

**Second Sunday of Advent,
Sunday, 4th December 2022**



Dear Friends,

‘Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance’ (Matthew 3: 8)

On the Second Sunday of Advent, we light the second candle of the Advent wreath to commemorate the lives of the Prophets as we count down the weeks to the birth of Christ.

Matthew’s Gospel gives us an understanding of the Prophet, John the Baptist, standing by the River Jordan, offering ritual cleansing to Jews who were coming to fulfil the law by (superficially, at least) purifying themselves from their sins. John was preparing the way for the coming of Jesus Christ. He exhorts the crowds to repent, to turn their lives around and receive the healing forgiveness of God’s love. John not only preached God’s law, he lived it! His scratchy camel hair coat and strange sounding diet of locusts and honey were his visible way of shunning the indulgent practices of his pious yet greedy cohort.



‘The Preaching of St John the Baptist’ by Pieter Bruegel the Elder

This week, I am in repentant mood myself. Many of you will have read the recent saga of my handbag, missing presumed stolen in Winchester, and of our subsequent trip to Newport to replace my passport and other vital documents contained in the handbag at the time of its disappearance. Well, guess what ... I've found it! And in my own bedroom, to boot. Somehow, it had slipped down behind my dressing table and even though I had searched my room from top to bottom, I simply didn't see it there. As you might imagine, I have been eating a fair amount of humble pie, as Darren and Eleanor had walked Winchester inside out, searching every shop and causing already overworked staff to double-check lost property. And you dear reader, having to cope with my addled brain!



Dame Edith Evans as Lady Bracknell in 'The Importance of Being Earnest' 1952

When I saw it nestled on the floor in a dark corner of my room, I couldn't believe my eyes! All those weeks of anxiety, turning over the events of the day in my mind and driving myself mad with disbelief that I could have absent-mindedly put the bag down somewhere. Now that I have found it, with all those vital documents intact, I can't stop giving thanks to God for His faithfulness. What a relief that I hadn't been the victim of a mystifying crime after all. How wonderful that my prayers have been answered in such a positive way. And a reflective message to self to slow down a little, to stop racing around doing twenty things at once ... so that just maybe I might not make such a mistake again! Whatever would Lady Bracknell say?!

As I try to relax and focus on Jesus this Advent, I'm delighted to bring you an account of Anna and Stefan Lipa's recent pilgrimage to the Holy Land with Father Mark Hogan from St Peter's Roman Catholic Church in Winchester. As we watch and wait and hope for the coming of the Christ-child, I hope you will enjoy the immersive experience Anna and Stefan bring us in their vivid reflection.

Yours, in the redeeming light of Christ,

Jax
Rector, The Downs Benefice

Pilgrimage to the Holy Land 2022 by Anna Lipa, Wherwell

(All photos at the courtesy of Anna Lipa)

As our tour guide told us, Pope St Paul VI first described the Holy Land as the 5th Gospel, meaning we can interpret the other 4 gospels more clearly and with more insight after seeing the land where Christ walked and worked. On our pilgrimage, we saw many Biblical sites, accompanied by Bible readings to remind us of various scenes, carefully selected by our tour leader, Fr Mark Hogan, priest of St Peter and the Winchester Martyrs.

We were indeed especially blessed that Fr Mark had also arranged to say Mass in several important places, each time assisted at the Altar by our tour guide, Yaccoub Ghazzawi, who is a Christian working in the Church in Jerusalem, as well as one of organists at the Holy Sepulchre! Our first Mass was said at the Shepherds' Fields, just outside old Jerusalem on a stony hillside with caves where the shepherds guarded their sheep – an amazing experience to be plunged straight into a well-known biblical scene.



Church at Shepherds' Fields

We started the tour of Jerusalem with a visit to a huge model of the city late in the 2nd Temple period i.e. just after the time of Christ when King Solomon's 1st Temple, destroyed by the Babylonians, had been rebuilt by Herod the Great. Yaccoub's explanation of the history was necessarily complicated as he described many different layers of history, with many waves of invasion, destruction and rebuilding: 14 up to the current time. A most interesting thing to see was the fact that that there were 2 sets of City walls – this explained a confusing fact - we both knew that Christ had been taken outside the (ancient) City walls to Calvary, and yet the Church of the Holy Sepulchre which contains Calvary is firmly inside the later walls.



Wailing Wall



South Temple Wall

Neither of us had any idea of the actual topography of Jerusalem – it is a very hilly city, almost mountainous – when they call it Mount Zion or the Mount of Olives, they really mean it! The Palm Sunday route from the Mount of Olives to the Temple or the Via Dolorosa to Calvary demonstrate this amply – extremely hard work, and the latter where Christ had been tortured and was forced to carry his own cross.



