

# ELSTOW PARISH MAGAZINE



**December 2011 and January 2012**



## Advent and Christmas Dec 2011

Dear Parishioners,

Waiting! Waiting! Waiting! It's really hard isn't it? How many times did I hear that as a child? 'Not now'. 'Later'. 'When I am ready'. I seemed to spend my impatient young life waiting. For holidays, for term to end - so that I could play; for the rain to stop so that I could go out into the garden; for my dad to come home from work; for my little sister to be born. Waiting. Always waiting!!! And then waiting for Christmas was the greatest agony of all. Waiting for my mother to be preoccupied with some task in the kitchen or the garden, so that I could sneak around the house looking in all the likely places for presents bought in secret and wrapped with such love. Why could I never find them? My impatience would know no bounds, and the days would seem to drag with what seemed like an eternity.

I have learnt over the years that to wait, to be patient, to not rush, to be given time to prepare is a wonderful opportunity. Many of you find that during these next few weeks that time is flying by with little or no time to prepare properly for Christmas. You and I are waiting in this time of Advent for the Birth of the Christ Child. For its' true meaning to enlighten us, even though we are very busy we must try and create times to reflect on the past; a time to cleanse; and a time to begin anew. A time to bring together again; a time to strengthen – to be fully prepared. *'Jesus said in Luke 13:34: 'How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, how often I have wanted to be with you and to help you and to keep you all together'.*

A story that may help with our thoughts as we prepare to celebrate Christmas ... *Shah Abbas was a Persian monarch who loved his people very much. To know and understand them better, he would mingle with his subjects in various disguises. One day he went as a poor man to the public baths, and in a tiny cellar sat beside the fireman who tended the furnace. When it was meal-time the monarch shared his coarse food and talked to his lonely subject as a friend. Again and again he visited and the man grew to love him. One day the Shah told him he was the monarch, expecting the man to ask for some gift from him. But the fireman sat gazing at his ruler with love and wonder and at last spoke: 'You left your palace and your glory to sit with me in this dark place, to eat of my coarse food, to care whether my heart is glad or sorry. On others you may bestow rich presents, but to me you have given yourself, and it only remains for me to pray that you never withdraw the gift of your friendship.'*

Christmas is God's gift to our two main basic needs: he answers our need to love by showing us the depth of his love in giving us his Son. And he offers meaning to our lives by allowing us to become his children. God shares his very life with us and so makes us his sons and daughters.

We know we are loved and we know why we exist: to live in God's love forever. To live a life that is *'full of his grace and truth'* (from St. John's Prologue) is to treat ourselves with respect. We need to find the time and space to allow God in - to seek continually to be led deeper and deeper into the love of God, into the life of God. I hope that we shall allow a few minutes every day during this time of Advent to prepare properly for his coming at Christmas.

And finally at Christmas-time I try and find a short story for the children:

### **This is the story of how the fir tree became the Christmas tree.**

*At the time when the Christ Child was born all the people, the animals, and the trees, and plants were very happy. The Child was born to bring peace and happiness to the whole world. People came daily to see the little One, and they always brought gifts with them. There were three trees standing near the crypt which saw the people, and they wished that they, too, might give presents to the Christ Child. The Palm said: "I will choose my most beautiful leaf, and place it as a fan over the Child." "And I," said the Olive, "will sprinkle sweet-smelling oil upon His head." "What can I give to the Child?" asked the Fir, who stood near.*

*"You!" cried the others. "You have nothing to offer Him. Your needles would prick Him, and your tears are sticky." So the poor little Fir tree was very unhappy, and it said: "Yes, you are right. I have nothing to offer the Christ Child."*

*Now, quite near the trees stood the Christmas Angel, who had heard all that the trees had said. The Angel was sorry for the Fir tree who was so lowly and without envy of the other trees. So, when it was dark, and the stars came out, he begged a few of the little stars to come down and rest upon the branches of the Fir tree. They did as the Angel asked, and the Fir tree shone suddenly with a beautiful light. And, at that very moment, the Christ Child opened His eyes—for He had been asleep—and as the lovely light fell upon Him He smiled.*

*Every year people keep Jesus' birthday by giving gifts to each other, and every year, in remembrance of His first birthday, the Christmas Angel places in every house a fir tree, also. Covered with starry candles it shines for the children as the stars shone for the baby Jesus. The Fir tree was rewarded for its meekness, for no other tree shines upon so many faces.*

I hope that you will all have a very happy and peaceful Christmas,

With Very Best Wishes,

**Jeremy Crocker.**



## THE CHURCH CALENDAR DECEMBER 2011

1<sup>st</sup> Thursday 09.30am Morning Prayers at St Michael's (JRC + SS)  
 11.00am Holy Communion (JRC)  
 12Noon Monthly Lunch at The Red Lion  
 7-8.30pm London Road Youth Club  
 7.30pm Bedfordshire Bagpipes rehearse in the Abbey  
**7.30pm Elstow PCC meeting in the Vestry, including mince pies!**

2<sup>nd</sup> Friday 7pm Choir Practice  
 7pm Mums and Toddlers group Christmas Meal (for mums/carers) at The Red Lion  
 8pm Bell Ringing

3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday 7.00pm **Elstow Abbey Advent Quiz night at Elstow Bunyan Christian Fellowship for the whole Benefice.** Anyone locally is welcome.  
 Free event, but donations are welcome to cover hall hire. Includes jacket potato + filling supper.

