

CORNERSTONE

The Magazine of
WITNEY CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH



Christ Jesus is the chief cornerstone.

In Him the whole fabric is bound together, as it grows into a temple,
dedicated to the Lord (Ephesians 2:21)

February & March 2021



Doesn't time fly by as it is now nearly a year since COVID and I think we all hoped that it might be short-lived and that we would be able to return to our normal way of lives quite quickly. That has not been the case. I am sure that many of you, like me, have been frustrated that there is little we can do, other than follow the latest advice.

Just like when the last edition was being prepared, we are still in lockdown, and, once again our churches are closed. But those who have broadband internet connection and a device connected to it, our Sunday morning services are starting again but this time via Zoom from **Sunday 7th February**; and it is hoped that you will take this opportunity to be part of this when you receive the associated link by e-mail or input the codes as published on the Sunday Link

Once again, I hope this edition of the magazine will remind you that you are not forgotten; so, may God bless you and keep you in the months ahead. He alone is our refuge and strength when times get tough. May we continue to do our work for Him in the grace which He alone can provide.

So, on that note, I now turn to some of this month's contents: Lesley Barter, once again, gives us the Deacon's Letter; there is the continuation of Ken Lee's Bible Study and Pip Cartwright's history of WCC; some articles have been extracted from Parish Pump, to which we subscribe, 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

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

The next 2-monthly edition, covering April & May is due on **Sunday 4th April**

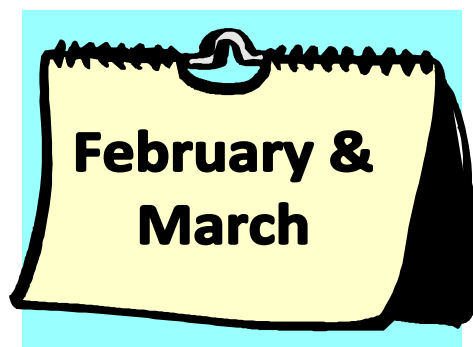
Your Editor



"Don't worry, I'm not getting Covid - I didn't realise the sign meant a low door..."

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Reflections during COVID-19 pandemic

Starting today, 7th February, the weekly services will be via Zoom & will start at 10.30 am but you will be able to join at 10.15

Feb

7th Rev Elaine Kinchin
 14th Rev Judi Holloway
 21st David Kinchin
 28th Nanna Blackman

March

7th Rev Elaine Kinchin
 14th Rev Judi Holloway
 21st Rev Elaine Kinchin
 28th David Kinchin

April

1 st	Rev Judi Holloway	Maundy Thursday
2 nd	Rev Elaine Kinchin	Good Friday
4 th	Rev Judi Holloway	Easter Sunday

Feb	08	Pat Brent
	13	Judi Holloway
	16	Leah Cotton
	22	Dave Wesson
	24	Marian Kew



Mar	01	Sean Kelly
	08	Joan Currie
	11	Lesley Barter
	19	Beryl Cartwright
	22	Peter Sellman
	28	Wendell La Fortune

Witney Congregational Church meets on-line!

From Sunday February 7th we start an on-line service using Zoom every Sunday morning where you can join from 10.15 with the service starting at 10.30

- This is FREE to users, as the church has purchased a subscription.
- To join in, you need a computer, laptop, tablet, iPhone or android (smart) phone.
- Search for Zoom - and follow the instructions. Once you have set yourself up, you will be able to JOIN A MEETING - as it is called - using the codes sent to you by email & will always be the same
- On Wednesday mornings there are reflections from 10.30-11.00 but the meeting is open both before and after this time, and have different codes
- Please join us, and if you need help, contact David on david.kinchin@gmail.com - but not ten minutes before the service starts!
- You do not have to speak or have yourself visible - you can just listen and only join in if you feel comfortable and confident

Deacon's Letter

Dear Friends

Lifting the spirits at this time of year is always an effort and never more so than now.

Compounded if, like me, you have spent a good part of January on flood alert. When, we wonder, will there be good news? Some of us, I hope, will already have had it in the form of a first vaccine. It is the beginning of the new dawn that we have all been praying for.

As I write there is snow on the ground and Spring still seems to be a long way off, but peeping through are little clumps of snowdrops that belie their hardiness with their delicate appearance. So, it must be with our faith. Buffeted and tested by circumstances but never quite extinguished. Nourished by life-giving prayer it enables us to cope when the going gets tough.

One of our challenges during the pandemic has been to maintain contact with people and hold our Church Family together. As part of this effort, we are preparing to relay Sunday worship via Zoom, in the hope that some of us at least will feel more connected. We know that this cannot reach everybody and we shall of course continue to keep in touch by 'phone and The Link. If anyone has any other innovative ideas which could enhance social interaction during lockdown, please let us know.

February sees the beginning of Lent when 'Christians replicate Jesus Christ's sacrifice and withdrawal into the desert for 40 days.' This state of affairs is all too familiar at present and doesn't just apply to Christians. We can, however, make use of the enforced isolation to reflect, repent and prepare for Easter. There is plenty of devotional literature to help us with our Lent journey and recommendations can be found on the St Andrews website. Also, Christian Aid and spck, to mention just two organisations, provide daily prayers and reflections online.

This prayer from Guideposts is a good starting point:

Father, help me to see this holy season of Lent as a time of spiritual renewal, rather than a time of deprivation.

Motivate me to reach a new level of experiencing your grace. Amen

May God bless you all and keep you safe until we are able to meet again.

Sent on behalf of The Deacons.

