



# Gateway

December 2020/January 2021



St Michael's, Alnwick  
*The magazine for the people of the Church and the Town*



# WEEKLY WORSHIP

## SUNDAYS AT ST MICHAEL'S

8.00 am

HOLY COMMUNION (said)

A quiet early morning service (CW\*) with a sermon. On the third Sunday of the month we use BCP

9.30 am

THE PARISH EUCHARIST

Sung Eucharist (CW) with Junior Church for children, a robed choir and the largest congregation of the day. On the first Sunday of the month a 'First Sunday Eucharist' is especially welcoming to children.

11.15 am

LATE MORNING WORSHIP

A more flexible and varied service, which includes Holy Communion about once a month. The music includes traditional hymns as well as contemporary Christian songs. A small and welcoming congregation with some provision for children.

6.00 pm

EVENSONG

A traditional service of Evening Prayer (BCP) with sermon, choir, hymns and Anglican chant for Psalms and Canticles.

## WEDNESDAYS AT ST MICHAEL'S

10.15 am

HOLY COMMUNION

A said service of Holy Communion (CW) followed by coffee and the opportunity for fellowship. Once a month we are joined by a class from St Michael's Church School and once a term the service takes place in the school.

## DENWICK VILLAGE CHAPEL

A small chapel-of-ease built by the Duke of Northumberland in 1872

11.15 am on the Second Sunday of the month.

MATINS OR HOLY COMMUNION

\*CW – Common Worship, BCP – Book of Common Prayer (1662)

For more information on St Michael's please visit our website at  
[www.alnwickanglican.com](http://www.alnwickanglican.com)

# From the Vicar

St. Michael's Vicarage  
Alnwick

Dear People of Alnwick,

I am writing this letter in the middle of November for an issue of 'Gateway' which covers the period to the end of January.

In terms of the Church's year this will see us through Advent, Christmas and most of the season of Epiphany; times of patient expectation, of great rejoicing and of understanding how the baby born in the manger was God's gift to the whole world.

As the weeks pass by, we know that the observation of these important days will take place – just as they always have down the ages – but just how we might be able observe them remains a mystery as we await further news on the ending of a second period of 'Lockdown', what might be required in the way of ongoing restrictions and, in particular, the extent to which we may, or may, be able to gather with friends and family over Christmas and New Year.

Uncertainty is all around us – including the uncertainty of just when a safe and effective vaccine may be successfully developed and freely available.

It depends, to a large extent, on each individual's personality as to just how much uncertainty one can deal with. For my own part, I function much better when I know what plans are and how they will be implemented; but the simple fact of the matter is that this is just not possible at the current time.

This time 'round, Christmas and Epiphany may be times of 'waiting' just as much as Advent: waiting – but without the full knowledge of what might lie ahead.

The expectancy of Advent is always undergirded with the joyful anticipation of the birth of the Christ-child at Christmas and, although that everlasting joy and truth remains, it will, most likely, be the oddest of celebrations most of will have experienced.

More than ever, the opening words of the hymn we often sing in Advent reflect the mood of all of us 'Longing for light, we wait in darkness'.

*Continued on page 5*

Principal readings for December 2020 and January 2021

*Please note that, during the current restrictions, there will be only ONE reading used at our Sunday worship*

Date	Holy Communion	Evening Prayer
06 Dec 2nd Sunday of Advent	Isaiah 40: 1-11 2 Peter 3:8-15a Mark 1:1-8	1 Kings 22:1-28 Romans 15:4-13
13th Dec 3rd Sunday of Advent	Isaiah 61: 1-4, 8-11 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 John 1:6-8, 19-28	Malachi 3:1-4 & 4 Philippians 4:4-7
20th Dec 4th Sunday of Advent	2 Samuel 7:1-11 & 16 Romans 16:25-27 Luke 1: 26-38	Zechariah 2:10-13 Luke 1:39-55
<i>If we are able to celebrate in church over Christmas, the readings will be selected from part of one of the following three sets</i>		
Set 1	Isaiah 9:2-7; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2: 1-14 [15-20]	
Set 2	Isaiah 62:6-12; Titus 3: 4-7; Luke 2 [1-7] 8-20	
Set 3	Isaiah 52:7-10; Hebrews 1:1-4 [5-12]; John 1:1-14	
27th Dec 1st Sunday of Christmas	Isaiah 61:1-10 Galatians 4:4-7 Luke 2: 15-21	Isaiah 35:1-10 Colossians 1:9-20
3rd January 2nd Sunday of Christmas	Jeremiah 31:7-14 Ephesians 1:3-14 John 1:10-18	Isaiah 46:3-13 Romans 12:1-8
Wed 6th Jan Epiphany	Isaiah 60.1-6 Ephesians 3.1-12 Matthew 2.1-12	
10th Jan Baptism of Christ	Genesis 1:1-5 Acts 19:1-7 Mark 1:4-11	Isaiah 42:1-9 Ephesians 2:1-10
17th Jan Second Sunday of Epiphany	1 Samuel 3:1-10 (11-20) Revelation 5:1-10 John 1:43-51	Isaiah 60:9-22 Hebrews 6:17-7:10
24th Jan Conversion of Paul	Jeremiah 1:4-10 Galatians 1:11-16 Acts 9:1-22 Matthew 19:27-30	Transferred from Monday 25th
31st Jan 4th Sunday of Epiphany	Deuteronomy 18:15-20 Revelation 12:1-5a Mark 1:21-28	1 Samuel 3:1-20 1 Corinthians 14: 12-20

As we journey through the dark days of winter, however different our celebrations may have to be, we know in our heart of hearts that, come what may, our God will be with us. His love, demonstrated in the gift of his Son, is unwavering. Now, despite all the uncertainties, is a time to rest in that simple yet profound truth.

