

The Stratfield Mortimer Benefice of

St Saviour
Mortimer West End

St Mary and St John
Stratfield Mortimer

St John the Baptist
Padworth

St Mary's Church of England School

St John's Church of England School

Diocese of Oxford



The Parish Sunday Eucharist *for* The Second Sunday in Advent

10th December 2023 at 10 a.m. at St John's church, Mortimer

and online at Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6931233940>

Some years ago a teacher asked pupils to reflect upon the significance for Christians of the prophet John the Baptist. By way of introduction the pupils were asked which trailblazers they admired. One pupil, who hailed from the USA, cited Christopher Columbus and explained that, in 1492, Columbus had dared to think it possible to reach the East Indies by sailing west across an uncharted ocean. And, so, the pupil concluded, when Columbus found the 'New World' he became a trailblazer for millions. Another pupil, captivated by science, told how, about eighty years after Columbus, Nicholas Copernicus, a Polish priest and astronomer, had concluded that the theory that the earth was the centre of the universe was wrong and that the sun is the centre of our 'solar system.' And, the pupil concluded, whilst his views were considered at odds with the scriptures, and he faced much opposition, nevertheless, Copernicus became a trailblazer for science. Another pupil explained how, on 3rd December 1967, Christiaan Barnard conducted the first heart transplant and so became a trailblazer for heart surgery for which their family had particular cause to be thankful.

The Gospel passage for this second Sunday of our Advent odyssey is the story that begins St Mark's Gospel (1: 1-8) - the 'liturgical Gospel' of the year - and which recounts how 'John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness.' And, perhaps, like the pupils, it might give us pause to reflect upon the contribution of John the Baptist to the Christian 'way of the Lord' and, perhaps, to our response to the trailblazer from the wilderness.

John the Baptist's message is a call to 'repent' i.e. to confront, confess and turn from our own sins and to receive and celebrate together the grace of forgiveness. Mark, the Gospel writer, makes clear that he considers John the Baptist's ministry to be effective primarily because his message was his life: he lived what he preached and he was humble. We see that John saw his role simply as a 'trailblazer' for Christ and he is recorded elsewhere (John 3:30) as saying: 'He must increase and I must decrease.'

Perhaps the Gospel writer's hope was that in reflecting on the contribution of John the Baptist his readers might be encouraged to consider how we too might become, however humble, 'trailblazers' for Christ and for his way of justice and peace. Perhaps some of us might remember from our school days the anecdote about how, one day, a man was walking along the shore and, as he looked down the beach, saw a boy reaching down to the sand and picking up something and gently throwing it into the sea. When the man got closer to the boy he called out, 'Good morning. May I ask what you're doing?' The boy paused, looked up, and replied, 'Throwing starfish into the sea.' The man asked 'But, why?' The boy replied, 'The sun is up and the tide is going out and if I don't throw them in they'll die.' The man replied, 'But, can't you see that there are miles of beach here and starfish all along it and you can't possibly make a difference.' The boy listened politely and then knelt down and picked up another starfish and threw it into the sea and said... 'Made a difference to that one.' Perhaps Advent is a good time to reflect on whether and how we're making a difference.

With the help of a friend I discovered, quite recently, Alfred Delp's writings - from a Nazi death row - which have, perhaps, helped many to understand better the season of Advent. We'll put a note about one of his works - 'The Shaking Reality of Advent' - at the end of this order of service.

God bless, Paul

THE PARISH EUCHARIST FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

10th DECEMBER 2023

THE YEAR OF ST MARK'S GOSPEL

A warm welcome to the Parish Sunday Eucharist.

An induction loop is provided. To use, please turn your hearing aid to T.

Gluten free wafers are available for those who need them. Please inform one of the vergers who will pass the information on to the clergy.

Online: If you are not able to come to St John's you are warmly invited to share in the Parish's Sunday Eucharist online. And may God bless and renew us as we join together to worship. Thank you.

THIS 'HOLY MEMORIAL' is known by various names: 1) 'The Eucharist' - which means 'Thanksgiving' - because Jesus offered himself in love; 2) 'The Lord's Supper' - or 'Breaking of the Bread' - because we celebrate it as a shared meal; 3) 'Holy Communion,' - because we become one with Christ by receiving him; and 4) 'Holy Mass' - holy sending - because it gives us a mission: to go in peace to serve the Lord.

