

Witney Congregational Church

R CROSS A D S

Witney Congregational Church is a crossroads where we:

meet God in worship

meet one another in friendship

meet our community and world with the love of Jesus



WHAT'S ON GUIDE

Witney Congregational Church offer a whole range of activities through which we seek to Worship, Work and Witness to the Lord Jesus Christ in this community today.

Further information can be obtained from the Church Administrator, Minister, Church Secretary or the leaders of the particular activities who are listed at the back of this magazine.

WORSHIP

Daily Worship	9.30 am	Mon-Fri	Short time of Prayer and Reading
Saturday Praise	11.00 am	1 st Saturday of the month	
Sunday Services	10.30 am		
	6.00 pm	1 st Sunday of the month	

Communion is held twice during the month at the first Sunday evening and third Sunday morning services

PRAYER

The Church is open each morning for Prayer

STUDY & FELLOWSHIP

Tuesday	12.15pm	Lite Bite piece of the Word (1 st Tuesday of each month)
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YOUTH ACTIVITIES

Sunday	10.30 am	Crèche, Noah's Ark & The K.I.C.K. on Sundays
Monday	10.00 am	Noah's Ark – Infant Group for babies and pre-school children
Friday	7.00 pm	Y4J – Twice a month

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Tuesday	Monthly	Deacon's Meeting
	Bi-Monthly	Church Meeting
Thursday	10.00am	Rest & Chat (Coffee/Tea available)
Saturday	10.30 am	Coffee Morning

SUNDAY LINK

Weekly bulletin for all Christians providing stimulating thought along with news and notices concerning our Church

WITNEY ECUMENICAL YOUTH TRUST (BASE 33)

4 Welch Way (Entrance – High Street) ☎ 01993 774402

St ANDREW'S BOOKSHOP

Opening Hours: Monday – Saturday ☎ 01993 709429

CHURCH WEBSITE

For further information, please visit our website:

www.witneycongregational.org.uk



or, just plainly written on paper, which can be typed up.

The next 2-monthly edition, covering February & March is due on **Sunday 29th January**

Your Editor

Doesn't time fly as it doesn't seem 3 months since the Autumn edition was published and as I write this we are now into Advent; a new start for the Church.

For many of us Christmas is a time of busyness as we rush to and fro organising presents, dinners, and trips to distant relatives.

Whilst fully aware of the importance of this Christian holiday, we still often struggle to keep the focus on the most important Christmas gift, that of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Taking this into account, and for those fortunate to have access to the internet, the following short video, which I also recommended last year – Advent in 2 minutes, is well worth a look:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S02KOlw7dIA&index=2&list=RDAySe5pZnwig>

Turning now to those who have contributed to this edition; alongside the standard pages, Lesley Barter updates us on what she has been reading, and also an article on creature comforts: Canon David Winter reflects on the most beautiful story & we three kings; and there is an article on Trump & Brexit, but nothing like you would imagine, to name but a few.

Many thanks for those who have contributed for this edition, but would encourage anyone to consider submitting article(s) for the next edition by either:
E-mail:

terrypowlesland@uwclub.net
jacquipowlesland@uwclub.net



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Daily Prayer Time:

Mon-Fri 9.30 am

Services

10.30 am weekly & 6.00pm on first Sunday of the month and will normally be led by Rev Dr Jason Boyd unless advised below

Dec

3rd Saturday Praise 11.00am
 4th am Morning Worship Communion (No evening Worship)
 11th am Morning Worship – Nativity
 18th am Morning Worship Communion
 pm Carols by Candlelight
 24th 11.15pm Watchnight Service at High St Methodist Church
 25th am All-Age Worship Communion

Jan

1st am Morning Worship Communion (No evening Worship)
 7th Saturday Praise 11.00am
 8th am Morning Worship
 15th am Morning Worship Communion
 22nd am Morning Worship
 29th am Morning Worship
 Madley Park Residential Home 3.00pm

Feb

4th Saturday Praise 11.00am
 5th am Morning Worship
 pm Evening Worship Communion

The following events are given for your particular attention:

Dec

6th Lite Bite piece of the Word 12.15pm
 Deacon's meeting 7.30pm
 10th Prayer Chain meeting 9.15am
 CTiW Carol Singing 10.15am Congregational Church
 13th Springfield School Christmas Assembly 10.30am
 15th Advent Quiet Day 10.00am – 4.00pm
 22nd Thursday Coffee morning – Christmas Carols & Mince Pies

Jan

10th Lite Bite piece of the Word 12.15pm
 Deacon's meeting 7.30pm
 14th Prayer Chain meeting 9.15am
 18th – 25th CTiW Prayers for Christian Unity Venues/time will be on Sunday Link
 27th Women's World Day of Prayer preparation meeting 10.00am
 29th Church meeting 12.00pm following Morning Worship

Feb

7th Lite Bite piece of the Word 12.15pm
 Deacon's meeting 7.30pm

ROTAS

WELCOMING TEAM

Dec	04	Pat Smith & Joan Currie
	11	Nanna Blackman
	18	Pip Cartwright & Irene St Clair
	25	Viviane & Naomi Boyd
Jan 2017	01	Pat Smith & Joan Currie
	08	Jill & Robert McBride
	15	Viviane Boyd & Irene St Clair
	22	Nanna Blackman
Feb	29	Pat Smith & Joan Currie
	05	Susan Wass & Lesley Barter



COMMUNION

Dec	04 am	Beryl Cartwright & Lesley Barter	
		Susan Wass & Norline Martin	
		Preparation	Pat Smith
	18 am	Beryl Cartwright & Judi Holloway	
		Lesley Barter & Karen Brusck	
		Preparation	Irene St Clair
	25 am	tba	
		Preparation	Beryl Cartwright/Cecily Lau
		Jan 2017	01 am
Judi Holloway & Cecily Lau			
Preparation	Irene St Clair		
	15 am	Cecily Lau & Beryl Cartwright	
		Viviane Boyd & Judi Holloway	
		Preparation	Beryl Cartwright
Feb	05 pm	Viviane Boyd	
		Preparation	Viviane Boyd



