

# Parish of Central Exeter

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday before Lent

7<sup>th</sup> February 2021

## The Playfulness of God

Welcome everyone.

*Our reflections this morning are by Sheila and Chris, with the intercessions provided by Sarah. Many thanks to you both.*



*The next two Sundays are regarded in the C of E as Sundays in Ordinary Time, before we enter the Season of Lent: a different colour service book if we were in church. Is any time ordinary with God?*

### Call to Worship

i would prefer  
to be left  
leaning against the wall,  
shuffling my two left feet,  
watching the world  
twirl by;  
but you take me by the hand  
to teach me  
the dance steps  
of grace;

when i walk near  
the piano,  
it shudders,  
hoping  
i will not sit down;  
but you take my fingers  
and place them on the keys,  
whispering,  
"play, play with joy, play!"

even with  
the biggest bucket,  
i can't carry a tune;

but you push me  
out onto the stage,  
introducing me as  
the new soloist  
in the Good News Choir.

i will celebrate your joy,  
sing your hope,  
play your love,  
leaping and whirling  
in your grace  
forever!

*(Thom M. Shuman. Posted on Prayers4Today)*

### **Gathering Hymn**

For the Beauty of the Earth. Music by John Rutter, sung here by the King's College Choir, Cambridge. Words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xlBkpAm3fhw>

### **Confession** (silence)

We are most definitely awake,  
but we are not wide-eyed wonder awake ...  
we are not child-like take-it-all-in awake ...  
we are not ready-for-what-is-coming awake.

No.

We are fearful and stressed awake ...  
we are tearful and mourning awake ...  
we are fuelled-by-caffeine awake ...  
we are dread-the-new-day awake.

Awaken in us a new hope.

Help us to see the signs of a new season,  
the tender shoots of a brighter vision,  
the promised land of fulfilled promises,  
trusting in your Word to guide us  
even when all else fails.

*(From Revgalsblogpals)*



## Collect for the second Sunday before Lent

Almighty God,  
you have created the heavens and the earth  
and made us in your own image:  
teach us to discern your hand in all your works  
and your likeness in all your children;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who with you and the Holy Spirit reigns supreme over all things,  
now and for ever.

## Worship song

'Thou whose almighty word' from Christ Church, Bath. Words are on the screen.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vaXV\\_evnGVM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vaXV_evnGVM)

## Readings

### Proverbs 8:1, 22-31 The Gifts of Wisdom

Does not wisdom call,  
and does not understanding raise her voice?  
<sup>22</sup> "The Lord created me at the beginning of his work,  
the first of his acts of long ago.  
<sup>23</sup> Ages ago I was set up,  
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.  
<sup>24</sup> When there were no depths I was brought forth,  
when there were no springs abounding with water.  
<sup>25</sup> Before the mountains had been shaped,  
before the hills, I was brought forth—  
<sup>26</sup> when he had not yet made earth and fields,  
or the world's first bits of soil.  
<sup>27</sup> When he established the heavens, I was there,  
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,  
<sup>28</sup> when he made firm the skies above,  
when he established the fountains of the deep,  
<sup>29</sup> when he assigned to the sea its limit,  
so that the waters might not transgress his command,  
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,  
<sup>30</sup> then I was beside him, like a master worker;  
and I was daily his delight,  
rejoicing before him always,  
<sup>31</sup> rejoicing in his inhabited world  
and delighting in the human race." NRSV © 1989

**Psalm 104:24-35**

<sup>24-30</sup> What a wildly wonderful world, God!  
You made it all, with Wisdom at your side,  
made earth overflow with your wonderful creations.  
Oh, look—the deep, wide sea,  
brimming with fish past counting,  
sardines and sharks and salmon.  
Ships plough those waters,  
and Leviathan, your pet dragon, romps in them.  
All the creatures look expectantly to you  
to give them their meals on time.  
You come, and they gather around;  
you open your hand and they eat from it.  
If you turned your back,  
they'd die in a minute—  
Take back your Spirit and they die,  
revert to original mud;  
Send out your Spirit and they spring to life—  
the whole countryside in bloom and blossom.



