

Services February 2023		
Septuagesima 5 th February	9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton 11.00 Holy Communion Halling.	Isaiah 58 vv 1-12 p744 I Corinthians 2 vv 1-12 p1145 Matthew 5 vv 13-20 p969
Sexagesima 12 th February	9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton 11.00 Holy Communion Halling.	Genesis 1 v1 – 2v3 p3 Romans 8 vv 18-25 p1135 Matthew 6 vv 25-34 p971
Quinquagesima 19 th February	9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton 11.00 Holy Communion Halling.	Exodus 24 vv 12-18 p82 II Peter 1 vv 16-21 p1222 Matthew 17 vv 1-9 p984
Ash Wednesday 22 nd February	9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton 11.00 Holy Communion Halling.	Joel 2 vv 12-17 Matthew 6 vv 16 - 21
Lent 1 26 th February	9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton 11.00 Holy Communion Halling.	Genesis 2 v15 – 3v7 p4 Romans 5 vv 12-19 p1132 Matthew 4 vv 1-11 p967

Copy Date March Magazine: February 13th 8.30 am Rector

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Bible Emergency Numbers

When in sorrow	John 14
When people fail you	Psalm 27
When you have sinned	Psalm 51
When you worry	Matthew 6 vv 19-34
When you are in danger	Psalm 91
When God seems far away	Psalm 139
When your faith needs stirring	Hebrews 11
When you are lonely & fearful	Psalm 23
When you grow bitter & critical	I Corinthians 13
When you feel down & out	Romans 8 v31-39
When you want peace & rest	Matthew 11 vv 25-30
When the world seems bigger than God	Psalm 90
When you want Christian assurance	Romans 8 vv 1-30
When you leave home for labour or travel	Psalm 121
When your prayers grow narrow or selfish	Psalm 67
When you want courage for a task	Joshua 1 vv 1-9
When you think of investments & returns	Mark 10 vv 17-31
When you are depressed	Psalm 27
When your pocketbook is empty	Psalm 37
When you are losing confidence in people	I Corinthians 13
For understanding Christianity	II Corinthians 5 vv 15-19
For a great investment opportunity	Isaiah 55
For how to get along with your fellow men & women	Romans 12
For Paul's secret to happiness	Colossians 3 vv 12-17

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Direct petitions heavenward.

Joke

A man goes into a bar, orders his drink and puts his hat down on the seat next to him. Another man comes in with a large dog which eats the hat. The dog owner laughs. The first man says, "I don't like your attitude." The second one responds, "but it was your 'at' e chewed!"

From the Rector

You probably saw the report on the 2021 Census Return which indicated that fewer than half of UK citizens now identify themselves as Christian. That is a big change from my youth when most people said *C of E* if asked their religion, even if they never thought much about God or Jesus. In the same way, we took it for granted that our first names were our Christian names even if we hadn't been christened. I was disappointed at the Census figure, though not really surprised. Jesus said, *By their fruits ye shall know them*. On that basis, would you say that we are a Christian people?

God, of course, does not need us to believe in Him. God is. God does not need us, but we do need Him. It grieves God that so many of us reject or ignore Him, because without Him our lives are without meaning. God not only is; God is love. Romans 6 v23: *For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord*.

I'm not too exercised about numbers. For one thing counting is too easy. Or it looks easy anyway. It is a very common mistake on the part of government and even the Church to pay more attention to what can be counted than to the things which really count. For example, you can produce statistics on the teacher / pupil ratio in our classrooms. That is not an insignificant figure. Generally speaking, in smaller classes children get more attention and therefore do better. But what really counts? Suppose you had a class of 32 with an excellent teacher who were all doing really well and you split the class and put 16 of the 32 with someone who was a very poor teacher. The first 16 might do slightly better with the original teacher but the other 16 might fail altogether with the useless pedagogue. Or suppose you reduced class sizes by employing more teachers but then cut the budget for books and other educational materials or neglected maintenance work on the buildings? These are issues for educationists to debate and the answers will vary according to circumstances. Figures and statistics will be important in reaching conclusions, but it would be a bad mistake to take one number and infer from it that, say, borough A has better schools than borough B simply because it has a better teacher / pupil ratio. The pupils in B may actually be receiving the better education if their teaching staff, though fewer in number, are better teachers

