

The Vicar's Letter

Dear Friends,

Happy New Year! By the grace of God, may 2008 be a truly happy year for many, and may God sustain those whom happiness eludes.

As you may know, St Mary's is starting a new kind of service, Parish Praise, on Sunday 27 January. (See the separate box in this magazine.) The service is something of a departure for St Mary's from our traditional patterns of worship. The two most significant changes are that it will not be a communion service, and that it will be held in St Anne's School rather than the church itself. The start of the service, at 11.00 am, is also much later than our other main Sunday services. The music will be generally more contemporary than many of the hymns we use at other times. On the Sundays that Parish Praise takes place, it will be the main service offered by St Mary's, replacing the 9.45 Eucharist in church. There will still be the 8.00 am Holy Communion and 6.30 Evensong every Sunday. I am well aware that these changes are not comfortable for some, and that the service is not going to be everyone's cup of tea.

The reason for this new service is that we want to encourage people, who may never have thought of going to church before, to experience worship in a relatively informal setting, and to provide a relaxed welcome to all, including families with children. As a help to one section of the community, there will be sign language throughout the service, and there will also be a light meal after the service so we have the opportunity to get to know each other. I am a great believer in the value of sitting down to eat together in building friendships and a sense of belonging.

This is an experiment. What will make it come alive is **your** participation. Please consider coming, even if you have never been to church before. I hope it will be enjoyable, fun even, but also a time when we can add a new depth to our lives by taking a step towards God, who is always taking steps towards us. Bring a friend (or several), come alone or with family, and discover that the worship of God can be a source of great happiness. If we make that discovery, we shall have gone a long way to ensuring that 2008 really is a Happy New Year.

With love,

David

Mothers' Union

The December meeting was our pre-Christmas celebration and we invited members of all the other branches in the deanery to come and share some entertainment and refreshments. We had put together a selection of readings, poems, and carols as a Christmas alphabet. The Christmas story unfolded with traditional readings, interwoven with poems and pieces of prose, some of which were secular and some not. Ken Diffey deftly accompanied all the carols on the keyboard. We all enjoyed the afternoon very much.

At our next meeting on 8 January David Busk will give a talk about life in Japan.

Jean Morgan

Wives' Group

Nineteen ladies, including our special guests Ruth Rogers and Pat Saunders, met to get the Christmas festivities under way. Ruth was representing our charity of the year, Help the Aged, and we were delighted to be able to present the charity with a cheque for £350.

Then, on to the serious business of enjoying ourselves. Pass the Parcel, ably organised by Sheila Hartwell, was won by Val Pithey, who now has a festive addition to her towel collection. Barbara then presided over an unusual word game based on the phrase *Christmas Day* – there was no overall winner, but the first prize was awarded to Ruth, largely for her imagination. As everyone else came second, we just had to share a large box

of chocolates! The final game was another round of Ann's adjectival game entitled *The Vicar's Cat* – suffice it to say that the poor beast is in no better shape this year...

We then shared an ample supper, sang a few carols and played 'lucky dip' in the bran tub. After a quick run-down of next year's programme, it was time to wend our way home. The Wives' Group have had their party - Christmas has begun!

Our first meeting of the New Year is at 8 pm on 8 January, when we welcome Billy Smith, the speaker from our Charity of the Year, the Cheshire Home at Brampton. All are welcome.

Kate Robinson

Men's Social Group

The main event in December was the Christmas dinner held at Fawcett Towers when thirteen of us, including the vicar, managed to squeeze into the main dining hall. The event is in danger of becoming a tradition and has been described by some members as the best event of the year. This year the high standards were maintained as we enjoyed a relaxed atmosphere, excellent food, a reasonable supply of wine and not a little banter, which was punctuated by moments of erudite discussion. After the meal we had a most sophisticated presentation of pictures taken during the Fawcetts' recent visit to South Africa, with plenty of beautiful scenery, some wild animals and a steam engine to admire. Thank you, Andrew and Mary, for your kind hospitality and warm welcome - we

would like to come again next year if you will have us!

There is no formal meeting in January but we have been invited to dismantle the Christmas tree in church when the order is given – keep an eye on the newsletter. As a reward we have been invited afterwards to partake of mulled wine and hot mince pies at the Irving Establishment.

