



st JOHN'S

Living God's Love

Parish Magazine

WINTER 2018

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Living God's Love

*Winter 2018
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ADDRESS

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We are very grateful to those who write contributions and the many volunteers who distribute and deliver the magazines, come rain or shine, to everyone in the parish.

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Advent and Light by the Reverend James Brown

I don't know about you but I love this time of year when the nights stretch to overtake the days and the cold starts to creep in. The reason they are so cheering is not for the dark and the cold themselves, but for the light and the warmth that meet them. This is a time for candles, and fairy lights, for the new street lights decorating Southdown. This is a season for chunky jumpers, long, huddled evenings, and the cosy sanctuary of home; safe indoors against the weather outside.

Light in the darkness is a key image in this season of Advent. At church through Advent we light special candles week by week: we have Christingles, we decorate the tree with things that sparkle, and ultimately we think of Jesus as the light of the world. What does that mean? Christians believe that Jesus came into the hardships as well as the beauties of this world, into the injustice as much as the harmony; God arriving into the great complexity of human history, God with skin on to enlighten this world from within. O Come, O Come Emmanuel; a vulnerable infant, delicate child. Jesus was born into a complicated family life and a treacherous political situation where he ultimately became a refugee, fleeing with his parents for fear of his life. He knows this world from the inside out and he shone as a beacon of hope and transformation, offering a different way; a light in the darkness.

The thing about this metaphor of light that I find so powerful is its simple physics: light and dark are not opposites. Rather darkness is simply the absence of light. It takes only a little light to dispel the greatest darkness. Of course there are horrors in this world but to find God in the midst of them is truly enlightening.

However your year has been, however challenging or troubled, I pray that this Advent and Christmas you may know the light of Christ; that he may guide and lighten your way, and reveal things hidden in the shadows and lead you to all that is joyful and peaceful.

Throughout this season there are many wonderful events planned at St John's. You are all very welcome, so please look over the list that you'll find later in this magazine. Amongst the many things on offer you'll find traditional services of nine lessons and carols, carols in the pub, and a special Christmas Eve walking story event for the whole family.

I wish you a joyous Advent, a merry Christmas, and a happy New Year.

Revd James Brown

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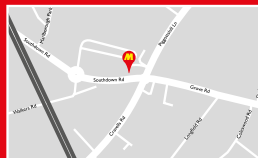
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Little Acorns



Parish registers

Baptisms

Welcome to the family of God

26 August 2018

Samuel Joseph Walter Ellison

26 August 2018

Beatrice Rose Olive Ellison

26 August 2018

Eglantine Gloria Venner

16 September 2018

William Paul Ellison

Marriages

Joined by God

28 July 2018

Kyle McHale to Laura Merrifield

18 August 2018

Oliver Spicer to Imogen Henshaw

Funerals in Church

May they rest in peace

1 August 2018

June Helen Jones

20 August 2018

Derek Richard Satchell

26 September 2018

Brian Leslie Gander

29 September 2018

John Murray Blair Borthwick

12 October 2018

Kathleen Elizabeth O'Dell

25 October 2018

Michael Hopper

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5 November 2018

Henry Stroyan

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Letter from the Churchwardens

Once more we find ourselves nearing the end of the year, anticipating the joys of Christmas but wondering where the year has gone. It has been a busy and eventful year in many respects, containing moments of joy and celebration, and leaving us with both challenges and opportunities for the future.

Looking ahead, we would love to welcome you to share the excitement of Advent and Christmas with us. The services on offer are many and varied: our Advent worship and weekly Night Prayer; carol singing at various Southdown locations; a special Advent and Christmas coffee concert; the Junior Church Nativity Play; our service of Nine Lessons and Carols; and our Midnight Mass and Christmas Day Festival Eucharist celebrations. Details of all of these, and other services, can be found in this magazine.

The past months have included a time of sadness as we saw the departure of our vicar, Nicholas Anderson, who has retired and moved out of the vicarage. After four and a half years of sharing his ministry with us, he goes with all our prayers and thanks, and we wish him and Anneke every happiness in his retirement north of the border.

