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READ ALL ABOUT IT



Several years ago, the Peterborough Column of the Daily Telegraph delightedly reported on a little sign that someone had spotted over a church door in rural Cheshire.

It read:

‘This is the house of God. This is the gate of heaven. (This door is locked in winter months.)’

Despite everything, hopefully this Christmas our doors will NOT be locked, but instead wide open. Let’s welcome everyone who wants to join our celebration of the best news the world has ever known – that God sent his Son into the world to die for us, so that we

could call God our Father, too. What can be better news than that?

In the absence of any angels flying over the church building, your magazine can play a critical role in getting the message out this month. Not only are we sending out a digital issue, but we printed extra copies of your magazine this month. Please distribute them widely around your community. Aim to get them into the hands of people who don’t usually come to church.

Finally, why not spend some time in praying for your community. It has been a difficult year for so many of us, and we all need to know the truth. God is indeed there, that He loves us, and that the birth of Jesus changed the course of human history.

Ed

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A STEP OF FAITH

As we get ready for Christmas services here in Melksham, I'm reminded of the glittering highlight of my brief acting career - starring as Joseph in our nursery school Nativity play. It was all downhill after that!

But when you think about it, Joseph is actually something of an awkward bystander in the Christmas story. He hasn't the earthiness of the Shepherds, or the exotic mystique of the Wise Men, and compared to Mary, 'Most Highly Favoured Lady', he rather fades into the background.

Compared to Mary, Joseph hardly makes it onto the Christmas cards, and gets barely a mention in the carols. 'Mary was that mother mild, Jesus Christ the little child' - but where was Joseph? Probably standing around with his arms folded, having to make awkward small talk with several Shepherds who decided to pay an impromptu visit to crowd around his wife at rather intimate moment.

However, on deeper reflection, it's precisely Joseph's ordinariness that perhaps makes him the character in the nativity who we can most identify with. Joseph is really an ordinary guy, contemplating an extraordinary event, wanting to do the right thing, but requiring some convincing.

A rather vocal atheist friend of mine posted on Facebook one year that Christmas was simply one woman's lie about an indiscretion that just got way out of hand. Ho ho ho. The implication being that in pre-scientific times, people were quick to attribute to miraculous intervention something that we now know must have had a much more natural (and embarrassing) explanation.

But Joseph was no fool. He knew then just as well as we do now how people get pregnant, and in fact one of the few mentions Joseph has in the gospel accounts is for his scepticism. So unconvinced was Joseph by Mary's 'miraculous conception' that he planned to divorce her for her unfaithfulness. People don't generally believe in Virgin Births now, and they didn't believe in them then either.

Photo 'You are welcome here' Charlie pictured with Bishop Andrew, and centre the Rural Dean Andrew Evans



Joseph required some convincing, because as everyone knows, you can't get something from nothing. Everything has a cause. But to be slightly provocative to my atheist friends, the alternative to the Christmas story isn't much easier to believe. We must all believe in a Virgin Birth of some sort - either we trust in a God of miracles, or we must believe in the Virgin Birth of the entire cosmos, that the whole universe came from nothing, with no explanation or cause. As one writer said, "modern science is based on the principle: give us one free miracle (the Big Bang) and we'll explain the rest".

Joseph found the Christian message tough to believe, and many still do today. But it must be admitted that the alternative also requires a step of faith. So perhaps we're all a bit like Joseph, just ordinary people contemplating an extraordinary event, wanting to do the right thing, but requiring some convincing.

Well maybe our New Year's resolution may be to allow ourselves, like Joseph, to look a bit deeper into the Gospel story, come along to one of our Christmas services, and perhaps find that Jesus Christ really is Good News of great joy.

As one carol puts it:

I wonder as I wander out under the sky,
How Jesus the Savior did come for to die.
For poor on'ry people like you and like I...

Charlie

Alison – presentation of gifts

On Tuesday 9th November, a small group of representatives from our three churches gathered in St Michael's Church room to make a presentation to Alison for all her dedication and hard work during our 2 year interregnum and Covid-19 lockdowns. In the weeks before, we had a collection for Alison at the three churches and a tidy sum of money was collected.

Margaret Willis presented Alison and Derek with the gifts, mentioning the hard work and in particular the "kitchen table" ministry over social media, and with Derek's support and expertise in the IT department of course. The parish and much wider community have benefited from this ministry.



Thanks to all who helped.

Peter Maslen and Margaret Willis, Team Wardens

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CALL FOR DOUBLE THE TREE COVER

According to new research carried out by Friends of the Earth, England's biggest landowners have nowhere near enough trees on their land to tackle the climate crisis. The list includes the Church of England. It says that the church has a vital role to play.

Increasing tree cover isn't simply a numbers game, the right varieties of trees also need to be planted.

Friends mapping show that it is possible to double England's woodland cover without impacting on these habitats or valuable farmland.

They ask that the Church Commissioners use their land to become part of the solution.

* Source: Friends of the Earth - Guy Shrubsole, trees campaigner

Meanwhile, some parishes are finding difficulty when applying for planning permission to erect solar panels on church buildings. Some objections are coming from the Victorian society.

According to Wikipedia, The Victorian Society is a UK amenity, society and membership organisation that campaigns to preserve and promote interest in Victorian and Edwardian architecture and heritage built between 1837 and 1914 in England and Wales. It is a registered charity. It is interesting to note its founder was John Betjeman and its president is Griff Rhys Jones.

A Faculty to install solar panels on the roof of St Luke's, West Holloway, in London, has been blocked by the Diocesan Advisory Council (DAC) after an objection from the Victorian Society.

