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St Helen's Church

Ashby-de-la-Zouch

Loving God, Loving Others, Loving the World



Parish Magazine

May 2024

WELCOME FROM THE EDITOR



Hello and welcome to May's edition of the parish magazine.

The month ahead has lots to look forward to and lots to hold in your prayers. Many of these things are outlined in this magazine, including the much anticipated PRG trip in half term and the opportunity to join with other churches in Ashby to pray together.

Within the month of May, we also celebrate Ascension day and Pentecost Sunday. As we reflect on the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, several articles in this edition remind us of the need to be stirred to action by issues of injustice and to give thanks for all the just and equitable causes we are involved with.

I hope you all enjoy the month ahead, with its bank holidays and the welcome appearance of some sunshine.

With blessings and best wishes,

Emily

Donations can be left in the boxes at the back of St Helen's Church, in the porch of Holy Trinity or the Congregational Church, or at any of Ashby's Co-ops. Thank you to everyone for the continued support.



St Helen's Church is part of the **Ashby Churches**

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Ashby Congregational	01530 563301
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FROM THE MINISTRY TEAM

Dear friends,

I am writing this a few days after our Annual Meeting and I wanted to use this letter to share some things that arose in that meeting.

1. Judith Lewis very kindly agreed to stand again as Churchwarden but has said that she will definitely not seek re-election next year. We are very grateful to Anne Heaton for her year as Churchwarden but I remain concerned that we do not have a second Warden to assist Judith. It also means that, next year, we will be looking for two new Wardens. We do have a good team of Assistant Wardens and we have recently appointed Pete Hyland (acting Warden at Breedon) as our verger. We will be looking to work more collaboratively so as to support Judith who also offers ministry as a Licensed Reader.



2. We are very grateful to Chris Lewis and Cornelia Wright who are no longer on the PCC but it is great to welcome Laura Tucker, Catalina Chan and Peter Rose to the PCC. Catalina has been appointed as PCC Treasurer and Lyn Price as Vice Chair. We do not currently have a PCC secretary.



A free phone line of hymns,
reflections and prayers

3. Having worked through the standard business of the accounts and elections etc, I was able to address a few issues in my report.

Minster Communities – I outlined the process we have been following so far to form Minster Communities and it seems that the Flagstaff Team will be in a community with The Woodfield Group, Ibstock, Heather, Blackfordby and Woodville. Parish boundaries will remain unchanged but clergy and others will be required to work across a larger area. Rather than go into a lot of detail here, I would suggest having a look at the Diocesan website [Minster Communities - Diocese of Leicester \(anglican.org\)](http://Minster Communities - Diocese of Leicester (anglican.org)) but please do come back to me if you would like to discuss this further.

Buildings – we have reached a point where we will need, in the not too distant future, to do some work on our church building as follows:

1. The Tower – needs some major work doing on it, for example, there is masonry repair needed and the clock needs to be restored.
2. Memorials and monuments – many of these need restoring.
3. The Organ – is in need of major work

All of this will require significant fundraising and grant applications and, whilst this is going on, we feel we ought to look at the interior of our building to see if there are any improvements we would like to make.

This will entail substantial effort and commitment and we believe that we will need to go beyond our congregation to seek help with this. Many significant parish churches have ‘Friends’ groups and it may be that this is a way forward – but there are other possibilities too. Please do pray for God’s guidance in all of this and let me know if you can offer any help or have any ideas.

4. At the end of our meeting, I invited those present to talk with people around them about what they see as priorities over the next few years. Many felt that it was important to develop our missional

work – going out into our community and sharing the good news of Christ in relevant and appropriate ways - but also welcoming people into our building and finding ways to grow both of those ministries. I hope that there will be opportunities to develop and continue those conversations over the coming months but thank you for all you offer to the Body of Christ in Ashby.

With best wishes

NOTICE SHEET

Change to notice sheet email address:

You will all be familiar with our weekly notice sheet, whether you are sent it by email or collect it in person at our weekly services. From 1st May we will be changing how you let us know about the notices, events and news that you would like to go into the sheet. This will make sure that the notices are always picked up, even when people are on holiday.

From 1st May, please email your notices to the following email address:

noticesheet@sthelensashby.net

Could we please also ask that you send your notice by 5pm on a Tuesday to make sure that it gets into the newsletter the following Sunday.

We would love to include all your news and events, so please do send these through– we look forward to reading them soon.