Peter Dawe

Charity of the Month

Making history, bringing hope and turning the church inside out – Mark Russell on 125 years of the work of Church Army

The Church Army is our Charity for January and we are pleased to support them, particularly as they have been going for 125 years.

All those years ago a young curate called Wilson Carlile, and a fearful, faithful bunch of churchgoers came together to form the first recruits to Church Army.

One of the first handbills given out about the work of this new Church Army said this- ‘Every night at 8 o’clock and Sundays at 3 and 7, Church Army declaration of war against sin and Satan; under the command of the Revd W. Carlile. Come if you dare.’ It’s not exactly how we do things now is it? In January 1883 the Church Times reported that the Church Army had done even more than William Booth to provoke

blasphemy and disorder, and should receive no encouragement and ought never to march again. I’m pleased to say that 125 years later both Church Times and Church Army are still here!

Mark Russell is the present leader and feels it a huge privilege and very humbling to be leading this society in its 125th year. As for any organisation that gets to this age, the most crucial question to ask is why are they here?

Mark has travelled all over the UK and Ireland, and seen some incredible people taking risks for the Gospel, serving on the edge – inspirational work. He has seen Paul Little and his team who run *Grafted*, a project helping socially excluded young people in Scotland turn their lives around. He went to the *Amber Project* in Cardiff that helps young people who self harm, where he met Kath, a young woman who said that, without the help of *Amber*, she would never have been able to cope with life. Mark has been to Ellesmere Port and met Rob Barker and Richard Tett, who take a big double-decker bus into estates in the diocese to meet huge numbers of young people. He also met Alison Wooding in Sheffield, who runs a brilliant ministry with older people, and saw how a former Sikh, Kinder Kalsi, is seeking to serve the local community in Langsett, while Edwin Bates and the team are doing stunning work at the *Marylebone Project* – London’s largest dedicated homeless women’s only hostel. Whilst in Manchester Mark Russell visited David Hamilton, serving in Openshaw, where the local council is redeveloping the area and the local community is being displaced. He also

met Nick Russell who works in Kidbrooke in SE London, on an estate full of social needs and issues. He worked alongside Graham Nunn, when he preached to 700 young people in Canterbury Cathedral, and sought to encourage them to make a difference with their lives.

Surely all this is an indication that we must support them and we are pleased that our Church is involved in this.

Bizz Thackray

Caring for Carers Concert

The concert for us starts in March, when the committee meet at Finings to get the ball rolling and for Norma Major to ask the readers, as they all need a lot of notice. This year we wanted to ask Alan Titchmarsh again as the ladies love him! Norma was keen to try and get Pam Ayres (as she could not come last year), together with Martin Lewis and Robert Powell. Susie Fowler Watt of Look East has become part of the furniture and a friend to us all.

We then agree the music, the soloists and the programme. Ken Diffey and Peter Moger suggest the music and the soloists. Norma and David Busk the readings. Norma takes on the sponsor, advertisers and the readers, without which the concert would not happen. Trish Appleton deals with the huge task of the printing of the eight hundred invitations and six hundred programmes. Bizz and I send out the invitations and tickets and arrange the seating etc.

So it was that, with a church packed with over five hundred people all seated, somehow, the concert started with the Angel Gabriel Introit sung by the fantastic choir with Ken, who has worked so hard and done so much, at the helm. David gave a great welcome and a prayer. We all then joined in to sing 'O Come O Come Emmanuel' – audiences like to have a chance to take part and we sang five carols. For my money the best of these was – 'While Shepherds Watched,' to the tune of 'Ilkley Moor. How we loved it – singing the last line of each verse three times. Alan Titchmarsh, who comes from Ilkley, looks on this as his national anthem! We all listened intently to St Anne's Choir singing their special song – 'Prepare for the Lord', composed by Stephen Kenna.

Joanne Lunn, the international soprano, sang pieces including 'Rejoice, Rejoice' from the Messiah and 'Thorns in the Straw,' accompanied by the Moger quartet. How proud Heather's parents must have been listening to them. It was some night for them all!

