



March – June 2026

St Mary the Virgin

The Parish Magazine For Whitchurch and Whitchurch Hill

St John the Baptist



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Community Coffee Morning

Come and join us every Tuesday morning in the Old Stables, Whitchurch on Thames from 10.30am until 12.00 noon for a natter and coffee or tea with biscuits. Contact sally.woolhouse@gmail.com



Advertising in this magazine

The parish magazine is delivered to all homes in Whitchurch on Thames and Whitchurch Hill three times a year. The yearly rate is £50 for half a page £40 for a third and £30 for a quarter. Contact rosemarypearcele@btinternet.com



Letter from the Vicar

Dear Friends,

I wonder what you make of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Depending on who you listen to it could be humankind's saviour, or its destroyer, or something in between.

Whatever your own view, it certainly seems impossible to ignore. So, how might we think about it from a Christian point of view? The Bishop of Oxford, Steven Croft, is the Church of England's lead bishop on AI and technology, and he has written and spoken frequently about AI and its place in our society. As an experiment I asked Copilot, Microsoft's AI chatbot, to summarise in 250 words what Bishop Steven has written about AI since 2020 and here is the result:

“Since 2020, Bishop Steven Croft has written frequently about artificial intelligence as a defining moral and social issue of our age. His reflections emphasise that AI is already deeply embedded in everyday life, shaping how people access information, make choices, and understand the world. He urges greater public awareness of how algorithms influence news, advertising, entertainment, and even political opinion, often without individuals realising it.

He writes with genuine hope about AI's potential for good. His posts highlight advances in medicine, education, accessibility, and communication, and he sees real opportunities for healing, creativity, and human flourishing when technology is used wisely. He encourages society to approach AI not with fear but with thoughtful discernment and gratitude for its benefits.

At the same time, he warns of significant risks. Bishop Steven is concerned about bias in automated systems, the erosion of privacy, the spread of misinformation, and the concentration of power in a small number of global companies. He is particularly alert to the impact of AI on democracy, public trust, and the wellbeing of children and

young people navigating digital environments shaped by opaque algorithms.

A consistent theological thread runs through his writing: every person is made in the image of God. For him, this means technology must always serve human dignity, agency, and relationship. AI must never diminish what makes us human—our creativity, compassion, moral responsibility, and capacity for community.

He calls for strong regulation, ethical oversight, and international cooperation, and he sees a vital role for the Church in advocating for the vulnerable and helping society navigate rapid technological change with wisdom and hope.”

I pass this on, not just because you might find it interesting, but because I think it shows how the Christian faith, ancient though it may be, remains relevant to the issues of today and contains deep wisdom. In particular, it has something vital to say about what it means to be human.

The summary above refers to humans being made in the image of God and all that this entails. We might add that we have, in Jesus, the supreme example of what it looks like to live a truly human life. And as we look ahead to celebrating his resurrection at Easter, we are reminded that a truly human life, lived in connection with God, is not ended by death, but is eternal.

Every blessing, James

P.S.You can find Bishop Steven’s blog at <https://blogs.oxford.anglican.org/>

Electoral Roll : If you are over the age of 18 and would like to join the Church’s Electoral Roll and take part in discussion and decision making at the Annual Parochial Church Meeting or PCC (Parochial Church Council) please request a form from the Electoral Roll Officer :rosemarypearcele@btinternet.com or from the Vicar

DIARY DATES

The regular service schedule is set out on the back cover.