Nicholas's last service at St John's was on Sunday 30th September. The churchwardens and our curate James Brown paid tribute to Nicholas's work with us during his ministry in the parish, and we sent him on his way with gifts from the congregation, drinks and

canapés in the church hall, and our very best wishes.

So Nicholas's departure once more puts us in the position of a vacancy, and the process of selecting the new incumbent is already underway. The churchwardens have met with the Bishop of Hertford and the Rural Dean, and the Bishop has met with the PCC to discuss our needs, wishes and requirements. The PCC has agreed a detailed Parish Profile which describes the parish - where we are, who we are, what we do - and defines the criteria we are looking for in a new incumbent.

An advertisement for the position has been published in the Church Times and, with the parish profile, on the diocesan website. We are hopeful that potential applicants will respond enthusiastically and positively to our needs and future challenges and we expect that the selection process, which will involve representation from the parish as an integral part, will conclude before the end of the year.

In the meantime, the responsibility for the day-to-day activities of the parish remains with the churchwardens. It is intended that whilst this is naturally a period of change, life will continue as normal and the regular services and activities will continue. We are fortunate to be supported by a strong ministerial team who will continue to provide our spiritual direction, and we are particularly grateful to our neighbouring parishes, retired clergy, and the Rural Dean for providing support to us during this time.



CHARITY CHRISTMAS CARD POP-UP IN HARPENDEN

The festive season gets under way in Harpenden when the Cards for Good Causes charity Christmas-card shop opens in the United Reformed Church, Vaughan Road AL5 4ED on Friday 19 October 2018. Buying Christmas cards through Cards for Good Causes is the best way to get access to the widest selection of Christmas cards available, as well as a fantastic range of seasonal gifts and products, while supporting a range of national and local charities.

Staffed by a team of local volunteers, the Harpenden pop-up shop is part of a network of more than 300 temporary shops run by Cards for Good Causes, the UK's largest charity Christmas card organisation. It represents more than 250 charities including Cancer Research UK, Barnardo's, NSPCC, Alzheimer's Society and RNLI.

Shoppers will be able to choose from hundreds of different Christmas card designs, as well as traditional advent calendars and candles, wrapping paper, gift tags, napkins and stocking fillers. Christmas postage stamps will also be on sale.

Helen Mellor, Shop Manager for Cards for Good Causes says: 'Buying charity Christmas cards is one of the simplest ways to support good causes this festive season, and we stock one of the widest ranges of Christmas cards anywhere. The proceeds from every card or product sold make a vital contribution to the work of the charities that we partner. Come and find us in Vaughan Road in the centre of Harpenden and get ahead in your Christmas preparations by getting your cards early.'

In the past ten years, charities have received more than £40 million from Cards for Good Causes, representing at least 70p in every pound, out of which the charities pay for the production and distribution of their Christmas cards and any VAT.

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Should anyone have questions related to the vacancy or the general day-to-day running of the parish during this period, please contact the churchwardens.

We close our update by wishing everyone in the parish a merry Christmas and happy and prosperous New Year

and we look forward to greeting many of you at our Advent and Christmas celebrations.

James Hillman and Mary Jean Pritchard
Churchwardens

Project Phoenix - Our new parish centre

There will be a public consultation meeting about the plans for the new Parish Centre on Wednesday November 21st from 4pm to 8pm. This meeting is prior to submission of the project for Planning Permission. Please pop into the Church hall to review the plans and meet with the architect.

Project Phoenix Steering Committee

O Emmanuel by Malcolm Guite

This poem is taken from a series of Advent Sonnets based on the 'O Antiphons', which are ancient prayers from the very first centuries of the Church. Advent is a time to remember the coming of Jesus and to call on God's presence with us afresh.

O come, O come, and be our God-with-us
 O long-sought With-ness for a world without,
 O secret seed, O hidden spring of light.
 Come to us Wisdom, come unspoken Name
 Come Root, and Key, and King, and holy Flame,
 O quickened little wick so tightly curled,
 Be folded with us into time and place,
 Unfold for us the mystery of grace
 And make a womb of all this wounded world.
 O heart of heaven beating in the earth,
 O tiny hope within our hopelessness
 Come to be born, to bear us to our birth,
 To touch a dying world with new-made hands
 And make these rags of time our swaddling bands.