*'Be still, my soul: your God will undertake  
to guide the future as he has the past.  
Your hope, your confidence let nothing shake,  
all now mysterious shall be clear at last.'*

May you know Gods abiding presence as we continue to live through the uncertainties of these days and may our longing for light be rewarded with better days ahead.

With every blessing,

*Paul*

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## Christmas Service



We expect there to be just one service, on Christmas Day at 10 a.m. A Service of Christmas Readings with Blessing of the Crib and Holy Communion.

## Gateway

The next edition of Gateway will be for February, and that is the time for subscriptions to be renewed.

The price stays the same: £7.50 for the year.

If you are not already a subscriber and would like to have the magazine delivered each month, please let Colin Perkins or Jean Darby know.

With all good wishes for Christmas and the New Year from the Editors.

## Thought for the Month

**T**HIS CHRISTMAS will be among the strangest I can think of. As I write we're still in our second national lockdown. I'm not sure what life will look like on 25th December, and one thing this pandemic has surely taught us is not to predict the future! All our plans these days come with caveats, all our projects have conditions attached. It feels like there's very little we can be sure of through this Advent and into Christmas.

But as we approach this season, there is one thing that hasn't changed, and will never change. One thing we can be sure of, that has no caveat or condition to it. And that is that God is still with us. Because at Christmas we celebrate something far more important than that Santa is coming, or that mince pies are ready, or that the in-laws are coming for dinner. We celebrate that God is with us. At Christmas we celebrate something far more lasting than the box of chocolates we unwrap, or the bottle(s) of wine we open, or the turkey we roast. We celebrate that God is still with us, and he's never not with us.

That's the gift of Emmanuel, God with us, who comes at Christmas; the wonder of Jesus, who put off the glory of heaven, and took on human flesh; this Christ-child, who spoke

creation into being, and yet dwells among us in this fragile, sacred body of a new-born babe. That's what we celebrate at Christmas, that in Christ, God is with us. God will always be with us. God is never not with us.

Perhaps this Christmas, more than ever, we need to hold to the truth of that celebration. The trappings we love may not be available to us this year. We may or may not have family gathered around our tables. We may or may not be able to sing our favourite carols. We may or may not drink mulled wine, and laugh over Christmas pudding. We may or may not be able to doze to the sounds of *Strictly* on TV and the clattering of washing up in the kitchen. But, however our celebration looks, God will be with us.

He will be with us if this year we've lost loved ones, if this year we've felt financial strain, or if we've felt lonely, or stressed, or tired. God will be with us whether this year has brought sorrow or joy, or a complex mix of both. So whatever December 25th brings – and, really, I have no idea what it will be – what I am entirely and unshakably certain of is that, in all of it, God is with us. And that, I think, is still worth celebrating.

*Gerard Rundell*

# Nativity Scenes

**M**ANY PEOPLE put their Christmas decorations up early this year, seeking something cheerful in what has been a very difficult year. Alongside the tinsel, the baubles, and the fairy lights, many people will have a nativity scene, a symbol of our hope, in the darkest portion of the year. Nativity scenes predate many of our modern Christmas traditions, and really date back to the Middle Ages, and St Francis of Assisi.

Francis loved Christmas more than any other festival of the church year, and, with the Pope's permission, in 1223 he staged a Nativity scene in the town of Greccio. Francis' aims was to arouse devotion by reminding people of the discomfort and suffering Jesus experienced from infancy for their sake. When the local people came, they found bright lights, monks singing, and a living reenactment, with a manger filled with hay, an ox, an ass – and Francis, celebrating Mass over the manger. A local knight saw a vision, and said that “he saw a beautiful little child asleep in that manger, whom the blessed father Francis embraced in both of his arms, and seemed to wake it from sleep,” and everyone went home rejoicing. Afterwards, the hay was said to cure animal and human diseases and give women an easy labour. A church was built on the



site, with the altar over the manger, and in the words of one of Francis' early biographers:

*This was done  
so that where animals once ate the  
fodder of the hay,  
there humans henceforth  
for healing of body and soul  
would eat the flesh  
of the immaculate and spotless lamb,  
our Lord Jesus Christ,  
who gave Himself for us  
with supreme and indescribable love.*

Within a hundred years, every church in Italy had its own Nativity scene, and statues began to replace live participants. By the 19th century they could be seen in private homes and were becoming popular with non-Catholics, and now they are very common indeed. Christian art has always served as a tangible reminder of what we believe, a way to engage the senses, and rouse our devotion. Perhaps, in this difficult year, as we look on our Nativity scenes, we might remember that in suffering and in joy, Christ is present, a light in the darkness which will never be put out.

