

**ST MARY'S  
OLD SWINFORD  
Parish Church  
MONTHLY NEWS  
DECEMBER 2019  
ONLINE EDITION**

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OLD SWINFORD  
Parish Church  
MONTHLY NEWS  
DECEMBER 2019**



***PEACE ON EARTH GOODWILL TO ALL***

**RECTOR**

The Revd John Flitcroft  
The Rectory  
Old Swinford  
Stourbridge, DY8 2HA  
Tel: 01384 395410  
E-mail:  
st.mary.os.priest@btconnect.com

**CURATE:**

The Revd Alex French  
58 Arlington Court  
Old Swinford  
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**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 am - 12.00 noon - Open Church – refreshments available
<b>Clergy Day Off</b>	Friday

**OTHER REGULAR EVENTS**

		Tel:
Prayer Group	Third Wednesday in month 10 -11 am	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

<b>Reader:</b>	Mr Roger King	379800
<b>Church Wardens:</b>	Mrs Judy Hall	377349
	Mr Antony Tatford	822661
<b>Director of Music:</b>	Mr James Bradley	07973 934177
<b>PCC Secretary:</b>	Miss Katey Fletcher	378182
<b>Monthly News Editor:</b>	Vacant –Please contact the Parish Office	
<b>Safeguarding Officer:</b>	Mrs Liz Fourness	394359
<b>Church Hall and</b>		
<b>Coach House: - Bookings:</b>	Parish Office	441003
<b>Parish Administrator and</b>		
<b>Publicity Officer:</b>	Mr John Sutton	441003
<b>Parish Office:</b>	Open 9.00 am -1.00 pm Tuesday to Thursday, 9.00 am to 12.00 noon Friday Closed Saturday, Sunday and Monday	441003
<b>Church website address:</b>	<a href="http://www.stmaryschurcholdswinford.org.uk">www.stmaryschurcholdswinford.org.uk</a> E-mail: <a href="mailto:st.mary.os@btconnect.com">st.mary.os@btconnect.com</a>	
<b>Facebook:</b>	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/stmaryschurcholdswinford">www.facebook.com/stmaryschurcholdswinford</a>	
<b>Magazine e-mail address:</b>	<a href="mailto:stmary.parishmagazine@hotmail.co.uk">stmary.parishmagazine@hotmail.co.uk</a>	

## 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.

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## PARISH REGISTER

### Baptisms

20 October	Clara Jean Elsie Brown
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### Weddings

19 October	John Brothers and Clare Dannatt
26 October	Adrian Bryzak and Winnie Kandini

### Funerals

9 October	Graham John Wright	Aged 79
4 November	Interment of ashes – John Smith	

## DIARY FOR DECEMBER 2019

### **SUNDAY 1**

### **THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

- 6.30 pm Advent Carol Service
- Tuesday 3 7.30 pm All Saints /Advent Prayer and Reflection (5)
- Wednesday 4 9.00 am Morning Prayers and full staff meeting  
2.30 pm All Saints /Advent Prayer and Reflection (5)
- Thursday 5 8.30 am Christmas tree into church and decorate  
10.30 am Holy Communion in the Lady Chapel
- Friday 6 Clergy day off
- Saturday 7 10.00 am - 12.00 noon Open Church with Vestry Hour

### **SUNDAY 8**

### **THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

- 10.00 am TOY SERVICE** - You are invited to bring an unwrapped gift of a toy or toiletries in support of our annual appeal on behalf of the Dudley Women's Refuge
- 3.00 pm Charity Fundraising Concert in church
- 6.30 pm Choral Evensong
- Monday 9 7.30 pm Redhill School Christmas Concert in church
- Tuesday 10 11.30 am Holy Communion at Hollycroft  
9.30 am Peal attempt by Evesham Ringers  
2.15 pm Mothers' Union meeting in the Coach House
- Wednesday 11 10.30 am St Mary's Pre-School Christmas Service
- Thursday 12 10.30 am Holy Communion in the Lady Chapel  
7.30 pm King Edward VI College Carol Service
- Friday 13 Clergy day off  
2.00pm Old Swinford Hospital Carol Service
- Saturday 14 10.00 am - 11.00 noon Vestry Hour  
9.00 am onwards - GOT2SING rehearsal and Concert (7.30 pm)

