

Services at St Michael & All Angels Cuxton		
31 <sup>st</sup> March Easter Day	9.30 Holy Communion	Isaiah 65 vv 17-25 p752 Acts 10 vv 34-43 p1104 I Corinthians 15 vv 19-26 p1156 Luke 24 vv 1-12 p1061
7 <sup>th</sup> April Easter 2	9.30 Family Communion	Acts 5 vv 27-32 p1097 John 20 vv 19-31 p1089
14 <sup>th</sup> April Easter 3	9.30 Holy Communion	Zephaniah 3 vv 14-20 p947 Acts 9 vv 1-6 p1102 Revelation 5 vv 11-14 p1237 John 21 vv 1-19 p1090
21 <sup>st</sup> April Easter 4	8.00 Holy Communion	Epistle & Gospel BCP Easter 3
	9.30 Holy Communion & Holy Baptism	Genesis 7 vv 1-5 p8 Genesis 7 vv 11-18 p9 Genesis 8 vv 6-18 p9 Genesis 9 vv 8-13 p10 Acts 9 vv 36-43 p1103 Revelation 7 vv 9-17 p1238 John 10 vv 22-30 p1077
28 <sup>th</sup> April Easter 5	9.30 Holy Communion	Genesis 22 vv 1-18 p22 Acts 11 vv 1-18 p1105 Revelation 21 vv 1-6 p1249 John 13 vv 31-35 p1082
5 <sup>th</sup> May Easter 6	9.30 Family Communion Celebrant & Preacher the Bishop of Tonbridge.	Ezekiel 37 vv 1-14 p868 Acts 16 vv 6-15 p1111 John 5 vv 1-9 p1068
31 <sup>st</sup> March Easter Day	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	Acts 10 vv 34-43 p1104 John 20 vv 1-18 p1089
	11.00 Holy Communion	Isaiah 65 vv 17-25 p752 Acts 10 vv 34-43 p1104 I Corinthians 15 vv 19-26 p1156 Luke 24 vv 1-12 p1061
Services at St John the Baptist Halling & the Jubilee Hall Upper Halling		
7 <sup>th</sup> April Easter 2	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	Isaiah 52 v13 – 53 v12 p740 Luke 24 vv 13-35 p1061
	11.00 Holy Communion & Holy Baptism	Exodus 14 vv 10-31 p71 Exodus 15 vv 20&21 p72 Acts 5 vv 27-32 p1097 Revelation 1 vv 4-8 p1233 John 20 vv 19-31 p1089
14 <sup>th</sup> April Easter 3	11.00 Holy Communion	Zephaniah 3 vv 14-20 p947 Acts 9 vv 1-6 p1102 Revelation 5 vv 11-14 p1237 John 21 vv 1-19 p1090
	5.30 Evening Prayer Jubilee Hall	Isaiah 38 vv 9-20 p722 John 11 vv 17-44 p1078
21 <sup>st</sup> April Easter 4	11.00 Stop! Look! Listen! & Holy Communion	Genesis 7 vv 1-5 p8 Genesis 7 vv 11-18 p9 Genesis 8 vv 6-18 p9 Genesis 9 vv 8-13 p10 Acts 9 vv 36-43 p1103 Revelation 7 vv 9-17 p1238 John 10 vv 22-30 p1077
28 <sup>th</sup> April Easter 5	11.00 Holy Communion	Genesis 22 vv 1-18 p22 Acts 11 vv 1-18 p1105 Revelation 21 vv 1-6 p1249 John 13 vv 31-35 p1082
5 <sup>th</sup> May Easter 6	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	Daniel 6 vv 1-23 p890 Mark 15 v46 – 16v8 p1023
	11.00 Holy Communion Celebrant & Preacher the Bishop of Tonbridge.	Ezekiel 37 vv 1-14 p868 Acts 16 vv 6-15 p1111 John 14 vv 23-29 p1082

Holy Communion 9.30 am at St Michael's 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> April and 11.00 8<sup>th</sup> April and at St John's 4<sup>th</sup> at 9.30.

Holy Communion 9.30 Wednesdays @ St Michael's		Holy Communion 9.30 Thursdays @ St John's	
3 <sup>rd</sup> April	Acts 3 vv 1-10 Luke 24 vv 13-35	4 <sup>th</sup> April	Acts 3 vv 11-26 Luke 24 vv 35-48
10 <sup>th</sup> April	Acts 5 vv 17-26 John 3 vv 16-21	11 <sup>th</sup> April	Acts 5 vv 27-33 John 3 vv 31-36
17 <sup>th</sup> April	Acts 8 vv 1-8 John 6 vv 35-45	18 <sup>th</sup> April	Acts 8 vv 26-40 John 6 vv 44-51
24 <sup>th</sup> April	Acts 12 v24 – 13 v5 John 12 vv 44-50	25 <sup>th</sup> April	Ephesians 4 vv 7-16 Mark 13 vv 5-13

### Annunciation Service & Lunch

We are all invited to join the Mothers' Union at 11.00 at St Michael's on 8<sup>th</sup> April for our annual Lady Service and then for lunch in the church hall.

There is an **After School Club** at St John's on Thursdays at 3.45. **Saints Alive** (formerly Sunday School) meets in the Church Hall, Cuxton at 9.30 on 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> Sundays of the month in term time. There is a parish lunch to which all are invited every first Wednesday at 12.00 in the Church Hall. If you are prepared to **gift aid** your monetary contributions to the Church, please use one of the envelopes provided. Contact Jack Payne to **gift aid** all your donations.

