

Saints ALIVE

The magazine of:
All Saints, Leighton Buzzard
St. Nicholas, Hockliffe
St. Michael's, Eggington
St. Michael and All Angels,
Billington
The Good Shepherd, Sandhills

December 2020 / January 2021

60p

Inside this bumper issue

The O Antiphons:
Essential ingredient of an
Advent Carol Service
[The picture shows a medieval
manuscript of the antiphons]

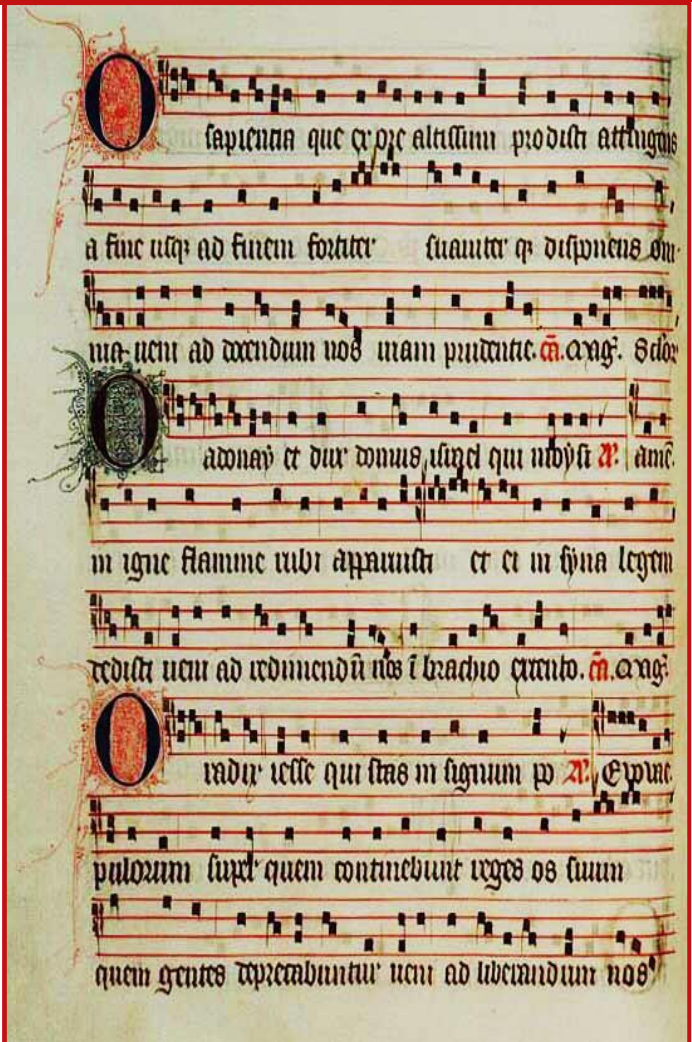
Introducing
Kirsty Borthwick,
our new curate-to-be

John Sykes celebrates the
arrival of new camera &
streaming equipment
with a tour in
the cherry picker

A life well lived:
remembering
Michael Grant

And Good Shepherd
helps with the virtual
Light Switch On

AND
An All Saints' chorister
reaches the semi-finals of
the BBC Young
Chorister of the Year



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Light and Darkness

By Rev'd Noel McGeeney

During baptisms I sometimes explain that two cosmic themes run through the service, Darkness and Light, Good and Evil. I share the story of going to an island on a lake in Donegal; people go there over the summer for a three-day pilgrimage of fasting and prayer. To get the pilgrimage started you stand in your bare feet, with your back to a cross carved into the wall of the church, say three times, 'I renounce the world, the flesh and the devil'.

I think of this as we approach our darkest time of the year, with the cosmic forces of goodness and light pushing against the forces of darkness and evil. Evil is a trinity of negative forces weaving through human history, summed up traditionally as the World, the Flesh, and the Devil.

Evil within the world: The human world as we know it is a system of nation states constructed along tribal lines. Therein lies the primary evil; the illusion that we are separated by the notion of tribalism. There is only one race and that is the human race. We celebrate Christmas at the darkest time of the year to announce Christ as the light of the world.

Evil within the flesh: Traditionally personal sin was the only sin with little concept of social sin or structural injustice. Morality was relegated to what went on behind closed doors but not what went on in the boardrooms. The motto of a large oil company says 'the business of business is business'. Read up on Mahatma Gandhi's seven social sins. It is human beings who make life and death decisions on others, on nations and continents.

Evil as the Devil: I saw a film one time called 'Evil has a Face'; just as God became incarnate in human form and lives within all who live a life in the Spirit, so too the devil is incarnate in all who live a life in the fullness of greed and hatred. Our journey is to become human in an inhuman world.

I want to conclude with a poem by Albert Camus:
*"In the midst of hate, I found that there was within me,
an invincible love.
In the midst of tears, I found there was, within me,
an invincible smile.
In the midst of chaos, I found there was, within me,
an invincible calm.
I realised through it all, that...
In the midst of winter, I found there was, within me,
an invincible summer.*

And that makes me happy. For it says that no matter how hard the world pushes against me, there's something stronger- something better, pushing right back".

Happy Christmas and New Year.

Noel McGeeney.



