

CHURCH SERVICES AT ST MARY'S AND ST JOHN'S

1st Sunday of the month: 9.30am Parish Communion at St Mary's

2nd Sunday of the month 9.30am Family Communion at St John's

3rd Sunday of the month: 9.30am Morning Worship at St Mary's

4th Sunday of the month: 9.30am Worship for All at St John's

5th Sundays: 10.30am Langtree Team Service in one of the Team churches.

Coffee and biscuits are served after services: in the Old Stables after services at St Mary's, and in church after services at St John's. All welcome!

For more details see the Langtree Team website at langtreechurches.org or the church website achurchnearyou.com/422.



St Mary the Virgin

December 2023
to February 2024

The Parish Magazine for Whitchurch and Whitchurch Hill



St John the Baptist



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Officers of the Parish

Team Rector:

Revd Canon Kevin Davies, The Rectory, Checkendon, Reading, RG8 0SR.
01491 680252. revkevdivdaves-langtree@yahoo.co.uk

Team Vicar:

Revd James Leach, St Mary's House, High Street, Whitchurch-on-Thames,
Reading RG8 7DF. 0118 976 5905. jamesleach.whitchurch@gmail.com

Churchwardens:

Kenneth Baker, 10 Laytom Rise, Tilehurst, Reading, RG31 6FQ.
0118 943 2778. baker_kenneth2@sky.com

Paul Witcher, Shepherds Close, Hardwick Road, Whitchurch-on-Thames,
Reading, RG8 7HN. 0118 984 4959. pvwitcher@aol.co.uk

Verger:

Kenneth Baker (contact details above).

Honorary Secretary and Electoral Roll Officer:

Rosemary Pearce, Little Eastfield, Eastfield Lane, Whitchurch-on-Thames,
Reading, RG8 7EJ. 07761 056125. rosemarypearcele@btinternet.com

Honorary Treasurer:

Peter Dragonetti, Covert Cottage, Hill Bottom, Whitchurch Hill, Reading,
RG8 7PT. 0118 984 4711. peter@dragonetti.co.uk

Assistant. Treasurer:

Kenneth Baker, 0118 943 2778

Organist and Choirmaster: rota

Contact for the Bell Ringers:

Kenneth Baker, 0118 943 2778

Magazine Editorial Team:

Wendy Ferguson, Rosemary Pearce, Angi Simpson.

Correspondence to wendyf21@icloud.com

Copy deadline for the March issue is Wednesday, 13th February

**Whitchurch Parish Magazine is issued four times a year,
in March, June, September and December, and can be viewed online in the
Church section of the village website, whitchurchonthames.com.**

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Letter from the Vicar

Dear Friends,

This year, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York have a special invitation for us as we enter the Advent and Christmas season. They say: "Imagine the wonder of the shepherds as they saw the night sky filled with angels singing God's praise.

And soon they were singing, too ... Singing is still at the heart of how many of us celebrate Christmas.

"We invite you this Christmas to follow the star, journey to the manger, join the song and come into the presence of Jesus Christ."

What a wonderful invitation! And we have so many chances to sing this year, whether in our churches or at a community event or even at home. There is something amazing and powerful about singing together with others, don't you think? Football fans know this well and every big sporting event these days seems to have a moment when Neil Diamond's *Sweet Caroline* fills the air, with everyone joining in for the chorus. I think it's one of the reasons why community choirs have become so popular in recent years, as people find, or find again, the joys of singing with others.

Some songs help us to shape our identity, both as individuals and as groups. Football clubs have their own songs and countries have their national anthems. For Christians, hymns and spiritual songs help us to remember who we are, and who God is. Many of them also link us to a bigger story, by telling us what God has done in the past and what he will do in the future. The hymns we sing during Advent not only remind us of the people who made way for Jesus's first coming, like John the Baptist, but they also look forward to Jesus's return. The carols we sing at Christmas focus on Jesus's birth, but many of them also go back to ancient prophecies of his coming and forward to his glory. So, in the last verse of *Once in Royal David's City* we look forward to seeing Jesus 'not in that poor lowly stable ... but in heaven, set at God's right hand on high.' It's a musical reminder that the Christmas story is part of a much bigger story that we can live in.

