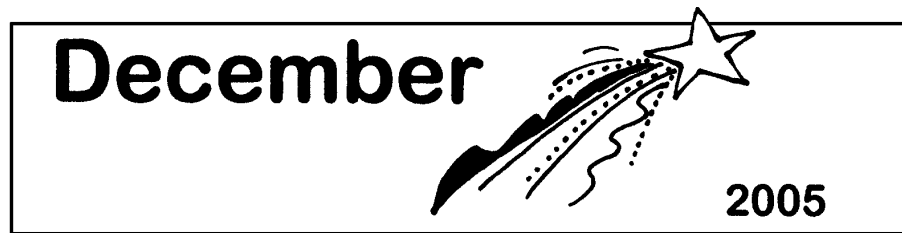


ELSTOW PARISH MAGAZINE



Dear Parishioners,

With less than a month to Christmas....

Christmas is soon to be upon us, and I thought for a change that I would particularly write to all the young people in the Parish. I begin by reminding you of the Bible account that leads us up to the birth of Jesus. I quote from Luke 1:39-45:

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Mary was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.

It requires a huge amount of love to bring up any baby, especially a baby like Jesus. If Jesus hadn't been loved by his parents, who knows what would have happened? So Christmas is – or should be – all about love. Here is a children's story for you to enjoy.

Spotty the dachshund puppy was feeling rather bewildered. He had just been getting used to his new family when something called 'Christmas' seemed to be arriving. It was very upsetting, for the children were over-excited which meant there were lots of quarrels and bickering. Spotty didn't know why they were so excited, but he had a feeling something special was about to happen. The last time he'd had this feeling was when the family had found him in the Dogs' Home and had brought him here, to this new home. Spotty hoped the feeling didn't mean he was going to have to move on again. But he felt a little uneasy and rather frightened, so he hid under the table whenever he heard raised voices.

One day, the family brought a tree into the house. Spotty couldn't believe his eyes. Everyone, even small puppies, knew the trees belonged outside! Why on earth should the family bring a tree indoors? It was even stranger when the family began to decorate the tree. The boys, who were taller than Alice, put a little angel on the top of the tree, and draped the tree with brightly coloured lights. Alice hung glass baubles and tiny ornaments on all the branches she could reach. Then the children adorned the tree with tinsel from top to bottom.

Even Spotty could see how grand the tree looked. Later, brightly wrapped packages and parcels of all shapes and sizes appeared at the foot of the tree. Spotty sniffed and snuffed and explored with his nose, but was immediately shouted at by the family. He wasn't sure what he'd done wrong, but he realised the packages weren't for him so he retired under the table again. Spotty wasn't sure he liked Christmas very much. He wished everything would return to normal, when he could play with the children and trees outside the house where they belonged. But when Christmas Day dawned, Spotty discovered his food bowl was filled with all sorts of enticing things to eat. He began to think perhaps Christmas wasn't

so bad after all. And when at lunchtime his bowl was refilled with something called 'turkey', he gradually began to enjoy himself.

After lunch the family began to open all the parcels underneath the Christmas tree. Spotty was afraid he might be shouted at again, so he hid beneath the table. But then he heard Alice calling him, so he ventured out on to the rug in front of the fire. Alice placed one of the parcels in front of him. Spotty looked up at her enquiringly, unsure of what he was supposed to do. 'Come on, Spotty,' said Alice encouragingly. 'This one is yours. It's my Christmas present to you, so you can open this one.' Spotty put his head on one side. He wasn't entirely sure what she had said, but her voice sounded really kind so he began to tentatively snuffle at the parcel. When this didn't produce any shouts, he began to tear at the coloured paper with his teeth. Inside the parcel were some Doggy Chews, some Doggy Chocolate Drops, a rubber toy which squeaked when he held it with his teeth, and a huge rubber bone. Spotty was so excited that he began to play all over the room with his rubber toy, while the family laughed and cheered him on.

When he was tired out, Spotty lay down on the rug in front of the fire and Alice came and lay besides him. Spotty snuggled up to Alice, who put her arm around him. Spotty felt completely ecstatically happy. He couldn't remember ever having been so happy before. And suddenly he realised what Christmas was all about. It was all about love, the love he felt in this family even if they occasionally shouted at him. And especially the love he felt from Alice and the love he felt for Alice. And as he fell asleep at the end of his first Christmas Day, Spotty knew that for a puppy like him, the most important thing in the world was love.

