

Services June 2023			
4 th June Trinity Sunday	9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton 11.00 Holy Communion Halling	Isaiah 40 vv 12-31 p724 II Corinthians 13 vv 11-13 p1167 Matthew 28 vv 16-20 p1001	
11 th June Trinity 1 St Barnabas	9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton 11.00 Holy Communion Halling	Acts 11 vv 22-30 p1106 John 15 vv 12-16 p1083	
18 th June Trinity 2	9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton 11.00 Holy Communion Halling	Genesis 18 vv 1-15 p17 Romans 5 vv 1-8 p1132 Matthew 9 vv 35 – 10 v23 p974	
Saturday 24 th June Nativity of St John the Baptist	Tea at 4.00 pm followed by Evensong	Malachi 4 vv 1-6 p962 Matthew 14 vv 1-13 p981	
25 th June Trinity 3	9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton 11.00 Holy Communion & Holy Baptism Halling	Genesis 21 vv 8-21 p21 Romans 6 vv 1-11 p1132 Matthew 10 vv 40-42 p976	
Holy Communion Cuxton Wednesdays 9.30		Holy Communion Halling Thursdays 9.30	
31 st May	Micah 3 vv 1-8 Matthew 11 vv 25-30	1 st June	Exodus 35 vv 30 – 36 v1 Matthew 12-32
7 th June	Joshua 3 vv 1-17 Luke 8 vv 40-56	8 th June Corpus Christi	Joshua 4 v1 – 5v1 Luke 9 vv 1-9
14 th June	Joshua 9 vv 1-27 Luke 9 vv 51-62	15 th June	Joshua 24 vv 1-28 Luke 10 vv 1-6
21 st June	Acts 12 vv 1-11 Matthew 16 vv 13-19	22 nd June	Judges 9 vv 1-21 Luke 11 vv 29-36
28 th June Ember Day	Judges 15 vv 1-20 Luke 12 vv 22-31	29 th June St Peter	Acts 12 vv 1-11 Matthew 16 vv 13-19

Copy Date July Magazine: June 9th 8.30 am Rectory

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St John's Draw (April): £5 each to Mrs Winter (14), Mrs Baker (46) & Mrs Waghorn (156).

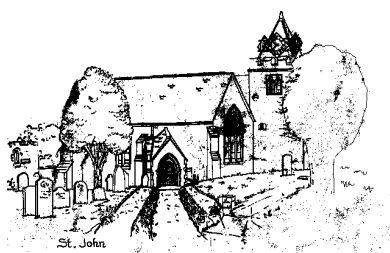
Dates

Christian Aid

A Division of The British Council of Churches



Sunday 21st May: Christian Aid Bring & Share Lunch - from 12.00 Church Hall.



Saturday 3rd June: 10.30 Children's Celebration at St John's - crafts, indoors & outdoors (if dry), music, story, refreshments, prayer. All children welcome with responsible adult.

Saturday 24th June Nativity of St John the Baptist 4.00pm: Tea followed by Evensong @ Halling Church.



From the Rector

The chains supporting the sanctuary lamp needed oiling and I wasn't sure whether to use WD40 or Three in One oil. The latter seemed more theologically appropriate. After all we sing a hymn~

Three in One, and One in Three,
Ruler of the earth and sea,
Hear us while we lift to Thee
Holy chant and psalm.

It's a hymn we might sing on Trinity Sunday, though not this year. We can't sing all our favourite hymns on every occasion for which they might be suitable. But it did make me think. Trinity Sunday this year falls on 4th June. It's a great Sunday for praising God. They all are really. Actually, so is every minute of the day, whatever it is that we're doing.

It is very meet, right, and our bounden duty, that we should at all times, and in all places, give thanks unto thee, O Lord,
*Holy Father, Almighty, Everlasting God.
* *These words [Holy Father] must be omitted on Trinity Sunday.*

Does that instruction in italics sound odd to you? Usually, when we pray formally, we come to God the Father through Jesus by the grace of the Holy Spirit, but sometimes it is appropriate to address Jesus or the Spirit directly or, as here, to worship together the three Persons of the Trinity. What matters is not that we get the words or the ritual right, but that we worship God in spirit and in truth.