### **SUNDAY 15**

### **THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

- 4.00 pm Christingle Service in aid of the Children's Society
- Tuesday 17 10.00 am - 12.00 noon Joint Mission Tea in the Narthex
- Wednesday 18 11.30 am Holy Communion at Holly Lodge  
1.30 pm St Mary's Toddlers - Christmas Party  
7.00 pm Old Swinford Primary School Christmas Carol Service
- Thursday 19 10.30 am Holy Communion in the Lady Chapel  
Christmas Tree Festival preparations
- Friday 20 Clergy day off  
11.00 am - 4.00 pm Christmas Tree Festival in church
- Saturday 21 10.00 am - 12.00 noon Open Church with Vestry Hour

### **SUNDAY 22**

### **THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

- 6.30 pm Carol Service followed by Festive Refreshments
- Tuesday 24 4.00 pm Crib Service  
11.00 pm Christmas Communion with Carols

## FROM THE RECTORY



Dear Friends,

As I am beginning to write this, (on a train to London – I am going to meet Mary and our daughter Rebecca there), the carriage is bathed in a blaze of bright, Autumn sunshine. There is a strong sense of the world turning into the light, even as this day early in November begins to wane.

‘Turning into light’ might be a vivid description of the season of Advent which, perhaps as you read this, is about to begin. It will seem an odd Advent, I suspect, with a winter General Election dominating the news for the first few weeks. I am sure I haven’t been alone in praying that the level of political discourse might rise from the abusive, divisive and aggressive tones which marked the end of the last parliament. The referendum on Britain’s EU membership seems to have unleashed a deep, negative energy; we might hope our politicians are capable of turning this into a positive and equitable response to the many problems faced by our society.

Advent can be a deeply reflective season. I think it is a time in which we should pray to be surprised. We are adept in the creation of idols – gods of our own making; in old Israel’s terms: the idols of stone and wood, of iron and bronze which, in the end, stare back at us with our own eyes. Advent is a time when we might relearn that God is the God of surprises, the God who speaks to us unexpectedly with a voice not like our own. As Rowan Williams wrote: ‘We are here at all, celebrating Advent, because there has been a word spoken, a word of unexpected interruption, a word that establishes for good the difference between the God we expect and the God who comes, a word that shows us once and for all what an idol looks like in face of the truth.’

I pray that I can cast aside my idols of success or security, the speechless and unperceiving models of myself I throw up in front of my path and in this Advent time I pray that I may really listen for the living Word which is for me. We might all make this our prayer because, I think, all of us want to be seen and talked to by God who is at once completely outside our own experience and completely within it as well.

So, with Peter Traben Haas, we might make this our Advent prayer:

‘Abba. Unwrap the layers of my heart in these Advent days so I can more clearly see the presence of your Christ in both friend and stranger.

Amen.

God Bless You.

**John**

## DIARY FOR DECEMBER (continued)

Wednesday 25	<b>Christmas Day</b> - Services at 8.00am and 10.00 am
Thursday 26	No services,. Church closed
Friday 27	Clergy day off
Saturday 28	10.00 am - 12.00 noon Open Church with Vestry Hour
SUNDAY 29	<b>THE FIRST SUNDAY OF CHRISTMAS</b>

The Parish Office will be closed as of Monday 23 December until Tuesday 7 January. Please try to allow the clergy some respite time during this period. In the event of urgent need please contact the Revd John Flitcroft at the Rectory.

### THANK YOU FOR COMING TO OUR SAINTS AND LIGHT PARTY

It was a delight to welcome some 17 young people and their carers to our Saints and Light Party in the Church Hall on Wednesday 30 October. With Halloween very much in everyone's mind the opportunity to carve pumpkins was an activity that clearly appealed to many. Soon the stock of pumpkin masks was complete, ready for display on All Hallows Eve.

A wide range of activities had been carefully prepared for these young visitors by a committed team of helpers to whom a very real thank you is expressed.

From cake decorating to lantern making and much more in between, the children were engaged and obviously enjoying their time. The Box of Saints provided much mystery and excitement as Revd John Flitcroft led the children in an interactive investigation of Saints and their stories with the added opportunity to dress-up and re-enact events in their own way.