*Emma Mavin*

# Ordinary Christians (continued)

## Is it going to cost me anything?

They say, the entrance fee is nothing; the subscription is everything. Entrance to the Kingdom of Heaven is free. The price was paid for you and me by Jesus on Calvary. Entrance to the church is free: there is no charge for baptism or confirmation. (There is a charge for weddings and funerals, the latter leading someone to remark, “It’s free to come in, but you have to pay to get out”).

Nevertheless, one of the marks of a Christian is a desire to give. This is part of the image of God in us, because God is a giver too. (“God so loved the world that he gave ...” *John 3.16*) So a Christian with any income or possessions will want to give, and the giving is of two kinds.

First, there is the simple giving in return for value received if you are a member of a local church. Salaried ministry will probably be provided, the building is available and maintained, lighted and heated, and various other expenses will have been incurred simply in order to put on a service on a Sunday morning. Clearly the members of the church should take their share of the financial responsibility for all this. We don’t have a fixed charge like a theatre ticket price: it works on the basis of paying according to our abilities. In many churches there is a funding scheme where everyone who can is encouraged to contribute by bank standing order under Deed of Gift, so that the church can recover the income tax paid by the giver, thus painlessly transforming every 80 pence into £1.00 (based on 20p in the pound income tax.)

Secondly, there is giving above this out of the goodness of your heart and feelings of gratitude, for any of a wide variety of good causes, missionary societies, relief organisations, appeals, disaster funds, and direct gifts. Money is a medium of service. You and I probably can’t be foreign missionaries or relief workers, so our money will go and provide for those who can.

In the Bible, the Old Testament standard of giving was a tithe: ten-percent of income. That was the basic level, and freewill offerings were over and above that. In our society it can be fairly claimed that much of what the tithe was intended to support is now paid for through taxation. Nevertheless, many Christians do take a tithe as the standard, though perhaps applying it to net income after taxation, and perhaps after mortgage payments too. In one sense it doesn’t matter so much how you arrive at the basis, as in having a basis from which to calculate. So decide how you are going to give, based on

your income, responsibilities, sense of gratitude and faith, and stick to it, until you feel able to increase it. Remember that it is always possible to change a commitment up or down, or cancel it altogether without penalty. For many people it is an act of faith that God is no one's debtor. If we give generously, God gives to us; not money, necessarily, but he blesses us as seems best to him. This is obviously something to be desired.

## **What about dying?**

Death and taxes are the two certain things about the future. We all want to go to heaven, but most of us don't want to go there just yet. And as Woody Allan said, "I don't mind the thought of death. I just don't want to be there when it happens." Together with our thoughts about the end of our lives on earth, is the conviction that death is in God's hand. Sometimes this is expressed in terms of the sanctity of life: only God has the right to take human life. And sometimes it is a form of consolation: that God has taken our loved ones to be with him. Most people, in my experience, are more concerned about the process of dying than of being dead. Dying may involve pain, illness, loss of control of bodily functions, and being a burden on others as well as the loss of family and familiar things. Whereas death is apparently going to be one of three things:

- ◆ extinction – with no further consciousness, in which case there is nothing to worry about, although the prospect may be alarming,
- ◆ judgement and punishment for sins committed – which certainly gives plenty to worry about if true,
- ◆ heaven and union with God, with everlasting bliss – which is obviously to be welcomed, but not easily understood, and so the expectation may not be real.

Most races and peoples have had some idea of something beyond earthly life. The concept of "nothing" seems to be fairly modern. Some believe in reincarnation, which is the idea that the soul persists through various bodies. Personally I can't see the point or advantage of this, if subsequent existences have no knowledge of the previous lives. If one could "come back" knowing what one knows now – well that would be useful. But simply being reborn without any knowledge of the past life seems a bit pointless. Reincarnation is not a Christian concept.

The Christian idea of a life beyond is Resurrection, and our knowledge of it, such as it is, is based almost entirely on the recorded accounts of the resurrection of Jesus. Within about thirty-six hours of Jesus being laid to rest

in a borrowed tomb after his crucifixion, he was raised to life again. His new life differed from the old in certain important respects:

- ◆ He was not limited by the usual constraints. He could appear in a locked room and disappear from sight. He could appear in Jerusalem or Galilee.

- ◆ He was not a ghost: he had flesh and bones and could eat food.

- ◆ He seems to have been changed in appearance so that his friends did not recognise him by sight, but only by what he did and said.

From these pieces of information we can deduce that the Resurrection body of Jesus was changed, not simply brought back to life (as Lazarus presumably was, in John 11, only to die again eventually). It was no longer subject to physical limitations, but the personality persisted. Christians believe that we shall all be changed in similar ways; that the old body will one day be done with, but that the *person* (or personality) will continue to live, and be given a new heavenly body which will not suffer the problems of our earthly bodies (“God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.” *Rev. 21.4*) For anyone suffering from a disability, or conscious of getting older and less able, or going through the distress of cancer, this must be a great comfort. Paul, in II Corinthians 4.16, says, “Though our outward nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day.” Or as I have heard it put, “As we become more like a prune on the outside, we become more like a peach on the inside!”