or if B has wisely invested in books and computers and taken good care to ensure that school buildings are in an acceptable condition, and A has spent too much of its budget on what can be counted rather than on what really counts. What counts in education is the spiritual, mental and physical well-being of the students and staff and that they all have the best possible chance to reach their full potential. Things that can be counted like test results and the number of computers in the IT unit may be an indication of whether the school is achieving its educational goals, but they can never be the full story. The tail mustn't wag the dog even if it is easier to count, record and boast about GCSE passes than it is to judge pupils' general well-being.

It is even harder for the Church to make judgments based on statistics than it for schools, prisons or hospitals. Jesus said, *Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance*. So which should we prefer - a Church with one repentant sinner in it or a Church full up with 99 people who think that they are just persons who need no repentance? Generally speaking in the Bible, it is the few who are prepared to listen to the Truth and to act on what they hear whereas the many are apt to go on in their own way, heedless of the consequences.

How accurate are the statistics? The Census records those who self-identify with a particular religion or with no religion at all. Might the people filling in the forms be deliberately deceiving the people taking the Census? Might the form-fillers be deceiving themselves? Only God really knows who His people are.

[When the the religious question first appeared on the Census in 2001, I gave my title as the Rev'd, my address as the Rectory and my occupation as clerk in holy orders, but declined to state my religion on the grounds that it was none of the government's business. I believe that thousands of other people did something similar. I remember Jews being concerned that their religious identities might fall into the hands of antisemites.]

What is a Christian anyway? Is it someone who comes to Church? Is it someone who tries to lead a good life? Is it someone who prays? Is it

someone who reads the Bible? Are there Christians who have not been christened (or baptized – two words for the same sacrament)? Is everyone who is christened a Christian? Is a Christian someone who has faith in Jesus Christ? Does a Christian have to believe everything it says in all three creeds or just what it says in one of them? Do you have to believe every word of the Bible in order to be a Christian? Can you be a Christian and a bad person? Are the only true Christians people who belong to the same Church as you or I do?

I should say that a Christian is someone who has faith in Jesus Christ, irrespective of anything else. *So God loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* But I can think of people who would define the word *Christian* in any of the ways I have mentioned above in the last paragraph. If it is not clear what we mean by a *Christian*, how much sense does it make to try to estimate how many Christians there are in the country? We may not be certain who is a Christian. We may have doubts ourselves as to whether in fact we are Christians. So what does it mean to say that 42.6% population identified themselves as Christians on census day 2021? Only what it says, that 46.2% so identified themselves. Whether all that 46.2% are really Christians only God knows. Whether some of the 53.8% who did not identify themselves as Christians are in fact Christians, again only God knows. But, if there are Christians who hesitate to identify themselves as such, they should read Romans 10^{9&10}: *if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.* Or, more worryingly what Jesus says in Mark 8 v38: *Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.*

Maybe, we shouldn't expect that a majority will identify as Christians. Jesus also said (Matthew 7): ¹³ *Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to*

destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: ¹⁴ Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. I'd like to know how many will be saved. Perhaps you would too. The disciples certainly wanted to know, but Jesus avoided giving them a straight answer. He doesn't satisfy our curiosity about other people. He tells us to attend to our own lives (Luke 13 vv 23&24): *Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.*

So how do we account for the huge decline in the proportion of the population who claim to be Christian – whatever it means? It's hard to be certain about religious belief and observance in the past (as it is in the present), but there was probably a slow decline already at the beginning of the twentieth century and for some time before that. The 1851 Census (uniquely before 2001) contained this information. The (Church) attendance count was 10,896,066 (64%) out of a population of 17.9 million. There were 5,292,551 attending Church of England services, 4,536,264 attending the other Protestant Churches, and 383,630 attending Catholic services. At the time, people were shocked that there were so many people not attending Church (nearly half the population). We'd be glad of a 64% turn out now!