A quieter moment to share a simple reflection and to sing along with our resident 'Bren on the keyboard' was much enjoyed as the children joined in with a song familiar to them. Then, a shared meal of Pumpkin Soup, Pizza and cake resulted in empty plates, satisfied smiles and cheerful words of thanks which underlined the obvious enjoyment taken from the event.

Thank you is shared warmly with those who attended and those who helped to make this such a joyous occasion.



# CHRISTMAS SERVICES AT ST MARY'S

We extend a very warm welcome to everyone to share in our services

## **Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> December—6.30 pm Advent Carol Service**

A service of readings and music at the start of Advent

## **Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> December— 10.00 am Toy Service**

A family 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 15<sup>th</sup> December—4.00 pm Christingle**

A family service for Christingle in aid of the Children's Society

## **Friday 20<sup>th</sup> - Saturday 28<sup>th</sup>**

### **Christmas Tree Festival in church**

A festival of celebration for all the community to contribute to and to enjoy with thirty trees on display. Refreshments and Children's activities available.

## **Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup>—6.30 pm Carol Service**

A traditional service of nine lessons and carols

## **Christmas Eve - Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup>**

4.00 pm Crib Service for children

11.00 pm Christmas Communion with carols

## **Christmas Day - Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup>**

8.00 am Holy Communion (BCP)

10.00 am Family Communion with carols.

**There will be a bucket collection in support of St Mary's Mission Charities Appeal at our Christmas services from the Carol Service onward**

## REMEMBRANCE 2019

St Mary's Service of Remembrance held at the 10.00 am service on Sunday 10 November evolved around a number of key themes.

Key to all was the recognition paid to all who have been wounded or who lost their life in the service of their country in the pursuit of world peace. One hundred years on from the first national Act of Remembrance at a rapidly built, temporary Cenotaph, Roy Peacock shared thoughts and details of the importance of Remembrance, the significance of the poppy and of the memorials that were established in almost every village, town and city to commemorate the dead of World War 1 whose bodies would not be brought home from the battlefields.

Those memorials and the services that take place around them have become the focus of much wider commemorations of all those who have, during the subsequent years, served in the armed forces in theatres of war and humanitarian operations throughout the world.

In his address, Revd John Flitcroft reminded us that this occasion, and the on-going work of the British Legion, is no glorification of war, but a sombre acknowledgement of service and a meaningful practice of true humanitarian care for one's neighbour.

The Revd Alex French blessed the floral tributes to be laid on the graves in St Mary's churchyard of those who have died in the service of their country. Then, after reading the words of Binyon's exhortation, the Last Post was sounded and the church community joined with others throughout the country for the two minutes silence. After Reveille, as the floral tributes were taken into the churchyard, the congregation laid their poppies of commemoration on the Chancel steps, adding to the knitted poppies that had been so lovingly prepared by the ladies of the needlework group.



The poppies laid on the Chancel steps will be gathered together and will lie at the foot of the memorials in the Lady Chapel for the coming year, a continuing symbol of our daily awareness of what man can do for man and of our need to do all we can to encourage and promote peace



## **ALL SOULS**

Many people have expressed their appreciation of the All Souls Service which took place on Sunday 3rd November in commemoration of those friends and family members who have died, especially in the past year. The Revd John Flitcroft and Revd Alex French shared the lead of a service in which carefully chosen words, music and opportunities for personal tribute enabled the congregation to reflect on their loss, grief and acknowledgement of those who no longer walk this world but whose presence is otherwise always with us.

Thank you to John and Alex and to our choir under the leadership of James Bradley for this fitting and memorable service.

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### **MICHAEL WOODALL**

It is with sadness that we acknowledge the death of Michael Woodall, a loyal, devoted and much loved member of this church community. We send our condolences to Margaret, Rachel and the family and offer our support in prayers and as thanksgiving for a life of service.

Since 1972 Michael had served St Mary's as an active and committed worshipper, a member of the choir for many years and as someone who was always seeking opportunities to support and promote the church in the local community. Michael led many important developments in the church, fulfilling the roles of Churchwarden and Master of Fabric. Alongside the many others he would encourage to assist and support him, Michael oversaw the installation of toilets, directed the creation of the Narthex and its facilities and jointly led the stonework appeal for essential repairs to the East window and much more. Not only did he bring his professional knowledge, skills and influence to these tasks, he brought an enthusiasm that infected others. He found ways to persuade those he may have helped in the past to help him with fund-raising and the organisation of events to raise those funds.

