



Trinitate 2

MINISTRY TEAM

VICAR: Revd. Bill Boon Email: bill.boon@btinternet.com
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**For Baptisms, Confirmations, Home Communions,
Wedding Arrangements etc...**

Please contact the Vicar.

Benefice Website: www.heuristika.co.uk/lfgdiscussion/

CHURCHWARDENS

Mrs Margaret Price (*Purton*) The Mill House, Purton (01453) 811 250
Ms Katrina Bailey (*Sharpness*) 8 Jubilee Way (01453) 810 850
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Vacancy - Slimbridge Warden

Parochial Church Council Officers

Sharpness with Purton

Mrs Carol Bailey (*Secretary*) 8 Jubilee Way (01453) 810 850
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Parish Diary - December 2021

(1st) SUNDAY 5th - ADVENT 2

9.00am	1662 Prayer Book Communion	St. John's, Slimbridge
9.30am	Morning Prayer	St. John's, Purton
10.00am	Sung Communion	St. John's, Slimbridge
11.00am	Morning Prayer	St. Andrew's, Sharpness

Friday 10th

7.30pm	Christmas Concert - Slimbridge Singers	St. John's, Slimbridge
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(2nd) SUNDAY 12th - ADVENT 3

9.30am	Morning Prayer	St. John's, Purton
10.00am	Sung Communion	St. John's, Slimbridge
11.00am	Sung Communion	St. Andrew's, Sharpness

(3rd) SUNDAY 19th - ADVENT 4

9.30am	Journeying to Christmas	St. John's, Purton
10.00am	All Age Service	St. John's, Slimbridge
11.00am	Informal Service	St. Andrew's, Sharpness

Friday 24th - **CHRISTMAS EVE**

4.00pm	Christingle Service	St. John's, Slimbridge
7.30pm	First Communion of Christmas	St. Andrew's, Sharpness
7.30pm	First Communion of Christmas	St. John's, Purton

Saturday 25th - **CHRISTMAS DAY**

10.00am	Christmas Morning Communion	St. John's, Slimbridge
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(4th) SUNDAY 26th - ST. STEPHEN

10.00am	Benefice Communion	St. John's, Purton
	<i>No Services at Slimbridge or Sharpness Today!</i>	

JANUARY

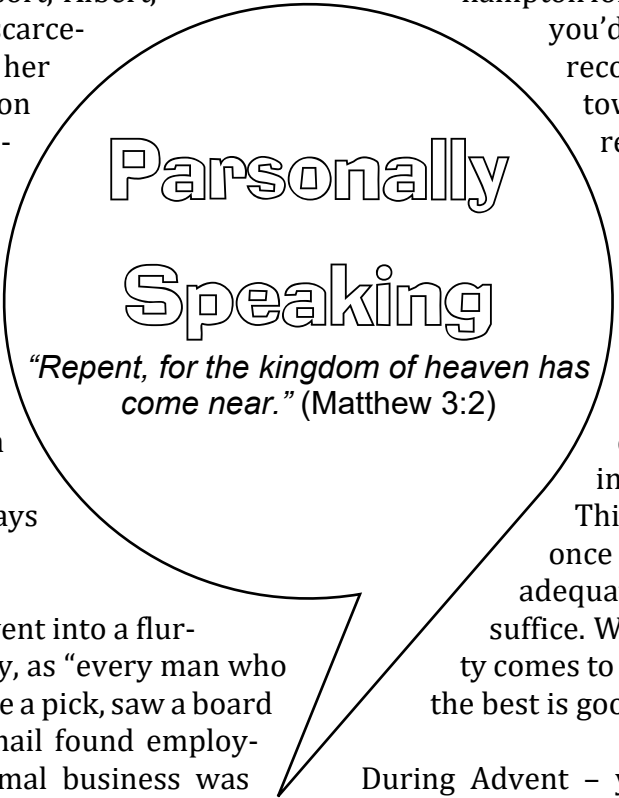
SUNDAY 2nd - EPIPHANY

9.00am	1662 Prayer Book Communion	St. John's, Slimbridge
9.30am	Morning Prayer	St. John's, Purton
10.00am	Sung Communion	St. John's, Slimbridge
11.00am	Morning Prayer	St. Andrew's, Sharpness

When the people of Wolverhampton humbly invited Queen Victoria to unveil their statue of the late Prince Consort, Albert, they could scarcely believe her response: on 22nd November 1866, the Mayor received the news that she would be coming – on 30th November, just eight days later.