**Copy Date** May Magazine: 12<sup>th</sup> April 8.30 am Rectory.



#### Imprudent? Irresponsible?

Having reached the age I have, I occasionally receive invitations from my doctor to go in for a routine check up. So far I

have failed to respond. My reasoning goes something like this. At the moment I feel quite well and it is not unlikely that the doctor would find nothing wrong, in which case we should have wasted both his time and mine and precious NHS resources. It is, however, given my age (fifty eight) and my family history, quite possible that the doctor would discover high blood pressure or raised blood levels of sugar or cholesterol. In that event he would quite likely tell me to stop eating or drinking anything which actually tastes nice and to take more exercise. I don't think I have time to take any more exercise and my poor old joints might not like it if I tried. Giving up enjoying my food might or might not lead to my living a longer life, but it would certainly seem longer!

The doctor could also prescribe medication. It might well then turn out that I should never again feel entirely well because of the side effects of the drugs. Moreover my life would be effectively medicalised with twice monthly trips to the surgery to drop off and pick up repeat prescriptions and six monthly consultations with the doctor preceded by blood tests. I believe there is a better system in operation now, but, until recently, getting a blood test meant attending at a centre some distance away from here where

parking was difficult or impossible and (in the case of the hospital) punitively expensive. Given the cost of bus fares and the unreliability of buses and the fact that taxis are completely outside my price range, that left walking or cycling to the blood clinic and my argument was always that if you could walk or cycle several miles, you obviously didn't need a blood test! Also I might worry if I were told that there was something wrong with me and worry is injurious to health.

I'm sure that most medically qualified people would say that I am being imprudent. If there is something wrong, they would contend, it is much better to find out before any unpleasant or dangerous symptoms appear and to deal with it. Better to put up with the inconvenience of regular visits to the doctor and daily pill swallowing and any minor side effects which the medication might produce than to develop diabetes with all its possible complications or to suffer a heart attack or stroke.

It is, of course, a matter of odds. I should be less likely to develop diabetes or to suffer from cardiovascular disease if I allowed my doctor to control my blood pressure and glucose and cholesterol levels, but there still would be no guarantee that I wouldn't develop these conditions. Less likely, but not impossible. And, although living on salad and mineral water, statins and alpha and beta blockers might reduce the likelihood of my dying of a stroke or a heart attack, it would make no difference at all to my chances of being run over or dying of something

else. Admittedly a routine check up might pick up cancer early and improve my chances of successful treatment, but there are plenty of other things to die of and some of them much less pleasant than a heart attack or stroke. I am reminded of the story of the two frail elderly gentlemen in one of our less salubrious care homes helplessly waiting for an overworked care assistant to take them to the lavatory and hoping desperately that she isn't too late. One says to the other, "If we hadn't given up beer, chips and fags, we might have missed all this!"

Perhaps I am being imprudent. I certainly wouldn't recommend anyone else to follow my example in this respect. It's your life and your decision (and you would do well to consider medical advice) just as my life is a matter for my decision. Freedom is extremely important. The right to self-determination is an essential part of our human dignity. We do have the right to be wrong. I am a follower of John Stuart Mill in the belief that no one has the right to compel me to do something or to refrain from doing something unless my actions harm or potentially harm other people. No one has the right to compel or restrain me in my own interests, only in the interests of other people. This is why I watch somewhat nervously as government extends its tentacles into people's private lives. "The experts know best," they tell us. "Listen to expert advice," they say. "Make sure you take our advice," they admonish. And eventually they get round to, "If you won't voluntarily do what we know is best for you, we'll make it compulsory. We'll stop you smoking, limit your drinking and force you to eat five fruits and vegetables a day and exercise for at least two hours a week, but not in the sun in case you catch skin cancer!" Even when they're right, compulsion is an insult to our autonomy as human beings. And they aren't always right. Forty years ago a lot of people switched from butter to margarine on medical advice, but it has since turned out that most of the margarine available in the 1970s was worse for you than butter. Who should take responsibility for the deaths of those people who might have died prematurely because they took the experts' advice and changed to a spread higher in harmful fats than the butter they would otherwise have chosen (and enjoyed a lot

more)? How much of the expert advice we are given today will turn out to be wrong?

Actually and seriously, I do think that it is irresponsible not to try at all to look after yourself. If you let yourself go, you may not be able to perform your duties. If you don't take care of yourself, someone else will have to take care of you.

Anyway, however careful you are, whatever you eat or drink, whatever medication you take, whatever exercise regime you follow, what is certain is that some day you are going to die. You might, if you are careful and lucky, be able to postpone the date of your death, but that day will surely come whatever you do to put it off. So perhaps instead of asking your doctor how you can prolong your mortal life, maybe it would be more sensible to be like the rich young man in Matthew 19<sup>16</sup>, who asked Jesus, *Good Master, what good thing shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?* Our mortal lives will end inevitably, however careful we are and we shall all face eternity. How do we face eternity? *Good Master, what good thing shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?* Jesus first tells the young man to keep God's Commandments. Actually being good is more important than eating well and keeping fit and drinking within the government's recommended limits. Yet somehow the rich young man knows that being good is not enough. He is a good person. He knows he's a good person. But somehow, it isn't enough. *What lack I yet?* (v20). *Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.* The rich young man found he couldn't do that; *for he had great possessions.* There follows a discussion with Jesus' puzzled disciples about camels and needles' eyes and a promise that *with God all things are possible.*

Isn't that the line we should be pursuing, not how to prolong our mortal lives but how it is possible in Christ to inherit eternal life? You won't find the answers in the doctor's surgery, the gymnasium, the kitchen or the chemist's shop. You might find them in the church. Roger.

