

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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17th December 2023
The Third Sunday
of Advent [Year B]
'Gaudete Sunday'

The Collect

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

A reading from the prophet Isaiah

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion – to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. For I the LORD love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. Their descendants shall be known among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed. I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

[61. 1 - 4, 8 - 11]

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

Psalm 126

R/ The Lord has done great things for us

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, then were we like those who dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy.

R/ The Lord has done great things for us

Then they said among the nations, 'The Lord has done great things for them.' The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad indeed.

R/ The Lord has done great things for us

Restore our fortunes, O Lord like the watercourses of the Negev. Those who sowed with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed, will come again with joy, shouldering their sheaves.

R/ The Lord has done great things for us

A reading from the first letter of St Paul to the Thessalonians

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil. May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless

at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

[5; 16 - 24]

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

Gradual Hymn

Alleluia, alleluia!
The Spirit of the Lord
has been given to me.
He has sent me
to bring good news to the poor.
Alleluia!

The Lord be with you:
And also with you

Listen to the Gospel of Christ
according to St John

Glory to you, O Lord

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, 'I am not the Messiah.' And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the prophet?' He answered, 'No.' Then they said to him, 'Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' He said, 'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord,"' as the prophet Isaiah said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, 'Why then are you baptising if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?' John answered them, 'I baptise with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.' This took place in Bethany across the

Jordan where John was baptising.

[*St John 1. 6 - 8, 19 - 28*]

This is the Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you, O Christ

For Your Prayers

That we rejoice as we prepare for the great feast of Lord's birth
For all musicians, particularly for choirs and organists at this season
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: Gordon Hickman; Jeremy Dowding, priest; Robert Prescott, priest, James Esherwood; our own departed relatives & friends, & those whose anniversaries of death fall at this time: Reg Owens; Nick Hoskins; Michael Houghton, bishop.

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'

Zare

Jereboam: That text Jesus read out this afternoon sounded very familiar, but I can't remember which prophet said it. You know: "The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me." Was it Amos?

Zare: I have a feeling it was Isaiah, but maybe it doesn't ultimately matter who says these things. If God inspires the words in the first place, he can surely choose whom he wishes to utter them on his behalf.

Jereboam: You're probably right...which reminds me of something that struck me about John the Baptist the other week.

Zare: What was that?

Jereboam: Well, a lot of what he said wasn't new at all. Much of the time he was quoting from the Scriptures. All that about making a straight way for the Lord and so on... As John himself pointed out, that's taken from our friend Isaiah again.

Zare: In John's position, if I felt called to serve as God's messenger, I'd probably be wary of adding too many original ideas of my own. I'd feel I were on safer ground if I followed the prophets of old very closely.

Jereboam: Do you think anybody could be a prophet then? Just quote what they say in the Scriptures...

Zare: In a small way, maybe anyone could be.

Jereboam: And if we're correct...well, you remember when that priest asked John whether he was Elijah, and he answered "no"?

Zare: Perfectly truthfully, I'm sure.

Jereboam: Of course, but when he said that, he could perhaps have added something like: "It shouldn't make any difference whether I'm Elijah or not. The message should be the same."

Zare: Yes, I'd agree with that. Here's another thought: let me try to put it into words. See what you think.

Jereboam: All right.

Zare: Well, we all aspire to the ways of God.

Jereboam: I'm with you so far.

Zare: At those moments when we come closest to achieving that aspiration, when we come within touching-distance of the ways of God, then – and only then – do we find ourselves able to speak authentically on his behalf. The difference, as I imagine it, is that real prophets spend much of their lives in that exalted state.

Jereboam: That sounds plausible...not that we're really in a position to know.

Zare: I guess not.

THIS WEEK

The Third Sunday of Advent offers us more of the promised hope. 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." On Sunday, we reach December 17th and in these last eight days of Advent, when we hear the great O anthems at the office and at mass, the focus returns to the gospels with stories from Jesus' family in the time before he was born. In st

Matthew's genealogy, we see the ancestors of Jesus.

Next Sunday is the Fourth Sunday of Advent, and also Christmas Eve. This year's short season of Advent comes to a close. We head the account in St Luke's Gospel of the Annunciation, the moment when a troubled Mary is told she has found favour with God and she will conceive and bear a son. She questions: "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" Then declaring herself the handmaiden of the Lord, she accepts: "May it be done to me according to your word."

A homily for the Third Sunday of Advent

+ As we all know we shouldn't really think of Advent as just being a preparation for Christmas. And we shouldn't think of it either as a kind of mini-Lent, a few short weeks of penance and austerity before the joyful celebrations surrounding Our Lord's birth on the 25th of December. It's a season and it's a journey in its own right, and to an extent it doesn't really depend on the destination we reach at the end of it.

