



December  
2020

St Michael's, Oulton.



## ‘Jesus is the Reason’

December 2020

In general, I’m of the opinion that Christmas begins far too early. I recently took the dog for a walk around the streets near to my parents’ home and noticed, on one estate, that there were already about ten houses festooned with Christmas lights and trees in the windows – and this was mid-November! Having said that, given all that we’ve coped with in 2020, I can understand why some are very keen to brighten the mood much earlier than usual this year.



The Rev. Helen Jary

I love Christmas, and all that comes with it, but I do feel that its very easy to allow it to eclipse another important Season, which is Advent. Advent is increasingly getting lost and we might be missing out as a result. Christmas, according to the Church Calendar, does not begin until December 24th and, until then, it’s Advent and it’s an important time.

Advent Calendars were always so exciting in my childhood because they were a way of counting down to Christmas ...and they got even better when the trend was that, behind each door, there was not only a cute Christmas picture but also a piece of chocolate! But is that all that Advent is? – a countdown to Christmas?

In Latin, the word ‘Adventus’ means “coming” or “arrival”. In the Roman Empire an adventus referred to the arrival of a person of dignity and great power, such as a king, emperor, or even one of the Roman gods. And, as you can imagine, such an important visit would require lengthy preparation.

Similarly, in the Church calendar, Advent is a time when we prepare for the coming of a King. And, not just any King, but the "...ruler of the Kings of the earth." (Revelation 1:5). During Advent, we have an opportunity to pause, and to prepare our hearts and lives to welcome the King of Kings:

...We prepare ourselves to celebrate, with worship and wonder, the first coming of Jesus. ...We seek to recognise the ways that Jesus comes to us in our daily lives.  
...We remind ourselves that Jesus will come again. (See Matthew chapter 24)



Advent is a season of waiting; a time when we are waiting upon God. We live in an increasingly 'instant' society and are less and less attuned to waiting. However, it seems to me that God is not in the same rush that we are sometimes in; Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him (Psalm 37:7). Unless we settle ourselves to moments of stillness and waiting before God we may, I believe, miss out on some of what he longs to give us.

This form of 'Advent waiting' can help us to avoid merely celebrating 'Xmas'. I think of Xmas as a winter festival of over-consumption, which promises much but delivers little. Xmas is what is left over when Christ is removed. Xmas can be a lot of fun and is great while it lasts, but it can also, if we are honest, leave us feeling disappointed and a bit empty. 'Christmas' is very different to 'Xmas' and our approach to Advent can help us (re) discover the wonder of the former.

With every blessing for Advent and Christmas,

Helen

## The ordinary tea towel by Lis Hayden.

You may think that a tea towel is ordinary but in these lockdown days, God inspires us and challenges us to think in different ways.

Dating back to the 18th century, this linen or cotton soft cloth was originally used at tea ceremonies and to dry expensive fine china. Today it is found in homes across the world. You may have a dishwasher, but I suspect you still have a tea towel somewhere.

Perhaps you have a traditional checked pattern, or personalised ones; you may have a tea towel which was a present for you from friends thinking of you whilst on holiday in Llangollen. Maybe you have cute penguins, or a picture of Edinburgh castle which you visited in August 2002 when you went to the Tattoo.



Does a tea towel bring back memories for you? Perhaps a self-catering holiday in a caravan, or memories of different kitchens you've had over the years. Maybe you can picture yourself standing near the draining board, drying up looking at those hanging baskets still in full bloom in September. Perhaps a tea towel makes you recall a rather crowded kitchen having had a 'family do.' There's lots of laughter, reminisces, a sausage roll to keep you going, and nibbles left on the worktop.

Today we are encouraged to use a tea towel as eco-friendly wrapping paper. Perhaps you remember using a tea towel to wrap up freshly baked goods or covering a cake to keep the flies off.

It is in the Nativity scene that I recall the use of many tea towels for Joseph, the Innkeeper and the crowd of shepherds. Whilst working in a Special School, we bought up woolly sheep from charity shops all year round and had a pile of tea towels and plaited wool in readiness for the Nativity performance. Everyone in the school would be included. Not everyone wanted a speaking part but as the day dawned, there was mounting excitement. After an early lunch, one pupil picked up a tea towel quite solemnly and laid it on his head. I helped to put on the band and he stood on the stage with a

woolly sheep tucked under his arm. As we sang and signed ‘Away in a manger’, the boy beamed with delight standing next to the crib. As we shuffled more pupils in for the finale, he said quite audibly” This is great being a shepherd. I’m in Bethlehem”.

The ordinary had been transformed into the extraordinary.

As you use a tea towel this Christmas, may you feel the ordinary transform your life.

‘From heaven you came, helpless, babe,  
Entered our world, Your glory veiled,  
not to be served, but to serve,  
and give Your life that we might live. ‘

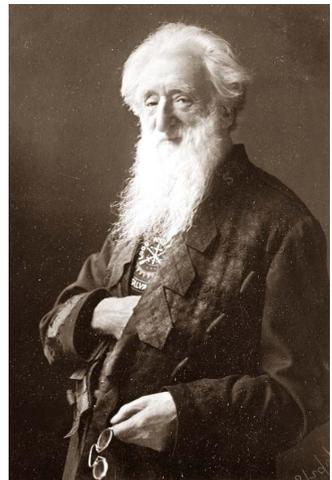
From the hymn *The Servant King*’.

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## Famous Christians

### William Booth (1829—1912)

William was apprenticed to a pawnbroker at the age of 13. It was at this time he became a Methodist. In 1844 he had a conversion experience and two years later became a revivalist preacher. In 1855 he marries Catherine Mumford. He then left the Methodist church who were unhappy with his style of evangelisation, he founded his own revivalist movement in the East End of London, combining evangelism with social service; later, in 1878, this was called the Salvation Army. As the movement spread General Booth spent more and more time travelling and organising. In his book *In Darkest England*, and in *The Way Out*, he outlined remedies for the social ills of his time.



