

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
Fr Michael Gollop,
The Vicarage, St Arvans
01291 622064;
Mobile 07867803479
E-mail: frmichael1@aol.com

31st December 2023

**The First Sunday
of Christmas**

Sunday in the Christmas Octave:
The Holy Family

The Collect

Almighty God, who wonderfully created us in your own image and yet more wonderfully restored us through your Son Jesus Christ: grant that, as he came to share in our humanity, so we may share the life of his divinity; 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 prophet Isaiah

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. For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch. The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

[61. 10 – 62.3]

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

Psalm 148

**R/ Praise, O praise
the name of the Lord.**

Alleluia! Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights. Praise him, all you angels of his; praise him, all his host. Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars.

**R/ Praise, O praise
the name of the Lord.**

Praise him, heaven of heavens, and you waters above the heavens. Let them praise the name of the Lord; for he commanded and they were created. He made them stand fast for ever and ever; he gave them a law

which shall not pass away.

**R/ Praise, O praise
the name of the Lord.**

Praise the Lord from the earth, you sea-monsters and all deeps; Fire and hail, snow and fog, tempestuous wind, doing his will; Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars;

**R/ Praise, O praise
the name of the Lord.**

Wild beasts and all cattle, creeping things and winged birds; Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the world; Young men and maidens, old and young together.

**R/ Praise, O praise
the name of the Lord.**

Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name only is exalted, his splendour is over earth and heaven. He has raised up strength for his people and praise for all his loyal servants, the children of Israel, a people who are near him. Alleluia!

**R/ Praise, O praise
the name of the Lord.**

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Galatians [4; 4-7]

When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

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

Gradual Hymn

Alleluia, alleluia!

At various times in the past
and in various different ways,
God spoke to our ancestors
by the prophets;
but in our own time, the last days,
he has spoken to us through his Son.
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.

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.'

So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.

But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.

The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

[St Luke 2. 15-21]

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 families, especially those caught up in war or conflict

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; Elsie Proctor; our own departed relatives & friends, & those whose anniversaries of death fall at this time: Margot Jenour; Maynard Jenour; Elizabeth Howell; Muriel Sunderland; James Smart

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'

Innkeeper

Jereboam: So you're the owner of this establishment?

Innkeeper: Yes sir, I am.

Jereboam: I should imagine that you don't see this sort of thing very often.

Innkeeper: It's never happened before. Obviously we had the census, for a start. The whole town's been swarming with people – which is why I had to put this family in the stable in the first place. It sounds incredible, but apparently there wasn't a single guest-room left in the whole town. Imagine how I felt, putting a heavily pregnant woman in the stable... I keep telling myself that we should have gone into the stable ourselves and let them use our private room, but I didn't think of it at the start, and they won't hear of it now, even with such a tiny baby. Added to which, the stable's the only place that could possibly accommodate all these extra visitors and well-wishers.

Jereboam: Where have they all sprung from?

Innkeeper: All over the place, really. The whole town seems to have come at some point or other, and we've had shepherds from over in that direction – they were the first ones here actually. It wouldn't surprise me if we saw people arriving from even further afield too.

Jereboam: Such as myself...I'm hardly local. I made my way here when I heard something special was happening. Any idea what's caused all the fuss?

Innkeeper: Well, there is something unusual about this little family. I can't put my finger on what, though. There's been talk of angels and all sorts – I don't know. They claim this is no ordinary baby, which I can well believe.

Jereboam: What makes you say that?

Innkeeper: Look, I realise that there's something enchanting about every couple with a new-born baby. Somehow the love of the family unit draws you in. The same is true with these people, but on a different scale. I know this sounds silly, but you see them and you want to be part of their family. You want to touch them, be part of their embrace. Not only that, though – you want everyone else to be part of it too.

Jereboam: And, unless I'm very much mistaken, there's a side of you that's wondering: "What have I done to deserve this honour?"

