



The Benefice of St Mary's Bocking & Panfield Church



Sunday 4th December 2022
The Second Sunday of Advent
Staying in Contact

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

Email: bockingchurch@gmail.com Call: (01376) 324887 www.stmarys-bocking.com

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

Forthcoming Services

Hymns

St Mary's, Bocking

Sunday 4th December

8am Said Mass
10am Sung Mass

6

492

Wednesday 7th December

9.30am Said Mass

Long ago prophets knew

Sunday 11th December

8am Said Mass
10am Sung Mass

7

Panfield Church

Sunday 4th December

11am Morning Worship

Tuesday 6th December

5pm Evening Prayer

Sunday 11th December

11am Holy Communion

Gospel Acclamation

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

NOTICES

Quarterly Newsletter - St Mary's Bocking are launching their new quarterly newsletter and the first issue is here! Please grab a copy at the back, we are also hoping to deliver over 1200 across the parish. If you can deliver to your road, or neighbouring streets, please sign the list at the back.

Christmas Tree Festival - The Festival will run Dec 10th to 13th with performances, raffle, tombola, pound presents, refreshments and lots of in-house stalls on SATURDAY 10TH DECEMBER, when Father Christmas may even put in an appearance. Posters and leaflets are available at the back of the church.

Festival donations - It is time to get your 'Pound Presents' in to Ann Lanham. We are also looking for items for the 'Tombola'. Instead of a prize draw there will be some hampers, details on what is needed for those are at the back of the church, where you will also find the items needed for the refreshments.

Bocking Calendars - We have a few of the brand new for 2023, Bocking Calendars with photos taken by local photographers. If you would like a copy please speak to Fr Rod. The cost is just £10.

Advent Course - We have made the decision to not go ahead with the course. A number of factors suggests that now is not the right time for enough people, so something to come back to in due course.

A Warm Place this Winter - Every Friday until March 10th we will be opening St Mary's Church Hall from 11.30am to 2pm as a warm place. Along with being a friendly space, there will be refreshments and a simple soup lunch, all of which will be free. Why not bring a friend and come along yourself.

Going Green! - In partnership with A Rocha, an environmental charity, we are hoping to work towards the various awards associated with being an Eco-Church. There will be opportunities for all to get involved as we progress, including for our younger ones. Watch this space for more details.

Prayers - We keep in our prayers Jean Goodwin, Sue, Jackie, Roger Hurford, Frances, Margaret, Peter, Jenifer, Jo, Bernard, and Margaret Everitt. We also 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 John Copp, Ethel Suckling, Harold Andrews, Caroline Chinnery, Bessie Sibley. John May and Maureen McCready.

The Collect for The Second Sunday of Advent

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 - Romans 15:4-13

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, 'Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles, and sing praises to your name'; and again he says, 'Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people'; and again, 'Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him'; and again Isaiah says, 'The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall hope.' May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 3:1-12

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.' This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, 'The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."' Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptised by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our ancestor"; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 'I baptise you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing-floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.'

Address

Have you begun to send Christmas Cards yet?

Of all the characters we might find on our Christmas cards – Mary, Joseph, the Kings, Shepherds, and angels... I have never once seen one with an image of John the Baptist. Of course, at the time of Jesus' birth he would only have been a baby himself, but although he's recognised as a prophet who points us to Jesus Christ, he's really not the stuff of Christmas cards – wild, scary, with a rather daunting message of repentance. In fact, just this week a friend sent me a picture of John the Baptist looking suitably wild and woolly, the wording said 'Merry Christmas you brood of vipers. Now repent'. Fortunately, not available in all good card shops anytime soon.

John's message isn't an easy one. "Choose" says John – choose to repent. Don't think you can hedge your bets by saying I am already baptised but not really changing anything else about your life: instead, we need to keep choosing hope, to keeping choosing light over dark.

His message is one shared by all the prophets of old whom we remember today in our countdown to Christmas. The OT prophets encouraged those listening to choose, John the Baptist did the same in Jesus' time, and I'm sure we would agree the question of choice is as relevant now as it was. However, even if we might want to choose, we are fearful of saying I'm a Christian, fearful that we might be harassed for having a faith. It is not just about choosing in our hearts to repent but to choose to do so in all parts of our life. That really would be counter cultural.

Thankfully, there is very little persecution in the UK based upon faith, but for Christians, and not least the Church of England our place within a wider, societal conversation is slipping. You won't have missed the updated census data released this week which for the first time indicated under half of the eligible UK population would tick the box, Christian. These aren't really surprising figures to us, the trend has been in place for some time. I'm not sure people are anti-Christian, but I think they are anti the church, which spends so much time naval gazing and pontificating on issues. I think for many they think they know what church will be like as a result, the reality of course is somewhat different.

Standing out amongst the crowd is exactly what we must do. John the Baptist did that, he certainly stood out but, in the end, attracted a lot of attention and brought many to faith. He chose hope and light when all seemed lost, in amongst the darkness of the wilderness.

In the light of the census numbers, I want to celebrate the 46% who ticked yes to being Christian, that is still tens of millions of people. 95% of whom we don't see in church either, so what an opportunity for us.

Of course, we could share stories of Christians who have been persecuted, the nurse who was suspended for offering to pray for a patient, a school receptionist suspended after asked friends to pray for her daughter, and the Bible being relegated to the top shelf in all Leicester libraries, a true story.

Those rare times when people are persecuted for their faith, well they are at one end of the scale and far removed from our daily lives. But each slowly chips away, decreases confidence, and undermines. Yes, our situations are a little quieter, but can we really ignore the call of John the Baptist? His message is for all. Prophets proclaimed a message often ignored and often contrary to what the world wanted to hear. Instead, they offered the message the world needed to hear. We need to turn towards the light and seek to live in that light. Repentance and hope will follow.

Can we really say there is no darkness in our hearts? We are human beings; we are fallible, but many day-to-day things do leave us frustrated. I thought of a few... bad driving, people speeding and the camera doesn't seem to flash, homeless people on the street, families without food. Then there are

things in our lives where people, family and friends' actions don't match up to our expectations. All of that and more, leaves us feeling hopeless and wondering where there is light.

So, in Advent we are given the freedom of choice and the ability, if we will use it, to take time to clear some space for ourselves. John's message to us is that we are offered the chance to turn, to repent and to follow Jesus, the one to whom John points the way. We need to stand up and be counted, to live out that choice and our faith by choosing hope and light, by being hope and light in this world that needs it so much.

So, have you begun to write your Christmas cards? Well, if it isn't too late, while you are unlikely to have one with John the Baptist on it, we can certainly take on board his call. Maybe our message for inside can be one of hope and joy.

Christ's birth was the fulfilment of prophecy, and his death and resurrection would conquer the darkness forever, love won. So, I encourage us all, to not just share that message for Christmas but may our message of light in the darkness, hope over evil, be one for every day.

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.