#### Deanery Synod

The meeting at St Francis Strood on 17<sup>th</sup> April at 7.30 pm is an open meeting for everyone to meet the Bishop on his visit to the Strood Deanery.



## Annual Easter Egg Hunt

### 2.00 pm Easter Monday

### Rectory Grounds and Church Hall

### All Welcome £2.00 per child hunting eggs.



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#### Forthcoming Attractions.

1<sup>st</sup> April: 2.00 Easter Egg Hunt Rectory Grounds (£2)  
19<sup>th</sup> April: Christian Aid Supper 7.30 Jubilee Hall.  
27<sup>th</sup> April: Annual Parochial Church & Vestry Meetings 10.00 at St John's.  
5<sup>th</sup> May: The Bishop of Tonbridge will preside at our 9.30 & 11.00 services.  
8<sup>th</sup> June: 10.00-4.00 Deanery Quiet Day at Aylesford Priory. All welcome. No charge, but please indicate if you are coming.  
29<sup>th</sup> June: Bellringers' Outing.  
30<sup>th</sup> June: St Francis Strood 6.30 pm Evening Service & Refreshments: Sister Gillian invites us to join her in celebrating 25 years of ministry as a Church Army Sister.  
8<sup>th</sup> September: Preacher @ 9.30 & 11.00 The Archdeacon of Rochester.  
29<sup>th</sup> September: Confirmation at St Michael's 6.30 pm. Please see Rector if interested in being confirmed this year. Classes will begin early Summer.  
6<sup>th</sup> October: 6.30 Harvest Praise & Harvest Supper Jubilee Hall.

#### Spreading the Word.

If you think this magazine is interesting and good value for money, why not try and get some more subscribers? See if your neighbours would like to receive it regularly. Especially when new people move into your road or perhaps on to your existing magazine round introduce them to what we have on offer. Take a copy free from the church. If someone who receives the magazine moves away or dies, deliver a few copies to the new occupants of the house as a taster.



We think this magazine is a good way of communicating with the wider community and also it raises money for our parish. We have a reasonable circulation, but circulation inevitably declines from year to year unless we constantly renew our list of regular subscribers.

**Christian Aid**

A Division of The British Council of Churches



#### Spreading the Bread

Our annual Christian Aid Supper this year is in the Jubilee Hall from 7.00 pm on 19<sup>th</sup> April. We hope that Bishop James will be present and there will be a Christian Aid speaker (Emma Kevan, whom we know well). £7 includes a buffet meal. Christian Aid Week begins on 12<sup>th</sup> May and Shirley Crundwell would be very pleased to hear from you if you can help with the street collection. Spreading the Word and Spreading the Bread are very much what we are about as Christians!



Bluebell Wood Charity walk  
Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> April 10.00 am.

Meet Browndens Road car park for the sixth annual (4.2 miles, 2½ hr) walk. (A bus leaves Lower Halling at 9.10). Please bring your own refreshments. To sponsor online go to [www.justgiving/lawrybluebell](http://www.justgiving/lawrybluebell). For sponsor forms and more information about the walk, please call Patrick Lawry on 240892. For more information about the Eve Appeal, [www.eveappeal.org.uk](http://www.eveappeal.org.uk). Any cheques should be payable to The Eve Appeal. Over the last five years, just over £13,000 has been raised to support the gynaecological cancers research programme at University College, London.

St Michael's Draw: £10 each Gill. Bogg, Dorothy Taylor, Jack Joyce & Tom Cosford.

St John's Draw: £25 Mrs Parris (54, £10 each Mrs Crow (29) & Mr Pratt (97) – drawn by Mrs Hayward

Imagine

You're a soldier in a long, weary and deadly conflict. Your platoon is hunkered down in an old shell crater somewhere in the middle of a vast battlefield. The mists swirling above the cold ground and the smoke of a thousand guns conceal your exact position but you are only too aware that the manoeuvring of mighty armies has left your small band of brothers isolated and behind enemy lines. The screams of the dying and the low moans of those beyond hope mingle with the roar of the canon, the staccato chatter of the machine guns and the whine of flying shells and bullets. Periodically a percussive explosion indicates a direct hit or maybe a bomb or a mine. Your water bottles are nearly empty and your ration packs are almost all consumed. If you stay where you are, you will surely be found and killed. If you surrender, you will be the prisoners of the enemy for the duration of the war. If you could only break out of your hole, you might just, if you waited for dark, be able to find a way back behind your own lines, but there is an enemy machine gun post trained on the no man's land separating you from your compatriots. What can you do?

You get out the last of your rations, share what you've got and make the best of what will probably be your last meal together. Your corporal calls you all to listen up.

“As soon as the sun sets behind our lines, I'm going to charge that machine gun nest, when the light will be fading and they'll have the sun in their eyes. The moment I put it out of action, you lads break out and run for our lines. Don't stop for anything. Leave your kit. Don't look back. Just run for it.”

“But, Corp,” you object, “You'll never make it. Even if you succeed in putting that machine gun post out of action, you'll draw the attention of hundreds of the enemy, thousands. You'll never get out alive.”

“Anyone got a better idea?” says the corporal. There's an embarrassed silence. “This is your only chance,” he says. “If you've got any brains, you'll take it. You've just got to trust me.”

In a solemn moment it dawns on everyone that their corporal is about to sacrifice his life to save theirs. “Just one thing,” he says, as you are finishing up the common “feast” you'd made from the last of your rations, “When all this is over and you're all safe home with your wives and sweethearts, will you do just one thing to remember me? Will you meet up sometimes and share a meal together like this and try to remember me?”

