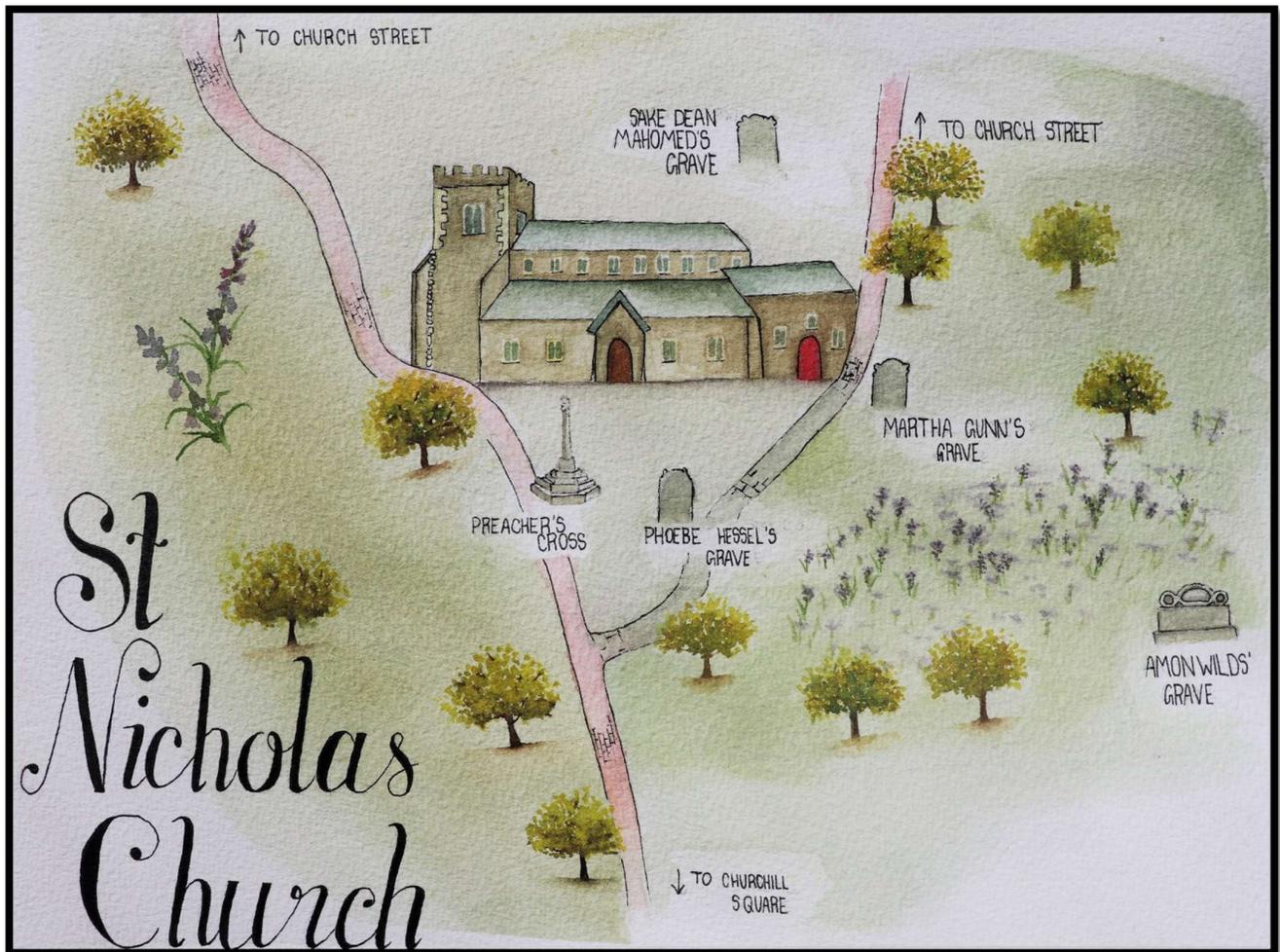


Parish Church of St Nicholas of Myra

Ancient Mother Church of Brighton



Churchyard Prayer Walk

The map illustration on the first page was painted by Imogen Ockenden. To see more of her work, visit: <https://www.instagram.com/ivockart/>. The walk begins at the south door of the church: the main entrance which faces down to Wykeham Terrace and the city centre.

God's Acre

For the place on which you are standing is holy ground.

