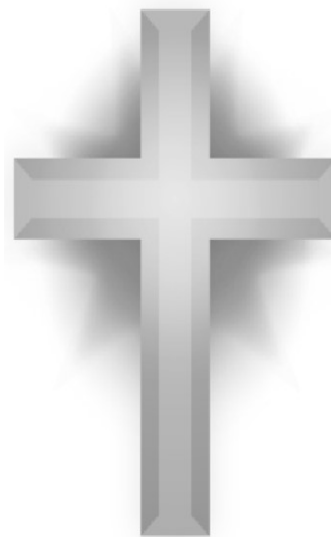
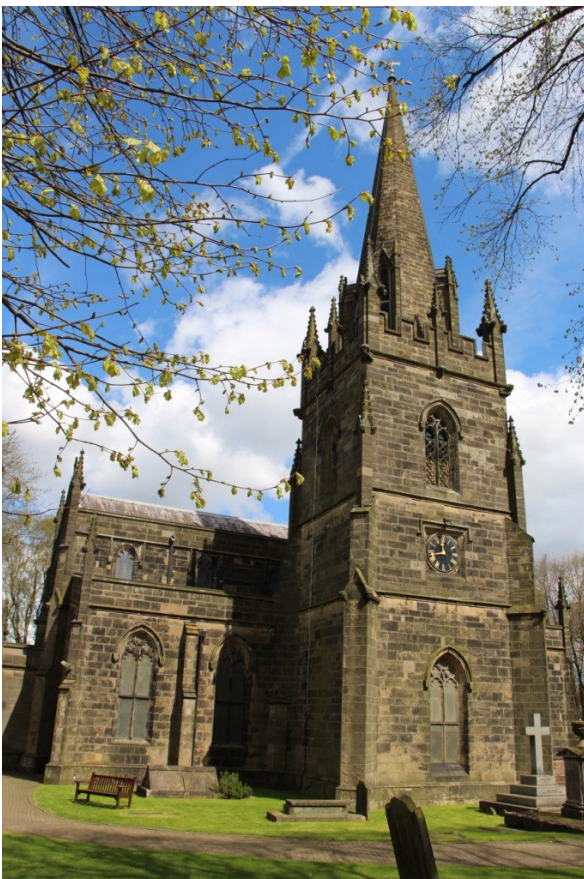


THE BEACON

THE PARISH MAGAZINE OF ALL SAINTS, SEDGLEY
ST. ANDREW'S THE STRAITS & ST. PETERS UPPER GORNAL

Registered Charity Number 1179471



Kingdom People
love • compassion • justice • freedom

50p

November 2020

PARISH WIDE WHO'S WHO

Team Rector	Revd Guy Hewlett	01902 295164
Team Vicar	Rev Catherine Mitchell	01902 677897
Licensed Lay Minister	Canon Jan Humphries	01902 661275
Ordinand and ALM	Claire Cox	07812 010108
Parish Safeguarding Officer	Barbara Baker	01902 882847
Pastoral Care	Tracey Bate	01902 880727
	Jackie Hewlett	01902 295164
	Sarah Parker	01902 885570
Worship Leader	Suzanne Bradley	01902 880055
Youth Leader and Youth Group	Laura Robinson	01902 678572
Singing Angels	Claire Cox	07812 010108
PCC Secretary	Kath Apperley	01902 663253
PCC Treasurer	Sheila Moss	01902 893570
Parish Office	Gail Griffiths	01902 540289
Web Editor	Martin Jones	01902 884461

St Peters

Parish Warden	David Moss	01902 893570
Parish Warden	Edward Grist	01902 682786
Treasurer	Sheila Moss	01902 893570
Children's Advocate	Suzanne Bradley	01902 880055
DCC Secretary	John Powell	
Uniformed Organisations	Please Contact David Moss	01902 893570

St Andrew's

Warden	Paul Cox	
Children's Advocate	Carol Haynes	
Treasurer	Alan Turner	01902 670938
DCC Secretary	Rosemary Reed	01902 679007
Little Angels Baby & Toddler Group	Canon Jan Humphries	01902 661275
Singing Angels	Claire Cox	07812 010108

Who's Who

Who's Who

All Saints Who's Who

Vestry Clerk	Chris Williams	01902 672880
Parish Wardens	Keith Tomlinson	01902 673366
	John Anderson	01902 677666
Treasurer	John Anderson	01902 677666
DCC Secretary	John Anderson	01902 677666
Caretaker	Pam Pugh	07860 256535
Junior Church	Barbara Price	01902 676591
Bell Ringer	Keith Williams	01902 672585
Organist	Martin Platts	07941 173252
Youth Leader	Laura Robinson	01902 678572
Brownies	Heather Churm	01902 674709
Ladies' Society	Geraldine Baker	01902 674608
Men's Society	Roger Berry	01902 881374
Mothers' Union	Liz Williams	01902 672880
Rainbows	Liz Naylor	07827 629648
Web Editor	Martin Jones	01902 884461
Server/Verger	Len Millard	01902 676339
	Steve Castle	07971 899072
Noah's Ark		
Parent &		
Toddler Group	Linda Edwards	01902 672556

