

# PARTNERS

## weekly newsletter



### 17<sup>th</sup> December 2023 - 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent

One of the things about prophets like John the Baptist, is that they bring us up with a jolt. Their message is often uncomfortable to hear because they confront us with something about ourselves and others, which nudges us to question our faith and belief.

Sydney Carter, an American poet, and song-writer from the sixties, was such a man. In this song he challenges us to think again what this great event of Christmas means for you and me in the ordinariness of our daily lives.

“Your holy hearsay is not evidence.  
Give me the good news in the present tense.  
What happened 1900 years ago,  
may not have happened.  
How am I to know?”

The living truth is what I long to see.  
I cannot hang upon what used to be.  
So shut your Bibles up  
and show me how  
the Christ you talk about is living now.”

John the Baptist’s message is quite clear-get rid of all distractions, all that blinds the view of God- ‘make straight his path’. May I humbly suggest that sometimes the sugary and sentimental way we portray the Christmas Story, is a distraction from a much harder reality, it can be a hindrance to people seeing God. Some of our best loved Christmas Carols don’t help either! John the Baptist and Sydney Carter both challenge me to get real, get human, get stuck in to the mess of our human lot-in a world in which God chooses to reveal the mystery of presence as a vulnerable child called Jesus. Perhaps when we see images of vulnerable children on our TV screens, let us remind ourselves that we are seeing God in Christ before our very eyes!

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 IPT

*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!**

# Readings for this Week: 17<sup>th</sup> December 2023

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent

### **COLLECT:**

God for whom we watch and wait,  
you sent John the Baptist to prepare the way of your Son:  
give us courage to speak the truth,  
to hunger for justice,  
and to suffer for the cause of right,  
with Jesus Christ our Lord.

**AMEN.**

### **PSALM 126**

1. When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,  
then were we like those who dream.
2. Then was our mouth filled with laughter  
and our tongue with songs of joy.
3. Then said they among the nations,  
'The Lord has done great things for them.'
4. The Lord has indeed done great things for us,  
and therefore we rejoiced.
5. Restore again our fortunes, O Lord,  
as the river beds of the desert.
6. Those who sow in tears  
shall reap with songs of joy.
7. Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed,  
will come back with shouts of joy, bearing their sheaves with them.

## A Reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

*Isaiah 61:1-4,8-11*

*Isaiah, in words that Jesus will quote later, speaks of being empowered by God to proclaim salvation.*

The servant of the Lord said: <sup>1</sup> The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; <sup>2</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; <sup>3</sup> to provide for those who mourn in Zion - to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory. <sup>4</sup> They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. <sup>8</sup> For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. <sup>9</sup> Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed. <sup>10</sup> I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. <sup>11</sup> For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

*At the end, the Reader says:*

This is 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 John

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

**(Glory be to thee, O Lord.)**

*John the Baptist points to the one who will follow him.*

<sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup> He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. <sup>19</sup> This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' <sup>20</sup> He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, 'I am not the Messiah.' <sup>21</sup> And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the prophet?' He answered, 'No.' <sup>22</sup> Then they said to him, 'Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' <sup>23</sup> He said, 'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord,"' as the prophet Isaiah said. <sup>24</sup> Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. <sup>25</sup> They asked him, 'Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?' <sup>26</sup> John answered them, 'I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, <sup>27</sup> the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.' <sup>28</sup> This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

c) *New Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible*

*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:**

We give you thanks, O Lord, for these heavenly gifts;  
kindle in us the fire of your Spirit  
that when your Christ comes again  
we may shine as lights before his face;  
who is alive and reigns now and for ever.  
**AMEN.**

**Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> December 10am service - Fordingbridge:** If you are attending the above service can I invite you to wear something pink/rose or bring something with you which is that colour. Thanks Mark Ward

**Carols on the Common** – Come and sing your favourite carols accompanied by brass! Hyde Common at 3pm (if you wish to sing in the informal choir, 2.40pm) on **Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> December**. Collection for “Embrace the Middle East”.

The traditional **Carol Service by Candlelight** at St Mary’s Fordingbridge is this coming **Sunday at 6pm**. This wonderful highlight of the Christmas season includes lots of congregational carols, and the choir will perform a number of choral carols by contemporary composers. The central part of the service is the Blessing of the Crib, at the High Altar, and is a really moving service. Do Join us.