The town went into a flurry of activity, as “every man who could handle a pick, saw a board or drive a nail found employment”. Normal business was suspended and people worked all hours to prepare the Queen’s route. Galleries were put on the house-fronts, and then bedecked with flags and wreaths. As well as gas-lit illuminations, arches depicting local industries were constructed along the way, including a three-ton coal arch. In the marketplace, a pavilion and grandstand for 2,000 spectators

were put up next to the statue, now patriotically curtained in red, white and blue. It was said if you’d been away from Wolverhampton for the week, you’d not have recognised the town on your return.



A monarch’s visit generates enormous excitement in any age. Things that once seemed adequate will not suffice. When royalty comes to town, only the best is good enough.

During Advent – you know, that almost forgotten season – an imminent royal arrival is announced, and the people are called to make urgent preparations, not in outward display, but in inner renewal. It’s an exciting time: after 400 years of silence from heaven, the prophetic voice is heard again in Israel, through a man of God called John the Baptist. His appearance in the garb of

poverty – camel-hair and leather belt - is no accident. This is reminiscent of the last great prophet, Elijah. By the Jordan River, where God's people once crossed over into the new life of the Promised Land, here John reveals the climax of the Almighty's long-promised salvation plan. John does not proclaim Jesus' coming in Israel's capital city, but out in the wilderness. Those thirsty for God's word have to go into the dryness of the desert to hear it - and many will go.

And yet their willingness to travel here is just the start of a longer journey. As John heralds the coming of God's kingdom, the people's curiosity needs to become commitment. They need humbly to enter the Jordan waters to be baptised. Yet even this is not enough. Being washed clean of the past is to be accompanied by repentance, a determination to put aside behaviours and attitudes not appropriate for the kingdom of heaven, now drawing close in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ.

The cost of personal change is demanding, particularly for the Sadducees and Pharisees, the religious leaders of the day. It

means humbling themselves before the people and being seen to have to put their lives in order. No wonder they prefer to turn to religious pedigree and background to guarantee their right of entry into God's kingdom. But John bluntly reminds them of their proud illusions: from where he stands only a genuinely holy and renewed life is evidence of a heart fit for heaven.

Hearing God's word carries a challenge, and John's urgent appeal to the crowd underlines that the opportunity to respond will only last for a season. He also declares that choices have consequences: failure to live the godly life is opting to exclude oneself from the kingdom of light. The time of repentance is a time of reckoning. Those who turn away from Christ as Saviour will subsequently face him as judge.

If we were about to welcome our monarch to our village, no effort would be spared, and we would work with the utmost urgency, knowing where our priorities lay. When we sense God speaking something new into our lives, will we make the space to listen, whatever else we have to put aside?

As we welcome Christ into our lives, we receive forgiveness, but also the responsibility of demonstrating our repentance in changed behaviour. The Christian life involves the Holy Spirit's refining fire as well as the cleansing water of baptism.

It's also easy to put off attending to those things we know God is prompting us personally to put right. But time is precious and – as Advent reminds us - also limited: we're called to make the most of every opportunity to prepare for our citizenship in heaven. Are we pilgrims, or are we mere passengers hoping for an easy ride? Whatever we may decide regarding that question we know that we have to be ready to meet Jesus on the Feast of his Nativity – and then we will know that only the best is good enough!



Be kind to your neighbour

This Christmas, why not make an extra effort to be kind to your neighbours? It seems that neighbourly distrust has grown more than fivefold since the summer of 2020, with one in five of us now saying that relations in our community have soured.

On the plus side, there are still 25 per cent of us who report greater trust in our neighbourhoods. But on the debit side, now 22 per cent of us, up from just four per cent, have reported a deterioration.

The research was carried out at University College London (UCL), who found that one in five of us now feel less cohesive with our neighbours, feeling that we have fewer shared values with them.

As one researcher put it, “Much has changed over the last 18 months, with limits to our freedom, how we interact with other, and changes to how we shop and travel. Perhaps these restrictions have caused some to feel less satisfied with life in their community.”

Proverbs 11:12 advises: ‘Whoever derides their neighbour has no sense, but the one who has understanding holds their tongue.’ Proverbs 27:10 advises: ‘Do not go to your relative’s house when disaster strikes you— better a neighbour nearby than a relative far away.’

Historical Snippets

*Taken from the Parish archives
held at St Johns Church Slimbridge;*

*Years ago, each of the local parish churches submitted their news to a publication called 'The Parish Magazine'. Contributors came from quite a large area including: Lower Cam; Coaley; Eastington; Frocester; North Nibley; Stinchcome; and *Slymbridge. It was printed by: O. E. Hill, Cam, Gloucestershire, for the cost of 2d (tuppence) per copy.*

This month's historical snippet is taken from December 1947

**Slymbridge is the old-fashioned spelling for Slimbridge.*

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Rector; Rev. W. H. Thomas, M.A.