Laura Tucker



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HEART WARMING SPACE



Last month our Heart Warming Space celebrated its first birthday! Offering refreshments and a friendly space to socialise, the initiative has steadily grown over the winter months. HWS is open every Friday afternoon from 1-4pm and also includes plenty of toys for young children to enjoy. Please do pop along or encourage anyone you know to do so. A big thank you to all those who have given their time this year to run the space and to offer a friendly welcome to all.

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LOUGHBOROUGH TOWN OF SANCTUARY

Well, I had hoped to write an upbeat piece this month about the success of a football tournament for asylum seekers in Loughborough - but sadly, events have taken a much darker turn.

The government has announced a rounding up of those who arrived after the Borders Bill became law, in preparation for their deportation to Rwanda. Loughborough Town of Sanctuary volunteers 'meet and greet' those reporting regularly at the Immigration Enforcement Centre in Loughborough - and the 'rounding up' is taking place at such centres - so this week is a particularly distressing one for all of us. I'm feeling somewhat guilty to be away on holiday, but LToS volunteers have been joined by groups from elsewhere to try to prevent this from happening. There has been some initial success but I fear this is only temporary.



Those who have followed *Basim's story will be reassured that this does not apply to him, because he arrived before the crucial date - so his claim was (eventually!) assessed and accepted. He is currently on a course, paid for by a friend from Sudan, who was previously helped to find a job via this route. The plan is that *Basim will pay him back when he secures employment. Others - including some of those who join us for the various activities and support groups we offer - will not be so lucky. I leave you to imagine how this makes me feel. I ask for your prayers concerning this situation - and I finish with an excerpt from our own Bishop of Leicester's inaugural speech in the House of Lords:

"These are human beings with feelings, with a desire for not just safety but to contribute to society.

"I understand people's concerns but I hope that through encounters - actually meeting those people - they'll understand that often these people are very fragile and vulnerable and they are here for very good reasons in most cases."

"I think we've become a very polarised society in many ways and it's so easy to forget that what we're talking about here is not just an issue - we're talking about people."

**Not Basim's real name.*

Pat Stafford

ASHBY YOUTH FOR CHRIST

Ashby Youth for Christ are working across the area to see young people's lives transformed by Jesus. We would love to be able to share with you on a regular basis what we are doing.

If you would like to sign up for regular updates either follow this link <http://eepurl.com/dvVqri> or email helen.davis@yfc.co.uk. Alternatively you can scan the QR code.

Thank you for all your prayers and support.



Rock Solid

Last weekend 8 young people from Rock Solid youth club enjoyed a sleepover at Ashby Baptist Church, followed by a day of Rock Climbing in the Peak District. During their time together, the group spent time considering what it means to truly put or trust in God. It was great to see them growing in friendship with one another and encouraging and supporting each other throughout the climb.

AGM

On the 16th of April we held our AGM and took the opportunity to give thanks for God's provision over the year and the connections we have been able to make. In our annual report to British Youth for Christ, these were some of the statistics we shared with relation to the number of young people we had contact with (some of these figures are through assemblies):

Number of under 11s: 1200

Number of 11s-18s: 175

Number of over 18s: 45

Number of young people reached: 1420

Thank you to everyone who has been involved in supporting AYFC, as volunteers, financially or prayerfully we appreciate all you have given in whatever way.

GARDENING TIPS FOR MAY

Now we are coming into May, we all hope that we have seen the last of the night frosts. However, don't be fooled and start planting out non-hardy plants too early, or without covering them when there is a risk of frost.

April has certainly been very wet and cold. It is time to tidy up Spring plants and plant out Summer-flowers, fruit and vegetables. It is also a good opportunity to experiment with something new – what about a grass, fern or a wild flower area?

Don't forget – resist cutting down Spring bulbs until they have died down completely (you can dead head them). Also add a little liquid fertiliser all around the clumps in preparation for a great display next year. If you haven't done so already add 2 inches of compost, or well-rotted manure to the soil in order to improve soil texture and help feed all the good things living below the surface.

This month should see the completion of potato planting. Those that are showing green shoots above the soil must be earthed up regularly to prevent the crop forming on top of the soil



surface. Start planting directly into the ground succession crops such as; chard, lettuce, spinach, rocket, parsnip, turnip carrots and peas etc. Prepare the ground for runner beans early in the month by digging the soil well and incorporating a little garden compost. Also put your supporting canes and nets in place.