St Mary's Youth Club : *Fridays in the Old Stables during term time*

Year 6: 6.00-7.00pm, Years 7 and 8 7.00-8.00pm, Years 9&10 8.00-9.00pm

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| MARCH | |
| <i>Tues 3rd</i> | Community Coffee Morning 10.30-12noon every week <i>Old Stables</i> |
| <i>Wed 4th</i> | Tots on the Thames 10.00 – 11.30 am in Old Stables, weekly during term time |
| | Compline Prayer Group 8.00- 9.00 weekly on Zoom, Meeting number 86972849715 passcode 259076 |
| <i>Thurs 5th</i> | WOTSING Choir 7.30 – 9.00pmat St John's monthly first Thursday |
| <i>Tues 10th</i> | Pray for the World 9.10-9.30am, normally second Tuesday in the Old Stables |
| <i>Sun 15th</i> | Outdoor Church , every third Sunday 4.00pm St John's followed by refreshments in Goring Heath Hall see p14 |
| <i>Tues 17th</i> | Lent Lunch 12.15- 2.30 in the Old Stables |
| <i>Mon 23rd</i> | PCC 7.30pm Old Stables |
| <i>Tues 31st</i> | Whitchurch United Charities closing date for applications for educational grants for under 25s. Contact Sarah Dixon 0118 984 4262 or Whitchurchunitedcharities@gmail.com |
| APRIL | |
| <i>Sat 4th</i> | Friends Coffee at Art Café 10.30-12.30 in the Old Stables |
| MAY | |
| <i>Sun 17th</i> | Annual Parochial Church Meeting in the Old Stables following the morning service |
| JUNE | |
| <i>Sat 1st</i> | Friends Coffee at Art Café 10.30—12.30 in the Old Stables |

Deadline for copy for the July issue is Wednesday 10th June 2026

Special Services During Lent and Easter

| | | | |
|------------------------|---------|--------------------------|--|
| 15 th March | 9.30 am | St Mary's | All Age Mothering Sunday Service |
| 2 nd April | 7.30pm | St Leonard's Woodcote | Langtree Team Maundy Thursday Service |
| 3 rd April | 2.00pm | St Mary's | Good Friday Service |
| 5 th April | 9.30am | St Mary's | Easter Sunday All Age Communion |

N.B. These dates and times are correct at time of going to print but are subject to change. For up to date service information see our website at <https://www.achurchnearyou.com/church/422/>. For a weekly update on what's going on at the church, sign up for the Vicar's email – contact Rev'd James Leach at jamesleach.whitchurch@gmail.com

LENT LUNCH 17th MARCH 12.15 - 2.15 pm

Please join us for a simple bread and soup lunch at the Old Stables, Whitchurch on Thames



Your donations will support **Teach us Too** and local church funds



<https://www.teachustoo.org.uk>
Reg Charity number: 1184480



SAVE OUR SPIRE!

ST MARY'S CHURCH, WHITCHURCH-ON-THAMES

The Save Our Spire Fundraising team are pleased to report continued good progress. A big thank you to all those who have given support and donations to date – these are very much appreciated and have resulted in £126,000 in available funds so far.



Courtesy Debbie Leach

This total includes monies previously put aside for the project, a donation from the Friends of St Mary's and St John's, a grant from Whitchurch Parish Council and many generous individual donations, as well as proceeds from a range of local fundraising events including Jazz in the Garden, James' sponsored run in the Oxford Half-Marathon, The Community Carol

Concert, Sale of Christmas Cards, Collection on Whitchurch Toll bridge (alongside Knit & Stitch's decoration of the bridge) and a Pub Quiz at the Sun Inn, Whitchurch Hill. Thank you to all for your generosity and support.

The outcome of a substantial grant application for the project from the National Lottery Heritage Fund is expected to be known imminently, and three other grant applications are also in process. If these grant applications are successful, the project should then proceed to the next stage, with preliminary work on site hopefully starting after Easter.

We need to continue our fundraising efforts so please watch out for further news and updates on events which will be published in the next edition of this magazine and also on the Whitchurch village website (www.whitchurchonthames.com).

Scan to Donate

Thanking you for your continued support for this once in a lifetime community and heritage project in our village.



From the Save Our Spire Fundraising Team.

