

Pick & Mix Carols  
British Legion Standard/Pennant Dedication  
19/12/21 11am St John's

Advent liturgy – week 4

StF215 See amid the winter's snow (v1, v2, v5)

Prayer:

Thank you, Father, for giving us your Son, Jesus.

With the shepherds we stand in awe.

With the wise men we bring our worship.

With Joseph we listen for your guiding word.

With Mary we treasure all our experiences of you.

And all to your praise and glory.

Forgive us when we forget all about you,

When we fail to put you at the centre of our lives.

Forgive us and help us to live lives worthy of you. Amen

This afternoon we have our Carols by Candlelight carol service when we will sing at least five or six well known Christmas carols. This year, unlike last, we will be able to sing, albeit from behind our masks and without blasting them out as we might want to. But we will enjoy them anyway. Everyone is encouraged to come back later for that special service, often the highlight of our Christmas celebrations here at St John's.

This morning we are going to sing some favourite carols but I've tried to make sure they are not ones we will sing this afternoon or on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.

This morning is also special because we are going to dedicate the British Legion standard. Yes, I know we did that a few years ago but we need to do it again because it is 100 years since the British Legion was established, shortly after the first world war ended. We will dedicate the Standard after our next carol.

StF214 Once in royal David's city

*During the singing of a hymn, the Standard Bearer will come forward to the foot of the chancel steps with the Standard.*

Brothers and sisters, we meet together in the presence of God to take part in the dedication of the Standard of the Llandudno branch of The Royal British Legion, 100 years after it was established; and to witness thereby to the noble ideals and great purposes, inspired by God, which animate the members of the Legion – such purposes being:

- the support of those of our number who are still serving in our military forces, and those who have served,
- the care of the widows, orphans and other dependants of those who served,
- the fostering of brotherly love and comradeship amongst all its members,
- the remembrance of the ideals for which we served and of our fellow citizens who have laid down their lives for us,
- and also the preservation of true loyalty and devotion to our Queen and country at all times, and in all places.

To this end I call upon the members of the Legion and the whole congregation here present to offer humble prayer to Almighty God, that he will bless this Standard now dedicated to his glory, and that he will inspire the members of the Legion to carry out with a single heart and devoted purpose the high aims for which they are joined in fellowship.

Clergy: Our help is in the name of the Lord.

People: **Who has made heaven and earth.**

Clergy: The Lord be with you.

People: **And also with you.**

*The Standard Bearer, with the Standard at the “Slope”, will come forward alone and the Standard being brought to the “Order” kneel on the right knee. The escorts will remain at the chancel steps.*

O Lord of our ancestors, who led your people through countless sufferings and times of trouble, keep us, we pray, ever mindful of your mercy. Pour your blessings upon the people over whom your servant, Queen Elizabeth, our Sovereign, is ruler. Unite us in the bond of kinship and in the service of our country, that the offering of our life’s work may be acceptable to you.

Grant, we pray, Almighty God, that all we who honour the memory of our brothers and sisters loyal sacrifice may be filled with the spirit of their love and courage and, forgetting all selfish and unworthy aims, may live

together to the glory of your name and in the service of one another.  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*The clergy shall unfurl the Standard, tie the pennant to it, lay her hands upon it and say:*

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we dedicate and set apart this Standard that it may be a sign of our duty towards our Queen and country in the sight of God, and a symbol of the service the Royal British Legion is called upon to render.

*The Standard Bearer will then stand.*

We give you thanks most merciful Father, that you have put it into the hearts of these your servants to join together in the fellowship of the Royal British Legion in this place and to desire to carry out its aims and purposes. Let your Fatherly love be over them, let your Holy Spirit be with them and so guide their meetings that they may set forth your glory, and help forward all the works to which they have given themselves, so that by their witness and their labours the spirit of love and comradeship among those who have served by advanced, and loyalty and devotion to Queen and country may be established here on a sure foundation, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Exhortation:

They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old,  
Age shall not weary them, not the years condemn.  
At the going down of the sun, and in the morning  
We will remember them.

**Response: We will remember them.**

*Last post, two minutes silence, reveille.*

Clergy: May the souls of the faithful departed rest in peace.

**Response: And rise in glory.**

*Standard returns down aisle to back of church.*

Carol – The Holly and the Ivy

Last week we heard Mary's account of the events leading up to the birth of Jesus. Today we hear Joseph's story:

Matthew 1:18-25

The British Legion standard has been carefully designed and its colours have special meaning. The union flag in the top left hand corner is symbolic of the unity and fidelity to the crown, community and nation. The main colour, royal blue, symbolises fidelity, and the gold band recalls all those who have died in the service of our country and reminds those who remain that we must always be true to the ideals of service not self.

Lots of things are signs with symbolic meaning. Those of us who were here last week will remember how I explained the symbolism of water and light in the baptism liturgy.

And how about the colours of Christmas?

What about the greenery with which homes are traditionally decorated and to which the last carol we sang refers? This traditional English carol is curious for the prominence the title gives to two plants which have no place in the Christmas story. And indeed one of those plants - the ivy - is scarcely even mentioned in the lyrics of the song. So why a carol about *holly*, and why is *ivy* even included in the title? Before Christianity, holly and ivy had long established roles in pagan rituals, and particularly in winter solstice festivities, perhaps because their evergreen leaves had symbolised continuity and the promise of life returning. They were assimilated into Christian ceremonies and Christian music, which brings us to the carol '*The Holly and the Ivy*'. The carol clearly uses holly as a metaphor for aspects of the Christmas story and the subsequent life of Christ. In the song, the white of the flower is compared to Christ's purity, the red of the berry to Christ's blood, and the prickly leaves to the 'Crown of Thorns'. Its author is unknown.

And what colour do we almost always see Mary in? Blue was a special colour even in Old Testament times. It signified the commitment of the Israelites to be obedient to God. Mary herself, in her willingness to become the mother of Jesus, showed herself to be obedient to God's will. But there is another meaning in Mary's blue. Blue is the colour of the sky, transcendence, mystery and the divine. Within her body, Mary carried divinity, the Son of God.

By contrast, Jesus is often shown in red in traditional art. Red is the colour of the earth. It shows his humanity, his willingness to become one of us. Jesus, God yes, but God incarnate, a human just like us. And, of

course, red is the colour of blood, the blood of Jesus shed on the cross as he gave his life to save us. The ultimate example of service not self.

We give thanks for the obedience of Mary, the self-giving and sacrifice of Jesus and the love of God shown to us in him.

Let us pray.

Lord God,

When we fail to see the signs of your purpose, forgive us.

When we fail to see signs of your presence, forgive us.

For you are everywhere. There is nowhere we can flee from your presence

And you seek to communicate with us all the time, if only we had the sense to recognise you,

If we only looked and listened, if only we focused our attention, we would experience you everywhere.

Help us to find you this Christmastime.

Help us to see the signs of your Spirit,

To see the colours and sounds and scents of your presence all around.

May we learn how to feel your touch on our lives,

And may we respond with joy and thanksgiving,

For you are the source and sustainer of all life,

And only in unity with you are we complete. Amen.

Lord's prayer

Offering - at back.

Our last carol is probably one of the oldest still around. It is also famous because it is the only carol to be mentioned by name in Charles Dicken's "A Christmas Carol". Before we sing it I need to point out that the meaning of a few words have changed over the years – "God rest you merry, gentlemen" is nothing to do with drunken men needing to have a sit down. The comma comes after merry not after you and it actually means "God keep you strong, everyone".

HP103 God rest you merry gentlemen

Blessing