

Christmas – please don't pass the humbugs

Next to the Biblical account of the birth of Jesus, the most popular Christmas story must be Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol. A new Disney animated version in the cinema right now features Jim Carrey. The reviews say it's pretty good and I hope to see it soon.

But I love the old black and white film version with the late Alistair Sim. The first time I saw it I was six or seven, and when the Ghost of old Marley came rattling its chains through Scrooge's dark and lonely house, I wanted to hide behind the sofa.

Dickens had a deep faith, and he thought that the values of Christian England should inform its laws and behaviour. In his story A Christmas Carol Scrooge's life is empty, lonely, without meaning. He doesn't believe or trust in anything except his money, and his character reflects a deep cynicism which even more prevalent today. Not even Christmas can break through Scrooge's hardened heart. He denies poor old Bob Cratchit a bit of coal for heat in the office. And when Scrooge's nephew Fred invites him to Christmas dinner, Uncle Scrooge tries to infect his nephew with his own lonely, cynical view.

“What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?”

Scrooge needs to be (and indeed is) confronted with one of the most challenging questions the Bible has to offer: “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?” (Mark 8:36)

The painful changes that allow Scrooge to become truly human again begin when the ghost of Jacob Marley, Scrooge's deceased business partner, warns Scrooge that the sins of this life

are punished in the next. The Ghost of Christmas Past takes Scrooge back to the pivotal time when he first chose the love of money over a life of love—a tragic day, in a past of regret.

The Ghost of Christmas Present carries Scrooge to the homes of his clerk Bob Cratchit and his nephew, where Scrooge observes genuine love, nurture, and support, and sees how Christmas is truly kept. Although the Cratchits are poor, they are rich in love and relationships. Scrooge notes how well they love despite how badly he treats their father Bob. And he is deeply touched when Tiny Tim toasts Scrooge's health, even as his own health is failing.

Advent is a time to reflect on our own lives and the life of the church – so that we, like Scrooge, might rid ourselves of the cynicism and sin that keep us from experiencing God's love and transforming power.

The Ghost of Christmas Future shows Scrooge what will happen if he continues to live as he has done. Scrooge faces the death of Tiny Tim, and then his own death, which no one mourns. These episodes of self reflection and the power of love transform Scrooge. His cynicism gives way. He accepts the wisdom that God's love can transform us, and he discovers hope.

The Christ Child, love, children, family, friends, forgiveness, hope – they are all elements of the way we ought to keep Christmas – now and all year.

Howard



Chronicle

Cowley Team Ministry
December 2009
January 2010

Editors' Letter

Dear Reader

November seems to have been a month of "happening" in our parish and in our neighbourhood. One of the best things for those of us who walk regularly up and down Beauchamp Lane is the resurfacing of the pavements. Isn't it nice to see our council tax being used so well? And while we're on the subject of the council I'm sure the children in our area have noticed the work that has begun in the playground behind Matalan. The new equipment, though at the time of writing it is still incomplete, is looking very colourful and exciting.

Colourful was my aim when, a few Saturdays ago, Jamie Brown and I planted a hundred daffodil bulbs in the churchyard. Watch out for a colourful display in the spring – that is, if the wretched squirrels leave them alone!

Then there are the parish activities – what a month it has been! Norah Shallow has reported a profit of about £700 from the Caribbean evening at St Francis; the Craft Fair made a profit of nearly £900 (£386 from the hire of tables and the rest from the sale of books, cakes, bric-a-brac,

decorations and refreshments); and the sponsored Ride and Stride event made £734, half of which comes back to parish funds. We've been asked to thank every single one of you who helped with all this fund-raising; didn't we do well?

While we're on the subject of profits, you'll be delighted to know that our Proms concert in September more than doubled last year's total. £847 has been added to parish funds.

(A woman Carol deals with in Templars Square asked about next year's Proms. She heard all about it from a friend who'd come for the first time. "Her face said it all. It was just shining when she talked about it. I went home and asked my husband if we can buy tickets next year. So we're planning to come. Will you tell me the date when it's been set?"')

But we've got to keep it up! Joan has asked me to remind you that there will be another plant sale in May, and she hopes that you're taking cuttings, planting seeds and nurturing pot plants ready to sell. Anyone who is short of plant pots, please let us know. There

are plenty available if you need some.

Have you begun to sort out your Christmas decorations yet? You may recall a couple of months ago we suggested that if you have any decorations to spare, you might pass them on to the Emmaus Centre. They run on a very tight budget, and the people who live there have very little to spend, so a few decorations to brighten the place at Christmas would be very welcome. Drop them in yourself if you like, or bring them to the parish office and we'll deliver them for you. Thank you so much.

We hope you enjoy your bumper Christmas Chronicle, and look forward to writing for you again in February. With warmest wishes for a joyous Christmas, and a happy New Year to you and yours from

Rosanne and Carol

PS – Are you enjoying the occasional recipe slots? Would you like a regular, perhaps an unusual, recipe each month? If so please do tell us – we've got lots of ideas.

A Christmas Card Verse

*I think it is a lovely sight
To see the cards with pictures bright
Ranged upon the mantle shelf.
I'd have to post some to myself
If other people all forgot
To send me them (and such a lot!)
So many blessings, all in rhyme,
For everyone at Christmas time.*

Michael Kelly (on an antique Christmas card)



KEEPING IN TOUCH

An excellent scheme, called “Telecare” is on offer for elderly people. It seems so simple to access and to use that I want to recommend it to anyone who cares for a vulnerable friend or relative. Also, if you live alone and have not heard about it, do think about using it, or a similar plan.

Telecare is a lifeline unit, linked to a telephone and a personal pendant which is worn around the neck, on the wrist, or attached to a belt. The service also provides sensors that automatically monitor the home.

If the pendant is pressed or one of the sensors is activated, a fully trained operator is automatically alerted to assess the nature of any problem and react accordingly to contact the necessary help.

In order to acquire one of these pendants, the first move is to call the local Access Team on 0845 050 7666 and speak to one of the operators. They will find someone from the team to meet you and set up the Telecare service. It is free to those who genuinely need it.

