

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 later
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

21st December 2025 The Fourth Sunday of Advent

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 prophet Isaiah

The LORD spoke to Ahaz, saying,
'Ask a sign of the LORD your God;
let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.'
But Ahaz said, 'I will not ask,
and I will not put the LORD to the test.'
Then he said: 'Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary

mortals, that you weary my God also?
Therefore the Lord himself will give you
a sign. Look, the young woman is with
child and shall bear a son,
and shall name him Emmanuel.

[7. 10 - 14]

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

Psalm 80 1 - 7, 18 - 19

**R/ Restore us, O God of hosts
show the light of your countenance,
and we shall be saved.**

Hear, O Shepherd of Israel,
you that led Joseph like a flock;
Shine forth, you that are enthroned
upon the cherubim,
before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh.
Stir up your mighty strength
and come to our salvation.

**R/ Restore us, O God of hosts
show the light of your countenance,
and we shall be saved.**

O Lord God of hosts,
how long will you be angry
at your people's prayer?
You feed them with the bread of tears;
you give them abundance
of tears to drink.
You have made us
the derision of our neighbours,
and our enemies laugh us to scorn.

**R/ Restore us, O God of hosts
show the light of your countenance,
and we shall be saved.**

Let your hand be upon the man
at your right hand,
the son of man you made
so strong for yourself.
And so will we not go back from you;
give us life, and we shall call
upon your name.

**R/ Restore us, O God of hosts
show the light of your countenance,
and we shall be saved.**

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Romans [1; 1- 7]

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to
be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of
God, which he promised beforehand
through his prophets in the holy scriptures,
the gospel concerning his Son, who was
descended from David according to the
flesh and was declared to be Son of God
with power according to the spirit of
holiness by resurrection from the dead,
Jesus Christ our Lord. Through Christ we
have received grace and apostleship to
bring about the obedience of faith among
all the Gentiles for the sake of his name,
including yourselves who are called to
belong to Jesus Christ, To all God's
beloved in Rome, who are called to be
saints: Grace to you and peace from God
our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

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

Gradual Hymn

Gospel Acclamation

Alleluia, alleluia!
The Virgin will conceive
and give birth to a Son
and they will call him Emmanuel,
a name which means 'God-is-with-us.'
Alleluia!

The Lord be with you:
And also with you

Hear the Holy Gospel
according to St Matthew

Glory to you, O Lord.

The birth of Jesus the Messiah took
place in this way. When his mother Mary
had been engaged to Joseph,
but before they lived together, she was
found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.
Her husband Joseph, being a righteous
man and unwilling to expose her to public
disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly.

But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.'

All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,' which means, 'God is with us.'

When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him.

[1.18–24]

The Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you, O Christ

For Your Prayers

For peace and joy as we celebrate Christmas in our hearts, lives and throughout the world.

The government & people of Ukraine and a just and peaceful end to Russia's war of aggression there.

The people of Gaza, & Israel, & for lasting peace in the Middle East

For wisdom, restraint and a desire for peace among the nations of the world.

All who are caught up in war or conflict
All those without adequate food or shelter

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, & Archbishop of Wales; 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 Leo, 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 Jackson; The Revd Helen Rodwell; Elisabeth; Anne-Louise; Mary; Peter; Margaret; Althea; Margi Osborne, Nathan;

For the Departed:

The recently departed; our own departed relatives & friends, and those whose anniversaries of death fall this week: Nick Hoskins; Reg Cook; Ivir Shephard; 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 people whose lives have been affected in some way by Jesus Christ and his teaching

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

On the Fourth Sunday of Advent, we read in Matthew's Gospel about Joseph and his decision to divorce the pregnant Mary. An angel comes to Joseph: "Do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her."

St Luke's Gospel is our guide this week. On Monday, Mary at the Visitation responds to her cousin Elizabeth: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my saviour for he has looked upon his lowly servant...From this day all generations will call me blessed." On Tuesday we hear of the naming of John by Zechariah. On Wednesday, during the day, we hear Zechariah's prayer of praise after being allowed to speak again. The scenes and canticles, or songs, which are part of the story, are so well known to us that we can so easily taken them for granted and miss hearing them afresh and with an open heart.

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 St 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 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."

December 26th celebrates St. Stephen, the first martyr. December 27th is the feast of the Beloved Disciple, St. John, Apostle and Evangelist.

Next Sunday The First Sunday of Christmas is known as The Holy Family.

It is also the second day in the eight days of celebrating Christmas (The Christmas Octave). There are readings from the Book of Sirach, the First Book of Samuel, Paul's letter to the Colossians or the First

Letter of St John. The gospel from St Matthew is the story of the angel appearing to Joseph in a dream, telling him to flee with Mary and their newborn son, Jesus, to Egypt so Herod could not find them. After a time, they returned and lived in Nazareth, "so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, he shall be called a Nazarean."

