



Notes from the Riverbank

The newsletter for St Thomas of Canterbury Church in Goring,
St Mary's Church in Streatley and St Andrew's Church in South Stoke

December 2014 – 14th edition

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● Welcome to the fourteenth edition of "Notes from the Riverbank."

All contributions should be sent to Toria, the editor, by the 17th of each month at the usual email address webcontent.thomandmary@gmail.com. The on-line versions of the calendars are maintained by Glenn Cooke using the same email address. Bookings for the church or Canterbury Room should be made by contacting the UB Parish Secretary Jenny Hall at jandjh2@btinternet.com. We aim to produce the on-line and printed versions of each issue by the 25th of each month.

● Pastoral letter



You know it is getting near to Christmas when *I'm dreaming of a white Christmas* sung by Bing Crosby, hits the airwaves. I have not heard it yet this year, but I have heard *The Christmas Song* in different renderings several times. Both give a New England version of Christmas. It is a bit different in Texas. Snow, snow bells, sleighs, folks dressed up as Eskimos, Jack Frost and carols, Yuletide not Christmas. If ever there was a Christ less Christmas, these two "schmaltzy" renderings express it perfectly. How different from the reality of the young couple travelling on a donkey, heading to Bethlehem, hoping to get there before the baby was born.

The historian Luke gives clear, biographical details. WHEN, in the reign of Caesar Augustus because a census was being taken; WHERE, in the town of Bethlehem; WHY, because Joseph was of David's line and Mary was expecting a child (the Messiah was from David's line); WHO, a Saviour who is Christ the Lord; HOW, born in a stable, wrapped in cloths, laying in a manger. These are still the basic rules of reporting followed in Fleet Street. The Apostle Paul states it simply "In the fullness of time God sent forth his Son, born of a woman... to redeem those under sentence for having broken God's laws, so that they might receive the full rights of His sons and daughters". This is the message which we boldly declare in all the well-loved carols. It has made a difference to millions upon millions of people who have accepted Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

A noticeboard confidently declared "God changes people and people change things". So many of the social reforms, the abolition of slavery, factory acts, hospitals, education, credit unions, prison reform and democracy itself had their origins in Christian people concerned to make a difference. Despite all this, an open air

speaker at Hyde Park Corner was challenged by a tramp with the interjection "There's been Christianity in the world for two thousand years and look at the state of the world!" The speaker immediately replied "There's been water in the world for two million years and look at the state of your neck". In other words, the existence of something and its use are two different things.

Christmas is time to give thanks to God and make room for Jesus in our hearts and lives. In the end that is the point of all the festivities. A jigsaw with the centre pieces missing does not make sense; likewise a Christmas with Jesus banished to the circumference, or altogether, falls under the same condemnation.

Let us then make this Christmas a truly blessed and happy Christmas with Jesus central and everything else in its right place.



Peter Downham

● Thank you



THANK YOU to the whole benefice for all the kind and thoughtful words, cards and beautiful flowers I have received, as together we reached the tenth anniversary of my ordination. Without knowing then what a privilege and joy it would be, I promised, with God's help, to serve you all to the best of my ability. I recommit to continue to serve the benefice, albeit with just a few hours less, as God leads me. May God continue to bless us all as together we seek to extend his love in this place.



Liz D

● St Mary's charitable giving



Our choice of home charity this year is the Church Urban Fund, which aims to help people in deprived areas of the UK. More information about the work of the fund can be found at <http://www.cuf.org.uk/>. A total of £151.25 was raised through the sale of cakes and produce after services at St Mary's in September, and has been donated to the fund.



Ann Hart

● Retiring collection at St Thomas': The Children's Society



The retiring collection following the Crib Service at St Thomas' at 3pm on 24th December will go to support the Children's Society which works directly with over 50,000 children in the UK. There are many homeless and street children, disabled, young carers, children in trouble with the law and refugees who need help and support. The outreach programme's work is to try to change the world in which these children live, right injustices and provide a safe environment. The Church of England Children's Society works directly with these vulnerable young people. Please support the efforts which make a difference to the young and marginalised trying to cope in difficult circumstances in the UK.

● UB Christingle Service

 For the first time, we will be holding a United Benefice Christingle Service at Candlemas (or as near Candlemas as we can fit) on Sunday 8th February in St Mary's. As this service celebrates Jesus as *The Light of the World* this seems an appropriate time to celebrate Candlemas and light our Christingles. The plan is for everyone to meet in The Morrell Room at 3:15pm for refreshments and Christingle-making. We will then move to the church at 4pm for a short service.

Whilst in the Morrell Room there will be an opportunity for families to chat with our vicar, Paul. During the service there will be a collection in aid of the Children's Society. Everyone will be most welcome. Please do join us on what should be a very special occasion.

 Alison Gray (Churchwarden, St Mary's)

● Noisy Nativity



Come dressed as your favourite nativity character and join the angels, shepherds and wise men on their journey to Bethlehem to visit Mary, Joseph and the Baby Jesus.

Noisy Nativity will take place at 3pm on Christmas Eve at St Mary's Church. Some costumes will be available in church. There will be a retiring collection in aid of the Children's Society.

Everyone welcome!

● Goring Chamber Choir Christmas Concert: *In Dulci Jubilo*

 The Goring Chamber Choir Christmas concert entitled *In Dulci Jubilo* will take place on Sunday 14th December at 3pm in St Thomas' Church, Goring.