A letter from Carol Thornton

I got home from work one evening recently to find a parcel had come in the post. In it was a lovely apron from Bonne Maman, the jam company, but there was no note to say why they had sent it. If you were the person who arranged to have this delivered to me, I would like to say a big “Thank you!” to you. I am enjoying it very much. What a lovely surprise!

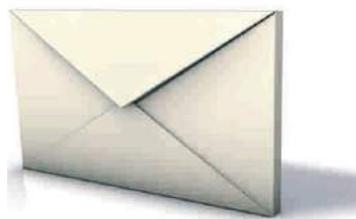
Carol

A letter from Rachel Arnatt

I would like to say thank you very much to everyone for their prayers during my illness. They have helped me a lot. I hope, God willing, it will not be too long before I am able to join you again in the Sunday service.

Yours sincerely,

Rachel



Help needed!

Is there anyone reading this who might be able to type some of articles for the Chronicle? We thought it may especially interest someone who does not already have a number of responsibilities in the parish, but might be thinking of getting involved in some way. If you would be willing to help, please get in touch with Carol or Rosanne. Thank you for thinking about this!

*What do you call a train
loaded with toffee?
A chew-chew train.*

Chronicle

The Chronicle is the monthly magazine of the Parish of Cowley Team Ministry. It is published ten times a year, with no publication in January or August. Issues going back as far as January, 2000 can be found online at this address: www.cowleyteamministry.co.uk/chronicle/

The Chronicle is edited by Rosanne Butler and Carol Thornton, and published by Philip Hind. Material from St Francis church members is collected by

Details and Deadlines

John Shreeve. This is the email address: chronicle@cowleyteamministry.co.uk

Or you can ring the parish office on (01865) 747 680.

We encourage contributions from everyone at St Francis and St James churches. To have an item included in the February issue, please submit it by 24 January.

Mothers' Union News

For those readers who get the impression that Mothers' Union is a cosy, monthly cuppa with an interesting speaker and a supportive and kindly bunch of ladies, I thought a view of the wider picture might be interesting.

Did you realise that Mothers' Union has representatives at the United Nations? They are invited to speak on world-wide issues, especially on the status of women. This year's theme was the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men including care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS.

Elizabeth Brown from Canterbury, our representative at this year's Commission in New York, wrote,

"Mothers' Union, with its practical experience of family life, can bring a unique grassroots perspective to this theme, although it is strange to be a faith group amongst the majority of secular organisations. At our own side event, "Sharing the Caring: How Mothers' Union promotes gender equality within families,"

I mentioned the UK parenting programme, the Flexible Families campaign, and the gender stereotyping illustrated within our new Commercialisation of Childhood campaign. [If you are interested in further information about these campaigns, look out in next year's Chronicle.] Mothers' Union believes

firmly in the importance of creating and supporting healthy relationships between couples and within families – this is where the equal sharing of responsibilities and gender equality can best be instilled.

It is an exhausting schedule but a great privilege to attend the Commission and take the stories of our members around the world to a forum like the United Nations."

The other issue I'd like to mention is the support our local branches give to The Children's Hospital at the JR. When parents and children arrive at the hospital, sometimes in an emergency and often emotionally stressed, they need comforting drinks and snacks. We send biscuits, hot chocolate, coffee, cup soups, etc to the hospital.

Comics and magazines, particularly for women, (although I'm not sure they will be allowed during the swine flu epidemic) are also being collected. And the receptionists keep a supply of mobile phone chargers for people who need them. Many phones have different types of connectors, so if you change your phone, please don't throw away your old charger; pass it on, please. If you'd like to help with any of these items, have a word with one of the Mothers' Union committee and we'll pass them on. Christmas is a time to care and share.

A Retrospect and a Question

*The year is past and over,
Say, have you spent it well?
Have you lived each hour with a purpose true?
Have you done each task you were called to do?
What does the record tell?*

*The year is past and over,
Save but a breath for prayer:
"For the tasks undone, for the evil wrought,
O Thou God of grace, is forgiveness sought."
Farewell, farewell Old Year!*

[This poem was copied into the back of Howard's grandmother's diary. I think it offers some questions to consider, and a prayer worth saying. I have been unable to determine who is the author. Carol]

They like it better than Christmas.

It was the last day of October and my friend was talking about her two young children. I was shocked and started to think. I asked another friend, a regular churchgoer, what she thought. "They like being scared and scaring other people," she replied. I like to think there are other reasons too, some of which tell us something about Christmas in 2009.

Halloween is a big celebration that lasts just one evening. It's a time to be with friends. It's a time to eat together. It's a time to dress up. It's a time to go out at night. Yes, it's scary, mysterious, exciting, fun. But it does have its dark side. How can we show those children that Christmas is better than Halloween? What do you think?

Mary Saunders

SAINT OF THE MONTH Saint Stephen

The date of Saint Stephen's birth is not known, but it was probably sometime in the first century. His name is Greek, meaning "crown", but he was a Jew. Most of what we know about Stephen comes from the Acts of the Apostles, which don't tell us how he was converted. But it seems that soon after Jesus' death, he became a leader among the Christians in Jerusalem.

He is first mentioned in Acts. The believers held in common everything they owned, the rich sharing with those who had less. Some thought they were being discriminated against, and seven men were chosen to administer and supervise financial matters. These seven served the Christian community, and their function came to be linked with the title of deacon.

Stephen became more prominent as a preacher, "working signs and wonders among the people." Many Jewish priests had become Christians but still held to their old traditions, whereas Stephen taught that the old Law had been overturned by a new commandment. The temple leaders were furious. He was brought before the Sanhedrin, and when accusations were made against him, he defended himself.

He said, "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and

murdered him-- you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it."

The people in the crowd "were furious and gnashed their teeth at him." But Stephen experienced a manifestation of God the Father and Jesus. "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

Angered, the crowd drove him out of the city and stoned him. In Jewish law, death by stoning was permitted as a punishment for blasphemy. One of the people in that crowd, who approved of the penalty, was a Jew, Saul of Tarsus, who would a few months later convert to Christianity, and would be known as Paul.

Thus Stephen became the first Christian martyr. The Feast Day of St Stephen is celebrated on December 26th.

St Stephen is the patron saint of coffin makers, horses, and stonemasons, and against headaches. He is usually portrayed as a deacon, carrying stones or standing alongside rocks, and sometimes with a book and/or a palm of martyrdom.

