

**Fourth Sunday of Advent,
Sunday, 19th December 2021**



Dear Friends,

‘When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb.’
(Luke 1: 41)

Dear Friends,

We reach the fourth week of Advent, and I am back in harness after my family’s experience of Coronavirus. Thank you all so much for your love and concern and for your prayers, which have carried us through. We are all recovering: my main concern was for our youngest son, Alexander, as he has no auto-immunity, but he has bounced back. Praise God! Rod has a lingering chest infection and I have a heart complication, which is very painful but will fade. We have been very lucky. Otherwise fit and healthy, this virus has knocked us all sideways. Please take Coronavirus seriously and ensure you are double vaccinated and have had your booster (or at least have it booked).

The omicron variant is virulent and spreading rapidly. Masks are now mandatory where people are gathering – in shops and supermarkets, restaurants and all public spaces. You will also need to wear masks in church services again, for weddings and funerals and for our Christmas services. We would ask you to book seats for the services you wish to attend, please, as this helps us to contact people if anyone later finds they have developed the virus.



What a world to be born into! I have been wondering how the first Nativity would have played out in the setting of a global pandemic?! Would Quirinius have been so insistent for Herod to undertake the Census? Would Mary and Joseph have been able to travel up to the City? And would the Three Wise Men have observed international travel restrictions and stayed at home ... or would that bright star have compelled them to cover their faces and urge their camels through unpopulated terrains, only to arrive in Bethlehem to be shouted at by a group of very stressed shepherds about lateral flow tests and proof of negative PCR results before being allowed entry into the holy stable? Not such a silent night!



'Still Life with Wine and Fruit' by Aziz Sulaymanov

In seeking a message for our contemporary predicament two Christmases in, we turn to Mary. Despite every good reason to the contrary, people still seem intent on rushing about in pursuit of material possessions. Mary encourages us to take a different approach as she offers a space within herself for the gift of God to dwell and have life. All she has is faith and love. No riches or position of power and prestige. And yet, in this space, freely given, the greatest gift to the world is nurtured and grown. Quietly. Faithfully. All social values upended. She allows Jesus to grow within her, and then she shares Him with us all.

We too are able to be part of that same creative process by which Mary gave birth to the Messiah. We are capable of making that same space in our lives to foster holy ground - giving birth to the Christ-child, not by rushing around trying to create the perfect Christmas, but by taking the risk to believe in the mysterious blessing of our faith which stirs within our hearts and longs to be shared so that all might find peace.

Extract from '*The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe*'

By Gerard Manley Hopkins

I say that we are wound
With mercy round and round
As if with air: the same
Is Mary, more by name.
She, wild web, wondrous robe,
Mantles the guilty globe,
Since God has let dispense
Her prayers his providence:
Nay, more than almoner,
The sweet alms' self is her
And men are meant to share
Her life as life does air.
If I have understood,
She holds high motherhood
Towards all our ghostly good
And plays in grace her part
About man's beating heart,
Laying, like air's fine flood,
The deathdance in his blood;
Yet no part but what will
Be Christ our Saviour still.
Of her flesh he took flesh:
He does take fresh and fresh,
Though much the mystery how,
Not flesh but spirit now
And makes, O marvellous!
New Nazareths in us,
Where she shall yet conceive
Him, morning, noon, and eve;
New Bethlems, and he born
There, evening, noon, and morn
Bethlem or Nazareth,
Men here may draw like breath
More Christ and baffle death;
Who, born so, comes to be
New self and nobler me
In each one and each one
More makes, when all is done,
Both God's and Mary's Son.

Yours, welcoming the coming Christ,

Jax

Rector, The Downs Benefice



Prayer for the Fourth Sunday of Advent – The Candle of Joy

Thank you God for the joy you give us.
We ask that as we wait for all your promises to come true,
and for Christ to come again,
that you would remain present with us.
Help us today, and every day to worship you,
to hear your word, and to do your will
by sharing your joy with each other.
We ask it in the name of the one who was born in Bethlehem.
Amen.

Micah 5:2-5 - The Ruler from Bethlehem

2 But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
who are one of the little clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me, one who is to rule in Israel,
whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.
3 Therefore he shall give them up until the time
when she who is in labour has brought forth;
then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel.
4 And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord,
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.
And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth;
5 and he shall be the one of peace.
If the Assyrians come into our land and tread upon our soil,
we will raise against them seven shepherds
and eight installed as rulers.

Hebrews 10:5-10 - Christ's Sacrifice Once for All

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,

‘Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me;
in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure.

Then I said, “See, God, I have come to do your will, O God”

(in the scroll of the book it is written of me).’

When he said above, ‘You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings’ (these are offered according to the law), then he added, ‘See, I have come to do your will.’ He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. And it is by God’s will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.



Luke 1: 39-45 - Mary Visits Elizabeth

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit 42 and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. 43 And why has this happened to me that the mother of my Lord comes to me? 44 For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

Schedule of Services

This schedule is correct at this time but may be subject to future alterations – please check on our website for the most up-to-date information.

All services start at 10am, unless marked differently on the table below.

Owing to the new Government Coronavirus restrictions, masks must once again be worn in church services and services must be booked by contacting the Benefice Office on 01962 880 845 or office@downsbenefice.org.uk

<i>Date</i>	<i>Ch</i>	<i>Cr</i>	<i>Li</i>	<i>Sp</i>	<i>Wh</i>
<i>19th Dec</i>	4pm – Carol Service	Holy Communion	6pm – Carol Service		
<i>22nd Dec (Wed)</i>			Mid-Week Holy Communion		
<i>24th Dec</i>	4pm – Crib Service	4.30pm – Nativity in the Barn	4pm – Crib service	4pm – Crib Service and 11.30pm – Midnight Service	2.30pm – Crib Service
<i>25th Dec</i>	Family Service	Family Service	Holy Communion	Family Service	Family Service
<i>26th Dec</i>	No Services				
<i>2nd Jan</i>	Morning Prayer		4pm – Café Church	10am – Patronal Festival - BCP Sung Eucharist	
<i>9th Jan</i>			Holy Communion		Morning Prayer
<i>16th Jan</i>	Holy Communion	Morning Prayer			
<i>23rd Jan</i>			Morning Prayer	Morning Prayer	8am – Holy Communion
<i>26th Jan</i>			Mid-Week Holy Communion		
<i>30th Jan</i>		Benefice Holy Communion			