



# The Benefice of St Mary's Bocking & Panfield Church

Sunday 28th January 2024  
The Fourth Sunday of Epiphany  
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 28th January	8am	Said Mass
	10am	Sung Mass
Wednesday 31st January	9.30am	Said Mass
Sunday 4th February	8am	Said Mass
	10am	Sung Mass on Candlemas
	5pm	BCP Evensong with Felsted School

301

43

577

446 (omit verse 3)

### **Panfield Church**

Sunday 28th January	11am	Holy Communion
Tuesday 30th January	5pm	Office Hour/Evening Prayer
Sunday 4th February	11am	Holy Communion

## Gospel Acclamation

*It is the Lord who gives the bread  
to the hungry, it is the Lord  
who sets prisoners free.*

## NOTICES

**Parish Meal** - For those who have booked a place for the Parish Meal on Friday February 9th at 7pm in The Retreat, please see the menu at the back of church and add know your food choices to the list.

**Choral Evensong** - NEXT SUNDAY, February 4th at 5pm there will be Choral Evensong at St Mary's, Bocking, led by the Senior Chapel Choir of Felsted School. All are welcome.

**Sunday Coffee - Charity of the Month** - Throughout January, the monies donated at tea and coffee following the main service at St Mary's will be going towards 'The Dean Rogers Million Penny Fund'.

**Stepping Stones** - Our next sessions of Stepping Stones will run in Lent, beginning on February 20th at 7pm. The remaining sessions will be February 27th, March 5th, March 19th and March 26th. More details will follow in a few weeks time, but we wanted to give you the dates as soon as possible. All welcome.

**Lent Soup** - Just to let you know that on Sunday March 3rd following the 10am service at St Mary's there will be a Lent Soup Lunch in the Church Hall. More details will follow soon.

**Childrens Society** - The final total of monies raised for the Children's Society through donations and the Christingle service is £530. Particular thanks to Irene who has arranged the Christingle making, helpers at the service, and counted the money for a number of years now. Irene has decided that 2023 was her last year leading on this, and what a wonderful high to step back on. Thank you Irene and all involved.

**Save the Date** - The next Friends event will be a Quiz Night in the Church Hall with Fish & Chip supper. Tickets and more details soon, but please save the date, Saturday March 16th, 6.30 for 7pm.

**Friendly Friday Cafe** - We are pleased to say that the Friendly Friday Café is back in the Church Hall from 12noon onwards, and now running each Friday up to and including Friday March 22nd.

**Stargazing Evening** - On Friday March 1st from 7-9pm our friends from the North Essex Astronomical Society will be running a free stargazing session in the church grounds. All are welcome.

**Online Donations** - At present, the card reader in St Mary's is out of action, but you are still very welcome to give online. You could do this by scanning the QR code at the end of this Notice Sheet or you'll find it in church, you scan the code using the camera on your phones. On most phones it will then ask you to 'open the link', from there you can give via the website. Some older phone models may need an additional app to scan the QR code. Alternatively you can go straight to the following website <http://givealittle.co/campaigns/8e6670a3-8911-43d2-bcc3-4b29613d6573>

**Prayers** - We keep in our prayers Barry and Janice Goody, Jean Goodwin, Sue, Roger, Frances, Jo Meech, and Tony & Ann. We remember our care homes Millard House, Larchwood, Fern Lodge, Aspen Grange, Braintree Mews, St Mary's Court and The New Deanery, and the following, whose anniversary of their passing falls this week Margaret Chinnery, Stanley Cotton, Derrick Bugby, Adelaide Tyler, Reginald Parkinson, John Beynon and Robert Ferdinando.

## The Collect for The Fourth Sunday of Epiphany

God our creator, who in the beginning  
commanded the light to shine out of darkness:  
we pray that the light of the glorious gospel of Christ  
may dispel the darkness of ignorance and unbelief,  
shine into the hearts of all your people,  
and reveal the knowledge of your glory  
in the face of 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.

### ***Epistle Reading - 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.

### ***Gospel Reading - 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, throwing him into convulsions 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 commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.' At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

## Address

Mark 1.22: They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. 'As one having authority'. St Mark does not tell us the content of Jesus' teaching, just that his hearers were 'astounded'. We can, of course, refer to the Gospels of St Matthew and St Luke if we want some content. St Mark is much more interested in the impact on his hearers of the words Jesus spoke. And perhaps also the impact on those who were suspicious of him or who rejected him. The teachings of Jesus could be uncomfortable, not only to those who opposed him but also to those who wanted to follow in 'The Way' but found it too demanding.

Whatever it was he said, it was recognised by his hearers as coming from one who spoke with 'authority'. A few years ago I took part in a very large international Economic History Conference held in Boston in the USA. I was presenting a short paper on the history of English department stores in one of the numerous special sessions attended by a handful of people. But there were also sessions where all attendees could listen to a lecture. One of these lectures was given by the very distinguished French economist and economic historian Thomas Piketty. The lecture room was packed and the audience hung on every word about economics, socialism and many other things. I'm not entirely sure we could hear 'every word', but at least we had seen and listened to the master: the one who spoke 'with authority'.

