

4th WEEK OF EPIPHANY NEWSLETTER

26th January – 1st February 2025

Brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. (2 Corinthians 13:11 NIV)

This is the Week of Christian Unity. We are reminded to hold fast to the foundations of our faith that underpin our believing, and which we share in common in the Church, the body of Christ. **This Sunday, a Christian Unity service will be held at 3pm in Gainford, St Osmund's Church,** hosted by Fr Thomas, who co-leads the service with Rev'd Canon Eileen, and Methodist Minister Rev'd Yemi will be giving the message. All are welcome from our parishes and beyond.



Do we truly believe in unity amongst and between members of the church, not only between denominations? How about peace and unity among Christians within every church?

*“To be a Christian, regardless of one’s particular tradition, is to be evangelical – in the sense of being one who believes in and shares the Gospel. Christian disunity is a countersign. It weakens our capacity to be credible witnesses in the world. **The conviction that what unites Christians is infinitely more significant than what divides us** has been central to my own believing and belonging for many years.”*

Rev'd Martin Browne OSB, Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, the Vatican, Rome

Here are **excerpts from Pope Francis' comment that he frames as a prayer:**

*This life will go by fast. Don't fight with people, don't criticize your body so much, don't complain so much. Everything perfect doesn't exist. Human beings can't accomplish this because it simply was not intended to be completed here. Here is an opportunity to learn. So, **take this challenge that is life and do it now... love more, forgive more, embrace more, love more intensely and leave the rest in God's hands. Amen***

By the power of God's grace, let us choose whatever feeds hope and restores the bond of peace.

Epiphany 4 Communion & Services

9.15 Staindrop St Mary Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop
9.30 Winston St Andrew Rev'd Moji Jaiyesimi
10.45 Gainford St Mary Rev'd Moji Jaiyesimi
11 Ingleton St John Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop
3pm St Osmunds Churches Together
Christian Unity Service

CANDLEMAS Communion & Services

9.15 Staindrop St Mary Rev'd Moji Jaiyesimi
9.30 Winston St Andrew Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop
10.45 Gainford St Mary Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop
Ordinand-in-Training Claire Mead is preaching at
Winston and Gainford

May God, Emmanuel, fill us with His Holy Spirit, and be with us in every aspect of our lives this year that His Righteousness and Love bless our words, thoughts, and deeds.

Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop

NOTICES

We pray for families recently bereaved and give thanks for the life of

† The Late Mrs Joyce White, whose funeral at Wear Valley Crematorium (private), and Thanksgiving Service at Winston St Andrew's takes place on Friday 31st January 2025 at 1pm

Keep fervently in prayer

'Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.' Proverbs 13:12

The ceasefire-hostage deal between Israel and Hamas has been far too long in the making, but it is welcome news for those caught up in this devastating violence.

My prayers are with all the families being reunited over the coming days, and for those who are still held in captivity. My prayers too are with the people of Gaza who have suffered such immense destruction, deprivation and displacement. Now must be the time – again, so long overdue – for unfettered aid to reach the people of Gaza, and for the indispensable role of UNRWA to be respected and protected by all parties. May this deal be a precursor to a wider, more durable and just settlement in the region: it must not be a false dawn.

Please pray for Archbishop Hosam and our Anglican sisters and brothers in Palestine and Israel, and for all the Christians of the Holy Land as they bear the light of Christ in such dark times. Pray too for the courageous staff of the Anglican Al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza, and those in their care. Across the West Bank, this war is being felt not just in the daily grievous news from Gaza, but through widespread intensification of the occupation. I pray this deal acts as a catalyst to bring freedom, justice and dignity to the Palestinian people as well as being a small step towards the long term security of both Palestinians and Israelis.

We lift before God the peoples of the Holy Land, and for His justice, mercy and peace to be known by all.



Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell

The political stance taken by leaders of Israel and Hamas wreaked terrible sorrow and devastation on the people they serve. The longer the impasse continued the more difficult to see how the people caught in their positions could be delivered from their plight.

An agreement was reached to a ceasefire and release of hostages. We pray this translates to reality for the affected families, loved ones, the injured, and hostages.

The Archbishop of York's statement communicates our prayers to them.

FROM OUR PARISHES

Invitations

† **To join our Parochial Church Councils (PCCs)**

All our churches are lovingly cared for by parishioners who step forward to serve on our PCCs. We have vacancies in Ingleton, Staindrop, and Winston, also for churchwardens. All interest welcome!

Staindrop St Mary's PCC meeting, Monday 27th January 4.30pm at 32 North Green, Staindrop – speak to churchwarden Linda Hausmanis before or after church services if you wish to enquire, observe, or join the PCC.

Ingleton St John the Evangelist's PCC meeting, Thursday 30th January 4.30pm at Allison's (opposite the church) – speak to churchwarden Judith Pressley or assistant warden Liz Chandler before or after church services if you wish to enquire, observe, or join the PCC.