FLOWERS

Dec	04	Joan Currie
	11	Christmas Tree
	18	Christmas Tree
	25	Christmas Tree
Jan 2017	01	Christmas Tree
	08	Val Obriain
	15	Sonya Boyd
	22	Jacqui Powlesland
Feb	29	Judi Holloway
	05	Beryl Cartwright



SUNDAY COFFEE

Dec	04	Susan Wass & Judith Bungey
	11	Jill & Robert McBride
	18	Clare Woodward & Susan Wass
	25	Christmas Day
Jan 2017	01	Sue Birdseye & Irene St Clair
	08	Viviane Boyd & Hilary Pratley
	15	Susan Wass & Judith Bungey
	22	Jill & Robert McBride
	29	Clare Woodward & Susan Wass



Feb 05 Sue Birdseye & Irene St Clair

THURSDAY COFFEE

Dec	08	Beryl Cartwright
	15	No Coffee Morning – Advent Quiet Day
	22	Carols
Jan 2017	05	Hilary Pratley
	12	Beryl Cartwright
	19	Jean Stanley, Marina Bowerman & Irene St Clair
	26	Hilary
Feb	02	Beryl Cartwright
	09	Hilary - coffee & croissants



Every effort has been made to meet individual circumstances. However, please change with someone else if the dates are not convenient for you

Dec	04	Charlotte Hayes
	06	Sue Birdseye
	07	Charlotte Hathaway
	09	Audrey Elliot
	16	Layla Holloway
	25	Preston Holloway
		Kathy Shaw
	29	Cecily Lau
	30	Jan Schunselaar



Jan	02	Benjamin Esapa
		Joseph Esapa
		Margaret Esapa
		Gwen Mee
	04	Tori St Clair
	07	Brian Bennett
		Storm Wallace
	10	Cheryl Birdseye
	12	Iris Lindsay
	24	David Kinchin

Wishing you all a Merry Christmas and a



Some observations on Christmas ...

If Jesus were born one thousand times in Bethlehem and not in me, then I would still be lost. *Corrie ten Boom*

Christ has outlasted the empire that crucified Him 19 centuries ago. He will outlast the nations who deny him now. - *Anon*

The nature of Christ's existence is mysterious, I admit; but ... reject it and the world is an inexplicable riddle; believe it, and the history of our race is satisfactorily explained. - *Napoleon Bonaparte*

God became man to turn creatures into sons; not simply to produce better men of the old kind but to produce a new kind of man. C S Lewis

Pastor's Papers

In sitting down to write this letter there is only one thing on my mind. I know I'm not the only one either. As a church family our hearts are weighed down with disbelief and sadness for Emma's loss. Dan's sudden death has shaken her world.

Only a few weeks ago our church was full of Emma and Dan's family and friends as we gathered to celebrate God's grace to us all in the baptism of Storm. It was a time of joy as we joined with Emma and Dan in the miraculous birth of Storm. We surrounded them with our love and prayers as we dreamt and hoped for God's blessing on this little family.

As a congregation we made our promises to support and surround Emma and Dan with our prayers as they brought Storm up. Now that Emma is on her own our promises take on even greater significance. Our prayers and practical support will be tangible signs of God's love in this desperately dark time.

With Emma's permission I will print the written text of that sermon as an invitation to trust in Jesus Christ in the face of the storm that has engulfed her. May we redouble our commitment and surround her with all the faith, hope and love that we have in God.

In addition, I am going to share the manuscript of a sermon I preached on the 6 November as we grappled with the question *Why?* Life often doesn't make sense and as we reel from events that shake our faith, we look to Job's long journey from desolation to consolation. We are moving through the season of Advent – of waiting expectantly for the coming of Jesus. At our last Church Meeting Suzanne challenged us to ask ourselves how we can be simpler and go deeper. **Simpler and deeper.** This time of expectant waiting is an ideal opportunity

for us to prepare for Christ's coming in simpler, deeper ways.

So much of the hype around the lead up to Christmas has to do with a sense of obligation. We churn out Christmas cards, shop frantically for gifts, buy food and drink galore and then collapse in a heap of crumpled and torn paper on Christmas day. How can we fill this time of Advent with less frenetic activity and more prayer in which stillness and silence are allowed to be a space for us to receive Jesus?

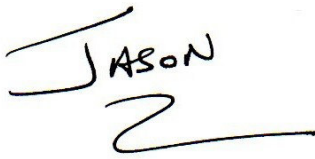
By all means celebrate! As we bow the knee to the infant king we have every reason to revel in the gift of his life, death and resurrection. The celebrating is much richer when I have carefully prepared my heart by emptying it of attachments to glitz and bling. Preparing room in my heart for Jesus demands the exercising of my prayer muscles. Attuning the ears of my heart to that which truly matters gives me acuity to hear the choir of angels. And remember, our celebration of Jesus' coming is not of the giggly, happy, carefree kind. It is a celebration rooted in the reality of the darkness and sorrow of this world:

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them a light has shined (Is. 9:2).

A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more (Mt. 2:18). Indeed, the celebration of Jesus' coming is centred on the reality that he is the one named Emmanuel, God with us (Mt. 1:23). God is with us in Jesus when we are elated and when we are in anguish.

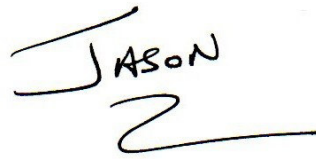
I want to assure each one of you of my prayers and love for you in Jesus Christ. I long to go 'simpler and deeper' with you as a congregation. May you prepare well

for Jesus' coming and when he comes may you welcome him with open arms. I wish you a Happy Christmas!
Shalom



that these important boundaries will be respected.