<sup>31-32</sup> The glory of God—let it last forever!  
Let God enjoy his creation!  
He takes one look at earth and triggers an earthquake,  
points a finger at the mountains, and volcanoes erupt.

<sup>33-35</sup> Oh, let me sing to God all my life long,  
sing hymns to my God as long as I live!  
Oh, let my song please him;  
I'm so pleased to be singing to God.  
But clear the ground of sinners—  
no more godless men and women!

O my soul, bless God!

*(The Message (MSG))*

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“Playfulness, dear friends, is what manifests love. Love is not manifested through serious survivability, seriousness, stability. Love, the essence of love, manifests itself through playfulness.”

— René Gaudette

## Reflection

### Proverbs and the Playfulness of God

I first read Chris Bryan's sermon for today, with the heading 'Proverbs and the Playfulness of God', just a week after hearing a CMS webinar about Play. This was from a series of four in January under the title *Just Imagine*, with the aim of encouraging ideas for mission and church life. One idea suggested was to combine unrelated things in an amusing way (according to the webinar, Einstein called it combinatory play). Putting liturgy and dessert together leads to 'Sharing the peach' or 'Go in peace to love and serve roulade', or from Richard 'General Confection', and 'Nicecream Creed', while Nigel replied with the 'Violetta' for Psalm 95 and more. Its reminiscent of Radio 4's *I'm sorry I haven't a clue*. Another idea was to use metaphor to spark ideas or the phrase 'what if'. In the chat function one contributor suggested that 'creation is God's what if!'

In his sermon Chris encourages us to think about the 'image of Divine Wisdom in the act of creation playing joyfully and even, we might even say (given the language) frivolously and dizzily before God'. He reminds us of the spectacular variety of creatures and that the appearance of the sea monster 'Leviathan' in Psalm 104 v27 suggests that 'God created it to *have fun!*'. He comments that children are much better than adults at playing and that perhaps Jesus was thinking about that aspect of childhood when he said that "whoever will not receive the Kingdom of God as a child, shall by no means enter it!" (Mark 10:15). I expect Chris would agree with a comment that appeared in the chat function during the webinar, when someone paraphrased a certain quote as: 'Where there is an absence of God, there is an absence of play' (*Dangerous Wonder* by M Yaconelli p70).

I should like to recall two more comments that appeared from others during the webinar, as both are relevant to the life of our parish. The first emphasised the importance of asking questions, which is something Central Parish excels in. The commentator then wrote 'Wondering... like in Godly Play: "I wonder..."'. Many years ago, I attended a retreat which introduced Godly Play, a way of telling biblical stories in a slow form with figures on a stage, and many opportunities to stop and 'wonder' about what is happening, how the characters are feeling, or what may happen next. Though designed for children it can also enable us adults to reengage with the bible and our faith in a fresh way.

The other comment was simply about 'telling stories and inviting more stories' from people. When we open-up and share our story of faith we can learn from each other and grow in our understanding of the faith. This is where the Diocesan Lent Course 'These are our stories' comes in. It includes five stories from Devon people telling their experience of life during the pandemic as a way into reflecting on our own stories from the past year and how this relates to our faith.

Whether you join a Lent group or not I hope that we can use the coming weeks not only to look back and learn from the past year but also look forward, imagine, and be playful, as we think about our future as individuals and members of God's church in central Exeter.

**One of Father Arlotto's Tricks** c.1640 *Galleria Palatina (Palazzo Pitti), Florence*



Arlotto Mainardi was a fourteenth-century parish priest who was close to the Medici, especially at their country seat at Careggi. After he died, a friend published a collection of his shrewd practical jokes and words of wisdom. The pleasure of seeing the foolish outwitted was still alive and well in seventeenth-century Florence.

The canvas, also known as *The trick of the wine*, is one of the most famous works by Il Volterranno, the nickname of Baldassarre Franceschini, one of the most skilled and original artists of seventeenth century Florence.

