

ST MARY'S OLD SWINFORD

Parish Church Magazine

DECEMBER 2013

Online edition

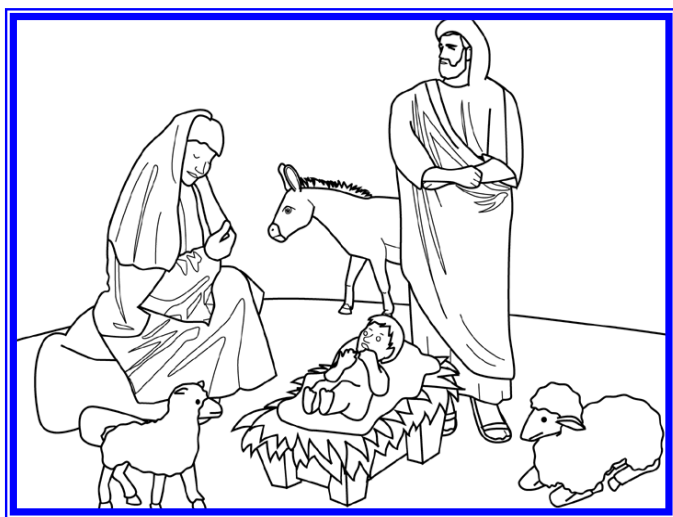


ST MARY'S OLD SWINFORD



Parish Church Magazine

MERRY CHRISTMAS



PEACE ON EARTH

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DECEMBER 2013

50p

SUNDAYS AT ST MARY'S

8.00 am	Holy Communion
10.00 am	Parish Communion and Children Together
6.30 pm	Evensong
10.00 am	(second Sunday) Worship Together

WEEKDAYS AT ST MARY'S

Daily:	9.00 am - Morning Prayer (except Fridays and Saturdays)
	Morning Prayer on Tuesdays will alternate between St Mary's, St Thomas' and Holy Trinity Amblecote
Daily:	5.00 pm - Evening Prayer (except Fridays)
Wednesday:	1.30 pm - Noah's Ark at St Mary's (term time) parents & toddlers
Thursday:	10.30 am - Holy Communion in Lady Chapel
Thursday:	7.30 pm - Bell Ringing Practice
Friday:	Choir Practice and Youth Groups (in term time)
Saturday:	10.00 - 12.00 am - Open Church –refreshments available
Priest in Charge and Curate's Day Off: Friday	

OTHER REGULAR EVENTS



Bible Study Group:	Monday, first in month at 2.30 pm	379972
Mothers' Union:	Second Tuesday at 2.15 pm	392951
Outreach Group:	Occasional meetings	01562 851491
Music Group Practice:	Second Saturday at 10.00 am	375167
St Mary's Walking Group:	Last Saturday of the month. Depart 9.30 am	

Reader Emeritus:	Mr Roy Peacock	379972
Reader:	Mrs Kanthi Ariaraj	395115
Church Wardens:	Mrs Marjorie Ferguson	393454
	Mr Antony Tatford	822661
Organist / Choirmaster:	Mr Robin Walker	01905 353939
Treasurer:	Mr Russ Fowler	442684
PCC Secretary:	Miss Katey Fletcher	378182
Magazine Editors:	Miss Gemma Sutton	423021
	Mr Antony Tatford	822661

Church Hall and		
Coach House: - Bookings	Parish Office	441003
Parish Administrator and		
Publicity Officer:	Mr John Sutton	441003
Parish Office:	Open 9.00 am -12.00 noon Monday to Friday	441003

Church website address:	www.stmaryschurchholdswinford.org.uk
	E-mail: st.mary.os@btconnect.com
Magazine e-mail address:	stmary.parishmagazine@hotmail.co.uk

ENQUIRIES ABOUT WEDDINGS, BANNS OF MARRIAGE, BAPTISMS.

Please come to the Church on Saturday morning between 10.00 and 11.00 for Vestry Hour. You will be warmly welcomed. Tea and coffee will be available.

DIARY FOR DECEMBER 2013



SUNDAY 1

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

- 3.00 pm Baptisms
6.30 pm Advent Carol Service
Tuesday 3 11.30 am Holy Communion at Hollycroft
Thursday 5 10.30 am Holy Communion
Saturday 7 9.30 am St Mary's Christmas Market in the Church Hall
10.00 am Open Church and Vestry Hour
1.00 pm Wedding

SUNDAY 8

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

- 10.00 am Worship Together — Toy Service
Tuesday 10 Copy date for January magazine
2.30-4.00pm Tuesday tea
Wednesday 11 6.00 pm Ham Dingle Primary School Carol service
Thursday 12 10.30 am Holy Communion
Friday 13 2.30 pm Old Swinford Hospital Carol Service
Saturday 14 10.00 am Open Church and Vestry Hour
7.30 pm 'Got 2 Sing' Concert

SUNDAY 15

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

- 3.00 pm Baptisms
4.30 pm Christingle Service
Tuesday 17 7.00 pm Oldswinford Primary School Carol Service
Wednesday 18 11.30 am Holy Communion at Holly Lodge
Thursday 19 10.30 am Holy Communion
Saturday 21 9.00 am Flower Guild to decorate church
10.00 am Open Church and Vestry Hour

SUNDAY 22

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

- 6.30 pm Carol Service
Tuesday 24 **CHRISTMAS EVE**
4.00 pm Children's Crib Service
10.00 pm First Communion of Christmas
Wednesday 25 **CHRISTMAS DAY**
8.00 am Holy Communion
10.00 am Parish Communion with Carols
Thursday 26 **ST STEPHEN'S DAY**
10.30 am Holy Communion
Saturday 28 10.00 am Open Church and Vestry Hour

SUNDAY 29

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF CHRISTMAS

- 6.30 pm Service of Seasonal Carols and Readings

TOWNSWOMENS' GUILD CAROL SERVICE

West Midlands Federation of Townswomens' Guilds invite you to join them at their Carol Service. It will be held on Saturday 14 December at 2.15pm in St Thomas's Church, Market Street, Stourbridge. All are warmly welcome to attend.