One famous Christian writer (C S Lewis) compared the spiritual nature to visibility. He said that on earth we cannot see pure spirits, but in heaven they cannot see pure physical bodies. It is only as we develop a spiritual nature that we become “visible” to heaven, or, if you like, become *real* to heaven. So there is eternal value in growing spiritually while we are here on earth, in preparation for our eternal life in heaven.

We tend to think that the here and now is the time and place for material things, and that spiritual things can wait until we get to heaven. But I believe that this life is the time and place for spiritual development, and that in heaven we shall have the material blessings which we long for now. The Biblical images of heaven are in terms of banquets, music and so on, which for the people of the first century were reserved for the very wealthy and powerful. Another writer (Adrian Plass) commented that heaven has to be much better than the very best thing we can imagine on earth; so that for someone whose

idea of bliss is scoring a century at Lords, heaven will provide if not a cricket match, at least an experience or an emotion which is better than that.

### **From the sublime to – the Church of England**

If you are interested, the Church of England is organised into two provinces, of Canterbury and York, each with an Archbishop. They are in theory equal in status, but the title of the Archbishop of York is “Primate of England”, and that of the Archbishop of Canterbury is “Primate of All England”: a subtle and very English distinction.

Within the Provinces there are now over forty dioceses. They correspond approximately to English counties although some dioceses cover more than one county. Most bear the name of the county town, like Lincoln, or Truro, which covers Cornwall, or Exeter, which is Devonshire. A few carry a different name, like Southwell, which is the name of a small town in Nottinghamshire and that diocese covers the county of Notts., plus two or three parishes in South Yorkshire. Some cover less than a county: Kent is divided between the dioceses of Canterbury and Rochester. Some are more than one county: the diocese of Lichfield includes Staffordshire, Shropshire and part of the West Midlands. The diocese of Newcastle covers that city and the county of Northumberland plus one parish in Cumbria. Until a hundred and fifty years ago there were far fewer, larger, dioceses but the decision was taken to increase the number to make them of more convenient sizes.

Each diocese has a Bishop in charge and of course York and Canterbury dioceses have the Archbishops as their bishops. To assist the Diocesan Bishops, most dioceses have one or more “suffragan” bishops or two or more “area” bishops. Diocesan bishops of the Church of England have the privilege of sitting in the House of Lords on a seniority basis, although whether this ancient right will survive much longer is uncertain.

Dioceses are divided into two or more Archdeaconries, each with an Archdeacon responsible for many administrative matters. At one time archdeacons needed only to be in deacons’ orders – Thomas à Becket was Archdeacon of Canterbury before he was even a priest – but now archdeacons are all in priests’ orders. They represent the bishop in many functions and form part of the senior staff of the diocese.

Archdeaconries are divided into a number of Area Deaneries, each composed of a number of parishes in one area. A senior priest from one of these parishes is appointed Area Dean and again forms a connecting link between the senior staff of the diocese and the parishes.

*To be continued*

*Colin Perkins*

An address given at the streamed 4 pm service on Advent Sunday.

## Lament, Longing and Hope

**I** AM NOT a happy man. My wife and I have been shielded since March. I feel I am in prison, cut off from anything I can do to make the world a better place in which to live.

My situation is like the picture we are seeing over and over again on the television. An old person with memory loss sitting by the window in a care home.

She sees someone she belongs with, outside the window. Her whole body cries WHY! WHY!! In protest. She can't understand. Her daughter, husband or whoever is outside, also feels helpless. Also protests.

This is no way to run a world! Yes I can see why the situation is like this because

Covid means that **there is no easy solution.**

I was shocked the other day to discover that I was looking at a picture of the crucifixion and feeling that I was like Jesus.

I am not entitled to compare myself with Jesus.

**Jesus was helpless on the cross.**

**There was nothing he could do** to make the world a better place.

He was literally nailed hand and foot to the wood.

But it isn't me comparing myself with Jesus. It is the other way round.

Jesus has chosen to be like me, or rather to be like that old bewildered lady in the nursing home window

Jesus on the cross **can't do anything.**

But he can still speak

And he shouts his protest to our Heavenly Father.

**WHY!**

**Why** hast thou forsaken me?

He is not expecting an answer, thinking that God will explain it all to him. He is **registering a complaint.**

## **This ought not to be!**

And just like the old lady in the nursing home window, there is no easy answer explaining it all away.

Jesus longs for the world to be run better. “I thirst “ he says Anybody who has to put up with this, is quite right to register a complaint. God, himself, does not expect us to put up with this, to pretend that everything in the garden is lovely!

Then Jesus, who feels helpless, who feels that he can do nothing, **does** two wonderful things

He gives *the short-term answer* to the thief on the cross next door. He puts the crucifixion in its true context. He says to the thief, “Today you will be with me in paradise”; and the thief believes him; we believe him.

