

The Vicar Writes...

Dear Friends

The first Christmas was a party! Caesar Augustus issued a decree for a general census. Everyone had to go to the town where he belonged, to the home town of his family. Joseph, therefore, took Mary to Bethlehem, so they all gathered, brothers, cousins, second cousins, etc. No wonder the local inn was full. Relations who had not met for years exchanged stories and treated each other to another round of drinks. It was a glorified bank holiday!

So Joseph and Mary arrived and were offered the stable, perhaps because it was quiet and peaceful. How on earth could the innkeeper be expected to know the significance of what was going on in his stable? Considering the dozens of guests, he did his best. In these conditions, Jesus the Christ, the Saviour of the world, the Son of God, was born. Probably the innkeeper told all his guests what had happened in the stable 'good for you! good for them! lets drink the baby's health'. How could they be expected to know?

The only people who knew what really happened were Joseph and Mary. The greatest event in human history happened in secret. Two people only understood the secret. It was the same with the temptations, transfiguration, the agony of Gethsemene, the Resurrection and Ascension. Only the crucifixion was open to public view, and this was misunderstood by all except a very few.

'How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given'.

Now we know the secret, but still to many it is lost in the turmoil of the world. In the seeking after money, power and possessions. As we celebrate this Christmas let us be open to the greatest gift of all, Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Wishing you a very blessed Christmas,

Andrew

CHRISTMAS SERVICES

This year, due to COVID restrictions, there will be no services on Christmas Eve. Obviously the Christingle Service is too busy and the Midnight Communion would require cleaning of the church following the service ready for Christmas Day.

So, we will be having the Carol Service in church on 20th December at 6.00 pm and a Family Service at 9.30 am in the hall on that day, as well as the 8.00 am and 10.30 am services.

On Christmas Day we will have two services: one at 9.00 am which will be Book of Common Prayer Communion and one at 10.30 am which will be our normal Parish Communion service.

And there were shepherds...

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 shabby shepherds.

Eglantyne Jebb – founder of ‘Save the Children’

(17th December)

Here is a modern-day saint whose compassion and determination has saved literally millions of lives.

Eglantyne did not begin as an obvious ‘mover and shaker’ of people. Born in Shropshire in 1876, she grew up in Ellesmere, studied history at

Lady Margaret Hall in Oxford, taught at Marlborough, and then resigned as she was not physically robust.



Eglantyne moved to live with her mother in Cambridge, and it would have been so easy to settle for a life of peaceful obscurity. But she was a Christian, and at Oxford she had developed a passion for social concerns, so this compassion now drove her to take action.

She began in 1906 by publishing research on the poverty she’d found in Cambridge.

Then in 1912 the Balkan Wars broke out, and Eglantyne left Cambridge for Macedonia. Her months among the refugees led her to decide that long-term constructive aid was more effective than short-term handouts.

The First World War left Eglantyne horrified by the prolonged Allied blockade on Germany and Austria-Hungary, which even after Armistice meant starvation for millions of civilians, especially children.

And so in 1919 Eglantyne and her sister Dorothy Buxton helped found the 'Fight the Famine' Council, which wanted to end the blockade and establish a League of Nations. One day during a rally in Trafalgar Square, Eglantyne was arrested for distributing a leaflet showing starving children which read: "Our blockade has caused this – millions of children are starving to death."

She ended up in court and was fined, but the judge was so impressed with Eglantyne's commitment to children that he himself paid her fine. His money became the first donation to Save the Children, the new charity just set up by Eglantyne and Dorothy.

Save the Children was officially launched at the Albert Hall in May 1919, with the aim of helping the starving civilians of central Europe. It was a success, raising £400,000 in that first year alone.

When in the autumn of 1921 Russia was facing famine, Save the Children chartered a cargo ship, the SS Torcello, to carry 600 tons of lifesaving food and medical supplies to Russia – saving hundreds of thousands of lives.