The 'objectives' of the Eucharist: The community gathers for the public celebration of the Eucharist in order to worship God; ask his forgiveness for sins; thank him for blessings received; listen to his voice in the Scriptures; present the needs of the world and our own needs too; offer our lives to him and his loving service; gain spiritual nourishment and recharge our weakened spiritual batteries by sharing life with him in Holy Communion. The simple structure of the Eucharistic celebration is organized around achieving these goals.

THE GATHERING SONG

**On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry
announces that the Lord is nigh;
awake and harken, for he brings
glad tidings of the King of kings.**

**Then cleansed be every breast from sin;
make straight the way for God within;
prepare we in our hearts a home,
where such a might guest may come.**

**To heal the sick stretch out thine hand,
and bid the fallen sinner stand;
shine forth, and let thy light restore
earth's own true loveliness once more.**

**All praise, eternal Son, to thee
whose advent sets thy people free,
whom with the Father we adore,
and Holy Spirit for evermore.**

THE GATHERING

Priest **+** In the name of God - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

All **Amen.**

THE GREETING - Words of Welcome and Introduction.

The greeting proclaims the presence of the Lord with us.

The Penitential Rite, the Gloria and the Opening Prayer follow. The purpose of these preliminary rites is to help the people, gathered for the celebration of the Eucharist, to join with each other as a worshipping community, and to prepare to listen to the Word of God and to celebrate the Eucharist - the Great Thanksgiving.

Priest The Lord be with you.

All **And also with you.**

The priest may introduce the Eucharist.

THE PRAYERS OF PENITENCE

The Invitation to Confession - we call to mind our sins that we may repent of them / turn from them and ask forgiveness of God and each other.

Priest My brothers and sisters, as we prepare to celebrate the mystery of God's love,
revealed to us in Word and Sacrament, let us call to mind our sins.

A pause for quiet reflection follows.

**When the Lord comes he will bring to light
the things now hidden in darkness
and will disclose the true purposes of the heart.
Therefore in the light of Christ let us confess our sins.**

cf 1 Corinthians 4:5

All **I confess to almighty God, and to you, my brothers and sisters,
that I have sinned through my own fault, in my thoughts and in my words,
in what I have done and in what I have failed to do.**

KYRIE ELEISON *is sung.*

The word 'mercy' is the English translation of the New Testament Greek word 'eleos' which, perhaps, has the same ultimate root as the old Greek word for oil, olive oil, which the ancients used extensively as a soothing agent for minor wounds, thus soothing, comforting and 'making whole' the injured part. The Hebrew word which is also translated as eleos and mercy is 'hesed', and means steadfast love. The Greek words for 'Lord, have mercy' are 'Kyrie, eleison,' that is to say, 'Lord, soothe me, comfort me, take away my pain, show me your steadfast love and make me/us whole.'

**Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.**

The Absolution

+ Almighty God, have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.

All **Amen.**

THE COLLECT

Priest Let us pray.

Together we spend a few moments in silence, realising, and giving thanks, that we are in the presence of God our Father to whom we make our prayers. The prayer 'collects' our thoughts.

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.

All **Amen.**

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

The Liturgy of the Word consists of readings from the scriptures; a sermon/homily, which expounds the readings; the Profession of Faith, which is the Creed of God's people; and the Prayer of the Faithful or General Intercessions in which the people of God intercede for all humankind and all creation.

In the Liturgy of the Word God speaks to us of redemption and salvation and nourishes us with his 'word.' We are not only listening to past history. The God who speaks to Israel and to the early Church speaks to us today through the power of the Holy Spirit working within us as we listen to him and as he reveals the pattern for our lives. 'The word of God is something alive and active: it cuts like any double edged sword but more finely...it can judge the secret emotions and thoughts' (The Letter to the Hebrews 4:12).

Either two or three READINGS FROM SCRIPTURE follow, the last of which is the Gospel.

THE FIRST READING – 2 PETER 3: 8 – 14. – To be read by Gwen Adshead.

Reader A reading from the Second Letter of St Peter.

There is one thing, my friends, that you must never forget: that with the Lord, 'a day' can mean a thousand years, and a thousand years is like a day. The Lord is not being slow to carry out his promises, as anybody else might be called slow; but he is being patient with you all, wanting nobody to be lost and everybody to be brought to change his ways. The Day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then with a roar the sky will vanish, the elements will catch fire and fall apart, the earth and all that it contains will be burnt up.

