

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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24th December 2023
The Fourth Sunday
of Advent [Year B]

The Collect

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**

A reading from the second book of Samuel [7. 1 - 5, 8 - 12, 14, 16]

Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you." But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies.

Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. 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 forever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.

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

Psalm 89 1 - 4; 19 - 26

**R/ Your love, O Lord,
for ever will I sing.**

Your love, O Lord,
for ever will I sing;
from age to age my mouth will
proclaim your faithfulness.
For I am persuaded that your love is
established for ever; you have set your
faithfulness firmly in the heavens.

**R/ Your love, O Lord,
for ever will I sing.**

'I have made a covenant
with my chosen one;
I have sworn an oath
to David my servant:
"I will establish your line for ever,
and preserve your throne
for all generations.'"

**R/ Your love, O Lord,
for ever will I sing.**

You spoke once in a vision and said to
your faithful people: 'I have set the
crown upon a warrior and have
exalted one chosen out of the people.
I have found David my servant; with
my holy oil have I anointed him.

**R/ Your love, O Lord,
for ever will I sing.**

My hand will hold him fast
and my arm will make him strong.
No enemy shall deceive him,
nor the wicked bring him down.
I will crush his foes before him
and strike down those who hate him.

**R/ Your love, O Lord,
for ever will I sing.**

My faithfulness and love
shall be with him,
and he shall be victorious
through my name.
I shall make his dominion extend
from the Great Sea to the River.
He will say to me, "You are my

Father, my God
and the rock of my salvation.”

**R/ Your love, O Lord,
for ever will I sing.**

**A reading from the letter of St Paul
to the Romans** [16; 25 - 27]

Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith-- to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory for ever! Amen.

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

Gradual Hymn

Alleluia, alleluia!
I am the handmaid of the Lord;
Be it unto me according to thy word.
Alleluia!

The Lord be with you:
And also with you

Listen to the Gospel of Christ
according to St Luke

Glory to you, O Lord.

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David.

The virgin's name was Mary.
And he came to her and said,
"Greetings, favoured one!
The Lord is with you."

But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

The angel said to her,
"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God.

And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to

him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"

The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God."

Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

Then the angel departed from her.

[St Luke 1. 26 - 38]

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

For Your Prayers

That we may rejoice in the birth of our Saviour
All those without adequate food or shelter
For all musicians, particularly for choirs and organists at this season
Those who travel at Christmastide
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: Jeremy Dowding, priest; Robert Prescott, priest, James Esherwood; our own departed relatives & friends, & those whose anniversaries of death fall at this time: Reg Cook; Ivor Shepherd; Oliver John Gollop; Peter Ayres; Ivor Richard; Kay Richard

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'

Semri

Jereboam: Hello, Semri. Wasn't that the carpenter from down your end of town?

Semri: Yes – Joseph, his name is... Poor chap, he's not having an easy time of it at the moment.

Jereboam: What's up?

Semri: Well, he's due to be married quite soon to a young woman called Mary – lovely girl, actually: I did meet her once. The trouble is: she's already expecting a baby.

Jereboam: I didn't realise Joseph was that sort of chap.

Semri: No: he's absolutely adamant that he had nothing to do with it.

Jereboam: In which case he should forget the wedding. Mary obviously can't be trusted.

Semri: That's the strange thing: he's convinced that she's done nothing wrong either – to the point that he feels he can't call off the wedding, in case people think he's accusing her of anything.

Jereboam: Hang on a moment: so you're talking about a child with no father?

Semri: Both Joseph and Mary claim that they have each, independently of the other, been visited by an angel, assuring them that God Himself has created this baby as a gift to mankind.

Jereboam: I'm sorry: that's a feeble and rather distasteful excuse.

Semri: No, honestly: I've known Joseph for years. He's totally straight. If he says something happened, he certainly believes it happened. And, just as relevantly, if he says something didn't happen, it most certainly did not. He's above suspicion.

