

# St Swithun's Church Newsletter

For information and inspiration

December 2011

## The Gift of Christmas

Every now and again there seems to be an advert on the TV that captures the Public's interest.

A few years ago it was the Marks and Spencer's series, "it's not just roast potatoes/chocolate pudding/strawberry trifle, it's M and S roast potatoes/chocolate pudding/strawberry trifle....". Indeed, I still use this phrase when serving up anything bought from the Marks and Spencer's range!

And this year it is the John Lewis advert. For those who haven't seen it, it centres around a little boy. He is clearly counting down to Christmas, and as the days go by he gets more excited and more impatient. The natural assumption is that he is impatient for his presents, but as Christmas day dawns he rushes past the huge pile of presents waiting for him at the end of his bed. He goes to his wardrobe for a large present which he has clearly wrapped himself and with a smile that could rival the Cheshire cat's he rushes into his parents' room. The line that appears on screen is "John Lewis. For gifts you can't wait to give."

It is a challenge isn't it. To get the right balance between giving and receiving gifts. It is a particular challenge with children - this year Ellie has a gift for every member of the family that she has, for the most part, chosen so that she can experience the satisfaction that comes from giving a gift that brings joy. (For Jack it is still all about the wrapping paper!)

At Christmas we celebrate the most significant gift that the world has ever seen. And we gain insight into the generous heart of our God. The gift of his son was extravagant, sacrificial and brought joy to the world.

So my prayer this Christmas, is that amongst the material gifts, the wrapping paper, the excitement, we might find a moment to consider the gift of God's love so evident at Christmas. A gift freely offered, not earned; the gift of love; the gift of life; the gift of hope.

*Em Coley*



## A Day in the Life of a 12-Year-Old...

My name is Anna, I am 12 years old and I have a sister called Rosie, a brother called Daniel, a very excitable cocker spaniel called Harry and a guinea pig called Popcorn. I am a member of St Swithun's Church. I have epilepsy, which means that every day I have to take pills to stop myself having fits. This is just another typical school day. Enjoy!!!!

"Why did you turn the lights on, I want to stay in bed!!" That is my good morning to whoever comes and wakes me up. But I have to go to school. So I drag myself heavily out of bed and wait for my sister to finally get out of the shower, then I go in for a hair wash. Now I get ready. Get dressed, dry hair, do make up, spend 15 minutes

sorting out my hair, go downstairs, make my packed lunch (unless it's chip day, double yum), eat breakfast, brush my teeth, shoes on and head out the door to catch the bus.

It takes about 20 minutes to get to Matthew Arnold, which I either spend on my Blackberry or chatting to my good friend Kara, who I usually sit next to. I have to admit, school isn't exactly my favourite place, but I do really enjoy some lessons like drama. I think this is because it's very active - I can't really stand just sitting still doing sums or something like that.

At break, I just go mad with my friends. We have our own table in the maths block

where we sit and chill every break and lunch and occasionally I'll get something to eat from the canteen but usually I will just eat some of my lunch. But then unfortunately it's back to the work.

At the end of the school day I will sometimes go home but sometimes I will have a drama rehearsal for the school play I am in, 'Guys

and Dolls'. Mostly, they are really fun because I am doing it with quite a lot of my friends: Lucy, another Anna M, Bethan, Jozie, Eleanor and Mary. My favourite scene is called Runyonland, where it is basically just creating a busy street by using lots of different people in different ways.



When I do finally get home I will usually sit down and relax by watching television, then on a Wednesday evening I will go out to my dancing class, or on a Friday I will go to my ice-skating lessons. Then I will come home after that and eat my tea - but I am a bit of a fussy eater. Finally I go upstairs and just spend the rest of the evening relaxing and reading in my room, until I go to bed at 10 'o' clock.

This is just another typical day in my life, and I hope you enjoyed reading it.

Anna xx

## 'Oh Little Town of Bethlehem'



Do you ever wonder what it is really like at Christmas in Bethlehem? If you went to Jesus' birthplace this Christmas you would be confronted by a 25 foot barrier wall, armed guards and a huge steel gate. All Palestinians who live in Bethlehem under Israeli military occupation are prevented from travelling, or even farming their own land, outside the wall. If they have the luck of being permitted to take employment outside the city they have to pass through the security at this wall every time they leave or return, which may entail long queuing every day.