Confirmation 2013 St Michael's

Bishop James will be holding a Confirmation at St. Michael's on 29<sup>th</sup> September at 6.30 pm. Those interested in being confirmed this year, please speak to the Rector. Classes will probably begin next Summer and involve reading one of the four gospels together as we consider what it means to be a Christian in terms of what we believe and how we act. Candidates are normally at least twelve years old but there is no upper limit. 29<sup>th</sup> September is also Michaelmas and BTCS. So a good opportunity for outreach.

ASB 1980: *Christians are formed by the way in which they pray, and the way they choose to pray expresses what they are.*

## From the Registers

### Baptism:

24<sup>th</sup> February

Ryan Ian Bird

Upnor

### Funerals:

18<sup>th</sup> February

Monica (Margaret) Hodges 82

Downsland House

7<sup>th</sup> March

Kim Arthur

Upper Halling

12<sup>th</sup> March

Edna Hilda Morgan (93)

formerly of Upper Bush

15<sup>th</sup> March

Shirley Georgina Houlan (83)

Bush Road



### Cuxton WI February

Bird watching for Beginners was the title of this month's talk and David Worcester certainly knew his stuff. He lives over in Burham and said that that morning he had been out for an hour or so and seen at least fifteen different species of birds. He showed large coloured pictures of birds and told us about their habitats, eating habits and how to look for their distinctive plumage. He surprised us by telling of different birds that we were not aware could be seen in our area. Ravens were flying around and he said that they seemed to really enjoy flying by turning and rolling as they flew and even flying upside down. Unfortunately he also told us of the many species that were now in serious decline. But, none the less an enjoyable and happy evening even if there were very few bird songs that we could recognise - perhaps we'll all try to listen a bit more carefully in future.

After all that it was business as usual and reports from all the reps who organise the various clubs

within the WI. We are all working hard at the moment as this year is the 95<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the WI movement and there will be a big two day celebration at the Friary in Aylesford later in the year. They want each WI to think up ten different classes venturing 95 items. We are making good progress with swimming 95 lengths, walking - up 95 steps, knitting Easter chicks, composing poems, cupcakes, collage photos, stories, table runners, etc. and one of our members is helping with the floral arrangements at the Friary.

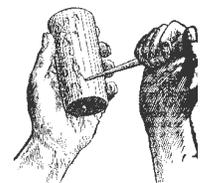
Then, we all came home a lot poorer as we are, as usual, fundraising to keep us going. So, soup lunches, 1p per step climbing, and teas will all cost us but will help us survive and I'm sure that I speak for all members when I say how very much the WI companionship affects us all and no way would we want it to have to stop. If you ever want to join us you are most welcome. Meetings at the Church Hall first Thursdays at 7 30pm. Sheila.

### Explanation and Apologies

Sorry that some months the WI report doesn't appear timely if that is a word. Cuxton WI meets on first Thursdays and our copy date is 8.00 am second Fridays. When a second Friday is the day after a first Thursday, a whole month and a day elapses before it is possible to obtain copy. Other organisations may suffer similarly for which I apologise. (The same is true of other village magazines.)



We used to have the same device on the cover every month. It was suggested that we ought to have a different design each month and that readers might contribute their own cover. So far only one has but we remain open to submissions from adults or children. Only line drawings or etchings reproduce satisfactorily. Normally I take the front cover from a book of Christian symbols, the web or a bible or prayer book. Sometimes



it is obvious what they are, sometimes not and a lot of people have asked me what the March cover was. To be honest, I couldn't remember as these are done yearly in advance in about November. Looking it up I see that it is an illustration of Jeremiah 17<sup>1-4</sup>, which means that the peoples' sins are indelibly written with an iron pen and a diamond nib on hearts that are given over to idolatry. Unless they repent and return to the one true God, they can neither escape sinning nor its consequences – an apt message for Lent. RIK.

The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond: it is graven upon the table of their heart, and upon the horns of your altars. Whilst their children remember their altars and their groves by the green trees upon the high hills. O my mountain in the field, I will give thy substance and all thy treasures to the spoil, and thy high places for sin, throughout all thy borders. And thou, even thyself, shalt discontinue from thy heritage that I gave thee; and I will cause thee to serve thine enemies in the land which thou knowest not: for ye have kindled a fire in mine anger, which shall burn for ever.

**Nature Notes February 2013**  
 "Eager Spring" Gordon Bottomley

Whirl ,snow ,on the blackbird's chatter;  
 You will not hinder his song to come.  
 East wind, Sleepless you cannot scatter  
 Quince-bud, almond-bud,  
 Little grape-hyacinth's  
 Clustering brood,  
 Nor unfurl the tips of the plum.  
 No half-born stalk of lily stops;  
 There is sap in the storm torn bush;  
 And, ruffled by gusts in a snow blurred copse,  
 "Pity to wait" says a thrush.

Love, there are few Springs left for us;  
 They go, and the count of them as they go  
 Makes surer the count that is left for us.  
 More than the East wind, more than the snow.  
 I would put back these hours that bring  
 Buds and bees and are lost;  
 I would hold the night and the frost,  
 To save for us one more Spring.

The 1<sup>st</sup> of the month is wet in the morning as rain falls steadily from a grey sky. I drive to Addington where the trees drip with rain and the fields are sodden with so much rain and snow. The skies begin to clear at mid-day and westerly winds blow. The sun shines brightly. It is still light at 5.00p.m. The 2<sup>nd</sup> is a blustery day with sunshine, and clouds being driven from the north. I hear birds singing in the trees as the sunlight warms the air, despite the northerly direction. Clouds thicken periodically through the afternoon when I walk to the village. On my return, I look at a sky of salmon pink brushed with some grey clouds. Cold, north winds continue to blow the next day.

