

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

Epiphany 3 – 24th January

Canticle - A Song of God's Splendour

**Sing to the Lord a new song;
sing to the Lord, all the earth.**

**Sing to the Lord and bless his name;
tell out his salvation from day to day.**

**Declare his glory among the nations
and his wonders among all peoples.**

**Honour and majesty are before him;
power and splendour are in his sanctuary.**

**Ascribe to the Lord, you families of the peoples;
ascribe to the Lord honour and strength.**

**Ascribe to the Lord the honour due to his name;
bring offerings and come into his courts.**

**O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness;
let the whole earth tremble before him.**

**Tell it out among the nations that the Lord is king.
with righteousness he will judge the world
and the peoples with his truth.**

Psalm 96.1-3,6-10a,13b

**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,
whose Son revealed in signs and miracles
the wonder of your saving presence:
renew your people with your heavenly grace,
and in all our weakness
sustain us by your mighty power;
through 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.

New Testament Reading - Revelation 19.6-10

⁶I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunder-peals, crying out,

'Hallelujah!
For the Lord our God
the Almighty reigns.

⁷Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready;

⁸to her it has been granted to be clothed
with fine linen, bright and pure' –

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. ⁹And the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.' And he said to me, 'These are true words of God.' ¹⁰Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, 'You must not do that! I am a fellow-servant with you and your comrades who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.'

Psalms 139.1-9

¹ Happy is everyone who fears the LORD,
who walks in his ways.

**² You shall eat the fruit of the labour of your hands;
you shall be happy, and it shall go well with you.**

³ Your wife will be like a fruitful vine
within your house;
your children will be like olive shoots
around your table.

**⁴ Thus shall the man be blessed
who fears the LORD.**

⁵ The LORD bless you from Zion.
May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days of your life.

**⁶ May you see your children's children.
Peace be upon Israel!**

**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 2.1-11

¹On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ²Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' ⁴And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.' ⁵His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' ⁶Now standing there were six stone water-jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸He said to them, 'Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.' So they took it. ⁹When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, ¹⁰'Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.' ¹¹Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Sermon - Quantity, quality, quaffability

Are you keeping Dry January this month? I am not, but I know many who are. It is an important public health opportunity, giving up alcohol for a while after the indulgence of Christmas. This year it can be particularly helpful for us to attend to our drinking in these days of lockdown. But if you are trying to keep dry January, this morning's gospel reading might be quite a challenge, because it shows Jesus doing something very different.

At the wedding in Cana of Galilee, he produces a huge amount of wine out of water. Let's do the mathematics. Six stone jars, each holding between 20 or 30 gallons, are filled to the brim with water. Even if each jar only holds 20 gallons, this means 120 gallons, 545 litres, of wine. A standard bottle of wine today is 75 cl: so Jesus has produced the equivalent of 727 bottles for a party which has already drunk its way through the cellar. On the higher figure of 30 gallons, the stock-taking rises to 1090 bottles, I think. If you had been enjoying yourself at that wedding in Cana of Galilee, you probably would have had a very sore head next morning.

That is a lot of wine. What is the gospel trying to tell us? It is not really about drinking alcohol or abstaining from alcohol. It is, as John says, a sign: a sign of abundance, of super-abundance.

Our God is a God of excessive generosity, exuberant in the kindness he lavishes upon us. This is his nature – how he is, who he is. This theme of abundance runs through the New Testament. The Sower scatters the grain everywhere; most is lost, but what falls on good soil produces amazing yields: 30, 60, 100-fold. In another parable, workers recruited to the vineyard at the last hour are paid with the same generosity as others who have slaved through the day, to the bewilderment of all. Paul says that the love of God is shed abroad by the Holy Spirit into the hearts of the ungodly, and in their justification the justice of God bears the fruits of amazing grace. Christian faith speaks of undeserved, unexpected, unscientific abundance; this is the sign which Jesus sets before us at Cana of Galilee.

So this wedding at Cana is a story of great quantity; but it is also a story of high quality – the wine Jesus provides is of the very best. There is a man called the steward of the feast; today, we would call him the event organiser. He is the person who is meant to be in charge, making sure that all the plans go right. He is surprised that the Lord has

kept the best wine till last. One early writer says that this steward is the only person whose judgement about the wine we can trust. Why is that? Well, because he has to organise the party, he is the only person there who has had to stay sober.

This best wine is kept to the end: what Jesus gives is promised as the completion of our time, the perfection of our human nature, a fullness of life for which all our days here on earth are a training and a preparation. John says that at Cana Jesus 'revealed his glory': that is the word he uses for the fulfilment of what we are meant to be. The glorious quality of the life Jesus offers to you and to me cannot be beaten for quality.