Yours



A Message from the Minister

We are fortunate as a Church to have such a committed staff. Sue Birdseye is the welcoming face of the Church, an asset to us. Graham Beechey has been serving as our caretaker for several months now. Recently his hours have increased from 10 hours to 15 hours. He is highly committed and brings a cheerful atmosphere.

I would like to remind members and friends that Sue's office hours are 9:30 am – 12:30 pm from Monday to Friday. Graham works from Monday to Saturday with varying hours depending on what needs to be done each day. His principle responsibility is to unlock the building in the morning and to secure it at night. He ensures that rooms and toilets are tidy and clean and undertakes some low level maintenance jobs together with gardening according to the season. All of this is prioritised as his time allows.

Sue and Graham work with me together with Lesley our Church Secretary. If there are any thoughts or ideas about how we can improve our efficiency then please contact Lesley or me rather than Sue or Graham directly.

As you are aware, Sue and Graham are a part of our congregation. It is important that when they are here outside of their working hours that they are treated as friends and not employees. I am confident

Sermon for Storm's Baptism on the 4 September 2016

Reaching out when we're going down

Text: Matthew 14:22-33

Jesus was in the centre of the storm. The grisly gift of John the Baptist's head presented on a platter from Herod to his daughter as the prize for a pleasing dance was reported to him. This would have been distressing as John was Jesus' cousin. His death was a stark reminder to Jesus that his own death was in view. Jesus needed courage for the journey. He required strength to stay faithful to the mission to which his Father had sent him to fulfil.

Jesus was in the centre of a storm. The news of John's death was a crisis moment. Jesus knew what he had to do when the pressure was on. He withdrew to the calm centre of the storm, the place of prayer. He took a boat to find solitude on the far shore. The only trouble was that the crowds pursued him.

Jesus was in the centre of a storm – a storm of need. He met the crowds with compassion, healing the sick. When the hour was late and stomachs growled with hunger, Jesus met their need for food too. Somehow a small offering of five loaves and two fishes fed 5000 men, not to speak of the women and children. There was no

time for rest. No time for prayer. The needs of the people pressed in on him. The disciples clamoured into a boat on Jesus' instruction. He tells them to go to the other side of the lake. He dismisses the crowds and then withdraws into a place of quietude. Where could be more ideal for prayer than the peak of a mountain. Breathless from the climb he settles into deep communion with his Father. The evening came. He was alone. Meanwhile, out on the lake a storm is brewing. The waves crested over the bow of the boat and the hull slapped and thudded with every surge and fall. The wind was against the disciples and the boat had been blown off course so badly that they were nowhere near the shore. At the moment when the world woke under the growing light of a dawning day, Jesus walked towards them on the lake. As every sensible person knows, it is humanly impossible to walk on the water unless you're on a pair of skis and behind a motor boat! So when the disciples see this apparition emerging through the gale they shouted, "Ghost!" They were afraid. Absolutely terrified.

Immediately Jesus speaks above the howling winds, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." His words echo those of Yahweh: I am that I am.

The truth of the matter was that this lone voice likely frightened them further. No one in their right mind would believe that this figure was Jesus.

Peter tested the voice. "If it is you Lord, then tell me to step out of this boat and walk to you on the water." There could be no surer sign. Surely there was nothing to lose either.

The voice invited, "Come." And so he did. Peter straddled the side of the boat and lowered himself down. Remember, this boat was bucking like a frightened horse. The water was heaving.

Peter begins to walk towards Jesus. Did he feel exhilaration at this strange sensation of walking on the water's surface? Was his faith rising in his heart as he neared Jesus? But then it happened. Peter was brought back to reality. This was impossible! He noticed the strength of the wind whipping around him. Terror took over. Fear displaced faith. He began to go under. In the moment between faith and doubt, hope and despair, awareness and oblivion, he had just enough of his wits about him to shout out. A kernel of trust cried, "Lord, save me!"

Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. The strong grasp of the carpenter drew Peter up with words of reproach, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" "Why did I doubt?" Wouldn't you be a doubting wreck too? I would. Why does Jesus demand the impossible? Why compassion for the crowds with healings and food and yet – at this moment when Peter demonstrates faith in stepping out and then can't quite pull it off – Jesus tells him off for doubt? Wasn't he faith-filled enough when he got out of boat? Why didn't Jesus cut him a bit of slack?

Jesus climbs into the boat with Peter. The moment Jesus is aboard the wind stilled to a whisper. The lake surface became a glassy calm.

This is jaw dropping stuff. All in the boat are thrust into a moment of awe. Peter saved and the storm stopped. And they worship. Yes, they worship. And where does worship lead? It turns our hearts towards God. "Truly you are the Son of God," they said. This storm calmed by Jesus leads to awe and worship.

As we baptise Storm, we come in a spirit of awe and worship. We come with our faith. We come with our doubt. We come with our brave striding over troubled waters. We come with our sinking – our going down. We come crying out, "Lord

save us!” As we baptise Storm we are acknowledging that Jesus saves. When we are going down his hand is reaching out. On the 4 September 1977, Judi and Preston presented Emma for baptism at St. Mary’s Church on the Green. Judi’s sister Susie took on the responsibility of being a godmother. As we come to baptise Storm on the same day 39 years later, we remember the storms of illness that took Preston and Susie from us. We rejoice that Susie’s daughter Tina, though unable to be here today, is taking up the mantle of godmother to Storm, alongside Tom and Julie. Of course this day of celebration makes their absence felt keenly.

Every baby’s birth is special. Yet the longing Emma and Dan had for a child entailed risk. And for Emma there was the hardship of medical intervention. The glimmer of hope that flickered with Storm’s conception grew with every passing month. Then Storm entered Dan and Emma’s life and the world changed and will never be the same again. There were the first surprising weeks when Storm was anything but ‘stormy’. She was so calm and quiet – no trouble at all. Perhaps she came to us as the calm in the eye of the storm – that place of complete stillness in the centre of a cyclone.

