

The United Benefice of St Michael  
Lichfield and St John, Wall

**Second Sunday before Lent  
7<sup>th</sup> February**

**Canticle: The Venite**

**O come, let us sing to the Lord;  
let us heartily rejoice in the rock of our salvation.**

**Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving  
and be glad in him with psalms.**

**For the Lord is a great God  
and a great king above all gods.**

**In his hand are the depths of the earth  
and the heights of the mountains are his also.**

**The sea is his, for he made it,  
and his hands have moulded the dry land.**

**Come, let us worship and bow down  
and kneel before the Lord our Maker.**

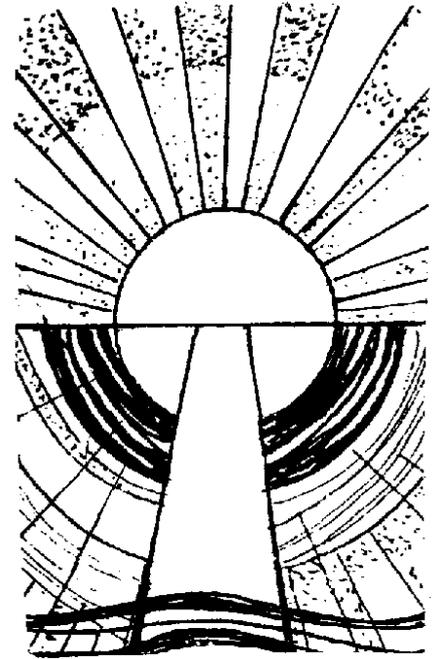
**For he is our God;  
we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand.**

**Glory to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now  
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

**Collect**

Almighty God,  
you have created the heavens and the earth  
and made us in your own image:  
teach us to discern your hand in all your works  
and your likeness in all your children;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who with you and the Holy Spirit reigns supreme over all things,  
now and for ever.

**Amen.**



## **New Testament Reading: Colossians 1.15-20**

<sup>15</sup>Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; <sup>16</sup>for in him 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. <sup>17</sup>He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup>He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. <sup>19</sup>For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup>and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

## **Psalm 104.26-35**

<sup>26</sup> There go the ships,  
and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.

<sup>27</sup> **These all look to you  
to give them their food in due season;**

<sup>28</sup> when you give to them, they gather it up;  
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

<sup>29</sup> **When you hide your face, they are dismayed;  
when you take away their breath, they die  
and return to their dust.**

<sup>30</sup> When you send forth your spirit, they are created;  
and you renew the face of the ground.

<sup>31</sup> **May the glory of the LORD endure for ever;  
may the LORD rejoice in his works—**

<sup>32</sup> who looks on the earth and it trembles,  
who touches the mountains and they smoke.

<sup>33</sup> **I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;  
I will sing praise to my God while I have being.**

<sup>34</sup> May my meditation be pleasing to him,  
for I rejoice in the LORD.

<sup>35</sup> **Let sinners be consumed from the earth,  
and let the wicked be no more.  
Bless the LORD, O my soul.  
Praise the LORD!**

**Glory to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now  
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

## **Gospel Reading: John 1.1-14**

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. <sup>4</sup>What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. <sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

<sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup>He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. <sup>9</sup>The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup>He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup>He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. <sup>12</sup>But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, <sup>13</sup>who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. <sup>14</sup>And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

## **Sermon**

### **Ongoing epiphanies of grace and truth**

The other day, someone, with a discernible note of resignation in their voice, said to me, "Oh well, at Candlemas we come to the end of the Epiphany season." I agreed but felt the need to add, "yes, but thankfully not the end of the season of epiphanies!" Epiphanies of our Lord are, I would suggest, a continual necessity within the Christian life. They help keep us faithful, they fuel hope, and they help keep us going through difficulties which are many and varied.

There are numerous religious orders within today's church founded by those who received their own, sometimes dramatic, epiphanies. We read of such people in books of church history and hagiographies; many Christians around the world still benefit greatly from the spiritual traditions these recipients of epiphanies founded - Franciscan, Dominican, Benedictine, Ignatian, and so on. Often based on a particular understanding of God, or one of his attributes, through direct revelation or mystical contemplation, frameworks for sustaining Christian, spiritual life have developed.