So we have quantity and we have quality; but any sermon needs three points, and it would be good if the third also began with a 'q'. So, with apologies, I give you the word 'quaffability': by which I mean, the urge to drink more and more of this wine. For an alcoholic, of course that is a problem; but the water become wine that Jesus gives is such that we want to return to it again and again, because it changes us from glory to glory drawing us closer to the God whose nature is love.

The quaffability of this wine changes people's lives as they grow in their relationship with God. The tradition of the Orthodox Church says that the groom at the wedding in Cana was actually Simon the Zealot, and it was because of Cana that he became one of the twelve apostles chosen by Jesus – he had been so affected by what he experienced there. There are traditions which says that Simon preached the gospel in Africa and Asia, and some say in Britain; and that he met a martyr's death in Persia, or some say near Grimsby.

That may or may not be the case, but we do not have to be one of the twelve apostles to want to drink again and again the wine of the Kingdom which the Lord gives us, and to have our lives changed as we do that. At the moment, of course, in most of our churches we are not gathering physically for the eucharist, and when we can do so it will be a long time before we can again share in the common cup of wine. But that experience, and the opportunity of 'spiritual communion' which we can make online, can make us think more deeply about this great sacramental gift, which we can usually enjoy and which we often take for granted.

The early Christians saw in the miracle at Cana a pointer to the wonder of Holy Communion. One of them, St Cyril of Jerusalem, wrote this: 'Once at Cana in Galilee he changed water into wine by his own will; is it incredible that he should change wine into blood?' This quaffable wine of Cana draws us closer and closer to our generous God. Its quality speaks to us of the unimaginable glory to which we are called. Its sheer quantity proclaims the vastness of God's love poured out for us. And what was miraculously provided as a one-off for invited guests in one town in Galilee is now given to us all, in God's grace freely lavished upon us. Even in these times of restriction and anxiety, particularly in these times of restriction and anxiety, God in Christ renews the wonder of Cana: he gives us the abundant wine of hope, to drink again and again.

+Michael Lich

FOR YOUR PRAYERS

ST MICHAEL

Those newly in need of prayer

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.

Those who have died

FOR YOUR PRAYERS

ST JOHN

Pat Crowe, Jo Hearn, Ann Kinson, Allan Law

Post Communion Prayer

Almighty Father,
whose Son our Saviour Jesus Christ is the light of the world:
may your people,
illumined by your word and sacraments,
shine with the radiance of his glory,
that he may be known, worshipped, and obeyed
to the ends of the earth;
for he is alive and reigns, now and for ever.

Amen

CHURCH NOTICES

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.

SUNDAY SERVICE 31ST JANUARY: CANDLEMAS

On Sunday 31st January we will celebrate Candlemas or the Feast of the Presentation in our 10.00am zoom service. As part of that service we would like everyone who attends to be able to light a candle. Please make sure that you have a candle available to light during the service. Something like a night light is probably best to ensure that you smoke alarm is not set off!

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

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*

FEBRUARY MAGAZINE

We shall try to deliver the Magazine in the normal way as much as possible. Barbara *Homewood*

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

email: phoenixcounselling2@gmail.com

Mobile: 07415517663

Best wishes, Rhoda Wharton

CHURCHES TOGETHER 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. *Maggie and David_01543 255308*

REDUNDANT SPECTACLES FOR AFRICA

The Rotary collection of redundant spectacles to be sent to development projects in Africa has now re-commenced. In your 'clearing out', please save any redundant spectacles for Trevor James to dispatch. They could be deposited by his garage doors—on your healthful daily walk!

PARISH DIARY

Sunday 24th January: Epiphany 3

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

Monday 25th January

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| All day | OFFICE CLOSED | |
| 8:15am | Morning Prayer | Zoom |

Tuesday 26th January

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| All Day | OFFICE CLOSED | |
| 8:15am | Morning Prayer | Zoom |

Wednesday 27th January

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| All Day | OFFICE CLOSED | |
| 8:15am | Morning Prayer | Zoom |

Thursday 28th January

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| All day | OFFICE OPEN | |
| 8:15am | Morning Prayer | Zoom |
| 9:00am | Magazine Distribution | St Michael's |

Friday 29th January

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| All Day | OFFICE CLOSED | |
| 8:15am | Morning Prayer | Zoom |
| 6:00pm | Floodlights in memory of Kathleen Plimmer | St Michael's |

Saturday 30th January

Sunday 31st January: Candlemas

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