*Quote by General Booth:*

Most Christians would like to send their recruits to Bible college for five years. I would like to send them to hell for five minutes. That would do more than anything else to prepare them for a lifetime of compassionate ministry.

## **A Message from the Churchwarden.**

Wishing you all the best possible Christmas and happiest new year. This strange time has certainly impacted on us, keeping friends and families apart . I can't help wondering if the new normal will be anything like the old one and indeed if it even should be. What will it mean for us here at St. Michael's?

This week we will be interviewing for the Team Vicar post, please pray on Wednesday that we will be able to make the right decision.

I know I feel apprehensive for the future but I also know that all I can do is place everything into God's hands and trust in His plan for us.

Your Churchwarden

Debbie Allsop.

Note: From Thursday the artificial Christmas flower arrangement items and fresh holly will be available for anyone willing to contribute arrangements for Christmas in Church and could be collected on Thursday 3rd in the morning after 10 am or during the regular prayer times.

### **Planned Christmas Services for St. Michael's during December.**

**Sunday 6th December**—Morning Service 10:45am

**Sunday 20th December**—Carol Service . 10:45 am.

**Christmas Eve**— Thursday 24th December at 6:00pm 'Christingle Service. (**On-line Benefice Christingle Service via Zoom. 5:30pm**).

**Midnight Holy Communion**—Christmas Eve. 11:30pm.

**Christmas Day**—Holy Communion—10:45am.

(Please note that the above services will take place if sanctioned by the Government following relaxation of the current 'lock-down rules).

## Going to church in the coronavirus pandemic

More than 17,000 online services and events have been provided by Church of England churches since the introduction of the lockdown and restrictions on public worship earlier this year.

Figures from the Church of England's A Church Near You website, which allows people to search for church services and events, show that more than 17,000 online services or events are now listed, including Sunday Communion services, Bible studies and morning or night prayer. Many of these services take place regularly and this figure represents a snapshot of the likely total number.

The statistics do not include the Church of England's national online weekly services broadcast on Sundays and shared on Facebook and YouTube. There have been nearly three million views of the national online services and posts about the weekly broadcasts have been seen 23.6 million times. Contributors have included the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, the Duke of Cambridge and Pope Francis.

The national online services are being watched by a wide range of ages and around one in five people viewing go to church infrequently or not at all.

Other figures in the report show that official Church of England apps from Church House Publishing – the most popular being Daily Prayer, or the Daily Office of morning, evening and night prayer - have been used more than seven million times so far this year, up from five million in 2019. Church of England social media posts have been seen 86 million times so far, nearly double the total for last year.

The growth in online services has been helped by the Church of England stepping up its digital training programme for congregations. More than 4,200 vicars and local church leaders have taken part in remote digital training courses so far this year, four times the number as in 2019.

The Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell, said: "At a time when many have felt isolated and fearful, Church of England parishes and clergy have broadcast thousands of online church services and events, seeking to bring comfort and hope to their communities. We know that tens of thousands of those tuning in will never have had contact with their local Church of England parish before and may never have heard the Christian message. Their welcome presence is a sign of the great hunger we all have for spiritual meaning in our lives."

## The Rectory

### St James the Least of All



December 2020

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,



"Nice idea, Amelia, but I don't think that the Angel of the Lord Zooming with the shepherds would have the same dramatic effect."



*Martin received the latest Christmas coronavirus regulations from the diocesan office.*

*Editor: The Revd Peter Crumpler, a Church of England priest in St Albans, Herts, and a former communications director for the CofE, considers the work of funeral directors during the pandemic.*

## The unsung heroes who help us say goodbye

No one likes to talk about death. Especially during a pandemic that's impacting everyone on the planet. And yet for some people, death is their life's work. It's their vocation.

In fact, helping bereaved families and friends say a personal goodbye to their loved ones is what motivates them, day after day.

They are the funeral directors and the staffs of our local crematoria and cemeteries. Often forgotten or out of mind, the men and women who arrange and service funerals perform a vital role.

Vicars and other ministers of religion work closely with these key workers. We see the care they take to help families arrange the funerals they want for their loved ones. We see the strict health regulations they have had to follow during this pandemic and the increased pressures on them. We see the long hours and dedication.

Yet, after one funeral, an undertaker confided to me how useless he felt while NHS staff were at the frontline of fighting coronavirus. I replied that what he did was essential too, and massively important during these difficult days.

Another undertaker told me how he helped families cope with the restrictions on the numbers of mourners at funerals, currently set at 30. He had slowly driven his hearse past golf clubs, pubs and old people's homes where friends – unable to attend the services – had said their goodbyes.

In the funerals I have taken during the pandemic, I have been much impressed by the care and sensitivity shown by funeral directors and crematorium staff. Often, while they have been under much stress themselves.

I applaud the way that crematoria have made it easier for mourners who cannot attend funerals to view the services via the internet. This seems to have become common practice across the country. During the pandemic, this 'optional extra' has become a key part of the service.



The feedback I have had from mourners watching from just outside the chapel, or across the world, has been very positive.

Christian ministers work closely with the bereaved family and the funeral director to ensure each funeral is very personal to the deceased, and an occasion they will remember long after the day has passed.

We want to bring a message of hope at funerals. I like to say that love never dies, and that the love we have for someone goes on beyond the grave.

As the funeral section on the Church of England website states: *“When someone dies, although we can’t see the person we love anymore, Christians believe that through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we will see that person again. It might be in a very different form, in a very different way, but that is the Christian hope, and that is the message everyone will hear when they come to a Church of England funeral.”*

Meanwhile, it’s the care of undertakers and all those who arrange and conduct funerals that help us say our goodbyes.