FROM THE RECTORY



Dear Friends,

For us Christmas comes at the darkest time of year, it is the time of the midwinter solstice, and its message of the light of God coming into a dark world makes a great deal of sense when the world around us is dark, and often rather dreary. I wonder how different it must be to try to reflect on the real meaning of Christmas at the height of summer, as you have to in the Southern hemisphere, but I suspect that I am unlikely to ever experience that firsthand.

The darkness of this time of year forces us to be grateful for the light, to appreciate both natural and artificial light, because with them our sight is not limited within our environment, but can see the way to go. For thousands of years people have been afraid of the dark, and have associated it with all sorts of terrors, physical and spiritual.

But at the same time that people have looked to avoid the dark and head for the light there has been a sense in which the light is enhanced by the presence of darkness, and darkness contributes to the magnificence of light. Perhaps we experience that at the most magical of times, Christmas Eve, when we anticipate Christmas, and the time of anticipation is more evocative than Christmas morning itself. Darkness somehow signifies a time of waiting, of expectancy and yearning, of looking forward with hope to a future as yet unknown. Darkness is also associated with dreams and revelation and other things that are mysterious and only half clear.

There are times in our own lives when we feel that we are in darkness, or just 'in the dark', and see that as entirely negative; but it may just be that being in darkness is a necessary preliminary to growing in understanding and faith, and coming 'into the light'.

Our faith, at its key points of Christmas and Easter, forces us to encounter the spiritual juxtaposition of light and darkness. Both festivals proclaim that the light comes through the darkness, that hope comes through times of despair.

I know that many people face their own times of darkness. At Christmas I would want to reassure you that Christ came as the light of the world to overcome darkness. I hope and pray that you may know his light in your lives this season and that the darkness you face is a darkness which will lead to ever greater faith and hope, and that it is a darkness which is a time of hope 'in waiting'.

With every blessing.

Stephen Agnew

SERVICES IN DECEMBER 2013

1 December The First Sunday of Advent	8.00 am Holy Communion			
	10.00 am Parish Communion	Isaiah 2. 1-5	Romans 13. 11-end	Matthew 24. 36-44
	6.30 pm	Advent Carol Service		
8 December The Second Sunday of Advent	8.00 am Holy Communion			
	10.00 am WORSHIP TOGETHER	Toy Service Please bring a new gift (unwrapped) that will be given as a Christmas present to a mother or child in the care of Dudley Women's Refuge.		
	6.30 pm Choral Evensong	1 Kings 18. 17-39	John 1. 19 –28	
15 December The Third Sunday of Advent	8.00 am Holy Communion			
	10.00 am Parish Communion	Isaiah 35. 1 - 10	James 5. 7-10	Matthew 11. 2-11
	4.30 pm	Christingle Service for children and adults in support of the Children's Society		
	6.30 pm Evensong	Isaiah 5. 8-end	Acts 13. 13-41	
22 December The Fourth Sunday of Advent	8.00 am Holy Communion			
	10.00 am Parish Communion			
	6.30 pm	Carol Service		
24 December Christmas Eve	4.00 pm	Crib Service		
	10.00 pm The First Communion of Christmas	Hebrews 1. 1-12	John 1. 1-14	
25 December Christmas Day	8.00 am Holy Communion			
	10.00 am Family Communion with Carols	Isaiah 9. 2-7	Titus 2. 11-14	Luke 2. 1-4
26 December St Stephen's Day	10.30 am	Said Service of Holy Communion		
29 December The First Sunday of Christmas	8.00 am Holy Communion			
	10.00 am Parish Communion	Hebrews 2. 10-end	Matthew 2. 13-end	
	6.30 pm	Service of Seasonal Carols and Readings		



ST MARY'S, OLD SWINFORD
We extend a warm invitation to you to our
CHRISTMAS SERVICES 2013

Sunday 1st December

6.30 pm Advent Carol Service

Sunday 8th December

8.00 am Holy Communion (BCP)

10.00 am Toy Service

6.30 pm Evensong

Sunday 15th December

8.00 am Holy Communion (BCP)

10.00 am Parish Communion

4.30 pm Christingle Service

6.30 pm Evensong

Our Toy Service aims to support the work of the Dudley Women's Refuge. We invite those attending the service to bring an unwrapped toy for a child of any age or toiletry or similar items for ladies. These gifts will be donated on your behalf for the benefit of the children and mothers using the provisions of the refuge.

