

**ST MARY'S
OLD SWINFORD
Parish Church
MONTHLY NEWS
DECEMBER 2018
ONLINE EDITION**

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OLD SWINFORD
Parish Church
MONTHLY NEWS**



50p

DECEMBER 2018

CURATE:

The Revd Alex French
58 Arlington Court
Old Swinford
Stourbridge, DY8 1NN
Tel 01384 622400
E-mail:
st.mary.os.curate@btconnect.com

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 (Monday to Thursday)
Daily:	5.00 pm - Evening Prayer (Monday to Thursday)
Wednesday:	1.30 pm - Toddlers' Group 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 noon - Open Church – refreshments available
Curate Day Off	Friday

OTHER REGULAR EVENTS

Prayer Group	Third Wednesday in month, 10 -11 am	Tel: 393454
Mothers' Union:	Second Tuesday at 2.15 pm	392951
St Mary's Walking Group:	Last Saturday of the month. Depart 9.30 am	

CONTACTS

Reader:	Mr Roger King	379800
Church Wardens:	Mrs Judy Hall	377349
	Mr Antony Tatford	822661
Director of Music:	Mr Graham Davies	07845 968025
	st.mary.os.dom@btconnect.com	
PCC Secretary:	Miss Katey Fletcher	378182
Monthly News Editor:	Mr Alec Beevers	444229
Safeguarding Officer:	Mrs Liz Fourness	394359
Church Hall and		
Coach House: - Bookings:	Parish Office	441003
Parish Administrator and		
Publicity Officer:	Mr John Sutton	441003
Parish Office:	Open 9.00 am -1.00 pm Tuesday to Thursday, 9.00 am to 12.00 noon Friday Closed Saturday, Sunday and Monday	441003
Church website address:	www.stmaryschurcholdswinford.org.uk E-mail: st.mary.os@btconnect.com	
Facebook:	www.facebook.com/stmaryschurcholdswinford	
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 am and 11.00 am for Vestry Hour. You will be warmly welcomed. Tea and coffee will be available.

PARISH REGISTER

Baptisms

21.10.18	Harper Wren McLeod
28.10.18	Katy Louise Whalley
4.11.18	Ava Sienna Barrows
	Henry Alfie Ayers
11.11.18	Sophia Katherine Johnson

Weddings

20.10.18	Aaron Tranter and Lisa Bolton
27.10.18	James Bentley and Sarah Winchurch

Funerals

12.10.18	Patricia Checketts – interment of ashes
17.10.18	Beryl Moreton
22.10.18	Cliff Day
8.11.18	Paul Lucas

DIARY FOR DECEMBER 2018

Saturday 1	10.00 – 12.00 noon Christmas Market
SUNDAY 2	ADVENT SUNDAY
	3.00 pm Baptism
	6.30 pm Advent Carol Service
Thursday 6	10.30 am Holy Communion
Friday 7	Clergy day off
	Christmas Tree into church
Saturday 8	10.00 am Open Church and Vestry Hour
SUNDAY 9	SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT
	10.00 am TOY SERVICE
	3.00-5.00pm MESSY CHURCH
Monday 10	7.00 pm Redhill School Carol Service
	Deadline for copy for magazine
Tuesday 11	11.30 am Holy Communion at Hollycroft
	2.15 pm Mothers' Union
Wednesday 12	7.00 pm OCEPS Carol Service
Thursday 13	10.30 am Holy Communion
	7.00 pm King Edwards Carol Service
Friday 14	Clergy day off
	2.00 pm OSH Carol Service
	2.30 pm Magazine Meeting
Saturday 15	10.00 am Open Church
	GOT2SING in church all day and evening
SUNDAY 16	THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT
	3.00 pm Baptism
Monday 17	7.30 pm PCC Meeting
Tuesday 18	2.00-4.00 pm Tuesday Tea in the Coach House
Wednesday 19	11.30 am Holy Communion at Holly Lodge
Thursday 20	10.30 am Holy Communion
Friday 21	Clergy day off
Saturday 22	Decorate church for Christmas
	10.00 am Open Church and Vestry Hour
SUNDAY 23	FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT
	4.00 pm CHRISTINGLE
	6.30 pm Christmas Carol Service
Monday 24	4.00 pm Crib Service
	10.00 pm First Communion of Christmas
Tuesday 25	CHRISTMAS DAY
Thursday 27	10.30 am Holy Communion
Friday 28	Clergy day off
SUNDAY 30	CHRISTMAS 1
	6.30 pm A service for the New Year
Monday 31	Parish Office closed until 8 January