The application, which includes repairs to the church roof, was filed by the Vicar of St Luke's, the Revd John Mackenzie in 2019, but the process has been delayed by the pandemic. Faculties require consultation with the relevant statutory authorities. In this case, because the church is Victorian, this includes the Victorian Society, which campaigns to protect buildings from that era.

In 2019 the former Bishop of Salisbury Bishop Nicholas welcomed Wiltshire Council's recognition of the seriousness of climate breakdown and the ambition to be carbon-neutral by 2030. He said their ambitions mirrored many of those the Diocese hoped to achieve. I wonder how carbon neutral the Melksham team is planning to become?

Front page: Melksham Christmas lights by permission
MiriamZaccarelli@melksham-tc.gov.uk

ALPHA - A LIFE CHANGING EXPERIENCE!



Alpha has been running worldwide for many years. Next year the Alpha course will once again be run locally. Many people who have taken the course have found it to be life changing.

What is Alpha?

Alpha is a series of sessions exploring the basics of the Christian faith. Typically run over eleven weeks, each session looks at a different question around faith, and the talks are designed to create conversation in small groups.

What happens at Alpha?

Every Alpha is different, but generally they have three things in common: food, a talk and conversation.

Food – Most sessions start with food, because it's a great way to connect and get to know everyone there.

Talk – The talks explore the basics of the Christian faith and are designed to inspire conversation. Usually around thirty minutes long, they can be given as a live talk or played as an episode.

Conversation – There is a discussion after the talk where you can share your thoughts and ideas on the session's topic.

How much does it cost?

Alpha is free – if you wish to make a donation towards the food it's welcome. There's no follow-up if you don't want to come back after the first session.

WHAT LOCAL PEOPLE SAID ABOUT ALPHA

LT said, “the Alpha course was an incredible experience. It was lovely to sit and ask questions in a safe and welcoming place.”

BS wrote, “I have always had faith but Alpha gave me a deeper understanding, and a closer walk with Jesus.”

MA said, “the course literally changed my life.”

GM wrote: “After years of struggling with my faith I attended an Alpha Course. I realised if I put my faith in Christ my life would change and eventually I found an inner peace.”

PC commented, “Alpha the first word in the Greek alphabet and the word that can bring Good News.”

The editor writes about Alpha

When I was a boy of about 11, I received my best Christmas present ever – a new stamp album. I was so excited, and had been waiting for it for many weeks. I still have the album, and it contains stamps I collected of the British Isles and the Commonwealth. I still feel the excitement of that Christmas morning, and the beginnings of a great hobby.



As time passed, the excitement of presents like the album somehow lost its appeal. Practical things like socks and handkerchiefs held sway. I began to learn first through Sunday school then school itself more about the Christian faith.

It was attending an Alpha course that literally changed my belief into a deeper understanding about the greatest gift of all, which is at the heart of our Christmas celebrations. The gift of God's own Son to be our Saviour. I feel particularly excited this Christmas that Alpha is planned to take place in our churches next year. It is a great opportunity to find out more why millions believe the Christmas and Easter message.



Why not give a special gift by inviting someone to come on the next Alpha course with you.

For more details, if you wish to talk to someone, or to sign up for the next course

email: alpha@melksham.church

Above is a photograph of a recent Alpha celebration supper

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MELKSHAM FOODBANK

The purpose of Melksham Foodbank is to provide practical short term help to a person or a family in need, during the short interval between a need or problem arising, and Social Services organising the benefits. This is done by supplying a food parcel containing sufficient food basics for 3 days. This will allow the person or family concerned to concentrate on resolving their problem (in conjunction with the appropriate agencies) without them also having to worry about their food needs.

Melksham Foodbank is a scheme run under the auspices of the Melksham Family of Churches by a small team of volunteers. We provide the food parcels but rely on recognised agencies who operate in this sphere to identify those in need and to supply them with a parcel.

<https://www.facebook.com/MelkshamFoodbank/>
melkshamfoodbank@gmail.com

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foodbank



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Sponge Pudding / Rice Pudding* / Cereal / Jam / Biscuits / Sweets for Children

*Items are tinned

ITEMS NEEDED FOR CHRISTMAS

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MELKSHAM SHED

The Shed and its progress

Since we started way back in 2014, The Shed has changed many times. When I say changed, I don't mean physically. The building has moved from a portacabin to three shipping containers! What has changed are the members and how they see The Shed.



At the beginning, members were happy doing anything that came along – making a bench for a widowed lady, repairing an old gents shed room, fixing a broken fence panel in someone's garden, as well as making flower troughs.

Today our list of projects have gone from helping to get rubbish out of the River Avon in 2016, to building raised flower beds for disabled young people, plus helping the youngsters at Canberra – not to mention the horse jump gate for disabled riders in Bradford on Avon. In between we have made more flower troughs, bird boxes, bird tables, hedgehog 'hotels' and bug houses.

Our members have ranged from the later 60 to mid-70's in 2014, a 30 year old lad with mental health issues to a very active 91 year old gentleman. We have people with mobility problems as well. The message is the same – that "All are welcome".

The Melksham Shed should be proud of its success, as it has provided a place for mainly men to feel the comradery once felt at work or in the Services. The banter is the best part of the meetings. For some, just being in the company of guys is a great relaxation. Stories are often the best parts. Relaying past events in individual lives gives a much more colourful expression of what that person has been doing over their life time. Needless to say there are some very comical stories, some I dare say should be kept to a selective company!

Thank you to everyone who has been part of the success of The Shed – those who have benefited from our members expertise, and those who have supported us by buying our goods. We look forward to our eighth year.