Funerals

14 October Gwendoline Hazelhurst - Gornal Wood

23rd October John Eric Mason Gornal Wood

29th October Dorothy Nancy Lilian Cartwright All Saints

High Days & Holy Days for November

- 1 Eloi – a patron saint for the euro?
- 3 Francis Xavier – the seasick missionary
- 3 Birinus – an apostle to the English
- 4 Osmund – the multi-talented saint
- 6 St Nicholas – patron saint of children
- 6 St Nicholas – another look at this much-loved saint
- 6 How Father Christmas got where he is today
- 11 Daniel the Stylite
- 17 Lazarus of Bethany – back from the tomb
- 17 Eglantyne Jebb – founder of ‘Save the Children’
- 21 Winter Solstice
- 24 Christmas Eve
- 25 Christmas
- 26 St Stephen
- 26 On the Feast of St Stephen
- 26 Look out for Wenceslas
- 26 In praise of Good King Wenceslas
- 28 Holy Innocents

THE BEACON

If you are interested in having the magazine delivered to your home on a regular basis please contact:

Karen Evans: 01902 678056

The Beacon is published ten times a year and the cost for the year is £5. A larger typeface version of The Beacon can be provided on request.

Articles for the December magazine need to be sent to:

admin@allsaintssedgley.co.uk

by

Friday 21st November

and needs to be in Arial typeface, size 18.

Do not send files in pdf format

WEBSITE: **www.gornalandsedgley.org.uk**

To Magazine Deliverers

Could you please get email addresses for all the people that you deliver to and please and let either Gail Griffiths or Karen Evans know .

St Peter's District Church magazine

St Peter's also publishes a magazine which is more particular to Upper Gornal. If you would like to receive that magazine (which is not available electronically), in the first instance please contact a St Peter's Church warden details on page 2 of this magazine.

You will have seen in the Press that all our churches are closed for services for the foreseeable future. This means there will be no Vestry Hour at All Saints' to deal with wedding and baptism enquiries. We are having to re-arrange those weddings and baptisms disrupted by the current situation so, regretfully, cannot consider any enquiries for baptisms until further notice, nor can we consider any requests for weddings for 2020.

If you wish to enquire about a wedding for 2021 or 2022, please contact

Chris Williams chriswilliams550@btinternet.com.

To the clergy of the Church of England

1 November 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Greetings to you on this All Saints Day and as we are reminded again that we are indeed part of a universal company of saints.

We are writing to you to set out some of our thinking in the light of the most recent announcement by the Prime Minister. We are very aware that details are still not clear and there is much discussion still to be had about what the impact of the new lockdown will mean. We are also writing to assure you of our prayers for you and our thanks for all you do. We are clear that we do now need to call all Christian people to pray and to do so continually over this next month. In this letter as well as reflection we also set out an invitation to you to join in this call to prayer and to keep both praying and serving our communities.

This is a difficult and challenging time for all of us. We are sure that some of you reading this letter will wish we had made other decisions during the period of the first lockdown, or even challenged the government harder on the decisions it has made. You may be right. However, it is our view that the best way we can serve our nation now is by pouring our energy into doing the things that we can do, which is to pray and to serve. We also dare to hope that we will be kind to each other and that God will give us the courage and humility we need to be faithful witnesses to the gospel of peace.

A second lockdown will be upon us on Thursday. It is going to be different from the first one. The days are getting shorter and colder. We are anxious for ourselves, for those we love, especially those who are vulnerable and elderly, and for our families. We know that this pandemic is having a devastating effect on our economy and on people's mental health. Thousands of people are dying. The National Health Service is being stretched to the limit. We also know and must continue to bear witness to the fact that the poorest communities in our nation are suffering the most. We are in for a long haul. It is going to be a hard winter.

But this second lockdown will also be different in other ways. There is much that we have learned from the first lockdown and there is much to celebrate and be proud of. Of course we are full of gratitude and respect for the amazing courage and commitment of all key workers, especially those working in the NHS. Their contribution is rightly and widely recognised. We also applaud the many creative ways that churches up and down the land have been serving their local communities and working with others to make sure that the hungry are fed and the vulnerable cared for. We have managed to maintain and, in many cases, extend our outreach by streaming worship online and by other ways of building community online.

