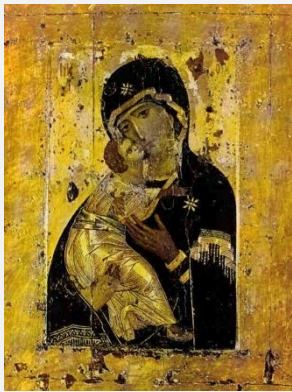


Issue 9:
November 2025



The Virgin of Kyiv
known by some as the
Virgin of Vladimir

A candle in...

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

Welcome Revd Dr Jen Brown –
Rector of Abingdon-on-Thames!

This issue was shaped
by:

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Photo: David Bevington

With Jen are Rev Canon David Tyler (Archdeacon of Dorchester), AKMA, Rev Rob
Glenny (Area Dean) Sue Scott (Deanery Synod Lay Chair) and Bishop Gavin.
See page 5 for another photograph

Inside:

Articles from a range of ages
Poems
Pictures
Events
And, of course, a quiz and a cartoon

Agnostics Anonymous, 28 October: Why do Christians bother with the Old Testament?

A talk by John Barton summarised by Gwen Bevington

We were fortunate indeed to be able to call upon an international expert, Professor John Barton, to address this question.

John began by acknowledging the paradox, that Christians read the Old Testament a great deal (Anglicans especially at the daily offices and at the eucharist, where an Old Testament reading is now always set) – and yet many Christians will question the point of using the Old Testament. It's not a new attitude: Harnack at the end of the 19th century opined that to keep the Old Testament in his time was the “result of religious paralysis”.

The first Christians took the view that the God of the Hebrew scriptures is the God of Jesus. Over time, as fewer Christians had a Jewish background, this idea was questioned. The first heresy to be condemned was that of Marcion, who argued that the God who created the world was a bad God, the God of Jesus new and good. Marcion thought the New Testament should be edited to remove Old Testament references (which would be a challenging task). The majority Christian view, which prevailed, was to keep the Old Testament, as the creator God is good, and is the God of Jesus.

John commented that Marcionism is still rampant and, since it implies rejection of the God of Judaism, can lead all too easily to antisemitism. He referred to a condescending remark of AS Byatt that from an early age, she found the scriptures, compared with say Shakespeare, both dead and nasty. Of course, most Old Testament experts don't defend every passage in it (and the New Testament is not without its challenging moments) – but similarly there are plays and passages of Shakespeare which potentially offend (who's for *Titus Andronicus*?). We base our approach in each case on an understanding of the whole canon.

In fact, many parts of the Old Testament are very positive and in line with the New Testament: consider the psalms, prophets, and the injunction in the law to love our neighbour (and indeed to love the resident alien). Moreover, some negative examples are presented as warnings, not appropriate for emulation. Nevertheless, some passages make indubitably uncomfortable reading – especially the command to enter the land and exterminate existing inhabitants. Rather than play theological ping-pong, we need to consider two ways in which we can fruitfully engage with the Old Testament:

- 1) It's evidence for how our religion came about and
- 2) it can aid our devotions.

John then offered reflections mainly relating to point 1, but with application to point 2.

The Old Testament gives a background to the New Testament – it's what Jesus and the disciples had as their scriptures. The Old Testament and Apocrypha (see John's article in the last Candle) show development in the way the One God was thought about and conceptualised. It's not a simple linear development, but it's there. On the other hand, there is an advance, one could say a leap, in the way New Testament writers/Jesus speak of God. Incarnation is a new idea; nothing in the Old Testament suggests the self-giving of God celebrated in the hymn of Philippians 2.

The problem about criticising the Old Testament is that if we imply that Christianity has displaced Judaism (“supersessionism”), that can lead to antisemitism. Yet to say that Christians have ideas about God which surpass those of the Old Testament doesn't need to be antisemitic. Judaism too has developed beyond it.

We can perhaps more helpfully call the Old Testament the “Hebrew Bible”. Jews of course call it the Bible! We can certainly say that God did something great and new in Jesus; we must not say that God has rejected the Jewish people.