The following song/hymn was used in a recent Evesham Baptist Church morning worship, and is an encouraging reminder from Jesus' beatitudes, and is entitled:

The Kingdom is Yours

Blessed are the ones who do not bury
All the broken pieces of their heart
Blessed are the tears of all the weary
Pouring like a sky of falling stars

Blessed are the wounded ones in mourning
Brave enough to show the Lord their scars
Blessed are the hurts that are not hidden
Open to the healing touch of God

***The kingdom is yours, the kingdom is yours
Hold on a little more, this is not the end
Hope is in the Lord, keep your eyes on him***

Blessed are the ones who walk in kindness
Even in the face of great abuse
Blessed are the deeds that go unnoticed
Serving with unguarded gratitude

Blessed are the ones who fight for justice
Longing for the coming day of peace
Blessed is the soul that thirsts for righteousness
Welcoming the last, the lost, the least

***The kingdom is yours, the kingdom is yours
Hold on a little more, this is not the end
Hope is in the Lord, keep your eyes on him***

Blessed are the ones who suffer violence
And still have strength to love their enemies
Blessed is the faith of those who persevere
Though they fall, they'll never know defeat

***The kingdom is yours, the kingdom is yours
Hold on a little more, this is not the end
Hope is in the Lord, keep your eyes on him***

Terrell Wilson, Brittney Spencer, Micah Massey, Aaron
Keyes © 2017 Common Hymnal Digital
CCLI 7109354

The song/hymn can be heard via this link:

[Common Hymnal ~ The Kingdom Is Yours \(Lyrics\) - YouTube](#)

The following article, written by Canon David Winter, has been extracted from Parish Pump, and is entitled:

Ash Wednesday; my memory of the Passover in Jerusalem

Ash Wednesday introduces the Christian preparation for Easter, which normally coincides with Passover, the major Jewish celebration of the year. It's near Easter because Jesus was crucified at Passover, having just shared this very meal with His disciples.

Passover celebrates and recalls the Israelites' escape from slavery in Egypt. Led by Moses they crossed the Red Sea and 40 days later entered the 'Promised Land.' They shared the Passover meal at their last night in Egypt and have kept it all for nearly the past three thousand years or so that have followed.

Many years ago, when I was in Jerusalem to produce a radio programme, I was invited to join a Jewish family for their Passover meal. It was a great occasion, very like our Christmas, a family event with deep religious significance for those who seek it.

At the meal in Jerusalem, we ate modest lentils and unleavened bread – Matzos as we now call it. We also drank plenty of wine but not from the cup at the end of the table. That is 'Elijah's cup', only to be drunk from when the prophet comes to announce the arrival of the Messiah. At the last supper Jesus instructed His disciples to drink from that cup after supper, which may

have shocked them at the time. The Messiah had come!

The following article has been extracted from Parish Pump, and is entitled:

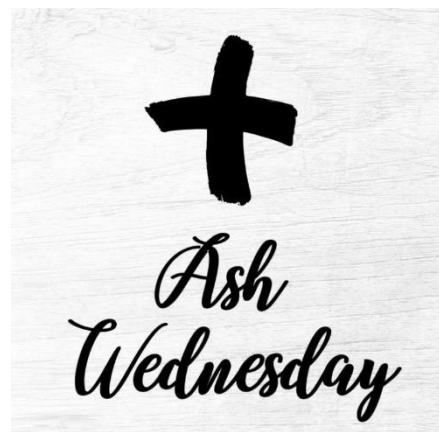
Ash Wednesday; a good time to admit you are sorry

Have you done something which haunts you? Which makes you feel restless and defensive, every time you think of it? Why not deal with it this month, and put it behind you? Whatever your mistake has been, consider what the Bible has to say to you:

'I have not come to call the virtuous but sinners to repentance' (said Jesus). (Luke 5.32) 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. (Isaiah 55.7)

'Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord, your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing.' (Joel 2:12-13)

God is inviting you to come to Him this Ash Wednesday. What a wonderful offer! Make the most of it and remember how the prodigal son was welcomed back by his compassionate father.





PRAYER LETTER No 196

Prayer Talking to God Communicating with Him

Christianity and other faiths practice prayer either corporately or privately. Even people of no faith turn to prayer when adverse circumstances or joyful experiences affect their lives. Perhaps many of us as children were taught or experienced the act of praying at home, at school or at Sunday School. In many societies Corporate Prayer is at a set time and place and a set dialogue but are we aware that God wants us to 'commune', speak to Him at any time, in any place, indoors or outdoors and in any circumstance, on our own or with others.

Jesus set aside time away from His disciples in a quiet place to pray to God His Heavenly Father. Was this time with God a time of praising, thankfulness, asking for strength to approach and tackle the current problems of Society or resting in God after the exhaustion of a busy day preaching and healing? He also taught His disciples to pray (Matthew 6:9-13), the familiar prayer which is known to us as 'The Lord's Prayer'. There are many occasions in our own Society when we join with friends and strangers in reciting this prayer. I personally found The Lord's Prayer very powerful on two occasions, once in a Church in Tronso, Norway and once at sunrise on Easter morning at the top of Mount Nebo in Jordan. On both occasions people of many nationalities joined together saying this prayer in their own language. This united action of prayer had a powerful effect on the participants.

What about our personal prayers with God, when, why, how and what do we pray about? A personal rhythm or practice of prayer can be helpful. It may be at the beginning of the day asking God for strength and opportunities to cope with the day ahead or at the end of the day, thanking God for all the blessings you have received during the day. Even 'arrow prayers' at any time of day is acceptable to God as He wants us to communicate our concerns for ourselves and others to Him.

The **Acrostic A.C.T.S.** can help us to organise a pattern of prayer:

A stands for Adoration, to praise and glorify God as creator (Psalm 150)

C stands for Confession, to admit to God our wrong doings, the things we have done or said which we ought not to have done and the things we should have done but left undone.

T stands for Thanksgiving not only the big things but the smallest kindnesses, e.g; a helpful hand, an encouraging word, for things in nature, a beautiful sunrise or sunset, for opportunities etc.

