

Vicar's letter – December 2014

In his *Sonnet (on his Blindness)*, John Milton struggled to come to terms with his loss of sight. He wrote of accepting the Divine will with patience because, “*They also serve who only stand and waite.*”

The trouble is that we have got used to fast food, to immediate access to information and to instant world-wide communication. We pester, cajole and bully our diaries and our calendars instead of letting times and seasons arrive in their own good time. The future is hauled greedily back into the present and so Christmas gifts are on the shelves in September and summer holidays are advertised on Boxing Day! ‘Deferred gratification’ is a personal and social inconvenience, a demon to be exorcised from our lifestyles. Waiting is simply *too* passive; it is living life on the motorway hard shoulder. Waiting is a waste of time.

Advent shines a probing spiritual searchlight on such an approach. It interrogates the ‘Zeitgeist’, the spirit of this age. It reminds us that waiting is an active pursuit requiring dedication, commitment and patience, and it can be hard and tortuous work. It is not easy to wait for important examination results or university offers or for the outcome of a job application. It is risky to wait and see whether your tentative “I love you” receives the response, “... and I love you too.” It takes courage to wait to discover if anti-depressants will ‘kick in’, or whether a course of chemotherapy has ‘done the trick’. To wait is to let go of our obsession for being in control of our lives; it is trusting yourself to something or someone else.

Pregnancy is all about waiting for a baby to be born. It is a wait which cannot be hurried; it takes time for the foetus to develop in its mother’s womb. Pregnancy also gives time for preparation – reading baby books, preparing a nursery, buying a cot, baby clothes, a push chair and a car seat.

Think of *Advent* as being like a pregnancy, for it too awaits the birth of a baby. However, we must not be in too much of a hurry to get to Christmas, otherwise we shall miss the opportunity to prepare. The Christian calendar gives us a God-given opportunity to take an honest look at ourselves and our lifestyles, to open our hearts to God and to ask him to transform us from the inside-out. In the waiting, we may learn how to become true subjects of the Coming King.

At Christmas, God chose to get involved with humanity *from the inside*. He did not hide within philosophical speculation or keep himself at the safe distance of literary semantics. Instead, “*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*” (St John 1.14 – R.S.V.) The Christian God is not only a divinity of language and ideas, but also of sweat, tears, amniotic fluid and blood!

Our familiarity with the Nativity can foster a cosy, Christmas-card complacency about an historical event which was radical, revolutionary and far from ‘correct’.

- It was *morally* incorrect for an unmarried teenager to become pregnant and announce that her betrothed was not the father.
- It was *hygienically* incorrect for a baby to be born amongst the urine and excrement of farm animals.
- It was *socially* incorrect for poor, uneducated shepherds to be the first to visit the cradle of the Messiah.
- It was *politically* incorrect for a new King to be celebrated during the reign of a living monarch.

- It was *religiously* incorrect for gentile astrologers to bow down and worship a Jewish leader.
- It was *philosophically* incorrect for immortality to limit itself to human form.

However, that's God for you – he never has been one for convention and predictability. He will always be a God of surprises; a God of transcendent mystery; a God who bursts like a 'jack' out of the box of our attempts to contain him.

There are many wonderful services and events at All Saints during the month of December. Please refer to the calendar, Christmas card or the website for details. It would be lovely to see you at some of these as we celebrate the 'God of Surprises' becoming Emmanuel - God with us and God as one of us.

Chryssa and I wish you a very happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year!

Fr Kim Taplin

ROSE PULSFORD RIP

On the key-ring that Rose always used to keep with her was a little piece of text. It explained that the name 'Rosemary' means '*sweet tempered, with an enigmatic personality who makes an impression on everyone she meets*'. We think it's a pretty good description, because Rose certainly made an impression on those she met, and during her long life she accumulated a huge number of friends and acquaintances.

As long as we can remember, our mother Rose always welcomed visitors to 68 Alma Vale Road and they were often persuaded in for a cup of tea, a piece of cake and a chat. Her dining room, where she held court, was the centre of her social life and was always warm, cosy and inviting .

We often used to tease her that she was more interested in other people than she was in us. It was an exaggeration, of course, but we were pleased and proud that she had such a large circle of friends. Rose enjoyed the company of people of all ages, particularly if they were what she considered to be young, which was often in heart and not age.

