

COMMENT

THE MAGAZINE OF THE CHURCHES IN TRING



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Editorial



At a recent visit to a high security prison, I was asked whether I was 'Legal' or a visitor. I think I can understand why I was asked. Sitting in the Waiting Room it would be easy to make such judgments based only on people's appearances and I didn't quite conform.

I, like most other Comment readers I imagine, don't like labels – short-hand judgments based only on what we can see, not on what's inside. But as human beings we do it all the time, consciously or subconsciously. Are you left or right-wing in your politics, your religion? Are you a Remainer or a Leaver? Are you Catholic or Protestant, my nationality or something else; old or young; rich or poor, a Waitrose customer or a user of the Foodbank; black, white, straight or LGBTQi+? Do you love or hate sport, gardening, antiques, the same kind of films, music or books – or Marmite?!

When we meet someone new, as we try to get to know and understand them, perhaps we mentally tick those boxes, guessing which 'camp' they fall into on any number of issues or biases. For some of us, this is the way we make sense of the world around us; for others

it may mean those we decide we don't want to get to know any further.

Sitting in the Visiting Room of that prison and watching dads bounce young children on their knees and read stories to them; watching the weeping children as they had to leave their dads till next time... whatever they had done to be in prison, the only label was 'a parent, a human being, just like me'.

The Churches in Tring represented by Comment magazine have a number of differences – in the shapes of the buildings, their style of worship, the labels by which they are known. The people who make up those churches are not all the same, don't all believe the same things and are not all in the same place on their spiritual journey. But all of them are welcoming, all want to see visitors over the Christmas and New Year period and all want to get to know new people who will join them as they journey in faith to know God better.

The prisoners in that high security prison will be on lock down for most of the Christmas break as there are not enough staff working over that period. They will not be the only people who are lonely or sad while others are enjoying being together in the festive season. Let's take advantage of our freedom to – with the shepherds – journey to find the baby in the manger; and like the wise men,

seek Jesus and worship him. Let's also remember those who will find the coming season a time of sadness or stress and be welcoming to them where we can.

A big Thank You is due to a number of Comment people especially this month. One is Livio Ghedin whose company in Watford have been faithfully printing and delivering Comment for many years. We wish him well in his retirement. Among the 'extra miles' Livio and his wife went for us included reprinting, unstapling and restapling a section one month when an author's changing circumstances meant we had to remove an article that might have caused embarrassment. This was all done by hand for 320 copies... Another is to Ian Matthews whose company has taken over the role. Our distribution Team have had a couple of difficult months with health issues so our prayers are with Frank Dalton and David and Margaret Whiting and our thanks to Sheila Whitehead who has stepped in to help where necessary.

Finally, enjoy the variety of articles you will find in this bumper edition of Comment. Maybe next year you will make a resolution to subscribe, if you don't already, or give your copy away to a neighbour – or even write your own article for others to enjoy.

The Editor

Wise men seek him still

As I write this, the smell of bonfires still lingers in the air and households across the country wonder if there is anything they can do with pumpkin innards saved after carving. As you read this, the aroma may well be that of mulled wine and mince pies and the culinary dilemma has become whether or not there is still time to book a Christmas delivery slot from our favourite online retailer!

In many ways November is a month of remembering: All Saints and All Souls; Bonfire Night and Remembrance Sunday all cause us to look back and remember. In contrast the season of Advent is about looking forward. A new church year has begun, and we are pointed immediately to what is to come – pointed to a baby, a humble birth in a place distant in geography and time.

Perhaps we do indeed look forward with child-like glee to Christmas; or

perhaps we are jaded adults, worried about money and strained relationships; but all of us, all parts of us, adult and child alike, would do well to focus on the child whose birth we are pointed to during this season.

We know this is the 'baby Jesus' but there is so much more. This is Emmanuel – the 'with us' God – the God whom we worship, who created the world we inhabit and who willed each of us into existence. This God, our God, did not wish to remain distant, but rather chose to come into the world – fully human and yet fully divine.

He came into the world in a manger, an animal's feeding trough, dirty and precarious, without any advertising agency polish or spin. We are reminded that God's kingdom is at hand, here and now; that as Christians we are called not to shun the world, not to cut ourselves

off from it or to bemoan how terrible 'things' have become, but rather to engage with it; not to accept the Christmas we are being sold but to seek the Christmas we are being offered by the child in the manger.

I pray that each one of us can find the joy and peace as well as the comfort and the challenge of Christmas and the New Year that lies ahead. I pray we find it for ourselves as individuals, for our churches as missional communities but also for the joint witness of the churches in Tring, that we may stand and work together to season and illumine God's work and world.

Andrew Openshaw
New Mill Baptist Church



Children and social responsibility



Engaging children in their community, and the wider world

'Can I have...?' 'I want...?' 'It's not fair...?' These are a few of the phrases which raise my hackles when they come out of the mouths of my children. But how can we expect anything else when we are surrounded by wonderful things: bright toys, sparkly treasures, must-have clothes, the latest plastic gimmick. Advertising is glossy, clever and subversive.

One of my biggest anxieties about returning to live in the UK, after thirteen years in west Africa, was how I was going to manage our family's desire to have 'things'. My children have grown up, so far, with the privilege of being sheltered from the media and many of the current trends. They have had very limited exposure to supermarkets, shops with toys or opportunities to spend money. Having said that, we would come on holiday to the UK each year and stock up on all sorts of goodies, and buy new clothes; they had pocket money and wanted to spend it! But then we returned to Nigeria or Togo and these distractions disappeared and were not missed.



Conversations about poverty, need, suffering or homelessness were commonplace in our family. These were things they saw evidence of outside our home, visiting friends, or on the drive to school. They were exposed to many situations which might be unfamiliar to most of their classmates today. They grappled to understand why there was a child who wanted to wash our windscreen as we stopped at the traffic lights. They asked why the children of the village we were in were not wearing shoes or t-shirts. Of course, this doesn't mean that as a result they are permanently full of compassion for others or that they don't yearn after

the latest computer game. Quite the contrary, over the summer we have just had six weeks of saving and pooling pocket money in order to buy Sims4. When they discovered this amazing game a couple of months ago, they were determined to 'own' it.

We also lived a very comfortable life compared to many of our neighbours and schoolmates in West Africa. So it was important to find ways to respond to what we saw around us with integrity. One of the projects we did emerged from our Saturday morning Bible Club. I ran the group with some other ex-pat mums in Lomé, Togo, for our children aged 3 to 13 years. A few years ago, we asked

the group to come up with ways of doing something for others near Christmas. They chose to make printed wrapping paper, sell it at a local craft fair, and use the profits to buy gifts for children at the local orphanage (see pictures).

Our children chose to buy toys, snacks, and toiletries for the children at the orphanage, and planned a fun afternoon of games, face-painting and presentation of the gifts. It was a tremendous experience for all involved. We did a similar project each Advent in the following years. My own children have very happy memories of this, and my daughter remembers: 'It was fun, and it helped other people. And we achieved what we wanted to do – helping the orphanage.'

After one year of being back in the UK, the period of transition has been a steep learning curve. As parents, we have had many conversations about how much to spend, what to buy, how to handle requests and navigating the totally new concept of 'Christmas lists'. I want my children to be considerate of others and aware of the wider world. I also want them to be children and have fun. For me there is a natural link between our faith and helping others. It really is the simplest of commandments: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength... Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these (Mark 12:30-31).

There are so many ways to engage in the wider world that sometimes we need to be conscious about it. A lot of this can be achieved easily and often with little financial cost (I've started a list!). Encouraging our children to reflect on the lives of others by asking them, 'How would you feel if...?' in response to an image, scene or news story is one way to help them think beyond themselves. Teaching gratitude is still a massive challenge to me, but I think that engaging in our community and the wider world is a start to raising considerate and thoughtful children. Hopefully this will lead to a little less wanting and a little more thanking!

Polly Eaton
High Street Baptist Church



Easy ways to help your children engage with social responsibility

- ★ Say Grace at meal times
- ★ Get a newspaper, read together and pray about the issues that concern you
- ★ Put up photos of church mission partners on the fridge
- ★ Have a collecting box in the house for spare change, or part of pocket money (decide together who to give it to)
- ★ When you get a new toy or item of clothing, give one away to someone without or take to a charity shop
- ★ Watch nature documentaries together
- ★ Buy Fairtrade and talk about what it means
- ★ Have a thoughtful or action-based Advent calendar
- ★ Help a local charity, e.g. pack boxes with People Not Borders, do a DENS shop together
- ★ Have a proactive Lent, instead of abstaining, e.g. www.40acts.org.uk

Pastor Philipp Nicolai



Wake, O wake, with tidings thrilling...

The sixteenth century saw probably the most decisive change in hymnody. Luther and the Reformers moved

the emphasis from the congregation as witness to a ritual using Latin, to participants singing together in the vernacular. Quotations from the Scriptures were put into German or English and arranged in metre to be sung by all the congregation. Initially known as 'chorales' and sung to tunes composed by Bach and his contemporaries, they became a regular part of Christian worship.

My third contribution to this series on hymns comes from the German Reformation tradition, and is customarily sung at the beginning of the season of Advent. Obviously the first name which comes to mind in this context is that of Martin Luther and while he is indeed represented in hymn books by 'A safe stronghold our God is still...' I have chosen one which has been described as 'one of the most perfect hymns of all time'. The tune to which it is sung, by J.S.Bach, is named after the opening words of the original: Wachet auf – and has been called the 'King of Chorales'.

This tune was also used by Felix Mendelssohn. Its author was a Lutheran pastor, Philipp Nicolai, who lived from 1556 to 1608. He served as minister to the people of Unna in Westphalia. A terrible plague struck in 1597 in which 1300 of his parishioners died. He was regularly burying up to thirty of them daily. In this crisis he reread 'The City of God' by St Augustine of Hippo, written as a result of the Sack of Rome in 410 by Alaric. Nicolai saw the calamity that had hit his people as a call to wake up to the Christian belief in the life eternal. Amid the disasters and terrors of this world there was the promise of the life of the heavenly Jerusalem. Pastor Nicolai wrote a book of meditations called 'A Mirror of Joy' in

which were two hymns which became very popular, this one and another which became a favourite German marriage hymn. Apparently in these classic days of early Lutheranism, every community had its own hymn book. A pastor was more likely to compose a hymn for his



Wake, O wake! With tidings thrilling the watchmen all the air are filling, arise, Jerusalem, arise! Midnight strikes! No more delaying, 'The hour has come!' we hear them saying, 'where are ye all, ye virgins wise? The Bridegroom comes in sight, raise high your torches bright!' Alleluia! The wedding song swells loud and strong: go forth and join the festal throng.

2 Zion hears the watchmen shouting, her heart leaps up with joy undoubting, she stands and waits with eager eyes; see her Friend from heaven descending, adorned with truth and grace unending! Her light burns clear, her star doth rise. Now come, thou precious Crown, Lord Jesus, God's own Son! Alleluia! Let us prepare to follow there, where in thy supper we may share.

3 Every soul in thee rejoices; from earth and from angelic voices be glory given to thee alone! Now the gates of pearl receive us, thy presence never more shall leave us, we stand with angels round thy throne. Earth cannot give below the bliss thou dost bestow. Alleluia! Grant us to raise, to length of days, the triumph-chorus of thy praise.

congregation than look in a book!

This hymn, then, born out of a disaster at a particular moment in history, has become an Advent hymn. Its call to wake up reminds us both of the Gospel call to be ready for Christ, as

for example in the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Bridesmaids and also of St Paul telling the Christians of Rome that 'now is the moment to awake from sleep'. Yet in origin this hymn was not tied to Advent but was a general call to be ready for eternal life. In fact, as we are often reminded in Advent sermons, we are to be ready for the three Comings of Christ – as the Babe of Bethlehem, as the Bread of Life in Holy Communion, and as the Judge of the living and the dead.

So here are three longer than usual verses calling us to wake up and be ready – not the most popular thought in these modern days to be told not only to be ready for Christmas but also for the end of the world! We don't like to think either of our own end or that of the created order. But the words are all about the call to be ready. The imagery of the first verse is based on Matthew 28:1-15, where we are to see Our Lord as the Bridegroom, who finds some but not all of the bridesmaids ready. We are to be ready to greet him and to join the 'festal throng'.

The second verse takes its inspiration from Isaiah 52, a chapter which starts 'Awake, awake'... and leads to the final verse about the joy of heaven as we enter through the gates of pearl. Here, of course, the reference is to the new Jerusalem in Revelation 21. The walls are adorned with different jewels and the 'twelve gates are twelve pearls, each of the gates is a single pearl'. Hence the common phrase 'the pearly gates' referring to heaven. And so we come to heaven where 'God's presence never more shall leave us'.

This hymn is a magnificent reminder of the Christian hope to be sustained in times of trouble by singing of the glory of God in which we can hope to share. No wonder the Salvation Army calls dying 'being called to glory'. It is all the more inspiring to think that this marvellous vision of hope arose out of a dreadful plague.

Martin Banister, St Albans Abbey

What is Advent?

The English Dictionary definition of Advent is 'coming', the arrival of a notable person or thing. The question then asked is: Who? Why? When?

The Jewish people were waiting for the Messiah, the Saviour. They had suffered exile and slavery. They asked God for a King and they got one in David – human, flawed but who was aware of his sin and sought God's mercy and indeed loved his Lord, the God of Israel. Their latest enslavement, to the Roman Empire, engendered a renewed desire for freedom.

How did they see the Messiah? What were their expectations? A King, powerful, full of light and strength – a ruler of nations of the line of David, the royal power of Israel! O Come, O Come! This was their cry!

The reality was a little different.

The baby born in Bethlehem started out in very poor circumstances, but, for those who have eyes to see... God has broken into time and space. And is – come. Does he come in majesty and power, royal, ruler of the nations, trailing stars, galaxies and planets in his wake? No – as a baby, soft perfection, needy, totally reliant on others for food, warmth, care and love. The healthy crying, the tiny pink hands and perfect fingers stretching out: totally vulnerable in an unsafe and brutal world.

Why did God come to us like this? Our Saviour, the Messiah, our Redeemer. How can the Lord of all, Creator of all, fit in the tiny cavities of the heart of a baby?

To redeem us, to save us, he needed to put on our humanity and have a heart that pumps with our excitement, our joy, our anxiety, our stress and our pain. He needed to do this to fulfil his promise, to be human like us because we are his creation and he loves us as his creation: after all he made us like himself. Only by being one of us could he fulfil that love by dying for us.

And now Advent has come to be: (a) a waiting time of preparation for the great celebration of Christmas, when God is with us, that tiny vulnerable babe; or (b) a growing frenetic preparation for what we have come to think Christmas should be: Christmas cards to write and send, stamps to buy, the annual round robin letter with who did this and who did that? Even if we email now – it still takes time! Buying gifts, the easy ones

for children who have 'a list'; but what about Granny, what on earth can we get for her and Auntie Mary so far away? What are the last posting dates? We must order food while still going about our daily work, attend Christmas parties, concerts, endure bad weather and dark nights.

The 'b' list is a little longer than the 'a' list! Which is the blessing? Which is the curse? Why do we do it? We give gifts when 'the Gift' only wants our love and like the little shepherd boy in the carol, all we can really give, that is really ours to give – is ourselves, our 'heart'.

But is our heart too precious to give to the God who created us and flings stars into space, who created this exquisite blue planet for us to live and grow on?

If we are brave enough to give our hearts (children do it better than us) it is the best gift ever! If, like me, you know that your heart can be a pretty

poor place to offer the One who loves me, especially when it's filled with stress, anxiety, worries, tiredness and an almost pathological busyness, maybe that is why Advent is also a preparation time for the heart. Can we clear it out and make it a more welcoming space to experience the joy, the mystery, the beauty of the crying babe that is the God/Man, Man/God who has come to those who really need him?

Celebrate Christmas, not as a stressed-out, financially over-stretched, wrung-out mess! Make room in your heart for a simple joy, paying attention to the small things and the people you love – and breathe! Jesus is come!

Tricia Apps, Corpus Christi





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The Real Advent campaign

It might be difficult to believe but knowledge of the Christmas story is fading.

When a group of 5-7 year olds was surveyed it was found that 36% didn't know whose birthday was celebrated at Christmas and 72% didn't know Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Among adults it was found that fewer than 12% know the full nativity story and 51% say that the birth of Jesus is irrelevant to their Christmas. This last figure represents a tipping point. Unless we actively share the Christmas story Christ will continue to be written out of Christmas.

If Christ is being written out of Christmas – let's put him back by sharing the Christmas story so it's heard and loved.

One of the ways you can share the Christmas story is giving a Real Advent Calendar – you can buy

them from larger branches of Tesco.

About Advent and calendars

Advent is the season leading up to Christmas day. It starts four Sundays before Christmas. It's



an exciting time for children as they wait for the big day when they

preparation and waiting too, and recalling the events of the first Christmas more than 2000 years ago.

Advent calendars were popular in Germany in the early 1800s and soon spread across Europe. The idea is simple - there is a window to open for each day of advent. It means that one day at a time you can share the journey to Christmas Day.

The Real Advent Calendar has a line of the Christmas story behind each window. There is also a Fairtrade chocolate behind each window and it is the only calendar to include a 24-page copy of the Christmas story to be read throughout Advent. This year, there is also an extra chocolate for Christmas Day. The whole calendar is foiled for freshness.

Advent calendars are popular with children and parents because they help explain the meaning of waiting in a fun way. Even adults find them a fun way of connecting with the Christmas story.

will celebrate Christmas and open their presents. For Christians it is a time of

Parish registers

Baptisms

We welcome this child into our church family and pray for his parents and Godparents.

