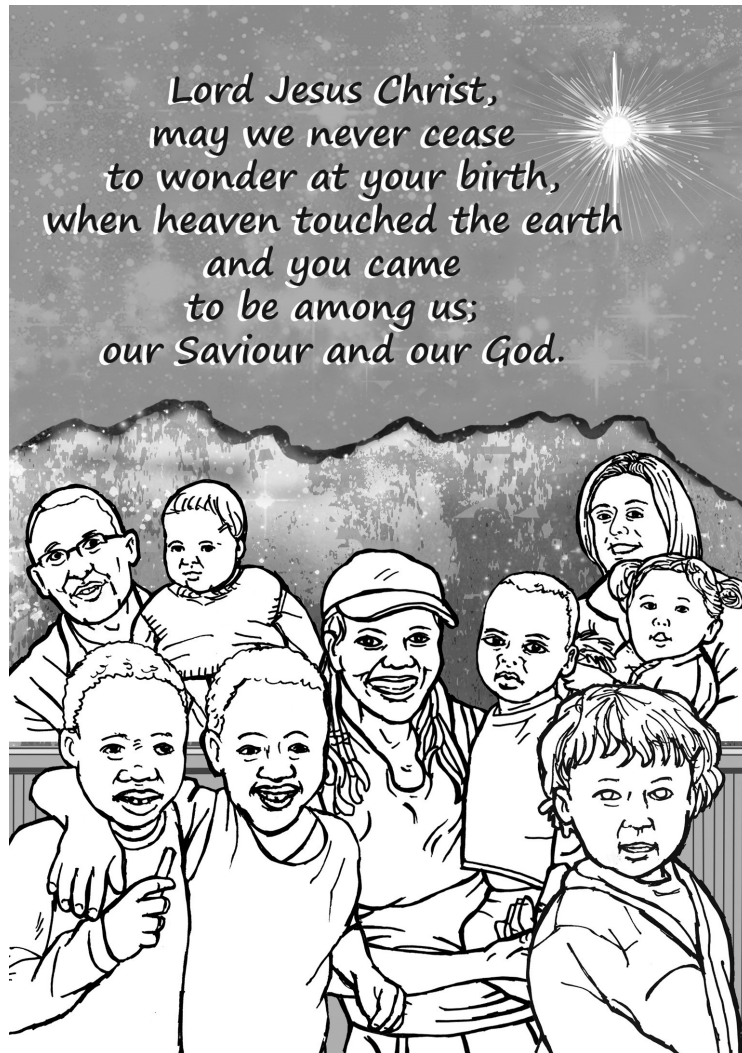
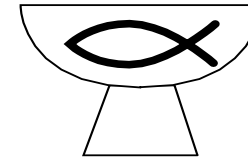


December 2022

30p

Upton-cum-Chalvey Parish News

St Mary St Laurence St Peter



*Lord Jesus Christ,
may we never cease
to wonder at your birth,
when heaven touched the earth
and you came
to be among us;
our Saviour and our God.*

Parish of Upton-cum-Chalvey

The Anglican parish of Upton-cum-Chalvey includes St Mary's, St Laurence's and St Peter's churches.

Revd Scott Lamb (Team Rector)	01753 529988
Revd Alistair Stewart (Team Vicar)	01753 520725
Revd Linda Hillier (Associate Minister)	0208 8645728
Parish Churchwarden: Andrea Sparrow	07446 187762
Parish Churchwarden: Lynda Bussley	01753 573614
District Churchwarden (SM): Jean Smith	01753 862357
District Churchwarden (SM): Derek White-Taylor	Ex-dir
District Churchwarden (SL): Allan James	01753 532425
District Churchwarden (SL):	
District Churchwarden (SP): Peter Clarke	07388 832233
District Churchwarden (SP): Frank Gerrish	07970 537572
Verger (SL): Allan James	01753 532425
Organist (SM): Malcolm Stowell	01628 660651

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Revd Alistair Stewart Tuesday

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<https://www.stpetersslough.org.uk>

The Rector Writes:

Dear Friends,

It is mid-November, so all the supermarket Christmas adverts have been released. In recent years there has been quite a competition to design the most heart-warming, tear-jerking, one minute drama and this year's offerings follow the familiar themes of family reunions and joyful surprises. However, for Christmas 2022 there are some changes. The shops still want us to give them our money of course, but their media content has been toned down to mirror the harder times. According to some analysts in the advertising industry, brand campaigns will need to reflect the upcoming frugal festive period if they don't want to seem grossly insensitive.