Among the places that commemorate St Stephen, including many churches, is St Stephen's House theological college in Oxford, a permanent private hall of the University.

He is remembered in the traditional carol, "Good King Wenceslaus." But this carol, written in

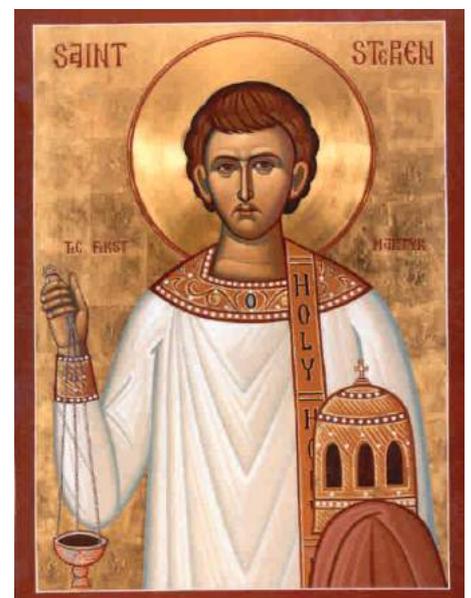
the middle of the 19th century, used music from a much older carol. Try singing this version:

*"Christian friends, your voices raise.
Wake the day with gladness.
God himself to joy and praise.
turns our human sadness:
joy that martyrs won their crown,
opened heaven's bright portal
when they laid the mortal down
for the life immortal."*

(The words are by Saint Joseph the Hymnographer, 9th C, translated from the Greek.)

A prayer:

"We give you thanks, O Lord of glory, for the example of the first martyr, Stephen, who looked up to heaven and prayed for his persecutors to your Son Jesus Christ, who stands at your right hand: where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting."



Rosanne Interviews **Ayd Instone**

I have often heard it said that if your job is your hobby and your hobby is your job you are contented and fulfilled. This month I want to introduce you to such a person. However, I'm sure many of you will say, "Ayd Instone? What sort of name is that and who is he?"

Well, his real name is Adrian but he prefers Ayd so that's good enough for me. If I describe him as a tall redhead with a pretty dark-haired wife and two delightful small children, all of whom attend St James Sunday morning services quite regularly, then at least half my readers will recognise the person about whom I am writing. By the end of this article the rest will, I hope, want to meet him personally.

Our opening conversation was focused on the Chronicle itself because Ayd is a published author, amongst a good many other things, who owns his own publishing company. He was intrigued to hear how many of our readers, past and present, I have interviewed during the last 15 or 16 years. I told him what marvellous people you are, with a myriad of human stories to tell, and he tried to persuade me to publish "some of the best" in a book. But oh dear, how would I choose? In my estimation, all are great stories. Still, let's meet Ayd and think about that book another time.

He was born in Yorkshire but he and his parents moved to County Durham when he was a very young, so his childhood memories are of growing up in a tiny former mining village. He has a younger brother and, from Ayd's descrip-

tion, they could hardly be more dissimilar. His brother grew up loving sport of every kind, and Ayd couldn't be less interested in sport if he tried.

He attended the village school where his education was mixed. A creative, highly imaginative child, he had one or two teachers who exploited this and under their care he flourished. However, some members of staff mistook his imaginative comments as facetious or even sarcastic, and this led to trouble. (More about that later.)

He was late learning to read, mainly, he said, because at home and at school there was no reading material which interested him. Why should he bother? Then one day he discovered science fiction, in particular "Star Wars" and that spark lit the flame. Being quite a forceful character he had a gang of like-minded pals who spent much of their time lost in a world of sci-fi, making up alternative versions of the Dr Who and Star Wars stories, and many out-of-this-world adventures of their own.

Luckily Ayd's parents had a choice of secondary schools and, in his opinion, they chose well. He has nothing but praise for the outstanding teaching he received. He sailed along in a haze of happy results in maths, sciences, and languages. Then came a nasty jolt. When he was 14 his family moved to Hook in Hampshire, and he was transferred to a school with much lower academic standards. Being the child he was, advanced in all subjects, he switched off and reached only just the re-

quired standards for his O-level exams. He hated school so much that he did not work in the sixth form. By then he had decided he wanted to play in a band, so at the age of 15, he taught himself to play the guitar. He and two friends formed a group, later recruiting a drummer, and began writing and recording their own songs. The technology they had at their disposal was quite rudimentary but Ayd assured me that even now their recordings sound quite good. With better equipment they became really successful. Alongside his music he began to write and produce plays and film scripts. It's not surprising to learn that his A-level results were disastrous. He left school and attended a local technical college, settled down to do some work, and qualified to read physics at Oxford Poly, soon to be renamed Brookes University.

Whilst at college he edited the student magazine and found he had a real aptitude for persuading talented people to write articles. He also found the right people to enhance various aspects of the magazine – poetry, music, etc. It grew from strength to strength and he loved every minute.

On leaving college he secured a post with a TV graphics firm in Newbury. In 1999 he was working for a multi-media graphics company near Wantage. He had taken out a mortgage on a house in Oxford Road, Cowley. He went on a holiday and on his return, learned the company had gone bust. He had no job, and to cap it all, the lady in his life walked out. Ayd went through a very bad patch.

A good friend who had worked on the student magazine was a wonderful support. He persuaded Ayd to accompany him to a comedy club he had set up in Jericho, and soon the silly “messing about” kind of humour began to work its magic. Ayd found out he too could make people laugh, and he began to do his own comedy spot.

About this time he heard of a man with the unlikely name of Zig Zigar, an American Christian man who had recorded a series of motivational talks. They greatly helped lift Ayd out of his despond. He realised that producing the kind of material he had written in his student days was the way forward. He showed me one of his articles about ways to succeed, motivation if you like. Soon he was writing a book and giving amusing talks on positive thinking to groups in business, education, and so on. He set up a course on creativity in Waterstock, advertised, sold tickets, and found there was a real demand.

One day he went into MacMillan publishers in Between Towns Road with some of his material. The receptionist was a young woman called Rachel. On a further visit she wasn't there. Enquiring about her he found she worked elsewhere in the building. He left a message inviting her to the comedy club. She came, bringing eight friends. They loved the humour and atmosphere and became real fans. One thing led to another, as they say, and Ayd and Rachel fell in love. In 2004 they were married.

