

The Flowering tree.
Iffley Church

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A candle in...

THE

WINDOW

News and Views from the Parish of Abingdon-on-Thames

Blessed are you, winter,
dark season of waiting,
you affirm the dark seasons of our lives,
forecasting the weather of waiting in hope.

Blessed are you, winter,
you faithfully guard a life unseen,
calling those who listen deeply
to discover winter rest.

Blessed are you, winter,
frozen and cold on the outside,
within your silent, nurturing womb
you warmly welcome all that longs for renewal.



Blessed are you, winter,
your bleak, barren trees
preach wordless sermons
about emptiness and solitude.

Blessed are you, winter,
you teach us valuable lessons
about waiting in darkness
with hope and trust.

Blessed are you, winter,
season of blood red sunsets
and star-filled, long, dark nights,
faithfully you pour out your beauty.

Blessed are you, winter,
when your tiny snowflakes
flurry through the air,
you awaken our sleeping souls.

Blessed are you, winter,
with your wild and varied moods,
so intent on being yourself,
you refuse to be a people-pleaser.

Blessed are you, winter,
when icy storms crush our hearts and homes,
you call forth the good in us
as we rush to help one another.

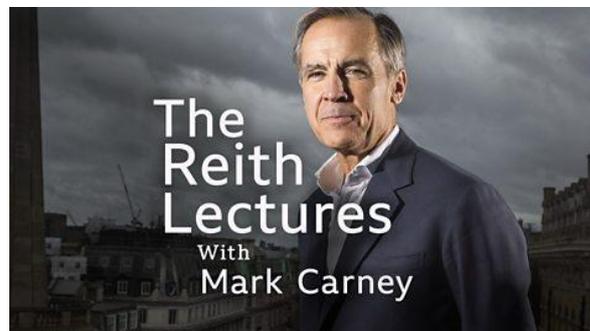
Blessed are you, winter,
your inconsistent moods often herald spring's arrival,
yet how gracefully you step aside
when her time has come.



‘How We Get What We Value’. Reflections on Mark Carney’s Reith Lectures

Geoff Meen, Churchwarden, St Helens and Professor Emeritus in Economics, University of Reading.

Can we avoid climate catastrophe? How do we remove the possibility of a future financial crisis? Does human life have a monetary value? What is the role of markets? These are some of the big issues discussed by Dr Mark Carney, former Governor of the Bank of England, in his recent BBC Reith Lectures, available on BBC Sounds.



At the heart of his analysis lies the distinction between values and value - concepts which are related but distinct: the former are principles or standards of behaviour and reflect a judgment of what is considered important by society - fairness, resilience, beauty, humility for example. The latter is the regard that something is held to deserve through its importance and usefulness often reflected in markets. Carney’s underlying theme is how financial market value has become detached from human and moral values where, of course, Christian thought has much to say. If market solutions dominate, there can be a drift from moral to market sentiment which corrodes societal values.

Economic principles are not driven by Christian values. The history of economic thought often begins with Aristotle, moving onto medieval Christian thinkers such as Aquinas, before delving into ‘modern’ economics with the classical 18th century writers - Smith, Ricardo, Malthus, Marx. But, as Carney points out, a step change in economic thought took place in the late 19th/early 20th centuries with the development of neo-classical models. These still provide the foundations of the subject, but many economists argue that neo-classicism by itself is insufficient to grapple with the above key issues.

At their most basic, in neo-classical models, market prices reflect consumers’ subjective perceptions of the value of goods at a particular point in time (rather than the costs of production) and prices do not necessarily reflect wider societal priorities. For some goods this is fine and suggests that if markets fail to work adequately, the solution is to correct the market (possibly by government action) or to develop additional markets. But all models (not just in economics) rely on assumptions which can be questioned. Economics often assumes that households have complete information on which to base their decisions and that they act rationally; a number of Nobel Prizes have been won by researchers who have relaxed these assumptions. Furthermore, most transactions do not take place in formal markets. They occur through communication between individuals. Do you choose your car based on its price or on what your friends recommend?

Nevertheless, value in economics is based on the price, determined in a market. What is not provided in a market has no value and, indeed, is not counted as part of national income. Therefore, homeworking and looking after children has no value, but if the children are sent to a child minder, this has a value. Similarly, the contribution of low-paid NHS staff is based on prices, not how society values the intrinsic value of their work. A further example is church volunteering: the work that our teams undertake has no value, based on purely market criteria. However, the evidence suggests that volunteers can be more productive than paid workers because they have a high level of commitment. But, in case you feel dismissive of prices, remember that if prices are not used to allocate scarce resources, then some other mechanism is required. In church, in the absence of a mechanism, we run the risk of over-working our volunteers or not defining our priorities.

In fact, standard economics has recognised these problems. A recent approach has been to develop wider indicators of well-being, including measures of happiness and mental health, to supplement conventional national income. These are important since there is only a limited correlation between income and well-being. If you live in poverty, your happiness is likely to be low, but beyond a threshold, well-being depends

more on relationships with family and friends, leisure, and spiritual values. Influential (although controversial) research argues that those countries that have a more equal income distribution are likely to be happier.

A Church of England priority is achieving net zero carbon emissions; this is not an arbitrary target but an imperative of climate physics. In economics, over-fishing, deforestation and pollution arise from the fact that individuals and firms do not allow for the effect of their actions on others. So, firms emit carbon because they have no market responsibility for the pollution. The challenge is to deal with these market failures; since the damage falls mainly on future generations (as Greta Thunberg forcefully argues), current markets have little incentive to act now. The textbook solution is either for the government to impose a tax – carbon taxes have been implemented but at a level much too low to achieve net zero carbon – or to change the market structure through the privatization of property rights. An alternative has been proposed by Elinor Ostrom, who demonstrates that, in many cases, local community co-operation (and churches have a role to play), can successfully manage scarce resources.

Nevertheless, Ostrom warns of the ‘panacea trap’ – proposing simple, universal solutions to complex problems - and markets and government still play a role. Carney sees the existential threat of climate change as a market opportunity if there is credible political commitment to achieving net zero emissions. This is why this year’s COP26 meeting is important. If markets believe that governments are committed to sustainability, then carbon targets will be factored into prices in financial markets and, thus, resource allocation. Therefore, markets can play a key role but their power needs to be aligned towards societal goals rather than short-term profits.