So, looking at the videos, Waitrose highlights the hard work of farmers in all weathers. John Lewis focusses on children in the care system and Tesco emphasises help available during the cost-of-living crisis. And while all the food still looks delicious across the board, the festive tables aren't groaning quite so heavily this time.

This year Christmas will be different for many people. In the midst of increasing prices and the promise of tax rises to come, difficult choices will have to be made. For some of us this may mean a few less treats or finding less expensive gifts. For some other people the choice between heating and eating will become more acute or the season will come with the worry of having disappointed children. In some ways a simpler Christmas may not be a bad thing, if it allows us to focus on what really matters: people rather than presents, and the Christmas story itself. However, that simply does not apply where hardship is concerned.

There is also one austerity trend which as Christians we must never adopt however prevalent it might be: reducing the scope of our charity. In a time of austerity, it is very natural to focus on ourselves and ours and then only to think of others once we feel that we are alright, but week by week in church we learn that really our priorities should be the other way round. Maintaining our generosity in heart and in action in difficult times witnesses to the God who so generously gives himself to us. There may be hard choices ahead, but Jesus's friends are called to be brave and to set an example.

Father Scott



CHRISTMAS SERVICES & EVENTS

Regular services at the three churches are listed on the back page

November

Sun 27th 6.00pm Parish Advent Carol Service (SP)

December

Sat 3rd 12noon Christmas Sparkle Concert (SM)

Sun 4th 11.00am St Laurence's Dedication Festival & Gift Day, followed by Christmas Lunch (call 01753 532425 to book by 30th November) (SL)

Tue 6th 12.30pm "Mulling It Over" group Christmas Lunch (SL)

Sun 11th 4.00pm Town Carol Service (with donkey) (SM)

Sun 18th 4.00pm Parish Lessons and Carols (SL)

Sat 24th 4.00pm Parish Crib Service (SL)
11.30pm Midnight Mass (SM, SP)

Sun 25th 9.30am Family Eucharist with Carols (SM)
10.00am Christmas Day All Age Celebration (SL)
11.00am Family Eucharist with Carols (SP)

January

Sun 8th 6.30pm Parish Epiphany Carol Service (SM)

St Mary's News

After a few stressful and nail biting days, the audio-visual installation by Lynda Laird finally happened. The exhibition was accompanied by a candle-lit performance of "An imperfect account of a comet". The church looked amazing and the sounds were equally magnificent. The church and performance had been widely advertised as being only 18 minutes by train from Paddington and it was good to see many of the audience had taken advantage of this and hopefully will come back to see us in daylight!

This last week saw the church full of music again when Slough Music Service visited for a singing workshop for local schools. The children all had a great day and hopefully will be back when they hold a Carol Concert on Tuesday 6th December.

For the first time since the Covid lockdown, Slough Borough Council held their Civic Remembrance Day Service in church following the two-minute silence in the town centre.

We are still missing several of our congregation following the interruption by Covid but it has been encouraging to welcome new faces who are becoming regular visitors.

We are looking forward to the Christmas Sparkle Concert on Saturday 3rd December with Malcolm Stowell and Sunday 11th December sees the welcome return of the Donkey for the Town Carol Concert.

Jean

"Yvonne's Art Classes"

These free art classes are held in St Mary's, every Thursday from 12.30pm to 3.30pm and are open to all.

St Laurence's News

Our Dedication Festival and Gift Day, followed by Christmas Lunch, will be on Sunday 4th December. The money donated will be used for general funds, as in previous years.

St Mary's School Nursery children will visit the church in two groups on 12th and 13th to sing Christmas songs. It is always a pleasure to have them with us.

The Parish Lessons and Carols Service will be held at St Laurence's at 4.00pm on Sunday 18th December and the Crib Service on Saturday 24th, also at 4.00pm. Our Christmas Day service will be an All Age Celebration at 10.00am. Collections at these Christmas services will again go to the homeless charity 'Crisis at Christmas' to sponsor four Christmas lunches.

If you want to send a card to the "St Laurence Family" instead of writing individual cards, please give it to Julie, who will place it on the tree. A table will be put out for individual cards if you prefer to send them.

If you have a collecting box for a charity or the church, please return it to Allan with your name on, so we can tot up before the end of the year.

Our Herschel 200 celebrations proved highly successful in attracting many new people into the church and in raising money. Perhaps some of the visitors will return.

Dave

"Santa's Special" – Congratulations on a job well done!