Innkeeper: Absolutely right. These events have transformed us all – transformed the whole place too, in ways I can't describe. I'm delighted, of course, but at the same time it's all a bit of a mystery. Come and see for yourself: they're over this way.

Jereboam: Thank you. Look, while I think of it, I take it that you're still fully booked? I think I might want to stay around for a day or two.

Innkeeper: Absolutely crammed to overflowing, I'm afraid. Your best bet is probably to have a word with one of the shepherds. They're always popping round. I guess they'll know where to find shelter on the hills

THIS WEEK

Sunday is the Sunday in the Christmas Octave, that week of special celebration of the Lord's Nativity. It is also known as the Feast of the Holy Family. We hear again the story of the shepherds coming to the manger in Bethlehem in response to the vision of angels they saw on the hillside. New Year's Day, is the Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God. In addition, it is a celebration of World Day of Prayer for Peace. It marks the mid-point in the Christmas Season.

The week continues on Tuesday with a the feast day of Saint Basil the Great and Saint Gregory Nazianzen.

The first readings this week continue from the First Letter of St John, encouraging us to make our home in the one who makes his home in us. In Jesus, we have eternal life and we are called to love one another. The Gospels for this week show Jesus manifesting himself in his life on earth, following St John's Gospel, from the

testimony of John to the manifestation or sign at the wedding feast of Cana.

The Epiphany of the Lord celebrates, with the coming of the Magi to the infant Christ, the light that has come into the darkness of the world and that our salvation was made known to the Gentiles – the non-Jewish world..

The Baptism of the Lord is another epiphany. At Jesus' baptism by John in the river Jordan the divine voice from heaven manifests, reveals, points Jesus out as God's "beloved Son."

We keep **Next Sunday** as the great feast of The Epiphany and the Christmas season comes to an end this year on Monday 8th January with the Baptism of the Lord

Traditionally, we keep the Christmas cribs up in our churches throughout the weeks after the Epiphany until we celebrate Candlemas, or the Feast of the Presentation in early February

A homily for the First Sunday of Christmas

+ I have to say that *one* of my pet hates at this time of year – I have quite a few, and I know I should be more tolerant - is when people say that Christmas is now over for another twelve months. Well, you can't blame them for saying that if, like much of society, if they've been celebrating it since the beginning of December; all good things have to come to an end, after all! But it's yet another symptom of the commercial degradation of culture about which we don't individually have much of a choice, and we're caught up in it to a great extent whether we like it or not. But for the Church, Christmas *isn't* over – it goes on at least until the Feast of the Epiphany, which we keep this year *next* Sunday. So, today on this Sunday in the Christmas Octave, we've only reached the half-way point. *The extended celebration* even goes on until Candlemas on the 2nd of February.

And this longer period of rejoicing means we have the time and the space both to celebrate and to reflect on the meaning of the Lord's birth, and the massive implications it has for the way we look at the world, the way we

regard our fellow human beings and the way we live our lives. Or, shall we say, *how we are meant* to look on those things.

Today's Feast, that of the Holy Family, is a case in point.

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary keep their appeal for us, their essential charisma (and that's a much misused word) and attractiveness not least because their goodness is authentic – it's completely real, despite sometimes its over-sentimental portrayal.

Blessed Mary and St Joseph are not people who have only acquired their faith at second hand: they have made it part of who they are. Theirs wasn't a code of behaviour which came neatly packaged and had no room for compassion or exception, nor were they strangers to complexity. Most of the family life of Jesus, Mary and Joseph has gone completely unrecorded, yet in the Christmas narratives of St Luke and St Matthew we are given significant glimpses into it – we have the events leading up to the birth of Jesus, the nativity itself, the visit of shepherds and wise men, the presentation in the Temple, the hasty flight into Egypt to avoid Herod's murderous rage, and then – apart from the story about the young teenage Jesus teaching in the Temple, nothing until Jesus is an adult at the start of his three-year ministry.