The First World War made a big difference. We look back with horror on life in Victorian times, but things were then actually getting better for people. Slavery was abolished. Improvements in agriculture, technology and industry were gradually making lives easier, safer and more comfortable. There were trains, steam ships and a postal service, telegrams and under sea cables linking continents. Medicine was advancing steadily, with some major steps forward such as immunisation, anaesthesia and antisepsis. Politics was slowly becoming more democratic. There was reform of the civil service. I could go on. The point is that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, they thought that things could only go on getting better. Progress was, for many, a consequence of divine Providence. Christian civilization was spreading across the globe, bringing with it the blessings of law, peace, science, justice and good government. That is

rather viewing the Edwardian era through rose-tinted spectacles, but many people did see things that way at the time. The First World War shattered for many their faith in Progress, the Establishment (including the Established Church) and God. How could you believe in Progress if new technologies made it possible to slay millions rather than the thousands who had died in traditional wars? How could you trust an Establishment - politicians, generals, bishops, etc. – who led the world into such a terrible conflict? How could you believe in a God Who allowed these things to happen?

Strangely, perhaps, there was something of a recovery of faith in the Second World War and in the years immediately following. Maybe it was because the defeat of the Nazis was so clearly the right thing to fight for. The war aims were much more straightforward in the Second World War than they were in the First. The successful evacuation from Dunkirk was regarded by many as a miracle. God was on our side against the diabolical Hitler. The Battle of Britain too was a close run thing in which right triumphed over might. There were seven National Days of Prayer during the Second World War. There was only one such day in the Great War. (It has been remarked, however, that the tide of war only turned in the Allies' favour from that date onwards.)

After the War, Billy Graham held several campaigns in Britain. There were thousands of conversions. Many who were already Christians had their faith strengthened. There was an increase in the number of vocations to the ministry. Perhaps wearied by war, significant numbers of men took up the monastic life. There was a tremendous effort to build new churches for the new housing estates which were springing up all over the country. I have a book of jokes with a forward by Tommy Handley published in 1948 and sold in aid of THE GREAT APPEAL FUND for general Church Reconstruction in West Kent – a project dear to the heart of Bishop Christopher Chevasse. The aims were repairs to damaged churches, the construction of new churches, better remuneration and housing for the clergy, education & moral welfare, and the Diocesan Conference and Retreat Centre (presumably Graham Chiesman House).

Coming onto the 1960s, however, decline in Church attendance accelerates. It may well be that religious belief did not fade away in proportion. Most people who stop going to Church don't do so because they have stopped believing in God. *You can be a Christian without going to Church* was a popular slogan. (You cannot, however, be a Christian without belonging to the Church.)

Why did people stop going to church? There were many more things to do on Sundays as people got their own cars, and leisure activities which had previously been closed on Sundays were permitted to open. Then came Sunday trading and Sunday is now much like any other day for a considerable proportion of the population. People still pray at home, read the bible, even sing hymns, but Church ceases to be familiar. If children go to the seaside instead of Church or Sunday School or play football on Sunday mornings, they don't learn the bible stories, the familiar prayers and much loved hymns. When they do come to Church for special occasions, they don't feel at home.

Some families assumed that their children would get all the Religious Education they needed in school, but, as Britain has become both more secular and more multicultural, Religious Education has either been sidelined or else has become more a study of what other people believe than the initiation into the Christian faith it was when I went to school. I attended county schools, not Church schools, but it was taken for granted that RE and daily assemblies would be Christian because we still thought of ourselves as a Christian country.

Parents ought to teach the faith to their own children, but, if people don't go to Church, each generation knows less than the one before. People who were parents in the sixties now have grandchildren and great grandchildren, many of whom know very little about God. Roman 10 again ¹³ *For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.* ¹⁴ *How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?* ¹⁷ *So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