Since everything is coming to an end like this, you should be living holy and saintly lives while you wait and long for the Day of God to come, when the sky will dissolve in flames and the elements melt in the heat. What we are waiting for is what he promised: the new heavens and new earth, the place where righteousness will be at home. So then, my friends, while you are waiting, do your best to live lives without spot or stain so that he will find you at peace.

At the end of the reading:

Reader This is the word of the Lord.

All **Thanks be to God.**

Now we prepare to hear the Gospel (the Good News) and acknowledge that we are his people and called to be part of his mission to the world inasmuch as we share his message and his life with faith, hope and love.

THE GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Cantor Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

All **Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.**

Prepare a way for the Lord, *Luke 3: 4 – 6.*
make his paths straight,
and all mankind shall see the salvation of God.

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

THE GOSPEL READING – ST MARK’S GOSPEL 1: 1 - 8.

The Lord be with you.

All **And also with you .**

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to St Mark.

All **Glory to you, O Lord.**

The beginning of the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is written in the book of the prophet Isaiah:

Look, I am going to send my messenger before you;
he will prepare your way.

A voice cries in the wilderness:

Prepare a way for the Lord,
make his paths straight,

and so it was that John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. All Judaea and all the people of Jerusalem made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins. John wore a garment of camel-skin, and he lived on locusts and wild honey. In the course of his preaching he said, ‘Someone is following me, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to kneel down and undo the strap of his sandals. I have baptised you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.’

At the end of the Gospel:

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

All **Praise to you, O Christ.**

THE SERMON

We are a Eucharistic community - united around word and sacrament. Through the readings God has spoken to his people of his redeeming love and of the nourishment which his Spirit gives. The sermon reflects on our readings and relates them to our Eucharistic celebration and to our ordinary daily life.

After the sermon there may be a short period of silent reflection.

THE PROFESSION OF CHRISTIAN FAITH - THE CREED

We make the profession of faith in response to the word of God written in the Gospels and spoken in the sermon. We testify that God is our Father who gives us new life through his Son and who calls us together in the power of his Spirit to be a Eucharistic people, a ‘thanksgiving people’, a living community of his abiding self-giving love.

All **We believe and trust in God the Father who made the world.**

We believe and trust in his Son, Jesus Christ, who redeemed the world.

We believe and trust in the Holy Spirit who gives life to the people of God. Amen

THE PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL OR GENERAL INTERCESSION

We are invited to pray for all people and for all creation and for the needs of the Church’s mission in bringing Christ’s Gospel to the world. Through baptism we have been made one with Christ, our great high priest, and we share in his prayer before the Father for the needs of the Church’s mission to the world and for of people. Our prayer flows from our listening to the Gospel and sermon by which we have been made more aware of our Christian commitment.

This Prayer of the Faithful, or General Intercession, is announced and consists of a series of intercessions; we pray for the universal Church and its mission and for our bishop and for our benefice - our parishes and our two Church schools; for the world, for our Queen and country, for our local communities, families and friends; for the sick and suffering and for all in pain; and we remember those who have died. And in communion with Mary, St John the Evangelist, St John the Baptist and all the Saints of God we entrust one another and all people and all creation to God’s saving love.

Priest My brothers and sisters, let us pray to our heavenly Father in the power of the Holy Spirit and in union with Christ Jesus that we may be found vigilant and working for the kingdom of justice and peace.

The deacon or minister continues:

Heavenly Father, give grace to Christian people everywhere to seek Christ in the Scriptures; to recognize Christ in the breaking of the Bread; to find in Christ grace to live by the light of truth; and to strive in the power of Christ for your kingdom of justice and peace for all.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Heavenly Father, we pray for your blessing upon Justin our Archbishop, Stephen Archbishop of York, Steven our Bishop and Olivia our area Bishop. We pray for the renewal of Christ's mission in our parishes, and for your blessing on our federated schools of St Mary's and St John's, and that we may all be equipped for the mission which is before us...

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Heavenly Father, bless and guide Charles our King, our government, our parliament, our district and village councils, and give grace to all in authority that they may govern with wisdom and compassion and always seek justice and the common good...

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Heavenly Father, we pray for your blessing on our families and friends and neighbours and all the communities to which we belong. May we learn to love one another as Christ loves all...

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Heavenly Father, we pray to you for all who are suffering today... May the love of Christ bring them comfort and may the hope of the resurrection bring them peace.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Heavenly Father, we remember before you those who have gone before us... Bring us all, at the last, to be united in love's eternal joy.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Heavenly Father, in communion with Mary, the Blessed Mother, St John the Evangelist, St John the Baptist and all the saints, we commend all humankind and all creation to your unfailing love.

