

St James Parish Newsletter

3rd January 2021



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.

Endurance

“Great faith is a product of great fights. Great testimonies are the outcome of great tests. Great triumphs can only come after great trials.”

Smith Wigglesworth

Epitaphs

On the grave of Ezekiel Aikle in East Dalhousie, Nova Scotia:

Here lies
Ezekiel Aikle
Age 102
The good
Die young.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ

Before Christmas in one of my sermons and podcasts I spoke about the difference between human and divine hope. Human hope is uncertain and precarious. It is based on something we are not completely sure of and which may or may not happen. We ‘hope’ it will, but we don’t know for certain. Divine hope on the other hand, because it is centred on God and His character is ‘sure and certain’. It is just a question of when, not if, what God has promised will come about.

I would like to draw a similar contrast between human happiness and divine happiness which the Bible calls joy. Human happiness is passing and transient. It is very much dependent on the outward circumstances of our lives. Whether it is sunny or rainy, whether we are in a good or bad mood, whether things are going our way or not.

Joy however is not based on such passing things, but is grounded in the person of Jesus. Joy, then, is knowing Jesus. It is the joy of knowing that whatever happens to me, I have Him. As Jesus Himself says:

*“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world”
(John 16:33).*

This does not mean the Christian will walk around with a permanent grin on his or her face, or somehow be kept from experiencing sorrow or trouble (as Jesus points out above). But it does mean that the deep joy or godly ‘happiness’ that knowing Him brings, will continue to flow in the subterranean depths of our hearts and souls as we stay rooted and grounded in Him.

I say this because 2020 has been a challenging year for everyone. A time of trial and tribulation. Our faith has been sorely and radically tested. Mine has certainly been (although not all down to COVID). Therefore, if you were to talk solely in terms of human happiness, then I guess that there was not much to be happy about. But as unhappy as it has been for so many, I do hope and pray that you have discovered, or rediscovered, your joy in Jesus. That even as things have gone rather badly, the truth behind the following words of an old hymn will still have continued to remain true for you:

*When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.*

*Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blessed assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.*

May all be well with your souls as we move into a new year and may you find, or keep hold of, your joy in Jesus.

Joy to you all for 2021

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

1. What is your name? - Leighton Lloyd Francis
2. Where were you born? - Penrhiwtyn Hospital, Neath
3. What is your earliest memory of Church? - Attending chapel with my grandmother as a young child. I soon realised that pew number 9 on the left-hand side was the Francis family pew. As a result, each time I attended a service at another chapel my first thought after sitting was 'am I sitting in someone's pew?'. Came to Anglicanism in my late 30's. My recollections of that first service at St. Mary's, Swansea was firstly 'no pews' and secondly during the service I seemed to be sitting when everyone was standing and standing when everyone was sitting. Nothing like a chapel service. Eventually became treasurer and Vicar's warden to Rev. Don Lewis.
4. What is your favourite Bible verse? - Matthew 11.28 'Dewch ataf fi, bawb sy'n flinedig ac yn llwythog, ac fe roddaf fi orffwystira i chwi.' 'Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.'
5. Why? - This is a verse learned in Welsh at Sunday school. There are times in life when things do not go to plan resulting in worry, hardship and even distress. It is at those difficult times that this verse comes into its own and for me has offered comfort that the burdens experienced are fleeting and as it says in 1 Peter 5:7 'cast your worries on him, because he cares for you'. Attending bible studies with Mark has given me a new perspective on interpreting the Bible.

Epiphany Tradition

Each year around the feast of the Epiphany, many Roman Catholic and some Anglican parishes throughout the world participate in an annual blessing of chalk. It is an ancient tradition that not only places God at the entrance of your home, it places your entire family under his protection.

The Epiphany blessing of chalk and homes is a centuries old tradition where priests would visit each home in their parish after the Feast of the Epiphany. Over time it became more difficult to accomplish such a feat as parishes became larger and larger and priests were stretched thin. For this reason it became an accepted tradition that a member of the household is able to lead this blessing in place of the priest.

The blessing has biblical roots, deeply tied to the Passover in the book of Exodus. *The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt ... "take some of the blood [of the lamb], and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat them. They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it ... The blood shall be a sign for you, upon the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall fall upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt."* (cf. Exodus 12:1-13)

It is no coincidence that the Epiphany blessing is traditionally written on the lintel of the main doorway and even some of the prayers echo God's words of protection that he gave to Moses.

Traditionally a priest blesses chalk on the Feast of the Epiphany by saying the following prayer (from the Roman Ritual):

Bless, + O Lord God, this creature, chalk, and let it be a help to mankind. Grant that those who will use it with faith in your most holy name, and with it inscribe on the doors of their homes the names of your saints, Casper, Melchior, and Balthassar, may through their merits and intercession enjoy health in body and protection of soul; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

One local example of this is St. Peter's Church, in Cockett. You can check it out on their website/Facebook page.

Contact information

For all contributions to the newsletter please email the Vicar, Mark, at:
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Home phone number: (01792) 470532

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

Epiphany Sunday

Although Epiphany is on the 6th January, the Church permits us to celebrate it on the Sunday closest. Therefore the following collect and readings are for that Feast.

Collect

O God, who by the leading of a star manifested your only Son to the peoples of the earth: mercifully grant that we, who know you now by faith, may at last behold your glory face to face; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Readings

Isaiah 60:1 - 6; Psalm 72;
Ephesians 3:1 - 12;
Matthew 2:1 - 12

The Epiphany is an ancient Christian feast day and is significant in a number of ways. In the East, the Epiphany celebrates the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist in the River Jordan. It also celebrates Jesus' birth. The Western Church began celebrating the Epiphany in the 4th century where it was, and still is, associated with the visit of the magi (wise men) to the infant Jesus when God revealed himself to the world through the incarnation of Jesus. According to Matthew 2:11 they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

For many Protestant church traditions, the season of Epiphany extends from 6 January until Ash Wednesday, which begins the season of Lent leading to Easter. The word 'Epiphany' means the manifestation of a deity, the deity in this particular case being Jesus as Son of God. Therefore in both East and West traditions of the Church it is a day when Christ is revealed to the world either in his birth, baptism or to the world in the Gentile Wise men.