This does not make what is happening right. It establishes that it is **wrong**; but that this wrong will not last; it is temporary; the future is eternal. Then Jesus does another wonderful thing. **He looks after his family.**

Nearly all of us want our family to flourish after we are gone.

Jesus says to John “Look after Mary”. He says to his mother “**You are not as alone as you feel.** You still have a son to look after you”.

Then he says to our Heavenly Father “I have done my best; I have done what I can. This imperfect situation is now handed over to you. Your problem; not mine any longer”.

**“Into your hands I commend my spirit.”**

*Martin Turner*

### **PARISH HALL DRAW**

Drawn on October 25th, winners were

1st	(£20)	No 23	Joan Crowe
2nd	(£10)	No 30	Annette Playle
3rd	(£5)	No 9	Judy Jobson

# It's important to me ...

“You will show me the path of life; in your presence is the fullness of joy and in your right hand are pleasures for evermore” (*Psalm 16:10*)

**I**T WAS while chanting Psalm 16 as cantor at the Easter Vigil in St Mary, Stoke Newington (Hackney) back in 1998, and hearing these words coming out of my mouth, that something fundamental in my relationship with God and my recognition of God's call on me changed quite dramatically. I had left my research and teaching job as a statistical epidemiologist at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine 15 months earlier, to give myself more time and space to live out what mattered to me, and to work out what future path my life would take. And now, as I sang out those words, I began to recognise and acknowledge that I should place these things into the hands of God.

In the subsequent weeks and months, and in the outworking and discernment of what I came to realise was a call to ordination, it gradually dawned on me that so many of the individual issues and organisations that I had supported since my student days (early '70's) were all highly connected, and that what held them together was bound up in the love God has for the whole of his creation, shown for us through the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

What had initially seemed like discreet interests and campaigns that I had been involved in, whether that was the work of Oxfam, Amnesty International, Traidcraft or Friends of the Earth, or campaigning for recycling, nuclear disarmament, or lead-free petrol, to name but a few, I was now beginning to see as integral to the fullness of life - windows into the Kingdom of God. Twenty or so years on, greater light shines through those windows, but in many ways the world feels to me in a more precarious and darker place, where the climate and environmental emergency takes centre stage.

In these recent pandemic months, with less opportunity for eucharistic worship which has always been at the heart of my spirituality, the Daily Offices of Morning and Evening Prayer, and Compline (Night Prayer) have taken on greater significance, with the psalms and canticles at their heart. Psalm 16 pops up regularly at Compline, and those words jumped out at me again only last week.

Since the start of the first 'lockdown' I have felt an increasing need to focus prayer not only on the effects of the pandemic, but on action against the

climate and environmental crisis which we all face. The former must not prevent our communal or individual response to the climate emergency from gathering momentum, whether that might be through our reduced use of plastics, shrinking our carbon footprint or reducing food waste.

For me, cherishing the earth that God sees as very good is a vital ingredient to living in the abundance of life and the fullness of joy. We've got some way to go.

*(For those who don't know me, I came to Alnwick in November last year, having retired from stipendiary ministry in London, Torbay and most recently in South Tyneside).*

*Gillian (Gilly) Maude*

## **Christmas Sunday Plus**

**4pm 20th December**

**'Comfort and Joy'**

**Short introductory worship on YouTube,**

Accessible from the Church website.

Continued on Zoom from 4.15pm.

Please contact Andrew Duff for the Zoom link.

This follows on from 'Lament, Longing and Hope' screened on 29th November. A number of familiar St Michael's faces will appear, including Martin Turner, who read his item on Lament, which is also in this edition of Gateway. Despite some technical difficulties because of the hour change, the first Sunday Plus, in October, seems to have been well received. Look out for 'Winter', probably towards the end of January.

# Christmas Carols Quiz

(All in the Church Hymnal numbers denote number of letters in words of first lines)

1. DARTH RHEA HELK GENSLA SIGN. (4, 3, 6, 6, 4.)

2. MANY A WAG ERIAN. (4, 2, 1, 6.)

3. FISH TRET WELLON HANGELET DAISYD (3, 5, 6, 3, 5, 3, 3. )

4. SLANGER MOF MEARTHLES FLOG ROY (6, 4, 3, 6, 2, 5. )

5. LENTING HIST HONGITHLY (6, 5, 4, 5. )

6. SHIMELY GENI DENIBA WORFAST ( 3, 3, 5, 2. 1, 3, 2, 5.)

7. KABLET HINE WRITEN DIM (2, 3, 5, 9. )

8. CAMEL VOWED ON ARCH MATTISS (4, 4, 4, 2, 9.)

9. IKEA DANCE FALLMEL (4, 1, 6, 5.)

10. DEACON MINJO CHERE TANTE BOIL ( 4, 3, 4, 3, 11.)

11 CAMEO LOYEL FAULT HIF (1, 4, 3, 2, 8. )

12 TOOTLE TWINL HEMTHOL BEEF ( 1, 6, 4, 2, 9.)

(Answers on page 21)

*Rachel Robinson*

## CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR'S GREETINGS

Christmas blessings to all my friends in Alnwick. May the hope this season brings sustain us all throughout the New Year.

