

Newsletter 19

We hope you are keeping safe and well. We are glad to hear about so many in the parish being offered the vaccine now, and we hope that those who have not had it yet will be able to get it soon. At Morning Prayer, we continue to pray for all who are suffering at this time, for medical staff and all key workers.

We will continue to broadcast services on Zoom at 10 am on Sundays and put recordings on the website <https://amchurchsheffield.co.uk>. It is possible to listen in if you dial in with your phone, following the instructions we sent out a couple of weeks ago (repeated at the end of this letter). If you have had problems with this, do try again and be assured that even though you may not hear anything to start with, keep listening because there are some parts where we have to 'mute' participants to help with the recording, and you may have just tuned in at one of these 'silent' times. If you continue to have problems, do please contact us during the week to let us know and we will try and help.

We will continue to open Holy Trinity for Private Prayer for one hour, (10.30am – 11.30am), on Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays. St John's will now only open on Thursdays, (10.30am – 11.30am).

In response to reaching the terrible milestone of 100,000 deaths from COVID-19, the Archbishops invite all to pray. They write "*Starting on 1 February we invite you to set aside time every evening to pray, particularly at 6pm each day. More than ever, this is a time when we need to love each other. Prayer is an expression of love.*" Here is one of the prayers they offer:

Watch, O Lord, with those who wake, or watch, or weep tonight, and give your angels and saints charge over those who sleep.
Tend your sick ones, O Lord Christ.
Rest your weary ones.
Bless your dying ones.
Soothe your suffering ones.
Pity your afflicted ones.
Shield your joyous ones, and all for your love's sake.
Amen.

Attributed to St. Augustine

More details at <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/prayer-nation>

At this uncertain time, we can't make plans to open our churches for public worship and at present cannot plan what we will be doing at Lent and Easter. We have ordered the Lent booklets and will deliver them as soon as possible to all who ordered one. We will definitely go ahead with the Lent discussion group scheduled for 24th February 8pm on Zoom, using the usual Parish meeting ID and password.

Meeting ID: 674 532 3083. Passcode: AMCHURCH or by following the link
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6745323083?pwd=eitkeVdiODV4S1NpRzJv0ZxbTd6UT09>

Hopefully, we can give more information about other plans in the next newsletter.

We continue with Morning Prayer at 9.30 Monday to Thursday on Zoom.

A reminder that there is still time to write something for the Easter edition of TRIO about stories of 'new life' and/or your vaccination stories. Pat Jackson needs all contributions by 22 February: email pat.jackson@blueyonder.co.uk or phone 281 7557.

At the end of January, a new vicar of Ecclesall was licenced – Rev'd Canon Mark Brown. He will also be our Area Dean and we look forward to meeting him at some point.

There is another national survey about Church life during lockdown. York St. John University write: "We would now like to get a sense of how clergy and lay people are coping with the current lockdown. We have created a survey that builds on our experience of the last survey and which should enable us to both assess how things have changed and find out what people think as they look forward to a post-pandemic future for the Church."

It takes about 20 minutes to complete and can be accessed [here](#).

Finally, we will be writing to you shortly as part of our Annual Stewardship campaign, as we are not able to have our usual Stewardship Sunday service. We are grateful for all who continue to support the church financially as well as in serving our parish in so many other ways.

With our good wishes,

Peter and Angie

Instructions for accessing services without using Zoom or a computer

We have discovered that it is possible to join a live Sunday morning service or a Morning Prayer without using Zoom or a computer, i.e., by using your mobile phone or a landline.

The instructions are as follows:

1. *Dial into a service on 0203 0512 874 (you may be charged, please check with your provider) on mobile or landline.*
2. *Enter the meeting ID followed by # ie, 674 532 3083 #*
3. *Enter participant ID followed by # (but this is not required and you can just enter #)*
4. *Enter the passcode, if needed 44005254 #*

Once you have dialled the first number the phone instructions are very clear.

