

St Helen's Magazine

January 2021



St Helen's Church

Ashby-de-la-Zouch



Loving God, loving others, loving the world

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Editor Writes ...

There were a lot of shared new experiences in 2020. We all added to our regular vocabulary: Bubble; Lockdown; Tiers; Furlough; Social distancing; Self-isolating; Covid secure; Shielding; R number; T cells; Vaccine rollout; Frontline; Tracking and tracing; Long Covid. We also had lots of opportunities to use, or even overuse, some old established words, like 'unprecedented' and 'new normal' – You can read the latest instalments of AYFC's 'new normal' on page 34, and Mandy McIntosh looks back at some unprecedented changes at the Fair trade shop on page 36.



We became experts in a variety of diverse skills too, most of which we might never have expected to need. We learned how to estimate what 2 meters looks like, how to read some quite complicated graphs, and how to operate Zoom. We discovered that loo roll is the panic buy item of choice for many, that a daily walk is a joy, and that we must remember to have a facemask with us at all times and in all places, just in case. We learnt how to find and read a parish magazine on a website. Some of us learnt how to be hairdressers, of sorts. Read about some genuinely useful skills on page 14.

We found ourselves avidly reading obscure medical stuff, about the key difference between respiratory droplets and aerosols perhaps, or the efficacy of facemasks as opposed to visors. An interesting fact I discovered was that in 2015 the World Health Organisation changed the way new human infectious diseases were named. Previously diseases were commonly named after their place of origin or the species of animal from which the disease was thought to have originated. The coronavirus disease was named after the Latin word for 'crown' due to its characteristic crown-like spikes. A great idea for everyone ... except the company which makes Corona beer. Oh dear. Poet Malcolm Guite has chosen a poetic form known as 'corona sonnets' for his latest book but, wisely perhaps, the book itself is called David's Crown – read about it on page 5.

At least initially we gained a good deal of expertise regarding Lockdown's rules. I suspect many of us didn't manage to maintain our expertise once the rules began to change, and I for one found the question, 'So what are we allowed to do?' was, and is, often on my (hidden-by-a-facemask) lips. At St Helen's our thoughtful and careful abiding by the rules meant a different sort of Advent and Christmas was had, and you can enjoy looking back to some of how we did it on pages 21 to 26.

And as our thoughts turn to 2021, read Revd Mary's message over the page.

Jill Chapman



Revd Mary Writes ...

Dear Friends

At our first services in January 2020, I produced a handout with a series of images depicting the love of God: Jesus, washing his friends' feet; the father, waiting for the prodigal son to return; the shepherd, looking for his one lost sheep; Jesus, on the cross, looking with compassion at his mother and best friend as they watch him die. As we approached that new year, I suggested that we should all 'gaze on the love of God - then, love'.

When I spoke on that theme, Coronavirus, as we then called it, was only at the periphery of our vision; a concerning story, certainly, but one which felt like a world away; the stuff more of a disaster movie than of anything which could be called 'real life'. How little we understood, then, of how 2020 would progress, of how our lives would change.

And yet - and I take no credit for this, make no claims of prophetic insight (or even of being 'Mystic Meg' as some of my colleagues in the Prison Service used to call me because of my initials - MEG) - I think that 2020 was characterised for us, as church communities, by gazing on the love of God, and then loving. Certainly, we have reflected more publicly and more frequently than ever before on the love of God through our online offerings of Prayer for the Day and Compline. Certainly, there has been a real growth in neighbourliness, of becoming more conscious of others at the very moment when we have been separated from them.

2020 was a year of many things - grief, separation, fear, pain - but it was also, I believe, one of love. Thank God.

If 'love', for us, was a core value of 2020 I wonder what might a watchword for 2021? (I'm not suggesting we ditch the love bit, of course - above all, keep on loving!)

I wonder whether 'faithfulness' might be our watchword. Why? - well, firstly because faithfulness lies at the heart of our understanding of God. Throughout humanity's waywardness, throughout the disasters that befall us, God, we are taught, is faithful. Nothing can separate us from his love. He shares our life. He guides us. He watches over us. 'Great is your faithfulness!' we sing in one of our favourite hymns.

'Faithfulness' might be our 2021 watchword because God is faithful and, secondly, because I think it is faithfulness we will need as we navigate the dark days of winter, as we live in Tier 4, as we wait for the vaccination programme to take effect and, in time, liberate us.

This faithfulness will be expressed in keeping on keeping on with complying with the restrictions that are set out for us by the Government: we will be faithful in playing our part in protecting the NHS and one another. This faithfulness will be expressed in keeping on keeping on caring for one another, especially the most vulnerable; in carrying on calling, even when we feel like we have nothing to say: we will be faithful by sticking by one another even as we become increasingly impatient and fractious. And this faithfulness will be expressed in our commitment to our worshipping life together, whether it is in-building, in-person, or must, from time-to-time, revert to being online only: we will worship our faithful God together.

Some might think that this description of 'faithfulness' is akin to resilience. Perhaps it is. But I think there may be a difference: resilience might suggest a lone-wolf determination to keep on going, but faithfulness suggests relationship, community, togetherness. It is to this that we are called: relationship with the One who is faithful; continuing to form a community of faithfulness with one another.

In 2021, trace the faithfulness of God and then, be faithful.

God bless
Mary

Sounding the Psalms

We frequently enjoy the poems of Malcolm Guite in this magazine. We enjoy them because they are very enjoyable poems, but we get the *opportunity* to enjoy them thanks to the poet's generosity in allowing us permission to use them.

At the end of this month his latest collection of poems will be published, called David's Crown - a poetic accompaniment to the Psalms, with one poem in response to each of the Bible's 150 psalms, as translated by William Coverdale.

The crown of the title refers to the poetic form used: A crown of sonnets is a sequence concerned with a single theme, where the final line of each one becomes the first line of the next.

DAVID'S CROWN

Sounding the Psalms
MALCOLM GUITE



Malcolm Guite knows exactly how to use the sonnet form to powerful effect. These poems have the economy and pungency of all good sonnets and offer deep resources for prayer and meditation. In his own words, 'brevity, clarity, concentration and a simplicity for paradox' are typical of the best sonnet sequences, and all those qualities are to be found here.

