

Stour Vale Letter No.194

Services for the Christmas weekend

Saturday 23rd

4pm Crib service Stour Row Village Hall



Sunday 24th December – Christmas Eve

10:30am Parish Communion Stour Provost (please note the later Service time)

4pm Christingle & Crib Service Buckhorn Weston

6pm Carol and Crib Service West Stour

11:30pm **Benefice Midnight Mass** Kington Magna with Revd Clare Dean



Christmas Day:

10:30am Benefice Communion East Stour with Bishop Karen

Sunday 31st December

10:30am **5th Sunday Benefice Communion Service** Todber with Revd Angela Syer



Readings for Sunday 24th December 4th Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 61.1–4, 8–end

Psalm 126

1 Thessalonians 5.16–24

John 1.6–8, 19–28



Readings for Christmas Day

Isaiah 9.2–7

Psalm 96

Titus 2.11–14

Luke 2.1–14

Readings for 31st December 1st Sunday of Christmas

Isaiah 61.10—62.3

Psalm 148

Galatians 4.4–7

Luke 2.15–21

The Birth of Jesus – Luke 2.1–14 (NIV)

2 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to their own town to register.

⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house

and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.”



Christmas Message from Revd Clare:

I've really enjoyed meeting so many people at the Carol Services and I look forward to seeing people at the Crib Services, Midnight Mass and at the service on Christmas day with Bishop Karen.

It's also been wonderful to see all the churches so beautifully decorated for Christmas.

A big thank you to all those people in the Benefice who work so hard in many different ways to keep our churches maintained and open. Special thanks to the organists and our trumpeter whose music enhances worship every week.

Thank you too for all the cards and good wishes we have received at the vicarage.

I want to wish everyone a very Happy Christmas wherever they will be spending it.

May God bless you and, may you know the peace and joy of Christ.

Clare



Praying for our communities

This week in the Stour Vale we pray for the community in Kington Magna, the congregation of All Saints and all who live and work in and around the village. Please find a few moments in your week to remember this community.



And we pray for:

Those in our communities who are ill or recovering at home, for those in hospital or care, and for those who are waiting for procedures and surgery. And we remember those who have lost loved ones and miss them. We pray for those who find life difficult, particularly the lonely, isolated and afraid, those who feel themselves forgotten or unloved, and those who are low in spirits or find the world a confusing place. May they all know the healing presence of God's love.

In particular we pray for:

Henrietta (KM), Barry (SR) and Margaret (WS) and all known to us, or only to God, who are ill and in need of prayer.

And for the bereaved family and friends of Graham Dyke (BW), Frances Austin Jones (ES), Barry Score (ES) and June Hough (FM).

If anyone would like to be included in our prayers, please ask your Church Warden to let Jill know, or contact her direct – details at the end of the newsletter.

*Please remember if you asking on behalf of someone else,
check they are happy for their name to be included.*

Other Prayers

The Archbishops' Prayer: God of peace and justice, we pray for the people of Ukraine. We pray for peace and the laying down of weapons. We pray for all those who fear for tomorrow, that your Spirit of comfort would draw near to them.

We pray for those with power over war or peace, for wisdom, discernment and compassion to guide their decisions. Above all, we pray for all your precious children, at risk and in fear, that you would hold and protect them. We pray in the name of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Amen



Private Prayer

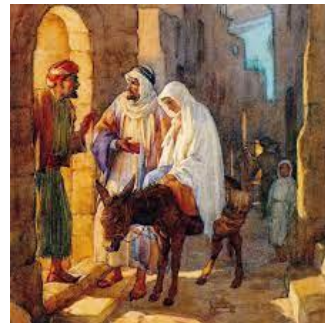
Many of our churches are open throughout the week for private prayer. Please do take advantage of this, and if you visit our beautiful churches and feel you can make a donation to their life and upkeep, please do so. It would be very much appreciated.

25 December *The Ven John Barton considers the Christmas story ...*

No Room? On the Contrary

This year one carol will be sung with particular poignancy. It retells the message of angels, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favour rests" and continues:

*Yet with the woes of sin and strife,
The world has suffered long;
Beneath the angel strain have rolled,
Two thousand years of wrong;
And man, at war with man, hears not
The love song which they bring:
O hush the noise, you men of strife,
And hear the angels sing.*



The angels' goodwill message will persist despite our clamour, for it proclaims God's all-embracing and eternal welcome. Heaven's doors are ever open: it is home for everyone. The final biblical vision is of an all-encompassing city: "On no day will its gates ever be shut... the glory and honour of the nations will be brought into it."