Darkness & light; calm above the chaos
Photo by Robert Woeger on Unsplash

Our present pattern of services across the Ouzel Valley Team

All Saints

Sundays:

Please note new times which allow for cleaning between services

8am Holy Communion

9.30am Parish Eucharist

11.30am

1st & 3rd Sunday (until Jan 1st 2021):

All Age "Service with a difference"

2nd & 4th Sunday Holy Baptism

6pm Said Evening Prayer

3rd Sunday: followed by Benediction

Weekdays:

Holy Communion

7.30pm Tuesday

(Service of Healing on 3rd Tuesday)

12.00pm Wednesday (**Not presently happening.**)

10.00am Thursday

9.00am Saturday

Morning Prayer: St. Hugh's Chapel

9.00am Monday – Friday

Evening Prayer: St. Hugh's Chapel

4.30pm Monday – Friday

St. Barnabas, Linslade

Sundays:

8am Said Eucharist

10am Parish Eucharist

6pm Evensong

www.linslade-parish.org.uk

During Lockdown, services in Heath & Reach, Eggington and Hockliffe are being shared by Zoom from each church in rotation at 10am. For details please contact Fr Noel McGeeney.

St. Leonard's, Heath & Reach

Sundays: Occasional services

8am Holy Communion

For details please visit:

www.saintleonardschurch.com

St. Michael's, Eggington

Sundays: Occasional services

St. Nicholas', Hockliffe

Sundays: Occasional services

St. Michael's and All Angels, Billington

Sundays:

11.15am Morning Prayer

Good Shepherd, Greenleas School, Sandhills:

Sundays at 9.45am:

1st & 3rd: Communion

2nd: Messy Church

4th: All Age Worship

Service times may vary.

For details of services and all other events, please see the websites.

Sunday Saints: for age 3+ year olds, meets during 9.30am Sunday service at All Saints.

All Saints Toddler Time: meets in All Saints on Wednesdays during term time.

Morning session 9.30 – 11am every week; afternoon session 1.30pm-3pm, except 1st Weds of month.

£1.50 per parent / carer & child; 50p extra per child; refreshments included: **will restart in October**

ACTIVE: (Senior Youth Group for age 11+) **not meeting at present because of a lack of leaders.**

If you could help, please contact the office.

Young Adults: meets fortnightly on Tuesdays at 8pm. See Facebook page "All Saints Young Adults".

Bereavement Café: a support group offering friendship and understanding

1st Sunday of the month, 2.30-4pm The Spire Coffee Shop, All Saints..

Choir Practice: Friday evenings, 7pm for 30 minutes for all members.

Bellringers: Practice on Monday, 7.30pm-9.30pm.

Spire Coffee Shop: Tuesday, Friday & Saturday 10am-2pm. **NOW OPEN.**

Contact Details on Page 2.

News Roundup

The Editors would like to thank all the contributors for their articles and continued support over the past year, and we hope you have enjoyed reading your Saints Alive Magazine. There will be no January issue, but we will be back in February with, hopefully, more interesting stories and articles to share with you. In the meantime we would like to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a healthy and happy 2021!

*** **

Unfortunately due to rising production costs, the cover price of Saints Alive will increase to 70p per issue with effect from February 2021. Annual subscriptions are now due and a form should be included with this issue.

*** **

For up to date information on the re-opening of The Coffee Shop following restrictions and details of Christmas opening, please see the weekly news sheet.



Worth a smile

The teacher asked her Sunday School class to draw a picture of a Bible story with a Christmas theme. She was puzzled by Kate's picture, which showed four people on an airplane. She asked her which story it was meant to represent.

'The Flight to Egypt,' was the reply.

Pointing at each figure, the teacher ventured: 'That must be Mary, Joseph, and Baby Jesus. But who's the fourth person?'

'Oh,' explained Kate happily, 'that's Pontius - the pilot!'



Christmas 2020 cancelled?

No Nativity this year because the 3 wise men face a travel ban; the shepherds have been furloughed; the inn keeper has shut under tier 3 regulations and had a slump in bookings; Santa won't be working as he would break the rule of 6 with Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Donner, and Blitzen; and Rudolph, with that red nose, should be isolating and taking a test.



Parish Registers

Holy Matrimony, October:

3: Duncan Lay & Mandy Downes at St. Michael's

Holy Matrimony, November:

No weddings

'Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate'

Holy Baptism, October:

25: Oliver Maverick Smith, Maverick Andrij Klymyszyn

Holy Baptism, November:

No baptisms

'One Lord, one faith, one baptism'

R.I.P. October:

6: Rose Gurney at St. Leonard's; 7: Sheila Cooke at St. Leonard's; 8: James Lander at All Saints; 16: Mary Davies at Bierton; 20: Vanessa Lloyd at All Saints; 23: Sandra Keen at All Saints, Stewart McGilvray at Bierton

R.I.P. November:

11: Michael Grant at St. Michael & All Angels; 23: Trevor French at St. Barnabas; 30: Alec Raymen at All Saints

'Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die'

Years Mind, December:

1: Tony Pyman, Nora Davis; 2: Frederick Deeley, Leslie Morgan; 3: Bram Evans, Keith Hazells; 5: Peter Harmer; 6: Leslie Plenderleath, Charles Scraggs; 7: Jonathan Finch; 8: Doreen Lewis, George Lee; 9: Arnold Woolhead, Derek Williamson; 10: Kathleen Meredith; 11: Cynthia Slater; 12: Edie Skevingon, Albert Perry, Edna Carpenter, Diane Hodder; 14: Dorothy Scammell, David Groom, Pamela Johnson; 16: Ernest Lennard, Win Deans; 18: Simon Munford, John Jones; 19: Gemma Howard; 20: Cynthia Jury; 21: Keith Biggerstaff; 22: David Noble, Eric Crompton, Luther Brazier; 25: Joan Winter, Margaret Ellison, Alice Shelley; 26: Roy Palmer; 27: Melanie Andrews, Sandra Hipwell, Maurice Raymond, Cecil Joynes; 28: Albert Nash, Colin Proctor; 29: David Brooker; 30: Mary Warburton, Evelyn Pomeroy, Reg Lunnon, Mary Jaggard; 31: Edward Meredith, Nancy Meredith, Peggy Stonier

Years Mind, January:

1: Sarah Andrew; 2: Arthur Keyworth, Kay Kiteley; 6: Eileen Garlick, Peter Walker, Elizabeth Underwood, David Burley; 7: John Fogg, Joyce Lathwell, John Carter; 9: Ellen Daniels, Stanley Rees Jones, Stanley Blake; 10: Eileen Pott, Arthur Speller, Margaret (Peg) Tingey; 11: Ivy Nash; 12: Rita Shephard, Elsie Molloy, Ronald Chandler; 15: Annie Norman, Mary Dell, Dennis Holroyd; 18: Danny Munroe; 19: Dian Milne; 20: Maurice Greensted, Dolly Harmer; 22: Margaret Beck, Cyril Dimmock; 23: Robert Kiteley, Percy Flewin, Betty Tuck, Annie Williams, Revd. Vernon Smith, Peter Kiddle; 26: Charlotte Sawka; 27: Betty Baines, William Leath, Alice Pyman; 28: Russell Palmer; 29: Bill Stonier; 30: Betty Harding; 31: John Harris, Maureen Webb

Pulford VA Lower School

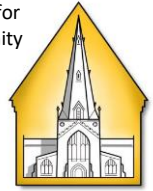
Head Teacher: Mr Dave Heather

Office Manager: Mrs Alison Quick

Tel: 01525 372188

Website: www.pulfordschool.org

A church school for
a whole community



It has been a real joy and privilege in recent weeks get to know more about Pulford School since I had the honour of being elected as a governor of the school this autumn. As a helper at Forest Church, which is just one aspect of the close relationship between All Saints and the school, I was already familiar with the woodland in the school grounds where we hold the services. It is a wonderful and cherished resource for the school. In my NHS career I have worked closely with the governing bodies of Luton and Dunstable Hospital and local NHS Commissioning Groups, but this is new territory for me. I have much to learn and am very grateful for the support and training that is on offer for new school governors. Geoff Huskisson has also been elected as a governor and he of course brings a wealth of experience from his teaching career to the role.

It has been most impressive to understand just how much effort has gone on to keep the school functioning during such challenging times while ensuring it is safe for children, staff and families. As a result, attendance levels at the school have continued at a very high level. But perhaps of even more significance is the pastoral work, and strong emphasis on supporting the emotional and mental wellbeing of the entire school family at a time when many are struggling with the worry and stress that Coronavirus has brought to our lives. It is clear just how important the school ethos and strong focus on good pastoral care is in this respect.

Although governor meetings are currently conducted virtually, we are still able to take practical decisions - such as agreeing to release funds from the Pulford Trust to help replace the school minibus, and agreeing how to work closely with teaching staff in order to offer understanding and support as much as possible.

Usually by now the school would be busy planning nativity plays, the carol service and lots of other things in preparation for Christmas. Inevitably, the Coronavirus has had an impact on all of that, but the school is able to go ahead with nativity services and related activities in the safe class group "bubbles" which have been established to allow the school day to go ahead as normally as possible. It's so important to be able to share with the children and their families the message of hope at the heart of the Christmas story.

Finally, do remember that if you have a young child in your family and are interested in applying for a place or finding out about more about what makes Pulford such an outstanding school please get in touch with the school office – details above.

Katrina Grant



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On a musical note.....



If I were to begin this article by saying that last summer we needed a new fridge/freezer here at Hockliffe Grange, you may well wonder what I am writing about. So I won't do that. But as it happens, Julia and I were in Curry's last summer looking for a new fridge/freezer when I had a telephone call from the BBC. They wanted to know more about one of our choristers, Alexander Olleson, who, along with hundreds of others, had entered this year's BBC Young Chorister of the Year competition.

You may have seen this competition on the TV in previous years, presented by Aled Jones and Katherine Jenkins. John Rutter is often a member of the judging panel.



This is from the BBC's publicity for the event:

"Are you a singer aged 10-16? Are you a member of a church or cathedral choir? A school choir, gospel or show choir? Maybe you lead worship in your church or perhaps you just love singing sacred music?"

If so, the BBC is launching a competition to find the best young singers in the country and you could be one of them!

To celebrate the contribution made by young people to choirs and music groups across the UK, Radio 2 and Songs of Praise are joining together to find the BBC Young Chorister of the Year 2020."

Alexander became a member of the All Saints choir in 2014, aged 7. In 2016, he joined the choir at Christ Church Cathedral in Oxford, singing with us when he was back in Leighton Buzzard and joining us on our summer residential cathedral visits. Alexander has been back singing with us regularly since March: firstly as part of our virtual choir during lockdown and then on Sundays when lockdown eased and we returned to sing in church.

As you may have already guessed, Alexander has achieved some success in the Young Chorister of the Year competition. At the time of writing he has reached the semi-finals and by the time you read this that semi-final will have happened. It will have been broadcast on Advent Sunday at 12.20pm. If you missed it, do have a look on I-Player. Should Alexander reach the final, it will be broadcast on BBC1 on Sunday 6th December. No time has yet been fixed for the final.

Good luck Alexander.

Paul Dickens



Christmas Crossword



ACROSS

1. Pumpkin or mincemeat
3. Santa's ride
6. Celebration
8. Newborn
9. Northpole crew
13. Word of praise
14. Words on a Christmas card
17. It's opened on Christmas

DOWN

1. Alternative word to 17 across
2. Christmas drink
4. Christmas dinner centerpiece
5. Dec. holiday
7. Christmas warmer
8. "Jingle _____"
10. Christmas tree
11. O. Henry's "The Gift of the ___"
12. What carolers do
15. French Christmas.
16. Snow glider



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You'll find the answer on Page 20

Introducing Kirsty Borthwick – a new curate for All Saints

A message from Mother Cate

I am delighted to announce that Kirsty Borthwick will be serving her title post with us as full time Assistant Curate at All Saints. She will be ordained as Deacon next June and I very much look forward to welcoming her to All Saints and to the Ouzel Valley Team Ministry.