† **YOUTH SAINTS meets on the 2nd Thursday of every month at 6.30pm**

Gainford St Mary's has been hosting and welcoming 7 to 11 year old young people for 8 years. Returning members and new members are always welcome. We welcome older youth to co-lead this time of making new friends, sharing, games, food, and prayer too. For more information contact Sarah Fells or Sheila Jones stmarys@gainfordwinston.church

† **BELL RINGING**

BREAKING NEWS: 2025 is STAINDROP ST MARY'S BELLS RESTORATION

CENTENERY! Plans have begun for a Festival of Bells. Feel free to share the attached poster. Get in touch with Tower Captain Mark Palmer if you'd like to know more and how you can help:

mark@palmerfrost.plus.com

COLLECT for Epiphany 4

God our creator,
who in the beginning
commanded the light to shine out of darkness:
we pray that the light of the glorious gospel of
Christ
may dispel the darkness of ignorance and unbelief,
shine into the hearts of all your people,
and reveal the knowledge of your glory
in the face of Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen

Post-Communion Prayer

Generous Lord,
in word and eucharist we have proclaimed the
mystery of your love:
help us so to live out our days
that we may be signs of your wonders in the
world;
through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen

I Corinthians 13

¹ If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. ⁷ It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸ Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. ⁹ For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; ¹⁰ but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. ¹² For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. ¹³ And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

The Gospel according to Luke (2:22-40) *Note: This is the same Gospel reading for Candlemas!

¹⁴ When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord'), ²⁴ and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons.'

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷ Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

²⁹ 'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
according to your word;

³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.'

³³ And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed ³⁵ so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

³⁹ When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

Sermon, 3rd in EPIPHANY, 19th January 2025 (1 Corinthians 12:12-31; Luke 4:14-21)

The season of Epiphany is marked by the ways in which God reveals his will in Christ Jesus. At the first Epiphany, his will was revealed in bringing of people to him from afar without knowledge of God's will in Christ. The magi represented those nations whose people did not know the One God. But following God's light, they found the King of Kings in Jesus and worshipped him. Then Jesus' power was revealed in an ordinary human event – the Wedding in Cana, when he turned water wine. And his disciples believed. It wasn't reported in the Gospel, so I wonder if the servants who had done what Jesus asked, and who witnessed the miracle, also believed. The people of Cana were among God's chosen people, who knew the scriptures and prophecies and the One God. Then Jesus' position as the Son of God, the One who baptises by the Spirit, was revealed at his baptism. God's will was revealed to those who had gone to John the Baptist to be baptised by water, who confessed their sin and their believing was affirmed.

Now the important point that I wish to highlight is made clear from the Gospel reading of The Baptism of Christ. *'...when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened'*. This is important because it sums up the season of Epiphany. It is God's intentional revelation to people, from these first occasions and throughout all generations since – to us, *that God came to us for us*. We, all peoples, have always been God's purpose.

'...when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him'. This was the preface to the coming of the Holy Spirit to all people and into all believers. Yes, at Jesus' Baptism, his God-ship and Son-ship were affirmed but God is not a God whose glory is for self-aggrandisement. God does not need to be aggrandised because He is God and there is nothing greater or more glorious. But we are to receive illumination, that we may move out of darkness, out of the grasp of the world, and returned to join God in sin-free glory.

In our Gospel passage today, Jesus had just been baptised, and *'Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee... and began to teach in their synagogues'*. Then he went on to his home district of Nazareth, opening his ministry with this message from the Prophet Isaiah:

*'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'*

And so, we fast forward to ourselves today. *We have received the Holy Spirit, and we have heard Jesus' commission*, which is exactly drawn from the prophecy of Isaiah.

How does this link in to our reading from Paul's letter to the Corinthians? Well, it is one thing to read that passage, which sounds rather nice – everyone being of One Body in Christ, and quite another to actually think like that and to act on what Jesus' said.

'For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.' '...the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable'

This is a tall order. These are difficult to live out, because we struggle in our human attitude to accept others who are unlike ourselves. We may laugh at Paul's rhetorical question: *'If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be?'* Imagine all of us as Cyclops – the body whose primary feature is the eye!

We cannot bring good news to the poor, to release the captives, to bring recovery of sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free, if we live by our human judgement.

We judge who is the poor who are worthy of receiving good news or perhaps whom we believe would be receptive of good news.

We judge who are captives who deserve to be released. Well, we know that from the terrible situation in Israel and Palestine.

We don't even recognise blindness, especially our own let alone what recovery of sight really means – and of course we are not referring particularly to physical eyesight.

We judge *who* are oppressed and deny those their freedom who fall outside our judgement.

Epiphany is our season of enlightenment. **This is our time to consider our human blindness by which we judge others and fail to act as Jesus commissioned.**

The Holy Spirit who descended on Jesus at his baptism, descended on all who confessed their sins and who were baptised with and in Jesus.

Today, let us reaffirm who we are as members of the body of Christ. Let us affirm that we have the power to be illumined, and in that power bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, and let the oppressed go free.

But we hold on to our human judgement instead of living in the Holy Spirit, we keep the shades on our blindness.

Today, I pray that we, you and I, choose to make room for the Holy Spirit. Vacate that stronghold of worldly and human judgementalism, of judgement over all the world, and over others, and make room for the complete counsel and leading of the Holy Spirit.

And by doing so, we do as Jesus said: *"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."*

Amen