On 5<sup>th</sup>, in the garden, long tailed tits throng to the feeders while a variety of birds visit the garden. The blue sky is brushed with white clouds and the air feels cold. There is some brightness the next day, but towards the late afternoon, billowing grey clouds trundle across the sky. As darkness falls, I hear the rooks cawing loudly as they come home to roost. On the morning of 8<sup>th</sup>, while the trees are bare, I can just see the river sparkling in the sunlight. High cloud drifts across the sky in cold northerly winds. Mist hangs over the fields across the water. There is frost on 9<sup>th</sup> and rain on 10<sup>th</sup> and the dreary conditions persist.

On the morning 11<sup>th</sup>, snow has formed a white carpet on the grass in the garden but the drive, pavement and road are clear. Snow showers fall during the day and cold northerly winds drive grey clouds across the sky. Despite the elements, I hear the strident call of a great tit. A variety of birds come to feed in the front

and back gardens. It remains wet and cold all day. On 14<sup>th</sup>, early grey clouds disperse to reveal sunshine and patches of blue surrounded by billowing clouds of white and grey. We drive to Bluewater where I walk with Murphy round the rippling lake. Westerly winds drive grey clouds across the sky full of grey clouds but with bursts of sunshine. Clumps of snowdrops bloom on the banks and hazels display fresh, green buds beside the catkins. Two black crows forage on the grass. Later, in the garden, I'm aware of slight warmth on my face. The early morning skies of 15<sup>th</sup> are bright with high cloud and some sunshine breaking through. Grey clouds gather at mid-day and there is a chill in the air but no rain falls. Birds come to feed and I watch them from the kitchen window: long tailed tits, a robin, great tits and dunnock. The morning of 16<sup>th</sup> feels as though Spring is in the air for beautiful birdsong accompanies my walk to the village. Skies are filled with high, grey cloud but it is bright. Long tailed tits flock to the feeders and feral pigeons gorge on seed. Before darkness falls in the evening, I observe a pink glow in the sky after the sun has set and it is beautiful. On 18<sup>th</sup>, the sun rises over Bluebell Hill and lights up the pale blue sky. Birds hop among the bare lilac branches and green holly and as the morning progresses, birdsong is heard. I walk round the lake at Bluewater with Murphy. Snowdrops are beautiful in the sunlight and now crocuses and daffodils are beginning to bloom. I see some daisies and a single dandelion. The sun continues to shine throughout the afternoon then, as the light fades in the late afternoon, there is a beautiful sunset and the sky is suffused with salmon pink cloud. On the

morning of 19<sup>th</sup> the countryside is grey with fog and the grass is sprayed with frost. The fog eventually disperses to reveal clear blue skies from which beams golden sunshine. Along the M2 golden gorse blooms on the banks. On our return from walking Murphy, I watch a large bumble bee flying near the west facing wall of the bungalow. It has found some warmth. After beautiful sunshine on the afternoon of 20<sup>th</sup>, the 21<sup>st</sup> is grey and very cold with easterly winds blowing. I walk round the lake at Bluewater with Murphy and the cold air envelops us, not a pleasant feeling. Ripples appear on the water where a lone coot glides and last year's reeds, now straw coloured, wave in the wind. The afternoon remains grey with flurries of snow forecast. We experience snow flurries during the following three days when skies are grey and it is bitterly cold. On 26<sup>th</sup> I notice hazel buds beginning to

burst, a sure sign of Spring. The evenings are slowly drawing out. During the day there has been melodious birdsong with a specially loud, strident cloud from a great tit. The morning of 27<sup>th</sup> is cold and grey but dry. I feed the birds before breakfast. Later, I walk to the village when I listen to birdsong and again the great tit's song is vibrant. The afternoon skies lighten and there is some pale sunshine and blue sky. I watch birds feeding in the garden. The final day of the month is grey and cold but dry. Spring is on hold but the garden tells its story, for crocuses, snowdrops, primroses, violets and elephants ears are in bloom. I feed the birds and am rewarded by the number of them that come to the garden. I watch them from the kitchen window. They are all so fascinating to watch especially the long tailed tits. Another month closes as more grey days are forecast. Elizabeth Summers.

### Women's World Day of Prayer

On Friday 1st March we held our Women's World Day of Prayer service at St John's church. It is the only service of the year when members of both churches and chapels in the two villages get to worship together and is very much enjoyed. It is a great feeling, that we are doing the same thing as millions of other women and men are doing all over the world on the same day. This year the women of France put the service together the theme being "I was a stranger and you welcomed me". It really did make you think, knowing how many different nationalities there are in our country today, but there are no strangers, just people we have never met before. After the service we were able to socialize with one another although none of us were strangers, but were able to enjoy the French bread, butter and cheeses, sorry no wine, just a good cup of coffee or tea. Thanks to all my little helpers for preparing and clearing up afterwards, We collected over £60 for the work of the WWDP movement. Next year the women of Egypt are preparing the service, and our meeting is going to be organized by the ladies at Cuxton chapel as a new venture. We will definitely have to have SANDwiches for refreshments. Phyllis.