It's interesting that Christians (perhaps following Paul) have tended to read the Hebrew Bible as a story. In Judaism the ethical aspect is emphasised much more – the Bible teaches us how to live. Christians may be talking of the Story while Jews talk of Instruction.

To sum up: the Hebrew Bible doesn't determine what we believe, but it is a resource which makes known the God in whom we believe. It IS worth bothering with, even though at times it may be bothering...

This stimulating talk gave rise to several questions round our use of the Hebrew Bible. These were fielded by John together with our new Rector Jen:

1) To read the Bible – if we don't start with Genesis, where should we start?

John suggests the books of Samuel – gripping stories with flashbacks which give an idea of the nature of Hebrew narrative. Or the Psalms. Jen suggested Isaiah (just as Ambrose did to Augustine).

2) If Jesus was a good Jew, was he trying to reform Judaism from within?

John: it's hard to see Jesus doing anything in contravention of Judaism as then understood. He seems to say the spirit of the law is more important than the letter – Jews tend to disagree. Once Christianity became mainly Gentile, people made a distinction between the ceremonial law and moral law.

Jen: we can see in Acts that the big question was, “Do we have to be Jews to be Christian?” That is not a live question for us.

The New Testament is evidence of the diversity of early Christianity.

3) The concept of a promised land?

John: Not much can be said, but it's important not to see groupings then and now as equivalent.

4) What about prophecy – to what extent does the Hebrew Bible see Jesus coming?

John: There were Messianic prophecies (of a new King) in the Hebrew Bible. Christianity has tended to see the Hebrew Bible as a series of prophecies now fulfilled.

Jen: We need to understand how the Gospels quote from the Hebrew Bible, and also to understand the prophecies in their own terms.

5) What's the point of prophecy anyway?

The modern view of prophecy is that it's a speaking out of God's word to people now, not foretelling or prediction.

6) If Jesus said, “No one can come to the Father but by me”, how is the Hebrew Bible not superseded?

John: You can read this as saying that if you are on your way to God, you are in fact in touch with Jesus. Karl Rahner spoke of “anonymous Christians”.

7) If you had to prune the Hebrew Bible, what would you cut out?

Jen: Numbers!

John: Most Christians would cut out the laws about worship. There are abridged Bibles – various reading schemes, even a Readers Digest Bible which works quite well!

Lectio Divina and Starbursts

Faith Forum summarised by Rosalind Rutherford

What do Starburst sweets (or Opal Fruits for some of us!) have in common with prayer and engaging with the Bible? The Faith Forum in October heard Sr Lizzie Ruth, one of the sisters from the Community of St Mary the Virgin in Wantage, who was speaking about Lectio Divina, give her answer!



She began by reminding us that there are several ways of engaging with scripture: reading the bible, either by hearing it read in a service or following a reading plan; studying the bible, often with the help of commentaries or books to guide us; using notes or written meditations to help us meditate on a passage ourselves (though we might find we spend more time thinking about the meditation than the bible passage itself). Lectio Divina is a way of engaging our whole self with scripture. All that is needed is God, a bible passage and ourselves, open to what we can learn and experience through the Holy Spirit.

Sr Lizzie Ruth then described how to go about engaging with scripture in this way. The first thing is to set aside enough time. Half an hour is good but 20 minutes is enough, so set a timer for 20 minutes.

Then came the Starbursts! She explained that studying the bible in this way is a process that can be compared to eating a chewy Starburst! She asked us to think of the five stages of eating the sweet: choosing a sweet and peeling off the wrapper; starting to enjoy the taste of the sweet in our mouth; chewing it; swallowing the sweet and finally enjoy the flavour in our mouth before moving on.



