



ST ANDREW'S UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
WALTON AND WEYBRIDGE

THE GRAPEVINE

FEBRUARY 2024

Volume 3 No 1



The towpath entrance to Manor Park, Walton-on-Thames

"I have always been delighted at the prospect of a new day, a fresh try, one more start with perhaps a bit of magic waiting behind the morning."

J B Priestley

From The Manse

February 2024



Dear friends

Happy New Year! On Advent Sunday a new year in the church's calendar began. With that began a new cycle of Bible readings for 2024 and our focus moves from Matthew's Gospel to Mark's. My pastoral letter this time last year gave a bit of an introduction to Matthew's Gospel, in preparation for the coming year. This year it, therefore, seems appropriate to do the same for Mark.

These days most scholars think Mark's Gospel was the first to be written and that he may have given himself a cameo role in it as well, being the young man mentioned at the arrest of Jesus (Mk 14.51-52). It's suggested that the primary source for his information was Simon Peter and, as you read it, you do get the feeling that it has all the features of a first-hand witness. It was probably written between about 50 and 65 AD, drawing on oral sources.

Mark is always thought of as being the story-teller – he wants to tell the story of Jesus – and so, when looking at passages from Mark, it is sometimes worth asking why he thinks this is a story worth telling; and how he might be telling it in such a way as to engage his listeners' attention? It's the shortest of the Gospels and can be read in about 40 minutes. I do encourage you to do that at some point because it's a really useful thing to do. Set aside ¾ hour, settle down comfortably and just read the Gospel "in a one-ner". I am willing to bet that you will find certainly things come across to you rather differently and that by the end of reading the story you will find you have a different perspective. It's also perhaps worth noting that over a third of Mark's Gospel is devoted to the last week in Jerusalem.

Like Matthew and Luke, Mark's Gospel contains the story of the events on the road to Caesarea Philippi but the way in which he tells of them and uses that story is the hinge point. I will say (and show) more about that when we get to it in the cycle of readings. For Mark, though, the Caesarea Philippi story is the pivotal story. Before then Jesus is shown as being a wonderworker with a good line in miracles. (Not my wit!) After it the way of the cross unfolds. The way of sorrow begins to stretch out.

As to where the Gospel was written, the current thinking is Rome. Reasons for this include that Mark is at pains to explain Jewish customs to his readers, the implication to us being that they didn't know them already. He also preserves the actual Aramaic words of Jesus, spoken just before he died (Mk 15.34) but then has to add a translation, again implying that his readers wouldn't have understood it.

Perhaps the final thing to say at this point, though, is that you will discover Mark does not gloss over the disciples' faults and failings and he can be critical of them. For example, when James and John ask Jesus for a special favour Matthew tries to put the blame on the mother – Mark doesn't. Or again, when the disciples try to stop the mothers bringing their children to Jesus Mark is quite indignant.

We pretty well know the motives each of the Gospel writers had for writing but what makes Mark's so special is that here we are very close to the original traditions and stories, in as "unaltered" a way as we could have. Mark's the story-teller – he's the one who just wants to tell us the story of Jesus. With that bit of background, I hope that we shall enjoy learning more in the coming year from Mark.

With all good wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John Cal", with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

CHURCH CALENDAR FOR 2024

“For last year's words belong to last year's language
 And next year's words await another voice.
 And to make an end is to make a beginning.”
'Little Gidding' - T S Eliot

January

Tuesday 9 th	7.30pm	Elders' Meeting
Sunday 21 st	2.30pm	Week of Prayer for Christian Unity at St James's Church, Weybridge

February

Tuesday 13 th	7.30pm	Elders' Meeting
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March

Sunday 10 th	10.30am	Mothering Sunday
Tuesday 12 th	7.30pm	Elders' Meeting
Thursday 28 th	7.00pm	Maundy Thursday Communion
Friday 29 th	10.30am	Good Friday Meditation
Sunday 31 st	10.30am	Easter Day Communion

April

Sunday 7 th or 14 th	after service	Church AGM
Tuesday 9 th	7.30pm	Elders' Meeting

May

Tuesday 14 th	7.30pm	Elders' Meeting
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June

Saturday 8 th ?	TBC	Dedication of rebuilt Weybridge URC organ in Morecambe
Tuesday 11 th	7.30pm	Elders' Meeting
Sunday 30 th	after service	Church Meeting

July

Tuesday 9 th	7.30pm	Elders' Meeting
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August

Sat/Sun 10 th /11 th		Flower Festival
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September

Tuesday 10 th	7.30pm	Elders' Meeting
Sunday 29 th	after service	Church Meeting

October

Tuesday 8 th	7.30pm	Elders' Meeting
Sunday 13 th	10.30am	Parade and Harvest Festival

November

Sunday 10 th	10.30am	Remembrance Sunday
Tuesday 12 th	7.30pm	Elders' Meeting

December

Sunday 8 th	10.30am	Parade and Gift Service
Tuesday 10 th ?	7.30pm	Elders' Meeting

News of the Church Family

In Memoriam

Ray Groves

We were much saddened to hear of the death of Ray Groves on 4 January. We send our condolences, love and thoughts to Sue and their daughters, Ali and Viv. There was a Service of Thanksgiving for Ray at St Andrew's Walton and Weybridge on 25 January. An appreciation of Ray's life will appear in the March issue.

Greetings from Hungary

The Revd Károly Mikesi sends greetings and good wishes to everyone who remembers him from his visit with his wife and daughter to Weybridge several years ago when he was Minister of the Reformed Church in Kiskunhalas (a link church with Weybridge) and particularly to those who over the years have visited Kiskunhalas. Although long retired he continues his work as a member of the Chaplaincy Team at the local hospital in Kecskemet. He also meets regularly with a group of retired Ministers and a few of them went on a retreat at a holiday home run by the Reformed Church. Károly retains his interest in music and still sings in the Kecskemet church choir where his son is the choir director and he is also very pleased that his daughter-in-law is now Deputy Head of the Reformed Grammar School.

