



Connection

Sunday 31st January 2021
Presentation of Christ in the Temple



View from a Vicarage

Hello and welcome to what has now become a regular weekly communication to members of church communities in the Bredon Hill Group in Worcestershire, and to friends who now receive this publication in other areas of the country.

What started out as a short-term idea nearly twelve months ago as we entered a national Lockdown, to help people connect with one another and to share some simple worship resources across the Hill, has now become an established part of our wider Group communication: And it has been good to hear that so many people enjoy reading it and using the resources within it for personal prayer and devotions.

This week, I am actually writing this article on Sunday 24 January due to a busy diary next week and in order to meet the required deadline for producing it. As I do, I am gazing at what looks like a winter wonderland, for as you may remember when you read this piece, last Sunday saw an unusually high level of snow fall bringing wonder, joy and sheer excitement to many.

Now some of you will know that I get immensely excited by snow, igniting in me memories of a childhood in Wales, at a time when it seemed we had so many greater occurrences and accumulations of snow; And in the small town I grew up in Mid Wales, this often meant that for a few days when the snow had just fallen, we would actually be cut off for a short time, with people struggling to get out of the town to other places. It was on these occasions, that my excitement would be at its greatest, for not only did we get “snow days” off school, when we made snowmen, had snowball fights and went sledging, but we would make sure all our neighbours were looked after. Sometimes this meant clearing paths for them, sometimes doing their shopping and sometimes just talking to them to make sure they didn’t feel lonely.

I wonder if this seems familiar, for is this not what we are doing as we continue through Lockdown - being aware of those people around us who are struggling, needing our care, being attentive and compassionate?

However, whilst snow drives some people outside to have fun and revel in the unfamiliar environment of a whitened world, it also further isolates those who find the outside even more difficult to venture out in because of the risks it presents.

The contrast of the whiteness of the world created by snow against the dark colours of buildings and trees, reminds me that this week we will be commemorating Candlemas, the celebration of the Presentation of Christ at the Temple, and the blessing by the prophets Simeon and Anna, as the long-awaited Messiah is recognized in the form of the baby Jesus, as being the Light of the World.

The light which Jesus brings into a world of darkness, continues to offer hope to all those who struggle – those who are sick, those who have lost loved ones, those whose livelihoods have been affected, those whose future is uncertain, those whose education has been interrupted, those who suffer in silence because they have no control over their circumstances, and those for whom life is fragile because of the geography of where they live.

Last week on 27 January it was the annual commemoration of the Holocaust, when over 7 million Jews were killed in concentration camps during the second world war. It was an event which we pray will never be repeated in human history. Yet across the world oppression of certain groups in society still continues! As such, it is our Christian responsibility to ensure that we never become immune to the cries of people thus affected, and we must continue to pray for social justice and an end to all political regimes which threaten the freedom of individuals and groups in society.



And as we recall such atrocities but look for the symbols of hope and inspiration, maybe we should remember Cornelia Arnolda Johanna "Corrie" ten Boom. She was a Dutch Christian watchmaker, and later a writer, who worked with her father, Casper ten Boom. She, together with her sister, Betsie ten Boom and other family members, helped many Jews escape from the Nazis during the Holocaust in World War II, by hiding them in her home, believing her actions were following the will of God. Sadly, they were caught, and she was arrested and sent to the Ravensbrück concentration camp.

Her most famous book, *The Hiding Place*, is a biography which, recounts the story of her family's efforts and how she found and shared hope in God while she was imprisoned at the concentration camp. Her sister however died in the camp, yet in spite of this, she lived to share her messages of forgiveness for those who had imprisoned and tortured her and her sister.

Her life is an inspiration of Christian living and reflected the light of Christ through some of the darkness days of history. Therefore, my prayer is that this week, we too may we seek opportunities for sharing the light of Christ with others.

I am pleased to announce this week that we have heard that the Reverend Sarah Dangerfield, has been appointed as the Area Dean for the new Pershore and Evesham Deanery, which comes into being on 1 February. And I am sure that we all congratulate Sarah and will support her in her new role in the new Deanery.

After some technical issues with the hymns in our Zoom service of Morning Prayer over the last couple of weeks, I am pleased to say that last Sunday we managed to resolve this. So if you have not come to one of our services then please do give it a try, and it would be lovely to have you join us. If you wish to do so, then please contact Alison Khan, and she will send you the Zoom invitation, through which you can either

join on your computer or by dialling in on the telephone. (Contact: email acbhteam@gmail.com or telephone 07984 748059).

