Parish of St. Mary’s Swynnerton & St. James’ Cotes Heath





Sunday January 10th (Epiphany 1)

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| From ‘Incarnation’ by Ann Lewin  He’s grown, that baby.  Not that most people have noticed.  He still looks the same,  Lying there in the straw, with  Animals and shepherds looking on.  He’s safe there, locked in that moment  Where time met Eternity.  By all means let us pause there  At the stable, and  Marvel at the miracle of birth.  But we’ll never get to know  God with us, until we learn  To find him at the Inn,  A fellow guest who shares the joy and sorrow,  The Host who is the life we celebrate.  He’s grown, that Baby |

Today’s readings are Genesis 1:1-5, Psalm 29, Acts 19:1-7, Mark 1:4-11.

The message is from The Bishop of Lichfield and is enclosed with this newsletter.

Worship for the congregations of St. Mary’s and St. James’ is moving “online” for the next few weeks as we respond to the very serious health crisis. Our first “Zoom” service last Sunday was attended by 17 people. We used the weekly common worship liturgy, listened to a reading, shared in June’s prayers and sang along to a couple of hymns. The sermon came from Bishop Clive; this week Bishop Michael will be with us! We hope that others will join in on their phones, laptops, ipads or PCs. The link is below; for more details, contact Ray or Doreen who may be able to help you set up “Zoom” on your device if you’ve not used it before. Service begins at 10.30. Join from 10.20.

[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82172796502?pwd=dm9PandVL1l6YTgzOFFTQzQ1L0NqQT09](about:blank)





Safety, Refuge, Acceptance, Love

“Sanctus” is one of the organisations our church supports financially. Based in the Potteries, their website explains that “Sanctus St Marks exists to welcome, support and walk alongside people who are isolated, due to leaving behind the country of their birth to seek sanctuary in the UK. Our name comes from the Latin word which means Holy. We believe that there is no action more holy than welcoming and loving people.” sanctusstmarks.org

Frank Mugglestone tells us more:

Along with several others, Tina and I volunteer to help refugees and asylum seekers learn and improve their English. Things have changed since lockdown because it is no longer possible to have face to face English teaching. People have found their own ways around it. Our way is to send out teaching materials via email and to use Skype to offer the next best thing to individual contact. It seems to work. Things have carried on, but not in quite the same way, or for as many people, so we all want to get back to normal and be able to meet again.

St. Mary’s supports Sanctus, and heartfelt thanks come from Sally and everyone involved for the kind individuals and church congregations who make such a difference. There’s a lot more to Sanctus than English lessons! During lockdown, 1603 deliveries of food and toiletries were made to people's homes. Since July people have been able to come to the Sanctus Help Desk on Wednesday mornings for help with Home Office paperwork and phone calls, and another 1450 deliveries have been made. Food has been given to 618 people who came to St Mark's, and sixteen new mums have been supported with equipment, baby clothes and befriending. Sanctus received enough Christmas presents to give to everyone whose homes receive food deliveries or who come to St Mark's on Wednesday mornings -a total of 150 children and their parents too!

Thanks to your support many refugees and asylum seekers have been helped to get through this difficult year.

* *Carol and Martyn Turner have asked us to convey their thanks to the very many friends in our church family and in our little communities who have expressed good wishes on the occasion of their wedding anniversary. They have been moved by the many ways in which love and support have been offered among us in these strange and difficult times.*
* Heather Eyre is now safely back in her flat in Eccleshall, having completed the move in possibly the worst week of the winter! We send all good wishes as she unpacks once again and wish her well as she settles into a new routine.
* *Ann Ramsey writes: “Thank you to everyone who had one of my Christmas cakes. I have sent £300 to   
  Marie Curie trust who looked after my son in law during his last weeks. Thank you for your generosity-*

*it really does help. Hope you enjoyed your cakes too.   
Wishing everyone a happy new year and keep safe. Miss you all and God Bless”. xxx*

* Please pray this week for Richard Wenger, Fr. Paul Chavasse, Wendy Jackson and Paul Bell, Dot Sergeant,

Elaine Dulson, Pat Lawrence, Carol & Martyn Turner, Pat Barley, Geoff & Linda Foster, Margaret Bailey,

Margaret Farr, Kay Bickerton, George Edwards, Nick & Jonquil Goacher, the Murrie family, Alex Baines and

Margaret McKnight and her family.

*“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving,*

*present your requests to God” Philippians 4:6*

* *Thanks to Nesta Williams for contributing our intercessions this week.*
* Weekly prayer meeting for everyone each Thursday at 7pm. If you would like to join in, please use the Zoom link on the front page.