Many thanks to all those who helped, especially other Parish folk who got roped in, grandchildren and friends, to make **Santa's Special** a joyful and prosperous occasion with £1,534 gross (£1,482 nett) takings.

Also, Thanks to all who helped – all the makers, choppers, wrappers and sellers in our **FUNdraising** throughout the year. New recruits always welcome, all you need is a sharp knife or scissors and an hour or two free when the making seasons beckon.

St Peter's News

As we look forward to Advent and Christmas it is a good time to look back on our fund raising efforts, the results of which, however small, do enable us to pay the bills, including the parish share.

We have had three 'in-house' events, at Easter, summer fete and now Martinmas Fair All were very successful, with takings exceeding those in recent pre-Covid days. The preparations for these are as much social and community gatherings as are the events themselves, and as such are a valuable part of church life.

In addition a very depleted but enthusiastic team has been out and about with stalls throughout the year. Eton Community Fair was postponed due to the late Queen's death (it will now be held in March 2023) and Canal Day could not be organised by Slough Borough Council due to financial restraints. Nevertheless the team has attended several other fairs around the area to advertise St Peter's

Other heartfelt thanks to all who have given time and energy to these enterprises.

Margaret

All in the month of DECEMBER

It was:

200 years ago, on 27th December 1822 that Louis Pasteur, French biologist, microbiologist, and chemist was born. One of the fathers of germ theory, he was best known for the pasteurisation process, which is named in his honour.

100 years ago, on 8th December 1922 that Lucian Freud, German-born British figurative artist and draughtsman was born. One of the leading portrait artists of the 20th century.

Also 100 years ago, on 14th December 1922 that John Reith (later Lord Reith) was appointed as General Manager of the BBC.

Also 100 years ago, on 30th December 1922 that the Soviet Union was founded. Officially known as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), it was dissolved in 1991.

90 years ago, on 25th December 1932 that the first Royal Christmas Message was broadcast on radio. King George V addressed the nation live from Sandringham.

80 years ago, on 1st December 1942 that the British Government published the Beveridge Report, which formed the basis of the welfare state.

Reflecting faith - To the Glory of God

Everything about the church building is intended to tell us something about God.

But it doesn't end there. We put into the building things that are important to us and again reflect not just our specific denomination but our ways of worship.

Imagine visiting someone in their home whom you are just getting to know and have a look around at the decorations, photos, wall hangings, books, music etc. What are their hobbies? How do they enjoy spending their time? Who is important to them? Well our church interiors are like that.

In most church buildings each week there will be a display of flowers. Venues vary from being large and elaborate to simple and homely and so do such arrangements. Of course, much depends upon finance and the availability of flowers as well as the interest and skills of the arranger.

Flower arrangements 'should' be in keeping with the church season or the occasion that is being celebrated. During Advent (Latin meaning 'coming') while we anticipate the birth of Christ at the Feast of Christmas most places of worship show restraint in their arrangements and often decline to use any coloured flowers using only evergreen leaves.

Then nearer to Christmas itself everything changes and either flowers are added to the original evergreens or they start completely new. Colours change to red for love and Christ's death and passion, white and gold for importance, royalty and celebration: with green alongside for the hope of new birth and spring.

Revd Dr Jo White

NEXT MONTH'S MAGAZINE

Please let me have articles for the January 2023 issue by **Sunday 4th December** at the latest!

Dave



Mary's Christmas

As Jesus' mother, Mary plays a crucial part in the Christmas story. It begins with Gabriel's visit to her: *'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.'* (Luke 1:30, 31). This conversation takes us straight to the heart of what Christmas is all about. God was doing something unique that had never happened before! *'God was beginning, at this divine and human point, the New Creation of all things. The whole soiled and weary universe quivered at this direct injection of essential life.'* (CS Lewis).

This child unites heaven and earth: the eternal God entered time and space and became a baby, both a real human being and fully divine. It reminds me of the sci-fi film *Fantastic Voyage* (1966) in which a team of surgeons are shrunk to the size of blood cells and injected into the veins of a patient to perform lifesaving surgery. The Christmas message affirms that God has entered the bloodstream of humanity to put things right with Him on the inside. We can know Him personally and make sense of His world.

God chose an unknown, frightened teenage girl to bring about this new beginning for the world. Her response is the pattern for us, as we welcome God's special gift into our lives this Christmas: *"I am the Lord's servant" Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled."* (Luke 1:38).

Mary gave an unqualified *Yes* to all that God wanted to do in her life. It was a costly decision, which risked both shame and scandal. Yet she was ready to obey God and trust His plans for her life, despite her many questions. Is the same true for us this Christmas?