My continued thanks to all who contribute to this publication with reflections and prayers. If you would like to share any news, articles or prayer requests, then please do get in touch with me at eckingtonvicarage@hotmail.com

Therefore, as we face another week, I hope that you all stay safe and well, and may the light and peace of Christ be with you in the days ahead.

Allison

Reverend Allison Davies

Vicar of Eckington, Defford with Besford and Associate Priest for the churches of the Bredon Hill Group

Service of Holy Communion for the Presentation of Christ in the Temple

Collect

Lord Jesus Christ,
light of the nations and glory of Israel:
make your home among us,
and present us pure and holy
to your heavenly Father,
your God, and our God.

Amen

Hebrews 2: 14-end

Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ^{and} free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

Luke 2: 22-40

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons." Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed ^{so} that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too." There was also a



prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

Post Communion Prayer

Lord, you fulfilled the hope of Simeon and Anna,
who lived to welcome the Messiah:
may we, who have received these gifts beyond words,
prepare to meet Christ Jesus when he comes
to bring us to eternal life;
for he is alive and reigns, now and for ever.

Amen

Hymns for the Zoom Service this Sunday

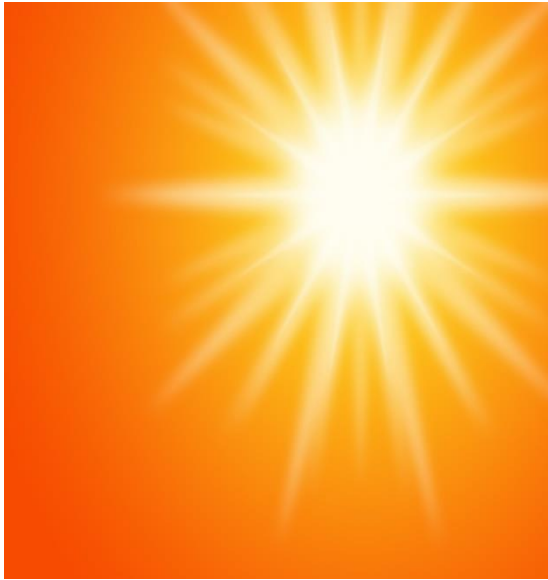
Christ is our cornerstone,
on him alone we build;
with his true saints alone
the courts of heaven are filled;
on his great love
our hopes we place
of present grace
and joys above.

O then with hymns of praise
these hallowed courts shall ring;
our voices we will raise
the Three in One to sing;
and thus proclaim
in joyful song,
both loud and long,
that glorious name.

Here, gracious God, do thou
for evermore draw nigh;
accept each faithful vow,
and mark each suppliant sigh;
in copious shower
on all who pray
each holy day
thy blessings pour.

Here may we gain from heaven
the grace which we implore;
and may that grace, once given,
be with us evermore,
until that day
when all the blest
to endless rest
are called away.





Lord, the light of your love is shining
In the midst of the darkness, shining
Jesus, Light of the world, shine upon us
Set us free by the truth you now bring us
Shine on me, shine on me

Refrain

Shine, Jesus, shine
Fill this land with the Father's glory
Blaze, Spirit, blaze
Set our hearts on fire
Flow, river, flow
Flood the nations with grace and mercy
Send forth your word
Lord, and let there be light

Lord, I come to your awesome presence
From the shadows into your radiance
By the blood I may enter your brightness
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness
Shine on me, shine on me

Refrain

As we gaze on your kingly brightness
So our faces display your likeness
Ever changing from glory to glory
Mirrored here may our lives tell your story
Shine on me, shine on me

Refrain



Readings for the Fourth Sunday of Epiphany and Septuagesima

Revelation 12: 1-5a

A great portent appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pangs, in the agony of giving birth. Then another portent appeared in heaven: a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, so that he might devour her child as soon as it was born. And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron. But her child was snatched away and taken to God and to his throne.

Mark 1: 21-28

They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He [\[m\]](#) commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

Reflection for the Third Sunday of Epiphany by Rev Roger Spiller

Today, Sunday, is the grim first anniversary of the start of Coronavirus. Back then just two people were found to be infected by an unrecognised strain of an unknown virus. We were shocked last April when Patrick Vallance told us that 20,000 deaths would be a 'good outcome', little thinking that we would reach and far exceed that milestone.