Our Nativity in a bus shelter, is once again set up in Woodgreen! We hope you will have chance to come and visit the Holy Family. They have arrived at the disused bus shelter, on the Village Green close to the old telephone box. Why not pop along and see our representation of the real meaning of Christmas...

Our Christmas Tree Festival is also up and running in St Boniface Church, with more trees than ever, and a chance to vote for your favourite tree and donate to a wide variety of charities.

Merry Christmas from the Church Family of Hale & Woodgreen

Please note the **church office** will be **closed** on **Monday 18<sup>th</sup>** of December.

**SP6 Friendship Group** – Our friendship group will be held on **Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> December** from 10.00am – 12.00md at the Ship Inn, Fordingbridge High Street. This group is for anyone who is bereaved or lonely and would like a cuppa and a friendly chat. We also organize outings, theatre trips and garden visits. If anyone would like to join us do come.

**Avon Valley Community Matters - Families Together Upcoming dates:**  
**Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> December** - Family Christmas Dinner and Nativity, 11am-2pm at St Mary’s Church Hall You can find information about our events by going to <https://AvonValleyCommunityMatters.eventbrite.com> or emailing [familybefriender@yahoo.com](mailto:familybefriender@yahoo.com)

**Shortest Day Christmas Service at St Giles, Godshill** - The Shortest Day Christmas Service is one with a difference! Like last year, it will be a more reflective half-hour service open to everyone, including those people who might recoil from a full-blown Carol Service, but may find welcome solace and sanctuary in a troubled world through this time together. There will be readings and carols and prayers, followed by mince pies and mulled wine. **The Date: Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> December, 11 am at St Giles, Godshill.** All are Welcome!

**Just Carols** (and readings, poems and songs, too!) Date for your diary: **Thursday, December 21<sup>st</sup> @ 7 o'clock** in St Mary's Fordingbridge (lasts just over an hour.) Our esteemed Men's Group will lead the Carol-singing and we want to invite everyone to a festive evening of Christmas music. This is not a formal Church service, but rather a wonderful, informal singalong for all the family - please wear silly Christmas jumpers and tinsel and bring tambourines, drums, claves and maracas to make a noise!

Admission is absolutely free. See you there! Barry the piano- player.

**TOFSS (Too Old For Sunday School)** usually meet monthly at 15 Provost Street at 10.30am on a Thursday. We will meet in the New Year on **11 January and 8 February**. We will be watching a DVD ("The Chosen") portraying parts of the New Testament in an authentic and inspiring way. Come and join us! All welcome. More information from Pat Bloomfield 01425 837735.

**Save the date : Sunday, 21<sup>st</sup> January** Epiphany concert to be held at St. Mary's Church, Hale, from 4pm. It will have all the tradition of our Advent concert but with a slightly different feel to it. Do come and support us. Raising funds for Trussell Trust and the roof fund. Thank you.

### **Open Gardens 2024 – Fordingbridge/Godshill/Sandleheath**

We now have a small list of gardens that will be open over the late May Bank Holiday to help us raise funds, but we need a few more. Your garden doesn't have to be either large or spectacular, we aren't trying to do Chelsea! It would be great if you could also host your guests with refreshments (or perhaps have a few plants to sell) but if you don't bake we can find you a partner. Or do you have a non-churchgoing friend with a garden they would be prepared to open? We need to begin to plan after Christmas so please let me know if you are willing to help. Mark Ward: mark@fordingbridge.com or 01425 656120

**Fundraising for St Mary's Hale roof repairs.** We have been donated some beautifully knitted childrens cardigans. Many with knitted in rabbits etc on the front. Pastel colours, age 2 - 4 approx. To buy, (they are £5 and at the back of St Boniface) please put your money in an envelope marked Cardigan and post it in the wall safe on the left of the toilet door.

Ever wondered **WHY?** Or been asked a difficult question from someone that starts 'Why...?'