## **Local News.**

In light of the current COVID-19 crisis many of the nations annual Remembrance Day events were largely scaled down in November. Sadly the restrictions meant that there was no Remembrance Day service at St. Michael’s this year but this did not prevent the Rev. Helen Jary marking the occasion in church and Robin Keightley reading out the names of those who made the ultimate sacrifice in both world wars and the Falklands Conflict. Robin said afterwards, “It was important that even in these difficult times we remembered those eighty-six men from our parish who gave their lives in the service of their country.’

## **Trees**

Following concern for several dead trees in the graveyard, plus a holly tree which was causing damage to the southern boundary wall, a local tree surgeon was called in to remove the trees. This was successfully carried out last month. It is planned to replant new flowering cherry trees before spring to replace those which sadly died to maintain our avenue of flowering trees.



## Jill Pirrie—A Life Well Lived

*Since the last edition of Pew News we have lost a stalwart of St. Michael's, the late lamented Jill Pirrie. Due to the current restrictions there were limited numbers able to be present at her funeral which took place on Monday 12th October and to give thanks to God for a life well lived and loved. The service was undertaken by the Rev's Helen Jary and Carol Pritchard. The Rev. Robin Pritchard gave a fitting eulogy which with his kind permission I now share with you.*

*Editor.*



Jill Pirrie M.B.E

I've been rereading some of Jill's poetry from her book of poetry, *Tide Turn*. I was privileged to work with Jill on this. I know some of you have a copy at home. It was not that she had not already written books, but I asked her one day if she had ever had any of her own poetry published.

'No,' was the answer.

'Why?'

She shrugged. There was Jill, self-effacing and modest. I could tell she was thinking, 'I don't think it is good enough.'

Jill came across as a pragmatist, matter of fact, an enabler of others. The Headmaster at Lowestoft Grammar School, when she was there as a pupil, in one of her reports says of her, 'Though naturally rather retiring, she volunteered for, and took, a major part in the production of Twelfth Night. On the hockey field she was a defender to be reckoned with. She had qualities of loyalty and reliability, as well as sound ability, which were her distinguishing features.'

And although many of us have experienced this side of Jill and her loving touch in our lives, it is good that some of her more passionate thoughts have been left with us in her poetry. Here are the opening lines of her poem *Burial Place*, quite fitting on this day when we lay her to rest.

## **Burial Place**

I want to be buried among brambles,  
canopied by leaves and thorns  
tacked down by suckers strong as guy ropes.  
There will be moles, soft shiftings of earth,  
nuzzling snouts, blind tunnellings  
gouged out by claws as fierce as dragon's fangs,  
and curt eruptions into light.

I'm not sure we can do the brambles for her in St. Michael's graveyard. It is too neat and tidy, but the poem reveals that she was under no illusions about what will happen after we bury her. The poem envisages the local children coming and playing around her grave, picking off the lichen. As a churchwarden she should have known that was not allowed.

I once called her a contended spinster. I was slightly afraid that she might take offence. However, it had quite the opposite response, as she took it to heart and reminded me on a number of occasions that I had called her such and was pleased with the title. There was nothing more that Jill liked than to get back to her house and settle there comfortable and warm in her little nest. I must say this was puzzling to me as the thought of going back to an empty house was not an attractive one. Yet it was true. Although she fulfilled so much out of the home, it was always where she wanted to get back to. After she graduated as a teacher in 1959, she soon wanted to get back to her parents and then later to her mum alone and finally and contently to be on her own.

By the way she gained a distinction in the Theory of Education. You wouldn't expect less of her would you?

She became to me the older sister I never had and I hope she saw me as the younger 'teasing' brother that she never had. She was a delight to tease as it always took a moment for her to realise I was joking. Fortunately, she also took me seriously when I was.

The real delight was that we were so often of a common mind. Our views on Christianity and the church coincided so well.

I believe Jill always wanted to be a teacher and in the black trunk of hers that I have had in my possession for a short time, whilst I helped her with her affairs, I found a number of testimonials from college and school to her ability.

The glory of her teaching was obviously her time at Halesworth Middle School where she was Head of English and where she enjoyed uncommon success. It was here that we find records of her great love of poetry and her skill in teaching it. Of course she taught all of English and I found a Facebook page where some of her pupils remembered her with affection and love. Here are a few of their voices

Paula Canham says, 'the amount of times she told us off for giggling.'

Martin Denton says, 'I owe all my spelling snobbery to her.'

Jane Wilson adds, 'best English teacher ever - loved her lessons.'

Chris Mayhew... 'she encouraged me to go on stage, something I still love today and now support other children to do the same.'

And Diana Malone: probably the best teacher I ever had. She could probably have worked at very expensive private schools, but she chose to work at a state educated school! We need more miss pirrie's [sic] in the world. I will always remember her reading Kes to us, even the swear words.'

As I said she had uncommon success. Presumably, at her instigation, the school entered a national poetry competition and won. And not just once, to a certain degree of embarrassment the success was repeated. And from that came invitations to share her skills in lectures on writer's retreats and in two books. One called 'On Common ground.' about teaching poetry. The other Apple Fire, an anthology from her school of the children's poetry. The final crown was her being awarded a MBE in 1987 for her service to education.

Not that you would know she had an MBE. Others may have lived up to it she downplayed it. In fact I discovered, going through her black box, that she had been awarded a Bachelor's Degree in Education from Roehampton University in 2017 - not a word to anybody. Did anyone else know?

