

## ELSTOW MAGAZINE MAY 2010

This month I would like to share with you my report to the AGM. This is my sixth report as Rector and I share some of the highlights of the last year:



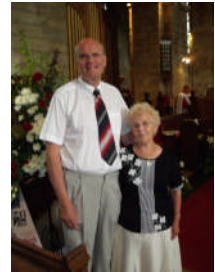
The May Festival was in my mind the most successful to date. Many turned up for it, and the Vikings and Hemel Hempstead Brass Band provided some good entertainment. I am grateful for the schools continuing to support and play a big part. It also raised a lot of money towards Church Funds. This year it is on May 8<sup>th</sup> 12-4pm, when the Mayor will be attending with the Salvation Army Band.

In June the Scripture Union led a wonderful project with the local schools - they are planning to come back again every

two years.

We had what may be the final Far Eastern Prisoners Of War service which was well attended and I found very moving.

In July the Women's Institute celebrated their 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with a major flower festival and we combined the Sunday with their celebrations and to say thank you to Colin Albon who stepped down from being Church Warden after 35 years faithful service and Rosemary Albon from doing many areas of ministry.



My family and David Wells attended the Diocesan Trip to Taizé in France and it was followed by a very successful holiday club. I was very proud of Margaret, Tracey, John and David for all they achieved and for the children and volunteers.

A group of 30 young, old and middling from around the Benefice spent a week on the Isle of Wight - one of the happiest Church holidays I have been on and led.

So we gained a new Church Warden in Tracey Hinson, who with Barbara Routledge have been tireless in all that they have done in the past year. I would like to say a big thank you to the whole PCC for all that they have done over this year and over the previous years. Thanking Anne Morris, Margaret Baron and Laura Laverty who are stepping down. For Stephen MacDonald and Alistair Laverty for agreeing to continue and for Marcus Taylor as treasurer and Philip Bettles as deputy Church warden, who have been first class in their first year.

In October it became clear that we were moving towards applying again for planning permission on the New Church Hall project, which thankfully was achieved at the end of December. (Mike Dales Partnership have developed a very impressive hall).

The PCC was left with a difficult decision - that of the future role of the caretakers - as we move towards a new facilities manager with a different and increased role in the future - for the mission, ministry and financial security of this church for the years to come. So it was with great sadness that Tony and Margaret were given 9 months notice to leave after 18 years with this Church.





Christmas has also been one of the best attended and the happiest for me of my time with you. The Christmas Tree on the Moot Hall Green was up and lit for the month of December thanks to a lot of goodwill from the village and the official evening included a wonderful concert in Elstow Abbey by Bedford Brass Band. The 9 Lessons and Carols went very well, (thanks to John Hinson) and we had a good reception to say goodbye to Stephen MacDonald after 3 years of being Director of Music.

January began with a new Director of Music, David Ewbank, whom I am pleased to say has gone down extremely well. The Stewardship campaign was very well put together by Anne Knight and the committee. Lent and Holy Week, I was very pleased to share the worship and journey with Revd. Roger Chapman and Revd. Gareth Parry. We had a lovely joint choir Palm Sunday celebration, another first!

At the end of February we had a very enjoyable Pantomime 'Little Red Riding Hood' my thanks to Alistair and Co. for a very well attended performance.

In March our professional Fundraiser Catherine Farrell, helped by our Patron Charles Whitbread and Sam Whitbread, organised a Gala Launch Event to start off our fundraising. A big thank you to the many who supported this and helped. We live in faith that the charities and benefactors will come forward to achieve our hopes and dreams.



In April Captain David Wells has been with us for three years and has worked hard and I am pleased that Revd. Littleford has raised enough money from the Diocese to enable David to be with us at least until Dec 2011. This month also marked the third anniversary of the Youth Club and a big thank you to all our volunteer leaders for their continued support.

St Michael's and St Mary's Cardington have changed their service times due to Canon Nigel Morrell being seriously ill, (thankfully he is slowly getting a lot better) and Revd Stephen Smith being suspended until 1<sup>st</sup> August. This is a new experiment, and my thanks to Peter Littleford and Jane Findlay and the two congregations for being gracious and letting us try this change for the time being. (part of a 5 year Team review conducted by Canon Dr Christopher Dent.)