Then came Prime Brass; if you have not heard them, then buy their CD – they are terrific. To somehow include 'When the Saints go marching in' within the Hallelujah Chorus took some doing! It was so good to see people's feet tapping as they lapped it up! The Bishop read from St. John's Gospel, and brought us back, very movingly, to the heart of the Christian message. The stars of the show – well with such talent, very difficult to say, but you would be hard pressed not to include Martyn Lewis', Pam Ayers' and

Alan Titchmarsh's readings of The Messiah – somewhere at the top.

We then had Helen Brown of Crossroads, who, having been a Carer, told us of the work the charity does to support the many children who look after their sick parents and families, without any help, and who still have to go to school and do the shopping, without any support other than from Caring for Carers. Truly emotional – so much so the audience generously put £2400 in the buckets on their way out!! Another record.

Everyone seemed to go home happy, after a wonderful concert in which they had been able, possibly, to make a difference to someone less fortunate than they are.

West Anglia Crossroads have been sent an interim cheque for £10,000.00

John and Bizz Thackray

Many thanks to John and Bizz, and to Ken Diffey, for the outstanding support they gave to Dame Norma Major in staging this event.

Thinking of New Year's Resolutions

It is a good rule never to look into the face of a man in the morning until you have looked into the face of God.

C.H.Spurgeon

Parish Praise

On Sunday, 27 January, we begin a new informal service for all, *Parish Praise*, which will be held in St Anne's School in London Road at 11.00 am. The service will last about 45 minutes, and we hope it will be especially welcoming and easy for families with children to take part it, as well as those of any age who may be new to, or unfamiliar with, Christian worship. There will be *sign language* throughout. It will be followed by a simple meal for anyone who would like a chance to meet others afterwards. Other dates for *Parish Praise* are 16 March, 25 May, 27 July, 28 September and 23 November, all at 11.00 am in St Anne's School. Please contact the Vicar on 436400 if you would like further information.

***It's back!* Meal with a Movie**

Returning to the Church Hall on Saturday 9 February, is another opportunity to enjoy a meal prepared by Gillian Bathurst Hoile, and a full length feature film presented by the Oundle Cinema outreach team.

'The Prestige' (2006), directed by Christopher Nolan, is an end-of-the-century period piece, following the fortunes of rival magicians, Robert Angier and Alfred Borden, who are obsessed with creating the best stage illusions, resulting in their competitive one-upmanship having tragic results.

There are twists and turns aplenty, and the audience is kept guessing right to the very end. Certificate 12A. The cast stars Christopher Bale (Borden), Hugh Jackman (Angier), David Bowie, Michael Caine, Scarlett Johansson, Piper Perabo, Andy Surkis and Rebecca Hall.

Meal at 6pm and film (£10)

Film only at 7.30pm (£4)

Tickets will be on sale in January 2008.

See the weekly Newsletter for further details.

For further information contact:

- John and Gillian Bathurst Hoile:
01480 465442 or
- Liz and Peter Irving: 01480
382144

This month's cover

For *We Three Kings* by Rachel Hirst we are indebted to Impress Publishing for permission to reproduce it here. The image was designed for use on charity Christmas cards supporting the Cystic Fibrosis Trust. Last month's cover of the church, which we first used in our Parish Festival publicity in 1994, was resurrected by Graham Campbell, and for that many thanks too. Lawrence Back, our regular cover designer for so long, has decided to take a break. His contribution to the new layout of *Parish News* has been enormous, his sense of humour never-ending, and members of the Editorial Team will miss him.

God loves to be consulted.

Charles Bridges



Flower Guild Christmas Coffee Morning

On a very wet Saturday morning in December members of the Flower Guild held their annual coffee, sherry and a mince pie morning at the home of Trish Pope, and raised the magnificent sum of £253 for our funds. A big thank you to husbands, members and friends for supporting us. It was a very happy morning with a super raffle and Bring and Buy table.

We were asked by a new-comer how we would be spending the money raised, and so here are a few facts about how the Flower Guild works. At festival times we provide the flowers to go in the two centre nave pedestals (£80) and the six gaslights (£60) a combined cost of £140; added to this are two boxes of Oasis, (floral foam for the flowers to sit in) and two reels of florists' tape, another £30; so a final total of £170. All other arrangements in the church, for example the porch, font, window ledges, smaller pedestals and so on, are paid for by the member arranging them, but we do supply a pool of oasis and tape for every one to use then and throughout the year. We also try to update some of our silk flowers each year. Had you noticed that the High Altar pedestal is made up of these?