The man who married Mary

The traditional Nativity scene on our Christmas cards has Mary with the Holy Babe. Around her are the shepherds and Magi. We may also see stable animals, angels and a star! While Joseph is often included, his presence seems to be of minor importance.

After all, we praise God for Jesus with our familiar Christmas carols, mentioning angels, shepherds, Wise Men and Mary but the name of Joseph is absent! Why is Joseph given a low profile? For he is a man to be remembered.

Joseph was a resident of Nazareth. He worked as a carpenter and his skills would have included making furniture, repairing buildings and crafting agricultural tools. Although Joseph had an honourable profession, he would not have been a man of great wealth.

The gospel writers Matthew and Luke give Joseph a few brief mentions. After the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary go to the temple in Jerusalem to dedicate the Baby to God. Afterwards, they flee into Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod and much later return to Nazareth. 12 years later, Mary and Joseph go with Jesus to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. Here they lose Jesus, only to find Him in the Temple talking with religious leaders!

Apart from these verses, the New Testament is silent about the rest of Joseph's life. However, we do know that Joseph was father to other children by Mary. His four sons are named, and they had at least two daughters. (See Matthew 13:55)

And we also know that Joseph was someone who quietly and humbly took on the awesome role in caring for the early life of the Son of God. Joseph would have taught Jesus many things – not just the skills of a labourer, but the lore of the countryside which was evident in our Lord's teaching. Jesus grew up within a loving family and described God as 'Father', knowing also the good fatherly qualities of Joseph.

In the Christmas story, Joseph is placed into a situation that brought him misunderstanding and suspicion. But Joseph remained faithful in the knowledge that as long as God had spoken, the opinion of others mattered little. Before Jesus began His ministry, it is believed that Joseph died. It is likely Jesus took on many of His father's responsibilities before He left home.

In the eyes of the world, Joseph was a nobody. He was not a man of valour, fame and fortune. But he was the one who had parental responsibility for the greatest person who has ever lived!

It is sad that we often equate ordinariness with ineffectiveness. Down the ages, God has used many ordinary people to accomplish great things. God continues to use ordinary people. Like Joseph, we need to know that doing God's will is the most important thing in life. May we, this Christmas, respond to God's call to us and please Him in all that we do.

Christmas and St Luke's Gospel

It is to St Luke's wonderful gospel that many Christians turn as the year draws to a close and Christmas approaches, for it is to St Luke that we owe the fullest account of the nativity.

Luke alone tells us the story of Mary and the angel's visit to her, and has thus given the Church the wonderful Magnificat of Mary.

Luke alone tells us the story of Simeon's hymn of praise, thus giving us the wonderful Nunc Dimmittis. Imagine an Anglican evensong without the Nunc Dimmittis.

Luke alone tells us the story of how the angels appeared to the shepherds and how the shepherds then visited the infant Jesus. So – imagine Christmas cards and nativity scenes every year without the shepherds arriving to visit baby Jesus. Imagine school nativity plays without our children dressed as shepherds or sheep. So – thank you, Luke!

What makes it so amazing is that Luke was not a Jew! The man who wrote the fullest nativity story, and indeed more of the New Testament than any other single person, was a Gentile!

Christmas Day Apples

In Ripon Cathedral on Christmas Day the congregation not only sings carols and says prayers but also receives Christmas Day Apples! Yes, the choristers give them out at the door. This custom originated back in medieval times. Apples were believed to be the symbol of life. There is a hymn that is sung, "Jesus Christ the Apple Tree" which includes "This fruit does make my soul to thrive, it keeps my dying faith alive, which makes my soul in haste to be, with Jesus Christ my soul to be".

Alice Sanders



The 'wonder' of the shepherds in the fields of Bethlehem

Shepherds in first century Palestine would have been attuned to the wonders and ravages of nature: star-lit nights, cold and heat, storm and calm, and the unwelcome attention of predators, both animal and human. They would have been more aware than we of human dependency on the seasons, and more respectful than us of the precarious nature of existence. Fear, as well as appreciation, would have shaped their religious sensitivities.

Some think the shepherds near Bethlehem may have been guarding sheep for the Jerusalem Temple, which used them as part of the sacrificial ritual of Judaism in those days. Yet the kind of work shepherds did and the hours they had to keep barred them from orthodox religious observance; they were regarded as uncouth and untrustworthy and were not allowed to give testimony in law courts.