Piketty spoke 'with authority' because of his reputation. I suspect that most people here, like me, have occasionally encountered people who spoke with and indeed exuded authority. One of my training incumbents was made in this mould. By way of explanation, a job change in the late 1980s entailed a move from London to Sheffield at about the half-way point of my ministry as a non-stipendiary curate. I attached myself to a church on the edge of Chesterfield where my then wife had worshipped since childhood and the Rector took over as my training incumbent. Fr Ross was an Anglo-Catholic priest of the 'old school'. He certainly presented as 'one having authority'. Daily Mass was preceded by Morning Prayer at some unearthly hour. Because I had a secular job in Sheffield, I was excused the very early morning services and could only really be of use on Sundays and weekday evenings. I think that over the years I was there I increasingly appreciated him 'having authority' without being authoritarian.

But in this much more secular and unbelieving world that we inhabit, is it possible either for the church as a whole, or individual Christians, not just to speak 'with authority' but to be recognised by people as doing so? Among individuals, perhaps William Temple, about whom I spoke not that long ago, would have been one and Desmond Tutu, one time Archbishop of Cape Town and a prominent opponent of apartheid would be another. There is, however, a difficulty relating to the way in which church leaders are perceived. A recent survey which asked people how trustworthy they thought members of a wide range of occupations were makes challenging reading. Those most trusted to tell the truth were nurses, engineers and doctors; the least trusted politicians, advertising executives and government ministers. Clergy came roughly half way down the ranking sandwiched between the man/woman in the street and car mechanics. Only just over half of those surveyed thought that clergy could be trusted to tell the truth.

Interpreting these sorts of survey results is always a bit problematic. Historic cases of child and sexual abuse by a tiny minority of clergy can easily be reported in such a way as to cast doubt on all members of the profession. Nor would it be unreasonable for a committed non-believer, who puts Bible stories in the same category as fairy stories, to think that those who believed such things had difficulty separating fact from fiction. But even taking all this into account I find it somewhat disturbing to be told that clergy are apparently less trusted than TV news readers or civil servants. I also, however, strongly suspect that if people were asked about their own parish priest, irrespective of whether they were church goers, most would regard him or her as trustworthy even if they were sceptical about clergy as a whole.

I do not want to read too much into any of this, but it provides food for thought, especially if those of us in ordained or licensed ministries are expected in some sense to speak 'with authority'. It may also complicate attempts by ordinary churchgoers to get a fair hearing when attempting to explain Christian beliefs and lifestyle to non-believers. It can also only serve to strengthen the suspicion that at least some people have that people who go to church are hypocrites. Speaking 'with authority' is almost certainly more difficult for professing Christians irrespective of whether or not they exercise a formal ministry than it was a couple of generations ago.

So does that mean that we should give up on the attempt to speak 'with authority' about the sort of issues that most people face at some point in their lives: issues about money, job security, the ethical implications of being involved in a particular area of work; and many other things? There is more than enough to do in church and in church-related matters. Would it not be much simpler to focus on these, including the ever-increasing burden of raising the money required just to keep the parish church functioning and available to those who make use of it? While it is tempting to look inwards, I think this would be a big mistake. It is important to remember that the church is unusual in that it primarily exists for the benefit of non-members whether through evangelism or practical service in the local community.

This is perhaps of particular importance as we move into a situation in the UK where more people identify as having 'no religion' than identify as being Christian. Nor does it help if the popular perception of church is that expressed in The Smiths song from the 1980s: 'And the church all they want is your money'. If church leaders (and the average person in the pew) wish to speak 'with authority' about what is going on in the world around them, then some of these damaging preconceptions about church need to be addressed. I have, for example, been asked in the past why, in a deprived area, a Church of England minister lives in the biggest house in the locality. Did not Jesus identify with the poor and the suffering? There may be good reasons for how things are, often rooted in history, but I suspect that a lot of what we take for granted would look very odd to someone from a different culture but who was familiar with the picture of Jesus as given in the Gospels. I'm not suggesting radical changes (probably costly and difficult to implement); simply that the church as we know it is very far removed from what I suspect Jesus envisaged.

If we acknowledge that we have to start from where we actually are and not where we might be had the early years of organised Christianity been very different, then maybe Christians in 21st century UK can claim a right and a duty to speak 'with authority'. Doing so does not preclude a proper sense of humility and a willingness to listen to others. Nevertheless, as Christians we believe that there are eternal truths embedded in the Gospels and that the teaching of Jesus in particular is as relevant today as it was twenty centuries ago. To speak with that sort of authority is to offer a much better story and way of living than can be provided by the self-obsessed consumerism so typical of our modern western world. Amen.

## Post Communion Prayer

Generous Lord, in word and eucharist  
we have proclaimed the mystery of your love:  
help us so to live out our days  
that we may be signs  
of your wonders in the world;  
through Jesus Christ our Saviour.  
Amen.

You can scan this QR code with  
your phone at anytime and  
make a donation to the church.

Open your camera app, hold it  
over the QR code and then  
click 'open link' *Thank you*