ROWAN WILLIAMS, ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY

If you enjoy Malcolm Guite's poems and would like to support his work, there are many published anthologies available to buy. Alternatively, you could also choose to encourage and support him by buying him an occasional cup of coffee! Go to <https://www.buymeacoffee.com/malcolmguite>

The poem below is from this new collection, and is a response to one of his favourite psalms - Psalm 65. He says he particularly loves it for its associations with Harvest festivals and the beautiful anthem setting of its words, *Thou visitest the earth, and blessest it*, by Maurice Greene, which is one well-known to us at St Helen's.

Lord in your shining wisdom, make us wise.
Morning and evening turn to you in praise,
Your glory stands where steadfast mountains rise.

Your presence girds us like the sea. The days
Arrive as gifts from you. The starlit nights
All manifest the beauty of your ways.

Your love touches the earth itself, alights
Not just in rain and growth and plenteousness
Or in the crowning goodness, which delights

The eye at harvest, but you visit us
And bless us far more deeply in your Son
Who came, a grain of wheat, sown deep for us

Into the furrowed grave, planted alone
That we might die and rise again with him
In the rich valley of the resurrection.

Ashby Foodbank

The team will return on 5th January, meaning donations can be left from that date once again at Holy Trinity Church or the Congregational Church, Kilwardby Street, and normal opening hours at all distribution sites will resume.

Opening Times

Ashby Congregational Church:	Tues 09:30 –11:30 Fri 14:00 –16:00
Stephen Church, Woodville:	Thurs 09:30 –11:30
Measham Baptist Church:	Fri 09:00 –10:30

January Shopping List

- Instant mash potatoes
- Tinned potatoes
- Tinned vegetables
- Tinned pulses
- Longlife Sponge puddings
- Squash
- Hand wash
- Toothbrushes
- Shampoo
- Toilet rolls
- Deodorant

Thank you for your support.

THE FOODBANK

WAYS YOU CAN HELP IN 2020



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NEEDED



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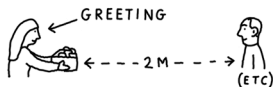


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[BUT CHECK
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PAGE

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Trussell Trust Fundraiser

LadBaby, a YouTube comedian, secured a third successive Christmas number 1 single in December, a feat that has only previously been achieved by The Beatles (1963, 1964 and 1965) and the Spice Girls (1996, 1997 and 1998).

LadBaby, whose real name is Mark Hoyle, topped the Christmas Day 2020 charts with Don't Stop Me Eatin', sung to the tune of Journey's Don't Stop Believin'. He had his first Christmas No 1 with We Built This City... On Sausage Rolls in 2018, followed by I Love Sausage Rolls in 2019.

All three singles have raised money for charity, with the most recent raising funds for the food bank charity The Trussell Trust.



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Next Bishop of Chelmsford announced

On December 17th Downing Street announced that our own Bishop Guli will be the next Bishop of Chelmsford, succeeding the Most Reverend Stephen Cottrell, who became Archbishop of York earlier in 2020. This was the first selection process for a diocesan bishop that has taken place entirely on Zoom and, at least initially, Zoom is how Bishop Guli will be introduced to people across her new diocese.

The Right Reverend Dr Guli Francis-Dehqani became the first Bishop of Loughborough, in the Diocese of Leicester, in late 2017. Born in Iran, her family left the country in the wake of the Iranian Revolution in 1980, when she was 13 years old, and to date she has been unable to return.

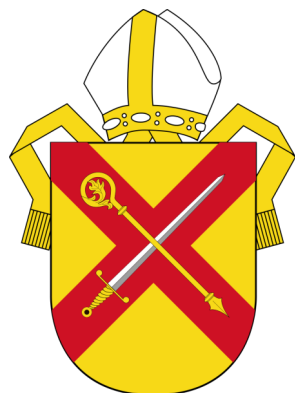
Her father, Hassan Barnaba Dehqani-Tafti was the Anglican Bishop of Iran from 1960 until his retirement in 1990, spending the last ten years of his episcopate in exile. He was the victim of an assassination attempt in 1979, during which Bishop Guli's mother Margaret was wounded. Bishop Guli's 25 year old brother, Bahram, was murdered by Iranian government agents in 1980.

Bishop Guli studied music at the University of Nottingham, graduating in 1989. She studied theology at the University of Bristol, graduating with her MA in 1994 and PhD in 1999. Her doctoral thesis was 'Religious feminism in an age of empire' about CMS women missionaries in Iran. From 1995 to 1998, she trained for ordination, and was ordained deacon in September 1998 and priest in October 1999. From 2002 to 2004, she was a chaplain to the Royal Academy of Music. In 2004, she stepped down from full-time ministry to raise her children, returning to full-time ministry in 2011 when appointed Curate Training Officer for the Diocese of Peterborough.

After the announcement of the new appointment, the Bishop of Leicester, the Right Reverend Martyn Snow said:

"Bishop's Guli's contribution to the Diocese of Leicester has been hugely significant. She has championed our work with people of BAME heritage and grown our links with a number of partner organisations.

She has renewed our vocations work and helped to support clergy through the demands of the pandemic and lockdown. And alongside all of this, she has contributed extensively to national and international church bodies. I give thanks to God for her ministry among us and assure her of prayers as she prepares to take up this new and demanding role. She and her family will be a wonderful gift to the Diocese of Chelmsford."



Historical Connections

This month I thought I would have a more light-hearted look at some aspects of Ashby's history and challenge you to get your thinking caps on too.

I have drawn a ring linking several very different sites in the town, and one just outside, and have come up with some historical links to join one to the next. Some are obvious, others less so.

Based on actual historical facts, can you think of a way of linking the following (some links are more obvious than others):

- Ash Tree Road (new estate off The Callis) with Ashby Castle.
- Ashby Castle with the Royal Hotel.
- The Royal Hotel with the National Forest Waterside Centre (near Conkers).
- The National Forest Waterside Centre with Ash Tree Road.

Any ideas? It would be interesting to hear what you come up with but here is my idea:

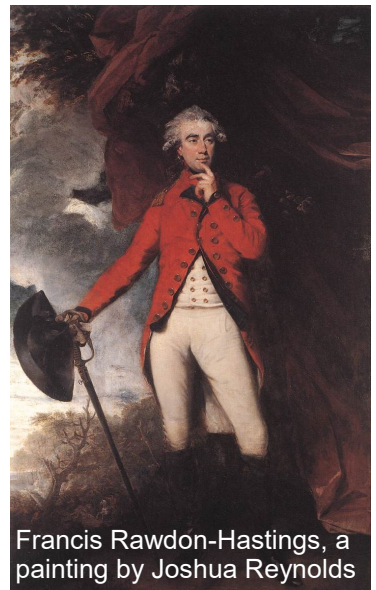
The new Ash Tree Road estate is built on the site of The Standard Soap Factory which manufactured soap and related products for over a hundred years until it was closed down in 2011 and demolished soon afterwards. The factory stood on the site of two older industries, Bindley's leather and glue factory and the old water works. Next door was the United biscuit factory and a little further up the road was the old dairy. It is no co-incidence that these industries all chose this site. They all stood on the banks of the Gilwiskaw stream and all used it for industrial purposes of one sort or another.