Exodus 3.5

Churchyards are a place in-between. Behind these doors is a place where for a thousand years people have come in times of joy or sorrow, or just the quiet of the everyday, to seek something beyond themselves. Here people come to stretch out their hands, however tentatively, to God, because here God makes himself present to us. The walls that enclose this green space mark a place of approach, a change of pace from the busy centre of town and the houses that tower above us on the top of the hill. Things are different here, quieter.

You might be forgiven for thinking we were somewhere else.

As you stand at the church doors, look around you at the beauty of trees and flowers, the scattered gravestones, the city that rises below us. What do you see in this place that calls out to you? What are the places in your life where you feel close to something indescribable? Where do you feel close to God?

Prayer

Almighty God,
you have made us for yourself,
and our hearts are restless
till they find their rest in you:
pour your love into our hearts
and draw us to yourself,
and so bring us at last to your heavenly city
where we shall see you face to face.

As you face down the hill, turn to your right and follow the path until you come to the red door of the Tower. Follow the little path around the tower until you come to a chain link fence.

Incarnation

Joseph went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Luke 2.5-7

The very heart of the Christian faith is the belief that God has come to live among us, and has shared our life. In a mystery we strain to describe with earthly words, God took human nature in the womb of his mother Mary, and was born in first century Palestine. There the Jewish people lived under Roman occupation in a world scarred by violence, oppression, social division and widespread poverty. Into this world, both marred and full of such beauty, God was born as a tiny, fragile baby. In the squalor of a stable, perfect Love cries out, and is suckled with tenderness.

Consider the view. There is the chain link fence, an outhouse, the bins... no oil painting. But set opposite them is a ridge of green and flowers, where our dear departed rest beneath the birds and open sky. Where have you seen marredness, and beauty, in our world – and in yourself? In spite of the poverty we all share, can you believe that you are lovely; indeed, that you are *perfectly Loved*?

Prayer

God in Trinity,
eternal unity of perfect love:
gather the nations to be one family,
and draw us into your holy life
through the birth of Emmanuel,
our Lord Jesus Christ.

Turn and walk back to the main path. Follow it up, to the right, nearly as far as the top entrance to the churchyard. Turn left and follow the path cut through the wild flowers, stop in the middle of the flowers.

Wandering

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

Matthew 5:23

Jesus' earthly ministry consisted of many journeys; he travelled to towns and villages, to bring the news of God's love to everyone. God does not sit and wait for us to come to him, he is ever seeking us, most of all in his Son. The message that Jesus proclaims is that God's love can bring about the extraordinary in our ordinary lives. His love takes anything we have to offer and makes something more than we could have anticipated. It teaches us to do small things with great care, and to trust that what little good we can do has a part to play in spreading the message of God's kingdom. Because God is here with us, wherever we are, reaching for us.

As you stand on the pathway here, think of the things in your life that have brought you to this city, or this place. There are often times when we feel lost or confused about the way we are going. Do you have a sense of God walking alongside you and calling you to a new path, a deeper commitment, a greater hope?

Prayer

Eternal God,
whose Son went among the crowds
and brought healing with his touch:
help us to show his love,
in your Church as we gather together,
and by our lives as they are transformed
into the image of Christ our Lord.

Continue along the path, which leads you out into the open lawn. Find a space on the grass and sit.

Feeding

The day was drawing to a close, and the twelve disciples came to Jesus and said, “Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside, to lodge and get provisions; for we are here in a deserted place.” But he said to them, “You give them something to eat.” They said, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.” For there were about five thousand. And he said to his disciples, “Make them sit down in groups of about fifty each.” They did so and made them all sit down. And taking the five loaves and the two fish, Jesus looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. And all ate and were filled.

Luke 9:12-17

Jesus understands the longing of the people who follow him. His heart reaches out for them as they try to make sense of his teaching. He cannot send them away hungry. The disciples do not understand, they try to separate the spiritual from the basic needs of food and rest; but Jesus feeds those who follow him,

offering food that truly satisfies. The crowd are hungry not just for bread, but for truth and for God himself. The miracle of the loaves and fishes is a sign of God's abundance. God offers us the chance to sate our hunger, to fill us to overflowing with his grace.

Look down at the city below you. Every person you can see is looking for something different. What is it that you are hungry for? As you sit here in this calm ask God to fill your heart with the thing that you need most.