On 8<sup>th</sup> May 1373, Julian of Norwich experienced fifteen visions (epiphanies, you could say) in which God's love for humanity was made clear through the person of Jesus. From the visions she writes, "And in this vision he also showed me a little thing, the size of a hazelnut, lying in the palm of my hand, as it seemed to me, and it was round as a ball. I looked at it with my mind's eye and thought, 'What can this be?' And the answer came in a general way, like this: It is all that is made." Julian's interpretation of this experience was that whatever God loves he holds in the palm of his hand: he holds it safely; he holds it securely. From her own perspective and dire, personal circumstances, the visions spoke of a future wellbeing, a situation of Shalom. The revelations gave rise in her heart to a sentiment lifted and used by T.S. Eliot in the last of his Four Quartets: "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well". Against the backdrop of our own present circumstances, I cannot think of any more hopeful a note to ponder.

Having been prompted to think about such matters, maybe you have had a moment of insight, an epiphany rather like Julian? Following a pilgrimage to Jerusalem that I led a couple of years ago, many of the pilgrims have shared special moments of insight, some

remarkable sense of our Lord's presence, a spiritual connection which is no less vibrant today despite the passage of time. Of course, you do not need to be in such notable, holy places to receive in this way from God. Within our own localities and throughout the year, what about those winter afternoons when the sky is flooded with the fiery red of the setting sun? What about that bright spring morning when birds are singing? There can be autumn mornings when the sunlight sparkles on a carpet of dew over the fields as if someone has scattered diamonds. Have you not perceived the face of a child light up as its mum or dad approaches? These can be moments when God invites us to delight in his creation, all that is made, to enjoy with him the world and the people who surround us. These are moments when a kind of innocence and joy that were surely present at the beginning of creation are restored; they now offer us glimpses of God in a new and dynamic way.

Reflecting on the recorded, spiritual experiences of others can challenge us to ask ourselves whether we have lost some sensitivity to the things of God and are less able to see that he delights and rejoices over us, the human race - his prize creation. Then again, maybe we think that such a sensitivity to these experiences are only for others, those in some way special and somehow privileged? Would we fear ridicule if we were to speak or write of our own spiritual experiences; might we be deemed 'over-spiritual' or somewhat 'OTT'? If either proved to be the case, we would at least find ourselves in good company. Living almost two centuries before Julian, the German visionary and mystic, Hildegard of Bingen, was not taken at all seriously before she received an affirming visit by St. Bernard of Clairvaux. Having listened carefully and prayerfully to Hildegard's compositions, St. Bernard drew the conclusion that others could not understand or accept Hildegard's visions simply because they had not shared them. Furthermore, until they sought God as fervently as Hildegard, they would remain in ignorance and without her depth of spiritual knowledge and insight. What a sadness it would be to miss out on the knowledge of God whose knowledge and love for us caused him to come and live among us, to restore us and to heal us.

Today's, well-known Gospel text, is that which I look forward to hearing at the annual service of Nine Lessons and Carols and again, often at midnight mass on Christmas Eve. Against the cosmic backdrop that St. John paints for us, the passage culminates in the tremendous affirmation that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us; the incarnate God - Emmanuel. John can make this statement with boldness because of a series of cumulative epiphanies he had received. John is describing a moment which makes for the possibility of change, it is a moment that brings hope, it is a moment in time which redefines what it means to be human, it is a moment that makes a way for reconciliation, for re-creation and newness.