We are grateful for people's energy, hard work and creativity in making this happen and we hope and pray this will continue. We are grateful that the new guidelines being introduced on Thursday not only allow churches to remain open for private prayer but also enable online worship to be broadcast from the church building. We were cautious about these issues during the first lockdown – perhaps overly so – but in this second lockdown we want to encourage church buildings to remain open for private prayer wherever possible, making sure that their buildings are Covid secure in the ways that we have learned in recent months, and to broadcast services from their church buildings. However, if you do not have the resources or wherewithal to do this, please do not feel that you have failed in any way. The good thing about provision of worship online, is that people can join in from anywhere and therefore we can support each other more easily in this endeavour. Our national digital team will continue to offer training and support and provide national services each week.

However, worship online still means that the people of God do not have access to the sacraments which are so central to our life in Christ. This is a huge loss and since we were not consulted about the lockdown provisions, we fully intend to speak with government about why certain exemptions are made and not others, emphasising the critical role that churches play in every community. The sacramental life of the church cannot be seen as an optional extra. Nor can we separate out our worship from our service, it is always both and not either or.

Nevertheless, we will of course abide by the law and ask you to do the same. We must do all that we can to keep our communities safe and to enable the NHS to manage this crisis. The Recovery Group chaired by the Bishop of London will be issuing specific guidance in the next day or two.

Bearing in mind our primary vocation as the Church of Jesus Christ to pray and to serve we call upon the Church of England to make this month of lockdown a month of prayer. More than anything else, whatever the nation thinks, we know that we are in the faithful hands of the risen Christ who knows our weaknesses, tiredness and struggles and whose steadfast love endures for ever.

Above all we recall people to some of the fundamental spiritual disciplines that shape our Christian life. How we do this is up to each congregation and clergy person. We will publish resources to support you before the first day of lockdown. During the first lockdown we cheered for the NHS every Thursday. During this second lockdown we invite you to fast in a way appropriate to you as well as pray for our nation every Thursday, for its leaders, its health and essential services and all those who suffer.

We thank you for your service and ministry and pray that God will sustain you and encourage you. After consulting the House of Bishops we will be writing a more general letter to the whole nation we serve, a letter expressing the hope we have and calling for courage, calm and compassion.

In one of the climactic passages of the New Testament, Paul says to those who follow Christ that their “love must be genuine, that they hate what is evil and hold fast to what is good.” He asks them to “serve the lord”, exhorting them to “rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.” (See Romans 12.9-12.) None of this is easy. Especially not at the moment. But it is our calling.

Yours in Christ,

The Most Revd & Rt Hon Justin Welby

The Most Revd & Rt Hon Stephen Cottrell

The Rt Revd & Rt Hon Dame Sarah Mullally Bishop of London

‘Remembering’, from Guy Hewlett

The autumn is well and truly here, and the leaves are falling fast from the trees. We are already being encouraged to buy Christmas gifts early to ensure Social Distancing. Christmas is going to be very different in 2020.

But November will be here first and it can be a very precious month – a month of reflecting and remembering before we move to Advent when we again remember the coming of Christ into the world as a child, and remind ourselves that he will return to bring a time of no more crying or pain.

On the 1st of November we will celebrate All Saints day. From its earliest days the Church has recognised as its foundation stones those heroes of the faith whose lives have ‘excited others to holiness and have assumed a communion with the Church on earth and the Church in heaven’.

Usually on the 2nd November we celebrate All Souls day, the Commemoration of the Faithful Departed. We will mark this day alongside All Saints on the 1st November in church. It has been written ‘The believer’s pilgrimage of faith is lived out with the mutual support of all the people of God. In Christ all the faithful, both living and departed, are bound together in a communion of prayer’. This can bring many of us a huge emotional warmth and comfort.

On the 5th November some will remember Guy Fawkes and the Gun Powder Plot; this year there will be no fireworks at Himley because of the coronavirus, BUT there will be fireworks high in the sky over Dudley and All Saints church with other churches will be illuminated by the Council!! I hope our community will see the church and be reminded that God and His church are here!

On the 11th November we remember Armistice Day and all who have given their lives in conflict; marked in church particularly on Remembrance Sunday, the 8th. God willing this helps us remember not

only the total sacrifice others have given for us but also that it is incumbent on us to strive for peace at all levels of life. As I write although we cannot have a procession through the streets the foundations of a new War Memorial in Sedgley are being laid and we hope the memorial will be in place for Remembrance Day.

Remembering matters for us as individuals, as family, as church and as society because it helps us understand how the past impacts our present and the future; it helps us understand who we are.

As individuals as we remember those people who have gone before us it allows us to mark the impact they have had on our lives; hopefully with thanksgiving. It allows us to notice things which help make us who we are and this allows us to give thanks, or indeed to lay down something which is not helpful, at the foot of the cross.

I pray that your remembering this November will be a deep blessing; above all I pray that you will remember in the midst of all the challenges with Covid 19 that you are deeply loved by God.