The alignment of societal objectives and market sentiment also helps to avoid future financial crises. The complexity of financial markets was blamed for the post-2007 global meltdown but needs to be seen against a mainstream view that neo-classicism had ‘solved’ the world’s economic woes. The newly-developed financial instruments used in international capital markets were designed to improve the allocation of finance between those countries looking for a home for funds and those undertaking investments, improving welfare. The underlying idea was sound but the global financial crisis problem was that this good idea was over-extended to ever more risky markets. Under the prevailing neo-classical orthodoxy, markets were always right and could not make consistent errors, a view that relied more on faith than hard evidence but justified light-touch government regulation. Carney argues that avoidance of future crises requires ethical banking and accountability where objectives align to those of society since markets are not inherently moral. Since our pensions depend on financial markets, we all have some responsibility for ensuring ethical investments, including programmes associated with climate change.

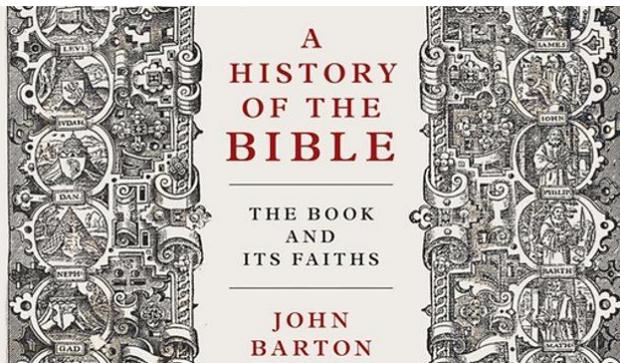
To be fair to my discipline, the subject has now extended beyond neo-classical approaches. Economics is now more focused on questions of equality and well-being compared with thirty years ago when market efficiency was the priority. But, equally, the question arises how the Church can take into account the realities under which economics has to work, including in its own investment decisions. Given the considerable resources available to the Church of England, this is one case in which economics and societal values could be brought more into line.

The Reith Lectures were broadcast on Radio 4 so can be found [here](#):

A simple video recording was also made of each lecture and they can be viewed [here](#):

A History of the Bible on Radio 4

John Barton



It was exciting to have my book *A History of the Bible: The Book and its Faiths* (Penguin) serialized as the ‘book of the week’ on Radio 4 in the week after Christmas. I don’t know how the BBC became aware of the book, though the Penguin publicity department has a long reach. But it had won the Duff Cooper Prize for non-fiction, and been shortlisted for the Wolfson History Prize, and my guess is that the corporation keeps an eye open for such books. I was approached in late November by the BBC Books editor.

As a complete novice where radio is concerned, I did not know what to expect. I found that a reader, Hugh Bonneville (the Earl of Grantham in *Downton Abbey*!) had already been invited. This was excellent news in that he has what I thought exactly the right kind of voice, and he is also a theology graduate (Cambridge), so understood the material he was reading. Everyone who heard the talks agreed that he made an excellent job of it, capturing the sometimes slightly quizzical tone and bringing out some humorous nuances I didn’t even know were there.

As a theme tune I asked for some Bach, and got the first (C major) prelude from book 1 of the Forty-eight Preludes and Fugues, which I think worked well, together with Handel’s *Messiah* for the final episode.

Much more complicated was the process of abridgement. Initially a professional abridger was given the task, but the product—which consisted just of chunks taken directly from the 600-page long book—was unusable. So in early December I was given a choice: either I must do an abridgement myself, or the programmes would be pulled. The deadline was very short, so I had one weekend in which to produce five talks. With the editor’s agreement I abandoned the excerpt-based approach and simply wrote five short essays based on the book. This had the advantage that I could use a more oral style, as I would in a talk or sermon, and also that I could do a bit of updating—for example introducing some references to the Covid-19 pandemic and to Christmas at the end.

With the ink (as it were) still wet, I then had three hours on Zoom with my editor, as we made sure that everything was fit for Radio 4. It was an exhausting few days, but in retrospect I am glad that I had the opportunity of writing material specifically for the radio, rather than relying on sections of a book intended, after all, to be read silently by solitary readers.

The aim of the book was in any case to inform (but also entertain) what might be called the Radio 4 audience: people who enjoy reading or listening to guides to subjects they are not all that familiar with. So the transition from print to radio was not so very great. There was never any intention to evangelize: my hope is simply that the hearers, like the readers, will feel they now know more about the Bible, whatever their religious convictions or lack of them may be.

You can still hear this set of 5 talks [here](#) or find them on BBC Sounds

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An open church

Paul Sheppy

The congregation of St Wilfrid's has gathered online for the Sunday eucharist. Gradually, people log into Zoom and spend a while greeting each other and catching up on news of one another – particularly of those who are not present. Wilma is in hospital and is not doing well, Marcus is working in the night shelter but his partner Gregory has managed to join us... Slowly we move through their names and the news become the subject for informal prayer with one another.

A deep-toned bell rings and Agnes, who is the priest-in-charge of this township community in the outback, greets us in the name of God who is the Three who is the One. Jess sings "Glory to God" and we join in. Jess is not a regular at St Wilfrid's but has gradually been drawn in, and with a voice like that you want it to lead. We are invited to make a short confession and then each person is named by Agnes and the congregation replies: John, the Lord forgives you; Sarah, the Lord forgives you; Marie, the Lord forgives you; Gervase, the Lord forgives you; Agnes, the Lord forgives you...

A small child stands and carefully repeats the words he has learned by heart: *God's word is a light for our path.*

Jess sings the response to the psalm and we repeat it. We sing of the sparrow who finds a home in the Lord's house and of the swallow who makes her home at its altar. As the psalm closes there is a minute of silence.

Don reads the Epistle from the first letter of John in which we are commanded to love one another. The silence that follows is interrupted only by Jenny who asks her granny if she can "have a chocolate now". Love's answer is caught as Jenny loudly announces "Thankyou grandma; I love you."

The Gospel reading is about the wedding at Cana. The congregation sings a verse written for this text and waits in further silence. Agnes then introduces the preacher who is from the other side of the world and has stayed up into what for her is the middle of the night.