Chris Pickett

MELKSHAM COMMUNITY MONEY ADVICE

We are here to help



Each year thousands of people from all walks of life, often through no fault of their own, fall into debt. “We are all vulnerable. It is easy to put bills, letters, final demands into a drawer and hope the problem will go away! Unfortunately it does not, but there are organisations like Melksham Community Money Advice who can help.

Anyone concerned about debt, or who would like to talk about their problems, can make an appointment. The help is free of charge and confidential.

An advisor will contact creditors. Doing this will lift a burden that may have affected clients emotionally, causing depression and despair. As the process continues over time, people grow in confidence, regain a smile, and realise that they can have hope for the future.

Melksham Community Money Advice website is now up and running. The centre is sponsored by the Melksham Family of Churches and meet weekly at the Baptist church. Clients can be seen by appointment on Thursdays or at other suitable times.

Contact Us – Melksham Community Money Advice
melkshamcma.org

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**melkshamcma.org
infomelkshamcma@gmail.com**

LOOKING TOWARDS THE NEW YEAR

Part of the help given at Melksham Community Money Advice is talking about planning to budget your money.

At the start of the month you may feel like you have enough money. Then after a few days discover that isn't going to be the case. An unexpected bill, a car breakdown, the fridge goes wrong, you can't resist that extra evening out, and it goes on. Christmas arrives, and before you know it the credit card is reaching its overflow point. January sales, and next year's holiday not yet booked.

A good way forward is to keep a record of your spending. You start to see trends in terms of where your money goes. Income and expenditure recorded regularly should make sticking to a budget easier.

The truth is that bad budgeting – and poor money management – can have a big impact on your financial health. A lack of control over your outgoings equates to a lack of control over your life, and can make managing daily, weekly and yearly life decisions difficult.

Budgeting carefully gives you the opportunity to take back some control.

Over the coming months we will explore what that can be done to keep a tighter reign on our finances

WHEN THINGS GET OUT OF CONTROL

1. Don't ignore the situation as it will only get worse
2. If you have a partner talk to them and decide together how you are going to tackle the situation.
3. Keep paying your essential bills such as rent, mortgage, Council Tax, gas, electricity etc
4. Identify areas of expenditure you may be able to cut back on or items you no longer need that you can sell
5. Let your creditors know if you are going to miss payments or if you need to make reduced payments
6. Seek free debt advice

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Feet First Foot Care Services is located in Melksham at Littlebrook Courtyard - next to Waitrose and opposite Sainsbury and the bus stop. We provide general and diabetic foot care verruca clinics. Treating common conditions of the feet such as corns, hard skin callous, ingrown nails, fungal infections, plantar fasciitis and more. If you can't reach your feet to cut your nails let us do it for you.

If your nails are thickened or discoloured we can help. Appointments are mainly in clinic, but home visits can be made for those unable to access the clinic.

Bookings are by appointment only. We are open between 8am and 8pm Monday to Friday and 9am to 2pm on Saturdays.

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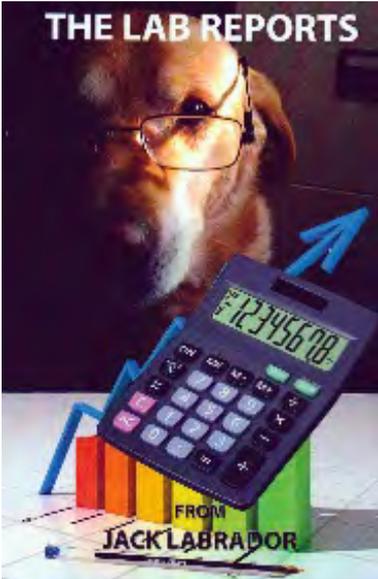
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www.feetfirstfootcareservices.co.uk

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Jack Labrador will be returning by special request in the New Year. He has been away during the lockdown.

Next time we will start off with a short story which gives Jack's slant about the arrival of his new book.

Jack has followers from all over the world, with one or two celebrities among them. Jack's one true love (apart from rolling in badger poo) is getting into cars to go for a drive, and he isn't fussy about whose car it is nor the state he is in when he tries.

All of Jack's stories have a small semblance of truth in them somewhere. They may well be embroidered with literary liberties but they are all based on something which has

happened either to Jack, The Owner, or both. His slavish love of Bonios and Markies and his absolute devotion to his Skinners Field and trial food are behind most of his motivation - after all he is a Lab, which is short for "a digestive system with legs".



The stories are written by Adrian Elmer who supports the Messenger with advice and magazine graphics. 'Lab reports' and his other books are available from Amazon. Order now in time for Christmas.

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THE TROUBLE WITH STOMACH ACHE!

Part 5 With Christmas in mind



Christmas can be an upsetting time in many ways.

Memories of times past, of friends and family no longer with us, Christmas remembered, the laughter, the joy, the food. The food um!

The word blowout is associated with this time of the year.

Parties, get togethers all feed in to that thought. I have often said come what may I am going to enjoy Christmas. As always food is the issue.

When I was young it was a time of rationing. At Christmas all sorts of improvisations were made including the decorations. Often people plucked home raised chicken round the fire while sipping slow gin. Bilious attacks were experienced, mainly brought on by rich food mixed with strange drink concoctions. The dreaded egg flip, a mixture of drinks that could have home made wine added, the drink was not in many cases any better than moonshine. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term flip was first used in 1695 to describe a mixture of beer, rum, and sugar, heated with a red-hot iron. The iron caused the drink to froth, and this frothing engendered the name.