Sunday 22nd December

8.00 am Holy Communion (BCP)

10.00 am Parish Communion

6.30 pm Christmas Carol Service

A traditional Service of Readings and Carols

Tuesday 24th December CHRISTMAS EVE

4.00 pm Crib Service for children

10.00 pm Communion with Carols

The First Communion of Christmas

Wednesday 25th December CHRISTMAS DAY

8.00 am Holy Communion (Book of Common Prayer)

10.00 am Family Communion (Common Worship) with Carols

Thursday 26th December ST STEPHEN'S DAY

10.30 am Said Service of Holy Communion

Sunday 29th December

10.00 am Parish Communion

6.30 pm Service of Seasonal Carols and Readings.



A CHRISTMAS PICTURE TO COLOUR

The picture on the front cover of this month's magazine has been reproduced and sent to the many children with whom we have direct links. We have invited the children to colour the picture and add detail as they wish. We will display the completed pictures in church during Christmas with a prize being given to the three most interesting outcomes. Copies of the picture are also available in church for any child to take part and to learn a little more about the true story of Christmas.

ENTRANCE
£1
Children
Free

ST MARY'S OLD SWINFORD **CHRISTMAS MARKET**

SATURDAY 7 DECEMBER

9.30 – 11.30 am

in the Church Hall

Please join us on this happy occasion and support our fund raising

If you are able to help before or on the day please get in touch

Katey Fletcher, 01384 378182

A warm welcome to all

Gifts, cakes, games, books, plants, bottles, toys,
refreshments and much more

ENTRANCE
£1
Children
Free

TIME TO SAY THANK YOU

Revd Ruth Atkinson will leave St Mary's at the end of her Curacy on 4 January 2014. As we know from those who have completed their training at St Mary's in the past, Curates have to move on at the end of their contracted period and in due course we look forward to the details of where Ruth will further her ministry in the future.

The 10.00 am service on Sunday 5 January will include a celebration of Ruth's work and ministry at St Mary's and with the wider community. This occasion will provide us all with the opportunity to express our gratitude to her and to pass on our best wishes for the future with a presentation of a gift that symbolises our appreciation of all the love and care she has given and all she has done for us during the past four years.

We hope that as many of you as possible will wish to be present on this occasion to help to express our thanks in a meaningful way. Should you wish for further information please talk to Marjorie Ferguson, Tony Tatford or Stephen Agnew.

HARVEST SUPPER

Many thanks to all the people who supported our Harvest Supper on Saturday, 19 October. The Social Committee members were heartened by so many people signing up early – so much so that we increased the number of places available by 12 from the original 50.

Many thanks also go to the committee members who turned up trumps again with their culinary skills and to Mike Blaxland for providing the light-hearted quizzes that kept us amused and puzzled throughout the evening. I thought he deserved a medal for the marathon of reading out all the answers, especially the logo list.

I must not forget all the 'other halves' who acted as waiters on the night. There are not too many places where you can get good company, a two course meal with coffee and waiter service on a Saturday evening all for the princely sum of £6.

The Church Hall roof has been patched and repaired many times over recent years and is now to be re-roofed and so all the profits from the harvest supper will go towards the cost. I am very pleased to say we raised £247.40 on the evening.

Thank you all again for your support. See you at the next event.

Sue Wakeley

TUESDAY TEA

The first 'Tuesday Tea' took place on Tuesday 29 October, the first of a planned activity promoted by the Mission Committee to provide an opportunity for people to get together for a couple of hours, to chat, enjoy good company and fellowship over a cup of tea and a biscuit. In fact, on this first occasion, the proposed biscuits had evolved, thanks to the skills and generosity of many of the ladies present, into delicious cakes that tempted all present and set a high standard for the future. Conversation was easy in a relaxed and comforting environment where everyone was made welcome and felt at ease.

The event was well attended by those providing support and those for whom the event was planned. Tuesday Tea aims to provide an opportunity through which the mission activities of St Mary's may reach a wider audience, engaging with a wider community, a true sign of a Healthy Church.

The challenge for the next Tuesday Tea on Tuesday 26 November is for everyone to invite someone else along with them, to widen the circle and to spread the message that there is a warm and genuine welcome at St Mary's; no expectations, no demands, just genuine Christian fellowship. If you need a lift, please ask.

Sue Tatford

The Coach House is still searching for a new secretary. If you could help please have a word with Joan Barwick, 01384 395319 or speak to a committee member.

CONFIRMATION



On Sunday, 20 October, Bishop Mark Santer was welcomed to St Mary's for the 10.00 am Celebration of Confirmation at the Eucharist Service. Unfortunately transport difficulties associated with road closures for the Birmingham Half Marathon delayed the start of the service at which there were five candidates for confirmation. In his sermon Bishop Santer explained the text of the Old Testament reading (Genesis 32.22-31) and how it parables the struggles and travels of

Jacob as a reflection of the life journeys of all Christians. Sharing his observations with the candidates and the whole congregation Bishop Santer encouraged all to reflect on how the words of the Lord's Prayer entreats us to want what God wants for us. This, he suggested, should be the way in which we try to lead our lives.

The service was clearly a special day for the candidates, their families and sponsors and it was warmly supported by the members of the congregation as everyone was called to renew their commitment to a life in which Jesus and His teachings is at the heart. The many children present and participating in their own learning activities in the Narthex during the service added a special meaning to the day.

Tony Tatford

CHRISTINGLE 2013

It is Christingle time again! This year the Children's Society's focus for Christingle is on child poverty. We know that growing up in poverty has an impact on a child's physical and mental development.