Third Sunday of Epiphany – St John’s - 24th January 2021

“On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee ...” John 2:1a

Clergy often find weddings more problematic than funerals. The pressures may be greater – branches of families who don’t get on, divorced parents who have to be accommodated with new partners or placed in the final procession, the best man, (ring bearer), who misbehaves, couples with unrealistic demands and guests who produce phones to intrusively try to film every moment. Weddings that are rightly memorable are often those that create a sense of community, of everyone knowing that they are invited to support the couple, not just as witnesses to a legal contract, or for the party at the reception but as participants in an ongoing journey. Some of the most joyful and satisfying services are quiet, low key occasions, with family and friends working together, offering their skills, their time, their love, and listening carefully to the needs expressed by the couple, to make the day special, focused on building for the future rather than simply celebrating a single moment. When this happens, the wedding becomes part of a process which, as the Church of England marriage service states, “enriches society and strengthens community”.

Ancient church lectionaries included the wedding at Cana as a reading for the Epiphany. In the Roman Catholic and the Revised Common Lectionary, it only appears for the second Sunday of Epiphany during Year C. The Church of England restores its importance, during Epiphany tide in all three years of the Common Worship Lectionary. The clue to its placement here lies in the timing, three days after Jesus is baptised, and as the sign that opened his public ministry, revealing his glory. The disciples saw and believed – it was, for them, a moment of Epiphany.

It was also an act that saved the newly-weds and their families from a potentially disastrous social mistake. From our contemporary perspective it might be tempting to view this as essentially a miracle that only lasted a day, nothing more than an occasion for drunkenness. However, in a Semitic society that took the contracting of marriage extremely seriously, during a ceremony with feasting that lasted some seven days, for the wine to run out was no mere catering error; rather it was a flaw with profound consequences. Inadequate supplies of drink, in a culture that regarded hospitality so highly, would have brought disgrace upon the host families, blighting the married couples’ nuptials, diminishing their status within their community.

This opening miracle clearly sign-posted that Jesus' ministry was focused on building reformed, cohesive communities and not just healing individuals. He commences his public ministry with a joyous celebration of relationships, an overflowing of grace and closes it, (John 19:26-30), on the cross by creating a new relationship between his mother and his favourite disciple before, in his final act prior to death, taking a few drops of wine on a sponge. He begins with a super abundance of good wine and finishes with a dribble of sour wine. In between he offers himself as the epitome of God's extravagant love, as the bread of life, as the true vine, as the good shepherd who draws everyone into the divine flock, (*it's worth noting that today's reading begins "on the third day" John only says 'on the third day' once but he knew the significance to the resurrection*).

The overwhelming generosity offered by Jesus in providing over 120 gallons of wine for a wedding hints at the lavishness of God's love, or, in terms familiar in liturgy, represents "a foretaste of the heavenly banquet". In a eucharistic setting it can sometimes feel hard to experience the wonder of that super abundance through a piece of bread and a sip of wine. Similarly, couples who request a church wedding may be dismayed when the clergy respond with details of legal requirements, qualifying criteria, banns and fees. These regulations may have been designed to ensure that marriage strengthens the community rather than dividing it, but nowadays, when families are so scattered their relevance may be lost.

How to display the vulnerable, open armed extravagance of divine love to all who approach God's house and God's table is one of the major challenges for Christians today. Jesus' reaction to his mother's request is a reminder that meanness is never an option if we are to share the hospitality of his heavenly kingdom.

Sermon - Presentation of Christ in the Temple 2021

31 January 10 am at St. John's

Readings: Malachi 3.1-5; Hebrews 2.14-18; Luke 2.22-40

The service outline for today does such a good job of summarising what today's three bible readings are about, I hardly need to preach a sermon! But I would like to share my thoughts on the theme of storytelling and its link to a central theme of this Candlemas service: light, as symbolised by the candles we will light at the end of the service.