Throughout any problems, his self-motivation has helped him to continue to pay his mortgage and now he and Rachel live in the

house in Oxford Road with their children, Oliver, born in 2005, and Mabel, who arrive in 2008. Rachel and Mabel, by the way, often come to Seashells, our mother-and-toddler group at the Church Centre. Ayd is now a regular speaker on creative, positive motivation and a member of the Professional Speakers Association. I was not surprised to learn that he edits their magazine. He has written two more books, founded his own publishing company, and joined the Professional Speakers Association. Alongside all of this still runs his love of music. He and his present band have produced their own CD and he has written over 380 songs. Apart from his lovely wife and family, writing, talking, and playing his guitar are all the things he enjoys most, along with his lovely wife and family. He also declares a strong Christian faith. No wonder Ayd is a happy man!

How would you describe yourself as a small child?

Imaginative. I had a real sense of wonder and I was quite an individual.

Do you have a childhood memory you'd care to share?

Because my birthday is on 30th December, I was always on holiday, and so never got to choose the school's morning hymn. (It was a birthday privilege.) Aged about nine or ten I was given the chance in January. I said, “Number 73,” knowing there were only 72 hymns in our book. It was meant to be a joke. The head-teacher was so cross she dragged me out to the front. “Why did you do this?”

“I thought it was a laugh.”

I was put into a cupboard for the rest of the day but I thought it

was worth it, because I sat there on my own and thought about “Blake's 7”.

Has God always been a part of your life?

I knew He was always there. We went as a family to church in the village. I was confirmed in Durham Cathedral – a privilege.

What are your thoughts on modern society?

People tend to pay too much attention to the media and its influence. They have opinions that are other people's, not theirs. News is negative, so we should go out and look for the positive. We must keep on seeking the good, the powerful, the positive and the pure.

What makes you angry about life today?

Ignorance, cruelty and unfairness.

What do you like to do in your leisure time?

At the moment I don't have any. If I'm not working, it's family time. My work covers most of my hobbies, but I also enjoy old British cars, The Beatles and Dr Who.

What makes you laugh?

Laugh? Old-fashioned British humour, classic stuff like Morecambe and Wise and Monty Python.

Which period of your adult life has given you the most satisfaction?

Probably now, though the best bit will probably be tomorrow!

What plans do you have for the future?

More of what I'm doing – more music, a lot more books, more talks, possibly scripts for television, probably publish my novel.

Dear friends at St James and St Francis churches,

Since I became a Christian ten years ago, both St James and St Francis churches have been instrumental in my walk with God. I will be forever grateful to all of you for your support, encouragement, and listening ears, but most of all, for your love.

However I now feel it is time for me to move into another church where I am around more people of my own age and can experience a different way of being church.

I have decided to go to Magdalen Road church which meets slightly nearer to where I live.

I will of course still be working as a self-employed gardener in and around Cowley and will keep in touch with friends in Cowley parish and all that goes on here. I am sure I will see you all from time to time.

There are many people in this parish that have influenced me and helped me so much over the years, and I hope and pray that I will continue to bear fruit from what you have sown.

I will miss St James but I know I will receive a lovely welcome from you whenever I visit.

Lots of Love,

Susie Pavelin

December Services at St James Church

13 Dec 3rd Sunday in Advent

10 am Holy Communion (All-age worship)

4 pm Christingle

20 Dec 4th Sunday in Advent

10 am Holy Communion and Junior Church

4 pm Carols by Candlelight followed by Tea in St Luke's Chapel

24 Dec Christmas Eve

4 pm Crib Service – The Christmas story enacted by the children – Costumes will be provided

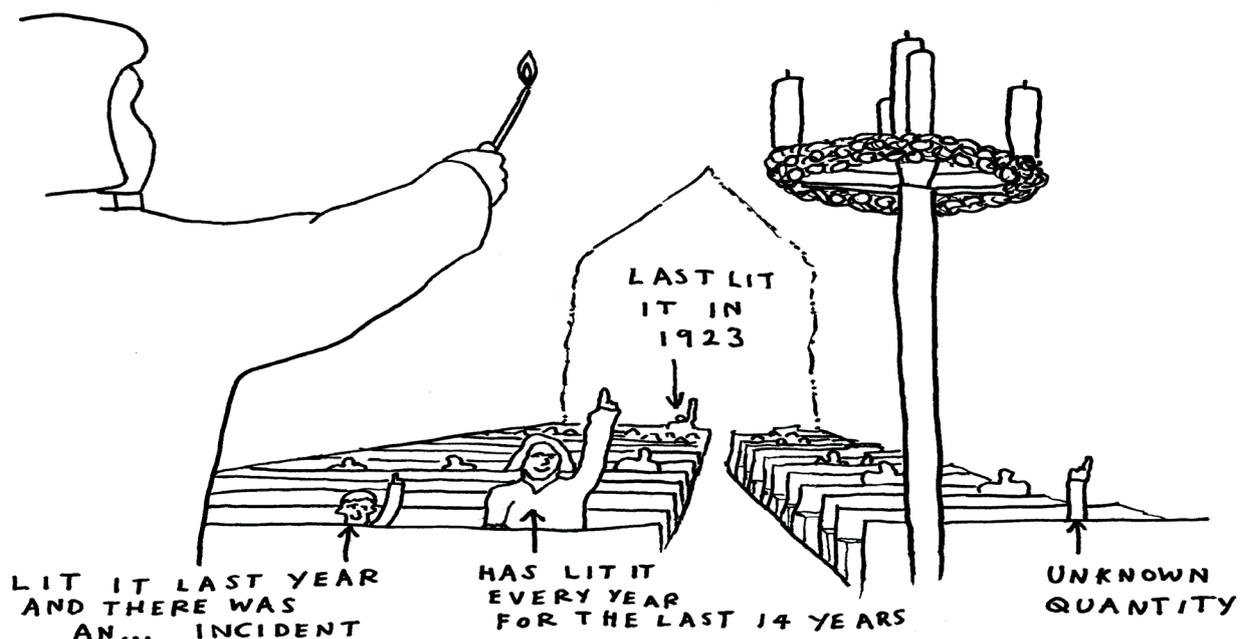
11 pm Holy Communion

25 Dec Christmas Day

10am Holy Communion and celebration of Jesus' birth

ADVENT

DURING THE SUNDAYS IN ADVENT THE VICAR MUST CHOOSE SOMEONE TO LIGHT THE ADVENT CANDLE. IT IS ONE OF THE YEAR'S MOST DIFFICULT DECISIONS



This CartoonChurch.com cartoon originally appeared in the Church Times and is taken from 'The Dave Walker Guide to the Church', published by Canterbury Press.