Keeping up-to-date with the younger generation

Angela Woods writes:

"In November following the completion of her Master's Degree in Sport and Exercise Psychology, we learnt that Rachel was awarded a Distinction. This included her dissertation about the culture in women's football for which she achieved 90%. Rachel has now started on her Doctorate although it will take her between three and five years to complete this – so a little time before we get a doctor in the family!"

In addition to Rachel's amazing academic achievements we, as a family, like many people, have been coping with a family member (Mike's Mum) who is suffering from Alzheimer's. Rachel has therefore decided that on 7th April she is going to run the London Landmarks Half-Marathon for the Alzheimer's Society – she has never run this far before and is currently in training for it! If you would like to support her or find out a little more please see the link below to her Just Giving page – thank you."

https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/rachel-woods-1?utm_source=Sharethis&utm_medium=fundraising&utm_content=rachel-woods-1&utm_campaign=pfp-email&utm_term=d353c531416848579306a1c4620f70c9.

We send many congratulations to Rachel (a former member of Junior Church at Weybridge URC) on her most recent academic achievement and wish her well in her future studies and, of course, success in the forthcoming half-marathon.

Prayers

Please remember all these friends in your prayers – Brian and Kate Ashfield, David Cheeseman, John Langdon, Lilian Smith and Michael Stevens. Remember, too, those who are in hospital or unwell at home.

If you know of anyone who would like to be included in this prayer list, or if you wish to be included yourself, please let the Editors know.

With thanks to Anne Fitzgerald for our cover photograph of the towpath entrance to Manor Park, Walton-on-Thames

SERVICES AND OTHER KEY DATES FEBRUARY 2024

On the first and third Sunday of the month services will also be on Zoom

Sunday 4 February (Zoom)	10.30 am	Morning Worship with Holy Communion
Friday 9 February	12.30 - 2.30 pm	People Who Lunch - Church Hall (<i>see page 11</i>)
Sunday 11 February	10.30 am	Morning Worship
Tuesday 13 February (Shrove Tuesday)	7.30 pm	Elders' Meeting Hersham Room


TUESDAY 13 FEBRUARY SHROVE TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY 14 FEBRUARY ASH WEDNESDAY

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Sunday 18 February (Zoom)	10.30 am	Morning Worship
	3.00 pm	 Messy Church
Sunday 25 February	10.30 am	Morning Worship

A BIG THANK-YOU

As November drew to a close there needed to be some frantic activity in the church. Our first Christmas Carol Service was on Advent Sunday and everywhere needed to be prepared. Trees, decorations, greenery, candles all got pulled out of the cupboards. Those that were lost were found and by 3rd December the church was decorated and looking good, drawing a gasp from the congregation at the Memorial Carol Service when they went into the candlelit church and it just looked absolutely stunning – a special moment indeed.

We have had all sorts of things this last December, including a lunchtime concert and a Parade/Gift Service that suffered from many last-minute crises but which was pulled back from collapse by a team effort, resulting in a much enjoyed and appreciated act of worship. Christmas Communion was celebrated in The Gateway to enable a very different service to be held. The Carol Service was as good as ever, complete with a choir this year.

Refreshments have been served – wine has been mulled and pies have been minced. Cards were collected, sorted and distributed. Thank you to everyone who worked so hard behind the scenes in so many different ways. Your work is much appreciated and everything came together beautifully and we drew well above average congregations over the festive period. Christmas 2023 is one to remember for all the right reasons.

Michael

LENT COURSE 2024

Ash Wednesday is on 14th February and this year I am reverting to writing my own course after the practical difficulties of using the URC's Daily Devotions' one last year. "Verses in Writing – a Lent Course for 2024" is now available in printed form in church and is also available as an email attachment on request.

Poetry was a significant part of my childhood and of my schooling. I am grateful for this because it gave me a rich resource upon which I have drawn many times.

This year's Lent course draws on the poets' insights and gives a poem for each of the six weeks in Lent, plus Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. The poems are all relevant in some way to the week's theme, although a couple of them could be considered a bit "left-field". Knowing me I expect that probably won't surprise you at all. I have tried to choose a variety of styles as well. Some are quite well-known but their pairing with the day's theme might prove to be quite thought-provoking. Others may be new to you. I hope, however, that the course is of interest to you and is of benefit. The title, "Verses in Writing" is taken from Ecclesiasticus 44, which speaks of "famous men" including those who, "recited verses in writing".

Michael

Christ of the ashes: finding life in the season of Lent

16th March 2024 at Guildford URC



A reflective day, led by Hannah Fytche (Associate Tutor at Westminster College)

The season of Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, a day on which some choose to be marked by a cross of ashes and oil on their forehead. This ashen cross reminds us of our human fragility whilst offering a prayer for Christ to continually renew us with his life. This prayer accompanies us on our journey towards the sorrow and joy of Easter weekend, and it is a symbol of both our weakness and our hope.

As we gather during Lent, we'll learn from each other about who the Ash Wednesday cross reveals Jesus to be. We'll discover a Christ who is fragile enough to suffer alongside us, yet strong enough to hold the ashes and dust of the universe together. Through reflections from the Bible, conversation, prayer, and creativity, we'll seek to discern how Christ meets us in the dust of our particular lives and brings us always to new life.

Saturday 16th March. Arrival from 10:30 for an 11am start; lunch at 1pm; finishing at 3pm.

Cost £5 which includes a simple lunch.

Spaces are limited, BOOK YOUR PLACE via the link on the Synod website urcwessex.org.uk/event/lent/
Any difficulties email: bookings@urcwessex.org.uk

The day is organised by Wessex Synod Spirituality Group, if you have any queries, please contact the group's convenor Alison Toplas atoplas@hotmail.com



THE ROYAL VISIT - 18 JANUARY 2024

What a lovely day we had when The Duchess of Edinburgh came to visit Elmbridge Mencap! The Duchess was amazing and chatted, danced, and joined in playing table football, the parachute game and cooking in our new kitchen all with our clients. The Duchess said she loved being with our special people and it showed.