Three of our hymns touch on the theme of storms: Jesus, a shelter in the time of storm; Jesus, present with us in the raging storm; and Jesus our anchor in the storms of life. As Emma and Dan bring Storm to be baptised, what are they doing? What are we doing as we stand around them and make our promises to support them? Is it that Storm is being placed in the centre of our community and that all our hopes and fears for her are being placed in the hands of Jesus? What will life bring for Storm? What will be her

achievements? What will be her joys and delights? Will there be disappointments and hurts? Will the terrible twos give way to the turbulent teens? And where will she go and what will she be and how will Emma and Dan keep her safe?

We do not know what Storm will become. What we do know is that we can surround her with love and be an anchoring presence to her wherever she goes and whatever happens in her life. In baptism we are participating in the ‘already’ love of God for Storm since long before the world began. Storm has been in God’s heart. His love is so great and vast that he sent Jesus Christ to die and rise again as a demonstration of his love for Storm.

Emma and Dan, as you offer thanks for Storm’s life and promise to give her all the love that you have within you, in baptising her you are making a commitment of faith. You are promising to live your faith through regular participation in worship, reading scripture and nurturing a life of prayer. Storm will only grow in her experience of Jesus’ love as you show her what it is to follow Jesus. You are bringing the faith you have, however great or small, and committing yourself to the community of faith to learn and grow in your own walk with Christ so that, when Storm is able to understand, she can hear Jesus’ call to her.

Emma and Dan, God has made his promise to Storm in Jesus. It is Jesus who saves. It is Jesus who reaches out to us when our faith collapses into doubt. It is Jesus who calms the storms of life. As a Christian community we want to love and support you as you embark on this life of nurturing Storm in the love of Jesus.

* * * * *

A sermon preached on the
6 November 2016

Why?

Text: Job 19:23-27 & Luke 20:27-38

Why? It was the question that met me as I rang the bell, the door opened, and I stepped into the room. I didn't know what to say. He was a young man in his late twenties. He was dead. Cause of death unknown. His sister had been killed in a car crash several years before. I sat with the parents, all of their children dead. I sat with them and empathised with their pain, a pain that only my worst nightmare could conjure up. There was nothing to say. I listened. I felt. I was simply there. Why? I watched a father and mother cling to each other as they carried the tiny white coffin. Their baby girl had lost her fight for her life. A few weeks later I was called to the home of that baby's grandparents. Gran had fallen down the stairs and died. I sat with that family, lost for words. I was simply there.

Why? An elderly woman in one of my previous churches called me. Something had happened to her 50 something daughter. I took her up to the hospital and as we entered the room it became clear that death was near. Her daughter died and was buried on the day she was to be married. A couple of years later her son couldn't cope with life and was found dead in the hills. This woman in her eighties lost two of her three children to death and yet amidst her sorrow she displayed a resolute trust in God. I had no words. I was simply there. I witnessed faith before the sound of silence to the unanswerable 'Why?' She blessed the Lord.

"Curse God and die." That's what Job's wife said. How could a person loyally serve a God who does deals with the

devil? How can you keep on singing God's praises when he allows the devastation? His oxen and donkeys and the servants who looked after them were slain by sword: destroyed. His sheep and the servants who looked after them were consumed by heavenly fire sent by God: destroyed. His camels stolen and the servants who looked after them and slaughtered: destroyed. His feasting children die in a house collapse caused by a wind storm: destroyed. Wave after wave of tragic news is brought from a surviving servant. Satan said to God – he was sure of his ground – if Job lost his possessions and his children he would spit a curse at God.

Heart wrung out with grief, head spinning, numbed and uncomprehending, how does Job respond? He rips his robe, shaves his head, and sinks to the ground and can you believe it? He worships. Can it be? His actions defy logic. "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (1:21). No cursing but a blessing. The devil's deal with God deepens. "I bet Job will curse you if you let me destroy his health. What do you say?" God agrees so long as Satan doesn't take Job's life.

Job is covered in sores from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet. He sits in an ash heap scraping his sores with a fragment of pottery. Surely Job will do the sensible thing and curse God. Isn't his wife right to think that it's time to jack in this God malarkey?

"This is foolish talk," Job responds. "Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad." So far so good. Job's loyalty to God is intact.

Three friends and then a fourth join Job. The three are so shocked by what they see that they wail with sorrow. They tear their robes and throw dust over their

heads. They sit with Job in silence for seven days.

It's when they open their mouths that the fabric of friendship unravels. There must be a reason why this horror has happened to Job. The lens through which they saw the world was simple enough. Prosperity and children is a sign of God's blessing. If you've done well in life then God is smiling on you. Poverty and misery are clear signs that a person has sinned and God is punishing them. The three friends are clear with Job: you have sinned and that is why you are suffering so. If Job would simply admit his sin then God might forgive him and the tide may turn back in his favour.

Job will have none of it. He argues. He protests his innocence. He curses the day of his birth. He demands a hearing with God. He wants to argue with God.

Job is desperate for his just cause to be heard by God before he dies. For a man in ancient times there was no prospect of life after death. Death was the end and possibly some shadowy existence in Sheol, the place of the dead.

Job wants his words to be written indelibly in a book or perhaps to take an iron pen and engrave his protest in lead inlaid into a rock. He wants his words to last for ever – to outlive him.

The famed words of Handel's Messiah "I know that my Redeemer liveth" infuse Job's words with the resurrection hope that we have in Jesus Christ. But for Job any thought of life beyond death was at best a wisp of smoke at the edge of reality.

Job affirms his hope in a living Redeemer. Behind the word 'redeemer' is the Hebrew word go-el. The redeemer was a close relation who helped a near relative to recover sold property and to continue the family line for a married man who

died childless. Boaz was a go-el for Naomi and married Ruth to give a son to continue the family line. The go-el is an advocate who defends a person against injustice.