Jereboam: All right: clearly you believe his claim. Let's say that I'm prepared to give him the benefit of the doubt, on your recommendation. But a good many people will simply not accept any of this. Joseph can expect a fair amount of trouble, I should say.

Semri: That's dawning on him too. He seems to be in two minds about it. On the one hand he'll say things like: "God has given us a task to perform, so surely He will give us the strength and ability to carry out His will." All very laudable, but at the same time you can see the worry in his face. He looks like someone burdened with huge responsibility.

Jereboam: Poor chap...Do wish him all the best from me.

Semri: I certainly shall.

THIS WEEK

Sunday 24th is the Fourth Sunday of Advent, and also Christmas Eve. This year's short season of Advent now 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."

Monday is Christmas Day. The first celebration of The Nativity of the Lord is the Mass at Midnight. The first reading is from Isaiah: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone." This powerful reading deserves a slow contemplation. The Gospel is from Luke: the journey to Bethlehem, the birth, the angels announce the birth to the shepherds. The second celebration of The Nativity of the Lord is the Mass at Dawn. The Gospel is from Luke: the shepherds visit the newborn child. "And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart." The third celebration of The Nativity of the Lord is the Mass during the Day. Here the Gospel is from the beginning of St John's Gospel: "And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth."

Then, the church celebrates three very important feasts after Christmas. We celebrate the **Feast of Saint Stephen**, the first public witness who gave his life for his faith. Then we celebrate the **Feast of Saint John, Apostle and evangelist**.

And, we encounter the moving **Feast of the Holy Innocents**, remembering the infant martyrs of Herod's jealous rage. On the Fifth Day in the Octave of Christmas we have the story of the Purification in the temple and the powerful words of Simeon about Jesus and about Mary. On the Sixth Day in the Octave of Christmas we have the story about Anna in the temple and Jesus going home with his parents. "The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him."

Next Sunday is the Feast of the Holy Family, the First Sunday of Christmas, St Luke's Gospel is the story of the teenaged Jesus teaching in the temple while his parents searched for him. Jesus goes back home with his family. "He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all

these things in her heart. And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favour before God and man."

A homily for the Fourth Sunday of Advent

After the other Advent gospels about John the Baptist appearing in the Judean desert as the prophet who will point out Jesus as the Christ, today's Gospel goes back to the beginning of the mystery of God's coming among us, with the Annunciation: the message Gabriel brings to Mary. There are many human experiences of the divine recounted throughout the Scriptures and in the history of the Church, but nothing resembling this. This is of a quite different order. We find it very difficult to believe that the Incarnation, an event so momentous as to concern the future destiny of the human race, should be announced so quietly, so obscurely to a young girl in an out of the way province of the ancient world. But we shouldn't be that surprised, because here we see the consistency and truth of the divine nature. It's an illustration - *the* illustration of the God whose greatness, whose power and authority consists in the renunciation of all that goes to make up those concepts in our own human thinking.

We might think, 'what a strange corner of the world in which to bring about Salvation; what an odd, our-of-the-way nation to pick as the principal recipients of his message to the human race!' But it's really not odd at all - but consistent - God continues to choose the odd, the despised and ignored, the obscure, the poor and the downtrodden: they put up fewer barriers; they have less to lose. They have fewer pretensions.

What we have in today's Gospel can only have been originally handed down to us through the witness of Mary herself in the earliest days of the Church; so what we have here in St Luke's account isn't a detailed account of the meeting between the heavenly messenger and Mary, the daughter of Zion, but essentially a remembered, much pondered on,

message of good news and of joy. The atmosphere is both one of a kind of sacred excitement in the face of the hidden mystery of God and the resulting peace which comes from Mary's willing acceptance of the archangel's message.

