



Notices:

Diocese of Exeter Annual Report

To view the Diocese of Exeter's Annual Report please see the link on the Roots & Shoots newsletter from the Diocese of Exeter.

Service of Light 6pm 13th December St Andrew's Ipplepen Near the shortest day of the year we come together to celebrate light in all its forms – a short service of music, readings and reflection.

Look out for the lovely things in our villages that our being re imagined and planned in COVID safe ways – Christmas lights, Advent Windows, Carol Singing...

Could You Inspire Others by Sharing Your Faith? The Plymouth Centre for Faiths and Cultural Diversity is a small charity which arranges for speakers from a variety of faiths to go into schools and other settings to run education sessions about their faith. It is currently continuing online but is short of Christian volunteers! If you would like to find out more please contact: Claire Linden, Education Officer, by telephone 01752 254438 or email education@pcfcd.co.uk

South West Community Chaplaincy for ex prisoners - could you help? [SWCC help people make a fresh start after prison](https://www.southwestcc.org.uk/making-new-start-possible), visiting prisoners pre and post-release, mentoring, discipling, and signposting valuable services like church communities. Could you join them in prayer, giving, and volunteering? <https://www.southwestcc.org.uk/making-new-start-possible>

In memory We keep in our prayers John Noble and Alan Grimshaw

For prayer In a season of waiting, we pray for those who watch and wait for news of loved ones.

The Beacon The new issue of the Beacon is out now. A fantastic bumper issue for all ages.

Sermon from the Diocese for the Third Sunday of Advent from the Very Reverend Jonathan Greener, the Dean of Exeter Cathedral. <https://vimeo.com/cofedevon>

Readings

	This week	Next week
Readings for this Sunday:		
First Reading	Isaiah 61.1-4, 8-11	2 Samuel 7.1-11. 16
Psalm	126	Luke 1:46b-55
Second Reading	1 Thessalonians 5.16-24	Romans 16:25-27
Gospel	John 1:6-8, 19-28	Luke 1:26-38

Readings for the week ahead:		
Mon	14 th	Matt 21:23-27
Tue	15 th	Matt 21:28-32
Wed	16 th	Luke 7.18b-23
Thurs	17 th	Matt 1.1-17
Fri	18 th	Matt 1.18-24
Sat	19 th	Luke 1.5-25

They can also be viewed/downloaded from <https://bible.oremus.org/>

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Today's Sunday Services

9.30am	Holy Communion	- St John the Baptist, Woodland
	Celtic Morning Prayer	- St Mary's, Denbury
11am	Holy Communion	- St Peter and St Paul's, Broadhempston
	Celtic Morning Prayer	- St Andrew's, Ipplepen
6pm	Service of Light	- St Andrew's, Ipplepen

Next Sunday 20th December

9.30am	Holy Communion	- St Mary's, Denbury
11am	Holy Communion	- St Andrew's, Ipplepen
5pm	Christmas readings, poems, carols and music	- St John the Baptist, Woodland
6.30pm	Zoom Carol Service (Hillary)	- Joint with Ipplepen Methodist Church (details to follow)

Morning Prayer 9am Monday to Thursday this week

Monday	- St John the Baptist, Woodland
Tuesday	- St Andrew's, Ipplepen
Wednesday	- St Peter and St Paul's, Broadhempston
Thursday	- St Mary's, Denbury

Mid-Week Communion Services

Tuesday 10am	- St Andrew's, Ipplepen
Thursday 10am	- St Mary's, Denbury

Other Services

Thurs 17 th 12noon	Funeral & Burial of John Noble	- St Andrew's, Ipplepen
Mon 21 st 10am	Funeral & Burial of Alan Grimshaw	- St Andrew's, Ipplepen

Christmas Services in the Beacon Parishes:

19th – 24th December

9am - 4pm daily The Wonder of Christmas Display - St Peter and St Paul's, Broadhempston

Sunday 20th December

5pm Christmas readings, poems, carols and music - St John the Baptist, Woodland
30pm Zoom Carol Service - Joint with Ipplepen Methodist Church (details to follow).

Thursday 24th December - Christmas Eve

3.30pm – 6.30pm Journey to the Crib Christmas Trail - St Andrew's, Ipplepen
4pm Crib Service - St Peter and St Paul's, Broadhempston
11pm Midnight Mass - St Mary's, Denbury
11pm Midnight Mass - St Andrew's, Ipplepen

Friday 25th December - Christmas Day

9.30am Holy Communion - St John the Baptist, Woodland
10am Family Christmas Service - St Mary's, Denbury
11am Holy Communion - St Andrew's, Ipplepen

Sunday 27th December

9.30am Celtic Morning Prayer - St Mary's, Denbury
11am Holy Communion - St Andrew's, Ipplepen



Reflection by Steve Sheldon

Third Sunday of Advent
John 1.6-8, 19-28
Sunday 13th December 2020

Here we are on the 3rd Sunday of Advent, where we explore the coming of Jesus into the world by thinking about John the Baptist. We read about him shouting:

I am the Voice of one crying out in the wilderness. Make straight the way of the Lord! Clear the way in the desert for our God! Fill every valley; level every mountain. Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind will see it.

John here was quoting directly from Isaiah, one of the most important sections of the Old Testament. And what was Isaiah writing about so long ago? - the Good News that Israel was going home at last after being exiled in Babylon for 50 years.

Do you remember Terry Waite and the other Beirut hostages who were allowed to return home after years of captivity in Lebanon? Think about the joy that was felt on that day. Think too about the joy of Nelson Mandela's long walk to freedom when he was released from prison. Multiply those events by a thousand-fold.