I hope you have a very loving and peaceful Christmas,

With Best Wishes,

Jeremy



Christmas Services at St Michael and All Angels.

If you can't manage the equivalent service at Elstow or Cardington, then you would be most welcome to join us at St Michael's. Our Christmas Services are:

Sunday 11th December	4.00pm Christingle Service
Sunday 18th December	4.00pm Christmas Carol Service
Saturday 24th December	6.00pm Christmas Eve Eucharist and Blessing of the Crib.
Sunday 25th December	10.15 Christmas Day Eucharist (with short sermon!)

Peter Littleford
Team Vicar

TUNES OF GLORY

We will be singing No, 30, *O come, all ye faithful*, which our hymn book quotes as being Latin 18th century, translated by *Frederick Oakley, 1802-80*, to the tune *Adeste Fideles*, probably by John F Wade 1711- 86. The authorship of the hymn has long been in some doubt (Frank Colquhoun, *A Hymn Companion*). Scholars were agreed that despite its Latin origin the hymn was not earlier than the 18th century. New light came in 1946, when Dr Maurice Frost, vicar of Deddington, Oxfordshire discovered a Latin manuscript of the hymn. His researches led him to conclude that both words and music were the work of a young Englishman, John Francis Wade, who worked in Douai, the famous Roman Catholic centre in France, where there was an English college. The hymn is most likely to date from 1743.

Originally, the hymn comprised four stanzas. The first is an invitation to Bethlehem to adore the new-born babe; the second an affirmation of faith in the Incarnation; the third an exhortation to the angels to sing their Christmas anthem; and the fourth greets the Holy Child on his birthday (usually sung only on Christmas Day). The current version is from a translation in 1841 by Canon Frederick Oakeley, then the incumbent of what is now All Saints', Margaret Street, London. He later entered the RC Church. The three additional stanzas found in many hymnals (including ours) were added later. The hymn has two unusual features, one being its irregular metre, the other being its lack of rhyme. This is unusual in a popular hymn, yet strangely we are not conscious of it when singing it at Christmas.

Regarding the tune '*Adeste Fideles*', few have gained such universal popularity, yet its origin is nevertheless obscure (Lightwood, "*Hymn Tunes and their Story*"). It appears to have been used by Roman Catholics early in the 18th century. At that period many of the Catholic families used to have their own private chapels, and it was the custom for priests who possessed musical abilities to go from one great house to another copying music for use at the various services. Thus we find that in the year 1751, John Wade was a 'pensioner' in the house of Nicholas King, who lived in Lancashire; and amongst the melodies he copied for his employer are found "*Adeste Fideles*", "*Stabat Mater*", and a "*Tantum ergo*", all of which appear in modern Protestant tune-books. This is the first known appearance of '*Adeste Fideles*', until it appeared in print in 1762 in a collection. Considering this hymn and its tune are regularly sung at Christmas, as we shall do, and are clear favourites, it is surprising that the origin is relatively obscure! But let's enjoy singing it all the same.

John Crookall

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

This recipe comes from Jane Grigson's Fruit Book. It is delicious.

Springfield Pear Cake

Heat 3 oz butter, 3 oz granulated sugar and 2 tbsp syrup from preserved ginger until they start to caramelize. Pour into a shallow cake tin, about 10" across, and spread over the base. This is easier if you heat the tin a little beforehand. Peel and slice 3 or 4 pears and arrange them decoratively over the caramel. Then mix – it is quickest in a processor– 4 oz butter, 4 oz caster sugar, 3½ oz self-raising flour, 1 teasp baking powder, 1 oz ground almonds (you could use an ounce more flour instead), 2 eggs and 3 tbsp ginger syrup. Stir in 4 bits of the preserved ginger, chopped.

Spread the cake mixture over the pears and cook at *regulo 5*, 190° C, for 45 minutes. If it is beginning to look cooked, turn the oven down a little and continue cooking until a skewer pushed into the middle comes out clean. Leave to cool for a few minutes then turn out, with the pears on top, on to a serving dish. Eat hot, warm or cold, preferably with cream. This is a cake to be eaten with a spoon, not with the fingers.....