My first contact with her was in 1991 when I came to be Rector here. She was still teaching them. I immediately recognised her as person of faith doing what she could in her spare time from her full involvement with school work. It was not until she retired that she came more to my notice. And the mists of time have now obscured to me how this came about. However, I'm sure it was by a prompting of the Holy Spirit that I suggested to her that she might become what was then known as a Lay Reader in the Church of England.

Immediately, there was the unworthiness of course. 'Not me surely? What do I know? What skills do I have? These all had to be overcome. Oh what a catch for the church. She was a joy to train and she took to the theology as a duck to water. I think any fear of an empty retirement was swept away by this new lease of life. Her ministry has been so appreciated her over the years. Always meticulously prepared, her sermons a joy. Some may have thought them a little erudite at times, but I loved them. There were those glorious moments when her sense of joy in the Lord, her insights and intuition brought a palpable sense of God's presence to us. I remember standing up once at the end of one of her sermons, something I've never done before or since, to congratulate her publicly it was so good.

And in those sermons came poetry. Not hers but others. She often read snippets as part of her talk. So now it is my turn. This restrained, shy, modest spinster could also write this. A poem called Love that is clearly an account of Mary anointing the feet of Jesus with oil, kissing them and wiping them with her hair.

## **LOVE**

There she was, at his feet.

Her fingers snapped. The phial broke and  
let loose a scent so light and field-fresh  
our minds dazzled in dreams of love.

Her fingers worked, cooling, soothing,  
somehow skilled at teasing flesh.

She moaned a little, almost a crooning,  
until her hair unfolded, fell slowly over his feet -  
oil-sweet under a mouth open  
to taste and kiss and weep.

He felt only the tears,  
Healed her by way of the love  
Spilled out on feet touched by passion.

But Jill was not naïve. Some of her poems express doubt. Such is the preacher's lot to declare from the pulpit and to admit private doubts here when our feet are on the ground.

Neither was Jill so heavenly minded that she was no earthly use. Jill was very generous, more so with others than herself at times. I have learnt recently of the private letters of encouragement she wrote to people. I know that she was a great supporter of Amnesty International. Her poem Easter Garden which documents the making of an Easter Garden for a church brings us back with a bump to our fallen world.

### **Easter Garden**

Her fingers, used to potting seedlings,  
had pressed prints lightly into damp soil,  
fleeting signatures she'd forgotten to scratch out.

Dreaming out of the garden, we follow them  
To the place where newsreel flies crawl forever  
On the blistered lips of the child.

Jill chose this passage from Revelation to be read at her funeral. It's a very strong hint: this text was her last earthly sermon. And I can do it the most justice by letting it mostly stand and speak directly for itself. However let me remind you of:

5 *"See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true."* 6 *To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.* 7 *Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children.*

There is a wonderful comfort in these words. In the last few times we saw Jill, Carol encouraged her with the words that she was facing a big adventure. That appealed to Jill. She would have remembered the conclusion of C S Lewis' book *The Last battle* where heaven is seen as such an adventure. There is nothing quite going to somebodies house and find they are looking forward to your visit and everything is prepared. They take you to your bedroom and show it you. Clean bedding, spare towels on the bed and then lead you to a wonderful meal that can only have been hours in the preparing. Life is a struggle, the everyday grind of it, but there is a holiday – a holy day coming - and all is prepared. When we commit our lives to Jesus we find he has done all the important stuff for us. There will be such marvels as we cannot even imagine and most importantly spending time with Jesus himself. Jill would want us to know this. She was prepared for it. She had prepared her heart by accepting Jesus all those long years ago when she was a child. No moment of conversion for her. She always knew. The quiet confidence burned in her, an unquenchable flame. And she would want you to discover that for yourself, if you have not already. She has left us the magnificent passage of the hope of the future for the faithful as her last words to us. Let's make sure we follow her.

I've always taking it as a sign of worth when a person inspires faithful loyalty, love and friendship. This was so true of Jill. Her friends, when she made them, stuck with her from years ago. There was something about her that drew us out to care for this lovely, thin woman – and painfully thin she was since she was diagnosed with Coeliac Disease. There was nothing thin about Jill the character though. So much of a miss match between the outer and the inner Jill. It's impossible to mention names, but I would be remiss not to just name Jane, Sue and Diane who have taken particular physical and emotional care of her in her last months.

It's tempting to say Jill Pirrie was our friend. However, if you are a person of faith, as Jill was, with not only a full understanding of the truth of the Christian Gospel but a definite experience of it, we can say Jill is our friend still. There is to be a bit of a gap until we see her again, but see her again. We will.

She lives on, not just in our hearts, but really lives on in one of the rooms in Jesus' house. He prepared a place for her and now she is there. He came out to welcome her himself, took her by the hand, and lead her there. How wonderful.

And now we're left to soldier on until we do see her again. Poor us. Amen.

## **IN MEMORIUM - TO MY LATE FRIEND JILL PIRRIE**

(passed from this life to be with the Lord on 12 Sept 2020)

By Shuba Ktorides

In the morning when I see the dew-glazed roses,  
Then you come to mind, Jill, you come to mind.  
And I wish for the rose that will never wither,  
Knowing you have passed into life forever.

When the breeze fans my brow and my eyes sense a tear,  
Then you come to mind, Jill, you come to mind.  
And I feel the longing that never goes away,  
The longing for a land that is fairer than day.

When the birds serenade in our garden trees,  
Then you come to mind, Jill, you come to mind.  
For you wanted to come to us this summer,  
As you did last year this time September.

When Oxfordshire sun sets slowly over our fence,  
Then you come to mind, Jill, you come to mind.  
You were a joy to be with, speaking words of grace  
Breathing fragrance of Christ with your life of service.

When I sing hymns to Christ and feel a catch at my heart,  
Then you come to mind, Jill, you come to mind;  
For now you have become a star in the sky  
Singing with the Morning Star, though we said goodbye.