Job's hope is that his words preserved for posterity will be defended by his redeemer to God. The redeemer will argue Job's case to God and be vindicated in his just cause. He knows that one day all the aspersions smeared over his character by his friends will be refuted. Job longs for the record to be set straight before he dies. He wants to see justice done by God in his flesh.

Job in the midst of his enormous suffering – his physical suffering as well as the emotional trauma of being blamed for his situation – somehow reaches this high note of faith. Eventually God does appear. God's majesty and mystery bring Job to a place of awe. There are no answers to the question 'Why?' only the knowledge that God does all things well.

When we are faced with tragedy, the loss of possessions, our children and even our health, doesn't it make sense to curse God and die? What kind of faith is called for when we sit with the death ravaged and the question 'Why?' is answered by silence?

The Sadducees were a conservative religious grouping within Judaism. They did not go for all the new-fangled ideas of the Pharisees. Ideas of angels and resurrection from the dead were laughable. For the Sadducee, if it wasn't in the Torah – the first five books of our Bible – then it simply didn't count.

The Sadducees pose a well-rehearsed and ridiculous riddle intended to make a joke out of the resurrection. They cite the Torah referring to the duties of the kinsman redeemer – the go-el. Imagine a man dies leaving his wife without a child. This man has six brothers. Each brother

marries their brother's wife and each dies without leaving a child as an heir. When the woman dies, whose wife will she be? Will she have seven husbands in heaven? Jesus dismisses the Sadducees on two counts. First, the Sadducees have not understood the resurrection from the dead. Those who are raised from death in the age to come will enter into a reality that is unimaginable for those of us in this age. In Jesus' day marriage was about possessions and procreation. For us in the West, it is hard to imagine our existence without romantic relationships between people. The resurrection life will establish a different set of relationships. We will be children of God, brothers and sisters in his family.

Jesus' tour de force is when he appeals to the Torah, the accepted scripture of the Sadducees. "Do you remember Moses approaching the bush? What did God say to Moses? Do you recall? The Lord said, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. He didn't say to Moses, 'I was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.' He speaks of them as living. God is not the God of the dead but of the living."

The Sadducees draw a breath. The scribes were impressed. They congratulated Jesus on his excellent response. The Sadducees had nothing more to say to him.

When we sit in the ash heap of grief...when our hearts are torn apart by tragedy...when we are covered with the sores of misery and ask 'Why' what will we do? Will we curse God and die or will we bless him? When we find our prayers to God are filled with weeping and raging do we have faith that our redeemer – our vindicator – our advocate will come? Reeling in doubt and despair will we feel the clasp of Jesus our Risen Lord holding us, assuring us that God is the God of the living?

The following article, written by Tim Lenton, has been extracted from Parish Pump, and is entitled:

The man who created Greenwich Mean Time

The British mathematician and astronomer Sir George Biddell Airy died 125 years ago this month. Not a household name, he nevertheless had a long-term effect on everyone's lives by establishing Greenwich as the location of the prime meridian, through calculations made using an immensely accurate telescope he invented called the Airy Transit Circle.

Greenwich Mean Time became legal time in Britain in 1880, and was adopted in principle as the basis of universal time in 1884.

Sir George was not so much a brilliant scientist as a meticulous engineer and a self-taught expert in many areas, including theology. His wife Ricarda, who he met on a walking holiday and proposed to after two days, was the daughter of the Rev Richard Smith, private chaplain to the Duke of Devonshire. After being initially rejected by Mr Smith, because of his limited means and prospects, he persisted in his suit for six years until he was successful.

Sir George was elected president of the Royal Astronomical Society four times, for a total of seven years between 1835 and 1864. No other person has been president more than four times.

He was famous (or notorious) for the care and foresight with which he planned his life. He made a careful note of everything that occurred in his life or interested him, and never threw anything away. These records still exist.



PRAYER LETTER

No 177

Light in our Darkness

Do you get impatient waiting in queues at bus stops, supermarkets, in traffic jams or for an event to happen? God, through the Old Testament Prophets told the people to 'wait' for the 'promised one'. We know that Jesus has come and will come again. When we see our troubled world we ache for peace stability and justice. This year has seen disappointments, resulting in anger and bitterness dividing nations including our own.

The Advent Season prepares us once again for the Celebration of Jesus' birth giving hope, light and peace not only to the world BUT also to each one of us individually within our own consciousness so that we may experience the hope light and peace in our everyday life. The prophecies of the Old Testament and the promises of Jesus of, hope, light and peace are not 'out there somewhere in the ether' but inside us prompting us to encourage hope, recognise the light and show love in our actions.

May the words of the following prayer and familiar song help during Advent and the New Year to focus and encourage us to show the hope light and love that Jesus brings.

Every Blessing Beryl

'The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it' (John 1:5)

Advent God, Meet us as we face the darkness of our world, that we may embrace you in the shadows and move out to greet your light.

Dispel our fears, increase our hope.

Enlighten us as we search for truth amongst the clamour of war, that we may have the courage to proclaim peace and determination to seek justice.

Dispel our fears, increase our hope.

Embolden us to cry out in the wilderness, that we may find a voice to disarm power and a way to challenge prejudice.

Dispel our fears, increase our hope.

Move us as we reach out to those in need, that we may respond with urgency and wait with patience.

Challenge us with your promise of salvation, that we may put aside all fear and proclaim the hope of liberation.

Dispel our fears, increase our hope and grant us peace. Amen

(Annabel Shilson Thomas)

'But those who do what is true come to the light' (John 3:21)

Longing for light we wait in darkness.

Longing for truth we turn to you

Make us your own, your holy people,
light for the world to see.

Longing for food, many are hungry.

Longing for water, many still thirst.

Make us your bread, broken for others,
shared until all are fed.