Jesus, for whom there had been no room at the inn, taught that God's kingdom is home for every race: "I say to you that many will come from the East and the West, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." He reassured those anxious about the future: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms..."

No room? Don't you believe it!

Parish Pump

Radio 4 Thought for the day – 20th December 2023

With the Reverend canon Dr. Jennifer Smith

Good morning. I work in central London and much of the news that I consume acts as if the capitalist the centre of the universe, but I also spend time on the west coast of Scotland and I'm proud to say I still have a subscription to the Oban Times, the Journal of record for Argyll and Bute. Oban is midway up the coast several hours drive northwest of Glasgow. It may be the closest city and mainland ferry port for most of the aisles, but it's also a small town.

The front page of the Oban Times last week carried an unexpected Christmas message for me. It shows five proud crew members on the deck of a new lifeboat a bright orange Shannon class 1350, The Campbell Watson. Inside a local lass in full storm gear stands in the bow to pipe the boat into the harbour. It might not make the headlines elsewhere, but this new lifeboat is crucial for Oban.

Here's the thing that struck me. This crew from the highlands had sailed it all the way from Dorset via Ireland in the middle of the winter storm season, when they could easily have gone

by road. It had been a conscious choice, they told the reporter, so they would get to know how the boat handled in rough weather and gain confidence in her capabilities. They got their wish, facing some very rough seas indeed. That crew chose to steer into the storm, preparing for the day when called to save those in distress, they would have no choice.

Jesus' birth took place in a storm of a different kind. His parents were displaced by global politics, stranded in Bethlehem without a home or shelter, and then fled for their lives into Egypt as refugees.

I think there's a lesson for all of us Christian or not in what the lifeboat crew chose. Christmas is not just a chance to take a break from the hard global news stories, as if we could anaesthetise ourselves with tinsel and lights and excess. Christmas is a time for us to steer into the storm to stand up and stand together and prepare for the day when we are called to help.

God chooses to do just this with us, born as men with men to dwell in the words of Charles Wesley's, Carol Hark the herald angels sing. That's the heart of the Christmas message God with us. Jesus never promised life would be easy sailing. Rather he came to his disciples in the heavy seas, telling them not to be afraid. So congratulations on the new lifeboat in open and a strong and good Christmas to you all from Central London.



And there were shepherds by *David Winter*

Luke's story of the birth of Jesus is brilliantly told – the angel's visit to Mary to tell her she would be mother of the long-promised Messiah, the old priest in the Temple told by another angel that his wife would have a son to be called 'John', who would prepare the people of Israel for that event, and then Mary and Joseph making the 60 mile journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, as required by

the Roman census. When they got there, no room at the inn, and they settled instead for a convenient stable, where Mary gave birth to a boy child.

Suddenly, Luke changes the tone. 'And there were shepherds ...' – that's what he actually wrote, just like that. 'And there were shepherds', doing exactly what shepherds do, looking after their flocks by night. But this night was different: yet another angelic message – a call to abandon their sheep and go into Bethlehem to see the baby Messiah. They were given directions and a 'sign' to identify Him. He would be lying in a feeding trough. Well, at least they would recognise that.

And why the shepherds, in this glorious story of our salvation? Because the event needed witnesses, and the chosen witnesses would be this bunch of scruffy, smelly shepherds straight from the sheep-pen. Nothing could speak more eloquently of God's purpose than that. This was not a Saviour for the strong, rich and powerful, but for everybody. The carpenter and his wife guarded the Saviour of the world, and the very first witnesses were not kings or priests but a handful of shepherds.

Parish Pump

Radio 4 Thought for the Day with the Reverend Jane Manfredi. 21st December 2023

Good morning. There's a field not far from here, where I walked my dogs and where my children played until the diggers came. And the turf and the trees were dug up, the concrete poured and the bricks put together to build houses. For a year walked my dogs around the perimeter of the building site, and watch the frenetic activity and noise and through another

year, during the pandemic, when nothing happened at all.

