

A THRILL OF HOPE, THE WEARY WORLD REJOICES





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Hello everyone

Dear Friends

I guess it's inevitable at this time of year that we look back at what has happened in our lives since last Christmas. For some of us, it will always be a massive surprise just how quickly this season has arrived, and that has been underscored by the late start to Advent. Or maybe we fret about it all being too commercial, too expensive, too this, too that. And maybe that's all true. It is!

But for others, much more seriously, this time of year will be tinged with sadness and regret as we remember those, we love who were here with us last year, or for previous Christmases, but are now not. We believe in the Resurrected life, and we know we will be with our loved ones again, but we miss their physical presence. And that absence hurts, deeply. We are human.

I mention loss now in this Christmas message because for me it points to the huge importance of the Incarnation – God's presence in human substance among us. Christmas reminds us that our faith should never become so pious, so abstract, indeed, so spiritual, that we overlook the real treasure of our physicality – our frail, sometimes unforgiving humanity. It is a humanity that God loved so much that he took on human form and came to be with us. Grief can make the light hard to find. But at that first Christmas, the Light of the World came to us, and lived and loved and, yes, grieved, among us.

I wish each and every one of you in our parish of the East Dartford Benefice every blessing Christmas offers – and remember the greatest blessing of all is actually the simplest. It is that God came down to earth as a baby, to a cold, very smelly and very dark manger, to be the light to show us the way to go. Follow that Light in every way you can; please take the hand of others who are struggling to find light this year and help them know they are not alone. Never.

God bless you,

Mandy



'Twas the Night After Christmas

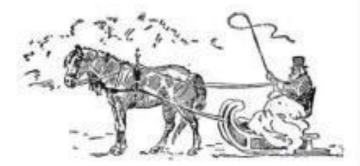


'Twas the night after Christmas, and all through the house Not a creature was stirring - excepting a mouse. The stockings were flung in haste over the chair, For hopes of St. Nicholas were no longer there.

The children were restlessly tossing in bed, For the pie and the candy were heavy as lead; While mamma in her kerchief, and I in my gown, Had just made up our minds that we would not lie down, When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter, I sprang from my chair to see what was the matter.

Away to the window I went with a dash, Flung open the shutter, and threw up the sash. The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow, Gave the lustre of noon-day to objects below.

When what to my long anxious eyes should appear
But a horse and a sleigh, both old-fashioned and queer;
With a little old driver, so solemn and slow,
I knew at a glance it must be Dr Brough.



Why do they do that? Prayer

Archbishop Tutu once said he was too busy not to pray. Jesus taught us how to pray and a life with prayer is a life filled with blessings.

And yet most of us find prayer sometimes difficult. Including me. It is perhaps hard to find the time; our minds drift; the words we use seem inadequate. And we feel deflated. Is anyone listening? Do our feeble attempts at prayer dishonour God? When we are in this frame of mind Paul's command to pray continually or "pray without ceasing," can seem to add to our sense of burden and inadequacy. But this call to constant prayer does not mean we are to be in a head-bowed, eyes-closed posture all day long. To pray constantly in that sense would exclude time for action and actual service of others and we are called to love God and to love our neighbour. Paul is speaking of an attitude of mind and heart that makes us always conscious of God because God is in the very DNA of who we are. When we pray as naturally as we breathe then we pray without ceasing.

For healthy relationships to grow, communication is key. We need to chat when we're happy, when we're low, when we have nothing much to day – small talk is underrated! Sometimes we can exist in a state of companionable silence and sometimes the words pour out of us in an incoherent jumble. Sometimes we say things we know we shouldn't and sometimes we get angry. God can take it. And sometimes if we stop talking and really listen, and if we're willing to be surprised by what we hear, God might get a word in too. Just be real. Prayer is like all communication – it is about creating space for growth and love and understanding to flourish.

Next time we'll look at the prayer that Jesus taught us – called the Lord's Prayer for just that reason.

God bless,

Mandy

What we do | Knit & Natter



On the first and third Saturday's of the month Knit & Natter is held at St Alban's Church. Starting at 10am we have a coffee, a natter and a bit of knitting goes on too! We welcome new members and whatever your level of knitting we can help with advice and there is always someone who can show you how to fix any problems!