Miriam is a professor of theology, so everybody is expecting something very profound (by which, of course, they mean 'complicated'). What a relief! Miriam uses words they can all understand - and she only takes five minutes. She invites them to see what will shortly follow as their way of sharing in the wedding feast. She ends in the most surprising way – with a limerick:

*The MC declared, "I resign;
This wedding has run out of wine."
But Mary replied,
"My boy's on your side.
Use that water and it will be fine."*

When we run out of wine, Miriam comments, don't give up. The wedding feast is only just beginning. Agnes invites us to pray for those who have no wine to make their heart glad, no oil to make their face shine, no bread to eat, no water (or bad water) to drink. Others add their petitions and their prayers for others: the sick, those in prison, those without shelter or clothing.

The peace is shared from screen to screen and the great prayer of thanksgiving begins:

*We are hungry, Lord; you have given us bread for the journey.
We are thirsty, Lord; you have given us wine for our joy....*

Each person in turn has a phrase to speak and the priestly prayer is made by the royal priesthood of believers.

As Agnes takes bread in her hands, the action is repeated in each household.

The body of Christ, the bread of life

She takes the cup and lifts it high. Each household raises its wine.

The blood of Christ, the wine of the kingdom.

We eat together; we drink together. And we set aside something for the outcast, the stranger.

Within hours, members of the congregation are posting their feedback onto St Wilfrid's website.

You may think that I have made this all up; you would be wrong. Over recent months, I have shared in this community of living faith and open-hearted enquiry. A small local church of thirty members has grown into a eucharistic and international community far more numerous. They have welcomed people of different faiths and of none. They have remembered what Bishop Niles said nearly a hundred years ago: Evangelism is one beggar telling another where to find bread. They are now discussing whether they want to return to a more traditional style of meeting. What they have learnt over the past year suggests that this may be the new normal.

Is Cyber Church the future?

Sue Sheppy

A pastor friend of ours in Australia wrote in his Christmas newsletter:

The November lifting of restrictions on religious gatherings is causing a dilemma. It has become apparent that not only has online congregational life worked better for some of the congregation, but that those people represent wider groups that have not normally been well catered for by churches. So a serious conversation is underway about whether this represents a new call to a new future which might not include ever returning to regular gatherings in the church building.

This led me to reflect on my experience of church during lockdown. I confess to have been doing a fair amount of church hopping. Although I usually follow one service through to the end, I often then pop into, for example, a Cathedral, to enjoy the surroundings and to hear the sermon (Ely Cathedral, by the way, has a wonderful set of nativity figures), but I wonder whether it is too easy to remain aloof when one is not physically present in a service. That may be good for those dipping their toe into church for the first time, but permanently? I am not sure. In Australia, our friend's virtual service is excellent in that a lot of people have a part to play, and so do engage, but it's easy to sit through a service online drinking coffee, or pressing the leave button in the middle, and going elsewhere as the mood takes one. Sometimes I feel like a member of an audience rather than part of a congregation, depending on how well it is done of course.



Interesting times ahead though. Churches that have splashed out on new equipment for live-streaming, I am sure will continue to use this facility, and the housebound, and previously non-churchgoing peoples, might feel included in ways they weren't before, which must be welcomed. Of course, the reverse is also true that those without internet connection have felt particularly excluded when church buildings were closed down. However, even when life does return to some kind of normality, online resources are undoubtedly here to stay. Already, planning some spiritual direction programmes last week, we decided to keep one out of three on Zoom, whatever happens, to help those with transport difficulties.

All of this, has led me to reflect on whether it would matter to me if 'church' was never to return to a building, if people never physically worshipped side by side. I concluded that what I would miss most is embrace:

Firstly, the embrace of Christ in the Eucharist. I admit that I find *spiritual communion* difficult to relate to. In his book, *Forgotten Among the Lilies* Ronald Rolheiser, a Canadian Catholic theologian and retreat giver likens the Eucharist to touching the hem of Christ's garment, and writes:

Like love, the Eucharist does not need to be understood or explained, it needs only to be touched. In the Eucharist, as in love, the main thing is that we are held...Perhaps the most useful image of how the Eucharist functions is the image of a mother holding a frightened, tired and tense child. In the Eucharist God functions as a mother. God picks us up...and holds us to her heart until the tension subsides and peace and strength flow into us...There is in an embrace something beyond what can be explained biologically or psychologically. Power is transmitted through love that goes beyond rational understanding...That is why after Jesus had spent all his words he left us the Eucharist...We are constantly helpless, helpless to heal, helpless to celebrate. In that fatigue and tension we need to abandon ourselves to the embrace, the Eucharist.

Secondly, the embrace of my fellow worshippers, sometimes literally hugging, but also that sense of coming together for mutual support, as the writer of the Hebrews exhorts, *let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another* (10: 24-25). For Christmas, my daughter sent me a novel called *Jayber Crow*. It is by Wendell Berry, whom I only knew previously as a poet. Observing those in church around him, the narrator of the story says:

The people didn't really want to be saints of self-deprivation and hatred of the world. They knew that the world would sooner or later deprive them of all it had given them, but still they liked it. What they came together for was to acknowledge, just by coming, their losses and failures and sorrows, their need for comfort, their faith always needing to be greater, their wish (in spite of all words and actions to the contrary) to love one another and to forgive and be forgiven, their need for one another's help and company and divine gifts, their hope (and experience) of love surpassing death, their gratitude.

This says much of what I often feel in church. Not many of us have clean hands and a pure heart, and we can only come to the one who has.

So, can Cyber Church really do all this for us? I fear not, although it a useful second best when needs must. For me, it is helpful to journey to a communal place, a sacred space, where prayers have been offered over many years. Entering a realm of awe and wonder helps me to quieten my heart, to get a better perspective on my life, to put my ego in its rightful lowly place. It helps me to open myself up to the majesty of God, to listen more humbly to what he has to say, and lift up my heart and voice with my fellow travellers in praise and worship of the one, who, as Julian of Norwich has it, is my maker and lover and keeper. It is a precious thing to physically touch the bread and the wine, knowing that this is a place where Jesus is present in a very particular way, to know I am obeying his command that I should do this in remembrance of his broken body, and to touch with my eyes or with my hands those who in their need have come with me to the source of all light, and love and healing.

