

ST JOHN THE BAPTIST, TIMBERHILL
with ST JULIAN, NORWICH December 2020



PARISH PEOPLE

Parish Priest

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Fr Richard's rest day is Monday.

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Liz Kilshaw

PCC Treasurer

Chris Bushnell

Gift Aid Secretary

Michael Watson

Organist

Keith Buxton

Head Server

John Foottit

Electoral Roll Secretary

Elizabeth Sutherland

Safeguarding Officer

Shirley Buxton

Deanery Synod representatives

Liz Kilshaw, Rhys Lewis

Parochial Church Council

Mary Barnes-Clay, Fr Peter Barnes-Clay, Andrew Knights, Susan Snasdell, Elizabeth Sutherland, Melissa Symes, Nigel Waller

Sidespeople

Garret Cronin, Barbara Donnelly, Andrew Knights (*Senior Sidesman*), Michael Rayner, Wendy Rayner, Nichola Rose, Diane Sheen, Susan Snasdell, Dorothy Tinkler, Richard Tinkler, Stuart Tinkler, John Woodrow

The Julian Centre Rouen Road, Norwich NR1 1QT

01603 767380 • www.julianofnorwich.org

The Centre is open on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays, from 10.30am to 3.30pm, between 4 and 23 December.

Prepare the way of the Lord!

Dear friends,

Advent is upon us, and 'startled at the solemn warning' we are given these weeks to deepen our attentiveness to the coming of the Lord – at Bethlehem in weakness and humility, in the life of his Church in Word and Sacrament, and on the Last Day as our Judge. There is a tremendous beauty and power to which a faithful keeping of these Advent days can open our eyes. Let us, with our patron John the Baptist, 'prepare the way of the Lord'.

Recognising that this work begins inside each of us, may I draw your attention to the times for Confessions before Christmas, printed on page 6... and to the programme of services from Christmas Eve to the Feast of the Epiphany (which we keep this year on its traditional date, January 6) on page 7. There are a number of changes because of the Coronavirus situation, which (viewed positively) gives us chance to experiment – though, in particular, we will miss the LGBT+ Carol Service and look forward to its return next year.

I deeply regret, too, that the present restrictions mean we won't be able to welcome 'all comers' to our popular Christmas services: if you want to be sure of a seat at the Midnight Mass or the Solemn Mass of Christmas Day (which is at St John's this year, so we can accommodate more people), you will need to book in advance via our website or, if you don't have internet access, by phoning the Rectory from Tuesday 8 December onwards. There may be space for people just to turn up, but to help us plan and to keep people safe, a booking system for these two services seems sensible.

There'll be extra Masses at 5pm at St John's on Christmas Eve (with music and the Blessing of the Crib, aimed particularly at children and families) and at 8am at St Julian's on Christmas morning. I hope this expanded programme will enable everyone to come to worship at the Christmas altar.

I wish you and yours a joyful and expectant Advent and, when it comes, a holy and peaceful Christmas.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

Your friend and parish priest,

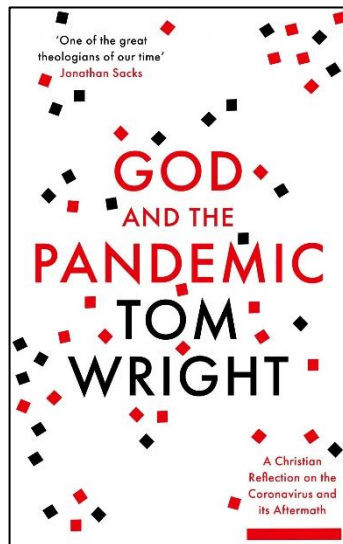
R. Richard

Advent 2020

Advent reading group

This Advent, join us online for two informal conversations about Tom Wright's latest book *God and the Pandemic*. This short and compelling book asks key questions about how we as Christians are to understand and live out our faith in the face of great suffering, and we will take as our basis its four main sections in two sessions on Zoom: **Wednesday 9 December and Wednesday 16 December**, both at 7.30pm. Copies of the book (£7) may be purchased from Fr Richard, though the sessions are open to all, whether you've had a chance to read it or not.