Matthew Peter Hewitt

Funerals

We thank God for the lives of the departed and pray for comfort for those who mourn.

Leonard Ansett 94
Gladys Christine McDermott 89
Andrew Mears 47
Hilda Ethel Grafen 97

Even it UP



people are facing, at home and worldwide. It creates divisions, suspicion, fear and hatred where our Christian faith calls for compassion, acceptance, understanding and love. So, when one of our members, Peter Dobson, talked to

us about some Oxfam research on this subject, we immediately wanted to share the message with a wider audience.

Even mainstream economic bodies such as the IMF and OECD are expressing concern about the threat this inequality causes to social stability, economic growth and innovation; and the Chief Economist at the Bank of England has called for public policy measures to tackle growing inequality.

What can we do?

Oxfam's campaign focuses on the causes and effects of extreme inequality,

but also puts forward practical approaches to ending it. Churches Together in Tring are keen for as many of us as possible to hear how we can help move these ideas forward. The CTT committee have organised a speaker from Oxfam to come along to the AGM on Tuesday evening, 6 February 2018, to give a brief talk on this subject. Please put this date in your diary for the New Year and watch out for more news from Peter in the next issue of Comment.

Anne Nobbs, Justice & Peace Group

Tring to Poland

In late September, twelve members and friends of the congregation at High Street Baptist Church convened in Krakow on the latest continental trip organised



by our 'in-house' tour arrangers, Dick and Dil. This visit had been suggested following earlier journeys to see some of the First World War Commonwealth graveyards in the Ypres area of Belgium, and on the Somme – but this time we were heading for Auschwitz, and anticipating that this would also be a challenging and humbling experience.

On the Wednesday we were picked up by coach from our hotel – conveniently near to the very attractive old city centre – and went first to the Schindler factory. Made famous in the film, Schindler's List, what had been Oskar Schindler's wartime factory is now a museum and we were taken through the various displays and told how a large number of Jewish people were saved from deportation to camps because they were employed in the factory.

Our next stop was in the former Jewish ghetto in the Podgórze district of the city, where we enjoyed a picnic lunch in the open square with its commemorative chairs before visiting the museum located in the former pharmacy. The only one enclosed within the Krakow Ghetto boundary, the pharmacy belonged to the Polish Roman Catholic pharmacist, Tadeusz Pankiewicz, whose care for and protection of his Jewish

customers earned him commendation in 1983 as a member, with Oskar Schindler, of the Righteous Among the Nations.

Our final stop for the day was the former Gestapo headquarters building, parts of which are also now a museum, including the basement cells where prisoners were kept.

Thursday was the day on which we travelled out of the city to the two camps at Auschwitz, about an hour's drive away. We were taken firstly around the brick blocks of Auschwitz and then the wooden barracks of Auschwitz-Birkenau, explaining in fairly harrowing detail the exhibits housed in the former. We saw some of the tons of human hair, thousands of household pots and pans and hundreds of labelled suitcases – all just a fraction of what was removed from incoming prisoners when they reached the camp. I had seen photographs and samples of these in the Jerusalem Holocaust Memorial Museum, but the sheer scale of what was on view here was completely different, and many people found it very affecting. What moved me most, however, was seeing the cell in Auschwitz where Maximilian Kolbe died after taking the place of a fellow prisoner who had been sentenced to death by starvation. We were told how, years later, the surviving prisoner expressed his gratitude and pointed out that Father Kolbe had saved not just one man but the children he went on to have, their children, and all of their descendants down through time. Extremely moving as well was the story of a very elderly recent visitor to Auschwitz-Birkenau, a surviving twin who had been one of the subjects of the experiments carried out in the camp by the notorious Josef Mengele; she returned to lay her memories to rest

and said that she had forgiven him for the dreadful things he had done to her and her sister. Those of us who had spent the day in Auschwitz returned to our hotel in a fairly sombre mood, reflecting on all that we had seen and heard.

On our final full day in the Krakow area we experienced a complete change of mood with a visit to the salt mines at Wieliczka. Now 'salt mines' conjured up ideas of people sent for punishment by the Russians, but this was something completely different. Our guide explained how mining of salt in the area had started in the thirteenth century and continued until 2007. Employment there was a high-status job and often passed down families with many generations of men from local families working in the mine. It is a huge network of tunnels and chambers and a guided tour takes in only a tiny fraction of what there is to see, but we visited a number of chapels with exquisite carving in the rock salt. The largest, St Kinga's Chapel, is used for functions, concerts and even weddings – 101 metres below ground! Although a commercial working mine, the construction of the many underground chapels was a wonderful antidote to the horrors of the death camps: here we saw what faith, dedication, skill and creativity could achieve for the benefit of others. This was a fitting end to an extremely interesting trip during which we had also been able to spend time exploring old Krakow, eating in local restaurants and sharing fellowship with our friends.

Nicky Bull, High Street Baptist Church



Celebrating U3A



Tring U3A is celebrating its tenth anniversary over the next few months beginning with an Anniversary Exhibition on Thursday 14 December at the Victoria Hall, Akeman Street, Tring. The Exhibition is open to all from 10.30am until 3.00pm. You may be wondering what the University of the Third Age is all about, so now is your chance to come along

and find out what we do and what the U3A can offer prospective new members. Despite the name we are not a university, rather a sociable, self-help, self-supporting group where members can pursue interests, update old skills or learn new ones. There are no restrictions to join, only that you must be retired or semi-retired; no limit to how many activities you can take part in and all in a relaxed atmosphere. Some people come just once a month to attend talks by guest speakers, others attend numerous interest groups, and additionally there

are monthly coffee mornings or a lunch to enjoy. Currently over 540 members belong to Tring U3A and there are thirty different groups; Walking, Patchwork, Table Tennis, Science & Technology, Painting, Bridge, Genealogy, Singing for Pleasure, History, Poetry and Spanish to name but a few. Come along and find out more, at the anniversary exhibition, Thursday 14 December, Victoria Hall, Tring, 10.30am to 3.00pm. You will be most welcome. **Vicky Baldock, St Cross, Wilstone**

Thank you



My own 'Thank you' to someone I have never been able to thank in person is not someone completely unknown, but someone I met only once. This Christmas I will celebrate with not only my husband but with four – now adult – sons. We will cook together, talk together, do the things we have done every Christmas; there will be lots of banter and laughter and lots of catching up. My family is very important to me and I am not sure who I would be without them. Without Sarah I would not be in a position to say this. Nearly thirty years ago, Sarah gave up her seven-week-old baby to complete strangers who were childless – us. The joy of having Tom in our lives had the unexpected side effect of enabling us to do something we had failed to do for the previous nine years – conceive a child. Without Tom we would not have had not just one child but three more – James, Jon or Ben. In giving up her baby, believing she was doing the very best for him, Sarah gave us more than she could have known. I often wish she could see him now and be proud of him, as we are, for being who he is. Thank you, Sarah. **Annette Reynolds, St Peter & St Paul**



**CHRISTMAS
AT ST CROSS**

**TUESDAY 12 DECEMBER
COFFEE MORNING
CHRISTMAS RAFFLE**

**CHRISTMAS EVE
CAROL SERVICE 7.00PM**

**CHRISTMAS DAY
FAMILY COMMUNION
10.00AM**

EVERYONE IS WELCOME

Piano and more...



On Sunday 15 October, another well-attended concert in the 'Piano and More...' series took place. Sally Cottle played a couple of piano solos, much enjoyed by all, and her daughter Jessica, currently in Year 5 at Bishop Wood School, started the whole concert off with a musical performance of 'Morning' by Grieg, and then ably turned pages for her mother. Anna Le Hair also played a piano solo, and then joined violinist Marion Garrett and cellist Gavin Clements in a performance of Mendelssohn's spirited and beautiful Piano Trio in D minor. On 19 November, soprano sisters Felicity and Melissa Davies from Aylesbury gave a wonderful recital of opera and oratorio arias and songs, with

Anna Le Hair at the piano. There will be a break in December and then recitals resume on Sunday 21 January, when soprano Angela Rowley, from Cheshire, along with Anna Le Hair, will give a varied recital including Schumann's 'Frauenliebe und leben'. From February onwards, the concerts will revert to the second Sunday of each month in St Peter & St Paul's Church. **Anna Le Hair, St Peter & St Paul**

Tring Mothers Union – a turning point



Tring Mothers Union branch has been in existence for over seventy-four years and is still thriving. When I joined on our 40th anniversary, I was welcomed by a warm and friendly group of ladies, quite a few of whom are still active members now. I quickly got involved and joined the committee at some point early on, and took a turn at being treasurer for a number of years. I was fortunate at that time not to be working as Lucy, our youngest, was just 4 years old, and when I went back to work it was part-time and I was generally able to get to meetings. When I was enrolled, in 1983, I made promises for life that included renewing my baptismal promises and committing myself to worship in Church, prayer and Bible reading. As members we promise to support and uphold the aims and objectives of the world-wide Mothers Union which are: to promote and support married life; to encourage parents in their role to develop the faith of their children; to maintain a worldwide fellowship of Christians united in prayer, worship and service; to promote conditions in society favourable to stable family life and the protection of children;

to help those whose family life has met with adversity. To me, all this is very relevant to simply being a Christian as well as being a Mothers Union member. Over the years we have had a variety of meetings and activities, guest speakers, do-it-yourself discussions, visits to other Churches and to College Lake, garden parties, walks, fun and games, craft evenings, made a new Mothers Union banner, celebrated anniversaries, joined in the deanery meetings and services, run cake stalls, hosted the Lenten Lunches for Christian Aid, and made hundreds of posies for Mothering Sunday. The list seems endless! We have raised money for Mothers Union funds; the overseas fund, the emergency and relief fund and helped to give holidays to struggling families in this country. So many memories are tied up with being part of a family: the Mothers Union family! And during this time we have said goodbye to friends who have moved away, and indeed, passed away. We have supported each other through the

ups and downs of life, laughed together and wept together. We have now come to the turning point of change. The committee members have clocked-up hundreds of years' service between us and we are not getting any younger. The numbers have naturally dropped as we have all got older. It is difficult for younger members of the church to join us as many are working during the day when we hold our meetings, so keeping the branch open any longer the way we did was going to be too much for any of us. But Mothers Union is too important to any of us just to fade away. We all value and need the encouragement and fellowship of that family, to support each other and learn from each other and have fun together. We will continue to support the world-wide family of Mothers Union doing amazing things in the poorest of countries. By becoming a Diocesan group of members, we can still meet together socially and for worship, maybe a bit more ad-hoc, to meet with our friends in the deanery, to continue to support Mothers Union financially by paying direct to the diocese branch, and to fundraise for particular projects. And we will continue to make posies and soup! We're looking forward to a new era! You haven't seen the last of us! **Janet Goodyer, St Peter & St Paul**

If any members have memories and thoughts about Mothers Union over the years, the Editor will be glad to have them!



Letter from Orkney



It is jet black, blacker than 'Newgate's Knocker' as they say in the classics. We have ARRIVED! After a three day, two night journey in our trusty Vamper Can (Camper Van for those not au fait with Mr Spooner) disembarking 'The Hamnavoe' we pulled into a salubrious lorry park someway off Stromness Dock, in grand isolation: 'Posh'. Drawing the curtains, we settled down for our first night in our 'Promised Land'.



Our peace was suddenly shattered by the sound of a diesel engine pulling up alongside. We were even more disturbed by a sharp rat-a-tat-tat on our door. 'Who is it?' I shouted, trying to sound big and gruff. The dog hid under the table. No answer, so I opened the door to total blackness, only to see in the light of the van door, a hand extended clutching a bottle of champagne. Well! Hands bearing Champagne are always welcome. It was our good friend Sue from the isle of Graemsay deciding to join us for the celebration. A bottle of bubbles later we retired very happy and thankful we had arrived intact with no incidents.

We awoke the following morning slightly dazed and numb, not through drink but circumstance. What have we done? I can only say something deep inside both Carrie and myself fell desperately in love with the huge skies, the rugged coast, the wonderful awesome view from our house over the sea to Hoy, the sparkling clean air and the lovely islander communities with their music and their quiet but inclusive way.

We picked up the keys making us officially 'new islanders'. Whitesails was ours. Following the influx of boxes we stood among the forest of cardboard and once again asked, 'What have we done?' We were sure we didn't pack THAT many. It must be Carrie's clothes.

Now, almost a week has gone by and the house is looking good. It brought home to both of us that our home was what went into it, not the bricks. Bits and pieces, each carrying memories and ghosts of events and people past and present. I was desperately sad to say goodbye to our friends, but every now and then, one reaches a fork in the road of life. There are no signposts, no satnav, you must decide which direction to take. Do nothing and move on, or jump into the unknown? Well, we jumped, both feet, with fingers crossed and a bucketful of faith. This is where our new life begins... Orkney!

The Co-op is seven minutes by car in Stromness (a quarter of the size of Tring), tiny narrow streets, a sizeable dock and a great pub and restaurant. Twenty minutes to the east we have Kirkwall, the capital of Orkney, about the size of Berkhamsted. It boasts the magnificent St Magnus Viking Cathedral, an airport AND a Lidl with a large Tesco

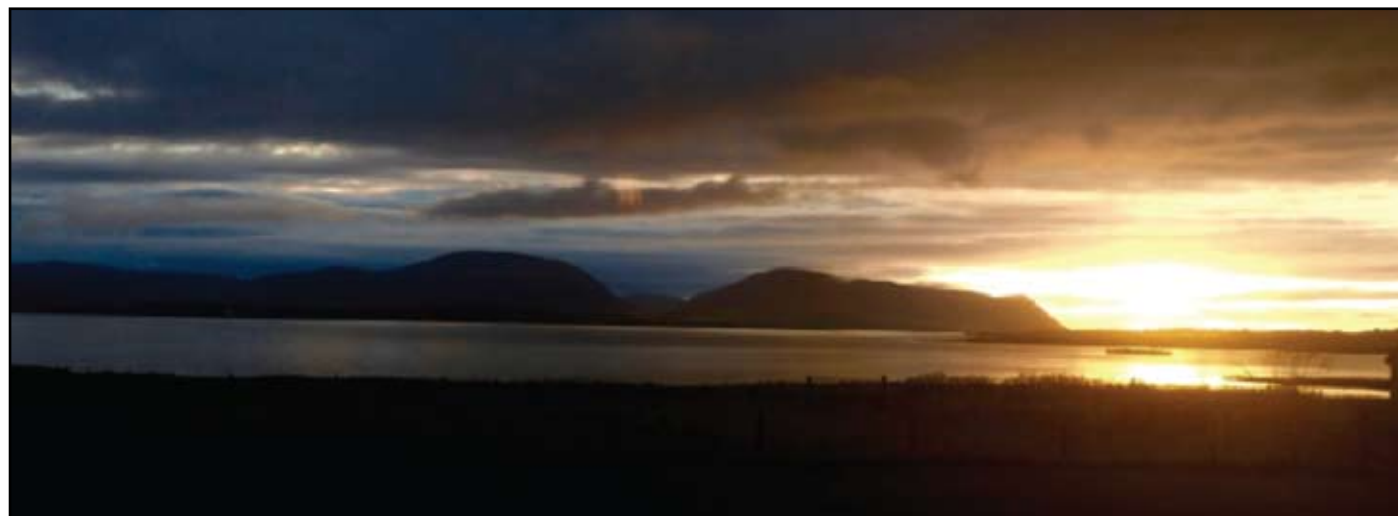
next door. The main hospital is being rebuilt due for completion 2019. It is going to be enormous. In the meantime cranky pensioners like me are flown to Aberdeen.

We are hunkered down at the moment with short days, black nights, a cosy home and winds at gale force, no traffic and everyone so friendly with 'it's nay bother'. At the moment life is good, and we are thankful for it. It has been very hard work over the last week, emptying boxes, hanging pictures, making up bedrooms and finding places to put everything, followed ten minutes later by wondering where we had put it, mostly in the kitchen. We did manage to get to 'The Reel' in Kirkwall to listen to a live Orkney music session and down a couple of Guinness. A welcome break.

We are now straight-ish, and with this newfound time we have launched into the Orkney social life by going to three Orkney Storytelling Festival events, attended by narrators from Sweden and Iceland financed by 'Storytelling Scotland' alongside homegrown chroniclers from Orkney. Another night, a lecture on 'Landscape and Spirituality' by Nick Mayhew-Smith in The Cathedral and the Grand Finale at a lovely Cafe/Bar in Kirkwall. Tonight we are at a talk by Tom Muir on the part a Stromness Artist/Explorer John Rae played in the discovery of 'The Northwest Passage'.

After our first ten days, in emotional turmoil, physically knackered, we are somewhat dazed, but on the whole very happy. I do wonder whether the Israelites felt like this in Canaan?

Mac Dodge, still St Peter & St Paul at heart



What is Christingle?

A few days before Christmas, a woman posted on Mumsnet.com in a state of utter bafflement: 'A satsuma, a candle, two raisins, a sweet, four cocktail sticks and a peanut ... what?' Her daughter had just come home from a Church School 'with the above items in a bag, and is on about putting the candle in the satsuma, and gluing on the sweet and raisins. She then is supposed to light the candle every day. Any idea what she is on about or what it all means?' Another mum sympathised: 'What on earth have jelly babies stuck in oranges got to do with Jesus?'

Christians these days have a lot on their hands with unbelievers asking difficult questions such as: 'If God is a God of love, why is Songs of Praise still on the telly?' So it's something of a trial at Christmas when you also have to explain the connection between Jesus and jelly babies. How did it come to this?

