



The Benefice of St Mary's Bocking & Panfield Church



Sunday 11th December 2022
The Third Sunday of Advent
Staying in Contact

The Very Revd Rod Reid - Incumbent (*usual rest day Monday*)

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or on Facebook, search for 'St Mary's Church, Bocking', or 'Panfield Church'

Forthcoming Services

Hymns

St Mary's, Bocking

Sunday 11th December

8am Said Mass

5

10am Sung Mass

9

Wednesday 14th December

9.30am Said Mass

503

Sunday 18th December

8am Said Mass

10am Sung Mass

504

6pm Carols by Candlelight

Gospel Acclamation

Panfield Church

Sunday 11th December

11am Holy Communion

The spirit of the Lord has been given

Tuesday 13th December

5pm Evening Prayer

to me. He has sent me to bring good

Sunday 18th December

3pm Carol Service

news to the poor.

NOTICES

Christmas Tree Festival - A huge thank you to absolutely everyone involved, from all those who decorated trees, took part in the bazaar or helped behind the scenes. It was wonderfully successful, and great to have so much support from the village. Final monies raised to be announced soon.

Fellowship - This Thursday at 12.30pm in the Church Hall it will be the last Fellowship meeting of the year. It is a Christmas themed lunch, with some entertainment and carol-singing. All welcome.

The Retreat, Bocking & The Bell, Panfield - We will be carol singing in The Retreat on Wednesday 21st Dec from 7.30pm, and at The Bell, Panfield on Monday Dec 19th also at 7.30pm. Come and join us!

A Warm Place this Winter - Every Friday until March 10th we will be opening St Mary's Church Hall from 11.30am to 2pm as a warm place. Along with being a friendly space, there will be refreshments and a simple soup lunch, all of which will be free. Why not bring a friend and come along yourself.

Messy Christmas - On Wed 21st Dec from 11am - 1pm, St Mary's are having a craft morning in church with activities, refreshments and carols. If you are around to help please sign up at the back. Thanks.

Going Green! - In partnership with A Rocha, an environmental charity, we are hoping to work towards the various awards associated with being an Eco-Church. There will be opportunities for all to get involved as we progress, including for our younger ones. Watch this space for more details.

Prayers - We keep in our prayers Jean Goodwin, Sue, Jackie, Roger Hurford, Frances, Margaret, Peter, Jenifer, Jo, Bernard, June Blackwood, Gwen Nicholls and Margaret Everitt. We also remember our care homes Millard House, Fern Lodge, Aspen Grange, Larchwood, The New Deanery & St Mary's Court. In our Years Mind, we pray for the families of Betty Thomas, Montague Britton, Ellen Plumb, Raymond Horrix, Edith Carter, Lilian Green, Timothy Lake, Ronald Taylor, Hilda Kent, and Margery Francis.

The Collect for The Third Sunday of Advent

O Lord Jesus Christ,
who at your first coming sent your messenger
to prepare your way before you:
grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries
may likewise so prepare and make ready your way
by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just,
that at your second coming to judge the world
we may be found an acceptable people in your sight;
for you are alive and reign with the Father
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

Epistle Reading - James 5:7-10

Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Indeed we call blessed those who showed endurance. You have heard of the endurance of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 11:2-11

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?' Jesus answered them, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me.' As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you." Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Address

A little over five years ago I visited the Scottish island of Iona for the first time in about 35 years. It is not the easiest place to get to. In the days when I went fairly frequently it entailed a train journey to Glasgow, another train to Oban, the ferry to the island of Mull, a bus across Mull and a further ferry to Iona itself. I didn't drive in those days. But even if you drive, it is the best part of a day's journey from Glasgow or Edinburgh and you still have to brave the ferry crossing from Fionnphort on Mull and then walk to your accommodation on Iona, whether in the Abbey or in one of the small number of hotels on the island.

So, using the words of Jesus to the crowds, it is not unreasonable to ask, 'What then did you go out to see?' What is it that makes Iona, for me and for many others, such a special place that it is worth the long journey? It almost goes without saying that it is a beautiful place. But it does not have the grandeur or spectacular scenery of other Scottish islands. It is, of course, of great significance in the history of Christianity in the British Isles. It was the place where St Columba landed after fleeing from Ireland around the year 563 and from where he and his companions set out on missionary journeys leading to the spread of the Christian faith in the northern parts of Britain. But there are many other sites much closer to where we are that are important in the history of Christianity. So why Iona?