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday 10.00am Holy Communion + Sunday School (JRC)  
 10.15am Holy Communion at St Michael's (NM)  
 11.20am Mattins (Group)  
 3.00pm St Michael's Christmas Crafts and Christingle (with refreshments)  
 5.30pm Confirmation Rehearsal (JRC)  
 6.30pm Evensong (JRC)

5<sup>th</sup> Monday 10.00am Mums and Toddlers in the Church/Vestry  
 2.00pm Prayer Group  
**7pm Confirmation Service at Elstow Abbey with the Bishop of Bedford, with refreshments following the service**

6<sup>th</sup> Tuesday 09.30am Elstow Lower School at Elstow Abbey  
 3.45-5.15pm After School Club at St Michael's  
 6.30pm Youth Club – Chocolate Night

7<sup>th</sup> Wednesday 09.30-10.30am Dance group for under 5s and carers in the Abbey. Run by Wilstead Children's Centre.  
 11.30am Coffee and soup in the Vestry  
 7.30pm St Michael's PCC meeting at 1 Binden Abbey

8<sup>th</sup> Thursday 09.30am Elstow Lower School at Elstow Abbey  
 09.30am Morning Prayers at St Michael's (SS + JRC)  
 11.00am Holy Communion **in the Vestry** (JRC)  
 7-8.30pm London Road Youth Club  
 7pm Wardens and Finance and Standing Christmas Meal

9<sup>th</sup> Friday 7pm Choir Practice  
 8pm Bell Ringing

10 <sup>th</sup>	Saturday	10am-12noon	Church Members + Sunday School children and parents – Prepare Christingles in the Vestry
11 <sup>th</sup>	Sunday	10.00am 10.15am 11.20am 3.00pm 4.00pm 6.30pm	Holy Communion + Sunday School + Baptism of Suzanne White and Joshua Coby Artiss (JRC) <i>Holy Communion at St Michael's (RC)</i> Mattins (JRC) <b>Christingle service (TH + choir)</b> Carol Service at St Michael's Evensong (Robert Heeley)
12 <sup>th</sup>	Monday	10.00am 2.00pm	<b>Mums and Toddlers Christmas party in the Church/Vestry</b> Prayer Group
13 <sup>th</sup>	Tuesday	3.45-5.15pm 6.30pm	After School Club at St Michael's <b>Youth Club Christmas Meal at The Red Lion £5 for 2 courses</b>
14 <sup>th</sup>	Wednesday	09.30-10.30am 11.30am 1-3pm 6pm	Dance group for under 5s and carers in the Abbey. Run by Wilstead Children's Centre. <b>Last one before Christmas.</b> <b>Christmas Party - Coffee and soup group in the Vestry</b> Abbey Middle School visiting the Abbey Ministers' Christmas Meal at the Toby Carvery (TBC)
15 <sup>th</sup>	Thursday	09.30am 11.00am 1pm 7-8.30pm 7.30-9.30pm	Morning Prayers at St Michael's (SS + JRC) Holy Communion (JRC) Parents of Elstow Lower watch school children perform Christmas show in the Abbey London Road Youth Club Bedfordshire Bagpipes rehearsing in the Abbey
16 <sup>th</sup>	Friday	7pm 8pm	Choir Practice Bell Ringing
17 <sup>th</sup>	Saturday	2pm -7pm	Children's Christmas Parties in the church and Vestry Different ages at different times. More details to follow.
18 <sup>th</sup>	Sunday	10.00am 10.15am 11.20am 2.30pm 6.30pm	Holy Communion + Sunday School (JRC) <i>Holy Communion at St Michael's (RC)</i> Mattins (Group) Baptism of Frankie de Angelis <b>Service of Nine Lessons and Carols (JRC + RC), followed by mince pies and mulled wine</b>
19 <sup>th</sup>	Monday	10.00am 2.00pm	<b>No Mums and Toddlers</b> Prayer Group
20 <sup>th</sup>	Tuesday		Help needed in preparing flowers for Christmas – please speak to Barbara if you are able to help. <b>No after school club or Youth Club</b>
21 <sup>st</sup>	Wednesday	11.30am	Coffee and soup in the Vestry

22 <sup>nd</sup>	Thursday	09.30am <b>09.30am</b> 11.00am	Morning Prayers at St Michael's (SS + JRC) <b>Crib Service Rehearsal</b> Holy Communion (JRC)
23 <sup>rd</sup>	Friday	<b>7pm</b> 8pm	<b>No Choir Practice</b> Bell Ringing
Christmas Eve		<b>4pm</b> <b>11.30pm</b>	<b>Crib Service (TH)</b> <b>Midnight Mass (JRC)</b>
Christmas Day		<b>10.30am</b>	<b>Holy Communion. No Sunday School. (RC)</b> <b>No Evensong</b>