We have knitted poppies and created a wonderful poppy banner (on display at St Alban's), we knit hats for premature babies, hats, scarves and gloves for the homeless and even decorations for the Knit & Natter Christmas Tree which was voted the best tree by the Mayor of Dartford at the East Dartford Benefice Christmas Tree Festival at St Edmund's Church.

Come along and join us.



The Fenland Black Oak Table

3rd March 2023 - 21st April 2024

See the spectacular 13m long table made from the wood of a 5,000 year old fossilised black oak tree



In 2012 a giant black oak tree was discovered in a field at Wissington Fen in East Anglia. A 13.2m long section of an immense tree had been preserved deep in the peat for 5000 years. The tree is believed to have been 55 metres tall. For comparison, a present day oak tree is around 20 metres. Black oak is the nation's rarest and most precious hardwood. It was decided that this incredible discovery needed to be preserved for future generations. Over ten years a team of privately funded specialist crafts people created a stunning sculptured table known as the Jubilee Oak Table



The black oak was discovered in 2012, the year of HM the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and was completed and unveiled in 2022, the year of HM the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. The table was dedicated to HM the Queen and is a "Table for the Nation."

The table has only been on public view once before at Ely Cathedral throughout 2022.

Rochester Cathedral Display



Alongside the table will be panels detailing the history of black oak (or bog oak). They will also detail elements of the 10 year project to turn the wood into a functioning table.

"It is a real privilege to be hosting the Fenland Black Oak Table. A wonder of creation and the work of some very skilled hands. As the ancient cathedral builders sought to inspire, so this

extraordinary table engenders its own sense of awe and gratitude. Not only in the exquisite application of design, imagination, beauty, and perseverance, but in the inspiring story that brought this sleeping giant to life bringing people together, once again, around its mighty girth. People from different continents have given time, skills, and resources freely in this truly selfless endeavour. Furthermore, it continues to involve people of goodwill. The heavenly vision of many nations and peoples gathered around a common table, eating, and drinking in the presence of God is one which at the Cathedral we will aspire to replicate over the coming year as we invite others to share in this remarkable story with genuine thanksgiving."

Dean Philip, Rochester

Struck Down, But Not Destroyed

By Rev. Esther Rose

Do you like surprises? I guess it depends on what the surprise is. Some surprises are nice, but some surprises can be upsetting.

Sometimes surprises are enjoyable, like when you bump into an old friend who you haven't seen for years. And sometimes surprises are dreadful, like if someone you love becomes seriously ill, or you realise that you have been a victim of financial fraud. Some surprises are lovely, and others are terrifying.

At Christmas time we hear about the birth of Jesus. It begins with a surprise visit from Archangel Gabriel to Mary, saying she would soon be pregnant. Mary replied it was impossible because she had not 'been with' Joseph. And although the angel said: "with God, nothing is impossible," the surprising news was tainted with trepidation.

There were more surprises after Jesus was born - they became suddenly homeless, suddenly escaping a massacre intended to kill little Jesus, and suddenly they became refugees travelling to another country to find somewhere safe to live. These tragic surprises were life changing.

I wonder how you respond to tragic surprises. Dr. Ganzevoort, a traumatheologian, writes about three different ways people might respond to unwelcome surprises.

The first is to be like a tree that bends in relentless winds. It stays in the same spot, held in place by its roots. It continues to grow, but its entire shape is changed. It is almost unrecognisable because it became twisted by the pressure of the winds.

The second is to be like a giant rock in a rushing river. Like the tree, it remains in place, unmoved by the pressure of water beating against it. Its shape and location are fixed. Instead, the water and everything else has to go around it because it will not move for anything.

The third way we might respond to life's awful surprises is to be like grains of sand that form patterns on a beach. When the storms hit, the sand flies up in the air. Thrown around in the wind, pushed down into the water, whipped out and pulled along the beach. Eventually, the storm stops, and the sand settles where it lands. The grain of sand is nowhere near where it was before. Every single thing has changed. The location, the other grains of sand they formed patterns with, and even the pattern itself has changed. Yet, like the rock in the river, it is unchanged. It is still a arain of sand, and with all the others on the beach, is immediately recognisable. The grain of sand feels so very different, but its identity in the community of the beach, remains the same.

