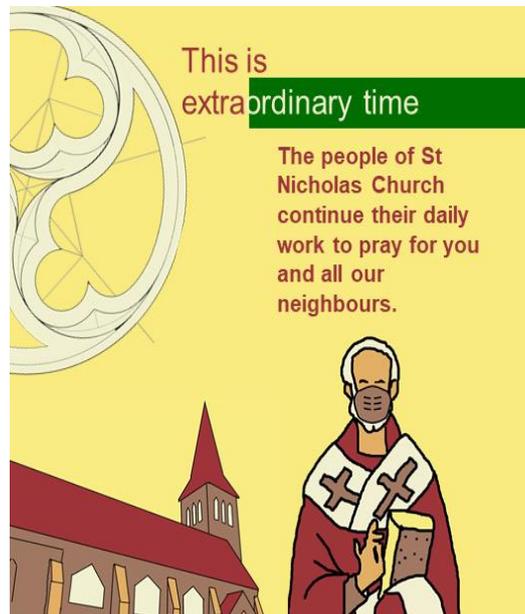


**Worship at St. Nicholas, Sutton**  
**for 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday before Advent, *Remembrance Sunday* on 8 November 2020**  
**Collect, hymns, readings & sermon**



Please join me for our service at 10.30am today (or at another convenient time) by following the Order of Service and singing in your own home.  
I will be thinking of you all and praying for you at The Rectory at the same time and longing for our future reunion in Church.

*Frances*

Revd Frances Arnold, Priest-in-Charge

**Collect** (prayer of the week)

Almighty Father,  
whose will is to restore all things  
in your beloved Son, the King of all:  
govern the hearts and minds of those in authority,  
and bring the families of the nations,  
divided and torn apart by the ravages of sin,  
to be subject to his just and gentle rule;  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

**Hymns**

Opening *Praise, my soul, the king of heaven*

Gradual *All people that on earth do dwell*

## Readings

### **Wisdom of Solomon 6.12-20**

#### *Description of Wisdom*

<sup>12</sup> Wisdom is radiant and unfading,  
and she is easily discerned by those who love her,  
and is found by those who seek her.  
<sup>13</sup> She hastens to make herself known to those who desire her.  
<sup>14</sup> One who rises early to seek her will have no difficulty,  
for she will be found sitting at the gate.  
<sup>15</sup> To fix one's thought on her is perfect understanding,  
and one who is vigilant on her account will soon be free from care,  
<sup>16</sup> because she goes about seeking those worthy of her,  
and she graciously appears to them in their paths,  
and meets them in every thought.

<sup>17</sup> The beginning of wisdom is the most sincere desire for instruction,  
and concern for instruction is love of her,  
<sup>18</sup> and love of her is the keeping of her laws,  
and giving heed to her laws is assurance of immortality,  
<sup>19</sup> and immortality brings one near to God;  
<sup>20</sup> so the desire for wisdom leads to a kingdom.

### **1 Thessalonians 4.13-18**

#### *The Coming of the Lord*

13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. <sup>14</sup>For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. <sup>15</sup>For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. <sup>16</sup>For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup>Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord for ever.  
<sup>18</sup>Therefore encourage one another with these words.

### **Matthew 25.1-13**

#### *The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids*

<sup>25</sup>Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. <sup>2</sup>Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. <sup>3</sup>When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; <sup>4</sup>but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. <sup>5</sup>As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. <sup>6</sup>But at midnight there was a shout, "Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him."

<sup>7</sup>Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. <sup>8</sup>The foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." <sup>9</sup>But the wise replied, "No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves." <sup>10</sup>And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. <sup>11</sup>Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, "Lord, lord, open to us." <sup>12</sup>But he replied, "Truly I tell you, I do not know you." <sup>13</sup>Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

## **Sermon**

The guests were seated. The organist was playing. The bridegroom and best man were ready. The photographer was waiting. The flowers had been beautifully arranged. The choir had practised the anthem. And the bride was nowhere to be seen! I went out of the church and up the path to the gate. Then I saw her. She was in a double decker bus struggling to get down the main street. She decided to walk, followed by the bridesmaids. They made their way on foot to great excitement. And we began the service twenty minutes late.

Every culture has its own way of celebrating a wedding - and its own risks of things going wrong. In the modern West people don't usually get married in the middle of the night. But in the Middle East there are still some places where the customs at a wedding are similar to the ones described in this parable. There are torchlight processions late in the evening and the bridegroom is quite likely to be delayed at an earlier venue before he arrives for the banquet itself, to be greeted at last by the bridesmaids.

Having said that, the parable isn't really about weddings or even about the wise bridesmaids sharing their oil with the foolish ones, which is what we might have expected in a parable. The situation is too serious for mere niceness; and the parable is not about sharing, it is about waiting and watchfulness, about being prepared.

The story of the ten bridesmaids is rooted in the Jewish tradition of contrasting wisdom and folly – being sensible or being foolish. In the Hebrew Scriptures (Proverbs) Wisdom and Folly appear as two young women: in this story there are five wise and five foolish girls and we are invited to decide which we'd rather be. Wisdom in this case means being ready with the oil for the lamp, and folly means not thinking about it until it's too late.

Being ready with the oil simply means being ready for the key moment. Our first reading says that Wisdom herself is always up early, washed and dressed and sitting at the gate. What matters is being ready; being prepared; being wise, thinking ahead, realising that a crisis is coming sooner or later and that if you don't make preparations now, and keep them in good shape in the meantime, you'll wish you had.

How do we, as nations, prepare ourselves for the very end of time, the great and terrible day for which the world and the church still wait? This Remembrance weekend, we describe ourselves in the collect as nations divided and torn apart by the ravages of sin. We are all too aware of the complexities of world situations that lead nations into wars which rarely have clear political answers. The prophet Amos insists that there are clear ethical answers: the prosperity of nations cannot be allowed to conceal the suffering of the poor, or their oppression, behind a facade of well-being. Waiting is not an option: justice must be pursued now. Amos calls us to dare to live faithfully in, and respond to, the world and our national situation. When he says our God is coming with justice, he expects us to prepare by bringing about a more just state of affairs on earth. This will make enormous demands on us, wherever we live and wherever there is injustice.

The focus in the early church, as we heard in the letter to the Thessalonians, was not so much the festivities and the coming of the bridegroom – as how people were to manage the consequences of the delay of ‘the coming of the Lord’, of God coming with justice.

The message is clear – eternal vigilance. We need to be awake and ready for his return. **Amen**