

Services at St Michael and All Angels Cuxton		
1 st December Advent Sunday (Year A) Gift Service	9.30 Family Communion	Isaiah 2 vv 1-5 p686 Romans 13 vv 11-14 p1140 Matthew 24 vv 36-44 p994
8 th December Advent 2	9.30 Holy Communion	Isaiah 11 vv 1-10 p696 Romans 15 vv 1-13 p1141 Matthew 3 vv 1-12 p967
15 th December Advent 3	8.00 Holy Communion	Epistle & Gospel BCP Advent 3
	9.30 Holy Communion	Isaiah 35 vv 1-10 p719 James 5 vv 7-10 p1216 Matthew 11 vv 2-19 p976
22 nd December Advent 4	9.30 Holy Communion	Isaiah 7 vv 10-16 p692 (Read from King James Bible?) Romans 1 vv 1-7 p1128 Matthew 1 vv 18-25 p966
	6.30 Nine Lessons and Carols	
24 th December Christmas Eve	5.00 Crib Service	
	11.00 Midnight Mass	Isaiah 52 vv 7-10 p739 Hebrews 1 vv 1-12 p1201 John 1 vv 1-14 p1063
25 th December Christmas Day	9.30 Family Communion	Isaiah 9 vv 2-7 p693 Luke 2 vv 1-14 p1027
29 th December Christmas 1	9.30 Holy Communion	Isaiah 63 vv 7-9 p749 Hebrews 2 vv 10-18 p1202 Matthew 2 vv 13-23 p966
5 th January Christmas 2	9.30 Family Communion	Jeremiah 31 vv 7-14 p791 Ephesians 1 vv 1-14 p1173 John 1 vv 10-18 p1062
Monday 6 th January Epiphany	9.30 Holy Communion & Brunch in Church Hall	Isaiah 60 vv 1-6 p746 Matthew 2 vv 1-12 p966
12 th January Baptism of Christ	9.30 Holy Communion	Isaiah 42 vv 1-9 p727 Acts 10 vv 34-43 p1104 Matthew 3 vv 13-17 p967
19 th January Epiphany 2	8.00 Holy Communion	Epistle & Gospel Epiphany 2 BCP
	9.30 Holy Communion	Isaiah 49 vv 1-7 p735 I Corinthians 1 vv 1-9 p1144 John 1 vv 29-42 p1064
26 th January Epiphany 3	9.30 Holy Communion	Isaiah 9 vv 1-7 p693 I Corinthians 1 vv 10-18 p1144 Matthew 4 vv 12-23
Services at St John the Baptist Halling & the Jubilee Hall Upper Halling		
1 st December Advent Sunday (Year A) Gift Service	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	Isaiah 52 vv 1-12 p739 Matthew 24 vv 15-28 p993
	11.00 Holy Communion	Isaiah 2 vv 1-5 p686 Romans 13 vv 11-14 p1140 Matthew 24 vv 36-44 p994
8 th December Advent 2	11.00 Holy Communion	Isaiah 11 vv 1-10 p696 Romans 15 vv 1-13 p1141 Matthew 3 vv 1-12 p967
	5.30 Evening Prayer Jubilee Hall	I Kings 18 vv 17-39 p359 John 1 vv 19-28 p1063
15 th December Advent 3	11.00 Holy Communion & Stop! Look! Listen!	Isaiah 35 vv 1-10 p719 James 5 vv 7-10 p1216 Matthew 11 vv 2-19 p976
22 nd December Advent 4	11.00 Holy Communion	Isaiah 7 vv 10-16 p692 (Read from King James Bible?) Romans 1 vv 1-7 p1128 Matthew 1 vv 18-25 p966
	3.00 Carol Service & Christingle, Crib Service & Nativity	
25 th December Christmas Day	8.00 Holy Communion	Hebrews 1 vv 1-12 p1201 John 1 vv 1-14 p1063

29 th December Christmas 1	11.00 Holy Communion	Isaiah 63 vv 7-9 p749 Hebrews 2 vv 10-18 p1202 Matthew 2 vv 13-23 p966
5 th January Christmas 2	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	Colossians 1 vv 1-14 p1182 Matthew 2 vv 13-23 p966
	11.00 Holy Communion	Jeremiah 31 vv 7-14 p791 Ephesians 1 vv 1-14 p1173 John 1 vv 10-18 p1062
12 th January Baptism of Christ	11.00 Holy Communion	Isaiah 42 vv 1-9 p727 Acts 10 vv 34-43 p1104 Matthew 3 vv 13-17 p967
	5.30 Evening Prayer Jubilee Hall	Joshua 3 vv 1-17 p217 Hebrews 1 vv 1-12 p1201
19 th January Epiphany 2	11.00 Holy Communion & Stop! Look! Listen!	Isaiah 49 vv 1-7 p735 I Corinthians 1 vv 1-9 p1144 John 1 vv 29-42 p1064
26 th January Epiphany 3	11.00 Holy Communion	Isaiah 9 vv 1-7 p693 I Corinthians 1 vv 10-18 p1144 Matthew 4 vv 12-23