A lot of people believe that Science (which has contributed so much to the modern world) is incompatible with faith. They repeat a few half understood stories about confrontations between scientists of the past like Galileo and Darwin and various religious leaders, but that is to miss the point. The Christian religion and Science – faith and reason – are both seeking the Truth. They are on the same side. They may use different methods and they very often look at different aspects of life, but both Science and Religion are about discovering the Truth. Some of the greatest scientists - like Newton, Boyle and Faraday – have been intensely religious men, inspired to study the universe by wonder at God's creative power and describing it in terms of Natural Laws (eg gravity) which are no less the Laws of God than the Laws revealed in Scripture such as the Ten Commandments. We speak of the *Book of Nature (which is the natural world itself)* and the *Book of Scripture, the Bible*. They complement one another; and both Scripture and the natural world reveal God's truth, as both have God's hand on them. Together, they speak a single truth, and they are, at their deepest level, in accord. We look for order in the universe because we believe that it is the creation of a Rational Entity (a Mind like our minds, only infinitely greater). Religion and Science are allies. They are on the same side against Post-Modernism – the belief that there is no such thing as absolute Truth to discover, only your truth and my truth, which leads to cultural relativism, moral relativism, cancel culture and a refusal to respect and to debate with people you don't agree with.

One of the reasons why Church plays a much bigger part in the lives of many Americans than it does in the lives of so many of us is that the US has a much less comprehensive welfare state than we do. The Church in America takes on responsibilities for the poor and the sick which in the UK are borne by the state. As a Christian country, we set up the NHS, an education system open to all, state provision for the unemployed etc., and ironically did the Church out of a job! We applaud the Welfare State, but the fact that it exists to some extent marginalises the Church.

Two schools of thought. One says that the Church needs to be more adaptable, to be ready to modernise if we are to reach a younger generation.

The other view is that we have a precious and eternal Truth and, if we compromise on essentials, we fail in our duty to the world to which we are sent with the Gospel message. Our task is to proclaim the Word of God whether they will hear or whether they will forbear.

There were many changes in the Church in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially from the 1960s onwards. Leading theologians – academics and bishops – wanted to reconsider some of our traditional beliefs, what we believe about God the Father and Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Some people have welcomed this openness to new ideas and take the view that the Church can only be relevant to every succeeding generation so long as she is prepared to review and renew her teaching and practice in the light of modern knowledge and changes in society. Many people, who have themselves found traditional doctrines difficult, have felt liberated by bishops and other clergy who have been prepared to question and even to set aside difficult doctrines like the Trinity, the two natures of Jesus, the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, Providence, Hell, etc.. Others of us fear that these more radical thinkers risk being disloyal to *the faith once delivered to the saints*, undermining what the Church has always believed and proclaimed, but offering no replacement able to meet humanity's deepest needs.

Similarly, as western society has departed from traditional Christian morality, the Church of England has tended to follow about twenty years behind. Is this a recognition that the Holy Spirit is leading us into new truths about relationships etc., more helpful in twenty first century Britain than the old biblical teaching which emerged in cultures very different from our own? Or are we actually failing to continue to maintain the truths with which God has entrusted us in a mistaken desire to be popular? Are we letting our contemporaries down if we appear to bless them when they are departing from God's eternal Law which alone enables human beings in every age and clime to live truly fulfilled lives?

In some ways, the Church became stricter in the 1960s than she had been previously. Some churches developed strict Baptism policies. You could only have your child christened if you attended Church regularly and took part in the

Vicar's Baptism classes. The thought was that there were too many nominal Christians, people who claimed to be Christian though no-one would have known that they were from their daily lives. I never agreed with strict Baptism policies. The Church is open to all. Christ invites and welcomes all who come to Him. I believe that strict Baptism policies alienated many English people from the Church of England and they have, thankfully, become much less common. Across the denominations, there was a move towards making Holy Communion the principal service every Sunday. Holy Communion does demand total commitment on the part of the worshipper. If you receive Communion unworthily (if you don't *truly and earnestly repent you of your sins, and are [not] in love and charity with your neighbours, and [don't] intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in his holy ways*) then you eat and drink judgment on yourself. So weekly Holy Communion, in the opinion of some people, risks putting off the less committed, of alienating those who are well-disposed towards Christianity, but are not prepared to give their lives entirely to the Lord. I do recognise that risk, but I still maintain that Holy Communion ought always to be our principal service. Jesus said, *Do this in remembrance of me* and we ought not to disobey Him. It is absolutely true that our Lord's Heart is open to all, but, if we love Him, we must be prepared to take up our cross and follow Him. Mark 8 again: ³⁴*And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.* ³⁵*For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.* ³⁶*For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?* ³⁷*Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*

The Church of England also spent a great deal of effort in the twentieth century revising and updating her services. Again, some people believe that this was necessary if we were to proclaim the Good News of Jesus and to find the appropriate words in which to express our worship in a rapidly changing world. Others take the view

that, in radically altering the way in which we worship, we discarded many of the valuable resources we inherited from our forefathers and, at the same time, alienated many of our existing members without achieving much in the way of commending the faith to those who did not already believe.