Church Wardens; Mr. J. Wherrett and Mr. W. P. Hill.

The Rector earnestly desires to be informed in all cases of sickness and sorrow.

My dear People, [*December 1947*]:

This month the church at Slimbridge St John the Evangelist, celebrates its Patronal Festival, I trust that all who are really Church people will observe this festival in the right and proper manner.

The Christmas festival will commence on Christmas Eve with midnight Holy Communion at 11.45pm.

On Christmas Day the Holy Communion will be at 8am and 10.30am.

The Patronal Festival will be kept on Sunday within the Octave the 28th. Also within the Octave we shall celebrate by having our "Church Family Social" in the Church Hall on Wednesday, 31st at 7.30pm to which you are all invited, come and don't come alone, please bring a friend or two with you. We shall hope to have a jolly evening finishing with singing of "Auld Lang Syne" as the church clock strikes 12 midnight with the church bells ushering in the New Year.

Other Christmas functions are:

- o Christmas Whist Drive Wednesday December 10th;

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- o Combined Mother's Union and Young Wives Christmas Party Wednesday 17th at 2.30pm;
- o Choir Boys and Choir Girls Pantomime Outing to Bristol on Saturday 27th;
- o Sunday School Christmas Party Saturday 3rd January;

On behalf of the Church Wardens and Church Council I beg to tender our best thanks for the gift of *£10 per Mrs Allen towards church expenses being the proceeds of a party dance recently organised by some of our farmers and wives.

We express our sympathy with the relatives of the late Mrs L Ireland of Cam. Mrs Ireland was at one time organist at this church. "Rest eternal grant her, O Lord."

Best wishes to you all for a Happy and Blessed Christmas.

Your friend and Rector.

W. H. Thomas.

NB

*Our archives containing these magazines can be viewed by mutual arrangement with the Vicar, Church Warden or any member of the PCC but not to be taken away.
David Carrington Vicars Church Warden*

**The value of ten pounds in 1947 would be the equivalent of £410.93p today.*



Your Gift of Life – at Christmas

*Creaking on the staircase -
Noise outside my door -
A rustle in the chimney –
It's 'Santa-time' once more.
St Nicholas is on his way
With all his Christ-life gifts
To fire every child-light with
The loving Christ-mass kiss.*

*In some he'll place the gift of gold -
In others frankincense -
While others will be given myrrh -
All signs of God's presence.
For in each earthly crib or bed
In squalor, comfort, splendour -
The Christ child has been placed again
To call the world to wonder.*

By Sam Doubtfire



From the Registers - October 2021

	<u>Attendance</u>	<u>Gift Aid</u>	<u>Envelopes</u>	<u>Cash</u>
<u>Sharpness:</u>	38	£180	£100	£ 70.00
Donations (<i>Gift Aided</i>)				£ 30.00
Bonus Ball:				£295.00
Fund-Raising:				£ 63.00
PCC Fees:				£127.62
	INCOME	EXPENDITURE		SURPLUS (+ / -)
For the Month:	£865.62	£214.79		+£650.83

From 1st Jan. 2021 St. Andrew's has received **£3,247.97** more than it has spent

<u>Purton:</u>	42	£60	£60	£ 88.00
Donations (<i>Gift Aided</i>)				£ 50.00
Baptism:				£ 42.50
Wall Boxes:				£ 70.16
Fund-Raising:				£ 51.00
PCC Fees:				£127.62
Fabric Fund:				(£ 50.00)
	INCOME	EXPENDITURE		SURPLUS (+ / -)
For the Month:	£549.28	£236.83		+£312.45

From 1st Jan. 2021 St. John's has received **£259.14** more than it has spent

<u>Slimbridge:</u>	52	£375	£	£
Charity (<i>Plate Collections</i>)				£210.20
Misc:				£170.00
PCC Fees:				£576.00
	INCOME	EXPENDITURE		SURPLUS (+ / -)
For the Month:	£1,331.20	£1,313.19		+£ 18.01

From 1st Jan. 2021 St. John's has received **£1,904.07** more than it has spent

Our thanks to all of you
who continue to support our churches

BAPTISMS:

We welcomed into the Lord's family:

CHESTER RONNIE HOBBS (*Slimbridge*) 21st Nov.

COBY LEE SUMMERS (*Purton*) 28th Nov.