Holy Communion Wednesdays at 9.30 at St Michael's.		Holy Communion Thursdays at 9.30 at St John's.	
4 th December	Isaiah 25 vv 6-10 Matthew 15 vv 29-37	5 th December	Isaiah 26 vv 1-6 Matthew 7 vv 21-27
11 th December Ember Day	Isaiah 40 vv 25-31 Matthew 11 vv 28-30	12 th December	Isaiah 41 vv 13-20 Matthew 11 vv 11-15
18 th December	Jeremiah 23 vv 5-8 Mathew 1 vv 18-24	19 th December	Judges 13 vv 1-25 Luke 1 vv 5-25
25 th December Christmas Day	Isaiah 9 vv 2-7 p693 Luke 2 vv 1-14 p1027	26 th December St Stephen	Acts 7 vv 51-60 Matthew 10 vv 17-22
1 st January Naming & Circumcision of Jesus	Galatians 4 vv 4-7 Luke 2 vv 15-21	2 nd January	I John 2 vv 22-28 John 1 vv 19-28
8 th January	I John 4 vv 7-10 Mark 6 vv 34-44	9 th January	I John 4 vv 11-18 Mark 6 vv 45-52
15 th January	I Samuel 3 vv 1-20 Mark 1 vv 29-39	16 th January	I Samuel 4 vv 1-11 Mark 1 vv 40-45
22 nd January	I Samuel 17 vv 1-58 Mark 3 vv 1-6	23 rd January	I Samuel 18 vv 6 – 19 vv 7 Mark 3 vv 7-12
29 th January	II Samuel 7 vv 4-17 Mark 4 vv 1-20	30 th January Charles King & Martyr	II Samuel 7 vv 18-29 Mark 4 vv 21-25

From December 27th – 31st, there will be Holy Communion daily at 9.30 at St Michael's and no other weekday services.
The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity runs 18th – 25th January, which is Conversion of St Paul – HC 8.00 St Michael's.

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Copy Date February Magazine 10th January 8.30
Rectory.

10th January has a significance for us at Cuxton in that it was the date on which in 1645 our former rector, William Laud, was beheaded. He does not seem to have spent much time at Cuxton but was an important actor on the national stage. He promoted education and church discipline. He could also, however, be a cruel man and he was a controversial figure in the period of the Civil War, encouraging Charles I not to give into the demands of parliament who impeached and executed him by bill of attainder.



The Most Important Thing in the World

If God exists, that fact matters more than anything. There are many reasons why it makes sense to believe in God, but, if God is Whom we believe Him to be, the only way we could know Him would be if He were to make Himself known to us. He does make Himself known to us in Jesus Christ. It is therefore possible to know God by faith and to know God is to have eternal life. The Son of God is born in our world at Christmas. If we believe in God, our faith matters to us more than anything else.

If we know this it is imperative that we share this Good News. God is manifest not just to us but to the whole world. Christ is not just for the Christians. Jesus is the One for all the nations. We celebrate this fact at Epiphany – the 6th January.

This year Epiphany falls on a Monday and we are celebrating with Holy Communion at 9.30 am at St Michael's followed by brunch in the church hall. Why not come along and bring all your friends?

A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to you all. Roger.

From the Registers

Baptisms:

13 th October	Will Leo Saunders	Higham
27 th October	Harrison William Bryant	Vicarage Road
3 rd November	Emma Sophie Smith	Gillingham
	Leo David Smith	Gillingham
	Noah William Smith	Gillingham

Funeral:

1 st November	Iris May Bailey (89)	James Road
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The Great War - More than Just Names

William George Simmonds

1. Born May 1884 at Hills Cottages, Maidstone. Son of William and Hannah (formerly Tuff).
2. 1887 William's mother died whilst they were living at Square Hill, Maidstone.
3. 1891 William and his father had moved in with his grandparents at Melville Road, Maidstone.
4. Sometime before 1901 William's father had re-married to Ellen and moved to Union Place, Maidstone. William's profession was a Rope Walk Labourer. It also appears that through the re-marriage of his father he had gained some stepsisters.
5. On 12 Sept 1903 at the age of 19 William married Laura Elizabeth Humphrey at St Luke's church, Maidstone. The marital home was Wheeler Street, Maidstone. William's occupation at the time was a Factory Hand.
6. By 1911 William was living at Jupps Cottages in Cuxton with his wife and four children (George, Daisy, William and Lillian). Again William's occupation was registered as a labourer at the Cattle Cake Works.
7. In Early 1915, William was called up to serve in WW1. William was assigned to the 1st Battalion Queens Own (Royal West Kent Regiment). On the 22nd of April 1915 William was at Southampton ready for departure to France and by 24th April he had arrived.
- 8? On Sunday 4th July 1915 at the age of 31 William was killed in action somewhere near Ypres. He was laid to rest at Voormezeelle Enclosure, Ieper, and West — Vlaanderen, Belgium.

C.S. Lewis recalling the period when he was an atheist: "Nearly all that I loved I believed to be imaginary; nearly all that I believed to be real I thought grim and meaningless."

After his conversion, "For me reason is the natural organ of truth, but imagination is the organ of meaning."

"I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen, not only because I see it but because by it I see everything else."



Christmas Coffee Morning

Don't miss our Annual Christmas Coffee Morning in the Church Hall on 14th December – 10.00 – 12.30. All are welcome to partake in refreshments which include Beaney's second to none mince pies. Santa Claus will be there. Also a tombola (prize every time), produce stall, woollens stall, a hamper raffle, and others, plus our friends with the life boat stall.

Forthcoming Attractions.

30th November 7.30 pm: Ukulele Concert Church Hall.

