

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

The Revd Mark Woodrow – 01206 262150 – revdmarkwoodrow@gmail.com
St James' Vicarage, Bear Street, Nayland CO6 4LA

Nicola Thorogood (Benefice Administrator) – 01206 262453 – nicola.church@yahoo.com

www.naylandchurches.wordpress.com

 /naylandchurches

 @naylandchurches

"Pay it forward!" – 2nd Sunday of Christmas

Firstly, let me wish you all a very Happy New Year!

The other day I was talking to someone who had just dropped off some items to be donated for our Community Pantry. It is something that has happened a lot in the run up to Christmas and I have been greatly touched by the generosity of many from our community, and further afield, who have chosen to support those less fortunate than themselves.

Whilst chatting, socially distanced of course, I ask the simple question, "Why? Why have you chosen to help?" and she went on to explain that when she was younger there was a period in her life when she was to all intents and purposes homeless, but because of friends and acquaintances she wasn't forced to sleep on the street, and although she knew what it was to have nothing and to be reliant on others for their kindness and their hospitality. She is now 'comfortable and secure' but remained grateful for what they did all those years ago and saw our Community Pantry as a way of "paying it forward".

John tells us that the "Word became flesh and lived among us." Well, if you ask me, compassion became flesh in that lovely lady. Generosity became flesh in her. Love became flesh in her. She embodied the Word of God in the experiences and uniqueness of her life.

As she drove away, I thought to myself, "Now that's the Christmas story." It is the story St. John tells in today's gospel and it is very different from the one we heard St. Luke tell on Christmas Eve. One is not better than the other. They are just different and to see fully we need both.

For Luke it is about Mary and Joseph going to Bethlehem, an angel announcing good news to the shepherds, and Jesus lying in the manger. It is a story about this-ness: "this day," "this thing that has happened," and "this child." But for John the story is cosmic. It is about the Word becoming flesh, light shining in the darkness, and grace upon grace. It is a creation story, an "In the beginning" story, a story of becoming and the calling forth of life.

Luke holds before us the child, "a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord." John says we have been given "power to become children of God." Luke tells us what is happening. John tells us what is going on in what is happening. And I wonder what is going on in Christmas for you? I am not asking what happened, but what's going on? What Word is becoming flesh in you?

I think most of us hear about the Word becoming flesh and living among us and we immediately assume it is about Jesus. I don't disagree with that. I think the Word becoming flesh is about Jesus, I just do not think it is exclusive to Jesus, as if Jesus is the only one in whom the Word became or can become flesh. What about you and me? What about this power to become children of God? What about the Word becoming flesh in us? What about that lovely lady supporting our Community Pantry?

The incarnation of God, the embodiment of God in human life, the Word become flesh, is not limited to Jesus. Jesus is the picture, the pattern, the archetype of what the Word become flesh looks like. And we look at that picture so that we can recognise it in ourselves and one another. We see Jesus embodying the Word of God throughout his life. He puts the flesh on the bones, so to speak, for us when he demonstrates forgiveness, love, mercy, peace, gentleness, nonviolence, wisdom, compassion, generosity. He is our way, our truth, our life. He personifies who we are and who we can become.

In today's gospel John speaks of becoming or coming into being five times. The Christmas story as told by John is not just a story of something God caused to happen. It is a story of God calling for the Word to become flesh. It is God insisting that God's Word be given existence in the uniqueness of each of our lives.

Suppose that is what's going on in what is happening at Christmas.

Suppose God is calling you and me, asking and waiting for a response.

Suppose God needs us and our flesh as much as we need God and God's spirit.

Suppose the Word of God can exist, desires to exist, needs to exist in your and my flesh to the same extent and fullness as it does in the flesh of Jesus.

Suppose that without our flesh God does not, cannot, exist in the world.

Suppose all that and then look at your life; the people, relationships, and circumstances. Picture their faces.

Speak their names. Describe what is happening.

And then tell me this: what is going on in what's happening? What is the insistence? What Word is calling for existence in your flesh today?

"And the Word became flesh and lived among us." It did in Jesus. And it did in that lovely, generous, humble lady at the Community Pantry. So, what about you and me?

God bless, keep safe, and continue to pay God's generosity forward wherever and whenever you can.

Mark

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:

- Michael Crisell (Leavenheath – *Funeral to be confirmed*)

Please pray for new beginnings and an opportunity for some to put the past behind them. For those struggling with mental health issues. For our NHS and Carers, for all who are working to alleviate the impact of COVID. For our Teachers and School staff and for the pupils in their care. For yourself and your family.



Community Pantry

Thank you to everyone for continuing to support our Community Pantry especially with donations of seasonal items!