Picking up on my earlier statement: the implications of what St. John proclaims are by no means limited to our Christmas and Epiphany seasonal celebrations. They speak of the very nature of love, and therefore, the nature of God. The Father's desire is to enjoy fellowship with us, his desire is of the very best for us. That is why God came to live among us; he wanted, and continually wants to draw us to himself through his Son. St. John would have us know with all certainty that in the man Jesus, we see enfleshed, the fullness of God. In Jesus we see demonstrated God's concern for people's lives and welfare, a God who wants to bring healing and forgiveness. Our God is always ready to offer a new start and there are always new possibilities opening before us. If God delights in us so much, then surely it matters to him how we respond to his initiative of love. Recognising his love must be the first step. In his book 'Mystery of the Incarnation', Cardinal Basil Hume states that we need to remember the simple truth that God is *in love* with each of

us. (Now, there is a rather nice Valentine's statement we could all think about next Sunday, 14<sup>th</sup> February.) It is an amazing thought that each of us can say, "God is *in love* with me" - "God delights *in me*". This simple yet profound truth, if watered and nurtured, can be a seed of faith which grows and begins to change who we are and how we live in no lesser way than the Julians and Hildegards of this world. This is the response and outcome our Lord desires.

Of course, this type of change is not something which generally happens overnight. Even with the best of intentions, we will probably spend our whole life receiving invitations from God and missing most of them because we cannot or will not watch and listen. Maybe we will recognise an invitation but be too afraid to say "yes". It is not by chance that our lectionary readings, now running up to Lent, will cause us to think about the implications of godly changes to our lives, necessary changes that we might draw closer to God. Let us open our eyes and our hearts. Today, St. John reminds us that it is God's presence in human form that allows us to receive and understand his love for us, his willingness and desire to be with us and share life with us. This is the kind of love which allows us to change, albeit ever so slowly. Yes, he comes to us as one of us; and to all who receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gives the right to become his children - born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of himself. May it be so for each of us. Amen.

*Prebendary Terry Bloor  
Associate Archdeacon of Stoke-upon-Trent*

### **Post Communion Prayer**

God our creator, by your gift the tree of life was set at the heart of the earthly paradise, and the bread of life at the heart of your Church:  
may we who have been nourished at your table on earth be transformed by the glory of the Saviour's cross and enjoy the delights of eternity;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen**

### **FOR YOUR PRAYERS**

#### **ST MICHAEL**

#### ***Those newly in need of prayer***

Norah and Arthur Palin, Alan Thompson and Alison Knight

#### ***Those in continuing special need of prayer:***

Sam Bassett, Mark Berry, Elizabeth Chapman, Chris Clayton,  
Dorothy Clayton, Jo Cobb, Dottie Collins, Alison Cox-Toplis, Martin Dewes, Chris Dickerson, Colin Eastwood, David Edge, Robert Harris, Robert McAllester-Jones, Marielouise Oliver, Arthur Palin, Nick Rutter, Anthony Staples aged 7, John Tipper, Sheila Vaughan, Judith Watson, Renee Wellings, Peter and Anne Whatson, Felicity Woodfield, Jamie, Gary and Denise, Julian & Wendy,

#### ***Those who have died***

John Stuart

### **FOR YOUR PRAYERS**

#### **ST JOHN**

Pat Crowe, Jo Hearn, Ann Kinson, Allan Law

# CHURCH NOTICES

## **ASH WEDNESDAY ZOOM SERVICE, Wednesday 17th February, 6pm**

This year, due to Covid restrictions, we need to do things a little differently and so Ash Wednesday won't be the same as it normally is, but we hope to offer you an alternative in our Ash Wednesday Zoom Service which will be a helpful and meaningful way to engage with this important moment to mark the beginning of Lent. The service will focus on reflection and prayer, taking the first steps on our journey with Christ towards Jerusalem and the cross.

## **RECTOR'S RETIREMENT**

I have written to Bishop Michael to tell him that I intend to retire at the end of April. My last Sunday will be the Sunday after Easter. I very much hope that we will be back in church by Easter Sunday and so will be able to say farewell in person. Diana and I have enjoyed being part of the church at St Michael's and St John's but it is now time to open a new chapter in our lives. We are moving to South Somerset.

*Simon Baker, Rector*

## **LEAVING GIFT FOR SIMON AND DIANA**

We are starting a collection to buy Simon and Diana a leaving gift from everyone here at St Michael's church. This is obviously trickier than usual as we are not currently in church to receive donations and need to minimise the handling of cash.

If you would like to contribute you can pay your donation straight into the church bank account which would be very helpful.