The episode is set in Florence, a short distance away from Villa della Mula (visible in the background). In the scene, at a meal with other young priests Arlotto is invited by the host to go to the cellar to tap wine from the cask. Resentful of being chosen to tackle the stairs rather than the younger men, the practical joker decides to take his revenge. The scene captures the climax of the good-natured joke. Arlotto returns to the table with a full carafe of wine and claims to have forgotten to close the tap on the keg, provoking the agitated reaction of the host who can be seen leaping from his chair to run down to repair the damage while his companions look on in astonishment and amusement.

## Prayer

Dour-faced  
in the presence  
of stunning sunsets;

stricken with chronic severity  
while surrounded  
by gurgling babies;

frozen-souled when touched  
by the warmth of  
grace;

if we are made in your image,  
it's no wonder people think of you  
as a grouchy old geezer,  
God of Joy.

So, breathe on us . . .

fill our souls with:  
laughter which chases away  
the long faces;  
chuckles which wipe frowns  
off our brows;  
great guffaws  
which shatter hardened hearts;

fill us,  
Breath of side-splitting shrieks,

so we can celebrate  
the last laugh on  
death.

*(Thom M. Shuman. Posted on Prayers4Today.)*



## Affirmation of Faith

We believe in God, who made us in His image.  
We live, we love, we laugh, because we are like Him.  
We believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Lord and Saviour.  
He had the last laugh on the devil when He rose from the dead.  
We believe in the Holy Spirit, coequal and coeternal with the Father and the Son.  
Our counsellor, our guide, our motivator - He is our joy!  
*(Rev. Robert M. Thompson)*

We believe transformation is a gift from God  
which is never complete  
and longs to be set free in us.

## **Intercessions**

We pray today for wisdom, for our leaders and ourselves, as we continue to cope with the pandemic.

Lord in your Mercy hear our prayer

We pray for everyone working in the hospitals - doctors, nurses and other staff as they become increasingly overburdened and tired. Help them to keep going until the worst of the crisis is over. We give you thanks today especially for the life of Captain Tom and the impact he has had during the pandemic.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer

We pray for the sick and the dying, for those living on the edge, the poor, the lonely and the alienated. May your presence be known in refugee camps and refuges and in all places where justice is denied.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer

Finally we thank you for our wonderful world and ask forgiveness that we have damaged it in mindless and heartless ways. We pray that as we recover from the pandemic we may change the way we live and enable the world to heal;

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ

## **The Peace**

If alone, smile and hug yourself (God does). If otherwise, share the Peace as appropriate.

## **A short Spiritual Communion**

The Book of Common Prayer reminds us that if we offer ourselves in penitence and faith, giving thanks for the redemption won by Christ crucified, we may truly 'eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ', even when we cannot receive the sacrament physically in ourselves.

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

O God,

help me to trust you,

help me to know that you are with me,



help me to believe that nothing  
can separate me from your love  
revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **An offertory prayer**

*We may not be in church, but we can still offer ourselves and our talents to God.*

Blessed are you, God and creator of the universe,  
as we offer you our activities, thanksgivings and our life.  
We present ourselves, and our world, as we are and as you can make us,  
for everything in heaven and on earth is yours,  
and of your own do we give you. Blessed be God for ever.

*As we prepare for communion you might like to listen to Nigel and St David's Choir singing  
'Wait for the Lord.'*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M89oWjtOk&feature=youtu.be>



*Because there is no Breaking and Sharing we can  
have only Spiritual Communion with Christ. I'm  
sure you can find a way to use a few minutes of  
silence or conversation to enjoy this, and make it  
a sacramental moment.*

*Giving thanks for Christ's death and resurrection  
you may wish to say*

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ,  
for all the benefits you have given me,  
for all the pains and insults you have borne for me.  
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,  
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.  
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,  
may I know you more clearly,  
love you more dearly,  
and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.