14th December 10.00: Christmas Coffee Morning & Minimarket Cuxton Church Hall.

6th January 2014: 9.30 am Epiphany Service at St Michael's followed by brunch in church hall.

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St Michael's Draw: £10 each for Jack Payne, John Jones, Gill Bogg, and £5 each for Jan Cheesmer and Bert & Ann Pentecost – drawn by David Joyce.

Contact Jeanne Harris to subscribe.

St John's Draw: £5 each to Mrs Thorne (3), Mr Tower (146), Miss Crowhurst (158) & Mrs Clark (180) – drawn by Mrs Baker.

Contact Betty Head to subscribe.

Nature Notes October 2013

"The Wren" Anonymous

The little Wren of tender mind,
To every other bird is kind;
It ne'er to mischief bends its will,
But sings and is good-humoured still.
Who'er has mixed in childish play
Must sure have heard the children say,

"The Robin and the Jenny Wren
Are God Almighty's cock and hen".
Hence 'tis from all respect they meet,
Hence all in kindly manner treat;
For none would use with disrespect,
Whom Heaven thinks proper to protect.

The early morning sunshine of 1st gives way to grey skies as I walk round the lake at Bluewater with Murphy. The water ripples in the westerly breeze. More trees are showing signs of Autumn especially hazels, limes and horse chestnuts. By the car parking area near the lake I see, in the hedges, hips, haws, dogwood berries, spindle berries and holly berries. Such is the skill of hedge planting for these berries feature within a few yards of each other. Heavy rain has fallen during the night and into the early morning of 2nd. It remains grey all day but no more rain falls. The sun breaks through in the afternoon. A feral pigeon and a white dove have a fight; the pigeon started it! Morning skies of 3rd are grey after some early sunshine as I walk round the rippling lake at Bluewater where a coot glides. A westerly wind blows. Rain begins to fall at mid-day and it is quite hard by

the time we reach home. Fungi had grown along the grassy paths and clumps of grass sparkled in the sunshine. Later, at home, I watch a dragonfly as it hovers across the garden. Warm days follow and the 7th is beautiful with golden sunshine and blue skies brushed with cloud. I walk up the church path and across the fields to Mays Wood. Bees gather nectar from ivy flowers and hips and haws and spindle berries have ripened. New catkins have formed on hazels where I see sparkling spiders' webs, while old man's beard straddles the hedgerows. Bristly ox tongue, dandelions, bell flowers, pink clover, ground ivy and red and white dead nettle bloom. Blackberries are still in evidence but not many sloes. Hawthorn leaves are changing colour, likewise the spindles. A clump of mallow peeps out below a hawthorn. The wych elms' leaves are also changing colour. I walk into

Mays Wood which feels chill after the warmth of the fields and silence reigns. Later, I gaze across Dean Valley where sheep are grazing and I listen to a magpie's call. Ash keys have ripened on their branches. I skirt the ploughed field, discover herb robert then return home across the fields where I can see the sparkling river.

On 10th I go to Margate and the Turner contemporary gallery with a friend. Grey clouds march across a pale blue sky. The tide races in and by the afternoon, huge waves are pounding against the sea walls sending white spray high into the air. It is a magnificent display of nature's strength. A few hours earlier, white horses were to be seen on the blue/green water. The wind is very strong and we are almost blown over as we battled our way along the street. Later, as we are coming home, there are beautiful colours in the sky - the setting sun and billowing clouds produce blue, gold, salmon pink and grey. It is a day to remember.. North winds blow on 11th. The 12th is a beautiful day when I walk to the village then return through the wood. I hear the strident call of a great tit. In the garden dragonflies hover across the grass and a robin comes looking for seed. In the evening, a misty half-moon hangs in the sky. The next day, in church, I watch a peacock butterfly as it hovers over us in the choir. We always have at least one such lovely creature at this time of the year. On 15th there is a definite chill in the air. Rain falls during the morning of 16th soon after I have walked to the church hall. I notice the first tinting of leaves on a sycamore and a silver birch tree. The rain increases into the afternoon but later the sun shines from a clear blue sky. A bright moon shines in the night sky. After early greyness on 17th, the sun shines warmly from a blue, cloud-brushed sky. I feed the birds then watch a squirrel feeding. It has jumped from the lilac tree; then sits stock still watching me. The next day, while at Bluewater, I notice that the tall grasses have been cut leaving dry seeds to be foraged by the crows. There

are beautiful colours in the trees and shrubs along the banks and up the sides of the chalk cliffs. Grey clouds build up in the sky covering the sun then brightness returns in the afternoon when birds come to feed. There are a few days of unsettled weather. In the early evening of 22nd, I watch rooks dipping and diving overhead as they fly home to roost. Their loud cawing fills the air. Heavy rain falls during the night, continuing into the next morning and blustery winds blow. Eventually the rain ceases, clouds disperse and the sun shines. The morning skies of 24th are clear and I watch a golden sunrise over Bluebell Hill. White clouds begin to drift across from the west and the air feels quite warm. Birds sing melodiously. I cut the grass and plant some bulbs. On 25th I walk round the lake at Bluewater with Murphy when grey, billowing clouds drift across from the west. However, blue sky is eventually revealed and the sun shines. The wind is warm and the grass sparkles in the sunlight which also lights up the beauty of the trees. and their Autumn colours. I come across a mound of small fungi as large as a mole hill. I find it fascinating. Dogwood flowers are in bloom. On 27th, after early morning blue skies, the wind strengthens. Strong winds are forecast so I clear away the bird feeders, tie down the garden bench cover and make sure that nothing can be blown away. Strong winds blow during the night and some heavy rain falls but we escape the severity of the storm which has caused flooding and brought down trees in other parts of the country. The day becomes sunny with blue skies across which billowing clouds march. The wind remains blustery. The air is quite cold on 29th as the sun rises into clear blue skies. We drive to Bluewater where I walk with Murphy. A grebe glides on the lake which ripples in the North West wind and I am reminded that Winter is on its way. The storm has moved on to Northern Europe. The next day, when the sun feels quite warm, I replenish the bird feeders. The last day of the month is damp and grey. A squirrel performs acrobatics as it attempts to feed on the nuts. It is successful. Elizabeth Summers.