While Shepherds Watched...

When I was about seven years old and in the top form of the infants' school of St Mary and St John, a Nativity play was planned. The casting began by having the class sing "While Shepherds Watched." I was the only pupil who could sing right through the carol. I was word perfect. I was cast as the Angel Gabriel. This carried some privileges as I was the most important of the angels. We were ranged on chairs behind Mary and Joseph and the crib containing a doll. I had the highest chair and was in the middle of the row, right behind Mary.

When it came time to find clothing to suit, I was given a long, full-skirted white dress from the school's costume box. The other angels had to provide their own white dresses and all were

short skirted. I had the biggest halo and the biggest wings, very much bigger wings. We practised our play a number of times. We angels had to sing several carols, sometimes on our own and with the whole cast. I had to say the Angel's words from "While shepherds watched". After a few rehearsals the teacher in charge asked me not to sing but to mouth the words. In all the carols I was putting the other angels off their stroke. I was devastated and humiliated. To this day I will not sing except in a crowd and I am convinced I have no voice.

A second problem was to crop up for me. On the great day when our parents were coming and the whole school were going to watch, I was dressed in my long dress, my massive wings were

attached and my halo fixed. To my own anguish and the horror of my teachers, I needed to go the loo. It was very close to start time, and the toilets were primitive and out in the playground with very restricted space. There was no time to undress me and start again. Somehow the teacher managed to help me to cope without damaging my dress. The play went off very well and no one but the cast knew of my double embarrassment. But 65 years later I still remember how I, playing the Angel Gabriel, was not allowed to sing! Neither shall I ever forget battling with that voluminous white dress, the huge wings and wobbly halo in the confines of the primitive lavatories.

Una

Thank You Lord

"Are you there?" I often wonder. "Do you hear me when I pray?
When I beg and ask your guidance do you hear the words I say?
Will you help me when I need you; will you be there when I'm down;
In my sea of desperation will you hear me when I drown?"

Then I suddenly remember what you did, Lord, just for me;
How to show your love, your life you gave on a cross at Calvary.
How could I ever doubt your love, or question that you care,
Or for even just one second not believe you hear my prayer?

I'm sorry, Lord. I'm selfish and at times think just of me.
If I took the time to clear my eyes I know that I would see
That you are always with me and you never leave my side,
And in all the things I do, Lord, my path you try to guide.

You love me without question and forgive me when I stray.
You accept me as I am, Lord, helping each and every day.
I'm ashamed I've never thanked you for always being there,
As these gifts you gave to me, dear Lord, are beautiful and rare.

Bernadette Fathers

[Editor's note: Bernadette is a member of staff in one of our parish primary schools. Isn't it wonderful to know that hundreds of our local children are in contact each day with Christian people such as she?]

*What lies in a pram
and wobbles?
A jelly-baby.*

*What do you
call a camel with
three humps?
Humphrey.*

Gardening

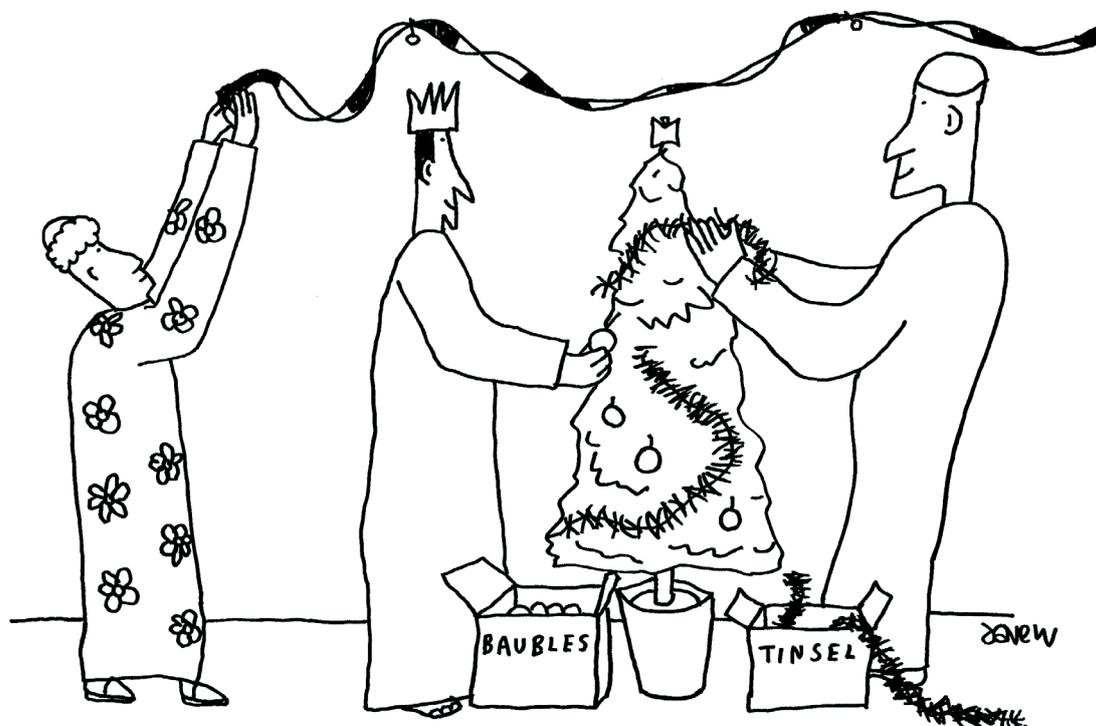
It is not so easy to talk about gardening on days like today when the wind is blowing a gale and you're wrapped up with scarves to soothe neuralgia, but I will try to imagine. Imagine a day later on when the bulbs we planted for indoors come into bloom. What beauty, what colour and what perfume! Mmm! Gorgeous. It was worth the work and the wait. Make sure your bulbs are not too dry and are not so far grown that they need to be in daylight. The daffodil bulbs which we planted in the garden are still growing roots, we hope. If you have neglected to plant them all, then plant them now. They may flower late, but they will not flower in the shed! Tulips can still be planted. They like to be later anyway.