By 1922 Save the Children had become one of Britain's biggest charities. Eglantyne's Declaration of the Rights of the Child, written in 1923, was adopted by the League of Nations the following year. The present-day UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is derived from it.

But ten years of running Save the Children had sapped Eglantyne's fragile strength, and she died in Geneva in 1928, aged only 52.

The 39 Articles – A Series

I don't know how many of you have ventured into the nether reaches of your Book of Common Prayer(BCP) to discover, at the end, something rather curious: a list of 39 statements, ranging from a couple of sentences to a paragraph or two.

These are known as the 39 Articles, and they are, properly, not actually a part of the BCP, but predate the current edition (1662) by a century, being ratified by Queen Elizabeth in 1571. But it is a convenient place to put them, just after the ordinal, such that the entire 'historic formularies' of the Church of England can be found in one place.

You might be forgiven for wondering why I'm writing about a text that is evidently many centuries old; have we not something newer and more relevant to look at? The short answer is no; the 'historic formularies' of the CofE remain as relevant today as they ever have been, they continue to be a unifying text to which every minister in the church swear their agreement, and I personally think there is much in them to commend to those who are not ministers. So over the next few editions of the parish magazine I intend to serialise a short, and hopefully accessible, commentary on the 39 Articles, and we can explore together some of the core issues around which the Church of England has found agreement.

I. OF FAITH IN THE HOLY TRINITY

THERE is but one living and true God, ever- lasting, without body, parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the Maker, and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there be three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

The 39 Articles begin where our faith begins; in the triune God, the creator of the world, three persons in one God, indivisible and inseparable, co-eternal and co-reigning. Here we see the influence of the theologians of the early church, who spent the first 400 years after Christ's incarnation working out (sometimes loudly) exactly what we were dealing with. The starting point of Christianity has to be here, and it's not just an 'angels on a pinhead' irrelevance; if Christ was not God, he could never have revealed God to us, nor could he ever have atoned for our sins on the Cross (as only a perfect sacrifice could do that, and the only perfection is found in God). If The Holy Spirit was not God, we could never know Christ, nor God; nothing short of God could reach God. And if the Father was not God, all our hopes are in vain; it is only God who can create and sustain.

II. OF THE WORD OR SON OF GOD, WHICH WAS MADE VERY MAN

THE Son, which is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, and of one substance with the Father, took Man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin, of her substance: so that two whole and perfect Natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one Person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God, and very Man; who truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men.

Here we continue our journey through the essentials of Christianity; who, exactly was Christ? How could he be both God and Man? These are mysteries of which we will never know the full answer – it is beyond us. But just because we can't know the full answer, doesn't mean it's not a truth; if Christ was not fully human, then he can't have taken our place on the Cross, and made sacrifice on our behalf; he can't have known and suffered like us. But if he were not fully God then he can't have offered that sacrifice; his

perfection was divine. So both God and Humanity existed in one person, a full God and a full Human. Only this can safeguard the promises of Christianity; God came to us, as one of us, and saved us, as only he could.

To be continued...

The Rev'd Tom Pelham

The Story of Mince Pies

Did you know that mince pies have been traditional English Christmas fare since the Middle Ages, when meat was a key ingredient? The addition of spices, suet and alcohol to meat came about because it was an alternative to salting and smoking in order to preserve the food. Mince pies used to be a different shape – cradle-shaped with a pastry baby Jesus on top.



Stitches of Hope 2020

Well, what can I say about 2020 that has not already been said. Locked in – time to knit, I think, but knitting is more of a winter pastime. Despite this I have sent eight big black bags to Stitches of Hope during the year, many of them in October when I was lucky enough to know someone going near the depot who took them for me. A win there as no postage needed!



All this wonderful knitting is sent to Christian Hope International in Essex where it is sorted, then collected by Missions Without Borders and despatched to Eastern Europe. Blankets of magnificent colours, jumpers of assorted sizes from babies to teenagers, hats and scarves make such a difference to the children who have so little and gives them comfort as the weather worsens. I thank everyone who has knitted and those who have the unenviable task of sewing the blanket squares up, every one of these items is so much appreciated.