Some of these examples might resonate with you. You may find, like the tree, that when the bad times hit, you are bent over double, and it feels like you will never be yourself again. You may feel like the rock, who when tragedy hits you pull back from

everybody because you don't want to talk or think about change and pressure. Or perhaps, like the sand, you feel fundamentally changed. Yet find yourself drawing to those who understand pain, and to community, as you rediscover who you are in this new pattern of life.

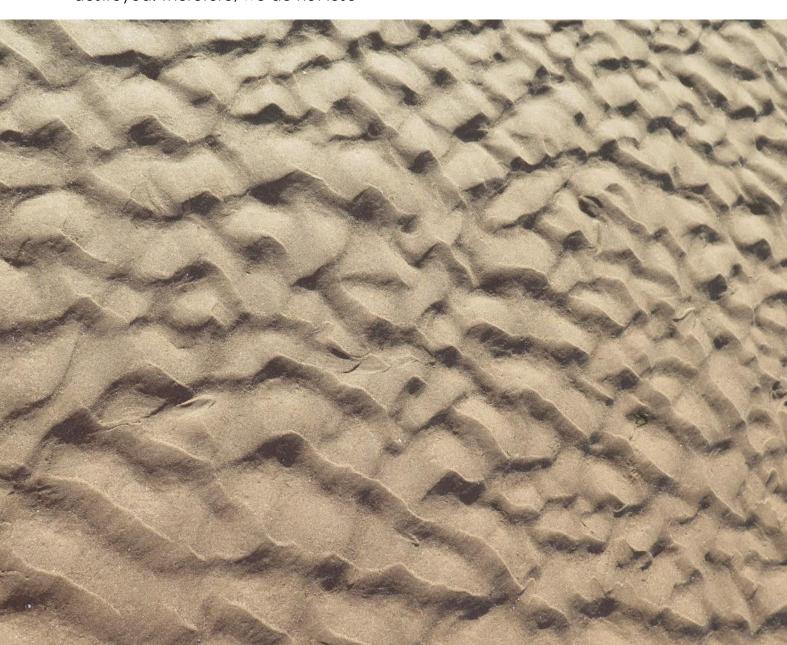
Being a Christian does not mean our lives will be problem free. The human condition affects everyone: conflict, sickness, rejection and death. Even Jesus experienced them.

In the Bible it says "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. Therefore, we do not lose

heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day."

Those sentences came from 2
Corinthians, chapter 4. If you have a
Bible, I recommend reading 2
Corinthians. It's not long and is written
to people with troubled lives, and full
of loving helpful wisdom. Definitely
one to highlight the verses that
encourage and challenge to read
another time.

Whatever surprises that come your way, my prayer is that you will feel God's presence with you. That you will find comfort in community, in silence, and in the Bible. And that you will have peace, come what way.





Together, we're helping young people hold on to hope

Your brilliant Christingling this year will help children across the country to feel safe, happy, and optimistic about their futures.

From everyone at The Children's Society, thank you so much for your support. We wish you all the best for the year ahead.

See you at Christingle 2024!

Thank you

We raised £131.72

christingle.org

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Visiting other churches



'... this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord ... (Psalm 27:4)

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is this month (18th – 25th January), so it's probably a good time to meet with other local Christians – or at least to visit one of their churches.

And when visiting other churches, it's fun to have a good nose around.

Fewer churches seem to have guides nowadays, and probably not many are

open every day. But when you next visit a church, why not look beyond the building itself and its monuments which show the history of the place? Try to discover what is going on there now.

First, ask yourself how easy it is to find out the following information:

What are the services in the church, and when are they held?

Who is who, and how do you contact people?

Are the photos and notices up to date?

Secondly, is there a church magazine? They can be the lifeblood of the church and community, keeping people in touch with each other. Also, as church magazines can be delivered door to door each month, they are an excellent way of reaching out to local non-churchy people, reminding them that they will always be welcome.

Thirdly, why not keep an eye out for any good ideas that the church has got – and pinch them for our own church? This can work the other way, too – if you see something that does NOT work, make a note of that as well.