Lectio Divina similarly has five stages:

1. “Unwrap” the bible passage by reading a short passage you have chosen slowly and with care
2. After this first reading of the bible passage, we sit, allowing ourselves to notice the effect the passage has on us, including how we feel.
3. Then we start to chew the bible passage too. We might continue to give attention of the whole passage, especially if it is quite short or we might take one or two words which have made most impact on us on and allow our emotions to be involved. How do the words make us feel? What other questions may they be raising for us?
4. Next, as our time comes to a close, we “swallow” the bible passage, and bring all that we have meditated on or felt to God in prayer, often in our own words.
5. Finally, we allow ourselves at least 5 minutes to just sit with God, resting in what we have discovered in the passage and what we have been given by God.



After this explanation of how to engage with God and scripture in this way, Sr Lizzie Ruth gave us all two very short 3-minute exercises to try, one based on Psalm 23, and one on Romans 8.28.

She then talked about how to engage prayerfully with a gospel, which is often a narrative passage. This is where the use of imagination comes in, which is something often associated with Ignatian

spirituality. She suggested that if we are praying with a narrative, we start by asking the Holy Spirit to guide us into entering the passage as a character. Who are we? What can we see or notice? What do we feel – and what might we want to say to Jesus or ask him? This is how we might “chew” a story.

She was asked how to find a bible passage, and whether the translation we use matters. Her instinct is to use a translation in our “mother tongue”, as we are searching for a personal encounter with God, and need to feel comfortable with the Bible version we are using.. Similarly, she told us that as a woman it mattered to her to use a translation that is as inclusive as possible, rather than hearing male pronouns all the time. A commentary or notes can also be helpful – until we begin meditating on the commentary rather than the biblical text. She had various suggestions for how to choose what to study in this way. We could take a book of the bible and work through it, concentrating on different verses each time, or read through the Psalms. If we decided to use this form of bible engagement weekly then we could use the Sunday gospel, either as preparation for Sunday, or to meditate on after hearing it in the eucharist. The Common Worship Lectionary, that is used for Morning and Evening prayer, or the readings set for weekday eucharists, could also be a way of selecting a passage . If you want to use these readings then one way of finding them is to use this website: <https://almanac.oremus.org/>

The talk and questions ended with encouragement once more, to try engaging with the bible in this way, even if only once or twice a week.



Photo: David Bevington
With Jen are husband Chris, the Deputy Lord-Lieutenant of Oxfordshire, Felicity Dick, The Mayor of Abingdon Cllr Rawda Jehanli and Bishop Gavin.

Welcome LLM Linda!

Photographs courtesy of Rebekah Sharrock Diocese of Oxford



Frideswide Voices

I'm a member of Frideswide Voices, in Christ Church, the cathedral of Oxford. We are an auditioned choir and I joined in Year 3 with three other girls. I really like it there and adore singing.

Recently, I was surpliced, so admitted as a full chorister. It was quite strange and embarrassing getting my surplice in front of such a great crowd. Afterwards though, we got cake. It was very yummy and I was given the figurine of me, wearing my purple cassock and made just of sugar. I'm trying to save it up as long as possible.

Frideswide is an amazing choir to be in and I would really recommend it. We normally sing on Mondays and Wednesdays but sometimes there are other days we sing for things like concerts, Christmas, or Ash Wednesday. I really like singing Handel, Jonathan Dove, 'Give us the wings of faith' by James Whitbourn and 'Set me as a seal' by Eleanor Daley. This year I am going to go on a tour with the choir for the first time and I am really looking forward to it!

By Kitty (age 9)

Kitty is a regular member of the congregation and of Junior Church at St Helen's.



Separation of State and Hate

Susan Scott

Like many others I am sure, I have watched the unfolding political drama in the USA with increasing dismay and alarm. One aspect especially which alarms me, is the apparent appropriation by the Republican Party, and Evangelical Christians, of Christianity itself as the basis for the many egregious policies the President is enacting. A principal one is that they see Donald Trump as God's "Chosen One" and as such can overlook his history, financial corruption and support for the rich at the expense of the poor. The reason is that they believe Christianity itself is under threat by liberals and the secular society and everything possible must be done to reverse this trend.