‘Give thanks to the God of heaven, for his steadfast love endures forever – Psalm 136:26

Major clergy wellbeing study results shared

What helps clergy to flourish? Some insights from an ongoing Church of England research programme have now been sent to curates across the country.

The study has found six main principles that contribute to the wellbeing of ordained ministers. They include the ability to handle expectations, recognise times of personal vulnerability, establish healthy boundaries, and the importance of affirmation.

How Clergy Thrive will be a practical resource for dioceses as they discuss the Covenant for Clergy Care and Wellbeing, launched earlier this year. The booklet is published by Church House Publishing

Vicars Ponderings November 2020

Last week I spent some time preparing a presentation for our next CYD (Calling Young Disciples) Hub group meeting in November, where we will meet together with other CYD teams in the diocese; to learn together, to share together and to make plans for our future work with young people and families in our parish.

The presentation is to show the activities we have planned and been involved with in the last 12 months and where we are at the moment with activities with young people.

The last 8 months have been a challenge for us all, as individuals, as church communities, as a parish and not least with our work with children and families, with us having to stop all face to face activities. It felt really difficult to stop the activities at the time, we had some exciting things planned, building on the amazing work we had done as a team and parish in the past year; the Good Friday Workshop, Teddy Bears Picnic, Spring Workshop, Pancake Party and the Youth Games Cafe. These activities were in addition to the toddler groups Little Angels and Noah's Arc, and Singing Angels, and also the new Worship Together family service at All Saints.

The lockdown came in March with the only children's activity that was able to continue was Singing Angels, which moved to running on Zoom until the summer holidays.

Preparing the presentation reminded me of all these amazing and exciting events, as a team and parish, we were able to do and the connections and relationships that were being built up, and the sadness at the potential of losing those relationships with the lockdown and social distancing restrictions, and having, and in many respects, to start again when we are able.

As a team, there will be a lot of planning to be done when we are able to start over again, whenever that will be! But in the mean time we will be thinking of how we can try and keep the connections with families going over the next few months; one thing we have been looking at is providing seasonal craft bags. The first ones have been prepared, thanks to some hard work by the team, especially Laura, and being delivered by the team. These bags included crafts for Halloween, with a focus of Jesus being the light of the world, and Remembrance.

We are hoping to be able to create Christmas bags, over the next few weeks, which will include lots of crafts around the theme of Christmas and Jesus, Emmanuel, God is with us.

The next few weeks and months will continue to be a challenge for all of us and especially for the CYD team as we try and make plans for the future work with children and families. Can I encourage you to pray for the CYD in this work, the children and families we have connections with, and the reinvigoration of our work with children and families in the coming months.

Blessings

Catherine

Picture

The teacher asked her Sunday School class to draw a picture of a Bible story with a Christmas theme. She was puzzled by Kate's picture, which showed four people on an airplane. She asked her which story it was meant to represent. 'The Flight to Egypt,' was the reply.

Pointing at each figure, the teacher ventured: 'That must be Mary, Joseph, and Baby Jesus. But who's the fourth person?'"

'Oh,' explained Kate happily, 'that's Pontius – the pilot!'

The Story is still the same!

‘Christmas may look different, but the story is still the same!’ That’s the message for Christmas in 2020. Coronavirus will make our celebrations this year look very different from usual. However, the message of the baby born in Bethlehem is still relevant!

In one nativity play, the highlight was to illuminate Jesus, with a light in the manger, when all the other lights were turned off. At the appropriate time, all the lights went out, including the manger one. The silence was broken when one of the shepherds loudly whispered: ‘Hey, you turned off Jesus.’ Of course, nobody can turn off Jesus this Christmas!

The angels announced, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; He is the Messiah, the Lord.’ (Luke 2: 10, 11). The birth of this baby brings great joy and good news for everyone! As the king of the universe, He has come as our Saviour. In an uncertain world, He offers joy and hope, because He holds this pandemic in His hands. This is a real cause for joy!

‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favour rests.’ (Luke 2: 14). We may feel anything but peace amid the anxieties over our current circumstances. How can a Jewish infant born to a peasant family in first century Palestine bring peace to our lives today? Jesus established peace with God through His death on the cross. Trusting the Prince of Peace for our lives brings God’s peace amid the huge uncertainties we face. As the carol says, ‘Joy to the world, the Lord has come, let earth receive her King.’

Friction at Christmas

This Christmas, when your family gets together, remember: a certain friction between the generations is inevitable. After all, the young and the old have all the answers and those in between are stuck with all the questions

Ivy and Ken

Change is constant but one thing that has been constant over the last 60 years has been Ivy and Kennedy's unstinting support for All Saints. Ken has been a staunch member of the choir since he was a young boy, and a declining few may remember the Cathedral visits when the choir was in sufficient voice to take part in Choral Evensong - treasured memories.