Halling WI

Calamity! Calamity! In all the years I have been writing these W.I. reports, I have never lost my notes - until now.

This is what my poor old brain can remember. We were few and far between with regards our members in October, but it all looked very intriguing when I arrived. Obviously we were going to have slides but what were the mountain bikes doing leaning against the stage? Margaret started the meeting off and welcomed all who were there. Quite a lot of movement behind me

and when I turned round our numbers had increased by six, three burly firemen and their wives; our speaker hadn't forgot to come. We continued with our business as Mark only lives next door. Nothing new from last month except the W.I. Christmas dinner will be held at *The Hungry Horse* and East Malling W.I. would like a plate of mince pies for the refreshments for the District carol service in December.

FOUND MY NOTES!

Apparently Mark had been in earlier and put the chairs out for Margaret. There is always a first for

everything. Margaret introduced Mark like we always do with all of our speakers, even though he is known to most of us as a friend. Mark, David Hawkes and another fireman, (didn't get his name) decided to cycle from London to Madrid in 2012 to raise money by sponsorship for a little boy with a very rare condition with a very funny name (the condition, not the little boy). It was all arranged. They were almost ready for the off when the backing team decided to pull out. A decision had to be made. Shall we still go without the backing team? It's a long way to Madrid on bikes, on unfamiliar territory. The boys decided to go it alone, as everything had been planned, ferry tickets bought etc., etc.. So off they went. With the aid of his maps and photographs, Mark took us to Madrid in eleven days and nights. They had the usual cycle problems, broken spokes, punctures and scorching hot sun and torrential rain. Mark had a great deal of praise for the kind people in France and Spain who helped them with the problems. Because of the very hot days they had to rest then cycle well into the night, must have been very scary in a strange country, but they had to try and keep up with their schedule. One story I liked was this. It was very dark and late. They needed to pitch their tents. After a few hours

sleep they were rudely awakened and told in a not very polite manner, sling your hook, move yourselves. They had put their tents up under the awning of a florist shop in a shopping mall, it was five thirty in the morning. They hadn't had a proper meal in all the time they were travelling. So when they arrived in Madrid, their wives were there to greet them and they all went to find a restaurant to have a slap up meal, steak and chips, I ask you. Spain, steak and chips? What's the matter with paella? Mark was an excellent speaker and they made £10,000 for the cause.

After our tea and cake the competitions were judged. Flower of the Month was Ann Graves and the letter beginning with S was won by Ann Hayward with an unusual item, a sextant, an old instrument which cost Ann's husband 7/6 many years ago. It was a good and very interesting evening. Now for November. I thought Margaret said we had Alison Brown talking about earrings, but she had said Hearing. Seems I might need a few tips on the subject. The competition letter is another easy one, T for Tea, lots of easy ones, but see if you can find an unusual one and I am not digging up my tortoise for anyone. He has gone down under for the winter, I hope. Phyllis.

Is the Church a Health and Safety Risk?

Helping Cuxton Parish Council to Make Up Its Mind

Cuxton Parish Council is reconsidering its health and safety policy with respect to Cuxton Recreation Ground. It has been represented to them that religious extremists might pose a threat to health and safety and that therefore all religious organisations including St Michael's Church and Cuxton United Reformed Church (Bush Road Chapel) ought to be banned from holding events in the recreation ground, apart perhaps from fund-raising. If you have any views on this matter, please tell the clerk or any of your elected councillors.

Firework Night

Thanks to all who worked so hard on our stall. Thanks also to all the members of the public who purchased our scrumptious burgers and double hot dogs. Sorry we ran out, but you will be pleased to know that we raised £353 for church funds.

St John Ambulance

If you really don't know what to do in the case of an accident or medical emergency it is usually best to do nothing except dial 999, but if you did know what to do, you might be able to save a life or prevent further injury in the time it takes for the ambulance to arrive or if there is no other help available apart from yourself. St John Ambulance is able to provide training for children upwards of year 3 and for adults. Courses can be arranged for schools and other organisations and individuals can be directed to existing courses. If you might be interested, try the following contacts:

St John Ambulance South East Region Schools, youth and community team rachel.lee@sja.org.uk
Telephone 07785 722128, 16 Crowhurst Road, Hollingbury, Brighton BN1 8AP,
South-east-training@sja.org.uk Telephone 03030030101 option1 option 2
www.sja.org.uk



The December Wednesday Christmas Parish Lunch at the Church Hall will now be on Wednesday, 11th December at 12.00 (not 4th).

The lunch on 1st January in the church hall at 12.00 is bring and share and the collection is for Paul and Charitas Cho our CMS link mission partners in Manila.