Malcolm Guite is a widely published priest and poet whose work you can find at malcolmguite.wordpress.com

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The Song of Mary the oldest Advent hymn

*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
My spirit rejoices in God my saviour;
He has looked with favour on his lowly servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed
The almighty has done great things for me
And holy is his name.
He has mercy on those who fear him
From generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm
and has scattered the proud in their conceit,
Casting down the mighty from their thrones
and lifting up the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty.
He has come to the aid of his servant Israel,
to remember his promise of mercy,
The promise made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and his children for ever.*

Luke (1:46-55).

The Song of Mary (the Magnificat) is one of the most powerful prayers of the church, sung or spoken daily in millions of Christian churches throughout the world.

Finding herself pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit, Mary goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth and sings the canticle that joyfully proclaims her faith in the God of Israel. She praises his divine mercy shown to her, a poor, peasant woman, and then, in both historic and prophetic language, expands this into praising his gracious mercy shown

to all oppressed people. The recurrent Biblical theme of reversal is repeated once more – the lowly will be defended and the arrogant brought to their knees, the lost will be redeemed, the defenceless will be protected, and liberation and life in all its glory and abundance will be the gift to those at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The tables will be totally turned over by a God who is not impressed by wealth, status or power but prefers to favour the pure of spirit and the faithful. This is a powerful message as important today as it was two

thousand years ago.

In the words of Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian, the Song of Mary 'is the oldest Advent hymn'. In a sermon preached in 1933, he defined it as 'a hard, strong, inexorable song about collapsing thrones and humbled lords of this world, about the power of God and the powerlessness of humankind', rather than a sweet Christmas carol.

We must imagine Mary, a poor unmarried girl, living in Galilee, a faithful Jew, leading an unremarkable life, coping with the domestic chores that were her lot. Her world was male dominated and her opportunities minimal. At the behest and arrangement of her parents she finds herself engaged to be married to Joseph, a carpenter who will hopefully prove to be a good and kind husband. Then, before she can even marry him, her life is turned upside down by the visitation of an angel asking her to carry in her womb and give birth to God's Son, who will be the long-awaited Messiah. She would have been justified in being just a little bit put out, perhaps weighing up the pros and cons of the situation she finds herself in, but not a bit of it. With every fibre of her being - her body, soul and spirit - she glorifies God who has chosen her for this extraordinary role. This is no quietly spoken hymn of praise but one that is confidently and assuredly proclaimed with a lungful of air to leave not even a hair's breadth of doubt that she willingly undertakes this privilege. Her consent to bearing God's son is no meek act of submission, a passivity and 'feminine' weakness, which has been

so unfairly attributed to her in the past, rather she co-owns the divine antipathy to whatever crushes the lowly. Here, as Elizabeth Johnson the contemporary American theologian expresses, there is 'solidarity with divine outrage over the degradation of life and with the divine promise to repair the world'. Whilst in every sense she is a woman, the misogynistic definition of 'femininity' is rewritten. With lungs full of joy in God and his desire to grant victory to the oppressed, Mary is a prophet not a subjugated woman.

Mary continues the strong Jewish tradition of female singers, and the sentiments she expresses strongly resemble those sung by Hannah in the book of Solomon (1 Sam. 2:1-10). The background circumstances to each are similar, both sung by women who find themselves unexpectedly pregnant, Hannah because she has been barren for so long (as indeed was Elizabeth) and Mary because she is a virgin. All three women bear offspring who will be Holy - Hannah's son, Solomon, is offered to the Lord as his servant as soon as he is weaned and then God calls him by name when he is just a child sleeping in the temple. John the Baptist, Elizabeth's son, will announce the dawn of the new age. Mary's son, our Lord Jesus, is the fulfillment of a promise made explicit through the unfolding of Luke's Gospel. Yet the scene is absurd. The coming of the Messiah who will redeem Israel is anticipated and proclaimed by two marginalised and pregnant women - one young, poor and unmarried, the other far beyond the normal age of conceiving.