I do fear that disputes and discussions regarding these issues have damaged the Church both by causing division and by leading people to believe that we take part in public worship in order to please ourselves rather than to please God. Back in 1662, when the Church of England was trying to reintroduce the Book of Common Prayer following the terrible divisions of the Civil War period, this was their stated policy. *And whereas in this our time, the minds of men are so diverse, that some think it a great matter of conscience to depart from a piece of the least of their Ceremonies, they be so addicted to their old customs; and again on the other side, some be so newfangled, that they would innovate all things, and so despise the old, that nothing can like them, but that is new: it was thought expedient, not so much to have respect how to please and satisfy either of these parties, as how to please God, and profit them both.* Those latter words ought to be heeded whenever there is disagreement in the Church, but they seldom are. (They weren't even in 1662! But that's another story.)

Lastly, of course, we have to admit that many people prefer not to identify themselves as religious because *religion*, what with paedophile priests and Islamist terrorists – has become something of a dirty word. People may describe themselves as *spiritual* rather than *religious*. The danger is that concentration on *my spirituality* rather than on *our common faith* too easily becomes self-centred and even selfish.

That was a bit of a marathon! *When the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on earth?* (Luke 18 v8). We who do know Him are stewards of His mysteries. *It is required of stewards, that a man be found faithful.* Whatever the challenges, whatever other people think, what is required of you and me is that we are found faithful. We can trust God for the rest. Roger.

Food for the Thought

Have you heard about the new restaurant called Karma? There's no menu. You get what you deserve, your just deserts in fact.

From the Registers

Baptisms:

26th November
4th December

Ivy May Dunbar
Arthur John Bevan

Poplicans Road
Rainham

Funerals:

17th November
22nd November
20th December

Michael Antony Phillips
Frank Cecil Wallis
Frederick John Pearmain

Ladywood Road
Marsh Lodge Farm
Hayley Close

Jeanne Harris RIP

We were sorry to learn of the death of Jeanne Harris. Jeanne had been a great supporter of our Church in various ways, including serving for a time as churchwarden. She is sadly missed.

Christmas Thanks



This is my opportunity to thank you all for everything you have done to make our Christmas celebrations so wonderful and for all that you do throughout the year. On 3rd December we held both our Christmas Fayre in the Scout Hall & our Christmas Concert at St John's with the Halling Sinfonia and the Bradstow Singers as well as children from Halling Primary School. We are grateful for Halling Parish Council's sponsorship of the latter. Others of us attended the switching on of the Christmas Tree lights at Cuxton Library. There was another spectacular Christmas Tree Festival this year at St John's, trees supplied and decorated by many village organisations. Our Crib Services, Christingles & Carol Services took place as usual. Thank you to all those of you who participated in any way: preparing Christingles, acting in nativity plays, singing, playing musical instruments, flower arranging and ringing the bells at Cuxton. It was good also to welcome back the scouts & guides for their annual carol service after the COVID hiatus. We did not hold a Christmas Midnight Mass this year for the sort of reasons mentioned in this month's letter to the parish. Sorry about that for those who would have liked to attend. We did, however, hold an excellent Epiphany party. The Church is the people and it's fantastic that so many of you do so much, including delivering this magazine for us. A Happy New Year to you all and every blessing in doing God's work here and now and in the years to come. Roger.

PS: There was an unexpected benefit from the Christingle Service in the home of one parishioner this year. When there was a power cut on Christmas afternoon, she was able to light the Christingle candle and by its light to open her presents, which, it transpired, included two more candles.

[A number of people complained about the Christmas Day power cut. They were **unampy** with the electricity company's **current** level of service. Their **ohms** were dark and cold. Half cooked Christmas dinners were quite **revolting**. There is obviously great **potential** for improvement, without which there could be some **resistance** to paying the bill. If you have to use a **battery**, you shouldn't finish up in the **cells** for failing to pay for **watt** you didn't get this month, despite having had to pawn your **joules** to pay last month's direct debit.]

