



March Team Ministry

March Team St John, St Mary, St Peter, St Wendreda

Welcome

Christmas Day ~ December 25th 2020

Please keep in touch with one another, and I am always glad to hear from you on 01354 279232 or at andrew.marchurch@gmail.com

We have Church services with social distancing, and also, for the foreseeable future, our zooming, emailing and leaflet deliveries. We want people to have a genuine choice. We are also trying to allow other aspects of the church's life to happen. Ideas and suggestions welcome.

St Peter's Sundays 8am & 11am; Wednesdays 10am

St Mary's Sundays 9.15am

St John's Sundays 9.30am; Tuesdays 10am

"Stay in touch, take care, keep safe, continue praying and God bless."

Prayers for today

Good and gracious God, on this day you gave us your Son, the Lord of the universe, wrapped in swaddling clothes, the Saviour of all, lying in a manger. On this day draw us into the mystery of your love. Join our voices with the heavenly host, that we may sing of your glory on high. Give us a place among the shepherds, that we may find the one for whom we have waited, Jesus Christ, your Word made flesh, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, in the splendour of eternal light, one God for ever and ever.

Amen

God of David's fragile house of hope and expectation: in the time of empires, your word is born to those who watch in the wild; may his birth unsettle our world with hidden glory and untold peace; through Jesus Christ, the Child of Promise.

Amen

Gospel of St Luke 2 v1-14

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!'

Meditation

'Do not be afraid' said the angel to the shepherds. Maybe this is just the standard greeting that angels give. 'Peace be with you', we say in innumerable greetings and church services. Maybe, it has become a standard greeting for us.

Certainly there is more than one recorded case of angels saying, 'Do not be afraid', and some as part of this Christmas narrative. When the angel appeared to Zechariah in the temple as he made the evening sacrifice, Zechariah was startled and afraid, so the angel needed to reassure him so he could give his message. The message that he and his elderly wife would have a son, and that son would be John the Baptist who would prepare the way for Christ. Despite the angel's reassurance, Zechariah could not comprehend it and was struck dumb.

When the angel appeared to the young girl Mary, after the initial angelic greetings Mary was perplexed, so likewise the angel reassured her, gave the message of the birth of the Son of God, and Mary responded with a spirit of acceptance and collaboration.

Now, on this first Christmas day, the angel appears to the shepherds and they are terrified. So yet again the angel must say, 'Do not be afraid' to get a hearing. Now we know that our New Testament was written in Greek, but the words translated, startled, perplexed, and terrified are different, and terrified is meant to be the most worrying and on the grandest scale. The shepherds are scarred witless, even before they hear the news. Are they the most unlikely people for angels to appear to? Are they those who least want God to know what they are getting up to? In some ways, since there is often safety in numbers, you may expect the shepherds to feel the least scared. But then it is dark and imaginations can run wild in wild places. The shepherds are given the news, but then they get a unique vision, not just one angel, but the whole heavenly host, angels, archangels and the whole company of heaven singing, and then the message excites sufficient curiosity and bravery and even foolishness in leaving their flocks to go and see and worship.

This Christmas, in particular, it is not angelic visions I fear, but I do want to hear the voice that says, 'Do not be afraid'. Covid has bred fear; fear of death; fear of dying alone; fear of symptoms; fear of treatment; fear of isolation; fear of being close to others; fear of giving others the virus; fear of loss of livelihood; fear of loss of ways of life; fear of the unknown; fear of how long! How I long to hear 'Do not be afraid' followed by good news. My fears may well have some exaggerations, some oversimplifications, some irrationality, but there is also a reality and a basis to these fears. We do live in fearful times.

Each of Zechariah, Mary and the shepherds were given good news after their fear, and each had to respond or cooperate; each had to wait for something to take its course; even the shepherds had to undertake a journey from the hills to the stable. And the destination of each's journey was Christ. Christmas reminds us that our destination too is Christ. Whatever our fears, we will arrive at Christ.

But that is enough about the reality of fear, and God's desire to quench fear and take us to Christ, for there is that other greeting, 'Peace be with you'. Is it a formality, or does it mean what it says on the tin?

For some people the angels' song is of limited peace, as our translation above indicates, 'and on earth peace among those whom he favours!'. Word for word the translation would be; 'and on earth peace among men of goodwill' which is clarified in ancient versions of Luke's gospel as 'and on earth peace, goodwill among men', which seems to be the church grasping the universal and never ending consequences of the birth of Christ.

Fear is often the source of strife, tension, war, violence. Not being afraid opens the way to peace, as the angels request to no longer be afraid, leads to Christ. Christmas, the presence of the Son of God on earth, leads to the invitation to have peace, share peace, make peace. Peace is more than the absence of strife, it is the presence of Christ. So, yes, some may legitimately see that offer of peace, and our task in sharing it, as limited to some, rather than universally requested. But I want to strive to offer that peace to include those who either I do not hold in goodwill, or those who do not regard me with goodwill, and pray that my journey whether to the manger, or to the cross, or to the empty tomb, will be a journey where peace is not a formality but a growing reality.

Before proclaiming peace, the heavenly host of angels declare the Glory of God! So we discover that my and your journeys to the manger, cross or tomb, are journeys in glory and to glory. So when we arrive, with our very real fears which we carry, we will find them consumed and eclipsed by the glorious incarnation of the babe in the manger; the glory of our redemption proclaimed in the cross; and in the empty tomb which is the gateway to glory everlasting. And for me, just like the peace which is linked with goodwill for all, and is not limited to those who possess goodwill, or are favoured, so, the ultimate embrace of glory in the presence of God is for all. So, maybe then, at the last, I can truly say, I am not afraid and rest in peace. Alleluya. Amen. Happy Christmas.

God bless, Andrew

Prayers

Father, your Son our saviour was born in human flesh.

Renew your Church as the Body of Christ.

There was no room for your Son in the inn.

Protect with your love those who have no home and all who live in poverty.

Mary, in the pain of labour, brought your Son to birth.

Hold in your hand all who are in pain or distress.

Joseph travelled, protected and guarded, but found little welcome in his home town.

Help us to show your welcome and embrace to migrants and visitors.

Your Christ came as a shining light in the darkness.

Bring comfort to all who suffer in the sadness of our world.

Angels sang, 'Peace to God's people on earth.'

Strengthen those who work for peace and justice in all the world.

Shepherds in the field heard good tidings of joy.

Give us grace to preach the gospel of Christ's redemption.

Strangers from afar found the Holy Family and saw the baby lying in a manger.

Bless our homes and all whom we love, and especially those from whom we are separated or isolated.

Heaven is come down to earth, and earth is raised to heaven.

Hold in your hand all those who have passed through death in the hope of your coming kingdom.

Christians the world over celebrate Christ's birth.

Open our hearts to be born in us today.

Father, at Christmas, angel, shepherds, and strangers worshipped at the manger throne.

Receive the worship we offer in fellowship with Mary and Joseph and all the saints, through him who is your

Word made flesh, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Christ, who by his incarnation gathered into one things earthly and heavenly, fill you with peace and goodwill and make you partakers of the divine natures, and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you always. Amen.