

NEWSLETTER

for the Churches of St Arvans, St Mary, Penterry,
St Deiniol, Itton, St James, Devauden & Holy Cross, Kilgwrrwg
forming part of the Severn Wye Ministry Area

IMPORTANT - PLEASE NOTE

St Arvan's Church is open during the day both for worship and private prayer, Following the lifting of Covid restrictions, Holy Communion may once again be received in both kinds, although there is, of course, no obligation to do so.

Our live-streamed services are as follows: Sunday Eucharist at 10. a.m., and a reflection & celebration of Night Prayer usually on Wednesdays at 8 p.m. They can be accessed on the St Arvans Parish Group page on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/vicaragecello1/> and are available to watch at any time The St Arvans Parish website can be found here:

<http://www.starvanschurch.org.uk/>

Please help to keep us informed of anyone who is in need or is isolated over the next weeks and months, and anyone in need of our prayer and support
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10th December 2023
The Second Sunday
of Advent
Year B

The Collect

O Lord, raise up, we pray, your power and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness we are grievously hindered in running the race that is set before us, your bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit, be honour and glory, now and for ever. **AMEN**

A reading from the prophet Isaiah

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

A voice cries out:

'In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.'

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

[40. 1 - 11]

Reader / This is the Word of the Lord
Response / Thanks be to God

Psalm 85 1 - 2, 8 - 13

**R Show us your mercy, O Lord,
and grant us your salvation.**

You have been gracious to your land,

O Lord, you have restored the good fortune of Jacob.

You have forgiven the iniquity of your people and blotted out all their sins.

**R Show us your mercy, O Lord,
and grant us your salvation.**

I will listen to what the Lord God is saying, for he is speaking peace to his faithful people and to those who turn their hearts to him. Truly, his salvation is very near to those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land.

**R Show us your mercy, O Lord,
and grant us your salvation.**

Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

Truth shall spring up from the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven.

**R Show us your mercy, O Lord,
and grant us your salvation.**

The Lord will indeed grant prosperity, and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness shall go before him, and peace shall be a pathway for his feet.

**R Show us your mercy, O Lord,
and grant us your salvation.**

A reading from the second letter of St Peter [3; 8 - 15a]

Do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and

everything that is done on it will be disclosed. Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home. Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation

*Reader/ This is the Word of the Lord
Response / **Thanks be to God***

Gradual Hymn

Alleluia, alleluia!
Prepare a way for the Lord.
Make his paths straight,
and all mankind shall see
the salvation of God.

Alleluia!

The Lord be with you:
And also with you

Listen to the Gospel of Christ
according to St Mark

Glory to you, O Lord.

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,"' John the baptiser appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming

after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

[St Mark 1.1 - 8]

The Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you, O Christ

For Your Prayers

That we may hear the voice of St John the Baptist and prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of the Lord
The peoples of Gaza and Israel
& for lasting peace in the Middle East
The people of Ukraine and a just and peaceful end to the war there
Those who suffer as a result of the climate emergency
For responsible stewardship of our planet
For compassion and responsibility in those elected to govern us.
For migrants & refugees, and all forced to flee from their homelands

For the Church:

For the bishops of the Church:
Cherry, Bishop of Monmouth, Philip, Episcopal Visitor of the Society of the Holy Cross in Wales, Justin, Archbishop of Canterbury. & for all who hold and teach the Catholic faith that comes to us from the Apostles.
All bishops, priests and deacons and all baptised Christians
For the reunion of all Christians: for Pope Francis, for Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew, & for the leaders of the Reformed traditions
For the Severn Wye Ministry Area, for its priests, licensed lay ministers and all its people.

For the Sick & those in need:

Roy Staples, Ralph Hamilton, Sylvia; The Revd Helen Rodwell; Elisabeth; Lisa; Anne-Louise; Helen; Abigail; Mary; Peter; Kenneth Cameron; Ken Reece; Margaret; Margot Davies, Margi.

For the Departed:

The recently departed: Rosemary Pamela Higgs; Gordon Hickman; our own departed relatives & friends, & those whose anniversaries of death fall at this time: Ronald Harry; Audrey Reece

A Prayer of Spiritual Communion

My Jesus, I believe that you are in the Blessed Sacrament.
I love you above all things, and I long for you in my soul.
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart.
As though you have already come, I embrace you and unite myself entirely to you; never permit me to be separated from you. Amen.
(The Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament)

The Jereboam Interview

We continue our series of extracts from the Jerusalem and Galilee Gazette, an imaginary first-century newspaper. Week by week the correspondent Jereboam interviews various people whose lives have been affected in some way by Jesus Christ and his teaching.