I would like to send sympathy to the family of Joy Bevans who died in June. She was 98, still attending morning services and still knitting. A very brave lady and a great loss.

Jan South also left us suddenly in October. She was very active in all church activities, she was on the PCC committee, supported the fetes with delicious chutneys and goodies, and more, and knitting. She will be very sadly missed by us all but by Henry and family the most. Our deepest sympathy to them all.

The second lockdown starts shortly and disrupts life again and our services are on line for a while but I hope you will all stay well and ... keep knitting!

Tessa Yeoman



CALENDAR FOR **DECEMBER**

ADVENT 2

Wed	2	10.30 am	Holy Communion <i>at St. Nicolas</i>
Sun	6	8.00 am	Holy Communion
		10.30 am	Parish Communion

Wed	9	10.30 am	Holy Communion <i>at St. Nicolas</i>
Thurs	10	5.00 pm	PCC Meeting <i>in church</i>

ADVENT 3

Sun	13	8.00 am	Holy Communion
		10.30 am	Matins

Wed	16	10.30 am	Holy Communion <i>at St. Nicolas</i>
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ADVENT 4

Sun	20	8.00 am	Holy Communion
		9.30 am	Family Service
		10.30 am	Parish Communion
		6.00 pm	Carol Service

Tues	22	3.30 pm	Magazine collation
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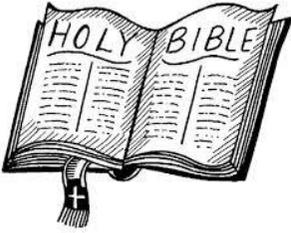
Wed	23	10.30 am	Holy Communion <i>at St. Nicolas</i>
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CHRISTMAS EVE

NO SERVICES

CHRISTMAS DAY

		9.00 am	Holy Communion (BCP)
		10.30 am	Parish Communion



SUNDAY READINGS **IN DECEMBER**

Sunday 6th December - Advent 2

OLD TESTAMENT: Isaiah 40.1-11

Isaiah is called upon to prepare the way for God's coming to console his people.

NEW TESTAMENT: 2 Peter 3.8-15

The believers to whom Peter writes have, in his view, two inter-related problems: they doubt the coming of Christ and they are drawn to immoral living.

GOSPEL: Mark 1.1-8

John the Baptist prepares the way for the coming of Jesus.

Sunday 13th December - Advent 3

OLD TESTAMENT: Isaiah 61.1-4, 8-end

Isaiah gives an account of his mission as a man chosen by God to speak on his behalf to Israel.

NEW TESTAMENT: John 1.6-8, 19-28

John has been sent as a witness to God's coming. He pronounces that God is already in the midst of his people.

Sunday 20th December - Advent 4

OLD TESTAMENT: 2 Samuel 7.1-16

Within David's checkered story (a patchwork of triumph and downfall), comes a pivotal glimpse into the Lord's relationship with David and Israel.

NEW TESTAMENT: Romans 16.25-end

Paul's great letter to the Romans ends with a doxology - a moment of praise.

GOSPEL: Luke 1. 26-38

The first two chapters of Luke include some of the most beautiful poetry in scripture, expressing the presence of God in the lives of the faithful of Israel.

Christmas Day

OLD TESTAMENT: Isaiah 9.2-7

For the prophet Isaiah, God comes to us as a child endowed with sovereignty and called by various names - Counsellor, mighty God, eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

NEW TESTAMENT: Titus 2.11-14

For Paul, in his letter to Titus, Jesus' credentials were validated by his identity as the indisputable expression of God's grace, and hence the basic source of the Christian moral life.

GOSPEL: Luke 2.1-14

In his familiar birth narrative, Luke reaffirms the Davidic lineage of Jesus and, in the message of the Angels, identifies him as Messiah, Lord, and Saviour.