The Christingle, cause of mystification on Mumsnet and focus of children's services at Advent and Christmas, is a curious beast. Its cocktail sticks, tin foil, candle and bits of ribbon (not to mention jelly babies) all lashed together on an orange, looks like an out-of-control Sputnik that's got tangled up in a load of space junk and then caught fire. Its eccentric appearance is matched by its fruit and nut symbolism. It can't seem to make up its mind which season of the Church year it's talking about – a bit like a cantankerous uncle who won't pick a lane on the motorway, despite the kindly blasts on the horn of other drivers.

The red ribbon is for the blood Jesus shed on the cross, so that's...

um... Easter. Ditto for the tin foil which is for the crucifixion nails. The bits of food impaled on the cocktail sticks are for the fruits of the earth, which is, well, Harvest. And the four cocktail sticks themselves symbolise the four seasons, which is Vivaldi. So remind me, someone: how in the name of Bassetts jelly babies is this meant to be a Christmas thing?

The Christingle is a surprisingly recent arrival in Church history. Its ingredients didn't emerge miraculously from the mists of time-honoured tradition, but were brought together in 1968 by Mr John Pensom, a Children's Society fundraiser, who was rather a character. When he died in 2006, the Church Times obituary revealed that on his letterhead he had once styled himself as John Pensom DGO. He admitted to friends that the DGO was in fact that well-known honour, the Damned Good Organiser. As things turned out, Mr Pensom needn't have bothered about gongs and awards. That's because his fruit-based marvel was enthusiastically embraced by British churches, and he became affectionately known as Mr Christingle, which is a lot better than having a DGO.

Admittedly, John Pensom wasn't creating *ex nihilo*. He adapted his idea from a Moravian bishop, Johannes de Watteville, who gave children candles wrapped in a red ribbon for a service in Christmas 1747. How and when de Watteville's simple idea transmogrified into the bloated Holy Orange of the present day is not hard to fathom. In the late 1960s and early 70s, every middle-class party featured a cheese and

pineapple hedgehog, which was half a grapefruit covered in tin foil and bristling with cocktail sticks, with big chunks of cheddar and tinned pineapple skewered on the spikes. You don't have to be Clouseau to spot that the Christingle is basically the love child of Christmas and terrible 70s party snacks. It's a miracle that Twiglets weren't added to symbolise the wood of Noah's Ark.

The 50th anniversary of the Christingle is coming up in 2018, and it's not too late for churches to carry out an upgrade to the Flaming Sputnik. Yes, it's time to change the fruit and let another item from the supermarket trolley point the way to Bethlehem.

My nomination is for the Christingle banana, a fruit with some solid doctrine behind it. Banana skins are hazardous when dropped, and that reminds us of Adam and Eve slipping up over a fruit. Bananas are yellow, the colour of gold, the first of Baby Jesus' presents. The banana looks like a boomerang, reminding us Jesus will return a bit unexpectedly. And bananas are smile-shaped, just like people smiling at Christmas parties as they're offered mulled wine, even though they're screaming inside.

The Christingle banana. It could just be the most random and ridiculous church idea ever, except for the Christingle orange.

Simon Jenkins, Ship of Fools



The great Aldbury bake off



When my friend and her husband came round for a cuppa a few years ago and casually dropped into the conversation that they had just popped their

home-made Christmas cake into the oven, it sparked my own desire to make a cake.

Now I am a tad competitive. Ok. I have self-imposed a ban on board games as I can't even let the children win Monopoly. So whilst expressing my interest in my friend's cake I was already planning my own!

I have made many Christmas cakes over the years but with a busy life had not bothered for the past few years. Now enthusiasm fired by a combination of GBBO fever and the knowledge that I could not offer my friend shop-bought cake knowing she would be countering it with a lovely home-made one (shallow I know!) made me decide this was the year I was going to take on the apron again.

My friend had chosen to go 'Delia'. She outlined the process of making a cake but it seemed a bit over complicated to me. So I dragged out my battered, stained 'Good Housekeeping' book given to me years ago by my Granny when I was a teenager (yes, I was a sad teenager who asked for a cookery book for Christmas). Once the recipe was chosen I set about making my cake.



Now, the recipe called for brandy to soak fruit in. I didn't have any brandy. I thought we had some port. Nope. All gone (or hidden?). I grovelled in my cupboards and found some ancient dark rum. That'll do. I sloshed it over the fruit. Hmmm. Needs more; more grovelling. Aha! Strawberry vodka. That's fruity and alcoholic. That'll do, I thought. Slosh slosh.



At this point my two youngest children decided they wanted to help. Cue lots of great maths chat about how many more eggs did we need to make five etc... Added in flour, spices (with added nutmeg not in the recipe because I love it!) and then boozy fruit. Splosh of bottled lemon juice because I didn't have any real ones to zest.

The recipe instructs me to fold in more brandy. Cue more grovelling in cupboard. Bingo! A forgotten miniature of Amaretto from last Christmas: that'll do, especially since I left out the flaked almonds because (a) I don't like them and (b) it would have added another couple of quid to the cost of the cake!

Splish, splash, fold, fold (or mix enthusiastically and flick cake mix all over the kitchen in the case of the children). I was now being assisted by a herd of children in assorted nightwear and costumes plus a large stuffed bear called Roy, sent home from school for me to photograph doing wholesome family activities with Grumpy. Thanks for that, School.



Onto prepping cake for the oven. The recipe instructed me to wrap up the

tin in greaseproof paper or newspaper and tie with string, then plonk in the oven sitting on more greaseproof paper or newspaper. Done. Quite proud of how wholesome, vintage-y and 1950s my cake looked. Awarded myself many 'good-mother' and 'good-housewife' points and tipped the last dregs of Amaretto into my mouth as reward!

Left children to 'clear up' (aka lick anything with cake mix on it ignoring niggling doubts about raw eggs).

Out of the oven, the cake seemed to be a triumph! But I had weeks ahead of 'feeding' it with more random alcohol and then marzipanning and icing. Carry on reading if you are at all interested in the outcome; or so bored even this passes as entertainment.



So time passes as the cake matures with the help of alcohol. Odd that, as I don't mature at all with the addition of alcohol; quite the opposite in fact.

Now this whole project started out as a bit of a joke but, Dear Reader, it grew and grew. From two families light-heartedly teasing each other about who might have made the best cake, it had grown into an official bake-off with a booze-fuelled cake-tasting finale to be held on New Year's Eve.

I had been so busy that I had neglected to marzipan or ice my cake until Christmas Eve! I know, I know (shakes head sadly) the marzipan should have had a week on the cake before I even thought of adding icing but on a positive note it meant my cake got an extra couple of weeks of being fed with alcohol so I was hoping to gain points that way.

Even worse I had intended to make my own marzipan and icing but when the other competitors offered me their



leftovers I took them gratefully. Saves waste and pennies.

So armed with sandwich bags of second-hand marzipan and icing I gathered my tools and a few curious children and after a brief perusal of the search term 'Christmas Cake Decorating' I started my masterpiece.

Luckily the marzipan, which had frankly been a bit sticky when my friend hand-smooched it onto his cake was now, two weeks later, the perfect consistency for rolling and survived the careful transfer onto the jam-coated cake.

Then I blended my other friend's left over roll-on fondant icing into some I had bought and carefully added that onto the moistened marzipan.

I hand-crafted stars by doing the two-triangle star trick onto the rolled out icing then used the bottom of the star as the top so no marks showed. I had bought edible silver spray to make a feature of the big star but it didn't really show up, so I grovelled in my cupboards, and found a selection of coloured sugar shakers and improvised.

I sent a child off to hunt for a slim ribbon as the big wired one I had bought to go round the cake didn't look right; and used a wand which originally came home in a party bag for the star pattern round the sides. You've got to give me

points there for imagination and creative use of party bag tat!

I made more icing stars to fill out the space on my rather large (re-used) cake board and to be honest I was pleased with the finished product!

Fast forward to New Year's Eve. After months of preparations, baking, feeding, marzipanning, icing, decorating, I was really hoping to tell you that my cake was victorious in the competitive Christmas cake competition.

I was sure that my 1979 Good Housekeeping recipe would beat all modern newcomers and the blend of not one, not two, but three different types of alcohol would prove a winning combination.

Originally there were only two competitors in the competition but after much joking around, and fight-talk about our cakes, we managed to persuade another three of our friends to enter their cakes. And even on the actual night of the finale we had a last minute entry from friends of our friends who had been invited along to see in the new year with us.

We arrived nurturing our entry slice of cake which was quickly plated and numbered for our judge – the friend of a friend who drew the short straw simply



because she once did a cake-related cookery course and was slightly less able to identify the cakes than the rest of us!

The judge sliced the cake samples, checked aroma, nibbled, made 'Hmmm' noises and went back to my cake for a second taste. I felt briefly hopeful until she shook her head and said the damning words: 'That one doesn't even taste like a Christmas cake'.

Well, I was crushed! I thought her judgement was a bit harsh but still



maintain that the Good Housekeeping recipe is just as good as the winning cake which was based on a Delia recipe and baked by Ian Munroe. But congratulations to the winners who were very gracious in their acceptance of the crown. I recall some whooping and screeching and a rather long victory dance but well deserved and if I'd won I would have been equally ~~beastful~~ gracious.

Already plans are afoot for an Easter simnel cake contest and another Christmas competition which may be a repeat of the cake; or maybe we will try a Christmas pudding or chocolate Yule log contest. Whatever, it was enormous fun and I can recommend it to anyone!

Afra Willmore
St John the Baptist, Aldbury

Thanks to Comment's editorial team!

On the first page of the magazine the Editor is always expressing her thanks to those people who have contributed to that edition of Comment. Perhaps now is an apposite moment to turn the tables and recognise Annette and all her team for their hard work in producing the magazine.

Churches Together in Tring is a wonderful organisation, acknowledging the diverse Christian views and interpretations of faith which exist in

society, and working as one voice in the town. It has been fascinating to watch Comment magazine changing and moving forward over time, now able to reflect these different yet similar churches within Tring. If this accord could be spread worldwide maybe the season of goodwill would last a little longer.

In the meantime, as the current theme is 'thanks', much appreciation should go to Annette and her team

for their skill and commitment in compiling the magazine. It is informative, interesting and very readable; I don't know how you edit a magazine (and I don't wish to learn!) but I enjoy the end result of someone else's endeavour.
Alison Cockerill, St Cross, Wilstone



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Two different families – Baptist and Benedictine

I am a Baptist Deacon and a Benedictine Oblate of Turvey Abbey (see article in last month's Comment). There are big differences and big similarities. The biggest difference is that Turvey Abbey is a Catholic Benedictine community or family and High Street Baptist Church is a Baptist Union community or family.

There are major differences between the two denominations.

Catholics believe that at Communion the bread and wine is actually the body and blood of Christ. The Baptists believe they are symbols. There are many other doctrinal differences.

Catholic Benedictines take vows of Obedience, Stability and Conversatio Morum. Obedience is to Christ and their Monastery Superior. Stability means that a monk or nun normally spends their life in one monastery. Conversatio Morum means continually striving in personal behaviour and monastic observance. The monk or nun will already be a Catholic. A Benedictine Oblate takes vows to abide by the Rule of St Benedict as much as is possible in their daily lives (and the Rule deals with Obedience and Conversatio Morum but not specifically with Stability).

Baptist churches normally insist that a person entering into membership is interviewed and a report is made to the Church Members' Meeting which makes a decision whether to receive the applicant into membership. Part of the interview would be to ensure that the person was a Christian, but normally no specific vows are required.

In the Baptist Church it is the Church Meeting that has the final say in a local congregation and not a person, or a group of leaders. It is the place where all members come together to seek the mind of Christ and this is also a place of mutual accountability where all members come, including the ministers, on equal terms seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit in all matters.

In the Catholic Church, including the monasteries, the final authority lies with the Pope – but major decisions are now often delegated down to the Bishop at a local level. Both the Pope and the Bishop seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in all matters.

There are also similarities. For example the Baptist Union believes that 'Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, is the sole and



absolute authority in all matters relating to faith and practice, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and that each Church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer His Laws'. The Catholic Church says 'The Christian faith is not a 'religion of the book'. Christianity is the religion of the 'Word' of God, a word which is 'not a written and mute word, but the Word is incarnate and living'. If the Scriptures are not to remain a dead letter, Christ, the eternal Word of the living God, must,

through the Holy Spirit, 'open our minds to understand the Scriptures'".

To me, these two statements show the absolute authority of the Bible which is interpreted through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This is the central point for the supreme authority in both churches.

However all this pales into insignificance when compared to the one thing both communities have in common – a love of Jesus and a love for each other. That is why I feel completely happy and at ease in both communities, despite their differences in belief and in worship. Because the Abbey has five services a day, I probably attend more Catholic services in a year than Baptist ones. Because I go to the Abbey for a whole day – or sometimes several days at a time, I probably spend as much time in each community during a year. Because the Benedictine community has a Great Silence between 9.00pm and 9.00am and a lesser silence during the day, I probably spend more time talking in our Baptist community!

I feel that I am greatly blessed and very privileged to be a member of two such wonderful families.

John Allan
High Street Baptist Church
and Turvey Abbey



Thank you from St Cross, Wilstone



Several years ago there was a discussion programme on the radio trying to ascertain the two most important words in the English language. Allowing for the vagaries of grammar the joint winners were 'I'm sorry' and 'Thank you'.

Also several years ago, back in 1990 in fact, St Cross started a major fundraising programme to raise money for updating the Church – new windows, mains water, new heating etc. Part of the project was the Jam-Jar scheme: anyone willing to help was given a decorated jam-jar and asked to save 10p a week in their jar. Twice a year the money was collected and added to the refurbishment fund. Many of these people were not local to Wilstone, and to ensure their support was acknowledged, the church committee produced a newsletter twice a year to thank people for their kindness and to let them know what their donations were being spent on. The jam-jar scheme is still running and so is the newsletter.

In tandem with the Editor's current theme of thankfulness, St Cross' newsletters are still about saying thank you to everyone who supports the Church in whatever way. With the help of the village community the outside fence was repaired, the timer-delay on the lighting was fixed and cleaning materials were donated. Hopefully everyone within the church family knows they are appreciated but for those who are unable to visit Wilstone, the newsletter serves; part of it is included here.

'As always it has been a busy year, with both joy and sorrow. To begin with we would like to pay tribute to Andrew Minter who for many years was Church Warden, and President of the Friends since the charity's formation in 1982. He and his wife Mary worshipped at St Cross for over forty years and together they undertook any and every

job that needed doing. Andrew was a 'gentleman' in every sense of the word; he loved cooking and enjoyed his turn on the Tuesday coffee morning rota, his speciality being Eccles cakes. We still miss his quiet presence—may he rest in peace.

Moving on to happier times, St Cross now has a new candle wheel, which Tony Bonham has kindly donated in memory of his mother Daphne. This was blessed at a recent service and will be used on special occasions, not just Christmas Eve. We have also been given a small nativity set by Ron and Liz Faulkner, which will be on display at Christmas. The large nativity stable, placed on the altar at Christmas, is being refurbished by Jack Quartley, and when complete will be adorned with a new set of figures, purchased with a donation from the late Eileen Knight. We are very grateful for all these kind gifts.

Throughout the year St Cross has hosted various events, usually involving food, starting in March with the Lent Lunch. The annual Strawberry Tea, held on the 30 July, was attended by over sixty people, who enjoyed sandwiches, cakes and of course strawberries and cream (Ken's skill at preparing strawberries is legendary!). This event was hosted by the Friends of St Cross and realised £320.00 for the Church. The final gourmet event was the Harvest Festival lunch (a bargain at two courses with wine for £6.00!) shared with people from across the parish. Although not a fundraising event, the Festival was able to donate £120 to the Bishop of St Albans Harvest Appeal. If you missed any of these events, we will be doing it all again next year!

Also in September St Cross participated in Bike & Hike day, and later in the month the church joined in the Big Coffee Morning to raise funds for Macmillan Cancer Care. We were delighted to welcome a large number of people to support this very worthy cause and through their generosity raised £237.00. We would like to thank everyone who supported these events, and especially those who helped to prepare, cook and wash-up! (No paper cups in Wilstone – bone china only!)

For the village of Wilstone, the big event of the year was Open Gardens/ Open Village in June, and St Cross was

proud to be part of the celebrations. It was a huge effort by a lot of people and highly successful, a wonderful community event. Perhaps the greatest honour for St Cross was to be nominated as one of the recipients of any profit made on the day, and we would once again like to say a big thank you for the donation the Church received.

Looking ahead, there is considerable work to be done at St Cross. The building needs new drainage pipes, outside painting, repointing, and ultimately new decking. By the time you read this, the first two will have been done; the latter is a long-term project. Sadly, it also looks as though the big Horse Chestnut tree close to the church entrance will have to be felled. This all costs a lot of money and we are extremely grateful to everyone who supports the Friends. The last jam-jar collection raised nearly £300.00, a wonderful sum once again.

For the rest of the year, as well as Sunday services and Tuesday coffee mornings, on 24 December at 7.00pm there is a Carol Service, followed by refreshments. If you have your next year's diary already, pencil in the Lent Lunch on Wednesday 7 March; Strawberry Tea on Sunday 29 July; and Harvest Festival lunch on Sunday 2 September. We look forward to seeing you.

To close, as always a big thank you to all the people who support St Cross in so many different ways, not least our minister Revd Didier Jaquet who juggles a full time job with the demands of church life. And special appreciation must go to our churchwarden Ken Martin for his tireless work on behalf of the Church. Along with Olga he spends many hours looking after St Cross – not least mowing the grass every other week – and everyone is very grateful for their commitment.'

'Thank you' are two very important words in today's world; hopefully they are more prevalent than 'I'm sorry', but who knows. (And if you would like a jam-jar let me know!)