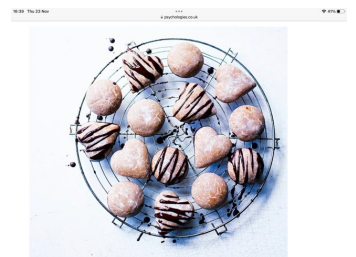
So, when we sing our Advent hymns and Christmas carols, we are, as the Archbishops say, joining a song that has been sung for centuries. It's the song of a God who 'loved the world so much that he sent his one and only

Lebkuchen

Lebkuchen is a German gingerbread that has become synonymous with Christmas baking. A cross between a biscuit and a cake and containing a delicious mixture of honey, almond, ginger and cocoa, it makes a wonderful edible gift - and they really do improve with age, so can be made a couple of weeks ahead of the holidays. Makes 24.

160g clear runny honey, 110g unsalted butter, 50g ground almonds, 260g plain flour, 1/2 tsp baking powder, 3/4 tsp bicarbonate of soda, 1 tbsp ground ginger, 2 tsps ground cinnamon, 1/2 tsp ground nutmeg, 1/4 tsp ground cloves, 2 tsps cocoa powder, 1/4 tsp salt. Decoration: 150g icing sugar, 1 medium egg white, 2-3 tsps cold water, 100g dark chocolate melted, 4cm heart cutter.

- Melt honey and butter in a small pan over a low heat. Stir occasionally until combined. Remove from heat and set aside to cool for 15 mins.
- Heat oven to 160 deg C/fan 140 deg. Line 2 large baking trays with silicone sheets or greaseproof paper.
- Place ground almonds in a large bowl and then sieve over remaining ingredients, mix thoroughly. Pour over cooled honey mixture and stir until it comes together to form a dough.
- Divide the dough in two. Set one half to side. Roll the other half into small equal sized balls and place on one of the lined baking sheets, spacing them evenly apart. Press down gently on each ball with palm of hand until the dough mixture is approx. 2cm thick.
- Roll out remaining dough to 2cm thick and, using a 4 cm heart cutter, cut into biscuits. Soften edges of hearts with your fingers. Place on the other baking sheet. Put both trays in oven for 8-10 minutes until just brown at edges. Leave to cool for 5 mins then transfer to wire racks to cool completely.
- Meanwhile mix icing sugar, egg white and water to make a thick runny icing. Place a baking sheet under each wire rack and thinly brush the lebkuchen with the icing using a pastry brush. Leave for 15 mins to set, then repeat with remaining icing. Leave to set.
- Dip half the lebkuchen into the melted chocolate to coat the base. Drizzle the other biscuits with a zigzag of chocolate.
- Enjoy!



The Old Stables Meeting Room

The Old Stables Meeting Room is a welcoming, carpeted space in the centre of Whitchurch-on-Thames available for hire by local groups and private event organisers. There are tables and chairs for up to 35 people and a well-equipped kitchen.

Hire fees start at £15 for 2 hours. For more information please contact

Geoff Weir at OldStablesBookings@btinternet.com

The Old Stables Meeting Room is owned by the Diocese of Oxford and managed by Whitchurch Parochial Church Council.

PURLEY BARN BRIDGE CLUB

The bridge club continues to thrive with its Tuesday evening competitive session on line and its social face-to-face session at the small barn (Goosecroft Lane, Purley on Thames, RG8 8DR) every Friday morning – play commencing at 9.50 a.m.

On September 29th the club held its ever popular autumn bridge drive. This attracted nearly 80 players and an enjoyable afternoon's bridge was had by all with a sumptuous tea and a host of raffle and other prizes available (one of which just happened to be won by your correspondent). A donation has been made by the club to Macmillan Cancer Support from the event proceeds.