At Christmas the decorated and heaving dinner table beckoned full of goodies. Looking great on the outside but I am already thinking what will it do on the inside.

Being a sufferer of IBS as I mentioned in previous articles, I can just grin and bear it, and pay the consequences - often for days later.

Of course these days there are options. You can take an Imodium tablet, become a Vegan and eat plants, or work out recipes from a Low FODMAP recipe book. You can generally protect yourself at home, but the dreaded visit to Auntie Joan's* to eat her special Christmas concoction, followed by the insistence of seconds can be 'fatal'.

Food can be a mine field, especially at this time of the year. If you know your guest has problems, try to work out something special for them. Always remember there is more to Christmas than food.

Happy Christmas. Ruth J

Ruth Jay - Ruth lives in Melksham and is a member of the local church. Please note the diagnosis of Irritable Bowel Syndrome should be made by a medical practitioner.

*With apologies to any Auntie Joan's reading this story.

Sources: Monash University, Melbourne, Australia - Low FODMAP diet app

A VIEW FROM THE BAR TOWARDS CHRISTMAS

Each of the four Inns of Court has as its three focal points a church, a dining hall and a library. They are all integral parts of a barrister's life.

The Middle Temple which I joined in 1977 shares its church, Temple Church, with the Inner Temple. It's a remarkable building. To the west still standing is the original round church built by the Knights Templar, modelled on the Dome of the Rock



in Jerusalem, which had been an Islamic shrine before the capture of Jerusalem by the crusaders in 1099 and had become part of the headquarters of the Knights Templar. The *Templum Domini*, as they called the Dome of the Rock, became a powerful symbol and featured on their official seals. The knights at prayer in the Temple church would find no difficulty in imagining they were actually there in Jerusalem. It was consecrated in 1185 by, appropriately, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem (ironically 2 years before the recapture of Jerusalem by Saladin in 1187). Effigies of one the most famous Knights Templar, William Marshall and of his sons lie on the floor. It is a vibrant church and a joy to be in.

Middle Temple Hall was built in 1572, a vast hall with an imposing double-hammer-beam roof to avoid the need for pillars. Back then in the 16th and early 17th centuries, the Middle Temple along with the other Inns of Court held Christmas 'Revels' in which each Inn appointed a Prince of Misrule. The new Hall was the ideal venue. The 'Revels' were longer and more varied than today's equivalent, lasting from All Saints' Eve in November to Candlemas Day on 2 February. They were the subject of admiration or opprobrium depending on your point of view. The 16th century clothier Henry Machyn described in his Chronicle with evident admiration "great revels as ever was for the gentlemen of the Temple every day [with] playing and singing". John Evelyn in contrast described the revels as "an old riotous custom [that] has relation neither to virtue nor policy". The three months were no doubt long enough to provide evidence for both points of view and the revels will have catered for every age-group, the senior barristers singing the fine music of the day and dancing the more sedate Elizabethan numbers and the students engaging in a rather wider spread of activities.

The revels are featured in Shakespeare's Henry IV Part II (Act 3 Scene 2):
“Enter Justice SHALLOW and Justice SILENCE, with MOULDY, SHADOW, WART, FEEBLE, BULLCALF, and a servant or two

Justice Shallow: I dare say my cousin William is become a good scholar. He is at Oxford still, is he not?

Silence: Indeed, sir, to my cost.

Shallow: A'must then to the Inns of Court shortly. I was once of Clement's Inn, where I think they will talk of Mad Shallow yet.

Silence: You were called 'lusty Shallow' then, cousin.

Shallow: By the mass I was called anything; and would have done anything indeed too and roundly too. There was I and little John Doit of Staffordshire and Black John Barnes and Francis Pickbone and Will Squele a Cotswold man; you had not four such swinge bucklers in the Inns of Court again; and again I say to you we knew where the bon robas were and had the best of them at commandment...”

Times have changed but the 'revels' survive to this day in each Inn, albeit in less controversial form than in previous centuries. For a couple of evenings at the end of each Michaelmas term, judges however senior get together with barristers and students of all levels to allow the young to let off steam at the expense of the old in a comedy show put on in their Hall by the members of each Inn.

In the past 20 months, we have all missed this backdrop. Everyday life has gone on as before. We have continued to fight our cases - more often than not by Teams and Zoom. We have continued to 'meet' our clients and colleagues - not in person but remotely by Teams, Zoom or telephone - and we have continued to advise in writing and draft documents as before. But we have certainly missed the human interaction with our friends and colleagues and the wonderful framework that these great institutions provide.

In missing them, we realise how much there is to praise and be thankful for, and to look forward to. This Christmas let's hope for a resurgence on every front - if not quite to the same extent as Justice Shallow.

William Massey

Photograph top of previous page, Dome of the Rock - Ed



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MELKSHAM FAMILY OF CHURCHES

How are you feeling about the state of the world in which we live today, and how do you view the prospect of eternity?

Two years ago, you could be forgiven for not giving it much thought! The state of the United Kingdom, along with issues closer to home in Wiltshire or Melksham might have been sufficient to exercise your mind.

As we approach Christmas 2021, we have had almost two years of focussing on global issues relating to the Coronavirus pandemic, and the utter upheaval it has caused to virtually every aspect of daily life for people in every nation across the world. Many have shielded, most have isolated at one time or another. NHS, other essential workers and volunteers have worked tirelessly to help those who fell victim, and those who had to rely on outside help to survive.

In recent months we have witnessed world leaders from rich and poor nations, from large and tiny countries grapple with the challenge of sharing the burden of alleviating the disaster, which is predicted to occur within the lifetime of young people living now, associated with climate change caused by world-wide dependence on fossil fuels for energy over the past 150 years. Rising sea levels and rising average temperatures will directly affect many across the world.