When I first went to Iona in the mid 1970s, George McLeod, the founder of the Iona Community, was still alive and active. Although not based on Iona, he spent some time there. There was, therefore, the possibility of hearing him preach or lead the prayers and being able to sit in his presence. He was an inspirational figure. There are still many strands to the work of the Iona Community. Some of us may be familiar with the excellent, and often challenging, worship material it has produced. Others may be more aware of its political stance, tending towards socialism and pacifism. Over time, my initial enthusiasm for the Iona Community tended to fade somewhat. I think my visit five years ago, when I stayed not in the Abbey but in the comfort of a hotel, was partly to acknowledge the significance Iona had had for me in my formative years as a Christian but also to accept that I no longer felt entirely at ease there.

I have no doubt that George McLeod could reasonably be described as a prophet. Not because he tried to predict the future, but because he was outspoken about injustice and inequality. But I suspect that he may not have been the easiest person to work with. I also suspect that that was the case with John the Baptist who featured in our Gospel reading both last week and this week. His message was an uncompromising one of the need to turn our lives around; and his language was direct – 'You brood of vipers' as we heard last week. Today's reading, however, hints at another side to John the Baptist. He has upset the powerful and is languishing in prison. As he reflects on what he has seen and heard, does he perhaps begin to have some doubts? Is Jesus really the expected one? Are great things going to happen soon? Or is there to be an extended period of waiting? Jesus does not answer directly, but instead points to the effects of his ministry, particularly his healing ministry, but also that what he is doing is good news for the poor. We can hope and believe that John the Baptist got the reassurance he was seeking before he was beheaded.

Let me return to that question Jesus posed to the crowds: 'What then did you go out to see?' And let me ask it in the context of our being gathered here this morning. The church is adorned with Christmas trees. It looks magnificent. The trees, the stalls and other events attract people to come and look. It is an excellent start to our Christmas festivities even if we are still in the middle of Advent. I am sure we are all grateful to those who have put so much time and effort into making the Christmas Tree Festival such a success. So one legitimate answer to that question could be that people come to see the sort of thing that St Mary's does so well – putting on a show.

But I hope that that is not the only answer to that question. Last Friday this church offered a 'warm space' to those who are worried about the impact of rising prices, and in particular the rising cost of energy. It was also an opportunity for people to enjoy a simple soup lunch and to meet with others. This is just one aspect of our being willing and able to serve our local community. Just how that is done will of course depend on specific circumstances. At present the rising cost of many necessities, particularly, fuel is prompting many organisations to explore how they can help. It is good that one of the reasons for visiting St Mary's is to receive practical help in a time of need.

That sort of help can be offered simply as an expression of our common humanity. But it is also part of our understanding of the Christian Gospel with its reminder that Jesus came not to be served but to serve. So a further reason for coming to church might well be to understand more about the Gospel – the good news of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and what that means in our own day. The teaching ministry of the church is important, whether done through the ten minute Sunday sermon or through Bible Study and discussion groups.

For many churches the weekly house group is one of the most important ways of exploring the Gospel and its implications for daily living. There is scope for us to build on what we already do so that another reason for getting involved with St Mary's is to learn more about our faith and how to put that into action in our local community.

A third answer to the question could and should be, 'to participate in the worship of God'. Perhaps that is so obvious that it does not need saying. It is simply what happens on Sundays (and other days) in church. But it does not 'simply happen'. It involves a significant amount of preparation and commitment whether from those who lead, those who make music or sing, those who ensure that all is prepared, those who welcome people and much else. It is good that so many people come week by week to take part in it. The question that may perhaps be asked is whether, in addition to the Sung Eucharist, there is a need for other forms of occasional worship that may be more accessible to people with limited experience of church.

The Christmas trees are lovely and the Festival is a wonderful way of sharing this very special place with our local community. But I hope that any answer to the question, 'What then did you go out to see' if asked in the context of St Mary's will look beyond the trees to reflect on the way the church serves the community, the way it proclaims and lives out the Christian Gospel and the way its worship tries to be worthy of the God we serve.

Amen.

Post Communion Prayer

We give you thanks, O Lord, for these heavenly gifts;
kindle in us the fire of your Spirit
that when your Christ comes again
we may shine as lights before his face;
who is alive and reigns now and for ever.
Amen.