Above all, try and 'get a feeling' for what the church is really like to attend. Would you want to belong there? Some churches, like people, feel welcoming and alive, while sadly others seem to be struggling and downright gloomy. Whether it is 'high' or 'low' is not as important as whether it is welcoming and caring.

And what about our own church? How about inviting a non-church friend to come along and tell you their honest first impressions of our church? We might be pleasantly surprised!



VIENNESE BISCUITS

By Debbie Dickinson

Visiting my mum recently I was reminded of the times we used to go to monthly tea dances in the village halls around Ashford, where I grew up. Halfway through each evening a tray would be passed round with a selection of cakes and biscuits on it. I always chose the Viennese Biscuits – crumbly yet mouthwatering and the end dipped in chocolate. And often sandwiched together with buttercream.

My recipe includes a couple of egg yolks (look back to a previous recipe for a meringue recipe to use the egg white). If you'd like to leave the egg out, just reduce the flour amount by about 50g. You will need: 220g Softened Butter 100g Icing Sugar 2 Egg Yolks 1 tsp Vanilla Extract 250g Plain Flour 50g Cornflour

Optional Chocolate Buttercream – made with equal measures of Butter and Icing Sugar.

What to do:

In a large mixing bowl mix the Butter and the loing Sugar together until pale and creamy. The butter needs to be soft to ensure no lumps of butter stay in the mix.

Separate the Eggs into small bowl and add the Yolks into the mix. The Whites can be frozen to use at a later date.

Add the Vanilla Extract and combine.

Fold in the Flour and Cornflour gradually to form a soft dough.

Pop your dough into a piping bag with a round or star nozzle and pipe sausages or circles onto a lined baking tray. If you don't have a piping bag – or your mix is a little too stiff to pipe – use 2 spoons to drop shapes onto the baking tray.

Bake at 170°C for 12-14 minutes until just golden brown.

Leave on the baking tray for a few minutes to cool then transfer to a wire rack to cool completely.

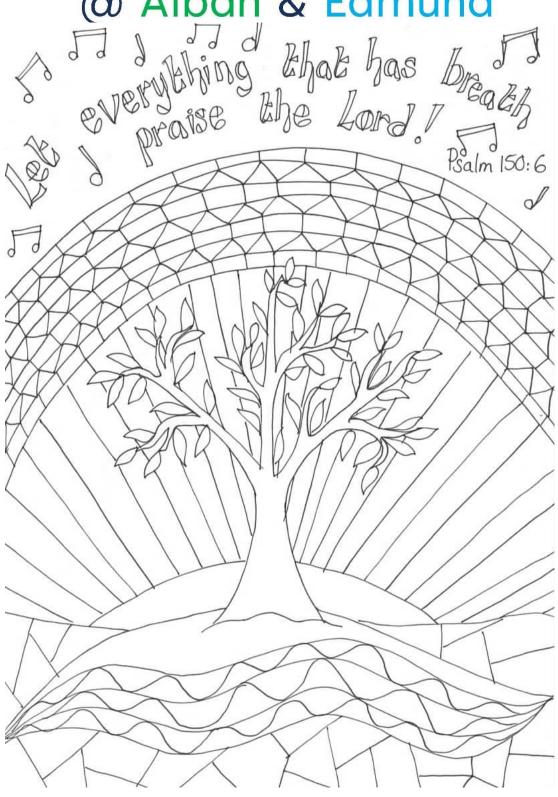
If you wish, you can sandwich together in pairs with buttercream and dip into melted chocolate.

Enjoy! xxx



Little Darish December

@ Alban & Edmund



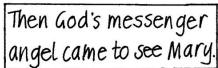
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It can be read in the Bible in Luke 1:26-56 & Matthew 1:18-25

A short story from the Bible

In Israel, about 2000 years ago, a young woman, Mary, was going to marry Joseph. The weddings were in two stages.

In one year we will complete our wedding





You will have God's baby, and call him Jesus, 'God saves', because he will save people from what they do wrong.



Your cousin Elizabeth, who couldn't have children, is now 6 months pregnant.



