

The week beginning ADVENT SUNDAY: 28th November – 3rd December 2022
Greetings from Eileen

Dear Friends,

A new church year begins this Sunday. We enter the period of waiting and reflection, which is somewhat countercultural in the world that is busier and more hurried than any other time of the year.



On Advent Sunday, our 2 distinctive stars will be lit to shine every night throughout Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany. In Gainford, a calendar has been provided for the dedication of loved ones, for names to be written on a preferred date in November, December, January and February. Donations are appreciated to help with the cost of lighting. Big thank yous to Steve White and Peter Graham at St Mary's, and Graham Young at St Andrew's for putting up the Stars.



Winston's residents are hosting an Advent Calendar around the village for each day in December up to Christmas Day. The whole of the trail will be in place on the 1st December. Everyone with access to the internet will also be able to listen to Bible Readings and Reflections connected with each display on the trail. A QR code will be provided so that everyone walking the trail can scan it to access Carols and seasonal music as well the readings and reflections.

The Advent Communion Service in St Andrew's will include lighting of the Tree in church, followed by hospitality served by our young people and the planting of a Yew tree for our late Majesty's Platinum Jubilee's Green Canopy in the churchyard.

Come along to our Churches Together **Advent Study Discussion 'Nine Lessons – an Advent Exploration'** led by Cressida Heath **7pm Thursday 1st December** in Gainford Village Hall. The second session will be held on Thursday 15th December 7pm.

Your support is gratefully appreciated for **Gainford St Mary's Christmas Market on Saturday 3rd December** from 10.30am. Donated gifts are still most welcome for our own stall. 3 local crafts persons and artists hope you would find suitable items for Christmas presents.

ADVENT SERVICES with lighting of the Advent Candle

9.30am St Andrew's, Winston – Holy Communion

10.45am St Mary's, Gainford – Holy Communion with Preacher: Simon Edens

May the Lord, when he comes, find us watching and waiting.

Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop

NOTICES:

- As we anticipate the joy and celebration of the coming of our Lord, we are reminded of those for whom this may be a difficult time. Last year, Churches Together in Gainford supported **Stella Maris Christmas Appeal**, which helps seafarers. by donating chocolates, biscuits, toiletries, socks, woolly hats, warm clothes to Stella Maris. Please contact Wico van Mourik (07563155756) to make arrangements for drop-off or pick-up of your donations.
- **Our VIRTUAL PILGRIMAGE is online across the Diocese** as the first multi-ability pilgrimage. View it on this link, and do encourage others to do so too.
www.gainfordwinston.church/virtualpilgrimage

The Licensing Service of the Priest-in-Charge of Staindrop St Mary and Ingleton St John The Evangelist is to take place on the 2nd Sunday in Advent 4th December 2022 at 11am in Staindrop St Mary followed by a buffet lunch in Staindrop. All 4 parishes are invited to join this service. There will be a short service at Ingleton St John the Evangelist at 10am, attended by representatives of the 4 churches led by the Archdeacon and Area Dean.

Please pray for our parishes and for me in this new season.

Collect for ADVENT SUNDAY

Almighty God,
as your kingdom dawns,
turn us from the darkness of sin to the
light of holiness,
that we may be ready to meet you
in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen

Post Communion Prayer

O Lord our God,
make us watchful and keep us faithful
as we await the coming of your Son our Lord;
that, when he shall appear,
he may not find us sleeping in sin
but active in his service
and joyful in his praise;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

First Reading: Isaiah 2:1-5

¹ The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

² In days to come
the mountain of the Lord's house
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be raised above the hills;
all the nations shall stream to it.

³ Many peoples shall come and say,
'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths.'

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

⁴ He shall judge between the nations,

and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
 they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
 and their spears into pruning-hooks;
 nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
 neither shall they learn war any more.

⁵ O house of Jacob,
 come, let us walk
 in the light of the Lord!

Gospel Reading: Matthew 24:36-44

³⁶ But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷ For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰ Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴² Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³ But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

Alexandra Kirkup, attending Youth Bible Study, learnt about the Psalms, and has prayerfully written her own Psalms, which we share here.

Youth Bible Study Psalms for Advent

Lord, I value you,
 Because you are faithful, loving and generous,
 Extraordinary seas and mighty mountains,
 You show me the light in this dark world,
 I love you Jesus because you were willing to die for me,
 Therefore, I will sing your praises and share your good news with others.

You are an amazing God,
 Because you love everyone,
 Your animals bring lots of joy and your crops sustain us,
 You sent Jesus to be my saviour,
 I thank you Jesus because nothing can separate us from your love,
 Therefore, I will pass on your words so others can experience your love.

Lord, you're amazing!
 Because you are loving to all,
 You gave us the rainbow as a promise and blessed us with all birds and animals in creation,
 You strengthen me,
 I love you Jesus because you showed us the words of God,
 Therefore, I will share the good news of the Gospel.