Playing bridge on a social basis is a great way to make new friends and meet local people so why not give it a try and come along to the barn. No experience is necessary and informal coaching from club players is available if required. The first three sessions are free. For more information call Martin on 07746 680183 or visit our website:

<https://www.bridgewebs.com/purleybarnbridge/>

See you up at the Barn!

Son' as John's gospel says. It's also the song of the Son who will one day return as the earth and heavens are renewed and peace is eternally restored. It's a song of light and hope and joy in a world of darkness and despair. It's a song we can sing with millions around the world. It's a song for Christmas and for the whole of our lives.

Every blessing,
James

0118 976 5905

jamesleach.whitchurch@gmail.com

Advent Wreath Prayers

Prayer for lighting the First Candle – Hope

Loving God, as we light the first Advent candle of hope, we ask for your presence to fill our hearts and homes. May the hope of Christ's coming bring light into our darkness and renew our spirits. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Prayer for lighting the Second Candle – Peace

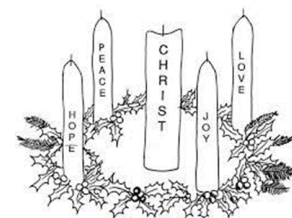
God of peace, as we light the second Advent candle of peace, may your peace fill our hearts and our world. Help us to be peacemakers in our relationships and communities. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Prayer for lighting the Third Candle – Joy

Gracious God, as we light the third Advent candle of joy, may the joy of your salvation fill us with gladness. Help us to share this joy with others, especially those in need. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Prayer for lighting the Fourth Candle – Love

Heavenly Father, as we light the fourth Advent candle of love, may your love inspire us to love one another as you have loved us. Let your love guide our actions and words. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.



DIARY DATES

DECEMBER

- Sun 3rd 9.30am **Advent Communion** at St Mary's
6pm The Journey **"From Darkness to Light"** at St John's.
- Tues 5th 10.30am-12 noon every week **Community Coffee Morning** in the Old Stables.
- Wed 6th 8-9pm weekly **Compline Prayer Group** on Zoom (see p. 14).
- Thurs 7th 7.30-9pm **WOTSING Choir** at St John's Church, Whitchurch Hill.
- Sun 10th 9.30am **Nativity Service** at St Mary's.
- Thurs 14th 10-11.30am **Ladies Bible Study** every 2nd and 4th Thursday.
2-30-4.30pm every 2nd Thursday **Afternoon Tea** at the Village Hall. All welcome, no need to book.
- Sun 17th 3pm **Service of Lessons & Carols** at St John's.
- Sun 24th 2.30 and 4.30pm **Christingle Services**
- Sun 31st 10.30am **Langtree Team Service** at St Leonard's, Woodcote.

JANUARY 2024

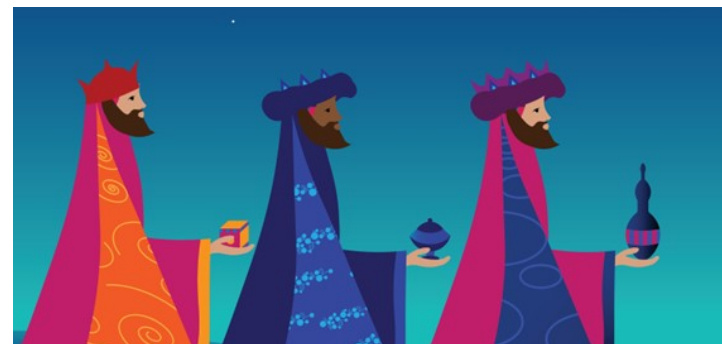
- Thurs 4th 7.30-9pm **WOTSING Choir** at St John's Church, Whitchurch Hill.
- Sun 7th 9.30am **Parish Communion** at St Mary's.
- Mon 8th 7.30pm **Parochial Church Council Meeting** in the Old Stables.
- Sun 14th 9.30am **Family Communion** at St John's.
- Sun 22nd 9.30am **Worship for All** at St John's.