Alison Cockerill, St Cross Wilstone



Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

At least once a year, Christians are reminded of Jesus' prayer for his disciples that 'they may be one so that the world may believe' (John 17:21). Hearts are touched and Christians come together to pray for their unity. Congregations and parishes all over the world exchange preachers or arrange special ecumenical celebrations and prayer services. The event that kicks off this special experience is the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

Traditionally the week of prayer is celebrated between 18-25 January, between the feasts of St Peter and St Paul. In the southern hemisphere, where January is a vacation time, churches often find other days to celebrate it, for example around Pentecost, which is also a symbolic date for unity.

Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power

Today Caribbean Christians of many different traditions see the hand of God active in the ending of enslavement. It is a uniting experience of the saving action of God which brings freedom. For this reason the choice of the song of Moses and Miriam (Exodus 15:1-21), as the motif of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2018 was considered a most appropriate one.

The themes of the daily material raise some of the contemporary issues addressed by the churches of the Caribbean. Abuses of human rights are found across the region and we are challenged to consider our manner of welcoming of the stranger into our midst. Human trafficking and modern-day slavery continue to be huge issues. Addiction to pornography and drugs continue to be serious challenges to

all societies. The debt crisis has a negative impact upon the nations and upon individuals – the economies of the nations and people have become precarious. Family life continues to be challenged by the economic restrictions which lead to migration, domestic abuse and violence.

The Caribbean Churches work together to heal the wounds in the body of Christ. Reconciliation demands

Together in Tring have for many years focused on the need to pray for unity and have put on a variety of times of prayer during the eight days.

In 2018, plans are still being finalized as we hope to have a pulpit swap on Sunday 21 January in some of the Churches where we can staff extra ministers being available to cover this.

Lunch and short prayer sessions will be in each of the churches at 12.00 noon. Please look out for up-to-date information but at present we have booked: Thursday 18 January at New Mill Baptist Church; Friday 19 January at High Street Baptist Church; Monday 22 January at St Martha's; Tuesday 23 January at St Peter & St Paul; and Wednesday 24 January at Corpus Christi Church; Thursday 25 January at New Mill Baptist Church.

Lunch will either be bread and soup, or if the Church has a café, the choice of something from their menu.

In the afternoon of Sunday 28 January at 3.30pm there will be a service of Choral Evensong at St Mary's Puttenham, to which all the churches are invited, and the theme of the sermon will be Christian Unity. This will be followed by tea and cake!

Please look for posters in the New Year for more local information.

More information about the Week of Prayer nationally can be found on the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland <https://ctbi.org.uk>.

Janet Goodyer, St Peter & St Paul



repentance, reparation and the healing of memories. The whole Church is called to be both a sign and an active agent of this reconciliation.

Christian Aid

Each year Christian Aid provides the Go and Do action points for each of the daily reflections – linking into the important work of Christian Aid in the relief of poverty and advocacy of justice.

Local response

This annual initiative from the World Council of Churches is disseminated through Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and taken up by local Churches Together groups. Locally, Churches

Transition at Bishop Wood School



Our lives are marked by moments when one experience begins and another one ends. Sometimes the change is gradual; sometimes it is sudden.

Change can be disorientating, but less so, I think, when we allow time for adjustment; when we create space for a period of transition from one way-of-being to the next.

The big changes in life take place on multiple levels; physical, emotional, psychological, financial, and implicitly we know that we need to make time to adjust, whether it's the acceptance of a period of chaos following the arrival of a new baby or a period of mourning following the death of a loved one. These are the big events that mark our lives profoundly and shape the narrative of who we are.

However, life is full of small changes too in our working lives, in our personal lives and in our life as a community. Many of you know that Christopher and I have three children. As they get older, their needs change and the shape of our family life together changes too.

Over six years ago, I gave up work and Chris became the sole earner in our household. This felt the best fit for our family at the time, but perhaps, not so, now. We are currently in a period of transition as we re-evaluate what our working lives might look like in the future and the implications for us, individually, as a couple and for our children.

Bishop Wood School is also in the middle of a period of transition. Linda Hardman, our Headteacher since September 2004, left at the end of July. We have appointed a new Headteacher, Gary Stanley, who will be taking up the post in January. This term, we have transitional arrangements in place. However, in reality, the process of adjustment began at the end of April when I first received Linda's letter of resignation and will no doubt continue for a good few months into the New Year.

Last term, once the practicalities of recruiting a new Headteacher were underway, an equally important

consideration for me was to ensure that Linda had a good ending to her time at Bishop Wood. Parents and staff quickly set about collecting money for gifts for Linda which, in my view, included some genius choices. Parents gave her an intricate papercraft design of the beautiful tree in the school field interwoven with inspirational phrases. A photograph album full of messages and memories was one of the gifts that was carefully put together by staff. Thanks to a tip off from Vicki Gentle as to Linda's love of all things Joules, the governors gave her a brightly-coloured Joules scarf amongst other things. We had a special assembly to which past governors and members of staff and other colleagues were invited, with Linda's family there as well. Every child in the school took part in some way with songs sung in French (Linda's specialist subject), ballet performances



(Linda used to dance herself) and a send-up of the encouragement, praise and rewards that could be expected from a trip to Mrs Hardman's office.

Over the summer, I met with Linda to hold an exit interview which created some space for her to reflect on her experiences as Headteacher at Bishop Wood. I also know that she spent many hours over the summer holidays tying up loose ends, passing on information and advice and planning for the autumn term with Jon Hall.

Early on in the recruitment process, it became clear that, realistically, we were aiming to recruit a new Headteacher to start in January 2018 and that some period of transitional arrangements would be required. Jon Hall, Deputy Head, was helpfully open with me about his position. His previous stint as Acting Headteacher before Linda's arrival had confirmed to him that Headship is not for him and that his great love as a teacher is being in the classroom. However, for

the good of the school, he was happy to take on the role of Acting Headteacher for a period of time, if this was required. This was good news for the governing body! We then needed to consider how to support Jon in this role. We decided to use this opportunity to grow leadership skills within the school and rather than appoint one Acting Deputy Head, we have appointed three Acting Assistant Heads. Ruth McGhee, Elaine Clark and Paula Birley all have clearly distinct areas of responsibility and, so far, this arrangement seems to be working well. Jon and his team have been doing a great job leading the school during this period of transition and I particularly want to thank Jon for his hard work and commitment over the last few months.

Gary Stanley does not officially start as Headteacher at Bishop Wood until January. However, it has been

encouraging that, over the course of this term, he has taken time to get to know the school better with numerous visits. Although, Gary, too, has had experience as an Acting Headteacher, this is his first Headship, and so we have ensured that time and resources are set aside for support and training for him to

help him adjust to his new role. Gary is bringing great enthusiasm and energy to the Headship of Bishop Wood and I know that this is an exciting opportunity for him.

The process of change from one Headteacher to another has been time-consuming. At home, I still have numerous bits of paperwork left over from the recruitment process to remind me of the work that it has involved; sample job adverts, draft person specifications and interview questions for the school council to name but a few! However, a Headteacher is enormously important and influential in the life of a school. A new Headteacher marks the start of a new era. As the Headship at Bishop Wood changes hands, I hope that we have created time and space for a good ending, a good transition and a good beginning and I am excited by the new possibilities that lie ahead.

**Beth Townsend, Chair of Governors
Bishop Wood C of E Junior School**

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Living God's Love

DRINK BEER AND SING CAROLS

CHRISTMAS IS THE CELEBRATION OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS, THE SAVIOUR OF MANKIND

Sunday 10th December 6 pm at Tring Brewery
Sing your favourite carols as we celebrate the birth of Christ. Food as well!

Booking essential - Sign up in Tring Church or email admin@tringteamparish.org.uk

Festive Choral Evensong for Candlemas

**Sunday, February 4th 2018 at 6.30pm,
St Peter and St Paul, Tring.**

With canticles 'based on Latin-American rhythms' by Bryan Kelly, a sumptuous anthem and rousing hymns.

Refreshments will be provided after the service.
Further information from Vivianne Child on 01442 826092 or email us at vhild@childassociates.co.uk

Winter Concert

2017

Tring Choral Society and Orchestra
Conductor: Colin Stevens
Leader: Janet Hicks

CHRISTMAS CONCERT

J S Bach
Christmas Oratorio

Soloists	
Soprano:	Ruth Provost
Contralto:	Helen Charlston
Tenor:	Robert Johnston
Bass:	Michael Bundy

Saturday 16 December
Church of Saint Peter & Saint Paul, TRING
Starting at 7.30pm
(doors open 6.45pm)

Tickets: £12, Free (U18)
from Beechwood Fine Foods, Frogmore St.
Tring. or Email: tringchoralsociety@gmail.com

Tring Choral Society
Registered Charity Number 276980
www.tringchoral.org.uk

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Wedding Fayre**

Saturday 28th April 11am-3pm
St Peter & St Paul's, Tring

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THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

Thank you...

When our youngest son was just over 2 we found ourselves in a situation where a stranger helped us but we didn't have time to say a proper thank you. We were out shopping in Chesham with our son who had a bit of a cold but was (I thought) OK and would benefit from a bit of fresh air.

We'd got a sausage roll for our son and all of a sudden I noticed he was staring into space. I have no idea how I knew but I said to my husband, 'He's going to have a fit'. To cut a long story short, he did indeed start fitting by which time we were rushing into Boots as this was the nearest shop. Strangely I thought that as they sold medicinal items it was even more apt that the nearest shop would also be the most helpful – they were bound to have someone with a bit of medical knowledge working there.

They were very good and phoned for an ambulance and whilst they were doing this a lady who was standing at the pharmacy collecting some prescriptions suddenly came and helped. She spoke really calmly. She helped turn him on his side and kept reassuring me

constantly. I by this time was sobbing and muttering over and over, 'Oh my goodness, oh my goodness,' in between 'It's OK sweetheart, it's OK sweetheart'. My husband was in complete shock: between the pair of us we were not much more than onlookers; but this lovely lady took over, wiping his mouth, checking he was not hurting himself and keeping an eye on how long he was fitting for.

When the paramedics arrived things moved really quickly and we were moved to the ambulance and blue-lighted with sirens blaring to hospital. We didn't get a chance to say a proper thank you to this lady.

After forty-eight hours in hospital where the whole episode played over constantly in my mind, I felt I just had to find this lady to tell her how much it had meant having her calm voice reassuring, to say thank you for taking charge when I felt I had just crumbled. I had no idea who she was, but I thought that Boots may know as she was collecting a prescription. I sent them a message but they couldn't tell me: all they could do was leave a message in case the lady

happened to enquire if they'd heard anything.

I contacted a local paper and they ran a story for me and said they would contact me if they found out who the lady was. I heard absolutely nothing. Three years on I still don't know who she was but I hope that she did hear how grateful I was somehow. I like to think that she is someone who just didn't feel the need to be praised, an angel in disguise. Whoever she was, I still remember her kindness as if it were yesterday, and if you are reading this by some chance and think that was me, well here's another thank you from me and my husband: your kindness made a difference to a truly awful day.

Sarah Johnson, St Peter & St Paul



A teenage rom-com, with cancer – no spoilers



Hazel's parents make her go to a cancer support group at the local Church; generally it's boring and a bit hopeless but she encounters Gus and they fall in love.

Both of them have cancer: Hazel's lungs don't work and she carts an oxygen tank with her everywhere, while Gus has lost most of one leg but does well with a prosthetic. They are both about 17.

Gus becomes intrigued by Hazel's favourite book – 'as close a thing as I had to a Bible'. Its author seemed to '(a) understand what it's like to be dying, and (b) not have died.' The book ends in mid-sentence, and Hazel wants to know what happens to the main characters, Anna, her Mum, the 'Dutch Tulip Man', and not least Anna's hamster (which her mother hates). Hazel has written repeatedly to the author but

he's become a recluse.

So Gus decides they'll take a trip from Indianapolis (where they live) to Amsterdam, where the author lives. It gets complicated but I won't spoil the story.

There are not many teenagers in the Parish Church Book Group (well, none, and Didier comes closest) but we were caught up by the story, and moved by it, in different ways. And we could empathise with Gus when he worries about not making a difference during his life; and Hazel, wanting to be understood and appreciated.

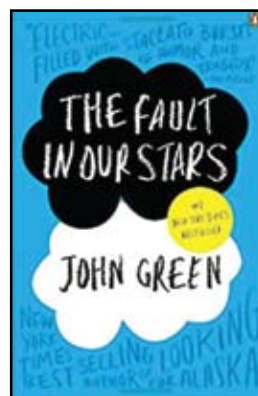
Along the way we read of how their respective parents try their best to support Hazel and Gus, while also

trying to cope with their own impending loss: Hazel's dad is on the point of tears all the time, while her mum is brisk and upbeat; Gus's parents post little 'Encouragements' around the house. One of these 'Without Pain, How Could We Know Joy' echoes the theme of last month's book ('The Problem of Pain' by C S Lewis), and for some of us this month's book brought to life the dry argument of last month's.

'The Fault in our Stars' is a best-selling book by John Green, an Episcopalian who lives in Indianapolis. It has also been made into a film. John and his brother Hank are also active Vloggers and they post, on YouTube, videos which millions of people look at. Well worth a read.

The next meeting of the Book Group is on Sunday 28 January 2018 at 6.45pm in St Peter & St Paul's, when we'll share our reactions to 'Sapiens', described as a brief history of humankind, by Yuval Noah Harari.

John Whiteman, St Peter & St Paul



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Tring's own Santa

With the sad passing of my mother, Mrs Jill Verlie Atkin in late August, I had time to reflect on the happy times we had as a family. With Christmas coming, I would like to share one memory with you.

Being a family of bakers, Christmas morning started early in our house with most of the presents left by Santa being opened by 6.00am. At the time I didn't think much of this, but I realise now that the reason Mum let me and my sister Elaine get away with this was because Mum was busy with other things. She was busy preparing her huge Shire Horse 'Queenie' – making sure she was well groomed and that her harness was cleaned and polished ready to be connected to Santa's second sleigh (a beautifully built governor's cart) in readiness to take Santa around Tring and the villages to deliver a few last minute presents; and to ask the children if they had received all the presents that they had hoped for.

Having a cart to go around in on Christmas day was very useful as there generally wasn't enough snow around for a sleigh to work. One of the questions nearly every child asked Santa



was why was a horse pulling Santa around and not Rudolf? And the answer that was given was that Rudolf and the other reindeer were now resting until next year.

Mum used the opportunity of going round with Santa to hand deliver presents to her friends and I now reflect on this and I'm amazed at the love and care she put into making these, be it pots of hyacinths planted just right so they started to just flower or home-made jars of bath salts.

As the years went on, the people of Tring got used to seeing Mum, Santa,

Elaine, Queenie and me on Christmas Day doing the rounds and would come out of their warm homes with a carrot for Queenie and an alcoholic drink for Mum and Santa. On some years this unfortunately left Santa worse for wear before finishing visiting everyone! And it wasn't unheard of for mum and family to be put up for a couple of hours in a friend's home before carrying on!

When the pulling of the cart got too much for Queenie, Mum was able to carry on taking Santa around on Christmas day in her open-topped MG sports car. This was what made Christmas special to my mum, being able to see and give presents to her friends on Christmas Day. Sadly we do not have any photos of this, but I have found a newspaper clipping of when Santa asked Mum to transport him to a Tring school for a Christmas Fair. (If any Comment readers do have a photo of Jill Atkin and the MG, please do contact the Editor.)

I hope that this has brought back some great Christmas memories for you from your childhood. Rest in peace, Mum.

Tony Atkin

A traditional Hungarian Karácsony



Christmas is a very significant celebration all across the western countries including Hungary. It is one of the most significant Christian holidays, but has many more layers apart from religion. Folklore, commercial and family traditions are attached to it, adding or subtracting value and giving a personal meaning for everyone. In this article I will try to touch briefly on these aspects of Christmas, sharing with you how we celebrate it in Hungary.

Let's start with the deepest layer of Christmas. The darkest days of the year have always been significant and celebrated long before Christianity. Searching for hope, light in the darkness and the promise of new life have been the core of many pagan traditions. The Hungarian word for Christmas is Karácsony. Although the etymology of

the word is uncertain, it most likely refers to a pagan ritual or the solstice.

The Catholic celebration of Christmas is similar to the Anglican, starting with Advent and finishing with Pentecost, including the Midnight Mass (which is undeniably the most 'popular' mass during the year). We do not have Christingles, but we celebrate St Nicolaus, a bishop of the first century, giving away all his fortune to the poor. His legend survived 800 years, transformed and was unfortunately commercialized into someone we all

know: Santa Claus. He arrives in Hungary earlier than England, on the 6 December and puts treats into children's shoes left in the window.

Christmas is very popular among children. All the lights, carols,



sweets... and the presents, of course. Christmas Eve is celebrated in the close family circle. That's when the children usually get their presents brought and placed under the tree by Baby Jesus or the angels (no Santa Claus this time). The Christmas menu is quite flexible: we usually have fish (as the symbol of Jesus) and there are Christmas cakes.

I loved Christmas as a child and I love it now, though its meaning and the way we celebrate it have changed a lot. And I already look forward to the Christmas of 2018 when I can share its love and light with my first baby.

I wish you all a merry Christmas from Hungary!

Eszter Pickarczyk Simon
St Peter & St Paul



'Twas the night before Christmas

World War II was causing problems, ration books were carefully looked after, no NHS, brides were wearing dresses sewn from parachute silk. Most husbands were away doing their duty for their country; most wives were at home doing their duty by holding everything together, growing vegetables, rearing chickens, eeking out rations, etc. and working in factories.

