

# 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, 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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## 7<sup>th</sup> April 2024 The Second Sunday of Easter

### The Collect

Almighty Father, you have given your only Son to die for our sins and to rise again for our justification: grant us so to put away the leaven of malice and wickedness that we may always serve you in pureness of living and truth;  
through the merits of your Son Jesus Christ 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 Acts of the Apostles

The whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common.

With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

[4; 32 - 35]

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

### Psalm 133

**R/ How good and pleasant it is to live together in unity**

Behold how good and pleasant it is to dwell together in unity.  
It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down upon the beard,  
Even on Aaron's beard, running down upon the collar of his clothing. **R/**

It is like the dew of Hermon running down upon the hills of Zion. For there the Lord has promised his blessing: even life for evermore. **R/**

### A reading from the first letter of St John [1; 1 - 2. 2]

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship

is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him

while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

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

### **Gradual Hymn**

Alleluia, alleluia!  
Jesus said:  
'You believe because you can see me. Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe.'  
**Alleluia!**

The Lord be with you:  
**And also with you**

Listen to the Gospel of Christ according to St. John. [20, 19 - 31]

**R/ Glory to you, O Lord.**

**I**t was evening on the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they

are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.' But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.' Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

This is the Gospel of the Lord  
**R/ Praise to you, O Christ.**

## For Your Prayers

That in Eastertide we may continue to rejoice in the glorious Resurrection of Christ & live in joy and hope  
All who are caught up in war or conflict  
All those without adequate food or shelter  
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; Anne-Louise; Helen; Mary; Peter; Kenneth Cameron; Margaret; Margot Davies, Margi; Billy; Altheya; Eira Firth; Sr Ruth Furneaux;

### For the Departed:

The recently departed: Alan Beattie; our own departed relatives & friends, & those whose anniversaries of death fall at this time: Joe Dunn; Evelyn Price; Audrey Sherwood; Roger Colthart

## 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.*

## Aminadab

**Jereboam:** Can you bring me up to date, Aminadab?

**Aminadab:** I'll try. Things are changing all the time, though.

**Jereboam:** From what I hear, it seems that some of Jesus' followers are annoyed with themselves at the moment...quite apart from their joy at Jesus' return. Peter's terribly upset about his denials, for example. And obviously Judas regretted his actions bitterly.

**Aminadab:** It's such a shame: I used to like Judas, and he was a good man in many ways. Things just got out of hand.

**Jereboam:** I'll say they did. What about the others though?

**Aminadab:** Well, Thomas is furious with himself for doubting that Jesus had risen from the dead. I must say that I sympathise with him: it was such an extraordinary thing to happen, after all. I think he's embarrassed that he didn't trust the people who had seen Jesus. Perhaps he thought they were making it up, or, more likely, he assumed that they were imagining things – either way he regrets it now.

**Jereboam:** I can see why, but surely his reaction was sensible enough. You can't go around believing everything just because other people do. I rather admire Thomas' independence of thought, to be honest.

**Aminadab:** I quite agree. Personally I feel quite encouraged by his experience. Let's face it: many of us haven't seen Jesus yet – since his resurrection, I mean – and it's good to think that someone like Thomas has scrutinised things and accepted them.

**Jereboam:** So you would say that Thomas shouldn't feel bad about his hesitation.

**Aminadab:** Absolutely not: he's saved the rest of us from an awful lot of doubts.

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

## THIS WEEK

On the **Second Sunday of Easter**, we are given a glimpse of how the early community lived their life of faith by sharing everything in common. In St John's Gospel, Jesus appears to the Apostles, hiding in fear, and gives them the gift of his Spirit, calling them to forgive sins. The Apostle Thomas has his doubts

dispelled by touching the wounds in the Risen Lord's hands and side, and we are reminded that the gospel is written, that we might come to believe in Christ and have life in his name.

The Acts of the Apostles all this week tells us of the challenges the apostles faced as they form the early community of the Church and face opposition.

For the remaining five weeks of the Easter season, the our weekday readings at the Eucharist will be from the Acts of the Apostles and from St John's Gospel, which offers stories of Jesus' ministry not heard during the Ordinary Time of the liturgical year.