FEBRUARY

- Sun 4th 9.30am **Parish Communion** at St Mary's.
- Sun 11th 9.30am **Family Communion** at St John's.
- Wed 14th 7.30pm **Ash Wednesday Team Communion Service** at Checkendon.
- Sun 18th 9.30am **Morning Worship** at St Mary's.
- Sun 25th 9.30am **Worship for All** at St John's.

See full list of church services in December on page 10.

Copy deadline for the March issue is Wednesday, 13th February.



Goring Chamber Choir presents:

GIFTS OF THE MAGI, a concert for Epiphany

When Christmas and New Year festivities are over it is a good time to 'find the star within our hearts', as Bob Chilcott says in his carol 'Epiphany'. Goring Chamber Choir will sing both familiar and some new carols reflecting on the bringing of gifts today. Atmospheric pieces by Canadian Stephanie Martin and Thomas Allain describe modern journeys 'to learn and to believe'. Steve Bowey will perform Gaston Litaize's organ piece 'Epiphanie' on the wonderfully restored organ, and there will be familiar carols for the audience to join in.

Music Director: Frances Brewitt-Taylor

Accompanist: Steve Bowey

Where: St Thomas' Church, Goring

When: Saturday, 6th January 2024 at 3pm

Tickets £15, free for under 18's
obtainable from: Inspiration, Goring,
from a choir member, or on the door.

<http://www.goringchamberchoir.org.uk/>

WOTsing Choir is the community choir for Whitchurch-on-Thames and Whitchurch Hill, which was formed in 2018. It is not a performing choir and members do not have to be able to read music, to take an audition or even to sing in tune! It is simply for people who enjoy singing. We meet once a month in St John's Church, Whitchurch Hill, but we are not in any sense a church choir. We sing songs from the shows, folk songs, pop songs, the occasional well-known hymn, but most important is that we enjoy singing, have fun and lots of laughter, and go home feeling happier than when we arrived!

Our current accompanist is Tim Taylor and we always meet on the first Thursday of the month from 7.30 to 9pm. For more information about the choir, please contact Geraldine on wotsing2018@gmail.com

Wednesday Evening Compline Prayer Group at 8pm GMT

In our Compline prayer we practise faithfully the presence of God. We pray gently, humbly and without giving way to anxiety. We share our prayers and also for the world as a source of divine pleasure. As our hearts and minds return to the word, we are focused upon the love of God. We learn and receive through the Holy Spirit the abundance of the Lord's grace. We are established internationally and ecumenically and it is a thrilling experience to flourish with Christians in other parts of the world as we embrace Jesus with tenderness and joy. Do join us if you can on ZOOM Meeting No 261 107 9079 at 7.55pm.

Mobile: 07557 383634

Email: peter@pcfconsultancy.com

Whitchurch Light Festival

On 3rd November, over 70 of us gathered at the Maze for the very first Whitchurch Light Festival with a Lantern Parade to the Old Stables for hot drinks, snacks and roasted marshmallows on the firepit. This was an event organised by the primary school PTA, and the parish church, and it achieved a community feel as all ages gathered to celebrate the turning of the seasons.



These will take place at the Old Stables, High Street, Whitchurch-on-Thames between 12.15 and 2pm on the following four Wednesdays: **February 21st & 28th and March 6th & 13th.**

Come and join us for a simple bread and soup lunch. Your donations will support Church funds and a local charity.

COMMUNITY COFFEE MORNING

Come and join us at the Old Stables on Tuesday, 12th December between 10.30am and 12 noon for our Coffee Morning Christmas Special with mulled wine & mince pies. All welcome!

The Friends of St Mary's and St John's

On Friday 20th October, The Friends organised a very successful 'Musical Evening' in St Mary's Church. We celebrated much local talent with a variety of performances from instrumentalists and singers who live in or near the village.

