

St James Parish Newsletter

20th December 2020



Our Mission Statement

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind...and your neighbour as yourself. Matthew 22:37-38

Sunday Podcasts of each Sunday Morning Service are available after the service on YouTube.

A time to speak

Parish Podcast on the YouTube channel.

The address for both is at the bottom of the page.

More Advent Quotes

"In the silence of a midwinter dusk, there is a sound so faint that for all you can tell it may be only the sound of the silence itself. You hold your breath to listen. You are aware of the beating of your heart. The extraordinary thing that is about to happen is matched only by the extraordinary moment just before it happens. Advent is the name of that moment."

Frederick Buechner

Christmas Service 2020

Just a reminder that, due to the continuing COVID restrictions, there will only be one Christmas service this year in church, on Christmas Eve at 4.30pm. This will be a said service, NOT a crib service. All those who wish to attend contact Leighton Francis on 07914526977. On this occasion, this also applies to all those who have been regular worshippers at the Sunday morning services. Please contact Leighton by Tuesday, 22nd December. This is the last day for booking.

Please note that there will be no church service on 27th December. I will, of course, prepare a podcast instead.

Mark

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

In many ways the first Christmas was a rather quiet and subdued affair. Sure, there were angels rejoicing in the heavens - although only the shepherds actually saw them - and, eventually, several kings made the long journey from the East to bring gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. But generally speaking it was just Mary and Joseph, a few disinterested animals and, of course, Jesus. All very quiet, and simple and rather plain.

This Christmas will, in some ways, be very reminiscent of that first Christmas. No fuss, no decorations, no music - except from the angels - and that's about all. Oh yes, there will be gifts, but these will not be wrapped up in Christmas paper or in ornate boxes. Rather they will be covered in scarves and coats and possibly gloves. Because the gifts we will bring to Jesus will be, in the words of the 1984 Welsh Prayerbook: "ourselves, our souls and bodies" which we will offer to Him as "a reasonable", meaning considered and thought through, "holy, and living sacrifice".

But that is surely what it always is, or at least should be. When we come to worship every Sunday, that is what we bring isn't it? Our offering of the whole of ourselves—our souls, bodies, minds and thoughts, our concentration and loving attention, laying before Him all that we are and have.

Paul writing to the Romans has just laid out for them the wonders of God's saving work, given by grace, received by faith. Now in the latter part of his letter he shows the Christians at Rome how to respond. He writes:

"Therefore" (i.e. in view of all that God has done for you) I urge you, brothers (and sisters), in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship" (Romans 12:1).

That is the worship we are to offer to Him. And so although our Christmas celebrations will be quieter and more subdued - and in some ways more authentic and without the modern accretions - they can still be sincere and sacrificial. For Jesus deserves nothing less for all He has done for us.

Have a happy and blessed Christmas, and keep safe,

Mark, Hazel and family.



THIS NEWSLETTER IS AVAILABLE ON THE PARISH WEBSITE:

www.stjamesswansea.org.uk

St. James Sunday Services on YouTube are available here:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCoNVea6r8mEr_KnOkSv6qQA/

The Vicar's New blog can be found here: sonofzebedee.blogspot.com

Five Questions

This week we welcome another contributor to Five Questions - the vicar:

1. What is your name? - (Howell) Mark Williams
2. Where were you born? - Aberdare in the Rhondda Valley
3. What is your earliest memory of Church? - Singing in the choir in St. Mary's aged about 11 in the front stall (on the left) with the other boys.
4. What is your favourite Bible verse? - So many. In fact there is a book full of them! But at this present moment in time it is Psalm 23:1 "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want".
5. Why? - Because all I could ever want or need can be found in God in Christ. He is the one who provides everything I could possibly need in life. He is the one who will, beginning now, start and continue the work of restoring my poor sin-battered soul. He it is who guides me along the right pathways in life. And when I face danger or death I know that He will walk with me and see me through. In Him I will ultimately triumph over all my enemies - sin, death and the devil. And He, who is always faithful, promises when this life is over, to bring me to His house and home to live with him forever. What more could anyone want?

Why has worship been different?

Words are only a small part of how we communicate with each other. There is body language - shrugs, frowns and smiles - as well as symbolism, pictures, sounds etc. In liturgy - the services we have on a Sunday - a lot of these things can play a part. That is why we have candles, colours, certain types of music, as well as words and gestures.

Those who have been able to attend St. James over the past four months or so, however, will notice that due to the restrictions, the whole feel of our service has changed quite dramatically. No hymns, little movement, no candles and a very short, word orientated service. And no Holy Communion. As time has gone on some music has been introduced but generally speaking the services have been the same. Why?

Partly because of the restrictions but also for another reason. Over the course of the year it has struck me that we cannot/should not continue as if nothing has happened or is happening around us. The whole world has been in some version of a lockdown with the most vulnerable and elderly shielding at home. You could say that the whole of the world has been in an enforced 'Advent' - a period of mourning and waiting - until the good news arrives of a vaccine that can give us back the life we long for.

And so it has been my decision that our church services should in some way reflect what is going on, in solidarity with those who cannot come to church, and who are feeling, even more than us, the restrictions that have been imposed on them.

Therefore we have not lit the candles. We have not had nor will have Holy Communion until this is over. We have had rather subdued music before and after the services. And we have kept everything plain and 'penitential'.

As the Bible says: "*There is a time for everything, and season for every activity under heaven*" (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

The time for full celebration and Holy Communion is when we are all back together again, as a Church, when this season of waiting is finally over. Until then, be patient. Stay faithful. Keep up the faith, and wait in hope. The time for resurrection and new life IS coming.

"...weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psalm 30:5).

Contact information

For all contributions to the newsletter please email the Vicar, Mark, at:

stjamesuplands1@googlemail.com

Home phone number: (01792) 470532

The Parish Website can be found at: www.stjamesw Swansea.org.uk

4th Sunday of Advent Collect and Readings

God our redeemer, who prepared the Blessed Virgin Mary to be the mother of Your Son: grant that, as she looked for His coming as our Saviour, so we may be ready to greet Him when He comes again as our judge; who is alive and reigns with You, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen

Readings

2 Samuel 7.1-11,16;
Magnificat (Luke 1.46-55)
Romans 16.25-27;
Luke 1.26-38

Extra collect

Heavenly Father, who chose the Blessed Virgin Mary to be the mother of the promised saviour:

fill us your servants with your grace, that in all things we may embrace your holy will and with her rejoice in your salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Thank You

Janet Morris thanks everyone who bought greetings cards this year, helping to raise £137 for church funds.

Christmas Joke

There once was a man in Russia whose name was Rudolph the Red. He was standing in his house one day with his wife. He looked out the window and saw something happening. Turning to his wife he said, "Look darling. It's raining". She, being rather obstinate responded, "I don't think so, dear. I think it's snowing". But Rudolph knew better. So he said to his wife, "Okay, let's step outside and we'll find out". They stepped outside and lo and behold, it was indeed raining, not snowing. Rudolph turned to his wife and said, "I knew all along that it was raining. Rudolph the Red knows rain, dear!"