The weekday readings begin with the frightened Pharisee, Nicodemus, coming at night to speak to Jesus, asking how anyone can be "born again." Jesus says we must be born of water and Spirit. The gospel offers a poetic look at light and darkness, good and evil: "the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light...But whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God. John writes, "For the one whom God sent speaks the words of God." Jesus feeds the 5,000 people. Alone in a storm, the disciples are afraid -- but more fearful when Jesus walks across the water toward them. "It is I. Do not be afraid," Jesus tells them.

**Next Sunday:** St Luke's Gospel has the very human story of Jesus appearing to the disciples after the Resurrection, inviting them to touch his hands and feet to see that he is real. He ate with them and "he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures."

## A Homily for the Second Sunday of Easter

+ Over time I've changed my mind about St Thomas. The phrase that has passed into the language -- 'doubting Thomas' -- used to mean someone who is sceptical about something unnecessarily and wrongly - is grossly unfair to the Apostle Thomas himself. Generally speaking, 'don't take anything just on trust,' is a pretty good one up to a point -- because obviously our attitude should depend on our own experience, the overall circumstances and the trustworthiness of the source of our information. We are

living through a strange period of history filled with people who, for whatever dubious purposes of their own, try to appeal to our emotions and prejudices rather than to anything more substantial or verifiable, often telling us to disregard the evidence available to us. And, as we know, religion throughout history hasn't exactly been free from that either.

And we could go a lot further and say that we have to be careful these days even about accepting what we think we can see. With the advent of AI and its ability to make deep fakes and falsehood seem utterly real, video and photographic evidence can be doctored, not only that but even our natural eyesight can sometimes be confused and disorientated by all kinds of natural phenomena and our own psychological state at the time - how else do you account for U.F.O. sightings, not to mention the enduring myth of the Loch Ness Monster and the Yeti, or Abominable Snowman and such like? We sometimes see all kinds of things that are just not there as well as those which might be..

The Church herself, of course, despite the common perception, has always -- officially anyway if I can put it like that - believed in giving due weight to the evidence, and has never simply recommended what people like to call "blind" faith. Theologians will undoubtedly tell you that faith combined with the evidence of our senses and the reasoning of our intellects is what enables us to see more clearly. Not that our practice has always lived up to the ideal -- but then anything involving human beings -- and fallen human nature - can tend to turn out that way

So, having said all that, what are we to make of today's Gospel?

St John tells us in the Gospel that in the evening of the day of the resurrection -- the first Easter Sunday, the day the apostles and disciples had heard that the Lord had risen and had seen the empty tomb, Jesus himself appeared to them. Thomas, the Twin, hadn't been with them and when he heard what had happened he was deeply sceptical and refused to believe what the others were telling him. He will only believe, he tells them in return, if he can reach out and touch the wounds in Jesus' hands and side, the wounds presumably he himself had seen inflicted. He knew Jesus was dead and

not having been with the others, he wasn't going to be so easily convinced -- even by his fellow disciples and friends - that he was now alive. People don't come back from the dead.

So a week later, John says, Jesus appeared to his followers again, and this time Thomas was with them and was changed by this encounter from a total sceptic into one of the principal witnesses of both Jesus' resurrection and his divinity. This was an earth-shattering, life-changing meeting for him.

In popular understanding, then, Thomas is defined as the one who doubts without good cause. But this is hardly fair or accurate. Thomas was an honest man; maybe he had a surer sense of human psychology than to take everything a group of people in deep shock and grief was saying to him purely at face value. Although it would have been the easier option, he wasn't going to pretend to accept something he wasn't sure about. Those whose minds are naturally somewhat sceptical and cautious can draw a great deal of comfort from his example. He just wasn't so easily convinced by what the others were saying to him, particularly when it went against all his experience of life.