There is unspeakable poverty affecting millions of people, and yet nations continue to plough billions into exploration of space and bigger and more powerful weapons of war!

And then I ask you about your view of eternity! But Christmas causes us to think back. To a child born in poverty, in remarkable circumstances and given the name of Jesus. To the eye-witness reports of simple shepherds and travelling scholars.

To ancient prophecies being fulfilled - for example, Messiah's lineage and birthplace. To a family that became refugees to avoid a cruel, heartless and insecure leader. To a God acknowledged to be a Protector, Fortress, Shield.

To a God who so loved the world that He sent His Son to save all who believe in Him. To a God whose free gift is eternal life through Jesus Christ. To the promise that all who call on Jesus 'will' be saved.

When we consider all this, we can be at peace. We need not worry. But we should acknowledge Him and be honest with ourselves about the nature of our relationship with Him.

We can ask His forgiveness, and offer ourselves to do what He would have us do to contribute to His plan for getting the world out of the mess it is currently in. And we should give thanks for those who are currently doing just that.

On behalf of all in the Melksham Family of Churches, I wish you a blessed Christmas and a peaceful New Year.

Alan McFall, Chair of Melksham Family of Churches

MELKSHAM FAMILY OF CHURCHES UPDATE

The continued exhortations to minimise the possible spread of Coronavirus infection has meant that the Family of Churches has avoided arranging any events that involved significant gatherings of people. We hope that we may be able to explore ways of getting together in 2022 as we seek God's will for us. In the meantime, a brief update on what has been happening.

WELCOME

To new ministers

Rev. Peggy Kabonde at Melksham United Church

Rev. Charlie Thomson new Rector at the Melksham Team Ministry

THANK YOU

To those who have kept going over the last 20 months: Foodbank Team who receive, sort, and distribute food items to those in crisis.

Foodbank donors of both food and finances who have helped meet the demand. Total parcels issued in 2020 was 3,148 and so far in 2021 its 4,923. Messy Church Team for monthly virtual Messy Church in a bag, plus Holiday Club and Light Party as restrictions were eased in 2021.

Our Treasurer, Sharon Pearce, who still had to attend to monthly accounting responsibilities

CONGRATULATIONS

To all Churches in Melksham for keeping going in difficult circumstances.

Offering regular worship either online, in person or both. Providing weddings, funerals and pastoral support. Learning to use new technology.

Melksham Community Money Advice for their transition from Hope Debt Advice and now offering once again practical advice to those who find that their indebtedness has got out of hand.

COMMISERATIONS

Core Church, Bowerhill who have decided to close after 14 years, as a result of a combination of retirement and change of circumstances for several on the leadership team. Our prayers are with you all in your changing circumstances. May God bless you richly. To all who have suffered bereavement in the last two years, and especially when we have not been able to share in your grief.

MELKSHAM CHORAL SOCIETY'S CHRISTMAS CONCERT

Melksham Choral Society's Christmas Concert will be held at the United Church in town on Saturday the 11th December at 7.30pm. The tickets cost £12.50.

We are singing the first part of Handel's Messiah and works by John Rutter and Howard Goodall, as well as some favourite carols

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TRAVELLING ON



Thank you Mr Editor for your comments in the November Messenger, and for requesting a feature.

I mostly cannot take the credit for my poems, for as you may have noticed in the November Messenger I 'cribbed' Rev. Charlie Thomson's first sermon at St. Michael's. And so it has been! Sometimes words of wisdom I've received, a Bible passage or story, or maybe sharing someone's life journey and thoughts of concern, love and joy.

Or being provoked by the workings out of my own ups and downs travelling through life - perhaps a beautiful view, experience or fun, and the coronavirus, that I have attempted to put into verse.

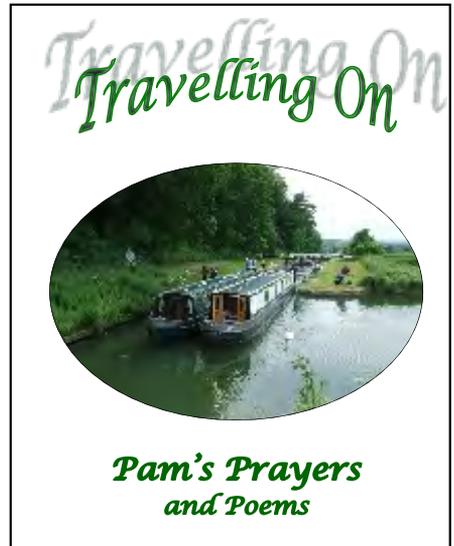
Sometimes poems come in a spontaneous way; or it could be Mr Editor asking "Have you something for the next magazine?" - Help! Then I'm really hoping the Good Lord will give me inspiration!

I suppose to put it briefly it's translating an experience, knowledge, joy, inspiration and importantly faith into verse. This month's poem appears on [page 37](#).

'**Travelling On**' follows 'Through the Years' (We still have some of these available.)

Proceeds of the books will go towards improving our churches facilities and an overseas charity. They are available from Team churches, or phone Netty Hucknall on 07907 481999 or 01225 791977.

Single copies £6. Five copies for the price of four £24, plus postage if appropriate. Cheques payable to 'Melksham Team Ministry general'



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CHRISTMAS and NEW YEAR waste and recycling 2021



Waste and recycling collection dates **will not** change this year. Collections will take place as normal on Bank Holiday Monday 27, Tuesday 28 December 2021 and Monday 3 January 2022.