Dear Friends

Earlier this week the Christmas adverts have started to appear on the television. In Aldi's offering we have been able to catch up with the adventures of Kevin the Carrot. This Christmas we have found him attempting to protect his family from the nefarious activities of his arch enemy, Pascal the wicked Parsnip. In contrast Sainsbury's advert concentrates on a primary school play, focusing on a very nervous looking child on stage who is just about to sing a solo. As she starts singing the song 'You Get What You Give' her face is awash with fright, her voice faltering. As she spots her mother in the audience, courage and confidence sweep through her body until she is singing without a care in the world. Boots have also followed the theme of family as their advert focuses on the influence that a parent has on a child. As we watch the interactions of a mother and daughter we see how precious and life affirming the bond between a parent and offspring is.

A few days ago I was asked by a child 'Why is Christmas special?'. As I started to think through my answer I found my mind filled with voices from people who, over the years I had heard lamenting the lost specialness of Christmas. Just what I wondered could I say? As I started to formulate an answer it was the Christmas adverts I realised which help encapsulate the specialness of Christmas.

Ironically the news today has been filled with reports concerning how Iceland's Christmas advert has been banned from the television. The advert addresses the impact of deforestation on tropical rainforests as woodland is cleared to make way for the planting of Palm Oil. Although the advert focuses specifically on the declining population of Orangutans it makes a powerful wider point about the survival of the planet more generally. Tellingly it acts as a reminder that our behaviours (most significantly displayed by what we buy) can protect and shield the environment or contribute to its decay.

There are adverts celebrating the importance of the bonds that can exist within families; adverts stripping evil of its strength, facilitating freedom and liberty instead; adverts dispelling fear and worry, filling their place with confidence and belief; adverts calling us to new patterns of behaviour, ones that protect and nurture the beauty of God's creation.

Right before our eyes, in the adverts on our televisions, there is something of the specialness of Christmas, of why the Messiah was born. If we allow him to enter the stable of our hearts, then we will not only find a new life devoid of fear, filled instead with freedom and liberty but we will be gathered into his family, held within the bond he has with his Father. This is the bond which helps us cast sin from our lives transforming us to help usher in the new reality of God's Kingdom. No gift is as priceless, no gift so special as the bestowal of a richer, deeper and freer life.

Friends, may the Christmas adverts this year help connect you back into the specialness of Christmas.

PROGRAMME OF SPECIAL SERVICES FOR CHRISTMAS

Sunday 2 December ADVENT SUNDAY

6.30 pm Advent Carol Service

Sunday 9 December

10.00am Toy Service (*During which you are invited to donate an unwrapped gift of a toy or toiletries which will be donated to the Dudley Women's' refuge*)

Sunday 23 December

4.00pm Christingle Service (*see page 6*)

6.30pm Christmas Carol Service
A traditional Service of Readings and Carols

Monday 24 December CHRISTMAS EVE

4.00pm Crib Service for children

10.00pm Communion with Carols
The First Communion of Christmas

Tuesday 25 December CHRISTMAS DAY

8.00am Holy Communion

10.00am Family Communion with Carols

REMEMBRANCE DAY AT ST MARY'S

In 2018 Remembrance has taken on a particular significance in recognition of the centenary of the 1918 Armistice. This year has seen the culmination of events recognising the sacrifices made by those who lost their lives and those who survived this and other hostilities. In parallel, there has been a wider, active involvement in the creation of local, more personal tributes such as the panel of knitted poppies created with such care and consideration by many at St Mary's and which lay draped on the Chancel steps. This has been much admired with appreciation of the skill involved and the sentiment behind the work.