There is nothing passive or gentle

about the vocabulary of Mary's Song. Look at the words employed: 'strength', 'scattered the proud', 'cast down the mighty', 'sent the rich away empty' – God's mercy and grace has never been, and will never be, the preserve of the rich and powerful; it is not a commodity that can be bought with either money or status. His mercy and assistance will be shown to those who are faithful and serve him, 'lifting up the lowly' and nourishing the hungry with the bread of heaven.

What opens as a hymn of deep, personal thanks and love of God becomes bold and daring, proclaiming the upside-down world inaugurated by Jesus' incarnation. It announces the subversive character of Jesus' arrival. The ordered church, political and social systems of the day will all be radically changed. Is it both 'the oldest advent hymn' and, indeed, the greatest advent hymn? Yes, because its singer has within her womb the life that will launch the messianic age in which the tables will

be turned, in which a new social order will be established and the hungry fed. Mary's song foretells the advent of the dawn of Christianity, foretells the words that her son himself will speak in the Beatitudes and of a movement that will bring about seismic, global and eternal transformations. Her womb has been filled with the protagonist of this change and, in the words of Martin Luther, her Song was sung 'not for herself alone but for all of us to sing it after her.' In doing so, we stand with Mary and the whole communion of saints, close to the God who is the source of all our hope and joy. We are summoned to play our part in God's plan to build a just world, to do what we can to relieve suffering, so that his will may be done on earth as it is in heaven. Our hope finds its voice in Mary's Song, resting securely on this: God is good, and God keeps his promises. •

Emma Bresslaw





Advent and Christmas 2018

You are very welcome to these special events at St Johns.
All normal service times will continue unless replaced by something below.