Mary visited Elizabeth



When Joseph heard that Mary was pregnant, he was very upset



This will bring _ shame on me and my family.



He always did what was right so he decided to end their marriage, but quietly.



But the angel came to him in a dream.



Don't be afraid to marry Mary.
The baby is Gods, and you will call him Jesus.

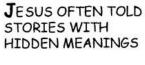


So Joseph and Mary completed their marriage.



The Big Bash!







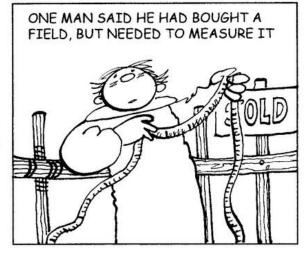


ONE STORY WAS ABOUT A RICH MAN WHO DECIDED TO HAVE A PARTY





BUT PEOPLE STARTED MAKING EXCUSES



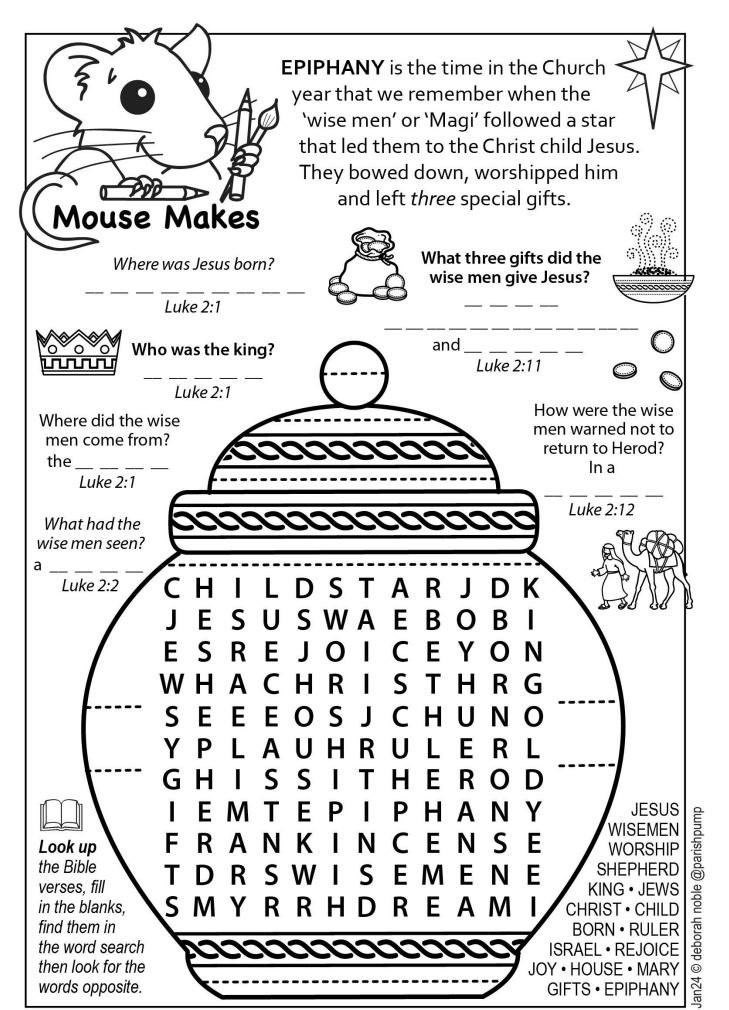




ANOTHER MAN SAID HE HAD JUST GOT MARRIED - AND HIS WIFE WOULDN'T LET HIM OUT!







St James the Least of All

The Rectory
St James the Least

My dear Nephew Darren

How to run your diary in 2024!



Your suggestion that every month at clergy meetings, someone should review a book of So, you have just attended a course on 'Diary Management', to get you prepared for another year. If you had visited me, I could have told you all you need to know in half the time. Allow me to provide you with useful information which was probably not provided in your conference hand-outs.

First, buy the smallest diary you can find. Large blank pages only encourage you to fill them with too many appointments; the smaller the page, the easier it can be made to appear that your days are fully booked.

Second, make sure that it is of a size that will conveniently fit into any pocket. When dates are being arranged for subsequent meetings, you can theatrically start going through jacket, trouser and overcoat pockets. By the time you discover it was in your briefcase all along, all the dates will have been fixed and no one will notice you never got any of them.