At the 10.00 am Service of Remembrance, so considerably composed by the Revd Alex French, St Mary's paid tribute to the men of Oldswinford and all those whose lives had been impacted upon by war. Children and others present shared in this tribute in readings and in the placing of a simple floral tribute on the eight graves in the churchyard that commemorate the service men and women who died in the service of their country. Their stories are available in church for you to read.



ST MARY'S WALKING GROUP - OCTOBER WALK

Kinver to Blakedown

On Saturday 27th October eleven of us set out for the church walk starting at Stourbridge Bus Station where we caught the bus to Kinver. We got off the bus just after the Vine pub and walked along Anchor Lane to the canal. Turning right we walked along the tow path for just over two miles almost reaching Cookley. After coffee we went over a canal bridge and walked steeply uphill along a path which passed a mobile home site, then a more gentle incline along the edge of Cookley to come out on the A449 by the old gate house of the former Brown Westhead estate.

After walking 200 metres down the road we crossed over and entered a wood where the path took us to the old Lea Castle Hospital site. This is now being developed for housing and the former buildings are being demolished. The resulting debris littered the next 300 metres of our walk so was of limited aesthetic value although, no doubt, providing much inspiration to any potential entrant to next year's Turner Prize. We then entered another small area of woodland, leading us on to Axborough Lane. The group then crossed the A451 on to Waggon Lane. After 800 metres of tarmac we turned off right along a path at the side of Blakedown golf course.

On reaching Blakedown we were pleased to discover a short cut to the main road over the railway line had been reopened. This had previously been fenced off and would have meant a detour under the railway viaduct. It was only a short walk to the Swan pub where, after being parted from our muddy boots, we were joined by three others for a nice lunch in the conservatory. The overall walk was just under 6 miles with varied landscape. The plan was then to walk to Blakedown station and catch a train back to Stourbridge. As others had joined us for lunch and had come in cars most people actually got a lift back with them.

We had set off in bright sunshine and a beautiful blue sky and although it clouded over and there was some rain this did not detract from the overall enjoyment of the walk.

Sue and Tony Wakeley

CHRISTINGLE 50



On 20th December, in the small town of Marionbon in Germany, in the year 1747, children were talking about a new Christmas service that had been arranged in their Moravian church. The first Christingle had arrived! In 1968 Christingle was brought to this country by The Children's Society and entered the Anglican church that year. It has proved popular everywhere.

It is also our 50th anniversary of Christingle at St Mary's. Do come and join us as we celebrate on Sunday 23 December at 4.00 pm.

May Christingle glow and grow for ever.



Wendy Tranter

ST STEPHEN'S DAY

*Good King Wenceslas looked out
On the Feast of Stephen,
When the snow lay round about
Deep and crisp and even;*

JM Neale 1818-66

St Stephen's Day falls on 26th December every year, the day that is also known in England as Boxing Day. St Stephen died in the year 34 AD, only a year or so after the death of Jesus. He was the first Christian martyr.



St Stephen is particularly associated with the provision of alms and charitable giving. He was one of seven deacons appointed by the apostles in the early church to distribute food and other aid to poor people. He was a Jewish convert to Christianity who upset many influential members of the Jewish community in a speech to an assembly of rabbis. This resulted in his martyrdom.

Stephen was buried but the place of his burial was not recorded. However, it is said that in 415 AD a priest named Lucian had a dream in which the location of Stephen's remains were to be found. These remains were removed to a place near the Damascus Gate to the north of Jerusalem. The Crusaders later referred to this gate as St Stephen's Gate.

Subsequently, Good King Wenceslas (907-935 AD) was looking out one St Stephen's Day when he saw a poor man gathering winter fuel. In fact it is quite likely that he looked out most days of the year because his good and charitable acts were well recorded. A reference from the twelfth century tells us that "...he went around to God's churches and gave alms generously to widows, orphans, those in prison and afflicted by every difficulty, so much so that he was considered, not a prince, but the father of all the wretched."

