

Parish News

St Mary the Virgin, Saffron Walden

St John, Little Walden and St James, Sewards End

Part of Saffron Walden &

Villages Team Ministry



December 2019

January 2020

FREE

The Deanery says farewell to David

At the Deanery Service at Great Chesterford on 20 October Graham Cook, the Lay Chair, paid tribute to David's time as Area Dean. Here are some of his words :

In my time as Lay Chair of the Deanery I have worked with six Rural, or Area Deans. David has actually served longer than the other five put together. He has led us through a period of significant change, not all of which has been easy. All of the incumbent clergy serving now have been appointed on his watch and the standard of the team he has put together is a tribute to his wisdom and puts us in a strong position to continue the good work he has initiated. A challenging task that it is our responsibility to uphold.



Working with David has been a pleasure for me, as I am sure it has for all of you. The book he has recently published, entitled *Leading a Church to Maturity in Love* can just as readily be applied to his leadership of the Deanery as it can to a Parish or Benefice. That is exactly what he has done, even if the level of maturity we have attained is not yet quite where he would like us to be, but he has certainly got us pointing in the right direction.

We owe a great debt of gratitude to David for his encouraging and inspiring leadership that has enabled us to achieve so much. It is no secret that many other Deaneries in the Diocese envy what we have been able to achieve and the manner in which it has been done.

David, we do thank you sincerely for all you have done for us, with us and through us. We are sorry that you are leaving but understand that these things have to happen and that our loss will be someone else's gain. You go with our love, gratitude and appreciation and our earnest prayer that you may be fulfilled in your ministry in whatever the future holds for you.

Graham Cook

The Bishop of Chelmsford writes:

David Tomlinson has been a wonderful servant of the Chelmsford diocese. He will be hugely missed. As Rector of the Saffron Walden team, as Area Dean, and as principle minister of the first Mission and Ministry Unit in the Diocese, David has been both a wise pastor and an adventurous pioneer. I have no doubt that God will open new doors of opportunity for David to use his considerable skills and experience in the cause of the gospel. He goes with my prayers and best wishes.

The Rt Revd Stephen Cottrell



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PARISH NEWS

EDITORIAL DEADLINE

The deadline for contributions for each issue is the 2nd Sunday of the month. Hence, the deadline for the **February** issue is: -

Sunday 12th January.

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Gerrit van Honthorst

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Back Cover: St. Mary's East Window © Martin Hugall

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The Curate's Letter

Dear Friends,

As I write this I am currently expecting my first child, due to be born in April next year. It is a time of beginnings and endings. As many people have told me, *"Life will never be the same again!"*

When I look at the Christmas story again, I wonder afresh about Mary. For her, the news of her pregnancy meant that *life was never going to be the same again*. For her too, the changes were unpredictable, and the future uncertain. However Mary did know some things about the baby she was carrying.

Unlike a modern mum, she was not able to hear her child's heartbeat, nor see each half of the baby's brain on the scan, nor have black and white images where she could marvel at little fingers and toes. And yet, at the angel's pronouncement, Mary knew things that many modern parents do not. She knew her baby's gender – way before the 20 week scan! – she knew his name, and she knew his vocation. Where many parents can only wonder what will become of their child, Mary was given a special insight into this most special baby – though I wonder if that only gave her more questions to ponder, such as how and when and why?

At Jesus' birth, it was clear that Mary's life was never going to be the same again with the abundance of strange visitors who turned up at the door. It was clear that things had changed when her child's existence put them at the risk of a despotic tyrant, and she had to live with the reality that terror was never far away, as many families live in the world today. It was clear too that her life was forever changed when she heard the words no one wants to hear: *a sword will pierce your own soul too*. The baby she held in her arms would be the very reason her heart would break, and the very way it would be mended.

We will revisit these stories over the Christmas season and see again the snap shots of all those whose encounter with the baby changed their lives. It is so easy to read them as all-too-familiar texts and to cease from wondering about these people: wondering about their faith, their lack of faith, as well as the uncertainties that they faced in their lives. It is all too easy to reduce these people to a one-dimensional image of faith and to lose the fact that they were flesh and blood, like you and me. And it is all too easy to sentimentalise the child in the manger, and to lose the powerful of the truth of Jesus whose birth brought insiders and outsiders together, rich and poor, young and old, men and women...people whose lives were never the same again.

As we reflect again on Christ's birth this Advent and Christmas time, let



us be ready to read and to wonder, to listen and to imagine, to learn and to delight afresh at the wonder of the Christchild in our midst. May our lives never be the same again.

With love,

Rachel

Thank You and Merry Christmas...

To Dawn Saxon and her loyal band of volunteers who, each month, meet to organise deliverers' bundles of our magazine, and to those who distribute them to homes, the Town Library and the Tourist Information Office. Thank you for your patience during the transition to using the Diocesan Print Unit in Chelmsford.

And a Merry Christmas to all our readers!

The Parish News Editorial Team

Gelio



It's reported that Tea Towel sales are up again this December!