I have a new red amaryllis (*hippeastrum*). It has two stems and a third bud just showing. The bulbs from previous years have leaves, and one has a bud which may burst for Christmas! I may buy a small red poinsettia (no space for a big one), but my favourites are cyclamens. I love their delicate flowers which turn downside up. They need to be kept cool, so are no good above a radiator.

When it is sensible to venture into the garden, I shall cut long pieces of clematis (*tangutica* type) and wind them round into a wreath. Then I shall twine more clematis around to stabilise it. After a while in the garage the leaves will fall off and I shall be able to spray it roughly with gold or silver paint and wrap red raffia and/or ribbon around it. In other years I have then decorated it with sliced oranges, cinnamon sticks, painted fir cones, and anything else I think of. A big ribbon at the top, and I think it will then be a nice natural (and cheap) decoration. Do you now feel more like thinking about plants and the garden next year? I'm off to slice up oranges to dry for my wreath (when I get it) and to read a seed catalogue. That is energetic enough for today!

Have a beautiful and blessed Christmas.

Diana Pope



EPHANY: THE WISE MEN /
TAKING DOWN THE CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS

This CartoonChurch.com cartoon originally appeared in the Church Times and is taken from 'The Dave Walker Guide to the Church', published by Canterbury Press.

Mummers' Plays

Mumming dates back to the early Middle Ages in Britain, and I am so pleased to report that it has held its appeal in rural Oxfordshire throughout the centuries right up until the present day. So what is mumming?

The answer is that, rather like wassailing or carol singing, it was a way for cottagers to knock on the doors of the houses of the rich in their neighbourhood, possibly be welcomed in, and usually rewarded with Christmas fare, a warming drink and even a few coins. In order to enhance their rewards, mummers performed plays.

In the best tradition, the mummers enacted the fight between good and evil, with good always triumphing, but before the final scene lots of shenanigans took place between crazy characters. In fact it is thought that these were the forerunners of our later pantomime figures.

The narrator is always Father Christmas. Although he was portrayed in various colours from Victorian times, in early England he was depicted as an elderly man dressed in green rather like the Jack the Green character we see on May Day. Father Christmas (never Santa) introduces Mother Dolly and "her" helpers who come to clear the room of dust and cobwebs before the Yuletide celebrations can begin. Mother Dolly is usually a man in drag (like a pantomime dame) and it can be left to the imagination as to where she flutters her duster and pokes her broom.

In strides the Turkey Knight – the baddie who has come to fight the good people and bring misrule to the celebrations. This, of course, is the peasants' pronunciation of Turkish Knight, and he represents the infidels who violated the holy sites in Palestine which led to the Crusades. Who, then, is to duel with this evil fellow? Why, none other than St George! A great fight ensues leading to St George being fearfully wounded. So who can help? The comic doctor with his assistants, of course. The things that doctor inflicts on gallant St George may be as hilarious as can be dreamed up by the mummers themselves. I have seen horrendous "operations" performed on St George in order to cure him, culminating in a whole string of sausages

being pulled from an opening in his stomach! Then up jumps the hero, ready to tackle the villain once again, this time to strike him dead, so that goodness has prevailed. Of course the Turkey Knight doesn't die easily, but staggers around the audience, usually brandishing his scimitar and casting evil stares to scare the children. All this is accompanied by boos and hisses. Great, great fun.

In early days the poorer folk who have been hard put to find suitable clothing in which to perform would turn their everyday garments inside out, thus exposing rough, ragged seams and making themselves into strange-looking characters. Nowadays the costumes are more appropriate, though still home-made and quite rustic.

If you want to see one of these crazy performances, you can. The Headington Quarry Morris Dancers present several versions of their Mummers' Play on Boxing Day every year. I write "versions" deliberately, as they journey from pub to pub round the Quarry so that by the time they reach the last venue the hijinks are at their most (shall we say?) relaxed.

Their performance commemorates December 26, 1899 when Cecil Sharp, the folk musicologist, was spending Christmas at Sandfield Cottage, where his mother-in-law lived. The dancers, led by William "Merry" Kimber with his concertina, came to perform at the house. Sharp asked Kimber to come back the following day and play the music again so that he could transcribe the tunes. He had not known of the survival of this form of dancing, and the meeting led to a revival of English folk music.

The first performance will begin at 11:15 am on Boxing Day at The Crown and Thistle pub near Titup Drive. The mummers then move on to The Six Bells, then The Chequers sometime around noon. They complete their circuit at 1:30 pm at The Mason's Arms in the heart of Headington Quarry. It is also traditional for them to dance the rapper sword dance as a finale.

My Best Christmas Gift

In the last issue, we asked people to share their memories of the best Christmas gift, either given or received. From the stories submitted, one writer will receive a copy of “My Pew: Things I Have Seen from It,” a book of cartoons by Dave Walker, whose cartoons we feature in the Chronicle.

Have you ever seen a photograph of either the Queen or Princess Margaret as a baby in her perambulator? If so, you will realise that in the 1940s a doll’s pram of similar design was a very desirable thing for a small girl. Of course it was war-time, and such big toys were almost unattainable, apart from being very, very expensive.

I can’t remember whether I was six or seven. I do remember that in the dark, early hours of Christmas morning, we heard a knock at our cottage door. (I knew it couldn’t be Father Christmas as he’d left my stocking and other parcels earlier.) Imagine my joy when there, on the doorstep, stood this very perambulator!

I give it its proper name because of its grandeur. Of course it was a shiny, black, coach-built model with a hood and apron, chrome wheels and push-bar with a white rubber grip. The interior was creamy white. Joy!!

My cousin eleven years older, who had been given it before the war, had kept it in pristine condition. My parents had negotiated with my aunt and

uncle for it to be passed on to me – all done in secret, of course.