The Gilwiskaw flowed on from there, supporting at least one mill in the town and arrived on what is now the Bath Grounds. It is now culverted, of course, but once ran as an open stream through the town and down the east side of the Bath Grounds where, from medieval times, it was damned to form several fish ponds. Traces of these ponds can be found in the piece of waste ground known as Bullen's Field at the side of the Bath Grounds and on the far side of the Bath Grounds themselves. The ponds served the castle above, providing the residents with fresh fish in the days before refrigerators.

The castle had begun life as a manor house in the 12th century. In 1474, William, Lord Hastings, a supporter of King Edward IV, was granted authority "to crenellate" meaning that the manor house could be extended and fortified to become a castle. William built the large tower that bears his name, but ten years later he found himself out of favour when Richard III

came to the throne. William refused to support the new king and was executed, but the Hastings family lived on, surviving even the destruction of their beloved castle in 1648 by the Parliamentarians.

A descendent of William, Elizabeth Hastings, married an Irishman, John Rawdon of Moira in County Down, Ireland. One of their children was Francis Rawdon, born 1754. Francis may never have set foot in Leicestershire if he hadn't been named as heir to his uncle, Francis Hastings who had died in 1789, unmarried and with no legitimate children. Francis Rawdon inherited Donington Hall and a huge amount of land in the area including Ashby Woulds where he gave the name of his own home in Ireland, Moira, to the new mining village established there. Francis also adopted the name Hastings, becoming Francis Rawdon-Hastings, the Earl of Moira between 1793 and 1816 and the 1st Marquess of Hastings from 1816.



Francis Rawdon-Hastings, a painting by Joshua Reynolds

By that time, he had not only built the Moira Furnace, but had learnt how mineral waters, thought to have beneficial medical properties, had been found in one of his coal mines. There was a short-lived attempt to turn Moira into a spa at a place called Bath Yard, now the site of the National Forest Waterside Centre and a timber yard.

It was soon felt that Ashby would be a more suitable place to attract fashionable and wealthy people to take the waters, and so the Ivanhoe Baths were opened here in 1822. This was shortly followed by The Royal Hotel (called the Hastings Hotel at first) in 1827.

Of course, the waters from the mines had to be brought to the new baths in Ashby and a pipeline would have been too expensive, so it was brought from Bath Yard to Willesley Basin by canal and from there on the horse-drawn railway to a station very close to where the later mainline station was built.

That horse-drawn railway ran on from Ashby to the lime yards at Ticknell and another branch ran to Breedon. The Willesley to Ashby line was taken up in 1850 but the rest of the line was taken over by the Midland Railway and continued to run up parallel to the Callis and Smisby Road. A short sidings ran off this line into the leather works and later served the soap factory. The bridge which carried the sidings over the Callis was demolished some time ago, but a small fragment remains on the side of the road, which brings us right back to Ash Tree Road!

Wendy Freer

Malawi

I must admit I had to check where Malawi was; I thought it was bordering Uganda, but it is further south, and to the east adjacent to Tanzania. Anyway thank you if you have already given to Tearfund's Christmas Appeal for Malawi. Gideon Heugh's article below gives an insight into how your gift can restore the dreams and bring hope to young people like Victor.



'It was only after the interview ended that I noticed it had been raining. I'd been so absorbed in Victor's story that I'd stopped taking notice of the world around me. I said a heartfelt thank you, turned off the dictaphone, then walked away. I needed to find a quiet spot where I could cry.'

It's February 2020, and I'm in a small village in rural Malawi. The surrounding countryside is lush and green. But the beauty only serves as a grim contrast with what people like Victor are going through.

Victor is 19 years old. He should be finishing school, but he's far behind. His father died when he was young; his mother is living with HIV; and his sister is partially paralysed having contracted malaria when she was little.

This family, like many in Malawi, live off the land. Except the land isn't letting them live.

'Climate change is real,' Victor tells me. 'We have excessive rainfall in a very short period. These rains cause flooding and bring diseases that affect our crops. People have cut down trees around the river banks, so the water finds it easier to come into the village. We are seeing this happening a lot.'

Instead of being at school, Victor has to work. 'I know that my future is being destroyed because of that,' he says. He wants to become a doctor, so that he can help people like his mother and sister. That dream is fading fast.

But the church is restoring his hope. Tearfund's church partners in Malawi are planting trees to protect against flooding, and are also training people in new farming techniques that are both more productive and more sustainable.

Victor's story wrenches my heart, but I take comfort in knowing the church is there. I have faith that, one day, his dreams will come to pass.'

Gideon asks us to pray for Victor and the work of Tearfund's Partners in Malawi;

- Pray for Victor and his family. Pray that their dreams of a better life will be fulfilled.
- Ask God to stir the hearts of world leaders to take stronger action on climate change.
- Pray for Tearfund's church partners as they serve vulnerable communities. Pray that they will be strengthened and encouraged.

For more information and to give to Tearfund see www.tearfund.org - A gift of £33 will buy 6 trees that can be planted to prevent the river flooding nearby land.

Thanks
Mandy McIntosh

Put your hand into the Hand of God

I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:

"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown."

And he replied:

"Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God.
That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."

Judith Lewis reminded us of these words in a recent Prayer for the Day, and also that they were quoted by King George VI in his Christmas broadcast in 1939, a time of national and international fear and uncertainty.

The words were written in 1908 by Minnie Haskins, and are the preamble to a poem called, God knows. At the time of writing she was doing missionary work in Madras, and the volume of poems was a fundraiser. She later went on to be an LSE academic.

Her words were read at the funeral of Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, in 2002, and are inscribed at the entrance to the George VI memorial chapel in St George's Chapel, Windsor.

Apologies that Pam's piece, below, and Mark's regular Christmas greeting to us, opposite, didn't appear in the December magazine.

Ed.

Thank you ...