Christina (Chris) Bauers Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

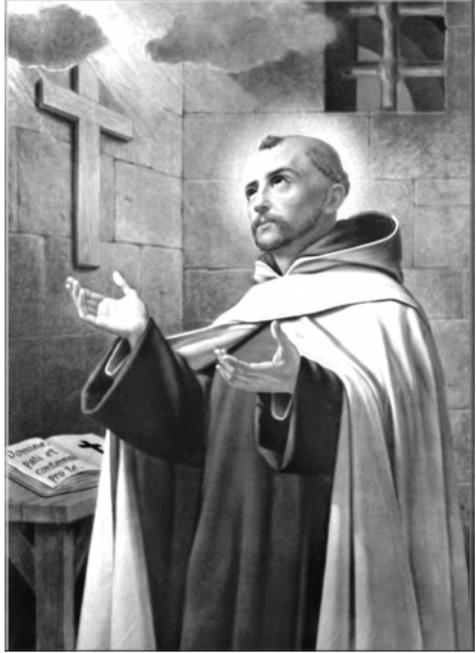
From Frances and Richard Allsop to all our friends at St Michael's – with our love and best wishes.

Paul and Jane send everyone their love and the warmest of Christmas greetings from the Vicarage and hope that 2021 brings a change for good in all that we can do.

Wishing you all a blessed Christmas in a difficult year. May God be always with you!

Gerard, Karen, Theo and Phoebe.

# St John of the Cross



ON THE 14th December, the Church celebrates the life of St John of the Cross (1542-1591). John was a mystic, poet, and writer, and was declared a Doctor of the Church in 1926.

John was born in Castile in 1542. He grew up in poverty – his father died when he was young, and his mother was left to bring up the children completely alone, as her in-laws refused to have anything to do with them, so they survived on what money she could make as a weaver. John was educated at a school for poor boys, and also worked as a carer within a local hospital. John's intellectual talents were spotted early, and as a result he was sent to a Jesuit school when he was seventeen. He was also offered ordination as a secular priest, or in the Society of Jesus, but ultimately chose to join the Carmelite Order, finishing his novitiate in 1564 as John of St. Matthias. He was then sent to the University of Salamanca for further study, spending three or four years primarily studying philosophy, theology, and biblical studies. John was ordained priest in 1567, and travelled home to sing his first Mass, which is when a chance meeting with

another member of his Order changed his life.

Religious Orders across Europe were having something of an existential crisis. Many had begun life with strict, ascetic rules of life which were later relaxed considerably, so that monasteries and convents were often wealthy places full of aristocrats, and not very dissimilar from the world outside them. A number of people were determined to bring about change, and one of those people was Madre Teresa de Jesús, better known to us as Teresa of Ávila. She had started a reform movement known as the discalced ('shoeless') Carmelites dedicated to poverty, simplicity, and, for women, cloistering. She now recruited John into the movement, and he spent the

rest of his life founding disalced establishments, and acting as spiritual director and confessor to convents and to individuals.

As you can imagine, not everyone was keen on being reformed, or in having to live lives less rich than before, and there was quite a bit of opposition from non-reformed Carmelites. The considerable tension came to a head on the 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1577 when a group of people broke into the monastery where John was serving, arrested him, and transported him to monastic prison in Toledo. He was kept in a small, dark room, flogged, and denied the Sacrament until, after nine months, he was able to escape. This was the point at which John began to write poetry and, as he continued in his ministry as confessor and spiritual director, he was asked about their meaning, leading him to write the commentaries which make up his prose works. He continued to travel around Spain, taking part in the administration of his Order (and sometimes falling out with people within the administration) until his death in 1591 from the skin infection St Antony's Fire, at the age of 46.

John's writings include his corpus of poems, and the commentaries the *Spiritual Canticle*, the *Dark Night*, the *Living Flame of Love*, and the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*. John talks about the experience of spiritual suffering and delight, and about reaching union with God traditionally

expressed in three stages: purgation (or purification), illumination, and union. Christian writers have always wrestled with just how to talk about a God who can never truly be comprehended, but who is said to be understood, with how to express the limitations of human speech about God, while still talking about him. John is one of a number of theologians over the centuries to use a technique of "saying" and "unsaying" theological statements, affirming that we can speak of God, while simultaneously affirming God's ultimate unknowability, describing rising beyond the senses, knowledge, words, and thought to approach God in the blinding darkness of mystical union.

John's works are fascinating, and how we speak about a God who is at once incarnated as one of us, yet wholly Other, and questions about the limitations of human speech, and how much humans can truly say we know, are ones that I find fascinating, as do many theologians today. I would definitely commend the works of John of the Cross to you – perhaps the most accessible are his poems, while of his prose commentaries, the *Dark Night* is quite easily available.

