

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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7th January 2024
THE EPIPHANY
OF THE LORD

The Collect

O God,
who by the leading of a star
manifested your only Son
to the peoples of the earth:
mercifully grant that we,
who know you now by faith,
may at last behold your glory
face to face; through Jesus Christ
your Son our Lord, 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

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms. Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.

[60. 1 - 6]

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

Psalm 72 1-7, 10-14

**R/ Kings bow down before him;
all the nations do him service.**

Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to the king's son; That he may rule your people righteously and the poor with justice; That the mountains may bring prosperity to the people, and the little hills bring righteousness.

**R/ Kings bow down before him;
all the nations do him service.**

He shall defend the needy among the people; he shall rescue the poor and crush the oppressor. He shall live as long as the sun and moon endure, from one generation to another.

**R/ Kings bow down before him;
all the nations do him service.**

He shall come down like rain upon the mown field, like showers that water the earth. In his time shall the righteous flourish; there shall be abundance of peace till the moon shall be no more.

**R/ Kings bow down before him;
all the nations do him service.**

The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall pay tribute, and the kings of Arabia and Saba offer gifts. All kings shall bow down before him, and all the nations do him service.

**R/ Kings bow down before him;
all the nations do him service.**

For he shall deliver the poor who cries out in distress, and the oppressed who has no helper. He shall have pity on the lowly and poor; he shall preserve the lives of the needy. He shall redeem their lives from oppression and violence, and dear shall their blood be in his sight.

**R/ Kings bow down before him;
all the nations do him service.**

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Ephesians [3; 1-12]

I, Paul, am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles – for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you, and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that is, the Gentiles have become fellow-heirs, members of the same body, and

sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

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

Alleluia, alleluia!
We saw his star as it rose
and have come to do the Lord
homage.
Alleluia!

The Lord be with you:
And also with you

**Hear the Holy Gospel according to
St Luke Glory to you, O Lord.**

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.' When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: "And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'" Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time

when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.' When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

[St Matthew 2. 1-12]

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

For Your Prayers

That like the Magi, we may follow the star which leads to Christ
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: James Esherwood; Elsie Procter; our own departed relatives & friends, & those whose anniversaries of death fall at this time: Angela; Phyllis Meade; Hartley Brooks; Margot Brooks; Connie Cook

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 (2)

Innkeeper: Please don't take this the wrong way, Jereboam, but I hadn't expected to see you around here again so soon.

Jereboam: No: I'm surprised myself, but I heard that some people had made their way here by following a star.

Innkeeper: Oh, our royal visitors, you mean...

Jereboam: So it's true that they're kings?

Innkeeper: When they first arrived, they certainly looked like royalty of some sort.

Jereboam: Am I right that they followed a star?

Innkeeper: Apparently so...and several of us have spotted an unusual star recently. I can only assume that these gentlemen had seen the same one.

Jereboam: Well, I don't know much about astronomy, but even I reckon I've seen some fairly unusual stars before – or some of them might have been planets, I'm not sure. Anyway, the point is that I've never felt the urge to walk towards one of them!

Innkeeper: Strange, isn't it? From what I gather, these people somehow felt drawn towards the star.

Jereboam: There's another thing: I can see that a star could lead you in a certain direction – sailors use them for navigation, obviously -- but how does the star tell you where to stop? It sounds like someone reaching the base of a rainbow: it just wouldn't happen.

Innkeeper: Such a curious business! They almost seem to have had their own connection with the star, as if it had summoned them personally. At least that would explain why half the world hasn't been turning up here.

Jereboam: That's a point: nobody else has followed this star, have they?

Innkeeper: Not as far as I know...although I think one or two of the shepherds might have mentioned it.

Jereboam: Look, can I pick you up on something you said a moment ago? You said that the men looked like royalty when they first arrived. Do you mean that they didn't look royal afterwards?

Innkeeper: They came into the town with great pomp and ceremony – all very impressive in its way. But then everything seemed to change, and you'd hardly notice that they were around. In the end they just slipped away, almost in secret.

Jereboam: I can explain that. From what I was told, they needed to avoid being spotted by certain people.

Innkeeper: I heard that rumour too – but there's more to it than that.

Everyone that's seen this young family has gone away changed in some way – myself included. With those kings, or whatever they were, you could see they'd been humbled, even startled. Everybody seems to be affected in a different way.

Jereboam: I'm beginning to realise that too.

THIS WEEK

Sunday is kept as the Feast of the Epiphany. We celebrate, 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..

On Monday we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord. , At Jesus' baptism by John in the river Jordan the divine voice from heaven manifests, reveals, points Jesus out as God's "beloved Son."

This marks the end of the Christmas Season.

Tuesday begins Epiphanytide, the winter ordinary time in the Church calendar which will last until Candlemas and then resume with the weeks before Lent which continue until Ash Wednesday in mid-February.

The weekday readings at the Eucharist, begin with a three-week cycle of readings from the First Book of Samuel. We read of Samuel's mother, Hannah, who promises the Lord, "if you give your handmaid a male child, I will give him to the LORD for as long as he lives." Samuel hears a call from the Lord and responds, "Speak, for your servant is listening." An epic battle against the Philistines ends in devastating losses for Israel and the capture of the Ark of the Covenant. In his old age, Samuel rules Israel and the elders ask Samuel to appoint a King to rule them. Samuel meets Saul. "When Samuel caught sight of Saul, the LORD assured him, " 'This is the man of whom I told you; he is to govern my people.'"

