



The Benefice of St Mary's Bocking & Panfield Church



Sunday 10th December 2023
The Second Sunday of Advent
Staying in Contact

The Very Revd Rod Reid - Incumbent (*usual rest day Monday*)

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or on Facebook, search for 'St Mary's Church, Bocking', or 'Panfield Church'

Forthcoming Services

Hymns

St Mary's, Bocking

Sunday 10th December	8am	Said Mass
	10am	Sung Mass
Wednesday 13th December	9.30am	Said Mass
Sunday 17th December	8am	Said Mass
	10am	Nativity with Carols
	6pm	Carols by Candlelight

503

2

404

393

Panfield Church

Sunday 10th December	11am	Morning Worship
Tuesday 12th December	5pm	Evening Prayer/Office Hour
Sunday 17th December	3pm	Carol Service

Gospel Acclamation

*Prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight his paths: all people
shall see the salvation of God*

NOTICES

Nativity - We are really pleased to say that Jacky Mitchell has written a Christmas Play with the Nativity story at the heart of it, and a camel called Camellia of course! Lots of the church family are involved and others too, and so to make sure we give it a full performance Fr Rod has agreed that it will be our service next Sunday at 10am, and we are very hopeful that other families will join us for the occasion. Alongside the Nativity we will have carols for us all to sing, and we hope you will support this.

Christmas Tree Festival - A huge thanks to every single person who has worked so hard in the lead up to and across the Christmas Tree Festival. The Christmas Market yesterday was really busy despite the awful weather, and monies raised will follow in a few weeks. We really are extremely grateful to those who volunteered and took part. A big team effort, which is very much appreciated.

Christmas Postcards - There are still plenty of postcards and we would love to get the last of these out across the village. Notable gaps include the new estate on the former Courtauld's site, much of Church Lane, as well as Carrington Way and Dorewards Avenue. If you can help then please see Fr Rod.

Christingle Making - We would love your help to make our 120 Christingles this year. All volunteers are welcome to join us in the Church Hall on Saturday 23rd December at 9.30am. Many hands make light work as they say! Please let Fr Rod or Irene know if you are able to assist, thank you.

Fellowship - Thursday Dec 21st at 12.30pm in the Church Hall it will be the last Fellowship meeting of the year. It is a Christmas themed lunch, with some entertainment and carol-singing. All welcome.

The Retreat, Bocking & The Bell, Panfield - We will be carol singing in The Retreat on Wednesday 20th Dec from 7.30pm, and at The Bell, Panfield on Thursday Dec 21st also at 7.30pm. Come and join us!

Messy Christmas - On Thurs 21st Dec from 10-11.30am, St Mary's are having a craft morning in church with activities, refreshments and carols. If you are around to help please let Fr Rod know. Thanks.

Friendly Friday Cafe - will run until this Friday December 15th with a special Christmas session. After a short break the new season will begin on Friday January 12th 2024. All are very welcome.

Prayers - We keep in our prayers Julie Wilkinson, Barry and Janice Goody, Jean Goodwin, Sue, Roger, Frances, Jo Meech, Tony & Ann and Margaret Everitt. We remember our care homes Millard House, Fern Lodge, Aspen Grange, Larchwood, The New Deanery & St Mary's Court. In our Years Mind, we pray for the families of Betty Thomas, Montague Bitton, Ellen Plumb, Raymond Horrix, Edith Carter, Lillian Green, Timothy Lake, Ronald Taylor, Hilda Kent and Roy Dove.

The Collect for Advent Sunday

O Lord, raise up, we pray, your power
and come among us, and with great might succour us;
that whereas, through our sins and wickedness
we are grievously hindered
in running the race that is set before us,
your bountiful grace and mercy
may speedily help and deliver us;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
to whom with you and the Holy Spirit,
be honour and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

Epistle Reading - 2 Peter 3:8-15a

But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed. Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home. Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given to him.

Gospel Reading - Mark 1:1-8

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight"', John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

Address

As I am sure most of us know, since 1947 Norway has sent a tree to Britain as a thank you for its support during World War II. The tree of course takes pride of place in Trafalgar Square. You may perhaps have also read that this year's tree attracted some criticism for its brown, sparse and asymmetrical appearance. All, however, is now said to be well: branches that were removed to help with the transportation of the tree have been re-attached. There is, however, still a lingering question about whether, in these much more environmentally conscious times, it is appropriate to cut down a healthy tree and ship it from Norway to England.