*Emma Mavin*

## The 3 Bs

THE LITTLE, furry black-and-tan fella just didn't feel right – he didn't know what the problem was or even if there WAS one. He was warm, dry and had lots of companions but his life seemed the same every day, with little change or excitement. He often saw others from the same place being picked up, looked at and, if they suited, being borne away to the checkout by what he was told were child-humans. He wondered what awaited them; then one day he heard a voice saying “Aww look at that little fella – doesn't he look like Zeus! Let's buy him to remind us of the Big Lad”



So, out of his round wire cage and into a different kind with a handle he was hefted (but gently), carried to the checkouts where he had seen others taken and this was where his adventures started.

His name was written on a tag fastened to his neck; he wasn't sure why, and because he was a soft toy, he couldn't bend down to see what was written on his tag (in any case, he was very young and didn't know what reading and writing were all about). Needless to say – that 'not feeling right' was, very simply BOREDOM, which is no longer there, so no problem at all!

*A bit of human explanation needed here. The two people who first saw him, in a wire basket near the entrance to ToysRUs, were very good friends of a Shields lad called Budgie. He had a Rottweiler dog called Zeus who just loved people; he would try to greet you by putting his forepaws on your shoulder, or sit on your knee! If he got to be too much of a pest, Budgie would say 'Get in the back kitchen, NOW'. Zeus would go, but always had the last word by going Grr Grr as he left!*

So, the two who in the toyshop picked up the soft toy and took him home. His name was (and still is) Bruno. He has gradually been joined by others over the years – a hand knitted Maine Coon cat called Blue, in memory of a 20-year old and much loved real one who left his earthly life behind and is now forever young; a rather bulky MUFC mascot called Bear. They, for a long time, were just referred to as 'The 3 Bs'

Now, the number has grown – all just soft toys that sit side by side on a wooden bench, just waiting for someone that needs a cuddle or a silent, sympathetic ear.

Like people, they all have personalities and like Zeus, have sometimes to be disciplined when adventures get out of hand; all, however, are treated with unending love and give much-needed gentle humour.

JMS-S

# Holy Days in Dec/Jan

**R**ED-LETTER DAYS in December are Christmas Day and the three days following: Stephen, First Martyr, John, Apostle and Evangelist, and the Holy Innocents. Sadly we shall not be able to keep these in church this year..

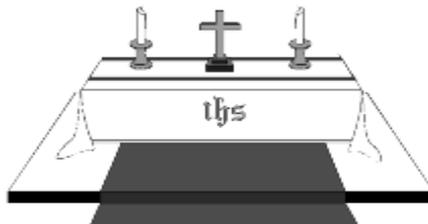
There are a number of other observances, including Nicholas, Bishop of Myra c.326, (Santa Claus), St John of the Cross, Poet and Teacher of the Faith (see page 17) and Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, , and Martyr 1170 on 29th.

In January there are three Red-letter days, beginning with the Naming of Jesus on 1st, then the Epiphany on 6th which we shall celebrate on Sunday 3rd, and on 25th, the Conversion of Paul, our second Patron Saint, which we shall commemorate on Sunday 24th.

Between 18th and 25th is the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Whatever form it takes this time it is important to recognise the progress that has been made, not so much in joining churches together but more in the acceptance of Christians of other traditions and recognition of the validity of their ministries. This may seem obvious now, but not so long ago there was much more antipathy between different denominations.

On 30th, Charles, King and Martyr 1649, was remembered, with a special service printed in the Prayer Book from 1662 to 1859. Five churches have been dedicated in his name.

*Colin Perkins*



# Answers to Quiz on Page 16

1. Hark the Herald Angels Sing.
2. Away in a Manger.
3. The First Nowell the Angel did say.
4. Angels from the Realms of Glory.
5. Silent Night, Holy Night.
6. See Him lying in a bed of Straw.
7. In the bleak Midwinter.
8. Love came down at Christmas.
9. Like a candle Flame.
10. Come and join the Celebration.
11. O Come all ye faithful.
12. O little Town of Bethlehem.

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## Smile

**S**O OFTEN, especially at the moment, it's the little things that make us smile, that keep our spirits up.

Here are a few smiley thoughts from around the parish:

- On a windy, wild day I sat in the car above Bamburgh beach watching the tumbling waves, the white crests, the flying spume while a flock of gannets, adults and juniors, wheeled, soared, skimmed over and dived into the restless sea. Beautiful birds in their element make me smile.

*Mora Rolley*

- Watching our resident mouse family run back and forth between the stones on our rockery.

- Sitting down to a meal of home grown fruit and vegetables from our extra well tended garden.

*Judy Jobson*

- Following days of strong winds and rain, I awoke to see a beautiful cloud free blue sky and the moon, the same moon that is shining on the ones I love in Australia. It made them feel so much closer. I smiled all day.

*Margaret Riley*

*Sue Wiltshire*

## FAMILY OF GOD

*May the faithful departed rest in peace and rise in glory*

1st October	Margaret McNeil
6th November	Iris Symmonds
28th October	Joan Marsden
10th November	Ann Brown
13th November	Margaret Gardner
15th November	Colin Shrimpton
16th November	Kit Thomas
18th November	Marian Cocks

### Church Services

It is not yet clear, at the time of writing, what we shall be allowed to do in December and January.