I was asked to tell her the story of how Elmbridge Mencap started up over 70 years ago and my family's involvement, starting with my mother Elsie Ness and after the birth of our brother David in 1949.

The Duchess was very easy to talk to and made me feel confident and comfortable. She was going to celebrate her birthday on 20 January, after presenting her with a cake and flowers, we all sang the traditional Happy Birthday followed by the Stevie Wonder version of Happy Birthday to You. Everyone got up and danced and sang; the Duchess joined in and hugged everyone who wanted a hug. A fabulous lady, full of love and with a genuine interest in all our special guys.

Jean Rigden



The Duchess of Edinburgh chats to Ben while joining in with the parachute game

You can find our more about The Royal Visit at Elmbridge Mencap by clicking on the link below:

<https://elmbridgemencap.org.uk/>

Holiday Memories

Spring and Summer are on their way and thoughts turn to sunny weather and times of blissful relaxation! If you go on holiday, or on a short-break or for a good day out to an interesting destination please share your experiences with us. Not everyone is able to get out and about to enjoy such activities and reading your stories brings a great deal of pleasure, so please send them in. We are grateful to Jem Ward for this month's contribution recounting a visit he and Claire made to a beautiful garden in the Surrey countryside. Associate Editor

A day out at Ramster Garden

Last year Claire's younger daughter, Katie, and then-fiancé Adam, recommended a visit to Ramster Garden. They had visited it in early May and found the whole place carpeted in bluebells.

It is open from mid-March until the first weekend in July – we suspect that the rest of the summer is taken up with wedding receptions!

It is sited just south of Chiddingfold on the A283 which runs from the A3 just past Guildford towards Petworth. Claire and I went in mid-May as they were hosting an exhibition by the Surrey Sculpture Society, which had some 50 exhibits. There is also some 'resident' statuary there all the time.

The garden is famous for its rhododendrons, many of which were planted by the great-grandmother of the current owner when the family first took the site over in the 1920s. We much enjoyed their displays of flowers even if, in some cases, it was necessary to look upwards, as some are twenty metres high! As it was mid-May, the display of azaleas was also stunning.

There are easy and mainly level walks around the gardens and the café does a very good line in soup and sandwiches for lunch – we didn't have time to taste the cakes but suspect them to be of an equally high standard!

Jem Ward

Ramster Garden, Petworth Road, Chiddingfold. GU8 4SN

Tel: 01428 654167

www.ramsterevents.com



A permanent statue set amidst the azaleas



THE SNOWDROP TRAIL

Every year, after its winter closure, the Chelsea Physic Garden opens its doors for an event to gladden the heart - 'Heralding Spring'. This includes the Snowdrop Trail. I went with a friend on this year's opening day, 21 January. The Chelsea Physic Garden website outlines the history of snowdrops.

"Snowdrops (galanthus cultivars - family Amaryllidaceae) are famed for their charming white flowers that speckle woodland floors and gardens to herald spring. Carl Linnaeus, whom we attribute modern plant naming to, coined the word Galanthus from the Greek words gala "milk" and anthos "flower".

The word 'snowdrop' first appeared in literature in the mid 1600s and was probably derived from Schneetropfen, the German name for pearl earrings resembling the shape of snowdrop flowers, that were particularly fashionable at the time.

Since the 1800s, when galanthophilia (snowdrop craze) began, plant hunters discovered new species and began breeding hybrids and cultivars. The craze never stopped and today we have many galanthophiles among us who celebrate and revere the modest snowdrop as much as we do.

Notice in front of you the vast array of Galanthus species and cultivars, of which there are over a hundred here at Chelsea Physic Garden today. It is not immediately obvious what the differences between each type are but the more you look the more you will notice the variation in the inner tepals, outer tepals, colouration of the leaves, height and so forth. Look closely. Do you have a favourite?"

Snowdrops were in evidence all around the garden, some, tiny, spread out like a carpet and others standing individually and quite tall; some scented and others miniature works of art with green patterns in a myriad of different designs. The trail included the 70-year old grapefruit tree, grown from a pip by a keen gardener and donated after it grew too large for her home and wintersweet, a tree which has small, sweetly scented, sulphur-yellow flowers that appear on bare branches throughout the winter months. At intervals there were 'snowdrop theatres' with a selection each one individually displayed in a group of cubicles. We were introduced to Kokedama, translated as 'moss ball' in Japanese, when small plants are encased in a moss-covered ball of soil. These look lovely suspended in the air or on a decorative tray. One of the volunteers guided us round the trail and we browsed the plants for sale at the end, succumbing to one that promised winter scent - 'sarcococca confusa' - apparently good for growing in containers but could be happier in the ground. Good to position them on the patio, just outside the back door, and open the door or windows during warm winter days. I can't wait!

Norma Reid (aka Ed)

THREE VOLUMES

Life is a book in volumes three -
The past, the present, and the yet-to-be.
The past is written and laid away
The present we're writing every day,
And the last and best of volumes three
Is locked from sight - God keeps the key.

(read by Claire Ward at our New Year's Eve service)

STRATUS CONCERT

Stratus, who last played at St Andrew's in April 2019, are a fresh take on the Piano Trio, offering an eclectic mix of classical favourites and the best of popular music. The Piano Trio - Nathaniel Brawn (violin), Samuel Grew (cello) and Zacchaeus Rodwell (piano) - have played together informally since their days working at Wetherby Preparatory School.



Having been in abeyance whilst Zacc and Nat were teaching abroad, Stratus are back together and held their “reunion” concert in The Gateway on 9th December. Informal and relaxed, “Christmas pullies” to the fore, the trio played a varied programme with an emphasis on seasonal music – including some medleys of popular festive songs and various pieces of music used in previous years’ John Lewis Christmas Adverts. (Very Surrey!)