It was Christmas Eve. My mother and big sister Joy, nearly 12 years old, were preparing for their Christmas Day, but it did not go according to plan. My mother realised that I wanted to join the world.



She had no intention of leaving Joy over Christmas. There was a bed waiting in a nursing home, but my mother would not go. I had other ideas. In the early evening our neighbour insisted that she would have Joy with her own five children (a small three-bedroom home), but it was still a problem to get my mother to the nursing home. She was

in labour. She could not walk, she could not go on the bus.

There was one man in the road (past signing up age) who had a car, a Ford Prefect.

He was not keen to help: petrol was rationed and private cars were not allowed on the road. Neighbours persuaded him, on the understanding that they would all stand up for him if he 'got into trouble'.

The expectant mother was delivered to the nursing home with no further problems, and in a couple of hours, midnight had passed and I was delivered on 25 December.

Many, many years later I asked Joy if she had hated me. She had been an only child for twelve years, and I had spoilt her Christmas with her mum. No children were allowed to visit. Joy said, 'No, an angel must have brought you being born on that day, but your name should have been Christine'.

My father was in England and was allowed a couple of days'

compassionate leave, during which time he went to the Registry Office. He forgot the name Christine on the way, and so I became Pamela, and for good measure he added my mother's name, Daisy. Phew! He got away with it.

As it happens our family all have birthdays on special days. My husband Clive and our first son have birthdays in April, so they often share it with Easter Day; our first daughter was a Valentine baby; our second son appeared the same time as the first day of Spring while our second daughter waited for the Ides of March.

Here I thank Mr Rolph, for driving his car and getting to the nursing home in time. Oh yes, Christmas Day is a great day to have a birthday.

Pam Russell, St Peter & St Paul



Christmas memories

Two Christmas Days stand out in my memory. One is my elder daughter's first Christmas. She was born the week before, and as we drove to the nursing home in the middle of night, every house had a lighted Christmas tree in the window. In those days, you stayed in the nursing home for ten days after the birth, but we were both allowed home for the day on Christmas Day. On my

tentative query as to whether or not I should partake of the rum sauce with my pudding, Matron, a no-nonsense Yorkshire woman, said stoutly that of course I should – it would help the baby to sleep soundly all afternoon.

And the other extra-special Christmas was the first of my eldest granddaughter. They were living in Devon at the time, and we woke on

Christmas morning to find snow had fallen during the night – quite magical! She was six months old and we wrapped her up warmly and took her to Church with us. My younger daughter, who had driven down from Bristol to spend the day with us, arrived a little late having had to fight her way through the snow.

Anthea Fraser, St Peter & St Paul

Christmas past



So many wonderful Christmas memories, each one made special by a particular gathering, a ritual continued or broken, an event or just a present.

By tradition and for most of my life it has always been a family Christmas day at our house, first with my mother as chief cook and then, luckily, with my dear Virginia looking after between eighteen and six, depending on who was around at the time.

Being born and living so close to the Parish Church our family Yuletides were always inter-connected with its sacred and secular activities. Hosting Norah Grace and her Red Cross Carol Singers to Hot Toddy and mince pies in the build up, to my playing Uncle Holly on a tower in the Market Car Park, to Midnight Mass and then the Morning Service.

In the 50s everybody in our block went to Grandma Wheeler's (where the estate agents are now) until 2.00 o'clock in the morning, then home to put the turkey in the oven before Church. Talking of the turkey, one picture that will remain in my mind forever is when my father returned home 'on leave' from the Army for Christmas 1944. He had managed

to get a huge turkey to feed our family of ten, only to find it was too big to go in our small oven. As was the practice of many families in those days, he took it to the nearest bakers, in our case Mr Goodliffe in Akeman Street. By this time Father had risen to the rank of Army Captain, a title – given his surname – he much enjoyed.

On Christmas morning he wore his full dress uniform and the picture I have is of him at 7.00 o'clock in the morning, walking proudly across the Church Square bearing this great steaming tray of roast turkey and smiling a 'Merry Christmas' to us all as we watched having gathered at the corner by the Church wall.

Nothing to do with Christmas, but the Goodliffe family were great friends with the Baker family who were not bakers but grocers at the bottom of Queen Street. Their daughter Hilary, who became a soul mate of mine when we were in our teens, used to go and play with the Goodliffe's children, which games included going down the flour chute from first floor to basement. Obviously forbidden and punishable by detention, great care was always taken to dust off outer clothing and so it was quite a while before both sets of parents discovered how little Hilary had got flour on her knickers.

In the early post-war period household appliances were considered a real luxury. Not surprising then that for Christmas 1952 my father proudly presented my mother with... a vacuum cleaner. And she was delighted. At least she said so. Some months before, a travelling salesman had called into my father's office to show him this latest wonderful machine. Dirt was taken from the garden, soot and ashes taken from the fireplace, and along with some white powder from the workshop all were liberally sprinkled on and trodden into the fine Turkey carpet on the office floor. The machine was pushed over the mess which miraculously disappeared into the inflated bag without a second traverse. 'But,' said the salesman, 'it is so gentle that no harm can be done to the most delicate of fabrics.' Deftly turning the machine upside-down, still running, he pulled a silk handkerchief from his breast pocket and drew it over the spinning sucking brushes. It floated across the yawning chasm unharmed and he put it back into his pocket. Father bought the machine on the spot and tucked it away for the big day.

That Christmas my dear Uncle Frank, a wonderful, little bit naughty and very handsome bachelor, was staying over together with my maternal grandma and other family members.



Father and Frank did not always see eye to eye – brothers-in-law – but peace was declared that morning, and Frank had bought my father an extremely expensive present to make sure. We all assembled for the grand unwrapping and the ceremony of exhibiting the abilities of the vacuum commenced. Dirt was brought in from the garden, soot and ashes, white powder, the lot. Shock and horror were expressed in full but we stood back in awe as all signs of potential damage to the newly fitted carpet disappeared. 'But wait,' said Father, 'It's so gentle...' Turning the still-running machine upside-down he took a silk handkerchief from his breast pocket, but lacking the practice of the salesman he let it slip from his fingers and with one satisfying gulp the machine sucked up and shredded the silk square. Power off, the refuse bag was opened to reveal a handful of small remnants of the precious fabric; doubly precious because it was the extremely expensive Christmas present that Frank had given Father that morning, and which he had not over-graciously received. They did not speak until the third round of drinks at which time the laughter took over. We had another unforgettable and wonderful day, but my father never lived it down.

But back to Christmas. During the 60s and the ensuing twenty years, I

remember marvelling at my parents' and uncles' stamina on the big day, having been up late on the Eve laying the Festive Table. One uncle insisted on measuring each knife and fork's position while the other polished every wine glass and decanted – and sampled – the port. After a late breakfast and a huge lunch, tea and the traditional cake was served, followed by a cold collation and then games. And more games and then finally Goodnight snacks and drinks. That generation had unbelievable stamina.

In the mid-70s (and perhaps, dear reader, you will recall the one time it snowed on Christmas Eve in Tring) Virginia's sister, who is almost as adorable, came to stay with her recently wed husband Brian. She had decamped to live in Guernsey and met, fell in love with and married (sadly rather briefly) a charismatic local whom I took to immediately. He did enjoy a drink. We all went for a walk in the snow. Absolute magic. That year as always, Mother and Father joined us and so we were just the six of us in the tiny little room behind our shop in the High Street. As was their wont, they dressed up as if for cocktails. I can still see my mother's long plaid skirt. Brian unfortunately had no such gear and sat on the sofa, smoking a roll-up, with open neck shirt and his sleeves rolled up to reveal – wait for it –



a tattoo of a Swastika. Well, he was from Guernsey. He did not stand up when my parents entered but greeted them by saying 'Hello' and addressing them as Frank and Nina. We all froze. Dad had been fighting the Swastika. Total, awful, dead, freezing silence. What would he say? In less than a split second Father went over, sat down and said 'Brian, I'm sorry to say... I've never been to Guernsey. Tell me, what's it like?' He then turned to me and asked for the whiskey bottle and some water as 'Brian and I could do with a drink!' Brian turned out to be a real bookworm, they got on famously and we had the jolliest of Christmases. Brian and Frank remained friends for many years.

During the War while my father was stationed in Northern Ireland and later Iceland attached to the Royal Signals, he would make model toys for me, inventively using scraps of whatever materials were available. One Christmas it was a battleship of wood, with portholes made of metal bootlace eyes, the guns, funnels and bridge made of cut sheets of food tins. Another was an oblong box, heavily painted with a mixture of paint and sand to represent grass and woodland with a silvery blue strip across the front and sandy pathways. When you opened the box, inside were blocks of wood painted to resemble parts of a castle. Each had pins which fitted into the box when upside-down and you assembled a fort. The silvery strip was the moat and pieces of sponge on sticks, which also fitted into holes, looked like trees and the whole thing came with some home-cast lead soldiers, all to be packed away when it was time for bed.

But the best of all came in 1945. A miniature model of our Bedford truck (that we used for collecting and delivering furniture before the War) was made from off-cuts of wood, the bumpers were of curtain rail, the mudguards of bean tins, a torch battery fired the lights and the removable wire-supported cover was of a section from his bedding. This was presented to me in a garage of plywood with a flat roof made of playing cards painted and sanded over to look like tiling. Various empty cartridge shells, buttons and bits of tubing made the petrol pump, fire extinguishers and outside fittings.

Imagine opening the hinged and bolted doors of this wonderful building and rolling out the lorry. What a father. What a Christmas.

John Bly, St Peter & St Paul

A very special Christmas



My birthday is on 27 December so when my 50th rolled around I decided that I wanted it to be special. I wanted to go somewhere cold – with snow if possible. I contacted my sister and family and we all agreed to go to Soll in Austria on the 16 December and return on the 30th. We booked everything up and also bought small Christmas presents for each other as well as buying all our alpine gear and we set off.

It was like a picture postcard when we arrived: all the fir trees tipped with snow and lovely Alpine houses and our typically Austrian Hotel. We had a go at skiing, went walking and sightseeing too. The build up to Christmas in the UK is so frantic now but it was not so then. People strolled around buying their Christmas tree and then carrying it home. The shops were not bursting at the seams and it was still snowing. We booked lunch for Christmas Day at the village Inn and also my birthday meal too.

On Christmas Eve, all was ready at the hotel. We wandered into the Square in the afternoon and the decorations were lovely. In the evening we went down for our meal and the hotelier was playing Mozart on his tape recorder. We

had all dressed up as this was the main meal of the festival. It was delicious. No turkey but some delicious pork instead with a lovely dessert to follow. Afterwards we went to the full Church in the village for Midnight Mass.

Afterwards people took candles lit from those in Church and lit small lights on their family graves in the churchyard. We walked back to the hotel and on a balcony nearby, a small group of musicians were playing ‘Silent Night’ as the snowflakes were tumbling down.

On Christmas morning we had breakfast and later went to the inn for lunch and opened our presents. We then went for a walk and noticed there were a few shops open. We went in just because we can usually never do this on Christmas Day!

In the evening we had our meal and then went for a carriage ride driven by horses through the countryside all wrapped up in blankets and warmed up with a glass of schnapps; then back to a café for hot chocolate.

My birthday was celebrated with a great trip to Innsbruck and another lovely meal.

This really was a memorable Christmas but I would never try to repeat it. Could it ever be that magical again? And suppose it didn’t snow?!

Thelma Fisher
High Street Baptist Church



What’s in a name?



My sister was born on Christmas Eve. My mother always blamed this slightly inconvenient date on Ivor Novello: my parents had been to see ‘The Dancing Years’ to celebrate my father’s birthday on 22 March earlier in the year.

As Mummy came round from the anaesthetic, nurses were coming through the ward with lanterns, singing Christmas carols. ‘Oh,’ thought Mummy, hazily but happily, ‘I’ve died, and this is Heaven!’

My parents faced an immediate ‘naming’ problem, however, having already used up Carole a couple of years earlier on me (who had actually been expected to be Peter). So my sister is Josephine Mary.

Twenty-one years later, as we sat round a winter tea at home, ‘Happy Birthday to You’ struck up outside and we drew open the curtains to see the Salvation Army band gathered on the pavement.

Carole Wells, St Peter & St Paul

The key to a good Christmas



Christmas Eve 2008 was mild and dry, so we walked down to the Church to sing at Midnight Mass.

When the service was over, there was cheerful bonhomie before we came home again, up the hill. Not until we were back at our own front door did we realise that the house keys were in the pocket of my robe, hanging in a cupboard in the choir vestry.

Back at the Church, everything was now as dark and silent as it had been bright and lively half an hour before. Home again, all on foot, with no alternative but to start banging the door loud enough to rouse the slumbering brother-in-law inside, without also waking the neighbours.

Martin Wells, St Peter & St Paul

Christmas in the Rector’s household

Unsurprisingly Christmas is an incredibly busy time of year in our house. Mum (Revd Jane Banister) and Dad (Revd Huw Bellis) are always at various services and concerts. This means we have developed some of our own Christmas traditions.

Christmas itself starts quite late in our house. While many put up their Christmas trees in early December, ours goes up on the Saturday after we break up from school. However this year that is the 23 December so I might angle for it to be earlier.

We tend to spend Christmas Eve at various services and occasionally being roped into them. Last year I somehow ended up being a Wise Girl in St Peter & St Paul – I’m not entirely sure when I agreed to that one! Over the years I have taken on the role of the Narrator in All Saints, Long Marston, and assisting Mum in the whole operation. Generally we go to the Long Marston Crib Service with our grandparents, which is always good. I have discovered, however, that there are only so many times ‘Away in a Manger’ remains adorable.

Dad then goes on to a Midnight Mass service but at that point I’m a little ‘Churched out’. We do lay out Christmas stockings (even though we don’t believe in Santa any more) but in our house we never took Father Christmas super

seriously. Our Christmas has a different focus.

On Christmas Day we wake up early (by my standards anyway). The rules have always been to open stockings and presents from our parents before Dad leaves for the 8.00 o’clock service (yes – another service!). Any family presents are opened after Church. Christmas Day in Church has always been one of my favourite services. The balloons are a



particular favourite – especially watching Lucy Winter’s reaction.

When we return home we open any other presents and have Christmas dinner. Rather than the classic turkey we have our own variations on the Christmas meal. We have had pizza, toad in the hole and last year was meatballs (I think). The discussions on what the dinner should be are always

fun; meatballs was Martha’s choice.

We choose to have a traditional Christmas dinner on Epiphany (6 January). It’s like the last hurrah for Christmas. After lunch everyone tends to veg out. Mum and Dad are fairly exhausted and everyone tends to be stuffed. The only appropriate thing to do is to enjoy Christmas TV which I think is done across the nation regardless of how the rest of the day was spent.

I asked a couple of my friends how they spend their Christmas since I have never seen ours as unusual. Lots of other people either head to family or have family descend on them. We do that on Boxing Day. I am certainly glad our Christmas requires no travelling.

The main difference seems to be the amount of Church attended (which is an awful lot) and the fact that it is a working day for Mum and Dad. People also seem to find our Christmas dinner tradition shocking.

Despite Christmas being a busy season for us, it is still one of my favourite times of the year. It is completely and utterly joyous.

Eliza Bellis, Tring Team



Christmas, past and present

I am now approaching my 83rd Christmas. Time to revisit my early ones and look forward a little?

The first I remember was Christmas 1939 which I spent on a farm with an uncle and aunt in Devon as a wartime evacuee. They lived near an old Methodist chapel and this was the first experience of organised religion that I can remember. The singing was deafening and the building some years later collapsed (not sure why), although the site and churchyard still remain.

Christmas of 1941 was spent in Exeter, by which time I had become a chorister at St Sidwell’s Church in the city. Sadly, the Church and the house I lived in were victims of Hitler’s blitz of cathedral cities in May 1942. As a result, my father brought me back to London – his argument was that if I were to be

killed it might as well be in London as in Exeter.

I then became a chorister at St Michael’s Church in Highgate and for some years, rehearsals for and performances in Christmas services dominated the run-up to the big day.

My pre-Christmases later became very predictable for many years. I had become a chorister at my secondary school in Highgate and December rotated around rehearsals for the ‘Nine Lessons and Carols’ performance and carol singing/fundraising at the biggest private Christmas parties we could talk our way into.

Our current solution to Christmas has become quite predictable. In recent years we have attended the children’s service at All Saints, Long Marston, where two of our grandchildren were

baptised. We are very lucky; all four adult children are now in the UK, all living within comfortable travelling distance. We wait to be invited out on the two big days but run an open house after and into the New Year. So far it seems to work quite well.

The idea of overeating and sitting around watching TV sitcoms (or worse) has as much attraction for me as taking a plunge into the Serpentine on Boxing Day morning. I once did something similar in a Hampstead Heath swimming pond out of curiosity as a teenager. It cured me of any ambition for a repeat.

All our children and grandchildren are still talking to us regularly and positively. Christmas is the cement that holds it all together.

Bill Bradford, St Peter & St Paul

Crisis at Christmas



Crisis, what crisis? Why, in the second decade of this century, is homelessness still such a pervasive problem? There are manifold reasons but it appears that, at present, the incumbent government are not actively fulfilling their duty to eradicate this problem, which sadly affects tens of thousands of people. It is then left to charities like 'Crisis' to pick up the pieces where central or local funding falls short.

The charity Crisis, formerly known as 'Crisis at Christmas', was initially formed in 1967, following Ken Loach's searing docudrama 'Cathy Come Home', which highlighted the desperate circumstances of one couple and their young child struggling to survive with little or no money and insecure housing.