A Christingle is a powerful symbol of God's love for the world, but it's practical too. It offers an opportunity to take the symbolic light of the Christingle candles and turn it into real hope for children who are living in darkness today.

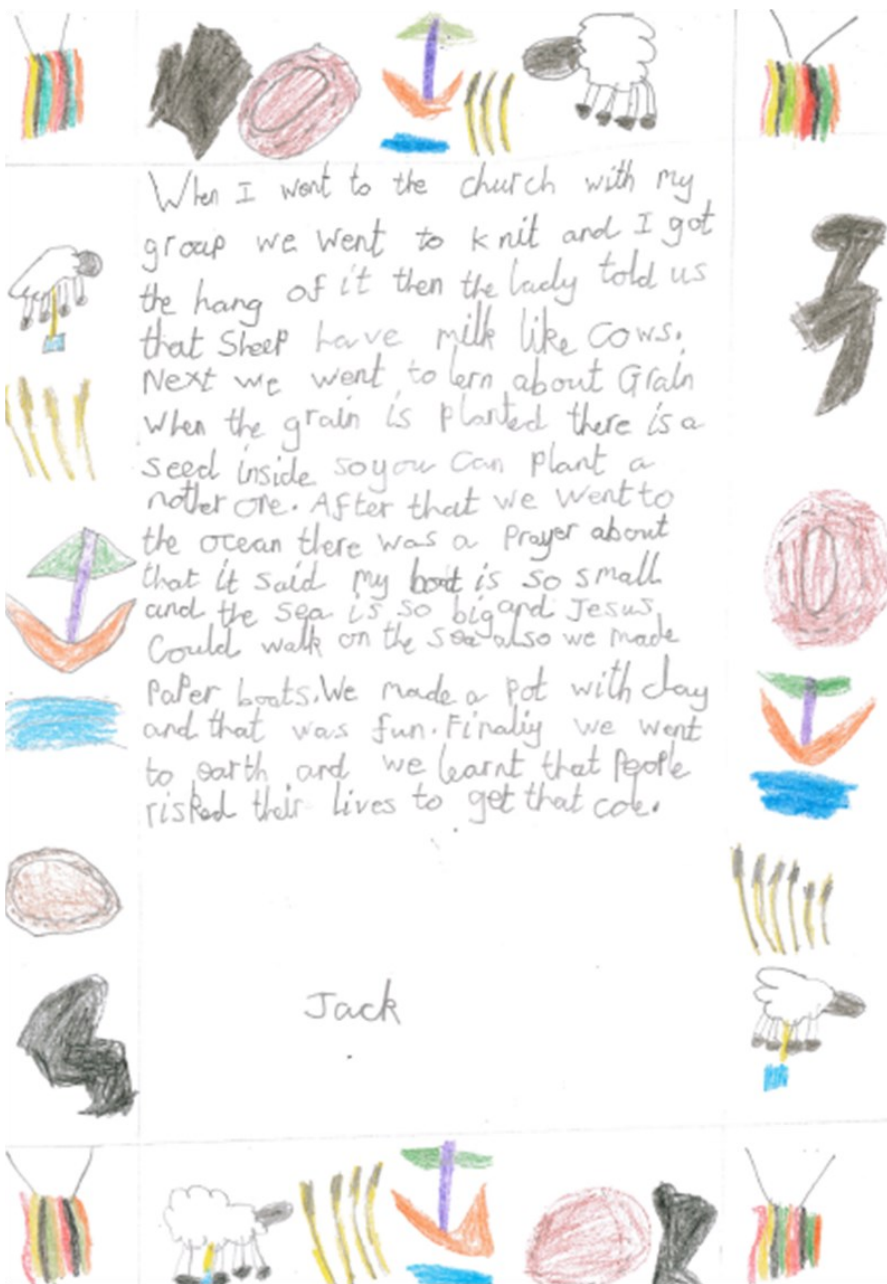
Do come along and join our celebration at St Mary's on Sunday 15 December at 4.30 pm.

Wendy Tranter

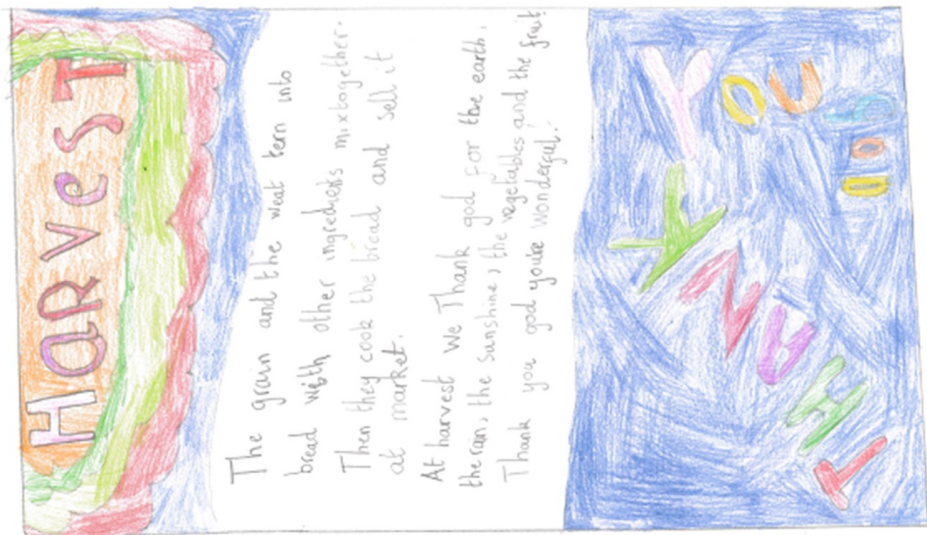
ST MARY'S CHRISTMAS CARD TO THE PARISH

These will soon be set out on a table at the back of church ready for delivery to every house in the parish. Please help if you can by taking a few packs and delivering them in the roads as labelled.

