

18th December 2022 - Advent 4

I wonder what your take is on the story in today's gospel in which we are told that whilst Joseph and Mary are betrothed, there has been no sexual union and Mary is found with child. It was usual for young women as early as 12 years to be betrothed to a man before completion of the marriage contract. Betrothal was the legal equivalent of marriage, and to break spelt divorce.

Clearly Joseph was unaware of Mary's conception. Did this mean that Mary conceived miraculously? The jury is out. Certainly, there are pagan parallels. Why is there no mention in Mark, John and Paul of this miraculous event?

I wonder if Matthew in today's gospel is simply making a significant theological point in that the birth of this child has been foretold. In other words, it is about the meaning and significance of the birth of Christ, rather than the historical fact of how.

How significant and meaningful is the birth of Christ for you? For me, it speaks of the gracious action of God, Creator and Saviour. God blesses our humanity. God again imprints his image on the whole of humanity and richly blesses it.

What is more, God is Emmanuel, God with us. In the disasters of the explosion and loss of life in Jersey, in the disaster of the drowning of the young boys in Solihull, in the violence and bloodshed in the Ukraine, with the dying, the asylum seeker, the homeless and fleeing refugee-God is with us sharing the pain and grief of our human lot.

And that means for us of the Church, to share in that work of God as we seek to find ways of being his body in our community and his world. Christ comes to our broken world as a vulnerable baby who will eventually die for love for us, that we might be united with the source of all life once more. What more might we want? Maybe this is enough! That is very good news indeed.

Revd John Towler

St Mary's
Fordingbridge
SP6 1BB

St Mary's
Breamore
SP6 2DF

Holy Ascension
Hyde
SP6 2QJ

St Giles
Godshill
SP6 2JJ

St Boniface
Woodgreen
SP6 2AJ

St Mary's
Hale
SP6 2RF

Sandleheath
Uniting Church
SP6 1PT

We welcome all, especially visitors and those attending for the first time. If you need gluten free wafers at Communion, please speak to someone at the door before the service.

Please take this newsletter home with you for the week ahead. God Bless!

<p>Readings for this Week: 18th December 2022 Advent 4</p>

COLLECT:

Eternal God,
as Mary waited for the birth of your Son,
so we wait for his coming in glory;
bring us through the birth pangs of this present age
to see, with her, our great salvation
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

AMEN.

PSALM 80:1-7

1. Hear, O Shepherd of Israel,
You that led Joseph like a flock;
2. Shine forth, you that are enthroned upon the cherubim,
Before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh.
3. Stir up your mighty strength
And come to our salvation.
4. Turn us again, O God;
Show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.
5. O Lord God of hosts,
How long will you be angry at your people's prayer?
6. You feed them with the bread of tears;
You give them abundance of tears to drink.
7. You have made us the derision of our neighbours
And our enemies laugh us to scorn.

A Reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

Isaiah 7:10-16

*King Ahaz, hard pressed by his enemies,
is invited to ask God for a sign of his intentions.*

¹⁰ The LORD spoke to Ahaz, saying, ¹¹ ‘Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.’ ¹² But Ahaz said, ‘I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.’ ¹³ Then Isaiah said: ‘Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.

¹⁵ He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. ¹⁶ For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.’

c) New Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible

*At the end, the Reader says:
For the word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.*

THE GOSPEL READING

Please stand and turn to face the Gospel Reader

*When the Gospel is announced, the Reader says:
Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew*

Glory to you, O Lord.

(Glory be to thee, O Lord.)

Matthew describes the birth of Jesus as a fulfilment of the sign given to Ahaz.

¹⁸ The birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰ But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' ²² All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ²³ 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,' which means, 'God is with us.' ²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, ²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

At the end, the Reader says:
This is the Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, O Christ.

(At the end, the Reader says:
This is the Gospel of the Lord.
Praise be to thee, O Christ.)

POST COMMUNION PRAYER:

Heavenly Father,
you chose the Blessed Virgin Mary
to be the mother of the promised saviour:
fill us your servants with your grace,
that in all things we may embrace your holy will
and with her rejoice in your salvation;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

AMEN

Christine and John Towler are very sad to announce the death of Christine's Mother Gladys Jones. For many years Gladys was a faithful and very well liked member of our congregation, and we have been praying for her each week. She reached the wonderful age of 102 years, and passed away in her sleep in a most serene way. Her funeral will be at St. Mary's Fordingbridge on **Monday 19th December** at 10.30.a.m. Everyone who wishes to attend will be most welcome, and there will be refreshments in the church after the service. The family have requested no flowers, but donations for the work of the Great Ormond Street Hospital, c/o I.N.Newman Ltd. Funeral Directors, 22, High Street, Fordingbridge.