Mother Cate.



Kirsty writes:

Hello everyone, my name is Kirsty Borthwick and I'm thrilled to be joining All Saints as your Assistant Curate from June 2021, as I continue my training for ordained ministry in the Church of England.

I'm currently on an international placement in Switzerland, but otherwise I have spent the last four years living and studying at Westcott House in Cambridge. Whilst there I've been working on my PhD exploring a Trinitarian understanding of prayer and completing various placements in secular and church settings: from a college chapel to the RAF, and lots in between!

Before beginning my training, I worked for two years as a pastoral assistant at St Albans Cathedral, immersing myself in parish life – with a strong emphasis on leading liturgy, pastoral care to our housebound, children's and youth work, and running the adult learning centre. Before that I've had various temporary posts in everything from cleaning and waitressing, to a year as a religious studies teacher and school chaplain.

When I'm not in church, you'll probably find me about the parish drinking coffee with a good book or over conversation with friends, or wandering for miles along the canal towpath or in the nearest hilly countryside. I also love to travel and – although I'm very much a novice – I love to craft and play the piano. I also enjoy playing sport – in the past I've done a lot of rowing, but I'm keen to try out something new when I move to Leighton Buzzard (suggestions welcome!).

I'm very much looking forward to getting to know you all over the next three years and to calling Leighton Buzzard home. I'm excited to see where the will of God leads in the next few years, and to journeying with you all as we seek to draw closer to one another and to Christ. I would dearly love your prayers as I finish my placement in Switzerland and return to the UK to prepare for ordination as a Deacon; I have been and will continue to pray for you.

Special Christmas & New Year Services At All Saints

*These services may be in Church as well as online depending on the level of restrictions, and all will be live-streamed on our YouTube channel. Subscribe for updates.
Details correct at the time of publication, but may well change!*

In normal times, Sunday services:

8.00am	Holy Communion
9.30am	Parish Eucharist
11,30am	All Age Worship (1 st & 3 rd Sundays each month)
6.00pm	Evening Prayer



Special events:

Sunday 6th December:

11.30am	Toy Service (Gifts new and not wrapped, please.)
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Sunday 13th December:

4.00pm	Christingle, in aid of the Children's Society
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Saturday 19th December:

3.00pm	"In the Bleak Midwinter" A simple service for those who find Christmas difficult
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Sunday 20th December:

6.00pm	Comfort & Joy, music and readings for Christmas
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Christmas Eve:

3.00pm & 5.00pm	The D.I.Y. Nativity (Same service to be repeated)
11.15pm	Midnight Mass, the First Eucharist of Christmas



Christmas Day:

8.00am	Holy Communion
10.00am	Christmas Day Family Communion

Friday 1st January:

11.00am	Naming of Jesus Holy Communion
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Sunday 3rd January:

11.30am	All Age Communion for Epiphany
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Wednesday 6th January:

10.00am	Holy Communion for Epiphany
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Sunday 10th January:

6.00pm	Epiphany Carol Service
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The Upside of Lockdown 2020: Modern technology enables improved broadcasting from church

So here we are all again in lockdown – I, amongst many others find it unbelievable that we are living through this. Watching a documentary on the Great Plague of 1665 however, has concentrated my mind on the fact that no matter how much we complain, we are so much better off than our ancestors of 355 years ago who had no real understanding of what was happening to them, apart from the fact that they were dying in droves within days of contracting a particularly nasty and painful illness. They didn't have *monthly* rolling news available to them, let alone daily 24 /7 news coverage.

Another thing unavailable to them was the ability to watch their church service or hear the angelic music sung by their choir from the safety of their own home via a streaming service. In fact, the only things streaming were their eyes, noses and other unspeakably nasty pustules located around various parts of their bodies.

Gadzooks, I hear you cry!! Perhaps my life is not quite as bad as I think.

So yes, dear reader, live streaming is a necessary invention of modern times in order to facilitate a connection with our church. We are committed to making this experience as good and easily accessible as we can. Now, it is fair to say that our first couple of attempts were somewhat 'Diblian' – there was nothing like the rustle of a sweet paper invading the sound, an intrusive thumb over the lens or indeed a long and loving shot of a self-conscious acolyte, mid-shot, fidgeting whilst distribution of the Sacrament was happening off camera.

But...at least we were doing *something* – better than doing nothing. Rome wasn't built in a day, you know.

A dedicated team of forward thinkers and 'Techies' spent a lot of time on your behalf researching the questions and answers for a long-term solution to this problem. We already have some cameras installed which will provide more options in respect of coverage of our services; and more possibilities will be available once the supply chain to complete our system is fully functional.

By the time life returns to 'normal' we will have honed our skills and intend to use this facility in a wider context - we can offer a recording facility for weddings, funerals civic services etc. We will also work in conjunction with the Town Council who most generously helped us out with financing this whole venture to project a number of events to the wider community.

One extra bonus was the opportunity for this writer to take advantage of the Cherry Picker brought along by Keystone to take some shots of the really, really high stained glass windows the Nave. It must be said that there has never been a starker contradiction between concept and the dawning of crass stupidity as I ascended to the heavens on a somewhat wobbly platform!!

Some of the results are to be seen on the centre pages, and I hope to share more once my heartrate stabilises.