© Chris Bishop

Belfry News

Maintaining our fine ring of 12 bells is very much unseen by most people at St Mary's but regular work goes on by our 'Steeplekeeper', Chris McCarthy, and others, to keep the bells in good working order. Over the last few weeks the ringers have embarked on a 'major service' of the bell fittings, the first significant work that has been carried out since the bells were completely refurbished in 1962. In brief, in conjunction with the only remaining bell foundry in the UK, John Taylor of Loughborough, the clappers are being refurbished, fittings are being undated, and the pads between the bell and headstock on the lightest 4 bells are being replaced. Work on the clappers has been undertaken at the bell foundry, and the on-site work is being carried out by our ringers with assistance of a specialist bell-hanger. The work started in early October and is being staged over 3 months so as to ensure that the bells remain available to ring for services — only one Sunday will be missed. The work will cost in the region of £5000 and is being funded entirely by the ringers of St Mary's.



The refurbished clappers prior to installation

Bell ringers re-installing the clappers

Stephen Wood

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Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht

Joseph Franz Mohr, born 11 December 1792 in Salzburg, arrived as a Catholic priest in Oberndorf bei Salzburg in 1818, having written a six stanza poem 'Stille Nacht' in 1816. That Christmas the church organ wasn't working so Mohr took his poem to Franz Xaver Gruber, schoolmaster and organist of a nearby village of Arnsdorf, to write a melody to



accompany the poem on guitar. On Christmas Eve, the congregation heard Gruber and Mohr sing their new composition to the accompaniment of Gruber's guitar.

Karl Mauracher, an organ builder, took the composition home where two families of singers — the Rainers and the Strassers — put the song into their repertoires. Around 1832, the "Silent Night" melody became what we now know. The Rainers made the first US performance of the song in 1839. Mohr wrote a 'Stille Nacht' arrangement around 1820, and new arrangements by Franz Gruber appeared — for a full orchestra in 1845, and for organ in 1855. By 1900 'Stille Nacht' was known around the globe. In the 1914 Christmas truce, the song was sung in French, English and German simultaneously. It was apparently the one song that all the soldiers knew.

In 1859 (or perhaps 1863), John Freeman Young published the English translation, from three of Mohr's verses. In 1998 the Silent Night Museum, Salzburg commissioned a new English translation by Bettina Klein which occasionally varies markedly from Young. The phrase translated by Young, 'Round yon Virgin mother and child, Holy infant so tender and mild' becomes, 'Round yon godly tender pair, Holy infant with curly hair', a translation closer to the original.

In Austria, "Stille Nacht" is a national treasure and may not be played publicly before Christmas Eve, and commercial use of the carol ist verboten. In 2011 UNESCO declared the carol an intangible cultural heritage. In the 1920s a new parish church was constructed, and a small memorial chapel, the *Stille-Nacht-Gedächtniskapelle*, replaced the original Nicola-Kirche.

A commentator has written: -

'Why *Silent* Night? The night of Jesus' birth was silent in the sense it was holy. If we take time to retreat from the commotion, and consider the mystery of the incarnation and imagine what it would have been like to join the shepherds at the manger, then perhaps we will hear in a new way the prophet's call to silence: "The LORD is in his holy manger; let all the earth be silent before him."

[Habakkuk 2:20]

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Twelve Days of Christmas Wonder

This is a Church of England initiative encouraging us to continue to pray and reflect from Christmas Day (25th December) to Epiphany (5th January). Written by Revd Mina Munns – a Pioneer Minister in the Diocese of Newcastle – and with a welcome from the Archbishops Justin Welby and John Sentamu, there are reflections and bible passages for each of the 12 days of Christmas. Each day offers a practical challenge to bring the theme alive, together with a short prayer. The hope is that like the Three Kings you too will have made some discoveries of your own about your journey of faith and the gifts you bring along the way. This is for all ages and there is plenty of scope to use it with children along with accompanying craft activities designed to help families and groups to explore the daily themes....

This was brought to the attention of the Prayer Team by Joe Hordern and I have to say I think it has potential both for us as individuals, families or with friends. We thought we did not have enough time to do anything as a team this year, but will be looking at it, and praying with it to see if this might be something we could use/get involved in as a church to reach out to our local community... If you too would like to use it to further and deepen your faith journey you can order the booklet from Church House Publishing: www.chpublishing.co.uk. The little booklet only costs £1.50 and there are other resources that can go with it. If any of you do 'Follow the Star' the Prayer Team would be very interested to have some feedback from you!

Sue Walker/ The Prayer Team

Email contact for feedback is: suewalker619@btinternet.com



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Weak Links

Seemingly insignificant and everyday things can influence our happiness, well being and mental health. We put our emphasis on relationships with friends and family, or lovers, but casual acquaintances are crucial too. That brief chat, banter or wave apparently shapes our sense of belonging, connectedness and well being. These have been given the inadequate name “Weak Links”.

A study by Gillian Sandstrom states, “People who on average have more interactions with weak ties tend to be happier than people who have fewer”. The benefits of casual encounters have been underestimated: we need them and they affect our mood. They can make the difference between feeling welcome and belonging, or excluded like an outsider looking in. Just being acknowledged by an acquaintance can lift us towards a sense of community and trust in the world. Lack of weak links can have negative consequences such as a sense of isolation, feeling disconnected and lowering a sense of the meaning of life. Loneliness is as bad for us as smoking or obesity.