News From the Cuxton Schools

Dear Friends of our Schools,

We have had an extremely busy time so far this term at Cuxton Infant and Junior schools. We held Harvest assemblies in October where children performed songs and rhymes for their parents. This year we collected tinned and packet foods for the Medway Foodbank. The children brought in an incredible 150 kilograms for which we are all extremely grateful. One of our parents baked a Harvest loaf, which is now part of our Autumn display in the Infant school.

Children in Years 5 and 6 spent an exciting day in the company of 'History Off The Page' who came in to provide an experience of life in Ancient Egypt. Many of the children got into the spirit of the day by wearing costumes ranging from mummies to pharaohs! The children spent the morning making a variety of things associated with the period, and then in the afternoon they enjoyed a banquet in the presence of a Pharaoh and his Queen.

The last week of term was Science week. Children in Foundation Stage learned about Autumn and how the seasons change. This included looking at the weather and learning about animals that hibernate. Children in Key Stage 1 visited other classes to take part in workshops on forces, materials and habitats. They also watched a production of Octopushy, a James Bond spoof play from the Quantum Theatre, which followed a Special Agent's mission to uncover the whereabouts of his colleague through scientific concepts of friction, magnetism and forces. We ended the week with Environment day for all children, who planted, painted, weeded, dug, cleared, and made bird feeders and minibeast homes. A lovely end to the term.

The governors of both schools also came in recently and helped with painting, weeding, sweeping, clearing drainage areas and putting book cases together. We are most appreciative of the time governors give to our schools, and look forward to the next action day!

We are lucky this term to have some hard-working Music and PE specialists coming into school to work with us. The children enjoy weekly music sessions of singing, rhymes and discovering percussion instruments, and a team of PE coaches have been running PE lessons and some lunchtime clubs in both schools. We appreciate this extra provision for the children.

As I write this letter, Remembrance Sunday is approaching. We have been selling poppies, badges and wrist bands in school in aid of the Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal, and children in Key Stage 1 will be holding a Remembrance morning this week, thinking about the armed forces personnel and their families, and learning a little about the work of the Royal British Legion.

This is also the time of year when parents are looking at schools for their children next September 2014! We have held open mornings, and welcomed new parents into both schools for a tour and presentation, and look forward to seeing them again once their applications have been successful.

Next on the calendar will be Christmas, which of course is a most exciting time in school for everyone!

Yours, Sandra Jones, Head teacher.



The Children's Society

CHILDREN'S SOCIETY NEWS

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the Children's Society over the past year by collecting loose change in their boxes. The result this year is a stunning £440.65, a superb total which is actually the highest amount collected for at least 10 years, so well done! The Children's Society carries out vital work with young people in the UK who are in need of help and support. Apart from providing practical assistance to those in need, its voice is often heard in national debates, speaking up on behalf of young people and representing their interests in many areas of decision-making. If you would like to join us in raising money by having a box in your home, please contact Julia Wells on 01634 727424.

Halling Historical Society

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 12th December at 7.30 pm in the Jubilee Hall. The speaker will be Mr J Preston and the subject the History of Rochester Bridge. New members and visitors welcome.

Hymn Writers 11
Phillips Brooks 1835 – 1893

It was a starry night on Christmas Eve, 1865, when a young minister surveyed the scene from the hills overlooking Bethlehem where the shepherds had watched their flocks on the night of Jesus' birth. It was very quiet and still as the young Phillips Brooks looked out that night and imagined the story of the first Christmas played out before him, the stars proclaiming the holy birth and the angels praising God and declaring peace to men on earth. How silently the gift and the many blessings were given to those who were receptive to the angels' message on Christmas night two thousand years before and just as relevant to the young clergyman now. Three years later he was asked to contribute a hymn for the children of his Philadelphia parish for their Christmas service and with the words of "O Little Town of Bethlehem" already in his mind, the quiet beauty of God's Christmas gift to the human heart flowed out onto paper and his organist, Lewis Redner, set the words to music, declaring that the tune was a gift of heaven. It was not the tune that we traditionally use in this country, adapted by Ralph Vaughan-Williams from a traditional English tune, but it is well known in the USA and Canada.

So many of our traditional Christmas 'carols' have a number of different tunes associated with them; I know at least six that are sung to 'While Shepherds Watched their Flocks by Night' and many composers over the years have set their own melodies to the poetry of others. Bishop Ambrose of Milan (340-397) introduced Christmas music into the church and St Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) introduced what might be called Christmas carols into the celebration of the Christmas festival but these are not like those with which we have become familiar. The Protestant church was more likely to embrace the Christmas story in this way through people like say Martin Luther (1483-1556) and the tradition of St Francis appeared to spread throughout Germany, Italy and France, but in this country the fanatical Protestantism of the Commonwealth of Oliver Cromwell banned Christmas and Christmas songs in the church and many of them fell out of use and were quickly forgotten. One or two stayed within the fold of the church like 'While Shepherds Watched', developing the story of the poor, working man worshipping Jesus before anyone else. The word carol comes from the French word 'carole' or the Latin 'carula' meaning to dance in a circle and many carols are in triple, dance time. The tunes of these were often traditional dancing and maypole melodies which became used by mainly the poor to keep the carol poetry going in the song-singing of working men. This is probably why you find carol singing going on in public houses along with other folk traditions like bonfire nights at the beginning of Autumn, soul-caking at All Souls, carol singing around the village and so on. The focus of the village (apart from the church) is the public house and if you visit Yorkshire, Derbyshire and Staffordshire (for example) near to Christmas, songs that we associate with the season are sung with gusto and loads of beer, often with exceptionally good harmony and great times had by all.