Longing for peace, our world is troubled.

Longing for hope, many despair.

Your word alone has power to save us.

Make us your living voice.

Longing for shelter, many are homeless.

Longing for warmth, many are cold.

Make us your building, sheltering others,
walls made of living stone.

Many the gifts, many the people,
many the hearts that yearn to belong.

Let us be servants to one another,

making your Kingdom come.

Bernadette Farrell

Please note that for up-to-date prayer requests contact Beryl Cartwright (703717)



The following article has been submitted by Lesley Barter, and is entitled:

This month I have been reading **Picture This - Joseph Heller**

Many people will know Joseph Heller only for *Catch 22*, the sixties cult anti-war novel. It was such a product of American culture that, having read it as a student, I subsequently ignored his offerings until this, which I found by accident.

If you are interested in art, classical history or modern politics, or simply enjoy satire, this is for you.

With wit and intelligence, the author examines Rembrandt's picture 'Aristotle contemplating the Bust of Homer' from the point of view of everybody involved in its production. We see Rembrandt's extraordinary attitude to money, Aristotle's reaction to his artist and the Greek and Dutch backdrop to both their lives, in parallel with modern world politics. Plus *ca change*.....

It is witty, clever and reveals – as always with Heller – Man's obstinate urge to do the wrong thing.

And also..... Some books, new and old, which you may want to suggest for your Christmas stocking (with thanks to the *Woman Alive* book club)

Being Disciples: Essentials of the Christian Life - Rowan Williams

This short book examines what it means to be a Christian disciple – 'ideal for those starting their journey of faith or those in

need of refreshing' It has been publicised as a gem of a book to read again and again.

Listening to God - Joyce Huggett
'A contemporary spiritual classic' If you are seeking a deeper relationship with God (as we all are) or simply struggling with prayer, this wise and gentle combination of spiritual testimony, practical guidance and advice will help.

Whose Promised Land? - Colin Chapman
The continuing conflict over Israel and Palestine – can it be resolved and if so, how? This book explains the basic issues and explores the theme of land in the Old and New Testaments.

Messiah

A visiting choir was due to come and sing *The Messiah* at our church just before Christmas. When a big snowstorm postponed the performance, the minister put up a sign outside which read: 'The Messiah is postponed - due to snow.'

Three strangers

The minister came home after church on Christmas morning looking very satisfied. "We had at least three visitors this morning, though I didn't see them." "Then how do you know?" "Because there were three £10 notes in the collection plate."

The following 3 articles have been extracted from Parish Pump, and are entitled:

Europe & Middle East News

Turkey's expansion of Islam

Despite the fact that Turkey technically has a secular Constitution, which guarantees freedom of belief and worship, Turkey's authoritarian President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has initiated a programme of increasing Islamisation in the Muslim-majority country. The government has expanded the number of Islamic schools and laws that previously banned women in public roles from wearing headscarves have been overturned. Christians have also reported violent attacks and threats against churches and pastors.

Historically, the region of Asia Minor was central to the spread of Christianity and in 1914 there were up to three million Christians in what is now Turkey. There are now estimated to be fewer than 150,000.

Today, there are two distinct Christian communities in the country: the historic, non-Turkish communities which existed prior to the creation of modern Turkey and younger churches of converts from Islam, which have emerged in the last few decades.

Following the attempted coup in July 2016, Erdogan's government began a vicious crackdown on dissent, in which an estimated 40,000 people have been arrested. There were several recorded attacks on churches in the immediate aftermath of the failed coup and believers have expressed concern that there is increasing intolerance toward the Christian minority in Turkey.

Iranian Christians face 80 lashes for taking communion wine

Three Iranian Christians are to appeal a sentence of 80 lashes for taking Communion wine. The Christians are converts from Muslim backgrounds. The sentence reflects the state's hard-line refusal to recognise the right of Muslims to change their religion.

Now Release International is calling for the Iranian authorities to allow its citizens to choose their own faith and to acquit the Christians. They also face charges of crimes 'against national security'.

Yaser Mosibzadeh, Saheb Fadayee and Mohammed Reza Omidi (also known as Youhan) were arrested at their house church in Rasht earlier this year.

90 prisoners are now in jail for their faith. Many have been beaten and abused. Some have been threatened with death. Iranian officials often target evangelical house groups. Yet the Church in Iran continues to grow, despite being under constant pressure.

Converts in Romanian prisons

Two Christians, Mircea and his wife Ronela, started "*Rock of Ages*" 22 years ago to reach men and women in prisons across Romania. In 2016 more than one hundred men and women in Romanian prisons gave their lives to Christ through the ministry. More than 750 are also doing Bible correspondence courses.

"*Rock of Ages*" is now working in 39 prisons with an aim to minister in every prison in Romania. For more info:

info@transformeuropenow.org

The following article has been submitted by Lesley Barter, and is entitled:

Creature Comforts

As I write this, my cat is patrolling the desk, eager to benefit from any unexpected treats that may be coming her way and making it clear that my attention is focused on The Wrong Thing. She is (like me) in the autumn of life. Not sure exactly what that is because she was a Blue Cross rescue cat when I first moved to Witney....a gift from my daughter who put on the application form as a reason for adoption 'friend'.

Ermintrude as I re-named her, (or Ermingtrude, as the vet's surgery has it) obviously did not read this. From the beginning she regarded my home as her property, which she graciously agreed to share with me, the sitting tenant and inferior partner. My bed immediately became hers and she reluctantly shares it, stretching out to her full length across my feet like a living rug. Her default state is sleep and her default attitude is Umbridge. Without spending more than an hour or two fully awake, she exudes more personality than most people I know. However, she has the very qualities that we, as human beings need desperately. She is always there for me and reminds me that I have a responsibility of care. She doesn't back off when I am cross or out of sorts. She soothes my ruffled feathers. She makes me feel ashamed when I behave badly.