S stands for Supplications praying for others, for healing, for strength, wisdom, patience, comfort, understanding difficult situations etc;

A simple version of the above would be **the Teaspoon Prayer**.

T for Thanks, S for Sorry and P for People

The Archbishops have asked the citizens of the UK to pray at 6pm every day throughout February for our Country and for the work of all in the N.H.S. Already a week has passed but it would be encouraging if people responded to this request.

Our own Fellowship operates a Prayer Chain where people pray in response to a specific request for prayer for a person or situation. If you would like to be part of the Prayer Chain please let me know.

Theo Howell has given me a number of Prayer Handbooks. If anyone would like one of these please let me know so that I can pass them on.

Please reflect on the words of the Hymn below, **‘What a friend we have in Jesus’** from Songs of Fellowship 598.

Every Blessing,

Beryl

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

1. What a friend we have in Jesus
All our sins and griefs to bear
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer

2. Oh, what peace we often forfeit
Oh, what needless pain we bear
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer

3. Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged
Take it to the Lord in prayer

4. Can we find a friend so faithful
Who will all our sorrows bear
Jesus knows our every weakness
Take it to the Lord in prayer

The following article, written by Canon Paul Hardingham, has been extracted from Parish Pump and offers the following for Lent, and is entitled:

Finding God in Each Moment of the Day

Do you know the popular series of books entitled *Where's Wally?* These books are filled with very detailed cartoon drawings in each of which is hidden Wally. He is dressed in a red and white striped ski cap and glasses and the challenge is to find Wally. You have to search for some time to pick him out of the crowd, but Wally is always there!

In many ways, like finding Wally, we need to develop the skill of identifying God's presence in our daily lives. One approach that can help us to find God throughout the day is to do a daily review of our day with God. It can provide us with a means of seeing where God has been at work during our day. It's an opportunity of remembering how God has been at work and how we have responded to Him. As

the psalmist says, *‘On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night’* (Ps 63:6).

What does this look like in practice? Here is a step by step guide:

1. Be still for a moment, and quiet your mind.
2. Acknowledge that Jesus is present. Invite Him to guide you.
3. Recall the beginning of the day, when you first woke up. Watch that scene, as if on film. What is your reaction to what you see? Talk to God about it.
4. Continue through the film of your day, going from scene to scene. As you reflect on each one, some scenes may fill you with gratitude, others with regret. Speak directly to God about this. You may also want to pray for those you encountered during the day.
5. End your review with a prayer of thanksgiving for God's mercy and love. Ask him to refresh you as you sleep.

As you begin reviewing your day with God regularly, you can expect to see two things beginning to happen:

Firstly, you will become more aware of recurring negative patterns in your life, which will challenge these wrong attitudes and habits and increase your desire to grow and change.

Secondly, you will become more aware of God's presence in the ordinary moments of your life. And when you start experiencing the reality of God's presence with you every day, it's not ordinary any more!

The following article has been extracted from Parish Pump, and is some encouragement to people to 'take soundings' on their life, and is entitled:

Stay trimmed and balanced

'Do not let this Book ...depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night ... be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be ... successful.' (Joshua 1.8)

Any flying instructor will tell you that aeroplanes need to be 'trimmed' or 'balanced in flight' on a regular basis. After flying through storms and hitting air pockets, they get knocked out of line. That's true of our path through life. The bad storms of sickness, redundancy, divorce and disappointment, can knock us off our balance, too.

In other words, our attitude needs to be constantly checked and adjusted. Have you checked yours lately? What are you encountering at the moment that is putting pressure on you to veer off course? So long as we live, we will always need to look to God, to stay 'trimmed and balanced'. Lent is an excellent time to do this.

The best way to stay balanced is to read God's Word. It gives us a true map of the world around us, and it shows us where we are on that map. Here's an idea you can try for Lent: every week, for the next few weeks, choose a Bible verse and write it down on a small card. Carry it with you wherever you go and memorise it. In one year, you'll know 52 new scriptures, and more importantly, your attitudes will be more naturally in line with God's Word, your faith will be strengthened, and your life will be moving in the right direction.

The following article has been extracted from Parish Pump, and is entitled:

Your daily walk should be a sacred ritual

Under lockdown, millions of us who rarely walked around our immediate locality are now well acquainted with every nearby driveway, every crack in the pavement, and every pothole in the road. We have developed views on our neighbours' gardens, on their oddly coloured garage doors, and on their dogs, children and cars. If we go out at the same time every day, we may even be saying hello to the same people we don't know every day.

For many of us, that daily walk has become the high point of our day. After all, it is one of the few liberties we have left. Some of us go early, to enjoy the relative peace and quiet. Some of us go midday, to at least see other people, even if we can't talk to them. Others of us opt for dusk, the dark comfort of a street with lit houses and stars in the sky.

Whatever time you most enjoy, make sure you do make the time to go for your walk. Your mental and physical fitness can only improve!

The following article has been submitted by Elaine Kinchin, and is entitled:

Witney Congregational Church Lockdown A-Z

As we

Began March 2020,

Covid-19, a new

Disaster, not just for us but for the whole

Earth began to affect our lives.

From that time on

“Giving up our freedom”

Has dominated the national news.

In my (humble) opinion all our freedoms

Just cannot be removed.

KeeP in mind that our

Lord and Saviour died to set us free. What does that

Mean? Death is not the end.

“Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love

Of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8: 38-39 NIV)

PrayeR is key – it is our conversation with God.

Questions – do not be afraid to ask our Father in Heaven.

Replies may be more difficult to discern but by

Staying close both

To God and other Christians

Understanding may happen.

Very often God speaks through others as well as his

Word. So when it comes time to vote on who saw you through this pandemic, put your

X in God’s box. He will never fail

You. And although

Zoom sessions cannot replace meeting in church but they are a real bonus.