It was typical of St Luke (the only New Testament writer to refer to the shepherds) to put them in the forefront of his narrative. Luke is the writer who favours the underdog: tax collectors, sinners, women, old and poor people and non-Jews all figure favourably in his account. Deliberately he sets before us shepherds as the first Christmas worshippers. They already knew how to *wonder*.

William of St Thierry wrote: "A man who has lost his sense of wonder is a man dead." The 19th Century scientist Michael Faraday wrote: "Let us consider... how wonderfully we stand upon this world. Here it is that we are born, bred and live, and yet we view these things with an almost entire absence of wonder..." This is no plea for anti-intellectual faith, but rather for the discovery of an extra dimension. Wonder is the prime ingredient of worship, and we need to recover it and use it. It takes practice.

William Blake encouraged us to look into the ordinary and see the extraordinary:

"To see a World in a Grain of Sand,
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower:
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
And eternity in an hour..."

The late Michael Mayne, Dean of Westminster wrote, “A sense of the sublime leads to a sense of awe, which is I suppose that combination of wonder and fearfulness you may feel in the presence of what takes your breath away. It is not afraid in the sense of feeling scared, but rather an awe-struck sense of amazement that the ordinary is rather more extraordinary than the extraordinary... it is not the rabbit out of the hat but the rabbit out of the rabbit that is so surprising...”

So, in the astonishing story of heaven-come-to-earth in Bethlehem, of divinity in a cowshed, it is *shepherds* who receive the revelation. Not priests, not presidents, not philosophers. “An angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.” For all they knew it might have been bad news. “But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord’.”

The response of the shepherds was to go and see. Not to question or even to reason. The main constituent of their belief was already *wonder*. They were accustomed to marvelling, for they were surrounded by a world of marvels. So, they went to look. And as they looked, they marvelled. Later, they were to return “glorifying and praising God for all they had seen and heard.”

Ven John Barton



"The vicar's still miffed that one of the parents got £250 from You've Been Framed for their video of last year's nativity play."



The Return of Jesus

‘For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people... while we wait for the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ’ (Titus 2:11,13-14).

Advent is the time when we focus on the first and second coming of Jesus. He first came as a baby in Bethlehem as our Saviour, *‘to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own.’* (14), through His cross and resurrection. Now we wait for His return to judge the world and finally put an end to sin and death.

We can understand the relationship of these two events by considering D Day and VE Day in World War 2. D Day marked the allied invasion at the beaches of Normandy on 6th June 1944. It was not the end of the war, but it was a decisive turning point in which victory was assured, although not finally achieved until VE Day on 8th May 1945.

For us, Jesus’ death and resurrection marks our D Day, when He secured victory over sin and death. However, only when He returns, will Jesus finally end sin and death and all who have put their trust in Him can share the great victory celebration in heaven.

In Advent we reflect on what it means to live in the time between these key events. Paul says, we need to *‘to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age’* (12). More troops died in the period between D Day and VE Day than during the rest of the war. Although we live under Christ’s victory, we will still struggle with sin and suffering.

Canon Paul Hardingham

Youthscape charity to work with parishes on reaching young people

The Church of England is to work with a youth charity to equip parishes to reach more young people with the Christian message.

A £1.29 million grant from the Archbishops' Council will fund work led by Youthscape to help parishes connect with young people and recruit and train church volunteers for youth work.

The Launchpad scheme, run by Youthscape, has already been successfully piloted in the Dioceses of Blackburn, London and St Albans. So far, the scheme has helped 140 Church of England priests to formulate plans to work with young people in their parishes.

Under the new funding arrangements, the scheme will be expanded to 450 churches across 18 dioceses over the next three years with the potential to engage with up to 4,000 young people.

The grant will also fund training produced by Youthscape for up to 2,500 church volunteers to do youth work and resources to support youth work in up to 2,000 churches or groups.



"Does anyone have a light, please?"

New £15 million fund to help churches with energy bills

The Church of England is to provide £15 million for dioceses to help churches struggling to pay their energy costs.

The Energy Costs Grant will be distributed to dioceses to enable them to help Parochial Church Councils (PCCs) cover the increased cost of heating and lighting church buildings this winter.

Dioceses will also be able to use some of their fund allocation to make additional targeted hardship payments for clergy and other employed ministers to cover household bills, in particular energy costs.

The new funding comes after £3 million was made available earlier this year by the Church of England for dioceses to distribute to clergy and lay ministers who are facing a particular hardship because of the cost-of-living crisis.

The Energy Costs Grant is accompanied by information aimed at helping churches to become more energy efficient and reduce their carbon footprint.