Christian Aid Week this year will mark the end of the all the hard work that Sheila Batiuk kindly gives year after year. It is hoped that she will continue but in a reduced way next year. We continue to find it a struggle to get volunteers. Elstow is one of one a few Churches that continue to do so much for Christian Aid Week and I would personally be very sad if this were to stop. Please can you offer Sheila and provide some support and maybe she will change her mind!

I would like to thank Beth Crocker for helping with the Sunday School and the lovely Sader meal and for being patient with me always being out and busy; Teresa Cornes for her help with Barbara and Michelle with Mums and Toddlers; Sarah Duffy, my new secretary since September, you take a lot off my shoulders!

For all the things that happen week on week that make the services and the regular groups run so successfully and for those I have forgotten thank you.

#### **In the Coming Year:**

1. A new Kids Craft afternoon began on Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> April and a new Community Dance class is expected in June.

2. A 6 day Team trip to Ireland is planned for the end of May - but I need a few more to come to keep the coach costs down. And there are plans for another Holiday Club in July and a return to the Isle of Wight in August.
3. All being well the first stage of the New Hall works will start in the Autumn and the new build will start in the first quarter of 2011. (A temporary hall will be in place when the current hall is demolished).
4. A 50k playbuilder project will be completed in September in the green by the brook by Elstow Lower School, providing a lot of fun for teenagers.
5. Mattins will also be on a second Sunday each month.
6. I would like to have a Benefice away day to Chellington to look at a recent conference that I have attended in 'Welcome'
7. All that we do must be rooted in our worship of God on a Sunday, and with his grace all of our other wishes and hopes will be rooted and properly prepared.

***Jeremy Crocker***

## READERS' LIST FOR MAY 2010

May 2nd	10.00am	Acts 11: v.1-18	John 13: v.31-35	John Hinson
	11.15am	2 Samuel 7: v.4-13	Acts 2: v.14a, 22-36	Delphine Fordham
	6.30pm	Daniel 6: v.1-23	Mark 15:v.46--16:v.8	Margaret Eastwell
May 9th	10.00am	Acts 16: v.9-15	John 14: v.23-29	Lynn Harris
	11.15am	Genesis 1: v.26-end	Colossians 3:v.1-11	David Ewbank
	6.30pm	Zephaniah 3: v.14-end	Matthew 28: v.1-end	Dorothy Steele
May 16th	10.00am	Acts 16: v. 16-34	John 17: v.20-end	Barbara Routledge
	11.15am	Deuteronomy 34	Luke 24: v. 44-end	Eric Crossen
	<b>6.00pm Christian Aid Service at St Michael's</b>			
May 23rd	<b>10.00am</b>	<b>Young People's Service</b>		
	<b>11.15am H.C.</b>	Acts 2: v.1-21	John 14: v.8-17 & 25-27	Peter Batiuk
	6.30pm	Exodus 33: v.7-20	2 Corinthians 3: v.4-end	Barbara Routledge
May 30th	<b>Joint Service for Trinity Sunday with Archdeacon</b>			
	<b>10.30am</b>	Romans 5: v.1-5	John 16: v.12-15	Lynne Faulkner
	6.30pm	Exodus 3: v. 1-15	John 3: v. 1-17	Catherine Parrish
June 6th	10.00am	Galatians 1: v.11-end	Luke 7: v.11-17	John Hinson
	11.15am	Deuteronomy 6: v.10-end	Acts 22: v.22 --23:11	Tim Elliott
	6.30pm	Genesis 8: v.15 --9: v.17	Mark 4: v.1-20	Glynis Annan

If any of the above dates are inconvenient, please arrange a swap, and let Ann Knight know that you have done so. Thank you. Tel: (01234) 854036