They moved to 68 Alma Vale Road early in the 1960s. At that time the street was a cul-de-sac, mostly occupied by families, and we could play outside in a street which had no parked cars. Rose quickly built up a large network of friends. As you know she remained there for all but the last few months of her life and witnessed many changes in the area, especially the development of the shopping precinct and the gradual change from families to students occupying the houses. Many people might have found these changes intimidating but Rose enjoyed the busy environment of the precinct, and it became a focus of her social life. Everyone who worked there knew Rose and would pass the time of day chatting and joking with her, telling her their troubles and sometimes helping her home with her shopping.

She also volunteered for work at the PDSA, where she especially enjoyed helping customers choose their outfits. She liked colour matching outfits and hats and loved to give advice on what went with what. In fact, she preferred this kind of shopping to any other, and we once told her something new had come from the charity shop so she would appreciate it more.

When Ron died in 1990 we got her a very young black Labrador pup as a companion. Rupert had a ravenous appetite. He was very easy-going about what he would eat, that is, anything, and very soon grew into his enormous paws. On one occasion at Christmas time he opened the fridge (with those same paws) and ate the whole cooked turkey. Rose,

however, was as tolerant as ever. *"He didn't mean it,"* she said, and it's true that he did have his polite side. On walks on the Downs with his dog walker, Mavis, he could often be seen queueing hopefully at the ice cream or hot dog stand. He became a very large Rupert, who liked to sit on the settee next to Rose.

Her house in Alma Vale Road was the centre of Rose's life for over 50 years and she wasn't really happy away from there. At the same time she disliked disruption at home and for a long time resisted having it redecorated. In 2012, though, we managed to persuade her to have the work done, and took her off to Bath for a week while John McGill and his team did the necessary. She hated every minute of it and gave us the week from hell. In the meantime, John had six men working flat out to get it done on time. On the day of her return, Rose glanced round the splendid job that had been done on her dining room. *"Well,"* she said, *"they haven't done much have they?"* It was a classically blunt Rose understatement but we could also see that she really loved the transformation.

In more recent years her territory was limited to Alma Vale, as she found the trip to the shopping precinct too difficult. She liked to wander up the road and pop into the shops and stop at the Alma Tavern for a cup of tea and a chat. In fine weather, she held court sitting on her front garden wall. It was a kind of *ad hoc* community counselling service. Passers-by were always welcome to sit down for as long as they liked, and share their problems and triumphs. She always amazed me on how much she knew about the local population.

She moved to Carlton Mansions in April, as she had grown to depend on the company in hospital, and transferred her interests and skills with her. She soon had a thorough working knowledge of both the care staff and the other residents and the then manager, often said that Rose knew more about the residents and staff than she did. Rose also loved to arrange flowers and I have very happy memories of doing this with her and the other residents at Carlton mansions in the last months.

It was no surprise to me to learn that Father Taplin lived at 68 Pembroke Road. Rose liked the number 8 and considered it to be lucky for her. When she moved to Bristol it was to 19 The Avenue (9-1 is 8) and from there to 38 Summerhill Totterdown, 48 Bradley Avenue, Winterbourne then finally to 68 Alma Vale Road. She moved to Carlton Mansions on 18th April and considered it lucky that it was at 8 Apsley Road. She died there on 24th September, 8 months after she first became ill and 8 days after I had returned home. She had celebrated her 88th birthday on 24 August, the 8th month.

Rose had 88 years of an eventful life, living the last 24 years alone, when mostly she was healthy and independent, and that is something to celebrate. Our mother Rose was an extraordinarily tolerant and outspoken woman for her times and her memory and wisdom will be in our hearts forever. She was kind and patient and loved to be asked for advice. She had great insight into what motivated people and her advice was often insightful and perceptive. It was a motherly skill and ideas of family permeated all her thoughts and actions. She used to say *'you will miss your mother when she isn't there'* and we certainly do.

Dr Ann Pulsford and Maryrose Pulsford

ADDRESS GIVEN AT THE FUNERAL OF MARION GROVES 21.11.2014

“Death is the touchstone of our attitude to life. People who are afraid of death are afraid of life. It is impossible not to be afraid of life with all its complexity and dangers if one is afraid of death.” Those profound and challenging words came from Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, (Archbishop Anthony Bloom) whose influence on Marion’s journey of faith was mentioned just now by her friend Zina. More of that in a moment.