Boxing Day                    **Jeremy on Paternity Leave for 2 weeks.**

28 <sup>th</sup>	Wednesday	11.30a.m.	Coffee and Soup in the Vestry
29 <sup>th</sup>	Thursday	09.30am 11.00am	Morning Prayers at St Michael's (SS) Holy Communion (RC)
30 <sup>th</sup>	Friday	8pm	Bell Ringing

### **JANUARY 2012**

1 <sup>st</sup>	Sunday	<b>10.30am</b> <i>10.15am</i> <b>11.20am</b> 6.30pm	<b>Holy Communion (PL)</b> <i>Holy Communion at St Michael's (NM)</i> <b>No Mattins</b> Evensong (JEH)
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Monday	Bank Holiday 10.00am 2.00pm	No Mums and Todders No Prayer Group
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Tuesday	No After School Club or Youth Club	
4 <sup>th</sup>	Wednesday	11.30am	Coffee and soup in the Vestry
5 <sup>th</sup>	Thursday	09.30am 11.00am 7-8.30pm	Morning Prayers at St Michael's (SS) Holy Communion (RC) London Road Youth Club
6 <sup>th</sup>	Friday	7pm 8pm	Choir Practice Bell Ringing
<b>Epiphany</b>			
8 <sup>th</sup>	Sunday	10.00am <i>10.15am</i> 11.20am 6.30pm	Holy Communion + Sunday School (RC ) <i>Holy Communion at St Michael's (JRC)</i> Mattins (RC) Evensong (JRC)
9 <sup>th</sup>	Monday	10.00am	Mums and Toddlers in the Vestry and back of church

		2.00pm	Prayer Group
10 <sup>th</sup>	Tuesday	3.45-5.15pm 6.30pm	After School Club at St Michael's Youth Club
11 <sup>th</sup>	Wednesday	11.30am	Coffee and soup in the Vestry
12 <sup>th</sup>	Thursday	09.30am 11.00am 12-1pm 7pm 7.45pm	Morning Prayers at St Michael's (JRC + SS) Holy Communion (RC) Clergy Chapter London Road Youth Club South Beds Council of Churches meeting including Fish & Chips + guest speaker Charles Whitbread. All Welcome at London Road Methodist Church. Please let Rosemary Langley know if you would like fish and chips.

**Deadline for the February Parish Magazine to [Jacquie Waterfield @ 269 Goldington Road, Bedford, MK41 9PH](#) or [jakhat77@hotmail.com](mailto:jakhat77@hotmail.com)**

13 <sup>th</sup>	Friday	7pm 8pm	Choir Practice Bell Ringing
15 <sup>th</sup>	Sunday	<b>No Morning Services at Elstow Abbey</b> 11.00am 10.15am 6.30pm	<b>Holy Communion at Elstow Bunyan Christian Fellowship</b> <i>Holy Communion at St Michael's (RC)</i> Evensong + Holy Communion + Healing (JRC)
16 <sup>th</sup>	Monday	10.00am 2.00pm	Mums and Todders in the Vestry and back of church Prayer Group
17 <sup>th</sup>	Tuesday	3.45-5.15pm 6.30pm	After School Club at St Michael's Youth Club
18 <sup>th</sup>	Wednesday	<b>Beginning of the week of prayer for Christian Unity</b> 11.30am 12Noon	Coffee and soup in the Vestry Prayers at St Andrews, Bedford
19 <sup>th</sup>	Thursday	09.30am 11.00am 12Noon 7-8.30pm	Morning Prayers at St Michael's (SS) Holy Communion (RC) Prayers at The Friends Meeting House London Road Youth Club
20 <sup>th</sup>	Friday	12 Noon 7pm 8pm	Prayers at St Joseph's Choir Practice Bell Ringing
21 <sup>st</sup>	Saturday	12Noon	Prayers at St Mary's Goldington
22 <sup>nd</sup>	Sunday	10.00am 10.15am 11.20am	Family service + Sunday School (JRC ) <i>Holy Communion at St Michael's (PL)</i> BCP Holy Communion (JRC)

		<b>6.00pm</b>	<b>Service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity at Bunyan Meeting (Bishop of Bedford)</b>
		<b>6.30pm</b>	<b>No Evensong at Elstow Abbey</b>
23 <sup>rd</sup>	Monday	10.00am 12Noon 2.00pm 8.00pm	Mums and Todders in the Vestry/Back of Church Prayers at St John's Prayer Group Liturgy Meeting in the Vestry
24 <sup>th</sup>	Tuesday	12Noon 3.45-5.15pm 6.30pm	Prayers at Miracle Church After School Club at St Michael's Youth Club
25 <sup>th</sup>	Wednesday	11.30am 7.30pm	Coffee and soup in the Vestry Combined Treasurers meeting at Elstow Vicarage
26 <sup>th</sup>	Thursday	09.30am 11.00am 7-8.30pm 7.45pm	Morning Prayers at St Michael's (SS) Holy Communion (RC) London Road Youth Club Cardington PCC
27 <sup>th</sup>	Friday	7pm 8pm	Choir Practice Bell Ringing