It's inevitable that, as we prepare to celebrate the coming of the Saviour, we should be concerned with the past – and I don't mean the sanitised Victorian past of Dickensian Christmas nostalgia and sentimentality, but a looking back to the Gospel accounts of the event itself in the Bethlehem stable, and a pondering on its significance for us and for the world in which we live. Advent, then, isn't not only about the past, but about the eternal significance of God becoming a human being in Jesus Christ and what that means for us, our present and our future.. St Bernard of Clairvaux, that fascinating and multi-faceted theologian of the middle ages, was fond of speaking about the "Sacrament of Advent." He says that the kingdom of God is already in the midst of us, the mystery of Christ is already present in the world. He enters into the lives of those who take him for their light, their strength and their salvation. Advent, then, doesn't

only commemorate the coming of Christ as a historical event, it isn't only a devotional preparation for the Feast of Christmas, it doesn't only look forward to the end of time and the last judgement. It is concerned with the presence of God in our world and in human time in Jesus Christ his Incarnate Word, and with the presence of Christ in our own lives as our Saviour, as our messiah, our deliverer, the one who brings about in our own lives the promises of God to his people. The mystery of the coming of Christ is not only a past and future event but something which happens here and now. That's also the message of John the Baptist.

The Gospel this morning makes it very clear that John the Baptist was the last and greatest of the prophets, he was the "bridge" if you like, between the Old and New Testaments; and the Gospel also makes it clear that perhaps the most important thing about him is that he always points away from himself and towards the person of Christ. He adamantly denies that he is the Messiah, he refuses to accept any personal status for himself, but he rather directs the attention of those who listen to his message towards the One who is to come, the Light of the World, the Messiah, the Christ of God. John in the desert, in the wilderness, prepares himself to recognise and receive the Lord, whilst also allowing Jesus to reveal himself to the world. He doesn't get carried away by the importance of his role, he keeps his ego constantly under control. Undoubtedly he was a celebrity for the people of his time, the crowds from the towns and cities flocked out into the desert to hear him, but in our terms he is an *odd* celebrity because he is always saying who he isn't. Don't look at *me*, he says, look at my message which is about the one who is to come after: so, don't look at *me*, look at *him!* John the Baptist has a great deal to say to each and every generation. But we have to be rather careful. St John the Baptist isn't the eccentric, irascible, colourful character probably many people mistook him for, and still mistake him for. His message is

far more subtle than that. Because the Church's sharing in the prophetic ministry of John isn't about expressing our own opinions or frustrations - it's not about complaining about the perceived evils of the modern world. However satisfying that might be on occasion, it usually amounts at best to little more than self-indulgence, or, most likely leads to a closing off of people's ears and minds to the positive message of the coming of Christ. The Church, like Christ himself, isn't here to condemn the world, but to point towards the possibility of its redemption and its fulfilment. The message we bring is one of hope and joy not despair, it's about the offer of the transformation of our lives in relationship with the God who has already become one of us to lead us to the life of God's kingdom, and to bring us to a vision of how that life can be lived here and now.

Of course, like John the Baptist, we shouldn't be afraid to say that, left to our own devices, we *are* without hope, because our only hope is in the one who is God, Jesus Christ our Lord. And the message of Advent - and of the coming celebration of Christmas - is precisely that we are *not* left to our own devices, because God is with us.

We seem to have very little in common with the world of Palestine two-thousand years ago. It would be difficult to think of a more different culture and way of life. Except for the fact that human nature is pretty much the same.

Yes, our values have changed - very often under the influence of the teaching of Jesus himself in the Gospels, and the way it's been developed in often unexpected ways, it's but - as we can see clearly from the news - human nature is still capable of the most awful savagery, violence, hatred and selfishness. Our prophetic role as followers of Christ - the one to whom John the Baptist points in this morning's Gospel - is to bring to our world a message of hope: that all those things which alienate us from our true selves - poverty, disease, hunger, fear, despair and

hatred, and the sins of selfishness, greed and hatred which lead to them, will not have the last word about the human nature Christ has come to share.

The monk and writer, Thomas Merton, a twentieth century Cistercian, who following St Bernard, also spoke about the 'sacrament of Advent' - meaning Advent as a season of grace which conveys to us a message about the life of God, was very clear that we can never hope to convert *the world* unless the process of conversion to Christ first begins in our own hearts and then goes on to influence and permeate our lives. It is only the presence of Christ which enables us to overcome our human fallibility and confusion, our resistance to the things of God. The Advent message is always one of hope, but it's never a particularly *comfortable* kind of hope, because the Advent journey is about opening up ourselves to the grace of repentance and change. It has to begin in ourselves before we can hold out our hands in joy to the God who becomes one of us. And that's our task for the remaining few days of this year's short Advent season, to allow - as Blessed Mary did - eternity and time to meet, not only in Christ himself, but in our own hearts. +

Thought for the Week

"Advent is the perfect time to clear and prepare the Way. Advent is a winter training camp for those who desire peace. By reflection and prayer, by reading and meditation, we can make our hearts a place where a blessing of peace would desire to abide and where the birth of the Prince of Peace might take place."

Edward Hays, "A Pilgrim's Almanac"

SERVICES IN OUR CHURCHES

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

Hymns: (*New English Hymnal*)

6; 443; 11; 3

NEXT SUNDAY

24th December 2023:

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

10 a.m. Sung Eucharist at St Arvans

Readings at the Eucharist:

2 Samuel 7. 1-11, 16;

Psalm 89. 1-4, 19-26 or Psalm 89. 1-8;

Romans 16. 25-27; St Luke 1. 26-38

For Christmas Eve see our list of Christmas Services

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 the live-streamed Wednesday evening celebration of Night Prayer at St Arvan's is open to a congregation.

It is 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.

This week's Night Prayer is on Thursday 21st at 8 p.m.

What's On

St Arvans Drop in Tea & Chat

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

January 20th

February 17th and usually 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!

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.**