Four years later, 'Crisis at Christmas' opened its doors in a local London Church, manned by twenty volunteers. Every year from 23-30 December, the charity has welcomed thousands of street homeless and those in temporary accommodation into its London-based shelters. All staffed by volunteers aged 18 to 70 plus, it has become an essential service to plug the gap where the lost and vulnerable in society are excluded, with no safe place to go at a time of year when family is paramount.

As a 20-something looking to find his way in the world and coming from a background where compassion and love were highly valued, I decided to become an active volunteer, meeting homeless

men and women on the weekly soup, tea and clothing run around the less salubrious parts of London. It was a simple concept: drive a slightly worn Transit on a Saturday evening to Seven Sisters (North), Hackney (East), Spitalfields (City) and The Strand (Central), offering hot tea, blankets and clothing and a lot of conversation.

I'd set off with usually about six other hardy souls, wrapped up warm and ready to dispense a little hope. At the time, this was a vital service and it continued as such for another six or so years before disbanding, as Crisis expanded more into a campaigning and research-led role.

The clothes, shoes and blankets were sorted and bagged in a part of a disused office block near to Elephant and Castle. I travelled there to help out and combined this with volunteering for night shifts at some of the annual Christmas shelters. I would work an average of four eight-hour shifts over a seven-day period; some would be there for the whole week. It was a humbling and exhausting experience but it never let you lose sight of its principal aim: to act collectively to help those on the margins of society and to offer them, hopefully, something more permanent than just cardboard sheeting and a damp sleeping bag.

Of course there were those who complained that it was doing no more than papering over the cracks. What I saw and experienced behind the veneer was, as with all people who volunteer, a dedicated, non-judgmental band of brothers and sisters simply doing what they could to help. For some of our

guests (I loved that word, that sense of making a person feel wanted and special) it was the only time they spoke to someone else all year. For others, it offered companionship, hot food, and a comfortable bed. For others still – those in the direst need – it offered a chance of a more permanent place to live in the New Year.

Crisis at Christmas still continues to this day – a shocking indictment of our 21st century society. An independent study called 'The Homelessness Monitor' has calculated that rough sleepers (ie those with no accommodation who are forced to sleep and exist on the streets) have increased by 132% since 2010 and 16% since 2015. The real figures are likely to be higher.

The main cause of statutory homelessness is the ending of assured shorthold tenancies, the standard contract for those renting from private landlords. With house prices in London rising by 48% between 2007 and 2015, there is even more financial pressure upon people from all backgrounds, whilst rents themselves become unaffordable. Lack of social housing and a growing gap between rich and poor means that organisations like Crisis are needed more than ever to address the funding gap and to try to improve the lives of homeless people.

It would be heartening to believe that Crisis at Christmas may one day become a distant memory. Whilst homelessness exists, it will have to focus on the present and bring renewed hope for those who have lost theirs.

Hugh Ogilvie, via St Peter & St Paul



No bells at Christmas!

Though by the time this letter is in circulation Christmas 1940 will have come and gone and 1941 will have already begun, yet I cannot begin it better than with the old and well-tried greeting to you all of 'A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year'.

To those who really believe that the blessed Babe at Bethlehem was Truly God and Truly Man, and act on that belief as if it were true – which is the only kind of belief or faith or trust which is worthy of the name – the message of Christmas will always be – as it has

always been – a message of joy and happiness in the truest sense of those words. It brings with it the assurance that no darkness – even of the blackest black-out – can put out the light of God's love and care for every single member of the human race, including ourselves. So long as that is true, what else matters? So let us shout with joy, and louder than ever this year seeing that the joy-bells of Christmas are silenced, which (as I still live in a free country) I am at liberty to think and say without fear of any Gestapo or Concentration Camp,

is stupendously stupid.
Michael Furse,
Bishop of St
Albans 1920-1944

Reproduced from
The Bishop's
Letter 13
December 1940
Supplied by Mr A
C Wood, St Peter
& St Paul



Christmas Day 1944

It was the last Christmas of the 1939-1945 war in Europe. The place was Chemnitz in Saxony, Germany. A party of about twenty British and Commonwealth POWs were engaged in the city digging a static water tank outside the Herman Goering Girls' School, which at this time had been converted into a hospital to deal with the large influx of the wounded from the Russian Front.

The prison camp was a wooden hut situated in another part of the city. It was comfortable by POW standards, guarded by four soldiers under the command of a sergeant. He was a humane man in his late fifties or early sixties.

The German rations were supplemented by British Red Cross parcels which arrived spasmodically over the battered German railway system. Determined to have a good meal on Christmas Day, with great willpower,

food was saved from the Red Cross food parcels: Spam, Walls sausages, tea, chocolate etc. The German sergeant was very co-operative and said he would bring his wife along. He also suggested that if the men could save some English cigarettes (also sent by the Red Cross) extras could be obtained, including the hire of a piano.

Christmas Day arrived and the men's thoughts were with their families more than usual. The great feast was to be an evening meal. During the morning the camp was visited by some high-ranking Nazi officers who wished the men a 'Happy Christmas' and informed the POWs that the Americans had that morning carried out a raid. The German Sergeant and the guards were pleased when the officers left.

The evening meal was a great success and was made complete by a Christmas cake.

Before the war one of the guards had been a professional pianist but service on the Russian front had shattered his nerves; however, his playing was still very good. He played and the POWs sang with great feeling.

The Sergeant's wife said she would like to speak. 'I hope this will be your last Christmas in captivity and that next year you will be home with your loved ones,' she said. She went on to say that recently they had received news that their son had been killed on the Russian front. The presents they had sent for Christmas had been returned and they would like to give them to the POWs. Lots were drawn and the presents distributed. The men were very moved

by this kind and unexpected gesture.

The sergeant stood up and said that in the First World War he had been a soldier and collected British Regimental Badges. He now thought the badges should be returned to the land of their origin. Lots were drawn again and the badges distributed.

The climax to a memorable day arrived. Candles were lit and the lights switched off, British and German soldiers around the piano. The pianist played the beautiful carol, 'Silent Night', German and British voices were raised in unity, all singing the same message of Christmas.

Whenever my dad sang or heard this carol he was transported back to Stalag1VB, grateful for the fact that he was now well fed and free.

Pamela Everton, Salvation Army





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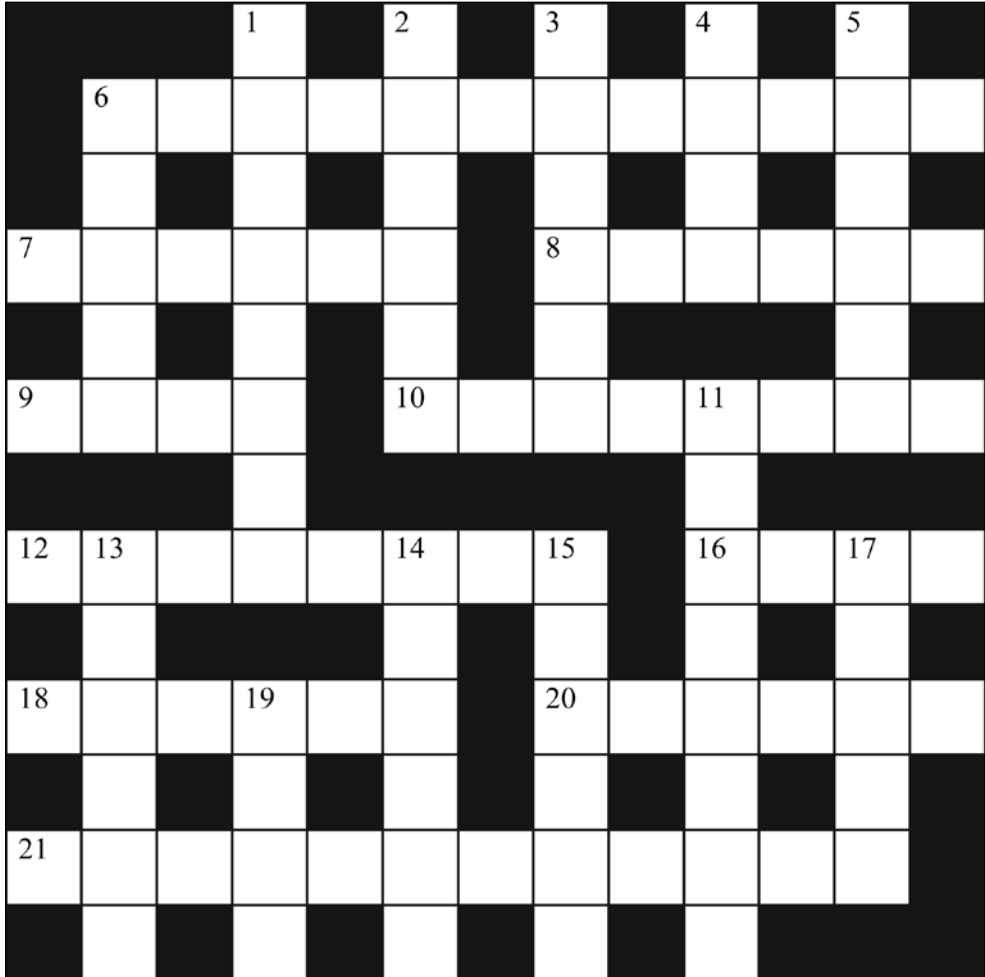
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CLUES ACROSS

6. Late Christmas visitors (5)(4)(3)
7. Delicious apple (6)
8. Try your hardest (6)
9. '....' your (sounds like 1 down) (4)
10. Evening service (8)
12. Hope you have a good one for 20 across (8)
16. Large barrel (4)
18. Invited for Christmas? (6)
20. Main Christmas meal (6)
21. Message for the future (5)(3)(4)

CLUES DOWN

1. Attendance (8)
2. Scottish (6)
3. Flexible - supplé (6)
4. Close (4)
5. Abode of God (6)
6. President (5)
11. Authorised (8)
13. Gateway (6)
14. Offset (6)
15. Gives freely (6)
17. Guide (5)
19. Catch sight of (4)

Answers on page 46

Boxing Days past

The day of Bubble and Squeak and cold turkey and usually the most relaxed day of the festivities. Dating back to the 17th century, mentioned in Pepys' diary of 1663 and also known as St Stephen's Day, it has been part of Christmas in the UK and many European countries ever since. The secular name comes from the original practice of giving servants a day to see their families and to send them off with a box of goodies. This turned into a present of money to all who had been of service throughout the year; errand boys, delivery men, dustmen, postmen and, of course, the milkman.

By the 1950s the number had been reduced to just the last three. We had two milkmen that trundled past our courtyard on their way down to the Vicarage or the two cottages just before the archway. One was the aptly named Mr 'Punch' Wilkins, a fearsome figure in his wide jodhpurs, highly polished gaiters, frock coat and topped with a

sharp pointed cap over a wide, white and waxed moustache in contrast to his bright red face. His cart was polished, the huge copper milk churn was polished, and his high-stepping horse was polished: quite a sight as he cracked his whip and thundered down to see Mrs Kemp who lived in the vicarage. He did not stop for us.

Our milkman was Mr Burch, a quiet, gentle man in every way. He wore a brown overall and his cart was ordinary, as was his horse, and he didn't use his whip and never got to more than a trot – until Boxing Day. I would watch in admiration as he delivered a measure of milk from a great height, like a Spaniard serving sherry, into a jug held by my mother. But then, every year and on this day only, he would stand and wait until my father appeared with a large glass tumbler full of neat whiskey. A man of few words, Mr Burch touched his cap, and then downed it in one. Another touch

of the cap and he was gone. We all three followed him to our gate and watched as Mr Burch continued down to Mr and Mrs Waring, in the last little cottage at the end of the lane. By now Mr Burch was sitting in his cart. The horse knew when to stop and how to turn around and before moving off it knew to wait until Mrs Waring came out and poured her own milk. Then, as if spirited by the smell of the whiskey, the horse took off at a gallop and as the cart, with Mr Burch clinging on for dear life, went clattering by, we waved a Merry Christmas to receive our annual somewhat terrified smile and a wave in return.

Absolute magic but gone forever.
John Bly, St Peter & St Paul



When Santa Claus was an Englishman

When my wife and I were married in 1975, like most couples we each gained a whole new family we didn't know. In my case much of that family was Polish.

My new father-in-law had served with the Polish wing of the RAF, having first walked most of the way to Britain following the invasion of Poland. Later he had been a prisoner of war, surviving the long walk when Germany was closing the outlying POW camps and marching the prisoners back to Germany. Tadek really knew what it means to forage, a polite way of saying scrounge or even steal a rabbit, a chicken or a few potatoes, for his very survival. He knew what hunger really felt like, something I am happy to say I've never needed to find out. He understood the true value of berries from the hedgerows or a few apples picked overhanging someone else's hedge. My wife and I still go out blackberrying every year in memory of Tadek, and not just because I love bramble jelly.

But, of course, In 1975 life was still like that for many in Poland: too many of the things we took for granted were scarce or unheard of there and Tadek would send large parcels back to his family every Christmas. We decided we would also like to send a parcel and

got a name and address from him and started buying things. Small gifts, sweets for the children and fresh fruit were the obvious choices; as long as they were unbreakable, we would consider anything. We boxed it all up, sent it off in the post and thought little more of it.

It was a little while later that we heard via Tadek that Santa Claus must be an Englishman, because of course my name – and my wife's new married name – meant nothing to the family in Poland. The parcel had arrived late on Christmas Eve, from an unknown sender – so it must have come from Santa Claus. Later, any parcels would be sent by my wife and include her maiden name (Kowalska) to make sure they knew she was part of the family.

One year Tadek's parcel had included a fresh pineapple simply because he thought it would be nice for them at Christmas. But this was just too exotic for them to eat. No one there had ever seen a fresh pineapple, only pictures in books, and it was kept on the sideboard to show to everyone who visited. It

probably went out for walks with them so that even strangers could marvel at it! This of course meant that the fruit eventually became totally inedible and must have been thrown out without any of them actually tasting fresh pineapple.

A little while later life in Poland improved and we could think of nothing to send that would justify the postage that they weren't able to buy for themselves so we sent no more parcels. But I will always remember the time when I was Santa Claus to a few people in Poland whom I've never met – decades before it became quite normal to make up Christmas packages for charity.

Doug Hewitt, Comment designer



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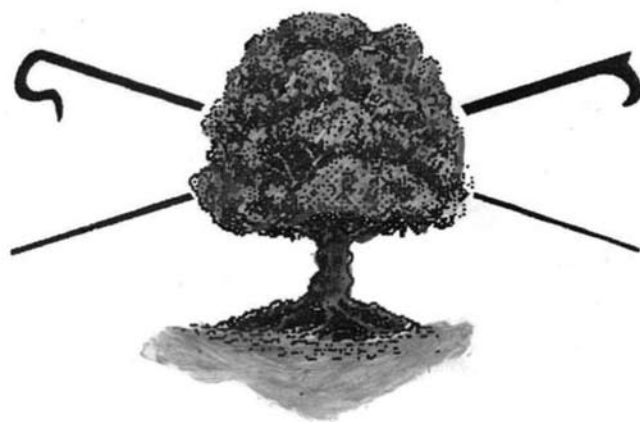
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Christmas in Germany

What does a typical Christmas in Germany look like? That's a pretty good question, even for a German girl like me. I've got the impression that there are many different traditions of celebrating Christmas in Germany. Nevertheless, there are some things which are common in the whole country.

First of all, we celebrate Christmas in the evening of 24 December and have two following Christmas days. During the whole month of December there are lots of Christmas markets in all kind of sizes, I really love them! You can buy so much food, hot drinks and the last Christmas presents. In addition, Advent calendars are very common in Germany: everyone loves them – not only children!

Most German families have an Advent wreath with four candles every year and baking Christmas biscuits is also a very popular thing. We put up our Christmas trees only just before Christmas Eve and put all of the presents under it. Many families go to Church before the giving of Christmas presents and a lot of churches prepare a nativity play every year, which is very lovely!

In my case my mother and I put out

and decorate our Christmas tree on the evening of 23 December and after that we close the living room until Christmas Eve. On 24 December we are at home all day, watching films together, and wrapping the last presents and my father prepares the sermons for the Christmas services as he is a minister. In the evening we go to Church, usually to the second service where my father preaches, and after that we have dinner together at home.

Our Christmas Eve dinner is the same meal every year: pasta salad, wiener sausages and baguette. A very easy, quick and delicious dinner! After that we enter the living room together, take a look at the beautiful Christmas tree and sing some Christmas songs which one of my little brothers plays on the piano. Then it is time for the giving of Christmas presents. All the presents are labelled and my little brother distributes them to us.

In Germany we do not have the equivalent of 'Christmas pudding' or 'Christmas cake' and we celebrate two Christmas Days – on 25 and 26 December. We may eat 'special' meals but they will be family traditions, rather

than national ones. Among them might be Christmas goose, carp or potato or pasta salad with sausages, as my family eats on Christmas Eve. In my family, we always have roulades, dumplings and red cabbage for the first Christmas Day and pasta with thin, sautéed strips of meat in a sauce for the second Christmas Day.

I personally enjoy the whole Christmas time every year, especially Christmas Eve, which is a very special and emotional evening for me together with my family. However, I am also very glad to have the chance to celebrate Christmas in a foreign country this year and I am really looking forward to experiencing Christmastime in Tring!

I wish you all a blessed and peaceful Christmastime surrounded by lovely people!

Elena Dressel
High Street Baptist Church



More on evangelicals

The world has changed much since the 1970s when I was a student. The Church has changed much. Evangelicals have also changed.

Then most people had some Bible knowledge from Sunday School or RE at school.