Lloyds Bank

Account Name – PCC of St Michael and St Mary Lichfield

Account Number – 00114488

Sort Code – 30-95-04

Reference – **RETIREMENT**

**(This is really important as we need to distinguish between this and other donations)**

If you would prefer to post your donations somewhere, please deliver them to:-

Sue Jones

or

Lyn Shiel

38 Bracken Close

1 Aspen Close

Lichfield WS14 9RU

Lichfield WS 13 6FE

Angie is currently working from home with the exception of Thursday's when she is in the church office, so if you prefer to use the church post box, please ensure that you drop your donation off by 11am on a Thursday.

Many thanks,

*Sue and Lyn*

Churchwardens

## **BIBLE STUDY IN LENT**

We will be starting a new series of Bible Studies on the Wednesdays of Lent starting on **Wednesday 24 February until Wednesday 31st March.**

Each session will be on Zoom at 10.30am.

This year the gospel that we are mainly reading at our Sunday services is the Gospel of Mark. Our Lent Bible Study will focus on **The Passion of Jesus in Mark's Gospel.**

Jesus's death and resurrection lies at the very heart of our Christian faith and has done so from the very beginning. These sessions will give us an opportunity to focus on the passion story and its meaning for us in a way that we are not often able to do.

The zoom link will be sent out each week with the links for our services. There will also be a sheet with the Bible text and questions to think about available to download from our website.

Everyone is invited to join these sessions.

## **MU Members.**

Our MU subs are due, this year they are £ 26. Could you pay by cheque please, made payable to St. Michael's MU. Thank you *Lynn*

**COUNSELLING** One result of this 3rd lockdown starting will be increased pressures on all of us, and many people are feeling anxious and depressed and are coping with a lot of extra stress and loss.

Phoenix Counselling Service is a small charity which for 5 years, has been providing counselling to adults living in Burntwood, Lichfield and the surrounding areas, who are not able to access counselling via the NHS and who cannot afford private counselling. Professionally trained counsellors provide a safe, confidential space to talk about your thoughts and feelings, and work through problems that you might be facing in your life. At present all the counselling is online or by telephone although we will offer face to face sessions when restrictions permit.

Contact details: [www.phoenixcounselling-service.co.uk](http://www.phoenixcounselling-service.co.uk)

email: [phoenixcounselling2@gmail.com](mailto:phoenixcounselling2@gmail.com)

Mobile: 07415517663

Best wishes, Rhoda Wharton

**CHURCHES TOGETHER** [www.stmichaelmaryjohn.org.uk/churches-together.html](http://www.stmichaelmaryjohn.org.uk/churches-together.html)

**THE FOODBANK** is always happy to receive gifts of

- Tinned meat and fish
- Tinned fruit and vegetables, soup and beans
- Rice pudding and custard
- Instant coffee, tea, sugar, long life milk and fruit juice
- Packets of cereals, biscuits and snacks
- Pasta, rice and pasta sauce
- Jam

Items should be **at least 3 months in date** or the Foodbank is not allowed to issue them.

**Donations of food** can be left at **51, Lime Grove, Lichfield WS13 6ER**

*Maggie and David\_01543 255308*

## **PARISH DIARY**

### **Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> February: Lent -2**

8:00am	Holy Communion	Zoom
10:00am	Sunday Service	Zoom

### **Monday 8<sup>th</sup> February**

All day	<b>OFFICE CLOSED</b>	
8:15am	Morning Prayer	Zoom

### **Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> February**

All Day	<b>OFFICE CLOSED</b>	
8:15am	Morning Prayer	Zoom

### **Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> February**

All Day	<b>OFFICE CLOSED</b>	
8:15am	Morning Prayer	Zoom

### **Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> February**

All day	<b>OFFICE COSED</b>	
8:15am	Morning Prayer	Zoom

### **Friday 12<sup>th</sup> February**

All Day	<b>OFFICE CLOSED</b>	
8:15am	Morning Prayer	Zoom

### **Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> February**

### **Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> February: Lent-1**

8:00am	Holy Communion	Zoom
10:00am	Sunday Service	Zoom