I didn't expect David to die. And I didn't expect such a groundswell of love as card after card, full of sympathy and support for me, and such appreciation of what David meant to you, poured through my letter box. You were an amazing comfort and strength to me, for which I will always be grateful. It would be so good to thank you face to face, but alas ...

So thank you for sharing your stories of how David has touched your lives. Please don't keep these stories to yourselves. Share them as proof that God is alive and at work in His world. How will people know this if we don't show them?

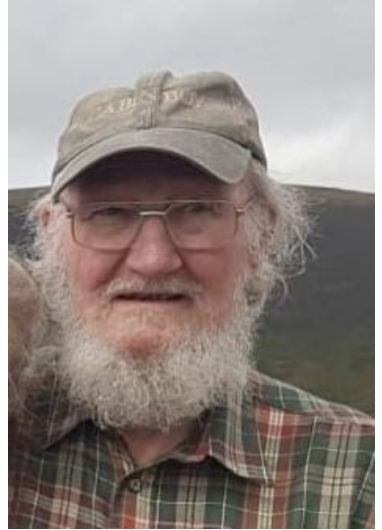
And thank you for being at the cemetery. What a service! God is so good! He rolled out at least three miracles that day: - the weather was perfect; I was there and bouncing (two days earlier I wasn't going to be there, so I had no choice but to tell Jesus that He needed to fill me completely inside, and wrap me totally outside, with Himself, if I was going to be able to handle the event/experience! He did!); and Mark arrived – from prison – just not heard of! Thank you, Lord!

Now that David has thrown off the heart pain and the hip pain he is dancing face to face with Jesus, His Saviour and friend, whom he has known and loved, served and worshipped for much of his life. His earnest desire for us is that we too have this vital relationship with Jesus, here and now, and for ever. Hallelujah!!!!!!!!!!

Thank you, and God bless you all real good.

All my love

Pam



pamanddavid@watsonashby.co.uk
01530 413511

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus

Greetings to you all for Christmas. May the LORD GOD fill your hearts and homes with His Love and also the Peace of our LORD Jesus.

I have been trying to write this letter for some time now and have been having a hard time of it because I always try to write from my heart and that is not always easy to put into words or written words.

Coming to David Watson's funeral, I looked down from the hill and saw a great many people already there.

I was truly amazed that I could be with you all on that day to honour him for how he touched our hearts and lives. He was a very special and precious person who loved and blessed people.

I really want to say to those who greeted me, that your warmth and kindness touched my heart deeply.

Mary, I do thank you for all that you did that day, you really are a rich blessing to people.

I would like to tell you about my very rich Blessings that I had that day I went to David's funeral. The first was being able to go and be there with you all, the second was the way people received me, the third was meeting some people I had not seen on a visit for what seems a long time and a few I have only talked to on the phone.

My love and prayers are for you all for Christmas, rich Blessings to you all.

From
Mark Roberts

A Prayer for Prisoners

Father God,

Please grant your peace to all those in prison who have trusted in you.

Help them to know that you are sovereign over all things and that much good can come from bad.

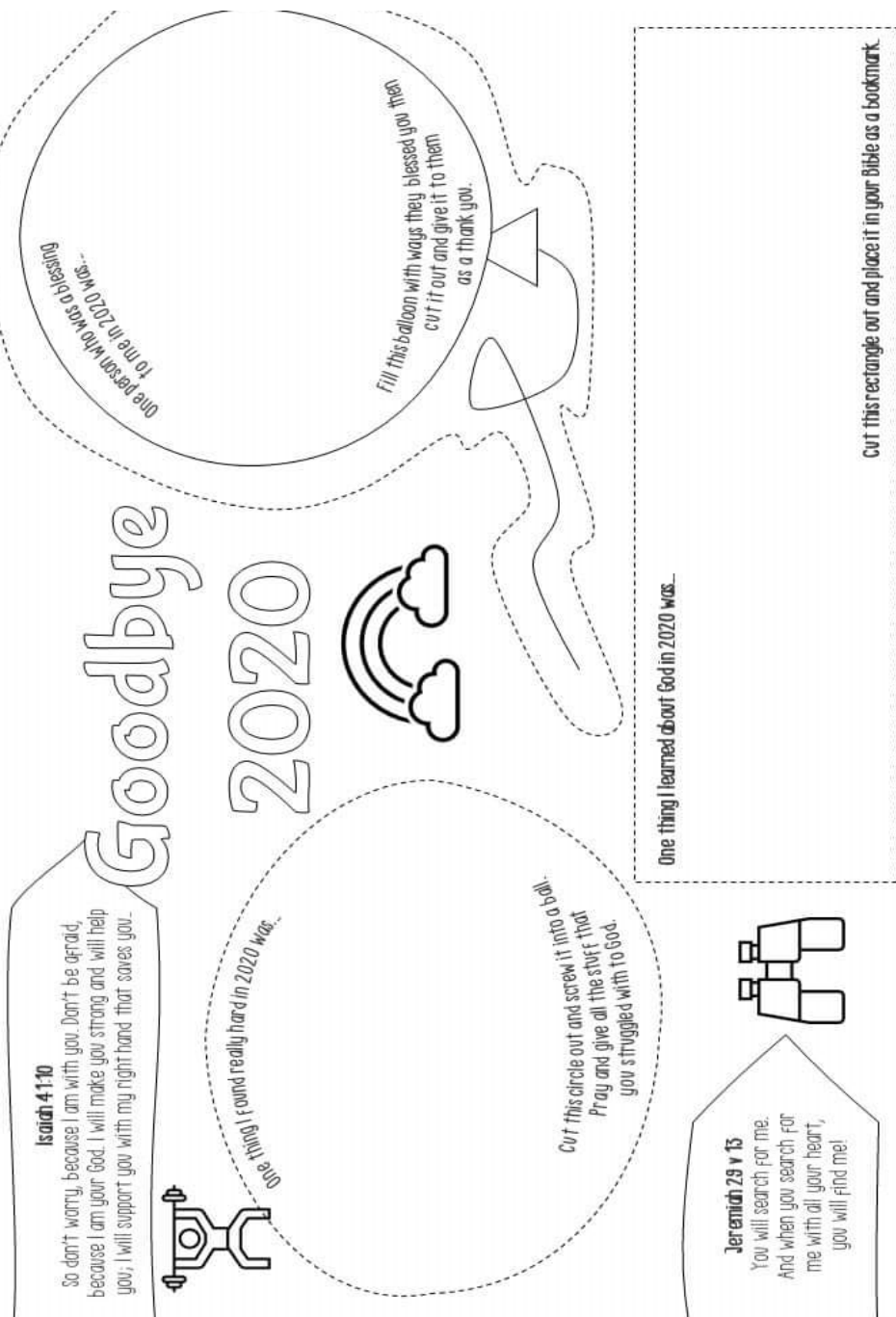
Show them, even in their darkest hours, that you are their true source of light which is found in Jesus Christ.