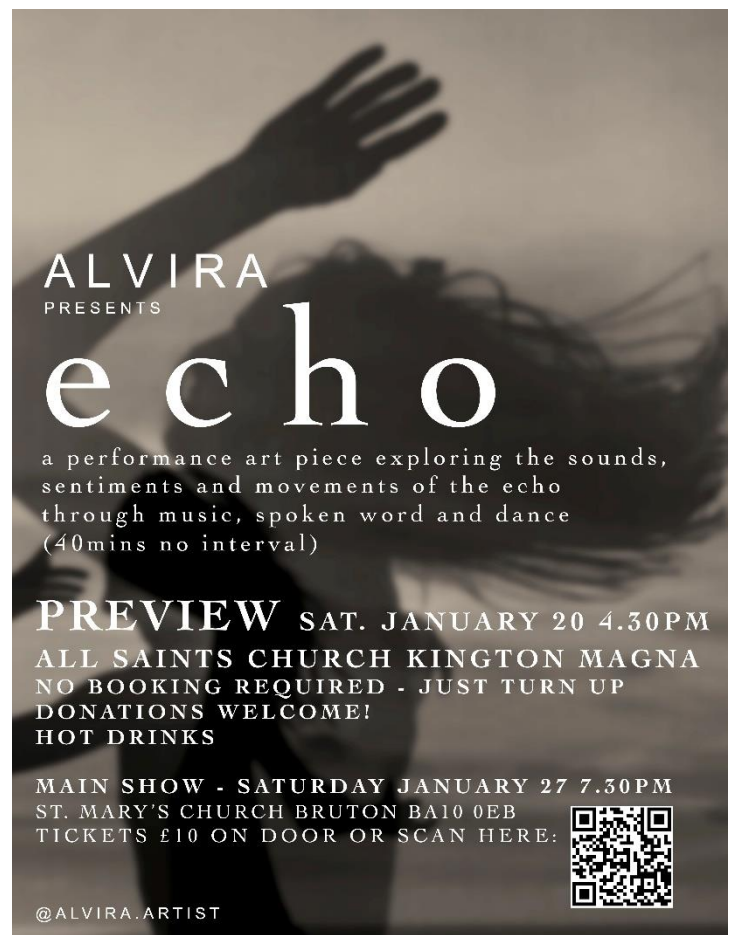
And another when the builders returned, and gradually I witnessed the homes rise up from nothing. I prayed as I walked for the families who would come for the babies that would be born for the life that would happen there. I prayed for our town and this new addition to it, I prayed that God would make something good from nothing.

The first Christmas after the builders left the new families work together to put up lights on their houses and in the streets. They played music and blew fake snow from the machine. The new estate became known as the Christmas estate. And people came from all over the town to see signs went up asking for a donation to be given to the estate's chosen charity, and people gave this year the lights are bigger and more extravagant than ever, cause a queue to get onto the estate. People jostle and sometimes become fractious with one another. The fame of the Christmas estate spreads, and more people come and more money gets dropped in the charity tin. I walked by with my kids and they love it too, because it really is spectacular.

Everyone loves it. Except for those who don't and who can't escape the annual extravaganza. Some people prefer the quiet and the dark. In the new year when the show ceases, the money will be totted up and given to the charity who will be beyond grateful for it. I sit in my bedroom in the dark and think about my prayers for the newest state. That isn't quite what I asked for. I tell God and in the dark which unfolds me as surely as it unfolded Mary and another darkened room 2000 years ago, I imagined I hear God laugh.

I ponder how answers to prayer sometimes don't look how I expect them to. And as I sit and pray in the dark, it reminds me that when the Christmas lights are taken down, there is one true light which remains and it's one which never goes out – another unexpected answer to prayer who started in the dark.

Please note that for most other events around the Benefice, 'For you Diary' has returned to the back page of Octavo – but here's an extra event taking place at Kington Magna Church at 4:30pm on Saturday 20th January




ALVIRA
PRESENTS

echo

a performance art piece exploring the sounds,
sentiments and movements of the echo
through music, spoken word and dance
(40mins no interval)

PREVIEW SAT. JANUARY 20 4.30PM
ALL SAINTS CHURCH KINGTON MAGNA
NO BOOKING REQUIRED - JUST TURN UP
DONATIONS WELCOME!
HOT DRINKS

MAIN SHOW - SATURDAY JANUARY 27 7.30PM
ST. MARY'S CHURCH BRUTON BA10 0EB
TICKETS £10 ON DOOR OR SCAN HERE:



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This Newsletter



We hope you find this newsletter helpful. If you know of anyone who would like to join the mailing list, tell them to send their name, parish and email address to Jill Perry at octavoeditorsvb@googlemail.com with the subject "Newsletter Mailing List". But, if you do not wish to continue receiving them, please email her with "Unsubscribe" in the subject field.

You can contact Revd Clare on: 01747 838171

Or by email: clare@evzone.co.uk



Please note Clare will be on annual leave between the 26th December and the 6th January.

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or follow the link on the Benefice Website.

Newsletter produced on behalf of the Stour Vale Benefice:

Buckhorn Weston – East Stour – Fifehead Magdalen – Kington Magna – Stour Provost – Todber – West Stour