JMCE

BOOK REVIEW

“A Christmas Carol” by Charles Dickens

Dickens was only 31 when he wrote *A Christmas Carol* (he died aged 58) and his more acerbic books lay ahead of him. So far, he had written *Sketches by Boz*, *The Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Barnaby Rudge* and *American Notes* and was well-known to the reading public. It took him a mere six weeks to write this story, alongside the eleventh episode of *Martin Chuzzlewit*. The illustrations we know so well were extravagantly commissioned by him from the satirist and well-known cartoonist and illustrator, Martin Leech. Later, *The Chimes*, *The Cricket on the Hearth*, *The Battle of Life* and *The Haunted Man* were to adopt the same successful and seasonal formula as *A Christmas Carol*.

Dickens has the reputation of being the writer who, perhaps more than any writer of his time, spoke up about the terrible economic conditions of his day (the 1840s were a time of severely repressive social change) and the broader issue of man’s innate selfishness. *A Christmas Carol*, perhaps because of its shortness and directness, is the most accessible example of his social writings. He wrote it specifically to generate some income at a moment when he was very much feeling the pinch himself, and it was an instant success. He chose his topic to coincide with Christmas – it was published on 17 December and rapidly sold out – and wrote it knowing that it would sell well.

It is a Christmas story, set on Christmas Eve, which highlights the plight of the poor and disadvantaged (and they were in a terrible poverty trap) and is an appeal for generosity from those financially and socially better off. Critics have drawn many parallels between the Cratchits and Dickens’ own earlier, as well as current, circumstances (he already had five children and had had a younger brother who had been as sickly as Tiny Tim) and the book is none the less for this.

The preface sets the tone and I quote it *in extenso*: “*I have endeavoured in this Ghostly little book, to raise the Ghost of an Idea, which shall not put my readers out of humour with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me. May it haunt their houses pleasantly, and no one wish to lay it.*” The avaricious Scrooge himself is quickly understandable in that he has the great quality of not being a hypocrite. He really does **not** understand what Christmas is all about. He really **does** hold by his views. To us, he is an ogre; but because he is an honest ogre, as it were, he is susceptible of the conversion and salvation to which he is subjected. When he says: “*every idiot who goes about with “Merry Christmas” on his lips, should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart*”, he means precisely that. And we believe it.

The first person to rattle his cage, in the thick and symbolic brown London fog, is his nephew, Fred, someone, we like to think, who exemplifies our own views. He calls Christmas “*a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time.*” Scrooge’s only response to the many exhortations of his nephew is a heartlessly dismissive “*Good afternoon*”. Then the ghost of Jacob Marley, his erstwhile and seven-year-dead partner, appears, wearing a heavy chain on this anniversary of his death (“*I wear the chain I forged in life*”), and warns Scrooge that, despite everything, he still has a chance to make amends for his grasping heartlessness. The ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future then, as we know so well, terrify Scrooge into re-evaluating his life and reforming.

I have only one problem with this moral tale: to me in the 21st century, it is horribly cloying and sentimental. But, then, that is what was acceptable to Dickens’ own times and is viscerally integral to how we would like to think that we, in 2005, view Christmas. It is a delightful fireside – and brief book.



Bookworm

THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

We are told that there are seven deadly sins. This is despite the fact that four of the ten Commandments are essentially related to ritualism (one's comportment before God) rather than to daily behaviour (one's comportment towards one's neighbour). This should leave only six behavioural sins and one of them ("*honour thy father and thy mother....*") is prescriptive rather than proscriptive, thereby reducing the tally to five.

The Seven Deadly Sins were first formally codified as such by Pope Gregory the Great in the late 6th Century. They, like the proscriptive five of those ten Commandments, represent the **negative** side of Christian behaviour and illustrate what one should **NOT** do. The **positive** side of the Seven Deadly Sins has much obscuring overlap and lack of clarity in the definitions of their opposites.

I offer you the acronym of "LAW PEGS". After all, they are the PEGS from which hang all matters relating to the LAWs of appropriate behaviour.

L is for Lust
A is for Avarice
W is for Wrath

P is for Pride
E is for Envy
G is for Gluttony
S is for Sloth

What their opposites are is less plain sailing. Let me suggest some simple opposites of my own.