Start to plan your Summer annual areas. Our local garden centres have a wealth of choice. We do limit annuals, but those we do buy we pack them in for a fabulous display. We also have a Spanish area (out of respect of our many Spanish family members). We have various sizes of Spanish pots and we restrict our choice to, "Hot Colours" – reds, yellows and oranges. We have them placed all together and we add a few ceramic lizards for interest.

Get your patio ready for Summer! Decorate your outdoor space with brightly coloured seat pads, cushions, colourful solar lights and hanging chimes etc. Continue mowing the lawn regularly and feed with fertilizer. Check for moss and large leaved weeds and then treat accordingly. If you would rather not use chemicals then you're going to have to get your hands dirty.

Mulch landscape beds adding 2 inches of bark to help reduce weeds and conserve moisture. Look out for plant pests as last year we lost all but one of our lupins due to Aphid attack.

We divided many of our Hostas in early March. Hostas also need to be kept pest free; the culprits primarily include, slugs and snails. We grow ours mainly in pots to deter them but we have increased our ground range. We have put bark around our ground Hostas and we have stones around all our pot Hostas. We do have around 100 different varieties from very large to miniature. We have recently bought, "Nemaslug", which is a biological product. By using a product like this you don't have to worry about damage to your crops, our environment or visiting wildlife. It contains millions of microscopic, naturally occurring Nematodes.

Hedgehogs are out and about now and we spotted many on outdoor cameras. We feed them nightly using a specialist Hedgehog feed. You can also spot their calling cards.

Finally start planning your garden visits, and garden show visits. We are planning to visit many more local Open Gardens in the surrounding area. We are also opening our garden in early August as part of the Ashby Open Garden Scheme so we would love to see you. We will also have many of our plants on sale – all monies going to Charity.

Alan and Alison Cross



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THE CHILDREN'S SOCIETY SHOP

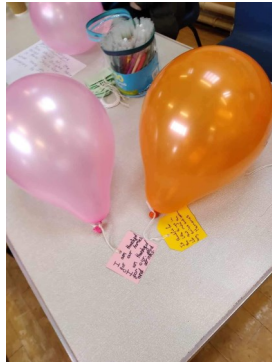
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MESSY CHURCH CELEBRATES ASCENSION

Lovely to welcome newcomers to Messy Church this month to hear about Ascension day - and celebrate it with a picnic, some balloon prayers, some lovely artwork - and of course, for the grown ups, a good natter and a welcome cuppa!

Don't miss the next Messy Church - this time at St Helen's Heritage Centre - Sunday 26th May - 3:30 till 5. See you there!



PRIEST ROOM GANG



PRG hosted another successful bake sale in aid of their now very imminent trip to Amsterdam. Thank you to everyone who made a purchase! The final itinerary for our trip includes visiting Anne Frank's annex, meeting some young people from the Anglican Church and visiting the Van Gogh museum as well as having plenty of free time for sight seeing. We have planned one final fundraiser before we go which will be a car washing event. Please do get your cars nice and mucky so we can wash them for you on Saturday 11th May, 10-2 at J.P. Springthorpe's on South Street.

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OUR WORSHIP IN MAY

	am	pm	Wednesday
1st Sunday 5th May		3.30pm All-Age Worship 6pm Evensong + Soiree	1st Wednesday-1st Holy Communion 10.30am In Church
2nd Sunday 12th May	10.30 am Holy Communion (with children's church)		2nd Wednesday- 8th Holy Communion 10.30am Prior Park Community centre
3rd Sunday 19th May (Pentecost Sunday)	10.30 am Morning worship		3rd Wednesday-15th Holy Communion 10.30am In church
4th Sunday 26th May	10.30 am Holy Communion	3.30pm Messy Church at St Helen's heritage centre	4th Wednesday- 22nd Morning prayer 10.30am In church

Regular activities:

- Monday mornings - Little Fishes 9.30 - 11.30am during term time
- Mondays - Monday Group – 8pm
- 3rd Tuesday - PCC meeting – 7 till 9pm
- 1st Wednesday - Knit and natter – 2 till 4pm
- Thursdays - Choir practice – 6.30 till 8.30pm
- Fridays - Heart- warming Space 1-4pm
- Saturdays - Parish Prayers – 9.30am in the Hastings chapel

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY// MAY

- **Thursday 9th May– Holy Communion for Ascension Day– 7.30pm** at St Helen's.
- **Saturday 11th May– PRG car washing event – 10am-2pm.**

Bring your cars to the yard of J.P. Springthorpe on South Street. Donations will be towards the PRG trip to Amsterdam which is taking place from the 27th-30th of this month. PRG would like to express their grateful thanks to Mr John Springthorpe for the use of his yard.