Shuba Ktorides



## **A prayer for my lovely friend Jill Pirrie**

(I visited Jill quite a few times in James Piaget Hospital, the week before she passed away, and read to her some of her well-loved poems, one of which was George Herbert's: "Love bade me welcome" which she absolutely loved. Jill was still very enthusiastic in her love of poetry ( a love we both shared) and mentally exceptionally alert, despite her illness. She reminisced her past vividly during our conversations by her hospital bed: her love for St Michaels, her teaching career, her presentation for her ordination as lay reader, her chat with the officiating Bishop, how she went to Buckingham Palace with her parents to receive the award of MBE from the Queen, and many other memories. The last time I visited her she said she was looking forward to more visits from me and also spoke of her intense desire to go back to her home in Lowestoft - sadly not to be. I was not able to attend her funeral as it was by invitation only. But after receiving news of her death from the hospital, I offered God thanksgiving for her life, and wrote the following poem to pay my respects).

Lord Jesus, a halcyon autumn's day that you have made  
And I remember the wondrous gifts you pour upon me.  
This beautiful land,  
My family and friends  
Your Holy Spirit uniting us all;  
And on this Sabbath Day  
I'm here to offer thanksgiving  
For Jill's life of service

And in the still sanctuary of my heart  
To offer praise and prayer,  
In assurance of Jill's place in your heavenly Kingdom.  
One unspoken thought lingered in this dear lady's mind  
When I was alone with her:  
She hoped to go home;  
And now has made her heavenly journey.  
I tried to divert her thoughts  
While her fragility became more apparent,  
As her long life, dedicated to service,  
Slowly ebbed away;  
I reflected on the privilege of her friendship;  
I am left with enduring fragments of memory  
Of this remarkable lady,  
A true lantern of God's love,  
And I draw strength from hope and prayers.

Caroline Buddery

## **Thank you**

May I conclude by thanking Robin Pritchard, Shuba Ktorides and Caroline Buddery for permission to print their touching thoughts on our dear friend Jill. One of my abiding memories of Jill was sitting with her in her front room transcribing various hand written documents to Microsoft Word. On occasions I would rather coyly ask whether the passage I was typing should include a semi-colon or other grammatical notation to which she would give it a moment or twos thought and inevitably say, 'Oh no Robin!' and I would sublimely bow to her wonderful grasp of English Grammar—Editor.

## 12 Ways to Avoid Stress this Christmas.

- Change your expectations this Christmas. Don't waste time lamenting what should have been. Instead, try and enjoy whatever is possible this year.
- Make a list. Include sending cards, buying presents and organising food for the big day. Having a lists helps keep you in control of your life.
- Set a reduced budget this year. With a pandemic raging, this no time to take on Christmas debt. If you can't pay for it this month, probably best not to buy it.
- Exercise each day – it releases happiness-inducing serotonin. That will help you to keep calm and positive over the festive period.
- Don't overindulge. Too much alcohol and rich food won't improve your life.
- Keep calm and keep kind – urge your family members to try and avoid any flare up of family tensions. If you need to cry, cry, but then, keep on keeping on.
- Remember those everyday essentials: batteries for new toys, toilet paper, milk, paper towel. Those things you never think about – until they are gone.
- Entertain the kids: plan ahead various films, games and whatever it takes to give them a memorable Christmas.
- Make the most of Zoom this year with far-flung relatives and friends.
- Most of all, include God in your Christmas! This is His Son's birthday – include Bible readings and carols in your family routine over the festive period.

## **Journeys or lockdown this Christmas?**

Christmas is a busy time for travel, as many of us venture a great distance to see family or friends again. But this year coronavirus has put an end to all that. Seeing all our loved ones this Christmas will be difficult, if not impossible. Soon we may not be travelling anywhere very much at all.

Have you noticed that the Christmas story is about journeys? It begins with Mary and Joseph travelling from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Then, some shepherds receive news from an angel about a special birth. They travel through the night, across dark fields and down unlit streets to search for the baby Jesus.

After this, in an eastern country some wise men see a new star, one that heralds a new king. They leave home and set out with only the star to guide them, and their faith to reassure them that Someone special is waiting at the end of their journey.

All these travellers must have wondered what really lay ahead. Nothing was fully understood, carefully planned for, or safe. They all travelled with questions and uncertainties. But God had come unexpectedly into their lives, and suddenly they were given new roles to serve Him.