Fortunately these are not issues for us to decide at St Mary's. Instead we can enjoy the Christmas trees which so beautifully decorate the church this weekend and herald a shift in mood from early Advent with its theme of penitence to a growing anticipation of Christmas itself. Next Sunday's morning service will be given over to a retelling of the Christmas story complete with shepherds, wise men, an evil king, the holy family and a not always perfectly compliant camel.

For the time being, however, it is still Advent. The Gospel readings for this and next Sunday focus on John the Baptist (or baptizer as St Mark calls him). John seems not to have wasted words. His message was a call to repentance in preparation for the coming of the promised Messiah; the one who would baptise not with water but the Holy Spirit; the one whom we know as Jesus of Nazareth and as the Christ, the second person of the Trinity. But that is for a Christmas sermon, not one on the second Sunday of Advent.

So let me return to the seemingly imperfect Trafalgar Square Christmas tree. Is there perhaps a message for us in its lack of perfection? I greatly appreciate the music, songs and poetry of the late Canadian poet and musician Leonard Cohen. I use the word appreciate rather than enjoy because there is a darkness at the heart of much, though by no means all, of his writing. In the song called Anthem, Cohen tells us: 'Forget your perfect offering. There is a crack, a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in'.

I won't try to interpret that fragment of Cohen's writing. But it does suggest to me that there is an argument for being prepared to live with some degree of imperfection. Sometimes it is indeed through the broken and the cracked that some glimmers of light can get in. Perhaps the Trafalgar Square Christmas tree in its damaged condition might have had a more powerful message than the repaired tree? Indeed in some cultures, such as Japanese, things that have been broken and carefully repaired are valued more highly than pristine items

That does not mean being content with what is shoddy or not fit for purpose. But it may be that striving too hard for an unachievable perfection is ultimately damaging. The concept of being 'good enough' might be a familiar one to some of us. Trying always to be 'best' and never quite succeeding might be more damaging than aiming slightly lower and achieving, or even surpassing, what is being aimed for. Learning to live with the cracks and the imperfections may be a useful message for some of us, especially those with perfectionist tendencies.

Jesus, it could be argued, may have recognised something of this. The sort of people he called to be his closest followers were not, so far as we know, high achievers. They were small businessmen, minor government officials, people used to working with their hands. They were not perfect. St Peter, just to take one example, comes across as fiercely loyal, quite stubborn and prone to speaking before he thought things through. No doubt we have encountered a few St Peter's in our lifetimes. None of them would have been a sealed container, impervious to the light and darkness of the real world.

Rather, they would have had their cracks through which the light filtered in and then shone in the world around. There is a place for accepting a degree of imperfection in ourselves and in others.

I have in the past been used to a tradition that held firmly to the view that Christmas did not start until the evening of Christmas Eve. Until then no Christmas carols would have been allowed in church, though Advent carols might have been sung earlier in December. Nor indeed would there have been much sign of Christmas decoration until Christmas Eve, either in church or indeed at home. There is a part of me that understands this wish not to anticipate the festival but rather to keep Advent solely as a time of preparation. But I increasingly accept that this purist view is unrealistic. I don't want to start Christmas in October as some of the shops seem to do, but I have no qualms about church looking Christmassy and getting into the Christmas mood by about the middle of Advent. So it is very good to see all the trees today. Thank you to all who have worked so hard to decorate the church for this Christmas Tree Festival weekend.

I am sure I speak for Fr Rod as well as myself when I encourage you to come and experience something a little different next Sunday. And we will be singing some carols even if it is still Advent!

Amen.

Post Communion Prayer

Father in heaven,
who sent your Son to redeem the world
and will send him again to be our judge:
give us grace so to imitate him
in the humility and purity of his first coming
that, when he comes again,
we may be ready to greet him
with joyful love and firm faith;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

You can scan this QR code with
your phone at anytime and
make a donation to the church.

Open your camera app, hold it
over the QR code and then
click 'open link' *Thank you*