Wenceslas was considered a martyr and a saint immediately after his death. In life he had been the Duke of Bohemia, but after his death, was accorded regal status by the Holy Roman Emperor in recognition of his good and charitable works. A cult of Wenceslas then developed in Bohemia and England.

St Stephen's Day has long been associated with charitable giving and the distribution of alms. In England in the Middle Ages it was the day when alms boxes and collection boxes for the poor were traditionally opened and the contents given to the poor and needy. This may well be the reason that the day came to be known as Boxing Day.

In the past, Boxing Day was the day that domestic servants were often allowed the day off, in order that they might visit their families to celebrate Christmas with them. It was also the day when the householder might expect a knock on the door from regular trades people, such as bakers or butchers to convey season's greetings. In this event the caller might be induced to accept a small gratuity often known as a Christmas box.

Stephen Howard

A LETTER FROM STEPHEN AND JEAN

White Garden,
53b High Street,
Martin,
Lincoln. LN43QY
01526 378825
revsmagnew@yahoo.com

25 October 2018

Dear All,

It is now three weeks since Jean and I moved to Lincolnshire and as of this morning we have disposed of most of the boxes we used for the move (what would we do without marketplace?) It has been one great round of activity since coming here, what with unpacking, getting used to the new house and all its quirks, looking after the grandchildren, starting to prepare the garden for winter, walking the dog, getting to know the area and its churches and so many other things.

One of the things which has struck us is the wonderful light here, we have had so many wonderful sunrises and sunsets, and it is a great delight to go outside and walk the dog early and late each day. Islay has quickly settled into her new life and spends much of her time out of doors. I have not had time to go out specifically birdwatching, that will come later, but when out with the dog there are dozens of pheasant flushed each day, plus the inevitable partridge (the red-legged variety) and we have even encountered a trio of Roe Deer on one occasion. The area is deeply rural and very relaxed, but at the same time a mere 8 minute drive from the nearest small town, Woodhall Spa, which is a delightful place. We attended the village church this last Sunday for a Eucharist, Jean and I almost doubled the size of the congregation.

As the pace of settling in becomes more manageable Jean and I have been thinking about our final days at St Mary's and want to thank you all for making our departing so memorable and enjoyable. As I mentioned on the final Sunday, I apologize that I did not get to see everyone that I wanted to in the last few months of my time at St Mary's, my own family situation militated against that, and I am continuing to spend a good part of my time in Chester - please do continue to include my mother, Joyce Agnew, in your prayers as she continues to get used to living alone.

Our final Sunday itself was very memorable for both of us, with so many people from St Mary's and other places coming and saying goodbye, and of course being able to say farewell with music. You were also so very generous with your gifts and whilst I haven't yet been birding, so haven't purchased a spotting scope, we have made a point of preparing flower beds and planting out the white roses which were presented to Jean. We have also used many of the garden tokens and gifts of money to set up the garden as much as we can, and we await the delivery of fruit trees and more rose bushes next month, so the garden will be a constant reminder of you all and of your kindness and generosity.

If you are ever visiting Lincolnshire and would like to drop into Martin you would be very welcome. We would be most pleased to give you a cup of tea or a place to rest your head, and show you the delights of the area. But whether you travel this way or not, thank you for your good wishes, your kindness and your generosity. We wish you and St Mary's God's blessing in the future.

Best wishes to you all.

Stephen and Jean

NEWS FROM THE PEWS

December is always a busy month. As part of our Parish Priorities and for several events during the month you are invited to offer to read at services or to otherwise help with the many events that require a little extra supervision. If you are able to help in this way please sign up on the lists displayed in the narthex or speak to a warden or a member of the clergy.

Vacancy News The closing date for applications for the post of Rector at St Mary's has now passed. Shortlisting and interviews will be held in November. The rectory has been inspected by members of the Parsonages Board who will undertake essential work before the new Rector moves in.