John Spence, Chair of the Archbishops' Council Finance Committee, said: "The Government has announced welcome support for non-domestic energy users including voluntary sector organisations such as PCCs.

"But, in spite of this, our churches still face the challenge of significant rises in their energy bills over this winter, and that is why we are announcing the Energy Costs Grant which will be in addition to Government support. We will keep the situation under close review throughout the winter."

The Holy Family

A Sunday school teacher asked her class, "What was Jesus' mother's name?"

One child answered, "Mary."

The teacher then asked, "Who knows what Jesus' father's name was?"

Another child ventured: "Verge?"

Confused, the teacher asked, "Where did you get that?"

He replied hesitantly: "Well, you know they are always talking about Verge n' Mary."

Church leaders in Ukraine continue to protest against Russia

The leaders of Churches in Ukraine have urged Christian leaders in the West to help to try and persuade Russia to comply with humanitarian standards of behaviour, and to stop indiscriminately attacking civilians and torturing prisoners and deportees.

The All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organisations has said “the Russian Federation has significantly stepped-up acts of terror and genocide, using a wide arsenal of missile armaments.” They go on: “Russian officials do not hide their criminal desire to destroy the vital infrastructure of Ukrainian cities on the eve of cold winter in order to destabilise the socio-political situation, to sow fear and panic...”

The Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I has told a Roman Catholic news agency that he has made “heated and fraternal appeal” to Russia’s Patriarch Kirill to distance himself from Moscow’s aggression and “unjustified bloodshed”.

However, preaching recently in Nizhny Novgorod, Patriarch Kirill assured Russian troops that they would be protected by the Virgin Mary and St Seraphim of Sarov (1754-1833) in vanquishing “forces of evil” and those who had “taken up arms against Holy Russia.”

The Primate of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk and the head of Ukraine’s independent Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Epiphany (Dumenko) have also voiced their opposition to the Russian Orthodox Church’s position

Russia’s suspension of Black Sea grain deal a “body blow” to world’s poorest, Christian Aid says

International development agency Christian Aid has urged all parties to the Black Sea grain deal, which would allow the export of Ukrainian agricultural products to world markets, to persuade Russia to end its unilateral suspension.

Elizabeth Hallinan, Christian Aid’s Global Crisis Contexts Lead, said:

“Any interruption to grain exports is a body blow to countries already reeling from spiralling energy and food prices. Russia’s unilateral suspension will only push more people to starvation. It is critical that all parties keep talking to find a way for grain to reach countries desperate to feed their people.”

The Incarnation: fearfully and wonderfully made

My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. Psalm 139:15-16

You began life as a single cell. For a few hours you were a miniscule but highly complex blob of jelly, until it began to divide: two cells, four, eight, sixteen, a ball, a hollow ball, and then something more recognisably like a living organism. You were still tiny, but developing a nervous system, a head, a body, arms and legs.

Until recently I hadn’t thought much about Jesus being an embryo. Somehow, I find that thought even more shocking than His birth. How could God, who made the universe, have become something so completely and utterly vulnerable? Maybe in the past, when the development of a child happened in ‘secret’, it was possible just to let that part of the Christmas story go untold.

Today, when we see images of a developing child, or even embryos outside the womb, it is harder to ignore the process of Jesus developing into a baby. The incarnation meant that God’s Son went through all the stages in the diagram in my developmental biology textbook: ‘zygote’, ‘morula’, ‘blastocyst’, implantation, and so on.

Jesus was there in the beginning, and all life owes its existence to Him. But instead of remaining aloof, He chose to become one of us. The Son of God shared the same kind of DNA as every other organism on the planet. He knows what it feels like to have a body, to feel hungry and thirsty, pain and pleasure, dark and light.

In Psalm 139, the writer is meditating on God’s intimate knowledge of him, which began when he was an embryo. There is nothing God doesn’t know about him, and even darkness cannot obscure him from God’s sight. The incarnation means that God’s intimacy with us now extends even further. He became one of us, lived alongside us, and shared our very fragile material nature.

The transcendent God is also immanent, longing for us to relate to Him as Father. He became as fragile as we are so He could rescue us from the messes we so often find ourselves in. With His help, we can remember what it means to be fearfully and wonderfully made.

Dr Ruth M. Bancewicz

Reproduced by permission from Merry Christmas Everyone: A festive feast of stories, poems and reflection, Edited by Wendy H. Jones, Amy Robinson & Jane Clamp (Association of Christian Writers, 2018)

The mysterious ways of mistletoe

Mistletoe has long been used as part of our Christmas decorations. It is not your usual kind of plant.