Priest Merciful Father,
All **Accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, Our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

At the Last Supper Christ 'took some bread and when he had given thanks, broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying "This is my body which will be given for you; do this in remembrance of me". He did the same with the cup...' (Luke 22:19-20). The Church, joyfully obedient to the Lord's command, celebrates the Eucharist taking care that our 'liturgy' corresponds to the words and actions of Christ: 1) Taking bread and wine - we take our own gifts to the Altar, such as our time and talents and our money for the poor and for ministry. 2) Giving thanks (the meaning of the word Eucharist) - in the Eucharistic Prayer the priest, in the name of us all, says the great hymn of our thanksgiving to God for the whole work of salvation, in which the offerings become the Body and Blood of Christ. 3) The breaking of the one bread is a sign of the unity of the faithful - a sign of the unity which comes through sharing in Christ. 4) And in Holy Communion we receive Christ. In this way, Sunday by Sunday and day by day, the Church tries to carry out what the Lord asked his disciples to do in remembrance of him.

THE PEACE

We acknowledge and give thanks for our unity with one another in Jesus Christ our Lord, which his death and resurrection have brought to us. He is the peace between us. The sign of peace echoes Christ's own resurrection greeting to his disciples. Before we share in the same bread we express our love for one another in Christ and pray for peace and unity (cf Luke 1.78,79).

Priest The dayspring from on high shall break upon us,
 to give light to those who dwell now in darkness
 and in the shadow of death,
 and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

cf Luke 1: 78,79.

All The peace of the Lord be always with you.
All **And also with you.**

THE OFFERTORY HYMN

**'Come to me', says Jesus,
 'all who are distressed;
take my yoke upon you,
 I will give you rest.**

**I am meek and humble,
 find, with me, release
from false airs and graces;
 come, and be at peace.'**

**Hear the call of Jesus,
 come, be deeply blessed;
his the invitation,
 you the honoured guest.**

**Here, where bread is broken,
 here, where wine is poured,
thankfully receive him,
 find your faith restored.**

**Pardon, feed and heal us,
 humble, courteous Lord,
gracious host, for ever
 honoured and adored.**

THE PRESENTATION AND PREPARATION OF THE GIFTS

*The peoples' gifts of bread and wine are brought to the altar. The offerings of money is made and promised to support the wider ministry and work of the Church.
Taking the Gifts: We give thanks to God for the gifts in the following words.*

BREAD

Priest Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this bread to offer, which earth has given and human hands have made. It will become for us the bread of life.
All **Blessed be God for ever.**

WINE

All Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this wine to offer, fruit of the vine and work of human hands. It will become for us the cup of salvation.
All **Blessed be God for ever.**

OUR TIME, TALENTS AND TREASURE/MONEY

All Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have the gifts of our time, talents and money to offer. May our offerings of our gifts be a sincere sign of our gratitude and our dedication to your service.
All **Blessed be God for ever.**

The priest prays quietly: Lord God, we ask you to receive us and be pleased with the sacrifice we offer you with humble, contrite and thankful hearts.

The priest washes hands as an act of cleanliness and as an expression of the desire for inward purification, praying quietly: Lord, wash away my iniquity; cleanse me from my sin.

PRAYER OVER THE GIFTS

Priest Pray my brothers and sisters, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the Almighty Father.
All **May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name,
 for our good, and the good of all his Church.**

Priest Amen.

Priest Lord, as you sustain us with your loving mercy, strengthen us with the bread of heaven that we may be merciful as Christ is merciful.

All **Amen.**

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

The Eucharistic Prayer is the centre and high point of the whole Christian celebration. This great prayer of praise and thanksgiving proclaims the wonderful works of God and through it we join ourselves with Christ in praise and thanksgiving to God the Father and in offering ourselves to him in union with Christ's self-offering on the cross. We express our share in the prayer, which is said on behalf of all the people, by listening inwardly and joining in the acclamations (joyful shouts or songs) and the Sanctus (the Holy, Holy, Holy which concludes the preface), the memorial acclamation and the great 'Amen' which concludes our Eucharistic Prayer.

Priest The Lord be with you.

All **And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

All **We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All **It is right to give thanks and praise.**

In the Preface we praise God for his mighty acts:

Heavenly Father, it is our joy always and everywhere to give you thanks
and to sing of the glory of your goodness through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And now we give you thanks because you prepared the way of your Son Jesus Christ
by the preaching of your servant John the Baptist,
who proclaimed him as the Lamb of God, our Saviour.