When Jeremy and I moved to Saffron Walden in 2002 we knew no one here. As we took the dog for a walk every morning an elderly lady sitting at her window waved to us. We did not know her name and she never knew how important that small acknowledgement meant to us and helped us settle and feel at home. How I looked forward to those little chats and smiles at the supermarket and building society. Greetings from a neighbour in her wheelchair on the other side of the road gave me a lift and brightened the day. We slowly began to feel part of the scene.

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People need people, we are wired for relationship. Weak links can also provide that bridge between different social circles, and therefore new ideas, new information, new possibilities. I loved it when a lady from the U3A Literacy Class raised an eyebrow in church to check I was okay, having missed the class. I felt a buzz when Olly recognised me and stopped to chat when we were both shopping. I was deeply touched when a member of the tennis club brought round some doughnuts when Jeremy could no longer play. These are small, insignificant gestures but have a profound and positive impact for that connectedness we all need to feel safe and seen, of belonging. These are vital for our mental health.

Perhaps the Flower Festival at St Mary's epitomised the strengths of weak links. There was such a sense of shared appreciation of beauty and generosity as we worked together with a common aim, strangers chatting and smiling about the floral arrangements and the wonderful cakes. There was a sense of warmth and wellbeing. Contrast this with a visit I made with my mother to her rural church on Christmas Day. The vicar shook our hands and wished us a Happy Christmas. Not a single member of the congregation spoke or acknowledged my mother, my husband, myself or my three small children. I chose to never go there again. Apparently there is a huge difference for visitors whether a member of the congregation speaks to them. They are far more likely to come again than if it is only the vicar who welcomes them.

Benjamin Franklin wrote, "Human felicity is produced not so much by great pieces of good fortunes that so seldom happen, as by the little advantages that occur every day." You may not know how that nod of acknowledgement helped someone, or how that cold shoulder hurt. We're in this together, part of the Body of Christ. The strength of the chain is in the weakest link, or Weak Link. And His strength is made perfect in weakness.

Margaret Collingwood

The 3 Minute Rule

Nigel McCulloch, the former Bishop of Manchester, encouraged his people to follow a 3 minute rule: for at least the first three minutes after a church service go and speak to someone you don't know, before speaking to those you do. This is a helpful way to remember that we all have a responsibility to make others feel welcome in church.

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St Mary's Book Group

Shakespeare by Bill Bryson



The only important thing to know about who wrote Shakespeare's plays is that all 38 were written by the same man — whoever he was, though a few speeches in one or two of the late plays that are almost certainly by someone else, so right at the end of his career Shakespeare, like other playwrights of the time, was making some use of collaborators.

Bill Bryson's excellent short biography of Shakespeare, which St Mary's Book Group discussed at their November meeting, disposes briskly of the range of other possible authors proposed over the past two centuries, most of them wildly improbable. None fits both the right dates and the necessary background of writing for the theatre. But what we know of William Shakespeare himself is tantalisingly little: a few entries in church registers, some signatures to legal documents, printed copies of some of his plays with his name on the cover, and a very few references to him by other contemporary writers, most but not all of them favourable. Shakespeare was born in Stratford on Avon in 1564 and was buried there in 1616. He married at the age of 18 and had three children. He was a working actor as well as a playwright, and he spent his time between London and Stratford, where he bought substantial property. In London, he seems always to have lived in lodgings or rented houses. That is it.

Deliberately, Bryson does not consider the plays only their author, but they are what really matters. But he shows that as a playwright, Shakespeare had much going for him. Playgoing was very popular at the end of the 16th century and London had several successful theatres. Important cultural influences had reached England from Italy and France. The vocabulary of the English language had greatly expanded, with some of the new words coming from Shakespeare himself. And in 1623 two of Shakespeare's friends published all his plays in a single volume, the First Folio. These were not written to be read, like a book, but to be acted, and it is on the stage that the tensions in the plot, the complexity of the characters and the full effect of Shakespeare's language really come through. No single quotation gives justice to this language, but if you have doubts simply speak, out loud, Hamlet's words to Laertes on the death of Laertes' father and sister:

*Sir, in this Audience,
Let my disclaiming from a purpos'd evil
Free me so far in your most generous thoughts
That I have shot mine arrow o'er the house
And hurt my brother.*

The Book Group's next meeting will discuss Thomas Hardy's novel *Jude the Obscure*, on Friday 13th December.

Robin O'Neill

Calendar for December 2019 - January 2020

See also *The Grapevine* for the **latest** information

St Mary's, Saffron Walden - Sunday services

Sunday 1 December (Advent Sunday)

8.00am Holy Communion (1662)
10.00am Parish Communion
12.00 Holy Baptism
6.30pm Advent Carol Service

Sunday 8 December (Advent 2)

8.00am Holy Communion (1662)
10.00am Parish Communion
4.00pm Christingle Service



Sunday 15 December (Advent 3)

8.00am Holy Communion (1662)
10.00am Family Service
11.45am Holy Communion
3.00pm Coffee, Cakes and Company (Parish Rooms)
4.00pm Evening Communion (with Wholeness & Healing)



Sunday 22 December (Advent 4)