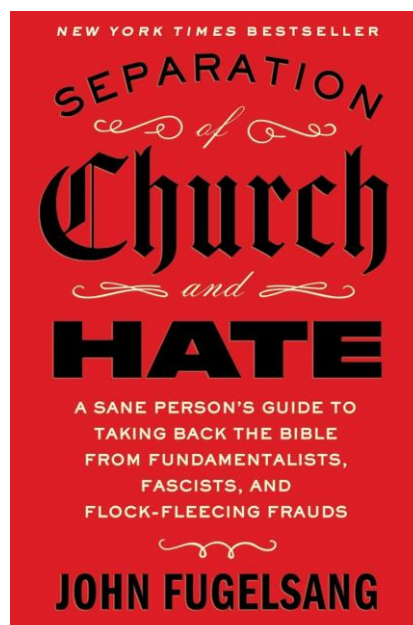
The brand of Christianity they wish to see adopted however is not one I feel at all comfortable with, from the reversal of *Roe v Wade*, demonisation of LGBT people, tax cuts for the super-rich, and the feeling I have that none of this will do women any favours, and with the Bible, especially it seems the Old Testament, being used as the rationale for these and many other policies.

However, there are voices being raised in the States, even if up to now they may have been crying in the wilderness, pushing back against this mis-use, as they see it of biblical text. One such voice is that of John Fugelsang, who has written a best-selling book titled *Separation of State and Hate*, hence the title of this article. John is a comedian and broadcaster, the son of a former Franciscan Brother and former Nun who was raised as a Roman Catholic. His book is described as a deeply irreverent and biblically correct take down of far-right Christian hatred. In my opinion it is a timely warning to the possibility of fundamentalist Christians beginning to go down the Islamist path. John claims that in most religions fundamentalists are the angriest, most aggressive, xenophobic members. There is no space here to expound his many take downs of biblical fundamentalists and his defence as he sees it of his parents' faith and the faith in which he was raised.

However, before I get too sanctimonious and smug he has made me think of whether I really follow the teachings of the inconvenient radical Jew, Jesus. So easy to see others flaws more than one's own, so a bit of plank removing I think before I delve too much into the motes in other's eyes!

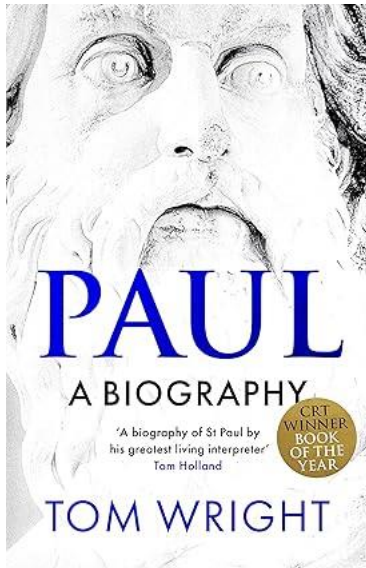
You can see John's many interviews on US TV on You-Tube, and his masterly way of using his knowledge of scripture to refute the ignorance of scripture of many evangelical fundamentalists.

Thank God for John Barton!



Paul: a biography

The book by Tom Wright reviewed by Silvia Joinson



Quite by chance I discovered this book in Abingdon library; a large tome of over 400 pages plus notes. The Desiring Life reading group had been reading Rowan Williams's "Meeting God in Paul" and Tom Wright is a well-known and respected writer so I decided to make this my summer reading project. In general, I find religious books hard going. I'm not good with ideas and struggled with the political ideas part of my history course. However, I found this book very readable and though he lost me at times it was a stimulating read.

Using Acts and the personal details mentioned in the letters Wright builds up a picture of Paul's personality. Paul was an unusually gifted man who red Biblical Hebrew fluently, spoke Aramaic and the ubiquitous Greek which he spoke and wrote at speed. He knew his bible inside out. He was a man of enormous energy who could be very blunt - telling things as he saw them. The approach is chronological - fitting the letters into the narrative from Acts with a useful table of events for reference.