Worship for Epiphany 1

Jesus, Light of the world, shine in the darkest of places.  
Jesus, Light of God, reveal your love to all.  
Jesus, Light of love, draw us ever closer to you.

Amen.

*Confession:* Lord Jesus, illuminate the darkness in our hearts:

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, open our eyes to your saving love:

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, unstop our ears to hear your living word:

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

May God who loved the world so much

that he sent his Son to be our Saviour

forgive us our sins

and make us holy to serve him in the world,

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

*Statement of belief*:

Jesus is the light of the world.

Jesus is our Way.

With Jesus even the dark places are light.

Jesus is the truth.

In Jesus we shall live forever.

Jesus is our life.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, today we celebrate the Baptism of Jesus Christ by John, when Your voice from heaven declares Jesus Christ to be Your beloved Son. May we rejoice again in that life giving declaration and humbly come before you in prayer.

*Collect:* Creator of the heavens,

who led the Magi by a star

to worship the Christ-child:

guide and sustain us,

that we may find our journey’s end

in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Heavenly Father You know the serious situation in which Your wonderful creation finds itself during this pandemic. You also know the outcome and have the situation in hand. Thankyou Lord and guide us all to take our own responsibility in reducing and eventually bringing this situation to an end.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

As we enter another national lockdown, Heavenly Father be with all those who already find life hard and who will be impacted further by the increased restrictions.

We pray for all those involved in frontline work that cannot be done from home: for all those that keep our essential services going.

We thank you Lord for the scientists who are producing vaccines, which will in time have a huge impact on the virus. Guide the scientists and our politicians as they make major life changing decisions to fight the pandemic.

We pray for our economy, all those who have lost jobs and businesses and subsequently income and homes as a result of the pandemic. Be with them Lord as they rebuild their lives.

Heavenly Father, guide all leaders and governments who are in positions of power and authority, to have the will to govern with wisdom and integrity in order to bring us through the pandemic, both here in the UK and across the world.

Lord in your mercy, hear our Prayer.

Heavenly Father we thank You for the leadership and ministry which supports us in our parish and church family during this time of interregnum and pandemic. We pray for Ray our churchwarden, for Jackie Stokes who prepares the weekly newsletter and for all those on the ministry team and for the PCC.

Guide us all Lord, to play our part in bringing others to know Your Redeeming Love.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Heavenly Father we bring before you all those who are unwell at this time, for their families and for all those who care for them. In a few quiet moments we pray for all those listed in the newsletter, those known to ourselves and those known only to You.

We pray for Your kingdom to come in places of pain, of weariness, disappointment and fear, to bring about the peace which only You can give and Your comfort which speaks of hope.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Heavenly Father for those who mourn the death of a loved one, may Your love calm their turmoil of bereavement and loss, putting their minds at rest and their spirits at peace, secure in the knowledge of Your unconditional and constant love.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

As we Your church approach this new week, we thank you Heavenly Father, that we have received the greatest gift ever, the promise of salvation through Your Son, Jesus Christ. May we shine as bright lights in this world, living to show the glory of God, and letting Your presence be seen in our lives.

The Lord’s Prayer

The Grace

BISHOP MICHAEL’S SERMON FOR EPIPHANY 1 [Baptism of the Lord]: 10th January 2021

Mk 1.4-11, (Gen 1.1-5, Acts 19.1-7)

The Gospel of Mark tells of the Baptism of Jesus two thousand years ago. I want to tell you about the baptism of my granddaughter Rosaline two and a bit years ago. Our daughter-in-law is Russian, and Rosaline was baptised in a little church in Russia near the Estonian border. It was a joyful celebration, with little Rosalinka sat in a huge tub as gallons of water were poured over her, she was drenched in oil, and a great feast was had by all. It was so different from the baptism of her grandfather – not me, but her Russian grandfather, 50 something years ago. That was in Soviet days, and Evgeni’s grandmother knew that her daughter (his mother) would not approve, as a member of the Communist party. So she arranged for the priest to call in secret while her daughter was out at work, and he hurriedly baptised little Evgeny in the kitchen sink. Fast forward to two years ago, and Evgeny’s mother’s way of thinking had changed so much that it was actually she who arranged her own granddaughter’s baptism.

That family understood what a precious gift baptism is in our lives. We sometimes take it for granted, but Mark puts the story of Jesus’ baptism right at the start of his gospel, to underline its importance not just for the Lord but for us his followers. So, what is it all about?