L is for Lust whose opposite is Self-control
A is for Avarice whose opposite is Generosity, both material and spiritual
W is for Wrath whose opposite is Love and Patience, or Charity in the Pauline sense

P is for Pride whose opposite is Humility
E is for Envy whose opposite is Love, or, again, Charity
G is for Gluttony whose opposite is Moderation
S is for Sloth whose opposite is an amalgam of Zeal, Energy and, even, Courage

As for defining them, let me offer, again, my own definitions:

Lust. An excessive longing or appetite for such as money, or sex
Avarice. An excessive love of wealth or power
Wrath. Anger or exasperation: it is often the result of impatience or hurt self-esteem

Pride. An unwillingness to look at one's faults honestly
Envy. Jealousy or perverted love: resentment of the good that others have or will have
Gluttony. Excessive indulgence in eating or drinking; excessive love of pleasure
Sloth. Idleness of any kind

You might be amused to know what the various traditional punishments for each sin were:

Lust. To be smothered in fire and brimstone
Avarice. To be put in a cauldron of boiling oil
Wrath. To be dismembered alive

Pride. To be broken on the wheel, arguably the worst punishment for the worst sin
Envy. To be put in freezing water
Gluttony. To be forced to eat rats, toads and snakes
Sloth. To be cast into a snake pit

TJE

ISLAM

Islam is the second most popular faith in the world, as it is in the UK. The focal points of the religion are the prophet Muhammad and their “bible” is the Qur’an, which is the exact, untranslatable and unchangeable word of Allah – which is why it remains in Arabic. The book called the “Hadith” is the (translatable) authority which narrates the prophet’s life and times. The Muslim code of conduct is based on the premise that everyone and everything belongs to Allah (or God). Religious routine is based on the faith’s “five pillars”.

Muhammad, the prophet of Allah, was born in 570 and underwent the first of many mystical experiences in 610 when the archangel Gabriel appeared to him for the first time. His was no peaceful vision: the Hejirah as we know it (the “Hijrah”) was militant and took place as Muhammad left Mecca for Medina in 622. This is the year from which the Muslim calendar is dated. The word “Hijrah” itself means basically to leave a place in order to seek sanctuary or freedom from persecution. Muhammad died, back in Mecca, in 632.

In 638, Jerusalem, which had been the site of Muhammad’s great dream of 620, as related in the Hadith, was to fall bloodlessly to the Muslims. The city thus became the third of the Muslim Holy Cities, after Mecca and Medina.

Islam is based on five pillars:

1. Shahada: The Muslim profession of faith. (Reciting this statement three times in front of witnesses is all that anyone need do to become a Muslim.)
2. Salah: Praying ritually five times a day. (Shiites pray three times a day.)
3. Zakat: Charitable giving.
4. Sawm: Fasting during Ramadan.
5. Hajj: The pilgrimage to Mecca, to be carried out at least once in a lifetime.

Perhaps a few further definitions may help.

Allah: He is the Merciful, the Beneficent, the Knowledgeable, the Protector, the Mighty, the God, the Provider, the Exalted, the Lord, the All-Knowing, the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing, the Magnificent, the Wise, the Loving, the First, the Last, the Eternal.

Fatwa: Rather surprisingly, this simply means a legal opinion rather than the death threat we connect with Salman Rushdie and his *Satanic Verses*.

Halal: Something that is lawful and permitted in Islam. It is usually connected with food.

Imam: An Imam is both a religious and a political leader.

Islam: Islam means “submitting to Allah”.

Jihad: This is a complex word. Jihad is not a defensive war, so much as a war against any unjust regime. It has come to mean a Holy War of aggression.

Qur’an: The Qur’an is the Muslim bible. It is composed of 114 Suwar (a Surah is a chapter).

Ramadan: The holy month of fasting for the Muslims. It is the name of the 9th month of the Muslim holy year. The [Islamic calendar](#) is a [lunar calendar](#), and, since the lunar calendar year is shorter than the [solar year](#), the dates of Ramadan change yearly.

Torah: The Revelation that Allah sent down to Moses. It is also the Jewish Holy Book.

It is a fact of history that Muslim influence spread dramatically through the known world over the century following the Hejirah and has continued to spread.

However, Islam, like Christianity, has not escaped the syndrome of schism and this to us is very relevant.

There are, as we know, two main sects: the Sunnis and the Shiites. Sunni means “one who follows the “Sunna” (what the Prophet said). Shia is a contraction of the phrase “Shiat Ali”, meaning the “partisans of Ali”. The Sunni Muslims form by far the great majority.