It’s so busy in the run-up to Christmas, what with all the shopping and other preparations, and it was a real treat to have 45 minutes of calm, in the company of three extremely talented musicians, sitting in a beautifully decorated church. It was the first time we have had that sort of concert so close to Christmas in church but I rather hope it won’t be the last. To Zacc, Sam and Nat – a very big “thank you”.

Michael



God has not promised skies always blue,
Flower strewn pathways all our lives through.
God has not promised sun without rain,
joy without sorrow, peace without pain.
But he has promised strength for each day, rest for the labour,
light for our way, grace for all trials,
help from above, unfailing sympathy, undying love.

*by Annie Johnson Flint from the Morecambe URC magazine
and with thanks to David Netherwood*

MY FAMILY



Happiness is.... a family of fat mamas.

Already addicted to ArtPeace Zimbabwean sculptures, with more than I have house room for, some new kids on the block appeared in the form of 'fat mamas'. These characters have evolved since the first consignment landed in the UK, when they were larger and more simple in form. The latest sculptures, by different artists, are smaller and more detailed. I missed out on the original ladies but have now accumulated a family of eight, including one couple. I love them all and they make me smile every day. They normally reside on my dining-table but braved the freezing temperature in the garden so as to look

their best for the photograph. I bought the three individual ladies on the left first, then the others at our most recent ArtPeace display in church. Elizabeth, our administrator snaffled one. In fact, this left one behind but she looked so lonely without her friends that I had to go back for her. I can't wait for the next consignment to arrive – Johnston expects two deliveries in February and will top up the small display left in a corner of the Gateway.

Norma Reid (aka Ed)

PEOPLE WHO LUNCH

A large group – 31 in total – came together for the Christmas 'People who Lunch' event on 8 December in the church hall. In tune with the season, Scotch Broth was provided as one of the soup choices to ensure everyone could be fortified against the cold! The extensive selection of desserts included Christmas Pudding, plum pie, lemon meringue pie, Norwegian tart and fruit salad supplemented by meringues, mince pies and cheese and biscuits. (If this isn't tempting you to attend this monthly get-together we don't know what will!)

Now, about the singing of *The Twelve Days of Christmas*. Margaret Faultless tells us that she often gets groups to sing this well-known carol around this time of year. The aim is to have some fun by separating participants into small groups singing one line each at the appropriate time.

Having been busy in the kitchen for most of the singing we feel that we will need to practise ready for next year, in order to time our contribution a bit better and not be a triumph of enthusiasm over accuracy – there seemed to be some confusion from the singers as to the exact numbers of Lords, Ladies, Pipers and Drummers who should be turning up! Nevertheless, much fun was had by all.

Our thanks go to Margaret for hosting and organising the event, to everyone who provided the food and assisted with the clearing-up and to all those who came for the excellent companionship. And all for £5 per person – a bargain!

Claire and Jem Ward

Remember, everyone is welcome at this monthly get-together held on the second Friday of the month in the Church Hall. For just £5 you can have soup, a roll, dessert, cheese and biscuits and coffee/tea.

Advance booking essential! To book your place please contact Margaret Faultless either in church or by email margaret.faultless@blueyonder.co.uk

PS: If any PWL aficionado felt the urge to take the odd photograph of these happy occasions, we might all enjoy it in future issues of The Grapevine (with the relevant permission from those featured, of course). Ed

CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS

GIFT SERVICE - 10 DECEMBER

The Gift Service was held on the second Sunday in Advent and we were definitely looking forward to Christmas! The church trees by the lectern and in The Gateway had been set up and decorated and there were candles placed on pew ends in anticipation of the Carol Service the next week. All we needed was a well-organised service to go smoothly. However, the tech desk and the projector were metaphorically 'sitting with their backs to each other, arms folded and refusing to communicate', so it was a bonus that some carol words were printed on the Order of Service.



After the Colours had been brought in, a large number of gifts of toys were brought up to the front to be given out later as gifts by local Social Services. Then it was time for the re-lighting of the first Advent candle – cue a rush by the Minister to get the tapers from the vestry – and the Cubs had this under control in very short order. The second candle was then lit by a member of the 1st Weybridge Brownies (modesty forbids us mentioning her name ...)

A well-rehearsed group representing the 4th Weybridge Beavers, Cubs, Scouts and Rainbows and the 1st Weybridge Guides were there to do their part. Crucially, despite the technical failures reported earlier, the hand-held microphone was working, so that explanations of what a prophet is and what they had to say about the birth of Jesus came across very clearly, as did the prayers. It is a pleasure to be served by young people who are confident in their use of a microphone and clear in their speech.



Then it was time for the Nativity Tableau. The Wardrobe Mistress was unavoidably absent, as was the Deputy Wardrobe Mistress, so three members of the congregation were press-ganged into service and made a splendid job of outfitting the participants. Mary got a baby to hold, the straw-filled crib was brought forth and the three junior shepherds were each given a sheep to hold. (*We might have to find a crook for the senior shepherd next year – alternatively he might bring one of his golf clubs.*) The angelic chorus of Rainbows stood, twinkling, on the steps. Special mention must be made of the one who was selected as the Angel Gabriel, who gently flapped her arms, to indicate that she was flying, throughout the whole of the set-up. The Wise Men arrived, with some costumes covering their

Cub or Scout uniforms more effectively than others. (*One was wearing a costume made from the design of sheet that Jem had on in his bed in the 1970s – not quite sure what that signifies!*)

All in all, this was an excellent service, with hard work paying off in its planning, enforced adaptation, willingness to participate and technical and musical input. Thank you very much to all of those who took part, both 'on stage' and 'behind the scenes'!