### Halling WI

Our March meeting was well attended, but our chairman was indisposed. So we muddled on without her and all went well. After Jerusalem, and the minutes of the previous meeting, Ann dealt with the correspondence. Once again the rounds of parties and activities start, beetle drive, fashion shows, annual days so many you can't keep up with them all, or I can't. Money wise we keep our heads above water. Thanks to Betty Head for her excellent bookkeeping. our speaker for the evening was Mr John Mills, no, not the famous actor. Mr Mills was going to talk about "How things have changed in our lifetime". It wasn't quite what some of our members were expecting, quite controversial, and we could have gone on longer than we did. The changes were mainly about people, how children behave, how we react to one another and how respect has mainly gone out with the dishwasher, and we don't

react with our neighbours as we once did. Perhaps it is easier in the villages than in the towns, but even here people move around so much these days. Nobody settles any where for long. It is quite difficult to get to know newcomers. If only people would join W.I. or come to church! We seem to do O.K. It was my job to thank Mr Mills and only on that day, my four year old great-granddaughter told me she was going to have an I pad for her next birthday. What's an I pad? (I do know). The flower of the month was won by Ann Hayward with a perfect *Iris reticulata*, named Katherine Hodgeskin. Something beginning with the letter L was won with my little hurricane lamp. I suppose we did used to rely on them for light in the distant past. It was a good choice but we did have a goodly assortment of objects.

Next month it's the letter M. Lots of things begin with that letter, but don't bring too much Money. Our speaker for March will be Mrs Julie Pennell.

Her talk, a bit connected with this month "Share your memories, don't lose them". Jemma Graves has volunteered to take over the secretary's job in May. Perhaps I should have started this report

with this fact as it is the best piece of news we have had so far this year. Thank you Jemma, and thank you Ann. Phyllis



### 101 Great Ideas for Growing Healthy Churches by John Nelson, Anton Müller & Michael Lofthouse

[www.themothersunion.org](http://www.themothersunion.org) is a book co-edited by a member of our congregation and will form the basis of the discussion at our April Mothers' Union meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> at 10.45 am in the church hall led by Michael and the Rector. This is such an interesting and important subject that the meeting will be an open meeting to which every interested person is invited. Hope to see you there. If you type the book title into a search engine, you will see how you can purchase your own copy if you wish to.

### **Cuxton Community Infant School News**

Dear Friends of our School,

We recently celebrated Book Week at school, and our theme this year was poetry and rhymes. All the children enjoyed listening to poems read by staff, and also from two visiting librarians from Strood Library. The children were busy during this week completing different poetry work, including changing and finishing poems and writing some wonderful poems of their own. Our special week ended with the children dressing up as Nursery Rhyme characters, and we had a variety come into school that day including Little Boy Blue, Ladybird Ladybird, Old King Cole, Incy Wincy Spider, Polly Put the Kettle On, and the Grand Old Duke of York to name just a few!

As a part of our Religious Education work in school we are required to teach the children about the different world religions. One of the religions that we look at is the Jewish faith. Our older children in Years 1 and 2 recently combined a trip to the Guildhall Museum in Rochester to look at their old toys with a visit to the Synagogue in Chatham. The children enjoyed our trip greatly, and were pleased to be able to see all the different aspects of the synagogue that they had been learning about in school. The awe and wonder in the children's faces whilst they were in the synagogue was a delight to see.

This term we have some class assemblies to look forward to, and by the time you read this we will have celebrated Mother's Day with a special assembly performed by the children for their mums. Still to come is the annual Egg Rolling competition on the last day of term. All children take part and roll a decorated hardboiled egg to see which one goes furthest. Each child receives a chocolate egg, with the winner in each class receiving a £10 book voucher this year. Our thanks go as always to the FCS for organising these extra treats for our children.

That's all our news for now, Sandra Jones, Head teacher.

### Halling Historical Society

The next meeting will be held on April 18<sup>th</sup> at the Jubilee Hall Upper Halling at 7.30 pm. Visitors are welcome. The speaker will be Dr Frank Andrews and the subject: *Scandal in Sandwich* – the 1880 election bribery case.

### Commercial Ethics?

A man walks into a bar and the barman thinks, *he looks like a right mug*, and charges him £10 per pint for the whole evening. The next night, the man sticks his head round the door and says, *I'm not drinking here anymore. Beer's only £3.50 down the road*. The barman says, *OK, from now on I'll only charge you £3 per pint only don't switch to another pub*. Or you go into your usual greengrocers and ask for half a dozen of those nice oranges on sale at 30p each. *Sorry*, he says, *that's an introductory offer for new customers. For regulars like you oranges are 37p each*. Do these two examples seem outrageous to you? Then how do power companies and insurance companies get away with behaving like this? And why do we let them?

Hymn Writers by John Bogg - Cecil Frances Alexander -1823 – 1895

*Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them,  
for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (Matthew Chapter 19, verse 14)*