The doctrine of the Holy Trinity – three in one and one in three – what does it all mean? It's not a mathematical puzzle for us to solve. Does Mathematics even exist in heaven? A lot of schoolchildren might regard Maths as something more hellish than heavenly. Maths must exist in heaven because Maths exists in the mind of God. Maths is a pure expression of reason, beautiful in its own right – so people who love Maths tell me.

Anyway, that was a digression. The doctrine of the Trinity is not a mathematical puzzle. One does not equal three. Applied Maths, the Maths

human beings have to use to understand the world and to work things out - from how to build a bridge across an estuary to how to pay for this week's groceries - is a tool which we use in our dealings with this material universe, the world of time and space. God created this material universe and He is infinitely more wonderful than it or anything in it. *The earth is the Lord's, and all that therein is : the compass of the world, and they that dwell therein.* God is essentially incomprehensible. And yet we can, may and do love Him. We can know Him. To know God is to have eternal life. But we cannot understand God.

There are certain things we do know about God. We know that God is one. There is no other. Deuteronomy 6: ⁴*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord:* ⁵*And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.* He is the Maker of Heaven and earth. He is our Redeemer and He makes us holy. Jesus teaches us to speak to God as *Our Father*. The Holy Spirit teaches us to know that God is our Father and Jesus is our Lord.

Jesus is God. The Christmas Gospel begins (John 1): *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.* Jesus is the Word of God. He is, therefore, God. Together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, He is the Creator of everything that is. Jesus, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit is our Redeemer – the triune God Who makes us holy, Who sanctifies us.

The Holy Spirit (or Holy Ghost) is God. That is why we worship Him together with the Father and the Son. If the Holy Spirit were not God, to worship Him would be idolatry. The Spirit too is active with the Father and the Son in our Redemption as well as in our Sanctification. He was present at Creation. *The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.*

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

So we know that the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are each one totally, completely and eternally God and yet we know that there is only

one God. Hence the doctrine of the Trinity – not a mathematical puzzle, but the best account we human beings are capable of understanding of an unfathomable mystery.

I can't leave this subject without mentioning the last verse of the Christmas Gospel. *And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.* The Son of God is not only in every respect God; He is also in every respect human. He is one of us. We can't understand. All we can do is worship.

My silly thought about using Three in One oil to lubricate the chains of the sanctuary lamp was the starting point for some other thoughts about God and the world. At St John's, I have to stand on a step ladder to change the candles in the sanctuary lamp, but at St Michaels there is a counterweight mechanism which enables one to pull down the lamp, replace the candle and raise it back up into position while still standing on the ground. It was this mechanism which was sticking and in need of oil.

There are lots of things wrong with the world. There are lots of things in our own lives which don't seem to work properly. How could we make the world run smoothly? Actually, the answer is obvious. If we want the world to run well what we need to do is to obey the Maker's instructions. *Thy word is a lantern unto my feet : and a light unto my paths.*

The custom of burning a lamp in the sanctuary goes right back to the time of Moses in the Old Testament. The first thing which God created was light. II Corinthians 4⁶ *For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.* God's law is a light to our paths. Jesus is the Light of the world. We are called, as Christians, to light up this dark planet. *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.* In heaven, we shall dwell in the eternal light of God.

In the heavenly country bright
Need they no created light
Thou its light, its joy, its crown
Thou its sun, which goes not down.

There forever may we sing
Hallelujahs to our King.

Oil is also used in anointing, in anointing kings and priests. The anointed one is the Messiah. Jesus is King of Kings and the great High Priest. The anointing signifies His appointment by God and the outpouring on Him of the Holy Spirit. Christians are one with Christ and He with us. We therefore constitute a royal priesthood. I Peter 2⁹: *But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.* It's not essential to the rite, but we very often anoint with oil those who are being baptised or confirmed. The oil for this purpose is blessed by the bishop in the cathedral on Maundy Thursday – the day that Jesus consecrates Himself and consecrates His Church (including you and me if you are a believer).

