Repeat what was said at the beginning of the Magnificat for the appropriate day.

Prayers of thanksgiving are made for the day that is ending. Intercessions are offered for the church, the world and for individuals, the sick and the departed.

Our Father, who art in heaven ...

The Collects for this week:

God our redeemer,
who prepared the Blessed Virgin Mary
to be the mother of your Son:
grant that, as she looked for his coming as our saviour,
so we may be ready to greet him
when he comes again as our judge;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Almighty God,
give us grace to cast away the works of darkness
and to put on the armour of light,
now in the time of this mortal life,
in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us
in great humility; that on the last day,
when he shall come again in his glorious majesty
to judge the living and the dead,
we may rise to the life immortal;
through him who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Collect for Christmas Day:

Almighty God,
you have given us your only-begotten Son
to take our nature upon him
and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin:
grant that we, who have been born again
and made your children by adoption and grace,
may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Collect for Boxing Day (St Stephen)

Gracious Father,
who gave the first martyr Stephen
grace to pray for those who took up stones against him:
grant that in all our sufferings for the truth
we may learn to love even our enemies
and to seek forgiveness for those who desire our hurt,
looking up to heaven to him who was crucified for us,
Jesus Christ, our mediator and advocate,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

This hymn may be said or sung:

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here,
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell Thy people save,
And give them victory o'er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Dayspring, from on high,
And cheer us by Thy drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Key of David, come
And open wide our heav'nly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Adonai, Lord of might,
Who to Thy tribes, on Sinai's height,
In ancient times didst give the law
In cloud and majesty and awe.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

Let us pray:

Loving God, at this time of crisis when so many are suffering, we pray for our nation and our world. Give our leaders wisdom, our Health Service strength, our people hope. Lead us through these parched and difficult days to the fresh springs of joy and comfort that we find in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

A Family Prayer

Loving God, you know us and all that we are facing. We thank you that we can come to you as we are – with all our fears and concerns, our difficulties and challenges. Please draw close to each of us and those we remember before you now. Bring to us your peace and comfort. And fill us with your Spirit that we may be bearers of your grace and hope to others. As a country protect us, encourage us and keep us. In the name of your Son Jesus we pray. Amen

Lighten our darkness, Lord, we pray, and in your great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night, for the love of your only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

May the Lord, when he comes, find us watching and waiting and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen.

May the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

SERMON FROM BISHOP JO

Advent 4: The ordinary and the extraordinary

I imagine Mary kneading some dough one fine day in her parents' kitchen. A fairly ordinary girl living a fairly ordinary life, doing a very ordinary thing – pressing it, stretching it, pounding it, pulling it, no end to the beautiful texture and funny shapes - when an extraordinary thing happened. An angel pops up unannounced, as angels are wont to do – a little scary and dramatic, right there in the kitchen. You can imagine her saying perhaps, 'Did you get the right house?' Then, thinking of safeguarding concerns I'm sure, 'Shall I find my parents?' Then, after she's been addressed as 'highly favoured' thinking, 'O, please just wait while I run and take a shower and put on some decent clothes'. Doubtless later her mother might have asked, 'I hope you'd done the dishes and the surfaces were wiped and clean, darling'. No, no and no. God meets us in the midst of the ordinary, when we've got flour all over our hands. And what does the messenger of God announce? Essentially, into our nitty gritty a wider perspective: God. World. Saviour. I don't know if life was tough for her but I'm willing to bet it might have been – just the sort of circumstances, as for many of us now, that brings us to wonder is this what life is about? Is this all there is? And so the angel reminds, that since the beginning of time God had loved the world He created, and since early in the foundation of Israel had promised a Saviour. God. World. Saviour. But then finally he adds: Here. Now. You.

Ordinary girl kneading ordinary bread in an ordinary kitchen on an ordinary day. But the extraordinary thing about God is he loves the ordinary. It's through the ordinary things that God works in extraordinary ways, and even when we don't see it, when all we see it's the ordinary.

Mary listened. God. World Saviour. And responds: 'What? How? Me?'. Ordinary words though probably she said them in an extraordinary voice. [What? How? Me? Moi?]

Now, lest this angel starts to sound like some text message, I want to make clear that he was not confined to a tweet of 140 characters. So the angel explains in a little more detail what he meant, what God was doing. She was going to have a baby, God's baby, and this baby was going to be the greatest and be a king forever.

I picture her with the dough in her hands just as she was forming it into a loaf. God's bread, my hands, my oven. (Sorry about that pun – hard to resist). The divine extraordinary working in the human ordinary. That is God's way.