- **Sunday 12th May– Eco-initiative breakfast.**

The Eco-Initiative group invites you to brunch, to be held in the Heritage Centre, commencing at 9am, prior to morning worship. We will be highlighting the work of the Fairtrade Foundation. If you are able to attend, please sign the sheet at the back of church, or give names to Caroline Millward, stating any dietary requirements. Many thanks for your support. Look forward to seeing you.

- **Wednesday 15th May– Ashby Churches Together prayer meeting– 7.30pm at St Helen's Heritage Centre.**

From Beth Lunt, Associate Minister at Holy Trinity, Ashby. You are invited to an opportunity to come together as one Christian community in Ashby to pray for our Churches, our town, our country and our world. This prayer meeting will be aligned with Thy Kingdom Come 2024 and its theme of 'Light up the world with prayer'. We welcome those from all our town's Churches and other local Christians. Please join us to pray together.

- **Sunday 2nd June– Sunday Soiree– 6-8pm**

Choral evensong sung by St Helen's choir followed by refreshments, then a short organ recital by Andrew Chapman. He will be performing music by Mendelssohn and Bach– and something more modern.

THY KINGDOM COME 2024

Light up the world with prayer.



THY KINGDOM COME

Light Up The World In Prayer

9th–19th May 2024

‘Thy Kingdom Come (TKC) is a global ecumenical prayer movement that invites Christians around the world to pray from Ascension to Pentecost for more people to come to know Jesus.

Since it began in May 2016, God has grown TKC from a dream of possibility into a movement which unites more than a million Christians in prayer, in nearly 90% of countries worldwide, across 85 different denominations and traditions- so that friends and family, neighbours and colleagues might come to faith in Jesus Christ.

Every person, household and church are encouraged to pray during the 11 days in their own way. It is our hope & prayer, that those who have not yet heard the Good News of Jesus Christ and His love for the world, will hear it for themselves and respond and follow Him.

Specifically, we again invite each and every Christian across the globe to pray that God’s Spirit might work in the lives of 5 people who have not responded with their ‘Yes’ to God’s call. Whether you have joined in ‘Thy Kingdom Come’ before or not, we invite you to take part & join in.

“In praying ‘Thy Kingdom Come’ we all commit to playing our part in the renewal of the nations and the transformation of communities.” Archbishop Justin Welby’

(<https://www.thykingdomcome.global/>)

WHY AREN'T WE RAGING MORE?

*Jesus Christ is raging, raging in the streets,
where injustice spirals and real hope retreats.
Listen, Lord Jesus, I am angry too.
In the Kingdom's causes let me rage with you.*

On Palm Sunday we sang the above verse during one of our hymns. Anger is not usually thought to be a Christian virtue, but the lines made me think that perhaps we ought to be more angry at the state of our country than we are. The NHS, our education system, our justice system, our pot-holed roads and our taxation policies could lead me to despair.

But anger can serve to motivate us to do something, give us energy to change things - to make society better, more in keeping with how Christ might want things to be. We can all be involved in small acts of kindness and generosity, showing God's love in practical ways. Unfortunately bringing meaningful change on a larger scale usually means politicians making decisions. Will our anger lead us to take more interest in politics? "Get back in your pulpit!" and "Keep politics out of religion" are the usual cries from people who say that religion and politics shouldn't be mixed. Usually these cries will usually come from politicians who feel their policies are under attack for lacking compassion towards immigrants, those on benefits or the homeless etc. The Archbishop of Canterbury had quite a mauling when he expressed his opinion in one of these areas in the House of Lords.

I have just been reading a book called "Politics - a Survivor's Guide" by Rafael Behr.

He is the son of Jewish immigrants and uses his own experiences and influences as a starting point for exploring the concepts of democracy, belonging, nationality, why referenda aren't democratic and why populism can never work despite its wide appeal. He looks at why politicians (like the rest of us) can do some very stupid things but why their colleagues will go along with arguing black is white until it becomes blatantly obvious to everyone that the "King's New Clothes" are a

completely dishonest con trick and the king is absolutely naked.