After the dramatic events in Damascus, Wright follows Paul's account in Galatians chapter 1 - time spent in Arabia and Damascus before going to Jerusalem. There is an interesting chapter on the time spent in Arabia and Tarsus. He examines the situation in Tarsus and speculates about what may have happened during that decade before Barnabas came to find him and his journeys began. In his preface he mentioned two large assumptions he'd made: a south Galatian address for Galatians and an Ephesian location for the Prison letters.

Besides building up a picture of Paul's personality he also fills in background details of the places he visited. Many of them were on important trade routes and were also colonies where ex-service personnel were settled. Pisidian Antioch was one of these referred to as New Rome with a vast complex of buildings focusing on the imperial cult. An interesting detail that was new to me was the deal Jews had made with the Roman authorities. Everyone in the Empire had to worship the Emperor Caesar and partake in festivals. The alternative proposed by the Jewish leaders was that instead of praying *to* Caesar they would pray to their God *for* Rome and the Empire. The question then was the position of non-Jewish followers of Jesus? Later Gallio described this as a Jewish dispute about words and dismisses it. Wright describes this as a momentous event in the history of the church.

Paul's influence was kept alive by his letters - just 70 - 80 pages in the average Bible. Wright looks at the background circumstances; for Galatians "dictating so fast" that it's like "listening to one side of a complicated telephone conversation". A decade later by the time "he settled down to plan and dictate his great letter to Rome....every idea it expounded had been tried, tested and worked out in detail." He had not been to Rome but had friends there and wanted to spread the messianic message further west.

Having had this book out for six weeks I felt there was too much to take in in one sitting so managed to find a paperback copy!

Ode to November

Season of coughs and phlegmy sneeziness,
Close bosom-friend of the deepening gloom;
When wheezing sufferers hear loud cries of "Bless
You!" and "Now will you kindly leave the room?"
Hats, coats, thick woollen scarves cannot withstand
The chill and damp that permeate the bone;
Nor can warm gloves or mitts protect the hand
Nor hanky clear the nose so often blown.
No bonfire lit with fireworks will suffice
To stay the advent of December's ice,
For Winter comes and turns the earth to stone.

Who has not reached for linctus or for pill
To ward off tickles in the throat or chest?
Or huddled under blankets fighting chill
Mornings while reaching for a thermal vest?
Rain, mist and cold unwelcome make return
And fringe the street lamps with a watery glow
As longer nights announce their dark sojourn
And dawn's awakening begins to slow,
The clocks reveal time's steady, even tread
As month eleven ravel out its thread
And marks the closing of the year we know.

Is dark November thus in some disgrace
Because it is not May or sunlit June?
For all its damp and chill it has its place;
The minor key may play its own clear tune.
The shadows speak of light and tell their tale
In sights and sounds that cannot be undone
For loud tones ought not always to prevail.
There is a truth that wisdom does not shun:
Beauty is not destroyed by shades of grey
And muted tones have part in the display:
The planet makes its path around the sun.

Paul Sheppy



Bonfires, Beacons & Bangers

Eluned Hallas and Louise Heffernan

1. "See! The beacons of _____ are alight, calling for aid. War is kindled. See, there is the fire on Amon Din, and flame on Eilenach."
What is the missing place name? Who is the author?
2. What is the approximate autoignition point of paper
3. Which novel concludes with the burning of an island forest so alerting a naval cutter to come to the rescue?
4. John and Christopher Wright, Robert and Thomas Wintour, Thomas Percy, Robert Keyes, Thomas Bates, John Grant, Ambrose Rookwood, Sir Everard Digby and Francis Tresham
Who is missing and when and what did they do?
5. According to Greek mythology who stole fire from the gods to give it to mankind?
6. Which Hardy novel opens with the lighting of a bonfire on Rainbarrow hill on Guy Fawkes Night?
7. When was the first recorded use of fireworks in the UK?
8. Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn and caldron bubble.
Who?
9. How do we remember Catherine / Katherine of Alexandria
10. In which novel does a creature, 'thrust his hand into the live embers, but quickly [draw] it out with a cry of pain'?
11. What metal is commonly used to give the yellow colour to fireworks
12. What is / was meant by a Bonfire of vanities?
13. What is a Belisha Beacon?