<b>28<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Saturday</b>	<b>3.30-6pm</b>	<b>PCC and Sidesmen of the three churches – a study afternoon looking at the ministry of welcome, at St Michael's Church</b>
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29 <sup>th</sup>	Sunday	<b>Fifth Sunday - at Our own Churches</b> - Benefice service with Bishop of St Albans next week (Sunday 5 <sup>th</sup> February) 10.00am Holy Communion + Sunday School (JRC ) 10.15am <i>Holy Communion at St Michael's (NM)</i> 11.20am Mattins (JRC) 6.30pm Evensong (JRC )
30 <sup>th</sup>	Monday	10.00am Mums and Todders in the Vestry/Back of Church 2.00pm Prayer Group
31 <sup>st</sup>	Tuesday	6.30pm Youth Club

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## READERS' LIST FOR DECEMBER 2011 AND JANUARY 2012

<u>DATE</u>	<u>SERVICE</u>	<u>1ST LESSON</u>	<u>2ND LESSON</u>	<u>READER</u>
4th Dec	10.00 am	Isaiah 40: v.1-11	Mark 1: v.1-8	Phillip Bettles
	11.20 am	Zephaniah 3: v.14-end	Luke 1: v.5-20	Tim Elliott
	6.30 pm	1 Kings 22: v.1-28	Romans 15: v.4-13	Ann Knight
11th Dec	10.00 am	Isaiah 61: v.1-4, 8-end	John 1: v.6-8, 19-28	Tim Harris
	11.20 am	Isaiah Chapter 12	Luke 1: v.57-66	Tessa Wood
	6.30 pm	Malachi 3: v.1-4; Chapter 4	Philippians 4: v.4-8	Glynis Annan
18th Dec	10.00 am	2 Samuel 7: v.1-11,16	Luke 1: v.26-38	Glynis Freeman
	11.20 am	Isaiah 7: v.10-16	Romans 1: v.1-7	David Ewbank
	<b>6.30pm</b>	<b>Festival of Nine Lessons &amp; Carols</b>		To be advised
24th Dec	<b>11.30 pm</b>	<b>Midnight Holy Communion</b>		
		Isaiah 52: v.7-10	John 1: v.1-14	Tracey Hinson
25th Dec	<b>10.30 am</b>	<b>Joint Holy Communion</b>		
		Isaiah 9: v.2-7	Luke 2: v.1-20	Barbara Routledge
<b>2012</b>				
1st Jan	<b>10.30 am</b>	<b>Joint Holy Communion</b>		
	6.30 pm	Numbers 6: v.22-end Deuteronomy 30: v.1-end	Luke 2: v.15-21 Acts 3: v.1-16	Steve McDonald Catherine Parish
8th Jan	10.00 am	Genesis 1: v.1-5	Mark 1: v.4-11	Peter Batiuk
	11.20 am	1 Samuel 16: v.1-13	John 1: v.29-34	Delphine Fordham
	6.30 pm	Isaiah 42: v.1-9	Ephesians 2: v.1-10	Peter Moss
15th Jan	<b>No Morning Services at Elstow Abbey</b>			
	<b>11.00 am</b>	<b>Joint Service at Elstow Bunyan Christian Fellowship</b>		
<b>H.C.+H.</b>	<b>6.30 pm</b>	Isaiah 60: v.9-end	Matthew 8: v.5-13	Glynis Annan
22nd Jan	10.00 am	<b>Family Service + Sunday School</b>		
<b>BCP H.C.</b>	<b>11.20 am</b>	Revelation 19: v.6-10	John 2: v.1-11	Eric Crossen
	<b>6.00 pm</b>	<b>No Evensong at Elstow Abbey</b>		
		<b>Week of Prayer for Christian Unity at Bunyan Meeting with Bishop of Bedford</b>		
29th Jan	10.00 am	Deuteronomy 18: v.15-20	Mark 1: v.21-28	Joanna Jameson
	11.20 am	Jeremiah 1: v.4-10	Mark 1: v.40-end	Eric Crossen
	6.30 pm	1 Samuel 3: v.1-20	Matthew 13: v.10-17	Ann Knight
5th Feb	<b>10.30 am</b>	<b>Joint Benefice Service with Bishop Alan of St Albans</b>		
	6.30 pm	Isaiah 40: v.21-end Numbers 13: v.1-2, 27-end	Mark 1: v.29-39 Philippians 2: v.12-28	Tessa Wood Catherine Parish

**If any dates are inconvenient, please arrange a swap and let Ann Knight know you have done so. Thank you. Tel: 01234 854036 or email:knightannv@aol.com**