Obviously Behr has his own opinions, but he is extremely thoughtful and explains the forces that lead politicians to take up differing stances on issues - both left and right wing. What he does emphasise is that our democracy, which we tend to take for granted, has been under severe attack from those who didn't follow the unwritten constitutional rules or the assumption that people in high office would behave with honour and integrity.

I have found it absolutely fascinating. It has also made me realise: as often as I am tempted to dismiss all politicians as self serving, greasy pole climbing, ne'er do wells, that I have to stay engaged with politics, politicians and elections. It is the only channel I have to influence the really big decisions that shape our lives in this country. I would see it as my Christian duty to be as well informed as I can be about the different political parties and which one I will vote for. If the editor is willing, I will try and pen a few articles over the coming months, outlining some of the things I have learnt from the latest book, as well as other articles about politics and tax.

Maybe you will come and Rage with me?

Martin Vaughan



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MAY DAY

If you were up at St Mary and St Hardulph's Church, Breedon upon the Hill, just before dawn on May 1st, you may have been surprised to see a small gathering of people dressed in traditional folk customs. They will have been members of the Packington Morris Dance side and others, still keeping alive a centuries old tradition.

According to folklore, 1st May is the first day of summer. One of the many traditions associated with this day is that dancers and others climb the nearest/highest hill before dawn on May Day and await the sunrise. At that time of year in Leicestershire, this will be a couple of minutes after 5.30. As the sun comes up, they will dance and sing traditional May Day songs to welcome in the summer.



A Maypole Event On Bath Grounds With North Street Infant School Morris And Maypole Dancing On June 22nd 1911.

Later in the day, other traditions are still observed in some places near to Ashby. In Packington, the morris men usually gather, along with other dance teams on the car park of the Bull and Lion. The local primary school usually elects a May Queen (or perhaps King in this day and age!) and other children make May sticks. The whole gathering then parades around the village before returning to the car park to dance.

Many of you will be familiar with May Poles, although you may never have seen one in reality, let alone dances around one. This is a tradition, also associated with May Day, that has died out in many places. Ashby Museum has several photographs of May Pole dancing on the Bath Grounds in 1911. Strangely it took place in June, probably on the day of George V's coronation. I have also seen photographs of children May Pole dancing in Brook Street on one occasion. In recent times, a group of

women brought a May Pole to the Bath Grounds in 2016 as part of that year's Ashby Arts Festival, but on the whole, May Pole dancing is no longer a regular part of May Day celebrations in our region – unless, of course, you know better!

The first of May has been celebrated with various folklore customs for well over a thousand years. The ancient Celts divided the year into four seasons and called the Spring Season *Beltane*. *They celebrated with bonfires to welcome in the new season. It is a season also associated with fertility and represented in various ways.* Other folklore customs include dressing as a dancing figure known as Jack-in-the-Green who would lead the village processions. He can still be seen represented in some pub signs as *The Green Man*. *In some villages in the West Country, villagers preserve the tradition of the Hobby Horse, or Oss when the villagers process around at dawn following a person dressed in a colourful horse mask or head.*

May Day celebrations have at times been frowned upon by the authorities. You won't be surprised to learn that the Puritans under Oliver Cromwell banned these and other celebrations, describing them as '*a heathenish vanity generally abused to superstition and wickedness*' *But they were not the first to do so. May Day celebrations were also banned a hundred years before that, in the 16th century, following riots. Fourteen rioters were hanged and Henry VIII is said to have pardoned a further 400 who had been sentenced to the same fate.*

The traditions and customs returned, however, from 1660 when the monarchy was restored with the accession of Charles II. He even helped the revival by ordering the erection of a 40 metre high May Pole in London's Strand, which remained standing for almost fifty years.

So, if you missed this year's celebrations at Breedon, Packington or elsewhere, make a note in your 2025 diary to set the alarm clock for five o'clock a.m. next time when you can head up Breedon hill and join in the fun! Happy Beltane everyone!

Wendy Freer

A RESPONSE TO APRILS FAMOUS PHRASES

Thankyou Richard for your thought provoking article. I did some wrestling and concluded that as Jesus referred to himself as "Son of Man" and "Son of God" it's quite possible/probable that both titles are true. So I delved into the accounts of Jesus' life on earth in the gospels.