I have leapt into the middle of the nineteenth century for my next hymn writer whose words and poetry mean so very much, especially to children. Cecil Frances Alexander instinctively knew that children loved poetry and could easily memorise stories in the Bible using poems and songs, and the majority of her Christian output helped make the scriptures more understandable in a more modern medium than the language used in the King James Bible. Excellent though that translation is, it is old-fashioned (especially by today's standard) which meant that especially children (as well as many adults) would often not be able to understand fully the stories and truths contained there. Cecil used a language that was clear, but not childish nor condescending. Many of her poems set out the profound truths of the Christian faith, often based on the catechism and Apostles Creed, in a way loved by children and adults alike. Cecil Frances Alexander began to write poetry from the age of nine. Fearing her father, a stern military officer, would disapprove, she hid her poems under the carpet in her bedroom. One day he discovered them but to her surprise and obvious delight, he gave her a box in which to keep them and, on Sunday evenings opened the box and read her new poems aloud, making helpful comments. He was extremely encouraging and this gave her a sound basis from which to write more. Some of her best hymns were written before she was twenty and five years later she published a volume of hymns for children that is arguably un-equalled. In 1850 she married William Alexander, a parish priest who was destined to become a Bishop and then Archbishop of Ireland. In early married life they served a parish in a poor, impoverished rural community. In his book 'The Story of Christian Hymnody', E E Ryden tells how Cecil went "from one poor house to another, from one bed of sickness to another, from one sorrow to another, she went. Christ was ever with her and in her, and all felt her influence." She later gave the profits from her hymnbook to support work with handicapped children in the north of Ireland. Shortly before he died, her husband rightly remarked that he would be remembered only as the husband of the woman who wrote "There is a Green Hill Far Away". Although he occupied an important position in the church, time showed that he was right, and although they might not know her name, they do know and love her hymns which are still regularly sung in church today. As a child, I always found the concept of "without a city wall" a difficult one. Why did a hill need a city wall round it and why didn't it have one? Of course, I hadn't realised that the word "without" in the context of the poetry meant "outside". One evening, I was driving south from Canterbury when a village sign came out of the darkness – THANNINGTON WITHOUT. Underneath, in felt-tipped pen someone, perhaps with a highly charged sense of humour, had written in similar sized letters GIRLS. Obviously I was not the only one who didn't understand the meaning. Two other hymns that are famously linked to the previous "Green Hill" are the outstanding "Once in Royal David's City" and the exquisite "All Things Bright and Beautiful" all of which are frequently used in our parish but undoubtedly across the spectrum of different branches of the Christian Church and will continue to be sung where respect for the Bible still exists and the praise of God is paramount. Mrs Alexander also wrote "Jesus Calls Us O'er the Tumult" based on St Andrew's calling and speaks to us when life's troubles and hardships need to be overcome. Cecil Frances Alexander died at the age of seventy-two and rests in Londonderry Cathedral. When her husband died sixteen years later, the congregation at his funeral sang "There is a Green Hill". The French composer Charles Gounod considered this to be as near perfect a hymn as ever was, with simplicity its great beauty –

*There is a green hill far away without a city wall  
Where the dear Lord was crucified, who died to save us all.*

During the twentieth century, James Alfred Wight, a country veterinarian writing under the pen-name James Herriot, used the refrain of All Things Bright and Beautiful as the titles to four books about his life working in Thirsk between the Yorkshire Dales and Yorkshire Moors, painting a humorous, sometimes sad, story of his life caring for animals and the people who looked after them. All Creatures Great and Small was instantly recognised as a classic when it was first published just as Mrs Alexander's poetry was when it came to the public's attention over a hundred years earlier.

*Each little flow'r that opens, Each little bird that sings,  
He made their glowing colours, He made their tiny wings.  
Yes, all things bright and beautiful, All creatures great and small,  
All things wise and wonderful, The Lord God made them all.*

The Annunciation

This year Gabriel's visit to Mary to her inform her that she will be the mother of Jesus is celebrated on 8<sup>th</sup> April. We are all invited to celebrate with the Mothers' Union at St Michael's at 11.00. Here follow some thoughts on the Annunciation.

One Christmas at the Service of Nine Lesson and Carols, it was a former midwife who read the Gospel of the Annunciation. I asked her afterwards how she would have reacted if one of her patients had come up with a story like Mary's? She said that she would have sent the patient to me. So what do we make of this story? Is it something to enjoy only while we are in church and among our Christian friends? Would we be sceptical if we were told that something like this had happened in the real world? It is hard to believe in a virgin birth. Cynics would prefer to believe that there was some other much more earthly reason why Mary gave birth to a child who was not Joseph's. Or, more charitably, they might want to insist that the child was in fact Joseph's as well as Mary's. But the miracle of the Virgin Birth is as nothing compared with the miracle of the Incarnation. Virgin birth or parthenogenesis is not so uncommon in the animal world. Many creatures normally produce young without mating and some animals, which ordinarily mate can, in certain circumstances, give birth parthenogenetically. Apart from Mary, no human mother has ever been known to give birth to a baby without a human father, but it is not, in principle impossible, although, in fact, such a baby would have to be a daughter, because the Y chromosome, which makes a man, can only come from the father's side. A human virgin birth is not, however, inconceivable, if you will forgive the pun. What is almost unbelievable is the Incarnation, the fact that Almighty God, Who made heaven and earth and sustains everything that there is, effectively became a human child.

Our God, heaven cannot hold him,  
Nor earth sustain;  
Heaven and earth shall flee away  
When he comes to reign:  
In the bleak midwinter  
A stable place sufficed  
The Lord God Almighty,  
Jesus Christ.

Angels and archangels  
May have gathered there,  
Cherubim and seraphim  
Thronged the air  
But only his mother  
In her maiden bliss  
Worshipped the beloved  
With a kiss.