This is an important part of our mission in the Old Swinford community through which we offer a warm welcome to all to our services at Christmas and throughout 2014. Thank you.



Children from Oldswinford Primary School sent some of the work they completed in class after their visit to the Harvest display

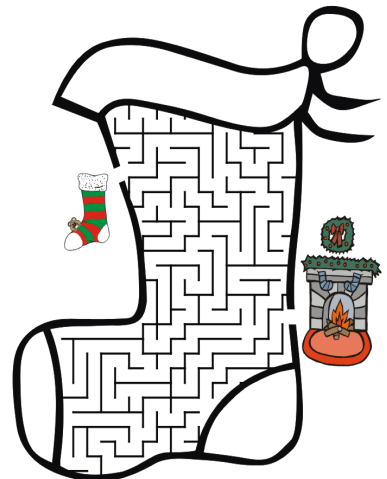


FOR ALL GOD'S CHILDREN

A CHILD IS BORN

Can you choose the correct answer and get 10 out of 10 in our Christmas Quiz?

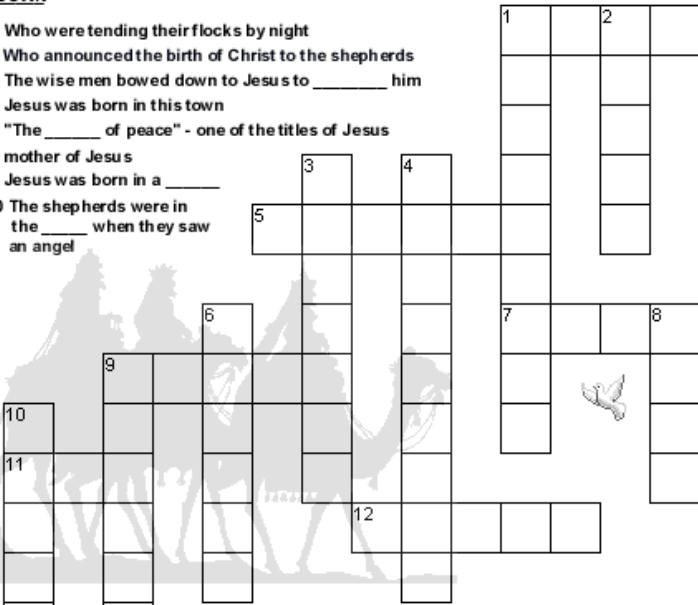
1. The name of the mother of Jesus was?
Martha/Mary/Eve/Deborah
2. Jesus was born in what town?
Jerusalem/Nazareth/Bethlehem/New York
3. Joseph was a?
Carpenter/Doctor/Engineer/Fisherman
4. Why didn't Joseph and Mary stay at the inn?
It was too expensive/There was no inn
/There was no room
5. How did Joseph and Mary get to Bethlehem?
Colt/Mary rode a donkey and Joseph walked/we are not told
6. After being born, Jesus was placed in a?
Basket/Manger/Pile of hay/on the back of a donkey
7. What is frankincense?
A form of gold/incense from a tree/
a jewel/none of these
8. How many wise men came to see Jesus?
One/Two/Three/The Bible doesn't say
9. Who told Joseph and Mary to go to Bethlehem?
An angel/Caesar Augustus/
Herod/Joseph was told in a dream
10. In which books do we find the story of Jesus' birth?
Matthew/Mark/Luke/John



Birth of Christ

DOWN

- Who were tending their flocks by night
- Who announced the birth of Christ to the shepherds
- The wise men bowed down to Jesus to _____ him
- Jesus was born in this town
- "The _____ of peace" - one of the titles of Jesus
- mother of Jesus
- Jesus was born in a _____
- The shepherds were in the _____ when they saw an angel



ACROSS

- The wise men followed a _____ that led them to Jesus
- human father of Jesus
- There was no _____ at the inn for Jesus
- one of the gifts of the three wise men
- Jesus could not stay at the _____ because it was full
- and on earth _____, goodwill toward men (Luke 2:14)



What are your colouring skills like? Brighten up your pictures and then send them in to the editors to be displayed in next month's edition of the magazine...



Christmas provides us with an opportunity to be more aware of those around us who have less than ourselves, of those who face particular hardships for which there seems an unending cycle of challenge.

There is no difficulty in identifying a worthy cause to support, or the form in which the help may be provided. So this Christmas perhaps we should all make a special effort to identify what we can do and how we can do it. Then, make sure it is done and with sustained determination, do all we can to maintain that contribution throughout the coming year. That is what will help to make others healthy and will help to ensure the health of our church too.