Our thanks to the Parish of St Catharine's Chipping Campden & to the author for permission to reproduce 'Jereboam'

Joanna

Jereboam: If I've understood correctly, you're a cousin of John – the one they call "the Baptist".

Joanna: Yes, that's right: our fathers were brothers. John and I know each other pretty well.

Jereboam: Excuse me for saying this – and I haven't met John myself – but I understand that he's quite a stern man, even perhaps rather angry.

Joanna: No, no, on the contrary: he's very sensitive...open and kind.

Jereboam: Somehow I've been given a different impression.

Joanna: John has always sensed people's full potential. He sees each person's gifts. At the same time it upsets him when this potential is distorted by weakness. That's probably when he might appear stern. John tries to wash away any negative influences. For him it's almost like a physical process. I suppose that's how he came to start his ministry of baptism.

Jereboam: And he's always known Jesus?

Joanna: Yes. They're related too: in their case I think it's their mothers who have the family connection. Anyway,

there was always a strong understanding between the two boys, even though they lived quite a distance away from one another.

Jereboam: I wonder what they used to speak about as children.

Joanna: As I recall, John would often talk about people he met. Jesus didn't say so much, but he'd encourage John. He'd say, "Yes, I think you're right" or "I agree" or something like that. So, whilst John would react to everything and discuss it, Jesus observed a great deal, but you felt that he was waiting for his opinion to mature. John was more immediate, but nothing escaped Jesus' attention.

Jereboam: That's interesting. Just one more thing: is this rumour true about John eating locusts? I can't help feeling intrigued...

Joanna: I'm sorry, I don't know. You'd need to ask him that yourself.

THIS WEEK

Sunday is the Second Sunday of Advent we hear Isaiah write of a voice that cries out in the wilderness, "Prepare the way of the LORD! Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God!" These lines from the prophet are repeated in St Mark's Gospel as we are introduced to John the Baptist who prepares the way for Jesus. John says, "One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit."

Wednesday is the feast day of St Lucy, and Thursday that of St John of the Cross

We focus on the first readings from the Prophet Isaiah this week. With the Babylonian Captivity, the temple was destroyed, the leaders of the people were taken away to Babylon and a remnant was left behind. A life-threatening desert separated the people. In this context, Isaiah proclaims God's vindication of the people in exile. The desert will be reborn. A highway will bring their liberation. And the signs will be that there is healing and peace. "Comfort, give comfort to my people," says the Lord. The valleys will be filled in the mountains levelled - every obstacle will be overcome - to build a highway for our God to come and save us.

The people can hardly believe the good news. They are weak and weary of their captivity. Isaiah proclaims, "They that hope in the LORD will renew their strength, they will soar as with eagles' wings." The people have been at a distance from the Lord for some time and were not obeying the commandments. The Lord says, "I am the LORD, your God, who grasp your right hand; It is I who say to you, 'Fear not, I will help you.'" God promises them that if they follow his teachings, "Your descendants would be like the sand... their name never cut off or blotted out from my presence." The final first reading this week is a piece from the book of **Sirach** in which the prophet Elijah is praised. Elijah, who was destined to come again to restore order before the day of the Lord, is seen in the reading from St **Matthew's Gospel** to be John the Baptist.

Next Sunday, the Third Sunday of Advent, offers us more of the promise. The words used by the prophet Isaiah to describe God's vindication are the ones Jesus points to as describing his own mission: "The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favour from the LORD and a day of vindication by our God."

A homily for the Second Sunday of Advent

+ Advent is meant to be what we call these days a reality check. It brings us up short, and confronts us with some fairly searching questions. But the way things are, if Advent is observed at all, it's only as a brief preparation for Christmas. Yet the searching questions we are meant to be asking ourselves at this time of year have nothing to do with ticking off on our lists what presents we've bought, or how much food we need to buy, or who we're going to invite for Christmas lunch. They are about our consciences and those things we really don't want to confront at all - and which the surrounding culture teaches us to shy away from - thoughts of heaven, hell, death and judgement - those things we are jolly

well going to have to confront in some way sooner or later.

Christmas - in just a couple of weeks now - is the celebration of the great mystery of the Incarnation of Christ and the salvation and redemption of the human race by God's taking our human flesh and living as one of us. The Incarnation blesses material things and makes them holy. Advent, though, presents us with the counter-cultural thought that it might be a good idea to take stock and come to terms with our own human vulnerability before we get swept up into the delightful distractions of parties and decorated fir trees, turkey and plum pudding and the less than delightful frenzy in the shops or on the internet. Because as the second letter of St Peter tells us today, the coming of the Lord (and we can also read that as meaning the ending of our lives) may come like a thief in the night and take us unawares.