When Jesus was circumcised we are told that "the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him." Twelve/thirteen years later at his Bar Mitzvah, when he became eligible to take part in public worship, we are told that "Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man."

Fast forward to Jesus being about 27/30 years old. His ministry begins. God had called John the Baptist to baptise in the Jordan and look for Jesus, who he would recognise by the presence of the Holy Spirit. When Jesus presented for baptism, he prayed and was baptised, and the Holy Spirit settled on him. God spoke - "This is my Son whom I love; with him I am well pleased." The gospel writers each give an amazing account of Jesus' life and ministry, culminating in his crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. Jesus had a three-fold ministry - to teach, to preach and to heal, which the disciples witnessed, questioned and marvelled at - not always with understanding!

So what was the "secret" of Jesus' ministry? How did he do it? Take a look at the time when Jesus got up early, while it was still dark, and went off into a quiet place to pray. What does that tell us? And the disciples went looking for him and found him and almost "told him off". "What are you doing here? There are sick folk looking for healing. Come on, lets get this sorted." But Jesus didn't go and heal. He took the disciples away to a new area because his ministry was also to preach and to teach the good news of who he was and why he was there and what was to come. Intimate time with God was vital for Jesus, for fellowship, encouragement, direction, reassurance, strength and much more. His ultimate need for prayer, from him and the disciples, was in the Garden of Gethsemane, when his anguish was such that his sweat fell to the ground "like drops of blood" which was no mistake. In cases of extreme anguish, stress or sensitivity blood and sweat actually mingle in a condition called haematidosis. But prayer was not the only "secret" Jesus depended on. When he presented for baptism, the Holy Spirit was with him. He returned from the Jordan full of the Spirit. He returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit. When he went into the synagogue to read he found in Isaiah "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me...."

Throughout Jesus' time of ministry God has spoken directly, confirming his delight in his Son and instructing his hearers to listen or obey. The time was coming when the disciples would be distressed at what was happening to Jesus and these words would remind them of who Jesus was and why he was here. The transfiguration was a display of Jesus glory bestowed by his Father and treasured by his disciples. This reminds me of a true story. During uprisings in an African country, a group of missionaries knew they were about to be massacred by the approaching soldiers. So they gathered in the compound and prayed. After a short while there was silence. What is going on? Where are they? Eventually they looked outside. Nothing. Not a soldier in sight! Somehow they had been spared. Apparently God had woken the prayer partners of each missionary and compelled them to pray urgently for their missionary - friend or family. So they did. Some years later one of the missionaries met one of the soldiers and asked why they didnt just kill them all. The soldier was visibly shaken and told the missionary that surrrounding the compound was a ring of soldiers in bright shining armour! They were terrified and ran away as fast as they could.

This is the Jesus we meet in the gospels, and God is involved. After all, he sent Jesus into the world for our salvation from sin and its consequences, and to bring us into his family - Father God, Saviour Jesus, Holy Spirit. Today, followers of Jesus, believers, Christians, have access to the same "secrets" as Jesus did. In the late 1980s my Dad was in a Youth for Christ meeting in Ashby when the guy leading it spoke of someone in the meeting with a painful back condition and someone with a painful knee which God wanted to heal. My Dad identified with the "back" and a young friend identified with the knee. Dad knew he was healed but told no-one. He went into the garden with a spade and worked and worked and worked until muscles not used for years began to complain. He had proved his healing was real and told Mum. His back never bothered him again. And the young man's knee behaved similarly.

I hope this mini exploration of the life and work of Jesus and its relevance to our life excites you and sets you off on a journey of discovery, trust and expectation....

**God bless.
Pam Watson**

THE SPIRIT OF ASCENSION DAY

Ascension Day will soon be upon us. Always on a Thursday, because it's exactly 40 days after Easter Sunday, this year it's on 9th May. What is Ascension Day? We know Christmas is the birth of Jesus, and Easter is his death and resurrection, but is there one more thing to happen? This last thing is hardly mentioned in church.



Consider the famous phrase 'Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.' What happened to the ascension? Why is it left out? Is it in the bible? The ascension is in the bible, in Luke 28 and Acts chapter 1. Jesus is taken up into heaven to sit at the right hand of

God. You might think this is like two people sitting next to each other, but that's unlikely as neither God nor Christ are human and they dwell in heaven, where none of us has ever been. It may explain why the ascension of Jesus is not much mentioned in Christian teaching – he goes into the unknown, into the realm of imagination.