Marion’s association with All Saints Clifton goes back forty or so years, but I came to know her really only over the last four, at first as she began occasionally receiving the Blessed Sacrament at her home in Canynge Road, and later more regularly, after her sister Pat’s death, when she moved to Ash Lea Court. Jean Bradford and I shared the privilege of Communion visits at home and in hospital during this latter time. I say privilege because that’s how it was, in spite of Marion’s ever-modest protestations that she didn’t want to be a burden. No, Marion, never! We knew what it meant to you; your quiet, deep, steadfast faith was an inspiration we shan’t forget.

I’ve spoken with others, and we agreed that the sister-in-Christ whose life we celebrate and commend today has been one lived close to God, exemplified by her character and many talents. Her 98-year-old friend Christine Malet, when I visited her this morning and asked how she remembered Marion, declared she was “full of fun”. Some might consider her gifts should have entitled her to a more distinguished professional life. As it was, though, they were used in myriad ways pleasing to God, as we’ve just heard from Zina. Her sense of the beautiful, the orderly, the numinous, all pointed to her servanthood and friendship with Christ. Her shyness and natural reserve were at least in part, one feels, due to her being deeply thoughtful and prayerful. The readings she chose – ever meticulous in detail! – for yesterday, at the requiem mass, and today, reflect this. The opening of John’s gospel expounds the unfathomable mystery of the Incarnation, the Word made Flesh. The Prayer of Jesus for the unity of his Church in John 17 was another passage which resonated strongly with her as one whose pathways included Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism and Orthodox.

Marion coped patiently and bravely with the Parkinson’s disease which so limited the last years of her life, rarely showing the frustration it must have caused her. She wasn’t afraid to speak confidently of death, which is why those words of Anthony of Sourozh seemed appropriate. It was saddening to see her troubled and distressed during the last months, but receiving the Sacrament always calmed her. Something that exercised her was feeling undeserving of God’s forgiveness, a struggle many of us doubtless have from time to time. There’s a verse from one of the hymns she chose for today which expresses that eloquently:

*Just as I am, though tossed about,
With many a conflict, many a doubt;
Fightings within and fears without,
O Lamb of God, I come.*

Another influence on Marion was the 17th century priest poet George Herbert. He knew well that sense of unworthiness before God that dogged Marion – and as often besets the sensitive and truly good. I want to finish by reading his poem *Love bade me welcome* and I ask you to imagine, for a moment, such a conversation taking place between God and Marion:

Love bade me welcome. Yet my soul drew back
 Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack

From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
If I lacked any thing.

A guest, I answered, worthy to be here:
Love said, You shall be he.
I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,
I cannot look on thee.
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
Who made the eyes but I?

Truth Lord, but I have marred them: let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.
And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?
My dear, then I will serve.
You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:
So I did sit and eat.

Dear Marion, freed now from frailties of flesh and spirit, may you sit and eat in the presence of him who has loved you throughout your life and loves you in eternity. + Rest in peace.

Jessica Smith, Parish Lay Minister

The Angelus-What, When, How

The recent 'Food for the Soul' prayer event at All Saints on Saturday 17 October gave many opportunities to experience and reflect on prayer practices new to them and to find new dimensions in ways of praying familiar to them.

WHAT

A prayer familiar to us at All Saints, the Angelus, was the focus of my contribution to 'Food for the Soul'. I hope these notes may be informative and encouraging to our spiritual life.

The Angelus is a short prayer honouring the Incarnation, acknowledging the Blessed Virgin Mary, and petitioning Christ for grace. It begins with a quote from the account of the Annunciation, the moment when the archangel Gabriel came to Mary and announced to her that she would be the mother of Christ.

All of the elements of the Angelus are either quotes from scripture or have scriptural analogues:

The prayer begins: 'The Angel of the Lord brought tidings unto Mary'.

This refers to Luke 1: 26ff:

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, **27** to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. **28** And he came to her and said...

It continues: 'And she conceived by the Holy Ghost'. This refers to Luke 1: 35:

35 The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.'

We then come to the invocation or address: 'Hail Mary, full of grace'. This is the greeting with which Gabriel meets the Virgin Mary according to Luke 1:28 'Hail, full of Grace'.