Both sects agree that Muhammad is the single great prophet; both accept Allah as the only God. Both recognise the ancient and historically confluent interests of Islam, Judaism and Christianity. Neither sect considered Muhammad’s successors to be prophets; just leaders. Both sects, however, can be aggressively militant. Islam is a powerful force elsewhere in the world: Malaysia and Indonesia are good examples. In China, it has a growing presence.

In the late 1980s, a new quasi-sect appeared: al-Qaeda, meaning “network”. Although without formal structure, it arose in Afghanistan in the wake of and primarily in reaction to the Soviet occupation. Their creed, as Islamists, is to practise Jihad all over the world.

To conclude, Islamism is very much part, and a growing part, of our modern world but, whilst sensitive to the World Trade Centre incident and other atrocities, we must not demonise it and forget the strength of the peaceful tradition which lies behind it all.

Abbreviated from the address given by Tim Elliott at mattins on Sunday 20 November, 2005

PARISH PUMP

Sermon Notebook - ‘People Like Us’

The Magi: Matthew 2: 1-12

The visit of the magi to Jesus is often presented as a cosy story of three oriental kings with gifts for a baby in a stable. As Matthew says nothing about a stable or kings, how does he want us to understand this story?

The Star

In the ancient world it was commonly accepted that when an important event took place on earth it would be reflected in the heavens. As they also accepted that God communicated through stars and planets, their interest in the ‘star in the east’ (2) is not surprising. In fact, it was probably a conjunction of Jupiter (a royal planet) and Saturn (representing the Jews) in 7 BC.

The Magi

The Magi were astrologers from what we know today as Iraq. As experts in interpreting the sky, they set off to find a new king that was foretold. Today we would probably identify them as ‘new-agers’, seeking spiritual experiences in a whole range of different things. Where do we find ‘seekers’ after Jesus today?

The Child

At the time there was a universal expectation of a new ruler appearing on the world stage. Therefore, their search for the ‘king of the Jews’ was as much political as spiritual. No wonder that Herod took the news so badly. Jesus was not just born king of the Jews, but as a universal ruler who would bring God’s justice and peace to the whole world. In what ways can we give Jesus our worship this Christmas?

The Magi's gifts remind us that the man born to be king is also the man born to die. And so the soldiers at the cross are the first Gentiles following the Magi to call Jesus 'king of the Jews' (27:29).

Discipleship in a small planet

When God in Christ entered his own creation, he was underlining the covenant made with Noah in Genesis 8 and 9. An ecological covenant, that gave humankind God's blessing to enjoy the fruits of the earth, but laid a responsibility on us all to take care of this planet.

In the past half-century we have seen an energy crisis, the effects of global warming, the burgeoning of debt and the onset of terrorism as factors which seem almost to be spinning out of control. Yet as Christians we worship a God to whom we pray for our daily bread and our well-being.

And in February the General Synod called upon the Church of England's members to make "care for creation, and repentance for its exploitation" fundamental to "their faith, practice and mission". Repentance means a change of direction, and an important part of the way we follow Christ will emerge from the decisions we take about the future of our planet.

Such a change of direction will not only involve individual lifestyles, but the way we do things at corporate and global levels too. Economics, which is another word for 'housekeeping', will become as much a part of our discipleship as matters we now regard as essentials of faith. All this is part of our worship which, as we saw last month, extends far beyond the ceremonies of the Church and into the things in life to which we assign worth and value. Yet the very idea of worship is strange to many people and many in church find it a difficult idea to handle. What does it mean, where do we find it, how do we play our part and contribute to it? And who do we worship?

Elizabeth Goodridge and Ian Yearsley of Southwark Diocese

Praying with the Prayers of the Bible

The prayer for mercy and grace; Hebrews 4:16. 'Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.'

It is appropriate that this series on the prayers of the Bible should finish with this prayer. It is a prayer for mercy and grace and we are always in need of both!

Throughout this letter to the Hebrew Christians, there are many invitations and encouragements to pray. In this passage we are exhorted to 'come boldly' and we also have, 'we draw near to God' (7:19); 'those who draw near to God' (7:25); 'the way into the holiest' (9:8); 'the new and living way' (10:20); 'let us draw near' (10:22); 'whoever would draw near to God' (11:6). We should study each of these expressions carefully for they all emphasise what glorious privileges we have to come into the presence of God.