When we can, there will be a service at 10a.m. Each Sunday, of Holy Communion or a Service of the Word.

When this is not permitted the service will be streamed, on our website and our YouTube channel.

Copies of **The Gateway** can be obtained in St Michael's Church or ordered for delivery in this version or **large print**

Phone The Parish Office 602797 leave a message or email  
stmichaelandstpaul@btconnect.com

The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Church of England  
nor of the editorial committee

**The Gateway** is Desktop-Published by **St Michael's Magazine Group**

# Parish Information

## VICAR

The Rev'd Canon Paul Scott 01665 603078  
St Michael's Vicarage  
Howling Lane, Alnwick, NE66 1DH  
Email: paulscott1957@btinternet.com  
*The Vicar's day off is Friday and Gerard's day off is Monday. They would be glad to be spared all but the most urgent matters on these days*

## CURATE

The Rev'd Gerard Rundell 07394792277  
10 Allerburn Lea, Alnwick, NE66 2NJ  
Email rev.g.rundell@gmail.com

## CLERGY WITH PERMISSION TO OFFICIATE

The Rev'd Canon Sue Allen 01665 605361  
The Rev'd Gilly Maude 01665 603460  
The Rev'd Colin Perkins 01665 510445  
The Rev'd Martin Roff 01665 602207  
The Rev'd Natasha Schemanoff 01665 603815  
The Rev'd Jane Scott 01665 603078  
The Rev'd Martin Turner 01665 603815  
The Rev'd Canon Dennis Winter 01665 602658

## READERS

John Cooke 01665 830419  
Annette Playle 01665 606902

## READER EMERITUS

Bill Callaghan 01665 602348

## ELECTORAL ROLL OFFICER

Susan Trafford 01665 606180

## ORGANIST AND CHOIRMASTER

Vacant

## CHURCHWARDENS

Anne Blades 01665 602020  
Pat Taylor 01665 603811

## CHURCHWARDEN EMERITUS

Albert Brown 01665 602700

## ASSISTANT CHURCHWARDEN

Pat Tweed 01665 479280

## PCC TREASURER

Richard Dale 01665 606804

## PCC SECRETARY

Rosie Buxton 01665 604830

## THE PARISH OFFICE

01665 602797  
E-mail stmichaelandstpaul@btconnect.com  
Urgent calls should be addressed to the Vicarage

## MOTHERS' UNION

Meets in church at 2.00 pm on the second  
Wednesday of each month except August  
Branch Leader  
Val. Hawker 01665 602348  
(Mobile) 07732431056

## BAPTISMS

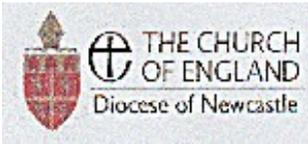
Because of COVID-19 restrictions,  
currently not available until further  
notice

## COMMUNION

for the **SICK** and **HOUSEBOUND**  
can be arranged by contacting  
The Vicar 01665 603078  
Or  
Pat Taylor 01665 603811

For more information on St Michael's,  
please visit our website at [www.alnwickanglican.com](http://www.alnwickanglican.com)

To hire the **PARISH HALL**  
Phone Mariana on 075624188837 or email [bookstmichael@gmail.com](mailto:bookstmichael@gmail.com)



Staying Connected during this pandemic

## At the Cathedral

[https://www.newcastle.anglican.org/coronavirus/live\\_streaming](https://www.newcastle.anglican.org/coronavirus/live_streaming)

### Newcastle Cathedral ministry team

<https://www.facebook.com/NewcastleCathedral>. Facebook live stream of morning prayer led from home by one of the ministry team daily Monday to Friday at 8.30 am <https://tinyurl.com/NclCathedral>

Subscribe to their channel on YouTube for notifications of the Daily Reflections (also Monday to Friday).

### At St Michael's Alnwick

Thanks to the easing of some CoronaVirus restrictions, St Michael's Church is now open for private prayer (with social distancing and hygiene measures in place) on Monday, **Wednesday and Friday, 10.00 am – 12.00 pm**, and **Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, Sunday 2.00 pm – 4.00 pm**.

Please come to spend some time in prayer in our beloved building.

From **10.00 am on Sundays**, there is now a Worship Service in church, which is *streamed at* the same time so that those who are unable to be in church, can watch at home at the same time, or can watch later, as online worship which is available on the website, and on our [YouTube channel](#). This will allow us to maintain our communal Christian life without compromising health and well-being. Social distancing and hygiene measure are in place.

This may be a said Holy Communion service, or a Service of The Word.

Following the service, at approximately **11:15 am**, we enjoy a virtual **get together** over coffee, via Zoom. If you would like to join us for this, please email Andrew Duff on [duffandrew@btinternet.com](mailto:duffandrew@btinternet.com) for the meeting ID, password, or for any questions about using Zoom.

- In addition to this, we also have some groups meeting for fellowship and to pray Compline together on weekday evenings via **Zoom** - if you would like to know more about these or join in, please contact our Curate, the Rev'd Gerard Rundell ([rev.g.rundell@gmail.com](mailto:rev.g.rundell@gmail.com)).