Please help them to know they are no longer condemned, that you have pardoned them, without parole, and love them unconditionally.

in Jesus' name

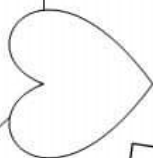
Amen

Here for you to colour in, doodle over and use as a focus for prayer are the sheets Rev'd Rob shared with us at January's All-Age service.



Proverbs 3 v 5-6

Trust the Lord with all your heart, and don't depend on your own understanding. Remember the Lord in all you do, and he will give you success.



Hello 2021

One good habit I want to develop in 2021 is...

One target I want to achieve in 2021 is...

Hebrews 10 v 23

Let us hold firmly to the hope that we have confessed, because we can trust God to do what he promised.

Cut out your dream and put it somewhere you will see it everyday!



One way I want to draw closer to God in 2021 is...

Cut this rectangle out and place it in your Bible as a bookmark.

Service Pattern

Wednesdays

10.00am Holy Communion

Sundays

10.30am Holy Communion

These services can be watched **live** on the Flagstaff Family of Churches Facebook page, or afterwards on the St Helen's website - https://www.sthelensashby.net/Groups/338385/Online_Services_and.aspx

Saturdays

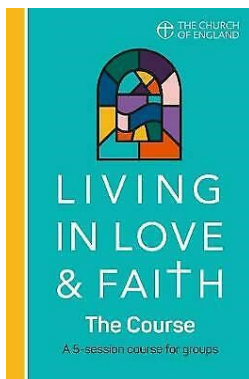
In the light of our region's placement in Tier 4 and the urgent appeals from medics that we stay at home, we've taken the difficult decision to cancel the Saturday morning solitary prayer sessions at St Helen's. Instead, there will be a simple time of prayer and Bible reading on Zoom at 9.30am for 45 minutes. The Zoom link is <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86050040052?pwd=TDUrVEEdEbHFTVTh3MWxMQUw1VEZOUT09>

Living in Love & Faith

In line with the Church of England asking all its parishes to ready themselves for conversations about human sexuality in the new year, in September members of the Flagstaff Family of Churches engaged in a series of conversations called 'Pastoral Principles' - These were designed to help us have good conversations even on challenging topics; conversations where we are open and attentive to others, and alert to our own assumptions, preferences, even prejudices.

The Church of England has now published its material on a Christian exploration of identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage, and we would like to offer this 'Living in Love and Faith' course to our Flagstaff Family of Churches on **13th, 20th and 27th January, and 3rd and 10th February**, all Wednesday evenings at 7.30pm.

Anyone who would like to attend please can they email Revd Mary to confirm and to receive the Zoom link. - revmarygregory@aol.co.uk . Each course member will need the book that accompanies the course, and Mary has a couple available still from when she bulk bought.

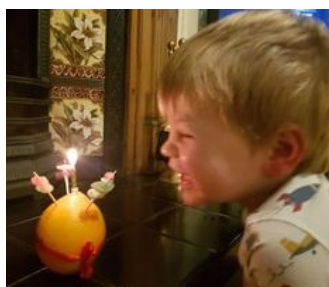


From the Christmas Photo Albums

Enjoy 6 pages of photos recalling some of our Advent and Christmas celebrations & highlights.

DIY Christingle

Here are some of the Christingles the DIY kits became during our on-line Christingle service on 13th December.



There was much Carol Singing

We managed some socially-distanced carol singing at the care homes ...



... and at the end of the Christmas morning Holy Communion service.



Our Junior Choir carolled beautifully for us at the Christingle ...