When I was a young man, I used to think that Psalm 104¹⁵ was a bit odd. *That he may bring food out of the earth, and wine that maketh glad the heart of man : and oil to make him a cheerful countenance, and bread to strengthen man's heart.* Obviously food, wine and bread are good things, but why would oil make a cheerful countenance? The psalmist isn't talking about cut price petrol or dodgy diesel. He's not talking about mineral oil at all. This is olive oil. It's used to cleanse and soften the skin. I think it still is used in this way in some countries. Anyway, soap and detergent are basically alkali boiled up with fat or oil. So we too use fats and oils as cleansing agents. When we come to God in faith and repentance, we are cleansed from our sins. *Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*

We're reminded in the service when the oils are blessed, the Chrism Mass, that oils are also used for healing, for preparing athletes for competition and for massaging tired limbs. Psalm 103: *Praise the Lord, O my soul : and all that is within me praise his holy Name. 2. Praise the Lord, O my soul : and forget not all his benefits; 3. Who forgiveth all thy sin : and healeth all thine infirmities; 4. Who saveth thy life from destruction*

: and crowneth thee with mercy and loving-kindness; 5. Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things : making thee young and lusty as an eagle. 6. The Lord executeth righteousness and judgement : for all them that are oppressed with wrong.

1 Three in One, and
One in Three,
Ruler of the earth
and sea,
Hear us while we lift
to Thee
Holy chant and
psalm.

2 Light of lights!
with morning-shine,
Lift on us Thy light
divine;
And let charity
benign
Breathe on us her
balm.

So my whimsical thoughts about Three in One oil and the Holy Trinity seem to have led us down a few worthwhile pathways. I hope you've found them as interesting and stimulating as I have. Roger.

3 Light of lights!
when falls the even,
Let it close on sin
forgiven;
Fold us in the peace
of heaven;
Shed a holy calm.

4 Three in One, and
One in Three,
Dimly here we
worship Thee;
With the saints
hereafter we
Hope to bear the
palm. Amen.

PERCY PIGEON'S PERCEPTIONS

Good day to you all. The weather has been "unsettled". This is a euphemism for wet, windy and cool. A few good days have been precious and a relief to know the hosepipe ban has finally been lifted. We have flown over some potential new reservoirs, largely near Court Farm in Upper Halling and around the home of the alpacas in Cuxton. Those alpacas are very friendly, unlike their cousin the llamas. The alpaca farm is a great place for children's birthday parties, and you can walk with them and picnic with them! We avians enjoy collecting the crumbs.

When you read this you will have celebrated the coronation of your King. We pigeons don't have a hierarchy but we do respect those older and wiser than us. Within the whole avian kingdom there is a pecking order of course, determined by size or ferocity. We pigeons shelter from gulls, ravens and hawks. I notice that the foxes, badgers and cats are still delighting in your rubbish bags, left out overnight. We too forage among the left-overs before the bin men whisk it away. Have you noticed that the foxes are now looking much fitter? That is largely down to those of you who leave rubbish out overnight. If you have any discarded leather like a lone glove or shoe, if you leave it in your garden at this time of the year, the foxes will take it for their cubs to play with. I hope you enjoy your late Spring.

Coo coo.

Pronunciation Poem

I take it you already know
Of tough and bough and cough and dough?
Others may stumble, but not you,
On hiccough, thorough, laugh and through.
Well done! And now you wish, perhaps,
To learn of less familiar traps.

Beware of heard, a dreadful word,
That looks like beard and sounds like bird.
And dead – it's said like bed, not bead –
And for goodness sake, don't call it deed.
Watch out for meat and great and threat
(They rhyme with suite and straight and debt.)

A moth is not the moth in mother,
Nor both in bother, broth in brother.
And here is not a match for there,
Nor dear and fear for bear and pear.
And then there's dose and rose and lose –
Just look them up – and goose and choose.
And cork and work and card and ward
And font and front and word and sword,
And do and go and thwart and cart –
Come, come, I've hardly made a start.
A dreadful language? Man alive!
I'd mastered it when I was five.

Jokes

Two mobile phones got married. They exchanged ringtones, but the reception was terrible.
I told my girlfriend she was drawing her eyebrows too high.

