

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.,

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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26th January 2025 The Third Sunday of Epiphany

The Collect

Almighty God, whose Son revealed in signs and miracles the wonder of your saving presence: renew your people with your heavenly grace, and in all our weakness sustain us by your mighty power; 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 book of Nehemiah

All the people gathered together into the square before the Water Gate. They told the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had given to Israel. Accordingly, the priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding. This was on the first

day of the seventh month. He read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. Then Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God and all the people answered, 'Amen, Amen,' lifting up their hands. Then they bowed their heads and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground. So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, 'This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep.' For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. Then he said to them, 'Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to our LORD; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.'

[8. 1-3,5-6,8-10]

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

Psalm 19 7 - 14

**R/ Your words are spirit, Lord,
and they are life.**

The law of the Lord is perfect and revives the soul;
the testimony of the Lord is sure and gives wisdom to the innocent.
The statutes of the Lord are just and rejoice the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is clear and gives light to the eyes.

**R/ Your words are spirit, Lord,
and they are life.**

The fear of the Lord is clean and endures for ever;
the judgements of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold, more than much fine gold, sweeter far than honey, than honey in the comb.

**R/ Your words are spirit, Lord,
and they are life.**

By them also is your servant enlightened, and in keeping them there is great reward. Who can tell how often he offends? Cleanse me from my secret faults. Above all, keep your servant from presumptuous sins; let them not get dominion over me; then shall I be whole and sound, and innocent of a great offence.

**R/ Your words are spirit, Lord,
and they are life.**

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

**R/ Your words are spirit, Lord,
and they are life.**

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

Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many.

If the foot would say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be?

If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But strive for the greater gifts.

[12.12–31a]

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

For Your Prayers

That we may show mercy and compassion in the way we behave towards others.

All who are caught up in war or conflict
All those without adequate food or shelter
The people of the Holy Land; of Palestine & Gaza, Israel, Lebanon & Syria, & for lasting peace in the Middle East
The people of the U.S.A.

The people of Ukraine and a just and peaceful end to the war there

The people of Georgia

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, & 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; The Revd Stuart Jackson; Anne-Louise; Helen; Mary; Peter; Kenneth Cameron; Margaret; Althea; Naylor & Eira Firth; Margi & Bob Osborne, James Burnam; Jen James

For the Departed:

The recently departed: Douglas Ashcraft; Gerdien Versteeg; Joan Kenington; Pauline Lawson; our own departed relatives & friends, and those whose anniversaries of death fall at this time: Pat Beattie; Marian Price

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 people whose lives have been affected

in some way by Jesus Christ and his teaching.

Simeon

Jereboam: Well, Simeon, I must say that I'm rather taken with this picture of the Church as a human body, with the members working together like arms and legs and so on. I have understood the image correctly, haven't I?

Simeon: Absolutely, yes.

Jereboam: It's a lovely analogy, and it's bound to help people recognise the value of their contributions. I wonder, though: does the image really work, or is it just a little bit simplistic?

Simeon: I'd say that it does work, but perhaps we need to consider a few extra points too.

Jereboam: Such as...?

Simeon: Well, first of all, this might sound rather obvious, but one person can play several roles in the Church. Also, several people can play the same role.

Jereboam: I guess that sort of thing happens in the human body anyway.

Simeon: Yes, you're right, but I think it's worth pointing out nevertheless. If someone has a valid contribution to make, they mustn't feel that it isn't valued, just because someone else does the same thing, or indeed because they themselves already offer another service.

Jereboam: That sounds very reasonable.

Simeon: Here's another thought: people can contribute to the Church in different ways at various stages of their lives. Obviously, some things need to be permanent: marriage is a lifelong commitment. In my opinion the priesthood should be too, but in other ways people's roles may change over time...or they may continue to make the same sort of contribution, but in a new way.

Jereboam: Even that has its parallels: our bodies change the way

they function as we grow older, don't they?

Simeon: You're right. I do feel that it's important to mention these points though, especially for the sake of younger people. They probably don't have much idea of how their lives will develop. At this stage, most of them shouldn't feel tied for ever to one particular role.

Jereboam: Look, this is all fair enough, but overall the image of the body still seems rather attractive and indeed helpful.

Simeon: Oh, I'm certainly not meaning to criticise it; I'm just adding a few practical considerations. Here's one more thought... As you probably know, we believe that God, through his Spirit, is the source of the talents we use, as we play our part within the Church.

