

## **The Benefice of Stoke-by-Nayland, with Leavenheath and Polstead and Nayland with Wissington (Wiston)**

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### **"Toppling Temples and New Beginnings" – Advent Sunday**

One of the most important roles of a priest is to encourage each member of their congregation and indeed the community to explore the inner life of a personal faith. It is that inner life which can take us from darkness to light. It means we are always trying to move beyond the world of external appearances to deep insight and wisdom. It values meaning over achievement. It is more qualitative than quantitative. Instead of sleepwalking through life we seek to live fully awake and watchfully. Rather than thinking about God we emphasise seeing and experiencing God. In short, we live from the inside out rather than from the outside in.

With that in mind I think today is one of the most important Sundays in the church year. It is the First Sunday of Advent. It is the beginning of a new year in the church. Today the cycle of liturgical feasts, fasts, and gospel readings begins anew.

Every year we come to this day and every year on this day we hear a gospel about an ending. According to St. Mark, Jesus says, In those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. It sounds like the end of the world, the grand finale. That is certainly how many have heard the gospel stories associated with the First Sunday of Advent. For most of us, I suspect, there is often some fear and anxiety about the end of life and the end of the world.

But what if that is not what this gospel is about? I wonder if we are often too quick to hear this gospel as being about the end of the world. Instead, maybe today's gospel is about "an" ending but not "the" end. Maybe there's more to our lives and our world than a single static beginning point and a single static ending point separated and defined by time. Maybe beginnings and endings are two sides or perspectives of the same event, recognisable moments of growth and transformation in Christ, deepening's of our interior life. It is not time that separates and defines our beginnings and endings. It is, rather, that Christ joins and unites them. So, every beginning finds its fullness in an ending and every ending is the context for a new beginning. And all that happens in Christ, the one who called himself the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end.

Perhaps that is why the new church year and this Season of Advent begin with a story about an ending. Every beginning starts with an ending. Today's gospel confronts us with a necessary ending that makes space for a new beginning. It reveals a darkness from which new light will shine. It shakes us awake to watch for the one who is always coming. That is the gift and good news of this First Sunday of Advent. Sometimes we need to wake up and face the necessary endings in our lives.

Each one of us comes to this day with all sorts of stories and experiences that have defined us, shaped who we are, given meaning and direction to our lives, and have been the motives and drivers for what we do, how we think, and the ways we relate. They are powerful stories that give structure to our lives and upon which we have built. They are central to our life and identity. They are the stories that shape our view of the world, ourselves, others, and God. We could call them temple stories.

And temple stories fit in well with the context for today's gospel. Jesus and his disciples have just left the temple. In Jesus' day the temple was the centre of Jewish life and identity. It gave the people meaning and direction. One of the disciples, clearly impressed and influenced by the temple, remarked, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" "Not one stone," Jesus says to him, "will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down" (Mark. 13:1-2).

Today's gospel concludes Jesus' teaching in response to that disciple's remark and the other disciples' questions of when this will happen and what the signs of its happening will be. Jesus is telling them that the story of their life and identity is changing and will be replaced with another. He is telling them that they will need to let go of the old view of life, the world, themselves, even of God. They will have to let go of their temple story... and so too must we.

But what are the temple stories you carry within you? What stories have been foundational for you but no longer give you a safe or life-giving place to stand? In what ways have these stories defined and determined your life in such a way that they have denied you the life you really want? How have they narrowed your view of God, the world, others, and yourself?

Look for the places where your world is small, and your life is impoverished, and you'll find a temple story. Look for the patterns of conflict and difficulty in your relationships and you will find a temple story. Look for the ways in which you continue to do the same old thing the same old way with the same old results and you will find a temple story.

Every temple story has a necessary ending. It is the coming of Christ. His coming is the beginning of our new life and a new life story. He is our life and our story. But we can neither live his life nor tell his story if we cling to our temple stories. But are we willing to discover and face our temple stories? Are we willing to accept the necessary ending of our temple stories?

That is the challenge of today's gospel and this First Sunday of Advent. This day, however, is not about only a challenge. It also offers an assurance and a promise, the assurance that it is safe to let go of our temple stories and the promise that this is not the end but the context for a new beginning.

The entire Season of Advent echoes with challenge, assurance, and promise. We'll hear it next week in John the Baptist's words, "Prepare the way of the Lord," a preparation that opens us to "the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." We'll see it in Mary, the one who will be inhabited by a new life and a new story, the one who will give flesh and blood to that life and story, the one who will birth that life and story into our world.

So, keep awake. Watch. Look deep into your life for your temple stories. Name them, tell them, and then let them go. I know this is not easy work. It is often painful, and it takes time. We do not do it all at once. But maybe this year we can be a bit more awake to and aware of our temple stories than we were last year. Maybe this year we can create a bit more space for a new story than we did last year. Maybe this year we can be a bit more trusting of the darkness and the necessary endings of our temple stories than we were last year. This is our Advent work, our preparation for the coming of Christ.

*Mark*

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**Of your kindness and charity, please pray for all those who have recently died and for the families who mourn their loss, including from within our own benefice:**

- Maurice Bradenbury (*Nayland – 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2020 at 2.45pm in Colchester Crematorium*)
- Audrey Robinson (*Nayland – 8<sup>th</sup> December 2020 at 11am in St James', Nayland*)
- Ruby Warren (*Polstead – 16<sup>th</sup> December 2020 at 11.30am in St Mary's, Polstead*)
- Frances Norton (*Nayland – 17<sup>th</sup> December 2020 at 2pm in Colchester Crematorium*)

**Please pray for** the self-employed, our local tradesmen and women, for artisans and artists. We pray for all who work in entertainment, for musicians and actors. We pray for all living in poverty or who struggle to make ends meet. We also pray for ourselves, for our anxieties, for our hopes and for our fears, trusting them all to our loving God.

