

Dear friends,

It always feels good to have our morning services tip over the 100 barrier and for a dismal Sunday in February it feels especially good. If you are wondering who that rather tall young man is you have received communion wine from or will act as crucifer this coming Sunday – this is Stephen and he is only 17 years old. He lives locally and has been a constant member of the congregation since his first appearance at our Wednesday morning service just before Christmas. He helps us all feel very old (and rather short – what do they feed youngsters nowadays?) and is a welcome addition to our congregation.

**Lent** is hurtling towards us and this year it shares the date with Valentine's day – the 14th February, so just over a week away. As in other years, because we have a well-established Wednesday communion service this will act as our Ash Wednesday service for the whole RMC at 9.30am (with optional Ashing).

### **Sunday 11th February – Next before Lent.**

I will preside at All Saints and St. Michael's this coming Sunday and I will also be presiding at the 8am BCP communion at St. Peter's and the 6pm Choral evensong, so a pretty hefty day but this allows Canon Ken Parry to preside at the 10am at St. Peter's so everyone's a winner. Our choir is supplemented by Woodberry choir in the evening so a pretty special service to boot!

**2 Kings 2: 1-12.** Elijah being taken bodily into heaven in a "chariot of fire" led the Israelites to conclude that Elijah didn't die and was alive in heaven, and indeed would one day return. (People mistakenly thought Jesus was shouting for Elijah from the cross, it was Elijah who appeared along with Moses at the transfiguration, and indeed Jesus said that if you are able to accept it John the Baptist fulfils the Elijah role). Elisha, asking for a double portion of his spirit is actually asking to be his successor on earth once Elijah had departed.

**2 Corinthians 4: 3-6.** Paul is really re-iterating what Jesus said in the parable of the Sower, that people will ultimately reject the gospel for many and various reasons and this is going to happen no matter what we do. For the gospel being veiled and people blinded to the gospel read Jesus' words about the seed falling amongst thorns or in shallow soil and being choked by the cares of this world

**Mark 9: 2-9.** The Transfiguration is an important event in that it is a full blown “Theophany” (God-event) with the mysterious voice of the Father speaking out of the cloud saying the same words that were heard at Jesus’ baptism but with “Listen to him” added. Moses and Elijah are presented as subordinate to Jesus. The two figures have traditionally come to be seen as representative of the law (Moses) and all the prophets (Elijah).

### **Dinner Club at the Holt (The new cricket pavilion)**

On the 22nd February we have our first Dinner club for 2024 and the first one for a long time. The Holt is very new, extremely well kitted out and plenty of parking and has a great aspect. 6.30 for a 7pm start and £25 per ticket. You will be greeted with a glass of fizz or orange juice, have a hot buffet style 2-course dinner followed by coffee. Be quick as we need final numbers by the 16th Feb!

### **Come and see!**

The Lent course this year will be the Exeter Diocesan course called “Come and see”. and will be starting pretty soon. The final days and times are being mulled over as we speak and hopefully will be confirmed next week..

### **Thought for the Day.**

Every so often we go to London to see a show and last Friday we saw the “Time traveller’s wife” (very good if you’re interested), but as well as going to the National portrait gallery we also decided to go and see the Parthenon friezes and sculptures known as the Elgin Marbles, as we had read about the controversies surrounding a proposed deal to send them back to Athens, and we had never seen them. I didn’t know what to expect but they were very impressive and well-presented in a massive, dedicated room with side annexes. You learn a lot from these things. One thing I learned was that Lord Elgin procured the Marbles entirely lawfully gaining written permission from the Sultan, (who was the legitimate authority at the time) to basically take what he wanted and ship them back to Britain. Secondly, I learned a lot about what the Greek names actually meant (The derivation of words fascinates me). Parthenon means “the virgin” so the Temple was dedicated to Athena the Virgin, set amongst a few Temples atop the acropolis which just means the “High city” because it is a rocky outcrop in Athens. That led me to think about how popular female deities were in the world and especially female virgins. Of course, the virgin Mary is the latest in a long line that stretches way back and across different cultures. The Magi (wise men or kings) that brought the gifts to the infant Jesus, were Zoroastrians and they too were looking for a saviour that would be born of a virgin. I am not going to go into the controversy of what

Isaiah actually says and how the virgin/young woman words he used differ because I don't pretend to know. I know the Trinity is seen as very patriarchal – and that is simply because it is how it was revealed to mankind and we can't change that, but I can't help wondering if the Catholics and Orthodox have the advantage over us in their exaltation of Mary within their respective traditions. It gives that most obvious of female figures an important aspect within their respective Christian traditions – an aspect we threw out with the bathwater of the reformation.

### The Prayer for Today

**Joy with peace  
Amendment of life  
Time for true repentance  
The Grace and comfort of the Holy Spirit  
And perseverance in good works  
Grant us  
O almighty and merciful Lord.**

Love and peace  
Martin