Many have asked what is going to happen to this once Revd Mark leaves the benefice. Well, the good news is that it is planned to move the Community Pantry to the currently unused **West End Porch of St James' Church, Nayland** where we hope it will continue to be accessible to those who need it, as well as for people to leave items when they are able.

In the meantime, the following items are currently needed:

- UHT Milk (*not Skimmed*)
- Instant Coffee (but no more Tea Bags please)
- Toilet Rolls & Toothpaste
- Laundry Detergent "Pods"
- Packets of Microwave Rice
- Pot Noodles
- Packets of Instant Noodles
- Baked Beans
- Jars of Cheesy Pasta Sauces
- Jars of Cooking Sauces (Chinese/Curry/Mexican)
- Tins of Stews & Mince
- Tins of Curry
- Tins of Chili con Carne
- Cup-a-soups
- Loaves of Bread

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 up **until the 10th January** (please mark your envelope "**Community Pantry**") – after the 10th January please pass any donations onto Revd Val.



DETAILS OF SERVICES IN CHURCH AND ONLINE ARE AVAILABLE AT:

www.naylandchurches.wordpress.com

Going forward, and especially whilst we are in Tier Four, we will need to be particularly careful in how we conduct our "in person" services and there may be times when these may need to be cancelled or rearranged.

This Sunday (3rd January) there will be a 9am Communion in Nayland, but there will NOT be an 11am Service in Stoke

Also, given the fact that after next Sunday when Revd Mark leaves, we will be in vacancy it is likely that we may not always be able to offer a benefice online service every week – however there continue to be regular online services both from the Cathedral, as well as from the National Church of England, and also from surrounding benefices (e.g. Boxford, Hadleigh etc)

Please do contact your church wardens or Revd Val or Nicola Thorogood (Benefice Administrator) if you have any particular pastoral needs and they will be able to help find the right person to assist you.



Revd Mark's leaving service

Despite the current COVID situation, we are still very much hoping to be able to gather as a church family to say goodbye to Revd Mark at a special Benefice Service next **Sunday (10th January) at 11am in St Mary's Church, Stoke by Nayland**, if you would like to attend it would be helpful if your could let Stoke's Church Wardens (Andrew – 01206 263186 or June – 01206 263225) know in advance, and also if others from your household bubble will be joining you.

We are aware that not everyone will feel comfortable being physically present, and indeed it isn't safe or practical for everyone to attend, so Revd Mark is going to also host a final live **online "Coffee, Cake and Conversation" via Zoom at 3pm on Sunday 10th January**. You can use the link below to join in:

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us04web.zoom.us/j/73566697068?pwd=amViNDNBVGVEEdFNVMUcxRnBhR0hFUT09>

Meeting ID: 735 6669 7068

Passcode: Goodbye



COLLECT

Almighty God, in the birth of your Son you have poured on us the new light of your incarnate Word, and shown us the fullness of your love: help us to walk in his light and dwell in his love that we may know the fullness of his joy; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

FIRST READING

Ecclesiasticus 24:1-12

Wisdom praises herself, and tells of her glory in the midst of her people. In the assembly of the Most High she opens her mouth, and in the presence of his hosts she tells of her glory: 'I came forth from the mouth of the Most High, and covered the earth like a mist. I dwelt in the highest heavens, and my throne was in a pillar of cloud. Alone I compassed the vault of heaven and traversed the depths of the abyss. Over waves of the sea, over all the earth, and over every people and nation I have held sway. Among all these I sought a resting-place; in whose territory should I abide? 'Then the Creator of all things gave me a command, and my Creator chose the place for my tent. He said, "Make your dwelling in Jacob, and in Israel receive your inheritance." Before the ages, in the beginning, he created me, and for all the ages I shall not cease to be. In the holy tent I ministered before him, and so I was established in Zion. Thus in the beloved city he gave me a resting-place, and in Jerusalem was my domain. I took root in an honoured people, in the portion of the Lord, his heritage.

PSALM Psalm 147:13-21

Sing praise to the Lord, O Jerusalem; praise your God, O Zion; For he has strengthened the bars of your gates and has blest your children within you. He has established peace in your borders and satisfies you with the finest wheat. He sends forth his command to the earth and his word runs very swiftly. He gives snow like wool and scatters the hoarfrost like ashes. He casts down his hailstones like

morsels of bread; who can endure his frost? He sends forth his word and melts them; he blows with his wind and the waters flow. He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and judgements to Israel. He has not dealt so with any other nation; they do not know his laws. Alleluia.

SECOND READING

Ephesians 1:3-14

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance towards redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

GOSPEL John 1:1-18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the

Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, 'This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me."') From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

POST COMMUNION

All praise to you, almighty God and heavenly king, who sent your Son into the world to take our nature upon him and to be born of a pure virgin: grant that, as we are born again in him, so he may continually dwell in us and reign on earth as he reigns in heaven, now and for ever.