The following article, written by Sheridan Voysey, is an extract from his book *The Making of Us: Who We Can Become When Life Doesn't Go as Planned*, and with his permission to publish, and is entitled:



The hand that spins the galaxies brought me into being.

The One who holds the stars has made me his own.

I am God's child. My life is rich, my days are sacred.

I am held by a love that's wider and higher than the farthest
edges of this expanding universe.

I am a pilgrim in this world, in search of wisdom and wonder.

I will take new adventures.

And follow God into the unknown.

What I achieve is not as important as the person I become.

So I will seek to imitate the Nail-Pierced One.

I will step in the direction of my strengths and talents.

They are Spirit-given tools for my God-given tasks.

I will pay attention to my persistent aspirations.

They could be the whispers of God.

I will serve all I can and walk deeply with a few.

I will aim for great things but leave my legacy to God.

The path is long and the terrain at times hard.

Still:

I will not wish for another's life.

I will take my place, play my part.

Something important will be missed if I don't.

For the hand that spins the galaxies wants me here

A video of the creed can be seen via this link: <https://sheridanvoysey.com/thecreed>

Bible Study

In this edition, and with permission from Ken & Marjorie Lee's family, and in memoriam to Rev Ken Lee, a series of Bible Studies, written by Ken and first submitted back in 1999, will be re-produced and is entitled:

MEANDERING IN MARK

"Meander" means "To wander deviously or aimlessly". Perchance this is not too accurate a description of these studies; it is hoped that they are not too devious nor totally aimless. However, the term "meander" is used to indicate an approach which takes its time, stops as needful to let a thought, an idea, an insight develop - all with the purpose of seeing what the Lord has to say to his people. May He speak, and to Him be the glory.

16. Mark 6: 14-29

"King Herod heard of it." So Mark begins this particular section of his story in which he takes the opportunity afforded by the brief time-gap in the story of Jesus, between the sending out of the apostles and their return, to recount the story of Herod and the death of John the Baptist. The "Herod" of this story is Herod Antipas, one of the sons of Herod the Great. We may wonder as to why Mark includes this story in such detail since it appears to add very little to the ongoing story of the good news in Jesus although it does raise yet again the question as to whom Jesus is. Mark's account seems to have been based upon popular gossip and does not agree too well with "official" accounts such as that reported by the Jewish historian Josephus. Sometimes, however, gossip may be closer to the truth than "official" accounts; this could well be so in the story we now consider. However, Mark's story does contain a number of inaccuracies as well as an improbable situation. Firstly, it is incorrect to call Herod "king". Herod Antipas was only Tetrarch of

Galilee and Perea: it was his aspirations to be king which led to his banishment in A.D. 39 by the Emperor Caligula. Quite possibly Herod encouraged reference to himself in the bazaars and market-place as "king". Mark would then be following common usage in writing his account concerning Herod and his actions.

We may question as to what the "it" was of which Herod had heard. He may have heard that Jesus was sending out disciples in the way that Mark has just described, or it may be that Herod had heard the various opinions concerning whom Jesus is which Mark now goes on to record. All that is certain is that some report about Jesus had reached Herod: Jesus's name had become known to him together with opinions about him. Three opinions are current. The first is that John the Baptist has risen from the dead and hence is possessed of the wonderful powers which seem to rest in Jesus. Mark has previously (1:14) reported the arrest of John but only now does he introduce his demise with which he deals in more detail shortly. Any possibility of Jesus being the resurrected John has already been ruled out by Mark when he told of Jesus being baptised by John (1:9).

The second opinion current concerning Jesus is that he is Elijah returned. Elijah, according to II Kings 2, had not died but had been carried up into heaven by a chariot of fire and a whirlwind. The prophet Malachi (4:5) had spoken of the return of Elijah "before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes." A great many Jewish hopes centred upon the return of Elijah, all of which had association with the coming of God's Kingdom, the reality of God's rule being seen upon earth. Mark does not elaborate upon how this opinion was being applied to Jesus but he has already ruled it out as a possibility by applying Malachi 3:1 to John the Baptist (1:2-4).

The third opinion reported is that Jesus is a prophet of the type that there "used to be".

Such prophets had direct contact with God - a contact which seemed to have been largely lost in the years through which people were now living. The appearance of Jesus had, for some, awakened a hope that such direct contact was being renewed. Perhaps the "good old days" were really returning when God spoke directly to his people; perhaps this was the sign of renewal, that God was going to get his people out of the mess into which they had descended. There is in this a longing to go back to times when life seemed simpler, when people really took notice of God and responded to his will. "Oh for the great days of Revival" is the longing reflected here; it is a desire to repeat what has been before, even though the world has changed beyond recognition. Those who wanted to see Jesus as an old-time prophet forgot that the prophets again and again called for the people to change, to become righteous before God, and they also forgot that the prophets were usually rejected and their messages were largely disregarded. The work of a prophet might bring a Revival, but such revival never seemed to last for more than a few years. A greater change is needed than ever a prophet can bring about.

Mark makes no comment on these three opinions concerning Jesus but hurries on to Herod's reaction. "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised." Here is a man with a guilty conscience, a man who knew that he had done wrong and was haunted by guilt. Despite himself, Herod had admired, respected, listened to John the Baptist and, so reports Mark at v.20, feared him as a righteous and holy man. So much so was this that even when Herod had put John in prison, he would have John brought before him, and listen gladly to what John had to say. Somehow, in his inner self, Herod knew that John was right in what he said and that he, Herod, ought to act upon John's words. Herod, however, was too weak a man, too captive to his own desires and his lust for

power and that seeking for self-aggrandisement which ultimately proved his undoing, that he dared not "lose face" when a rash promise to a dancing girl to give her "Whatever you ask me" brought the request for the head of John the Baptist. Herod was "deeply grieved, so Mark reports, but John was beheaded.