FUNERALS:

We commended to the Lord's keeping:

NADINE ANDREA BIDWELL (*Gloucester Crematorium*) 5th Nov.

DUDLEY JAMES BRAIN (*Berkeley*) 25th Nov.

SYLVIA KATE THOMAS (*Sharpness*) 26th Nov.

ASHES:

We laid to rest the remains of:

MARGARET ANNE JELLINGS (*Sharpness*) 7th Nov.

CHRISTOPHER DAVIES (*Slimbridge Cemetery*) 16th Nov.

CHRISTOPHER JOHN RODELL (*Slimbridge Cemetery*) 17th Nov.

The Slimbridge Singers

will be hosting an evening of Christmas music on **Friday 10 December at 7.30**. It will be extra special because of the Christmas tree festival in the church that week; there will be fifteen beautifully decorated trees donated by various organisations in the village! We will sing for you, offer you refreshments in the interval, and then we will enjoy singing some carols together as a community.

So do please come along to St John's church, Slimbridge to join in! Please bring some cash if you can, to make donations for the refreshments and to help maintain the upkeep of the beautiful church building.

Ursula Toher

Close Attention to Text

Written by Stephen Cottrell

Matthew 12:38-end

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Jesus, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you". But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was for three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth. The people of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah, and see, something greater than Jonah is here! The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and see, something greater than Solomon is here!"

When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it wanders through waterless regions looking for a resting place, but it finds none. Then it says, "I will return to my house from which I came". When it comes, it finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then it goes and brings along seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and live there; and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So will it be also with this evil generation".

While he was still speaking to the crowds, his mother and his brothers were standing outside, wanting to speak to him. someone told him, "Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you". But to the one who had told him this, Jesus replied, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers"? For whoever does the will of my father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother".



To be the ones through whom Jesus is known today, to be his hands and heart in the midst of the world's hurt, is an awesome and privileged vocation. It is shared by everyone who is baptized into Christ.

Jesus is not callously snubbing his mother and his family in this reading. He is pointing us to the realities of belonging and identity that transcends even bonds of human family.

Water is thicker than blood. This is the audacious Christian claim. we have a new belonging with each other and with God through Jesus Christ. The story of his birth that we are preparing to celebrate is the advent of the fulfilment of God's heart and leads through the cross and resurrection to a new humanity. This promise of eternal life with God and a new relationship with each other is another of the great Advent themes. The sign that is even greater than the sign of Jonah is the sign of Jesus' death and resurrection, the promise of a new humanity and of life lived with God.

Judgment, in this sense isn't about being weighed in the scales and found wanting - this is a contest no one can win, and the reason Christ came in the first place! -but about being judged ready for glory.

Almighty God,
give us grace to castaway the works of darkness
and to put on the Armour of light,
now in the time of this mortal life,
in which your Son Jesus Christ
came to us in great humility;
that on the last day,
when he shall come again in his glorious majesty
to judge the living and the dead,
we may rise to the life immortal;
through him who is alive reigns with you,
In the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
Amen.



Red Letter Days

Lucy, Martyr at Syracuse - 13th December

Lucy was a Christian girl who got caught up in the fierce and widespread Diocletian persecutions of 303-4. She refused to give up her Christian faith, and so was put to death. Her tomb can still be found in a Catacomb in Syracuse (Sicily), and there are early fourth-century inscriptions bearing her name (Euskia).

Lucy's full story has been lost in the mists of time, but a romantic legend of her martyrdom grew up after her death. According to the legend, Lucy was arrested while giving to the poor at the height of the persecution. Her own fiancé had betrayed her, telling the authorities about her faith. The judge ordered that she be raped in a brothel and then burned, but all attempts to inflict such punishment on her went amiss, because God protected her. At last, Lucy was killed by the sword.

Lucy's legend was written in the 5th century, and she was honoured in Rome from the 6th century. The name Lucy means 'light', and so in time she became the patron saint for those with eye diseases. Her feast day is close to the shortest day of the year, so it is celebrated in Sweden as a festival of light.

As the full details of Lucy's martyrdom will never be known, she can represent all the young women who have been willing to die for Christ, and whose full stories will also never be known to us.



Smile for a While

New bank

Mother decided that ten-year old Cathy should get something 'practical' for Christmas. "Suppose we open a savings account for you?" she suggested. Cathy was delighted. "It's your account, darling," mother said as they arrived at the bank, "so you fill out the application." Cathy was doing fine until she came to the space for 'Name of your former bank.' After a slight hesitation, she put down 'Piggy'.