Edwin Wilton-Morgan



Holy Hour and Benediction

The Blessed Sacrament will be exposed in St John's **each Thursday in Advent** from 11am. A reading or suitable devotion begins the hour, and silent prayer and adoration follows. You are welcome to come and go during this time as you need to. Benediction is given at the end of the hour, and Mass follows at noon. In these days of rush and hurry, some stillness and calm in the presence of the Lord will be a gift to any of us – if we accept it.

Advent stalls

Stalls offering a variety of seasonal treats will be available in St John's after the Solemn Mass and after Benediction on **Sundays 6 and 13 December**. Come and buy! All proceeds go to church funds. Many thanks to Lynton Johnson for his hard work coordinating this popular annual fundraising effort.

Gaudete Sunday

The Third Sunday of Advent, which is **December 13** this year, is often called 'Gaudete Sunday' because of its opening words in Latin ('Rejoice!'). As we eagerly anticipate the coming feast, the purple of Advent softens briefly to rose. As our guest preacher at the Solemn Mass, we look forward to welcoming **Canon Aidan Platten**, Precentor of Norwich Cathedral.

Rorate Mass

The 'Rorate' Mass – so called because of its opening words which in Latin are 'Rorate caeli', and in English 'Drop down ye heavens from above' – is the Mass of our Lady in Advent celebrated by candlelight at dawn. Last year many people found this a powerful and moving part of their preparation for Christmas. This year's Rorate Mass will be offered at 8am on **Saturday 19 December** at St John's. You might then be able to have some breakfast in the city before coming back for...

Pre-Christmas working party

...to clean St John's and erect the Christmas tree. We welcome help on **Saturday 19 December** from 9am to 12 noon. Strong men and women to help put the tree up efficiently and safely are particularly needed, but there'll be a job for anyone with any time to spare! The Mass of the day follows at 12 noon.

Christmas flowers

Gifts towards the cost of the Christmas flowers and decorations will be very gratefully received. You can give money to Lynton Johnson or Fr Richard, or send it to the Rectory. We also need and warmly welcome help with arranging the flowers at either of our churches: don't be shy! We'd love to hear from you.

Home Communion

Fr Richard will be very pleased, where possible and with appropriate precautions, to bring the Blessed Sacrament to those unable to get to church at Christmas. Just get in touch with him to make a time. Steps will be taken to minimise the risk of virus transmission, and thus the length of the visit will be shorter than usual.

Comfort
and Joy



'Let us each our hearts prepare'

An examination of conscience during Advent

Sit quietly by yourself (maybe in church, or maybe at home) and turn over each question in your mind, honestly and dispassionately. You might like to keep a note of your thoughts so that, afterwards, you can take any actions you consider necessary.

Am I faithful to God and do I make time for prayer each day?

Do I participate as fully as possible in the sacramental life of the Church?

How far am I actively working on strengthening my relationship with God?

As far as lies in me, am I supportive of my family and friends?

How have the events of this extraordinary year changed me? Honestly, what do I think of that change?

Do I feel free to speak about God and my faith in him?

Do I let my family and friends know that they are loved, no matter what they may do?

Do I – *how* do I – share the good things I have with others? Am I generous?

What do I do to help others cope during difficult times?

Do I show respect to others? Am I jealous of what others have?

Do I ask others for forgiveness when I've wronged them?

Do I forgive others who have hurt me or do I hold a grudge?

Do I offer my time and talents to my community and my parish?

Does my life reflect my love for God?

Confessions before Christmas

A priest will be in St John's to hear Confessions, give spiritual advice and pronounce the forgiveness of sins at the following times before Christmas:

Sunday 20 December	5pm to 6pm	<i>The Parish Priest</i>
Tuesday 22 December	11am to 12 noon 5pm to 6pm	<i>The Parish Priest</i> <i>The Parish Priest</i>
Wednesday 23 December	11am to 12 noon 5pm to 6pm	<i>Fr Peter Barnes-Clay</i> <i>Fr Peter Barnes-Clay</i>
Thursday 24 December	11am to 12 noon	<i>The Parish Priest</i>

Christmas 2020

Thursday 24 December • Christmas Eve

- 12 noon Low Mass: Last Mass of Advent (*St John's*)
5pm Mass with music and Blessing of the Crib,
aimed particularly at children and families (*St John's*)
11.30pm † Midnight Mass and Procession (*St John's*)

Friday 25 December • The Nativity of Our Lord: Christmas Day

- 8am Low Mass of the Dawn (*St Julian's*)
10am † Solemn Mass of the Day (*St John's*)
6pm Evening Prayer at the Crib (*St Julian's*)

Saturday 26 December • St Stephen, Deacon and First Martyr

- 12 noon Low Mass (*St John's*)

Sunday 27 December • Sunday in the Octave of Christmas

- 9am Low Mass (*St Julian's*)
11am Solemn Mass (*St John's*)
6pm Evening Prayer at the Crib and Benediction (*St John's*)

Monday 28 December • The Holy Innocents

- 10am Low Mass (*St Julian's*)

Tuesday 29 December • St John, Apostle and Evangelist (tr.)