Ivy was a Sidesman at Evensong where she would meet and welcome the faithful few with a smile and greeting.

Both Ivy and Ken were founder members of the Social Club and worked tirelessly to support social activities. I feel sure many will recall Ivy's annual plea for the membership pound!

Ivy with June Wright and Val Trinder were founder members of the Ladies Society.

They have now started a new life in Gwynned and we wish them well. A photo collage of memories was presented on their leaving - a copy of which can be seen in the Narthex.

Sue and John

Next Christmas

The grandson had just taken a photograph of his grandmother who'd come to stay for Christmas and her 89th birthday. 'Grannie, I sure hope I'm around next year to photograph you on your 90th birthday,' he said tactfully.

'Why not?' his grandmother shrugged. 'You look healthy enough.'

Mothers' Union

Due to the coronavirus news at the time we, as a branch, decided not to meet in October. We are planning a programme for 2021 as we need to look to the future and a time when we can meet together. The beginning of the year will be 'home grown' meetings where we will not have a booked speaker – in the eventuality of having to cancel. Our first meeting on Tuesday 12th January, 2.15pm, in All Saints' Church, will be a Communion service led by Revd Guy Hewlett. Holding the service in church will allow those unable to attend to join by Zoom, if they are on the internet.

Our subscriptions, which remain at £25, will also be due on that date. Wherever possible a cheque would be preferable made out to **'The Mothers' Union, Diocese of Worcester, All Saints' and St Andrew's, Sedgley'**.

Collection for the Women's Refuge

Children's colouring books, dot-to-dot books

Adult quiz books and colouring books

Felt pens & crayons

If you are able to help with this appeal, I am happy to collect the items, and I will get them to the Refuge.

Thank you to those who have already given me items for the collection.

Please note I will be delivering these items to the Refuge at the beginning of December.

16 Days of Activism and Global Day

You will have read in the press that research has shown that cases of Domestic Violence have increased during the lockdown.

December 5th marks the Mothers' Union first 'Global Day' when we say **'No More 1 in 3'** in response to the statistic that 1 in 3 women world-wide will experience Domestic or Sexual Abuse in their lifetime.

This will be part of the '16 Days of Activism' which begins on 25th November to 10th December and speaks out against Gender Violence.

Mothers' Union Midday Prayers during these 16 days will have 16 guests from around the world leading prayers. There will be a purple candle lit on the altar in the Cathedral throughout the 16 days. The present restrictions make it difficult to mark this time as a branch, however we could pray the prayer below during the 16 days.

We pray for the work of our members worldwide to combat domestic abuse; for their highlighting of the issue, their petitioning of governments and their work with victims and survivors.

As a global family we embrace our mission to share your love through speaking out for the vulnerable.

Help us play our part in creating a just and equal society.
Loving Lord, we draw near in faith.

We pray for the dawn of a better world where all may live in safety.
Amen

Take care, and God Bless

Liz Williams

Macmillan Coffee Morning

Thank you to Guy for hosting the Coffee Morning on Zoom and thank you to those who joined and all who donated to this worthy cause. We raised £235.

Liz

The Church of England - child sexual abuse

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sex Abuse (IICSA)'s report says the Church's failure to respond consistently to victims and survivors of abuse often added to their trauma.

It added that alleged perpetrators were often given more support than victims.

The Church admitted progress to improve safeguarding had been "too slow".

The report, which is the latest in a series of publications from the IICSA, said 390 clergy members and other church leaders were convicted of abuse between the 1940s and 2018.

The Church defended alleged perpetrators instead of protecting children and young people from sexual predators, the report added.

The Church of England failed to protect children from sexual abuse, and created a culture where abusers "could hide", a report has concluded. The Independent Inquiry into Child Sex Abuse (IICSA)'s report says the Church's failure to respond consistently to victims and survivors of abuse often added to their trauma.

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The Church defended alleged perpetrators instead of protecting children and young people from sexual predators, the report added.

Reflected Faith Series: Grace for all

Last month we thought about one key element of gathered worship – the Welcome. It is for everyone, regardless of how they look, or dress, their faith or their behaviour. This month, being the month of Advent and Christmas, let's focus on Grace.

God, in Jesus, did not wait for us to become perfect or reach up to Him but rather He came to us, in the daily mess of our lives; as and where we are.

I recently heard someone say: 'God's nature is goodness', and the Bible confirms that this is true. He cannot help it. That's what He is. He is goodness, and grace, and forgiveness, and faithfulness, and all those wonderful attributes that come from the pure essence of love.

It's what we strive for – to be more like Him every day. Then our welcome to others will also be full of grace, His grace, and not guided by our own likes or prejudices. Instead, we can reach out to others spontaneously, from a heart of love.