Mark's story of the events which led to John's beheading is full of inconsistencies even without taking into account other historical records of the period and concerning Herod. This is not surprising considering the complex relationships of the family of Herod the Great and his descendants including the fact that the same names are used repeatedly for differing members of the family. Mark records that Herod had put John the Baptist in prison because John had told him that it was not lawful for Herod to marry Herodias who was his brother (Herod) Philip's wife. It does appear fairly certain that Herodias was the niece of both Antipas and Philip. Josephus however states that Herodias was Philip's mother-in-law. The relationship is obviously confused and becomes somewhat more obscure when Mark records, at v.22, that "his (Herod's) daughter Herodias came in and danced". Josephus records that the daughter of Herodias was named Salome and this may be why some manuscripts amend Mark's words to "the daughter of Herodias herself came in and danced". Certainly, this would fit with later verses in Mark's account where the girl asks her mother what reward she shall seek from Herod, and with a preceding verse where Mark records that Herodias had a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. Which Herod, if any, was the father of Salome seems to be somewhat obscure.

The story proceeds to its gory climax when the head of John the Baptist is presented to the dancing girl on a platter and taken by her to her mother. We may wonder at the factual reality of much of the story. An

awareness of the sensual sexually explicit nature of much oriental dancing of the period may lead us to question as to whether a high-born young woman would indeed dance in front of a gathered company of men however distinguished those men might be. Certainly, it seems highly improbable that even a member of such a dissolute family as that of Herod would do so in such a manner as to so please the company that it would bring forth Herod's rash promise of a reward of "even half my kingdom". The whole story bears all the marks of being bazaar gossip which had grown in the telling as an explanation of why, after having had John the Baptist imprisoned for some considerable time, Herod should suddenly execute him. Certainly, the story depicts vividly the contrast between the weakness of Herod, the man with worldly power, and the strength of both John the Baptist and of Jesus, neither of whom had any worldly power.

Mark brings this account to its end with a picture of John's disciples coming and collecting his body and laying it in a tomb. John has run his course; from now on Mark's total focus is to be upon Jesus as Mark prepares to tell what the disciples of Jesus had been doing in their first venturing forth in the name of Jesus. We may wonder as to whether the apostles, as they heard of John's disciples laying their master's body in a tomb, had any foreboding of a day when they too would perform that service for Jesus. Perhaps this is why Mark has included the story of the death of John the Baptist in such detail: to serve as a reminder of the moral weakness of men in power and a warning to Mark's readers of what lies ahead in his account of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.



The following article, written by Canon David Winter, has been extracted from Parish Pump, and is entitled:

Who's for pancakes?

Why do we have pancakes on Shrove Tuesday, or Pancake Day, as we call it today? And what is Shrove Tuesday? And why do thousands of people feel it rewarding to race along a street somewhere tossing pancakes from their frying pans as they go?

Well, the answer to the first question is that it is the day before Lent begins and for well over a thousand years that has meant it was the last chance to enjoy meat, fat and other tasty dishes until Easter Day. The 'Lent Fast' was widely and strictly observed. The food in the larder wouldn't keep for six weeks so it had to be eaten. With all these rich foods no wonder the French call it 'Fatty Tuesday' – Mardi Gras.

So, what have pancake races got to do with all this solemnity? 'Shrove' is an old word for 'forgiven' and in those days to prepare for the rigours of Lent people would want to confess and seek forgiveness – not quite what you want at a party. The answer is quite simply enjoying yourself while you can! So, on Shrove Tuesday this year let's have some fun and make it last as long as possible. The most convincing (and amusing) of the explanations of pancake races is of outwitting the Sexton who rang the curfew bell that marked the start of Lent. He was reluctant to do it while the race was unfinished. So, the revelry caused by dropped pancakes, postponed the inevitable.

Since the Reformation it has not been so rigorously observed in Britain, but still people will resolve to 'give up something for Lent'. Six weeks is about right as a duration and Sunday has always been exempt but make the most of those pancakes. They may well not reappear until April 12th!

The following article, extracted from Parish Pump, is entitled:

Christian persecution in 2021

That is the forecast of Release International, which has recently published its annual Persecution Trends survey. "Our partners tell us that attacks are on the rise under Communism in China, Islam in Iran and Malaysia, and under militant Hinduism in India," says Release CEO Paul Robinson.

"Yet despite persecution and pandemic, we see clear evidence of the boldness, courage and trust in God of Christians under pressure around the world."

China - Persecution is thriving in Communist China, which has bought the silence of the international community through increased dependence on trade, according to the report. Release International's partners warn: 'The government of President Xi Jinping is increasing its 'clean up' of anything that does not advance the communist agenda. They appear to believe that they can achieve this by systematic opposition."

Tough new laws controlling religion have been imposed. Non-registered churches have been raided and closed in 2020, and increasing numbers of registered churches have been made to install CCTV cameras and put up posters proclaiming communist ideals and beliefs.

According to Release International's partners, the Chinese authorities "have bought freedom from censure due to trade with China. Many countries now regard this trade as essential to their own economies."

Covid-19 - In common with a number of persecuting nations, China has been exploiting the Covid-19 pandemic to tighten restrictions on underground believers.

"The Chinese Government is trying every way to take advantage of the virus by increasing the crackdown against Christian churches," says Release partner Bob Fu, of ChinaAid. "It

has accelerated particular campaigns, such as the forced removal of crosses."

Bob Fu's work has come under direct pressure as a result of a bizarre campaign targeting Chinese exiles in many countries. Even in the United States he has faced bomb threats and been forced to seek police protection, but he says the work of ChinaAid will not be stopped.