Sacred Spaces

Marian Ward

Like many in this past year who've been in exile from worship in church, I have followed services on line. I confess that I have not always been loyal to place and have also visited other places of worship with their different forms of liturgy. While I am immensely grateful for the efforts being made all over the country to hold us all together as a Church, virtual worship, has for me, led to a feeling of distance, of detachment. So what is it that is missing? Is it being present in the building itself which enables us to feel touched by the Holy Spirit? Certainly the stones of centuries old churches seem to resonate with the prayers and worship of countless generations - a sense of a place of mystery and connectedness. Many Christians make space in their homes for an Icon or a statue of a saint or even set up a little chapel where we hope to experience a connection with God. In the Old Testament, the Israelites moved on from worshipping God in the sacred places He had revealed himself to building the Ark of the Covenant and then the Temple. It seems that there is a human need to pin God down to specific places. And yet this desire to contain God can fall short. How many people have felt let down by the edifices erected at the biblical sites in the Holy Land? It was walking on the hillsides outside Jerusalem where the memories of these accretions of the last 2,000 years centuries were blown away by a warm herb-scented breeze and the realisation that Jesus and his disciples would have been refreshed by the same winds that brought me closer to the Jesus of the New Testament.

There are many such places in the natural world where the 'terrestrial' and the 'celestial' seem to meet. In Graham James' (Bishop of Norwich) book, 'A Place for God', he explores the question, 'Where do we meet God, encounter Jesus or receive the gift of the Holy Spirit?'. For him this can be not just in religious buildings but in unlikely places such as, for him, the Lakeland Motor Museum or in places in the natural world. In Celtic Spirituality, the phrase, 'Thin Places' has been used for millennia to describe places where the distance between the Divine and the Human is particularly close: places where there is felt to be a connection to the Sacred. I would be interested to know whether other people find some mysterious sense of 'The Other' as I do in places where the shape and contours of the landscape reveal the presence of ancient peoples such as, locally, the White Horse and Waylands Smythy.

The most powerful experience of this kind I found was in the Indian Canyons near Palm Springs, California. These majestic canyons are home to 2,000 year old fan palm trees which provide an oasis in the arid desert around. If one is prepared to brave the heat and to walk to the canyon furthest from the car park, it is possible to sense in the silence held under the great fan canopies, a profound sense of the presence of the ancient settlements and places of worship of the Coahuila people to whom this area is still sacred. No, I didn't convert to the religion of the First Generation peoples of America, but the experience did help to remind me that these 'thin places' are places where the presence of the Sacred is manifested in community.



We may all have our personal encounters with God in private prayer or at specific moments of contemplation of the beauty of God's creation. But for me, it is the gathering together of God's people in worship that makes the place important: a place where the Holy Spirit can work among us, confirming us in our Christian faith. So, roll on the time when we can all meet together again, partake in the Eucharist and share Christ's Peace.

Christmas Past

Susan Gee 16 January 2021

It was a brief Christmastide,
robbed of eleven days,
a bare and empty landscape,
no turtle doves,
no gold rings, just a
lonely partridge in his pear tree,
the season reduced to a
scatter of carols, distanced greetings,
snatched conversations,
a shift from tangible to digital,
to the click of a mouse and
a screen full of images.

And yet
the star still rises
out of deep darkness
to light the world,
the angels still sing
their hymn of glory
for all who are listening,
the Christ-child still comes
into hearts alert to him,
bringing grace, truth and love,
love enough
even for our frightened world.



Candlemas: The Presentation of Christ in the Temple

Carol Worthington

Candlemas is celebrated on February 2nd every year, exactly 40 days from December 25th, Christmas day. According to the Law of Moses, all first-born males had to be dedicated to the LORD, (Exodus 13v1-2), so Christ had to be presented in the Temple. The story is told in the second chapter of St Luke's Gospel. As with all Jewish women, Mary was considered ceremonially unclean following birth, so she had observed the traditional 40-day purification period required following the birth of a male child (Leviticus 12). She and Joseph now came to offer the necessary sacrifice to the priest outside the Temple, so that she could be cleansed, and enter inside. They could not afford a lamb, but offered what the Law required for poor people, 'a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons'.

Inside the Temple was an elderly man called Simeon. The Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon that he would not die until he had set eyes on the promised Messiah. When he saw the baby Jesus, he was overwhelmed, and recognised him as the child he had been waiting for. He took Jesus in his arms and praised God, using the beautiful words, known as the 'Song of Simeon', familiar to us as the Nunc dimittis at Evensong or Compline services.

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace: according to thy word.

For mine eyes have seen: thy salvation;

Which thou hast prepared: before the face of all people;

To be a light to lighten the Gentiles: and to be the glory of thy people Israel.

The Feast is known as Candlemas because it refers to Jesus as the light of the world, to give light to the Gentiles, as well as the Jews. Over the years, it became traditional at Candlemas to bless candles to be used in church and home, and for a candle-lit procession to precede a Mass or Eucharist held to celebrate the Feast. It is celebrated in most Christian countries, signifying the end of the Christmas season. Some churches and cathedrals do not clear away their nativity scenes until February 2nd.

Some traditions refer to snowdrops as Candlemas bells, because they bloom around that time. A legend arose that an angel helped these flowers to bloom after winter, and pointed them as a sign of hope to Eve, who wept in repentance and despair over the cold and death that had entered the world.

Snowdrops – Candlemas bells



Rembrandt and Reductionism

Rob Rutherford

What are you looking at?

If you are looking at this picture on a screen then you are seeing a matrix of tiny dots of light. If you are looking at a print then you are seeing dots of ink or if you have been lucky enough to look at the original painting in the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm and then it would be oil paints coloured with a variety of chemicals.

In all cases though, you can see the unmistakable hand of Rembrandt and recognise the scene as the meeting in the temple of Simeon and (probably) Anna with the baby Jesus. Rembrandt painted this scene earlier in his life* but I prefer the simplicity of this one, painted in Rembrandt's old age. The baby is a real baby and Simeon seems to be caught in the middle of his wonderful outpouring of joy that he has seen the Messiah. Simeon took the baby in his arms and praised God, saying, 'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your



word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.'