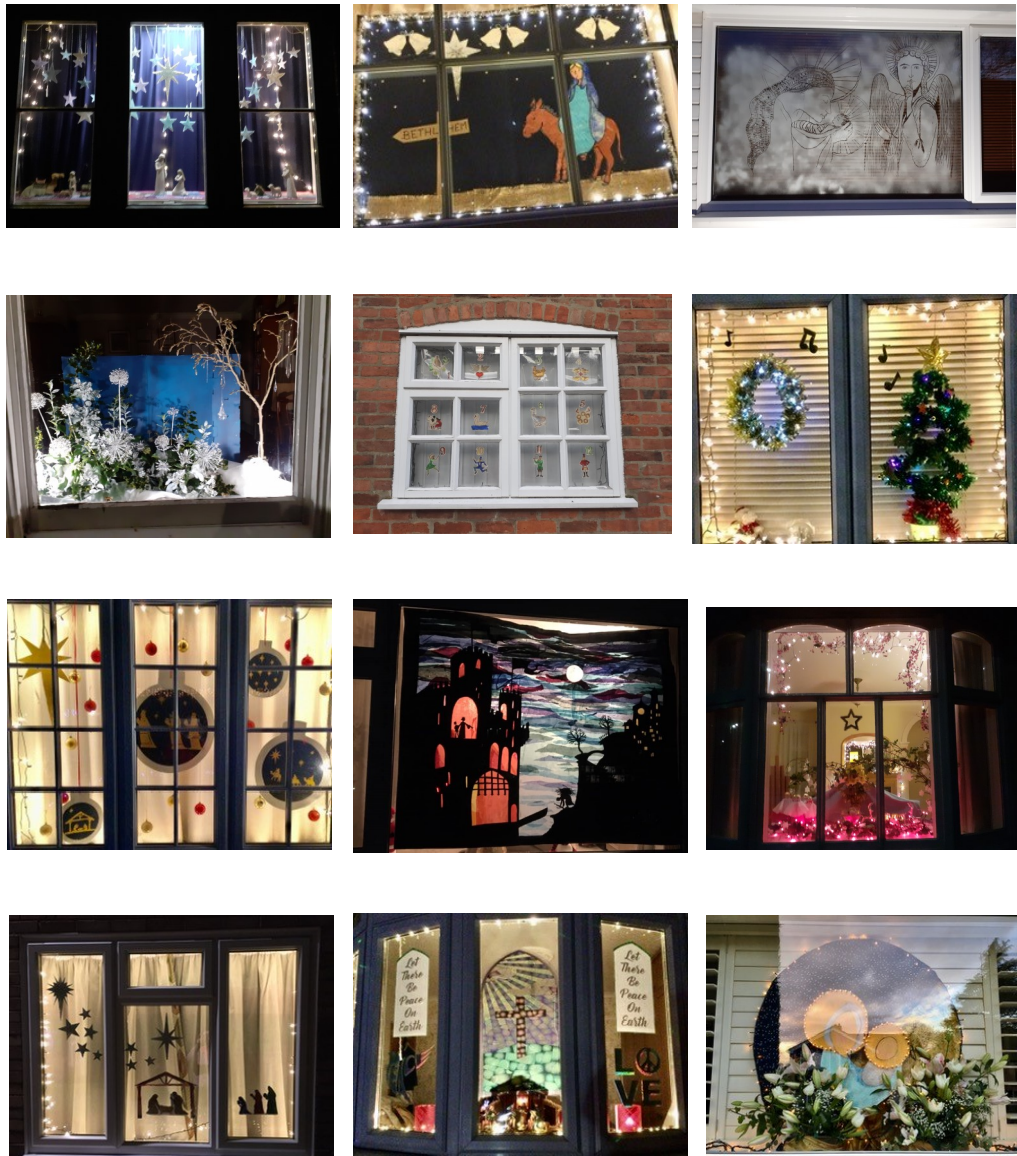


... and our choir sang their hearts out for us at the traditional service of Nine Lessons and Carols. It was the annual service we all know and love, telling the Christmas story through readings, poems and beautiful music, but this year, thanks to talented film-maker Rory Jackson, and his assistant, Revd Laura Jackson, we enjoyed it all on film, which we can watch and enjoy repeatedly here - <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1098395223960248>. All of the Flagstaff churches participated, providing their church buildings and readers from their congregations. Here are some 'behind the scenes' shots.



Christmas Windows

Together with our brothers and sisters at Holy Trinity, over 40 of us decorated a window in the theme of a Christmas carol, and lit it up, so that from 18th-23rd December, from 4-7pm, people could follow the trail maps and see the Christmas story lit up in windows all over Ashby.





We have photos of less than half of the windows that took part, so please do send in to the parish office any you may have in addition to these.

For a full list of the carols portrayed at each address go to the Christmas Windows item on the Recent Events tab of the St Helen's website - https://www.sthelensashby.net/Groups/327463/Recent_Events.aspx

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Christmas Eve children's carol service

This service is always guaranteed to put a smile on your face, and December 2020 was no exception, even though it was on-line rather than, as is more usual, in a rather packed church building. We had music making, thanks to Pete Hyland and friends, and a nativity play which included a Mary concerned that Archangel Gabriel was breaking Tier 3 restrictions, Gabriel reassuring her he had been self-isolating in heaven for eternity, a donkey who got his Airbnb confused with his glamping, an innkeeper who had lots of rooms, none of which he could let due to being in Tier 3, and a helpful innkeeper's wife finding some small print which allowed the use of their stable as long as they obeyed the 'rule of six'. There was also, of course, a full complement of on-screen angels and shepherds, some wise men and women, and a narrator, Revd Mary, who looked like she might be a good contender to win the Christmas jumper competition.



Mothers' UNION

Christian care for families

Christmas Appeal

The Mothers' Union Christmas Appeal, which ran from December 1st – 8th, has been a great success. The target for donations of £46,000 to unlock the full match funding from the Big Give Christmas Challenge was achieved in the first 24 hours, and an incredible £66,400 was raised in total in the 7 days of the appeal. A huge thank you goes to all who donated; your gifts will mean more women in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) will have a second chance at education and will help towards a safe and stable future for them and their children. Women in DRC are vital to the economic development of the country. However, they have fewer opportunities to go to school and poorer literacy than men. The Mothers' Union Literacy and Skills programme can help these women achieve a better future, and the success of the appeal means this programme can reach more women in DRC.

Midday Prayers

Every day, around the world, members pray for each other and the work of the Mothers' Union, through our Midday Prayers. These are still being streamed, Monday to Saturday, on the Mothers' Union Facebook page, where you can watch and comment.

Those members who do not have access to the internet are still able to hear midday prayers

through the Church of England's Daily Hope line. Just call 0800 804 8044 from a UK mobile or landline, and press option 4, then option 8.



Beryl Stephens

A New Christmas Carol

In September 2020 BBC Radio 3 challenged its listeners with a competition to compose the music for a new Christmas carol, which would be the setting for the words of a poem called Christmas Carol. There were more than a thousand entries. The six shortlisted tunes were then recorded by the BBC Singers, to be voted on by the Radio 3 audience, and the winner was a lovely tune composed by James Walton. I shall, of course, make sure our Director of Music is aware.

But what particularly fascinated me was the author of the carol's words - Paul Laurence Dunbar. Who was he, and should I have heard of him? I discovered a fascinating story. Despite an unpromising beginning, born to freed slaves in Kentucky in 1872, he went on to become one of the first influential black poets in American literature.

Dunbar was clearly very gifted. By the age of fourteen, he had begun to have his poetry published in the Dayton Herald, and while in high school he edited the Dayton Tattler, a newspaper published by his classmate Orville Wright, one of the famous aeroplane-inventing Wright brothers.

Sadly, when he left school Dunbar was financially unable to attend college, and so took a job as an elevator operator. But he continued to write poems and, when invited to read them publicly, they were well-received. In 1893, he self-published a poetry collection, selling copies to passengers in his lift! By 1895, his poems began appearing in major national newspapers and magazines and, with the help of friends, he published a second collection which received favourable national reviews.

Dunbar wrote in two distinct styles, with most poems written in standard English but also some in dialect. He began to gain international as well as national acclaim, and in 1897 he embarked on a six-month reading tour of England. When the popular composer of choral music Samuel Coleridge Taylor heard that the celebrated poet was in London, he made contact and asked for permission to set some of his poems to music. This led to Coleridge-Taylor's African Romances, published later the same year, a joint recital, favourably reviewed by The Times, and a collaboration on an operatic romance entitled Dream Lovers.

In 1898 Dunbar published a short story collection, Folks from Dixie, and a novel entitled The Uncalled; two more poetry collections followed in 1899. From 1898 to 1905 he continued to write despite his deteriorating health, and he died in February 1906 aged just 33.