## SIDESMANS ROTA MAY 2010

<b>May 2<sup>nd</sup></b>	10am	Mrs S Brown Mrs A Morris
	11.15am	Mrs M Crossen
	6.30pm	Mrs C Parrish
<b>May 9<sup>th</sup></b>	10am	Mrs S Batiuk Mr P Batiuk
	11.15am	Mrs D Fordham
	6.30pm	P Moss
<b>May 16<sup>th</sup></b>	10am	Mrs J Barnicott Mrs S Brown
	11.15am	Mr F W Crossen
	6.30pm	Mrs G Arran
<b>May 23<sup>rd</sup></b>	10am	Mrs B Routledge
	11.15am	Mrs A Knight
	6.30pm	Miss M Eastwell
<b>May 30<sup>th</sup></b>	10.30am	Mrs M Crossen Mr F W Crossen
	6.30pm	Mrs C Parrish
<b>June 6<sup>th</sup></b>	10am	Mrs S Brown Mrs A Morris
	11.15am	Mrs D Fordham 6.30pm P Moss

# THE CHURCH CALENDAR

## May 2010

2 <sup>nd</sup>	Sunday	10.00am	Holy Communion with Baptism of Callum David Parke + Sunday School (JRC)
		11.15am	Mattins (JRC)
		6.30pm	Evensong (JRC)
		<b>6-7.30pm</b>	<b>NEW Yoyo Group at David Well's house</b>
		<i>11.00am</i>	<i>@ St Mary's Cardington – Peter Littleford</i>
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Monday	10.00am	NO Mums and Toddlers
	Bank Holiday	2pm	NO Prayer Group
4 <sup>th</sup>	Tuesday	1.30-2.30pm	Sing and Sign in the Church Hall
		2.30pm	Ronald Nordstrand Burial of Ashes @ Cardington (JRC)
5 <sup>th</sup>	Wednesday	11.30am	Coffee Morning followed by soup
		5.45-8pm	Youth Club – May Festival Preparations
		8.00pm	Team Bible Study @ St Mary's
6 <sup>th</sup>	Thursday	11.00am	Holy Communion (JRC)
		12noon	Monthly lunch at The Red Lion
		1.30-2.30pm	Elstow Art & Craft Club in the Church Hall
		6-7pm	Yoga (for mixed abilities) Elstow Church Hall for more details call June Hannigan 07817601686
		8pm	Finance & Standing Meeting @ Vicarage
7 <sup>th</sup>	Friday	7.15pm	Choir Practice
		8pm	Bell Ringing
8 <sup>th</sup>	Saturday	12-4pm	<b>Elstow May Festival,</b> attended by Mayor Dave Hodgson and Patron Charles Whitbread with procession from the old School through the High Street to the Green at 2pm, followed by crowning of the May Queen. If you would like a stall, please contact Sarah Duffy at the vicarage. Charity stalls are free and other stalls are £7
9 <sup>th</sup>	Sunday	10.00am	Holy Communion with Sunday School (JRC)
		11.15am	Mattins (Group)
		3pm	Baptism of Miles Endersby (JRC)
		6.30pm	Evening Prayer (JRC)
		6-7.30pm	Yoyo Group for years 8 and over at David Well's house
		<i>11.00am</i>	<i>@ St Mary's Cardington – Jeremy Crocker</i>