*Certum est quia impossibile est*, said Tertullian, which means, It is certain because it is impossible. It is at the limits of our understanding that God is. It is almost unbelievable that God became man. If we can believe that He did, that the Word was made flesh, that He emptied Himself and took the form of a servant, and became obedient even to death on the cross, no other miracle is impossible. It is not incredible that He was born of a virgin and that He rose from the dead or that He healed the sick and walked on water, or even that He empowered His followers to work miracles too, if we can only believe that God is and that the Son of Mary is the Son of God. What we are asked to believe, what we are invited to believe, is that God is so far intimate with His world. The eternal and spiritual permeate the temporal and material. Indeed it is the spiritual which sustains the material and the temporal exists within the eternal. I do not say that miracles are common. In fact, the Birth of Jesus is unique. I do not expect that there will be any more human virgin births. I do not expect many miraculous healings or raisings of the dead or nature miracles, but I could not say either that they are impossible or that they never happen. It is not unreasonable to pray in faith for a miracle. It is unreasonable to demand one. These things are by the grace of God and are beyond our understanding. I would say this, however. Mary encountered God in this world and so may we. I do not expect that any of us will ever see an angel, though it is not impossible and some of us might, but God is always with us and we ought to be ready to encounter Him. We should be ready to welcome Him. The Incarnation teaches us that God is always present in our world. At the beginning of these thoughts I asked you of the Annunciation, Is it something to enjoy only while we are in church and among our Christian friends? Would we be sceptical if we were told that something like this had happened in the real world? But I made a false distinction. There is no real world as opposed to the world of the spirit we encounter in Church. The Church is in the real world and, if we are Christians, we interpret the world outside the Church, the world of shopping and work and socialising, in the light of the eternal gospel. What is real is what is of God and what is farther from God can only be understood in terms of what is nearer to Him. We seek God in the world and He graciously reveals Himself to us. Sometimes, as with St Paul or the prophet Jonah, He makes Himself known to us when we are trying to get away from Him. But Jesus says, *Seek and ye shall find*. The more normal route to God is to seek Him. *For he that cometh to God must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*. I attended a meeting of the Rochester Theological Society. The speaker explained that very few people outside the Church read the Bible at all, unless they leaf through the Gideon Bible when they are bored in a hotel bedroom. Even more shockingly, he said, most Christians seldom read the Bible and, when they do, they seek only comfort and guidance and the confirmation of their prejudices. They hardly read the Old Testament, except perhaps the odd favourite psalm, or indeed much of the New Testament. We have lost the sense that the Bible is transformative. We find the Bible off-putting and dull because we do not expect to encounter God in its pages. We don't expect to be challenged by Him, to wrestle with Him, to be transformed by Him. So we don't read the Bible and we don't recommend it to other people. Yet the Bible is God's written Word and bears witness to Jesus the Word

made flesh. Nearly 2,000 years ago the Christian thinker Origen taught that, when we read the Bible, the Word of God is reaching out from its pages seeking us, just as we are seeking Jesus as we search the Scriptures. *The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.* I think we could give similar reasons for the fact that non-Christians regard the Church as irrelevant and that many Christians hardly pray or ever take part in public worship. The same thing could probably be said of our approach to public worship, to prayer and to the Sacraments as can be said of our attitude to the Bible. We do not expect to meet God in Holy Communion or in prayer or in the fellowship of the Church. We don't expect to be challenged by God, to wrestle with Him, to be transformed by Him. So worship, prayer and Bible reading don't mean much to us and it isn't hard to give up on prayer, except when we are in trouble, to push our Bibles to one side when we are so very busy, and to stay away from public worship unless it pleases us or entertains us more than the other things we might be doing on a Sunday morning. We don't expect to encounter God. We don't expect to be challenged by Him. We don't expect to be transformed by Him. But Mary did and was. If the story of the Incarnation is true for Mary, then it is true for us also. God is there for us. He is in the world today. May our hearts be open to receive Him! If we encounter God, God will transform us. If we are transformed, other people will encounter God. Thus and only thus will the Church in this land recover and fulfil her vocation as the people of God. May our hearts be open to receive Him so that we may know His transforming power and fulfil our vocation as His people!

Prevent us, O Lord, in all our doings with thy most gracious favour, and further us with thy continual help; that in all our works begun, continued and ended in thee, we may glorify thy holy Name, and finally by thy mercy obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



#### Max's Tail Piece

Master got into a lot of trouble last month because he didn't find any room in the magazine for me. He says he gave me a whole page in February, but that isn't the point. He has the whole magazine to write in and lots of people say they read my piece first and like it best! In February I was talking about just how far dogs will go for their love of human beings. Since I wrote that more research has been published which suggests almost that we can read your minds. Certainly we are attentive people watchers. We notice every sign you make, every word, every gesture in an effort to anticipate what you are going to do next and how it will affect us dogs. The researchers observe that it is quite something even to recognise that a creature of another species has a mind, let alone to attempt to read it. Only people and dogs can do it. Maybe?!

But there is a simpler explanation, you will be relieved to hear. Apparently, dogs just want to be loved by human beings. It is claimed that if you make a fuss of a lost or stray dog he will form a bond with you in as little as fifteen minutes. We just want to be loved and a lot of you want to love us.

Let me give you an example. Quite often when we turn homeward in the woods Master lets me off my lead. I like then to run on ahead. I know he doesn't really like me out of his sight. So I walk quite fast on the bendy bits of the pathway and leave him behind and then really speed up when he can't see me any more. So he gets to the long straight bits and there is no longer any sign of me. He doesn't worry too much, however, because he knows that when I come to the gate at the top of the field I can't get through it and I have to wait for him.

Or so he thought until a couple of weeks ago. I'd left him way behind and when he got to the gate, there was no sign of me. I now can get under it! (The vet says I have lost weight, but I don't think that's the reason. Just feed me more biscuits.) Didn't he panic? He thought I must have wandered off the pathway and retraced our steps for at least a mile. I was probably waiting just the other side of the gate, but he didn't know that. He shouted himself hoarse and it was about three quarters of an hour before I trotted back for him and we met on the path, me with a puzzled expression on my face, him with a mighty relieved one. It was getting dark and he didn't know what to do, keep looking in the woods or check whether I had gone to church or gone home to find him. I'm now much more careful not to let him out of my sight! I always go back to him anyway if I meet another dog I'm afraid of – most of them – or wait for him when I get thorns tangled in my long hair. It's his job to get them out! So I'm all for the human/canine mutual love partnership thing! It's good for me and it's good for him. Max, the Rectory Spaniel.