The International Court of Justice ruled the Wall to be illegal in June 2004 but Israel continues to extend it around Bethlehem and throughout the West Bank.

Perhaps we could remember the people of Bethlehem in our prayers as we approach our Christmas celebrations and sing the familiar carols.

*Halcyon Leonard*

# Pause for Prayer

'Prepare the way for the Lord,  
make straight paths for him.'  
(Matthew 3: 3)



In the lonely places  
The wilderness  
Where we stand forlorn  
Windswept and alone  
Your voice calls out  
Prepare a way for the Lord

In the dark places  
The shadows  
Where we hide our fears  
Embrace our tears  
Your voice calls out  
Prepare a way for the Lord

For the desert places in which we walk  
The streets we roam  
The paths we cross  
Guide our feet  
Take us to places  
Where you would go.  
Give us words that you would use  
That in this Advent season  
Of promise and preparation  
We might point the way  
To the Lamb of God, who takes away  
the sin of the world!

Read more at:  
[http://www.faithandworship.com/  
Advent/](http://www.faithandworship.com/Advent/)

## Advent

This advent we will be following a sermon series based on the book 'Impossible Things to Believe Before Christmas' by Kevin Scully.

Kevin Wright started us off brilliantly on Sunday by helping us to think about angels. We can also look forward to the following:

### Sunday 4 December

That the message of Christmas is a threat to society

Luke 1: 46-55

Galatians 3: 27-29

### Sunday 11 December

That God became flesh

John 1: 1-14

Philippians 2: 5-11

### Sunday 18 December

The role of stars

Genesis 1: 14-19

Matthew 2: 1-14

I hope this will provide a thought-provoking angle to our advent preparations.

**Em**



## You are all invited...

Em, Lee, Ellie and Jack are excited to invite you to Open House at the Vicarage on **23 December** from 5.00pm till 8.00pm. Join us for a glass of wine and some nibbles as we celebrate Christmas!

## Enjoy the People who Love You



Advent is a time of expectation, preparation, and anticipation, when we look forward to the birth of Jesus. We are busy buying cards and gifts, and thinking about the celebrations to come.

Many artists have painted the Adoration of the Magi, including Leonardo da Vinci and Rubens, and some of these are reproduced as Christmas cards. Look closer at the painting and what do you see? The gift of gold symbolises Christ's kingship, frankincense his priestly divinity, and myrrh his suffering humanity. But there is more to the picture. It is the relationship between the kneeling Magi and the child. It is telling us that a tired world can recover its identity through relationships. That being with people matters more than the gifts.

Then there are the gifts we lavish on others. John Betjeman wrote about the money we spend on 'bath salts and inexpensive scents, the hideous tie, so kindly meant'. It is deeply ironic in these difficult times of sinister commercialism and the debilitating culture of debt that Christmas is celebrated in an

orgy of over-spending and over-eating, because the story of the nativity is one of deprivation. How would Jesus react to what we are doing, when he told his disciples to give everything they had to the poor and not to amass riches on earth, but lay up treasures in heaven?

But let us enjoy Christmas and the giving of gifts and ourselves, and perhaps try to escape, if we can, the excessive, gaudy, greedy materialism. Then we end up with a simple message of peace and hope, which says that our faith is more durable and valuable than secularism and materialism. It's got to be worth celebrating, no matter what customs we follow or symbols we use. So eat your heart out Mr Dawkins and enjoy the people who love you.

*Gerry Bowen-Thomas*



## The Big Hall Clean

See the New Year in by giving a helping hand to spring clean the church hall on 21 January 2012 at 10.00am.



## Prayer Partnership

As you might be aware, we should be changing partners at the start of the church's year, Advent. Because so much seems to have been going on during October and November it has been decided that we will now change partners on the Sunday before Ash Wednesday, 19 February 2012.

Please continue to pray for and with your current prayer partner, for the different parts you all play within the church in spreading God's love in Kennington and beyond.

If you are new to St Swithuns and are curious to know what this scheme is all about, please do ask Em, Margaret Smith, or perhaps one of the prayer partners on the list at the back of the church.