And the importance of this acceptance, this "yes" to God's purpose for humanity shouldn't be underestimated. It underlines Mary's importance as a kind of representative of the entire human race, in that here we don't have God in some way forcing his will upon us, but always seeking our assent and our co-operation in his vision for our future, a vision of love, redemption and infinite possibilities. Mary's "yes" makes that future possible, she's not just a replaceable pawn in God's game (because that's not the way of the God in whom we believe acts – we are each of infinite value, not objects to be used and then discarded) but, Mary is filled with God's grace, a willing and joyful participant in the bringing about of the birth of the Incarnate Son.

In this story we see God once again operating by means of what's called a covenant relationship - a solemn and sacred agreement between God and his people. A covenant is an agreement not an imposition. This isn't a re-telling of that frighteningly violent classical myth of Leda and the swan. No, the conception of Jesus is a *merger* of the human and the divine and it depends entirely upon Mary's willing cooperation: it takes two to make any *agreement* and it's appropriate that the Good News should be given in this way. We see a God who always respects the autonomy and free will of his creatures, who works by persuasion and grace rather than through coercion, power, might and terror. The God whose Covenant relationship with Israel is frequently flouted and ignored, yet who always remains faithful, is the God who seeks a willing co-worker in Blessed Mary, and is the God who in her Son goes to suffering and death, whose power is in weakness and vulnerability, whose rising to new life occurs obscurely in the early morning in a deserted

graveyard. The God who is love works through love, that is his nature. And today we see the divine love of God finding a response in the human heart of Mary; in those very familiar words of St Augustine Mary conceives and gives birth to the Christ in her heart before ever she does so in her body. In faith: that's how she becomes our example and the Mother not only of Jesus, but of us all. And the God of love often acts quietly, operating in the silences of the world and the neglected corners of human experience and the poverty of the human heart. The events of today's Gospel take place in the obscurity of a fairly humble Jewish home in Roman - occupied Palestine. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" That cynical comment of the Apostle Nathaniel before his calling by Jesus is answered in today's Gospel with a resounding 'Yes' And this incident - the Annunciation - the most liberating act of creative energy for the whole human race is in human terms a non-event - it doesn't take place at the seats of power at the heart of an empire or with a fanfare of trumpets human or divine. In our contemporary terms there is very little publicity, there are no first century equivalents of flashing cameras or a scrum of reporters. The message is first delivered to wandering, socially undesirable shepherds on a Palestinian hillside. Only quite a bit later does it reach the ears of the rich and powerful and with predictably brutal and cold-hearted results. Their servants come to Bethlehem not on their knees but with drawn swords and a clear set of instructions.

But for the moment, at the very end of this Advent Season, here in poverty, silence and obscurity the world is turned upside down. But this is the mysterious nature of the Word of God among us and even today he operates in the same way to reassure us, to free us, to inspire us and give us life. But only if we let him; if we don't let the noise of our hot-blooded and intemperate, but often cold-hearted and callous, world drown him out. +

Thought for the Week

"Welcome! all wonders in one sight!
Eternity shut in a span!
Summer in winter, day in night!
Heaven in earth, and God in man!
Great little One,
whose all-embracing birth
Lifts earth to heaven,
stoops Heaven to earth!"

- Richard Crashaw (1613-1649),
from "A Hymn of the Nativity, sung by
the Shepherds"

SERVICES IN OUR CHURCHES

24th December 2023: **The Fourth Sunday of Advent**

10 a.m. Sung Eucharist at St Arvans
Hymns: (*New English Hymnal*)
161, 7, 19, 10

NEXT SUNDAY 31st December 2023: **The First Sunday of Christmas The Holy Family**

10 a.m. Sung Eucharist at St Arvans

Readings at the Eucharist:
Isaiah 61.10 – 62.3;
Psalms 148; Galatians 4. 4-7;
St Luke 2. 15-21

See overleaf for all our 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

Christmas 2023

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

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**
**No Prayer Group this
Thursday**

2024 dates to follow

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.**