During the American Civil War, Phillips Brooks was a strong Unionist supporting the North and was outspoken about the abolishing of slavery which was abhorrent to him. In 1891, Brooks became the Protestant Episcopal Bishop in Massachusetts, and from this position he took a strong stand against the Unitarian movement. An outstanding preacher, he was probably the most esteemed clergyman of his day. He made a strong impression on his listeners because of his eloquence combined with his deep insight and earnestness, but he found speaking and writing always hard. He said that speeches were like "towing ideas out to sea and escaping by a small boat into the fog!"

Brooks was a handsome man with a nobility of stature and purity of character; a giant in spirit and body six and a half feet tall. Though he never married, he loved children – his presence in a home was so exciting that it seemed to penetrate the whole house. Like a picture from 'Alice in Wonderland, he would romp on the floors with the little ones acting out the scenes, or stand as Goliath for some small, smiling David with a sling. He always had toys in his study for the many children who visited him. At his funeral, a speaker gave Brooks this tribute: "No more signal example has this generation seen of that deep work which the Holy Spirit accomplishes when He takes possession of the whole man." Phillips Brooks was a great man, with a great mind and a great heart.

*O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light –
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.JGB*

**PENINSULA BIG BAND CHRISTMAS SWING PARTY – Saturday, 14th December, 2013 at 8.00pm- 30s/40s and more
Higham Memorial Hall, School Lane, Higham. On the door £9.00 Bring your own food/drinks-Raffle- 01634 221908**

STAMPS - Please bring your used (and even unused) stamps into us. Thanks to those who have already done so. We are still collecting them –they are appreciated and for a good cause!! JGB.

Trinity 21 2013 – Prayer

Genesis 32 vv 22-31 p36, Psalm 121, II Timothy 3 v14 – 4 v5 p1197, Luke 18 vv 1-8 p1052

The extract from Paul's second letter to Timothy today is about Timothy remaining firm, firm in his own personal faith and firm in his commitment to God's work. In Timothy's case this is to be a minister of the Gospel, maintaining Christians in the faith by teaching the Word of God, exercising discipline in accordance with his position in the Church and preaching the Good News to the whole world – to all those who do not yet know the joyful truth in Jesus Christ or who have not yet accepted Him into their lives. Timothy will be able to play his part in fulfilling these tremendous responsibilities because God has given him the Holy Spirit personally and because he is familiar with the Holy Scriptures, which, as S Paul says, *are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Jesus Christ*, and as Paul also says, *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*. What is true for Timothy is also, of course, true for us. God has called each one of us, you and me and all Christian people. He has anointed every one of us with the Holy Spirit, whereby we cry to God, *Abba, Father*. The Holy Scriptures are His gift to the whole Church, able to make us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Jesus Christ, profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

Psalm 121 is about our dependence on God, our dependence on Him Who is absolutely dependable and the other two readings are about persistence in prayer. Read the Bible and pray continually. Reading the Bible and praying you open yourself to the grace of God, to the Holy Spirit, Who will sustain you in your own personal relationship with God and enable you to play your part in the Church and in the world, doing all the good works God has prepared for you to walk in. In practical terms, as I say again and again, it is basic to the Christian life to pray and to read the Bible every day, to have a quiet time, to meditate, whatever you want to call it, and to meet at least every Sunday with other Christians in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit to experience the love of God and to receive the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Sacrament of Holy Communion and in all the many ways He graciously makes known to us Himself, Whom to know is eternal life.

Prayer is a funny thing. On the one hand, everybody does it. Or at least most people pray – if only *in extremis*. Prayer is as natural as breathing. *God bless you. God help me. Thank God. May God forgive me!* Prayer is easy. Yet prayer can also seem very hard. Jacob wrestled with God in prayer all night. Jesus presumably told that parable about the unjust judge who eventually heard the poor widow because so many people have the experience of praying and feeling that God is not listening. Jesus told them to persevere. Even that lazy judge eventually got round to granting the widow justice. You can be sure that God won't let you down – but it doesn't always feel like that. S John of the Cross spoke of the dark night of the soul. Sometimes it seems that the most spiritually profound people have the greatest difficulty with prayer. Maybe it is the fact that they sometimes have the sweetest experiences of the presence of God that makes it seem so awful when they cannot feel His presence at all. It happens to us all. For us ordinary Christians, we may find prayer hard because we find it boring. We make out that we are too busy. We may even make the excuse that we are not spiritual enough, though that is hardly the point! Or we feel that we do pray but God isn't answering. We're not getting what we ask for even though we think we are asking in faith. We are not asking selfishly for something for ourselves but for other people. And it is a good thing that we are asking for - like someone getting to be cured of a terrible disease or an unemployed person to find a job or for peace in some long-standing conflict. God doesn't seem to be listening or, if He's listening, He doesn't seem to be answering, or, if He is answering, He is saying *No*, but why would He say *No* when we are praying for something which is surely His Will – like healing, reconciliation, freedom from want – all the things we work for as Christians, believing that we are acting in accordance with God's Will, obeying His commandments even? Jesus tells us that we *ought always to pray and not to faint*. He is not contradicting here what He says in Matthew 6⁷ *But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they*

think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. The heathen confuse prayer with magic. Magic is an attempt to use spiritual authority to get what you want, to make the world function in accordance with your will. Magic is about the ability of the magician to control nature. Prayer is entirely different. Prayer is submission to God. Prayer is accepting God's control of our lives. Prayer is something we can only do if we have faith in God, both *that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him* (Hebrews 11⁶).