Garden waste collections **will stop** for two weeks. The last collection will be on Friday 24 December and they will restart on Monday 10 January 2022.

Check your waste, recycling and garden waste collections at wiltshire.gov.uk/WasteCollectionDays

Household recycling centre CHRISTMAS and NEW YEAR opening times

Household Recycling Centers (HRCs) normally open on Fridays will be open on 24 December from 10am to 1pm. All HRCs will be closed Saturday 25, Sunday 26 December and Saturday 1 January 2022.

HRCs will open as normal on their specified opening days over the holiday period.

Check your local HRC is open before visiting at wiltshire.gov.uk/household-recycling-centres

 Wiltshire recycles

 Wiltshire Council

MAINTAINING A BALANCE

With resolutions in mind

Hamlet once said to Horatio, “There are more things on heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.” By writing this, Shakespeare suggested that one must believe what he or she sees. Even if they previously did not think so, the evidence should change their mind.

Soil is teeming with life - much of which we cannot see – but like all living things it can become unwell and even die if it isn't looked after properly.

You might be surprised to learn there are more living things in one teaspoon of soil than there are people on the planet. One gram of soil can contain several billion bacteria from thousands of different species.*

Amazingly the whole of creation is built that way. A balance has to be maintained in all that we do. Much of the difficulty is that we either will not accept a lifetime in balance, or fight tooth and nail for our slant or belief. Striking a balance helps you lead a happy and contented life. It ensures your growth as an individual, and secures your mental peace and well-being. By maintaining a healthy balance, you secure your future.

If you wish to keep your life in balance, here are some things for you to try to begin with:

1. Start every day with with nourishment - not only for your body but also for your mind and spirit.
2. Exercise body and mind. Walk, read, listen to music, and pray.
3. Spend regular time on household chores daily.
4. Practice saying ‘no I'm too busy.’ We can't do everything.
5. List all your extra-curricular activities/volunteer positions. Which ones are you struggling to continue? Some may need to go.
6. Take a day off every week. We all need a day set aside to rest. It is imperative to our balance. Work hard and then rest hard.

The proverb ‘a change is as good as a rest’ expresses, in a fairly straightforward literal way, the notion that a change from one's regular occupation is as restorative as a holiday. You might then find then a stitch in time saves nine. I could go on!

Ted Bolger

* "What on Earth? Your soil health explained" The James Hutton Institute
Ted is a local man and occasional contributor to the Messenger.

You talk about your pleasures to your acquaintances; you talk about your troubles to your friends. – Fr Andrew SDC
 Some people use one half their ingenuity to get into debt, and the other half to avoid paying it.
 George D Prentice

The only way to entertain some folks is to listen to them.
 Kin Hubbard

The greatest pleasure I know is to do a good action by stealth, and to have it found out by accident.
 Charles Lamb

Drive carefully this Christmas. It's not only cars that can be recalled by their maker. – Anon

LIFE WITH LOUIS



IS SANTA COMING THIS YEAR?



We don't sing carols no more... you 'ave to listen to 'em off me iPod!

First Christmas

Daniel aged four, had gone to Sunday School just before Christmas. He came home with a new understanding of the Christmas story...

“There wasn’t a Father Christmas way back then, so these three blokes on camels had to deliver all the toys. And Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer with his nose so bright wasn’t there yet, so they used this big light in the sky to find their way around.”

Good advice

If you have a lot of tension this Christmas and you get a headache, do what it says on the aspirin bottle: ‘Take two aspirin’ and ‘Keep away from children.’

Flue Jab

Why doesn’t Father Christmas suffer from claustrophobia when he climbs down the chimney? Because he has had his flue jab.

BOOKS AND DEMENTIA

Buy your children some books this Christmas to help stave off dementia in later life, according to a recent study. It seems that more books in your home read in childhood can help stave off problems.

It found that children who are exposed to the written word from a young age, form more resilience against degenerative processes which can lead to Alzheimer's.

Nurturing our brain in our early years boosts our 'cognitive reserves', as intellectually stimulating activities like reading create extra connections in the brain. That acts as a long-term buffer against cognitive decline in later life.

The study was done at the University of Haifa in Israel.

The editor comments,

"I still have one of my first books, *The Coral Island* by R. M. Ballantyne. One of the first works of juvenile fiction to feature exclusively juvenile heroes, the story relates the adventures of three boys marooned on a South Pacific island. The book first went on sale in late 1857 and has never been out of print. Among the novel's major themes are the civilising effect of Christianity".

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CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Christmas 2021 and New Year

The festive season is upon us and it's a blessing that we are together this Christmas. It's been a joy to journey alongside children and families this year, especially after so much time apart.



In every community, we meet families looking for a space to connect with others, receive support and engage in play. We have the perfect opportunity to open our doors and serve families as they journey through life - what a privilege! It has been wonderful to witness Melksham Messy Church continue to flourish this year, and we loved gathering once again

for our Light Party celebration in October. Our Messy Christmas celebration at the end of November welcomed many new and returning Messy Church families, and it was a joy to worship God and celebrate the birth of Jesus in an inclusive and creative way! Our Little Cherubs toddler groups have been in full swing this term meeting twice a week, at Melksham Welcome Hall, formerly Melksham Skills Centre, and St Michael's Church Room. It is a pleasure to welcome so many children and families to Little Cherubs, many of whom have not experienced a children's group before due to lockdown.