Prayer

God our creator,
you feed your children with the true manna,
the living bread from heaven:
let this holy food sustain us through our earthly
pilgrimage
until we come to that place
where hunger and thirst are no more.

Walk down through the lawn towards the main path. Follow the path down the hill until you reach the boundary with Wykeham Terrace.

Healing

Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralysed. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, ‘Do you want to be made well?’ The sick man answered him, ‘Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Stand up, take your mat and walk.’ At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.

John 5.2-9

The man had been lying sick at the gate for a long time, unable to go in or out, or reach the pool and its soothing water. Like so many of the sick in his society, he had been forced to beg for assistance, and nobody had been able to meet his needs. He longed for healing, and to be able to move forward.

Jesus encounters his complete incapacity, and addresses his need directly: Do you want to be made well? In the exchange which follows, pain, sorrow and dejection meet with love, and a command which liberates. The man rises, and walks into freedom.

Consider the 'gateway' to the churchyard. Below is the city and all its traffic; above is green, and sanctuary. You stand at the boundary. Be still: call to mind your own need of healing and release from pain, which will allow you to move forward. Leave it here, alongside the paralysed man's mat; and walk on.

Prayer

Heal us, O God, from all our afflictions
and keep us steadfast in your love;
bind up our wounds, raise us from death,
and lead us to fullness of life;
through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Go into the churchyard and take the path which leads up the hill to the right. When you reach the top, take a right and walk across the grass, down the hill, to the tomb of Amon Wilds.

Mourning

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep.

John 11.1, 17, 32-34

Jesus began to weep. Our God feels the immensity of our sorrow. He understands what it is to lose those we love. He weeps alongside us, in the agony of our grief. There has been much to grieve in these last weeks. We may have lost loved ones and livelihoods, or have been separated from our families and friends. Perhaps you have found yourself asking God why? Christianity does not allow us to jump neatly from grief to a happy ending.

Instead, Christianity proclaims that God's answer to the pain and grief of his world is his Son. In Jesus, God makes clear to us that he is alongside us in our pain, he knows all the things that hurt us beyond words, and he grieves them with us.

Consider the tomb before you, the inscription to a person you will never know, but who is known perfectly by God, his creator. Think of the ways we remember those we have lost, the names read at memorials, the candles that we burn. Hold the people you love and miss before God now.

Prayer

God of all consolation,
your Son Jesus Christ was moved to tears
at the grave of Lazarus his friend.
Look with compassion on your children in their loss;
give to troubled hearts the light of hope
and strengthen in us the gift of faith,

Return to the path and walk back towards the front doors of the church. At the top of the path you will find the preaching cross.

Passion

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.'

Luke 23.44-46

Death by crucifixion was a routine punishment for criminals in the Roman Empire. It was a horrible and gruesome way to die, at the same time as it emphasised the unassailable power of imperial rule. The gospels make clear that the Passion of Jesus - his betrayal, trials, flogging; his walk out of Jerusalem carrying his cross; his stripping, crucifixion and slow death – was humiliating and agonizingly painful. Through all his suffering, Jesus remains resolute: he speaks the truth to corruption, and seeks forgiveness for those who are destroying him. Here, on a cross, Christian faith sees the goodness of God himself. He hangs with us in our suffering; with us, he dies our death. God will not leave us alone, even in this final darkness.

Consider the Preaching Cross, which stands in the centre of the churchyard, and the image of the crucifixion which faces west. Where do you identify in your life with the suffering you see in the passion? How easy do you find it to live with your own mortality? Do you ever sense the presence of God in your own experience of pain?

Prayer

O Saviour of the World,
who by thy cross and precious blood
hast redeemed us.
Save us and help us,
we humbly beseech Thee,
O Lord.

Turn back towards the church and follow the path to the right. Turn left at the corner of the church and follow the path until you reach the Garden of Remembrance, on the left just before you reach Church Street.

Resurrection

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said."

Matthew 28:1-6

Jesus was buried in a garden, and this little corner of our churchyard is filled with flowers as well as memorials to those we have lost. When the Marys reach Jesus' tomb it is already empty. He is not there. He has risen. Death cannot hold the Son of God, because God is life itself. And so Jesus answers death with life, despair with hope. In rising from the dead he makes something new of our deaths. When we die, we are not lost forever. Instead our death is a way to new life with him.