When you come to think about it, intercessory prayer (asking God for things) is pretty odd. Jesus reminds us, *your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him* (Matthew 6⁹). God hasn't forgotten about Aunt Alice or the people in Syria or Madeline McCann or Bishop James or the people next door or anyone else we might pray for. Neither does He need us to tell Him to guide the surgeon's hand during Bob's operation or what the United Nations ought to do about the Somali pirates. God is omniscient. He is all knowing. God is omnipotent. He is all powerful. God is omnipresent. He is everywhere. God is love. He doesn't need us to tell Him what to do. In fact, of course, He knows Aunt Alice, the people in Syria, Madeline McCann, Bishop James, Bob and his surgeon and the General Assembly of the United Nations infinitely better than we do. And He loves them infinitely more than we do. So why pray at all? One reason is that prayer is an expression of our love for people and that is why I pray for my family every day and for other people and causes, missions, charities and churches, rather less frequently, but nevertheless I hope faithfully. Also prayer changes the person praying. As an expression of love, prayer makes us more loving people. It is good for us to pray. Praying makes us better people. What a power of good it does us to pray *Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us!* Yet prayer is more than benevolence, of greater value than meditation. St James assures us *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much* (James 5¹⁶). How can that be when God doesn't need us to pray in order for Him to act? What difference do our prayers make to a God Who is infinitely wiser, more loving and better informed than we are? Understandably, Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before His terrible Death on the Cross, *Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me* (Mark 14³⁶). No man could be more righteous than Jesus, no prayer more fervent. Was it effectual? The cup wasn't taken away. He had to die on the cross. Jesus completed His prayer with the words, *Nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.* When we pray, we align our wills with the Will of God. We may not know what to say. Our prayers may be weak and feeble. The best we can manage might be the prayer of the father of the epileptic boy in Mark 9²⁴, *Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.* But when we pray, even if our faith is as small as a grain of mustard seed, we ally ourselves with the One Who made heaven and earth, the One Who redeemed Creation by His death on the Cross, the One Who moved on the face of the waters and was poured out from the belly of the crucified Christ in rivers of living water, God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When we pray our souls and bodies, our hearts and minds, our lives, our hopes and aspirations, our wills and purposes, are taken up into the mystery of the triune God. As Father, Son and Holy Ghost are one in love, so we are one in love with them and God's purposes become our purposes as our wills become His Will.

It doesn't matter that our prayers are so feeble. What does matter is that our prayers are answered by Almighty God. Faith entrusts everything we care about to Him, not so that God will give us what we want, but so that we may come to want what God wants.

And because we matter to God, because He loves us, He graciously uses our prayers to bring about His purposes in the world. He uses our prayers to bless us, to bless our families and friends, to bless the Church and the world. *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.* Our prayers are used by God to bring about the salvation of the cosmos.

So just two remaining questions which might trouble us. Why does it sometimes appear in the Bible that prayer changes God's mind? For example in Exodus 32, when, while Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments and the pattern of the Tabernacle, the Israelites got fed up with waiting and persuaded his brother Aaron to make a golden calf which they then set about worshipping as a god. God is

so angry in the story that He says He will destroy all the people except Moses and Moses intercedes and apparently gets God to change His mind. How could a mere mortal change God's mind?

The second question is closely allied to this. How can the feeble prayers of ignorant people like us have any place in the providence of God? How can our weak and feeble efforts be allowed to make any difference to anything of importance? But then we are of infinite importance to God. Christ died for you and me.

I think the answer must be in the eternity of God. God not only knows what we need before we ask Him. He also knows all our prayers before we pray them. God knows eternally. He really does know everything even before it happens. So our prayers are factored into God's plans. Our prayers are an aspect of His providence. God knew Moses would talk him out of destroying the Israelites, but it was part of Moses' spiritual development and part of Israel's spiritual development that the conversation between God and Moses took place. Moses needed to wrestle with God on behalf of the Israelites for the Israelites' sake and for Moses' sake. We need to pray and so God incorporates our prayers into His plans.

I don't want to end on a concept which is hard to grasp. The truth I am trying to bear witness to is that prayer isn't hard at all. Just trust God. All these troubling questions we might have are answered in God's providence. We don't have to worry about them, just to pray always and not to faint, to pray continually in faith and hope and love. As the psalmist says (Psalm 131) : *Lord, I am not high-minded: I have no proud looks. I do not exercise myself in great matters: which are too high for me. But I refrain my soul, and keep it low, like as a child that is weaned from his mother: yea, my soul is even as a weaned child. O Israel, trust in the Lord: from this time forth for evermore.*



