

NEWSLETTER FOR DECEMBER 2012

Happy New (Christian) Year....

....for Advent Sunday marks the start of the annual liturgical cycle, with a season of powerful and evocative readings (from Isaiah in particular) and hymns and liturgical actions. Among these are the Advent candles - children light one each week as we prepare for Christmas: for all God's people watching and waiting; for the prophets; for John the Baptist; and for Mary. A group of us began the season by attending St Paul's Cathedral **Advent Procession**, to which the new Dean, David Ison, had specially invited parish groups.

We also begin the season with the baptism of **Aidan Anand Conlon Patel** - Sarah-Ann and Anand's son, Annadale's grandson - at the All-Age Eucharist on 2 December. We will also welcome at the end of the service a visitor from Positive East, to remind us, on **World AIDS Day**, of the work that is being done locally to those living with HIV and AIDS.

The following week sees the twice-nightly performances (Monday to Friday, 6.30pm and 7.30pm) of parts of the medieval cycle of mystery plays, originally performed through the streets of various towns on carts and wagons, with knockabout humour mixed into the devotional content. The **Players of St Peter** have presented these for many years in various City churches. This year we have offered them a home here, and they hope they will be as well-supported as they have been in the past. Do come if you can!

December is a busy month, in our homes as well as in church, but we shall do our best not to let the distinctive notes of Advent - which focus on the second as well as the first coming of Christ - get drowned out. The Advent collect makes the contrast:

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness and to put on the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in great humility; that on the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

In other words, we start the Christian year not only by looking back to events at Bethlehem, but ahead to the glory that we believe is in store for all who have a lively faith; in the words of another great Advent prayer, based on words of the Puritan divine Richard Baxter, which echoes the parables of the talents, and of the wise and foolish bridesmaids:

*Keep us, O Lord, while we tarry on this earth,
in a serious seeking after you, and in an affectionate walking with you, every day of our lives;
that when you come, we may be found not hiding our talent, nor serving the flesh,
nor yet asleep with our lamp unfurnished,
but waiting and longing for our Lord, our glorious God for ever.*

Another Advent task (marking the end of the financial year) is to decide the group of charities and other causes that we wish to support as a church, from our annual income - in addition to the many individual donations that many members make. This will be done by the Parochial Church Council on 12 December (members: please note the revised date, to enable the Rector to attend our son's PhD graduation in Manchester on the date originally set). We try to do this carefully, looking at reports from the various causes, and aiming for a balance between local, national and international causes, and between mission and humanitarian relief. If you have a cause you'd like us to consider, please let us know. (Note also the letters of thanks displayed in church from Whitechapel Mission, for our harvest gifts, and from Richard House, for our ongoing support. The Rector recently attended a session for faith group leaders at Richard House which provided much food for thought about how we can help people to celebrate the positives of their extraordinary work with children living with cancer, and to remove some of the fears that are around.)

We have a number of local schools visiting church in the last weeks to term, to explore the

building and see how the church prepares for Christmas, as part of their RE curriculum work. These are important visits; the majority of children are from Muslim-heritage families and it will be their first time inside a Christian church. In most cases, their teachers do an excellent job in preparing them for this visit, and our task is to make them as welcome as possible, and show them some of our riches.

And then we turn to carol services: **News International**, who will be here on Thursday 13 December at 1pm, with the choir of St Brides Fleet Street, their own Wapping Great Voices, and children from our school. This service has been held here for a number of years, ever since they deliberately chose to hold the service in their local church rather than somewhere in the City (and to provide us with our Christmas tree), but it is now 'under new management' following all the trials and tribulations of NI. At a time when Christians and others who work for the organisation are feeling vulnerable, we hope this service will be a moment of encouragement for them.

St George's own carol service is the following week, on Thursday 20 at 6pm (note the slightly earlier start time, to enable children from St Paul's School to join us and share some items from their Christmas production, as well as making it possible for members of our congregation to bring young children. Apologies to those who will still be hard at work on that day and may struggle to get here on time!) This is very much a service for all ages, with well-known congregational carols, including some by candlelight around the tree, and will be followed by seasonal refreshments.

Our **Christmas services** follow the normal pattern: 11.30pm on Christmas Eve, and 10.15am on Christmas morning. We know that some of our regulars 'escape' from London at this time to be with family elsewhere, but hope that all who remain in the smoke will join us. (The Church of England says that if you wish to be regarded as 'in good standing' you should be sure to receive holy communion at Christmas.) If you know of anyone who cannot get to church and would like to receive the sacrament at home or in hospital, please let the Rector know.

One such is **Olive Wagstaff**, who after a fall breaking her leg has been in the London and as we go to press is awaiting a bed at Mile End, where she can receive more physiotherapy. In terms of spiritual devotion, Olive is an example to us all: she makes sure - as do we - that she receives the sacrament regularly, as this has always been a central part of her life and she knows this is more, rather than less, important when her physical state is presenting problems. We send her our love and prayers.

Women bishops

The Bishop of London (who was absent through illness from the vote at General Synod) said recently - at the dedication of St Jude Courtfield Gardens, near Earls Court, as the new centre for St Mellitus College (to which North Thames Ministerial Training Course has now moved, from our crypt) - that there are more important issues affecting the Church of England than the current impasse on this issue, and that one day it will be a mere footnote in the dust of history. As one who takes the 'long view' he may be right - since we will certainly have women bishops one day - but more immediately we really cannot ignore the serious reputational damage to the church that the recent vote has triggered. Prompted by the media storm, and by the 'prod' from the Prime Minister and Equalities Minister, the Archbishops' Council has decided that the issue must be brought back to General Synod sooner rather than later (i.e. next July), though in what form remains to be seen. Space does not permit more comment here, but the Rector tried to explain the issues (in as even-handed a way as possible!) in a recent sermon which you can see at www.stgite.org.uk/newsletter/christtheking251112.pdf