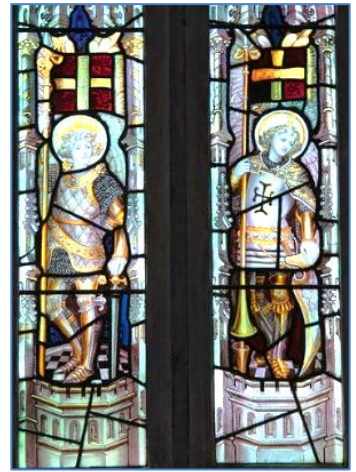
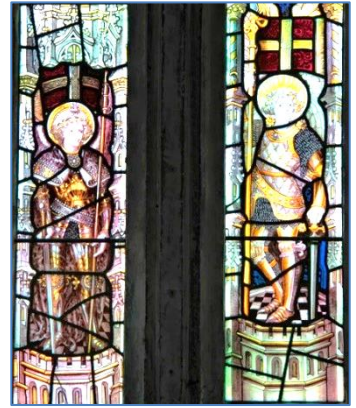
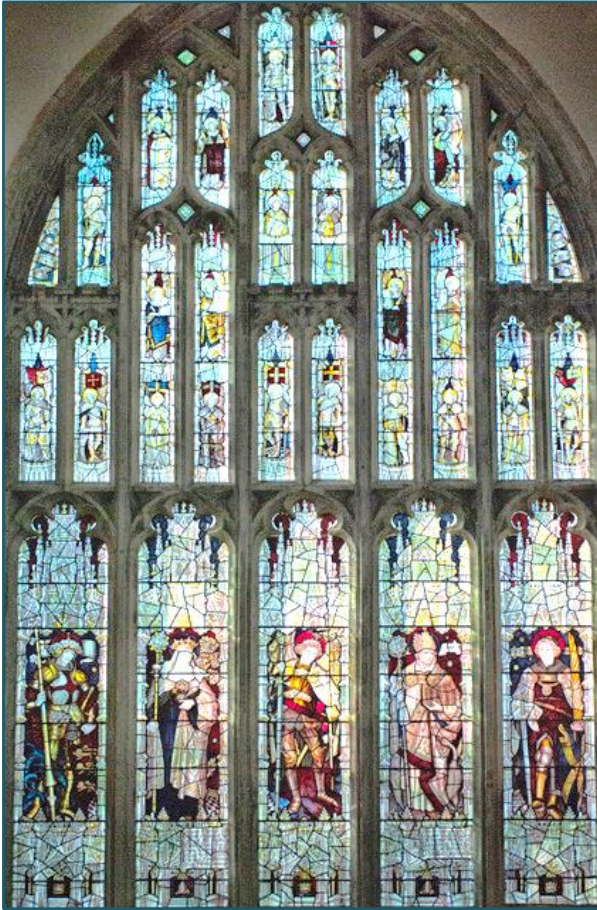
John Sykes

Lift thine eyes, O lift thine eyes

*There's a wealth of saints and angels in the clerestory and roof.
They've been watching over generations of worshippers,
and will no doubt continue to do so, Covid or not.*



*You don't have to have a cherry picker to see them, but it helps...
John Sykes took his camera up close to spend time with them.
See his article on page 13.*



Man, the greatest predator, bestrides the earth like a Colossus. His feet crush centuries of forests, glades and plants. His hands grasp greedily and crush sea-life, land-life and the rarest living gems in the animal kingdom.

Oil, precious stones, all things essential to material living matter more than the eons taken to develop, change and evolve so many precious living things. Some of our seas are little more than plastic sewage; leaking oil pollutes and kills our sea birds; plastic motes live within our sea creatures, taking away fertility and life.



Photo by John Cameron on Unsplash

What is Man doing?



Do we want our next generation to see these horrors?

Seals and birds wrapped, gasping in plastic.

Whales and dolphins tied and strangled in nets, cruel metal rings cutting into living flesh.

Barren wasteland where once were forests and jungles teeming with nature's wonderful life.

Ancient peoples, their peaceful worlds destroyed by logging, drilling, pollution.

Crowding people in poorer countries already struggle for food.

Must they all die? Has the human race, so rich, no mercy?

We have little time to turn things round. The pandemic is a warning, a shout for help around the world. Many drops fill a bucket. We can each play our part. We can save our beautiful but wounded earth. Save our bees, our insects, flowers, trees, animals and birds.

A little from each goes a long way. Our young people care more than we do. They should. They will have to live here long after we have gone.

Let us work to make this world worthy of them.

Audrey Ingledow

The ECO Church team asks that this Christmas, we avoid glitter, ALL glitter, even that claiming to be "ECO"

They point to some research, reported in the Guardian, which shows that eco glitter causes the same damage to rivers as the ordinary product.

So please: this Christmas, avoid glitter, including sparkly cards (they also can't be recycled) because of the damage even so-called eco-friendly glitter does to the environment.

St. Nicholas, Hockliffe

Vicar: Rev'd Noel McGeeney

Tel: 01525 237633

Churchwardens: Brian Speller: 210 565;

Roger Spalding: 07451 877 501



No Stopping in Hockliffe

It's often said that as you get older time is faster. Certainly the times we are in now seem to move at breakneck speed: no sooner do I begin to feel comfortable with using Facebook by the beginning of this year, (it was launched in 2004) than I am informed by the millennials in our family that Facebook is old hat and I should be tweeting via Twitter. It's a whole new language. So I launched myself into the battle with hashtags, whatever they are. (### How can you say anything significant in 140 characters?)

Then, I'm told that it didn't really matter if I couldn't use Twitter because that's old hat too, and I should be using Instagram, followed within days by an admonition that Instagram is finished and TikTok is king. Will it never end? It seems there is no stopping in Hockliffe.

I blame the road: Watling Street. Something about it seems to cause people to keep moving, not stopping.

Watling Street is a Roman road laid over a track, or way, which may have existed in the Bronze Age. It is quite probable that Roman soldiers stationed in Dunstable, on the crossroads with the Icknield Way, left Dunstable marching at the regulation 4.5 miles an hour. They would not have stopped in Hockliffe. It was only an hour out of town, not worth stopping when you're needed in the far north.