10 <sup>th</sup>	Monday	10.00am	Mums and Toddlers in the Church Hall
		2.00pm	Prayer Group meet in the Church Hall
		5-6pm	Children's confirmation class at St Michael's
		6.30-8pm	Adults' confirmation class at St Michael's
11 <sup>th</sup>	Tuesday	1.30-2.30pm	Sing and Sign in the Church Hall
		7pm	St Michael's Faith Walk
		7.30pm	Elstow Parish Council Meeting (Playing fields hall)
12 <sup>th</sup>	Wednesday	11.30am	Coffee Morning followed by soup in the Church Hall
		2pm	Clergy Ministers Meeting @ Vicarage
		6pm	Elstow Brownies visit the Church Tower
		5.45-8pm	Youth Club
		8pm	Wedding rehearsal for Alex Dennis and Stacy Sanders
13 <sup>th</sup>	Thursday	11.00am	Holy Communion (JRC)
		1.30-2.30pm	Elstow Art & Craft Club in the Church Hall
		6pm	Christian Aid Meal @ the Vicarage
		6-7pm	Yoga (for mixed abilities) Elstow Church Hall for more details call June Hannigan 07817601686
14 <sup>th</sup>	Friday	7.15pm	Choir Practice
		8.00pm	Bellringing
15 <sup>th</sup>	Saturday	12noon	Doris Simmonds burial of Ashes (JRC)
		3pm	Wedding interview @ the Vicarage (JRC)
		4.30pm	Wedding Blessing – Alex Dennis and Stacy Sanders (JRC)
16 <sup>th</sup>	Sunday	10.00am	Holy Communion + Sunday School (JRC)
		11.15am	Mattins (JRC)
		3pm	Baptism of Harriet Francis May Owen (JRC)
		6pm	St Michael's Christian Aid Service
		6-7.30pm	Yoyo Group for years 8 and over at David Well's house
		<b>6.30pm</b>	<b>NO Evensong at Elstow Abbey</b>
17 <sup>th</sup>	Monday	10.00am	Mums and Toddlers in the Church Hall
		2.00pm	Prayer Group meet in the Church Hall
		5-6pm	Children's confirmation class at St Michael's
		6.30-8pm	Adults' confirmation class at St Michael's

**Deadline for the June/July Parish Magazine to **Jacquie Waterfield** @ 269 Goldington Road, Bedford, MK41 9PH or [jakhat77@hotmail.com](mailto:jakhat77@hotmail.com)**

18 <sup>th</sup>	Tuesday	1.30-2.30pm	Sing and Sign in the Church Hall
19 <sup>th</sup>	Wednesday	11.30am	Coffee Morning followed by soup in the Hall
		5.45-8pm	Youth Club in the church hall
20 <sup>th</sup>	Thursday	11.00am	Holy Communion (JRC)

		1.30-2.30pm	Elstow Art & Craft Club in the Church Hall
		6-7pm	Yoga (for mixed abilities) Elstow Church Hall for more details call June Hannigan 07817601686
21 <sup>st</sup>	Friday	7.30pm	Elstow PCC Meeting in the Church Hall
		7.15pm	Choir Practice
		8.00pm	Bellringing
23 <sup>rd</sup>	Sunday	10.00am	Youth Service (JH)
		11.15am	Holy Communion (PL)
		3pm	Baptism of Poppy Ann Reed (JRC)
		4.30pm	Friends of Elstow Abbey AGM in the Church Hall
		6-7.30pm	Yoyo Group for years 8 and over at David Well's house
		6.30pm	Evensong & Holy Communion and the laying on of Hands (JRC)
			<i>9.45am @ St Michael's &amp; 11am @ St Mary's Cardington – Jeremy Crocker</i>
24 <sup>th</sup>	Monday	10.00am	Mums and Toddlers in the Church Hall
		2.00pm	Prayer Group meet in the Church Hall
		5-6pm	Children's confirmation class at St Michael's
		6.30-8pm	Adults' confirmation class at St Michael's
25 <sup>th</sup>	Tuesday	1.30-2.30pm	Sing and Sign in the Church Hall
26 <sup>th</sup>	Wednesday	11.30am	Coffee Morning followed by soup in the Church Hall
		5.45pm	Youth Club
		8.00pm	Team Bible Study @ Centenary Room, Cardington
27 <sup>th</sup>	Thursday	11.00am	Holy Communion (TBA)
		1.30-2.30pm	Kiddycraft group in the Church Hall for pre-school children and their parents/carers
28 <sup>th</sup>	Friday	7.15pm	Choir
		8.00pm	Bellringing
29 <sup>th</sup>	Saturday	2pm	Wedding of Daniel Clark & Claire Das at Elstow Abbey (JRC)
30 <sup>th</sup>	Sunday	10.30am	Benifice Holy Communion @ Elstow Abbey with the Ven Paul Hughes Archdeacon of Bedford
		6-7.30pm	Yoyo Group for years 8 and over at David Well's house
		6.30pm	Evensong (TBA)
31 <sup>st</sup>	Monday	10.00am	No Mums and Toddlers
		2.00pm	No Prayer Group
		5-6pm	No Children's confirmation class at St Michael's
		6.30-8pm	No Adults' confirmation class at St Michael's