This is why other living creatures, however small and helpless, need us, as we need them. They are little reflections of God and it is our responsibility to protect them. God works in many ways to speak to us and to provide comfort and support in low moments. How lucky we are to have his creatures to remind us of his love.

The following article, written by Rev Paul Hardingham, has been extracted from Parish Pump, and is entitled:

The Challenges of Christmas

Christmas is a great time of year, but it's not without its challenges! One household had 250,000 Christmas lights, but could not boil a kettle for fear of blowing the system!

The challenge of over-indulging

We all remember the episode of the Vicar of Dibley, where she had to consume four Christmas dinners! Christmas is a time when we usually eat and drink far too much, the average person gaining 6 pounds in weight. But Christmas is not simply about gaining weight, but losing what weighs us down. *'Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.'* (1 Peter 5:7). Whatever your concerns or worries this Christmas, bring them to God.

The challenge of overspending

In the rush to buy Christmas cards, a woman bought a pack of 50 identical cards. Without reading the verse, she hastily signed and sent them off, but for one. A few days later she read the message: *'This card is just to say a little gift is on the way.'* Christmas is not about getting into debt, but God getting us out of debt. He spent exactly what was needed on the first Christmas night: *'You are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.'* (Matt 1:21)

The challenge of over too quickly

Christmas doesn't last very long, yet the effect of the first Christmas is long-lasting. *'For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.'* (John 3:16). Jesus has come to bring us life in all its fullness, both for now and all eternity.

How do we face the challenges of Christmas? *'Yet what I can, I give Him - give my heart'*.

The following article, written by Canon David Winter, has been extracted from Church News Service, reflects on the coming of Jesus, and is entitled:

THE WAY I SEE IT: The Most Beautiful Story

Earlier this year a well-known atheist was being interviewed on Radio 4. In the course of an enlightening chat he was asked how he spent Christmas, and he said that he went to Midnight Mass at church. 'But you're an atheist', his interviewer protested. 'Yes', he replied, 'but what they celebrate at Christmas is the most beautiful story ever told'.

That 'beautiful story' tells of a Creator who sent His Son to share the life of His creation, to be born as a helpless baby, to grow up as a man of extraordinary wisdom, gentleness and love, who was executed by the authorities for contradicting the traditions of the time. His followers – who today number about two billion people all over the world – believe that He rose from the dead, and that by His death and resurrection He has made possible forgiveness and eternal life for men and women everywhere.

That is certainly quite a story, perhaps the greatest story ever told, and yes, beautiful. And that is the story that will be rehearsed again this Christmas, in children's Nativities, in hymns and carols, in Bible readings and sermons all over the country. People who stay away from church all year turn up to hear it, and who can blame them? This is a story of hope, of love and of heaven touching earth.

During 2016 we have all become familiar with probably the best-known statue in the world, Christ the Redeemer, towering over the Olympic city of Rio, His arms outstretched in blessing. Christmas celebrates the birth of that great Redeemer – a tiny baby laid in a feeding trough. His birth changed history, His life transformed our understanding of what it means to be human, His death was at one and the same time a tragedy and a triumph. Yes, 'the most beautiful story ever told'. Enjoy it again this Christmas.

Christmas: Why the world was ready

Ever wonder why Jesus was born when He was? The Bible tells us that "when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son..." The Jewish people had been waiting for their Messiah for centuries. Why did God send Him precisely when He did?

Many biblical scholars believe that the 'time had fully come' for Jesus because of the politics of the time. The Roman Empire's sheer size and dominance had achieved something unique in world history: the opportunity for travel from Bethlehem to Berwick on Tweed without ever crossing into 'enemy territory' or needing a 'passport'. For the first time ever, it was possible for 'common' people to travel wide and far, and quickly spread news and ideas. And all you needed were two languages - Greek to the east of Rome, and Latin to the west and north. You could set sail from Joppa (Tel Aviv) and head for any port on the Med. And the Roman roads ran straight and true throughout the empire.

So the Roman Empire achieved something it never intended: it helped spread news of Christianity far and wide for 400 years.

After that, the Empire crumbled, and the borders shut down. Not until the 19th century would people again roam so freely. The time for Jesus to be born, and for news of Him to be able to travel, had indeed 'fully come'.

Christmas: The story of mince pies

Did you know that mince pies have been traditional English Christmas fare since the Middle Ages, when meat was a key ingredient? The addition of spices, suet and alcohol to meat came about because it was an alternative to salting and smoking in order to preserve the food. Mince pies used to be a different shape - cradle-shaped with a pastry baby Jesus on top.

Christmas: Mistletoe's smelly history

Did you know that the word 'mistletoe' means dung on a tree? The Anglo-Saxons thought that mistletoe grew in trees where birds had left their droppings. Mistel means dung, and tan means twig.

Christmas: All wrapped up!

"And this will be a sign to you, you will find the babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." Luke 2:2

Do you ever dread wrapping all those Christmas presents? The large roll of fragile paper that slides around on the table, the lumpy gifts that defy wrapping,

the tape that sticks to your fingers... what is so important about wrapping presents, anyway? Why not just hand them over?

Well did you ever consider that the very first Christmas present EVER was wrapped up – in swaddling cloths? In biblical times, after a birth, the umbilical cord would be cut, the baby would be washed, rubbed with salt and oil, and then carefully wrapped in swaddling cloths. The swaddling is described as a cloth or blanket tied together like bandages. This process was carried out with great love and care, and was thought to have health-giving benefits.

On the other hand, to ignore the swaddling process was seen as abandonment and rejection. "And as for thy nativity, on the day thou wast born thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed in water to soothe thee. Thou wast not salted at all, nor swaddled at all. (Ezekiel 16:4 KJ21)

So why wrap your presents? Because just as the baby Jesus was swaddled as a sign of great love and care, wrapping our gifts is a sign of our own effort, love and care towards those whom we love. So be patient with the wrapping paper, and Happy Christmas!