Nearly 12 years ago Sheila and I were blessed to be on holiday in Tunisia on the day Barak Obama was sworn in as President. We were in a hotel conference room filled with African businessmen in sober suits, there for a convention, who studiously ignored the elaborate luncheon that was prepared and waiting for them, shouting and weeping and praying with joy as we watched the culmination of the long walk to freedom for America's enslaved ancestors. As the only white folk in the crowd, we shouted and wept and prayed along with them in joy. It was like that for Judeans coming home on a long walk to freedom from Babylon back to Jerusalem: make the paths straight, fill in the valleys, cut down the hills; we are coming home!

Isaiah shouts in triumph to build a great super-highway so that God can finally come in and lead his chosen people back to Jerusalem. But like the Beirut hostages, like Nelson Mandela, like America's newly freed slaves back in 1865, Israel had changed while in captivity: physically weaker, but spiritually stronger.

Sadly however, 600 years later, Jerusalem and the rebuilt Temple were wiped off the face of the earth. Lebanon is still a mess; South Africa is struggling; and racism in America is as bad as it ever was. But these were political, man-made problems, with only fallible man-made solutions.

So what purpose do these words of Isaiah have in our story of John the Baptist? John was obviously not referring to a real road across the Judean desert. John was telling people then, and people today, to make a smooth and level pathway for the Lord to use in coming into our hearts.

Symbolically Advent is a time of preparation for the coming of baby Jesus at Christmas; but God's pathway is more real than just that, more individual, and not limited to any particular season. Part of John's message was that we build this pathway through repentance which leads to forgiveness.

John taught that to prepare a way for the Lord, we confess our sins and he forgives us. But Jesus teaches us that there is something else bound up with our forgiveness. Some of us pray for it every day. But how sincere is that prayer? We say, *'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us'*.

Preparing a smooth pathway for the Lord into our hearts requires us to forgive the sins all others have committed against us. That is in ALL others, including our enemies, and most importantly, including ourselves. We can't properly receive God's forgiveness if we can't forgive our own sins and hand them over to God.

Last Monday was December 7. Does that date have any significance to you? Growing up in America, I had drilled into me the significance of December 7. We were taught it in school; it is still probably on many American calendars. Know what it is?

Pearl Harbour Day is part of American culture. It's a way of handing on one generation's bitterness to another, passing on a grudge like an athletics baton.

My father fought in the Pacific and is alleged to be the first American to enter Tokyo after the surrender on 2 September 1945. On that day he recognised that the war was over, and welcomed political reconciliation. Whereas my step-mother, whose war experience was only second-hand, never forgave and refused to buy Japanese made products, repeatedly saying, I can never forgive them, because those Japs killed our boys.

Through things like Pearl Harbour Day and unforgiving attitudes, senseless hatreds get passed on from generation to generation. We saw this at work in the Balkans where, freed from the artificial constraints of Yugoslavia, the different ethnic tribes were killing each other not only over grudges from WW 2 and WW 1, but over all the tribal battles of centuries ago.

Lack of forgiveness over historical grudges perpetuated the Troubles in Ireland. When the Berlin Wall fell and all the former Soviet states became independent, all the old stresses and difficulties re-emerged in places like Chechnya and Ukraine. Grudges are behind much of the blood-letting in central Africa and the Congo.

All of this hatred prevents people and nations from getting on with their lives, it prevents them from sorting out problems within themselves. It also prevents God from entering into their lives. But through all the depressing muck and gore of the daily newspapers there is occasionally an item which jumps out like a shining light.

I recall reading several years ago about someone given a life sentence for the horrendous murder of his girlfriend; sadly not an uncommon event in our society. The media had chronicled this depressing story day by day. The one spark of salvation in this tragic story was the attitude of the dead girl's parents who were quoted as saying: *"We have forgiven him. You have to, otherwise it eats into your life and into the lives of those around you. If you forgive, then you can start to build your lives again."*

On that day the Kingdom of God made its way into that family. The pathway for God had been made smoother by their courageous act of love.

Could any of us have made such a statement? It seems inconceivable in human beings who are so keen to hang on to grudges and feuds, to endlessly rehearse old hurts and injuries. Perhaps we cling to old hurts because they are familiar, and they guard us from unknown new hurts that would come in if we let go of the old ones. Or even worse, if we let go of all our enemies without, we are only left with the enemy within, the whisperer in the darkness. What would we hear if left only with our own sins to worry about? Can we forgive those as well?

But remember the words of St Paul to the church in Corinth: *'YOU are God's temple and God's Spirit lives in YOU!'* So you are never alone in the darkness, God's holy light is always there for your aid and comfort. Always. So forgiving others, and forgiving yourself, is not an action that you have to perform on your own; you don't have to rely on your own strength to do it; you just need the will to do it and pray for the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

If in your personal life you find there is a long standing hatred or grudge lurking about, distorting your relationship with others, with yourself, or with God, then try to do something about it today, that you might ask for and receive God's full forgiveness.

How can you take hold of what God is offering you if your hands are full of something else? Pray for the help of the Holy Spirit to let the past be the past, and to lead you into new adventures and joys. Know then that God has called you out of Exile into Freedom, God is calling you home.

As Isaiah wrote: *'Comfort my people, says our God.'* Comfort them! Encourage the people. Tell them they have suffered long enough, and their sins are now forgiven. The Sovereign Lord is coming to rule with power, bringing with him the people he has rescued. And that's you and me. Amen.

Christmas Day is coming, but Jesus comes to us every day.