## **JUNE 2010**

1 <sup>st</sup>	Tuesday	1.30-2.30pm	Sing and Sign in the Church Hall
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Wednesday	11.30am	Coffee Morning followed by soup in the Church Hall

		4-15-5.30pm	New Dance Class meet in the Church Hall
		5.45-8pm	No Youth Groups
		8.00pm	Team Bible Study @ Centenary Room, Cardington
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Thursday	11.00am	Holy Communion (TBA)
		1.30-2.30pm	Elstow Art and Craft Club in the Church Hall
		6-7pm	Yoga (for mixed abilities) Elstow Church Hall
4 <sup>th</sup>	Friday	10.30am	Wedding Rehearsal @ Elstow Abbey
		11.30am	Wedding Rehearsal @ Elstow Abbey
		7.15pm	NO Choir Practice
		8.00pm	Bellringing
5 <sup>th</sup>	Saturday	2.00pm	Wedding @ Elstow Abbey
		3.30pm	Wedding @ Elstow Abbey
		4.30pm	Wedding @ Elstow Abbey
6 <sup>th</sup>	Sunday	10.00am	Holy Communion with Sunday School (JRC)
		11.15am	Mattins (Group)
		6-7.30pm	Yoyo Group for years 8 and over at David Well's house
		6.30pm	Evening Prayer (JRC)
		09.45am	<i>Peter Littleford at St Michael's / 11.25am St Mary's Cardington.</i>

### **The Yo-Yo Group**

In May a new group will be starting for young people aged 13 and over, those in School Year 8 and above.

The aim of this group is to help our young people to explore their faith in a relaxed way and so grow as Christians. The group will be called "YO YO", which stands for "YOU'RE ONLY YOUNG ONCE".

This group will run on Sunday Afternoons from 6pm to 7.30 at the Verger's Cottage, Cardington starting on, Sunday May 1<sup>st</sup> 2010. We will have tea together, talk about what is important to the youngsters and discover how the Christian Faith can help them to live as a young people in Bedfordshire in 2010.

If you know any young people who may be interested in this group please phone David on 838279.

# **ELSTOW MAY FESTIVAL 2010**

**Saturday May 8<sup>th</sup>**

**12-4pm**

**Attended by Mayor Dave Hodgson**

**and**

**Patron Charles Whitbread**

**with a procession from the old school at 2pm to the Moot Hall Green.**

**Lunches, Cream Teas, Hog Roast, Fun fair rides, May pole dancing, Salvation Army Band, craft stalls, cake stall, plants, face painting, Cheer leaders, Steel Band, Penguin Books**

**Come and enjoy the May festivities!**

## **FRIENDS OF ELSTOW ABBEY VISIT TO SOUTHILL PARK**

**Tuesday 8 June 2010**

Charles Whitbread, Patron of Elstow Abbey, has kindly invited a group of 40 people from Elstow Abbey to visit his home Southill Park on Tuesday 8 June 2010. Charles will personally show the group round Southill Park, telling us about its history, and tea is provided afterwards. The group will meet at Elstow Abbey at 2pm and travel to Southill Park in private cars. The cost is only £10 per head, including the tour and tea, and all proceeds go towards refurbishing and maintaining Elstow Abbey.

We are very privileged to receive this personal invitation, as Southill Park is only opened for two weeks a year to a small number of local groups and charities.

"Southill Park has been the home of the Whitbread family for over 200 years. The house was bought in 1795 by Samuel Whitbread I from Viscount Torrington, whose unfortunate uncle, Vice Admiral the Hon. John Byng, was shot at Portsmouth in 1757 for an error of judgement whilst in command of the Fleet. The earliest known owner of Southill was Sir John Kelynge, "a violent Cavalier", who succeeded Hyde as Lord Chief Justice in 1663. His son sold the property to Admiral Sir George Byng, later Viscount Torrington.