Graham Davies has presented his resignation from the post of Director of Music with effect from the end of January 2019. We thank Graham for his service and wish him well for the future. The PCC will give immediate consideration to the process of seeking a new appointment to this important post. In the meantime full support and consideration will be provided to our choir and all who assist in providing for the musical worship at St Mary's.



Our next Messy Church event will be on Sunday 9 December from 3.00 pm - 5.00 pm in the Church Hall. Please let the Parish Office know if you would like to join us.

REMEMBRANCE AT OLDSWINFORD CofE PRIMARY SCHOOL



We held our school remembrance memorial service on Friday 9 November: every year group contributed and we held a two-minute silence. During the service we focused on two things: remembering the courage of those who lost their lives (human and animal) and hope for peace.

We asked our children and families to create a fabric poppy to display around our memorial board of the 48 Oldswinford pupils who served and died in the Great War. The response was overwhelming. I have attached a photo of the finished display...it really doesn't do it justice.

Each poppy is beautifully unique and makes a stunning, collaborative display.

Jo Seker
Acting Head Teacher & DSL
Oldswinford Church of England Primary School

RINGING REMEMBERS

The Old Swinford bell ringers joined in with other ringers around the country to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the armistice, and cessation of hostilities that came with the ending of the First World War.

We undertook service ringing as normal. In addition to this, we rang at 12.30pm to coincide with the nation's tribute as thousands marched past the Cenotaph in honour of the fallen. As is usual at times of remembrance and reflection, we rang the bells half muffled. This produced a more muted tone appropriate to the day.

This event brought to a close a year-long campaign, Ringing Remembers, launched by the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers to mark this year's 100th anniversary. The aim being that on this day 1400 newly recruited bell ringers would add to the ringing taking place in the nation's towns, villages and cities.

The figure of 1400 new ringers is significant, that being the number of ringers that perished on active service during the Great War. It is pleasing to record, that in the event over 2400 new ringers have been registered on the scheme, and have been actively preparing to participate on the day.



Stephen Howard

BARN DANCE

You should have been there!

On Saturday 3rd November it was the Church Barn Dance. Several members of the Social Committee met at 6.30pm to set out tables and chairs, and sort out the food. Eve and John arrived to set up their equipment and soon the first potential dancers arrived. As start time neared several names on the list remained unaccounted for.

We decided to begin. The first few dances everyone seemed confident at following Eve's instructions. From experience you learn that one dance really means two before you can have a break.



After nearly an hour it was time to eat. We tucked into hot dogs – onions and sauces to suit your taste plus pizzas. If you had room there were more hot dogs and pizza slices. We found room. Parkin and marshmallows followed, then a short rest after tea and coffee and we were back on the dance floor.

Absolute chaos!! Well from one set there was. An imbalance in the ratio of men to women meant many ladies were dancing the man's part. Easy to forget which you were, and not to know your left from your right. Amazingly the set finished with everyone in the right place.

We all had a fantastic time – good food and good company with a very good pair to lead us in our dancing. Such a pity that the 7 people who didn't turn up missed all that entertainment.

We were expecting you, we prepared food for you, we missed you.

Sue Wakeley

Strictly - No Dancing

The church hall was alive with music and dance as Eve and John provided great entertainment. Sadly I was unable to take to the floor for the dancing due to limited mobility but everyone else joined in despite age and infirmity. However I was able to tap my feet to the music and watched the performers. Some of the dances were quite hilarious and I laughed so much that tears ran down my face!

During the interval we were provided with good food - hot-dogs and pizza were very appropriate for a barn dance and added to the lively atmosphere.

Thank you to the social committee for all their hard work. I had a wonderful evening and could have gone on all night.

Dorothy Cotton

A SERVICE FOR OUR DOGS

Our service for dog walkers on Sunday 14 October brought together over twenty dogs, owners and friends from our community who enjoy social fellowship through meeting and walking in our parish. Many of us are more identifiable and known through the dogs' names rather than the owners!