Malaysia - Covid has also been used as a cover for increasing persecution in Malaysia, report Release partners working in that country. "The newly formed government is using the outbreak of Covid for their purposes. They have closed churches all over the country, where persecution is definitely increasing."

Release International is petitioning the Malaysian authorities to release Pastor Raymond Koh, who was abducted off the street in a military-style operation.

Malaysian Christians from a Muslim background have experienced the sharpest persecution, which is likely to increase in 2021.

However, coronavirus has also presented opportunities for the underground church in nations hostile to the Christian faith.

North Korea - One of the harshest environments in the world for Christians, believers have viewed the coronavirus as an act of God that opens new opportunities for them, states Release International's partner.

"This has been the most creative year we have witnessed in the underground church to date." During 2020, despite the Covid restrictions, Release partners were able to double their distribution of Bibles to Christians in North Korea.

Iran - The church is growing, increasing numbers of Christians were able to avoid government surveillance by meeting online.

"Persecution is on the increase in Iran because the authorities are aware of the growth in the number of converts and house churches. They

are determined at all costs to stem this,” say Release International’s partners.

“There is no doubt that the government is concerned that disillusioned Muslims are becoming Christians.”

The pressure on Christians in Iran is likely to continue, leading to a further exodus of Christians from the country in 2021.

Pakistan - Another Islamic nation where persecution is a major concern for the coming year. Release partners say the blasphemy laws continued to be widely misused against Christians and other minorities – often to settle personal scores. In addition, the Christian community is facing the abduction, rape, and enforced conversion and marriage of Christian girls.

Egypt - This trend has also been noted in Egypt, home to the largest Christian population in the Arab world. Again, it is Christians from a Muslim background who bear the brunt of persecution. Converts face expulsion from their families, divorce, estrangement from their children and loss of employment.

Nigeria - Christians have long been at risk from the Islamist terror group Boko Haram, they face a growing threat from heavily armed Fulani militants. Release partners believe these attacks are increasingly taking on the characteristic of a jihad – to which the international community is turning a blind eye.

“We have seen well-planned, well-orchestrated, systematic attacks on Christian communities that have nothing to do with a fight for grazing lands,” said Release partner Rev Hassan John.

“These attacks are driven by an Islamist ideology, aimed at destroying ‘the infidels’ and, in many places, displacing them from their communities, while the government, by design or omission turns a blind eye to the carnage.’

Another Release partner in Nigeria, Mark Lipdo, adds: “The failure of governance has led to increased criminality with impunity.”

As a result, Christians have suffered increasing attacks, including robbery and kidnapping for ransom. Unless the authorities hold the perpetrators accountable and take measures to protect vulnerable communities, the violence against Christians is set to continue throughout 2021.

India - Christians and other minorities fear religious intolerance will continue to grow during 2021, largely due to growing Hindu nationalism. Hindu extremists attacked churches and individual believers throughout 2020.

According to India’s Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), Christians suffered 225 incidents of religiously motivated violence during the first ten months of 2020 – compared to 218 incidents in the same period in 2019. Many of these attacks were by vigilante mobs.

In September 2020, Hindu extremists incited mobs of up to 3,000 people to attack Christians in three villages in Chhattisgarh state.

The growing intolerance towards Christianity has been marked since the coming to power of the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) in 2014. According to Release partners, there has been a significant rise in the number of attacks against Christians following the subsequent landslide victory of BJP Prime Minister Narendra Modi in May 2019.

The Persecution Trends survey is published in the latest of edition of Release International’s *Voice* magazine, available shortly.

Through its international network of missions, Release International is active in some 25 countries around the world, supporting pastors, Christian prisoners and their families; supplying Christian literature and Bibles, and working for justice.

More at: www.releaseinternational.org

The following article, written & submitted by Pip Cartwright, was correct when first published in July 2006, and is a continuation from the last edition, and is entitled:

The Growth of WCC: 1954-1957

With the sad death of the Rev. Auty in 1954, the Rev. Jacques of Longworth came to the Church's assistance and helped where he could.

Between 1955 and 1960 Mansfield College, Oxford came to our rescue once again with a stream of post-graduate student pastors. The Rev. Victor Bredankamp who came from South Africa accepted to be a tenant at the Manse and to act as an interim Minister until he returned home in the August of 1955. He lived there with his family and whilst in Witney their eldest baby was born. To make it habitable the Manse roof had to be put in order.

The Church roll numbered 41 with a Sunday School of 25. The previous Sunday School outing to Wickstead Park, Kettering must have been a success, as they decided to go there again. The Marlborough Lane property needed further repair, especially the guttering. It was at this time that the Moderator visited the Church and the condition of the Manse was discussed and as a result the Manse was redecorated.

In 1956 an American, the Rev. (Dr) W. H. Mackintosh M.A., B.D., who successfully studied for his D. Phil at Oxford agreed to act as a part-time Minister. His arrival seems to have encouraged church growth and increased activity. Mr and Mrs David Pearson were made members as were Sydney Collis and his sister, Mary Collis. Mr David Pearson is still a member of our Church and regularly attends the morning services. On July 17th 1956 the Minister married Miss Phyllis Worley (sister of Tom

Worley) to Mr E. B. Findlayson and later in March 1957 he married Mr Peter Sellman to Miss Diane Wheeler. On April 8th 1956, in common with numerous other churches at this time, it was agreed to replace the Sunday afternoon Sunday School with the morning Family Church, which is our practice to this day. The 100th issue of the Church Newsletter was celebrated in December 1956, which reported that the Christian Bazaar raised £104 and 80 attended the Harvest Supper.