Quotation

Freeman Dyson: "To worship God means to recognise that mind and intelligence are woven into the fabric of our universe in a way that altogether surpasses our comprehension."

Rainham Ladies Choir

We're looking forward to a concert to be held at St John's on 13th March at 7.30 pm. Please make sure that it is in your diaries as it will be another evening not to be missed.

PERCY PIGEON'S PERCEPTIONS

Good day to you all. A New Year! I hope yours will be happy and healthy. Were your festivities as cheering as you planned? Philippa and I feasted on a split pack of cashew nuts in Charles Drive and some seeded bread in Woodhurst Close. We did well. We enjoyed listening to the sounds of fun and laughter. Most of all we liked the Christmas music. Carols have existed for thousands of years and were originally Pagan and part of the winter solstice festivities. A carol was then a tune to dance to. Your carols are so wonderfully rich and celebratory, but not really the stuff of "Strictly".

We listened to some littl'uns telling each other about their Christmas gifts. What's an X-box? Is it like our Amazon box? It seems a long time since those festivities and the mild but wet weather has continued as I write. It was unusual to have that bitterly cold spell in early December with the snow and ice lasting nearly a week. Philippa tells me that you human beans sometimes make resolutions as the year turns. She also tells me that you aren't good at keeping these resolutions. Did you make any resolutions? Maybe to lose weight, to give up chocolate or alcohol or just to do more smiling. I hope some of you resolved to feed avians more often - and I hope that is a resolution you won't break! Perhaps you could indulge in a R.A.K. [Random Act of Kindness]. I heard of a lady sitting on her rollator in a supermarket, and a man just presented her with a lovely bouquet of flowers saying, "For you. Happy Christmas". Wasn't that wonderful?

So now the year has turned. *As the days get longer, the cold gets stronger.* Wrap up warm! Eat and heat. The Spring will be here soon - it will creep up on us and burst into a riot of garden colour. Already snowdrops and crocuses are appearing, and the ericas have flowered since December as have many hellebores. Most avians avoid venturing out too much in the winter and soon enough there will be squabs to warm, feed, clean and fledge. You will have "Spring cleaning" to occupy you as the sun shows you the dust and fluff. Please put that dust and fluff in your garden for small birds to use to line their nests. The hair from combs and brushes is also welcome, and when you groom your pet, all that moulting fur can just be left in the garden and you can watch the tits, sparrows and finches swoop to collect it.

I think this is the time of year when you start planning your summer holidays. A tree mail from cousin Pepe in Menorca invites us for the summer there - blue skies and sea, lots of almonds and walnuts, pasta and ensaimadas. We would have to start that journey next month and fly in small stages. We are thinking about it but suspect we will be going no further than Leybourne Lakes. It's good to dream! I hope your dreams are realised this year. Coo coo

St John's Draw (November): £10 each to Miss Heighes (40) & Mrs Smith (49).

St John's Draw (December): £5 each to Mrs Burr (11), Mrs Booth (86) & Mrs Cheeseman (134).

Church Hall Draw (December): 1st - David Gates, 2nd - Ann Saunders, 3rd - Margaret Booth

Church Hall Draw January): 1st - Dennis Hills, 2nd - Di Maxwell, 3rd - Julia Wells.

Annual Report of the Fresh Expressions of Church Group.

We designed and had printed a Christmas card and delivered it to every household in Cuxton, including boat holders at Cuxton Marina and Port Medway Marina and most of Halling Parish. We raised £225 at the Millennium Big Lunch for the relief of Ukrainian refugees. We raised £140 for Medway food bank at a small coffee morning and clearance event. This also benefitted numerous other charities by further distribution of clearance items. We provided a living tableau in costume of the nativity at the village tree lighting and carol singing event as a reminder that Christmas is not all about tinsel and bright lights.

We meet in the home of one of our members in Cuxton a few times a year. We would be pleased to welcome Christians of any denomination or none, who are interested in spreading the gospel to our communities to join our small committee. Please contact Buffy Maisey on 01634 727126 or 07778 305 651.