- 12 noon Low Mass (*St John's*)

Friday 1 January • Mary, the Holy Mother of God

- 11am Mass for New Year's Day (*St John's*)

Sunday 3 January • Second Sunday of Christmas

- 9am Low Mass (*St Julian's*)
11am Solemn Mass (*St John's*)
Preacher: Fr Jack Branford, Chaplain of Gresham's School, Holt
6pm Choral Evensong and Benediction (*St John's*)

Wednesday 6 January • Feast of the Epiphany

- 10am Low Mass (*St Julian's*)
7.30pm Solemn Mass (*St John's*)

To be sure of a seat at services marked †, book at www.stjohnstimberhill.org from Tuesday 8 December or, if you don't have internet access, phone the Rectory: **01603 626104**. We may not be able to accommodate those who haven't booked.

From the Parish Registers

Communicants and collections

	Sunday	Weekday	Collection
Week beginning 1 November	66	75 [†]	£350.00
29 November	—	27 [†]	—

[†] Owing to Government restrictions, there were no public services from Thursday 5 November until Wednesday 2 December.

The collection figure above does not include the amount given by standing order, which averages £2,850 a month.

Funerals and committals

'Lord all-pitying, Jesu blest: grant them thine eternal rest'

2 December Clifford James Cecil HYATT, aged 92

4 December Bernice Ivy ALLEN, aged 92



Certificate of Appreciation

St. John the Baptist Church, Timber Hill

is generously supporting the Norwich Foodbank.

As at **November 2020**, you have donated a total of more than **896kg** of food.

Based on the average weight of the food boxes we supply, this would be enough food to feed approximately **112** local people, who are in crisis, for **3** days.

Thank you very much for your support!

www.norwichfoodbank.co.uk email: admin@norwich.foodbank.org.uk tel: 01603 251733

Gift Aid No. XT22368 Reg. Ltd Co. No. 7051996 Reg Charity No 1143528 Reg. in England & Wales
Patrons The Right Revd Graham Usher, Bishop of Norwich, Delia Smith CBE and Susan Hill CBE.

Parish notes

Lockdown II

At least, during the second lockdown which dominated November, we were able to keep our **churches open every day**, and it was good to see people making use of them for prayer and quiet. **Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament** for a couple of hours twice a week offered a particular focus for silent prayer, intercession and adoration. Encouraged and aided by our ordinand Edwin Wilton-Morgan, we were able to broadcast **Low Mass live** from St John's Timberhill on our Facebook page each Sunday, and many people seem to have appreciated this connection with the worship being offered in their parish church and the opportunity for us to pray together as a 'virtual' community, united in the spirit if separated in the body. Each Friday during the lockdown there was also a lively **Church Family coffee morning** on Zoom, when the conversation covered a vast array of topics and Fr John Fellows suggested we might well have borrowed the old strapline from the *News of the World*: 'All human life is here.'

Churchwardens and PCC

Shirley Buxton and Gudrun Warren will be admitted as Churchwardens of our Parish during the Solemn Mass on **Sunday 6 December**: please pray for them and give them your practical support as they serve our Church Family. Their contact details appear in the inside cover of this Newsletter.

The office of Churchwarden is an ancient and venerable one in the Church of England, whose canon law states: 'The Churchwardens when admitted are officers of the bishop. They shall discharge such duties as are by law and custom assigned to them; they shall be foremost in representing the laity and in co-operating with the incumbent; they shall use their best endeavours by example and precept to encourage the parishioners in the practice of true religion and to promote unity and peace among them. They shall also maintain order and decency in the church and churchyard, especially during the time of divine service.'

Together with the PCC, the Churchwardens have a vital role in the leadership of our Church Family. Our **PCC** will next meet on **Tuesday 8 December** after the evening Mass.