But the most fascinating thing I felt I'd discovered about Paul Laurence Dunbar was that he wrote the famous line, "I know why the caged bird sings" probably more widely known now as the title of the first volume of the best-

selling autobiography of the African American writer and poet Maya Angelou.

These are his words used in the BBC competition:

Ring out, ye bells!
All Nature swells
With gladness at the wondrous story,—
The world was lorn,
But Christ is born
To change our sadness into glory.

Sing, earthlings, sing!
To-night a King
Hath come from heaven's high throne to bless us.
The outstretched hand
O'er all the land
Is raised in pity to caress us.

Come at his call;
Be joyful all;
Away with mourning and with sadness!
The heavenly choir
With holy fire
Their voices raise in songs of gladness.

The darkness breaks
And Dawn awakes,
Her cheeks suffused with youthful blushes.
The rocks and stones
In holy tones
Are singing sweeter than the thrushes.

Then why should we
In silence be,
When Nature lends her voice to praises;
When heaven and earth
Proclaim the truth
Of Him for whom that lone star blazes?

No, be not still,
But with a will
Strike all your harps and set them ringing;
On hill and heath
Let every breath
Throw all its power into singing!

Jill Chapman



We extend a special welcome to those who are single, married, divorced, widowed, gay, confused, filthy rich, comfortable or dirt poor.

We extend a special welcome to wailing babies and excited toddlers.

We welcome you whether you can sing like Pavarotti or just growl quietly to yourself. You're welcome here if you're just browsing, just woken up or just got out of prison. We don't care if you're more Christian than the Archbishop of Canterbury, or haven't been to church since Christmas ten years ago.

We extend a special welcome to those who are over 60 but not grown up yet, and to teenagers who are growing up too fast. We welcome keep-fit mums, football dads, starving artists, tree-huggers, latte-sippers, vegetarians, junk-food eaters. We welcome those who are in recovery or still addicted. We welcome you if you're having problems, are down in the dumps or don't like 'organised religion'.

We offer a welcome to those who think the earth is flat, work too hard, don't work, can't spell, or are here because granny is visiting and wanted to come to the church.

We welcome those who are linked, pierced, both or neither. We offer a special welcome to those who could use a prayer right now, had religion shoved down their throat as kids or simply got lost in the area and wound up here by mistake. We welcome pilgrims, tourists, seekers, doubters ... and you!

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Quotes for the Month

'When you put on that mask ... You're doing the altruistic, loving thing of saying, 'I'm going to protect people from me.' And that's a Christian action if ever I've heard one.'

Dr. Francis Collins to his fellow Christians, NPR.org, December 3rd

'The Catholic Church in England and Wales has now stated that they do not think a person sins by taking the AstraZeneca vaccine because of the distance and number of steps taken between a foetus being involved and the administration of the vaccine today.'

<https://premierchristian.news>, December 3rd

'Christmas isn't just fluffy, cosy warmth, it can be difficult, painful and messy, the 1st Christmas was like this ... Surely this year of all years we get that.'

Revd Kate Bottley, Twitter, December 4th

'2 California megachurches rebrand as "strip clubs" to defy government lockdown orders.'
Joel Abbott, <https://disrn.com/news>, December 4th

'Just as before our birth, our loved ones awaited us, so now Love in person awaits us.'
Pope Francis, Twitter, December 5th

'It is tough being a bishop, running Debenhams in the age of Amazon.'
Revd Richard Coles, Twitter, December 6th

'Hey church people faithfully streaming low budget, shaky, amateur daily prayer or Sunday service from your messy house ... that's your perfume poured over Jesus' feet. It's beautiful.'
Mark Hewerdine, [ProgressiveChristianity.org](https://www.progressivechristianity.org), December 6th

'And Jesus said unto the theologians, "Who do you say that I am?" They replied, "You are the eschatological manifestation of the ground of our being, the kerygma of which we find the ultimate meaning in our personal relationships."
Liberal Christians, Facebook, December 14th

'Vatican Nativity Scene reviews have been so bad that if the nativity were a Broadway play, it probably would have closed on opening night.'
Philip Pullella, Reuters, December 15th

'The saying goes that if you don't make mistakes you don't make anything. Norman Price [from Fireman Sam stories] and the apostle Paul have this in common, they are always up to something.'
Christian Misfit Community, Facebook, December 16th

'No need to go to church on Christmas Day, says Justin Welby'
Caroline Davies, [The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com), December 20th

'When it comes to Mary's Magnificat we try to tame it by turning it into a pretty hymn ... But the Magnificat is no lullaby or art song. This is an anthem of revolution!'
Prof. Leah D. Schade, [Eco Preacher blog](https://www.ecopreacher.com), [The Magnificat: Mary & the Refusal to be Small](https://www.theguardian.com), December 20th

'During this season, Christians around the world celebrate ... God, coming to Earth. According to that God, Earth and its inhabitants are worth quite a bit of trouble.'
Juliet Vedral, [Sojourners](https://sojo.net/), <https://sojo.net/>, December 22nd

'Science cannot rule out miracles. The universe is not a closed system. This world is not the only world there is.'
Prof. John Lennox, [Why a scientist can believe in the miracle of Christmas](https://www.patheos.com/blogs), www.patheos.com/blogs, December 22nd

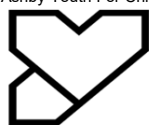
'Each of us is an innkeeper who decides if there is room for Jesus.'
Revd J John, Facebook, December 23rd

'God knew shepherds were the only ones who wouldn't be freaked out by the whole baby in a manger thing.'
Revd Nadia Bolz-Weber, [Christmas Eve service on Instagram](https://www.instagram.com), December 24th

'God doesn't send us a message, but a messenger; not a manifesto, but a man. Not a set of instructions, but a child.'
Most Revd Stephen Cottrell, [Pause for Thought](https://www.bbc.com), [BBC Radio2 Good Morning](https://www.bbc.com), December 25th

'God couldn't have made himself any bigger to impress us, so he made himself smaller to attract us.'
Revd J. John, Facebook, December 25th

'You can generally find in the Bible whatever you are looking for. The Bible shape-shifts according to our demands.'
John Barton's [History of the Bible](https://www.bbc.com), [BBC Radio 4](https://www.bbc.com), December 28th



Ashby
**YOUTH
FOR CHRIST**

December News

Advent

In the final two weeks of the school term we led lots of classroom assemblies in local schools, something we have never done before. We filmed a short collective act of worship and invited schools to access it via YouTube. We had grateful feedback from teachers and a good number of views. The assembly is at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQYAcGCeKRQ&feature=youtu.be>

Rock Solid

Have you ever played moonlit foot golf? You should. We did at the first meeting of December. We enjoyed the sky some more too, and thought a little of Old Testament prophecy. We did so with gratitude for the prophets who despite their doubts and trials faithfully left us with much to inform and encourage us.