Easy come, easy go

Father Christmas enters through a hole in the chimney and leaves through a hole in your pocket.



Angel tidings

The little boy was to be an angel in the Christmas play and his one line was: "Behold, I bring you good tidings." He asked what tidings were and his mother explained that the word meant news. On the night of the play, the youngster had stage fright and, after a long silence, blurted out: "Hey, have I got news for you!"



Grandfathers

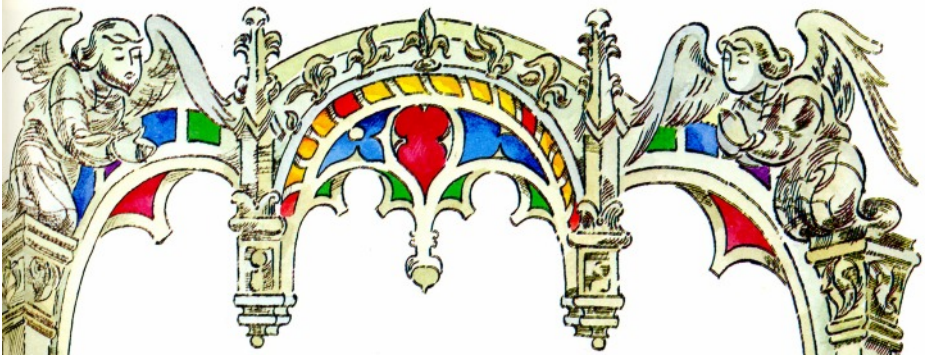
I was talking to my young Sunday School class, and a four-year-old boy suddenly asked me: "Miss, do you have a grandfather?"

I replied, "I used to have two, but they both went to Heaven to be with Jesus."

He thought, shook his head sadly, and said, "One of my grandfathers hasn't gone to Heaven."

(Long pause while I tried to decide how to proceed.)

"He's gone to Bexhill-on-Sea."



All in the Month of DECEMBER

It was -

1500 years ago, on 7th December 521 that St Columba, Irish missionary who spread Christianity in Scotland, was born. He was one of the Twelve Apostles of Ireland.

100 years ago, on 6th Dec 1921 that the Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed in London. It ended the Irish War of Independence and established the Irish Free State (with effect from December 1922.)

60 years ago, on 4th December 1961, that birth control pills became available on the NHS.

30 years ago, on 25th and 26th December 1991, that Mikhail Gorbachev resigned as President of the Soviet Union, and the next day the Soviet Union was officially dissolved. The 12 remaining Soviet republics became independent states.

What a Christmas

John Barton reflects on the meaning of Christmas

The Bethlehem manger, shepherds, wise men, Jesus, Mary and Joseph – it's all so familiar to older people, who are shocked to hear that younger generations may be hazy or ignorant of them. Aren't they part of everyone's education?

Yet the first Christmas was restricted to just a few. What 21st Century Christians proclaim as the most significant event in history began in a remote corner of the Roman Empire, without the pomp and publicity we associate with kingship and power. What modern media have called 'The Greatest Story Ever Told', escaped everyone's attention in first century Palestine.

This year, Christmas is going to be a busier celebration than last year, but probably not yet back to the normal fuss we usually make each December. The streets will be crowded, but shops may struggle with supplies. Parties will take place, but many people will feel reluctant join in. Family gatherings are allowed again, but the vulnerable may hesitate. Christmas services will be held, but as singing has the potential for droplet and aerosol transmission, music will be muted this year. A Christmas without many carols!

Many will struggle to hold their 'usual' Christmas. Yet God does not neglect us. This may be the very opportunity to rekindle or deepen our faith in what really matters about Christmas. Away from the hordes, perhaps completely alone this Christmas, we may sit quietly and allow our heavenly Father to draw near to us. We may picture Mary inviting us to gaze with her at her Son, born to save us from our sins. In the silence of our imagination, we may join the chorus of angels announcing His birth to the shepherds:

"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom His favour rests."

It was that chorus which inspired an American Minister, Edmund Sears, to write the Christmas hymn, 'It Came Upon a Midnight Clear'. Sears, troubled by the world's turbulent history and failure to hear the Christmas

message, was himself recovering from a breakdown. Written in 1849, his words have a timeless ring about them:

Yet with the woes of sin and strife
The world has suffered long;
Beneath the angel-strain have rolled
Two thousand years of wrong;
And man, at war with man, hears not
The love-song which they bring;
Oh, hush the noise, ye men of strife,
And hear the angels sing.