Members of the 'God Squad' could open a Bible and challenge others, perhaps getting them to read appropriate passages. No one was offended by being 'bashed' with a Bible – which is not to be taken literally!

Students came to the parties we organised and often were impressed that we and they had a good time without alcohol.

Not only did many churches have

Gospel services, but for some it was every Sunday evening. The big



difference today is that before we can share the Gospel with our neighbours they need to see God's love for them through us.

I have always regarded John Stott as very sound, but in Sheffield our favourite evangelist and Church was David Watson at St Michael le Belfry. Moreover the Biblical Studies Department was largely evangelical.

Fundamentalism (from the US) was a reaction against theologians who in the 19th century were out to disprove and discredit Christianity. There are lots of metaphors in the Bible, especially in the Psalms. I am a fundamentalist only in the sense that I believe in the fundamentals (basic beliefs) set out in the Creed.

I now believe that the creation stories are 'myths' in the true sense of the word, not the popular. But I am finding it difficult to determine where in Genesis myth becomes the historic truth of Abraham.

Personally I believe that evangelicals

overemphasised the Written Word at the expense of the Living Word, but for me this was corrected by the charismatic movement. Through the Spirit we can converse with the Living Word.

My fear for the Church today concerns the lack of biblical knowledge, let alone understanding, particularly regarding the Old Testament. Without comprehending the OT it is difficult to appreciate the fullness of the Eucharist.

My hope is in the growth of church unity, which has developed from individuals working together to local congregations co-operating, as shown by this magazine.

Leslie Barker, St Peter & St Paul



Grave talk...



Previous articles in Comment have covered the preparation and planning for our 'funeral focus initiative', which took place on 5 November in St Peter & St Paul's Church and Parish Hall. Here is how it all turned out.

The day dawned bright and sunny and as it transpired the mood throughout the event was similarly upbeat and engaged, despite the 'difficult nature' of some of the subject matter.



The concept was to weave opportunities for discussion and involvement on the theme of 'A Good Life Deserves a Good Death' into the normal pattern of our Sunday Worship. We started with the usual 8.00am BCP Communion, which was attended by thirty-three people. We had an excellent number of people for breakfast in the Church and then the 10.00am Common Worship Communion was attended by ninety-five more people. In both services

the theme of the sermons (Didier Jaquet at 8.00 and myself at 10.00) was centred on the connections between our life on earth and the life that follows. This hopefully helped focus thoughts on the discussions that were to come during the remainder of the day: the Reading from 1 John 3 'We are God's Children now... what we WILL be has not yet been revealed' was very relevant to that theme.

At 11.30am those who had signed up for the event assembled in the hall and engaged in 'Grave Talk'. This is a Church of England Bishop's Council initiative of small group discussions using prompt cards which suggest questions to discuss about all aspects of death, dying, bereavements, funerals etc. Fifty-four individuals took part in the discussions, which were in groups of seven or eight. The total attendance at the event was sixty-five people; the eldest was 96, the youngest in her early 30s. Throughout the atmosphere was very lively and there was a great deal of laughter.

The overall consensus is that this is an extremely good programme for church groups and there is a strong appetite for us to repeat this aspect of the event on future events. Grave Talk card packs are available from www.gravetalk.org (but are currently out of print!). You can judge the level of interest generated as a number of 'delegates' asked for printed lists of the questions to use afterwards!

The event then moved into lunch, which was brilliantly catered by Barry

Child and his team and some excellent wines were enjoyed. The conversation flowed with equal freedom until we were ready for the speakers to cover different aspects of death, dying, funerals, wills, inheritance tax, end-of-life care and bereavement support. The speakers were Betty Aston and Peter Hughes on the legal side of things; Charlie Jarrett and Duncan Satterly on preparation and management of funerals themselves; Jo Fernandes of The Hospice of St Francis in Berkamsted on end-of-life care and the considerable contribution of the Hospices into what makes 'a good death'; and Sheila Whitehead on the First Saturday Lunches and the social support that is provided for the recently bereaved.

There followed a very vigorous question-and-answer session ranging widely from wills and inheritance tax to 'whole body donation'. A lot of people have expressed a wish to follow up different issues separately.

'I almost didn't come but I'm really, really glad I did,' was a comment from one of those who attended and 'Can we do this again?' came via several voices.

The party then moved back into the Church, where a reflective recital from Anna Le Hair helped everybody calm down and relax and the day ended with an All Souls Service which was attended by forty-eight people.

In summary, 'A Good Life Deserves a Good Death' was, in prospect, a fairly difficult concept to introduce and engage with. In practice it proved much easier. It is an unavoidable issue for us all to contemplate and it was good that we managed to do so as a community and in an open and involving way. Thank you to all who planned, participated, supported and attended.

It strikes me that this was very much an initiative in tune with our 'Open Church' strategy. We are open all day, every day and 'All are welcome, all are welcome, in this place' – as the hymn has it. That is surely never more important than when we meet to consider how we face up to the transition between our earthly lives and that which is to come.

If anyone would like any further information about any aspect of this please do get in touch via gseior@seniorpartners.co.uk or 01442 822770.

Grahame Senior, St Peter & St Paul



Is Britain supporting atrocities in Yemen?

At the end of our Mega Stick Sunday walk the walkers and supporters looked at the various disasters Christian Aid were currently working with. One of them was the Yemen crisis.

To our shame we didn't know that much about it; however some of us had been to a deanery lecture given by Richard Stanforth, Humanitarian Policy Adviser for Oxfam. Richard told us a bit about the Yemen crisis and I relayed this to our Youth Café kids. They were shocked: in terms of numbers of people, the civil war in Yemen is a bigger humanitarian crisis than Syria. Having heard a little about the Yemen it seemed a good opportunity to ask Richard along to a Youth Café so that they could learn more.

Richard told them that his job was to lobby politicians to try to get change in policies. For ten years he has been visiting Yemen and has fallen in love with the country. He described the ancient mud skyscrapers; he explained that Yemen was the birth place of the Arab people and language; he told us

that they claimed to be the birth place of coffee and it is certainly the home of Mocha. He told us about an ancient Jewish community alongside the Muslim community. He described a friendly, hospitable, colourful, traditional society.

He also told us, however, about horrendous corruption and mismanagement. He told us of the civil war in which there were no good guys, with atrocities on both sides including 'disappearances' and child soldiers; blockades and starvation, lack of clean water and cholera; the effects of the bombing by Saudi Arabia; employees of BAE loading the bombs onto Saudi planes; he told us about the billions Britain gets from selling arms to Saudi Arabia and how British weapons are being used. He described the bombing of Oxfam's warehouse, the bombing of market places and funeral processions; and described how the bombers would return half an hour after the first attack targeting the rescue and emergency services.

Richard also told the Youth Café

that there were two kinds of support they could offer: financial and activism. He was however clear that he thought activism was a better path for the Youth Café to take.

Youth Café will discuss what they heard from Richard but the chances are they will end up writing to some MPs and maybe ask to meet them to hear their side and also to campaign for change. At the moment the top questions would appear to be: (1) Why isn't the British government clearly and consistently calling for a ceasefire? (2) Why isn't the British government pushing its allies to allow neutral reporters into Yemen to give accurate reports about what is going on? (3) Why are British arms being used against civilians?

Huw Bellis, Tring Team



Tweet of the month

In Britain there are several birds that are associated with Christmas and probably the two most obvious are Turkey and Robin – for very different reasons. The Turkey is generally considered to be the traditional choice for Christmas dinner and Robin is a popular choice for Christmas cards and decorations.

The Wild Turkey was originally found from Canada, throughout USA and as far south as central Mexico. They have also been successfully introduced in Czech Republic, Germany, Hawaii and New Zealand. New Zealand is actually the only place I have seen Turkeys in the wild and they are fairly common and widespread on North Island. It was first brought to Britain in the early 16th century and Henry VIII is known to have eaten it, but it was Edward VII who really started the tradition of eating Turkey at Christmas. It was a luxury food as recently as the 1950s, when it became more affordable. These days Turkey is eaten throughout the year but there is no doubt it is most popular at Christmas.

By contrast the Robin seems set to remain a firm favourite with the British public and a recent vote again

confirmed it as the nation's favourite bird. It is not hard to understand why, given its lovely red breast and confiding nature. They will often accompany gardeners as they dig in their gardens and certainly after I have cut the grass (the closest I get to gardening most of the time!), the Robin is usually the first



bird to visit the lawn to look for insects. Often it doesn't wait until I have finished packing up the lawnmower. What many people may not realise is that this bold behaviour in gardens is something that is almost exclusively confined to Britain. Elsewhere it is wary and in Northern Europe is mainly found in forests and not

the garden bird we know and love.

While Robins are popular on Christmas cards their association with Christianity and Christmas pre-dates their appearance on cards. There are two legends about how the Robin got its red breast. One has it that a Robin plucked a thorn out of Christ's crown while he was on the cross and it was Jesus' blood that stained its breast red. The more appropriate one is that when Jesus was in his manger a fire lit to keep him warm flared up and a brown robin placed himself between the fire and the face of Jesus. In doing this the Robin's breast was scorched by the fire and from that day onwards all Robins have red breasts.

Personally I think the pain endured by the Robin that led to something beautiful is not unlike Christ's life here on Earth, enduring pain because of his great love for us which was, and is still, a beautiful thing. So when you see a Robin remember that pain and beauty can go together and were found in Jesus our Saviour, whose birth we celebrate at Christmas.

Roy Hargreaves, St Peter & St Paul

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tenth anniversary**


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and find out more about us.

**Anniversary exhibition
Thursday 14 December
Victoria Hall, Tring
10.30am to 3.00pm**

**Heirs & Graces
Day Nursery**



Happy Christmas from all
The staff and children at
Heirs & Graces Day Nursery



DENS Foodbank Christmas shopping list

Food and treats:
Tinned cold meat (ham/corned beef), Selection Boxes, Mince pies, Tins/boxes of sweets, Nuts, Chocolate Biscuits, Gravy, Christmas Puddings, Christmas crackers, Custard, Tinned vegetables, Long life fruit juice

For use within DENS services:
Roll on deodorant, Toilet rolls, Washing powder & softener, Antibacterial cleaning spray, Kitchen foil/cling film, Large disposable baking trays for turkey, gifts, Air freshener, White A4 copy paper, C5 white window & non window envelopes, A4 laminating pouches

Other useful items:
Sleeping bags and duvets (new only), Large rucksacks or sports bags, Gloves, Woolly hats and scarves (unisex), Mens thermal underwear/socks, Womens underwear/socks, Pens, pencils and small notepads

Please note that all products must have a best before date of 2018 onwards.

All of these items will be used to help those in need across DENS services, supporting The Elms, Day Centre and Foodbank. Excess donations may be used as prizes or sold to avoid being wasted.

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www.DENS.org.uk Charity No: 1097185

Men's Society



OUR RESPONSE TO DISASTERS

Around a dozen men met for October's Parish Church Men's Society meeting and John began by thanking the two Clives for between them bringing most of the men, and for all those who at the previous meeting kept the discussion focused on the Ten Commandments.

Originally October's discussion was to be on our response to the Grenfell disaster with its ongoing media features, but it was decided to widen the theme to all disasters.

Martin began by suggesting that the degree to which we are affected depends on the type of disaster: we might be made less angry by natural disasters than by manmade ones such as the plight of the Rahindra refugees in Bangladesh where there is someone 'to blame', Bangladesh itself a very poor country.

Various terms are used for disasters, such as tragedies, with disaster used more for natural ones and tragedy for those caused by war. Tragedy implies something more personal such as the stories coming from the Grenfell fire, while all the background leading to it was the disastrous aspect.

This month it was difficult to keep the debate focused. When on the topic it was mostly the technical response, such as the London Building Acts with its brick party walls to prevent the Great Fire of London recurring. I explained the discussions in the building industry where architects were examining new methods of roof insulation, and Building Control officers looking at open plan houses where staircases were open to areas containing kitchens.

Our response in terms of charitable giving was hardly mentioned. The immediate response to the Grenfell fire was overwhelming in giving shelter, clothing, food, money etc. However other aspects such as how as a nation we treat the poor and vulnerable with their social and economic needs was seen not as requiring a charitable or Christian response, but a political one. It is; but it needs Christians to become involved.

TRANSPORT: YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW

Ten members met for the November meeting on transport. The topic was widened following a suggestion that we discussed the particular issues around the 'one man trains' dispute then still ongoing. This proved to be a more light-hearted romp through several thousand years in the history of transport – a less serious topic than previous ones.

John opened the evening with the invention of the wheel around 3500 BC. How was it invented and how was it used? We were reminded that before then animals were used for transport, such as the (assumed) camels carrying the Magi to Bethlehem. Was river transport earlier using dug-out canoes or simple logs?

We then jumped forward to air transport, with hot air balloons in the 18th century and the Wright brothers' powered flight in 1903. This developed very quickly, powered by Mercedes engines, and aircraft were employed extensively during the First World War.

Somehow the discussion then centred on rail transport and how to return to Tring with an off-peak ticket in the rush hour. The 387 bus and local authority subsidies were mentioned: OK in the rush hour but only every two hours during the day and nothing in the evening. Not all realised that on the alternate hours it will take you to Wigginton instead.

David G proved to be the expert on using a combination of transport types, including off-peak (but not Virgin) trains. For example, you can avoid paying for the Park & Ride parking fee by driving to Stone and catching the 280 to Oxford (with your bus pass) which runs every twenty minutes. Martin benefited from the 387's circuitous route as it stops outside his house.

The motor car raised considerable debate, not only about diesels, but also about electric and driverless cars, such as where they could be recharged quickly.

Diesels in and diesels out as we continued our hasty journey, before returning to buses and the Oxford Tube and Heathrow Express: leading naturally to the planned third runway. Should it be built elsewhere, and should any of these airports have been built in the first place? Luton could not be expanded as it sits on a small plateau above the Chilterns snow line.

John asked how we felt about flying? Not much with the budget airlines and their current problems. Ted said that cruises made more relaxing holidays, with everything done for you, but it depended on whom you were sat next to at dinner. River cruises were now becoming more popular, but the cabins are smaller.

After being asked for our worst travel experience, I related the story of the Romanian coach driver who overtook a queue of traffic and zig-zagged round the level crossing barriers; he also ignored a contraflow sign until reaching the roadworks when he crossed the central reservation. He then ignored the end of the contraflow and headed up the motorway against the oncoming traffic! (This was in Romania, not on a 387...)

At the end of the allotted time several men re-engaged with means of transport not yet mentioned. Bicycles were the main addition, but skate boards also featured.

Everyone enjoyed the evening together, all taking part in its lively discussion. John finally brought the discussion to a close by thanking those who had used their cars to bring us here.

As is our custom, Bill concluded the evening by leading us in the Night Prayer.

At our next meeting in December we shall gather for Advent and Christmas, seeking their significance for today. All men are welcome to our meetings at the Half Moon in Wilstone, usually at 7.30pm on the first Wednesday of the month. Meals are available.

Leslie Barker, St Peter & St Paul



No action is too small...



These days it is almost impossible for us to escape the reminders of 'climate change', regardless of the means of mass communication to which we ascribe. Some scientists remind us on a regular basis about global warming. For those who are anti-science the question is 'why believe?' However, scientific findings can inform us that to disbelieve is dangerous. For me, the physics, chemistry and other relevant scientific disciplines involved are almost inexplicable because they are a great mystery to me.



I do, however, understand that global warming refers to the earth's rising surface temperature, while climate change includes warming and its side effects. Such side effects include the melting glaciers, as evidenced in Antarctica; powerful and frequent storms – hurricanes/typhoons (of which we were recently made aware in the West Indies and the United States); more frequent drought in parts of Africa and Asia. Over the years we have seen and heard of famine in these drought-stricken areas; they are returning with greater regularity.

The number and severity of the impacts of climate change differ from place to place. As an example, I have included here what I consider a very impressive article entitled 'A View from Polynesia' written for a USPG (United Society Partners in the Gospel) publication by the Rt Revd Apimeleki Qiliho, Assistant Bishop, diocese of Polynesia. USPG (founded in 1701) is an Anglican mission agency which supports churches around the world 'in their mission to bring fullness of life to the

communities they serve'. The use of the article has been authorised by USPG.

'I am indigenous to the village of Rukurukulevu, in the province of M'Nadroga. Like every indigenous Fijian, I derive my identity and sense of belonging from the vanua (land); I am defined by my attachment to my vanua.

Today, the land to which I belong is in crisis. The source of my identity and belonging is threatened by the immense changes being brought about by climate change.

Over the years, there has been increased erosion of the beach surrounding my village: the beach and habitable soil has been gradually washed away in the lagoon. In the early 1980s, the village leadership became so concerned that a seawall was built to try and slow down the rate of erosion. But their initiative has proved to be ineffective; the seawall around Rukurukulevu village has collapsed in places, with a detrimental impact on the lives of the villagers. During storms and high tides, sea water reaches the village green and damages roads, gardens and homes.

The lagoon has become shallower because the physical landscape has changed. The water has become dirtier. Sedimentation and thick deposits of sand have also damaged the marine ecosystems that we rely on for our livelihoods and daily sustenance. We are at a crucial juncture in our history. As members of the Anglican Communion, and as appointed guardians and stewards of the environment, we have a responsibility to act. Climate change is upon us; we can never go back to before it was an issue. The onus is on us to honour our commitment to God.

Fiji and the Pacific are at the centre of the changes our world is going through. In response, we have made great strides in the areas of climate change adaptation and mitigation and nations across the Pacific are taking up the Fiji example. But more can be done. To shore up the Pacific, and indeed the whole world, we need to focus on proactive approaches, multi-lateral co-operation and innovation. If we are of one mind, one heart and one spirit, we can challenge leaders and decision-makers to work effectively to end the calamity that surely awaits us if we continue blindly down this road.