Sermon, Sunday next before ADVENT – Christ The King: Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop, 20th November 2022 (Colossians 1.11-20; Luke 23.33-43)

The first time I came across the word 'King' was in the nursery rhyme: *'Old King Cole was a merry old soul and a merry old soul was he'*. Being in a British colonial territory and of the sultanates of Malaya, I soon got used to Kings or Agongs (kings in Malaya) being part of life. Then there were legends of Imperial China with Emperors, their courts of generals, administrators, eunuchs and concubines. And we have the image of grandeur, pomp and ceremony, and of Kings, Agongs, and Emperors being so special that they are necessarily remote – coming amongst the public very occasionally. As a child I used to wonder why it was significant when family members or their friends were bestowed an honour by the Yang di Pertuan Agong or from the King of Great Britain, Head of the Commonwealth. I am told that I am, on my maternal side of the family, a descendant of the first Emperor of China Tzi Wang Di via his favourite concubine.

But none of that matters and compares to the most significant reality, that all of us belong to the family of the King of all Kings and Lord of Lords. We belong as co-heirs with the King who is enthroned in Heaven with all authority over heaven and earth.

However, not only is the image of Kingship and territory in the world different, it contrasts completely to the Kingdom of God and Christ the King. Earthly kings are surrounded by courtiers and estates that ease their lives and afford every comfort. Our Gospel narrative today presents no ease nor worldly comfort to Christ at all.

'When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals...' 'the leaders scoffed at him...' 'The soldiers also mocked him...'

We know, of course, that there have been kings even of this country who had ignominious ends. But citing King Charles I as an example, he committed treason against the people of England, so invited a criminal's end.

Do the taunts against Jesus by the religious leaders, soldiers, and one of the 2 criminals, remind you of anything? It reminded me of Satan's taunts as he tempted Jesus in the wilderness right at the start of Jesus' ministry. In the desert as it was at his Crucifixion, Jesus was challenged to prove his identity.

Satan goaded Jesus to turn stone into bread. Satan was accusing God for the cry of this troubled world: there should never be physical hunger if Jesus you would turn stone into food. He was then challenged to show that God would deploy Heaven's angels to bear Jesus up if he threw himself off the top of the temple. Satan challenged God to prove his love and to prove Jesus' Sonship. Then Satan challenged Jesus to prove who was the real king over the world: Satan would give Jesus the world's kingdoms in exchange for his worship.

Have you noticed that in both these trials Jesus, at the start and end of his earthly ministry, that Jesus does not react? Jesus knew he had nothing to prove, that his identity was secure and not in doubt.

Jesus refers each time to God the Father. He had no doubts about God. At the Cross, the taunts are meaningless. Compared to the sin of sending an innocent person to a cruel and suffering death, the taunts condemn the taunters. Every innocent person, who has been wronged, especially suffering to the end of earthly life, is vindicated and liberated by Jesus' words: *'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'* The innocent have nothing to repent, but by their sharing of Jesus' own suffering of injustice and cruelty, they are with the King of all heaven and earth.

Paul's words to the Colossians, unpack the nature of Christ's Kingship. Being in Christ, belonging to His Kingdom, we have strength drawn from Christ himself. We can do all things as he commands. And we know there are only 2 commandments. If we enthrone Christ as King in our lives, we will have strength to love. In this broken world, we and others sometimes make loving one another rather difficult, and we have to endure one another. Then we will fail to endure with patience and joy, because it is countercultural in the world.

There is a verse from the Prophet Nehemiah (8:10) that I hold dearly in this regard: *'this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength'*. There is so much strife and brokenness in the world, whether big aspects like the war in Ukraine and the drought in many places causing severe hunger, or the spirit of condemnation and cynicism around us manifest in all sorts of ways every day. I find that I'm not very good at enduring, and definitely struggle to be joyful.

In Christ the King, we have redemption from all our sins. His forgiveness is absolute and unlimited. It is strange how we bind the seemingly smallest of sins to ourselves. I had held on to the regret of snatching from my twin sister's hands her birthday toy when we were 4 hurling it off the balcony. Despite having apologised to my sister, I deemed myself wicked, amongst those who were sinful even as a child. So, I am thankful to discover that Christ is our King of love, is personal, and neither distant nor occasional. Coming to Jesus again and again every time this childhood memory condemns me, I hear His truth and reclaim his grace. *'The joy of the Lord is your (and my) strength'*.

When the troubles of the world feel overwhelming; when noises and voices of the world justify their conclusions of disastrous outcomes, we can choose to share Paul's faith expressed to the Colossians. We can either believe the clever and loud voices of the world or believe that Paul's words hold God's truth.

'...in Christ Jesus all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him'; 'in him all things hold together'; 'He is the head of the body, the church'; 'For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell'.

There is only one King, and that is the only King with the authority to say and deliver: *"today you will be with me in Paradise."* Amen