



Advent candles

Traditionally at St Thomas' we have an Advent wreath with five candles: one for each Sunday of the season plus one for Christmas Day. Today's candle is purple, and the last one before we celebrate Our Lord's Nativity.

Pour forth thy power, O Lord, and come: Assist us by that mighty power, so that by thy grace and merciful kindness we may swiftly receive the salvation that our sins impede: Who livest and reignest with thee in the unity of the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen

RECTOR

It has been agreed to re-advertise the position in the new year. One candidate withdrew before interview, and the other two were not considered 'right' by all the panel.

We may revisit the benefice profile to ensure we attract the right candidate.

PRAYERS

We pray for all those in trouble, sorrow, need, sickness or any other adversity; including: Phil, Pam Swabey, Joan Bishop, Ken Allbon, Rosemary Burnett and Jean Burges.



MASKS

A reminder that, apart from those who are exempt, masks must be worn while in church but may be removed to receive Communion.



Christmas Services

To confirm that we are unable to hold our usual crib service or Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve this year due to Covid. But, festive services will be as follows:

Christmas Eve – Our Eucharist at 7am and 10am. 11.30am Orthodox Service.

Sunday 27th – Parish Communion for St John at 9.45am.

Christmas Day - Parish Communion at 9.45am, (Book places with the sidesman as numbers are limited.)

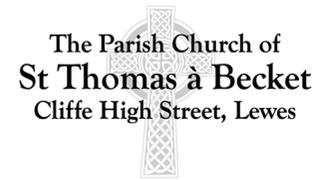
Monday 28th – Eucharist at 9am for The Holy Innocents.

Saturday 26th – Eucharist at 9am for St Stephen.

Tuesday 29th – Eucharist at 9am for St Thomas Becket.

CHRISTMAS MUSIC

We look forward to welcoming the Lewes Singers to St Thomas' this evening for their sell-out recital of seasonal music. Everyone is welcome to pop-in to the rehearsal after 4pm which will finishing time for Evening Prayer as usual at 6pm.



20th December 2020
ADVENT IV



The Collect

O Lord, raise up (we pray thee) thy power, and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through the satisfaction of thy Son our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be honour and glory, world without end. Amen.

The Epistle – Philippians 4.4-7

Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing: but in every thing, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

The Gospel – St. John 1.19-28

This is the record of John, when the Jews sent Priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that Prophet? And he answered, No. Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias. And they which were sent were of the Pharisees. And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that Prophet? John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not: he it is who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.

COFFEE & TOILETS

While we still cannot meet in the hall for coffee, the toilets are accessible. Ask the sidesman for the key if you need access.

DECORATION

We will decorate the church for Christmas on 23rd December. Please bring any donations of flowers from 9am.

PRAYER REQUESTS

Parish prayer requests may be sent by email to Fr. Herbert or via Trevor using email, telephone or through his letterbox.



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Fr Herbert's Email: AssociateVicar@st-thomas-lewes.org.uk

Tel: 01273 937678



STOP PRESS

Diaries – please help yourself to a 2021 church diary and take one for anyone who can't make it to church at the moment.

COLLECT - to be said every day in Advent

ALMIGHTY God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last

day, when he shall come again in his glorious Majesty, to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen.



SERMON

‘The Witness of John’

LAST week we heard about John the Baptist sending His disciples to ask Jesus was he the Messiah about whom he had heralded? This week we focus again on John the Baptist and hear more about what he had to say in heralding that proclamation in the wilderness to all.

St John, the gospel writer, shows in this passage before us today, that Jesus is the Word come into our world in human form. John's gospel presents the greatness of Jesus and John the Baptist is the great witness to that fact.

Today's passage from St John begins by showing the Jews in Jerusalem sending priests and Levites to meet with John the Baptist and ask 'who art thou?'. It was quite natural for the Levites and priests to be interested because John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, was the son of Zacharias who was a priest himself. Now in Judaism a priest needed to be a descendant of Aaron. Therefore, because John the Baptist was Zacharias' son he was a priest too in their thinking and so they were keen to see why he was behaving in such an unusual way by the way he preached in the wilderness and by the way he dressed. To them John the Baptist did not conform to the stereotype of a priest as they knew.

So these visiting priests and Levites thought of three things John the Baptist might be and asked him certain questions to confirm their thinking. Firstly, they ask John the Baptist if he is the Messiah. The Jewish people were long looking and waiting for the Messiah coming so it was quite understandable that they should ask him this question. However, John the Baptist plainly rejects

such a suggestion, saying 'I am not the Christ'.

Then they ask him if he is Elias or Elijah. This is because the Jewish people believed that ahead of the Messiah the great prophet Elijah would appear to herald his coming, as was foretold by Malachi when he said 'Behold I send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord'. However, this also John the Baptist denied.

Lastly, they ask him 'Art thou that prophet?', referring to the longstanding belief that Isaiah and Jeremiah would also return to herald in the coming Messiah. They would be the greatest of all the prophets to be anticipated. However, once more John the Baptist says, no, he is not either of them.

By now I am sure the priests and Levites are somewhat perplexed and need an answer to give back to those who sent them. So they ask 'Who art thou, what sayest thou of thyself?'. Here then is the essence of who John the Baptist really is when he replies 'I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness'. John the Baptist was the one preparing the way for the approaching king Messiah. As Isaiah the prophet had said 'The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God'. The thought behind Isaiah's prophecy is the held belief that when a king came to visit the roads were smoothed and straightened in preparation.

Lastly, we read that the priests and Levites were perplexed by the fact that John the Baptist baptised and asked 'Why baptizes thou then if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?'

Behind their thinking was their understanding that baptism was not for the Jews but for new comers from other faiths. The Jews were already God's people and did not need to be baptised and washed clean. Yet here was John the Baptist calling for just that, to one and all.

To this last question John the Baptist simply replies 'I baptise with water but there standeth one among you whom ye know not. He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe latches I am not worthy to unloose'. In this response John the Baptist cites that task which is the most menial of all a servant's tasks, that of untying a masters' shoes. John sees himself as just a servant.

So in conclusion John the Baptist is saying to the visiting priests and Levites that they, along with everyone, need to be cleansed in prepared readiness for the coming of the king Messiah. John the Baptists' great role was simply, and yet most importantly, to prepare the way of the Lord. In that John the Baptist is the greatest example of one who empties himself totally to be the sign post to Jesus. For we ourselves, may God give us grace to forget ourselves and to be a sign post to Christ also as we live our lives.

John the Baptist said he was merely a voice crying in the wilderness of life calling people to be ready for the coming of their king, but he carried that great message to proclaim. May we likewise use this Advent season to be ready, for our Messiah king is coming and He is on His way. Amen.

Fr Herbert.