8.00am Holy Communion (1662)
10.00am Parish Communion
6.30pm Nine Lessons and Carols

Sunday 29 December (Christmas 1)

8.00am Holy Communion (1662)
10.00am Parish Communion
4.00pm Evensong

Sunday 5 January (Christmas 2)

8.00am Holy Communion (1662)
10.00am Parish Communion
6.30pm H2H (Parish Rooms)

Sunday 12 January (Baptism of Christ)

8.00am Holy Communion (1662)
10.00am Parish Communion
4.00pm Choral Evensong
7.00pm Aftershock (Parish Rooms)

Sunday 19 January (Epiphany 2)

8.00am Holy Communion (1662)
10.30am United Service (URC)
3.00pm Coffee, Cakes and Company (Parish Rooms)

Christmas Eve

4pm & 6pm Christmas Tree Services
11.30pm Midnight Holy Communion

Christmas Day

8.00am Holy Communion (1662)
10.00am Family Communion

Thursday 26 December (Stephen)

9.30am Holy Communion

Friday 27 December (John, The Apostle)

9.30am Holy Communion

Saturday 28 December (The Holy Innocents)

9.30am Holy Communion

FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY



4.00pm Evening Communion (with Wholeness & Healing)
7.00pm Aftershock (Parish Rooms)

Sunday 26 January (Epiphany 3)

8.00am Holy Communion (1662)
10.00am Family Service
11.45am Holy Communion
6.30pm Epiphany Carol Service
7.00pm Aftershock (Parish Rooms)



Weekday services

Morning Prayer

8.00am: every Wednesday
8.30am: every Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday
9.00am: every Saturday (*except 28th Dec when it will be Holy Communion*)

Evening Prayer

5.00pm: every Tuesday (*not 24th or 31st Dec*) - restarts again on 7 January

Holy Communion

9.30am: every Wednesday (*except 25th Dec*)

St Mary's Tinies (in Church)

2.00pm every Tuesday during term time

Festivals this month

Saturday 25 January (Conversion of Paul)

9.30am Holy Communion

Thursday Healing Service

1.00pm 5 December
1.00pm 2 January



Monday 27 January

1.40pm Holocaust Memorial Service



St James', Sewards End

Sunday 8 December

9.30am Holy Communion

Saturday 21 December

5.00pm Carols and Christingle



Christmas Eve

11.30pm Midnight Holy Communion

Christmas Day

9.30am Holy Communion

Sunday 12 January

9.30am Holy Communion

Sunday 26 January

9.30am Morning Praise



St John's, Little Walden

Sunday 8 December

11.15am Family Service

Saturday 21 December

5.00pm Carol Service

Christmas Day

11.15am Holy Communion

Sunday 12 January

11.15am Family Service

Sunday 26 January

11.15am Holy Communion

YOU in the PEW interviewed by

Chris Bishop

Lisa Brook

I decided to find out a little more about Lisa Brook considering she does the important work of being PCC Secretary.

Coming originally from Ipswich she made her way eventually down to Bath in Somerset where she read Maths at the University, and then trained in London as an accountant at one of the four major practices, KPMG. Her work took her back to East Anglia but the important part of her life from 2004 has been centred here in Saffron Walden.

As in so many conversations suddenly you can find that a common interest is shared, on this occasion it was cycling, not that I cycle but that we both are fascinated by the big international cycling tours. For Lisa married to Liam from Newdales Bicycle shop in the town centre this is 'a way of life' so to speak.

In answer to the question what for her are the important and special events in her Saffron Walden life I was shown two pictures hanging together on the wall, one was of her marriage to Liam at St Marys in 2016 and the other was another one of the church but with the Tour de France cyclists passing by it in 2014. Still in the world of cycling, having been to the Giro d'Italia in 2004 and experienced the Tour here on home soil in 2014, their goal is to go out to Spain for the 2024 Vuelta a Espana !

So St Marys is an important part of her busy working life. For a long time she was Secretary of the Communications Committee but was eventually encouraged to swap roles with Clifford Want and become PCC Secretary. So, just before leaving I asked her whether there was a particular saying or quotation that meant something special to her. She passed me some words from Eleanor Roosevelt, '**Do the thing you think you cannot do**'.



Prayer for the Month *provided by the Prayer Team*

During the two months of this edition let us contemplate, from time to time, the significance of the line from the great hymn 'Day of Wrath' composed by Thomas of Celano, and translated by William J Irons.

'Think, good Jesus, my salvation caused Thy wondrous Incarnation.'



Gardening Notes

Although we're at the end of the gardening year, a number of things remain to be dealt with before we can hibernate.

How about your winter hanging baskets? Mine are planted up with heather and variegated ivy, carefully positioned to allow several clumps of daffodils - a short stemmed variety - to form part of each display. The summer baskets have been emptied, cleared and away till next year with thought meantime to their then content.

The greenhouse is emptied of produce and attendant debris and the inside glass cleaned, so now readied for its winter task of protecting several large pots of various agapanthus: then in January adding some heated trays to give - hopefully - a really early start for some selected flower and vegetable seeds.