## SIDSMENS ROTA DECEMBER 2011 & JANUARY 2012

<b>Dec 4<sup>th</sup></b>	10am	Mrs G Freeman	Mrs A Barfoot
	11.20am	F.W. Crossen	
	6.30pm	Mrs G Annan	
<b>Dec 11<sup>th</sup></b>	10am	Mrs S Batiuk	P. Batiuk
	11.20am	Mrs M Crossen	
	3pm	<b>Christingle Service</b>	
	6.30pm	P. Moss	
<b>Dec 18<sup>th</sup></b>	10am	Mrs A Morris	Mrs S Brown
	11.20am	Mrs D Fordham	
<b>Carol Service</b>	6.30pm	Mrs G Annan	Mrs M Crossen Mrs A Knight Mrs C Parrish
<b>Christmas Eve</b>	4pm	Mrs B Routledge	
	11.30pm	Mrs G Annan	Mrs A Knight
<b>Christmas Day</b>	10.30am	Mrs S Batiuk	P. Batiuk
<b>Jan 1<sup>st</sup></b>	10.30am	Mrs A Morris	Mrs A Barfoot
<b>Jan 8<sup>th</sup></b>	10am	Mrs S Batiuk	A Freeman
	11.20am	Mrs M Crossen	
	6.30pm	Mrs G Annan	
<b>Jan 15<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>No morning service at Elstow Abbey</b>		
	11am	Joint Service at Elstow Bunyan Christian Fellowship	
	6.30pm	Miss M Eastwell	
<b>Jan 22<sup>nd</sup></b>	10am	Mrs A Morris	Mrs S Brown
	11.20am	F.W. Crossen	
	<b>No Evensong at Elstow</b>		
	6pm	Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Service at Bedford Bunyan	
<b>Jan 29<sup>th</sup></b>	10am	Mrs G Freeman	A Freeman
	11.20am	Mrs A Knight	
	6.30pm	Mrs C Parrish	
<b>Feb 5<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Joint Service</b>		
	10.30am	Mrs M Crossen	Mrs A Knight
	6.30pm	P. Moss	



## Tunes of Glory

Everyone is present, and in a moment of hushed anticipation a solo choir voice starts the singing of “*Once in Royal David’s city*”. Every year this starts our *Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols*” to Henry John Gauntlett’s tune *Irby*, bringing in the choir and clergy for the service. It is No. 34, and will be sung on Sunday, 18<sup>th</sup> December at 6.30pm. In writing the hymn, Mrs C F Alexander’s original object was to teach children the meaning of what we celebrate at this very special time, so as to make clear not only *what* happened but *why* it happened. The hymn is a skilful mingling of Bible story and Christian theology.

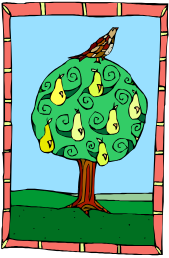
Dr Henry Gauntlett was one of the pioneers of modern psalmody, with an influence on the music of all denominations. He was connected with nearly every tune-book of importance, editing some and contributing to many others, and he was always ready to advance the interests of church music.

Born in 1905 at Wellington, Salop, he spent most of his earlier years at Olney Parish Church where his father was vicar. As a boy he soon showed an aptitude for music, and began composing tunes at a very early age. To encourage him his father offered him a farthing for every tune or chant he copied out. A few days later Henry knocked at the study door and presented a thousand tunes and chants all copied out, which he accompanied with a request for a guinea to settle the account. His father paid up, but put an end to the contract!

Anxious to improve the musical service at Olney, Henry promised his congregation that if they would subscribe for an organ he would find a player, and when the organ was erected he was duly appointed organist. I have played that organ several times. The console has a glass frontage, inscribed with Henry Gauntlett’s memorial. He held the position for eleven years, being educated meanwhile by his father with a view to taking holy orders. After much deliberation about the choice of a profession, his father, fearing that a musician's life offered too many temptations, decided to article him to a solicitor in London. However soon after coming to London he was appointed organist of St Olave's, Southwark, and remained there for twenty years, during part of which he also held a similar post at Christ Church, Newgate Street.

His fame as one of the most accomplished organists and church musicians of the day was already established, and whatever he did in that direction commanded respect. In 1852 he edited the *Church Hymns and Tune-Book*, which marked a new era in psalmody, suggesting the “fixed time” principle, which was afterwards so successfully adopted and established by *Hymns Ancient & Modern*, containing many of his best-known tunes. For example, “St Albinus” was sung with great effect at the funeral service in St. Paul's after the death of General Gordon. In 1852 John Gauntlett was appointed organist of Union Chapel, Islington, and raised the standard of the music to a high degree. In 1858 the *Congregational Psalmist* was issued under joint editorship with Dr Allon. His last work was the editing of the tune-book issued by the Wesleyans in 1876, but only about three months later he died suddenly on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1876. Henry Gauntlett used to say that he had probably composed about ten thousand tunes, of which tonight’s singing of *Irby* is but one of the great favourites.

***John Crookall***



## THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

On February 2<sup>nd</sup> we celebrate each year the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, Candlemass, which concludes the great 40 days of Christmas, so I thought (in this double edition of the Magazine) that I would test your minds and general knowledge as to the meaning of the Carol 'The Twelve Days of Christmas'. So before you read my answers please try and think what in the world do leaping lords, French hens, swimming swans and especially the partridge that won't come out of the pear tree have to do with Christmas?

So let me set the scene..... From 1558 until 1829, Roman Catholics in England were not permitted to practice their faith openly. Someone during that era wrote this carol as a catechism song for young Catholics. It has two levels of meaning: the surface meaning plus a hidden meaning known to members of their church. Each element in the carol has a code for a religious reality, which the children could remember.