It appears that the Rev. Mackintosh enlivened discussion on several topics. At his suggestion the back three rows of the Church were to be left vacant so as to make the 'congregation more compact'. In the October 1956 Church Meeting a new name for the Church was considered. Suggestions included 'St Lukes', 'St Stephens', 'Emmanuel', 'Calvary' and 'Holy Cross'. As there were not enough members present the idea was deferred and later in 1957 it was decided to stick to the name 'The Congregational Church Witney'. The Minister also brought forward a draft constitution which was later adopted. Another idea was that of a 'Church Friend' whereby a specific Church Member would be nominated to act as a special friend for every new member "to make them feel at home". The suggestion was approved and acted upon.

The previous June 1956 saw the reopening of the Youth Group and in order to encourage youth work it was agreed that the Coach House at the back of the Church should be converted into a Hall for use of the Sunday School (Family Church) and 'Youth Circle'. Having engendered all this activity the Minister announced that he would cease his ministry early 1957. In January 1957 it was announced that Miss L Smith had been chosen for the English Women's Lawn Bowling Team.

At a special meeting in March 1957 another American, the Rev. J Renwick Jackson was invited to the pastorate from April to July as a stand in. This was later extended to the end of the year. Under the supervision of Mr Graham Wheeler the Coach House was altered using timber from the Brize Norton Air Base. With the concern about the state of the Manse a 'Manse Fund' was started with an initial target of £4000. The Fund was later incorporated into a Building Fund. I assume with the view of raising further funds, it was decided that negotiations for the sale of the Marlborough Lane Hall to the Oxon Education Authorities be placed in the hands of the Trustees of New College. As the Sunday School had been replaced by Family Church there was no Sunday School Anniversary, so it was suggested that a Sunday in September be held as a 'Children's Sunday' with prize-giving. Under the leadership of Mr Philip Turner (husband of Daphne Sellman) and Mr Ken Smith, a Youth Circle flourished with a membership of 30, the evening including numerous activities including a devotional, games and dancing. Church membership rose to 58 and it was decided to review the list and it was suggested that non-attending be approached by Church Officers and perhaps become Associate Members.

In June 1957 the Sunday School outing visited Chessington Zoo and there were reports of the choir singing 'Olivet to Calvary', a Garden Party, Ladies Guild and a Jumble Sale and the gift of the Altar Cloth by Mrs Cadell and Mrs L Smith. The Church was buzzing.

The following article has been extracted from Parish Pump, and is entitled:

Open Doors welcomes Fiona Bruce as PM's Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief

Fiona Bruce, MP for Congleton, has recently been appointed as the new Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB).

Bruce has long been a supporter of the work of Open Doors, including attending the World Watch List parliamentary launch, visiting an Open Doors exhibition highlighting the plight of Yazidi women in Iraq, and regularly raising the issue of persecuted believers to the House of Commons.

She said: "My post will be placed at the service of some of the most vulnerable people across the world." She listed just some of the "continuing large scale horrors taking place" – such as those against Uighur Muslims in China, Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar and Yazidis in Iraq. She agreed with "the late and much respected former Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks" when he had stated: 'the persecution of Christians throughout much of the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, and elsewhere, is one of the crimes against humanity of our time'.

Fiona Bruce said: "These are some of the most deeply concerning issues of our generation, on which it will be a privilege to engage as Special Envoy, both nationally and internationally."

Fiona Bruce has been a friend of Open Doors for many years, and is "a real champion for freedom of religion and belief," says Henrietta Blyth, CEO of Open Doors UK and Ireland.



The following article, written by Canon Paul Hardingham, has been extracted from Parish Pump, and looks back on the year that changed the world, and is entitled:

One Year On

It was just over a year ago that the WHO discussed the coronavirus that was starting to spread around the world. None of us could have foreseen the devastating effect on our world, with over 80 million people infected and nearly two million deaths. How has the pandemic challenged our faith, as we look back over the last year?

Firstly, it has forced us to face up to the **reality of our situation**. We cannot underestimate the health, social and economic effects of the virus on our lives, churches and communities. We have learned how to do church online, but the future shape of church life is uncertain!

As the apostle Paul writes: *'We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus'* (2 Cor 4:8-10).

The pandemic has challenged so much of what we take for granted, but also demonstrated that God is alongside to help us in these circumstances.

Secondly, alongside the fear and uncertainty of this year, we have also learned to find **new faith and hope in Jesus**. The experience of Jesus' death and His resurrection provides a pattern for us in facing the future: *'so that His life may also be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.'* (2 Cor 4:10-12).

During the season of Lent, as we anticipate the events at Easter, it's good to focus on the promise of sharing in the death and resurrection of Jesus. As we consider our present struggles, are we ready to surrender them to Jesus? May the hope of Easter Day take us forward into the coming year.

The following article has been extracted from Parish Pump, and is entitled:

Coronavirus near Easter: still a good time to pause, pray and remember

When the UK death toll for coronavirus recently reached 100,000, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York issued a call to the nation. They asked everyone to pause and remember the victims of Covid-19. The victims and their families were 'known to God and cherished by God'.

Perhaps, as we approach Easter, we should consider stopping again and remembering again the terrible cost of the pandemic.

In their open letter, Archbishops Justin Welby and Stephen Cottrell had insisted that death does not have "the last word", and the Christian faith promises that one day "every tear will be wiped away".

God, they wrote, knows grief and suffering and "shares in the weight of our sadness".

Turning to the wider impact of the pandemic, the loneliness, anxiety and economic hardship, they then invited people to "cast their fears on God".

The archbishops said: "We write to you in consolation, but also in encouragement, and ultimately in the

hope of Jesus Christ. The God who comes to us in Jesus knew grief and suffering Himself. On the cross, Jesus shares the weight of our sadness."

"Most of all, we have hope because God raised Jesus from the dead. This is the Christian hope that we will be celebrating at Easter. We live in the hope that we will share in His resurrection. Death doesn't have the last word. In God's kingdom, every tear will be wiped away.

"Please be assured of our prayers. Please join us."