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER 2023

10.00 am FRIDAY 3 MARCH ST. JOHN'S CHURCH, HALLING

I have heard about your faith - TAIWAN

Tommy's Talking Points

I am not sure that I have ever seen as much snow as we had in December, though here is a picture of me taken a few years ago with me up to my middle in the white stuff, but I think that might have been a drift in our garden. It seems extraordinary after the very hot dry Summer and the mild moist Autumn we had this year. Your human scientists keep warning about global warming and you keep on building new roads and encouraging people to drive and fly. It defies canine logic, but no doubt you have your reasons.



We had some very cold dry frosty days soon after the beginning of December. It was good to get out in the woods without becoming smothered in mud. Both Master and I are undeterred by running in the cold and find it rather bracing and utterly enjoyable. As the early mornings grew darker, Master slept in a bit longer and our morning runs were somewhat curtailed, though we usually get at least an hour despite his tardiness. We also met fewer other dogs and dog walkers. By 5.00 pm, when we are usually coming back from our afternoon walk in order to go to Evening Prayer at St. Michael's, it was quite dark and Master had to choose our routes carefully so that he would not get lost among the more obscure paths. I wouldn't get lost. I know the woods and fields around the Rectory perfectly. And so should he as we go out in them every day, but human beings rely on sight whereas I follow my nose.

Anyway, we had these cold frosty days and he did his best to economise on the heating. He gets me to sit on his lap of an evening. A dog's body temperature is around 101F (38.5C) and a human being's is only about 98F (37C). So we dogs make good hot water bottles for you.

[I just let him off typing up my words for a few minutes so that he could go and make a suet crust meat pie for his dinner. He reports back that the new packet of suet is as it should be. The one we had in the sunny Summer melted into lumps – but it still did the job OK. Of course, the oven uses gas to cook, but it also warms the kitchen (my bedroom), which is a bonus.]

Anyway, Sunday 11th (Advent 3) we were very late starting. He stayed in bed till 7.00, discouraged from rising by the fact that it was cold and dark. There was a frost and freezing fog. We did manage a good run, however, albeit a short one, and then we went to Church. The moisture in the fog had crystallised out onto the twigs and branches of the trees in the churchyard. It is hard to describe just how fine they looked.

After St Michael's, I went home and waited for my dinner while Master went to Halling. The lunchtime weather forecast suggested that there might be some snow. We went out just before four as usual. It was getting dark. Ice crystals bedecked the hedge which runs alongside the footpath which ascends Church Hill towards Mays Wood. Once in the wood, the remaining autumn leaves decorated our route in their various hues of yellows, reds and browns. And so around Dean and Bush Valleys in the diminishing light with the fading prospect of Brockles and Ranscombe on the northern boundary of our vision, to skirt the edge of Mays Wood in the dark (darker than we might have expected) and into Six Acres to take the top path to the Church. Master noticed that the temperature had risen a bit and the frost was melting somewhat. In view of this and the weather forecast, he thought a little snow not unlikely.

But, when he peeped out at about 8.00, he saw the garden invested in a blanket of white. It was awe-inspiring. So, when we went out for the last time to stretch our legs just before ten, instead of just going to the bottom of our garden, we went back up through the churchyard and again ascended Church Hill as far as Mays Wood. I had a good run round in the field. He immersed himself in the beauty of the landscape. The snow was pristine. Ours were the first paw prints.

When we went out in the morning, again we were the first, but just behind us came another dog we often see, white like me, but appearing cream against the snow. We stuck to the woods because the snow was too deep in the fields and ran up as far as the back of Court Farm at Upper Halling. There was hardly anybody about. The silence was wonderful. Mostly, it was only the tracks of birds and wild animals which marked the snow. Trees were adorned. Some bent right over the path and some were broken by the weight and will never return to the upright. It was altogether an amazing experience, but, I fear, not one which you human beings will wish to see prolonged.

When the thaw came, it was rapid – warm rain all day for two days. Taking Lolly & me out for our morning run, Master demonstrated just how slippery a mixture of mud and ice can be as he slithered flat on his back down the path towards Woodhurst Close! All was well though. He regained the vertical and concluded our completed our excursion as planned.