Sun 2 Dec **6.30pm** **Advent hymns and readings**

Wed 5 Dec **8pm** **Night Prayer**
Short candlelit prayer service

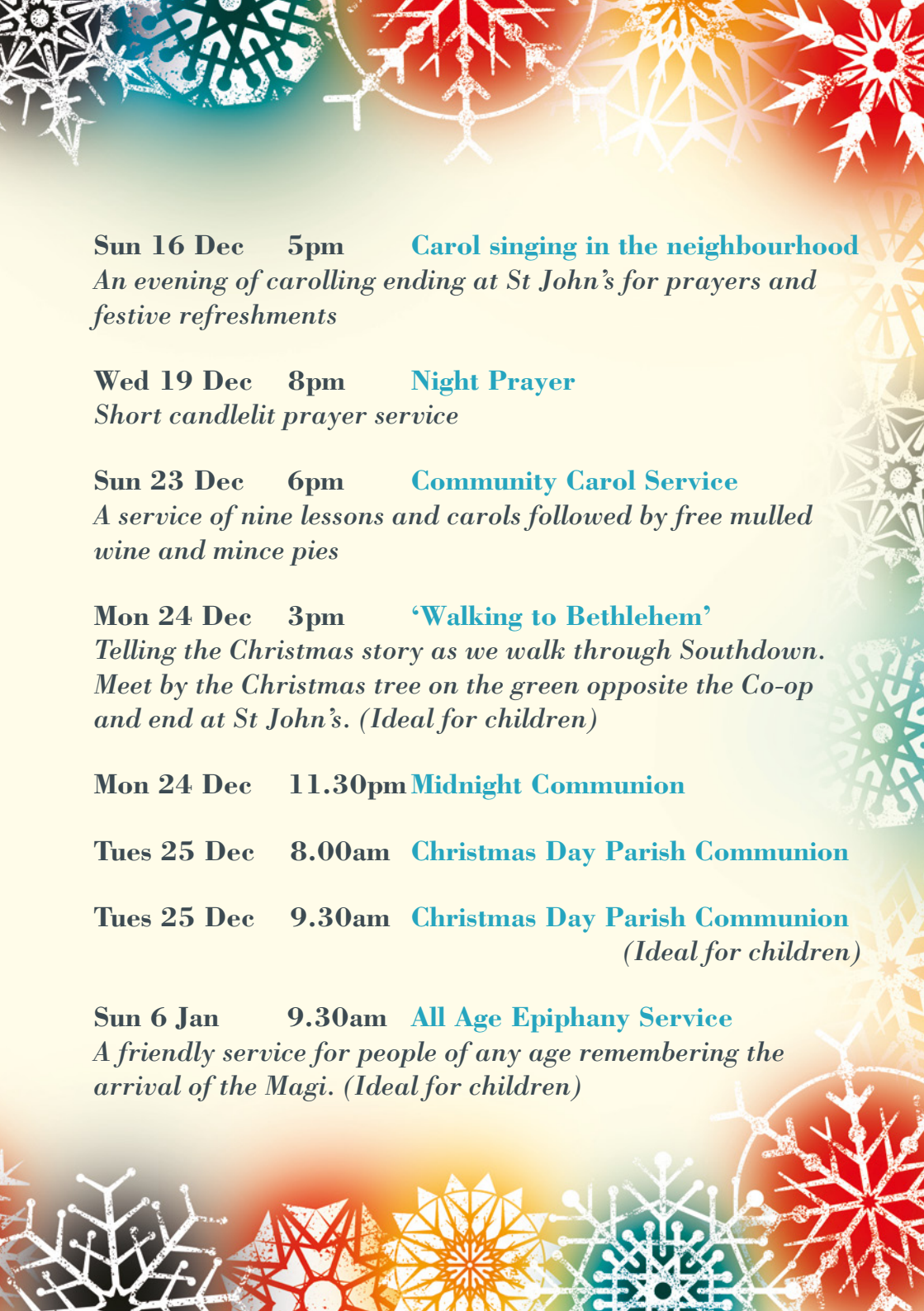
Thurs 6 Dec **8pm** **Beer and Carols**
Friendly, festive singalong in The Engineer pub. Over 18s only

Wed 12 Dec **8pm** **Night Prayer**
Short candlelit prayer service

Fri 14 Dec **3pm** **Tea at 3 Christmas Special**
Friendly companionship over a cup of tea, homemade cakes and sandwiches. Special Christmas music from the Grove Juniors choir and orchestra

Sat 15 Dec **10.30am** **Coffee Concert**
Free Advent and Christmas themed organ concert and coffee

Sun 16 Dec **9.00am** **All Age Christmas Nativity Service**
Led by members of the Junior Church. Ideal for children



Sun 16 Dec 5pm Carol singing in the neighbourhood
An evening of carolling ending at St John's for prayers and festive refreshments

Wed 19 Dec 8pm Night Prayer
Short candlelit prayer service

Sun 23 Dec 6pm Community Carol Service
A service of nine lessons and carols followed by free mulled wine and mince pies

Mon 24 Dec 3pm 'Walking to Bethlehem'
Telling the Christmas story as we walk through Southdown. Meet by the Christmas tree on the green opposite the Co-op and end at St John's. (Ideal for children)

Mon 24 Dec 11.30pm Midnight Communion

Tues 25 Dec 8.00am Christmas Day Parish Communion

Tues 25 Dec 9.30am Christmas Day Parish Communion
(Ideal for children)

Sun 6 Jan 9.30am All Age Epiphany Service
A friendly service for people of any age remembering the arrival of the Magi. (Ideal for children)

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St Luke's Cell prayer group

Would you like us to pray for you?

We pray for anyone in the parish who has asked for our prayers for themselves or for their loved ones. St Luke's Cell prayer group is named after the disciple and physician Luke, who is the patron saint of doctors. The group meets monthly to pray and is made up of members from St John's and Southdown Methodist churches.

If you would like us to pray for you or someone else then please be in touch with Michael Hughes 01582 765576



Lord Jesus Christ,

Throughout your ministry on earth you looked to bring healing and wholeness. You touched the lepers, restored sight to the blind, cured the sick, and brought hope to the broken-hearted. We bring before you all in any kind of need, praying again for your healing and renewing touch. Restore us and make us whole, by your love and grace.