Before the service a joyful bustle of excited dogs and owners assembled in the narthex: as they were led through into the nave and seated, the dogs became silent – perhaps helped by the seclusion of the box pews. Alex led us through the service of thanksgiving for the gift of our dogs and asking for God's blessing on all of creation. After prayers, hymns and readings, Alex delivered a short talk in which he observed that the love between dog and owner reflected the love of God for all creation. At the end of the service Alex blessed all the dogs individually and the congregation withdrew to the accompaniment of amusing and appropriate organ music selected and played by Graham Davies – an arrangement of "How much is that doggy in the window?"

The service has continued to be a topic of conversation among the dog walkers of Oldswinford with expressions of appreciation to Alex and St Mary's - but also questions about the choice of artwork on the service sheet. The consensus is that Edvard Munch's "Head of a Dog" was chosen so that owners would appreciate how much prettier their own dogs were!

.....and a shaggy dog puzzle

In the pre-service bustle the churchwardens were unable to make an accurate headcount of visitors to enter into the attendance register. However during the service a member of the congregation counted all the legs that were in church at that time and came to the total of 150. There was one owner with 3 dogs, two owners, including Alex with Mahler and Moses, with 2 dogs; and there were two more people with 1 dog than those without a dog, including Graham the organist. Tony thanked the observer for this information which enabled to him to enter the correct figures in the register. How many people and dogs were in the church for the service?

Alec Beevers

ST MARY'S WITH ST JOHN'S MOTHER'S UNION

At our November meeting Brenda Selby led our opening service on the theme of remembrance. A minute's silence was held in memory of Anne Davies, a member of our branch and St Mary's church for many years, who had recently died.

The subject of our talk "Fiddle Quilts" was given by Karen Perry. These are small lap quilts given to people with dementia to prompt memory or soothe anxiety, often combining a few items like zips, fringes, key rings, pockets etc. to hold their interest. Karen trained as a specialist carer and was inspired and helped by Judy Oxford, a quilter from Wolverhampton.

Groups in other parts of the country are now developing to extend and apply the fiddle quilt idea.

Karen showed us the personalised one she had made for her mother. Quilts are designed and made to try to help reduce the patients' isolation by reminding them of people loved, occupations they'd had, passions enjoyed, such as animals, birds, sports, places they knew, or by using textures or fasteners to stimulate awareness. Colours are usually bright red, orange or yellow as sight diminishes for many. Some quilts are made for special children who need these stimuli. Families often keep these quilts when their loved ones have died.

Some members took kits which Karen had provided to make up for her, ready to gift on to those in need and Karen was thanked for making us aware of the special needs of so many.

Next meeting: Tuesday 11 December at 2.15 pm in the Coach House
Readings, music and carols for Christmas.
All are welcome.

Dawn Nex

IN MEMORY OF CLIFF DAY

In his address at the funeral service for Cliff Day, the Revd Alex French encouraged the congregation to reflect on and be grateful for the footprints left in the many lives influenced, in one way or another, by Cliff. Alex paid tribute to a man who knew who he was and what he needed to accomplish. Cliff was a man who had the courage to live being true to himself each day, a life that was well lived, a life that was rich and colourful and fun.

Outside his career occupation in insurance Cliff had a strong interest in Folk dancing and also in the church. St Mary's, Old Swinford played a significant part in Cliff's strong faith. Alongside his commitment to worship he served loyally in many roles, not least as Church warden. He was a much loved and respected, gentle man who helped with Youth Club and was instrumental in the 1980s in the establishment of the monthly Saturday Walking Group outings which still continue with strong support each month.

There was much more to Cliff's life, his gardening, his voluntary work, his travels and his interest in and support for the activities of others. He was a very proud and much loved father and grandfather and he will be missed greatly by all his family and friends.

Poor and deteriorating health had brought challenges to Cliff and to Chris in her dedication of care, since 2006. The trials must have been considerable but the tenacity and quiet acceptance with which Cliff met his lot brought admiration and respect from all who knew him. Cliff will be missed, but lives have been enhanced by his company, made more enjoyable by his sense of fun and set an example by his sense of knowing who he is and what he wanted to achieve. We can do no more than to reflect on the footprint he left to serve as a guide to live long in our memories.