The concert will be a popular and festive programme of favourite carols for choir and audience including *In dulci jubilo*, Rutter's *Nativity Carol*, Darke's setting of *In the bleak midwinter*, *Three kings from Persian lands afar*, and well-known traditional carols such as *The angel Gabriel*, *Jingle bells*, *We wish you a merry Christmas*, *Silent night* and many more. The accompanist is Jonathan Holl, a well-recognised organ recitalist in the area.

Ticket prices are £12 (full), £10 (concessions) and £5 (students) and are on sale at Inspirations in Goring, from Choir members, and on the door (subject to availability). Refreshments will be sold at the interval. Proceeds will be in support of the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.

● Ride and Stride 2014



This year Henry and Elizabeth Parkinson cycled round 27 churches – with a stop at Waitrose in Henley on the way – and raised a total of £530. This is nearly three times the average amount raised per participant in 2013 so well done!

Half the money raised goes to Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust and half comes to St Thomas' so very many thanks to Henry and Elizabeth and to all those who sponsored them. <http://www.ohct.org.uk/>



Brenda Kerr Muir

● Staged Messiah



St Mary's, Streatley were fortunate enough to have the Merry Opera Company visit with the Staged Messiah on Sunday 16th October.



Three sopranos, two altos, three tenors and three basses performed the complete Handel's Messiah with magnificent virtuosity and at the same time wove it into a play that was a meaningful story for modern times. We were taken to the depths of despair at earthly sorrows and the presence of death and then raised back up into joy. If you ever get a chance to see it for yourself I think the entire audience who were there would advise you most strongly to go. It was quite incredible and fully deserved the standing ovation at the end. Magnificent.



Stella, photos from Rebecca Russell

● St Mary's Christmas appeal for Wallingford Food Bank



There will be a box at the back of the church during Advent to receive your gifts of Christmas treats such as crackers, chocolates and special biscuits for families who are supported by Wallingford Food Bank throughout the year.



Tina Farr and Ann Hart

● Advent Carol Service at St Mary's



After the very moving Advent Carol Service last year we will be holding a similar UB service of readings and music at St Mary's on Sunday 30th November at 4.00pm. Entitled *The King and His Kingdom* it will contain all the favourite Advent hymns for the congregation, together with items from the joint choirs (with St. Thomas's trebles) including choruses from Handel's Messiah and anthems by John Joubert and Michael Wise.



Michael Howell

● Faure's Requiem



Over 50 singers from St Mary's, St Thomas' and other local choirs sang Faure's *Requiem* as part of our UB All Souls' Service held at St Thomas' Church on Sunday 2nd November.



Our large United Benefice choir are now working towards our Advent Carol Service (4pm Sunday 30th November at St Mary's) and our Christmas Carol Services (4pm Sunday 21st December at St Thomas' and 7pm at St Mary's).



Elizabeth Parkinson, photo from Robin Middleton

● UB Songs of Praise: Playing our part against Poverty

On Sunday 30th November – St Andrew's Day – there will be a UB service of Songs of Praise at St Andrew's, South Stoke, with a guest speaker Ben Niblett, the campaign director for Tearfund.

tearfund Tearfund is a leading British Relief Agency and a member of the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) working with other leading relief agencies in the aftermath of major disasters across the world. Ben is currently working on a new campaign about transforming the economy to make the world fair and sustainable.

● Children in need



On Friday 14th November at St Thomas' we had a choir practice with a difference. It was *Children in Need* night so to raise money for the charity, the braver (or more foolish?) choir members came dressed in onesies! Actually, it turned out to be a very good idea as the heating in Church had broken down and the onesies proved to be beautifully warm.

Thank you to everyone who supported the event by wearing unusual or spotty clothes, made cakes, or who gave donations. We were able to send £50 on behalf of the choir to Children in Need.



Elizabeth Parkinson, photo from Robin Middleton

● Retiring collection: Open Doors



Open Doors originated with the journeys made by Brother Andrew behind the Iron Curtain in the Soviet era in his battered Beetle smuggling Bibles to secret Christian believers. It was dangerous and illegal work but Open Doors has never been afraid to take risks for suffering Christians in dangerous places of persecution or violence and war like North Korea, Communist China, and Iraq, Iran Syria and Nigeria. The need today is greater than ever and the work has expanded enormously to include the provision of shelter, aid, trauma counselling, lobbying as well as the older core activities of Bible provision and support for those in prison. It is the perfect charity to support generously on Christmas Day as we celebrate with them, but without the persecution and violence which will mar this day for so many of them. Please give generously a little of what He has given us.



Garry Alder

● Wintershall Nativity



When performed at Wintershall in Surrey, as it has been for the past 22 years, this is an excellent way of celebrating Christmas by attending the Wintershall Nativity play. It takes place in and outside the Barn Theatre, Holly Barn complete with shepherds and sheep, donkeys and the three wise men on horseback! It depicts a Christian view of Christmas in both an exciting and original way. Go warmly dressed with boots/appropriate footwear. The 'inn' opens for tea, coffee and mince pies about an hour before each 90-minute performance.

Performances at Wintershall:

18th and 19th December 2014 at 4.45 pm and 7.30 pm each day

20th and 21st December 2014 at 2.30 pm and 5.30 pm each day

Also in Central London on 17th December.

See <http://www.wintershall-estate.com/events/>