This Advent and Christmas it will probably be harder to welcome people into our times of worship. Virtual is not the same as actual, and actual will include facemasks. But that does not mean that we should give up on reaching out to those who visit our church. This year, more than ever, they may need us. Many will be lonely this Christmas, far from their families.

So, although our normal church services may be disrupted, we have to remember that services are not the church; WE are the church. In what has been an extraordinary year, perhaps we can each of us find an informal way of sharing our Christmas joy with anyone whom God sends our way.

Cathedrals battered by the pandemic

Cathedrals have struggled this year, as Covid-19 drastically cut visitor numbers, and thus income has plummeted. Numbers of lay staff in cathedrals across the country have been facing possible redundancy, as the financial impact of the pandemic continues to hit.

Westminster Abbey alone is losing 20 per cent of its staff as it faces a “breath-taking” loss of up to £12million next year.

Now 20 other cathedrals have been handed a lifeline by the Government’s £1.57billion Culture Recovery Fund. They include Canterbury, Chichester, Coventry, Derby, Ely, Exeter, Gloucester, Hereford, Leicester, Lincoln, Liverpool, Portsmouth, Salisbury, Southwell Minster, St Albans, Sheffield, Truro, Wells, Winchester and Worcester.

So many denominations!

Church leaders often talk about new churches and church planting, but probably talk less about new denominations. Yet new denominations are also being started. In the UK the number has grown from the 97 listed, when they were first counted in 1977, to 250 by the year 2000, falling to 230 by this year.

The number of denominations has grown worldwide also. When first counted globally in 1970, the total number was 16,100. It reached 33,100 by 1995, and the number is now reckoned to be 44,800. In 2020, Africa had almost half (46%) of all the global denominations. This is primarily because the charismatic Pentecostals are extremely strong in Africa, and, as in the UK, they are formed of many small denominations. Across the rest of the globe inter-continental comparisons are fairly even in terms of number of denominations, although Oceania has fewer.

BEETHOVEN: 'from the heart to the heart'

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

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

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

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

Beethoven was to compose six more symphonies after the *Eroica* and a wealth of other music up to his death in 1827. He spent most of his life in Vienna, but through his music his creative genius travelled far and wide. Scholars divide his work into three stages. Up to 1800 he composed very much in the classical tradition. That year marked a second stage with works like the 5th Symphony, which opens with the famous eight-note motif of fate knocking at the door, and his opera *Fidelio*. Then in 1817 came a final stage when his compositions explored new territories of the human spirit altogether.

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

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

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

The Arab Spring of 2010

The so-called Arab Spring started 10 years ago, in December 2010, when Tunisian street vendor Mohammed Bouazizi set himself on fire in protest at police seizing his vegetable stand over failure to obtain a permit. What was originally Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution became a tsunami of demonstrations, protests, riots, coups, foreign interventions and civil wars throughout North Africa and the Middle East. The leaders and governments of several countries were overthrown and ousted, and Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi was killed a year later.

The effects in Tunisia were mainly favourable, but elsewhere they were mixed, and in some cases disastrous. Full-scale civil wars erupted in countries such as Libya, Syria and Yemen. In Egypt authoritarian rule seems to have returned after the ousting of President Mubarak, and Libya remains in a state of violent and largely anarchic civil war, contributing significantly to the worldwide refugee crisis.

In Syria, although ISIS has largely been defeated, the oppressive regime of long-time dictator Bashar al Assad persists.

The anti-Christian sentiments of almost all Arab Spring groups means that violence against Christians has increased considerably. Islamic State, which emerged as a result, is known particularly for its ethnic cleansing of Christians and other faith groups in Syria and Iraq.

LETTERS WITH LOVE

WITH SO MANY PEOPLE EXPERIENCING ISOLATION THIS YEAR
WE WANTED TO START SOMETHING JUST IN TIME
FOR CHRISTMAS TO BRING US ALL TOGETHER AND
RAISE MONEY FOR A GOOD CAUSE!

STEP ONE- CHOOSE YOUR MEDIUM - YOU CAN SIMPLY SEND A CHRISTMAS
CARD

(THEY'VE GOT SOME REALLY LOVELY ONES AT EMOTIONS -SEDGLEY)
OR IF YOU'RE FEELING BRAVE WRITE A LETTER
WRITE SOMETHING LOVELY, WHETHER IT BE ABOUT
YOURSELF, RECOMMENDING A FAVOURITE BOOK
OR JUST WISHING A STRANGER A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS
YOU CAN BE AS CREATIVE AS YOU LIKE

STEP TWO- POP IT IN A BLANK ENVELOPE AND BRING IT TO
HUMBUGS COFFEE AND CRAFTS, 5 PENNY FARTHING ARCADE
DY3 IRW

WE ARE ASKING FOR A SUGGESTED DONATION OF £3 WHICH WILL GO
TO RAISING MONEY FOR THE GEORGINA UNIT
AND IF YOU CAN, PLEASE POP A STAMP ON YOUR BLANK ENVELOPE.