I've never really believed in the values of reductionism. The world is more than atoms and pixels – it is full of meaning. Even Physics recognises this but calls the extra thing 'information' rather than 'meaning'. If I can go off on a tangent, physicists even debate whether the information content of an object survives if the object itself is swallowed up by a black hole. The answer seems to be 'yes' but that is another story and I don't really understand it! It is clear, though, that there is more to the Universe than matter. Just as there is more in this painting than just matter. The meaning of this painting cannot be found in the substance of it but in the stories associated with it. Here it is telling a Gospel story but as well as telling a story about Jesus, this painting also tells a moving story about Rembrandt himself. It was his last painting, found unfinished on his easel after his death. Perhaps Rembrandt, like Simeon, saw in Jesus the nature of God's salvation.

A question to think about and perhaps discuss: Where exactly is the painting?

*To see if you agree with me, visit the online Ashmolean exhibition about young Rembrandt [here](#).

My Hopes

Eileen Duckett

I hope
My loved ones don't die of COVID.
I hope
I get the vaccine soon.
I hope
Our lives will soon be more normal.
I hope
I will soon be able to hug my son and grandsons again.
I hope
I will be able to sort out my dead mother's belongings with my sisters and we can grieve together.
I hope
I can see the sea again. I missed it last year.
I hope
I can go shopping and there will still be shops to shop in.
I hope
I can live again without anxiety and fear.
And I really really hope
That when all this is over I don't forget the lessons I have learnt during the pandemic and I live my life better because of it.

A Rainy Day

Eileen Duckett

I can't get in my kitchen
Because my husband loves to bake
He's busy making bread
When I want to make a cake

The trouble is the weather
Because when the sun doth shine
He's back out in the garden
And the kitchen is all mine.

A Snowy Day



For more snow pictures, see pages 16-17

The Heart's Time: Janet Morley

A poem a day for Lent and Easter

Louise Heffernan

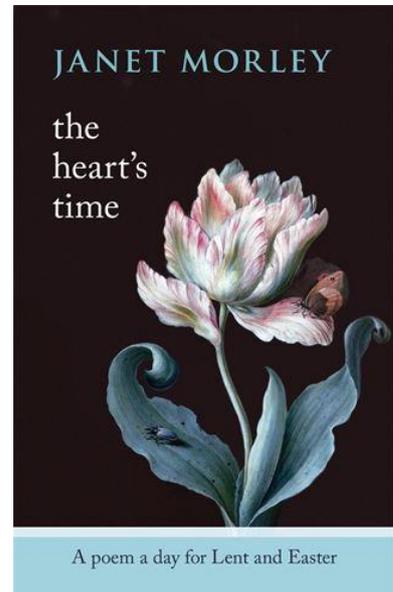
For my birthday last autumn, a good friend gave me a copy of Janet Morley's 'Hazard by Starlight', which offers a poem a day from Advent to Epiphany. I found the poems and the accompanying commentaries so helpful as a guide through that time of waiting, that I decided to treat myself to another similarly purposed book: 'The Heart's Time' which offers poems to read and reflect on through Lent and Easter. These are not recently published books so this cannot be classed as a review, but just a recommendation.

Poetry, of course, is not everyone's cup of tea. Nor do we all like the same kind of poems. Like paintings in a gallery, some poems will seem to require only a momentary glance, whereas others grab our attention and our full focus. Poems, given that kind of attention, can help us reflect on our worries, our unsolved internal discussions, our griefs and joys – not because poets are necessarily all wise, but because a good poem will ask the right questions.

Janet Morley has chosen a variety of poems for consideration in her collections. Many of the poems are devotional in theme while some of her choices speak challengingly to us, making us look at the world and ourselves differently. Others are inspiring, helping our meditations, taking our thought nearer to God. Some might make us sad; others might make us laugh. Not by any means is each poet in the volume an avowed Christian. So, while there are places for Milton, St Augustine and George Herbert, Larkin, that self-declared agnostic, has a seat too. So too do Margaret Atwood and Robert Frost, whose poems here included are not overtly Christian. Yet each has something valuable to say, some fresh thought on which to meditate. Janet Morley provides a commentary on each poem, in which she gives us her insight, her reading of the poem. We may or may not find the same focus; we may approach the poem from a different angle or have further inspiration of our own, but her ideas explore readings and her final daily question always invites reflection.

So, as an aid to prayer and perhaps discussion, Janet Morley's anthology offers a helpful guide to walk with through Lent.

The Heart's Time, A Poem A Day for Lent and Easter: Janet Morley, 2011, SPCK publishing, ISBN-13: 9780281063727



"A River Runs Through It"

Andrew Coker

The title of my article may remind you of the 1990s Brad Pitt film but you do not have to go to rural Montana to find an example as our local River Stert runs directly under St Nicolas. Who on earth back in the 1170s thought it was a good idea to build a church over a river? To this day the river flows underground from behind Abivale Vets to the Thames via Stert Street and our church. Most of the time no one notices, but with December's downpours the water level rose pushing it through the paving, forming rather pretty fountains in the street outside.

According to the Environment Agency the River Stert under the church is OUR responsibility, not theirs. So, in addition to looking after an historic landmark building, we also have to put on waders and check OUR culvert! (That was not in the Church Warden handbook!) The Environment Agency was very reassuring, "It's been there for nearly 900 years, don't worry." That's all very well for them, they don't have to deal with the dreaded F word, "Faculties" rather than flood warnings! It was suggested that we harness the river and use it as a heating source. Such schemes depend on totally sealed buildings, such as a new build, rather than an 850 year-old leaky sieve. My own 130 year-old house is F rated (Fail). The chances of dear 850 year-old St Nic's getting a better rating is not great.

One benefit of the Stert creating renaissance style fountains was that my South porch nativity scene finally had a water feature, something I had long thought about creating, though not in this format.