From now until the beginning of Lent, the weekday gospels are from **St Mark's Gospel**. Mark offers us a look at the beginning of Jesus public ministry. Jesus calls his first disciples, fisherman at work: Simon and Andrew, then James and John. "Then they left their nets and followed him." He drives out evil spirits and heals

the sick. He hears the cry of the leper: "If you wish, you can make me clean," and Jesus, "moved with pity" heals him. Friends lower a paralytic from a roof down into the crowd in front of Jesus, who heals him and says, "Child, your sins are forgiven." Jesus extends an invitation to the despised tax collector, Levi: "Follow me."

Next Sunday is the **Second Sunday of Epiphany**. St John's Gospel offers us the story of the calling of the first two disciples. He asks them what they are looking for and when they ask where he lives, he invites them, "Come, and you will see."

A homily for the Feast of the Epiphany

+ No traditional crib scene *or* nativity play, would be complete without "the three kings," who in St Matthew's Gospel are central characters in the story of Christ's birth. Of course, the Gospel doesn't refer to them as kings at all, that seems to be a later early mediaeval legend which reaches its high point in the gilded shrine claiming to contain their relics in Cologne Cathedral. No, St Matthew describes them as *Magi* or "wise men", travellers from the east, probably Persia. They were most likely astrologers, those who were skilled in interpreting the stars and their meanings in terms of the culture of the day. St Matthew doesn't even say how many they were but the tradition that there were three probably arose because of the three gifts that were presented to the Christ Child, a reasonable assumption. The word 'Epiphany' means revelation or 'showing forth.' Today's feast is really about God revealing himself to the non-Jewish world. In many ways, in its use of Old Testament themes, St Matthew's is the most Jewish of the four Gospels. But here right at its beginning, it emphasises the message that God is reaching out to the whole world -- to both Jews and Gentiles alike. The Old Testament is largely concerned with God's dealings with his chosen people, the people of Israel and the New Testament with his revelation of himself to the people of the whole world. That's what the visit

of the Magi to the infant Jesus represents, the offer of salvation – a sharing in the life of God – being available to everyone.

St Matthew describes the magi as having been led by a star to discover where the promised king of the Jews was to be born. It would have been a considerable distance to travel.

Bishop Lancelot Andrewes in the seventeenth century, in words more familiar to us from T.S. Eliot's poem, said of the journey of the Magi:

A cold coming they had of it at this time of the year, just the worst time of the year to take a journey, and specially a long journey. The ways deep, the weather sharp, the days short, the sun farthest off ... the very dead of winter."

So God builds upon their wisdom and their knowledge of the stars and uses it as a starting point for their journey, a journey which leads them to faith in Jesus, to a recognition that here in the new-born Jesus is God's mysterious revelation of himself to the world. Yet St Matthew tells us that their wisdom doesn't take them directly to Bethlehem, first they had to consult those who knew the Jewish scriptures, and allow themselves to be guided by them. And when they reached Bethlehem, Matthew tells us that they offered the worship which is due only to God, the source and goal of our intellect, to this new-born baby, the most vulnerable of all living creatures. What we are being told in this Christmas season which is now coming to a close, is that in the person of Jesus, the almighty and transcendent God, the creator of heaven and earth, expressed his divine love in becoming a human being. He could be seen and heard, held in his mother's arms and later when he is a man, would be displayed to the world upon the arms of the cross.

And as we know, the Magi brought gifts: gold, which acknowledged his kingship, frankincense which is symbolic of his divinity (you only burn incense to God) and myrrh which foreshadows his death (this is someone whose death will be significant). In return, Jesus gave them the gift of faith. St Matthew says

they instinctively recognise who he is and they knelt and paid him homage. So, what does today's Feast say to us ? Like the magi, we are called to welcome Jesus with faith, and to be ourselves, in whatever small a way, epiphanies, revelations to the world of the love and redemption God offers to everyone. We are called to proclaim this Good News not only by what we say, but also by the way in which we think and the way we follow that through in our daily lives.

Someone said - I've forgotten who - that almost all of the imperfections and problems of our human lives come about because we are desperately looking for happiness and are not sure how to find it. The answer to our search is the same as that of the Magi - in Christ we find the ability to live truly human lives that reflect God's love and compassion.

As we said, the magi from the East are wise men, magicians, astrologers, the intellectuals leaders of their culture. In a sense they are also representative of all those who are searching for the deepest meaning of life.

Today we ourselves are invited to continue our searching for God, our seeking of the deepest meaning of human existence. Yet as with the Magi, it is not an unaided search, we are not journeying in the dark. God has come to meet us and share his life with us. Our search for God is in reality our recognition that it is God who in Christ has come searching for us. And, of course, that recognition is also about being willing to receive him.

We find him here, at the altar, in the Eucharist, in the flesh, as the Wise men found him at the stable, but in the humble elements of Bread and Wine changed into his Body and Blood. The gifts the Magi brought are exchanged for the gift of faith and belief and meaning .The gifts that we offer are themselves transformed by God himself into the person of our crucified and risen Lord who gives himself to us as nourishment, spiritual, sacramental food, to strengthen us in our lives as Christians. +

Thought for the Week

"What are you doing, O Magi? Do you adore a little Babe, in a wretched hovel, wrapped in miserable rags? Can this Child be truly God? ... Are you become foolish, O Wise Men ... Yes, these Wise Men have become fools that they may be wise."

Saint Bernard of Clairvaux

SERVICES IN OUR CHURCHES TODAY

7th January 2024:

The EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

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

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

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

NEXT SUNDAY

14th January 2024:

The Second Sunday of Epiphany

10 a.m. Sung Eucharist at St Arvans

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

Readings at the Eucharist :

1 Samuel 3. 1-10,
Psalms 139. 1-6, 13-18 or 139. 1-10;
Revelation 5. 1-10;
St John 1. 43-51

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 the Christmas Season

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## 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.**