### ***So please fill in the gaps***

The partridge in a pear tree.....Seven swans a-swimming.....  
Two turtledoves.....Eight maids a-milking.....  
Three French Hens.....Nine ladies dancing.....  
Four calling birds.....Ten lords a-leaping.....  
Five gold rings.....Eleven pipers piping.....  
Six geese a-laying.....Twelve drummers drumming.....

### ***Answers***

The partridge in the pear tree was Jesus Christ.  
Two turtledoves were the Old and New Testaments.  
Three French hens stood for faith, hope and love.  
The four calling birds were the four gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke & John.  
The five gold rings recalled the Torah or Law, the first five books of the Old Testament.  
The six geese a-laying stood for the six days of creation.  
Seven swans a-swimming represented the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit: prophesy serving, teaching, exhortation, contribution, leadership and mercy.  
The eight maids a-milking were the eight beatitudes.  
Nine ladies dancing were the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.  
The ten lords a-leaping were the Ten Commandments.  
The eleven pipers piping stood for the eleven faithful disciples.  
The twelve drummers drumming symbolised the twelve points of belief in the Apostles' Creed.

So I have shared with you how this strange song has become a very well known Christmas Carol, and is full of interesting and important meanings to remember.

## DETAILS FROM THE REGISTERS

### OCTOBER 2011

Date	Communicants	Attendance	Collections
2 <sup>nd</sup>	48	93	409.08
6 <sup>th</sup>	9	9	5.00
9 <sup>th</sup>	65	131	229.90 Gift Aid 138.33 Africa Appeal
13 <sup>th</sup>	8	8	7.00
16 <sup>th</sup>	44	100	341.61
20 <sup>th</sup>	8	8	18.00
23 <sup>rd</sup>	29	69	216.57
27 <sup>th</sup>	7	7	4.00
30 <sup>th</sup>	--	63	293.46
	<b><u>218</u></b>	<b><u>488</u></b>	<b><u>1662.95</u></b>

### BAPTISMS

October 30<sup>th</sup> Grace Clark

November 6<sup>th</sup> Isobel Faith Downes

November 13<sup>th</sup> Luke Arthur Richardson  
Beau Robert Richardson  
Shawn Thomas Richardson

### MARRIAGES

November 5<sup>th</sup> 2011 Sabrina Butler and Ryan Schreiner

November 11<sup>th</sup> 2011 Keely Ann Astle and Phillip Eric Jones

## **Presidential Address - 15 October 2011**

Let me begin by quoting words of Jesus from St Matthew's Gospel, chapter 16 v.3 'You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.'

It was during a ferry crossing to France that I first came across a smorgasbord – it's the Swedish word for a large number of different dishes and you mix them up as you like. Well, this presidential address is a sort of smorgasbord as I reflect on 'interpreting the signs of the times' and attempt to pull them into some sort of unity. I want to say something about the disturbances over the summer, where we have reached with our diocesan strategy, and today's debate about women bishops, and link them all together by commenting on how we might live as Christians during a time of change and transition. So let me begin with August.

### **The Riots in August**

The defining images since our last Diocesan Synod are of the riots that began in South London and quickly spread across the country. You will remember that they were triggered by the shooting of Mark Duggan in Tottenham by a policeman on Thursday 4 August. A protest march on Saturday 6 August turned violent and copy cat riots took place in various parts of the capital, spreading to other cities over the next few days. Richard Mannington-Bowes was killed in Ealing and three Birmingham men were killed by a car as they were attempting to protect their properties. After a slow initial response, a strong police presence quelled further disturbances and since then more than 3000 people have been arrested and charged, and the number of convictions continues to rise.

Those convicted range from a fourteen-year-old lad from Waltham Forest to a seventy-year-old man from Leeds. There has been much talk about 'mindless thieving and destruction', but perhaps the most bizarre episode was one middle-class lady who indignantly denied the charge of stealing a television, explaining to the magistrate that when she got into the store they did not have the model she wanted. If ever there was a 'sign of the times' it is encapsulated in that exchange.

A vigorous debate about the causes of the riots is continuing. Some argue that it was opportunistic, pointing out that over 75% of those convicted have previous convictions (although it has also been noted that those with police records are the most easily identified). Others lay the blame at the door of the Metropolitan Police because of the shooting in Tottenham and for their subsequent inadequate response. Others claim the problem lies in endemic gang culture, although only 19% of those arrested so far are known to be involved in gangs. Still others believe the problem is rooted in the widening disparity between rich and poor in Britain. The Home Office is sponsoring research into the riots. Whatever your views, one thing is clear. Our Western society, based on mutual trust, is fragile. We cannot take it for granted. None of us is as civilised as we like to think, particularly when there are flat screen televisions available for the taking.

So how does all this relate to our priorities as a diocese and our work in our parishes, schools and chaplaincies? Before answering this question, let me remind you of what we have been doing this year across the diocese.