Anon

MUCH APPRECIATED VOLUNTEERS

This happy band of volunteers, members of the Church of Latter Day Saints, has adopted St Mary's churchyard as a community project. On Saturday 2 November up to 35 people formed a work party that tackled the overgrown area to the south of the church. For five hours the group worked hard, a group of young and not so young from a wide variety of home countries, and achieved a very real impact which had our own resident historian Roy Peacock observing that he could now see memorials he had not seen before. Thank you all very much. The group plans to return in the Spring to continue the clearance of this area and to involve children in the planting of poppy seeds around the service memorials in the churchyard. I hope to bring news of this event to you all well in advance so that we may add our own workforce to the task to make a big impact at the start of next year's growing season.



Tony Tatford

Before.....and.....After



A HARVEST EXPERIENCE

On the evening of October 19 in the church hall more than sixty people sat down to a delicious Harvest Supper. It had been cooked and was served by members of the Social Committee and their partners. After the meal, the hall hummed with the chatter of friends trying to find the answers to a multitude of questions about Harvest. The evening was a great success and our thanks must go to the Social Committee for once again organising such a lovely evening. This event was the culmination of two weeks of Harvest Celebrations at St Mary's.



Earlier in the month Revd Ruth Atkinson and Sally Frost had inspired members of the Flower Guild to collect materials to enable them to decorate the church. This resulted in some original and very beautiful displays. The different aspects of harvest were illustrated by Earth Garden, Flock, Grain and the Ocean. These were linked to the Fruits of the Spirit, Joy, Patience, Humility, Generosity and Peace.

Ruth was eager to get the children from Ham Dingle and Oldswinford Primary Schools involved, so Year 3 pupils were invited to visit the church on four afternoons during this time. After Ruth's introduction they divided into small groups, and in rotation talked to church members who were stationed at each of the displays. There was a great deal of discussion as the fruits, vegetables and products of the earth were illustrated.

Each display included an activity to engage and involve the children and resulted in some remarkably carefully and skilfully modelled products that were proudly carried back to school as evidence of the afternoon's work. The visits passed very quickly and the children returned to school "buzzing" with enthusiasm about the different aspects of Harvest.

During the Harvest Festival weekend, we welcomed many visitors to St Mary's. On Friday and Saturday there were two weddings, and on Sunday afternoon four children were baptised. Students from Old Swinford Hospital and many others joined us for "Worship Together" on Sunday at the 10.00 am service when many gifts of groceries were brought into church. These were later taken to the Food Bank and St Basil's Hostel for the Homeless in Birmingham as a gift from the people of St Mary's.

Our Harvest Experience involved many members of St Mary's Church family, working in harmony together. It was very rewarding and very worthwhile, but most of all it reminded us all of how God loves, cares and provides for us, His children.

A very special thank you is due to Revd Ruth Atkinson for her guidance and direction in organising the displays and presentations on four afternoons to children from Oldswinford Primary School and Ham Dingle Primary School. Thank you also to the team of people who contributed in many ways to the assembly of the displays, the floral decorations and the afternoon activities. This all proved to be a very special celebration of Harvest, yet again, something a little bit different and with greater relevance to the community of which St Mary's is a part. Thank you Ruth for your inspiration.

Brenda Selby

BEHIND THE SCENES WITH THE PARISH ADMINISTRATOR

John Sutton has been our parish administrator for just over three years now, filling a role that is far more complex than many would believe. Alongside the obvious jobs of responding to enquiries, receiving deliveries and printing the weekly service sheets, John maintains the website and Facebook page, providing up to date access to important news, information and resources.

John is often the first and regular contact with those using the facilities at St Mary's as he manages bookings for weddings, funerals, the church hall and the Coach House. In time, other people take on the details of church hall and Coach House bookings whilst John has oversight of the administration of other church events.

A number of diary systems, on paper and online, are used to maintain information records about the regular services and key events within church. One diary is kept for the staff only and it contains all the important and confidential information about funerals and weddings.

Cont'd.....

Once a couple have made their booking for a wedding with one of the clergy during vestry hour on a Saturday morning, John undertakes the responsibility for ensuring the special day runs without a hitch. Maintaining accurate records of details exchanged in letters, by phone or email are a high priority. In a constantly updated diary contained within a spreadsheet all the details are made available to other members of the church: the clergy, the vergers, the organist, the choir master, the bell ringers and many others. Over a period of a year or more the details are refined and the records are adjusted until everything falls into place...a job well done!

John often has visitors knocking on his door. It may be someone who is collecting vouchers for the Food Bank, someone trying to locate the grave of their ancestor/s or perhaps somebody who wants to go in to church for some personal quiet time. Funeral directors, flower arrangers, work contractors such as organ tuners and electricians, roofers and security firms all keep John on the go.

At various points of the church year John liaises with organisations such as the Robin Wood's library who provide the church with any relevant books the clergy and congregation may find of interest and support in their spiritual life. At other times, as recently, he compiled the list of names for commemoration at the All Soul's service, and soon he will be busy having moved on to producing the Christmas cards which will be delivered to every house in the parish of Old Swinford. He will also be producing the service sheets for the Advent Carol Service, Midnight Mass and Christmas morning Holy Eucharist.

John's key job is to support the work of the clergy which he does through his role as an Authorised Lay Minister (ALM), as he contributes through administration services to the spiritual life of the church. A major task in this capacity is the compilation of the service rota to ensure all Sunday services are fully staffed with readers, sidespeople, chalice assistants, wardens and even people to make coffee at the end of the 10.00 am Sunday service. Also, as sacristan, he makes sure the church is stocked with wine, wafers and candles - the consumables. He prepares the chalices and ciboria, changes the aumbrey candle each week and tops up all candles with fuel.