(Nick Fawcett, in *Prayers for Healing*, Kevin Mayhew, 2013)

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Getting to know the congregation

An interview with Christine Kenyon

How long have you been in Southdown and what do you like about the local community?

I've been here since 1982, when our eldest daughter was one year old, and went to the church at St John's more or less straight away. I love Southdown - it's so friendly! I help out at Sauncey Wood school in Batford. I go one morning a week to the reception class. I used to teach; primary level is my absolute favourite age. I was pleased to retire, what with all the tick boxes that came in, but I love being a volunteer.

I also go to a monthly book group, which I do with a group of friends that I've known for ages, and I also belong to a Scottish dancing group in Batford. The teacher is just amazing! She's over 80 and still dances if we're short on numbers. I also used to love singing; I still do, but I haven't really got time for that so I just sing along at home to CDs!

And how are you involved at St John's?

I've always done the coffees after church. It started off when my parents moved to Harpenden to be near me as they got older. We came from a very vibrant church and my mum wanted to do all sorts of things but she was getting quite frail so we did the coffees and my girls would help, too. When my girls were growing up I helped with the Sunday school. I've always cared about children being involved, as they're the future of the church, and now I'm involved with Little Acorns.

What is Little Acorns?

It's a group for toddlers and their mums, dads or carers. We meet on a Thursday between 1.30pm and 2.45pm. There is a play session with trikes and cycles and lots of toys for the children. A little boy asked me

last week for dinosaurs, so I have spent a lot of time looking round the charity shops for dinosaurs! We have hot drinks for the adults and also a little snack time for the kids, followed by some singing. It's really lovely and it's growing.

It sounds like you're quite involved with things at St John's. What does it mean to you to be a part of that Christian community?

Well, what it means to me is that I'm trying to do what God wants me to do. The Sunday School was important because I wanted our girls to grow up with a Christian background, although I never forced them to come to church. I thought they should come because they want to come. I really did feel God calling me to Little Acorns and it's been quite amazing really! So it means something to be part of the church community but, because my husband doesn't believe, there is a bit of limit as to how much I can get involved. He is, however, supportive of my beliefs/ involvement with the church and he never objected to the children going to church. He's always agreed that it's up to them to decide. And now we have one daughter that is very Christian and spiritual and one that doesn't believe at all - so one of each! ●



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News from the Mothers' Union

Very sadly we lost our great friend June Jones during the summer. We shall miss her. We send our condolences to John.

We miss, too, Anneke and Nicholas and wish them every happiness in their new life in Scotland. Nicholas gave a great deal of support to The Mothers' Union, promoting it in church whenever he could, and we enjoyed his generosity at his home on many occasions. Nicholas enrolled Rosie Horne as a new member during the summer, and we have welcomed back Nona Moss into our ranks whilst also sending our sympathies for the loss of her husband, Ron.

Congratulations to David and Elizabeth Brown and to Sue and Colin Chambers who celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversaries during the summer. John and June Jones also celebrated theirs earlier in the year.

On a Saturday in May we served coffee etc. in Wesley's cafe and enjoyed a lovely garden party in July courtesy of the generosity of Colin and Sue Chambers. The weather was favourable and it was good to chance to have fellowship with our friends from the Deanery. These events brought in £368 for funds.

During August we hosted a deanery lunch in the church hall and our speaker was Pastor Lonnie Hays from the Women's Immigration Detention Centre in Bedford. We gave Lonnie stationery and underwear and fabrics for sewing to take back for the detainees. We plan to send small gifts for the ladies at Christmas time.

Some of us attended the Diocesan AGM at the Church of King Charles the Martyr in Potters Bar. We also attended several 'Quiet Days', which are led by our MU chaplain and are a chance to reflect in a quiet place for a few hours. These were enjoyed by several members, with the Quiet Day at Childwickbury being particularly enjoyable.