Well maybe you would like to come to **the 6 o'clock service**. We are starting a new series in January to explore some questions that are fundamental to the Christian faith and the January question is... **'Why was Jesus born?'** So maybe you know someone who has asked you about Jesus recently or maybe you have asked yourself 'why did Jesus have to come to earth?' If so, please do come on the 7<sup>th</sup> January at 6 o'clock. For those of you who don't know about this service, it is an informal service that happens once a month at St Mary's in Fordingbridge (1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of every month) and is

primarily aimed at people who wish to explore faith. But we would love to see more of our regular church goers to help us to support those who are exploring. We also serve tea and coffee at the beginning and a hot meal at the end for those who fancy eating with us. So it's a lovely way to end the weekend!  
Any questions, please do contact Alex Sains 07816225030

**ITEMS FOR PARTNERS** need to be sent to the Church Office (e-mail address below) by 5.00p.m. on **Wednesdays**. Please put 'Partners' in the e-mail subject line.  
Thank you, Zoe

## Reflection

Each year we celebrate the season of Advent in the weeks leading up to Christmas. We read the words of the prophets, and put ourselves back in that time and place of watching and waiting for the Saviour of the world, expectant and hopeful.

However, it seems that the prospect of Christmas quickly overshadows the season of Advent. Today is the third Sunday of Advent, but is dominated by Carol Services, thoughts, and plans for Christmas. Next Sunday, the final Sunday of Advent is Christmas Eve, when we will all be preparing for Christmas Day. It is as if we have lost at least two Sundays of this precious and penitential season, and the opportunity to reflect quietly and humbly on the gift that we will receive at Christmas in Jesus Christ.

This year, it is difficult to think of Christmas as a peaceful, happy time, with all the troubles in the world but especially in Israel and Gaza, the very place where our Christmas stories are set. So, what as Christians can we do this Christmas? The final verse of the carol '*In the bleak mid-winter*' gives us good advice.

What can I give Him, poor as I am.  
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb.  
If I were a wise man, I would do my part  
Yet what I can, I give Him  
Give my heart.

Mary Melbourne (Breamore Churchwarden and LLM)

**CHURCH OFFICE IS OPEN TO VISITORS** between 10.00 am and 12.00  
Contact via Email : [Office@AvonValleyChurches.org.uk](mailto:Office@AvonValleyChurches.org.uk) or call 01425 653163 between 10.00 am and 12.00 or  
leave a message Website : [www.AvonValleyChurches.org.uk](http://www.AvonValleyChurches.org.uk)

# 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent

## 17<sup>th</sup> December

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

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<b>Sunday</b>	<b>8.15 am</b>	<b>Fordingbridge</b>	<b>Holy Communion</b>
<b>17<sup>th</sup> Dec</b>	<b>10.00 am</b>	<b>Fordingbridge</b>	<b>Morning Service</b>
	<b>10.00 am</b>	<b>Hale</b>	<b>Carols and Readings</b>
	<b>10.00 am</b>	<b>Hyde</b>	<b>Informal prayer time</b>
	<b>10.45 am</b>	<b>Sandleheath</b>	<b>Morning Service</b>
	<b>3.00 pm</b>	<b>Hyde</b>	<b>Carols on the Common</b>
	<b>6.00 pm</b>	<b>Breamore</b>	<b>Carol Service</b>
	<b>6.00 pm</b>	<b>Fordingbridge</b>	<b>Carols by Candlelight</b>
Monday	10.00 am	Online	Morning prayer ( <i>Meeting ID: 846 5168 7529, Password: 764200</i> )
Wednesday			
Friday			
<b>Wed 20<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>10.00 am</b>	<b>Fordingbridge</b>	<b>Holy Communion</b>
	<b>7.00 pm</b>	<b>Woodgreen</b>	<b>Carols in the Pub at the Horse and Groom</b>
<b>Thurs 21<sup>st</sup></b>	<b>11.00 am</b>	<b>St Giles, Godshill</b>	<b>Shortest Day Service</b>
	<b>1.30 pm</b>	<b>Fordingbridge</b>	<b>The funeral of the late Michael Hayward</b>
	<b>7.00 pm</b>	<b>Fordingbridge</b>	<b>Just Carols</b>
<b>Sunday</b>	<b>8.15 am</b>	<b>Breamore</b>	<b>Holy Communion</b>
<b>24<sup>th</sup> Dec</b>	<b>10.00 am</b>	<b>Hyde</b>	<b>Holy Communion</b>
	<b>10.00 am</b>	<b>Woodgreen</b>	<b>Holy Communion</b>
	<b>4.00 pm</b>	<b>Fordingbridge</b>	<b>Crib and Christingle Service</b>
	<b>11.00 pm</b>	<b>Fordingbridge</b>	<b>Midnight Mass</b>
	<b>11.00 pm</b>	<b>Woodgreen</b>	<b>Carols and Readings</b>