



# The Benefice of St Mary's Bocking & Panfield Church



Sunday 24th December 2023  
The Fourth 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 24th December

8am Said Mass

10am Sung Mass

5pm Christingle

11.30pm Midnight Mass

Monday 25th December

10am Christmas Day Mass

Wednesday 27th December

\*\*\* Please note—no service \*\*\*

Sunday 31st December

8am Said Mass

10am Sung Mass

### **Panfield Church**

Sunday 24th December

3pm Crib Service

Monday 25th December

10.30am Christmas Day Communion

Sunday 31st December

\*\*\* Please note—no service \*\*\*

26 (*omit v4*)

Come thou long expected  
(*see sheet*)

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Tell out my soul  
(*see sheet*)

## Gospel Acclamation

*The Virgin will conceive and bear  
a Son, and his name will be  
called 'Emmanuel'.*

## NOTICES

**Thank you** - Rod and the family would like to say a huge thank you to all of you for the cards and gifts in the run up to Christmas, each of which is thoroughly appreciated. It seems hard to believe this is our 10th Christmas in the Benefice! We all hope that you have a wonderful and Happy Christmas.

**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. We really are extremely grateful to those who volunteered and took part. A big team effort, which is very much appreciated. The final total is just over £2,500 (with gift aid to be claimed too!) and includes £230 from the Brass Band concert at the start of the month.

**Eco Church** - Well done St Mary's! After the further hard work, we have been awarded an Eco Church, Silver Certificate! This is a brilliant and deserved reward, but the work goes on!

**Midweek Services** - A reminder that there will be no Office Hour/Evening Prayer in Panfield until January 9th, and the next midweek communion service at St Mary's will be on Wednesday Jan 3rd 2024!

**Friendly Friday Cafe** - A reminder that the next session of the Friendly Friday Café will be January 12th following a Christmas Break. Sessions will then run up to just before Easter.

**Prayers** - We keep in our prayers Barry and Janice Goody, Jean Goodwin, Sue, Roger, Frances, Jo Meech, and Tony & Ann. 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 Frank Goodchild, Ruth Warren, Frank Camp, Irene Clayden, Quinton Riley, Mary Evans, Jonathon Pearson, Harold Moore, David Dixon, Ralph Fuller, Dorothy Johnson, Agnes Adams & Stephanie Collins.

## The Collect for The Fourth Sunday of Advent

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.

### ***Epistle Reading - Romans 16:25-end***

Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory for ever! Amen.

### ***Gospel Reading - Luke 1:26-38***

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.' Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.

## Address

So, excitement is at near peak levels now, or at least it is in our house. Just 14hrs to go! The wonder, the awe and the joy are just amazing, and we see it best in children, don't we.

Much as I feel that excitement too, we are still in Advent, only just, but we are. A season of waiting and expectation and on this the fourth Sunday of Advent, we remember Mary. I feel we shouldn't short change her voice and experience by rushing into Christmas, but continue our wait even if only for a few more hours. Not least, as I think her witness has much to say to us and teach us, that will last long through Christmas and into the New Year.

We first meet her when she is visited by the Angel Gabriel, a moment when her life changes. This angel unexpectedly appearing with news that quite simply would transform her life. And as we hear it again, I am always struck by Mary's humanity. She must have had hopes and dreams, plans for her life, and that with Joseph. And then they are changed forever.

She is not some fictional literary character, but a woman living her life, she is simply Mary, and then it all changed. Now she is probably the most well-known Mary ever, whether to a believer or not. Let's not miss then, that as the angel visits her, in something much like a dream or vision, her world is turned upside down.

Even more staggering is her response because while there is some trepidation, there is also a determination and a strength of faith which should encourage us. Mary abandons her plans and seeks to fulfil God's, trusting they would be best for her. What a leap of faith. Joseph too, when he hears the news, gives up on his plans. He is no walk on extra in our story, albeit not a speaking part, but he is central too, and he 'in faith' gives up on his dreams, to again follow God's. They really are quite the partnership.

Rather incredibly dreams appear over 70 times in scripture. God becoming present and real in the midst of them, changing lives time after time. Did you know all of us dream? We may not remember them the next day, but we do all dream. The presence of dreams has been found in the sleep of every single human being, and usually for a minimum of 1 hr 30mins each night.

So as your head hits the pillow, for at least 90mins, we are transported to a place of truth, the world that is our unconscious self. A place full of memories, needs, and feelings that our minds don't often acknowledge. We really are marvellous and awesome human beings!

And we don't dream by accident. We were designed to dream, as a way of processing the day, but also as a place of discovery. These dreams, so many of which we can't remember, are windows into our souls, our very being. Places where our minds reach beyond, to sense there is more, to sense God.

What do those dreams have to say? Is it all too easy to forget to dream, to hope, to seek more? Honestly, probably yes, but we are designed to do just that. Psychologists now know though that if this unconscious material is ignored, if it is not acknowledged and integrated in some way into our lives, then we will suffer great mental and emotional distress.

Dreams, visions, feelings are the way we compensate for the spirit and truth we have cut out of our lives. Dreams are the way we discover the full image of God that rests deeply within each one of us. Where are your dreams and visions, needs and intuitions this day? Is the unconscious voice of God whispering to you in your heart, in your sleep, in your feelings, in your instincts? What is the restlessness which is stirring you up, echoing in your emptiness, bubbling within your fears and anxieties?

This story of the angels and the shepherds, the star and the wise men, a partnership between Mary and Joseph - this ancient tale about God finding a home in our world - none of it makes much sense. And some historians, non-believers, and scientists find delight in the illegitimacy of this tale. But God persists anyway. I think Christmas is not about fact or fiction. Christmas is about incarnation, God with us.

And the children really could teach us something, the awe, the opportunity, the joy, the wonder they see, we need to re-discover for ourselves. They dream big, with an attitude that nothing is impossible. Well we might know it, that nothing is impossible with God, but do we live it?

Christmas then is God's dream becoming flesh. Christmas is God's invitation to each one of us to experience in our most inner selves the coming together of the human and the divine, to sense the possibilities of our own living, to acknowledge the possibilities of the world's healing. Christmas is our opportunity to believe that beneath the predictable patterns of day to day life, there is the imagination of God's love - that can make all things new.

So this Sunday, irrespective of how close we are to Christmas, let us wake up to our dreams, and more importantly let us wake up to God's dream for us, and then find the courage, like Mary, to not ignore it and go back to sleep, but to wrestle with it, to give ourselves over to it, and make it so. Amen.

## Post Communion Prayer

Heavenly Father,  
who chose the Blessed Virgin Mary  
to be the mother of the promised saviour:  
fill us your servants with your grace,  
that in all things we may embrace your holy will  
and with her rejoice in your salvation;  
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*