### **Post Communion Collect**

Go before us, Lord, in all we do  
with your most gracious favour,  
and guide us with your continual help,  
that in all our works  
begun, continued and ended in you,

we may glorify your holy name,  
and finally by your mercy receive everlasting life;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### **Commission & Benediction**

You call us to be  
your light  
in the darkness,  
your voice  
in the wilderness,  
your hope  
for the hopeless.

You give us  
strength  
in our weakness,  
peace  
and gentleness,  
words  
and boldness,  
to proclaim  
more of you  
and of us, less.

*(by John Birch, and posted on Faith and Worship.)*

May the blessing of God fall on our community,  
May it be a safe place,  
full of understanding and acceptance,  
where you can be as you are,  
without the need of any mask  
or pretense or image.

**Amen.**

*(posted on Third Space. <http://third-space.org.uk/>)*

### **Closing Music**

‘Before the world began.’ This is a hymn by John Bell through the Iona Community. Played and sung here at St David’s church, Edmonton, Canada. Words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6h2n8kqmiQ>

*Scroll down for Coffee Break*

# Coffee Break

## The yaks are coming!

I think you all know that we have a crack in the ceiling at St Stephen's which needs urgent repair. Our parish architect has drawn up a specification which I had to send out to the PCC members for approval before it could be sent to the Archdeacon for his blessing. (Yes the Church of England does move in a mysterious way!).

Richard had clearly read the specification very carefully and noted that the rendering to the replacement ceiling area had to include a specified quantity of yak hair. His subsequent musings over this led to an outpouring of emails from a number of PCC members. These included the following poems all generated the same day from Helen and Richard:

There was once a Yak from Elsewhere  
Whose heart was as good as her hair  
And what is my proof?  
Well, told of our roof  
She sent us hair for the repair.

My name is Arthur the Yak,  
and I'd like to have my hair back:  
it keeps out the wet  
where I live in Tibet,  
much more than this old plastic mac.

Don't be such a grumpy old fella,  
dear Arthur – just buy an umbrella!  
So what if you're bald –  
We'll all be appalled  
If our ceiling ends up in the cellar.

Okay, I'm a grumpy old yak,  
But I don't think I've yet lost the knack  
Of pulling my weight  
(Which is pretty great):  
So no need to send my hair back.

Dear Arthur, I take it all back:  
You're a wonderful, generous Yak!  
We'll all say a prayer  
Of thanks for your hair  
– and acknowledge your gift with a plaque.

The Great Yak Mother also invited you, when restrictions allow, to find a yak and hug it. Viv has considered the implications of this and suggested a virtual hug is probably to be recommended. I think she's right! Thank you to all who got involved!



*Who fancies giving me a hair-cut?*

# Night Prayer

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday before Lent  
7<sup>th</sup> February 2021

## Life-light blazing in the Darkness



### Preparation

Creator God  
swirling, formless one,  
hovering over creation and  
bringing new things to life  
you speak new worlds into being with language that creates and liberates

### Eternal God

living, limitless one  
inhabiting the vast universe with the rich complexity of your being  
you reveal yourself to your creatures and invite us to know you

### Friendly God

nurturing, welcoming one  
opening yourself wide to the joy and pain of loving your people  
you place us in communities and families that echo your true nature

*(pause to think about the language we instinctively use for God)*

*(posted on the Fresh Worship website of Grace Church, an alternative congregation in London, <http://www.freshworship.org/>)*

### Hymn

'God moves in a mysterious way.' Words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9MgbVoyPWT0>

### Confession

God of shadows and light,  
God of hiddenness and revelation,  
**Forgive us when we miss you—**  
when we overlook the love,  
**when we turn our backs on the hope,**

when we gaze too intently at ourselves  
**ignoring the blessed others that surround us.**  
Forgive us, God, and in your infinite grace  
**shine your holy light**  
*or perhaps sit with us in the dark.*

**Reading John 1:1-5, 14-18**

<sup>1-2</sup> The Word was first,  
the Word present to God,  
God present to the Word.  
The Word was God,  
in readiness for God from day one.  
<sup>3-5</sup> Everything was created through him;  
nothing—not one thing!—  
came into being without him.  
What came into existence was Life,  
and the Life was Light to live by.  
The Life-Light blazed out of the darkness;  
the darkness couldn't put it out.  
<sup>14</sup> The Word became flesh and blood,  
and moved into the neighbourhood.  
We saw the glory with our own eyes,  
the one-of-a-kind glory,  
like Father, like Son,  
Generous inside and out,  
true from start to finish.