Sunday 27th December - Christmas 1

OLD TESTAMENT: Isaiah 61.10 – 62.3

The prophet praises God and looks forward to the creation of a new Jerusalem, a jewel in the crown of the kingdom of God.

NEW TESTAMENT: Luke 2.15-21

Jesus' identity is confirmed by the shepherds' response to the angels' message. The name which Jesus took at his Circumcision is but the fulfilment of this message.

CHRISTMAS 1980

This was always going to be a difficult Christmas for us, being the first one without my husband, the Father of our six children. He had been killed in Germany earlier in the year, so all the decisions were mine. Christmas loomed large and black, and to me it was unthinkable to spend the festive time with either set of parents, as our loss and theirs would have been even more poignant. It was essential to do something totally different. When a friend offered me a job as guide, matron and general factotem to the Dolphin Ski Club which she ran, and which was going to Italy over Christmas, I jumped at it. This offered us entirely different surroundings, the company of others, and skiing and ski lessons every day. I was responsible from Heathrow onwards and although there was no pay, our holiday would be free. Off we went to the mountains of Italy.

As the days got nearer to Christmas, I was getting increasingly edgy and very aware of the loss of Mark, and the effects on us as a family. On Christmas Eve, my children and I trudged through deep snow in the dark, with freezing temperatures, to the packed village church for Midnight Mass. We must have been the only visitors, and very obvious in our ski clothes - we had nothing else. As the familiar Latin Mass started with its incense and bells, (all my schooling was at a Roman Catholic convent), the worries, responsibilities and fears began to disappear. Towards the end of Mass, to our astonishment, snowy figures walked down the aisle to form a living tableau - real shepherds, real sheep, real parents and a real baby. Unbeknown to us, every year the youngest baby boy born in the village and his parents represented Joseph, Mary and the Infant Christ. It was unforgettable.

From that moment on I really understood the joy of the shepherds, the sanctity of the Holy Family, the peace of the Christ Child, and knew that in His Hands we would be alright. The rest of the holiday was a happy blur, and I will always be thankful to my friend who understood our dilemma - she too had lost her first husband - and offered me that job.

Anna Castley



Mistletoe

This time of year you can see all sorts of traditions played out with regard to Christmas decorations. Strict adherents use holly, ivy and of course, mistletoe. While holly and ivy are to be found in gardens and hedgerows, mistletoe usually only appears in greengrocers' shops, or high in a tree well out of reach.



Mistletoe is *hemiparasitic*, meaning that although its leaves enable it to feed itself through photosynthesis, its roots invade the host tree or shrub to extract water and other nutrients. Its favourite host trees are apple, lime, hawthorn, poplar or oak and it normally hangs as a large globe, tantalisingly high and totally visible once winter arrives and it is the only green left on the tree. There are some spectacular examples in Windsor Great Park, clearly visible from the path on the opposite side of the River Thames.

We all know about the almost translucent white berries, fleshy and sticky, which form in the forks of mistletoe's many branches. While they are toxic to humans, they are attractive to birds. When birds have enjoyed the juicy flesh, they wipe the remaining seeds off their beaks onto the nearest branch [somewhat like small children wiping sticky hands on any surface close by – mummy's face or clothes?]. With luck the seed remains stuck to the bark and solves mistletoe's problem of reproduction.

In Greek mythology, mistletoe gave access to the Underworld. Romans thought it represented Peace, Love and Understanding and perhaps that is how it has sidled into our Christmas celebrations. The earliest documentary evidence for kissing under mistletoe dates from the sixteenth century. Some people think a berry should be removed after each kiss. Given the small size of pieces generally available these days, perhaps that is a practice not to be pursued!

Kirsty Steele

SURPLICE TO REQUIREMENT

Not long ago, Mike decided that he needed a new surplice as the one he inherited from the vestry cupboard was linen and creased as soon as you looked at it. Compared with the rest of the choir, his looked scruffy. A new one was the answer. Not being cognitive with ecclesiastical vestments, "Mr know it all", google, was the answer. The choice of clothing was amazing, such a vast range, especially in the surplice department. Some of the catholic surplices were a work of art with lace, embroidery and lavish styles. Absolutely not the style for the Transfig.