The large audience enjoyed some rock, from the AcoustNics, jazz from Leslie and Dave Maynerd and classical music as early as Monteverdi, and more modern popular choral items from two local choirs. Frances Brewitt-Taylor played 'On Ilkley Moor' on the organ as well as directing members of the Goring Chamber Choir. Sara Benbow sang a beautiful Mendelssohn trio with her sister and partner, as well as directing the Lower Basildon singers. It was wonderfully eclectic and there was something for everyone. A couple of professional performers, Tim Valentine the pianist, and Derry Pope the singer, also very kindly gave us a taste of their show repertoires. Tim played as the audience arrived and he played us out. Derry Pope performed a beautifully heart rending 'Somewhere' from West Side Story. On arrival, we socialised over a glass of wine whilst the musicians took their places. It proved to be a most enjoyable, happy and celebratory evening.

Susan Lee organised this wonderful line-up of performers, aided by Graeme Pearce. Rev. James Leach was the master of ceremonies. The trustees of The Friends would like to express their heartfelt thanks to everyone who contributed to and attended this excellent fund-raising event, held in our beautiful church. Finally, a message from Susan "If there are other instrumentalists or singers in the village who feel they might like to take part, should we do this again - please make yourselves known to me!".

On the following afternoon (Saturday 21st October), the Friends held their 7th AGM in The Old Stables. At this meeting, there were some changes to the trustee body. Gordon Painter retired as a trustee, having served for the maximum permitted three terms. Gordon was the last of the original trustees when the charity was founded in 2016, and he was our very able Treasurer up until April 2023. However, we welcomed two new trustees – Jill Bradon and Sarah Dragonetti – who were elected unanimously at this AGM. In summary, the trustees now are :- Paul Witcher (Chairman), Geoff Weir (Treasurer), Jill Bradon, Sarah Dragonetti, Rev James Leach (ex-officio), Ken Baker (PCC rep), Graeme Pearce (PCC rep).

Peace is far more than a truce: an absence of conflict, violence and war. Peace is the presence of human flourishing, of well being, of harmony, of lives well lived from childhood to old age. Shalom describes the world where God's will is done on earth as in heaven.

The whole world is searching for peace first and foremost in our hearts. Living in a world of conflict and deep questions is not easy. We all worry. Jesus promises that peace: reconciliation with God and reconciliation one with another; reconciliation for the whole world. Jesus calls us to be channels of that peace to each other and to the world.

ADVENT WREATH MAKING

Would you like to make your own Advent wreath, either to hang on your door or as a table centre piece?

Mon 4th December 2.30 - 4.15pm at WoT Village Hall or

Tues 5th December 7.30 - 9.30pm at Goring Heath Parish Hall.

Cost: £10 to make a wreath or centre piece. £5 if you bring your own ring or recycle a ring (spare oasis provided).

Included: florist ring, some foliage, candles, refreshments, ideas if required.

Bring your own: foliage, secateurs, ideas for your wreath, decorations, e.g. ribbons, pine cones, Christmas spirit to have some fun with friends.

To book a place email Debbie Leach (debs.leach@btinternet.com)

Please note that this is the last year that we will use traditional florist oasis; more sustainable materials will be used in the future.



500 people attend Vigil for Peace



A candlelit 'act of solidarity' brought Oxford city centre to a silent standstill on Sunday, 5th November as faith and civic leaders were joined by members of the public to call for peace in the Middle East.

Those gathered heard messages from Bishop Steven, Imam Monawar Hussain, founder of the Oxford Foundation, and Louise Gordon, vice president of

the Oxford Jewish Congregation, as well as prayers from representatives of Sikh, Hindu and Buddhist faiths.

In his blog Bishop Steven (<https://blogs.oxford.anglican.org/blessed-are-the-peacemakers/>) reminds us that Jesus draws us back to peace-making at the heart of our lives. We are called to pursue all that makes for peace. With Jesus' help we can navigate the issues that divide us and, instead, hold together.