She looked surprised.

From the Registers

Baptisms:

30th April

30th April

6th May

Matthew Alex Wiltshire

Ellie Grace Best

Grace Michelle Josephine Griffiths

Maidstone

Bush Road

Charles Drive

The Coronation

I think most people enjoyed the Coronation weekend. I certainly did, despite having a few reservations. Don't get me wrong, I have no reservations about our being a constitutional and sacral monarchy. It is not the only way to govern a country, but it works for us and it works better than the systems of government in operation in far too many parts of the world. If we had an elected or appointed head of state, even one who had seized power, even if he or she were not a Christian, we would still have to respect our rulers, pay our taxes obey their laws (except where they were in opposition to God's Law) and pray for them. *The powers that be are ordained of God.* We are blessed that we have a head of state who knows Whose minister he and is and seeks God's grace in order to fulfil his vocation as our King and that he did so in a very public service, as well as no doubt daily in his own personal prayers..

Neither do I have any reservations about Charles as King. He is a person whom I find it easy to admire and respect, not that it is my place to judge the monarch or to judge any other human being. God is our judge. I know that there is some concern about serious sins in the past to which the King has confessed. *Let him who is without sin among you cast the first stone.* We all have to admit to being sinners if we are honest. *If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* When we have done wrong and acknowledged it, we have to seek God's guidance for the way ahead so that we can make the best use of the rest of our lives in His service and that of the world.

I do worry about the danger of idolising any human being. Only God is worthy of our worship. If we believe that God created us all in His own image and that Christ died for every one of us, we are all equal in the sight of God and it would be wrong to rate people by any other standard than that which God Himself uses. We are all equal. We are all of infinite worth. Several times in the Bible it says that God is no respecter of persons. Neither should we be. We should treat all persons with respect, justice and mercy and, above all, love.

Noble birth, fine clothes, carriages or top of the range cars, palaces or splendid houses, good looks, a good education, wealth, power - none of these things is relevant in our judgment of people. Generally speaking, we ought not to judge others at all. Jesus says, *Judge not, that ye be not judged.* If we must judge other people, the relevant factors are their character and their conduct. One of the consequences of our judging other people is that we worry about how they are judging us. More seriously, we are warned that God will judge us if we presume to judge other people. When Prince Philip died, there were plenty of well deserved appreciative comments about his very many great qualities and how he had tried to make use of his opportunities and talents to serve the Queen and the Commonwealth. We were also given lists of his many titles. I thought at the time that all those titles added nothing to his virtues and that, if he had been a bad man, no honorific title could have made him a good one. *By their fruits shall ye know them.* Everything we have – possessions, talents, our very nature – is God's gift to us, to be received with humble gratitude and to be offered back to Him unstintingly in His service.

I worry about ritual too. Ritual ought to be a worthy expression of deep underlying truths, but it can degenerate into meaningless ritual, performed without consideration or even understanding of what it is supposed to signify. Concentrating on getting the ritual right, we are sometimes distracted from the real underlying purpose of what we are doing. On the other hand, there are times when carrying out familiar rituals perhaps with little conscience thought can get us through difficult times of emotional stress.

I'm also uncomfortable with extravagance. I don't like display or obsession with material things. I value natural things more highly than manufactured, contrived or artificial beauty. We used to sing at school, *Daisies are our silver, Buttercups our gold: This is all the treasure We can have or hold*. Sounds good to me. I was rather pleased that some of the women and girls at the Coronation wore flowers on their heads rather than tiaras.

Then there is the expense. Couldn't the money spent on ceremonial and regalia have been better spent on more practical things, such as alleviating the cost of living crisis or research into green energy or funding the NHS? One has to be careful here. Of all the apostles, it was Judas Iscariot who complained when a woman anointed Jesus' feet with costly ointment and said that it should have been sold and the proceeds given to the poor. Jesus replied, *Ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will you may do them good*. Most of us could do more for the poor than we do and we risk being hypocrites if we criticize expenditure on great occasions intended to glorify God and to inspire people with a vision of splendour beyond themselves on the grounds that the money should have been given to the poor, if we ourselves rate looking after our own comfort higher than sharing what we have with people less fortunate than ourselves.