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HAPPY TO RECEIVE IT

THE DEADLINE FOR THE CHRISTMAS CARDS IS NOVEMBER 30TH,
WE WILL BE POSTING THEM DECEMBER 1ST

Follow the star

Jesus' welcoming committee included Eastern scholars who learned about His birth through their study of astrology. I can't help thinking that the arrival of these people at Bethlehem is a link between a very early form of science (albeit mixed in with their own form of religion) and Christian faith. What better way to discover God than to explore the world and follow the evidence wherever it leads? But what exactly was the star of Bethlehem? Scientists have investigated this question over the centuries, coming up with a variety of answers.

First, there is the idea of a supernova: the massively bright explosion caused by a dying star. On rare occasions a supernova can be seen from Earth with the naked eye, remaining visible for several months. We now know that Herod the Great died around 4BC, so the actual date of Jesus' birth must be a little earlier. The supernovae that might match this timing were one in the Andromeda galaxy between March 8BC and September 7BC, and another in the constellation of Capricorn in the Spring of 5BC. Next, comes a planetary conjunction. The alignment most commonly associated with the star of Bethlehem was between Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation of Pisces in 7BC, but not everyone is sure whether this would be extraordinary enough to be the 'star' mentioned in the Bible. Finally, the bright astronomical object that drew the Magi could have been a comet. This idea came from Sir Colin Humphreys, Professor of Materials Science at Cambridge University, and Oxford astronomer WG Waddington, who found that a comet was recorded by Chinese astronomers between March and May, 5BC. Humphreys then speculated that the 'no room at the inn' scenario came about because Jesus was born during Passover, and the Magi visited Jesus in May or June.

People interpret the biblical account of Jesus' birth in all sorts of ways, but there's very little argument from serious historians that Jesus of Nazareth actually existed. Whatever the true explanation for the 'star of Bethlehem' may be, there's plenty of evidence that an astronomical event could have happened at the time of His birth.

I think it makes perfect sense that if God was going to enter His own creation and take on the form of one of His own creatures, it should be marked by a very significant physical event.



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My dear Nephew Darren

I am sorry I was not alive during that wonderful four-year period when Oliver Cromwell abolished Christmas; no Christmas parties, no carol services, no cards to send and no frantic last-minute shopping. That man was a hero.



Planning for Christmas at St James' normally starts on 2nd January. By Easter, the flowers for church have been carefully chosen to be colour coordinated, and the seating plans and table decorations for the Christmas party have been allocated (with nominated reserves in case someone should inconveniently die in the intervening eight months). Long before Summer is over, the tree lights have been tested, music for the 9 Lessons and Carols Service has been chosen and the service sheets printed. Way before the dark nights set in, car parking attendants will have been found, those who are to light all the candles will have been rehearsed to perfection, and the brass lectern has had its annual polish.

We do not do spontaneity at St James the Least of All. If ever there was a service when time for something unexpected had to be allowed, its place would be announced in the order of service, how long the unexpected thing would happen for would have been decided by a committee, and who was to be spontaneous would have been allocated on a rota.

But the one person none of these well-meaning, efficient, committed organisers can control is the Rector. You could call it a staff perk.

Carols will (accidentally, of course) be announced in the wrong order; if verse 3 was to be omitted, I announce it will be verse 4. This keeps the organist on his toes while the choir hovers on the point of a collective nervous breakdown. At the Christmas supper, my introductory welcome speech and extensive grace make those in the kitchen wonder if the vegetables being boiled should better be served as thick soup.

I offer the helpful suggestion that the tree, having been installed and decorated in the chancel, may perhaps look better in the sanctuary and I turn all the heating off throughout the season, explaining that it will help

the flowers to last. All Services will start five minutes early (was my watch rather fast?) so I can look disapprovingly at those still coming in while we are singing the first carol and making it clear that I think they had spent too long in the pub next door.

And so we all reach Christmas morning, with 12 months of planning having gone yet again slightly awry, with parishioners exhausted and I exhilarated at the chaos that has been created with such ease. Mr Cromwell, your spirit lives on.

Your loving uncle,

Eustace

Eritrea

more Christians arrested as others released

Release International can confirm a total of 69 Christian prisoners of faith have now been released in Eritrea – while five more have been arrested.

Release partners say that many have been long-term prisoners. One has been behind bars for 16 years. None has ever been sent to trial. When news of their release broke in Eritrea, many Christians took to the streets to celebrate – prompting another round of arrests. The authorities seized five women who stepped outside to pray and rejoice at the news.