James Leach – Vicar jamesleach.whitchurch@gmail.com

Graeme Pearce – Buildings Sub-Committee Whitchurch PCC –
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Ken Baker – Churchwarden and Assistant Treasurer Whitchurch PCC
baker_kenneth2@sky.com

Rob Plumb – Committee Member rob.plumb@icloud.com

Sue Cockeram -Committee Member susancockeram@hotmail.com



**Thames Vale Singers
Concert**

Saturday, 28 March 2026
3.00pm St Mary's Church, Purley
Doors open 2.30pm

**SPRING
REFLECTIONS**

Musical Director - Katherine Walkem
Accompanist - Peter Bernard

Tickets: £10.00, under 16s: £6.00 (includes refreshments)
On sale: Tuesday 3 March 2026
From: 0118 942 4372 or
email: tickets@thamesvalesingers.org.uk
or Online:
www.ticketsource.co.uk/thames-vale-singers
(booking fee £0.50)

Profits will be donated to Purley Park Trust
www.thamesvalesingers.org.uk


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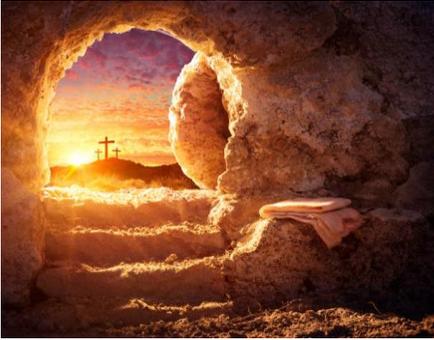
The Easter Story

At the festival Pilate, (the Roman Governor in Jerusalem) used to release a prisoner for the people, .. He asked them, “Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” ... But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. Pilate spoke to them again, “Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?” They shouted back, “Crucify him!” So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them, and after flogging Jesus he handed him over to be crucified.....

The (soldiers)brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. And they crucified him and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take....

It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, “The King of the Jews.” And with him they crucified two rebels, one on his right and one on his left...At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. Then Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion who stood facing him saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was God’s Son!”

When evening had come, and since it was the day....before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, ... went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. When Pilate learned from the centurion that he was dead he granted the body to Joseph. Then Joseph bought a linen cloth and, taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary saw where the body was laid.



When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the

stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” Mark Ch 15 &16 shortened

Goring Chamber Choir Celebrates 75th Anniversary at Douai Abbey on Saturday 16th May at 7.30pm

Including Bach’s Magnificat, the Durante Magnificat, contrasting unaccompanied motets by Bruckner, Britten, Timothy Blinks, Frank Ferko, John Tavener, and Pierre Villette. The choir will be accompanied by Oxford’s professional baroque orchestra Charivari Agréable, directed by Kah-Ming Ng, and joined by four highly accomplished young soloists.

Tickets are £20, available from tickets@goringchamberchoir.org.uk, Inspiration (Goring), Garlands Organic (Pangbourne) or from any choir member.



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

The Friends are an independent charity and welcome members from all faiths and none. We aim to bring together the local community in support of the preservation and improvement of our two churches and churchyards.

Those visiting St John's Churchyard may have noticed the recent work done on the trees that are on the northern boundary. Four Blue Atlas cedars and the Bishops Pine have been trimmed, and also a low hanging horizontal ash branch has been removed. This has opened up the church yard on the northern aspect and made it less likely for branches to fall and cause damage in high winds or storms. Also, the yew trees on the south side of the church have been trimmed and re-wired, to restore their columnar shapes. Both of these projects have been carried out by local professional contractors for the PCC, paid for by The Friends at a cost of just over £3000.

Work Parties

Our regular churchyard working parties at St John's take place on the last Wednesday of the month, starting at 10am. Work parties at St Mary's are on a more ad hoc basis as the churchyard is well tended at the moment. Thank you to all those that make a regular appearance as many hands really do make light work.

If you fancy joining one of these sessions, please get in touch with Sally Woolhouse whitchurchfriends@gmail.com. A welcome cup of coffee is always provided at half time.

Save our Spire!

The Save our Spire funding continues, and the PCC are currently waiting to hear if their application for National Lottery Funding has been agreed. Other grants have also been applied for.