Health issues have restricted Michael's involvement in church events for the past several years. Throughout this time he maintained a keen interest in what was going on and enjoyed those special occasions when, especially at Easter, he was able to attend a service.

Michael will be remembered for his gentle yet determined and productive ways, his (sometimes mischievous) sense of humour and, above all, his loyalty to his family and to his faith.



Christingle is a candle-lit, festive celebration that's perfect for bringing families and communities together.

Our annual Christingle Service will take place at 4.00 pm on Sunday 15th December. This is a very special occasion when, through the symbolism of the Christingle, we share the light of God's love in support of children who find themselves in the darkest situations imaginable.

This family service, with children at its heart, is an opportunity to raise funds to enable the essential work of the Children's Society to continue into the coming year.

Under the dedicated leadership and guidance of Wendy Tranter, St Mary's has held a Christingle Service in each of the past 50 years - since the inception of this event. Please help Wendy to continue this important work with your attendance, participation and donations.



**The orange** represents the world.



**The red ribbon** indicates God's love wrapped around the world and the blood Christ shed on the cross.



**The dried fruits and sweets** are symbols of God's creations. For many people, they also represent the four seasons.



**The lit candle** symbolises Jesus, the light of the world, who brings hope to people living in darkness.

## CHRISTMAS SERVICES

Details of our Christmas Services and the warm welcome extended to everyone have been circulated via our Christmas Card which is delivered to every house in the parish and by notices in this magazine and around church. Please be particularly aware of the new time for the Christmas Eve Communion service. This will start at 11.00 pm, an hour later than previously.

## **HARVEST SUPPER 2019**

The Social Committee knew that we would need more helpers this year as some were on holiday over the Harvest weekend.

"Thank you" doesn't begin to cover my gratitude to all the people who offered help – whether it was cooking, food preparation, washing tablecloths or one of the many tasks to get the hall ready and to put everything away afterwards.

We had a wonderful evening with more people than ever. Mike, as is becoming the custom, supplied us with several quizzes. Something to do throughout the supper.

Before the meal John entertained us with a very cleverly written poem full of harvest-related puns before saying grace.

Our first course was melon. Some powdered ginger was supplied, which on reflection we should have labelled, as a few people mistook it for brown sugar and added it to their coffee later! This was followed by Cowboy Chicken and Bean Stew with French sticks. As there was a plentiful supply of stew many had seconds. Our dessert was blackberry and apple crumble with cream. I have never seen such a variety of toppings. The cooks had thought this is for lots of people so we will use our largest dishes, which resulted in plenty of second helpings plus some leftovers. As if this wasn't enough it was followed by coffee, with or without ginger, and mints.

As people finished their drinks we drew the raffle and Mike gave the answers to his quizzes. I am constantly amazed and very grateful for the way in which everyone helps to clear the hall and get on with the washing up. We had quite a team in the kitchen who were very organised. Finally our boxes were packed, slow cookers taken home and everything loaded into cars. John was the last man out and I locked up after a very enjoyable Harvest Supper with grateful thanks to all who helped make it happen.

The added bonus to all this is that we raised more than £400 for Church funds.

**Sue Wakeley**

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### **WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE MORE INVOLVED?**

There are lots of ways in which you are welcome to take a more active part in our church services and the many activities that serve our local community. To read at a service, to become a server, to help with the welcome of visitors, to join the team of 'Holy Dusters' or whatever might appeal to you. We are inviting your involvement via the weekly pewsheets and notices in church. Please feel free to ask a member of the clergy or one of the wardens for details on how you might be able to help as you wish.