There is one thing church leaders hate - when the congregation is allowed to go into it's imagination. Who knows what might happen next? To make any progress at all, we have to make up stories about heaven, some of them lifted from the book of Revelation. One description is of God on a central throne surrounded by 24 other thrones for the 24 elders.

While most Christians think this is what heaven is like, theologians would regard this picture as pure metaphor. Also note, there is a person missing from this picture, namely the Holy Spirit. The ascension is where the Trinity is revealed. The Trinity being the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The hardest part of the Trinity to understand is the Holy Spirit, also called the spirit of God, or the spirit of Jesus. I can see by now you are puzzled. You're in good company, as the leading theologians over the last 2000 years have also been unable to fathom the Trinity, God as Three and God as One. Where do we start?

One way is to look at fairness. Surely, God is fair, and treats all people from all time in a fair way. If you agree with that you may ask 'It was all very well for those who met Jesus during his time on Earth, and benefited from his presence, but what

about us?’ It is unfair that we cannot also meet Jesus, but we’ve been sent the Holy Spirit, who is equally God, to be with us. Sounds simple, but it’s not.

For instance, the history of the Christian church shows that the Holy Spirit was not formally recognised as equal with God and part of the Trinity until the year 381, at the Council of Constantinople, when the Nicene Creed was written. This creed tries to summarise Christian belief, and the Holy Spirit is recognised.

You could also view the ascension as the end of a hero story, the hero being Jesus who faces much opposition and many challenges. Then the worst thing – he is killed. But he overcomes even death by rising on the third day. This leaves him in a state of limbo, somewhere between earth and heaven. This is resolved after 40 days when he dramatically goes through the last barrier and ascends into heaven.

How much is fact, how much is fiction? We cannot tell, and God has left it unclear. Possibly we should reflect on why God has not said who he is. Our greatest thinkers, and our theologians, and our ministers, are still grappling with this question.

And what is God doing? I imagine God is smiling.

Richard Vann

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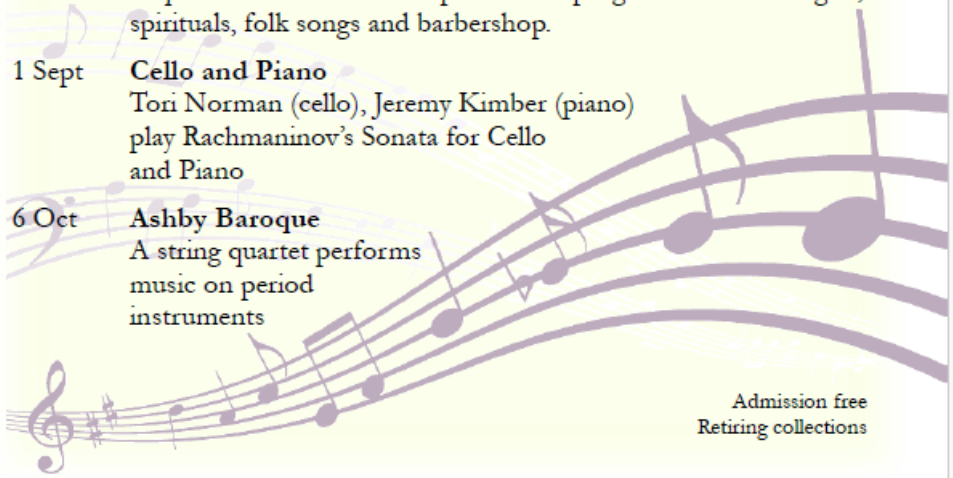


Sunday Soirée

6pm - 8 pm

Choral Evensong sung by St Helen's choir followed by refreshments then a short recital by

- 5 May **Capriccio Ensemble**
Clare Pitchford (violin), John Bean (cello), Jeremy Kimber (piano)
play music by Haydn, Mozart, Fauré, Gershwin and Lennon/
McCartney
- 2 June **Organ recital**
Andrew Chapman performs music by Mendelssohn and Bach -
and something more modern
- 7 July **Tesserae**
A quartet of female voices performs a programme of madrigals,
spirituals, folk songs and barbershop.
- 1 Sept **Cello and Piano**
Tori Norman (cello), Jeremy Kimber (piano)
play Rachmaninov's Sonata for Cello
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