We are called to live in peace and harmony with creation. The greed and ignorance of generations has dislocated humanity's relationship with nature and the climate. Shalom – peace and well being – is not just for humanity, but for the whole of creation. The responsibility for shalom in creation rests now in our hands.

We are called to seek peace in the villages, towns and cities where we live. There is the potential at present that terrible conflicts in distant places will fracture our own communities here in the Thames Valley. The rise in anti-semitism and hate crime against Muslims is deeply concerning. And we are called finally to seek peace of course in international relationships and healing from the memories of war. The work of reconciliation continues for generations after conflict.

Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God. Christ the Son of God who speaks these words is the peacemaker. Christ makes peace through his own blood shed on the cross. Christ opens the space for peace between the nations of the world, calling us into a single humanity Christ comes to us as the Prince of Peace.

Graeme Pearce presented a review of the potential future projects that the PCC (Parochial Church Council) are now considering, following the publication of the Quinquennial Report on the state of our two churches. There are urgent expensive repairs required to the fabric of the buildings, in particular the tower and spire of St. Mary's. The Friends' trustees hope to be able to contribute funds to support the PCC when requested and where appropriate, and within the terms of our constitution.

Finally, may I remind everyone about our leaflet that was circulated to all households in the previous edition of this Parish Magazine. This explains our aims and objectives, and encourages all members of our community to become members – our two historic churches and churchyards need your support now more than ever before!!

Sally Woolhouse, Secretary (non-trustee)
to The Friends of St Mary's & St John's



Sara Benbow with St Bartholomew's Choir and friends



Geoff Weir presents flowers to Sue Lee, the organiser



Church Services in December

- 3rd December at 9:30am | St Mary's | Advent Communion ***
10th December at 9:30am | St Mary's | Nativity Service
17th December at 3:00pm | St John's | Service of Lessons & Carols +
24th December at 2:30pm | St John's | Christingle
4:30pm | St Mary's | Christingle
9:00pm | St Mary's | Christmas Night Communion
25th December at 9:30am | St John's | Christmas Family Communion
31st December at 10:30pm | St Leonard's | Langtree Team Service
| Woodcote |

* followed by refreshments.

+ followed by mulled wine & mince pies

Growing Seed Trust Foundation

Running the Growing Seed charity, we develop community rugby football with underprivileged young boys and girls and, alongside this, operate organic farming God's way, with subsistent farmers. We also cultivate life-skills for future community leaders. The Growing Seed organization is situated at Ewulu on 21 hectares of land in Delta State, Nigeria. The vision for our charity is to dream the impossible, (with God's help we can). Our stretch goals are to build an international community rugby sports facility and a training centre for organic farming. We require resources, patience, persistence and the prayer of faith. The purpose of the tournament is to bring to the attention of the communities the benefits of organic farming. We have invited the Association of Organic Agricultural Practitioners of Nigeria (NOAN) who will share their vision for the future, and the day will be live-streamed.

On Sunday 10th December 2023, the Growing Seed Foundation is holding its annual Organic Farming Awareness Day and Rugby Tournament at Umomi Primary School, Ewulu Village, Aniocha South, starting at 10am, for boys and girls with competing village school teams from under 11s to 16s with sponsored kit, all competing for the Peter Ferguson Cup and medals.

Growing Seed will register prospective young farmers and their parents on the day in cluster groups. We are planning to offer parcels of land for developing organic farming techniques and training on an additional 5,000 hectare option for our expanding organic community enterprise.

Growing Seed wishes to convey the message that growing staple organic food for the community provides for a nutritious and healthy lifestyle. There is also the potential to export exotic organic products, such as ginger, turmeric and garlic. This will operate in an organic certification scheme using the Soil Association standards. This offers an opportunity for the underprivileged community to enhance their commercial enterprise by becoming profitable organic farmers. Combined with the fun of disciplined rugby football, youngsters enjoy how to cultivate a healthy body and sound mind, learning to be transformational team leaders.

Can you pray for us? Or speak to Peter Ferguson, Chairman of Growing Seed (tel 07557 383634). Thank you.