St Mary's Church,  
Rectory Road, Oldswinford.  
DY8 2HA



An invitation to our

## CHRISTMAS TREE FESTIVAL

2019

A display of specially decorated  
Christmas Trees prepared by local groups

Including events for children, demonstrations and activities

**Friday 20th December, 11.00 am - 4.00 pm**

**Saturday 21st December, 11.00 am - 4.00 pm**

**and 6.00 pm - 8.00 pm with festive refreshments**

**Sunday 22nd December 12.00 noon - 4.00 pm**

**Light refreshments available at all times.**

**Free Entry**

**Donations invited**

**All proceeds in support of St Mary's Church**

*John Hill has produced timetable sheets for stewarding and helping with refreshments during the festival. These are at the back of church for people to sign up if they are able to help during the times the festival is open to the public. Please do help if you can.*

## **ST MARY'S WALKING GROUP**

### **THE WALK THAT GOT AWAY!**

Our planned walk for October was to take cars to the Severn Valley Country Park at Alverley, to walk down to the River Severn, cross over on the footbridge, then cross the Severn Valley Railway before circling around Highley to re-cross the river and climb back up to our cars. Highley and the Severn Valley Country Park are old coal mining areas, some evidence of the mining can still be found.

Unfortunately our walk leader had injured his foot and could not lead us; and due to other group members being away or committed to bell ringing for a wedding, no one else was available to step in with an alternative.

In view of the monsoon conditions on the Saturday of the walk most members of the group were well pleased at not having to turn out!

Our next walk will be on Saturday 23 November at Worfield; this is a week earlier in the month than usual, to avoid clashing with the Christmas Market.

**Mike Blaxland**

Well that's some turn up for the books. In the past fifteen years I cannot recall this determined group of intrepid walkers having to cancel one of the scheduled walks. Thank you for the interesting descriptions you provide of your walks and for the enjoyment this brings to those who have not been able to join you all.

**The Editor**

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### **WITH YOU ALL THE WAY**

It is with great delight and congratulations that we share the news that the Revd Alex French has completed all aspects of his training. Everyone at St Mary's has been blessed by the ministry that Alex has brought to this community. Thank you Alex.

Inevitably, and to our sorrow, this will mean that, in due course, Alex will leave Oldswinford for new challenges as he extends his ministry into pastures new.

In the meantime we offer Alex our continued support and appreciation as he seeks God's direction for him for the future. We trust that our prayers and ongoing encouragement will assist Alex as he considers the options available to him.

**The Churchwardens**

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

Members were thanked by M.U. headquarters for their contribution to the Summer of Hope Appeal which will be used for M.U. work in Northern Ireland and Burundi. We also held in remembrance Jackie Smith and Margaret Exley who had died.

Roy Peacock spoke on Remembrance. His family had army connections over three generations. As a young boy in Kent he observed the Battle of Britain air raids and combat overhead. Post war he completed National Service in the army before taking up a teaching career as a history teacher. He has completed research and written books on local history, especially on the lives of men and women involved in the World Wars.

The Grazebrook Window in the Lady Chapel shows flags of allies including Japan and Italy. After the war St Mary's originally placed a carved memorial board in the churchyard garden. This listed those killed and those who served and returned to Old Swinford. Currently it is being renovated and can be seen in the Narthex.

At home and abroad families were invited to have their own sentiments carved at the base of the war gravestones. Churches initiated memorial cenotaphs to the fallen, later local and national authorities, towns, schools, and clubs erected them. Our choir members had their own plaque. One former choirboy, Felix Baxter, who lived at 'Thornleigh' in Hagley Road, a large detached house where the Crabmill is today, served in a Lancashire Regiment and was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross. Roy brought home the cost and tragedy of war as well as the bravery of those who served.

**Next Meeting:** 10 December 2.15 pm in the Coach House. Members remembering Christmas past.

**AGM:** 14 January 2020 at 2.15 pm in the Coach House.

**Dawn Nex**

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### **RINGING FOR REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY**

#### **1260 Grandsire Triples**

1Christopher Lees

2Katrina Emery

3Georgina Pearson

4David R Ingram

5John C Sutton

6Alex J Parsons

7Richard J Hurst (C)

8Anthony G Lloyd

**Rung half-muffled for**

**Evensong on**

**Remembrance**

The Old Swinford Bell Ringers rang with bells half muffled for the morning service on Remembrance Sunday. When the bells are rung in this way it produces a more muted tone, which is appropriate to times of remembrance and reflection.

In the evening, with the muffs still in place, a quarter peal of Grandsire Triples was rung starting at 5.30pm. A quarter peal on eight bells consists of 1260 changes and typically takes from 45 minutes to 60 minutes to complete. On this occasion, the quarter peal was completed successfully in 51 minutes.

