

3rd Before Advent

We have concluded the green 'Trinity' season to enter a much shorter one: three 'Sundays before Advent' as they are now called – to look back and to look forward. We look back and remember past remembrances and past loves. We look forward, to see how things could be better and fairer.

As today's collect spells out: "govern the hearts and minds of those in authority"; it is a fitting and timely prayer right now at the beginning of COP 27, as it is for those torn about human rights in Qatar or China; and even before the dawn of another Advent, we need to constantly pray for those angels out in the world we sometimes miss or neglect because we are too preoccupied. These are the angels who proclaim peace and persist in building stepping stones which might indeed become permanent bridges. These are the angels mentioned in today's Gospel who intuitively, are bearers of good news bringing strength and inspiration to others instead of being downcast, and instead of sounding like that character in Dad's Army whose favourite line was always, "We're all doomed, Mr Mannering, doomed."

Of course the angels to which I refer are not necessarily the great and the good so much as the person next door to you, or the colleague you used to share an office with; the one who also says 'yes' to helping out voluntarily with visiting the sick, teaching English to our Ukrainian guests, visiting a long-term prisoner, reading with a child in the local library, listening attentively on the phone at Samaritans, taking and

shifting those boxes of food at the local Foodbank. There are myriad ways in which the flight of angels and bumping into an occasional saint, can really make a difference to our everyday living and our everyday faith and hope in the living God. So when, later in December, we launch our very own 'Inspiring Angels' campaign in our own Benefice, please think on and pray about those people you may know locally, who truly deserve our thanks and recognition?

If possible, we would like to take a portrait picture of them (with permission of course) to build up our very own Advent Calendar of 24 Angelic co-workers and pilgrims of 'just and gentle' persuasion or, you could say 'obstinate' persuasion, who keep us focussed on the things of God, as children of God, which build up His kingdom on earth. That's my interpretation of our Gospel reading which Luke is hinting at; not to get too worked up about the differences between heaven and earth but to see them as sides of the same coin, lovingly created by God, our Maker and Redeemer; so let's use them both as common currency.

We look back and remember past loves, we look forward to see how things could be better.

If we had read or sung today's allotted Psalm, it would have been Psalm 17.1-8. I commend it to you for this coming week to use meditatively each day because it is written as a warm and open conversation between the created and the Creator. It concludes:

“I call upon you, O God, for you will answer me; incline your ear to me and hear my words. Show me your marvellous loving-kindness, O Saviour of those who take refuge at your right hand from those who rise up against them. Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me under the shadow of your wings.”

Now, I did say last week that I would be talking a lot about angels in the coming weeks. Please bear that in mind also if you have entered our Bake-Off today, and you don't win! If you have made an Angel cake with a soggy bottom, I promise, as today's judge, to keep it a secret! What we must never hesitate to share with one another, and all those we meet and pray for this week, comes loud and clear from the prophetic voice of Job:

“I know that my Redeemer lives. I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.”

Let's look forward in faith, and dare to change lives: our own, as well as others.

AMEN.