Christmas Silver Stars in Memory of Loved Ones

At St Andrew's Church, Sharpness 2021

Soon we will be thinking about Christmas, although with Covid -19 life is so very different for us all. This year we will hopefully be putting up the Christmas Tree and lights. As in previous years, I will be doing the Silver Christmas Stars. I will be collating the same names as last year, but if you require extra names in memory of a loved one who has sadly died this year, then please let me have their names by Friday 17th of December at the latest. Everyone will have an individual star on the tree and the name of their loved ones on a list in the church window sills. We will hopefully be having a Carol Service on Sunday 19th December. Times to be arranged. We will not be charging for the stars, but you are welcome to give a donation to help with the upkeep of the church.

If you would like to remember a loved one by name, then please let me know and have the names clearly printed out on paper.

(Katrina Bailey) Telephone Number 810 850

Out of the Silence . . .

The monthly journal of the journey of a Priest, Contemplative and Community Chaplain.

I sit down to write this as November 2021 draws towards its close and the church year towards its end. Advent looms and the TV is filled with ‘Ho! Ho! Ho!’ and red nosed reindeers but the overwhelming theme for advertising is a return to a ‘proper family Christmas’. This time last year we were hoping for just the same thing but then, at the last minute, COVID forced another re-think and a return to restrictions. I’ve chosen from my journal of that time some days that hopefully will make us particularly grateful for all that has been achieved in the last year to enable us to celebrate Christ’s birth with care but hopefully in a more traditional way with family and friends.

Wednesday 23rd December 2020

“I do hope your Christmas has . . . a little touch of eternity in amongst the rush and pitter-patter of it all. It always seems such a mixing of this world and the next – but that, after all, is the idea!”

Evelyn Underhill

There is so much that is different this year but despite everything those words are still a joy and so true. My ‘mixing’ today – collecting the turkey and organising the safety features at Church, cooking some first treats and finalizing tomorrow’s COVID restricted ‘Not’ Midnight Mass service – a perfect preparation then for ‘this world and the next’ and a great celebration of their mixing in your coming to us, Lord, and your presence with us always.

Christmas Day 2020

I woke at 5a.m. and, like an over-excited child, by 5.30 I’ve come down to worship at the manger bed . . . well to make a cup of tea and say Christmas Morning Prayer ahead of all the unwrapping and cooking and eating and drinking and, above all, laughing.

“I heard the bells on Christmas Day,
Their old familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet the words repeat,
Of peace on earth, good will to men.”

Even so I was not the first up, milking continues its normal round over the road at the farm and the children across the field next door had obviously also been unable to contain themselves and lights blazed from every window of their bungalow.

“O Lord, open our lips
and our mouths shall proclaim your praise.”

And my praise this morning is great because you blessed all my efforts to make the service at Purton special last night. Beyond my hopes and despite the restrictions it was probably the best ever – it was your hand behind it all and I too was moved greatly by the words you gave.

I can see why today’s Psalm 110 is chosen,
“Noble are you on this day of your birth,
on the holy mountain, from the womb of the dawn,
the dew of your new birth is upon you.”

Just a shame that this psalm, so wholly appropriate and prophetic, also has so much ‘smiting’ in later verses – but that is the reality into which you came, the reason you came, that ‘smiting’ and wrath might cease, swords be turned into ploughshares and that violence and tragedy should no longer hold sway ‘in all your holy mountain’.

John, in his first letter, speaks with personal knowledge of the miracle that has occurred.

“The Word of life which was from the beginning we proclaim to you. The darkness is passing away and the time of light is already shining.”

1 John 1

And in Isaiah 8 the words, made if anything more famous by Handel in his oratorio ‘The Messiah’, shout out with joyful foresight into the darkness of our present precarious position as they have to those in similar or worse situations down the last two millennia.

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shined . . .
For unto us a child is born,
to us a son is given;

and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
‘Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace.’”

I end as the Christmas morning office ends,
“May God who has called us out of darkness
into his marvellous light,
bless us and fill us with peace.”

. . . . and now for a final assault on the turkey ahead of a new pot of
tea, opening stockings and boiled eggs with soldiers to dip!

‘Alleluia!’ and again I say, ‘Alleluia!’

I hope and pray that you all have a very merry Christmas.

More next month

With love and many blessings

Mary Tucker



Saintly St Francis versus
secular St Nicholas?

On the Feast of Stephen

Everyone knows that it was on the feast of Stephen that 'good king Wenceslas looked on'. After all, it's in a Christmas carol - but why? There's nothing about Christmas in it: a splendid young page who rustled up some flesh, wine and logs, an old man out in the snow ('deep and crisp and even') and a kindly monarch. But *Christmas*?