This phrase 'full of grace' is a source of contention. Critics of the Angelus argue that this wording inappropriately attributes to Mary saving power that is Christ's alone. Yet a look at the language suggests this criticism is based on a lack of information. The Greek term translated as 'full of grace' (to use the wording to which some object) is *kecaritwmenh*

At its root is *caris*, 'charis'. This is one of the two most common words for 'grace' in the New Testament. This word 'charis' is related both in meaning and in verbal form and family to the other common word for grace, 'charisma'. Yet our 'charis' suggests God's merciful power by which He touches souls, turns them to Christ, keeps them and nourishes them to the practice of Christian virtues. It also suggests grace in the sense of beauty and delight. On the other hand, 'charisma' denotes the gift we do not earn by which we receive the forgiveness of sin, faith, and holiness by the Holy Spirit.¹

With this distinction in view, we can see why the salutation made by the angel to Mary can validly be understood as 'full of grace'. It is unfortunate perhaps that there are not two words for 'grace' in English, but by echoing the angel's words with the English 'grace', we evoke a fuller range of meanings suggested by the Greek.

The prayer goes on to assert 'The Lord is with thee', more words of the archangel Gabriel, as given at Luke 1:28. The following words 'blessed art thou among women' continue the biblical quotation as it appears in some ancient codices of scripture, as we see in the footnote at this point in the NRSV.

Both the phrase 'Blessed art thou among women' and the phrase 'blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus' appear together in Elizabeth's exclamation of wonder at the Visitation, Mary's encounter with her cousin (at Luke 1:42).

The next phrase again derives, if less directly, from the Visitation. 'Holy Mary, mother of God' echoes Elizabeth's rhetorical question at Luke 1:43, 'And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?' Of course some people hesitate to name Mary 'Mother of God', perhaps disliking the seeming paradox or the status this grants her, yet if we hold to the divinity of Christ, then logically Christ's mother must warrant such acknowledgement.

We then shift to petition. As we ourselves pray—and we shall see that the prayer is directed to Christ—we ask the Virgin to accompany us: 'Pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death'. Underlying this request is the biblical injunction at James 5:16 'Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects'. The scepticism about saints praying with and for us seems to betray an assumption that these persons who are not here on earth are less real and less righteous than people alive in the world. Such an attitude also runs counter to the practice which began with the earliest Christians of asking for the prayers of, and praying for, the faithful departed. The *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (written sometime between AD 155-156) explains: '.....we worship this One as the Son of God, but we worship the martyrs as disciples and imitators of the Lord, deservedly so, because of their unsurpassable devotion to their own King and Teacher .. (The *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 17).²

From praying with and to the Virgin and seeking her prayer, we move to a declaration of the incarnation directly quoting John 1: 14: 'And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us'.

¹ See:

<http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?q=charis&s=References&rc=LEX&rc2=LEX+GRK>

² See *The study of Liturgy: revised edition*, eds Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold SJ, and Paul Bradshaw, SPBK, 1992, p 475

This helps set up a slight shift in focus towards God the Father and Christ: 'Pour forth, we beseech thee, O Lord, thy grace unto our hearts, that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ, thy Son, was made known by the message of an Angel, may by His Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of His Resurrection, through the same Christ, our Lord, Amen.'

Our acknowledgement and celebration of the Incarnation through praise of the Virgin Mary is thus brought to overflowing fullness in the petition in the presence of the Virgin for the blessings of Father, Son, and – central to the Incarnation, as declared in scripture and in the Apostles' Creed if not named explicitly here —the Holy Spirit.

WHEN

History

The Angelus has always been associated with the ringing of a bell. One 13th century description mentions it in connection with the bell rung for Compline, the night monastic office.

The Hail Mary seems to have become widespread in England in the 11th century as an antiphon in the Little Hour devoted to Our Lady.

The Angelus is traditionally said at 6.00 in the morning, at noon, and at 6.00 in the evening. Evidence for the evening and morning practice is oldest.

The Angelus is replaced by [Regina Caeli](#) during [Eastertide](#), and is not said on [Good Friday](#) or [Holy Saturday](#). (Texts of both prayers appear at the end of this essay.)

