Dear friends,

The candlelight supper at St. Peter’s on Saturday evening was lovely. Many Thanks to everyone involved in putting together the evening and special thanks to Sandy for her whimsical poems and to Mark Perry and ensemble for their amusing rendition of Department of Transport instructions on crossing the road sung as a psalm.

We managed to sandwich in our shopping and writing all our Christmas cards and wrapping of parcels in between the morning services at All Saints and St. Michael’s and choral evensong at St. Peter’s, all of which happened as normal and were very uplifting.

Next week, we get into a higher gear as our normal Sunday services are supplemented by two carol services at St. Peter’s (6pm) and St. Michael’s (4pm) at which I will preside, and Rev. Jean Burrows will preside at the first of our three Christingle services at All Saints at 3pm.

Sunday 17th December – Advent three.

At our usual communion services this Sunday I will preside at both services at St. Peter’s and Archdeacon Trevor Jones will preside at All Saints and St. Michael’s at 9.30am and 11am respectively. Our candle this week in the scheme we are following represents John the Baptist in our salvation history.

**Isaiah 61: 1-4, 8-11.** In its original context, this was addressed to the Jewish people who had returned from exile, so free from their captivity, but living amongst the ruins of their devastated country and city of Jerusalem. The author proclaims that he has been filled with the spirit of God to proclaim good news to them. Famously of course Jesus uses this same passage to refer to himself as the one filled with the Spirit of God to proclaim good news.

**1 Thessalonians 5: 16-24.** The time waiting for the second coming must be spent in faithful living in continual worship and prayer. Because the spirit’s activity is mysterious and sometimes ambiguous, we must be discerning though without quenching the Spirit. There is also a call to Holiness (Sanctification) which does entail a measure of separation in Hebrew, but in Paul’s mind this happens through a discipline of constant prayer and rejoicing.

**John 1: 6-8, 19-28.** John is here acknowledged as a witness to Jesus but most of the passage deals with telling us who John is not! He is not the light, he is not Elijah, he is not a prophet, and he is not the Messiah. While most of this can be used to point to John’s humility and wanting people to concentrate their gaze on Jesus, it must also be acknowledged that in the early days there was great rivalry between followers of John and followers of Jesus. The fact that Jesus accepted baptism from John caused the early church much embarrassment because it inferred that Jesus accepted a subservient role to John and all the gospel writers try in their own way to downplay John and exalt Jesus.

Thought for Today

Last Sunday we lit a candle remembering the role of the prophets in our salvation history. Prophesy is not just foretelling the future though; it is being able to see deeply into the present and interpret what is happening – or has happened – in our midst. In this way the writers of the New Testament had real insight into the true meaning and significance of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They could see that this one life, lived out in Israel had a transcendent significance for all humanity and in fact, beyond our purely human concerns, significance for the entire universe. What St. Paul and all the contributors to the New Testament saw that this one life provided a model for all created life and Paul indeed does talk about the creation groaning in anticipation of its own salvation (Romans 8:22). Visionaries like the writers of John’s gospel and the book of Revelation set this carpenter’s son in the context of the eternal dimension that has huge ramifications for all people. It means that our lives are not lived within the false horizons of our birth and death but lived against the backdrop of an infinite horizon. The truly prophetic insight into the meaning of Christmas is that there is no distance between God and his creation – He is here (and always has been and always will be) and not a coolly detached unconcerned deity casting a dispassionate eye over the affairs of the world. God is Love and he deals with us all on the level of Grace and Mercy.

This is the God we worship. An accessible, caring and loving God who deals with us not as playthings but wants us to realise his universal Fatherhood and that we are all his children.

The Prayer for Today is a beautifully poignant prayer concerning aging and dying written by Fr. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

**Aging/Dying Prayer**

**When the signs of age begin to mark my body**

**(and still more when they touch my mind);**

**when the ill that is to diminish me or carry me off**

**strikes from without or is born within me;**

**When the painful moment comes**

**in which I suddenly awaken**

**to the fact that I am ill or growing old;**

**and above all at that last moment**

**when I feel I am losing hold of myself**

**and am absolutely passive within the hands**

**of the great unknown forces that have formed me;**

**in all these dark moments, O God,**

**grant that I may understand that it is You**

**(provided my faith is strong enough)**

**who are painfully parting the fibres of my being**

**in order to penetrate to the very marrow**

**of my substance and bear me away within Yourself.**

Love and peace,

Martin