John is also the tower captain for our bell ringers. Every Thursday evening he hosts a rehearsal for the team. He has to organise his ringers to ensure the bells ring-in the congregation for the Sunday services. He coordinates visitors from other churches wishing to ring our bells and organises any peels and quarter peels for special events.

Clearly the role of Parish Administrator covers a wide range of both interesting and repetitive tasks, many of which we may take for granted because of the efficiency that ensures all is in place at the right time. A busy life that provides us with the opportunity to say thank you.

Gemma Sutton

SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL CREDIT UNION

The Archbishop of Canterbury has urged that throughout the Church of England more consideration be given as to how church bodies and members might give more support to credit unions.

He said: "A large and growing number of people rely on short-term loans at very high interest rates to make ends meet, and can easily end up in a crippling spiral of debt. Our faith in Christ calls us to love the poor and vulnerable with our actions. That is why the Church must be actively involved in supporting the development of real lending alternatives, such as credit unions. We must help credit unions to become bigger, better known and easier to access if we want them to compete effectively with high interest lenders."

In October, to mark *International Credit Union Day*, the Worcester Diocesan Social Responsibility Fund became a corporate member of Castle and Crystal Credit Union Ltd in Dudley, the only substantive Credit Union operating in the Diocese, depositing £15,000.

Supporting a credit union by depositing money in it is not a donation like giving food to a food bank but is a way of using some of your savings productively. A deposit account will have 'easy access' so you can use funds that you or your church might need in the future for a positive purpose. You can withdraw all or some of your money as required.

Credit unions need people to save with them, preferably on a longer-term basis, so they have more funds to lend to ordinary people – often relatively small sums to help them make ends meet, to help cover an unexpected emergency or to spread the cost of a larger item. All borrowers from a credit union must be members and savers too.

Churches can support their credit union by:

- raising parishioners awareness about possible membership of the credit union
- the possibility of members to regularly make deposits through payroll deduction and for any church members who are managers to support this in their company/organisation
- parochial church councils opening a corporate account with their credit union

(There is a reputational benefit to the credit union: support from an organisation with recognised social status, such as a local church, endorses the credit union and helps it to attract other new members)

NB: It is important to state that those considering membership of a credit union should not take decisions on the basis of this article and that proper financial investment advice should be sought.

The credit union that serves Dudley borough is Castle and Crystal Credit Union Ltd. It can be contacted at: 25 New Street, Dudley, West Midlands, DY1 1LT, tel: 01384 815771, E-mail: castle.crystal@dudley.gov.uk or www.castlecrystal.co.uk

Diocesan News

THIS MONTH'S RECIPE

CHRISTMAS BROWNIES

These quantities make about 14 large pieces or 28 smaller pieces. I often make half the quantity in a 7 inch square tin and cut this into 9 pieces.

275g (10oz) soft butter or soft baking margarine
375g (13oz) caster sugar
4 eggs
1 teaspoon baking powder
75g (3oz) sifted cocoa
100g (4oz) plain flour
1 pack 100g (4oz) white chocolate polka dots or chopped
pecan nuts
1 pack 100g (4oz) white chocolate polka (for melting)
Christmas sprinkles (available in supermarket baking department)



Line a tray bake tin with baking parchment. If you don't have one line a small roasting tin with foil and grease well.

Put all the ingredients into a bowl and mix well until blended. This can be done in a food processor, mixing in one pack of the polka dots by hand at the last minute.

Spoon into the prepared tin. Bake at 190 C/Gas 5 for 40 minutes approximately. If making the smaller quantity I bake them for 25 minutes as you don't want them overcooked.

Cool in the tin. They should be squidgy!

To decorate, melt one pack of the white polka dots and drizzle over the brownies, sprinkle over the Christmas sprinkles. Cut into squares.

For a simpler decoration dust with a little icing sugar.

Ann Jennings

AND FOR THE WINE.....

Brownies make a wonderful treat at the end of a meal don't they? - A sip of something? The Italian tradition would be to munch some cantucci biscuits with a glass of Vin Santo. But Christmas approaches and we might want something special. So on this occasion, let's look at some brandy options - and at the same time meet some less frequently encountered grapes.

The quality end of the brandy market is dominated by the French superstars Cognac and Armagnac. In reality many wine-growing regions distill grape juice to produce brandy, although of course other fruits can be used : apples (Calvados), cherries (Kirsch), plums (Slivovitz).

Cognacs, made principally from the Ugni Blanc grape, embrace a glitterati of big names : Remy Martin, Hine, Hennessy, Courvoisier. Watch out too for the classy Cognacs of Delamain and Frapin which capture the glory of a fine double-distilled Cognac. Armagnacs are produced further south and feature Ugni Blanc, Colombard and Folle Blanche. Distilled only once, Armagnacs exhibit a denser fruit and texture and require longer to mature. Janneau is the name which stands the test of time but an aged Folle Blanche Armagnac, epitomized by the brandies crafted by Boigneres, remains a real delight.

Spanish brandies flow from huge plantings of the Airen grape and notch up the weight of fruit still further. Italy meanwhile is advancing from its fiery grappas of old. Although still made from distilling the residue of grape fermentations, there are now some wonderful grappas produced unusually from either red or white juice. Track down a grappa made from Brunello or the great Supertuscan Tignanello and enjoy a special Christmas sip!