A Homily for Advent 4

+ How willing are we to trust what we hear and what we see? How far can we trust other people? I may be wrong, but I get the sense that trust is a fairly rare commodity in society at the moment. Social media and the internet is full of misinformation, the advent of AI fills us with foreboding about deep fakes and whether we will be able ever again to trust the evidence of our own eyes and ears, at least when we're online. For a while now some politicians have built entire careers on not telling the truth and banking (literally sometimes) on the fact that a lot of people will believe them even when what they say is obvious insane nonsense. In private life, I suspect life has never felt so insecure, relationships of all kinds give the impression of an ever-greater fragility. Trust is in short supply; often for very understandable reasons. The false gospel of unlimited choice and the illusion that we should be happy 100% of the time or our lives are a failure *can* be utterly devastating upon individuals, families and society itself who can't, or don't have the money, to even pretend to attain the ideal.

Into the midst of this, as a kind of radical alternative, comes this morning's Gospel, which is *all about* trust. We are presented with Joseph, a man of utter nobility, integrity and honour. Discovering that his fiancée is already pregnant, even before he knows the truth, he refuses to humiliate Mary and cause a public scandal. In this he is completely unlike the heroes of fiction, Shakespeare's included. We have to ask ourselves how many men would then go on to marry Mary on the basis of a dream, however vivid. Clearly Joseph knew her character; not for nothing does the Archangel salute her as "full of grace." In the depths of his heart Joseph trusted in Mary and in God, too; he has no doubts after his dream that his wife-to-be and he himself have been singled out for an event

which is something unique in the history of salvation, truly a mystery beyond compare.

And then there is Blessed Mary herself. She puts her trust in the words of an angelic messenger although she must have known that few people were likely to have believed her story; she knows that to bear a child in this way could only bring shame on her family. But, again, she places her trust in Joseph's integrity, and in God too. She responds in a way which sets aside all notions of social respectability and what we would call 'common sense'. She recognises the authenticity of the angel's message and the truth of the vision. She puts her faith in the grace of God, and in the God-given honour of the man, Joseph.

It's been said that this passage from the Gospels which we've just heard revolves almost entirely around names and reputations. Joseph is told by the angel to give Jesus his name, and so claim him as his own son. And it's Joseph, of course, who transmits to Jesus the historic lineage of David, he becomes the heir to the royal house of Judah, and so fulfilling the words of the prophets. Joseph obeys the will of God and risks his own reputation in order to take into his care Mary carrying her unborn, divine son.

And I suppose one lesson we can draw from this passage (and it's not so incidental as we might think) is that to follow Jesus as a true disciple we have to take care of other people's good name. For the great medieval theologian, St Thomas Aquinas, someone's reputation was the most valuable thing they have - to destroy it is a form of robbery with violence. That's something to hang on to in a world which is always obsessed with celebrity tittle-tattle and the irresistible pleasure of passing on the latest bit of juicy gossip, whether it's true or not.. St Joseph teaches us how to welcome God's son into our lives this Christmas, caring for everyone's reputation, and at the same time, if necessary, not being afraid to lose our own.

But, of course, behind the human trust that we see so clearly and poignantly displayed in Mary and Joseph as a couple, there is of course something much greater here and that is the eternal trustworthiness of God, whose word once uttered can never be broken. God's total faithfulness in keeping faith with humanity

is not only on a completely different scale from ours, it has another extraordinary dimension to it. the unwritten promise that God has made to all creation.

We are preparing to celebrate the birth of Jesus, and mysterious and wonderful though the birth was, it's been said that in a way it was the most certain event in this world. From the beginning God has kept his promises, and his coming as man, his coming among us as one of us, was meant from the beginning.

The message the Church proclaims at this time of year is far more than a message of peace and goodwill on earth. We are being asked to trust in something much more sure and certain than to place our hopes in human benevolence and goodwill, something which we know well, just can't be relied upon. God is asking us to trust him, the One who makes *eternal* promises, the one who will not destroy reputations, who will not lose faith in us though we may lose faith in him, the one who will not change his mind and betray us or lie to us or worse.