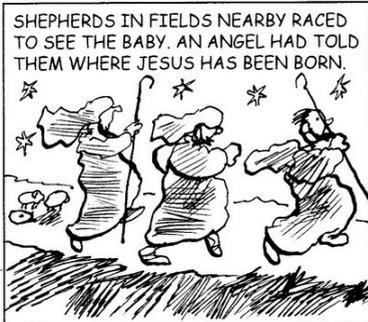
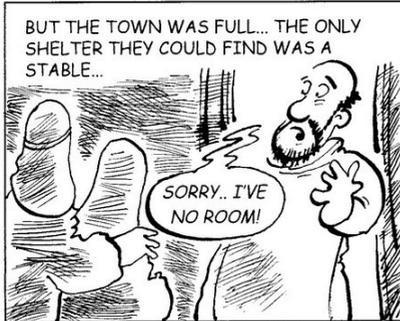
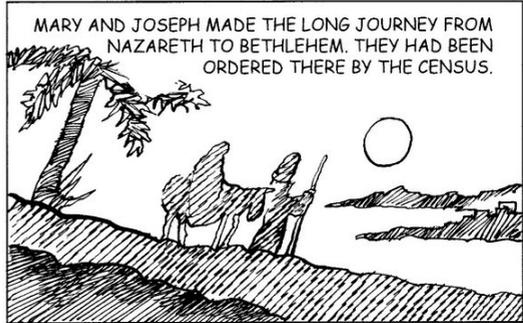
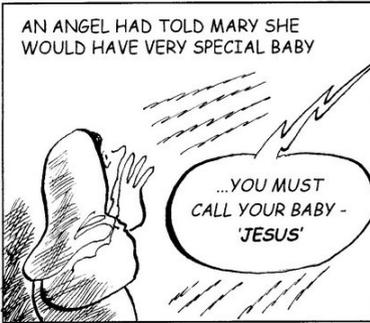
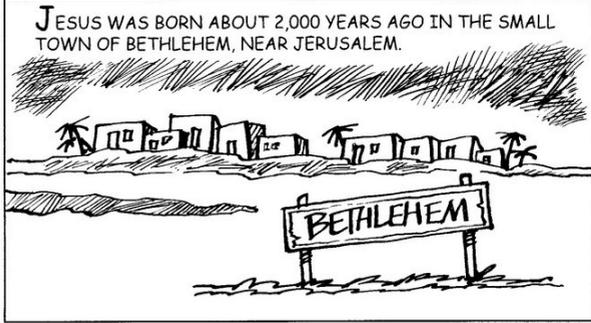
Despite worldly circumstances that could have crushed them, they stood firm and trusted God all the way.

These travellers' tales tell us that God may suddenly enter into our familiar, or this year, unfamiliar circumstances. He may come in surprising ways, to prompt us into new avenues of service. At first His call on us may be uncomfortable and challenging.

If our response is anything like Joseph, Mary, the shepherds and wise men – to be obedient to His call in serving, witnessing and worshipping, we shall be greatly blessed and rewarded.

We are all on life's journey. If we travel with God, He will be faithful and lead us to His heavenly Home.

# The First Christmas



## **A Letter From The Edge—the editor.**

After the disappointment of failing to get to Barra in May due to the coronavirus and then on the second attempt in August which failed miserably due to a car breakdown, we eventually made it in on the third attempt at the tail end of September. It was certainly touch and go for a while, what with the Western Isles being in total lock down for several months with only key workers being allowed in and out. The Scottish Transport Secretary, Michael Matheson had placed severe restrictions on those being allowed to travel with ferry operators, Caledonian Macbrayne, and so the possibility of getting to the Outer Hebrides looked as remote as the islands are themselves to mainland Scotland. During the latter part of July, the vast majority of restrictions were lifted, and we were at last able to book our passage out to the small Isle of Barra, which sits in the southern end of the Outer Hebridean archipelago, some 86 miles west of Oban.

This remote series of islands sits literally on the edge of the British Isles, they were often shown on school atlases in a separate box in the top left corner of the page. Its very location has given rise to the term, 'Living on The Edge'. Being able to visit was a great relief as it has been like a second home to us for the past 29 years.

The Outer Hebrides are a unique religious area in Britain. The northern islands of the archipelago (Harris and Lewis) are dominated by the Calvinist 'wee Free churches.' It is also home to a rather unusual form of Gaelic psalm singing called 'precenting'. These are the islands where even today strict Calvinists abstain from any work whatsoever on the Sabbath. I well remember several years ago; two Lowestoft detectives flew up to Stornoway to interview a young lad in relation to an incident which had previously occurred in Lowestoft. They made the fatal mistake of knocking on the lad's door on a Sunday morning, only to receive short shrift from his mother telling them in no uncertain terms that 'interviews were not undertaken on the Sabbath.'

However, the southern islands of South Uist, Barra and Vatersay are the last bastions of native pre-Reformation Roman Catholicism, with Barra and Vatersay registering 81.5% of the island's population being Catholic and 90% of the population in South Uist. Pretty amazing figures and the churches, prior

to COVID19 were active every Sunday.

Barra's four Catholic churches are under the care of Canon John Paul, who became something of a national celebrity a few years ago when he featured in two series of BBC2's documentary, 'An Island Parish.' There is one Church of Scotland kirk on the island with ironically the windows bricked up on the western side which it is said, tongue in cheek, 'that it was undertaken to prevent the 'wee-frees' seeing the Catholics down the road having a good time!

The main church on the island, the church of Our Lady Star of the Sea, stands on a rocky promontory overlooking Castlebay. It and the township featured in the 1949 Ealing Comedy, Whisky Galore! starring Basil Radford, Bruce Seton, Joan Greenwood and Gordon Jackson. It was the directorial debut of Alexander Mackendrick; the screenplay



was by Compton Mackenzie who for many years lived on the island. The story—based on a true event—concerns a shipwreck off a fictional Scottish island of Todday, the inhabitants of which have run out of whisky because of wartime rationing. The islanders find out the ship is carrying 50,000 cases of whisky, which they salvage, against the opposition of the local Customs and Excise men.

It was filmed on Barra; the weather was so poor that the production overran its 10-week schedule by five weeks, and the film went £20,000 over budget. None the less 'Whisky Galore!' became one of Ealing's greatest comedy films and is still watched and loved 71 years after its screen debut.

Incidentally at the time of writing a rare bottle of Scotch salvaged from the shipwreck that inspired 'Whisky Galore' could fetch £10,000 at auction.

60% of the island's population have the Gaelic as their first language. It is a difficult language to master yet beautiful in its adjectives. The language is made even more difficult by the fact that it does not have any direct translation for the words 'yes' or 'no.' In fact both words do not really exist in Gaelic. We English speakers might find it difficult to get our heads around that. For example, if the question is, 'Is that the door?' The answer might be, "it is," or simply, "it isn't". Another might be "Do you understand?" and the answer would be either, "I understand" or, "I don't understand."