Samuel Whitbread I died in 1796, one year after buying Southill, and his son, Samuel Whitbread II, a prominent Whig politician, employed Henry Holland to rebuild the existing house. Holland was the fashionable architect of the day. He reconstructed Carlton House for the Prince of Wales (later King George IV). Other examples of his work may be seen at Woburn, Ampthill, the Swan Hotel in Bedford and at Althorp House.

Today Southill Park stands very much as it did in 1806, the year of Holland's death. Much of the decoration is as Holland left it and most of the furniture was designed by him for the rooms in which it stands. There are also some fine English paintings in the house."

We are asked to guarantee a minimum group size of 40, and more than 20 people have already indicated their interest in attending.

This visit is mainly intended for the Friends of Elstow Abbey, but there may still be places available if anyone else would like to join this interesting trip, please contact **Sheila Batiuk on Tel: 01234 741112** or **Lynne Faulkner on 01234 3543914** - **email [lynne.faulkner@yahoo.com](mailto:lynne.faulkner@yahoo.com)** as soon as possible.

## DETAILS FROM THE REGISTERS

### MARCH 2010

Date	Communicants	Attendance	Collections
4th	15	15	12.00
7 <sup>th</sup>	32	74	201.01
11th	8	8	3.00
14 <sup>th</sup>	56	93	249.87
18th	8	8	4.40
21st	39	110	294.55
25th	8	8	12.00
28th	18	131	253.55
	<b><u>184</u></b>	<b><u>447</u></b>	<b><u>£1030.38</u></b>

### BAPTISMS

**March 28<sup>th</sup>** Giuseppe Michael Panarisi  
Nathaniel Terence Sean Ring  
Oliver George Yates

**April 11<sup>th</sup>** Joseph William Thomas Evans

### BURIALS

**March 10<sup>th</sup>** Edna Mavis Fraser (Ashes)

**July 26<sup>th</sup> 2009** Robert Charles Saunders (Ashes)

## **GENERAL ELECTION – MAY 6<sup>TH</sup> 2010**

**BY the time you read this the leader of the country may already have been selected but at the time of writing it is still anybody's race, especially after the interesting first televised Leaders' Debate. Whichever way you decide to vote, it's certainly true that election time throws up many important issues for people to think about.**

Ahead of the General Election Christian Leaders launched what they called a 'Conscience Manifesto' on Easter Sunday, urging Christians of all denominations to vote with their conscience, guided by their faith.

Thirty senior Christian leaders, including the former Archbishop of Canterbury Lord Carey, launched a Christian Manifesto, the 'Westminster 2010: Declaration of Christian Conscience', as a rallying call to UK Christian voters.

With four million regular church attenders in Britain, on average 6,000 per parliamentary constituency, the move has real potential to have a significant impact on who is elected, especially in marginal seats.

The document sets out a broad range of policies that unite churches in the UK, including support for marriage, freedom for those of faith to live their lives according to their beliefs and opposition to assisted suicide and euthanasia.

It also calls for Christians to support, protect, and be advocates for children born and unborn, and all those who are sick, disabled, addicted, elderly, poor, exploited, trafficked or exploited by unjust trade, aid or debt policies.

The timing of the launch of Westminster 2010, ahead of the call of the General election, was designed to send a clear message to all parliamentary candidates that Christians will be supporting those who will both promote policies that protect vulnerable people and also respect the right of Christians to hold, express and live according to Christian beliefs.

The call comes in the wake of an increase in reports of Christians facing discrimination in all walks of life, including the widely reported cases of discrimination against Christian workers Shirley Chaplin, Lillian Ladele and Caroline Petrie.

Earlier this year Christian leaders united to challenge the Equalities Bill, which would have made it illegal to insist that their employees, including the clergy, believed in God and the teachings of the Bible.

The Christian leaders planned to target Members of Parliament and candidates who are seeking election to pledge that they will 'respect, uphold and protect the right of Christians to hold and express Christian beliefs and act according to Christian conscience'.

The signatories of Westminster 2010 include the former Archbishop of Canterbury Lord Carey, former Bishop of Rochester Michael Nazir-Ali and Cardinal O'Brien, leader of the Catholic Church in Scotland.

They are joined by other leaders of major Christian denominations and church networks, Christian charities and principals of three leading UK Bible Colleges.