Claire and Jem Ward

(All the gifts were gratefully received by the NE Surrey Children and Families' Team at Surrey Social Services. They were taken to local families in need in time for Christmas together with vouchers (for use at local stores) which were purchased by the church with the monetary gifts made by members of the congregation.)

CAROL SERVICE - 17 DECEMBER

"I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me.
I will not shut out the lessons that they teach."

Charles Dickens - 'A Christmas Carol'



The carol service is always an event to look forward to, and one which often – as on this occasion – draws people from beyond our regular congregation. I arrived at the church about 20 minutes before the start of the service to find The Gateway full of people enjoying seasonal fare of mince pies and mulled wine, along with lively conversation. Shortly before 4 o'clock, everyone took their seats in church. It looked beautiful, lit largely by candles, and with the Christmas crib and decorations emphasising this time of joy.

The atmospheric candlelight left me initially wondering how anyone would manage to read the hymn books but, of course, I need not have worried – we had the words of the carols displayed on the screen at the front of the church, as were the details of each reading as the readers approached the lectern. The carols included many favourites, which everyone joined in with gusto, including *Once in Royal David's City*, *O Little Town of Bethlehem*, *In the Bleak Midwinter*, *Hark the Herald Angels Sing* and *O Come All Ye Faithful*. Interspersed were the traditional nine lessons and three less familiar readings: two poems – Denise Levertov's *Annunciation* and U A Fanthorpe's *BC/AD* – and a post-Christmas letter such as could have been written by one of the shepherds to one of the Wise Men from the East. Some lovely additional music was provided by the choir, a group of eight led by the Minister, and this choir processed out of the church at the end of the service, carrying candles and singing *Away in a Manger* – a simply beautiful way to end the service. We were all grateful to everyone involved, including Teresa Bacon and Zacc Rodwell, who provided the musical accompaniments.

I think if anyone had arrived not yet feeling 'Christmassy', that would certainly have been remedied by the time they left! And the great thing was, the service helped us all reflect on what Christmas is really about.



Liz Grimsey

CHRISTINGLE - CHRISTMAS EVE

Christingle "Light of the World" - a favourite Christmas service with the children and, I suspect, with a good few adults. Its origins, so we are given to understand, can be traced back to Moravian Bishop Johannes de Wetteville who started the tradition in Germany in 1747 as "an attempt to get children to think about Jesus". Originally, it was just a red ribbon wrapped around a candle and, with time, an orange was incorporated into the Christingle. The custom was made popular in the UK in 1968 by John Pensom, when he was raising funds for the charity The Children's Society. Each year, Christingle raises over £1.2m to help vulnerable young people.



It was a long journey from Zimbabwe

As we arrived for our well-attended service on the afternoon of Christmas Eve, we collected a brown paper bag from The Gateway continuing all the elements needed to make a Christingle. Each element has a special meaning that most of us now know well.

The orange represents the world; the red ribbon symbolises the love and blood of Christ, the sweet and dried fruit, perched on four sticks stuck into the orange to indicate the four compass points off the each, represent all of God's creations; and, finally, the lit candle stands



for Jesus the light of the world bringing hope to people living in darkness.

First on the agenda was to know exactly where in the world Santa was now. One of the children had been diligently following his progress on the Santa Tracker and informed us that at 16.03 precisely he was in Laos. He moved fast to be in Myanmar (formerly Burma) at 16.06 and then Russia at 16.18, Kazakhstan at 16.31 and at our final check, India at 16.39. We estimated that it would be about nine-and-a-half hours before he arrived

So, where do we find the nativity figures...?

in the UK, enough time for a fast worker with the aid of his elves to

deliver all our Christmas presents before daybreak on Christmas Day.

We sang *See him lying on a bed of straw* as the first hymn and then Michael had a reminder from one of the three sheep guarding the Baby Jesus in the manger in front of the Communion Table that the Nativity stable was empty.

There followed a flurry of activity on the part of our younger volunteers to find the missing nativity figures, hidden around the church. Soon, they had all been located and the children queued up to hand them over to Michael, who reminded us of their stories before building the nativity scene piece by piece.

The figures were rather special this year, having been lovingly sculpted by our friends in ArtPeace. There followed *Away in a Manger* and then it was time to build our Christingles. The candles were lit at the end of all the pews and, from one light held by Michael, we lit the first Christingle, then that of our neighbour, holding them up so that the church was bathed in warm candlelight. We took a moment to sit in silence and reflect on the true meaning of Christmas. We sang

the Christingle hymn *It's rounded like an orange* and, enjoying the soft glow of the candles, *Silent Night*.



Now who have we got here?

Additional entertainment was laid on by one little girl who, fascinated by the sheep (not much smaller than was she) was to be seen at intervals walking purposefully down the aisle and making off with one of them. She was equally taken by the Baby Jesus, who was close to being abducted from his manger bed at the end of the service!

Norma Reid (aka Ed) (and with thanks to the internet for the historical facts)



CHRISTMAS DAY

We gathered for our Christmas Day service, led by Anna Crawford, who began by explaining that Michael, our Minister, for the first time in 38 years of ministry felt unable to lead worship for family reasons. He had recently described the circumstances and asked for the congregation's agreement that he should miss the Christmas morning service, which was willingly given. The congregation had joined in his appreciation of Anna's agreement to lead worship on this significant date in the church calendar.



We were small in number but joined by family, friends and new faces we began our celebrations as Anna lit the Advent Candle and we sang *Joy to the World*. Following prayers Anna moved on to the traditional theme by asking what presents had been received and we saw some lovely gifts and heard of others left at home. A few of us had not had any presents yet as family traditions varied.

The reading from St Luke 2: vv 1-14, the Birth of Jesus, was delivered by Liz Grimsey and after we had sung *See! In Yonder Manger Low* Anna reflected on the reading. She highlighted the significance of simple shepherds being the first to hear of the birth; their obedient response which led them to the stable to see the infant Jesus and leaving to go on and give witness to others. A simple plan which we, having heard the good news, are expected to follow.