The Friends have currently set £20,000 aside towards the project. If you are interested in finding out more, please contact graemekpearce@btinternet.com.

Art Café

Our most recent Art Café was held on February 7th and was most successful, raising £181.00 profit for The Friends. Thank you to everyone that came and supported the event, whether it was by baking a cake, providing a raffle prize, or by joining us on the morning for coffee and a catch up. It was great to see so many people on the day.

Future Events

Granny's Attic is once again planned for the **Whitchurch Hill Fete on May 23rd**. If you are currently having a bit of a clear out, please remember The Friends for any articles that are small enough to carry away on the day: such as unwanted gifts, tools, knick-knacks, kitchen implements, plant pots, small items of china, accessories, vases etc. We do not take clothing or books. Please contact me via the website address below if you would like me to come and collect and store any donated items.

Membership

We are always keen to welcome new Friends. For more information on how to join please go to the Whitchurch on Thames village website at <https://whitchurchonthames.com>

and follow the link for the Church, or ask me, or Sally Woolhouse.

Sarah Dragonetti,
Chair of the Friends
whitchurchfriends@gmail.com

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Outdoor Church

Outdoor church is now in its second year and we have had many lovely get togethers in that time. Outdoor church provides an opportunity for anyone in the community to come together in an informal way for a moment of reflection and faith in the beautiful place where we live. A meal is also provided afterwards allowing time for conversation, sharing stories and meeting new people.



A couple of quotes from those who attend.

“I get to see friends, have fun and learn about Jesus”

“We enjoy it as a chance to be together with the wider community and have a moment to think about faith that fits with family life and is fun and accessible for all. Plus the kids get dinner which is always a winner!”

Every third Sunday 4.00pm at St John’s



Pray for the World

Do you feel in despair and helpless about the state of the world?

Come and join us to hold the needs of the world in a short period of reflection.

Monthly at Old Stables 9.10-9.30am 10th March, 14th April, 12th May and 9th June



Bishop Steven announces his retirement

The Bishop of Oxford, the Rt Revd Dr Steven Croft, has announced he will retire next July. After 10 years as diocesan bishop for the Diocese of Oxford, Bishop Steven will lay down his crozier at a service at Christ Church Cathedral on 31st May. He will also then step down from his place in the House of Lords.

Reflecting on 17 years as a Bishop, seven in Sheffield and latterly in Oxford, Bishop Steven said: “It has been and remains an immense joy and privilege to serve as Bishop of Oxford and I am deeply thankful for God’s grace in so many different people and communities across the diocese.” Bishop Steven became a member of the House of Lords in October 2013 and a member of the Select Committee on Artificial Intelligence in 2017.

A founding board member for the UK Government’s [Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation](#), he writes extensively on issues of [online safety and digital ethics](#). Bishop Steven also speaks passionately on the need to make gig economy a fairer, safer environment, particularly for the sake of today's young adults.

A leading advocate of fossil fuel divestment within the national Church, in April 2021 Bishop Steven was among 13 peers [appointed to the Lords Select Committee for the environment and climate change](#). He has previously called for "nothing less than an ecological conversion of every person and every part of society".

In 2022, Bishop Steven published [Together in Love and Faith](#), in doing so he became the most senior figure in the Church of England to support same-sex marriage.

For more of his writings on AI, deepfake, leadership, discipleship and the environment see <https://bishopstevencroft.substack.com>

100 Years Ago

The following item by the Rev'd E.P. Baverstock appeared in the February 1926 Whitchurch Parish Magazine. It may have been 100 years ago, but it will sound very familiar to anyone who has taken part in a churchyard working party!

THE CHURCHYARDS.

An old friend has started the Churchyard Fund for the present year, and we shall hope that when spring comes that other subscriptions will be flowing in. There has been considerable work in St. Mary's Churchyard during the winter and on the whole the alterations have met with approval. Some of the trees were indeed beautiful in themselves but had grown too large for the position they occupied. Other alterations were made not without thought and care for God's Acre. With limited funds placed at our disposal it is impossible to keep the Churchyard as we would wish unless we help the caretaker to get over the ground more easily. Before the winter is over we hope to do something with the trees at St. John's Churchyard, some of which are being spoiled through close contact with others.