Outside the back door several troughs which carried geraniums and are now cleared: I shall fill them with wallflowers, hopefully later this week, and they'll give us visual pleasure right through to late spring next year! The follow on occupancy is still under consideration - may be even geraniums again as they were so good earlier this year. More on this and other momentous decisions later in our shared New Year!

Charles White



With Christmas in mind...

This most tremendous tale of all,
Seen in a stained-glass window's hue,
A Baby in an ox's stall.

John Betjeman's 'Christmas'

Filling the world, He lies in a manger!

St Augustine



Paddy McKeown

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Why not write an article for *Parish News*?



We are a vibrant, thinking, Christian Community in the heart of the town and the magazine should reflect this and encourage interest in what's going on here. So we need a good balance of reports on past and forthcoming events, plus feature articles, both sacred and secular. Any topic of interest to you that is informative, encouraging or amusing, would be most welcome.

Handwritten or typed articles can be left at the Parish Office, St Mary's Churchyard, CB10 1JP Emailed articles should be sent to:

office@stmaryssaffronwalden.org

The copy deadline for each issue is the second Sunday of the month prior to publication.

Please be aware that 400 words fits comfortably onto an A5 page and that any article over 800 words will need to be edited to ensure readability.

Please mention Parish News when responding to an advertisement.

From the Registers

Baptisms

We welcome into the family of the Church and pray for:

29th September:

27th October:

Freddie John Robert Bailey

Freja Joy Ellegaard at St. James' Swards End

Lily Jane Jennifer Bailey

Sienna May Rose Lecky

India Betty Lincoln

Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child

6th October: Thomas Peter Ridge Mander



Weddings

They offer their Married life to God:

29th October

Peter Flack & Amie Jones



Funerals

We send our deepest sympathy to the families and friends of:

2nd September

Pauline June Hill

5th September

Edward Arthur O'Connor

7th September

James John Stuart Gorman

12th September

James Excell Halsey

17th September

Peter Ernest Coston

17th September

Doren Joyce Ketteridge

24th September

Brenda Marilyn Luckings

26th September

Ronald Arthur Bacon

Praying for them and for those who mourn

"May they rest in peace"



TUESDAY EVENING PRAYER Times over Christmas 2019

Our second year of having Evening Prayer on a Tuesday is coming to an end and we are still very encouraged! We have a wonderfully committed team and faithful attendees for which we are truly grateful. I think it is fair to say that the fellowship is growing and deepening amongst us all. We are going to have a little break over the Christmas period as Tuesday falls on Christmas and New Years Eves. So, there won't be any Evening Prayer on December 24th and Tuesday December 31st. We restart again on 7th January the day after Epiphany and so to celebrate Graeme and I are inviting all the team and those who usually come, and those who come on the 7th January, to come back to 3 Springhill Road for some nibbles and mulled wine..... In the meant time Evening Prayer is going on every Tuesday, the last one being on 17th December.

Sue Walker

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Is God hiding?

Some years ago one of the very youngest members of my church asked me a question: 'Is God hiding?' Coming to church regularly and hearing much talk of God but never actually seeing anyone of that name provoked this straight forward question in her young mind. I can't quite remember what I said at the time but it has kept me thinking ever since. It's a perfectly fair question for all of us to ask. Why doesn't God just come out and show himself for all to see? Wouldn't it make a vicar's life easier, and indeed everyone's life clearer, if God was revealed in glorious majesty, on the clouds of heaven?

There seem to be two possible beginnings of an answer to that kind of question. Either God is not there at all or he has good reasons for being elusive. If we say God is not there then that's a neat enough answer, but not one that the majority of people in the world find convincing. What good reason might God have for hiding? I think it boils down to the nature of true love. God does want us to know him, but he will not force himself on us. He wants us to choose him of our own free will. Just imagine if God did reveal himself as I described, then surely all choice in the matter would be lost. We would have to bow the knee to him and recognise his claim on our lives; there would be no hiding place. I think God hides from us so that we, if we wish, can hide from him. It's a matter of respecting us as persons.

But God does not hide from us completely. What we celebrate in this season is the wonderful news that God has come to us in the birth of his Son, born of Mary, born in human flesh. One of his disciples was later to write:

'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it.' (1John 1.1, 2)

If we want knowledge of God then we will surely find it in the person of Jesus Christ. But we need to look. God's promise is this: 'You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.' (Jeremiah 29.12). As in all games of hide and seek the real joy, for both sides, comes in the finding.

Andy Colebrooke

Smile Lines

When I told my children the story of how the Wise Men brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh for the infant Jesus, my six-year-old daughter was not impressed. 'Mum, a Wise Woman would have brought nappies.'

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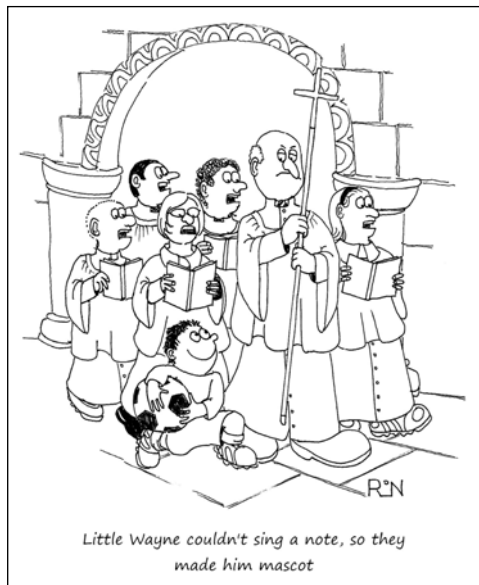


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The poet and hymn-writer who gave us 'In the Bleak Midwinter'

Christina Rossetti, British poet and hymn-writer, died of cancer 125 years ago, on 29th December 1894. She was 64.