Nativity in the Bus Shelter @ Woodgreen, Saturday 17th at 2pm will see the arrival of the Holy Family in the disused bus shelter in the centre of Woodgreen. Please come and join us to see this amazing piece of community art, there will be carols too!

There will be a Service of Prayer ,Music and Reflection at Hyde at 10.00am on **Sunday 18th December**. Please come and join us for this rather different service.

Monday 19th December – the church office will be closed

Monday 19th December – all welcome to sing carols in the Horse & Groom at 7pm with the Downton Jubilee Band! Mince pies and mulled wine will be on offer to warm us up!

Appeal for Squash & biscuits – Our Messy Church Team is hosting a free Christmas Lunch for local families on **Tuesday 20th December**. We would be very grateful for donations of squash and biscuits, which can be left on the trolley. Any excess will be sent to the foodbank. Thank you for your generosity.

The **table decorations** on order will be ready for collection on **Tuesday 20th December** between 10-00 and 12 noon from Janet at Central Stores in Shaftesbury Street. Please contact Helen if you are unable to collect them. thetagues@fordingbridge.com or 01425 655462

The Christmas Story – As Christians it is our joy to spread the true Christmas story far and wide; it is possibly the most significant event in the history of the world. 'Fordingbridge & District Churches Together', 16 churches united, are determined that this great story is widely appreciated; therefore, on **Tuesday 20 December, at 5.30 p.m.**, on stage in **St Mary's Fordingbridge** (the biggest church around), it will present 'Fordingbridge tells the Christmas Story'. It is expected to last about an hour. There is a large, mainly adult, costumed cast presenting this drama. It is written, presented, and directed by members of the Avon Valley Parish. The story starts with the Fathers and village Matchmaker arranging the marriage of Joseph and Mary. Their 'Betrothal' includes singing and dancing!

Later, in Roman-ruled Israel, they have to travel on a four-day journey when Mary is nine months pregnant. Then in 'David's town' they have to rough it, with Mary giving birth in a stable; then a few smelly shepherds come to visit. It is only when 'Wise Men' visit, many months later, that paranoid King Herod gets wind of the newly arrived 'King of the Jews'; then the holy family have to flee for their lives as refugees. Thus this drama ends. Bring your friends!

Thursday 22nd December 11am for half an hour: 'The Shortest Day' Carols, Readings & Reflections, followed by mince pies and mulled wine, at St Giles Hermitage (the Church), Godshill. Come and join us for a short time away from the hustle and bustle of pre-Christmas week!

Thursday 22nd December 2pm – calling all Christingle makers! Please come along to St Mary's Fordingbridge and help make Christingles for the service on Saturday 24 December at 4pm. It would be good if you told Revd Tom in advance (curate@avonvalleychurches.org.uk) but please do come even if you cannot give warning.

Christmas Tree Festival@St Boniface, Woodgreen- pop in any time to see the lovely community decorated trees and vote for your favourite, the trees will be in place till 12th night!

Great News – After months of hard work the Churchwardens, working with the Bishop of Southampton, and Jane Hammond the Clergy appointments advisor are pleased to announce that the Bishop has signed off the Profile and Role description for a new Rector for the Avon Valley Churches. The P.C.C. met last week and held the formal Section 11 meeting which approved the Profile and Role Description and also the Advertisement for the position of Rector. The meeting also appointed the four parish representatives, one from LCA They are: Breamore – Andy Finch, Fordingbridge – Ian Newman, Hale and Woodgreen – Bethan Davies and Hyde – Heather Clark. In addition we now have the appointment Time table: Advert in January. Applications to be returned by 9th February. Shortlisting of candidates on the 15th February. Interviews on the 28th February & 1st of March.

The appointment rules mean that the representative may not discuss anything about the candidates with anyone so please don't ask them.

We now pray for the Parish representatives, the Patrons and the Bishop that they may be given insight and wisdom as they carry the responsibilities placed upon them in the appointment process, and we pray for the candidates who ever they may be as they consider if the Holy Spirit is calling them to minister here.