All of us are likely to know of someone who has died or been impacted by the pandemic, and consolation is premature until we have entered into shared mourning. It's assumed that Christianity offers hope and comfort. And so it does, but only after we have faced the tragic, dark features of the world. As all people facing loss know too well, a facile, premature comfort can hinder the long grieving process. The dying figure pouring out his life in horrendous suffering on a cross, crying in anguish to a Father he thought had abandoned him, chastens the untimely exuberance of some styles of Christianity. Our faith gives us, instead, the language of lament, notably in the psalms, that refuses to soften or trivialise human suffering, but stays with it, so that we dare to hold on by our finger nails to the hope that God will see us through.

Our weekly gospel readings are drawn each year in the main from one of the three 'synoptic' gospels, over a three year cycle. This year we major on Mark's Gospel, the earliest and the one on which Matthew and Luke depend. Mark's is the most tragic and astringent of the gospels. As the plot unfolds, the opposition builds, the mood darkens and even the faith of Jesus' closest disciples grows progressively weaker. The only bearers of hope in the story are outsiders; the marginalised, women, the sick, sinners, Gentiles. It's a big challenge to all of us who imagine we're followers of Jesus. And this gospel doesn't even have a resurrection story!

Jesus is viewed in Mark as rejecting titles, notably Messiah, preferring the enigmatic title of Son of Man. He's seen, simply, as one with authority – not authorised by human powers like the scribes. His authority confounds them, forcing them, to ask 'Who is this?' The exorcism in today's reading represents the ever-present struggle between the authority of Jesus and that of 'the authorities'. When we contemplate the figure of the crucified Christ we know that it will take more than a vaccine to save us. Only through the suffering Jesus can the malevolent powers finally be ejected from our world.

As our nation mourns the horrendous loss, grief and suffering of our people at this grim milestone, Mark's gospel reassures us that even when 'death's mightiest powers have done their worst', we can be agents of the change that God is bringing forth. Try reading Mark's gospel all the way through in one sitting; it may be the best way you could spend 50 minutes or so. Read it with the victims of the virus on your heart and as an extended litany for prayer and remembrance. And let the authoritative voice of Jesus speak to you afresh.

Prayer for the Third Sunday of Epiphany by Peter Hayes



Almighty Father, the giver of life and health, look mercifully on those who suffer from leprosy.

Stretch out your hand to touch and heal them as Jesus did during his earthly life. Grant wisdom and insight to those who are seeking the prevention and cure of the disease; give skill and sympathy to those who minister to the patients; reunite the separated with their families and friends; and inspire your people with the task set before The Leprosy Mission, that it may never lack either the staff or the means to carry on its healing work, in accordance with your will, and to the glory of your holy name.

We ask this for the sake of Jesus Christ your son, our Lord.

Amen

If anyone is interested in finding out more about The Leprosy Mission and its work the following links provide more information:

<https://www.leprosymission.org.uk/latest-news/leprosy-hospital-himalayas-among-first-centres-give-covid-19-vaccine-nepal/#/>

<https://www.leprosymission.org.uk/latest-news/cutting-the-uk-aid-commitment-is-unjust-at-a-time-when-it-is-never-needed-more/#/>

Requests for Prayers

If there is someone or something that you would like to pray for please email us at eckingtonvicarage@hotmail.com



Please continue to pray for the ill and isolated, frontline, hospital and medical staff and for all those who are in any kind of need. As we head towards Lent, pray that it will provide an opportunity to pause and reflect as we remember the sacrifice Jesus made for us.

Those who are sick: Roy and Margaret Putnam, Richard Clements, Christopher Frith, Edward Bunn, Brian Bolam, Alison Edwards, Mari (friend of Lynette Mantle), Don Dufty

We continue to pray for: Percy and Sharon Blizzard, Jackie Pickford, Clive Hunt,

Those in residential care: Sheila Bigland-Gibbons, Barbara Milton, Rita Sheppy

Those who have died and their families: Geoff Relph, Revd Margie Schutte, Carol Newman, Michael Pilliner, Eileen Fincher, Stephen Jeenes

Anniversary of a death: Please pray for those who have lost loved ones

Church Services during Lockdown



Reverend Allison will be leading Morning Prayer via Zoom at 10.30am this Sunday. If you would like to join the service either by video or dialing in from your telephone; please contact Alison Khan at acbhteam@gmail.com or 07984 748059 who will send you the invite link.

Change of Opening Days for Private Prayer at St John the Baptist, Beckford

From the 1st February, days of opening for private prayer at St John the Baptist Beckford will be Wednesday and Sunday. On both days the church will be open between 10am and 4pm.