Christina was the youngest child of poet and Dante scholar Gabriele Rossetti, who emigrated to England from Italy in 1824, and the half-Italian Frances Polidari, who he married in 1826.

Christina was also sister of the pre-Raphaelite painter-poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti, whom she resembled in some ways: she had an innately passionate and sensuous nature and a fine sense of humour. But she was consummately religious and put self-denial at the top of her priorities. Her brother much admired her poetry and helped to promote it.

She was a serious and devout High Church Anglican and broke engagements twice for religious reasons – to James Collinson in 1850 and to Charles Bagot Cayley in 1864. After this she led a quiet and almost saint-like life, and in 1871 she contracted Graves' Disease, a disfiguring and life-threatening thyroid disorder. Some of her poetry was published under the pseudonym Ellen Alleyne, and she is widely regarded as one of the two best women poets of the 19th century. Her widest known hymn is possibly *In the Bleak Midwinter*, a Christmas favourite.

Tim Lenton (Parish Pump)



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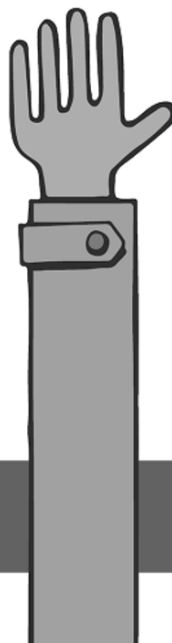
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"Be the change you wish to see in the world"

Gandhi

News of Lynn Treneary our CMS Partner in Chaima Institute, Maridi, South Sudan

Lynn writes in one of her emails: -

'I always try and encourage in my link letters because I know many people are unaware of the great treasures and riches they live amongst and so need carrying. Here are blessings too but it is hard to see them sometimes with the state of this place. Sickness every day in one member of the family or more.'

Lynn went out to Chaima 4 years ago having first served as a volunteer to test her calling as a CMS partner. She threw herself into the work and after a challenging first year of constant ill health, seems to be thriving in really challenging situations and uncertain political times. South Sudan has truly complicated politics and situations, appearing to seesaw between peace treaties being signed and conflict breaking out, leading to people being homeless, sick and starving; between hope and despair, between people suddenly finding themselves refugees returning to the camps and in times of peace trying to rebuild their homes and life again, only for conflict to return and having to leave their homes again

Maridi and Chaima seem to have escaped being caught up in the conflict. This has meant that the Institute, which provides education from land management to learning English, has been able to keep open offering a safe haven for the widows and children and also providing employment and hope in desperate times. It is a beacon of light in an otherwise war torn country. Chaima is now part of South Sudan new Episcopal University initiated by the Archbishops of Southern Sudan. Rufus Barnes' friend, Anne Tutt, was part of it; in March 2018 she gave us inspiration and clear insight into what was happening and what part Chaima had in it. Lynn throws herself into a great deal of life in the whole area; being licensed as a lay reader means she is preaching and taking part in a lot of gatherings and services; she also drives sick people to out of reach hospitals for medical care and personally provides work for people in destitute situations.

Lynn's inspiration and delight seem to come with the youth in Maridi Diocese now over 200 strong and often leading services that seem to be full of life, energy and joy; she is part of a very active Mothers' Union serving the area with very practical help from providing clothes, food and shelter and just being a wonderful channel of God's Love to those in great need. Her main concern is tackling Nodding Syndrome, which is a neurological condition affecting children between the ages of 5-15 years; it causes

progressive cognitive dysfunction, neurological deterioration, stunted growth and a characteristic nodding of the head. She describes it as a crisis which has been increasing since the 1980's and, while there is hope of a cure now on the horizon, South Sudan has over 20,000 families in dire distress and without medicine.



Some of the Youth Group (from Maridi) taking a break from evangelising!

We as a church have chosen to support the work of CMS and of Lynn in particular, which means we offer financial help as well as prayer and support for Lynn and South Sudan. It has been my privilege to be the Link Contact (now renamed by CMS, Advocate!) for the last 4 years. A job I have never done before and one I find challenging and inspiring both at the same time! There is a group of us who meet every 4 months or so to pray, reflect and occasionally put on events (mainly lunch in the Parish rooms). I think it is fair to say we are constantly surprised by our journeying with Lynn in this way, as well as being inspired and uplifted through her work, our faith horizons are being broadened, deepening fellowship with each other and with the Southern Sudanese people; we are catching some of the faith that comes from the pages of Lynn's letters. If you would be interested in joining us please do get in touch with me at suewalker619@btinternet.com or 01799523007

Sue Walker, CMS Advocate

Archive Group *findings...*

December 1939 & January 1940

My Dear Parishioners,

.....the next few weeks will be the worst for us in the whole year, for dark as they are naturally they will be darker still through the blackout regulations, but we have the comforting knowledge that very soon after Christmas the days will begin to lengthen and that no human legislation can prevent their progress. Probably too, we shall see internal commotion in Germany, a disillusioned people causing the Hitler gang to descend into the depths of destruction as did the Gadarene swine in the New Testament.....