Food for thought indeed, whichever way you cast your vote!

## PHARISEES (& SADDUCEES) IN THE GOSPELS <sup>i</sup>

People are often not clear as to what the difference was between a Pharisee and a Sadducee. This is partly because they are confusingly lumped together, rather like Crosse & Blackwell.

The Pharisees, middle class and often wealthy, had become the more important as well as the larger of these two major factions in the Israel of Jesus' day (there were other minor ones, such as the Essenes who were committed to poverty) and they saw themselves as the spiritual keepers of Judaism. They believed in the oral transmission of the Torah, the Law as expressed by and through Moses in the first five books of the Bible, and as further interpreted down the centuries by the Prophets. They also believed that there was an afterlife, that God was a punitive God who punished the wicked, and that one day a Messiah would come and bring peace to the world. They were an influential group of people with responsibilities extending beyond the religious world deep into the social and commercial worlds.

The Sadducees were aristocrats and elitists who were the watchdogs for the priestly caste. They rejected the idea of an oral Law and insisted on a written Law and its literal interpretation. They did not believe in an afterlife for the simple reason it is not mentioned in the Torah (their sole point of reference). The main focus of their day-to-day attentions was the rituals associated with the Temple and its religious life. Their main ancillary function in the occupied country of Israel was the overseeing of the application of Roman rule. They were generally more hostile to Jesus.

In the end and well before Jesus' birth, the Pharisees won their power struggle with the Sadducees insofar as the interpretation and execution of the Mosaic Law were concerned. With their belief in an afterlife, the key doctrine of the Pharisees was the related hope of the advent of a Messiah, a hope which the Sadducees, confined in their thinking to just the Torah, did not share and a role ascribed to Jesus (see John 1:40-1) which He was repeatedly to deny.

What perhaps most confuses us is that both Pharisees and Sadducees served side by side in the Great Sanhedrin, a kind of Jewish Supreme Court in Jerusalem (there were other smaller ones around the country) consisting of 71 members, but needing a quorum of only 27, and whose main responsibility it was to interpret civil and religious laws.

To summarise things, the Pharisees, in contrast to the Sadducees, represented the views and hopes of the ordinary people. It may come as a surprise to you to hear that the Pharisees had the reputation of being extremely virtuous and sober, and of despising luxuries. It will, probably, come as a surprise to you to hear that the Pharisees loathed nothing more than hypocrisy.

Let us now look at how the Pharisees are treated in the gospels.

In chapter 9 of St John's gospel (the chapter which tells the story of the giving of sight to the unnamed man who was born blind – a truly miraculous happening on the level of the miracle of the resurrection) we read tellingly that the Pharisees were divided over Jesus. This is a far cry from, say, St Matthew's unadulterated hostility to them. Indeed, in the three synoptic gospels, that prejudice is almost universal and unequivocal. We do, though, read in Luke (13.31) that in fact the hostility was neither mutual nor general: *"The same day there came certain of the Pharisees, saying unto him [Jesus], Get thee out, and depart hence: for Herod will kill thee"*. And, if we look in John's gospel, we find an attitude which, through his treatment of Nicodemus, is surprisingly and openly equivocal. Is there more going on than meets the eye?

In the gospels, apart from Luke's named but otherwise anonymous Pharisee, Simon, who invited Jesus in to his house to dine with him (Luke 7:36-50), only one other Pharisee, Nicodemus, is actually named (Annas and Caiaphas were Sadducees) and then only by John.

Historically, Nicodemus was a real person and well repays closer attention. As a rich Pharisee he is on record, but not in the Bible, as being reprimanded by his peers for having been over-ostentatious in giving of his surplus wealth to the poor.

John presents him to us three times in his gospel.

First of all, he is the Pharisee who comes to talk to Jesus under the cover of darkness. His opening statement (3:2) is most revealing: "*Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God ...*". One point struck me so forcibly that I went to the Greek original text to make sure that the vernacular versions I was using had got it right. Nicodemus says "We know" and the Greek showed me that that is correct: "We know". This immediately suggests that, if Nicodemus came to see Jesus in the unlit blackness of the night, then it was not so much that he didn't want others to be aware of his visit as because he didn't want other Pharisees to know about it. What John is suggesting is that the Pharisees sensed what Jesus was, and that Nicodemus wasn't the only one who wanted to know more. And, as we shall see, Nicodemus was neither a coward in that he came by night, nor was he alone in his views.