### **The current state of play in the Diocese of St Albans**

Last January we launched our new Diocesan Vision: *Living God's Love*, with its three priorities of:

- Going Deeper into God
- Transforming Communities
- Making New Disciples

These are not three separate activities. You cannot pick one or two of them, and ignore the third. Together they constitute three overlapping circles. We have committed ourselves to making them the guiding principles for shaping our diocesan life and they form the basis of our programme of *Mission Action Planning* at parish, chaplaincy, school and deanery level. We must strengthen what is happening at grass roots. The idea of Mission Action Planning is for each group to discern prayerfully how to engage with these three themes and to develop them according to the sort of communities they are living in, their churchmanship, and the resources they have available. Mission Action Planning also needs to be rooted in what is actually going on and events such as the August riots need to inform our thinking and our acting.

Originally I asked that everyone send in a copy of their Mission Action Plan by Easter next year. However, a number of parishes were quick off the mark and have already sent theirs in. I have to say how encouraged I am by the seriousness and imagination that lies behind the ones I have seen so far.

At diocesan level our aim is to get our structures onto a long-term sustainable footing, so that we are not driven by finance or by the availability of clergy. I have already said publicly that I would like us to get to the point where we are not cutting the overall numbers of parish clergy. This is why I and my colleagues are working hard on a strategy for young vocations and ministry, and the more effective deployment of clergy. However, even if we achieve this there will still have to be some further pastoral reorganisation simply because the population of the diocese continues to grow, with large areas of new housing being built. We need to plant new churches and to deploy clergy there, and sometimes this may mean that clergy posts will have to be taken from elsewhere.

This has financial implications. In recent years we have been collecting in 93-94% of the parish share. There is no way that we will be able to stabilise our staffing on that basis. Unless this changes we will have no choice but to continue cuts in stipendiary posts. However, it is highly significant – and very encouraging – that last year, 2010, we collected in 0.8% more of the parish share than in 2009; and this year we are currently 1.07% ahead of last year. This is a magnificent achievement and comes from a great deal of hard work and an increasing level of generous, sacrificial giving. Nevertheless, to stabilise the structures of the diocese and to free up time and energy to undertake our mission and ministry we will have to collect in excess of 98% of the parish share annually and also to collect much more of it in monthly payment throughout the year. As in our domestic finances, cash flow is important.

Now let me turn to the debate that is going to take up most of today's synod:

### **Women bishops**

In a few minutes we will debate the motion that has been sent down to us from General Synod. The debate about the role of women in ministry has been going on in the Church of England for decades now. Many of you will have been involved in a similar debate prior to the vote in General Synod in 1993 which gave the green light for women to be ordained as priests. I thank God for the gifts and insights that women have already brought to the priesthood, and today I want to support the legislation that they can be ordained bishops.

However, I am also acutely aware that there are some who are profoundly troubled by this development. Indeed, some have left the Church of England believing that we cannot make such a fundamental change alone. As a result several of my friends have become Roman Catholic priests or lay people. One of the questions that we are looking at is how we can find maximum accommodation for those who do not agree with this move, so that they can remain as Anglicans. This is proving complex and time consuming. Nevertheless I hope we will do all we can to be a church which seeks to keep as many people as possible on board.

I do not want to rehearse any aspects of the debate that we are going to have in a few minutes, but I do want to make two points.

Firstly, this is not the first time that Christians have navigated difficult waters. There have been many times in the past when fundamental differences have been faced and resolved. For example, should Gentiles have to be circumcised (Acts 15)? Should Christians ever go to war as soldiers? Is slavery compatible with the Christian faith? These matters were hotly contested in their day.

Secondly, as the church of Jesus Christ we do not debate like a secular legislative assembly and then just vote. We are not a democracy, as if God's will is declared by whom or what gets the most votes. We are called to do something more profound and that is to seek to *discern* what God wants us to be and to do. If this is to be reality rather than a pipe dream, then it will require humility from all of us. As we enter this debate, no matter how convinced any of us may be of the rightness of our opinions, we do have to bear in mind that we may just be wrong. The debate also calls for charity. We should impute the highest motives to those who take a different view from ourselves. When there is mutual trust, we are more likely to hear God's voice. Arrogance makes us deaf to others and to God.

### **Living in a time of liminality**

When we face social dislocation such as we witnessed in August, and when we come to debate controversial changes such as the ordination of women to the episcopate, it is good to reflect on the experience of past generations. History records similar periods of turbulence when change has come along and swept aside inherited ways of seeing things, challenging the certainties and assumptions that sustained previous generations.

Scholars use the word 'liminality' to describe such periods. The term first arose in the disciplines of psychology and anthropology, but is now used to describe what it is like for individuals and societies to live through a time of transition. In the words of one anthropologist, liminality is where you have "in-between situations and conditions that are characterised by the dislocation of established structures, the reversal of hierarchies, and uncertainty regarding the continuity of tradition and future outcomes".<sup>[1]</sup>

The arrival of the Romans, the Norman Conquest, the upheaval of the Reformation, and the Industrial Revolution all created seismic shifts in this country. Old world views were

challenged and people had to learn to live in a different way and in new contexts. We are not talking about superficial changes, but things that fundamentally and irrevocably affected the culture, outlook and perceptions of the entire population. I believe we are witnessing another one of these seismic cultural shifts, and it is both scary and exhilarating to be part of it.