Services for Holy Week and Easter – subject to changes due to Lockdown

Ash Wednesday 17th February - Zoom Service at 10.30am including imposition of ashes.

If you would like a small packet of ash, please send Alison Khan (details above) your address and we will post some to you.

Lent Study Course – every Wednesday from 24th February until 24th March – led by Rev Roger Spiller via Zoom at 7.00pm. See below for further details of the course. Details for how to participate in the course will be in next week's Connection.

Palm Sunday 28th March – Zoom service of Morning Prayer at 10.30am.

Holy Week Monday 29th March-Thursday 1st April – Zoom compline and short reflection led by Bishop Michael/Rev Allison at 7.00pm each evening.

Good Friday 2nd April – there will be localised church services where possible. More details to follow.

Easter Sunday 4th April – 10.30am Service at Holy Trinity, Eckington
Details of times of other services to be confirmed

Please contact Alison Khan if you would like to attend any of the Zoom services detailed above. The timetable of services is subject to any changes in government regulations regarding local and national lockdown.



Also watch this space for ideas for everyone for a '**Creative Easter**' – more details to follow.....



Lent Studies 2021

Where is God, in this Coronavirus epidemic and how does he act, directly or through human agents? How is our faith faring in these bleak times? What of science, often thought to compete with faith: is the vaccine saving the world and, conversely what about the precariousness of human knowledge? As individuals, we're more conscious of the fragility and tragedy of the human condition and seek to build resilient patterns of human flourishing. As a nation and world, new divisions and injustices have been exposed, and our core values have been threatened even though, for a brief time, the whole world is in the same boat. Is this the time for a new moral and social reconfiguring of our national life? Then there's the Church, whose attendances are fast becoming unsustainable, whilst innovative forms of 'meeting' are drawing in churchhoppers.

God, Science, Individuals, Society and Church are the five themes for the 2021 Lent Zoom study. The 90 minute session will start with a 30-40 minute talk, drawing on biblical and other resources. There will be space for questions, work in groups using handouts, and a gathering together and closing prayers. The meetings will take place on **Wednesdays at 7pm from 24th February.**

If you would like to raise questions or issues now or at any time during the course, please email me at rogerspiller@btinternet.com, citing 'Lent'. **Canon Roger Spiller**

Used Postage Stamps for Mercy Ships UK

Mercy Ships is a faith-based international development organisation that deploys hospital ships to some of the poorest countries in the world, delivering vital, free healthcare to people in desperate need.

Please save your used postage stamps for Mercy Ships UK and send them to:

Mercy Ships UK Stamps
P.O Box 6198
Leighton Buzzard
Beds LU7 9XT
UK

Please note that all correspondence (membership renewal, monetary donations etc) should not be included but sent to our headquarters.

For economic reasons we cannot reply to all donations of stamps but please continue to send them on a regular basis.

Please cut/tear the stamps from the envelope leaving approximately 1/2 cm of paper around the stamp. Foreign stamps can be sent separately and marked clearly on the front of the package 'Foreign Stamps Only' as these generate a greater amount of revenue.



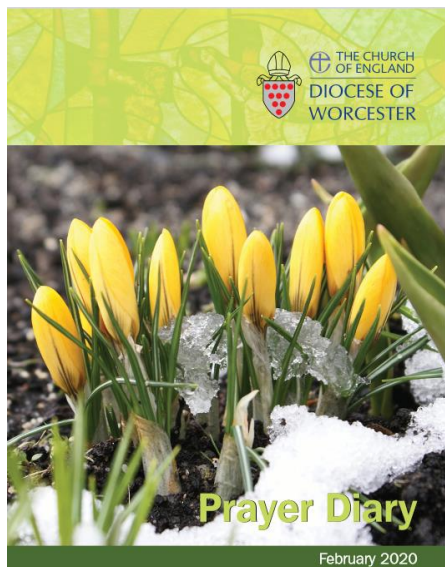
Additional Resources during Lockdown

Even though we are inviting everyone to join our weekly Zoom service at 10.30 on Sunday morning, please be aware that the Freephone Daily Hope programmes of worship services and prayers are still available by ringing 0800 804 8044. This includes a Church of England weekly service (select option 6) and traditional Morning/Evening Prayer (select option 7). This service will not cost the caller anything and provides worship material for those looking for additional services and prayer.



A free phoneline of hymns, reflections and prayers





News from the Diocese

Prayers and diocesan news can be found at www.cofe-worcester.org.uk



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