December 2020

- 1 Tue Advent Feria
2 Wed Advent Feria *Public worship resumes today*
3 Thu St Francis Xavier
4 Fri St John of Damascus
5 Sat Advent Feria
- 6 Sun The Second Sunday of Advent**
7 Mon St Ambrose
8 Tue The Immaculate Conception of the BVM 12 noon & 7pm LM
9 Wed Advent Feria
10 Thu Advent Feria
11 Fri Advent Feria
12 Sat Advent Feria
- 13 Sun The Third Sunday of Advent** (Gaudete)
14 Mon St John of the Cross
15 Tue Advent Feria
16 Wed Ember Day
17 Thu Advent Feria (O Sapientia)
18 Fri Ember Day (O Adonai)
19 Sat Ember Day (O Radix Jesse). 8am Rorate Mass; 12 noon LM
- 20 Sun The Fourth Sunday of Advent** (O Clavis David)
21 Mon Advent Feria (O Oriens)
22 Tue Advent Feria (O Rex Gentium)
23 Wed Advent Feria (O Emmanuel)
24 Thu Christmas Eve
12 noon Last Mass of Advent; 5pm Vigil Mass; 11.30pm Midnight Mass
25 Fri THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD: CHRISTMAS DAY
8am Mass of the Dawn; 10am Solemn Mass of the Day
26 Sat St Stephen, Deacon, First Martyr 12 noon LM
- 27 Sun Sunday in the Octave of Christmas**
28 Mon The Holy Innocents 10am LM
29 Tue St John, Apostle & Evangelist 12 noon LM
30 Wed in the Octave of Christmas 10am LM
31 Thu in the Octave of Christmas 12 noon LM

We pray for...

Those living with HIV/AIDS	1
All churches resuming public worship from today	2
Migrants and refugees (<i>Day of special prayer</i>)	3
Church artists	4
All suffering from Coronavirus or its effects	5
Our Parish and People	6
Norman and Graham our Bishops	7
Thanksgiving for our Lady, full of grace	8
Friends of Julian of Norwich	9
Deeper devotion to the Eucharist	10
The Covid-19 vaccination programme	11
The shops and businesses of our parish	12
Our Parish and People	13
Those struggling with spiritual darkness	14
Year's Minds for December	15
Ordinands	16
The homeless and all who support them	17
An increase in vocations to the Priesthood	18
The Shrine of our Lady of Walsingham	19
Our Parish and People	20
Penitents and confessors	21
Those working over Christmas	22
Those separated from loved ones this Christmas	23
That we may be ready to meet him when he comes	24
Our Parish and People: Thanksgiving for the Incarnation	25
Persecuted Christians	26
Our Parish and People	27
Abused and suffering children	28
The lonely	29
Peace in the Holy Land	30
Thanksgiving for the blessings of 2020	31

The Invitation

Millions of people were in lockdown when the invitation came. For thousands upon thousands it gave a glimmer of hope, an envelope fluttering onto the door mat. Some saw 'Special Invitation' emblazoned with gold across the top of the envelope, and scowled. Who would be stupid enough to send an invitation at a time when socializing was so restricted and when so many people were being told to stay at home? They ripped up the invitation and threw it in the bin. Most, however, opened the envelope.

Inside was a card embossed with the most amazing design. Its pearly surface had a soft glow, creating a rather ethereal quality. This was too much for some recipients and they tossed the invitation onto the fire. There were, however, many who delighted in the splendour of the card and read the message. It was rather like the first Pentecost when the apostles spoke and people of every nation understood the words being spoken, only this time it was the written word, clear for everyone of every tongue, to read.

They read the words but hundreds failed to understand the message. It perplexed them, for it spoke of things alien in their materialistic world. They consigned the invitation to the scrap-paper pile and soon it was hidden under a mountain of junk mail.

Other readers, fascinated by the message, were puzzled. They thought it might be important but had other things to think about at that moment, so they put it in the pending tray intending to look at it later. As time passed, with so much to do, it lay there forgotten.

For those who opened the invitation and read it with expectation, they were not disappointed. It announced the birth of a baby. This was good news and it brought a smile to many a face that bore a furrowed brow. They'd found life hard during Covid times, surrounded by death and illness, deprivation or loneliness, but now they were invited to meet a very special baby. He was heralded as a 'Mighty Counsellor and Prince of Peace.' They were invited to celebrate this 'Joy to the World.'