It's No Joke Getting Old

Eileen Duckett

I am getting old and slowing down
My hips hurt when I walk into town
I have real trouble getting out of a chair
And my face has too much unwanted hair
I can get down on the floor but there I remain
Because I can't get back up and stiff joints are to blame
I am back and forth to the loo during the night
My hearing is going and so is my sight
My memory used to be so good
But I can't now remember the things which I should
My teeth tend to break if I eat something hard
And because I am on blood thinners I have to carry a card
When I am with my friends we discuss all our ills
Then have a competition as to who takes the most pills
Old age is not for wimps as people say
And I certainly agree with that by the way
I used to like going out and having a good time
Now I stay in and write poems that rhyme
And although it's a wonderful life I have led
These days I can't wait to get into bed.



This arrived in Rob's Facebook feed together with a quote from Dylan Thomas:

'Do not go gentle into that good night'

Events November 2025

Compiled by Louise Heffernan



Music at St Michael's
SUNDAY 9TH NOVEMBER
3.00 pm

GLYNNE BUTT
 Piano
 with
PAVLOVA WINDS

MOZART: QUINTET FOR PIANO AND WINDS
 Glinka: Trio for piano, clarinet and bassoon

Tickets £12, children free. Available from
<https://www.trybooking.com/uk/FFRF>
 or by cash/card at the door

Refreshments Available
 Free Parking

St Michael's Church, Park Road
 Abingdon OX14 1DS

Sponsored by:
dawkes est 1966



MICHAEL & ALL
 ANGELS CHURCH
 ABINGDON OX14 1DS



CHRISTMAS ARTS & CRAFTS EXHIBITION

Thursday 13
 to
 Saturday 15
 November
 10am - 5pm

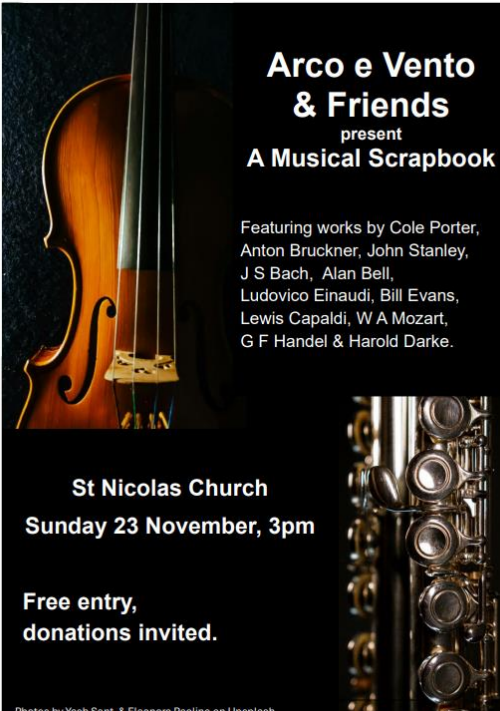
St. Nicolas' Church,
 Market Sq.
 Abingdon

OXFORDSHIRE
art
WEEKS

Christmas gifts, original art,
 prints, cards, jewellery,
 and glassware

Artists: Claire Cross, Nick Cross, Chris Eccles,
 Margaret Horton, Emma Williams

ABBEY GROUP



**Arco e Vento
 & Friends**
 present
A Musical Scrapbook

Featuring works by Cole Porter,
 Anton Bruckner, John Stanley,
 J S Bach, Alan Bell,
 Ludovico Einaudi, Bill Evans,
 Lewis Capaldi, W A Mozart,
 G F Handel & Harold Darke.