Thelma, our Florist, an F.G. member, does all our ordering when we need flowers or any other supplies. I do not

know how we would manage without her. She makes our lives so much easier as she sorts everything for us, ties up our bunches, boxes our pedestal flowers and has everything ready when we go rushing in on a festival or wedding morning. She is a real angel.

Our AGM coincides with the end of our financial year and at this time we always try to give a gift to the church funds of any surplus monies; this is given to the treasurer who knows where best to use it, if there is no special project running at the time.

We have many faithful members in the congregation who give generously to our funds at Easter and Christmas and we are always so grateful to them, as without these donations we would never have a penny to spare.

A big thank you to you all and we wish you a very happy and healthy New Year.

Jean Miller

Someone, somewhere . . .

Postcards with twelve separate views of the church are now on sale at the back of the church. For the photography we have to thank Grace Vane Percy, a professional photographer in London, who spent much time on this project and gave her services free of charge. The postcards were commissioned by the Communications Committee, ever watchful of the increasing number of visitors coming into church each year. Hopefully the postcards will catch the eye of regular churchgoers,

too. Just keeping in touch with someone, or on a mission writing post-Christmas thank-you letters, you'll find the postcards make an attractive alternative to writing paper and envelopes. They cost 40p each, and money may be placed in the wall box marked 'Literature' above the table at the south door.

Peter Irving

People like us – St Paul **

It is not merely co-incidental that the account of Paul's conversion occurs three times in the book of Acts (chs. 9, 22 & 26). Paul's encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road changed his life. The questions in his defence to the crowd in Jerusalem (Acts 22) give an understanding of what it means to follow Christ today.

'**Who are you Lord?**' (8) Paul described how he was going to Damascus to arrest and imprison Christians there. However, he was stopped in his tracks by the risen Christ amid a blaze of light. What do we observe about this encounter? First, it was God's initiative: God broke into Paul's life totally unexpectedly! It was not pre-arranged and it was totally undeserved.

Secondly, it was a personal encounter: Jesus addressed Paul by name. The Christian faith can never simply be a set of beliefs, but is always a personal relationship with the risen Christ.

Thirdly, it led to Paul's spiritual surrender. As a result of his meeting, Paul surrendered the whole of his life to

Christ's authority as Lord. No aspect of his life was outside the control of Christ.

In what ways have we experienced these aspects in OUR own meeting with Jesus?

'What shall I do Lord?' (10)

Paul recognised that his encounter with Christ was just the start of being a follower of Christ. Like Paul, we are also called to know Christ and to make him known. It started with a simple act of obeying Jesus in going to Damascus. We also have to start where we are, to listen to what God is saying, often through the unlikeliest of people (cf Ananias)!

What difference is Jesus making to our lives today? Not many of us will share Paul's dramatic experience, but we can all experience a life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ. And after all, 'if Jesus is not Lord of all, he is not Lord at all'.

Prepare for national breakdown day! **

January 2 is set to be 'national breakdown day', if the AA's past experience is anything to go by.

It is the day when Britain returns to work after the holiday break - and our cars break down. For the past six years, the AA patrols have had more breakdown calls on the first day after the New Year bank holiday than on any other day of the year.

In 2005 AA patrols dealt with 16,000 call-outs - compared to an average of 9,800 a day. The record is 2002, when the

AA was called by 23,500 distressed motorists who were going nowhere.

Dr John Middlemiss

It was with great sadness that the people of Godmanchester learned of the death of Dr Middlemiss on 27 November, and our thoughts and prayers are with his wife Elizabeth and family. Following a private funeral on 3 December, a memorial service will be held in church on Monday 17 January at 12 noon. An appreciation of the life of Dr Middlemiss, written by Tony Sursham, will appear in the February magazine.