More carols were sung, interjected with prayers, and our usual slightly shorter service ended with our singing *We wish you a Merry Christmas* to each other, turning around as we sang to include everyone in church. A very jolly conclusion to the Christmas Day service.

Gwenda Cochrane



Church Christmas Post Box

It had been thought that for various reasons there might be fewer cards this year but quite the reverse – numbers were definitely up! A special 'thank you' to those of you who very kindly delivered the cards to people who were unable to be in church to collect their cards personally.

...and after it's all over, Michael (very much at home with the animals after years of ministry among the farming communities of Brecon Beacons - 'Bannau Brycheiniog' - in Wales) returns the sheep to their rightful owners - until next year !



News from the URC



Prayer Calendar for February

- | | |
|----|--|
| 4 | Thatcham;
South Hayling |
| 11 | Westborough;
United Church Ferndown |
| 18 | Rowlands Castle;
United Church Egham |
| 25 | United Church Dorchester;
Isaac Watts Memorial, Southampton |

Message from the Synod Moderator Elect *Extracts from his letter sent in mid-December*

Dear friends in the Wessex Synod,

Thank you for the many warm and kind good wishes following the news of my nomination and appointment. There was a flood of love and I cannot thank you enough for these good wishes. I believe that the role of Synod Moderator is to be minister to ministers and a friend of churches. I accepted a call to this role on that basis and this is what I shall try to be and do. We face many challenges in the coming years but we do so believing that God is alive and active and working through us. I am very much looking forward to meeting more of you as I am out and about in the months following my induction service. Nearer the time that I start the role my new contact details and practical arrangements will be circulated.

Thank you for your prayers thus far. I would welcome your prayers for our churches in Farnham and Elstead as they prepare for unexpected changes in ministry and for my family and me as we prepare for the changes that this role will bring.

Here is a prayer that you may wish to join me in praying.
Advent God, you are the God who comes to us. You are not remote from the world you have made; each day you come to us, blessing us with your presence. You came in creation itself as your spirit moved over the waters of chaos. You came in Jesus Christ, made flesh in our world of weakness and needs. You came in power to raise him from death, a mighty promise for all creation. Each day you come, by your spirit, gently and positively working in the lives of ordinary people like us. At the end of time you will come in mercy and redeeming love. Help us to welcome your coming. Encourage our love to yearn for your presence. Enlarge our vision to recognise your coming each day, through Jesus Christ our saviour. Amen

With my prayers for, and best wishes to you all

Michael Hopkins



We were thinking about ships in Messy Church: worship, discipleship, and stewardship - a bit of a difficult concept for our little ones. Activities that we offered included making ships with small peppers, sails from cucumber and tomatoes plus hummus, to illustrate Paul going on a journey to spread the news of Jesus and how we too can tell people about Jesus. Sadly although the children enjoyed preparing them, they didn't last and by the time it came to going home, they were all mushy. Next time we should eat them immediately!

The concentration is palpable ...

Carrying on with this idea, we made cards to invite our friends to Messy Church. For worship, we made stained glass crosses, sticking tissue paper scraps on to sticky-backed plastic, simple but effective, and painted glass jars in which to put a light representing Jesus. We made peace doves, thinking about the world and the need for peace. For discipleship, we made pipe cleaner fish, recalling Jesus' words 'Follow me and I will make you fishers of men'. The children used them as bangles. There were pictures to colour in of the Wise Men on the ship of the desert. The dozen or so children worked together with guidance and support from parents and volunteers who also kept us supplied with tea or coffee.



Pipe-cleaner fish make the best bangles!



'You are invited to Messy Church - please come and join us to make new friends and have fun!'

We were short of volunteers but Michael saved the day coming to play for the celebration part straight from the service at St James. For the meal we had pasta bake and shepherd's pie plus chocolate mousse for pudding - there were no leftovers.

Anne Fitzgerald

FUTURE PROVISION OF STIPENDIARY MINISTRY IN OUR URC AREA

Our church is in the North-East Area of the Wessex Synod. About six years ago our area's Pastoral Committee was warned that the number of stipendiary (paid) ministerial posts able to be allotted to our area was going to have to be reduced by about half by the end of 2025. The reduction in posts is because we simply don't have enough new ministers coming out of college to fill all the denomination's vacancies. As you may imagine, working out how to deal with this has been a great challenge and there has been a lot of work going on behind the scenes in Pastoral Committee to think this through.

There is a plan in place now and all the churches of our Synod Area have received a letter from the Pastoral Committee setting it out. Copies of this letter are available in church (an email copy can be sent on request) and it does say what is currently intended for our church after I have retired. It is, therefore, quite an important document for us but the news it gives us is encouraging.

Michael

SYNOD BIG DAY OUT 2024 - BOOKINGS NOW OPEN!

Saturday 4 May 2024 10am – 5pm

Hollycombe, Liphook, Hampshire

Buy your tickets here <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/wessex-synod-big-day-out-24-tickets>

Following the success of the last Synod Big Day out at **Hollycombe Steam in the Country**, we have booked the site again for our exclusive use on Saturday 4 May from 10am – 5pm. There will be more steam rides open this year and additional programme activities provided by Wessex Synod. We invite all churches, church user groups and community groups with links to URCs and LEPs in Wessex Synod to come and enjoy a day of fellowship, fun and worship. Ticket prices are the same as in 2022: £8 per adult, £5 per child – for up to 10 rides on the attractions.

New this year are tickets for unlimited rides on the attractions: Adult £10.50, Child £7.50. A free ticket can be booked for an accompanying carer. Hollycombe's fabulous new café will be open this time and there will be other food and refreshment outlets. You are welcome to bring your own picnic. We have listened to feedback and so this time the layout for the Synod activities will be more central and accessible for all. Synod activities include a large marquee with worship, stories and entertainment, as well as a marketplace with crafts, Synod Youth Executive, and church connections, forest church and a nature walk. We look forward to seeing you there.