On the morning of 10th December 1290, the funeral cortege of Eleanor of Castile, accompanied by her husband, Edward I, left Stony Stratford, travelling on Watling Street heading for Woburn Abbey. The procession probably entered Hockliffe, at a speed of approximately 15 mph and went straight on to the Abbey by the old Woburn Road.

On 30th April 1483, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, later known as Richard III, left Stony Stratford travelling down Watling Street towards London, with his nephews: Edward V, King of England and Richard of Shrewsbury, Duke of York. These two young boys would become known as the Princes in the Tower. Probably that the procession also came straight through Hockliffe, without stopping for breath.

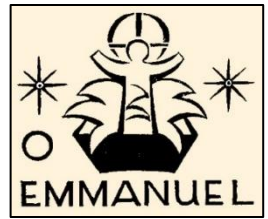
In 1772 Dr. William Dodd became the vicar at St Nicholas Church, Hockliffe. He only stayed for 2 years before heading for a more glamorous life in London. He was hanged in 1777 for forgery. Perhaps he should have stopped in Hockliffe.

In 1850 Arthur Henry Neumann was born in Hockliffe. He left for East Equatorial Africa, where he became internationally famous. He never returned.

Throughout the ages Hockliffe seems to be the place where people did not stop. Those of us who live here know that they missed a lovely village, with a wonderful community spirit.

Roger Spalding

The Great O Antiphons



Advent is about preparing for the coming of the Lord. We think of the season as a time of preparation for the celebration of Christ's birth at Christmas, and that is certainly part of its character. But Advent has a primary and much deeper meaning, in the sense that, as Christians we live in a time of transition between the first and second comings of Christ, between his incarnation and his coming in glory. Through Jesus, the kingdom of God is near, but it is not yet, and so we mark this time of year by watching and waiting, in prayer, in expectancy and hope, for that time when the whole church, living and departed will be gathered up in Him.

All Saints celebrates the start of the Advent Season with a special Carol Service, the biblical text of which focuses on the great Advent or "O" Antiphons. These are ancient texts, each one taking as its theme, one of the traditional titles of the Messiah. They all begin with the salutation 'O', hence the 'O Antiphons': O Sapientia (Wisdom); O Adonai (Hebrew word for God); O Radix Jesse (stem or root of Jesse); O Clavis David (Key of David); O Oriens (Dayspring); O Rex genitium (King of the Gentiles); O Emmanuel.

All seven are combined in the verses of the Advent hymn, "O come, O come, Emmanuel". Originally in Latin, this hymn takes us back over 1,200 years to monastic life in the 8th- or 9th-century; and by singing this hymn with the antiphons interspersed, Christians today may participate in a sacred Advent ritual at least 11 centuries old.

The service is also characterised by a procession from darkness to light, from the darkness of sin to the light of Christ. It is a procession that finds echoes in our own lives as we struggle to comprehend the love of God in the incarnate Jesus. The journey from darkness to light from all corners of the world is symbolised by carols sung from different part of the church.

Text taken from the Advent Carol Service booklet.

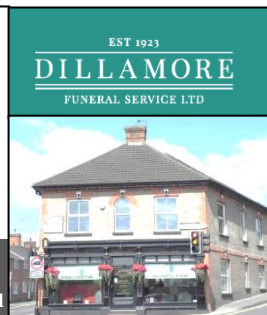
This year, for obvious reasons, the service has been recorded and while great efforts have been made to retain as much of the mystery and symbolism as possible, it is necessarily limited. The message though remains the same.

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Jesus is coming, let's celebrate!

At the end of October a number of the children in the village celebrated "Halloween" or "All Saints Day" by trick-or-treating at houses in the village in a COVID safe way, with villagers leaving out individually wrapped bags of treats for the children to collect. It was a small but popular community event during these difficult times when we have so many constraints. Thank you to everyone who support this.

Unfortunately due to COVID 19 we were unable to gather at the war memorial on Remembrance Sunday to commemorate the contribution of military and civilian servicemen and women in the two World Wars and later conflicts, but many had their own time for remembrance at home.

We are hoping that in 2021 some normality will return so we can all gather in church again, but also so the wider community can socialise and we can have some much needed fund raising events.

At the end of November we will celebrate the start of Advent, which is 'the final countdown' to Christmas day and many children will have an Advent calendar to help them count the days, no doubt receiving a small treat (a piece of chocolate in ours) when they open the section for each day.

The words Advent simply means 'coming', so let's remember that God came to earth to be born as the Christ child, Jesus. This is a time of hope, of getting ready, and expectation. So with all the uncertainty in our lives this year, it will be great to have something so positive to focus on.

Services using Zoom are fine but there is nothing quite like Christingle with the children dressing up to help tell the nativity story, so we hope that lock down can be lifted sufficiently to enable our community to gather in the church at Christmas to celebrate.



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Vicar: Rev'd Steve Marsh

Tel: 01525 838450

Churchwardens:

Sandra Brewin 373644; Julia Haviland 850380

Farewell, Michael Grant

Sandra Brewin looks back on a long and busy life, well-lived.

On Sunday 1st November 2020, All Saints Day, our dear Michael Grant left us to join his fellows in heaven. He died peacefully at home in the company of his family. His funeral took place on 11th November, Remembrance Day in St Michael and All Angels.



Michael was not a physically large man but in Billington and far beyond he was a giant and it would take many magazines, in fact books, to cover all the achievements of his long life. In reading through the list of Michael's career, charitable work, community work, involvement and responsibilities in the Church, the U3A, canal societies and associations and much more, the impression that hits forcefully is that old fashioned word COMMITMENT. Whatever Michael undertook he was utterly committed to with verve and enthusiasm. He would find it difficult to understand that many other people did not show the same determination.