The seas rise a little more every year, and more frequent, more deadly and more extreme weather events are occurring.

As Christians, it is our duty to care for the environment. The Fifth Mark of Mission of the Anglican Communion calls us to "strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth". It is down to each one of us to take it seriously; no action we take can be too small.'

In a recent newspaper article, on BBC One TV's 'Blue Planet II' I read that climate change will be addressed in the current series, particularly in the final episode. Keep watching!

Enid Powell, St Peter & St Paul

Christmas Tree prayers

If you would like your Christmas tree to mean more this year, why not try this beautiful and thoughtful prayer idea?

Buy some pretty gift tags (sparkly stars work well) – or make some by cutting up last year's Christmas cards.

Write on the plain side the names of people or situations that you want to pray about. Hang the gift tag prayers on your tree as a sparkly reminder – just as your tree lights shine in the darkness, so your prayers are like a candle that lights up the lives of those in need.

Christmas is a particularly difficult time if you are sad, or ill, or lonely or worried. Keep a few spare gift tags so you can add to your tree when you think of others who need your prayers.

Children love to help with decorating the tree. This idea is an easy way to let them get involved, and helps them to pray at the same time.



Prudentius

Of the several hymns by Prudentius in hymn books, two are about Christmas. One is a processional hymn – 'Of the Father's heart begotten'. The number of verses varies between nine and three according to your book and the order varies. The second is – 'Bethlehem of noblest cities'.

Who was Prudentius? The few facts known about him come from his writings. He was born in Spain, c350, probably in Saragossa, and spent a wild youth. Some suggest that since he came from a Christian family his self-accusation may be exaggerated. He was an orator, lawyer and started in politics. He was twice in command of a province before becoming commander of a division of the Roman Imperial Guard. Soon after reaching 50 he retired from public life to serve God. We don't know when he died (possibly around 410AD) but it was after he had collected and published his poems.

One of his books was a kind of daily hymn book containing twelve sacred poems for private use and another book consisted of versified accounts of the death of certain martyrs from Spain and Italy. Prudentius also wrote about the defence of the faith and doctrine and Christian discipline. He has been described as the greatest of the early Latin poets and he was much used in schools in the Middle Ages. His language flows gracefully and is mostly clear and vivid, although at times he can be long-winded and monotonous.

Of the Father's heart begotten...

This hymn starts with the fact that One born of Mary was begotten of the Father, before the world was created. Further he is both the Beginning and the End expressed in terms of the first and last letter of the Greek alphabet, Alpha and Omega (Revelation 1:8). The brief chorus 'Evermore and evermore' sums this up. The hymn continues with references to Jesus the Son's role in creation, his becoming man to be the world's redeemer, as was foretold in the Old Testament, and to be judge. All this echoes the main points of the creed. It leads on to encourage all people, old and young and all creation to sing praises together.

So this hymn is an antidote to our modern commercialisation of Christmas. It makes clear, following the creed, that Jesus is the Son of God from eternity, the agent of creation, the Redeemer and Judge.

Bethlehem of noblest cities...

Prudentius's other hymn is often in the section headed Epiphany, but as in so many Nativity plays the Visit of the Wise men is put close to the Visit of the



Shepherds. We tend to think of them as much closer in time than they, in fact, were. In ordinary devotion and cards we combine Luke's and Matthew's stories into one.

So we start with Bethlehem being described as the incomparable and noblest city. Strictly speaking, of course, Bethlehem was not a city. It is Jerusalem which is the city of David – but we can appreciate the aim of Prudentius to praise Bethlehem. He continues in poetic terms to describe 'the star that told his birth as being fairer than the sun at morning'. This again (if we think scientifically and astronomically) is inaccurate but we know what he means. There have been many attempts, none totally satisfactory, to identify the star, or perhaps comet... We might as well do what Matthew was probably doing in his Gospel, namely referring to the verse in Numbers 24:17, 'A star will come

forth out of Jacob'. Through this star God was announced, Prudentius writes. We have often been told that the Wise Men, the Magi, were not kings, strictly speaking, but we continue to go along with the way in which these mysterious figures from the East have developed into three kings from different countries, helped by the many ways artists have depicted them through the centuries. Further, their gifts have been a gift to preachers, if I may put it like that. I have never preached an Epiphany sermon without quoting Prudentius's words about the mystic meanings of the three gifts: Incense doth a God disclose, Gold a royal child proclaimeth, Myrrh a future tomb foreshows. And this is the common interpretation in church history. It is not confined to Prudentius; it is in the writings of Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen and others. A further version of these interpretations is found in a legend in the travels of Marco Polo where the gifts were brought to determine who Jesus was. If he took the gold he would be an earthly king, the frankincense he would be a god, the myrrh he would be a healer. Jesus took all three!

Unfortunately the learned commentators cannot endorse Prudentius's interpretation. The commentators prefer to link these gifts with Old Testament references to the Gentiles bringing gifts and worshipping in Sion. Examples of this link can be found in Isaiah 60 and Psalm 72. Some link this episode with the gifts brought to Solomon by foreigners. Frankincense and myrrh appear together only three times and then in connection with Solomon. There are many texts to suggest links between the Old Testament and the gifts. Certainly there is the implication of the Gentiles coming to worship and bring gifts and of portraying Jesus as another (and greater) Solomon. But, in the end, I suspect I shall use this verse again, should I be asked to preach at Epiphanytide.

Martin Banister, St Albans Abbey





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St Martha's Methodist Church

FRIENDSHIP CLUB

The Ladies Friendship Club will meet again at St Martha's on Tuesday 5 December, when Audrey Boniface will guide us through an afternoon of Christmas Craft. Friendship Club meets again on Tuesday 9 January when there will be a social afternoon, including quiz!

HOUSE GROUPS

John and Jennifer's House Group meets for the last time in 2017 on Wednesday

afternoon, 13 December, at 20 Verney Close.

ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS

The services during Advent (from 3-24 December) will once again feature the Advent Ring and candles as we approach the Christmas celebration. The morning service on 24 December will also be our traditional Carol Service at 10.00am, led by Revd Rachael Hawkins. Our Christmas Day celebration is at 9.00am.

3 December 10.00am
Audrey Cox

10 December 10.00am
Revd Rachael Hawkins

17 December 10.00am
John Benson

24 December 10.00am
 Carol Service
Revd Rachael Hawkins

31 December 10.00am
John Watkins

7 January 10.00am
 Covenant Service
Revd Rachael Hawkins

14 January 10.00am
David Morgan

21 January 10.00am
Revd Rachael Hawkins

28 January 10.00am
John Benson

Tring Community Church

Every Sunday 10.30am
 The Nora Grace Hall



New Mill Baptist Church

TOT SPOT

Tuesdays 10.00-11.30am
 5, 12, 19 December
 9, 16, 23, 30 January

BRIGHT HOUR

Tuesday 5 December 2.30pm
 Christmas Party with
Revd Andrew Openshaw

Tuesday 16 January 2.30pm
Speaker – Angela Walsh

KNIT & NATTER

Wednesdays 7.30pm
 6, 13, 20 December
 10, 17, 24, 31 January

THE MILL COMMUNITY CAFÉ

Thursdays 11.00-2.00pm
 7, 14, 21 December
 11, 18, 25 January

FRIDAY CLUB

Fridays 6.00-7.15pm
 1, 8, 15 December
 12, 19, 26 January

3, 10, 17 December 10.30am
 Morning Service
Revd Andrew Openshaw

17 December 4.30pm
 Carols by Candlelight

24, 31 December 10.30am
 Morning Service
Rev Andrew Openshaw

7 January 10.30am
 Morning Service
Revd Andrew Openshaw

14 January 10.30am
 Morning Service
Mr Ken Poulter

21 January 10.30am
 Morning Service
CTT Preaching Exchange

28 January 10.30am
 Morning Service
Rev Andrew Openshaw

High Street Baptist Church

ACTIVITY ROOM

Tuesdays 9.30-11.30am
 Craft, stories, songs and more!
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COFFEE FOR A CAUSE

Tuesdays 10.30am – 12noon
 Coffee in the foyer in aid of BMS World Mission

TOTS

Wednesdays 9.30-11.30am
 Baby play area, soft play, trikes, scooters!
 Suitable for 0 to 4yrs

GAMES AFTERNOON

Wednesdays 2.00-4.00pm
 Traditional games, puzzles and refreshments

PLAY CAFÉ

Thursdays 9.30-11.30am
 Relax and chat while the little ones play
 Suitable for 0 to 3yrs

FRIDAY CAFÉ

Fridays 12.00-1.30pm
 Freshly cooked lunches

WHO LET THE DADS OUT

First Saturday of the month at 8.30am to 10.00am

SUNDAY MORNING WORSHIP

Service at 10.30am with Junior Church and Crèche

SUNDAYS @ 7

First Sunday of the month at 7.00pm



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Tring Team Anglican Churches

The Tring Team consists of five churches: St Peter & St Paul in Tring; All Saints, Long Marston; St Cross, Wilstone; St Mary's, Puttenham; and St John the Baptist, Aldbury.

1st Sunday of the month

8.00am Holy Communion BCP Tring
8.00am Holy Communion BCP Aldbury
10.00am Holy Communion CW Tring
10.00am Holy Communion CW Wilstone
10.00am Sunday Worship CW Long Marston
10.00am Worship for All Aldbury
12.00 midday Baptisms Tring
No services in Puttenham

2nd Sunday of the month

8.00am Holy Communion CW Tring
8.15am Holy Communion BCP Puttenham
10.00am Holy Communion BCP Aldbury
10.00am Holy Communion Long Marston
10.00am Sunday Worship in Wilstone
10.00am Worship for All Tring
11.30am Holy Communion BCP Tring
6.00pm Evening Prayer Long Marston

3rd Sunday of the month

8.00am Holy Communion BCP Tring
10.00am Holy Communion CW Tring
10.00am Holy Communion CW Wilstone
10.00am Worship for All Long Marston
10.00am Holy Communion Aldbury
No service in Puttenham

4th Sunday of the month

8.00am Holy Communion BCP Tring
10.00am Holy Communion CW Tring
10.00am Worship for All Wilstone
10.00am Holy Communion Aldbury
10.00am Holy Communion CW Long Marston
3.30pm Evensong in Puttenham
6.00pm Alternative Communion CW Tring

5th Sunday of the month

8.00am Holy Communion BCP Aldbury
8.00am Holy Communion BCP Tring
10.00am Holy Communion CW Aldbury
10.00am Holy Communion CW Tring
10.00am Sunday Worship or Holy Communion Long Marston
10.00am Sunday Worship or Holy Communion Wilstone
No service in Puttenham

Weekday Services

Mondays 8.30am Morning Prayer Tring
Tuesdays 8.30am Morning Prayer Tring
Tuesdays 9.15am Holy Communion CW Tring
Wednesdays 8.30am Morning Prayer Aldbury
Thursdays 10.00am Holy Communion BCP Tring
Fridays 8.30am Morning Prayer Tring
Last Tuesday in the month 10.00am Holy Communion Wilstone

Dacorum Foodbank

Weekdays 10.00am St P&P

Youth Café

Mondays in term time 3.30pm St P&P
Secondary School aged children meet for toast, crisps, coke and chat.

Meditation

Thursdays 8.00pm Corpus Christi

Coffee Mornings

Saturdays 10.00am St P&P
Tuesdays 9.00am Aldbury
Tuesdays 10.30am Wilstone

Young Adults Group TAYA

First and third Thursdays 8.00pm St P&P
A discussion group for young adults

Fairtrade Fridays

First and third Fridays 9.00-12.30 St P&P

First Saturday Lunch

Saturday 2 December
From 1.00pm for those who have been bereaved to meet and eat with others.
Contact Margaret Oram for information on 01442 824575.

Baptism Preparation

Second Sunday in the month 11.20am
St P&P Emmie Hobbs Room

Afternoon Tea

Fourth Tuesday in the month
2.00-3.30pm All Saints, Long Marston

Book Group

Last Sunday in the month 6.45pm
St P&P

Piano and More Concert

Sunday 21 January 3.00pm St P&P

DENS Sleepout

Friday 1 December HH School

Rennie Grove Light Up A Life Service

Sunday 3 December 4.00pm St P&P

Tring Park School Christmas Service

Friday 8 December 4.00pm St P&P
Saturday 9 December 11.00am St P&P

Beer & Carols Tring Brewery

Sunday 10 December 6.00pm

Dacorum Age UK Concert

Monday 11 December 7.30pm St P&P

Stepping Stones Christmas Service

Thursday 14 December 11.00am St P&P

Bishop Wood School Christmas Concert

Monday 18 December 7.00pm St P&P



Useful contacts

TRING TEAM PARISH

Team Rector
(Tring & Puttenham)
Rev Huw Bellis
2 The Limes, Station Road
01442 822170 or
07411 483229
huw@tringteamparish.org.uk
(Day off Thursday)

Team Vicar
(Aldbury)
Rev Michelle Grace
Aldbury Vicarage
01442 851200
michelle@tringteamparish.org.uk
(Day off Friday)

School Chaplaincy and
Team Vicar
(Long Marston, Tring School)
Rev Jane Banister
01442 822170
jane@tringteamparish.org.uk

Associate Priest
(Wilstone)
Rev Didier Jaquet
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01442 851854

Christine Rutter (Puttenham)
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Ken Martin (Wilstone)
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Rev Jane Banister (Long
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Tring Team Administration
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Senior Steward
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**AKEMAN STREET
BAPTIST CHURCH**
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Rev David Williams
01442 827881

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**CORPUS CHRISTI
ROMAN CATHOLIC
CHURCH**
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tring@rcdow.org.uk

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Assistant Minister,
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**NEW MILL
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OUR CHURCHES ONLINE
www.tringteamparish.org.uk
www.tringchurchmusic.org.uk
www.stmarthas-tring.org.uk
www.tringbaptistchurch.co.uk
www.newmillbaptist.org.uk
www.akemanstreet.org.uk
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Articles and photos for the
next edition should arrive with
the Editor no later than the 6th
of the previous month.

Crossword puzzle answers

From page 32

ANSWERS ACROSS

- 6. THREE WISE MEN
- 7. RUSSET
- 8. STRIVE
- 9. OPEN
- 10.COMPLINE
- 12.APPETITE
- 16.CASK
- 18.FRIEND
- 20.DINNER
- 21.HAPPY NEW YEAR

ANSWERS DOWN

- 1. PRESENCE
- 2. CELTIC
- 3. LISSOM
- 4. NEAR
- 5. HEAVEN
- 6. TRUMP
- 11.LICENSED
- 13.PORTAL
- 14.INDENT
- 15.ENDOWS
- 17.STEER
- 19.ESPY

Come and Celebrate Christmas in the Tring Churches

Akeman Street Baptist Church

24th December, Christmas Eve
10.30 am Christmas All Age
6 pm Carols by Candlelight
followed by refreshments
25th December, Christmas Day
10 – 10.45 am Christmas
Worship

High Street Baptist Church

Sunday 17th December,
11 am Morning Service &
Nativity Play by the children
24th December, Christmas Eve
10.30 am Contemplative Service
(and film for children in the hall)
5 pm All Age Carol Service
11.30 pm Midnight Communion
25th December, Christmas Day
10 am Christmas Day All Age
celebration service

St. John the Baptist Aldbury

Sunday 17th December,
10 am Family Communion
6 pm Lessons & Carols
24th December, Christmas Eve
10 am Family Communion
4 pm Crib Service 11 15 pm
Midnight Mass
25th December, Christmas Day
10 am Family Holy Communion

St Martha's Methodist Church

Sunday 24th December,
10 am Christmas Carol service
25th December, Christmas Day
9 am Christmas Day service
Sunday 17th December
10 am Worship for All
24th December, Christmas Eve
10 am Family Communion
4 pm Crib Service
25th December, Christmas Day
10 am Family Communion

St. Mary's – Puttenham

Sunday 17th December
3.30 pm Lessons & Carols
24th December, Christmas Eve
9 pm Midnight Mass (BCP)

Corpus Christi Catholic Church

At the time of printing the
Christmas services were yet to
be finalised. Please visit www.
rcdow.org.uk/tring or email
tring@rcdow.org.uk for further
information.

St. Peter & St. Paul's Parish Church

Sunday 17th December
8 am Holy Communion (BCP)
10 am Family Communion
6.30 pm Lessons & Carols
by Candlelight followed by
refreshments
24th December, Christmas Eve
8 am Holy Communion (BCP)
10 am Family Communion
2 pm & 4 pm Crib Services
11.30 pm Midnight Mass
25th December, Christmas Day
8 am Holy Communion (BCP)
10 am Family Communion

Wigginton Baptist Chapel

Sunday 17th December
6 pm Carols by candlelight
24th December, Christmas Eve
10.30am Family service
25th December Christmas Day
10.30am Family Service

St. Cross – Wilstone

Sunday 17th December
10 am Family Communion
24th December, Christmas Eve
10 am Sunday Worship
7 pm Lessons and Carols
service
25th December Christmas Day
10 am Holy Communion

New Mill Baptist Church

Sunday 10th December
10.30 am All age Nativity service
Sunday 17th December
4.30pm Carols by Candlelight
25th December Christmas Day
10 am All-age Christmas
celebration

St Bartholomew's Wigginton

Sunday 17th December
8 am Holy Communion
10 am Parish Eucharist
6 pm Carol Service
24th December, Christmas Eve
8 am Holy Communion
10 am Parish Eucharist
3 pm Crib Service
11.45 pm Midnight Mass
25th December, Christmas Day
10.30 am Parish Eucharist

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