Only the Word of God who is Christ can restore a fragmented and alienated humanity, divided from each other and from the things of God - a human race which is not what it ought to be - to wholeness and the fullness of being alive, and ensuring that honesty and fidelity prevail in human relationships, our own included. The gospel tells us that Mary bears a son whose name is Emmanuel, or 'God-is-with-us'. The knowledge that God has become one of us is the one real antidote to the unjust, chaotic mess we've made of the world. No human being can ever rise to the level of the fidelity and truthfulness of God, but in a world full of deceit, of lying, of broken promises, the faithfulness of God in Christ shines as a light in the darkness. For the remaining days of Advent and the coming Christmas season, let's pray that, through God's grace, and the prayers of Blessed Mary & St Joseph, we and the world of which we are a part, may grow in honesty and in fidelity both to one another, and to the values of the Gospel Christ comes to proclaim. +

SERVICES IN OUR CHURCHES TODAY

The Fourth Sunday of Advent 21st December 2025

10 a.m. Sung Eucharist
at St Arvan's

NEXT SUNDAY

The First Sunday of Christmas *The Holy Family* 28th December 2025

10 a.m. Sung Eucharist
at St Arvan's

Readings:

Isaiah 63.7-9

Psalm 148 or 148.7-14

Hebrews 2.10-18

St Matthew 2.13-23

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

CHRISTMAS SERVICES

Monday 22nd December
6 p.m. St Arvan's Church
Nine Lessons & Carols.
followed by refreshments

Tuesday: 23rd December
10 a.m. Holy Eucharist (*said*)
in the Lady Chapel at St
Arvans

Wednesday 24th December
CHRISTMAS EVE

10 a.m. Holy Eucharist (*said*)
in the Lady Chapel at St
Arvans
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
*This is the 'midnight'
celebration for all our
parishes – please join us!*

Thursday December 25th:
CHRISTMAS DAY
The Nativity of Our Lord

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 at 10
a.m. on Friday – St Stephen's
Day and Saturday -for the
Feast of St John*

SUNDAY 28th December:
**THE FIRST SUNDAY
OF CHRISTMAS**
(*The Holy Family*)

10 a.m. Sung Eucharist
at St Arvans

SUNDAY 4th January:
kept as **THE EPIPHANY
OF THE LORD**

10 a.m. Sung Eucharist
at St Arvans
11.30 a.m. Holy Eucharist
with hymns at Penterry
4 p.m. All Age Eucharist
at Devauden

SUNDAY 11th January:
The Baptism of the Lord
10 a.m. Sung Eucharist
at St Arvans
11.30 a.m. Liturgy of the
Word at Itton

Many thanks to everyone who has taken part in the Advent course this year.

Many thanks, too, to all who have worked so hard in our preparations for Christmas and in our events during Advent and to those who have decorated our churches so beautifully for the Christmas Season

Daily Prayer

This may be one of the most difficult weeks to be reflective throughout each day. This weekend may be quite full for many of us. Others of us may be alone although we may be a part of the faith community on Wednesday or Thursday, or perhaps daily this week. While some of us have guests staying with us and a house to clean this week, others of us will be reviewing memories and struggling, even a little, or a great deal, with being alone. Even though this may be a very busy week, with final Christmas preparations, or perhaps travel to visit family, it can be a contemplative week if we focus our desires each morning. No matter what our days hold, we can take a few minutes in the shower or while getting dressed to consciously ask

for the grace to approach Christmas with faith and with a heart open to the graces offered us. "Lord, help me today to stay focused on your coming in the flesh to be with us. While I'm busy about this and that, I ask your help. Keep reminding me throughout this day about Mary's acceptance of your plan for her, about the poverty into which Jesus was born." We will use our own words to connect these stories of our Salvation with the concrete interactions and events of our upcoming day. Then, throughout the day, we will be able to let familiar parts of the story sustain us this week. All of us can relate to Zechariah's hesitation. We can look for and notice the times when we are hesitant to place our trust in God and how little we have to say about faith. But, when Zechariah could write "His name is John (God is gracious)," Zechariah could speak again. As we rush from one place to another, we can pray, "Lord, I know you are gracious, even when I act like I doubt it. Let me place my trust in you." Mary herself can be a wonderful guide for us this week, and we can be bold in

asking her to show us the graces her Son wants to give us this week. The one who says "Behold the handmaid of the Lord" and "My being proclaims the greatness of the Lord" can help us find words for our "yes" and for our giving praise to God this week.

It could be a great grace to pause before going to church, Christmas Eve or Christmas morning, as individuals or for a brief prayer as a family, to ask for the grace to be touched by how he came in history for us and how he comes now among us still, to set us free.

From now until the celebration that closes the Christmas season - the Baptism of the Lord on January 12th -- we can enter more fully into this sacred season.

With acknowledgements to Creighton University's Online Ministries, Omaha U.S.A.

St Arvans Tea and Chat

Saturday January 10th
and usually every second Saturday of the month
Childrens activity table

For assistance or a lift please ring Diane on 628084

The Ministry Area Prayer Group

will resume in the New Year