Some people were dismayed to discover the invitation was for Christmas Day. They ripped the card into tiny pieces and threw the pieces into the air. The fragments fell like snow and any fleeting interest quickly

melted away. These people turned to catalogues, selecting superfluous gifts to send to friends and family before turning to cook books to select recipes for a Christmas Feast. They were keen to compensate for the effects of the dreaded virus that kept them from their usual round of partying with friends and attending extended family gatherings.

There were, however, people who were considering the invitation seriously. They had wonder in their eyes and excitement stirred in their hearts. Before their eyes unfolded a vision that took them beyond words. They accepted the invitation and stepped in. Each honoured guest in turn had the new born child placed in their arms. The baby was wrapped in a flowing blanket of endless love. As they gazed down upon the tiny wonder, the blanket enveloped them also, holding them securely together with the Christ child. Peace entered their heart and tears of joy flowed down their cheeks, splashing onto the baby's head as in baptism. Deep in their soul they knew that past hurt and sin was being washed away. Hope swept in to fill the void.

Mary reached out for Jesus and cradled him. She smiled at each the guests with a smile of joy and acceptance. Suddenly they became aware of each other and that they were all of one family. Angelic light illuminated the heavens and angel voices sang out with psalms of praise. All the guests together with the Holy Family were held in the hands of the Creator, all resting safely in the loving arms of God the Father.

Shirley Buxton



The Crib in St John's, Christmas 2019

Two letters for each of us

A Sermon preached by Fr Richard Stanton, Parish Priest,
at the Solemn Mass on All Saints' Day:

1 November 2020

Lections Revelation 7.2-4, 9-14: *I saw a huge number, impossible to count*
1 John 3.1-3: *We shall be like him because we shall see him as he really is*
St Matthew 5.1-12: *How happy are the poor in spirit*

'Think of the love that the Father has lavished on us, by letting us be called God's children; and that is what we are.' (1 John 3.1)

Who are these, like stars appearing? One after another today, the eye picks them out as it peers upwards with the Seer St John the Divine, looking to that 'huge number, impossible to count' – Mary, John, Peter, Augustine, Ambrose, Francis, Catherine, Benedict, Teresa, Maximilian, Edith... 'Do you know who these are, and where they have come from?' They have come from among us – ordinary people like us who dared to open themselves fully to the power and activity of the Spirit of God working within them, that same Spirit by which Christ was raised from the dead and who gives life to our mortal bodies too. All Saints' Day is, if you like, the other side of the coin of Pentecost: the Spirit of the Risen Lord has been poured out, filled the whole world, and has brought harmony where there was confusion, peace where there was division, understanding where there was bewilderment, and has gathered into one the scattered children of God.

Today's great celebration sets before our eyes the vast treasury of spiritual power which is ours, the panoply and phalanx of the saints who stretch out in indescribable splendour around the throne of the Lamb, each of them shafts of his own radiance, his pure white light striking the prism of the created order and refracting into the technicolour glory and myriad diversity of the saints.

When they go marching in, we love to sing, 'I want to be in that number!' But can we really believe it? To be sure, we can know, intellectually, that people long ago, far away (or even near to home) seemed to cooperate with God in particularly striking ways to initiate and advance among us his reign of justice, mercy and peace. To be sure, we know that didn't always make them popular (indeed, very rarely), or the kinds of people

who would fit in easily around your meal table. And we know the Lord must have loved them, since they left all things for his sake and so, the Gospel assures us, have received a hundredfold and inherited eternal life.

But can we really believe in that same love for ourselves? It is too hard, too fearful, too implausible to imagine that the God whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, who created the streaming galaxies and all their works – it is too fantastic to believe that he might have a purpose and a plan for *me*, and not just a purpose and a plan (like you might have a purpose for some leftovers in your fridge) but a deep, abiding, burning love – that he loved *me* before ever he made me and knew what *I* was called to be, what *you* were called to be, that there is some unique part you are to play which nobody else has played nor even can play, that regardless of my productivity or my sin or my doubt he loves *me*. That, can I really believe?

So St Paul, dead and gone but alive to us in the communion of saints and the power of the Resurrection, writes to the Ephesians, and prays the same prayer for us: ‘I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints.’