This prayer in chapter four begins with great encouragement. We are to come to God 'with confidence.' All through the Bible we have the Lord seeking his people and wanting fellowship with them. God really wants us to come to him with our praises and our prayers!

The reason for this confidence is given in v.14. The ascended Lord Jesus is our 'great High Priest' who has gone into heaven on our behalf. He sympathises 'with our weaknesses' for he too was tested and tempted but remained sinless (v.15). Because Jesus is praying for us, we have confidence to come to God in prayer.

When we do ‘draw near’ to God in worship, praise and prayer, we receive mercy and grace. What a promise is this! We are always in need of mercy for we are constantly tempted, and, as Jeremiah said, were it not for the Lord’s mercies, we would be consumed (Lam. 3:22). As the day begins we need to come to God to seek his face and ask his mercies for what lies ahead. Who knows what news the post will bring today? What situations we will find ourselves in? What dangers await us? What temptations we will face? What lies around the corner for ourselves and those we love? Yes, we need the Lord’s mercies and he invites us to come to him.

But that is not all. The verse also promises that when we draw near to God he gives us grace. Grace! What a word it is! It is truly one of the great words of the Bible! Who can define grace? Who can describe grace? Who can explain grace? It means God’s gracious and all-sufficient provision for all our needs. When God promises to give us grace, he is promising to give us his love, his forgiveness, his healing, his presence, his tender compassion. Amazing grace indeed. And God promises it to us today, and tomorrow and every day of our pilgrimage. So let us every day ‘draw near to God’ in prayer.

Revd. Dr Herbert McGonigle, Senior Lecturer in Historical
Theology & Church History, Nazarene Theological
College, Manchester.

High Days and Holy Days – December

Dec 3 Francis Xavier

Ignatius Loyala sent his friend and follower Francis Xavier (born 1506) to the Orient as a missionary. His mass conversions became legendary – he baptised 10,000 people in one month and in just ten years of work was credited with 700,000 conversions. Xavier became the most famous Jesuit missionary of all time, working so hard that he had only a few hours’ sleep each night. He was known as ‘the Apostle of the Indies’ and ‘the apostle of Japan’. He began by reforming Goa and then worked among the Paravas in southern India, in Ceylon, Malacca, the Molucca islands, and the Malay peninsula. In 1549 he ventured on to Japan. Wherever Xavier sailed, he left after him numerous organised Christian communities. Xavier died in 1551.

December 6th St Nicholas

Father Christmas is as old as Europe. Once he was Woden, lashing his rein-deer through the darkness of northern midwinter. Then he encountered the Church, and She transformed him into a saint, the much-loved Nicholas, Bishop of Myra (in south-west Turkey) in the fourth century. St Nicholas became the patron saint of children, and was given 6 December as his day. Since the 6th century St Nicholas has been venerated in both East and West, though virtually nothing is known of his life. Some believe he may have been one of the fathers at the Council of Nicea (325), imprisoned during the Emperor Diocletian’s persecution. According to legend, Nicholas was an extremely generous man. Perhaps it was on account of S Nicholas’ generosity that in recent centuries children began to write little notes sometime before 6th December, to tell him about the toys they specially wanted. These notes were then left on the windowsill at night - or else on a ledge in the chimney. But St Nicholas Day chanced to lie in the magnetic field of a much more potent festival.... and after awhile his activities were moved towards Christmas. Then in Bavaria the children still left their notes on the window sill, but they addressed them to Liebes Christkind - Krishkinkle as they knew him - and the saint’s part in the matter was simply to deliver the letters in heaven. The most popular result of the cult of St Nicholas has been the institution of Santa Claus.

December 21st Winter Solstice

A mid-winter festival has been a part of life since pre-Christian times. When the hours of daylight are fewest, the warmth of the sun weakest, and life itself seemingly at a standstill, our ancestors, the pagan peoples of Europe and Western Asia, kept festival by lighting bonfires and decorating their buildings with evergreens. Perhaps they believed that the dying sun could be re-kindled by fire, and the life of the buried seed assured by the presence of evergreen branches. With the advent of Christianity, the Spring gods became identified with Christ, and the birthday of the Sun with the birthday of the Light of the World.

