

Dear friends,

The miracle of new life was on display in Dartmouth when we travelled to see two three-month-old nieces, Sophie and Rachel, over here in the UK for a month before returning to Singapore and then re-locating to Chennai in India, which is the place where next time we shall probably see them next year. Rashpal, their mother is a Sikh, but the Gurdwara in Singapore has been closed because of strict covid restrictions and she was desperate to have the children blessed. So, while in Dartmouth I asked the churchwarden of St. Petrox if it was OK to bless the children in a makeshift service of blessing where we lit two candles, made the sign of the cross on their heads, prayed the prayer of St. Columba in a lovely little service that was very much appreciated.

On that same day we enjoyed our second Christmas dinner of the season already in a packed Peter hall for the splendid Candlelight supper. Louise and I drew the 100 club which resulted in our treasurer, Tony Gray (Who else!) winning the top prize of £100. I can't complain of course because I won it last year.

Our magnificent Advent service of readings and carols was a great success and as I said at the time had been filmed and edited by Lucinda, our webmaster extraordinaire and is now available on the Raleigh Mission community website.

Sunday 12th December – Advent 3

For unavoidable logistical reasons I am presiding again at St. Peter's at both services in the morning – 8am and 10am - and also at our choral evensong service at 6pm. Fr. Peter is presiding at All Saints at 9.30am and Reverend Chris Cant is presiding at St. Michael's at 11am. The advent wreath theme this Sunday commemorates John the Baptist.

Zephaniah 3: 14-20. A prophecy of future promise and redemption that will be achieved not by an earthly king but by God himself being present in the midst of his people. The future promise of God residing with his people is reminiscent of Isaiah 7:14 and the prophecy of a saviour being born of a virgin and being called Emmanuel – God with us.

Philippians 4: 4-7. The classic New Testament passage about both joy and peace. Peace here is understood as the Hebrew "Shalom", the total well-being of a person, the source of which can only be found in God.

Luke 3: 7-18. Luke describes the ministry of John the Baptist – the voice crying out in the wilderness – and his ministry of calling people to repentance and to act justly towards people. People naturally ask whether John is the Messiah, but he subordinates his ministry to Jesus who will baptise with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Fire generally refers to cleansing/purging/refining in the New Testament.

The Family Carol service on December 19th at 6pm at St. Peter's has now been finalised and we are looking forward to it. Afterwards, we will enjoy mince pies and mulled wine. I'll remind people of our full Christmas service schedule next Wednesday. A shorter version covering Christmas weekend will appear in the December edition of the One magazine.

Thought for the day

I wrote earlier that I had blessed two children. And it is good to ask the simple question “What is a blessing anyway?” In addressing that question I am indebted to catholic priest Ronald Rolheiser who writes wonderfully about Blessing and why we do it and why we need it. It is to affirm that God delights in what is being blessed as a wonderful piece of his creation, a creation that in the beginning was “created good” as Genesis tells us. Dietrich Bonhoeffer describes a blessing as a “visible, perceptible, effective proximity of God. A blessing demands to be passed on – it communicates itself to other people. To be blessed is to be oneself a blessing”. To believe that we are good, very good; to take delight in our lives and in each other; to live lives that radiate joy rather than depression, boredom and resentment sounds simple but is seldom achieved. Sadly, rather than create and radiate delight around us we more often kill it. When we stop blessing, which means to affirm and delight in someone's joy, beauty and creativity we immediately begin to curse. This happens because we more often don't delight in ourselves and the world because we ourselves have experienced too few people delighting in us and too few people ever told us we were good and very good. The word “blessing” takes its root from the Latin “Benedicere” (To speak well of). Thus, to bless someone is to speak well of him or her. To bless someone is to make them aware of three things 1) That the original creation and they themselves are good, very good. 2) That God experiences the same delight and pleasure in him or her that he experienced with Jesus at his baptism when He said “This is my beloved son. With him I am well pleased” 3) That I who am giving the blessing recognise that goodness and take delight in him or her. Thus, the ritual blessing that we are given at the end of the Eucharist could be paraphrased to sound like this. “As we leave this celebration, let us feel deeply and take with us the deep truth that we, the world and our lives are

good. There is no need to live in guilt and depression. We are, despite our faults, very good and delightful to God. Let us therefore take delight in each other and in ourselves. We are after all, extremely pleasing to God”

The prayer for today is an Irish blessing.

May you have many friends

And may they be as mature in taste and health and colour and as sought after as the contents of this glass.

May you have warm words on a cold evening

A full moon on a dark night

And the road downhill all the way to your door.

May every hair on your head turn into a candle

To light your way to heaven.

And my God and his Holy Mother

Take the harm of the years away from you.

And may you have no frost on your spuds

No worms on your cabbage

May your goat give plenty of milk.

And if you should buy a Donkey

Please God, she be pregnant!

Love and peace,

Martin

Please note my new email address is vicar@rmcommunity.co.uk