Instead, it is *hemiparasitic*, meaning that although its leaves enable it to feed itself through photosynthesis, its roots invade the host tree or shrub to extract water and other nutrients.

Mistletoe loves living in apple, lime, hawthorn, poplar or oak trees. You may spot it high up, as a large globe, on the bare trees in winter. There is one spectacular example in Windsor Great Park, clearly visible from the path on the opposite side of the Thames.

Mistletoe's berries are almost translucent, fleshy and sticky. They form in the forks of mistletoe's many branches. While they are toxic to humans, they are attractive to birds, who wipe the remaining seeds off their beaks onto the nearest branch, which of course helps the plant to spread.

For some reason, Romans thought mistletoe represented Peace, Love and Understanding. Perhaps that is how it got into our Christmas celebrations? The earliest documentary evidence for kissing under mistletoe dates from the 16th century, but we don't know who got kissed first.

Good home

After the christening of his baby brother in church, young Jason sobbed all the way home in the back seat of the car. His father asked him three times what was wrong. Finally, the boy replied, "That minister said he wanted us to be brought up in a good Christian home, but I want to stay with you guys."

Visiting Father Christmas

A mother took her young daughter to visit Father Christmas in his grotto at the garden centre. He greeted the youngster merrily and asked: "And what would you like for Christmas?"

The little girl stared at him, open-mouthed with horror. "*Didn't you get my email?!*"



On giving the after-dinner speech

The Rectory
St James the Least

My dear Nephew Darren

I have been slightly surprised that in your ministry so far, you have never been asked to give an after-dinner speech. Now you have delivered your first one, I can understand why. Speeches after any dinner come at the point where stomachs are dealing with a little too much food and brains with about the same quantity of wine. They should be short and witty; yours was neither.

An hour-long speech on the Herodians and Second Temple Judaism at the time of the birth of Christ was not quite what we had expected. I applauded your enthusiasm, but I was the only one; the rest of them were asleep. Long after you had left, the catering staff gently vacuumed the carpets around the audience, and it was only when the night security guard arrived that the last diners were woken and politely sent home. I suspect you will have put many marriages under strain as husbands, returning home in the early hours of the morning, had to explain to wives why they were so late. Their truthful answers would have been unbelievable.

When the head waiter appeared in a dressing gown and started placing chairs on tables, even you must have suspected that hints were being dropped and I have never heard of a hotel manager interrupting a speech to place his keys on the top table and asking if the last person to leave would kindly lock the main door.

I know that your clerical attire is more usually T-shirt and jeans, but borrowing the curate's dinner suit from your next-door parish was also not a good idea. He is a foot taller and several stones heavier than you. The result was quite worrying – several people wondered if you had just recovered from some dreadful disease

that had made you shrink.

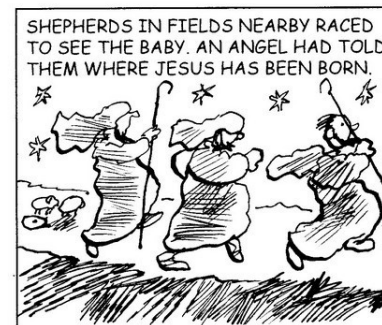
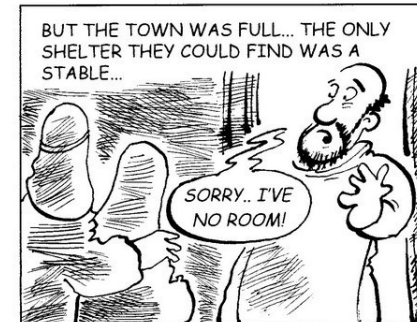
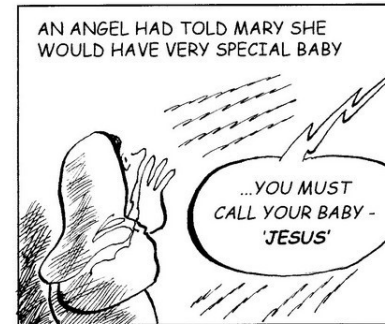
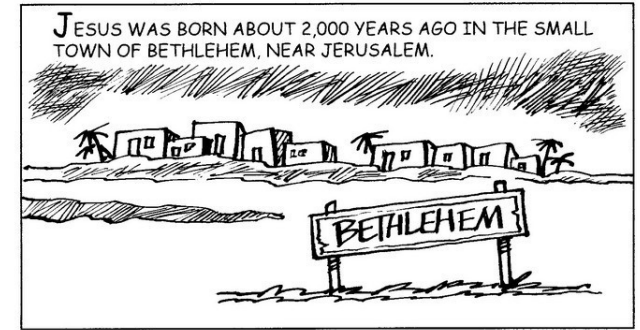
In the light of your qualified success, thank you for offering to come to repeat your speech after our annual Christmas dinner, but no thank you. The verger's son wants to share with us how many potholes he has counted in and around the town, and that should be most interesting.