First of all, it is about a new creation, a starting all over again. There is something fresh here breaking into the world, breaking into our lives. Our readings this morning underline that by taking us back to the beginning of the whole Bible, to the opening verses of Genesis. There, in the dawn of time, was the deep water, sign and means of baptism. And over the face of the deep there hovered what some translations call ‘a wind from God’. But the Hebrew word also means ‘the Spirit of God’ – there, right at the start, were water and the Spirit, just as the Holy Spirit hovered over Jesus like a dove as he came out from the waters of the Jordan. The story of creation happens all over again in the life of the Christ; and it happens all over again in the life of us Christians.

And then, that new creation is a gift. Like being born, this is not something we can arrange for ourselves, but only receive in gratitude. There is a power, a strength, a wisdom, a love from beyond that is poured upon us. This is the greatest of gifts given to us in creation, the uncreated gift of the Spirit who is God. In the reading from Acts 19 appointed for this morning, St Paul makes this very clear to some people in Ephesus who so far have only known the baptism of John. ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit?’, he asks them. ‘No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit’, they reply. So Paul baptises them in the name of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit comes upon them. Our Christian life is not something we take for ourselves; it is given to us in the Spirit.

As the Spirit comes down upon Jesus, there is a voice heard from heaven. Now, this is the great climax of the story. Think of it: there is a great crowd gathered there, the heavens are torn apart, extraordinary things are going on. Now is the time to get the message across – now, in this moment of drama, when everybody’s attention is riveted. Just imagine – what message would you want to get across at that point if you were God? Suppose you had one minute on prime-time TV to address a nation. What would you want to say most of all? Suppose you had hired a plane to pull a banner streaming across central London. What would you write on that banner? Now is the time; what is the message?

God’s message is so simple, it is almost an anticlimax. He doesn’t tell people how to live; he doesn’t unveil a secret wisdom; he doesn’t threaten; he doesn’t promise; he doesn’t explain the future. He just says to

Jesus: ‘You’re my boy; and you’re all right’ – that’s what he means when he says: ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased’. This is the one important thing he needs to get across: to tell Jesus how much he loves him. In other words, this baptism is about identity: who Jesus is, and who is the one he belongs to. And what God said to Jesus he said to each one of us in the baptism that made us Christians: ‘You’re my boy, my girl; and you’re all right’. What Jesus is by nature, we become by adoption and grace: beloved sons and daughters of a God who loves us and make us his own.

That is the most important message God wants us to hear, and that is why we need to take our baptism seriously: because it assures us of our identity. We live in an age where many people are really unsure about who they are,

confused about their identity, bewildered by the celebrity ‘icons’ paraded before them. People fight furiously about identity, how A’s identity threatens B’s, or C’s is better than D’s; and the more unsure of themselves they feel the shriller they shout.

But, for us who are baptised in the name of Jesus Christ, identity is given and secure. When my little Rosalinka was lifted out of the tub, the priest lifted her up high above his head and whooshed her along in front of the screen full of icons – real icons, of saints not celebrities. Her little face lit up with delight at their glittering golden surfaces, but the inner joy was to know that these shining ones were now her brothers and sisters: like you, like me, she has become a citizen of heaven.

The great Reformer Martin Luther was troubled by doubts, fears, anxieties throughout his life. Terrors would suddenly grab him in the middle of the night, or when he was sitting with friends. But he always had one way of overcoming his fears. Lying in bed, to his wife’s annoyance he would shout out: ‘Baptizatus sum, I have been baptised’. Visiting his friends, to their annoyance he would write on walls or tables with a piece of chalk: Baptizatus sum. That identity gave him peace of mind.

Whether in the joy of celebration, or the anxiety of mental distress, or just the everyday business of living, this is what our baptism means for us. It marks us out as a new creation of God. It tells us that both the start of our Christian life and its continuance are a gift from God the Holy Spirit. Most of all, it assures us that we are who we are: beloved daughters and sons of God.

That identity is something which we are to carry with us throughout our lives, and which nobody can take from us. The theologian Elizabeth Stuart wrote these moving words after being at the funeral of a friend:

There is only one identity stable enough to hope in … In the end before the throne of grace everything will dissolve except that identity … Gender, race, sexual orientation, family, nationality and all other culturally constructed identities will not survive the grave … [But] the I that I am is God’s own special creation, and that is my only ground for hope.

So, as you stand at the beginning of this new year of 2021, give thanks to God for the baptism with which he has made you his own. Give thanks for the baptism in which he said to you: ‘You’re my boy, my girl; and you’re all right’. Give thanks for the baptism which gives you an identity in which you can live your life with assurance of love and hope of glory.

+Michael Lich