Third, adopt your own private code for bookings. This means that any parishioner looking over your shoulder and seeing '1.30pm PLS' or '7.30pm WTD' will assume you are attending important church meetings. The fact that they mean 'Post Lunch Sleep' and 'Walk The Dog' will be known to you alone – although do have alternative possibilities for your acronyms should you ever be challenged. My congregation know I am assiduous in attending the 'Pauline Letters Seminars' and my membership of the 'World Theology Directorate' is of many years standing.

Fourth, record everything in pencil so that once you return home, you can rub most of it out and can then deny you knew anything about those meetings you were supposed to attend – and to prove it, you can show the blank page in your diary.

Fifth, put someone else's address inside your diary. Should you ever have to resort to the ultimate act and need to lose it, you do not want some Good Samaritan returning it to you from the churchyard compost heap.

So, you see, your day of flip charts and group discussions were quite wasted – and I would gladly have presented my course for half their price.

Your loving uncle, Eustace













Hi I'm Zee

A little about me and the face behind The Beauty Shed., I'm 30 years old and a fully qualified beauty therapist with over 11 years of experience. The Beauty Shed is based in my back garden in DA1. I'm also a mum to my beautiful 2 year old son Roman. All my treatments are provided with a 5* satisfaction guarantee. I've had the privilege of working in hotels and spas across London in my career and now have the opportunity to become my own boss and work from the comfort of my own home which I'm super excited about. I've transformed my current summerhouse into The Beauty Shed.

It gives me such happiness to welcome you all to be a part of my new exciting journey offering wonderful treatments and more. My passion for my job grows daily and it's something I want to continue forever.

I'm grateful for my family, friends and my local church community for supporting me and I look forward to growing with your support. It's means so much, Thank you. Love Zee Xx

NAILS

zeemonica@icloud.com

Call now: 07802 367950

@thebeautyshed byzee

PRICE (ist

FACIALS

DR Murad 60 90	£40 £55
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Luxury M&P 90	£55
Sassy Kids Manicure 30	£10
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Eyebrow tint 20	£14
Eyleash, brow shape	£28
& tint 30	
Eye lift anti age 30	£25
Lash lift 60	£30
Brow lamination 60	£40

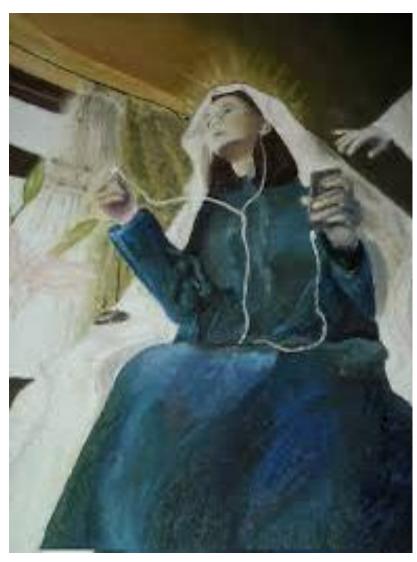
WAXING

WAXING	
Full leg 45	£28
Half leg 25	£19
Hollywood 30	£38
Brazilian 30	£28
Bikini 15	£12
Extended 25	£18
Under arm	£10
Eyebrow 20	£20
Full arm 30	£24
Half arm 25	£12
Lip/chin 10	£8

Please note patch test is required 24 hours before all eye treatments.

Everyday Faith

Wednesday Zoom Meetings



Some of us meet weekly on zoom to look at art which reflects and interprets the stories we hear as we travel through the church year. Since Advent we have looked at the Annunciation (the angel announcing to Mary she would give birth to a son), at Mary and Joseph travelling to Bethlehem, and at the shepherds who were the first hear the Good News. Some pictures are more inspiring than others but they all help us understand our faith a little better.

This picture started a really good chat about

how it would go if the Incarnation were to happen now! The picture shows Mary, with her headphones in, and the Angel reaching out to touch her, seeking her attention. And the question we asked was this do most of us still hear God speaking to us now, or is such spiritual awareness drowned out by modern busyness and technology? Does God need to tap us on the shoulder because we're so busy looking at other stuff or maybe does God speak to us through technology?