(January) I would repeat my request that the names of all parishioners now serving in the forces be sent to one or other of the clergy. We are trying to compile a complete list to be put up in church that prayers may be asked for them. Pitifully few names have so far been handed in. It is a great satisfaction to know that a former choir boy, Sergeant Ronald Newman, son of Mr Arthur Newman of Victoria Avenue, has received a commission.

L. Hughes. Vicar.

Mothers' Union October Meeting Report

On 10th October 2019, Mothers' Union member Gwynneth Nicholas was our speaker. Her subject was her visit to Kerala in Southern India. It all began with the wedding of her daughter Susie to Sachin Jacob on 26th September 2015. Sach's family originated from Kerala where 25% of the population are Christian and the custom is to adopt biblical surnames. Since his parents came to live in this country, Sach has been educated and worked in England all his life. Both he and Susie are qualified doctors and work in Leeds.

By arrangement with Revd David Tomlinson, an Indian Orthodox priest called Father Thomas John took part in the wedding ceremony at St Mary's Church. This involved a special wedding sari being given to the bride by the groom as a symbol of their care for one another. Susie also wore the sari at the wedding reception. Two weeks later, Sach's sister Sareen was married in County Durham. The same Orthodox priest also attended. This enabled Sach and Sareen's elderly grandmother, who had travelled from India, to attend the weddings of both her grandchildren. Susie was also an attendant at Sareen's wedding and was dressed in the most beautiful Indian clothes. These and her wedding sari were both on display at Gwynneth's presentation. In time, a new grandson, Felix was born and Gwynneth was determined to visit Kerala and find out more about her grandson's ancestry.

A holiday was arranged to coincide with her 75th birthday. They saw wonderful elaborately decorated Christian churches, some Orthodox (Syrian Catholic), some Roman Catholic and Hindu Temples. Elephants play an important part in the Hindu temple ceremonies. Kerala lies in South West India between the coast and the hills of western Ghats. As you travel inland towards higher ground the crops change from coconuts and rice to spices and rubber and finally tea. On the coast, fishing is very important and there were fishing boats called Anna and Mary Martha. A highlight of the trip was an overnight stay sleeping on a houseboat on the backwaters. A crew of three sailed the boat and cooked and served food to nine passengers. They also saw displays of puppetry and dancing and the people were very courteous and welcoming. On Gwynneth's birthday the hotel chef made a birthday cake for her which was iced 'Happy Birthday Mrs Gwynneth'. Gwynneth also achieved her ambition to paddle in the Indian Ocean and she had a wonderful impression of her grandson's heritage.

Brenda Sheath



Quinqua-Quiz

Another name for The Sunday before Lent is Quinquagesima Sunday.

On the Saturday before Lent **February 22nd next year** we will be holding a Quinqua-Quiz a 'not too complicated' general knowledge Quiz in the Parish Room to help raise money for **The Bishop's Lent Appeal**.

Quiz Master Canon Chris Bishop would like to get at least 6 teams of 5 people at £5 a head (£25 a team) to take part in the Quinqua-Quiz.

Are you interested ?

If so, we will meet 7 for 7.30 pm start and please bring your own drinks and nibbles, and it will not be a late night finish...and who knows you might win the **Quinquacup !**

Please let Chris know if you would like to take part or could put together a team, by ringing him on 523722 or emailing him at chrismitre@hotmail.com by no later than...Saturday February 15th.

Thank you.



The Quinquacup

If only we could have a garden of Eden

It is good to know leading professionals from more than 70 wildlife organisations have joined with government agencies for the first time, to present the clearest picture to date of the status of our species across land and sea. Churches are realising that their grounds can become sustainable wildlife habitats and St Mary's has taken the first step in agreement with the town council to ensure no chemicals are used on site and to start a mowing regime in a trial area to create a wildflower meadow. The eco-team are hoping to start planting; increasing the number of flowers in existing beds, planting wild flowers seeds and plant plugs to attract pollinators to increase biodiversity.



The UK's wildlife continues to decline according to the new State of Nature Report 2019. The latest findings show that since rigorous scientific monitoring began in the 1970s, 41% of UK species studied have declined. 133 species assessed have already been lost since Tudor times. Butterfly decline is 17% and moths 25%. The numbers of species that require more specialised habitats have declined by more than three quarters. As God knows 'every flower in the meadow and bird in the sky' he cares for each and every living thing then so should we. [project](#)

The UK's mammals also fare badly with greater than 26% of species at risk of disappearing altogether. At St Mary's we plan to create small log piles, hedgehog homes and a bug hotel in discreet corner to encourage mammals and amphibians.

Much is known about the causes of decline and about some of the ways in which we could reduce impacts and help struggling species. The evidence from the last 50 years shows that significant and ongoing changes in the way we manage our land for agriculture and the ongoing effects of climate change are having the biggest impacts on nature. Both nationally and locally we need to alter the way we treat the natural world.