If you have to choose between being kind and being right, choose kind and you will always be right.

Unknown

FLOWER POWER

Ghislaine Stevenson says:

"My thanks to all at St Andrew's for the beautifully arranged bouquet of pink, white and purple alstromeria, stocks and roses which I received after Church on 21st January. It is a lovely foretaste of spring and brightens up my living room as the drabness of winter recedes."

Here is a selection of the lovely floral tributes that we have enjoyed over the past two months.

***If you feel you can help with distribution, please speak to Claire, Irene or Moira.
Your offer would be most welcome!***



26 November - Paula Walsh
for her father's birthday



3 December - Irene Pearson in memory
her husband, Jeff



10 December - Dorothy Rushworth



24 December - Christmas



31 December - Rosemary Topping in
memory of Brian and Beryl Brown in
memory of Frank



7 January - Moira and Jan de Kok



14 January - Val Cave for her mother



21 January - Valerie Brownridge, in memory of
her aunt, Sheila Gardner

Ukrainian postscript

A brief update at the start of 2024 on the three Ukrainian families we have hosted in succession following the start of the war nearly two years ago – all have done amazingly well building on the financial and practical support they received from (in no particular order) Woking URC, Woking Borough Council and the UK Government.

In the summer, the Bahin family moved from a small rented house in Woking to a larger one in New Haw. The extra space has made such a difference, especially with four children growing up and Vova (Dad) needing an office to run his business. The house is in a perfect location: the girls walk to Fullbrook School and it's an easy car journey for the boys to Pyrford Primary School. Vova and Mariia found the property, met the landlord and made all the arrangements for themselves. Unlike other landlords they had dealt with, this one was very willing to rent his house to a refugee family. Vova's business interests in Eastern Europe are doing well – although he lost everything in Ukraine – and he has recently started to employ one of his friends from Kharkiv, who had previously worked for him as a manager. Mariia was so happy showing me around their new home – there is a lovely garden and a big kitchen, but having a bedroom with an en-suite was clearly the cherry on top for her!

The Yankovskiy family has settled in Germany. Anton found a job with an international company so he continues to use his English, and both he and Ilona are studying German. Ilona has found a job with children, which is what she wanted to do; her mother, who lives nearby, provides childcare for Milana, aged 4, as needed. Alex (14) has made friends at school although they are all Ukrainian. I'm sure that as Alex progresses through school and his German improves, this will change. Anton and Ilona made a brief visit back to the UK in November, staying with us overnight. They were both very keen to find employment and to start integrating into German society even though enough financial support is given to refugees in Germany such that it is possible to get by fairly well without working. We had a delightful video from the family just before Christmas showing Milana and Ilona decorating their Christmas tree.

Vika Yurchyk and her two daughters, Kate and Maryna, are very happy in their flat in West Byfleet. It really is the ideal location for them, and they can easily walk to the Bahin's house too. The family was on their own over Christmas as Vika wanted this special time together in their own home. Vika and the girls made their own decorations for their Christmas tree, which went up very early! Having time off over the holiday period was very important for Vika not least because she works so hard in the café in West Byfleet. Vika's husband is still fighting for Ukraine near Bakhmut – he is often very tired and it has been bitterly cold recently. And so the war grinds on

Late last year, a new friend of mine mentioned that he (Brian) and his wife (Josie) were hosting a young Ukrainian woman. They live in a small village in East Devon. Nina, the young woman, was supposed to come to the UK with her mother, but very sadly her mother was killed in a bomb blast in Kyiv so Nina came on her own. Walks in the countryside over the past year with Brian, Josie and their dog, Dennis, helped Nina come to terms with what had happened. She is a talented musician having taken a music degree in Kyiv and played the cello with the Ukrainian National Youth Orchestra in happier times. Nina decided to follow in her father's footsteps and so she subsequently completed a degree in architecture although in Italy rather than Ukraine. Unfortunately, there are no work opportunities for Nina locally – not even in the village pub. One of our friends runs an architecture firm in Woking, so I asked him about the possibility of organising two weeks of work experience for Nina before Christmas. This was agreed provided that we arranged the accommodation, which we were happy to do. Nina was keen to get to the office independently by bike. Unlike the three Ukrainian mums who have lived with us she is tall, and my bike was the perfect size for her. Nina was involved with several different projects, including one in London, and thoroughly enjoyed learning how the business worked. During her time with us, we had a super morning together at Wisley Gardens and we also went to London one evening for a candle-lit concert of Baroque music at St George's Church, Hanover Square, which was very atmospheric, with a meal beforehand at a rather nice restaurant nearby. Nina returned to Kyiv late December to visit her boyfriend, who is a doctor, and family and friends. She will come back to the UK in a few weeks' time but has decided to move on from Devon to share a flat in London with a Ukrainian friend. She will definitely bring her cello back with her this time as she realised how much she missed playing! I'm sure we will stay in touch with Nina in the months ahead as the next chapter in her life begins to unfold.

Teresa Bacon

PRAYER CORNER



A Lenten Prayer (based on John 2: vv 13-22)

Wake us up too

Almighty God,
in the bustle of daily life
when our lives are full of bright lights, noise and activity,
when they are full of those things that distract from you,
shock us by your presence.

In the busyness of our lives
may we be awed by your power,
amazed by your message,
inspired by your good news.

Wake us up with your wisdom,
for we are foolish.

Remind us of your strength,
for we are weak.

Draw us closer to you
in the busyness and the quiet.