What matters is not how much money you own, or what kind of home you have, or how educated you are: what matters is how you live and we, here, on Timberhill and St Julian’s Alley, are in the business of making saints. We want everyone who comes here to know and to understand that they are called to be a great saint, and people spend vast amounts of time and money in this world trying to get letters to put after their name in order to validate or prove or confirm their worth – BA, PhD, MSc, OBE – while there’s only two letters we should be looking for, and they actually go in front of our name: ‘ST’.

And they are already ours, in Christ, because in him the Father has lavished such love on us that we can be called God’s children, and when he is revealed we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is. All we must do is recognise that the letters are there already, given to us as to all who have overcome in the great tribulation, and the work of our Christian life is to dust off, as we cleaned and polished this church yesterday, the accumulated grime which hides those two letters ‘ST’ from our sight and makes us doubt

that all things are possible to those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

Highfalutin piety, you might think. I was out to lunch at a friend's house two weeks ago and saw one of those cans of squirry cream; it said on the front, 'Professional nozzle.' I wonder what a 'professional nozzle' is? Is this sermon the application with a professional nozzle of frothy cream, insubstantial and rapidly fading, to the dullness and tepidity of our daily life and our wavering faith?

No. There are no saints who were not forged in the fire of adversity, no saints whose sanctity was not wrought and tested and refined by bitter experience and struggle. One twentieth century saint, who believed that everyone is called to holiness and that ordinary life can result in sanctity, expressed it like this: 'Let's not deceive ourselves: in our life we will find vigour and victory, and depression and defeat. This has always been true of the earthly pilgrimage of Christians, even of those we venerate on the altars. Don't you remember Peter, Augustine, Francis? I have never liked biographies of saints which naively – but also with a lack of sound doctrine – present their deeds as if they had been confirmed in grace from birth. No: the true life stories of Christian heroes resemble our own experience; they fought and won; they fought and lost. And then, repentant, they returned to the fray.'

So every saint whom we celebrate in glory today can make their own, as can we, these words from the sixty-sixth psalm: 'Thou, O God, hast proved us: thou also hast tried us, like as silver is tried. Thou broughtest us into the snare: and laidest trouble upon our loins. Thou sufferedst men to ride over our heads: we went through fire and water, and thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place... O come hither, and hearken, all ye that fear God: and I will tell you what he hath done for my soul.'

From this great cloud of witnesses, who have lost themselves in God and can tell us all he has done for them, we are not 'socially distanced'. There is no true social distancing for Christians who believe, as we profess every time we say the Creed, in 'the communion of saints', the interdependent and mutually-indwelling fellowship of faith, hope and charity which death is powerless to break and which is charged into life by the Risen Lord who calls us by name and makes us his own.

The family resemblance which marks us out as fellow heirs with the saints is the prototype and pattern for the Kingdom laid out by Jesus in today's Gospel: the Beatitudes, the rule and mark of Christian living which turns upside down the values, estimation and expectation of the world and does, indeed, make us feel like square pegs in round holes in a world which does not see or know the Father. The Christian life is the gradual unfolding and discovering of what those blessings pronounced by Jesus mean for me, and for us, and for that whole mystical body of which we are made part in our baptism, which is the blessed company of all faithful people.

Think of the love that the Father has lavished on us, by letting us be called God's children; and that is what we are.

PRE- CHRISTMAS SALE AT THE JULIAN CENTRE



Cards, wrapping paper,
books, gifts and more

10.30am to 3.30pm

Mondays, Wednesdays,
Fridays and Saturdays
from 4 to 23 December

Rouen Road, Norwich NR1 1QT
01603 767380
www.julianofnorwich.org



Alert, but not anxious

A homily preached by Fr Richard Stanton, Parish Priest,
at the livestreamed Low Mass on the First Sunday of Advent:
29 November 2020

Lections Isaiah 63.16-17; 64.1, 3-8: *O that you would tear the heavens and come*
I Corinthians 1.3-9: *Waiting for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed*
St Mark 13.33-37: *You do not know when the master is coming*

'Be on your guard, stay awake, because you never know when the time will come.' (*St Mark 13.33*)

This year we have been encouraged incessantly to 'stay alert'. It was in May that the Government replaced its initial public message – 'Stay home, protect the NHS, save lives' – with the updated 'Stay alert, control the virus, save lives.' And so we have sought to be alert, as individuals, as communities, as churches: alert to physical distancing, hand hygiene, sanitising surfaces, face coverings, alert to neighbours' needs and vulnerabilities, alert to every breaking news bulletin, alert to changing tiers and protocols and guidance, alert and alert and alert to the point of exhaustion as Advent arrives with the Lord's warning: 'Stay awake!'