Schools work has been continuing this term, and we have loved exploring bible stories with children from The Manor, Forest & Sandridge and Aloeric schools. There are so many ways to bring the bible to life and it's been fantastic to explore faith in schools through storytelling, activities, Collective Worship, prayer opportunities and more. Please continue to pray for the ministry to children and families within our town; that families would experience the grace and love of Jesus for themselves and grow in relationship with him.



I have been reminded so much this year of the need to celebrate unity, both in our churches and the community. Psalm 133:1 says: 'Oh, how wonderful, how pleasing is it when God's people all come together as one!'. Being together in community and fellowship is special, and we see this modelled by Jesus throughout his life. My heart is that as we move into 2022, we come together as one to bring the light and love of God to those we meet.

Hannah Tarring

Children & Families Coordinator
Melksham Team Ministry

SERVICES IN THE TEAM - DECEMBER 2021 AND JANUARY 2022

SUNDAY 5th DECEMBER

10am Family Worship, St Andrew's
10am Breakfast Church, St Barnabas
10.15am Family Communion, St Michael's

SUNDAY 12th DECEMBER

10am Family Communion, St Andrew's
4pm Christingle, St Andrew's
10.15am Family Communion, St Michael's

SUNDAY 19th DECEMBER

10am Family Praise St Andrew's
6pm Spirit of Christmas Carols, St Andrew's
6pm Carol Service, St Barnabas
10.15am Family Communion St Michael's
6pm Carols by Candlelight, St Michael's

FRIDAY 24th DECEMBER - CHRISTMAS EVE

4pm Christingle & Nativity, St Michael's
11.30pm Midnight Mass, St Michael's
11.30pm Midnight Mass, St Andrew's

SATURDAY 25th DECEMBER - CHRISTMAS DAY

10am Christmas Communion, St Andrew's
10.15am Family Communion, St Michael's

SUNDAY 26th DECEMBER

10.15am Team Communion, St Michael's

SUNDAY SERVICE TIMES IN JANUARY

10am St Andrew's
9.30am 4th Sunday
10.15 St Michael's
10am St Barnabas

Please refer to the website for a full list of services
website - melksham.church



THE SHEPHERDS

On the hillside, shivering and cold,
The shepherds cared for sheep.
They little thought that night would be
The biggest world's event.

The sheep were safely in their fold,
Whilst they discussed their day.
And then, a light of immense shine
Their attention drew away.

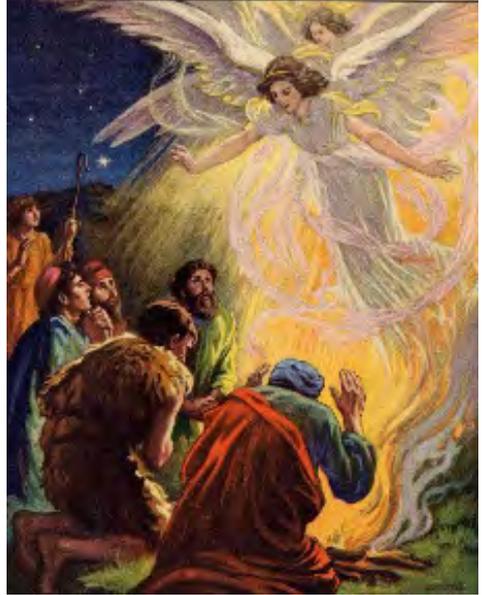
Angels were singing "God on high",
A frightening event –
For they worshipped God with joy,
And, to David's Town they sent –
These lowly shepherds to a stall,
At rough and tumble stable ,
To meet God's child and welcome Him,
As best as they were able.

They ran towards a starry light,
And true enough they saw
A little babe in manger wrapped
Who was the Christ of all.

With wonder and with bated breath,
They knelt on bended knee,
For here the Saviour of the World,
Their humble eyes could see –

A maiden with God's little babe
In adoration beamed
Her tiny son within her arms,
T'was an amazing scene.

For this, was no ordinary child
The angels had announced,
He was the Christ foretold of old,
The King of Eminence.



The shepherds left that humble scene
With wonder and with joy,
For **them** it was the privilege
To announce the new born boy.

They sang, and praised, and glorified,
The day that God had brought
His only Son into the world,
And with rapture they were caught.

Life never'd be the same again as
They announced the joyous news –
Of the day when God's Son arrived,
And they'd had a privileged view.

But do not think **you** cannot see,
Or know this King of Kings,
For He loves the likes of you and me,
So! With joy let **your** heart sing.

Luke 2 v 8 – 19

Pam Muller

Bookworm is on page 29 of this issue with details of Pam's new book of poems and prayers. Pam has written poems and prayers regularly for the magazine for a number of years.

MEDITATION ON THE INCARNATION

*After the bright beam of annunciation
fused heaven with dark earth
His searing sharply-focused light
went out for a while
eclipsed in amniotic gloom:
His cool immensity of splendour
His universal grace
small-folded in a warm dim
female space*

This extract from Luci Shaw's poem *Made Flesh* captures something of the wonder of the moment when the second person of the Trinity became an embryo.

How does a single cell turn into an infant, and what does that process say about us – and God? These are the questions that Professor Jeff Hardin, a developmental biologist, asks himself. Having studied theology as well as science, he has a unique perspective on embryonic development.

A new-born baby is made of around five trillion cells. These cells come in hundreds of different types, each of which must be in the correct place for the child's body to function properly. Every new life is the result of intricate and highly ordered processes. Three things must happen as an embryo develops.

The first important process is for cells to take on their identity as types of muscle, bone, nerves, and so on. The second is when each cell learns which part of the body it belongs to.



Third, those cells are moved around to form the different tissues and organs. These three are not discrete stages, but they all happen at around the same time, building up gradually like the different aspects of a picture coming into focus.