We pray in the name of the one
whose cross stands silently
as a sign of the living God,
with us always.
Amen

Matthew Prevett
(from *Prayers for Lent,*
URC Prayer Handbook 2012)

ARTPEACE AND FRIENDS

WHILST ENJOYING A COFFEE with the family recently in one of the numerous local coffee shops, my mobile pinged with a few photos from artist Panashe. They showed a woman standing by her modest home surrounded by rubbish. He texted: 'Morning John, this old woman is a widow called Mrs Moyo. She tries to earn a living by collecting plastics from the streets. She said if the garbage (recycling) collectors do not come she goes to bed hungry. She is hoping for some support. She had two kids but both sadly passed away a long time ago. The amount she earns per kg. is pitiful'. This resonated with me as I looked around the shop, full



as ever, with youngsters enjoying drinks costing £5 or more which probably equates to this poor lady's weekly earnings. Artpeace envy our Food Banks, support from the Govt. and many other avenues - they receive nothing from the State. Mike Masedza commented: 'Life in Zimbabwe is hell'. As luck would have it, that evening, I received a phone call from Eleanor at Kettering URC, with tremendous news that a collection of £273 from their Christingle service was on the way. Mrs Moyo is in for a nice surprise and will share this gift with Artpeace. Our donations give recipients a boost knowing that others care for them.



OTHER DONATIONS were also welcome. Mike Masedza said: 'Thank God, I will now be able to pay my son's school fees – it was doing my head in!' Dickson said: 'Thank you so much St. Andrew's and friends. I was able to buy exercise books for my daughter Martha (15) – her smile says it all'. Artist Lovemore James said: 'John, most months we only get money from you and your friends. Imagine what it's like, always struggling to pay rents, medicines, food and school fees. My wife is currently working as a volunteer at school to cook porridge donated by the UN'.



SOUTHWARK CATHEDRAL'S new shop is now open and nicely positioned by the courtyard entrance near their restaurant. Note the Artpeace lit cabinet on right (below). Staff are hopeful of an improved footfall so I must keep their cabinet topped up!



I AM ALWAYS IMPRESSED by Peter Kananji's resourcefulness. In addition to being one of our best artists, he works hard in his field and is a skilled angler. He could not afford meat for his large family's Christmas meal so set off on his bicycle (repaired thanks to the kindness of a donor) for a lake several miles away. He returned with two large catfish, stopping to pick some wild mushrooms so his family had a meal fit for a king! On awakening on New Year's day, his son Clive (4) said: 'When I grow up I want to go to school and become a doctor'. Priscilla his mother, dressed him in an old white shirt with a cable for a stethoscope round his neck plus a board and pen to



pretend he was writing prescriptions. This gave the little boy (left) as much pleasure as any expensive toy. The congregation may recognise Clive from the dance video with brother Harry (3) recently shown in church. I have a feeling Clive will go far! Peter

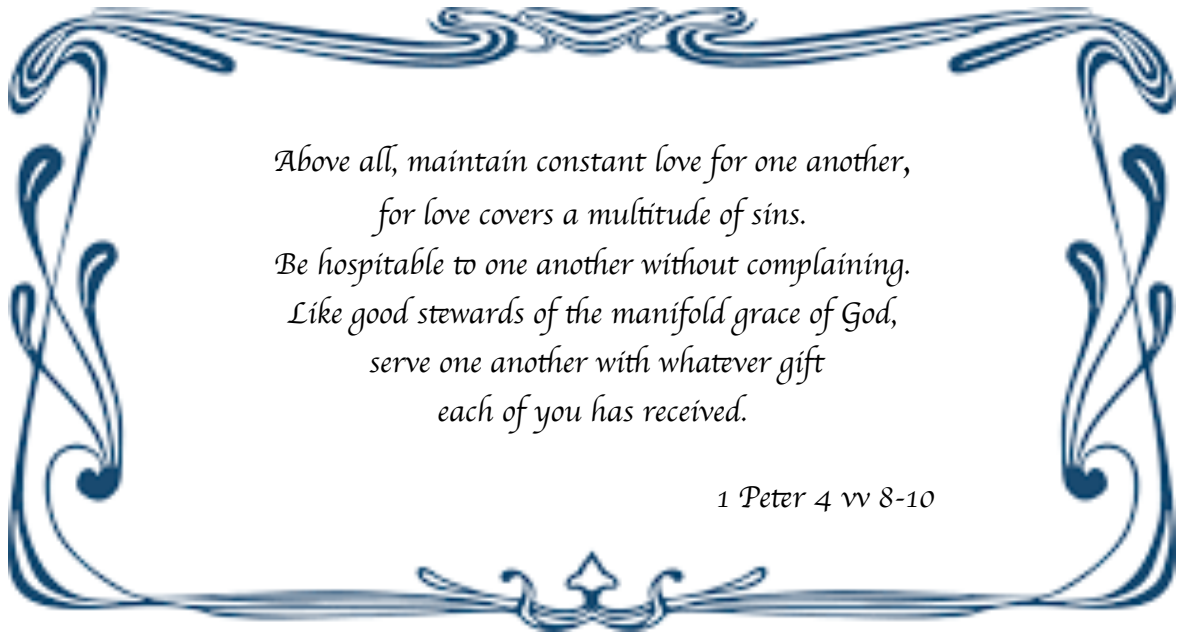


sent a photo of a Flame Lily, a symbol of purity and beauty and adopted as Zimbabwe's national flower.



RAPT AUDIENCES: Photo 1) extreme left, shows some of artist Godwin's children with friends listening to one of our pre - Christmas services on his dad's mobile and 2) left, Fortune (holding our 'Good News' bible) with his grandchildren, artist Simba and neighbours also listening in. Our 'family' is growing but restricted by a lack of working mobiles (bought via eBay). Mobiles

and running costs in Zimbabwe are amongst the most expensive in the world. **Johnston Simpson**



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Mrs Shirley Morley

HALL HIRE

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Services start at 10.30 am.
Services are currently accessible on Zoom on the first and third Sunday of the month.

Anyone who wishes to take part in the Zoom service should contact the Minister who will be able to send them a link to enable easy participation.

You are all most welcome to join us!