The flowers that grow here are a sign of hope, they anticipate something that is still beyond our understanding; there will be a new heaven and a new earth, and there we shall be reunited with all those we love and together we shall behold God face to face.

As you stand in this garden, can you see signs of hope in your own life? Are you afraid to trust them? What simple thing can you do today to help that hope blossom?

Prayer

God of glory,
by the raising of your Son
you have broken the chains of death and hell:
fill your Church with faith and hope;
for a new day has dawned
and the way to life stands open.

Walk out of the garden at through the gates at the top of the path. Turn and look back across all the churchyard, the city and towards the sea.

The Good News

Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. She turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

John 20. 11, 14-18

The hope of resurrection is not just a promise of life after death, it is the transformation of all God's creation in the light of the new life of Easter. It spills out from the empty tomb and brings hope and the fullness of God's glory to the whole world. It is a message that does not allow us to stay in the garden.

Instead, like Mary, it sends us out to share what we have seen and heard. All of our lives should be shaped by the good news of Jesus' resurrection. It is what allows us to stand up in the face of inequality and injustice, to speak out for the people around us who feel no hope for themselves, to celebrate the good that we find and bring comfort where there is sorrow.

As you consider the city spreading out across the hills and the sea beyond it, what would it look like to see new life dawning throughout Brighton? What would it mean for your life to be full of the hopefulness of God's glory?

Prayer

Risen Christ,
you filled your disciples with boldness and fresh hope:
strengthen us to proclaim your risen life
and fill us with your peace,
to the glory of God the Father.

Turn back and walk along Church street towards Dyke Road. Go back into the church yard at the gate opposite St Nicholas Road and walk down the path to the tower.

Ascension

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

Luke 24.50-53

For forty days after his resurrection, Jesus appears to his disciples. He comes, always mysteriously, to talk and walk and eat with them. At his final visitation, he takes his friends out to Bethany, where he had raised Lazarus, and they follow him up the mountain – it is not the first mountain they have scaled together. But this journey is different. It is for departure. Jesus ‘withdraws’ from them ‘into heaven’: from his home in time and space, he returns to his home in eternity. The Ascension of Jesus takes the dust from which we are made up and beyond, and into the wellspring of Love. He departs, in order to be everywhere-present, the human in eternity.

Look upwards. See the flint rise up, past the door and window and bell-chamber. Can you see the top of the little spire with its weathervane, pointing into the sky? Beyond the blue, see in your mind's eye the panoply of stars which are always glowing, planets yet unknown and the vast tract of space. Consider beyond, not a place but the reality which makes the cosmos; and which has made you. Can you also see Jesus there? And can you imagine that there is your destination, too? Might it be that, as you think about it, 'there' is... already *here*?

Prayer

Risen Christ,
you have raised our human nature
to the throne of heaven:
help us to seek and serve you,
that we may join you at the Father's side,
where you reign with the Spirit in glory,
now and for ever.

Return to the main pathway and turn left. Walk back to the main entrance of the church and stand facing the door.

Whitsun

When the day of Pentecost had come, the disciples were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Acts 2.1-4

Back on the ground, the disciples wait, as Jesus told them to do. Ten days pass since that visit to the mountain; they stay together, and practise patience for the something which is about to happen. At Pentecost, fifty days after Easter, it finally does, and it is both elemental and supernatural. Inside the house there is a gale, and bright flickering flame, and an outpouring which makes them speak new words of ecstasy. This is a gift from Jesus, surely; love's fire sent from above, to give them ability unimagined and hearts renewed. The Spirit makes them one in purpose and identity: they

are Christ's body now, his hands and feet on earth, to live as he lived and love as he loved, and finally – at the end of this journey through time – to dwell with him in God for eternity. This is church, our dwelling with God, where our lives and his life are one.

Consider the door. God's people come in to be nourished by the Spirit. They go out to share that sustenance in the world. Turn and face the path, and the city. Where is God calling you to go now? What gifts from the Spirit of God do you need to do the thing you next have to do? Ask the Spirit for guidance, for comfort and counsel, and most of all for his gift of love.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, sent by the Father,
ignite in us your holy fire;
strengthen your children with the gift of faith,
revive your Church with the breath of love,
and renew the face of the earth,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

May God
help us
to walk
in love, and bring
us through all our
journeying to our
eternal home with
him. **Amen.**