“These were mothers,” says Release International’s Eritrean partner, Dr Berhane Asmelash. “One is a mother of five. They were cheering from the roadside – and arrested on the spot.”

Dr Berhane estimates some 300 Christian prisoners of faith remain in the country – held indefinitely without charge or ever having been sent for trial. Prisoners face hardship, illness and malnutrition. Most of the prisons don’t even have toilet facilities.

“Eritrea has been likened to the North Korea of Africa,” says Release International CEO Paul Robinson. “It began its crackdown on churches in 2002.”

Mistletoe

This time of year you can see all sorts of traditions played out with regard to Christmas decorations. Strict adherents use holly, ivy and of course, mistletoe. While holly and ivy are to be found in gardens and hedgerows, mistletoe usually only appears in greengrocers' shops, or high in a tree well out of reach.

Mistletoe is *hemiparasitic*, meaning that although its leaves enable it to feed itself through photosynthesis, its roots invade the host tree or shrub to extract water and other nutrients. Its favourite host trees are apple, lime, hawthorn, poplar or oak and it normally hangs as a large globe, tantalisingly high and totally visible once winter arrives and it is the only green left on the tree. There are some spectacular examples in Windsor Great Park, clearly visible from the path on the opposite side of the River Thames.

We all know about the almost translucent white berries, fleshy and sticky, which form in the forks of mistletoe's many branches. While they are toxic to humans, they are attractive to birds. When birds have enjoyed the juicy flesh, they wipe the remaining seeds off their beaks onto the nearest branch [somewhat like small children wiping sticky hands on any surface close by – mummy's face or clothes?]. With luck the seed remains stuck to the bark and solves mistletoe's problem of reproduction.

In Greek mythology, mistletoe gave access to the Underworld. Romans thought it represented Peace, Love and Understanding and perhaps that is how it has sidled into our Christmas celebrations. The earliest documentary evidence for kissing under mistletoe dates from the sixteenth century. Some people think a berry should be removed after each kiss. Given the small size of pieces generally available these days, perhaps that is a practice not to be pursued.

Thoughts for the month of November 2020

Hope the following thoughts from my friendship book help.
Stay Safe Everyone. Gail

Jeremys wife, Geri, recently had an operation on her foot. When I asked how she was doing, he replied, she's hobbling well.

The fact that she was hobbling was the starting point for Jeremy, and he was more concerned with (and more proud of) how well she was doing it. I liked that.

In a world where it seems that everyone has some hidden trial, or some sorrow they are bearing, we might all be said to be hobbling.

Whatever it may be that you are dealing with, if you are doing so with grace, courage and hope for the future, then, like Geri, you are hobbling well.

A friend was walking through the autumn mist towards her bee hive when she had an encounter with a deer. Their eyes met and their souls seemed to mingle.

It was like seeing God she said, he is always there of course but we don't always remember to look.

I see deer regularly when out with my dog, and I said so to a man who works in the single building in the area.

There are no deer around here he told me, contradicting all I had said. I have worked here for 5 years and never seen any.

Some don't look because they have never been shown; some because it might challenge their world view. But the deer was there all the same.

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Joseph and his Amazing Journey

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world... And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David. (Luke 2 1-4)

What a year we have had! But I suppose Joseph had had a demanding year as well. Having learned that his betrothed was pregnant due to divine intervention, he then learned of the Roman government's demand for a census.

These Bible verses show Joseph being a good citizen. Leaving home for a long journey in order to please the government would not have been welcome, but Joseph complied and obeyed the law.

This year the situation is reversed. Millions of us *want* to make a long journey, to visit our loved ones across the UK. But this year, because of coronavirus, the Government is asking us to stay at home.

The Romans had censuses for a good reason: to help them run the business of the empire. This Government has restrictions in place for a good reason: to help slow the spread of a deadly virus.

Following government rules and laws it is not always easy or pleasant but as Christians we should be good citizens. As always this is a light-hearted guide to a complicated subject. If you are going home for Christmas, get proper advice – and have a Merry one

New Year's Eve is coming soon...

The inventor of the bagpipes was inspired when he saw a man carrying an indignant asthmatic pig under his arm. Unfortunately, the man-made sound never equalled the purity of the sound achieved by the pig. –

Alfred Hitchcock

November Services In Lockdown

We are unable to meet for public services however our buildings can open for private prayer and of course will continue on Zoom.

Sunday's

9.30am Andrews Church open for private prayer

9.30am On Zoom - Holy Communion for the whole parish

10.30am All Saints Church open for private prayer

10.30am St Peters Church Hall open for private prayer

11.45 Zoom coffee morning

6.30pm Compline night prayer on zoom

Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday 9.15am zoom Parish Prayers