Richard W. B. Ryan

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ST MARY'S WITH ST JOHN'S MOTHERS' UNION

Twenty four members and one visitor were welcomed to our November meeting by Anne May. Members were reminded that subscriptions are now due.

Two indoor members, Marion Tyler and Rene Pearson had recently died. They had supported Mothers' Union for many years. Originally they belonged to the group at St John's C of E in Stourbridge Town. When this church was transferred to become a United Reformed Church these MU members were amalgamated with St Mary's. Condolences were sent to their families.

Audrey Tranter led the service and special prayers were given for those suffering from the Haiyan Typhoon in the Philippines. Dorothy Gibson's talk was based on the 2013 MU theme "The Seeds We Sow". We were reminded that birth and change of life rather than death are the destiny of Christians as Christ taught (St John 12 v24). Be careful what you sow in life, your legacy could have a long term impact on others.

Dates for your dairy:

Next meeting 10 December, 2.15pm at the Coach House.

Theme : Christmas Celebrations.

19 December, 2.00pm Kinver Church Hall

MU Annual Carol Service.

Dawn Nex

PARISH REGISTER

Baptisms

3 November Marnie Alyssia Sara Benn

Funerals

25 October	Hester Turner	aged 50
30 October	Marian Tyler	aged 89
4 November	Bryan Kimberley	aged 90
5 November	Doris Raybould	aged 92
7 November	John Golledge	aged 72

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

Members of the Magazine Committee express thanks to all our readers, contributors, distributors and advertisers for their support and assistance during the past year and send the very best of wishes to all for the joy of a peaceful and meaningful Christmas.

We hope you have enjoyed the magazines we have published in the past year and have found the articles to be interesting, informative and entertaining. As always, we invite contributions for inclusion in future editions and welcome ideas which may help us to further the mission of St Mary's through the pages of the magazine. Equally, should you feel so inclined, we would welcome the support and contributions of new members to our small, friendly committee.

Children's Page Answers

1. Mary 2. Bethlehem 3. Carpenter 4. There was no room 5. We are not told. 6. Manger
7. A valuable incense made from the sap of a tree 8. No one knows but more than one 9. Caesar
Augustus 10. Matthew and Luke.

DOWN:

- 1-Shephards
2-Angels
3-Worship
4-Bethlehem
6-Prince
8-Mary
9-Manger
10-Fields

ACROSS:

- 1 -Star
5 -Joseph
7 - Room
9 -Myrrh
11 -Inn
12 -Peace

Letter from the Archdeacon of Worcester

'It's a Christmas Thing'

I keep hearing voices - but they are not human voices. When I telephone a utility company, a voice presents me with a number of options and then interrupts a crackly version of Greensleeves to tell me that my call is important to the company.

At the supermarket, a voice reminds me to scan or swipe my loyalty card before warning me that there is an unexpected item in the bagging area. On the train, a voice announces the names of stations and then tells me to mind the gap between the train and the platform edge. There are many voices that one hears each day but they are not the words of a human being. I am also conscious that the way in which we communicate with others has changed; we 'tweet' and 'poke' and 'friend' and 'like' as we stare at the screen of our phone, tablet or computer. It seems to me that in the 21st century we are becoming increasingly remote from one another - less human - less connected.

The Bible tells us that the word became flesh and dwelt among us. CS Lewis said that the 'central miracle asserted by Christians is the incarnation' and he adds that 'every other miracle prepares for this, or exhibits this, or results from this'.

God himself refused to be remote but came to earth; touching the untouchable, embracing the guilty, healing the blind and the lame and blessing the little children. Those feet in ancient times really did walk somewhere on this earth even if it wasn't precisely in England.

How ironic then that we are that we should become less and less physically present to each other - less incarnate. Mark Edmundson, Professor of English at the University of Virginia, describes his students 'chatting on a mobile and skim-reading a book while browsing a website with the TV in the background and instant messaging three friends would make, say, seven 'places' they were... at the same time' and he adds that 'anyone who is in seven places at once is not anywhere in particular - not present, not here now. And yet we are called to love incarnationally and to be with people physically, humanly - to be at their side.

Last Christmas I watched a video on YouTube that featured Kim Wilde (a popular singer from the 1980s and daughter of Marty Wilde). She and Ricky (her brother) had caught the tube train home after last year's MagicFM Christmas Party. Kim may have had a few sherries at the party because all of a sudden she began to sing one of her hit songs 'Kids in America'. The people on the tube looked out of the window and down at their shoes or into their phones and still they refused to acknowledge one another's presence. Then she walked down the carriage singing 'Rocking Around the Christmas Tree' and she said to her fellow passengers, 'look, I know we're on this train together and we're ignoring each other like we normally do - and we're just looking down into our phones and stuff, but hey - why not join in?' And then she added, 'It's a Christmas thing.'

What Kim Wilde achieved was 'a Christmas thing' for she challenged people to be present to each other, to acknowledge one another and to end their remoteness. This Christmas, despite the disembodied voices and the countless electronic messages on phones and computers, let us celebrate the one who became flesh and who made his home among us. Let us be fully present with each other - acknowledge one another and let us love incarnationally - the way that Jesus did. After all, as Kim Wilde said, 'It's a Christmas thing'.

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