Finally, I have reservations about thinking that a big service in an abbey or cathedral with a huge congregation, splendid robes, wonderful music, etc. is somehow more glorious or significant than worship in a humble parish church, someone's home or a field. The King of Kings and Lord of Lords is present with us wherever we are. We are told not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together because He is especially present when two or three are gathered together in His Name. We can talk to Him in prayer. We receive His Word in the Bible, in sermons and in the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. He comes to us and dwells in us in the Sacraments. That's just as true for a handful of us in St Michael's or St John's as it is for thousands in Westminster Abbey. What is required of us is that we *worship in spirit and in truth*, that we offer God the best that we have. Some people were very disappointed not to be invited to the Coronation in the Abbey, but you can enjoy all the essentials in any church on any day there is a service anywhere in the world. An infinitely greater King than Charles invites us into His Presence every day.

Having got all that off my chest, I'd better say something about how we celebrated the Coronation here in Cuxton and Halling. We have a monthly coffee morning at the Jubilee Hall, Upper Halling, to which everybody is invited and which is free to all, not only coffee or tea, but cakes and biscuits as well. Usually this happens on the first Thursday of the month, but the hall was required for use as a polling station on 4th. So the date was changed to Friday 5th and we thus began our celebrations of the Coronation. There was a competition for regal hats. We toasted the King in sparkling wine. We extended the morning to include a buffet lunch and a good time was had by all.

Halling Parish Council had very kindly put up the flagpole and union flag at St John's. I needed to do that at Cuxton in the afternoon. I had my doubts about climbing the tower as thunder and lightning were forecast. I wasn't sure that putting up a flag was sufficient reason to risk my life for King & country, but the storm held off and the flag was duly flown.

When Tommy and I were coming back from our run in the woods on Saturday morning, the bells at Cuxton were beginning to be rung for the King. We carried on along Bush Road a bit to see how people had decorated their gardens for the Coronation. Then we came in to get ready. Having to shave on a Saturday! Tommy had to stay at home while I cycled to Halling where again people had put out the bunting.

It was just coming on to rain, but not enough to dampen the spirits or spoil the occasion. A good crowd had turned out to view the procession, which included various bands of cadets from Snodland and was followed by and added to by members of the public. There was a lot of horn blowing and general merriment.

I had misunderstood what we would be doing in the Community Centre at 11.00 when we were all invited to experience the Coronation together on a big screen. Halling Parish Council had done a great job. Tables

and chairs were set out and refreshments provided. Some of our senior residents had been invited to take their seats at the top table. (Were these the people who could remember the last or even earlier coronations?) There was a good crowd of people of all ages. I was expecting that we would form a congregation, joining in the service at the Abbey, albeit remotely. Most people, however, I think regarded themselves more as spectators (not always very attentive ones) comprising an audience watching and listening to what the King and Queen, the Bishops and the rest of the Abbey congregation were doing in London. I was sorry that people in the Community Centre didn't seem to be taking part in the service on a spiritual level, but I was pleased to be celebrating this significant event in the life of our nation with so many friends, neighbours and parishioners.

Rishi Sunak read the lesson very well. It was good to see people of other faiths taking part. Charles is King of the whole nation and has subjects of many religions and none. Two questions arise, however. What about the supposedly 52% of UK citizens who claim to have no religion? How should they be represented in an essentially religious event like a coronation? Different religions hold beliefs with regard to some subjects which are incompatible with one another. At what point does compromise become impossible to reconcile with integrity? For example, there is no difficulty in recognising that a Jew would regard it as forbidden to travel any distance on the Sabbath, that a Hindu would not eat beef or that a strict Muslim woman would insist on keeping her head covered and to make appropriate allowances for such differences on multi-faith occasions, but we could not expect any of them to pray *through Jesus Christ our Lord*, while we would always pray through and with Jesus, whether explicitly or implicitly, and we should be dishonest if we pretended otherwise. Like Islam, but unlike some other faiths, Christianity is essentially a missionary religion. Christians feel constrained by the love of God to share what God has revealed to us in Jesus with the whole world. I did pray that our Hindu prime minister would come to know the truth of the words he read from Colossians 1: ⁹ *For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;*¹⁰ *That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;*¹¹ *Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness;*¹² *Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.*¹³ *Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:*¹⁴ *In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:*¹⁵ *Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:*¹⁶ *For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:*¹⁷ *And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.*