**Stephen Howard**

## **A NEW BISHOP OF DUDLEY**

Downing Street has announced that the Venerable Martin Gorick will become the next Bishop of Dudley, working with Bishop John across the whole of Worcestershire and Dudley. Martin is currently the Archdeacon of Oxford and Residentiary Canon at Christ Church College and Cathedral.

In his current role, Martin has particular responsibility for the churches and clergy in the city of Oxford, as well as being Diocesan Interfaith Adviser. He has held strategic responsibility for growing new congregations of all shapes and sizes across the three counties that make up the Diocese of Oxford, overseeing an ambitious £5 million bid to support church revitalisation and planting, fresh expressions of church and pioneering ministry in major new housing areas. Martin has always enjoyed the Church of England's connections with people and places outside the church, and oversees and supports the work of over 100 chaplains in prisons, schools, colleges, military bases and hospitals.

Martin was ordained in 1987 and prior to moving to Oxford in 2013, was Vicar of 'Shakespeare's Church' in Stratford-upon-Avon where he was also Chaplain to the Royal Shakespeare Company. From 1994-2001, Martin was Vicar of Smethwick Old Church and Area Dean for the Black Country Deanery of Warley. He has also worked as Bishop's Chaplain for Richard Harries in Oxford and started his ordained life as Curate of Birtley, an industrial and mining town near Gateshead in the Diocese of Durham.

On his appointment, Martin said: "I'm looking forward to joining God's people in Dudley and the wider Diocese of Worcester as they seek to live lives of love, compassion, justice and freedom. We're currently living in a challenging times with many divided communities. The Church has a key role to play in offering a place of safety and sanctuary where all people can come together to share their common humanity under God. As Bishop of Dudley, I would want to lead that work while supporting and encouraging all in our congregations to live out their faith in Jesus at home, at work and at school as well as in church."

The Bishop of Worcester, Dr John Inge, said: "Martin is a hugely gifted priest with an enormous amount of experience in ministry, not least as a vicar in the Black Country. I look forward greatly to working with him for the growth of God's Kingdom in this diocese to which he is already committed. I pray that he and his wife Katharine will find much joy in their new life here."

Martin will be consecrated as a Bishop on 28 January and will be officially welcomed into his new role in the Diocese of Worcester with events in Worcester and Dudley in February.

## A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN OF WORCESTER

In many churches and cathedrals, people are invited to light candles and to write down their prayers. Often children do this, and often they are thoughtful and thought-provoking. Here is one I read some time ago. It simply said, "Dear God, everyone misses you".

Now I don't know what passed through that child's mind as he or she wrote those words. Were they just the sort of words you write on a holiday postcard to a much-loved grandparent, or on a get-well card to a poorly aunt, an affectionate phrase that seemed the right sort of message to send to God? Or was there more to it than that? Whatever that child had in mind, I think those words bear thinking about. "Dear God, everyone misses you".

The Christmas story is the story of the God who is missed. For centuries, the prophets had foretold the coming of the Saviour, but when he came how few noticed it! How many doors were closed against him? Our failure to recognise the Christ when he comes is a theme that runs through the gospels, in the stories of his infancy, his ministry, his suffering and death, and his resurrection. Everyone, or almost everyone, "misses God".

But the words have another way of being read. "Everyone misses you": that is, everyone would love you to be here, everyone longs for you; there is in every human heart a deep yearning for God, a desire for the meaning and purpose and peace of mind that God alone can give. "Everyone misses you".

And the message of Christmas is that God acted decisively to meet this human need for him. God has drawn near, God has made his home with us: "the Word", says St John, "was made flesh and dwelt among us". The God whom all the ages have longed for has come to us at last. And the message of Christmas, and of Christianity, is not of the rumour of some far distant God, but of God who has made himself one with us: in the person of his blessed Son he has shared our birth, and our life, and our death; and in his resurrection he points us to the life which lies beyond this life and lifts us into the gracious presence of the Father. "Dear God, everyone misses you". "Dear child", says God, "but you have come home to me and I have come home to you".

Yea, Lord, we greet thee  
Born this happy morning,  
Jesu, to thee be glory given;  
Word of the Father,  
Now in flesh appearing:  
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord

**Peter Atkinson**



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**Home is where the care is**  
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