The invitation of this First Sunday of Advent, with which the Church begins her year, is not, however, a summons simply to fear, nervousness or anxiety, lest we be caught out in a naughtiness or through some inadvertence trip off the straight and narrow. The scriptures which we proclaim today summon us to a joyful hope in the coming for which we are asked to stay alert – we are not just to be alert for it, like a child up to no good keeping one ear out for the parent's approaching footsteps, but we are to hope for that coming, petition it with loud cries, do all we can to *hasten* it. The coming for which we wait is (as Isaiah put it in the first reading) like the coming of a father, and we are invited to hope in him, to live justly, and to be mindful of him, his demands, his mercy and his love in all that we do.

St Paul, in the epistle, reminds us that in this searching, this waiting and longing, this hoping for the fulfilment of God's purposes and the establishment of his reign in and through the stuff of our existence, now 'in bondage to decay', we have been 'enriched in so many ways' with graces and are not left destitute. Indeed, we have been given all 'the gifts of the Spirit'

while we are 'waiting for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed': our task is to use these gifts of the Spirit to bring forth the fruits of a people prepared, made ready for the Lord, with our hearts turned to him and filled with joyful hope.

The call of Jesus to be on guard, to stay awake and watch is not a demand for anxiety or fear; it is a summons to eager expectation. How can we allow that expectation to be rekindled in us? Might we turn the circumstances of this particular year to our advantage, as our accretions of self-defence are peeled back to permit us, in simplicity and poverty, to be counted among those whom Jesus calls blessed 'because they know their need of God'?

The Church is the community of hope and expectation, eyes straining forward into the distance and the dark night, watching for the signs of the Master's coming and ready to announce it when she sees it, to call not only the world but we ourselves to sit up and take notice that his kingdom – with its demands and priorities, strange and unusual and countercultural – really is breaking in now, and that 'already on the hills the flags of dawn appear'.

In 1943, the Lutheran pastor, theologian and staunch anti-Nazi dissident Dietrich Bonhoeffer, whose reflections on the cost of discipleship are searing and profound, pondered our Advent experience in a letter from his prison cell. He wrote: 'A prison cell is like our situation in Advent: one waits, hopes, does this and that, meaningless acts, but the door is locked and can only be opened from the outside.'

In Advent we deepen our desire for the coming of the Lord, seeking to recognise as we grow into the fullness of his stature that it may mean for us the pain which growth always brings, and yet joyful because (as St Paul puts it) the God who is calling us has *already* joined us to his Son, bound us to him with bonds that even death cannot break. There is no place for anxiety here – only, perhaps, for a recognition that, unlike a prison cell with the lock only on the outside, there is a lock on *our* side too, and we must find a way to turn the key.

May these days of Advent be a blessing to us and bring us fresh consolation, stir up in us new zeal and love, and lead us to recognise the tiny advents which give opportunity for service each day, 'as we await the blessed hope, and the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.'

WORSHIP WITH US

We warmly welcome you.

Sundays	9am Low Mass	<i>St Julian's</i>
	11am Solemn Mass and Sermon	<i>St John's</i>
	6pm Low Mass and Benediction	<i>St John's</i>

Weekdays

<i>The Mass</i>	Monday 10am	<i>St Julian's</i>
	Tuesday 12 noon	<i>St John's</i>
	Wednesday 10am	<i>St Julian's</i>
	Thursday 12 noon	<i>St John's</i>
	Friday 5pm	<i>St Julian's</i>
	Saturday 12 noon	<i>St John's</i>

<i>The Rosary</i>	Monday 10.30am	<i>St Julian's</i>
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Morning and Evening Prayer

The Daily Office is currently said privately in church, before opening and after closing

The Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession)

Physically-distanced Confessions may be heard at any time by arrangement with the Parish Priest

St John's and St Julian's are both **open daily** for prayer, quiet and visiting (except St John's which is currently closed on Mondays). The Blessed Sacrament is reserved on the High Altar of both churches for the Communion of the Sick and the devotion of the faithful.

We warmly welcome enquiries about **baptisms and weddings**. We will be pleased to help you in any way we can.



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On the cover

The first candle on the Advent wreath is lit during Mass on 29 November 2020.