If I am right, then as Christians we need to revisit our creedal and cultural roots and re-examine them. And we can do so with a high degree of anticipation, because in the providence of God it has been precisely in these periods of liminality that some of the most exciting new movements of the Christian faith have emerged.

There is no escaping the choices that have to be made – and we need to remember that in previous generations some Christians, I believe, made bad ones. So we need to pray earnestly for the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, if only to protect us from our natural timidity. The instinctive reaction of some people is to pull up the drawbridge, retreat into lament about how awful everything is (even when it is not that awful) and hope it all goes away. For better or for worse, God has placed us where we are. Our job is to enter into the debates, the problems and the issues of our day, whether the causes of the riots in August and/or the future role of women in the church, and in all things to seek God's guidance.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, how does all this relate to our life in Christ and Jesus' call 'to interpret the signs of the times'? First, we must join up what we are doing in the church and in our diocese with what is going on in the world. We cannot live in a spiritual bubble, retreating from the challenges and opportunities of the present moment into a religious ghetto. We need to be deeply immersed in our local communities if we are to read and respond effectively to the 'signs of the times.'

Secondly, we need to re-think our attitude to the present time of liminality. We have a real opportunity to witness to Christ. We must not give into fear and retreat behind the barricades. We need to hold our nerve. The God who raised Jesus from the dead is still alive and active in the church and in our world. Our task is to spot what he is doing and join in, which incidentally might be a good description of Mission Action Planning – discerning where God is at work in our communities and joining in.

'You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times,' says Jesus. Well, it's a brave person who claims to be able to predict the weather in England. But at the risk of being way off beam, let me say finally that I think we need to rediscover and reaffirm our shared life in Christ. In a fragmented world, with our current stress on individuality and 'doing your own thing', I believe that as Christians we need to reaffirm God's call to a corporate life and to mutual service. We need each other and we need to hold onto one another resolutely as God's people, and demonstrate to others by our shared life the presence of Christ in our midst. In so doing we will be his authentic witnesses, and effective 'signs of the time' to our contemporaries.

Alan St Albans 12 October 2011

[1 ] Horvath, A., Thomassen, B. and Wydra, H. (2009) *Introduction: Liminality and Cultures of Change* (International Political Anthropology).

## ADVENT RESOURCES

Two great resources are available from the Diocese of St Albans to help people make the most of it.

unwrap ...

*Gifts for Life*



**The Advent  
Challenge this year  
is called *Gifts for  
Life.***

*“take time in the run up to  
Christmas to unwrap Gifts for Life*

*take a moment each day to think about and act on the things that truly  
matter*

*the gifts that really make a difference*

*receive a text or email, a verse, a thought, a prayer, a challenge.”*

Sign up and get more information at the new home of the Challenge

[www.livethechallenge.co.uk](http://www.livethechallenge.co.uk)

Download publicity from [www.livethechallenge.co.uk/download/](http://www.livethechallenge.co.uk/download/)

- A4 Poster for notice boards
- A5 fliers to go with the weekly service sheet
- gifts tags for your own campaign

**Wait Look  
Listen  
is a series of  
Advent  
stories  
for families**



**and schools**

*Download a story and a worksheet*

*each week day in Advent*

*together with an extra colouring sheet;*

*the stories follow the Gifts for Life themes.*

Download these from [www.livethechallenge.co.uk/download/](http://www.livethechallenge.co.uk/download/)



Elstow PCC would like to ask all members of the congregation if they would bring in items over the coming month to help those in need this Christmas. The poverty and request for food help in Bedfordshire has shown a significant increase over recent months and we as a church would like to help. Jeremy is happy to store in the vicarage and to take across just before Christmas, or you could take to the venue yourself if you prefer.

*"We rely on food donations to feed local people in crisis."*

Donations of in-date, non-perishable food items are welcomed. There are opportunities for volunteering and fundraising. The foodbank is part of the Hope Trust (Bedford), run in partnership with local churches led by Brickhill Baptist Church.

Contact:

Sue Collins,

Brickhill Baptist Church Centre,

79 Brickhill Drive

Bedford

MK41 7QF

01234 273773

[info@bedford.foodbank.org.uk](mailto:info@bedford.foodbank.org.uk)

[www.bedford.foodbank.org.uk](http://www.bedford.foodbank.org.uk)



Items suggested are:

Tin openers  
Milk (UHT)  
Jam  
Fruit Juice (carton)  
Soup (Tinned/ Cup-a-soup)  
Pasta Sauces  
Baked beans/ Spagetti



Breakfast Cereals  
Rice Pudding (Tinned)  
Tea Bags/ Instant Coffee  
Potatoes (Tinned/ Instant)  
Rice/ Pasta  
Meat/ Fish (Tinned)  
Biscuits/snack bars/

*"Emergency food for local people in crisis."*

BIBLICAL FAR SIDE - HAPPY CHRISTMAS!



After  $39\frac{1}{2}$  years of wandering in the desert, Mrs. Moses secretly asks for directions.