It is expected that the Church of England will hold services of remembrance for those who have died and thanksgiving for all those who have cared for them when it is possible to do so.

The following article has been extracted from Parish Pump, and is entitled:

Real Easter Egg launches despite being dropped by supermarkets

The Meaningful Chocolate Company has launched its 2021 Fairtrade Real Easter Egg range. All Real Easter Eggs come with an Easter story in the box. The stories range from simple guides to a 24-page activity book version with a prize competition worth £200. They provide an opportunity to share the joy of Easter with friends and family.

The 2021 Original Real Easter Egg includes a new 24-page Easter story activity book. It features a rainbow design to remind us of the importance of working together, in amazing and inspiring ways, for the common good. It costs £4.50 and is delivered in multiples of six or as singles.

David Marshall, from Meaningful Chocolate, said: "Even with the current uncertainties we believe that it is more important than ever that churches, schools and individuals find ways to share the Easter story in 2021. Our aim is to provide some of these resources and continue to support Fairtrade. The Real Easter Egg is a proven way to do this. So, if you are one of the 80,000 people who usually buy a Real Easter Egg from a supermarket then go online and order direct from www.realeasteregg.co.uk

About the Real Easter Egg

Out of the 80 million chocolate Easter eggs sold each year in the UK, The Real Easter Egg is the first and only Fairtrade chocolate Easter egg to share the Easter story.

The Real Easter Egg has been on sale since 2010 and involves thousands of churches, schools and groups. It crosses all denominations and offers individuals a simple way to share the Easter Story while supporting Fairtrade and charitable projects.

The Real Easter Egg continues to be the UK's top mail order Egg in terms of volume.

To date more than a million eggs have been sold and more than £300,000 has been donated to charitable causes.



Pray with us



Four new mothers who gave birth at Kalima Camp in Malawi after surviving flooding following Cyclone Idai in 2019.

Introduction

Welcome to the February prayer sheet. This is a temporary resource replacing the prayer diary until the next edition comes out in April. Do print or forward to anyone you think would be glad to receive it so as to aid them in their prayers.

This February, we highlight prayer requests from our country programme in Malawi and their work helping families in poverty to start small businesses.

There are also points for prayer on upcoming UN International Days that were once a feature of the monthly prayer e-mail.

You can sign up for the prayer e-mail using the link available on the prayer diary page: caid.org.uk/prayerdiary

Thank you for joining with us in prayer.

Reflection on prayer

'To pray is to practice that posture of radical trust in God's grace—and to participate in perhaps the most radical movement of all, which is the movement of God's Love.'

Richard Rohr Daily Meditations – The Politics of Prayer
28/12/2020

Praise and petition

Give thanks for all those who bring about positive change. This month is Christian Aid's Changemakers Supporter Conference with sessions to help to equip and inspire all those who are standing with us to create change in 2021.

Pray for those who sign up to find fellowship and for God to be at work in the conversations and ideas during the week.

Give thanks for the love we have for God's wonderful creation. On 14 February the Climate Coalition will be holding their annual 'Show the Love' celebration highlighting everything we care about and want to protect from the worst impacts of the climate crisis.

Pray for a wave of support and for our politicians to prioritise tackling climate change.

Give thanks for all the benefits of Fairtrade which allows growers, workers and miners to achieve a fair price for their work and for communities to benefit.

Pray that this Fairtrade Fortnight will be a success in renewing our commitment to social justice and fair trade for all.

Prayer requests from Malawi

Heavenly Father, you are good. You delight in us when we honour you in our work. May you please bring opportunities for businesses and employment that fulfil parents' desire to make life better for their children.

Thank you for Christian Aid Malawi for providing processing equipment and soft loans to women. Bless these ventures so their families can live healthier and more secure lives. Colossians 3:23

Jesus, we come to you humbled by Malawi's unstable economic situation which has been exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. This has affected all professions, including those working for the Christian Aid Malawi country office.

Restore our economy Lord as prices for all commodities have risen. Inspire our leaders to create policies that address the causes of extreme poverty. Proverbs 31:8-9

Prayers for Malawi provided by Lusungu Chinombo, Programme Officer, Christian Aid Malawi.

Prayers for family, friends and colleagues

There are so many people who have suffered great losses due to Covid-19. Please hold in your prayers the families, friends and colleagues of the two Christian Aid staff members who have sadly passed away recently.

Take some time to pray for all those experiencing bereavement at this time, and especially anyone you know personally, that they will feel loved during this time of loss.

International days in February

4 February: Pray for all those working for peace around the world across boundaries of religion and culture on the International Day of Human Fraternity.

6 February: Pray for everyone campaigning for an end to FGM and working with women and girls suffering the consequences on the International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation.

11 February: Pray for those working in education around the world and giving young people the possibility to learn and discover on the International Day of Women and Girls in

Science.

13 February: Pray for Christian Aid's partners using broadcasting to send important messages to remote communities on World Radio Day.

20 February: Give thanks for all those who have tirelessly worked for social justice and pray for fresh awakening and inspiration for campaigners on the World Day of Social Justice.

21 February: Pray for all those who have been displaced and who feel cut off from their language and culture on International Mother Language Day.

22 February: Pray for the success of this year's Fairtrade Fortnight and that everyone will get a fair price for their hard work.

A prayer for Ash Wednesday (17 February)

O God, advocate of all who are oppressed,
You shatter our illusions of righteousness
and unmask our divided hearts,
in order that we might be filled with longing for justice and generosity
and so be made whole.
And as justice and generosity
are true marks of a heart turning towards you,
let our actions as well as our intentions
bear witness for the longing of our hearts.

Changemakers Conference 2021

Our Changemakers Conference is running from 22-26 February with online sessions every day on a range of different topics including opportunities to discuss scripture and pray together.

You can see the programme and sign up online at caid.org.uk/supporterconference2021

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