The clue is in 'the feast of Stephen', which falls on 26th December, or 'Boxing Day', as we know it. That, too, has nothing to do with Christmas, beyond the fact that in the past people put a contribution in tradesmen's boxes as a kind of Christmas present for their services during the year.

The Stephen whose feast day falls on the day after Christmas was the first Christian martyr. (You can read his story in the book of Acts). He was a member of the church in Jerusalem in its very early days, and soon found himself involved with six others in administering the allocation of food to those in need. The apostles, who were the leaders of the church, felt that it wasn't appropriate for them to abandon preaching and 'serve tables', so they selected these seven to do the job for them. Stephen, however, quickly revealed hidden gifts as an eloquent spokesman for the Christian cause.

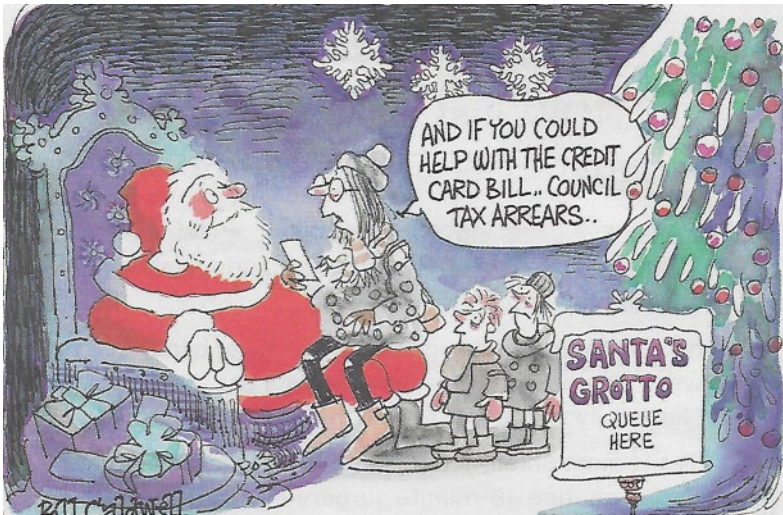
The Temple authorities, who had already had trouble with the apostles, were soon alerted to this new and hitherto unknown evangelist. They decided to make an example of him, thus firing a warning shot, as it were, across the bows of the apostles themselves. So, they arrested Stephen and accused him of speaking against the two central elements of their religion - the 'holy place' (the Temple) and 'the customs Moses handed down to us' (the Law). It's always dangerous to criticise a monument or a custom!

Given the right to defend himself, Stephen instead launched into an eloquent and at times biting account of Jewish history, culminating in the accusation that they had committed the worst possible sin by

killing the Messiah. Inflamed by his words, his hearers abandoned any pretence of legal impartiality, rushing towards him and dragging him out of the city to a place where they began to stone him to death. Stephen, the rank and file Christian, died under a hail of rocks for claiming that Mary's Son was the promised Messiah.

That is most probably the reason why the first martyr is honoured on the day after we celebrate the birth of the Saviour. It's a bit like the myrrh in the gifts of the Wise Men - a reminder, as we celebrate, that the bitter shadow of a cross is never far away from this story.

This year 'Boxing Day' falls on a Sunday – the first time that has happened since 2010. There will be a Benefice Service at Purton at 10am. when we will remember St. Stephen



THE WAY I SEE IT!

Catherine Pepinster considers the call to leadership

England's monarchs have been vying with one another to secure another crown: this time to be voted the greatest sovereign of all time in an online poll. In a knockout final round, a surprising winner emerged when Elizabeth I was pipped to the title by the Anglo-Saxon Athelstan.

Historian Tom Holland, who helped organize the ballot, says that while Athelstan, who reigned from 924 to 939, was a great conqueror who helped unite England, there were other reasons for his popularity. He felt a profound moral obligation to rule justly and well, according to Holland, and created just laws.

To many, royalty is about grandeur, pomp and ceremony while others have always laid store by monarchs having Athelstan's qualities – a sense of justice and obligation – even though some of them fell far short.

These ideas of kingship derive largely from Hebrew and Christian scriptures. At every coronation service, there is reference to Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anointing Solomon king – a reminder that monarchs, like Solomon, should be bywords for wisdom.

But it is the example of Jesus that has most influenced ideas of monarchy in this country. It's not by chance that both Roman Catholic and Anglican churches end their liturgical year by celebrating the Feast of Christ the King. It's always marked just before Advent, the run-up to Christmas when this king became the humblest of creatures, a child born in a stable, with a cot created out of the hay and straw of animal feed. Which raises the question: what kind of king is this?