December 25th Christmas Day

Why does it begin at midnight with Holy Communion? The hour was first chosen at Rome in the fifth century to symbolise the idea that Christ was born at midnight – a mystical idea in no way hindered by historical evidence. No one knows the hour of his birth. Certainly in recent times, Holy Communion at midnight on Christmas morning has proved popular with modern families. As for Christmas itself, let Matthew tell it his way (Matthew 2: 1 – 11)

December 26th St Stephen (died c. 35 AD)

Stephen was one of the first deacons of the Christian Church. He'd been appointed by the apostles to look after the distribution of alms to the faithful poor, and to help in the ministry of preaching. Acts 6 and 7 tells us all that we know of his life, and the passages seem to suggest that he was an educated Hellenistic Jew. Certainly Stephen's famous challenge to the Jews reveals him to have been learned in the Scriptures and the history of Judaism, besides being eloquent and forceful. Stephen's proclamation on the day of his martyrdom pulled no punches. He told the Jews that God did not depend on the Temple. The Temple was but a temporary institution destined to be fulfilled and superseded by Christ, who was the prophet foreseen by Moses as the Messiah for whom the Jewish race had so long awaited. Stephen then challenged his hearers for resisting the Spirit and for killing the Christ, as their fathers before them had killed the prophets. The Jews were so outraged by this that they stoned Stephen on the spot for blasphemy. As he died, Stephen saw a vision of Christ on God's right hand. The men who were witness to the stoning placed their clothes at the feet of Saul (afterwards Paul), who (to his deep regret later) consented to Stephen's death. By the fourth century Stephen had his own feast day in both East and West Churches.

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THE CHURCH CALENDAR

DECEMBER

Thursday 1 st	11.00am 7.30pm	Holy Communion (The Revd JR Crocker - JRC) Joint meeting of Benefice Parochial Church Councils at Cardington Village Hall
Saturday 3 rd	2.00pm	Elstow Christmas Bazaar in the Church Hall
Sunday 4th	Advent 2	
	9.30am	Family Communion with Children's Groups and the Lighting of the Second Advent Candle (JRC)
	11.00am	Morning Prayer (JRC)
	3.30pm	Christingle Service (JRC and the Music Group) Preacher Tony Brookes of the Children's Society
	6.00pm	Advent Praise at St. Michael's Church
Monday 5 th	All Day 7.00pm 7.00pm	John Bunyan School Carol Concert rehearsal John Bunyan School Carol Concert Prayer Group meet in the Summerhouse
Wednesday 7 th	11.30am	Coffee Morning followed by light lunch in the Church Hall
Thursday 8 th	11.00am	Holy Communion (Canon Nigel Morrell - NPM)
Friday 9 th	8.00pm	Women's Institute Carol Service with the Band of The Salvation Army
Saturday 10 th	10.00am - 3.00pm	Quiet Day at Barton-Le-Cley Church Hall with a bring-and-share lunch.
Sunday 11th	Advent 3	
	11.00am	Parish Communion with the lighting of the Third Advent Candle (The Revd Peter Littleford)
	4.00-5.30pm	Pantomime rehearsal at Elstow Abbey
	6.30pm	Evening Prayer (JRC)
Monday 12 th	7.00pm	Prayer Group meet in the Summerhouse
Tuesday 13 th	All Day	Abbey School Carol Concert
Wednesday 14 th	11.30am 7.30pm	Coffee Morning followed by light lunch in the Church Hall Choir Christmas drinks in the Rectory
Thursday 15 th	11.00am	Holy Communion (JRC)
Friday 16 th	6.00pm	Carol Singing round the Parish followed by Refreshments in the Church Hall
Saturday 17 th	2.00pm	Children's Christmas Party in the Church Hall
Sunday 18th	Advent 4	
	9.30am	Family Communion with Children's Groups and the Lighting of the Fourth Advent Candle (JRC)
	11.00am	Morning Prayer (Mattins Group)
	6.30pm	The Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols (JRC)