On telephoning one firm, a mournful voice answered with a reverential tone, "May I help you?". "I do hope so, a standard, no frills surplice is what we need. I have looked at your website and see you have the perfect answer". "Madam, what measurement?" "Very large".

After a lengthy conversation one was ordered and paid for. Just as I was thinking they were up to date with a card machine via the phone, the voice said "You have ordered a child's size, Madam". So we started all over again, measuring Mike in all the right places! He is now the proud owner of a standard choir surplice, which fits and is Omo white and creaseless.

All this reminded me of a story my Father told us when we were children of a Cambridge friend who ended up as Subdean of Westminster Abbey. They had kept in touch for years and we used to meet him at Henley as they both rowed. He was a lovely man and very round. One day he must have brushed up against some pollen in the Abbey which stained his surplice. His wife took it to the dry cleaners and when it returned, stainless, the Subdean was most amused by the laundry ticket pinned to the surplice, "one bell tent".

Jo Tombs

JOURNEYS OR LOCKDOWN THIS CHRISTMAS?

Christmas is a busy time for travel, as many of us venture a great distance to see family or friends again. But this year coronavirus has put an end to all that. Seeing all our loved ones this Christmas will be difficult, if not impossible. Soon we may not be travelling anywhere very much at all.

Have you noticed that the Christmas story is about journeys? It begins with Mary and Joseph travelling from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Then, some shepherds receive news from an angel about a special birth. They travel through the night, across dark fields and down unlit streets to search for the baby Jesus.

After this, in an eastern country some wise men see a new star, one that heralds a new king. They leave home and set out with only the star to guide them, and their faith to reassure them that Someone special is waiting at the end of their journey.

All these travellers must have wondered what really lay ahead. Nothing was fully understood, carefully planned for, or safe. They all travelled with questions and uncertainties. But God had come unexpectedly into their lives, and suddenly they were given new roles to serve Him. Despite worldly circumstances that could have crushed them, they stood firm and trusted God all the way.

These travellers' tales tell us that God may suddenly enter into our familiar, or this year, unfamiliar circumstances. He may come in surprising ways, to prompt us into new avenues of service. At first His call on us may be uncomfortable and challenging.

If our response is anything like Joseph, Mary, the shepherds and wise men – to be obedient to His call in serving, witnessing and worshipping, we shall be greatly blessed and rewarded.

We are all on life's journey. If we travel with God, He will be faithful and lead us to His heavenly Home.

Lester Amann

Christmas Frustration????

I said to God, upon my knees
 "O Lord, I am so cross!
"That gift I sent to Aunt Denise
 "Within the post is lost!
"That tree I bought for forty pounds
 "(Well, just a penny less)
"Its needles lie upon the ground
 "It looks a total mess!"

"I know," said God, "I understand,
 "I sent my Son, you know.
"He came to Earth, just as I'd planned
 "Two thousand years ago
 "Was born within a stable bare –
 "The cattle heard Him cry
"He spoke of love, men didn't care
 "They led Him out to die."

"No gift was given with such love
 "No higher price was paid.
"He left His throne of light above
 "For sin His life to trade.
 "But even after all these years
 "This gift you men eschew,
"So Christmas is a time of tears
 "For Me, as well as you."

By Nigel Beeton

FROM THE REGISTERS

Funeral

25th November Rodney Graham Ernest Herring (71)

ALTAR FLOWERS

Sunday 29 th November	Advent	No flowers
Sunday 6 th December	Advent	No flowers
Sunday 13 th December	Advent	No flowers
Sunday 20 th December	Advent	No flowers



MAGAZINE DEADLINE

The deadline for the January issue of the
Church Magazine is
Wednesday 16th December