



The Benefice of the Piddle Valley, Hilton & Ansty, Cheselbourne and Melcombe Horsey

Sunday 22nd December 2019

4th Sunday of Advent

Altar Colour – Purple

Readings: Isa. 7: 10-16, Psalm 80: 1-8, Rom. 1: 1-7, Matt. 1: 18-end

Collect: God our redeemer, who prepared the Blessed Virgin Mary to be the mother of your Son: grant that, as she looked for his coming as our saviour, so we may be ready to greet him when he comes again as our judge; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

Isaiah 7:10-16 (ESV) - The Sign of Immanuel

Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz: “Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.” And he said, “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted.

COMMENT: In seeing this passage as a prophecy of the birth of Jesus, we more often than not ignore the historical situation behind it. These are well attested in 2 Kings 16, 2 Chronicles 28, and in the annals of the Assyrian king Tiglathpileser. The year was 734 BC. Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel had planned to invade the southern kingdom of Judah and lay siege to Jerusalem during the reign of Ahaz, the king of Judah and direct descendant of King David. Isaiah had encouraged Ahaz to resist, but had failed. Instead, Ahaz emptied his own and the temple treasuries paying tribute to the Assyrians and introduced Assyrian worship into the temple. Tiglathpileser subsequently crushed the rebellious provinces on his western boundaries, including the Northern Kingdom of Israel, but spared Judah. The events of this passage occurred a little later than the first meeting of Ahaz and Isaiah described in verses 3-9. The scene probably took place in the king’s council chamber where the prophet again addressed the monarch terrified at the threatened invasion. (verses 5-6) Isaiah pleaded with Ahaz to ask the LORD for a sign, but the king refused to put the LORD “to the test.” The sign would likely have

been some event which would prove that the LORD had indeed spoken through the prophet. His plea rejected, the prophet uttered this oracle (verses 13-17) warning Ahaz that before a child to be named Immanuel (“God is with us”) soon to be borne to a young maiden, Israel and Damascus would be defeated and Judah would suffer its worst disaster since the division of the northern and southern kingdoms after the death of Solomon nearly two hundred years earlier (circa 920 BC). Early Christians saw within the passage from Isaiah a prophecy about the birth of Jesus. It is clear that this method of using the Old Testament was not just invented by the early Church. Apologetic appeals to the Old Testament were made by the various groups emerging within Judaism, including the main-stream Rabbinic tradition and so this practice was not novum. The Midrash Tehillim (Hebrew: תהלים מדרש (or Midrash to Psalms (a haggadic midrash – a homiletic and non-legalistic exegetical text, and known since the 11th century but incorporating earlier opinion) reveals that the Rabbinic community accepted that some psalms contained messianic prophecy, and that this can be seen as true even in the 1st Century. In debates with the Pharisees, Jesus often argued from a shared understanding of the Messianic Psalms – for an example see Matthew 22:41-46. The use of the word ‘virgin’ owes itself to a Greek translation of the Hebrew, known as the Septuagint (LXX) which was translated between 300 and 200 BC. The Hebrew word ‘almah’ means a young maiden of marriageable age, who by definition would be a virgin (maiden). The translators of the Jewish Greek translation use ‘parthenos,’ the Greek word for ‘virgin’, as the best replacement. The critics of the virgin birth doctrine suggest that if Isaiah wanted to mean ‘virgin’ he would have used ‘bethulah’ which they argue means ‘virgin’. However ‘bethulah’ can refer to a married woman as in Joel 1:8, Jeremiah 18:13; Jeremiah 31:4, and Jeremiah 31:21. Nowhere in the Bible or elsewhere does ‘almah’ mean anything but a virgin. If Isaiah had used ‘bethulah’ the critics would cite the Joel and Jeremiah texts to demonstrate that ‘bethulah’ does not mean ‘virgin’! In the historic event, the young maiden cited may have been the recently betrothed maiden of either the prophet or the king, but well-known to both.

Matthew 1:18-25 (ESV) - The Birth of Jesus Christ

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfil what the Lord

had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

COMMENT: The familiar stories of Jesus’ birth read more like rabbinical midrashim than poetry. A midrash was a story told by the rabbis to explain the meaning of scripture. The fact that Matthew quoted the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint translation made in circa 300 BC onward) three times in his birth narratives indicates that he may well have had this literary form in mind as he began his very Jewish gospel. When Matthew wrote in the 80s AD for second generation Christians, Jews who believed that Jesus was the Messiah had been expelled from the synagogues by the dominant Pharisees. The hostility between Jews and Christians so clearly expressed in Acts and the Paul’s letters had reached into every community where Jewish synagogues existed. As well as confessing the Christian faith in Jesus as Messiah, Matthew may well have had a secondary purpose in telling his story: to counter the defamatory rumour that Jesus’ had been conceived out of wedlock. In a much simpler way than Luke, Matthew described the spiritual conception of Mary’s child (verse 20). The account portrays Joseph as a devout and sensitive man. His decision to divorce Mary had sincere intent, but it also gives force to the controversy concerning the nature of Mary conception. Joseph believed that she had conceived in an inappropriate relationship. The dream sequence in verses 20-21 and 24-25 is a Hebrew literary account to describe divine intervention preventing Joseph from carrying out his plan contrary to the purposes of God.

Short Preface And now we give you thanks because you sent him to redeem us from sin and death and to make us inheritors of everlasting life; that when he shall come again in power and great triumph to judge the world, we may with joy behold his appearing, and in confidence may stand before him.

Post Communion Heavenly Father, who chose the Blessed Virgin Mary to be the mother of the promised saviour: fill us your servants with your grace, that in all things we may embrace your holy will and with her rejoice in your salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Blessing: Christ the Sun of Righteousness shine upon you, scatter the darkness from before your path, and make you ready to meet him when he comes in glory; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you, and remain with you always. **Amen.**



Benefice Prayer Requests:

Please pray for the sick, those in hospital, and those recovering from illness or surgery: Pat Kenwick, June Kellaway, Ann Lambert, Fay Lord, Reg Hanbury, Geoff Harris, Katie, Lisa Bailey, Roger Gray, Bernard, Martin, Marion Traynor...

Please pray for all who find this time of year difficult.

What's going on around the Benefice!

Food Bank: Thank you for continuing to support the Food Bank. Christmassy items are welcome but nothing containing alcohol please.



Christmas Eve

3.30pm Christingle at Cheselbourne

5.00pm Christingle at Hilton

5.30pm Christingle at Piddletrenthide

7.00pm carols at the Brace of Pheasants, Plush

11.30pm Midnight Mass at Hilton

11.30pm Midnight Mass at Piddlehinton

Christmas Day

9.30am Valley Christmas Eucharist at Alton Pancras

10.30am Joint Christmas Eucharist at Cheselbourne

11.00am Lessons and Carols at Melcombe Horsey

Sunday 29th December - 5th Sunday Benefice Service

**11.00am Songs of Praise at Nina's Barn Rose Hill Farm
(Communion by ext. available after the service.)**

**Followed by Fish & Chip Lunch available to buy –
cooked by The Frying Squad owner Andy and Fr. Roger!**

Dates for your Diary

Stepping Stones Home Group, Tuesday 7th January 2020

Tiddlers 0-3's at PVS, Tuesday 7th January 2020

Police Station Chaplaincy Visits by Fr. Roger 15th January 2020

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