And so, with all the company of heaven we proclaim the glory of your goodness
and join in their unending hymn of praise:

All **Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

We pray to the Father for the sending down of the Holy Spirit and recall the Lord's Supper.

Priest We thank you, loving Father, because when we turned away
you sent to us your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

He gave his life for us upon the cross. He shows us now the way to live.

Send your Holy Spirit that these gifts of bread and wine
may be for us Christ's body and his blood.

On the night before he died, when darkness had fallen, Jesus took bread. He gave thanks,
broke it, and shared it with his disciples, saying:

‘This is my body, given for you. Do this to remember me.’

After they had eaten he took the cup of wine, gave thanks, and shared it with his disciples,
saying:

‘This is my blood, poured out for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this to remember me.’

So, Father, with this bread and this cup we celebrate his love, his death, his risen life.

As you feed us with these gifts, send your Holy Spirit upon us and change us more and more
to be like Jesus our Saviour.

Help us, Father, to love one another, as we look forward to that day when suffering is ended
and all creation is gathered in your loving arms.

And now with Mary, St John the Evangelist, St John the Baptist, and all your saints,
we give you glory, through Jesus Christ and in the strength of your Holy Spirit,
today and for ever.

All **Amen.**

HOLY COMMUNION

The communion rite lays strong emphasis on peace, unity and our prayer for forgiveness. We come together to the Lord's table in accordance with the Lord's command, 'Take, eat... take, drink', as a community bound together by the love of God manifest in Christ. We can all be confident in Christ's mercy as we respond to his call to come to his table. Our communal recitation of the Lord's Prayer - the prayer he taught us - prepares us for Holy Communion with our Lord.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

We bless God and pray for our world, our communities and our lives to be shaped by God's will; we pray for daily needs to be met, for forgiveness for wrongdoings, strength to resist temptation and protection from danger.

Priest Let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us.

All **Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.**

THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD

The priest takes the host and breaks it over the cup, praying quietly: 'May this mingling of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ bring eternal life to us who receive it.' 'Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread' (1 Corinthians 10:17)

Christ's gesture of breaking bread with his disciples at the Last Supper gave the Eucharist the name of the 'breaking of bread.'. This gesture signifies that we who share one bread and one cup are made one. The breaking of the Eucharistic bread becomes a sign of unity and charity as the one bread is distributed to the family of God's people.

Priest We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

All **Though we are many, we are one body, because we all share in one bread.**

The priest prepares quietly for Holy Communion. We may all join quietly in this prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, by the will of the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit your death brought life to the world. By your holy body and blood free me from all my sins and from every evil. Keep me faithful to your teaching, and never let me be parted from you. Amen.

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

Priest Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. *cf. John 1: 29*

Blessed are those who are called to his supper.

All **Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word, and I shall be healed.**

The sign of communion is more complete when given under both 'kinds' since then the 'sign' of the eucharistic meal appears more clearly. However, we live in exceptional times when, if you think right, communion may be received in one 'kind.'

The priest takes the host, raises it a little and shows it saying: The Body of Christ. And the same with the cup saying: The Blood of Christ. When receiving Holy Communion the response and assent to Christ is:

+ Amen.

DURING HOLY COMMUNION *The Choir may sing these hymns or other anthems or songs.*

**Like a candle flame,
flickering small in our darkness,
uncreated light shines through infant eyes.**

*God is with us, alleluia,
come to save us, alleluia.*

**Stars and angels sing,
yet the earth sleeps in shadows;
can this tiny spark set a world on fire?**

**Yet his light shall shine
from our lives, Spirit blazing,
as we touch the flame of his holy fire.**

PRAYER AFTER HOLY COMMUNION

Priest Let us pray.

The priest invites us all to pray that the Holy Eucharist will have its effect in transforming our lives and bring us all to God's kingdom. We pray together silently for a while before the Post Communion prayer.

Priest O Lord Heavenly Father, 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.

All **Amen.**

THE NOTICES FOR THE COMMUNITY ARE GIVEN.

THE CONCLUDING RITE

Priest The Lord be with you.

All **And also with you.**

THE BLESSING

Priest Christ the Sun of Righteousness shine upon you,
scatter the darkness from before your path,
and make you ready to meet him when he comes in glory.

+ And the blessing of almighty God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you for ever.