The island enjoys a close community spirit which is rarely found on mainland Britain. There is no class system, and everyone is treated as equals. Doors are seldom locked and car keys are left in the ignition per chance someone might need to move it. Crime is almost zero.



When you live on an island which has a circular road 16 miles in circumference there are few places for any lawbreakers to hide. The island has one major attraction which has a worldwide reputation, and that is its airport. It is the only airport in the world which gets washed twice a day by the tides, for the aircraft land on the beach. Scheduled flights are governed by the tides. The Loganair service flies twin otter aircraft which fly regularly from Glasgow airport. It is one of the top ten landings in the world which causes a few problems. The aircraft seats 19 passengers with 2 aircrew, and many aircraft buffs consider flying in and out of Barra worthy of ticking off their bucket list. This means that islanders who need to use the service for their own ends often find the flight overbooked.

It's now late November and we are safely back home in rural Suffolk. My mobile 'phone regularly sends out text messages of prolonged weather conditions in the Hebrides. I'm sure the islanders will baton the hatches and come thorough all that the Atlantic storms can throw at them and come through in one piece to welcome us back next spring.

Editor.

## Shall we abolish Christmas?

This year there are obvious reasons for people thinking and talking about Christmas being "cancelled". But for Christians there are equally strong reasons (if not stronger reasons) for saying that it is just not possible for us to cancel Christmas. However much the outward details of our celebration of

Christmas may need to be modified, the basic truth of Christmas remains the same.

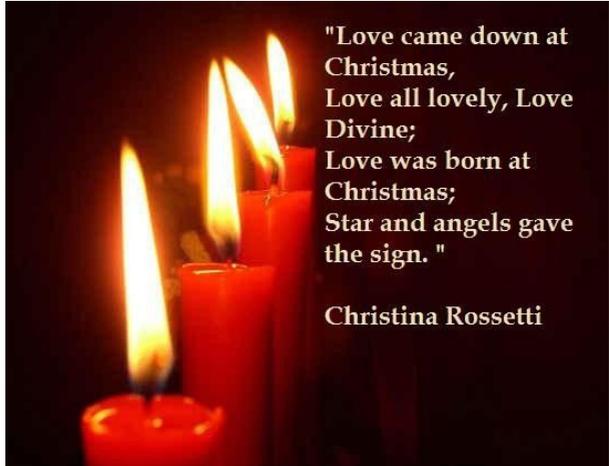
This is that God's love for all the people He has created, which came down once and for all at the first Christmas, in the coming of Jesus into the world, is still as

strong and constant towards each of us for our eternal good, as ever. This is a faith to hold onto come what may; it is at the heart of our faith in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is really important for us to keep remembering:

- with all the questions and uncertainties of the covid problems around us;
- with all the pressures of 24 hour news on TV and the media;
- with all the loneliness of being isolated from family and friends;
- with what seems like silence and negativity from church leaders ;

So we must not neglect to rejoice in the simple truths of Christmas Day! As the old hymn puts it, Love came down at Christmas time.



Malory and Jackie Makower

## BEETHOVEN: from the heart to the heart.

This year, 2020, is a special year for Beethoven: it marks the 250th anniversary of his birth on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1770.

And so it was very fitting that back in August, at the first Live Prom this year in the Royal Albert Hall, the BBC Symphony Orchestra played his 3rd symphony, the *Eroica*.



Beethoven composed it in 1804. A few years earlier he had noticed the first symptoms of his deafness. He wrote in a letter to his brothers that was found after his death, *'I must live like an exile.'* The deafness brought in its wake depression and thoughts of suicide, but Beethoven wrote that *'the only thing that held me back was my art.'*

He went on to compose works which expressed the tragedy this cross of deafness brought, but also conveyed the power of the human spirit which proved indomitable in the face of that struggle. *'Music,'* he wrote, *'is the electric soil in which the spirit thinks, lives and invents.'*

Beethoven was to compose six more symphonies after the *Eroica* and a wealth of other music up to his death in 1827. He spent most of his life in Vienna, but through his music his creative genius travelled far and wide.

Scholars divide his work into three stages. Up to 1800 he composed very much in the classical tradition. That year marked a second stage with works like the 5th Symphony, which opens with the famous eight-note motif of fate knocking at the door, and his opera *Fidelio*. Then in 1817 came a final stage when his compositions explored new territories of the human spirit altogether.

Although his deafness brought loneliness and isolation, he found in music the means to express those experiences: his struggle with Destiny, his love of Nature and that search for an inner peace and serenity. Weighed down by physical limitations, he found a freedom to express himself and his longing for transcendence and light.

It is there in the Prisoners' Chorus in his opera *Fidelio* as they emerge from the dungeon into the sunlight. And it is quintessentially present in his last great works: the late String Quartets, the 9th Symphony with its exultant hymn to Joy, and the Missa Solemnis where there is a beauty and a serenity in the Benedictus and Agnus Dei.

On the score of this work, Beethoven wrote above the Kyrie *It comes from the heart – may it go to the heart*. In this month which marks the 250th anniversary of his birth, we give thanks for his music which continues to speak to hearts in every age. It is music that tells us of the pain and struggle of life, but also the discovery of a courage and freedom that can help us to step out in his company and welcome the light and the joy, the peace and the beauty.

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## **21 December                      Winter Solstice**

A Midwinter festival has been a part of life since pre-Christian times. When the hours of daylight are fewest, the warmth of the sun weakest, and life itself seemingly at a standstill, our ancestors, the pagan peoples of Europe and Western Asia, kept festival by lighting bonfires and decorating their buildings with evergreens.

Perhaps they believed that the dying sun could be enheartened by fire, and the life of the buried seed assured by the presence of evergreen branches.

With the advent of Christianity, the Spring gods became identified with Christ, and the birthday of the sun with the birthday of the Light of the World.