<sup>15</sup> John pointed him out and called, "This is the One! The One I told you was coming after me but in fact was ahead of me. He has always been ahead of me, has always had the first word."

<sup>16-18</sup> We all live off his generous abundance,  
gift after gift after gift.  
We got the basics from Moses,  
and then this exuberant giving and receiving,  
This endless knowing and understanding—  
all this came through Jesus, the Messiah.  
No one has ever seen God,  
not so much as a glimpse.  
This one-of-a-kind God-Expression,  
who exists at the very heart of the Father,  
has made him plain as day.

*(The Message (MSG) Copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson)*

## Reflection

Reading a familiar passage in an unfamiliar version can provoke a variety of responses from the 'very favourable' for some, to 'absolutely awful' for others. This is true for me when reading The Message translation of these opening verses of John's gospel. I like the idea of using the word 'present' rather than 'with' in verse 1, of 'the Life was the Light to live by' in verse 4, the description of 'the Life-Light blazed out of the darkness' in verse 5. I am less keen on 'This one-of-a-kind God-Expression' instead of 'It is God the only Son' in verse 18.

The writer is introducing important concepts many of which he develops through the gospel – life, light, glory, witness. He begins though before the beginning of time with the idea that the Word was first – in the beginning – before anything else was made. This is the mystery of the nature of God. That word, reason, logic was there with God and was God. This word was involved in creation in a similar way to the divine wisdom we read about in this morning's Proverbs passage. The mystery both deepens and yet becomes real in a new way with the incarnation – the divine becoming human, 'the Word became flesh and blood.'

In the Exodus, the founding story of the People of Israel, Yahweh let his glory dwell in the tent of the tabernacle. Now the writer says this glory of God has 'moved into the neighbourhood', has come into our time and space, into Palestine under Roman occupation when Pontius Pilate was the governor and Annas and Caiaphas were high priests. This is the truth the writer is sharing with us as he introduces us to the person of Jesus. This is the truth for us to share with those around us. To close, the following is a quote from Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons in the second century.