Mount of Olives

One morning early, before the crowds were up and about, we visited the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where Fr Mark celebrated Mass in the Chapel of the Crucifixion on the exact site of Calvary, a beautiful experience in the quiet church. Later in the week, we queued with many others for some considerable time to see the Holy Sepulchre itself – it is hard to believe that one is actually at the site of Jesus' tomb, and that you can lay your hand on the stone itself.



Garden of Gethsemane

An interesting visit in Jerusalem was to see the site of King David's Palace on a hill neighbouring the Temple Mount. The whole site is on a vertiginous plot descending to the Pool of Siloam and includes the ancient tunnels and cisterns for water supply.

Although a busy centre of daily activity, Bethlehem was immensely moving – the Church of the Nativity a crush of pilgrims keen to see where Our Lord came into the world, and where he was laid in a manger.



Church of the Nativity

Our trip to the wilderness was mind-blowing: the territory is truly harsh – mountainous in the extreme, dry, and rocky. To think of anyone even surviving one day in the area defies imagination. The road where the Good Samaritan aided the traveller passes through this wilderness between Jericho and Jerusalem - it is easy to imagine how desperately the traveller would have needed aid.

The antiquity of the Holy Land is evident to see, with ancient ruins and archaeology all around, from Old Testament onwards. We even saw the Biblical city of Dan visited by Abraham, a site that maybe we thought was lost to myth or the mists of time.

To see where Jesus lived and worked was a truly spiritual experience. For us, a most moving day was when we went for a boat trip on the Sea of Galilee; the captain turned off the engine and we appreciated the calm peacefulness. We then went to the little beach where Christ appeared to Peter and other apostles, post-resurrection, and had a breakfast bbq ready and waiting! After paddling in the water and having our toes nibbled by the descendants of the fish that escaped Peter's nets, we then viewed the Mensa Christi, a solid rock where the simple breakfast of bread and fish was eaten.



St Peter

Nazareth is now a huge centre of population with epic traffic jams – another place where we nearly missed our time slot for Mass on account of traffic. We viewed Mary’s Spring and Well and House, one of which according to different traditions, was the site of the Annunciation. More peaceful and more spiritual, was our earlier trip to Ein Karem – the scene of the birth of St John the Baptist, and where Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth.



Manger Square



Anna at The Manger

Evident all around was the political turmoil that Israel is still enduring. Things do not seem to have changed since Roman times and before, when the war lords of the Old Testament smote each other with monotonous regularity: Dan was an perfect example where the people who had built it were living peacefully until they received a ‘friendly’ visit from the tribe of Dan who liked what they saw, and after accepting the hospitality of Micah and the locals, then killed them all, and moved in.

Seeing all this, as well as renewing our baptismal vows in the River Jordan, seeing St Peter’s House in Capernaum where Jesus spent a great deal of time, along with a float in the Dead Sea, made for a thoroughly enjoyable and thought-provoking pilgrimage.

Anna Lipa, Wherwell

Prayer for the Second Sunday of Advent – The Candle of Peace

Lord Jesus, Light of the World,
the prophets said you would bring peace and save your people from trouble.
Give peace in our hearts at Christmastide.
We ask that as we wait for you to come again,
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 peace with each other.
We ask it in the name of the one who was born in Bethlehem.
Amen.



Matthew 3: 1-13 John the Baptist Prepares the Way

- 1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea,
2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.
3 For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.
4 And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.
5 Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan,
6 And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.
7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?
8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:
9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.
10 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.
11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance. but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:
12 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Schedule of Services

Services start at 10am unless stated otherwise

Date	Ch	Cr	Li	Sp	Wh
4 th December	Morning Prayer	Holy Communion			
11 th December	4pm – Carol Service	6pm – Carol Service	Holy Communion and Celebration of Canon Bruce Kington’s 50th Anniversary of Ordination	6pm – Carol Service	Carol Service <i>PLUS</i> 6pm – Autumn Meditations
15 th December					6pm – Wherwell School Christmas Service
18 th December	Holy Communion	Morning Worship	6pm – Carol Service	8am – Holy Communion (BCP)	
24 th December	4pm – Crib Service		4pm – Crib Service	4pm - Crib Service <i>PLUS</i> 11.30pm – Midnight Service	2.30pm – Crib Service
25 th December	Christmas Family Service	Christmas Family Service	Christmas Holy Communion	Christmas Family Service	Christmas Family Service
1 st January	5pm- Evening Prayer for New Year’s Day			Patronal Festival Holy Communion (Sung BCP)	
8 th January			Family Communion		Morning Prayer
15 th January	Holy Communion	Morning Worship	6pm – Peace & Wholeness Service	8am – Holy Communion (BCP)	
22 nd January			Morning Worship	Morning Worship with	8am – Holy Communion (BCP)

				Sparsholt School	
25 th January			Mid-week Holy Communion		
29 th January		Holy Communion			