And so in spite of the element of reproach in Jesus' words when he did appear to Thomas, it's also clear that Jesus respects Thomas' basic intellectual honesty, because he does submit to Thomas' demand for evidence, and allows him to touch the wounds inflicted on his body by the crucifixion. And because of that, Thomas' doubts and uncertainty are taken away. Not only that, but there's a sense here that Thomas has somehow hit upon a profound truth: that the Risen Christ can be recognised precisely by his wounds, by the evidence of his sharing in the pain and suffering of humanity.

The words of rebuke "*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe,*" are meant not so much for Thomas himself, but for those of us who come after, who can't receive physical proof. But are we always wrong to look for evidence, for some kind of proof that all this is real. We have, of course, the witness of the Church down the ages -- not only the Apostles' own testimony to the Resurrection, but also the lived experience of those who have come after them down the centuries, but, as we said

at the beginning we have an understandable, even desirable, reluctance just to take things on trust. Doubt in this sense can be a useful protection against all the unscrupulous ways in which human beings seek to exercise control over others. So, this encounter in the Upper Room a week after the discovery of the empty tomb and all the events of the first Easter Day, this definitive apostolic experience of the Resurrection, is important for us in several respects. Firstly, it reassures us about our insecurities and our doubts and our need for evidence. Yes, Thomas the Apostle represents all of us. He asks the questions on our behalf. But let's be clear: we can't have that direct, physical, encounter with Christ that Thomas had. In spiritual matters it's usually a good idea, after taking into account all the accumulated evidence available, to trust our own experience. Faith is never the opposite of doubt: honest doubt - just not being sure - can lead us from a state of mind which is characterised by this sense of hesitation and uncertainty into a mature and hard won faith even and it can happen in the midst of the difficulties and doubts and uncertainties which are thrown up in the process of living (or by grace trying to live) as a disciple of Christ. His risen life surrounds us and we need to be open to follow St Thomas in recognising the power of the resurrection in our own lives, and in the lives of other people - not to abandon honesty, but through prayer, through worship, through our service of others to allow the risen Lord himself to reach out to us and draw us into his resurrection life. Are we able to recognise the Risen Christ and the new life he offers, even as we are aware of our own woundedness and vulnerability, despite - *even through* - our natural doubts and hesitations? Where do we see him, where do we find evidence of resurrection in our own lives and experience? That's the question this morning's gospel is putting to us. +

### Thought for the Week

"Receive every day as a resurrection from death, as a new enjoyment of life; meet every rising sun with such sentiments of God's goodness, as if you had seen it, and all things, new-created upon your account: and under the sense of so great a blessing, let your joyful heart praise and magnify so good and glorious a Creator."

- William Law -

*A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*

### SERVICES IN OUR CHURCHES TODAY

**7<sup>th</sup> April 2024:**

#### ***The Second Sunday of Easter***

10 a.m. Sung Eucharist at St Arvans

11.30 a.m. Holy Eucharist

at St Mary's Penterry

4 p.m. Family Eucharist

at St James, Devauden

### **NEXT SUNDAY**

**14<sup>th</sup> April 2024:**

#### ***The Third Sunday of Easter***

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 :**

*Acts 4. 32-35;*

*Acts 3. 12-19; Psalm 4;*

*1 John 3. 1-7;*

*St Luke 24. 36b-48*

*For services in the wider Ministry Area*

*please see [www.severnwyema.co.uk](http://www.severnwyema.co.uk)*

**The Severn Wye Ministry  
Area Prayer Group meets  
each Thursday at 7.30 p.m.**

**All are welcome!**

**For details see**

**[www.severnwyema.co.uk](http://www.severnwyema.co.uk)**

### **St Arvans Drop in Tea & Chat**

2.30-4 p.m. at the Meeting Rooms

Everyone Welcome

***April 13<sup>th</sup> and usually  
every second Saturday  
of the month***

Childrens activity table

For assistance or a lift

please ring 628084

### **FASHION SHOW**

**Friday 19<sup>th</sup> April**

**by Harts of Monmouth**

**'Spring Colours'**

***St Arvans Memorial Hall***

***7.30 p.m.***

***Tickets £10***

***available from Jean Papps***

***01291 628691***

***or email***

***daiane.parnell@live.com***

***to include a glass of wine or a***

***soft drink***

***In aid of St Arvan's Church***