Having lost my continuous play tape deck, this year's more pressing nativity concern was how to provide a continuous "heavenly" chorus to accompany it. The solution was an iPod with King's College, Cambridge's seasonal offering, but it also holds my other favourites. With much fiddling we managed to ensure that it only played carols and Abba's Greatest Hits and the works of Elvis Costello were silenced! After six weeks of continuous play, I can report "Dancing Queen", "Money, Money, Money" and "Oliver's Army" never provided a choral backdrop to the Holy Family and guests, although "Gimme, Gimme, Gimme" would have been an interesting choice when the Magi arrived!

On the subject of recorded music, our Carol Service had a wonderful selection of choirs from the ubiquitous King's to the Mormon Tabernacle. Yes, all 500 of them plus orchestra. Who knew St Nic's could get that lot in! It was a squeeze, but we did it. As I played in the carols from the internet, it was necessary (and a bit stressful) to cut the YouTube adverts before they kicked in. Ensuring the congregation was not subjected to hire purchase adverts and how to deal with unsightly nasal hair kept me alert throughout what was for everyone else a very successful service. I at least had the satisfaction of knowing what inappropriate adverts they missed!

The waters have now receded and the Stert flows quietly again, but for how long?



Thanks to Nick Hallas and Alastair Fear for the images.

A video "Abingdon Uncovered" exploring the Stert culvert can be found [here](#):

Christingle 2020

Sue Pemberton

Question: How do you generate some odd purchase suggestions on Amazon?

Answer: order 500 small packets of sweets, 400 paper lunch bags, 2,000 wooden cocktail sticks and 150m of red raffia!

During the late autumn a small group of us started discussing what we could do for Christingle. St Helen's Christingle service is very much a part of Christmas in Abingdon, and is an outreach opportunity as many families come who wouldn't normally come to church. Christingle making is also part of Christmas at St Helen's, and the service is a fund raiser for the Children's Society. We felt we wanted to capture all these elements but of course this was 2020 and it all had to be done in a safe and secure way.

The plan that eventually crystallised was to assemble and give out 'Christingle kits' that could be used for online services at home, hence the Amazon order. Candles, cards and a few rather posh bags were supplied by the Children's Society. An army of bag packers assembled the kits in the safety of their homes. We set up the crib in the West Porch and the outside of the church displayed a host of angels and a flock of sheep leading the way to the crib! The angels were coloured and decorated by Junior Church and other members of the congregation. The West Porch was open for a few hours a day in the week leading up to Christmas, and a heroic group of volunteers braved cold, wind and rain to greet people and hand out the Christingle kits.

We had two Christingle services. One was pre-recorded, mainly in church but with some input from families at home. This was made live on the church website at 4.30pm on Christmas Eve, the usual time of the service, and followed the traditional form. It was preceded by a live Zoom service, a first for St Helen's. The service got off to a flying start with an angel countdown followed by a procession of bleating sheep trotting across the screen! Quite a number of people took an active part, and the moment when we turned out our lights at home and the Zoom gallery became a screen of flickering candles was really magical.

Although different from usual, I think we achieved the original aims. Regulars came to collect their Christingle kits and others passing by really enjoyed seeing the crib and having the chance of a few friendly words. People were delighted that the church was making this effort. We realised that the West Porch is a valuable and under-used space. Many members of the congregation were involved in the event and money was raised for the Children's Society.

Huge thanks are due to the many who contributed: bag packers, stewards, the team who produced the angels and sheep and set up the display, clergy, the technical team who ran the services, choristers who recorded carols, people who took part in the services.

We very much hope that we'll be back in church for Christingle 2021, but meanwhile we are thinking about Holy Week and Easter.....



Winter Photographs

Contributed by Rachel and Jeanette Thomas, Silvia Joinson, Roger Cox, Claudia Martin, Rhianydd Hallas, The Gibson Family, Sue Pemberton, Norman Dawson, Louise Heffernan





Junior Church

Sue Pemberton on behalf of the Junior Church leadership team

Junior Church has continued to ‘meet’ via Facebook and Zoom. All Junior Church families now have a copy of the ‘Children of God Storybook Bible’ by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. It contains retellings of both well and lesser known stories from the Old and New Testaments, beautifully illustrated by a range of international artists. Each child also has a notebook so that they can keep a record of Junior Church activities.

Advent was a busy time as everyone coloured angels for the churchyard display. Leader Rachel made the angel templates, and also the wonderful sheep. The Jarvis and Oliver families bravely did readings for the Christingle services, and the Hatton family made a wonderful video of themselves making Christingles which was included in the pre-recorded service. See the Christingle article for more information.



We started Advent with a Zoom meeting. We couldn't light the Advent candles in church, but the Advent wreath prayers were on Facebook each week and families had their own wreaths, candles etc. Pictures of some of these also appeared on Facebook. On the remaining Sundays our themes were some Old Testament stories leading up to the coming of Jesus, John the Baptist and the Annunciation (more angels!).



On 27th December we had a social Zoom, exchanging news about Christmas celebrations and describing our best Christmas presents. Of course, Jesus is the best Christmas present of all. The following week we celebrated Epiphany. We enjoyed a video of reporter Eliza interviewing a Bethlehem local (alias Jemima, in costume) about the recent strange goings on in the town. The next Sunday gave an opportunity for children to ask their families about their baptism as we celebrated the Baptism of Christ, and also to think about new beginnings. Next we looked at the meeting between Philip Nathanael and Jesus. Nathanael only believed when he saw Jesus, but Philip helped him to understand and believe. On 24th January we had two stories, both about changing direction and both about fish! One was about Jesus calling the fishermen Simon, Andrew, James and John to be his disciples and the other was the story of Jonah and the Whale (or big fish). Changing direction and changing plans are something we've all experienced in the last year, so it's good to know that God is with us.



Jemima's fish



Miriam's fish

We ended January, and the Advent/Christmas/Epiphany season with a very special Candlemas Zoom as Charles Masheder joined us to talk about the festival of Candlemas. We also enjoyed some music and a game, and managed to blow out Mel's candle over Zoom!

My trip

Crispin Mugabi

We always look forward to our trip to Uganda (my birth country) since we moved to England in 2014. Which is always during the long summer break every other year. The family back in Uganda always plan lots of activities for us, prior to our arrival.

But sadly our recent trip wasn't planned as Dad went to be with God, so Mum, Calum, Nadine (Crispina) and I had to return to his final resting place in our ancestral home, Sironko district, Uganda. It is in eastern Uganda on the slope of Mount Elgon very beautiful scenery he always loved to talk about it. He had a wonderful funeral.