How did it reach us from far away on the other side of Oxfordshire? It had been despatched by train to Oxford station to be picked up by our village carrier when he took the churns of milk from local farms to meet the London train. He and his wife held on to it until that special Christmas morning, when he brought it up the lane especially for me.

Not being a particularly doll-y kind of child, I did perambulate my dolls and teddies around the village on many occasions. However, the toys were made to sit up straight in the pram while I taught them their multiplication table as they went for their rides.

Rosanne

I was born in 1927, the second of what was eventually eight children.

I loved to read, but there was very little reading matter in our house. In 1937, when asked what I would like for Christmas, I said that I would love to have an annual of my own.

On Christmas morning, I was thrilled to find that I had got my annual, “The British Girls’ Annual”. It was ten years old, the same as myself (it was second-hand.) I read that book over and over again.

The book is now very dilapidated, due to poor treatment by my younger siblings, but I still have it.

Betty Davis (I belong to Una’s home group)

When I was a child (the eldest of nine siblings) there weren’t a lot of gifts, but the atmosphere at Christmas was always special.

Dad spent most of each day outdoors because the farm kept him so busy. On Christmas mornings we’d watch through the window while he went about his chores in the dark. He’d come through the door and knock the snow from his boots. And finally we’d be allowed to open our stockings. The excitement was sweeter because we knew that for most of the day, Dad would be in the house with us.

One of my favourite memories of Christmas actually began the previous summer. A neighbour lady arrived one afternoon to visit my mother. Mrs. Ferber had brought a box of toys that her daughter had outgrown: several dolls and a couple of doctor kits with toy medical instruments and medicine bottles.

I don’t remember whether I gave my mother the idea or she suggested it, but she helped me find a safe hiding place for the toys. Over the summer holidays I cut up old clothes, and sewed nightgowns and simple dresses for the dolls on the cantankerous old Singer. I

washed the dolls, brushed their hair, and dressed them. When it got closer to Christmas, I bought Smarties and little candies to fill the toy medicine bottles.

When Christmas morning arrived, I was more interested in seeing my sisters open the gifts I'd wrapped for them than in opening my own gifts. I watched their eyes and saw their faces light up with smiles. I had received a gift that would never lose its lustre - I'd experienced the joy of giving.

Carol Thornton

Forthcoming Event

To precede our annual Advent carol service this year, Christine Woodman and her amazing band of caterers are organising a Christmas tea in the church. The tea will be served in St Luke's Chapel at 4 pm on Sunday, 20th December. This means that it will be early enough for children to attend, so why not make it a family occasion?

The New Year Parish Dinner will be held in the Church Centre on Sunday, 17th January. Tickets will be on sale, priced at £12, from the beginning of December. The ticket includes a pre-dinner sherry, a four-course meal with all wines and drinks included, and even crackers. What a bargain! There will be a bumper raffle on the evening too.

The February Snowdrop Weekends in 2010 will be on the 6th and 7th and the 13th and 14th. It may seem rather early to publish the dates, but the next Chronicle issue is out on Sunday, 7th February. This will give you time to let friends and family know well in advance about our lovely spring flowers and the warm welcome, with tea and cakes, they will find in church.

On 13th February there will also be, by popular request, one of our family quiz evenings. Because the date is just before Shrove Tuesday, we're calling it a quiz with pancakes evening. (Other refreshments will be available.) The cost on the night will be £10 per table/team. Starting time is 6:30 pm in the Church Centre.

Events outside the parish include the Helen and Douglas House Carol Service at Wesley Memorial Church on 13th December.

Can't Wait

The banners scream in the middle of June,
"Book your Christmas party soon!"

Christmas cards in cut-price packs
Arrive by July on the superstore racks.

Gift shopping begins as August drifts by –
Only four months now; how they will fly!

Mince pies on sale in early September
With "eat-by" dates for the first of
December.

October bring Santa's grotto a-twinkle
With fake holly, snow and draped in tinsel.

Come November the rush is now on
To shop before all the best stocks are gone.

"Sleighride", "Rudolph", and carols galore
Assaulting our ears in every store.

December arrives and it's getting too late
To buy a tree to decorate.

By Christmas Eve we're almost done.
Too tired and jaded for joy and fun?

Surely that's when Christmas should start
As we welcome Jesus into our hearts.

Perhaps for almost half the year
The world can't wait to say, "Christmas is
here!"

Rosanne Butler

*Where do snowmen
and snowladies go to
dance?
To the snowball.*

Seasonal recipes from Oxfordshire's past

Looking through some traditional Oxfordshire recipes, we found the following seasonal recipes you might like to try. We haven't attempted them yet, so let us know how they turn out!

Aladdin's Christmas Pudding

5 oz flour
4 oz finely chopped beef suet
1 dessertspoon dark brown "moist" sugar
1 teaspoon bicarbonate of soda
A pinch of salt
1 teaspoon raspberry jam
1 teacup milk

Mix all the dry ingredients together thoroughly. Then add the jam and milk. Pour the mixture into a greased basin dusted with sugar, leaving room for the pudding to rise. Place a buttered paper on top of the pudding. Tie down with a cloth and steam for three hours.



Oxford Sweet Bishop Punch

(Makes 3 pints)
6 oz lump sugar
4 lemons
2 Seville oranges
24 cloves
1 pint water
½ teaspoon allspice
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
½ teaspoon ground ginger
½ teaspoon ground mace
2 pints port

Rub the sugar on the rind of two of the lemons, until the zest is removed. Squeeze the juice from these two lemons. Put the sugar into a jug and pour the strained lemon juice over it. Score the rind of the remaining two lemons and the oranges. Stick 6 cloves into each fruit. Roast the oranges and lemons in a moderately hot oven for about 45 minutes until soft and brown. Cut the fruit into quarters and put into a large saucepan. Add the water, spices, port, sugar and lemon juice. Simmer gently for 30 minutes. Strain and serve hot.

Oven: 375F/190C/Fan oven 170/Gas Mark 5

Children's Christmas Quiz

Our Christmas quiz is designed for the youngest children in our parish. The first 10 questions are for the under-7s; the whole quiz is for those under 12. Children, if you'd like to try to win a prize, put your answers, together with your name, age, and phone number on a sheet of paper and post it through the letter box at the Church Centre by 20th December. All the correct answers will go into a hat and a winner for each age group will be drawn at the crib service in St James Church on Christmas Eve.