Jereboam: Yes, I understand that.

Simeon: I also like to look at that idea in reverse, as it were. So: if I have some talent or other, God must have given me that talent, in order that I might use it for His honour, as a part of my contribution to the Church. In other words, all our talents, abilities and understandings are to be offered in God's service. If I don't acknowledge one of my abilities and don't use it for God's glory, my role in the Church is incomplete.

Jereboam: It sounds challenging when you put it like that.

Simeon: That's because it is...

THIS WEEK

In Sunday's Gospel Jesus is seen returning to Galilee "in the power of the Spirit" where he goes to the synagogue and teaches from Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor." He ends with the significant words "Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing."

Tuesday this week is the feast day of Saint Thomas Aquinas, priest and doctor of the Church, Friday sees that of St John Bosco, priest, venerated for his ministry to

children and the poor. On Saturday we celebrate St Bride (St Brigid).

The first readings at the Eucharist this week continue from the letter to the Hebrews: Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant and a priest who "offered one sacrifice for sins. He took his seat for ever at the right hand of God."

In St Mark's Gospel this week, the ever-critical scribes accuse Jesus of being possessed by demons. Jesus responds clearly, "If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand." When told his family has arrived to see him, he replies that "whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." He tells the story of the sower and the seed and after the crowd dispersed, Jesus explains to the disciples that the seed is the word of God, received in various ways. He encourages his disciples to show their faith: "Is a lamp brought in to be placed under a bushel basket or under a bed, and not to be placed on a lampstand?" Jesus compares the Kingdom with the tiniest of mustard seeds which grow to "the largest of plants." He calms the seas during a storm. His disciples wonder, "Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?"

Next Sunday is the Feast of the Presentation, which commemorated the infant Jesus being brought to the Jerusalem Temple, where he is recognised as the Messiah by Simon and Anna. Candlemas marks the end of the extended Christmas / Epiphany season.

A Homily for the Third Sunday of Epiphany

When, at the end of the Gospel reading, Jesus says to those who were listening to him in the synagogue in his home town of Nazareth, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." What does he mean? He seems to mean quite clearly that the words of the prophet Isaiah apply to him personally and apply to him as to no one else; he is the Saviour for whom the people of Israel had been waiting for many generations, that he is the chosen one of God who would free them and lead them to God's kingdom, lead them to the presence of God. In other words he is claiming to be the Messiah.

What was the reaction of those who heard him? How seriously did they take what he was saying? We have to remember that

this was the place where Jesus had been brought up; they knew his family and probably, as they thought, everything about him. What happens next - after today's Gospel passage answers these questions in just the way we might anticipate, they reject his claims out of hand and even try to do away with him. Some one has said that if Jesus had confined himself simply to doing good things at Nazareth, healing the sick, the kind of things which bring comfort, there would have been no problem. The difficulty begins when he insisted on talking to his friends and neighbours and acquaintances about the power of God, about the proclamation of liberty to the captives, the freeing of the oppressed, recovery of sight to the blind and the bringing of Good News - the sort of things that make some powerful people uncomfortable then and now. The problem is that Jesus can't talk about these things, he can't perform the actions associated with these ringing proclamations, without also pointing to himself. And that sets the pattern for his ministry. It's not only what *he does*, it's *who he is and who he claims to be* which matters. It's who he is which determines what he does.

And that's the difficulty we all have when we are confronted with the person of Jesus. It's not possible to separate the actions he does, the teaching he gives from the astonishing claims he makes. I know people *have* tried to separate them, saying that Jesus never made the claims about himself that St Paul and the Christian Church - always the villains of the piece - make on his behalf. But it's clearly stretching the limits of interpretation to read the Gospels in this way, his divine claims and his divine actions are quite impossible to disentangle and, as we see from this morning's Gospel, they are there right from the beginning. This isn't a teacher and miracle worker who people later come to regard as the Son of God; he makes those claims himself. And the choices the people in the Nazareth synagogue had to make in their reaction to him - do they accept what he says about himself or do they reject it - are essentially our choices too.