A short story of my journey home from Cheadle last Friday:

I left Mum's house at 5.35pm. It was already dark, and it was windy and raining. I switched on Radio 3 and drove through the dark Peak District countryside, listening to Katie Derham and her selection of music. I know the roads so well and I've done this journey so often that I can predict where I will be at any time. The roads are always quiet – there is no 'rush hour' in the Peak District. In daylight, there are limestone walls, green fields, small villages, windy roads, beautiful views. My mind had wandered, and I was surprised as I rounded the corner by Monyash C of E primary school – as predicted - at 10 past six. There on the green in front of the Bull's Head was the wonderful tall Christmas tree, covered in coloured lights on branches swaying in the wind, with a big star lit up on top. It cheered me up! I've been watching out for it on my journeys, assuming that the Monyash Parish Council must have done what many families have done this year – kept up their lights until Candlemas to cheer us up. So, will it be there next Friday?

I've started with a simple story, giving a few details which helps paint a picture and helps you imagine my journey. Our Gospel reading today is a story which gives enough detail so that you can imagine yourself being there with the Holy Family, hearing the words of Simeon and Anna, pondering their meaning. And you can imagine this elderly man, looking at the face of the infant Jesus with smiling, kindly eyes. Then in verse 40, a single sentence with little detail projects us years into the future, to the story of 12-year-old Jesus in the Temple, as a boy: "*The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom*". In the following verse, another story begins, with sufficient detail and again, you can imagine being there: Jesus continuing to sit in the Temple to listen to the teachers, while his anxious parents thought he had got lost. Later in Luke's gospel, the story of Jesus' ministry and teaching, crucifixion and resurrection. At Candlemas, we are flung from Epiphany towards Lent!

Simeon's prophetic words at the presentation of Christ in the Temple sum up the reason for Jesus coming into the world:

"my eyes have seen your salvation" "a light for revelation to the Gentiles".

The theme of light runs through the whole of the liturgy today. I suggest there are two main groupings for these words about light:

Light given to us and Light shared with others

Light given to us:

In the **Gospel acclamation:**

Today old Simeon proclaims Christ

As the Light of the nations and the Glory of Israel.

In the prayers of penitence:

Hear the words of our Saviour Jesus Christ:

'I am the light of the world.

*Whoever follows me shall never walk in darkness
but shall have the light of life'.*

*Let us therefore bring our sins into his light
and confess them in penitence and faith.*

This fits in with the Malachi reading which foretells the coming of a messenger who will refine and purify. The darkness of sin is brought into the light by confession, that we may have the light of life. As the reading from Hebrews affirms, Jesus came as a human so that he could understand our human tendency to sin and therefore be a “*merciful and faithful high priest*”.

In the introduction to the peace:

the dayspring from on high has broken upon us,

to give light to those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death

This picks up the reading from Hebrews, that we no longer need be afraid of death:

“through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death.”

We have been made more aware of death in these days of the Covid-19 pandemic, when daily figures for deaths are announced in the news. The fear of death is particularly prevalent at this time. How much the light of Christ is needed to free all from this fear, by giving us the hope of eternal life. Therefore, how important, for those of us who know the light of Christ, to be nourished by it in the Eucharist. In the **Eucharistic prayer**, as the consecrated bread is broken, we will say:

God here among us, light in the midst of us, bring us to light and life.

Last Sunday, Peter finished his sermon about the miracle of water into wine at wedding at Cana with the words, “*Jesus’ reaction to his mother’s request is a reminder that meanness is never an option if we are to share the hospitality of his heavenly kingdom.*”

And so, we are called to share the light we have received.

Light shared with others:

We say these words before the **Collect**: *Let us pray that we may know and share the light of Christ;*

and at the **dismissal**: ***Help us, who now go in peace, to shine with your light in the world.***

I believe that the Lent booklet that we have chosen for this year – God’s story, our story - is practical and realistic about what it means for each one of us to share our light. And a big part of that is telling our story – we all have a story; and by being inspired by the story of Jesus life and the light that he brings to the world in all its need, revealing the love of God for all of us.

AMEN