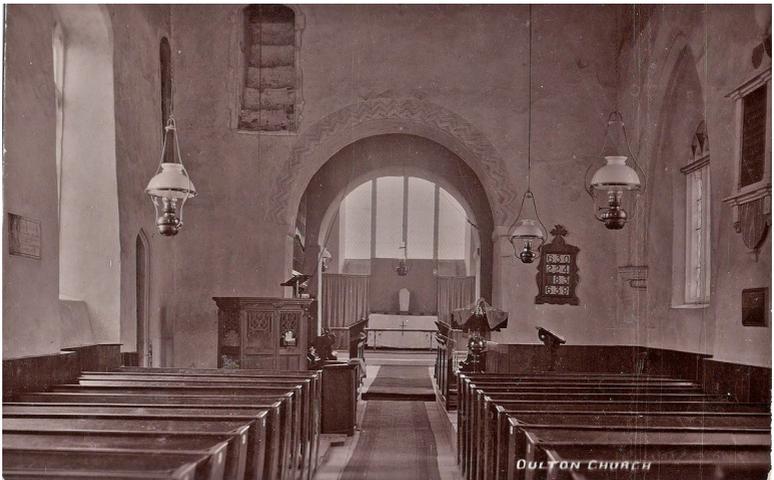
The early church father Tertullian did not approve of Christmas decorations. "Let those who have no light in themselves light candles!... You are the light of the world, you are the tree ever green...." But by the time of St Gregory and St Augustine, four centuries later, this had changed. Pope Gregory instructed Augustine not to worry about harmless outward customs, as long as the right God be worshipped through them. And so many Anglo-Saxon customs were never discarded, but simply endowed with a new significance.

By 1598 one John Stow of London wrote how: 'Against the feast of Christmas, every man's house, as also their parish churches, were decked with holme, ivie, bayes, and whatsoever the season of the yeare afforded to be greene.'

## A Look Back in Time.

I always try and keep a weathered eye on eBay for any postcards of St. Michael's church that pop up every now and again. Over the years I've managed to collect a good few but only one of any age showing the interior of our fine church. I was recently delighted to come across a new one which shows the nave of St. Michael's looking towards the bell tower and chancel beyond. I would guess the photograph was taken circa 1910. The immediate difference to what we see now is those wonderful oil-lamps, the lack of door to the old bell-tower

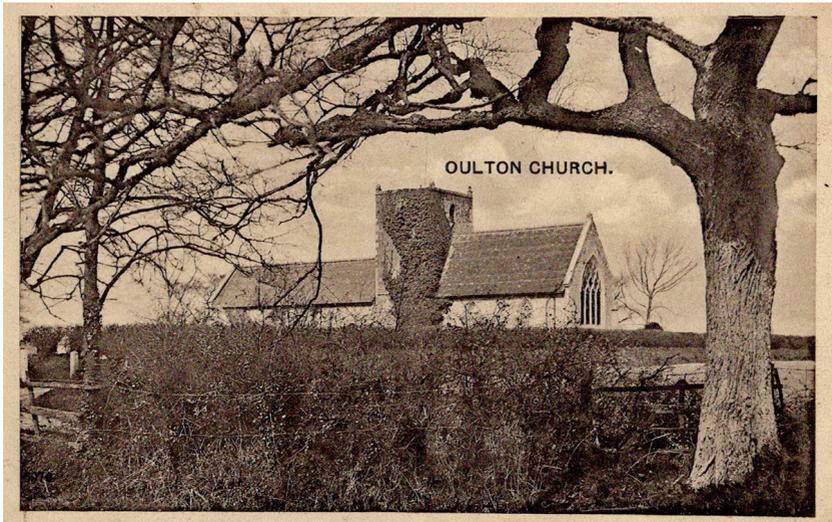
entrance, the old pews and the as yet to be installed reredos. I wonder who had the job of filling the lamps



with oil and keeping them serviceable? I would imagine the ambience at a winters evening service would have been quite atmospheric as the congregation peered through the dim light to read from their prayer and hymn books.

A week or two later I stumbled across this exterior view, again dated 1910. It certainly illustrates that not too much has changed over the intervening 110 years.

I would be most interested to see any historic photographs of the church or past events which with your permission could be included in the next spring edition of Pew News.



## **Late News**

### **Leprosy Mission**

Debbie Allsop has asked me to mention that she will be collecting the Leprosy Mission boxes during January.

### **Christmas Card**

As in previous years we have a Church Christmas card which will hopefully raise money for our Compassion Child. The card will kept be on the Communion Table as and when the church is open for your donations and endorsement.

### **Jams, Jellies and Chutney.**

Jars of the above tasty treats will be on sale on any occasion the church is open. Get in quick as they make a wonderful accompaniment to any Christmas meal.

### **Piano**

We are delighted to announce that St. Michael's has been kindly donated an upright piano which will soon be installed in the nave. This will be a wonderful addition to our fine organ which has been recently tuned.



*'On behalf of the Clergy Team and St. Michael's PCC , we wish you all a  
Very Happy, Safe and Peaceful Christmas'*

### ***Jesus Is The Reason***

*In Bethlehem, God gave to us  
The source of Christmas joy;  
A star shown on a miracle:  
The virgin birth of a boy.  
He was born both God and man,  
A Saviour for us all,  
The way to get to our heavenly home,  
If we just heed His call.  
So as we shop and spend and wrap  
And enjoy the Christmas season,  
Let's keep in mind the sacred truth:  
Jesus is the reason.*

*By Joanna Fuchs*

If you have any contributions for the next quarterly edition of the 'Pew News'  
please send your material to Robin Keightley

[robinkeightley175@btinternet.com](mailto:robinkeightley175@btinternet.com)