All **Amen.**

Let us go in the peace of Christ.

All **Thanks be to God.**

THE SENDING OUT or RECESSIONAL HYMN

**Long ago, prophets knew
Christ would come, born a Jew,
come to make all things new;
bear his people's burden,
freely love and pardon.**

*Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring!
sing, choirs, sing, sing, sing!
When he comes,
when he comes,
who will make him welcome?*

**Mary, hail! Though afraid,
she believed, she obeyed.
In her womb, God is laid:
till the time expected,
nurtured and protected.**

**Journey ends! Where afar
Bethlem shines, like a star,
stable door stands ajar.
Unborn Son of Mary,
Saviour, do not tarry!**

*Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring!
sing, choirs, sing, sing, sing!
Jesus comes!
Jesus comes!
We will make him welcome!*

'The Shaking Reality of Advent' - and Alfred Delp SJ

A friend told how twenty years after the end of World War II the German postal system released a series of stamps honouring eight of the countless people who served in the Resistance against the Nazi regime. Among those honoured with a commemorative stamp were Lutheran pastor and professor of theology, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and also the Jesuit priest Alfred Delp. Apparently Fr Delp was editor of a monthly 'The Voice of the Times' until it was suppressed in 1941. He then moved to a suburban parish where he helped Jews escape to Switzerland. Fr Alfred was arrested, interrogated, tortured and hanged in February 1945. He managed to write several pieces in secret in prison and somehow smuggled them out. Among them was an essay he wrote shortly before his execution called 'The Shaking Reality of Advent.' In that essay Fr Alfred suggests – and I abbreviate:

'There is perhaps nothing we...need more than to be genuinely shaken up. Where life is firm we need to sense its firmness; and where it is unstable and uncertain and has no basis, we need to know this, too, and endure it. We may ask...why the chaos where all appears hopeless and dark, and why there seems to be no end to human suffering... Here is the message of Advent: faced with him who is the Last, the world will begin to shake. Only when we do not cling to false securities will our eyes be able to see this Last One and get to the bottom of things. Only then will we have the strength to overcome the terrors... use these terrors to awaken us from sleep, as Paul says, and to show us that it is time to repent, time to change things. It's time to say, "all right, it was night; but let that be over now and let us get ready for the day." We must do this with a decision that comes out of the very horrors we experience. And because of this our decision will be unshakable even in uncertainty...

If we want Advent to transform us – our homes and hearts, and even nations – then the great question for us is whether we will come out of the convulsions of our time with this determination: Yes, arise! It is time to awaken from sleep... a waking up must begin somewhere...It is time for each of us to go to work – certain that the Lord will come – to set our life in God's order wherever we can... We need people who are moved by the horrific calamities and emerge from them with the knowledge that those who look to the Lord will be preserved by him, even if they are hounded from the earth.

The Advent message comes out of an encounter with God, with the gospel. It is thus the message that shakes – so that in the end the entire world shall be shaken. The fact that the son of man shall come again is more than an historic prophecy; it is also a decree that God's coming and the shaking up of humanity are somehow connected. If we are inwardly inert, incapable of being genuinely moved, if we become obstinate and hard and superficial and cheap, then... he will teach us... what it means to be placed in turmoil and to be inwardly stirred.

Then the great question to us is whether we are still capable of being truly shocked – or whether we will continue to see thousands of things that we know should not be and must not be and yet remain hardened to them. In how many ways have we become indifferent and used to things that ought not to be? Being shocked, however, out of our pathetic complacency is only part of Advent. There is much more that belongs to it. Advent is blessed with God's promises, which constitute the hidden happiness of this time. These promises kindle the light in our hearts. Being shattered, being awakened – these are necessary for Advent. In the bitterness of awakening, in the helplessness of "coming to," in the wretchedness of realizing our limitations, the golden threads that pass between heaven and earth reach us. These threads give the world a taste of the abundance it can have.

We must not shy away from Advent thoughts of this kind. We must let our inner eye see and our hearts range far. Then we will encounter both the seriousness of Advent and its blessings in a different way. We will, if we would but listen, hear the message calling out to us to cheer us, to console us, and to uplift us.'

Please donate regularly to support the Church's mission and work. *The church here needs your help in order to serve our villages, our diocese, our nation and our world in the future. Our doors were closed due to Covid 19 and with no regular Government or Church of England funding the parish lost significant income. Please see the website to see how to give efficiently. Thank you.*