Warm, welcome space – we had the first of our weekly Tuesday 10.30-2.30pm gatherings this week, a small group came along and we had at least 3 people who would otherwise have had their lunch alone. If you can support us with games, jigsaws, quizzes etc we would be very grateful, please drop them off in St Boniface

Church. Further details from Linda Warne 07799 542707 or Ruth Crosland 07855210769.

Jigsaw Festival 2023 – St Mary's Fordingbridge. Advance warning to keep doing your jigsaws over the winter months! The next festival is being planned for October, exact days TBC. We won't be ready to receive any puzzles, either on board or in boxes, for some months yet so please keep them safe at home. Watch out for more details around spring time next year. Many thanks Judith Dowsett, Viv Finch, Jean Groves and The Jigsaw Team

Can anyone spare an hour, or two, or even three from **9am - 12pm on a Friday** morning to help support our thriving playgroup **Superstars** which takes place each week at St Mary's Church Hall? We now have more than 20 families who attend regularly and only a very small crew of helpers. For more information about Superstars and other Avon Valley Community Matters outreach projects, please visit: <https://www.avonvalleychurches.org.uk/avcmatters>. Contact irenecanton@hotmail.co.uk if you would like to get involved. DBS check required.

Advent Concert – many, many thanks to all of you who contributed in any way to the success of the Advent Concert at Hale House, we are pleased to tell you that the amazing amount of £1010 was raised! This will be split equally between the Food-bank and St Mary's Church, Hale roof fund.

Reflection

Reading Partners last week it is marvellous to see how much is going on across all our churches in this time of Advent. Last Sunday I attended the 6:00pm Advent Evensong in Fordingbridge and so enjoyed listening to the amazing Mustard Seeds. Of course my son, Matthew, is enjoying his Fair Trade Advent calendar, complete with a Christmas Story book. A tradition in our household – thank you, Nanny !

As I write this we are looking forward to Carols on the Common up at Hyde. Then there is the Christmas Story on 20th December at Fordingbridge, an event not to be missed. With these and all the other services and gatherings we have much to be thankful for as we prepare to celebrate Jesus' birth.

To end, a note of thanks to the ladies in Fordingbridge who made such a beautiful Christmas wreath for us. Now proudly hung on our front door – another tradition in our house!

Stephen Darke

CHURCH OFFICE CLOSED TO VISITORS EXCEPT BY APPOINTMENT

Contact via Email : Office@AvonValleyChurches.org.uk or call 01425 653163 between 10.30 am and 12.00 or leave a message Website : www.AvonValleyChurches.org.uk

This Week: Advent 4

18th December 2022

**Online services available via Facebook or Website
at 'Avon Valley Churches'**

Sunday	8.15am	Fordingbridge	Holy Communion (BCP)
18th Dec	10.00am	Fordingbridge	Morning Service
	10.00am	Hale	Morning Carol Service
	10.00am	Hyde	Service of Prayer, Music and Reflection
	10.45am	Sandleheath	C of E Morning Service with Carols
	2.00pm	Hyde	Carols on the Common
	4.00pm	Sandleheath	Carol service and Christingle
	6.00pm	Breamore	Carol Service followed by nibbles
	6.00pm	Fordingbridge	Carols by Candlelight
Monday 19 th	9.00am	Online (Zoom)	Morning prayer (<i>Meeting ID: 846 5168 7529, Password: 764200</i>)
Wednesday, Friday	10.00am	Online	Thought for the Day
Monday 19 th	10.30am	Fordingbridge	The Funeral of the late Gladys Jones
	7.00pm	Woodgreen (The Horse and Groom)	Carols in the Pub
Tuesday 20 th	5.30pm	Fordingbridge	Nativity Play
Wednesday 21 st	10.00am	Fordingbridge	Holy Communion
	7.00pm	Fordingbridge	Just Carols
Thursday 22 nd	11.00am	Godshill	'The Shortest Day' Carols, Readings & Reflections
	12.00pm	Hyde	The Funeral of the late Angela Wenyon
Sat 24 th	10.00am	Online	The Saturday Play: The Nativity
	4.00pm	Fordingbridge	Christingle & Crib Service
	11.00pm	Fordingbridge	Midnight Communion
	11.00pm	Woodgreen	Carols & Refreshments
Sunday	8.15am	Fordingbridge	Holy Communion
25th Dec	10.00am	Breamore	Holy Communion and Carols
	10.00am	Fordingbridge	Family Service and Carols
	10.00am	Hyde	Holy Communion and Carols
	10.00am	Hale	Morning Service with Carols
	10.45am	Sandleheath	Christmas Service