But those glimpses we are given tell us a lot. In the beginning, Joseph has to struggle with the knowledge with the discovery that Mary was expecting a child, and not his child. The circumstances of the birth of Jesus, taking place far from home and family were hardly the easiest and, on returning to their own neighbourhood, they had to leave hurriedly out of fear of a kind of state-sponsored massacre. Family life has its fair share of anxieties and sorrows – as we probably all know only too well; our problems and troubles are largely hidden away from public view, but most of us have nothing like the problems confronting the Holy Family to cope with despite our society's grave shortcomings.

The Gospels show us that Mary herself although filled with a kind of

deep-down joy and trust was also deeply disturbed by the words of the angel Gabriel, and she didn't find their meaning either particularly clear or guaranteed to lead to a stress-free existence. And we read in the Gospels, too, that later on Jesus' own attitude to his family, and to family relationships in general can't be easily portrayed as either traditional or complacent; there are various texts in the gospels where Jesus considers the relationship between family and faith and he doesn't simply reply with a safe, automatic response. Those who want to tell us that the Holy Family is composed of formulaic, cardboard characters lacking in sophistication and humanity can never have read the Scriptures, much less understood what it is they are saying.

The secret of the Holy Family, if we can put it that way, is that their faith and trust in the divine mystery with which they are confronted and caught up in was well and truly tried and tested by the events they went through. Their relationships, their free responses to God and to one another were upheld by a divine grace that, while it didn't spare Jesus, Mary and Joseph the mess, the cost and the suffering of life in an imperfect, fallen world, wasn't limited or destroyed by it. Here was love and here was holiness, neither happening effortlessly, or without a heavy price having to be paid for it. Here, hidden away from our eyes is the mystery of God at work. And Jesus Christ - the Word of God - by taking human nature, by offering each one of us a share in his nature, makes us all part of the divine plan, and - if we follow him, if we are open to the working of grace - even in our own imperfect, flawed, struggling lives, that makes us all potentially sharers in the nature and life of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Despite being set against the background of the world's darkness, the darkness in human hearts and minds, the Christmas story is not one of despair. When we set the fact of God dwelling alongside us against the callousness and brutality of the world - the world as it was then, the world as it is now - it shines all the brighter.

Here is God in Christ showing an unimaginable solidarity with his people, leading us to the holiness, grace, truth and beauty of a life without limit, and a compassion without reserve.

Because of the first Christmas, because, too, of this hidden childhood of Christ, we are being told that this is a realistic prospect for all of us. This is our destiny, and the life of the Holy Family points us towards it and tells us that such a seemingly impossible thing is possible - even for us today. And that's something that's worth celebrating for another week or so at least +

Thought for the Week

"Make many acts of love, for they set the soul on fire and make it gentle. Whatever you do, offer it up to God, and pray that it may be for His honour and glory."

- St. Teresa of Avila -

(A good new year resolution!)

SERVICES IN OUR CHURCHES TODAY

31st December 2023:

The First Sunday of Christmas
The Holy Family

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

NEXT SUNDAY

7th January 2024:

The EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

10 a.m. Sung Eucharist at St Arvans

11.30 a.m. Holy Eucharist
at St Mary's, Penterry

4 p.m. All Age Celebration
at St James, Devauden

Readings at the Eucharist :

Isaiah 60. 1-6; Psalm 72. 10-15;
Ephesians 3. 1-12; St Matthew 2. 1-12

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

Our grateful thanks to all those who have worked so hard in very many ways in our churches over Christmas and in preparation for our celebrations!

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**2024 Calendars from St James Church, Devauden are still 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

### What's On

**St Arvans Drop in Tea & Chat**  
2.30-4 p.m. at the Meeting Rooms  
Everyone Welcome

*January 20<sup>th</sup>*

*February 17<sup>th</sup> 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!**

2024 dates to follow ....

## ***Ministry Area Prayer***

**D**ear 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.**