We usually spend most of our stay at our grandparents' house. In my mother tongue grandparents are called 'Jajja' so grandpa is 'Jajja mwami' and grandma is 'Jajja mukyala' so that how we address our grandparents. They own a restaurant which is right next to their house, we love the delicious meals Jajja mukyala makes.

It is a pleasure and great adventure being in the company of my cousins because they all have different personalities. Being the eldest grandchild in the family, I enjoy trying to boss them around though I don't succeed very often.

My aunties and uncles have great big hearts which are filled with love and joy, they made ensure we had a wonderful unplanned break especially with the current pandemic restriction. We had sleepovers at my cousins' homes where I had a good older boys' time, we could stay up late at night talking about anything and everything.

We enjoyed a big family Christmas; it had been 8 years since we had been with the entire family for the celebration. It was sad that Daddy was not with us but as my little sister says, "Daddy is always watching us from heaven".

I love being in Uganda the weather is so wonderful allows lots of outdoor games. My brother – Calum never stopped playing, he enjoyed his football, climbed trees, played in the sand. My sister – Nadene had quality girl time with her cousins.

It was a difficult trip, but we are grateful we were able to spend quality time with family, I love my family.

Crispin Mugabi (13) is a member of St Nicolas Church. He and his family went to Uganda for the funeral of his stepfather, Fred Mafabi, who died in England in December.



Manifestations

Eluned Hallas

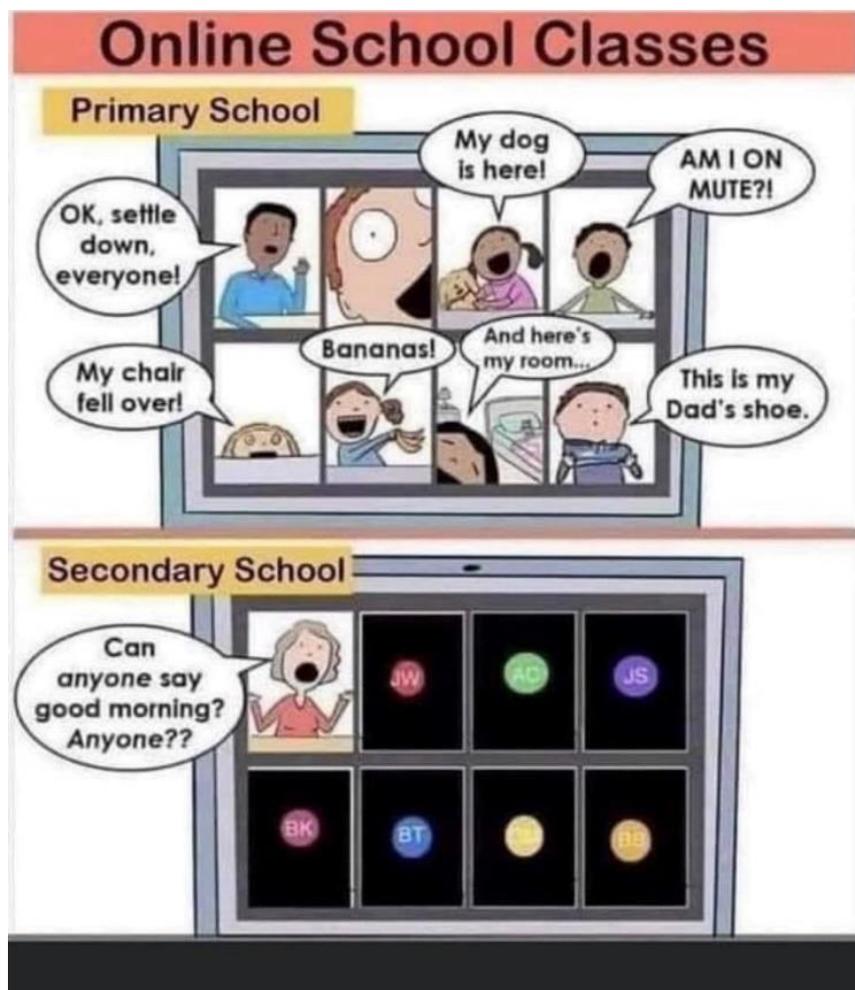
Star	Wine	Wedding	Water
Purification	Jars	Holy Spirit	Dove
Messiah	Locusts	Myrrh	Anna
John	Servants	Sword	Mary

Can you ‘solve the wall’ and place these words into four linked groups of four?

Hint: John 2:1–11; Luke 2:22–40; Mark 1:4-11; Matthew 2:1-12 NRSV

Words from words

How many words can you make from the letters in **Candlemas** (use letters only once)
(our dictionary corner has managed more than 150!)

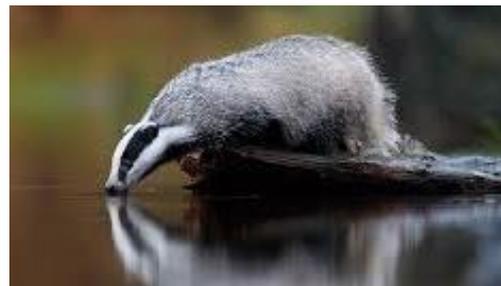


All Creatures Great and Small

Eccles

These are all animals to be found in the British Isles. Some clues are factual, others are cryptic with a few being devious. The pictures are to look pretty rather than be helpful!

1. Loud bovine
2. Feline seen dancing on May 1st
3. "I don't know how she swallowed a ___"
4. Long for Mr Kemp it seems
5. Second employment
6. Cockney outcome of climate change
7. Associated with Dr Seuss
8. Chas & Dave's favourite
9. Made from willow
10. Burke's colleague
11. Tropical
12. Rhymes with Cyril
13. Burnt toast
14. A tame performance from Liz Taylor
15. Almost Harry Potter character
16. Right after symbol
17. "This little ___ had roast beef"
18. Insomniacs count on them
19. A spy
20. Part of the offer retailers make
21. Starts to Richard and Trudy
22. Love upset
23. Mixture of hydrogen, oxygen, rhenium and sulphur
24. Suez perhaps
25. Sounds expensive



Did you know you had an Episcopal Vicar?