The King spoke of coming to serve, not to be served. He was referencing what Jesus says in Mark 10⁴⁵: *For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.* Minister is another word for serve or servant, which both ministers of religion and government ministers do well to remember. *Son of man* is a title for Jesus. It means both that He is fully human just like us (except that He is not a sinner) and that He represents the whole human race. The King, therefore, like every Christian, devotes Himself to following the example of Jesus. Jesus goes so far as to lay down His life in service to God and God's world. We too, like King Charles, are called to take up our cross daily and follow Him.

I wasn't a fan of the public pledge of allegiance. As a minister of the Established Church, I have taken that oath more than once in an appropriately solemn manner and I didn't like what I thought was a trivialisation. Especially, I thought the last line *May King Charles live for ever* was a bit silly. *Long live the King* is a reasonable aspiration, but only God can give the gift of eternal life. But He does. He gives the gift of eternal life to all who take up the Cross and follow Jesus. So we do pray for the King, as we do for ourselves and for all people: *Most heartily we beseech thee with thy favour to behold our most gracious Sovereign Lord, King CHARLES; and so replenish him with the grace of thy Holy Spirit, that he may alway incline to thy will, and walk in thy way. Endue him plenteously with heavenly gifts; grant him in health and*

wealth long to live; strengthen him that he may vanquish and overcome all his enemies; and finally, after this life, he may attain everlasting joy and felicity; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We had a Baptism (aka Christening) that Saturday afternoon and I made the point that the most important day in King Charles' life was not his coronation or his accession to the throne on 8th September last year, but a date he probably doesn't even remember, the day he was christened. Charles' vocation is to be King, but every baptised person has his or her calling – to serve God and our fellow human beings in whatever way He calls us to do so. Like the King, it is something we must do wholeheartedly and which we cannot do without the grace of God. At the Coronation, there was much prayer, the King was handed a Bible and he received Holy Communion. So there you are – *the means of grace and the hope of glory*.

The bells at Halling were rung for the King at 4.30 in the afternoon.

I had thought to continue the celebration that day with a couple of pints in the "White Hart" later on after tea, but, as I discovered some years ago, there comes a time in life when a full day is better capped with an evening in, a cup of cocoa and an early bedtime, than with further festivities and a night out.

On the Sunday, I preached on the above lines at both services, we sang some appropriate favourite hymns, shared the Scriptures and celebrated the Sacrament. The church flowers were good too. Our bellringers at Cuxton attempted a peal in honour of our sovereign that afternoon. A group of neighbours picnicked in the warm sun in the garden of one of us. I hope you all had a good time too.

Roger.

Tommy's Talking Points



It was worth waiting for to be taken out of county at last for a walk with our friends. This is Enzo, their puppy. This picture was taken when he was very small. He was eight weeks when it was taken. He is 29 weeks now. This picture of me was taken some years ago, but not far from where we met up for our walk.



It was decided that we should congregate at Box Hill in Surrey. Master was a little bit anxious about this. When we arranged to meet at Leith Hill during COVID, he couldn't find it, even though it is supposedly the only mountain in southern England (because it has a tower on the top which takes it to over 1.000', the definition of a mountain). He got directions from the AA and packed a map, but unnecessarily, as it turned out. Box Hill is signposted pretty well all the way from J9 on the M25 – the Leatherhead turnoff.

We actually were the first to get there, but we didn't have long to wait before Enzo's transport arrived. We got on well from the start, attempted to ascertain the correct start for the Juniper Trail and then just set off anyway from where we happened to be. When you think about it, you can't do anything else really! So we missed seeing Chanctonbury Ring, 24 miles away on the South Downs, but there were plenty of other lovely views to enjoy. We walked a short distance on the North Downs Way, which is where my picture was taken and also, of course, is the same path as we take almost daily through Dean & Bush Valleys.