FRIENDS OF THE MUSIC CONCERT



An Evening with Michael Jones, Tony Bridgewater and Stella Seaton-Sims

The latest in a series of concerts arranged by Friends of the Music at St Mary's brought together vocal and keyboard performers in a varied programme which demonstrated the range and versatility of voice and instruments. Michael Jones introduced sections of the programme with interesting narrative about the performance and connections between the composers, performers and the Black Country.

Michael described the opening piece which he played on the organ as a cross-over between cinema and concert organ music, and "Festal Day" provided a lively start to the evening.

Tony Bridgewater entertained us with some of his own compositions and also unpublished pieces by Dorothy Howell who spent many years in Stourbridge.

Stella sang two sets of songs from her long international repertoire with emotion, passion and joy reflecting the moods of Russia, Spain, France and England. Her performance of "The Farewell", from the poem "The Unreturning" by Wilfred Owen, was particularly poignant as it coincided with the unveiling of the poet's statue in Oswestry that day.

The finale was a piano composition called "Midland Dances" by Tony Bridgewater and played by Tony and Michael on one piano. Tony had been inspired by the lyrical arrangements of English folk music by R Vaughan Williams but noted that there was a dearth of traditional folk tunes and dance music from the Midlands. This composition conjured up some lovely melodies with occasional hints of familiar airs such as Scarborough Fair and was a joy to listen to.

Thank you to all performers for an entertaining evening from an appreciative audience.

The next concert will take place on Saturday 30 March 2019.

Alec Beevers

ANNE DAVIES

The news of the death of Anne Davies brought much sadness to St Mary's. Anne, along with her late husband, Norman, gave richly to the St Mary's community in very many ways. Anne had moved to live closer to her daughters as her ability to care for herself failed. She had, for the past three years enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle, in care, supported by her family and enriched by the communications received from friends and news of past associations. Our condolences are sent to Anne's family in appreciation of Anne's compassion and sharing.

Tony Tatford

LETTER FROM THE BISHOP OF WORCESTER

The Christian faith is essentially about love – because God is love.

At Christmas we celebrate God's love for us in coming to share our human life in the person of Jesus. At Easter we celebrate the depths of that love in dying for us, and its triumph over death itself in the resurrection. At Pentecost we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit, 'power from on high', to enable us to love as God has loved us.



It's as simple as that, really. The problem – in case you hadn't noticed – is that we don't manage to love as God loves us. As we celebrate the Advent of the Prince of Peace this Christmas, the world is filled with conflict. One hundred years after the ending of what was referred to at the time as 'the war to end all wars' there is still so much violence, bloodshed and oppression in the world.

Why is that? I suggest that the main reason we do not love as we ought is that we cannot, deep down, believe that we are loved or even loveable. Most of our 'sinfulness' – in Christian terminology – derives from an insecurity, a deep disease within.

Ever since I became a Christian I have believed that I am unconditionally loved – in my head. The trouble is I couldn't quite believe in my heart that anyone, let alone I, could be unconditionally loved. Until I became a parent, that is. I then felt an extraordinarily powerful and quite unconditional love for my children, and still do. I spoke to my daughter about this the other day and she feels the same about her two year-old-daughter.

Now I can believe that God loves me unconditionally – with my heart as well as my head. I have a long way to go but it has made me more loving.

My prayer this Christmas is that, whether or not we are parents, we shall be given grace to believe with all our heart that God loves us more than we can possibly imagine with a love that is stronger than death and which will stretch into all eternity. Then we might be able better to love as God loves us.

+John



The Magazine committee would like to take this opportunity to express their thanks to all those who have contributed articles, helped with the printing and supported the magazine in any way during the past year. We wish you all a Joyous Christmas and a Peaceful 2019.

We are grateful for the sponsorship of the following businesses



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