Rob Rutherford



Because of the COVID situation, the consecration of Gavin our Bishop-designate has been postponed at relatively short notice. However, it will still be possible for Gavin to begin his ministry among us in the period before his consecration.

By agreement with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Bishop Steven licensed Gavin as Episcopal Vicar for the Dorchester Area on 28 January, the originally planned day of his consecration.

Gavin and Christina will move to Arran House in early February and have some time to settle into their new home. There will then be a Service of Welcome for Gavin as our Bishop-designate, as originally planned, on Sunday 28 February. If conditions allow, this will be streamed from Dorchester Abbey.

Update from the Foodbank

Hilary Beale

Abingdon Foodbank is doing really very well considering the challenges everyone is facing. We are seeing a lot of extra people coming along for the first time, and are currently feeding up to 100 people each week. Amazingly, the donations keep coming in, and seem to be matching the increase in demand. We are really proud that throughout the last nine months we have managed to keep open for every session, with a great team of volunteers. They brave the cold each week, and do a fantastic job of cheering people up and handing out everything, from food to nappies, toiletries and pet food! See page 24 for needs.

TrinityLearning is looking for volunteers for Experience Easter!



Experience Easter is a series of reflective workshops, specially developed by TrinityLearning to allow Key Stage 2 children (7 to 11-year-olds) to access the Easter Story in a meaningful way. It is also an introduction to mindfulness, using stilling exercises and simple activities to allow the children to consider their emotions.

Over 3,000 children and 500 adults have enjoyed Experience Easter with us since we first began the workshops in 2010.

TrinityLearning's Experience Easter is going ahead in 2021! Sadly, we won't be able to welcome children to Trinity Church, but we can offer a safe and virtual alternative.

Could you help us by becoming a virtual volunteer?

We will run Experience Easter through videos sharing the Easter story and 'how-to' crafts on our website and through craft packs sent out to schools.

Could you support us by volunteering to read a story, or helping with a craft video? The videos will be very simple, similar to those our workshop leader Taz created for Advent which were well received by schools and families. These are available on our website at

<https://trinitylearning.org.uk/christmas-storytelling/> if you would like to take a look.

Perhaps you have led sessions at Experience Easter before and would like to get involved 'virtually' this year? Or maybe this is your first year and you are interested in giving it a go?

Either way, we would love to hear from you! Please get in touch and find out more by emailing Nicola at nic.trinitylearning@gmail.com.



Useful Weblinks:

To take part in the Diocesan services led by the Bishops and to find live streams from other churches:

<https://www.oxford.anglican.org/coronavirus-covid-19/livestream/>

Services: for the latest news see the church websites:

<https://www.abingdon-st-helens.org.uk/>

<https://www.stmichaels-abingdon.org.uk/>

<https://www.stnicolasabingdon.org.uk/>

Page for Church of England links: services, daily readings etc

<https://www.churchofengland.org/>

RESOURCES ACCESSIBLE BY TELEPHONE

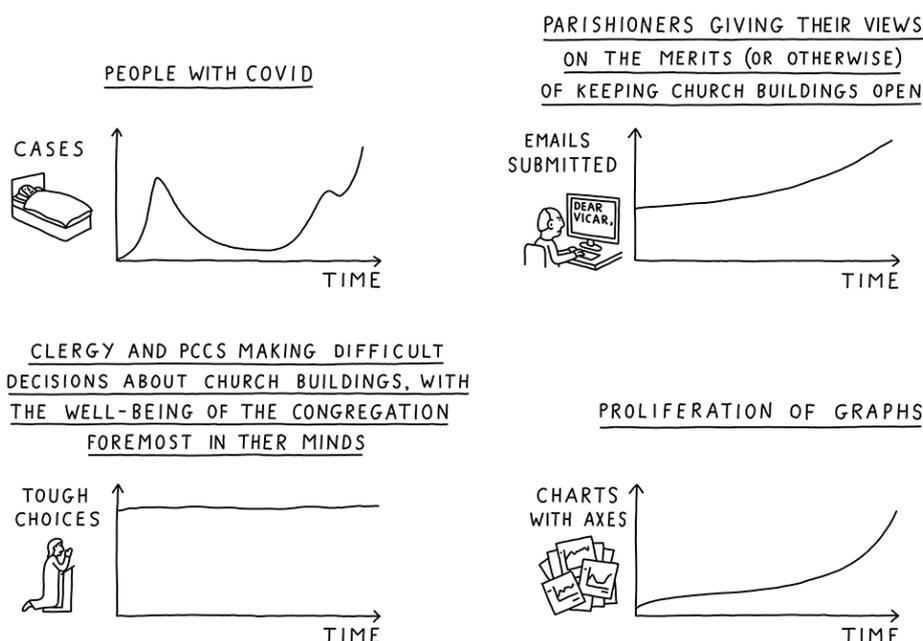
Diocesan Eucharist: Recordings of most of the Sunday services should be available from around 11am each Sunday. Simply call 01865 920930 and, once connected, dial 0 for the full service or 1 a shortened form. Standard call rates apply.

Daily Hope A Church of England resource offering hymns, prayers and reflections as well as full services via a freephone number 0800 804 8044.

FOOD BANK. The Abingdon Foodbank is still very busy and anxious to keep up the support even though churches are closed. **Northcourt Road (Christ Church) is open to receive donations on Tuesday and Friday mornings between 9.30 am and 1.00 pm.** Their main long-term needs are: Long life milk (not soya), sugar, fruit squash, tinned meat and vegetables. They also give out a lot of washing up liquid, bleach and toilet rolls. You can also make donations by sending a cheque made out to *North Abingdon PCC Christ Church*, clearly marked 'for Food Bank', you can also donate via CCA website at <https://cca.churchsuite.co.uk/donate/fund/njbejebi/foodbank> or the Parish office have details if you want to donate via online banking.

And finally, from Dave Walker of Cartoon Church:

GRAPHS



Thank you to all contributors and to you, the readers.
 The theme for the March issue will be 'Waiting and Hoping'.
 Please get thinking and email ideas and contributions to Candle@abingdonparish.org.uk
 We would also welcome responses to any articles published in this issue!