All three of these processes are driven forward by the movement of cells, the connections between them, and the signals they pass to each other. Jeff studies a sort of cellular glue which is involved in joining cells together. Making and breaking these adhesions can affect how cells move and signal to each other, their identity in the body, how they are organised as groups, and ultimately their survival. This glue is found on the surface of cells throughout the animal kingdom, including the small worms Jeff's lab studies.

For Jeff, peering down a microscope at tiny worm embryos can be an act of worship. It is also an exercise in art appreciation, as he learns to appreciate the created order. Understanding the complexities of development, while also being aware that God knows that process intimately both as Creator and created, fills Jeff with a profound sense of awe, wonder and worship.

Does the minute scale of our early development, compared to the incomprehensibly vast and ancient universe, give us a sense of insignificance? Psalm 8 says, "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?"

For Jeff and the Psalmist, such feelings can be a positive experience if they serve as a reminder to be humble in the face of a universe that is vastly complicated but also deeply meaningful, made by a God who loves each one of us.

This series is written by Dr Ruth M Bancewicz, who is Church Engagement Director at The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion in Cambridge. Ruth writes on the positive relationship between Science and Christian faith.

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website - melksham.church

FROM THE REGISTER

BAPTISMS

Cassie Disney-Napier 7th November St Andrew's

Felix Cheeseman 21st November St Michael's

WEDDINGS:

Orrie Brassington & Melanie Morris 26th November St Barnabas

FUNERALS

Bill Coleman 18th November St Michael's

Ruth Adams 12th December West Wilts Crematorium

Jane Cleverley 3rd December St Michael's

Obituary

Audrey Mary Webb 1934 - 2021

There are a number of people in the parish who will remember Audrey. For many years she ran the Sunday school at St Barnabas.

In recent years Audrey with husband John moved to Wadebridge in Cornwall.

The funeral service was held at Egloshayle Parish Church on Monday 22nd November.

We pray and give thanks for the life of Audrey, and for all the family.

Bill Coleman 1922 - 2021

Some of our readers will remember Bill, possibly from his time as Churchwarden at St Michael's or perhaps from other activities he took part in across Melksham.

My earliest memory of Bill is from around 1980 after we had started regularly attending St Michael's. Within a few years, Bill had spotted my interest in the church building maintenance and asked me to help him survey the stained glass windows for replacement metal guards. I became his "apprentice" churchwarden looking after the window guards. My involvement continues to this day!

Bill was working for Spencers Engineering in Beanacre Road - Spencers became GEC Mechanical Handling - and was involved with design and sales of their products, worldwide. These skills came in useful when Bill designed a new steel flagpole for the church, complete with a supporting frame, when the one on the top of the tower became unsafe as the masonry deteriorated in the late 1980s. When Bill retired as churchwarden, he entrusted me with a working model of his flagpole that he had made, complete with its ropes illustrating the correct way to raise and lower the flag!

Linda and I were honoured to be invited to his and Ursula's Diamond wedding celebrations at Kingsdown Golf Club, which reflected another of Bill's activities. After the party was assembled in the clubhouse private dining room for lunch, Bill announced that I was representing his church and would I therefore say Grace before the meal!

Later on, Bill and Ursula moved into a nice flat in Giffords Court for a few years, until Ursula was in need of more specialised nursing care and they moved to Chippenham.

After Ursula's death, Bill insisted he moved back to Melksham so he ended his days at Mavern House, Shaw.

Bill's ashes will be interred alongside Ursula's in St Michael's graveyard.

With all condolences to Bill's family.

Peter Maslen

MUSIC FOR THE MESSIAH

Have you noticed that in the Christmas story, singing is featured on three occasions?

Firstly, after Mary was given a message from the angel Gabriel, and was visiting her elderly and pregnant relative, Elizabeth. Mary was so overwhelmed with happiness at the forthcoming miraculous births, she started to sing.

Over the years, her words, known as The Magnificat, have been set to music by various composers. The hymn Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord is one example of it. Of course, we don't know Mary's melody line, but her words express God's promise that He would rescue His people and through them save the world. Mary sings of God's mercy and benevolence on the helpless, the humble and the hungry.

Months later, in the fields of Bethlehem, shepherds were confronted with an angel and given an incredible message: the Saviour, the Messiah had been born. This was followed by a host of angels who could not help but sing glory to God. Later, the shepherds saw the baby Jesus. They then returned home: not in silence and awe, but in song. They were overwhelmed with an encounter with Almighty God! Heaven and earth had been brought together. They simply couldn't stop themselves from praising and glorifying God.

For Mary, the Shepherds and the Eastern Men too, that first Christmas brought in a time of hope: hope for the helpless, pardon for the guilty, and forgiveness for the conscious stricken. Good news for those who had had nothing but bad news!

From that time on, people have tried to express their gratitude, thanks and wonder at God's love and mercy. Over the centuries, countless poets and musicians have composed music for us to sing. At no other time in the year, is so much music used to describe and express one moment in history.

Traditionally, December is a time for concerts and services of Christmas music. We come together to sing carols and other songs that express the wonder of God's Gift to us. Unfortunately, last year, the coronavirus restricted or even cancelled our musical festivities. This month, we may be in a better position to worship together.

Lester Amann

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SAFEGUARDING

During the COVID-19 crisis, it is particularly important to safeguard adults and children with care and support needs. They may be more vulnerable to abuse and neglect as others may seek to exploit disadvantages due to age, disability, mental or physical impairment or illness.

The church safeguarding officer is Gwen McLean 01225 705440

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Please contact
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