The answer, according to the Gospels, shows that he has come to serve and he has no throne of power but instead a cross: this is a king who represents sacrifice, humility and vulnerability.

Some leaders – politicians or football managers, perhaps – might think that showing vulnerability is a sign of weakness in a leader. But in recent times we have seen two leaders express their frailty to powerful effect. A few months ago the Queen seemed poignantly vulnerable when she sat alone and masked at her husband's funeral. And in his last years John Paul II continued to serve as pope, even when he was very weak. In doing he so conveyed the message that here was a leader who understood human frailty.

The paradox is that for some leaders, vulnerability can be strikingly powerful. It runs counter to the all too common notion that a leader must actively shape their image, and so take on a particular persona. But leaders, honest about their frailty, have a notable authenticity. The personal story becomes greater than themselves



Bible Bite

A short story from the Bible

It can be read in the Bible in Matthew 2: 1-10

Around the time of Jesus' birth, in a land far to the east of Israel, there were men who studied the stars...


When they saw a new star they believed it showed a special King had been born. ✨



They set off to see that King.




They reached Jerusalem, the home of King Herod.




Where is the new King whose star we saw?


The Romans had made Herod king of the Jews about 30 years earlier. He was ruthless.



The Jews hated him and he was always worried that people were plotting against him.




He had them killed even if they were his wife or children...



So what the wise men said about a new King upset Herod and that made everyone else afraid.




Herod got the teachers and priests together and asked about the king's birthplace.




That would be Little Bethlehem. *Micah 5:2



Herod secretly met the wise men and asked when they had first seen the star.



Go to Bethlehem and look for the child. When you find him let me know so I can come and worship him.



As they left Jerusalem the wise men were elated to see the guiding star again.





BONUS BALL SWEEPSTAKE



**November
WINNERS**



Vicky Beard

19



Chris Curry

56



Muriel Forward

53



Margaret Roberts

09



**YOU HAVE TO BE IN IT
TO WIN IT!**

*Thousands of Pounds Won
Thousands of Pounds Raised
for Sharpness Church*



ALL NUMBERS ARE IN PLAY!



THANK YOU!



LETTERS TO UNCLE EUSTACE*On the peril of choosing new kneelers*The Rectory
St. James the Least

My dear Nephew Darren

After all these years, I now understand why the non-conformist denominations sit down, rather than kneel, to say their prayers. That way, no decisions have to be taken over the number, size, shape, colour, material and design of kneelers in church.

Our present set was donated by a retired Major-General in 1899 to celebrate the Relief of Mafeking, and after more than a century of use by the pious and not-so-devout has taken its toll. Like certain members of our congregation, they now look a little worse for wear. Many have sprung leaks, so that when used, a jet of flocking is emitted all over the clothes of their neighbour, who then leaves Mattins looking like a Yeti.

Other kneelers have been occupied by grateful mice, who find them most congenial for nesting and who leave in high umbrage, creating chaos as Miss Mapp chases them down the aisle with her umbrella; that this provides her with the perfect excuse to leave before the sermon is, I am sure, entirely coincidental. The final straw came when my own, by some quirk in its design, now sounds like a whoopee cushion every time I kneel. It may cause the choirboys much amusement, but it lends nothing to the dignity of our worship.

So, we have decided to have a completely new set – and therein lies the problem. Who makes them? What will be the designs? Who co-ordinates the whole project? There is enough here to occupy the combined minds of our Church Council for the next Millennium and there will be enough scheming, manoeuvring, signing of non-aggression pacts and formation of tactical truces to make the United Nations look like amateurs. Unfortunately, we do not have the ecclesiastical equivalents of the blue berets to enforce peace.

The more patriotic members of the congregation have suggested they all show the Union Jack – presumably so they can be waved at appropriate moments in our services; one belligerent individual wants to see depictions of St Michael slaughtering the dragon, John the Baptist's head on a platter and other such tasteful scenes; on the other hand, dear Miss Timmins wants them all to depict doves or small fluffy creatures, which would make the church look more like pets corner.

Cutting through these vital issues, I have suggested that the entire congregation converts to Roman Catholicism.... and then we could stand for our prayers and do without kneelers entirely.

Your loving uncle

WORD-SEARCH

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upset

hated

King

star

priests

new

plotting

killed

Jerusalem

Jews

teachers

guiding

little

born

Bethlehem

elated

birthplace

worship

Herod

secretly

Jesus

child

wise

afraid



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Celebrating the Season Together



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