Monday 19 th	7.00pm	Prayer Group meet in the Summerhouse
	7.30pm	Concert by Kempston Musical Society in aid of The Friends of Elstow Abbey.
Wednesday 21 st	11.30am	Coffee morning followed by light lunch in the Church Hall
Thursday 22 nd	11.00am	Holy Communion (JRC)
Saturday	4.30pm	Crib Service (JRC)
<u>Christmas Eve</u>	11.30pm	The First Communion of Christmas (JRC)
Sunday 25th	Christmas Day	
	<u>10.30am</u>	Family Communion (JRC)
		NO EVENING PRAYER AT ELSTOW
Wednesday 28 th		No Coffee Morning
Thursday 29 th	11.00am	Holy Communion (The Revd Stephen Smith - SS)
	1.30pm	Wedding of Martin Owen and Isabel Orme (SS)
 JANUARY 2006		
Sunday 1st		The Naming and Circumcision of Jesus
	<u>10.30am</u>	Parish Communion (NPM)
		NO EVENING PRAYER AT ELSTOW
Monday 2 nd		BANK HOLIDAY NO PRAYER GROUP
Wednesday 4 th	11.30am	Coffee morning followed by light lunch in the Church Hall
Thursday 5 th	11.00am	Holy Communion (JRC)
Saturday 7 th	3.30-5.00pm	Pantomime Dress Rehearsal
Sunday 8th		The Epiphany
	11.00am	Parish Communion (JRC). Preacher: The Arch-deacon of Bedford, The Venerable Paul Hughes with the commissioning of the Bereavement Team
	6.30pm	Evening Prayer (JRC)
Monday 9 th	7.00pm	Prayer Group meet in the Summerhouse
	8.00pm	Liturgy Committee meet at 43, Armstrong Close, Wilstead
Wednesday 11 th	11.30am	Coffee Morning followed by light lunch in the Church Hall
Thursday 12 th	11.00am	Holy Communion (JRC)
Saturday 14 th	3.00-5.00pm	Final run-through of Pantomime in Elstow Abbey
	5.00pm	Pantomime in Elstow Abbey followed by a bring-and-share supper in the Church Hall with refreshments
Sunday 15th		Epiphany 2
	9.30am	Family Communion with Children's Groups (JRC)
	11.00am	Morning Prayer (JRC)
	6.30pm	Evening Prayer led by Mr. Robert Heley
Monday 16 th	7.00pm	Prayer Group meet in the Summerhouse
	7.30pm	Confirmation Service at St. Michael's Church
		<u>DEADLINE FOR MATERIAL FOR FEBRUARY MAGAZINE</u>

Tuesday 17 th	8.00pm	Finance & Standing Committee meet at 43 Armstrong Close, Wilstead
Wednesday 18 th	11.30am	Coffee Morning followed by light lunch in the Church Hall
Thursday 19 th	11.00am	Holy Communion (JRC)
Saturday 21 st	2.00pm	Children's Workshop
Sunday 22nd	Epiphany 3	
	9.30am	Young People's Service (Group)
	11.00am	Morning Prayer (Mattins Group)
	6.00pm	Service for the week of Prayer for Christian Unity for Bedford. Preacher: The Right Reverend Christopher Herbert, Bishop of St. Albans, followed by refreshments in the Church Hall.
Monday 23 rd	7.00pm	Prayer Group meet in the Summerhouse
	8.00pm	Meeting of the Friends of Elstow to discuss the Elstow May Festival
Wednesday 25 th	11.30am	Coffee Morning followed by a light lunch in the Church Hall
Thursday 26 th	11.00am	Holy Communion (JRC)
	7.30pm	Joint meeting of The Benefice Churchwardens and the Bishop of Bedford with the Patron
Sunday 29th	Epiphany 4 (the Presentation of Christ in the Temple)	
	11.00am	Parish Communion (JRC)
	6.30pm	Evening Prayer followed by Holy Communion with the Laying on of Hands for Healing
Monday 30 th	7.00pm	Prayer Group meet in the Summerhouse
FEBRUARY 2006		
Wednesday 1 st	11.30am	Coffee Morning followed by light lunch in the Church Hall
	7.30pm	Deanery Synod in the Church Hall
Thursday 2 nd	11.00am	Holy Communion (JRC)
	7.30pm	Meeting of the Parochial Church Council in The Church Hall
Sunday 5th	Epiphany 5 Stewardship Sunday	
	9.30am	Family Communion with Children's Groups with a presentation by Mr Geoff Fletcher, Diocesan Stewardship Officer
	11.00am	Morning Prayer (JRC) with a presentation by Mr Geoff Fletcher, Diocesan Stewardship Officer
	6.30pm	Evening Prayer led by Mr Peter Moss