Indeed, any suggestion that Nicodemus might lack courage is put firmly to one side by John's second reference to him at the end of chapter 7. It is a long passage which rarely features in the lectionary and not at all in the prayer book so that you may not be familiar with it. I will summarise: Jesus has declined to go to Jerusalem for the Passover ("*My time is not yet come*"), even though he did in fact go there in the end if relatively unobtrusively. The Temple authorities inevitably get to hear of this and, at their ensuing gathering, we have Nicodemus saying to what we may take to be the full Sanhedrin "*Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?*" eliciting the tartly hostile and evasive rejoinder "*Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet*" (7:51-2), a reminder that any Messiah should come from the "senior" province of Judaea. Whilst it is highly likely that a Pharisee of Nicodemus' stature would be listened to, it is unlikely that his would have been an isolated voice. However, isolated or not – and we simply don't know – it would have taken courage to confront the Sanhedrin.

The third occasion we hear of Nicodemus (19:38-40) is when John records him as contributing a large quantity of expensive myrrh and aloes after the crucifixion whilst Joseph of Arimathaea, mentioned in all four gospels, obtains a no doubt grateful Pilate's permission to donate a tomb to Jesus' family. Matthew is silent on the topic, Mark (16:1) says that the women brought "*sweet spices*" to the tomb and Luke (23:56) talks of "*spices and ointments*".

Why does John (19:39) make a point of having Nicodemus bring "*a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight*" to Joseph of Arimathaea before Jesus is buried. As I wrote a few lines above, is there is more going on than meets the eye?

By implication this makes one of the theologically most crucial statements about the divinity of Jesus. First of all, it seems virtually certain that this Joseph, "*being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews*" (John 19:38), was a fellow member of the Sanhedrin with Nicodemus, which reinforces what I said a moment ago, namely that Nicodemus wasn't the only member of that Court who was sympathetic to Jesus.

Secondly, one of the most pernicious and persistent of the heretical theories about Jesus has been that he chose to die, and thus committed suicide. Nicodemus' gift, alongside Joseph's initiative, is the strongest possible evidence in refutation of that theory. No Jew, if he

committed the anathema of suicide, could legally be buried and, most especially, his body could not be prepared for burial by using myrrh, the traditional unguent for the dead, often in conjunction with aloes (*“Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury”* – John 19:40). No member of the Sanhedrin, whether Sadducee or Pharisee, could conceivably have been party to such a blasphemy. And here we have two established members of that Court indirectly making the point that Jesus did not commit suicide.

© TJ Elliott MA (2010)

*(i This is one of a series of occasional articles relating to less well-known aspects of the Bible)*

\*\*\*\*\*

### **DON'T FORGET!**

### **Taize 2010**

We will travel by bus from St Albans leaving mid-afternoon on **Saturday 24th and returning around 6am on Monday 1st August**. The pilgrimage is open to young adults between the ages of **15 and 29**. *You are welcome to bring your children and there is a special families' programme and camping area*. Costs will be around £175 (please ask for costs for families) which includes travel and all food. Accommodation is in tents, and for those who do not have their own tent there are big dormitory tents available. Group leaders are The Revd Philippa Segrave-Pride ([philippa@segrave-pride.freeserve.co.uk](mailto:philippa@segrave-pride.freeserve.co.uk)) and The Revd John Kiddle ([john.kiddle@stalbans.anglican.org](mailto:john.kiddle@stalbans.anglican.org))

**For information, or to request a booking form, please contact:**

The Revd Ysmena Pentelow on 01727 818151 or [ysmenapentelow@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:ysmenapentelow@tiscali.co.uk)  
[www.taize.fr](http://www.taize.fr) (the Taize website); [www.gotaize.org.uk](http://www.gotaize.org.uk) (our website)

\*\*\*\*\*

---