There are many who will write tributes to Michael from the vast areas in which he was involved but here we think of Billington. Nobody could ignore in Springtime the multitude of daffodils which enhance the verges of Billington. This was not only Michael's inspiration, it was his execution of this bulb planting project into which he managed to persuade members of the village to take part. He so loved the area in which he lived that he headed up the Parish Paths Partnership, making sure that footpaths were kept open and accessible. He organised the Billington Winter Walk for many years, lately being hosted for breakfast by David and Tina Thompson.

For a long time Michael was Churchwarden at St Michael and All Angels also taking up the responsibility of supervising the burial plots in the graveyard, a task which is complicated and time-consuming.

It is only lately, due to illness that Michael has been absent at our weekly Holy Communion services. In previous years he was always there, assisting with the chalice, reading the Scripture, conducting intercessions and all this after he had attended All Saints at 8am picking up other worshippers on the way.

Our parish has cause to be grateful to Michael. For 5 years from 1996 he was chairman of the Parish Council having previously served as councillor from 1978.

Absolutely nobody could achieve what Michael has in his lifetime without support and encouragement. Dear Marjory, Iain, Gill and Charles have always been his enduring tower of strength. We extend our deepest sympathy to them. There is a huge gap in the lives of all of us in Billington but none larger than the one felt by his family.

Sandra Brewin, on behalf of all at St. Michael and All Angels

What Mary taught me

Norma Murrain, of Silverfish Jewellery in Birmingham considers Mary....



"And behold, you shall conceive in your womb and bring forth a son and call His name JESUS..." (Luke 1:31)

On 8th December Roman Catholics celebrate the feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. While non-Roman Catholics do not venerate Mary in the same way, we can still learn so much from the Mother of Jesus.

Trust. A woman's trust can only be built on an intimate relationship and strong communication over time. Mary therefore must have had a relationship with God for years prior to the visit by the angel Gabriel. She would have known the Jewish scriptures of the coming Messiah, and this enabled her to recognise God's will in

the voice of the angel. (Luke 1:26-38) She trusted Him because she already knew Him.

Willingness to obey. She was willing to surrender to God's will, without even asking why He had chosen her. "Let it be to me according to your Word." (Luke 1:34) Her asking 'how' only reflected her willingness to obey Him. "How will this be," Mary said, "since I am a virgin." (Luke 1:34)

Testimony. It's one thing to say we believe God, but far harder to go and tell somebody about Him. Yet Mary did just that: "At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth" (Luke 1:39-40). And her cousin saluted her faith: "Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished". (Luke 1:45)



Worship. Finally, Mary worshipped, her poetic song full of love and reverence for God: "My soul magnifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my saviour..." (Luke 1:46)

This Christmas, as we remember Mary, what has God been able to conceive in us lately?

The Bible is clear that Jesus wants to implant His Holy Spirit into each one of us, so that we may live our lives in His presence, grow to become more like Him, and fulfil His particular will for our lives. Like Mary, our prayer can also be: "Let it be to me according to your Word" (Luke 1:34)

Good Shepherd, Sandhills

Vicar: Rev'd Steve Marsh

Tel: 01525 838450

Churchwarden: Steve Nixon



Celebrating Christmas with song and light

The raucous hilarity of our popular Beer and Carols event is unfortunately a thing of 2020's Christmas past. It seems strange that 12 months ago more than a hundred people were packed into Astral Park Sports and Community Centre, singing with joy and laughter and sharing nibbles together. This feels like another world now where social distancing wasn't in the dictionary and bubbles were consigned to the bath.

Our Christmas present may not involve a social gathering this year, but we still wanted to share music with our community to help celebrate the light, this Christmas. Around 15 musicians and singers from the church are contributing to a recording of "Light of the World" and "O Come All Ye Faithful".

The contributions from musicians playing the trombone, keyboard, saxophone, guitar, piano, organ, violin, trumpet and drums are being recorded separately and then professionally mixed as a soundtrack to pictures of local people turning on their own Christmas lights. The idea was developed in response to Leighton-Linslade Helpers organising a Virtual Christmas Light Turn On event. This year instead of the usual bustling, popular annual event in the town centre, local people have been invited to video themselves turning on their Christmas lights and this will be made in to one video which will be livestreamed on 5th December at 7pm.

CGS will be contributing these two songs and encouraging people within the Sandhills estate to film and send in their own Christmas lights switch on.

Philip Nichols, who is leading on the recording project, said: "There is no Beer and Carols this year but we wanted to maintain the momentum and relationships we have developed over the last two years of hosting the event". This year, once again the CGS band should be joined by Rising Voices, a choir based in Leighton Buzzard.

"We want to help people celebrate light this Christmas with songs that mean light bursting in", Philip added.

The universal and powerful symbol of light will resonate with many people's own personal journeys through this pandemic. Light can be a symbol of hope, remembrance, love and gratitude. But I am also mindful that for some going through tough times, there will be an overwhelming feeling that there is an absence of light. I heard a psychologist on the radio recently say 'if you can't see the light at the end of the tunnel, get your torch out'. Sometimes we can switch this torch on with a deliberate change in mind-set or we can strengthen the light with help from friends, family or professionals.

But the torch shines brightest when powered by Jesus as "the Light of the World" (John 8:12).

Jo Bellamy

Patterns of Prayer

In a series of articles looking at different types of spirituality and the influences that inspire us in our lives of prayer, John Wallace discusses

Praying with the Bible



The American Presbyterian minister, Archie Parrish who died last year, wrote these words:

'The will of God is revealed as you listen to the Spirit of God in the Word of God. The precepts and promises of the Bible teach us what to pray. They teach us what grace to ask for and for what work we need strength. On every page of the Bible there is subject matter for prayer. Bishop Westcott, the renowned nineteenth-century theologian and Bishop of Durham observed:

'The petitions of true disciples are echoes (so to speak) of Christ's words. As He has spoken so they speak. Their prayer is only some fragment of His teaching transformed into a supplication, and so it will necessarily be heard.'

