



March Team Ministry

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

Welcome

Sunday after Christmas ~ December 27th 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 this Week

O God, you cradle us at the beginning of life and embrace us to our journey's end, for you love us as your own. Bind our lives together and deepen our faith, that we may grow in wisdom, obedient to your word. We ask this through your

Son, 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 every creature, whose Son was born for all the world; we praise you for the shepherds who lived between earth and sky, who, with animals and angels, greeted the Word made flesh: may we share their urgency to meet the promised child with wonder and with joy; through Jesus Christ, who binds all things together.

Amen.

Paul's Letter to the Galatians 4 v4-7

When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

Gospel of St Luke 2 v15-20

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.' So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Meditation

What happened next?

- The shepherds, having heard the angels' song, went with haste.
- The sheep were left unprotected.
- The shepherds arrived, and saw the baby lying in a manger.
- Mary and Joseph had their privacy invaded and special moment interrupted.
- The shepherds told people, even though it appears to be the middle of the night, of what they have been told and seen.
- The people were amazed.
- Mary treasured and pondered.
- The shepherds returned glorifying and praising God.
- And then, what happened next ?

What happens next?

We are having a strange and stressful Christmas with many huge disappointments. Meeting people is cancelled or curtailed. Presents are undelivered. Food put into freezers. Loneliness is exacerbated.

And it does feel like a double whammy; a longed for bright time that has provided something to look forward to in the last grim months, dashed, and, it seems, even grimmer times ahead with virus mutations and a need for a most severe lockdown. And it lengthens ahead of us. It's a big question, what happens next!?

Questions about what happened next then too...

- Were the sheep safe ?
- Did people sign up for the census ?
- How long did the amazement last ?
- How long did it take Bethlehem to go back to normal after this drama ?
- Did Mary and Joseph manage better accommodation in Bethlehem, or did it have to wait until they returned to Nazareth ?

I can think of nothing to indicate what happened to those people who were amazed, or to the shepherds, or the inn keeper, or the census takers. There is no record of Jesus going back to Bethlehem to preach and teach. It does not look as if any of the disciples came from the Bethlehem area. Mary's treasuring and pondering may well have left us a significant legacy in the early church, and maybe for our Gospel writers (although the two gospels, Mark and John, traditionally most associated with Mary, contain no story of Jesus' birth!). How long did Joseph live? Did they have other children? Did Jesus take on the family business? Were the angels able to put their feet up (fold their wings!?) until required nearly 30 years later when Jesus went into the wilderness.

You will really have to wait until next week for more of Matthew's account, but for that Gospel, what happened next contained a great tragedy, the slaughter of young Bethlehem children, on Herod's orders, to eliminate this new-born King; Joseph's flight to Egypt with his wife and child, does not take away this sting. Perhaps that is why no one from Bethlehem appears to welcome the grown up Jesus.

What happens next, here and now?

- Will we be safe? And our loved ones too?
 - Will people sign up for the vaccine? And how long will it take and how effective will it be?
 - How long will we have the emotional resources to withstand the pressures of isolating, and will they last for as long as is required? So far most have been amazingly resilient, but is there a breaking point?
 - How long will it take us to go back to a new normal after this drama?
 - Will life turn out, in the long run, to be better, or more challenging?
 - Will old things still provide the same comfort, or will we have to rebuild our lives?
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2000 years ago, Jesus' birth did not answer all the questions, indeed it created more questions or changed how things were seen. The revelation then was God's commitment to the world; he dwells in it in God the Son. God embraces with love the people of the world, in God the Son. In God the Son he shares in all the suffering, even to death, of our world. And that is not the end of the questions and the consequences; He raises God the Son to new life. Recalling or celebrating Jesus' birth 2000 years later, reminds us of God's commitment to us, his people. It does remind us of the ups and downs of reality and not to make shallow or false promises that offer easy or pain free answers. Jesus is born into a muddled world with competing ideas, power structures and challenges. We live in world with all those too.

So moving forward in an often confusing, sometimes fearful, always uncertain world, we are with God, and God is with us. We may not feel in control of our own destiny, for neither was Jesus when he was laid in his Bethlehem manger. But he was loved, and so are we.

What happens next?

Well some of it is up to you. Yes some things are beyond our control or comprehension. But there are things we ordinary people can do. We can keep in touch with people. We can listen. We can reassure. We can support. We can meet some practical needs. Just take small steps, do small things, out of love, for love and with love; for you are loved beyond measure.

God bless, Andrew

Prayers

As we pray to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we say with Mary:

Lord, have mercy on those who fear you. Holy is your name.

Your prophet of old foretold the day when a young woman would conceive and bear a son who would be called God-with-us. Help us to look forward to your deliverance and to seek the fullness of your kingdom.

Lord, have mercy on those who fear you. Holy is your name.

Your angel declared to Mary that she was to be the mother of the Saviour. Help every Christian person to be open to your word, and obedient to your will. *Lord, have mercy on those who fear you. Holy is your name.*

Mary rejoiced with Elizabeth and sang your praise, 'My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord.' Help us to live joyful lives that sing of your praise.

Lord, have mercy on those who fear you. Holy is your name.

Mary bore a son of David's line, a king whose reign would never end. Bless all the nations of the world with Christ's gift of peace.

Lord, have mercy on those who fear you. Holy is your name.

The child Jesus grew in wisdom and stature in exile and in the home of Mary and Joseph. Strengthen our homes and families, and keep under your protection all those whom we love.

Lord, have mercy on those who fear you. Holy is your name.

At the foot of the cross of Christ stood his mother, and from the cross she received his lifeless body into her arms. Give comfort and healing to all who suffer and all who watch the suffering of those they love.

Lord, have mercy on those who fear you. Holy is your name.

The apostle John saw a vision of a woman in heaven, robed with the sun. Bring us with all those who have died in the faith of Christ to share the joy of heaven with Mary and all the saints.

Lord, have mercy on those who fear you. Holy is your name.

Almighty and everlasting God, your handmaid Mary magnified your name and rejoiced in your saving love. May the love of the Holy family, surround you. May the joy that was Mary's, refresh you. May the faithfulness that was Joseph's, encourage you. May the peace of the Christ-child, fill your lives. And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**