Mary discovered it was God's way with her cousin Elizabeth, who gave birth to another extraordinary baby in her old age. We know her exclamations of praise and excitement after she and Elizabeth meet up and compare notes. Over and over again she

discovered it was God's way with Jesus, as he did some extraordinary things with some very ordinary disciples. And still today.

As I go around this diocese I see over and over how God is doing extraordinary things with ordinary people in ordinary circumstances. In schools. In prisons. In car parks. Look on the website and find the story of the food being given away in some Camberley carparks in Old Dean and at St Mary's, given for the blessing of whoever may need it. At the other side of the diocese I met a man who through dropping a bag of ordinary groceries at the local foodbank has found his life turned around, stirred to do extraordinary things using his IT skills to create a digital inclusion project to support children in their learning from home during the pandemic. Two weeks ago I joined an online vigil to pray for those caught up in Gender-Based Violence and the Sex-trafficking industry – an ordinary hour where we were joined together in silence and lit a candle, trusting God to work in extraordinary ways. Yesterday I received a Christmas letter from a former teacher of mine, a NT scholar, who reminded me it was at a confirmation service at Holy Trinity Guildford – through an ordinary sermon on Mt 28 to go and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded' and now even in his late 80s continues to write the most extraordinary books that are translated to all nations. And here in today's gospel, a young teenage girl is called to bear a child, to be *the God-bearer*, to fulfil an utterly unique, the most ultimate bridging role between heaven and earth, between the divine and the human, between the spiritual and the physical – between the ordinary and the extraordinary.

We may be preoccupied, we may be resistant, we may be fearful... Yet God is present, in our homes, still popping up no matter our bubbles, still delivering messages no matter our isolation, still transforming ordinary people to do extraordinary things. It happens in that juxtaposition of God! World! Saviour! and What? How? Me? I wonder in what circumstances you might have uttered any of those words recently? And in particular, how you might bring them together.

I think of a young mum I spoke to not long ago, valiantly raising 3 young daughters who have had their share of struggles. 'I've learned so much from listening and supporting them that I realise I might have something to offer others. So I've signed up and am training to qualify as a counsellor. And d'you know, I realise what a blessing that is – as I listen to others it puts my own family situation in perspective. And helps me with what to say, how to cope'. Ordinary things that become extraordinary, even painful things that become redemptive. That is God's way. God, world, Saviour. What, how, me.

Yes, you. I am no Gabriel, no angel, but I do want to scatter some seed to set you wondering further. What extraordinary things might God seek to work through your seemingly ordinary life?

Whatever the ordinary parts of your life this day, this Christmas period, this new year: I wonder if you can identify some ordinary situations in your life where you might pin your ears back and listen afresh to God, seeking his call to you. It might be while cooking in the kitchen or digging in the garden. Or sitting in the chair. I urge you to dare to hold out your ordinariness - the 'what how me' stuff of your life - to the level of the divine extraordinary - 'God, world, Saviour'. There's a danger that this pandemic has closed down our horizons - and I urge you to be especially intentional in stretching them out again. And inviting God to interrupt you.

Our God who made the world interrupted it to send a Saviour. This is what we celebrate at Christmas. This is who we follow in discipleship. This is what brings us to tell and tend and teach and treasure and transform (the five marks of mission). To offer our lives to God for whatever.

Then I'd urge you to talk to someone about this. It might be your spouse, it might be a neighbour, it might be a spiritual director or a vocations adviser (those last two you track down through the Dio of Gfd website) to reflect on this. Even in tier 3 you can do over zoom or by phone or by meeting up for a walk & talk. About how your ordinary might become part of God's extraordinary.

To discern what God may want to get up to in the new year through you. To listen the soul into a place of discovery. To piece together your understanding and experience of the past with your circumstances in the present, with God's promises concerning the future. Essentially: God! World! Saviour! and What? How? Me?

That's what happened to Mary mother of our Lord 2000 years ago. And that's what kept on happening ever since. I think of the C5 Augustine, landing in Canterbury on a mission to bring the gospel to England. I think of Mary Sumner, founder of the Mothers' Union, over in Old Arlesford in 1876. I think of my New Testament professor, confirmed at HT Guildford.

Ever since the annunciation of Gabriel to Mary, we shouldn't be surprised, but expect God to be working out his extraordinary purposes through ordinary people, like you and me.

So, keep up the kneading, the digging, the walking: recognising how in the ordinary stuff of our lives God is at work in extraordinary ways.

Indeed Jesus talks about the yeast in such dough - which works often invisibly to make for tremendous transformation. He works in ordinary dough everywhere. He works even in dough that is full of gritty bits. He works again and again. He is working even when we don't see it. God's way is to come among us, to dwell with us and in us, and through us to raise life, to transform what is human ordinary into what is divine extraordinary.