Daniel Hayhow, lead author on the report, said: "We know more about the UK's wildlife than any other country on the planet, and what it is telling us should make us sit up and listen. We need to respond more urgently across the board if we are to put nature back where it belongs. Governments, conservation groups and individuals must continue to work together to help restore our land and sea for wildlife and people in a way that is both ambitious and inspiring for future generations". Bishop Stephen's letter to Essex churches supports this view when he stated it is our duty to play our part. God's wonderful world needs our help and prayers, fortunately people's attitudes towards valuing nature means there are positive steps forward.

Jackie Damary-Homan (Eco group)



The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2020

This Week of Prayer takes place in January each year and Churches Together in Saffron Walden mark it with a United Service and an Agape Meal. This meal is a simple one, usually soup, bread, cheese and fruit, but it gives an opportunity for sharing and fellowship with members of the other churches in the town.

In 2020 the United Service will be held at the United Reformed Church in Abbey Lane on **Sunday, 19th January at 10.30 am.**

The Agape Meal will take place on **Thursday, 23rd January**, hosted by the Society of Friends at the Quaker Meeting House in the High Street.

Everyone is welcome and there will be a notice in the Grapevine in early January, giving more detail of the time and a list to sign at the back of the Church, if you would like to come.

Kathryn Fiddock

Gauguin's Portrait of a Breton Girl at Prayer

The National Gallery, London

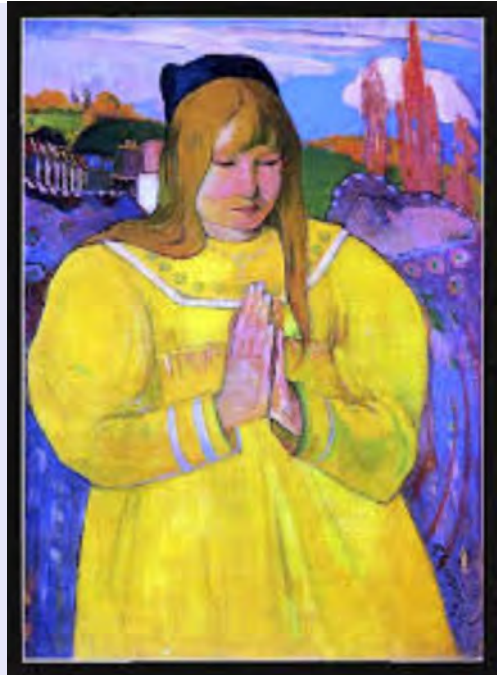
This painting is from those years when Gauguin was influenced by folk art and impressed by the simple faith of the Breton peasants. He has captured that faith in this painting of a Breton girl at prayer. His own catchphrase was 'I shut my eyes in order to see.' The girl has her eyes closed as she offers her prayers, but we sense that the inner eye of her heart is open in trust to God's will for her.

At this time of the year children step into the limelight of church and school life with nativity plays. They invite us to journey with them in that same simplicity and trust to Bethlehem, just as St Francis of Assisi invited the people of Greccio to a cave outside the town in 1223. As they looked into the cave, they saw the animals and the hay, and in the centre, a new-born babe. St Francis talked to them of the simple message of God's love revealed in all humility and openness in this birth of the Christ-Child. He invited the people to respond with those same gifts.

As we look at this painting, we see something of the simplicity and trust called of us, whether young or old. Too often as we get older, we find our lives weighed down by responsibilities and pressures. We find time is swallowed up in the busyness of this season, and somehow we lose that innocence and simplicity of life.

But, pondering the Christmas story and pondering this painting, we can put our hands together and pray for that openness and childlike trust. Fr Faber wrote a hymn with the lines:

*'If our love were but more simple,
we should take him at his word;
and our hearts would find assurance
in the promise of the Lord.'*



The Revd Michael Burgess (Parish Pump)



Special Services for Christmas and Epiphany

An Advent Carol Service

Sunday 1 December

6.30pm at St Mary's, Saffron Walden

Christingle Services

Sunday 8 December

4pm at St Mary's, Saffron Walden

Saturday 21 December

5pm at St James, Sewards End

Carol Services

Sunday 22 December:

6.30pm at St Mary's, Saffron Walden

A Service of Nine Lessons and Carols

Saturday 21 December:

5pm at St James, Sewards End

A Service with Carols and Christingles

Saturday 21 December

5pm at St John's, Little Walden

Monday 23rd December

6.00pm *Carol Singing around Sewards End*



Christmas Eve (Tuesday 24 December)

Lighting of the Christmas Tree: 4pm & 6pm at St Mary's, Saffron Walden

Midnight Holy Communion: 11.30pm at St Mary's, Saffron Walden

Midnight Holy Communion: 11.30pm at St James, Sewards End

Christmas Day (Wednesday 25 December)

Holy Communion (1662 traditional): 8am at St Mary's, Saffron Walden

Family Communion: 9.30am at St James, Sewards End

Family Communion: 10am at St Mary's, Saffron Walden

Holy Communion: 11.15am at St John's, Little Walden

An Epiphany Carol Service

Sunday 26th January 2020: 6.30pm at St Mary's, Saffron Walden