Charity Concert Evening

The Godmanchester Town Mayor, Malcolm Cohen, has organised a Charity Concert Evening for Saturday 26 January 2008 at 7.30 pm in St Mary's Church. The event is being held in aid of the Mayor's charity, East Anglia's Children's Hospices. The Concert will feature the Huntingdon Male Voice Choir and the combined choirs from the town schools. Tickets will be available from the Town Office, the secretary at each of the two schools and the Parish Office. Prices are £12 (£8 concessions, £5 children).

Please support this very worthwhile cause.

And finally . . .

A ghost story for the Christmas season

The following story is a true account of an incident that occurred late one night, many years ago, at St James' Palace in London, when the writer was serving in the Brigade of Guards.

On Thursday 27 November 1969, a wet, blustery and especially dark night, 24000393 Guards Drummer/Bugler Higgins C.J. found himself as Guardsman Higgins with his rifle manning No.3C sentry post from 12.00 midnight to 2.00 am, these hours known throughout the army as 'the dead man's stag.' The sentry post in question is in almost complete darkness in Stable Yard and is known by the guards as Ghost's Walk. Each sentry post has a beat of so many paces – on 3C it is 25 paces to the west as far as a lamp post in front of Clarence House; and as far as the wall of York House to the east. As he stood in front of his sentry box the only light was from the gas lamp. At 12.45 am Guardsman Higgins remembers hearing the chimes of the Palace clock and the clock bells of St. Stephen's clock tower, Westminster, (ie. Big Ben). Suddenly he realized he was not alone although he heard no footsteps. But he knew someone was there. To his left was a great blaze of light, and when Guardsman Higgins looked, he saw a sight that made his blood run cold. Three yards away was a young woman standing in a bright halo of light looking straight at him. Realizing this lady was not of this world, his brain went into overdrive, thinking, 'Who the hell is she? My God, I'm seeing a ghost.' Suddenly he remembered the drill – if an incident occurs, note the time. He asked himself, 'Why is this happening to this old boy from Godmanchester?' He looked at his watch. It was eight minutes past one. He closed his eyes and thought, 'When I open them there will be no one there.' Wrong. She was still there, wearing a white garment with a black or crimson cape. She had shoulder length hair, and piercing eyes. The guardsman felt a chill run down his spine. He also noticed that although it was a blustery night she did not have a hair on her head out of place. What should he do? Speak to her? Ignore her? Run? Certainly not the last – Guardsmen run from nothing. Suddenly the Guardsman found himself patrolling towards her. As he approached, the apparition somehow stayed the same distance from him, and just as he neared the end of his beat the aura of light dimmed and went out. The spectre of the girl remained for a few seconds more, then faded out altogether in the light of the gas lamp. As he about turned and marched back to his box, Guardsman Higgins felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand to attention. It is well known that all the Royal Guard posts are haunted, but this girl was not on the list. At 2.00 am the Guard relief arrived, his words of greeting being: 'What's up with you? You seen a ghost or summat?' After Guardsman Higgins related the night's events the relief sentry said, 'Thank you very much.' Back in the guardroom the events were reported to the Sergeant of the Guard, who informed him, 'Well you know the drill, write it in the incident book.' From the rest of the guard there was much ribbing: 'It must be the bells that bring it out in you, no more of your ghosts tonight please.'

A fortnight later, the same apparition was seen, by a Coldstream Guardsman. He was so terrified he left his post and ran to the guardroom to report it. Very naughty. I never did find out her identity, or if she was ever seen again. Since leaving the army I have witnessed paranormal activity on the streets of London and in various churches and churchyards; but of all the things I've seen none compares with the frightening events at St. James' Palace at 1.08 am in the early hours of Friday 28 November 1969.