The following article, written by Canon David Winter, considers the role of the Magi, and is entitled:

We, three kings?

They're there in most Nativity plays, resplendent in regal gowns and cardboard crowns, carrying their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Actually, the Church celebrates the coming of these exotic people to the stable at Bethlehem not at Christmas but now, in January, in a season called 'Epiphany'.

The word means 'revealing', and it reminds us that the Saviour was a gift to the whole world – even Gentiles from 'the East' were welcome at His coming. The story of the Wise Men, as we usually call them (but more accurately the *Magi*), is a 'revealing' – the 'new king' was to be the Saviour of the world, 'good news for all people', as the angels proclaimed to the shepherds.

The name 'Magi' should alert us to their true role. They were 'wise' in the sense that they knew and studied the stars, but their primary trade was fortune-telling. 'Magi' is the root of our word 'magic', and people like them held the ancient world in thrall to their predictions. In the Greek and Roman world of the time no major decision would be made without their sanction. Think of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and the superstitious fear that dominated people's lives.

Yet when these powerful representatives of the world of magic, portent and fear came to the stable, they prostrated themselves before the infant Jesus, as they gave Him their gifts. Thus, as the first Christians saw it, the old world of fear and superstition gave way to the new world of love, grace and faith. That was the 'revealing' that we celebrate in Epiphany – not some elderly men bringing gifts to a baby, but a baby bringing to the world the greatest gift of all, a Saviour

The following article, written by The Ven John Barton, has been extracted from Parish Pump, and considers the politics of the past year, and is entitled:

Why we have Trump and Brexit

Voters surprised politicians on both sides of the Atlantic last year. As a result,

America has an unlikely President and the United Kingdom is in the process of leaving the European Union. There are hints that the electorate in other countries are also disgruntled with the status quo and may vote for untried alternatives.

Why? Here's one suggestion. Dreams of utopia have evaporated. Not so long ago we thought the human race was set on a moving walkway called progress, which would deliver health, wealth and happiness. Up to a point it has done that. Modern medicine has kept millions alive. We can fly to the other side of the world in a day or if we prefer, sit at home and communicate with our distant relatives via Skype. Astonishing advances are being made, but simultaneously the bloodiest wars are being fought and there's no sign of a let-up. Human beings are no nicer than they ever were.

Confidence has been rocked by nightly news of carnage across the world. We are losing faith in progress and in politics. And when it comes to prosperity, we have witnessed the world's economy shipwrecked by a handful of bonus-greedy bankers. The outcome? The rich have become richer and the poor, poorer.

We still have a built-in yearning for something more stable, more trustworthy, more just. Imagine a different world where the Kingdom belongs to the spiritually poor, where mourners find comfort and meekness is rewarded. Where a deep desire for right to prevail will be satisfied, mercy is offered and received, purity of heart brings a vision of God, and peacemakers are His children. This is Christ's alternative to the status quo. It isn't cheap. Some will be persecuted, as He was, simply for being identified with righteousness. Their place, too, is in heaven. Is that the manifesto we're seeking?



Angels doing cartwheels

I am not a poet. That said, when I went away on a silent retreat I dabbled in this art. I was inspired by the awe I experience whenever I see wind turbines. I was at St. Beuno's in north Wales overlooking a host of angels.

I wrote the first poem – an initial attempt to evoke the vista that filled me with wonder. I was sitting in a pasture. When I finished, I carefully manoeuvred around cow pats as I descended the hill, I looked up and a new perspective filled my vision. I stopped and wrote the second poem hurriedly. These both express something of the generosity of God towards me within the entire creation. These poems are not polished but they come out of a moment of grace.

Energy

Angels stand waist deep.
Spires ascend into mist shrouded stillness.
Steel bladed wings a three-fold watch
keep.
Cartwheels playing with wind's fullness.
Air cut sharp with razor precision
Energy of earth the power of God.

Angels stand waist deep.
Metal wings spreading over sea and
shore.
Whisper gentle benediction over
creatures
 below the cloud filled canopy of
 heaven
 below the skin of water
 now wave
 then calm.

Energy of earth the power of God.
Angels stand waist deep.
White wings suspended motionless.
Waiting. Watching. Resting.
Breath of earth and breath of God held.
Wordless. Speechless.
Alert.
Standing waist deep in ocean front.
Energy of earth the power of God.

Angels stand waist deep.
Spinning joy.
Stilling peace.
Hoping for earth's renewal
the world shot through with wonder.
Energy of earth the power of God.

Jason C. Boyd

The Song of Heaven

There's a host of angels on the horizon.
Can I hear them sing?
They gather on that place where sky and
sea meet.

Their wings beat out a prayer.
If I listen closely I can hear the rhythm of
their symphony.
The music rolls gently with the turning of
their arms.
Their wings conduct an orchestra of love.

These angels stand waist deep
A choir arranged in rows
They gather close to hear the wind-
whispered song:
 a chorus of voices – one speaks to
 the other -
 now listening,
 now speaking.

A harmony of sea and sky – an energy of
love.

Each angel waits patiently to hear the
voice of love.
The angel cannot tell when – if ever – they
will hear
The voice of God breathe fierce or light
across the raging, gentle sea.

Each angel waits for God to speak – for
wind to touch their wings.
Each watches with sharp seeing eyes.
Will God come?
Will he speak?
Will God move me?

Angels stand waist deep rejoicing for their
neighbour.

For while they wait in stillness they hear a
soft sung hymn spoken to their friend
and they rejoice in that knowing.

For if God sings his song to one – though
silent he to me -

I know that he is present in you to me.

Angels stand waist deep
A choral host hung twixt heaven and
earth.

Some wait and rest and listen to the
others.

Then when the bars command to sing and
play they rouse from rest to action.

Together with a host of angels - angels
waist deep –

they sing the song of heaven.

Jason C. Boyd