Your loving uncle,

Eustace



Rodney didn't know how she'd got in, but she seemed keen to audition for the nativity play...



CHILDREN'S PAGE

Mouse Makes
HAPPY CHRISTMAS!
Read the Christmas story in Luke 2:1-21.
Answer the questions, colour the picture and colour one star each day until Christmas.

Where was Mary's baby born? Why were Joseph and Mary there?
Where did Mary lay her baby and why?
What did Mary dress her baby in?
Why were the shepherds afraid?
What good news did the angel tell?

Who appeared praising God, what did they say?

What did the shepherds do after they had seen the baby?

Word search grid:
 G L J O Y
 M R C
 S A Y G P
 O N V O J
 G B A B Y N G O O D A B L F
 V O S H E P H E R D S A V I O U R
 D A Y T M A R Y N E N F R R O
 S C H R I S T E P G L T D
 A L A I D R W H E O H
 E P R A I S E L C
 H E I V A L L S K
 E E A N I G H T O L D
 S M C N D E C R E E B
 E A E I S I G N
 E T D E

ALL • DECREE • JOSEPH • DAVID • BETHLEHEM • MARY • BIRTH • SON • LAID • MANGER
 INN • SHEPHERDS • FLOCK • NIGHT • LORD • GLORY • GOOD NEWS • JOY • DAY
 SAVIOUR • CHRIST • SIGN • BABY • GOD • PEACE • ANGELS • GO • SEE • TOLD • PRAISE

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Bible Bite

A short story from the Bible

It can be read in the Bible in Luke ch.1 verses 1-25 & 57-80

The Romans had invaded Israel and still ruled it. Zechariah and Elizabeth were an old childless couple living in the hill country.

It was Zechariah's turn for temple duty in Jerusalem.

He was given a once-in-a-lifetime chance to burn incense in the holiest place in the temple

As it burnt he prayed
Lord God, please rescue us, your people.

Then he saw the angel standing next to him
God has heard your prayer, and you will have a son.

At our age that's not going to happen
To show you that God means what He says..

you will be unable to speak until your son, John*, is born
*In Hebrew, 'John' is 'Yochanan' or 'God is gracious'

When Zechariah came out of the holy place...
What happened?

He went home and soon Elizabeth had good news
I'm pregnant!

Elizabeth's cousin Mary visited her...
but left before...

Elizabeth's baby was born.
He is called John
But that's not his father's name

Zechariah wrote...
His name is John
and could speak again.

He praised God for what He had done...
and what He was going to do...

Church officials

Six-year-old Angie and her four-year-old brother Joel were sitting together in church. Joel giggled, sang, and talked out loud. Finally, his big sister had had enough. "You're not supposed to talk out loud in church."

"Why? Who's going to stop me?" Joel demanded.

Angie pointed to the back of the church and said, "See those two big men standing by the door and glaring at you? They're hushers."

Santa

I am terrified of the Santa at the shopping centre where I work. Our HR lady talked it over with me, and has discovered I am Claustrophobic.

Disclaimer

Inclusion of an advertisement in this magazine does not constitute an endorsement of the advertiser.

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SERVICES IN THE PARISH

St Mary's Church, Church Street, Slough, SL1 1PJ

Sunday: 9.30am Family Eucharist with children's groups.
6.00pm Evensong/Evening Prayer (BCP)
Tuesday: 10.00am Eucharist
Wednesday: 12.30pm Eucharist

St Laurence's Church, Upton Court Road, Upton, Slough, SL3 7LU

Sunday: 11.00am Family Eucharist with children's group.
Thursday: 10.00am Holy Communion

St Peter's Church, Church Street, Chalvey, Slough, SL1 2NL

Sunday: 9.30am Family Eucharist with children's groups.
Wednesday: 9.30am Holy Communion

Websites:

<https://stmarys-slough.org.uk>

<https://www.saint-laurence.com>

<https://www.stpetersslough.org.uk>