1. Why do some people put a star at the top of their Christmas tree?
2. What is the name of the angel who told Mary about the coming of Jesus?
3. What wicked king wanted to get rid of baby Jesus?
4. Who usually lives in a stable?
5. What colour are holly berries?
6. Who had to keep plodding onward on the dusty road?
7. What is another name for Father Christmas?
8. Which little bird is sometimes shown on Christmas cards?
9. What was the name of the little town where Jesus was born?
10. What tiny surprises are hidden in Christmas puddings?
11. What do you do when you go wassailing?
12. What is a wassail?
13. Why is it impossible to see three ships come sailing into Bethlehem?
14. What is the correct term for a plant like mistletoe?
15. What is another name for St Nicholas?
16. St Nicholas is the patron saint of which people?
17. What is the name of the crippled boy in "A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens?
18. Why is Boxing Day so called?
19. What are the traditional names of the three kings?
20. To which country did Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus escape?

Roman Day at St Francis School

Last week, Year Three and Four children dressed as Romans, and had a Roman banquet at St. Francis School. These are two accounts the children wrote about the day. As you can see, the children had great fun imagining what it was like to live 2,000 years ago.

Flavius Maximus told us we were going to have amazing acrobats, the best jugglers in town, good story tellers and much more. First a messenger came and gave us the shocking news, so the soldiers had to go and fight, but the Celts didn't win, (obviously we were good!) so we celebrated. The acrobats did handstands, cartwheels, and roly polys. One amazing boy did a cartwheel and a handstand!

After the entertainment we had exotic, sweet stuff to eat. I especially liked the honey toast. We had goblets to drink pretend wine from. Everyone had nice clothing to wear, but Mattas had the best clothes.

IT WAS THE BEST DAY EVER, because everyone was good.

Zarah Ali

The Roman banquet was extremely awesome. It was so great. I even got to be a leader in the story telling. I had the best feast I ever had. I even saw acrobats doing cartwheels, forward rolls and handsprings. It was like I was a real Roman. It was also great because I had a shield and marched around the hall. We sat on mats and some people told us about the Celts who had captured some Romans. The Romans went to fight the Celts by marching round the room. On Roman Day we dressed up as Romans (but we weren't really Romans). We ate food like cheese, grapes, biscuits (with nothing inside) and carrots.

Medhi Souameur

Here is an account of the year 2 assembly. These children are 6 or 7 years old.

We did an assembly for our mums and dads and the rest of the school. It was about houses and homes.

Sam and Max introduced the assembly and then asked, "What is your house made of?" Some

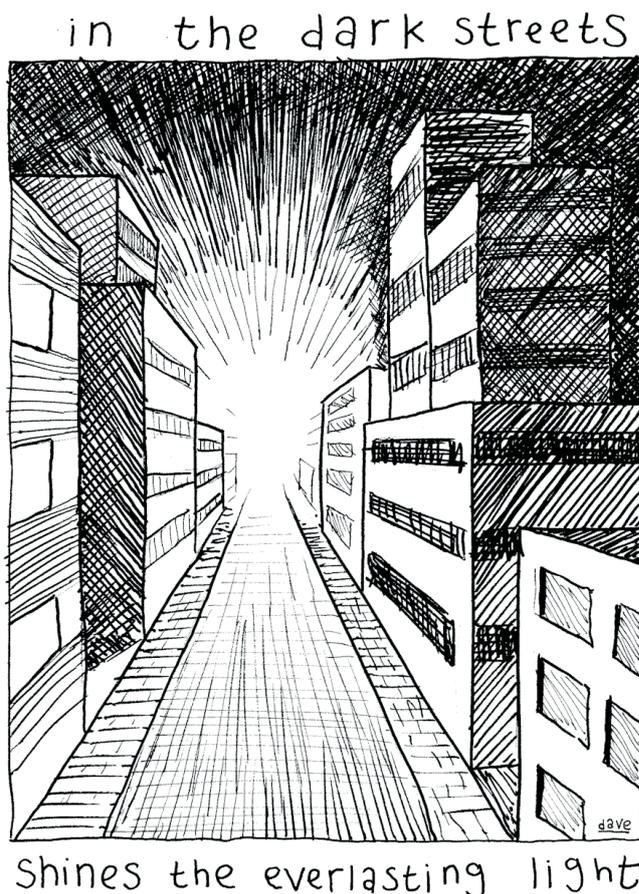
children up some materials that are in your house and it was metal, plastic, pretend glass, wood and tiles. Then George and Max were the building inspectors, they did a little play with Shubdeep, Kareem and Mateen.

We said the poem "This Is The House that Jack Built". We showed paintings and drawings. We did a quiz for all the children about animals. After that we did another play called "This Is Our House".

Sam and Kareem said a prayer. Then some children stood up and said why we are lucky to have homes. Last of all we sang a song about the wise man and the foolish man

After that our assembly was over. All the children went out and we got to see our mums and dads.

Laura, Malaieka and Sam (*Miss Jordan's class*)



Sunday Services

ST JAMES' CHURCH, BEAUCHAMP LANE

8.00 am Holy Communion

10.00 am Sung Eucharist

Every fourth Sunday: *Church at the Centre*

Every third Sunday: *Sunday Lunch*

ST FRANCIS' CHURCH, HOLLOW WAY

10.30 am Parish Eucharist

Mid-Week Services & Meetings

Monday 8.15 am Morning Prayer – St James
2.30 pm Parish Mothers' Union –
St James (3rd Mon)

Tuesday 8.15 am Morning Prayer – St James
10.00 am Seashells Toddler Group : St James
12.00 pm Eucharist – St James
12.30 pm Tuesday Lunch Club – St James
2.30 pm Friends of St Francis –
St Francis (2nd & 4th)

Wednesday 8.15 am Morning Prayer – St James
9.15 am Morning Prayer – St Francis

Thursday 8.15 am Morning Prayer – St James

Friday 8.15 am Morning Prayer – St James
5.30 pm Evening Prayer – St James

**The Parish of Cowley office in
St James Church Centre is open**

Tuesday 12.30 pm to 3 pm
Friday 9.00 am to 3 pm
and by appointment.

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Revd Howard Thornton

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