Max's Tail Piece

Master reckons I am entitled to four miles walk every day. That doesn't include trips to St Michael's church and churchyard because he considers them to be part of my territory anyway. I don't always get four miles. He doesn't often miss and, when he does, he says this failure is made up for by the fact that I usually get more than my four mile ration, sometimes a lot more. Sometimes, though, I don't get a walk at all. That might be when he has a lot on or when he is very busy. Sometimes it is because he has used his "exercise time" to go for a run and there is no time left for a walk with me. That doesn't happen often. Partly this is because when he feels really energised to have a long run, he feels really energised to add in a walk and partly it is guilt. He knows that dogs ought to be taken out every day and feels uncomfortable if he gets to go out and I don't. He occasionally reminds me that, when I was younger, I could have gone running with him if I had been more cooperative and sometimes makes invidious comparisons with a Springer spaniel he had years ago, Ben, who not only went running with him but also went swimming in the sea. Ben loved water and Master has fond memories of him swimming in the lake in the park, having chased the ducks away so that he could eat the bread the children had given them, coming out of the sea with icicles in his fur, and shaking himself off of dirty pond water over sunbathers in the municipal gardens. Those were the days! Master makes the excuse for Ben that he had been a stray and was starving when he first went to live with him. Bobby too, who came between Ben and me, used to go running as well as walking, but he wasn't very keen on swimming. I was taken once to the beach when I was a puppy, but I was afraid of the sea and ran away from it. I never have been one to go into the water much – which is slightly odd considering that I am a water spaniel. We hardly ever go to the seaside anyway. Dogs are banned from so many beaches that Master says it is not even worth going there.

Anyway, coming back to the reasons I sometimes don't get a walk, there is the fact that he is turning into a bit of a wimp in his old age. He allows pathetic excuses like the fact that is raining or dark or cold to put him off. He sometimes doesn't go running for these reasons too and he took the car the other day for a journey he could perfectly well have done on his bike, only it was raining! Actually, I love the car. If he can't find me in our vast garden, he has only to open the garage door and, if I think we are going out in the car, I materialise right next to it as if out of nowhere. Sometimes he says that a nice ride in the motor car is

a substitute for a walk. Well at least I get to see new places even if I don't get the exercise. A car ride is certainly a lot better than not going out at all. If he opens the windows, there is a cornucopia of aromas to inhale as we go along.

So, as I was saying, last Monday morning things looked a bit grim on the walk front. When we woke up (Remember I've inveigled my way into sleeping on his bedroom floor) it was still dark and it was raining hard. My poor, pathetic wimp of a master decided to turn over and stay in bed! He did eventually get up with the dawn. I suppose there is some excuse, Monday being his day off! We then had breakfast – boiled eggs on Mondays, one for him and two for me, but I don't get toast and marmalade. Then he spent more than an hour reading the newspaper! He must like finding things to depress himself with. Then he had a letter to post and, amazingly, by this time the sun was shining beautifully. We started with a brief walk through the woods to the post box near what used to be the paint factory. He then felt inspired by the sunshine. So we crossed over to where that very narrow steep path ascends towards the railway – to be avoided in the Summer by those wearing shorts when it is sometimes entirely overgrown with nettles. (Someone who used to live there admitted to liking that because it discouraged some of the less savoury characters from passing that way). Do you remember? The post box used to be on that side as well.

We crossed over the railway bridge. Master crossed twice in fact, because I was afraid of another dog and refused to pass it until he came back and got me. Then we walked down on to the path in the valley leading up towards Cobham woods. We don't often go that way, because it is easier to go up into the woods our side of Bush Road. It was beautiful with the sun shining on the grass and on the trees, which were even then only just changing colour. Autumn has been late this year. That storm we had the previous Monday brought down surprisingly few leaves and there were only a few places where footpaths were blocked by fallen branches. We went out quite early that morning while the wind was still blowing strongly and the temperature was amazingly mild and it was only on the plough path that we had to climb over a fallen tree which obstructed the right of way.

But that's another story. This Monday just past, we followed the yellow brick road, skirting Cobham woods to the south of the mausoleum and headed on up to the war memorial. It was an incredibly beautiful day and there are all those superb views across the valley. When we were walking the North Downs Way with a friend from another part of the country, he remarked on how amazingly beautiful the north Kent countryside is. We get to see it every day. What a privilege to treasure! No wonder Master instinctively opposes every proposal for further development! We then walked down the lanes to Luddesdowne – another beautiful route, one of Master's jogging runs. He complains that there is too much traffic if sees even one car on that road. Well to be fair it must be of very limited utility to motorists. How many people need to drive from Luddesdown to Cobham but not Sole Street? By the way I've deliberately spelt the village name differently because it's spelt both ways on the village signs.

Then up towards Buckland and on to a path which I really cannot remember whether I have ever been on before. It was a good path, mostly uphill through the trees, with lots of interesting things to sniff and smell. I got well ahead of him, running on ahead. Part of the pleasure of a walk for him is to see me trotting along with my tail wagging and the sun shining on my glossy coat. Do you suppose that is the reason why so many non dog owners don't feel inspired to go on country walks? Surely, even without a dog, running or walking in the woods is more fun than using an exercise machine indoors in a gymnasium. Some of this path had been surfaced but some of it was actually under water, an opportunity for Master to prove his new boots and for me to refresh my credentials as a water spaniel, which I did. I might not have been there before, but it was I who located the junction with the North Downs Way he was looking for. He admitted that more than twenty years ago, whilst out running one Monday, he had missed that very same junction and nearly made himself late for something which he had nobly undertaken to do in the parish even though it was his day off. Lucky I was with him this time. And so home to dinner. Another perfect day in the Rectory. Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! Max the Rectory Spaniel (and from Master too).