We'll be carrying on looking at the church year through relevant art every Wednesday at 7 on zoom. Do join us and send it some pictures. The next meeting will be on Wednesday 10th January. The meetings, which include prayer and a song, last about an hour.

Poems by Nigel Beeton

Why churchwardens love January!

Hail to the Lord's anointed,
Both clergyman and lay!
But they're seldom disappointed
To get past Christmas Day!
The hectic Christmas season is
Of service constantly –
There can't be better reason
To welcome January!

The Curate and the Vicar
A busy schedule keep,
As they rush, ever quicker –
They don't get that much sleep.
And overworked Churchwardens
And their sidespersons team –
Sure don't get time for boredom,
And only seldom scream!

So, when the season's over, The crib has been put by, The drapes to green changed over,

They breathe a heartfelt sigh!
They laugh and smile with pleasure,
And sing a merry rhyme,
But short-lived is their leisure –
For soon comes Easter time!

The Robin on my Christmas Card

The Robin on my Christmas Card Upon a postbox, red – He fixed me with a gaze quite hard And this is what he said:

"O, viewer of this Christmas card I bet that you don't know Why I upon this card am here To bring a yuletide glow?"

I said to him, "O birdie, do Reveal your secret deep I see you all the yearlong through And hear your joyful cheep!

"So why, O Robin, tell me why When you're around all year On lawn, or branch, or in the sky Why now this Christmas cheer?"

He said to me that long ago
The postmen you would see
Their jackets vivid red would glow –
"In fact, they looked like me!

"From then till now my bright red breast And cheery trilling tweet Has come upon the Christmas fest To bring a Christmas treat!

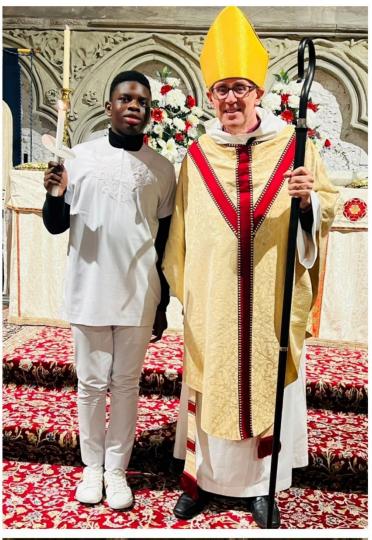


















































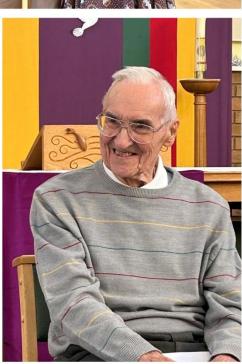




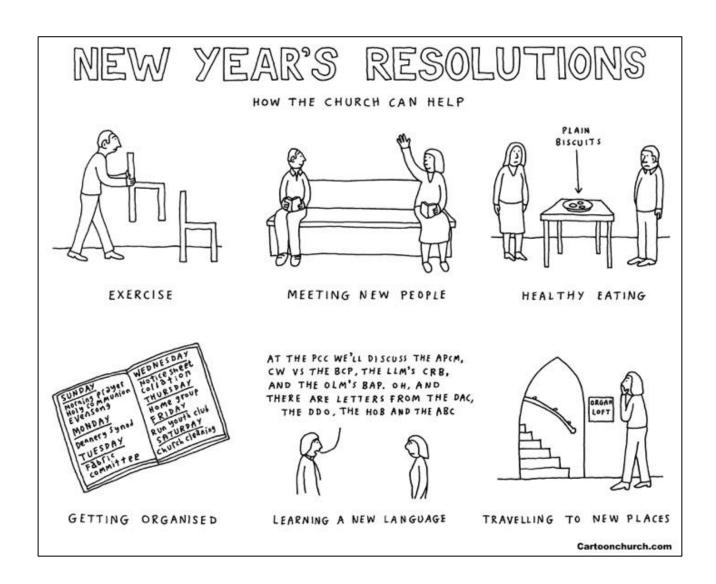












Getting in touch...

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