The difficulty we Christian believers have these days *in the culture in which we all live* is how do we do that - in a broader sense, how do we make the faith the real and living centre of our lives and not just a kind of optional and increasingly eccentric add-on which most other people find quite incomprehensible?

There's a particularly theory doing the rounds about the supposedly pagan influence on Christmas carols - largely due to the fact that some of them speak about running deer and holly and ivy and having a good time and all kinds of northern European things not mentioned in the scriptural accounts and unknown to the church for centuries. It's asinine nonsense, of course; our carols only seek to do what we should all be doing all the time - rooting the reality of the coming of the Saviour into our lives as and where we live them - exactly what the mediaeval and Renaissance painters did in their nativity scenes - there's absolutely nothing pagan about that. Or if there is, it's a paganism baptised and redeemed, treated as preparing the way for a fuller revelation of God. There's nothing at all wrong with that... In what we are now preparing to celebrate, God is in Christ reconciling

the world to Himself - *our world*, not only the world of 1st century Judea. Christ is the divine light, shining in the darkness of a world gone astray and the darkness of a human nature alienated from its own deepest longings and source of life and joy. Without that light, the darkness would overcome us leading to a contempt for truth and justice, beauty and innocence of heart, an indifference to spiritual things and an avoidance of the thought of our own coming to judgement, of our being accountable for what we do and how we use the time given to us. Advent is about watching and waiting for the One who alone can save us from all that; it's the coming of salvation not only *then* but now.

We know very well that Advent has largely been suffocated by commercial interests - in fact it's hard not to feel a bit like King Canute rebuking the incoming tide in encouraging people to find a little bit of time and space for Advent reflection, when for probably a majority of people Christmas has already started - in any case, when do we have the time... ?

We know, too, that a superficial commercial culture feels decidedly uncomfortable with the deep mysteries of life and what lies beyond, when what it is really concerned with is selling more and more stuff to more and more people, or a relentless self-promotion to elbow ourselves to the front of the queue to receive life's prizes. But in reality, meditating on these themes - not in a spirit of puritanical, life-denying miserableness, but in finding time to think about what really matters in life, and what we might be missing - is hardly discordant with the "Christmas spirit" of peace and goodwill.

John the Baptist's message isn't that of a killjoy, he isn't saying 'bah humbug!' or anything approaching that. John, despite his forbidding exterior, is telling us to sort out our priorities so that we can first understand and then live out the joy that is to come.

So we do need to be able to sort out in our own minds the difference between

the real message of Advent and Christmas and the peripherals which may add to our enjoyment and are great if they underline the essential message of God's solidarity with us, and our duty to show mercy and love to each other, but also run the risk of distracting us from it, if they end up just as substitutes for the real thing. They're great, they add to the sum of enjoyment, and we shouldn't be suspicious of that, but they aren't the central message - they are only by-products of it .

Advent as a season of preparation exists, even if only in the corners of our own minds. To say to us that if we don't take on board what the Birth of Christ really means, there is a great joy and a profound meaning that we are in danger of missing altogether. Now having a good time isn't something followers of Christ should be afraid of - in this world God has made for our enjoyment - but at this time of year our faith presents to the world the paradox that a lot of people don't get anymore of taking time out to prepare for a great feast, because salvation, the true message of this time of year, offers us a joy that needs reflection in order to approach it, and appreciate it more deeply, and - in the coming of Christ among us - it speaks of something so utterly glorious that it would frighten us, just as it did the shepherds on the hillsides, if we were to see it face to face in this flawed, fragile, and fleeting world. +
"Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,"

Thought for the Week

"With the divinest Word, the Virgin Made pregnant, down the road Comes walking, if you'll grant her A room in your abode"

-St John of the Cross - translated by Roy Campbell

SERVICES IN OUR CHURCHES

10th December 2023:

The Second Sunday of Advent

10 a.m. Sung Eucharist at St Arvans
Hymns: (*New English Hymnal*)

12; 8; 16; 5

11.30 a.m. Advent Liturgy of the Word at St Deiniol's, Itton

NEXT SUNDAY

17th December 2023:

The Third Sunday of Advent

9 a.m. Holy Eucharist

at St James' Devauden

10 a.m. Sung Eucharist at St Arvans

Readings at the Eucharist:

Isaiah 61. 1-4, 8-11;