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## Christmas Helping Hand 2020



Thank you to everyone who has already supported Revd Mark's Christmas "Helping Hand" appeal to help the most vulnerable in our community have a more enjoyable and comfortable Christmas. If you are in the fortunate position to help, perhaps you receive a winter fuel payment that you do not really need, if so why not pass it on to someone who does? Or perhaps you are scaling back your own Christmas Celebrations this year, if so perhaps you might consider giving some of the money you will save to help an individual or family have a really good Christmas this year?

You can do so online using the following Link: <https://gf.me/u/y8j58i>

Alternatively, if you would prefer you can post a cash donation in a sealed envelope through the letterbox at the Vicarage (please mark your envelope "Christmas Helping Hand")

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### 'TIS THE SEASON OF GIVING

#### HOLIDAY FOOD DRIVE



The Community Pantry, which is based at St James Vicarage, Bear Street, Nayland CO6 4LA continues to be well used. By their very nature, some items are used more frequently than others and there are times when we do run very low on some items. If you are already doing our "Reverse Advent Calendar" it would be particularly helpful if you were able to include some extra items from the list below:

- UHT Milk (*not Skimmed*)
- Instant Coffee & Tea Bags
- Toilet Rolls & Toothpaste
- Laundry Detergent "Pods"
- Packets of Microwave Rice
- Instant &/or Pot Noodles
- Jars of Cheesy/Tomato Pasta Sauces
- Jars of Cooking Sauces (Chinese/Curry/Mexican)
- Packets of Rice
- Tins of Stews & Mince
- Tins of Curry
- Tins of Chili con Carne
- Cup-a-soups
- Loaves of Bread
- Individual Christmas Puddings
- Tins or Packets of Custard
- Boxes of Mince Pies
- Christmas Crackers
- Fresh Eggs are always a bonus!

Alternatively, if you would prefer to support financially, then you can post a cash donation in a sealed envelope through the letterbox at the Vicarage (please mark your envelope "Community Pantry")

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**DETAILS OF SERVICES IN CHURCH AND ONLINE WILL BE AVAILABLE AT:**

[www.naylandchurches.wordpress.com/christmas](http://www.naylandchurches.wordpress.com/christmas)

In the meantime you can access online services from The Church of England, download the free **#ComfortAndJoy** App where you can hear again the message of the angels - good news of God's unfailing love for a world that is weary and hurting at: [www.churchofengland.org/ComfortAndJoy](http://www.churchofengland.org/ComfortAndJoy)

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## **Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> December at 9am – National Online Christingle Service**

The Children's Society warmly invite you to join them for their first ever National Online Christingle Service. This will be streamed on the Church of England's website, Facebook and YouTube channels and it would be great if you tuned in to share the light with the whole country.

The service will include a few words from HRH The Duchess of Gloucester, the Archbishop of Canterbury who will be lighting the Advent Candle, as well as the Children's Societies Vice-Chair of Trustees, the Bishop of Derby Libby Lane. There will also be a special performance from soprano Joanna Forest, and of course the opportunity to join young people lighting the Christingles. It is set to be a magical event.



## **Doorstep Carols** **Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> December 2020 at 6pm**

In conjunction with BBC Radio Suffolk, why not join in with neighbours and friends and sing Christmas Carols safely from your own doorstep!

You can download a carol sheet (and for the musically talented sheet music as well!) from [www.doorstepcarols.co.uk](http://www.doorstepcarols.co.uk) and then simply tune in to BBC Radio Suffolk who will be broadcasting the carols for everyone to sing along to.

**Has the impact of Coronavirus left you worrying about your bills, your job or your home?**

There are people that can help.  
Call us free on **0800 068 3131**

 Suffolk Collective  
The Suffolk Advice and Support Line is open from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday



**Home, But Not Alone**  
Supporting vulnerable people in Suffolk

The Home, But Not Alone free phoneline is for people who need **urgent** help and support during the Coronavirus pandemic. It is only for people who do not have support available from friends, family or neighbours and are struggling for food, medicines or other essential supplies.

**Coronavirus Emergency Phoneline**

 **0800 876 6926**

9am-5pm every day  
For all other enquiries please visit: [www.suffolk.gov.uk/homebutnotalone](http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/homebutnotalone)



## COLLECT

Almighty God,  
give us grace to cast away the works of  
darkness  
and to put on the armour of light,  
now in the time of this mortal life,  
in which your Son Jesus Christ  
came to us in great humility;  
that on the last day,  
when he shall come again in his glorious  
majesty to judge the living and the  
dead,  
we may rise to the life immortal;  
through him who is alive and reigns  
with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

## FIRST READING Isaiah 64:1-9

*A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah.*

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence – as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil – to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence! When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him. You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways. But you were angry, and we sinned; because you hid yourself we transgressed. We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity. Yet, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be exceedingly angry, O LORD, and do not remember iniquity

for ever. Now consider, we are all your people.

## PSALM Psalm 80:1-8. 18-20 (or 80:1-8)

**R** Turn us again, O God;  
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**

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**

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**

## SECOND READING

### 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

*A reading from the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians.*

My brothers and sisters: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind – just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you – so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus

Christ. God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

## GOSPEL Mark 13:24-37

*Hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark.*

Jesus said to his disciples: "In those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake – for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."

## POST COMMUNION

O Lord our God,  
make us watchful and keep us faithful  
as we await the coming of your Son our  
Lord;  
that, when he shall appear,  
he may not find us sleeping in sin  
but active in his service  
and joyful in his praise;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