Chris Higgins

** Items taken from *The Parish Pump* the on-line Church News Service.

The Registers

Baptisms

9 Dec Maximilian Thomas Richard Bourne and Elliot James Alexander Bourne
Daniel Simon Duggins
30 Dec Ned Smith

Funerals

3 Dec John Middlemiss (committal)
7 Dec Richard John Burton
11 Dec Rosemary Simpson (burial of ashes)
14 Dec Barbara Fawley (burial of ashes)
17 Dec John Middlemiss Memorial Service
24 Dec Dorothy Elsdon (burial of ashes)

The Lectionary

6 Jan **Epiphany**
Isaiah 60:1-6; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12

13 Jan **Baptism of Christ**
Isaiah 42:1-9; Matthew 3:13-end

20 Jan **Epiphany 3**
Isaiah 49:1-7; 1 Corinthians 1:1-9; John 1:29-42

27 Jan **Epiphany 4**
Isaiah 9:1-4; Matthew 4:12-23

Dates for your Diary

January

Wed	2	11.00 am	Holy Communion	The Chestnuts
Thu	3	9.45 am	Holy Communion	
Fri	4	7.30 pm	Choir Party	Church Hall
Sat	5	8.00 am	Men's Breakfast	Barley Mow, Hartford
Sun	6	Epiphany		
		8.00 am	Holy Communion	
		9.45 am	Sung Eucharist	
		6.30 pm	Sung Evensong	
		6.45 pm	Youth Group - Balloon Modelling and Greenbelt planning	Church Hall
		8.00 pm	Children's Church Leaders Meeting	Vicarage
Mon	7	1.30 pm	Stepping Stones	Baptist Church Centre
		8.00 pm	Worship Group Meeting	10 East Chadley Lane
Tue	8	8.30 am	Deanery Clergy Chapter Communion on completion Breakfast	Church Vicarage
		2.00 pm	Mothers' Union	QE School
		8.00 pm	Wives' Group	Church Hall
Wed	9	10.30 am	Holy Communion	Oak Tree Court
Thu	10	9.45 am	Holy Communion	
		10.00 am	St Mary's 0s-5s	Comrades' Club
Fri	11	7.30 pm	Choir Practice	Church Hall
		8.00pm	Signing Group	Vicarage
Sun	13	8.00 am	Holy Communion	
		9.45 am	Youth Group – Bird Box Blessing	Churchyard
		9.45 am	Sung Eucharist	
		11.30 am	Grassroots with Baptism	
		6.30 pm	Sung Evensong	
Mon	14	1.30 pm	Stepping Stones	Baptist Church Centre
		8.00pm	Signing Group	Vicarage
Tue	15	7.30 pm	PCC Meeting	Church Hall
Wed	16	11.00 am	Holy Communion	Woodley Court
Thu	17	9.45 am	Holy Communion	
		10.00 am	St Mary's 0s-5s	Comrades' Club
		7.30 pm	Prayer Group	36 Old Court Hall
Fri	18	7.30 pm	Choir Practice / Choir AGM	Church Hall
Sat	19	8.00 am	Holy Communion	
Sun	20	9.45 am	Sung Eucharist	
		6.30 pm	Christian Unity Joint Service	Trinity Free Church, Huntingdon
		6.45 pm	Youth Group – Film Making	Church Hall
Mon	21	1.30 pm	Stepping Stones	Baptist Church Centre
		7.30 pm	Governors' Meeting	St Anne's School
		8.00pm	Signing Group	Vicarage
Wed	23	2.00 pm	MU Committee Meeting	36 Old Court Hall
		8.00 pm	Bible Study	10 East Chadley Lane

G O D M A N C H E S T E R P A R I S H N E W S

Thu	24	9.45 am	Holy Communion	
		10.00 am	St Mary's 0s-5s	Comrades' Club
		8.00 pm	Communications Committee	2A Earning St
Fri	25	7.30 pm	Choir Practice	Church Hall
Sat	26	7.30 pm	Mayor's Charity Concert	Church
Sun	27	8.00 am	Holy Communion	
		11.00 am	Parish Praise	St Anne's School
		6.30 pm	Sung Evensong	
		6.45 pm	Youth Group – Film Night 'Hairspray'	79 Roman Way
Mon	28	1.30 pm	Stepping Stones	Baptist Church Centre
		7.30 pm	Fabric Committee Meeting	Church Vestry
Thu	31	9.45 am	Holy Communion	
		10.00 am	St Mary's 0s-5s	Comrades' Club



The Editorial Committee meeting for the February magazine will be held on **Sunday, 20 January**. Would you please ensure that material is with one of the following by that date and if possible not later than **Friday, 18 January**.

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Any enquiries concerning advertisements should be addressed to Victoria Richardson.