Psalm 126

or Canticle: Magnificat (St Luke 1. 47-55)

1 Thessalonians 5. 16-24;

St John 1. 6

For services in the wider Ministry Area please see www.severnwyema.co.uk

2024 Calendars from St James Church, Devauden are now on sale

featuring some superb local photography as seen in the photographic competition earlier in the year. £10 while stocks last! Available from Devauden Village Shop, also at St Arvan's Church

Advent

During Advent this year in the Ministry Area we are going to open the live-streamed Wednesday evening celebration of Night Prayer at St Arvan's to a congregation. It will be preceded by a seasonal reflection and a period of silent prayer before the Blessed Sacrament

All are very welcome to join us for this time of preparation and renewal as we approach Christmas.

What's On

St Arvans Drop in Tea & Chat

2.30–4 p.m. at the Meeting Rooms
Everyone Welcome

January 13th
& every second Saturday
of the month

Childrens activity table

For assistance or a lift
please ring Diane on 628084

**The Severn Wye Ministry
Area Prayer Group meets
each Thursday at 7.30 p.m.
In one of our churches
All are welcome!**

14th December
21st December
at The Cedars, Chapel lane,
Pwllmeyric

further dates to follow

Advent & Christmas 2023

Friday 15th December:
6 p.m. Carols around the
Christmas Tree in St Arvans
Churchyard
with Chepstow Town Band
held in church in bad weather
Refreshments after the carols

Saturday 16th December
7 p.m.
Christmas Concert
at St Deiniol's, Itton
With St Woolos Sinfonia
Chamber Music – Carols – Readings

Tickets £10 (students, under 16s free)
Available on the door
Proceeds for St Deiniol's church funds

SUNDAY 17th December:
The Third Sunday of Advent
9 a.m. Holy Eucharist
at St James' Devauden
10 a.m. Sung Eucharist
at St Arvans

Tuesday 19th December 2, 2023
Shirenewton Primary School's
Nativity Play
'The Little Red Robin'
St Deiniol's Itton at 10 a.m.

Wednesday 20th December:
7 p.m. Nine Lessons & Carols
by candlelight at Itton

Friday 22nd December:
6 p.m. Nine Lessons & Carols
at St Arvans

SUNDAY 24th December:
The Fourth Sunday of Advent
10 a.m. Sung Eucharist
at St Arvans
CHRISTMAS EVE

4.30 p.m. Carols by Candlelight
at St Mary's, Penterry
6.30 p.m. Christmas Eve Carol
Service at St James, Devauden
11 p.m. Midnight Mass
(*The first Eucharist of Christmas*)
at St Arvans

Monday December 25th:

CHRISTMAS DAY

9 a.m. Holy Eucharist with Carols
at St James, Devauden
10 a.m. Christmas Morning Family
Eucharist at St Arvans
11.30 a.m. Holy Eucharist with Carols
at St Deiniol's, Itton

**There will be a celebration of the
Eucharist in the Lady Chapel
at St Arvans each day at 10 a.m.
throughout Christmas Week**

SUNDAY 31st December:
The First Sunday of Christmas
(*The Holy Family*)
10 a.m. Sung Eucharist
at St Arvans

Ministry Area Prayer

Dear Lord,
we thank you for the opportunity
to work together as a Ministry Area.
May we engage with each other
with faith and encouragement.
May we manage each situation
with wisdom and mutual respect.
May we serve with integrity,
creativity and purpose.
May we speak with openness
and gentleness.
May we offer our gifts, time
and finances with generosity.
May we face each challenge
with courage and the desire
to grow through it.
May we all be drawn deeper
into our relationship with you
and be known as your disciples.
Help us to show your love, proclaim
your Good News and grow your Kingdom
in this place.
We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ,
our Lord and Saviour. **AMEN**

A Prayer for Ukraine

written by Ukrainian Christians

O Lord our God, look down with
mercy on the Ukrainian people.
Protect and save them from the unjust
aggressors who seek to subdue them.
Grant them steadfast trust in your
mercy and protection.
O Mother of God, who gave us your
miraculous icon at Zarvanytsia,
intercede for the Ukrainian people,
who run to the shelter of your mercy
in their times of need.
O Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on
us. Grant peace and protection to the
people of Ukraine. Give them strength
and courage to defend what is good,
right, and holy. Keep them safe from
harm and provide for all their needs,
both temporal and spiritual.
Hear our prayers, O Lord, and deliver
us from distress, for You are merciful
and compassionate and love mankind.
To you we give glory: the Father,
the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
now and for ever. **Amen.**