One way to pray more effectively is to echo God's Word back to Him as you pray. We align our hearts with His heart as we pray His Words from our hearts.'



Nowhere is this more true than in the Book of Psalms. They are *par excellence* the place where prayers are to be found in the Bible. What is good about praying The Daily Office is that it makes you read the psalms in which can be found many types of prayer to fit in with our own personal situations. If you use the internet, The Daily Office app is there and so easy to use. It is a key part of my daily devotions.

But you don't need the internet to engage. If you are a devotee of the Prayer Book, it sets out a month's readings of the Psalms for Morning and Evening Prayer – so there is no excuse. The following are just examples of the types of prayer which can be encountered.

We can join in praise (Psalm 150); we can claim confidence in God's care and support (Psalms 23 and 121); we can confess (Psalm 51); we can rage in God's presence about injustice and personal distress (Psalm 55); and pray for his protection in specific circumstances (Psalm 59). Above all, as we read these Psalms, we are drawn into the presence of God.

[Photo by Kelly Sikkema on Unsplash]

The same Bishop Westcott also wrote this:

'True prayer – the prayer that must be answered is the personal recognition and acceptance of the divine will. It follows that the hearing of prayer that teaches is not so much the granting of a specific petition... .. but the assurance that what is granted does most effectively lead the end.'

So when we pray The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9 onwards) we pray: *'Thy will be done'* so aligning what we pray for with God's will. Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane prayed for *'this cup to be removed, nevertheless, let your will, not mine be done.'*

There are so many examples of how and for what to pray. In 1 Samuel we read of the childless Hannah praying in the shrine at Shiloh for a child, with such intensity that the priest Eli thought she was drunk. The response of many of the prophets to what often they perceived to be an uncomfortable and potentially dangerous call from God was prayer. Isaiah responded to his quite unnerving vision of God's majesty in the Temple, with the simple words: *'Lord here I am, send me.'*

Other people were not so convinced. Gideon in the Book of Judges doubted his call to free the people from the oppression of the Midianites and the worship of Baal and used prayer as a way of challenging God to confirm what he perceived to be God's will.

In the New Testament we see many examples of people praying and they fit into our daily experiences. Jairus comes to Jesus and asks him to heal his daughter who was sick. So from this example and from a verse in the letter of James (5:15) we derive our sick prayer list which is an important part of our intercessions on (in normal times) a daily basis. In the same chapter, the writer refers to Elijah who prayed fervently for drought to challenge king Ahab, which happened. Then after 42 months he prayed again and it rained.

The Bible gives us so many examples as to how prayer has worked (or not if you believe that the answer should just confirm what you want). In my childhood, in a very different church from All Saints, I was taught about 'The Traffic Light' approach to prayer and this fits with every prayer you can read in the Bible.

Red – No: the answer to prayer does not align with the way God works. (I pray that my football team will win on Saturday).

Amber – Wait: this is the hardest one as you feel that the heavens are as brass and there is no response.

Green – Your prayer has been answered as you had hoped.

We all experience these times and praying with the Bible shows us that we are not abnormal. My prayer is that we all continue to focus our prayers as we read the Bible knowing that we have a God who hears our prayers and, as he responds, conforms them to his will.



John Wallace

The Revd Dr Gary Bowness continues his tongue-in-cheek letters from 'Uncle Eustace'...

On the best ways for a vicar to disrupt Christmas



The Rectory
St James the Least of All

My dear Nephew Darren

I am sorry I was not alive during that wonderful four-year period when Oliver Cromwell abolished Christmas; no Christmas parties, no carol services, no cards to send and no frantic last-minute shopping. That man was a hero.

Planning for Christmas at St James' normally starts on 2nd January. By Easter, the flowers for church have been carefully chosen to be colour coordinated, and the seating plans and table decorations for the Christmas party have been allocated (with nominated reserves in case someone should inconveniently die in the intervening eight months). Long before Summer is over, the tree lights have been tested, music for the 9 Lessons and Carols Service has been chosen and the service sheets printed. Way before the dark nights set in, car parking attendants will have been found, those who are to light all the candles will have been rehearsed to perfection, and the brass lectern has had its annual polish.

We do not do spontaneity at St James the Least of All. If ever there was a service when time for something unexpected had to be allowed, its place would be announced in the order of service, how long the unexpected thing would happen for would have been decided by a committee, and who was to be spontaneous would have been allocated on a rota.

But the one person none of these well-meaning, efficient, committed organisers can control is the Rector. You could call it a staff perk.

Carols will (accidentally, of course) be announced in the wrong order; if verse 3 was to be omitted, I announce it will be verse 4. This keeps the organist on his toes while the choir hovers on the point of a collective nervous breakdown. At the Christmas supper, my introductory welcome speech and extensive grace make those in the kitchen wonder if the vegetables being boiled should better be served as thick soup.

I offer the helpful suggestion that the tree, having been installed and decorated in the chancel, may perhaps look better in the sanctuary and I turn all the heating off throughout the season, explaining that it will help the flowers to last. All Services will start five minutes early (was my watch rather fast?) so I can look disapprovingly at those still coming in while we are singing the first carol and making it clear that I think they had spent too long in the pub next door.

And so we all reach Christmas morning, with 12 months of planning having gone yet again slightly awry, with parishioners exhausted and I exhilarated at the chaos that has been created with such ease. Mr Cromwell, your spirit lives on.

Your loving uncle, Eustace

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