The message that he is proclaiming and in a literal sense embodying in his own person is that God's power is not like our idea of power at all, God himself doesn't correspond to the categories into which

we desperately try to pigeonhole him in order to avoid the real implications for the way we think and behave. What Jesus showed the world, in his words but above all in his life, is that God's power is the power of love, the power which looks very much like weakness -- something so radically different that our minds by themselves struggle to grasp it. It was the German theologian and opponent of Nazism who said "Christianity stands or falls with its revolutionary protest against violence, arbitrariness and pride of power and with its plea for the weak." Surely I don't have to spell out the relevance of that today and in the last week particularly. And it's crucially important that we don't overlook what God in Christ is always seeking to do in the world just because it doesn't fit in with our own preconceived and economically and politically convenient ideas of how the world and God should interact, and not ignore those habits of thought and behaviour that the Gospel message demands of us. That's the message the Episcopal Bishop of Washington DC was delivering to an unwilling audience last week.

In Christ We are being drawn deeper and deeper into a mystery that cannot be bound by time. That moment in today's Gospel when Jesus began to speak is made present for us here today not just in words or sounds but actually present (both in Word and Sacrament) as he himself was present in the synagogue at Nazareth.

If we are not very careful we can relegate both the scriptures and Jesus himself to the past. We can fall into the trap of reading the Gospels as if they were simply modern-style biographies of Jesus and fail to recognize that they are also meant to be about the unfolding of faith in our own lives. We fail to, or are afraid to, accept that these words of scripture are being addressed to us now and are meant to challenge us in precisely the same way as those people were who were brought face to face with Jesus as described in the Gospels themselves. We are invited to listen carefully to God's Word, and to receive as if it is the first time that we have heard it and believed it. It's enough to be going on with, but it helps us to understand the truth that Christ isn't someone from the past and that our faith isn't just a philosophy of life, or a way of

coping with the meaninglessness of modern existence but someone who is present among us here and now.

The questions we ask about the meaning of existence and more particularly and of more personal significance to us *about the meaning of our own lives* are answered by the questions we ask ourselves about Christ, not only, 'who is he?' but '*who is he for me*' and what difference does that make? The answers we receive to those questions are found in the creeds and formularies of the Christian Church, even if we have to dig a bit deeper so we can discover their relevance for us today, but they are given *flesh and blood*, immediate personal meaning, by our own listening to the Word of God, by our receiving of his life in Holy Communion, and by our prayer and devotion which draw strength from that. And that's a process because faith itself is a process - a lifetime's process - which we have a duty - a calling - to try to deepen and broaden until there's no aspect of our lives which isn't touched by it and transformed by it. It doesn't normally happen overnight and there are no easy or instant answers promised us. Instead we are drawn into the mystery who is God, and Jesus Christ is that mystery's human face: God with us and among us and for us. God become one of us. It is Dietrich Bonhoeffer [again, someone whose significance to the present day seems to be growing by the minute] who sums up very clearly this revolutionary act of solidarity - the act which breaks down the barriers between the divine and the human - between what is holy and the ordinary things of life, even we could say between what people call 'religion' and the everyday lives we all lead: "It's not enough to say that God takes care of human beings.... Out of love for human beings, God *becomes* a human being. +

Bishop Cherry is visiting the Ministry Area on Thursday (30th January)
Various events will take place across our communities. There will be a celebration of the Eucharist at St Arvan's at 7 p.m.

The Ministry Area Prayer Group meets every Thursday 7.45pm – 9pm at David Carne's house, The Cedars, Chapel Lane, Pwllmeyric.
email david@bedlambeds.com
This week the prayer group will attend the Bishop's celebration at St Arvans

SERVICES IN OUR CHURCHES TODAY

The Third Sunday of Epiphany 26th January 2025

10 a.m. Sung Eucharist at St Arvan's
11.30 a.m. Holy Eucharist
at St Deiniol's, Itton

NEXT SUNDAY **The PRESENTATION** **OF THE LORD**

'Candlemas' 2nd February 2025

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

Readings:

Malachi 3.1-5; Psalm 24. [1-6,] 7-10
Hebrews 2.14-18; St Luke 2.22-40

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

Fr Michael's day off is Monday

Daily celebrations of the Eucharist (Tuesday to Saturday) at St Arvan's are at 10 a.m.

Puddings and Alpha! **Starting Sunday 12th !**

The Alpha course is a free 10 week course involving eating puddings, meeting others and learning about the Christian faith in an informal way. Each session we will share a delicious pudding, watch a video and have time for discussion where different thoughts, ideas and opinions can be raised
Sundays 7pm - 8.45pm 12th January to 23rd March at St Christopher's Bulwark.
Alpha is for those new to faith, and it's also for those who want to explore their faith further.
For more information, contact Zoe or Barney
at SaintsChepstow@cinw.org.uk