Spring was definitely in the air. The trees were coming into leaf, light green foliage in the month of April. Master has recently read that they economise on chlorophyll early in the year, not needing so much of it as when they are shaded by the leaves coming out on higher branches later on in the Summer. Whatever the reason, the effect is very attractive.

There were plenty of other dogs and human walkers about. The sun came out warm. Most of the paths had dried out, but there were still some very muddy wet places. Enzo really enjoyed wallowing in them. He is an Italian water dog and very much in his element when wet. Dogs like him can even swim under the water. Maybe we'll see this demonstrated on some other walk.

We stopped for lunch at Juniper Top, looking out over the Downs towards London. It's a popular place to stop and rest, but there was only one seat and it was already occupied when we arrived. So we all had to settle down on the grass. There followed the incident for which I am told that I ought to be ashamed. I ate Enzo's lunch and I didn't even let him come back to lick out the bowl. Master thinks that my lack of apparent contrition is disgraceful. Master's friends had kindly provided sandwiches for him on this occasion and there were plenty to share. He didn't steal anyone else's meal and everybody had sufficient.

We continued down a long grassy track and through a gate. We then had a long walk up Happy Valley back to the car park. The guide described this route as mildly challenging. Enzo and I didn't find it so. We bounded along, but the bipeds adopted a more sedate pace on the ascents.

When we arrived at the car park, we were surprised to meet someone else Master and his friends knew. I had never before met this gentleman, but he too was enjoying the peace of a Surrey beauty spot.

Coming home was less straightforward than going. If there is a sign for the M25 eastbound coming from Leatherhead, Master has never managed to spot it. So we had something of a diversion westwards before being able to turn round and head for home, where we sat in the garden for a bit while Master drank his tea and I enjoyed a well deserved lie down in the sun. A thoroughly enjoyable day out. Pictures taken on the day are to be found in electronic editions of the magazine on the last page.

That lovely day was the 17th April. The rain then returned with a vengeance. I caught Master consulting Genesis 6 for instructions in ark building. The following Monday we set off under a cloudy sky squelching in the mud for what he had intended should be a short run, but the sun came out and the sight of some bluebells in Mays Wood inspired him to go farther, reasoning that we might miss seeing their cerulean carpets altogether this year if we allowed the weather to put us off. So we had a terrific trip to Upper Halling, where the bluebells are always at their best around here, enjoyed the spectacle tremendously and returned via Dean and Bush Valleys – without slipping over once! He loves to see the bluebells lit up from behind by the sun's rays. We were even able to sit in the garden in the sun while we read the paper. Actually, the bluebells which have sprung up around the backdoor look really great when the skies are dark.

A lighter blue tapestry of forget-me-nots covers the rose garden and fills in the gaps between the other kinds of plant in the other flower beds and even thrust their way through tarmac and concrete.

The rains returned and it was quite cold for April. Usually the may blossoms half way through the month of April, but it waited this year until May was almost upon us. We heard the cuckoo for the first time this year in Bush Valley on 1st May. White dead nettles have been in flower for some time and the yellow dead nettle or archangel is blooming at Upper Halling. Also bugle and dandelions. The grass in Cuxton churchyard has been yellow with buttercups and Halling Cemetery has delighted with that combination of wild flowers and garden flowers gone feral which is characteristic of graveyards – never treated with pesticides or fertilised, areas left wild and containing graves on which flowers are cultivated and then free to spread to the adjacent grass land. The blue anemones are especially striking. The bird song seems exceptional this year. The days are getting beautifully longer and, when it deigns to shine, the sun is really warm.

I've been told that I can tell you a good dog story. An Englishman was on holiday in Germany. His dog fell in the River Rhine and was carried away by the current. A local diver, rescued the dog and saved it's life by giving it artificial respiration. Impressed the Englishman asked if he were a vet. "Of course, I'm vet," came the reply, "I've just got out of der river."

A final thought. Master has discovered that if I am categorised as a working dog, there's no VAT due on my food. Do you think that writing for this magazine qualifies me as a working dog? Tommy.