St Nicolas Church
Sunday 23 November, 3pm

**Free entry,
 donations invited.**

Photos by Yash Sant & Eleonora Paulino on Unsplash

St HELEN'S CHURCH

**AGNOSTICS
 ANONYMOUS**

Meeting for Open Discussion

**Can you believe in both
 science and the Bible?**

Led by Jennifer Brown,
 & John Barton

Tuesday 25th November 2025
6pm to 7.30pm

In Parish Centre (opposite main door of St Helen's Church,
 Abingdon)

FREE **Everyone Welcome**

Contact for more Information: Jill Gant 01235 528929



Abingdon
Chorale
Director: Tim Robson

Christmas cheer

An informal Christmas concert for all ages
in aid of The Abingdon Bridge

Hear and sing beautiful music then join
us for festive refreshments

Saturday 29 November 2025, 4pm
St Michael and All Angels Church
Abingdon OX14 1DS
Tickets £10 (£2.50 under 16s)
From tinyurl.com/mtn6r4dk
or via QR code



Advent Labyrinth Walks:

St Michael and All Angels will be open on Tuesday 2, 9 and 16 December between 11 am and noon. There will an opportunity to walk the labyrinth or simply to enjoy the sacred space. Material for reflection will be available on a different Advent theme each week.

A short prayer will be said at the beginning and end of each session, but feel free to come and go as you please. Parking permits are available.



CHRISTMAS FAIR

COME AND BUY YOUR PRESENTS!
BOOKS, GIFTS, JEWELLERY, BAKING, RAFFLE,
TOMBOLA AND BACON BUTTIES TO EAT.

NOV 29TH 10AM - 1PM
ST HELEN'S CHURCH
ABINGDON



Saturday 6 December 2025, 3.30pm
Doors open 3pm

St Helen's Church
St Helen's Court, Abingdon OX14 5BS

CHRISTMAS DAY IN CONCERT

David Batsman
Musical Director

BUCKS FIZZ
are Making Your Mind Up

MARY POPPINS
THE NUTCRACKER

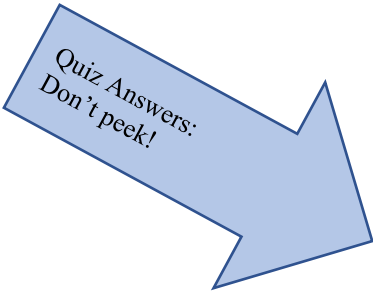
CHRISTMAS OVERTURE
CHICKEN RUN

STRICTLY
Come Dancing

Tickets £10/£8
Under 12s free
Tickets available online at bit.ly/acbChristmasDay
and on the door.

www.abingdonconcertband.org.uk

Faith Forum: in the Parish Centre, 12.30 on Sunday 23 November preceded by lunch
Theme: Putting faith into action



1	Gondor, JRR Tolkien, 'The Return of the King' 451F / 233C
2	'Lord of the Flies', William Golding
3	Guy Fawkes, Gunpowder Plot, 1605
4	Prometheus
5	The Return of the Native
6	1486, celebrating the wedding of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York, and the end of the War of the Roses
7	The Weird Sisters who appear to Macbeth, giving him a misleading prophecy. Macbeth
8	(This verse is not used in Wyrd Sisters (T Pratchett), but you think of it all the same)
9	The Catherine Wheel
	St Catherine was an early C4th martyr condemned to death on a spiked breaking wheel, which shattered at her touch. She was subsequently beheaded.
10	'Frankenstein', Mary Shelley
11	Sodium
12	A burning of objects condemned by religious authorities as occasions of sin
13	A yellow-coloured globe lamp atop a tall black and white striped pole, marking pedestrian crossings. Named after Leslie Hore-Belisha (1893–1957), the Minister of Transport who, in 1934, added beacons to pedestrian crossings



The Parish Centre garden in late October

Useful Weblinks:

Services: for the latest news see the Parish Website:

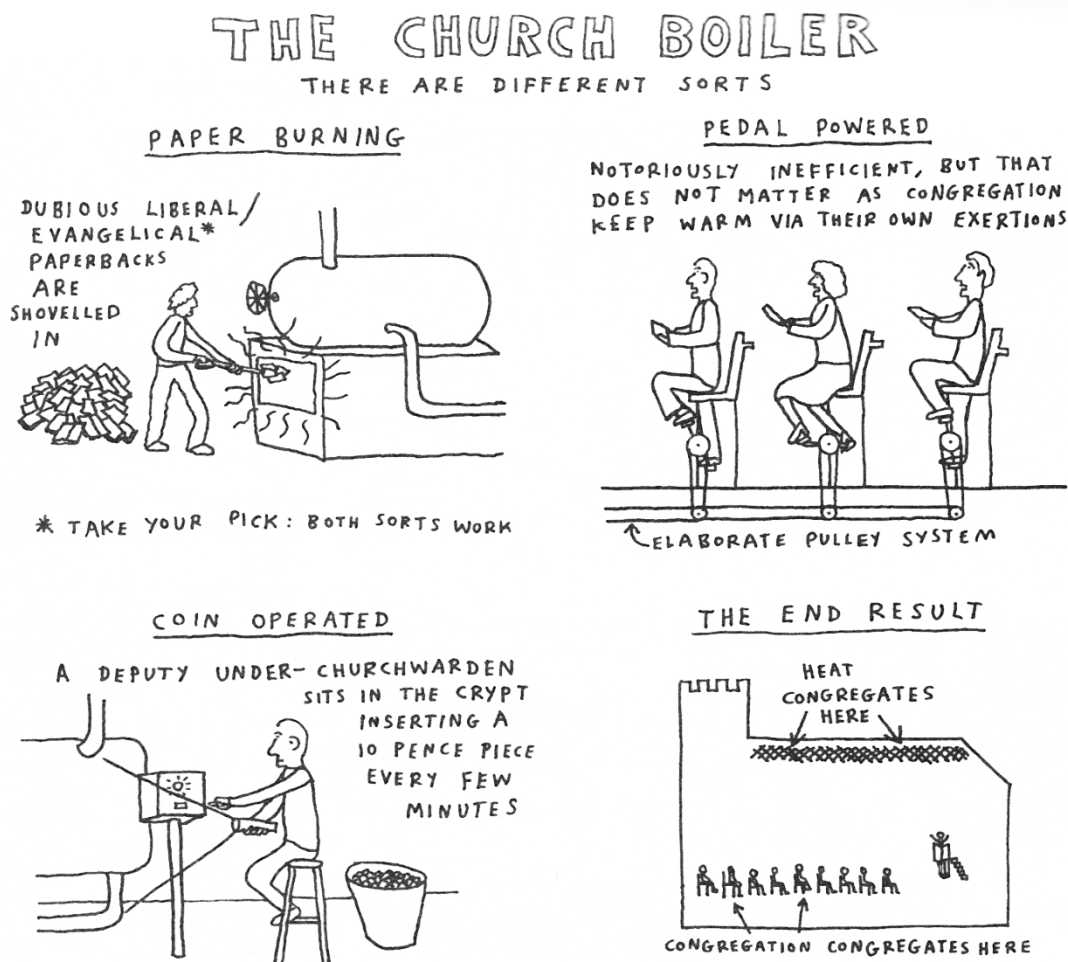
<https://abingdonparish.org.uk>

for Church of England links: services, daily readings etc

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

FOOD BANK. The Abingdon Foodbank is still very busy and anxious to keep up the support. Northcourt Road (Christ Church) is open to receive donations on Tuesday and Friday mornings between 9.30 am and 1.00 pm. The foodbank also operates from Preston Road Community Centre. Donations are welcome there too between 12.00 and 2.30pm on Wednesdays. You can also donate money by sending a cheque made out to *North Abingdon PCC Christ Church*, clearly marked 'for Food Bank' or via the Foodbank website <https://abingdon.foodbank.org.uk/give-help/donate-money/> or the Parish office has details if you want to donate via online banking.

Finally, from Dave Walker:



Thanks to all contributors and to you, the readers.

The next issue will be published on December 7th. It will be the 60th on-line edition.

- ideas and contributions to Candle@abingdonparish.org.uk