I desire to thank Mrs. Foster and others for the gift of bulbs and plants, and I have the promise of one or voluntary helpers who will assist in looking after the flower beds.

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 organizers. 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.

The Word of God.

Thoughts from our Team Rector the Rev Canon Kevin Davies

Sales of Bibles are up in the UK. To be precise, sales of Bibles in the UK are up 134% since 2019.

A generation of new, younger readers, most from a “non-church” background, are turning to Scripture in a way not seen for a generation.

I ought to be curious, but I am just happy, for I know what these (mostly Gen-Z) young adults are discovering.

As one who was given a bible at my (infant) baptism, and who then struggled with it as a junior aged child (it was an “authorized Bible”, and the dense, strange English was mysterious and puzzling), when I read the New International version as a teenager the world exploded. It seemed that God was talking directly to me. Jesus leapt from the pages of the New Testament into my life, and the formerly incomprehensible narrative of the Old Testament became a library of wonder, as the story of God’s people filled page after page. The wisdom literature, the Psalms, the Prophets, all crammed onto the backstage behind the action pictures of the gospels.

If you are among those who feel you ought to know the Bible better than you do, here’s a few short tips to help you read it.

(1) Get a good translation. The New International version, or the New Revised Standard version are my recommendations. (If you are interested in languages, the original texts of the Bible are Hebrew, a variant of Greek, and some Aramaic. There is no obligation to learn these!)

(2) Don’t start at the start. The Bible is a “book of books” written by many people over almost a thousand years. It is OK to “choose a book” and start there. My recommendation would be to start with a shorter book, such as one of the Gospels, or one of the “Histories” such as 1 Kings.

(3) Little and often. Making the time each day is the way to appreciate what you are doing. The Bible is a big work, and even to read it through in a year is a serious undertaking. Eat the elephant one bite (book) at a time.

(4) Read more slowly than you normally do. The object is not to “finish” the book, the page, the chapter, but to be open to what God has to say. Allow yourself to be properly “present” as you read, and you’ll be better prepared to notice whatever word, line, encounter, truth that is there.

(5) It is OK to read the Bible by yourself. Some, equally, enjoy meeting as a group to explore God’s word. This can be fun, too, as other people can be relied upon to offer a different angle, and this helps our own understanding.

The year 2026 marks the 500th anniversary of William Tyndale’s translation of the New Testament into English. This marked a watershed moment for Christianity in England as it meant that for the first time the Scriptures were available to all. Even those who were illiterate could nevertheless hear the good news of God read in their mother tongue. Tyndale’s principle was that God’s word was for everyone. This cost him his life, as at the time it was considered treasonable to tamper with the received (Latin) text.

But his legacy to us is the half a millennium of religious freedom we have enjoyed, being now at liberty to receive God’s word for ourselves, and to make our own minds up about it. Please, don’t take my word for it – check it out for yourself.



Revd Kevin.

Officers of the Parish

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Organist and Choirmaster: rota

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Kenneth Baker, 0118 943 2778

Magazine Editorial Team: Wendy Ferguson, Rosemary Pearce, Angi Simpson. Correspondence to rosemarypearcele@btinternet.com

Copy deadline for the July issue is Wednesday 10th June 2026.

Registered Charity Number 1213356.

CHURCH SERVICES at ST MARY'S and ST JOHN'S

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

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

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

4.00pm Outdoor Church at St John's

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

5th Sundays: 10.30 am 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 churchnearyou.com/42

Registered Charity Number
1213356



If you would like to give to the work of the church locally you can do so using this QR code.

You can also make a lasting gift by including a legacy in your will. For more information contact Ken Baker baker_kenneth2@sky.com

The magazine can be viewed online in the Church section of the village website, whitchurchonthames.com.