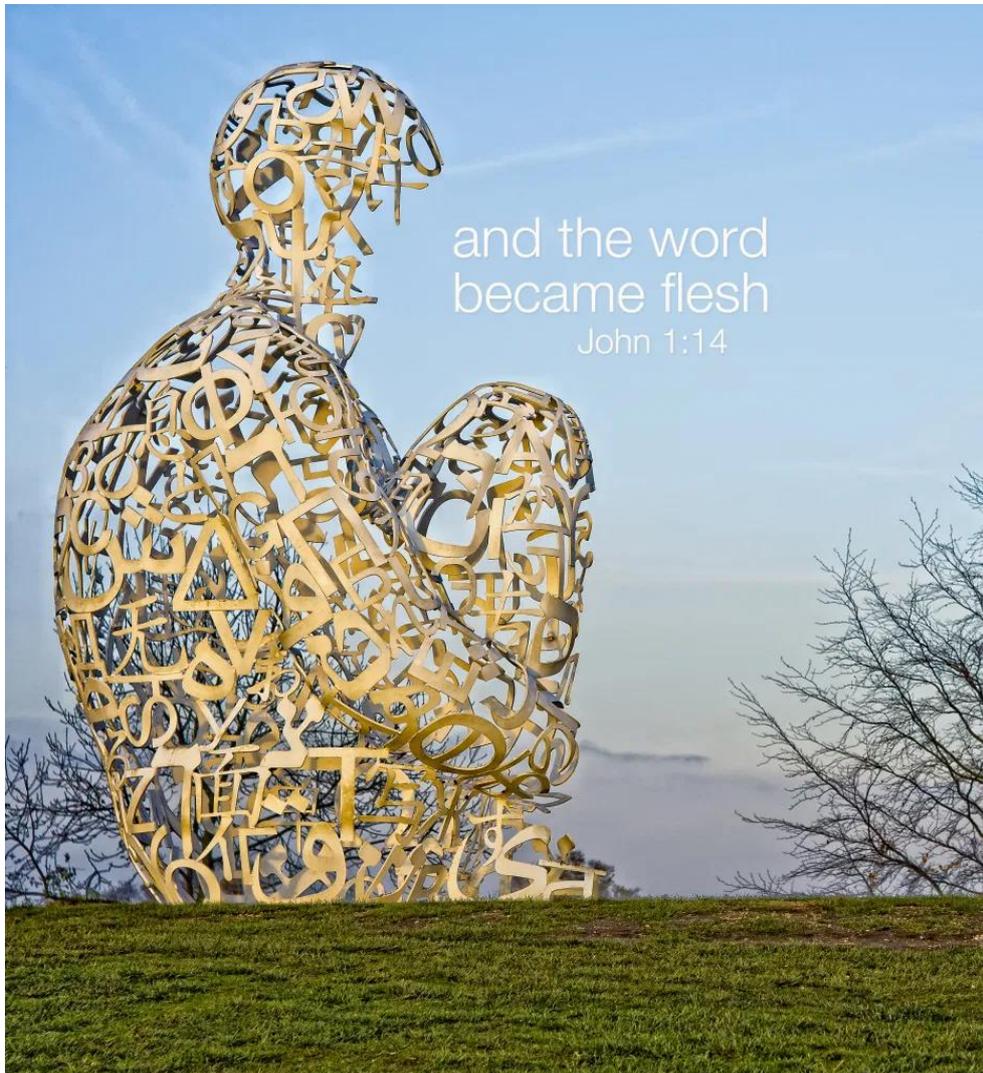
'And the Word became flesh  
and dwelt among us.  
God's Word became human  
to accustom human beings  
to receiving God.  
God had begun  
to live with the human race.'

## We pray

Holy God  
We thank you for the ways in which  
we have known and understood you;  
We thank you for the metaphors  
that have opened our eyes to more of who you are;  
We thank you for the language that has brought  
the transcendent, timeless, mysterious God within our grasp.

Holy God  
We are hungry for more of you  
We ask you to reveal more of yourself to us  
to take us beyond the confines of familiar habits  
to free us from the restrictions and distortions of our language

to expand our understanding of you  
so that we can love you whole heartedly  
we can communicate you faithfully  
and we can reflect your full image to a world that needs you  
Amen.



*The Word became Flesh by David Perry*

### **Closing Prayer**

Go now. Listen for the voice of the Lord  
and follow wherever it leads.  
Do not be dominated by anything.  
Allow no room within yourselves for deceit,  
but offer yourselves as a temple for the Holy Spirit.

And may God be with you and speak through you;  
May Christ Jesus be one with you and raise you to life;  
And may the Holy Spirit dwell within you and make you holy.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,  
In the name of Christ. Amen.

*(Nathan Nettleton <http://www.laughingbird.net/>)*

### **Blessing**

The love of the faithful Creator  
The peace of the wounded Healer  
The joy of the challenging Spirit  
The hope of the three in One  
Surround and encourage you  
Today, tonight and for ever.

*(Kathy Galloway)*

### **Closing music**

Glory to thee, my God, this night, sung as a round to the well-known tune of Thomas Tallis  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bYJ8SneHfT4>

### **Thanks**

*Thanks to everyone who has participated, especially to Chris for his writing, Sheila for the two reflections, Sarah for the intercessions, Nigel and Richard for the communion music. Material taken or adapted from other websites has an attribution made where possible.*