The following week we had a chilly walk to a large shop where we imagined that we were aliens from another planet investigating what this festival that earth people were celebrating was all about. We concluded it seemed to centre on a jolly bearded fellow with reindeer. Trees with lights on also featured.

At our last Rock Solid meeting of 2020 we thought about names and why we are given the names we have. We reminded ourselves what we have prayed about and identified how God has responded.

Thank you for your prayers over this year. We have felt you in our team. We have been blessed by God in all kinds of wonderful and mysterious ways. We have enjoyed planning less and expecting more. We have all enjoyed opening ourselves to God and trusting him as we have moved through uncharted terrain. More than ever before we have also appreciated his gift to us of each other. Please pray that our openness to God and expectations of him would continue to increase.

Sk8ers round up 2020

We thank the Lord God for all the opportunities we have had this year to meet with the Sk8ers youth group and share Him; it's been a wonderful year!

We have managed to meet indoors, outdoors, under gazebos, in parks on street corners and even in the Co-op, and God never failed to be with us in

each of these meetings. We have heard from and seen the impact of poor mental health, addiction and isolation in the lives of these young people this year...and yet, at every chance to talk with us, the Sk8ers have never failed to astound us with their honesty love and care for one another and us. It has been a year of real connection as we shared similar feelings of loss, anxiety, fear and hope!

We've just received the fantastic news that we can re-enter the Baptist church in 2021, making it easier for young people to attend and for us to bless them consistently, as we are not ruled by the winter weather. Praise God for this answer to prayer.

Please keep praying for the Sk8ers young people. Just last week when celebrating Christmas and giving out small gifts to all who came, we still heard about the long term effects that abuse and trauma in their lives was causing. Pray for release and peace for these young souls, in Jesus name. Please pray too for a joyous Christmas break for all of them and their families and that somehow the Holy Spirit breaks through into their lives.

As a team we want to thank you for your support of us and the Sk8ers this year.

Mentoring joys

It has been a pure joy this year to be able to continue mentoring two wonderful young ladies in Ivanhoe School this year. We started both relationships with weekly 1 hour mentoring in year 6 at primary school and continued into year 7 at Ivanhoe and then into year 8 for one student.

The hour is spent, catching up on the young person's highlights of their week, listening to their worries and concerns, working on their self esteem and doing some arts and crafts with them. It wonderful to see them making everything, from a giant cardboard Christmas tree (complete with Christmas decorations), an angry bird piñata, earrings and individually designed Christmas crafts for their families (plus many more projects) over the last 2 years or so together.

Please could you pray for these 2 young women, both have very low self esteem and struggle with behaviour in school, recently leaving one of them suspended until after the Christmas holidays, and really affecting their belief that they will ever be seen as a 'good girl'. Pray that they find peace this Christmas and the love of the father who will never leave them or hurt them, as is their experience.

Thank you for your support of our work. One parent recently said that the day we go in their youngster is so excited and cannot wait to get into school (a real turn around from the child 18 months ago who was late every day as she didn't want to attend.)

Fair2all's 2020 Round Up

I don't think anyone would be surprised if I said that 2020 has been one of the most unusual trading years since I opened fair2all back in November 2008. I expect what would be more surprising would be when I say I feel I am in a better place at the end of the year than I did at the beginning. I feel very hopeful as I go into 2021.

Maybe it is because I had an enforced break of 13 weeks in the Spring, or maybe because www.fair2all.net has received over 40 orders in the last 6 weeks, that I feel greatly encouraged that all the work I have put into creating it has not been in vain.

One of the challenges of Lockdown 2 was that it was very hard to catch up on the November build up to Christmas, so apologies there wasn't a wide Christmas range on display in December.

As I work on adding a new range of socks I am optimistic that the good on-line sales of recent weeks may continue. I have also been encouraged by the success of the 'Fiver Fests': a new initiative in Ashby where many of the businesses have a fortnight during which they offer their customers Special Promotions costing £5 - The observant amongst you will notice that fair2all continues to offer a range of items for £5.

It has been exciting to add another environmentally friendly range – the upcycled Bicycle Inner Tube products. They have been made by a project in Malawi which trains people to become tailors, resulting in a well finished item.



Thank you for your continued support and encouragement throughout 2020. I look forward to welcoming you soon.

Mandy McIntosh

fair2all 17 Bath Street 01530 417286

The Great Conjunction

Did you see it? Nor me. All I saw were clouds. Hey ho. We only have to wait until 5th November 2040 to see the next one.

The event known as the great conjunction is when the paths of Jupiter and Saturn appear to come together in the night sky, looking like a bright star to the naked eye. In the recent great conjunction the two planets reached their closest point on 21st December. Of course, the moment when the planets seemingly come together, they are in reality about 450 million miles apart in space.

Jupiter and Saturn are the two slowest moving planets in the sky - Jupiter takes nearly 12 years to orbit the Sun, while Saturn takes 29.5 years. This makes a conjunction rather unusual - about every 20 years on average. But the recent conjunction was particularly close - the last time these two planets appeared so close was on July 16th, 1623!

Much of the excitement about the recent event was due to the idea that this was a Christmas star, replicating the Star of Bethlehem. One theory for the star which led the wise men to Jesus is that it was a series of conjunctions between Jupiter and Saturn in 7 BC. In that year Jupiter and Saturn met not once but three times - in May, September and December. The theory goes that the first conjunction on May 29th, visible before sunrise, started the Magi on their way to Bethlehem from the Far East. The middle conjunction on September 30th would then have strengthened their resolve in the purpose of their journey, and the third and final conjunction, on December 5th, occurred just as they arrived in Judea to meet with King Herod, who sent them on to Bethlehem.

And if you really want to see an actual Christmas Star, these two planets will appear even closer together than this time on December 25th, Christmas Day, in the year 2874 - I can't wait!



Jill Chapman

St Helen's Church, Ashby de la Zouch is part of the **Flagstaff Family of Churches**

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Team Vicar:	Rev. Tim Phillips	01530 412339
Curate:	Rev. Stewart Betts	01530 563762


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