Our monthly meetings and talks resumed in September. Anyone is most welcome as a visitor; please do take a programme from the noticeboards. We meet on the first Wednesday of the month at 7.30 pm.

I wish you all a good Advent.

Julia Smith

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16 December, 9.30am - Nativity Play

Junior Church perform the nativity play they have written themselves, with lots of fun carol singing as we celebrate the story of Jesus' birth.

6 January, 9.30am - Epiphany

The three wise men arrive to visit the infant Jesus. In this season of presents we think about the gifts they gave to Jesus.

3 February, 9.30am - Candlemas

Jesus was presented at the temple as a baby and his parents heard amazing things about him. We think about what that means for us today.

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The moment in the service when the lights are turned off and we sing a carol is magical!

The Christingle Service is for children of all ages and their parents and carers. Each child will receive a Christingle, which is an orange decorated with sweets, dried fruit, red ribbon and a candle.

Donations will be invited for The Children's Society, a national charity that runs local projects helping children and young people when they are at their most vulnerable and have nowhere left to turn.

Sunday, 2 December, 4.30pm

at St Nicholas Church, Church Green, Harpenden AL5 2TP

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Forthcoming events

November 2018

Saturday 24 November	7.30 pm	Carillon Concert in church
Sunday 25 November	11.30 am	Family baptism
Monday 26 November	8.00 pm	Fellowship & Study Group
Wednesday 28 November	8.15 pm	PCC meeting
Friday 30 November	3.00 pm	Tea at Three in the parish hall

December 2018

Wednesday 5 December	7.30 pm	Mothers' Union Branch party
Thursday 6 December	7.00 pm	Roundwood Park School Concert in church
Friday 7 December	2.00 pm	Dorcas in the committee room
Friday 7 December	4.30 pm	Aldwickbury School Carol Concert in church
Friday 14 December	3.00 pm	Tea at Three in the parish hall
Saturday 15 December	10.30 am	Coffee Concert – Roger Carter (organ)
Sunday 16 December	2.30 pm	Family baptism
Monday 17 December	8.00 pm	Hardynge Choir Carol Concert in church
Sunday 23 December	6.30 pm	Community Carol service

January 2019

Sunday 6 January	4.00 pm	Faith and Light in the parish hall
Wednesday 9 January	7.30 pm	Mothers' Union Quiz
Thursday 10 January	8.15 pm	Standing Committee meeting
Saturday 19 January	12 noon	Inner Wheel Soup Kitchen
Thursday 24 January	8.15 pm	PCC meeting
Friday 25 January	3.00 pm	Tea at Three in the parish hall
Sunday 27 January	11.30 am	Family baptism



Services at St John's

Sunday

- 8.00 am Said Eucharist
9.30 am Parish Eucharist followed by coffee time in the hall
All-Age Eucharist, *normally first Sunday of the month; see list inside*
9.30 am Junior Church, *except for All Age Eucharists,*
and Little Gems in the hall
11.30 am Holy Baptism, *last Sunday of the month*
6.30 pm Evening Worship

Wednesday

- 9.30 am Said Eucharist

Major festivals advertised when appropriate in the magazine

World Day of Prayer Friday 1st March 2019

10.30am St John's Church

7.45pm St Mary's, Kinsbourne Green

As in previous years, we will be part of a great wave of prayer encircling over 120 countries and islands across the world.

This time the service has been prepared by the Christian women of Slovenia, on the theme 'Come - Everything is Ready!'. We shall hear the voices of wives, mothers and grandmothers, Roma people, refugees and migrant workers. Their stories reflect the political and economic situation of Slovenia from the time it was a socialist-communist state (part of Yugoslavia) to the present day.

So, do join us! Open to all, with refreshments after each service.

Pat Hudis

PARISH OFFICE

For enquiries, including marriages, baptisms, funerals and hall bookings, please contact the parish office open from Monday 9am to 5:30pm and Wednesday to Friday 9:30am to 1:30pm.

Telephone: 01582 712776
parish.office@
stjohnsharpenden.org.uk

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Revd Julia White

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Elizabeth Brown

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