## Homegroup

Our recent homegroup series explored the question 'What would it look like to live more simply, sustainably and generously?' The basis was a series of 3-4 minute films from the Breathe network, a Christian community for simple living. You can watch the films - called 'The Life', 'Home', 'Play' and 'Enough' - online at <http://conspiracyoffreedom.org/>

At the end of the series, we decided to make a list of things we wanted to try or to start doing, and felt it was worth sharing some of our ideas with the rest of the congregation. So, here goes: I/we want to start...

- working out what I need, not what I want, especially when shopping
- using the Oxford Scrap Store 'Orinoco' (<http://www.oxorinoco.org/>) - it fires your creativity!

- being aware of my acquisitiveness, asking why I want things
- setting goals for the new year which involve trying new things, playing and being creative
- having a homegroup (or church) games evening
- shopping with a list and ignoring 'Buy One Get One Free', because I don't have the storage space

Hope these ideas get you thinking too!

*Sam Partington and the 'Wednesday homegroup'*

PS Don't forget the special Advent groups running in December. After that, homegroups are restarting in the new year. Why not come and join us?

## Jubilee and Ball



Long summer evenings, a chilled glass of rosé, an ice cream cone topped with melting ice cream...Does is get you in the mood for summer??

I know, we are all focused on Christmas, staying warm, mulled wine and mince pies, but next summer is an important one for our nation. It's the Queen's diamond jubilee and we are hosting the Olympics. There are some exciting events planned...

### **The Jubilee**

I was at a meeting at the end of November called by Peter Biggs, Chairman of the Parish Council, to make some decisions about Kennington's Jubilee Celebrations.

It has been decided that on Saturday 2 June there will be a big village fete in the afternoon, probably on Forest Side, with a marquee, then a hog roast, dancing and fireworks in the evening.

On Sunday 3 June there will be a tea party, and the Jubilee celebrations will all be concluded by a special service in the

marquee so that we can involve a significant number of people.

Village organisations are all being asked to be involved. This is a great opportunity to see the whole community come together to celebrate.

### **A Ball...**

By way of celebrating both the Jubilee and the Olympics, St Swithun's Church will be hosting a Red, White and Blue ball.

We will hold this at the end of June/beginning of July, and we will use the whole church grounds - the hall, a marquee in the grounds, and the church.

We will include music, dancing, food and entertainment, and the decoration will be on the red, white and blue theme.

As with last year's Flower Festival, the key to the success of this initiative is an organising team. If you would like to be involved, please let me know. Thanks!

Em

## From the Editor

Thomas Hardy wrote 'The Oxen' in the middle of the carnage of the First World War. According to one writer in the *Guardian* last year (Adam Newey), Hardy 'encapsulates beautifully the urge to faith that persists even in the face of all better judgment'.

### The Oxen

Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock.  
"Now they are all on their knees,"  
An elder said as we sat in a flock  
By the embers in hearthside ease.

We pictured the meek mild creatures where  
They dwelt in their strawy pen,  
Nor did it occur to one of us there  
To doubt they were kneeling then.

So fair a fancy few would weave  
In these years! Yet, I feel,  
If someone said on Christmas Eve,  
"Come; see the oxen kneel,

"In the lonely barton by yonder coomb  
Our childhood used to know,"  
I should go with him in the gloom,  
Hoping it might be so'.

*Jacqueline Smith*

## Dates for Your Diary

### Sunday 4 December

6.00pm Carols around the Tree

### Saturday 10 December

10.00am-12.00 Craft Morning in Church

### Sunday 11 December

4.00pm Christingle

### Sunday 18 December

6.30pm Carols by Candlelight

### Saturday 24 December

4.00pm Crib Service

11.30pm Midnight Communion

### Sunday 25 December

10.00am Christmas All Age Communion

### Saturday 14 January

10.00am-12.00 Craft Morning in Church

### Saturday 21 January

10.00am The Big Clean

### Sunday 22 January

11.00am All Age Unity Service at St Swithun's

### Monday 23 January

8.00pm PCC

### Thursday 26 January

11.30am onwards Winter Warmer Lunch

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## Something to Say?

Please send any contributions for the St Swithun's Church newsletter to the Editor, Jackie Smith. We welcome text and/or pictures (in particular it would be good to build up a bank of pictures reflecting church life, so if you have any please do send them in).

Don't worry if writing isn't your thing – Jackie can help you with the right form of words.

**Deadline for copy: 20 Dec 2011**