Anglican Cult and Culture

The Angelus is found in two popular twentieth century [Anglo-Catholic](#) manuals of devotion. *The Practice of Religion: A Short Manual of Instructions and Devotions* by Archibald Campbell Knowles, first published in 1908, refers to the Angelus as "the memorial of the Incarnation" and notes that "In the Mystery of the Incarnation we worship and adore Our Lord as God of God, we honour and reverence Saint Mary as 'Blessed among women.' In honouring Mary, the Instrument of the Incarnation, we really honour Christ, Who became Incarnate." The Angelus is also found in *Saint Augustine's Prayer Book: A Book of Devotion for members of the Episcopal Church*, first published in 1947 (Revised Edition, 1967).³

HOW:

The bell

At least since the 13th century there has been a tradition of reciting the Angelus or three Hail Marys at the tolling of a bell in the evening. The statutes of Wells Cathedral, in 1331, direct that "three strokes should be struck at three several times upon the great bell in quick succession", and this shortly before curfew.⁴

The traditional practice seems to be to ring the bell in the pattern 3 3 3 9, that is, 3 rings at each of the versicle/ responses and 9 for the collect 'We beseech thee, O Lord...'. Ringing the bell draws our attention to the words, signalling their significance. It also reminds us of our place in God's order unfolding in, and transforming, the world in time-echoing the great mystery of Christ's Incarnation.

³ See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angelus#Anglican_practice

⁴ See <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01487a.htm>

Texts

The Angelus

V/. The Angel of the Lord brought tidings to Mary;
R/. And she conceived by the Holy Ghost.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee;
blessed art thou among women,
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners,
now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

V/. Behold the handmaid of the Lord;
R/. Be it done to me according to thy word.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee;
blessed art thou among women,
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners,
now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

V/. And the Word was made flesh;
R/. And dwelt among us.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee;
blessed art thou among women,
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners,
now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

V/. Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God.
R/. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray,
We beseech thee, O Lord, pour thy grace into our hearts; that as we have known the
Incarnation of your Son Jesus Christ
by the message of an angel, so by his + cross and passion, we may be brought to the glory
of his resurrection.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

The [Regina Caeli](#)

V. Queen of Heaven, rejoice, alleluia.
R. For He whom you did merit to bear, alleluia.
V. Has risen, as he said, alleluia.
R. Pray for us to God, alleluia.
V. Rejoice and be glad, O Virgin Mary, alleluia.
R. For the Lord has truly risen, alleluia.

Let us pray. O God, who gave joy to the world through the resurrection of Thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, grant we beseech Thee, that through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, His Mother, we may obtain the joys of everlasting life. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

Stephen D'Evelyn

Sermon preached by the Very Rev'd David Hoyle on the Feast of Christ the King 2014 Matthew 25.

About three weeks ago I was in Copenhagen and visited the Amalienborg, the winter home of the Danish royal family. If you have not been, you should, but a tip, you might not want to go in October – it is cold.

Now, I discovered the Danes are proud of their Queen; she is a very interesting woman. She is an assiduous constitutional monarch, she speaks, Danish, French, English, Swedish and German, and has (they say) a limited knowledge of Faroese. She has a Cambridge degree and has studied at Aarhus, the Sorbonne and the LSE. She is an accomplished artist and her page illustrations for the Lord of the Rings are quite famous. She also has a very light touch when it comes to royal dignity. On the day of her accession she gave up all the titles that the royal house normally claimed. She was styled simply *By the Grace of God, Queen of Denmark*

It is not how it is normally done. If you ever have to write to the King of Spain, buy a big envelope. The correct form of address is:

His Majesty Juan Carlos I King of Spain, of [Castile](#), of [León](#), of [Aragon](#), of the [Two Sicilies](#), of [Jerusalem](#), of [Navarre](#), of [Granada](#), of [Toledo](#), of [Valencia](#)..., (then thirteen more..., but your lunch might spoil, we will jump ahead)... King of the Spanish East and West Indies and of the Islands and Mainland of the [Ocean Sea](#); [Archduke of Austria](#); Duke of [Burgundy](#), of [Brabant](#), of [Milan](#), (then eight more titles before we get to), Sovereign [Grand Master](#) of the [Illustrious Royal Order of the Golden Fleece](#), (and Grand Master of more orders than you can shake a stick at).

And that is how we think of kingship; it is all to do with places, the people who live in this country and their top person, their boss. Your King is King of Spain, or *Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland* and of *Her other Realms and Territories*. When we think of Kings we think of *these* people with *their* king and not *those* people who are different. When we talk about Great Britain and Northern Ireland we are usually pretty clear we do not mean the French, who are foreign. We mean people like us who eat marmalade and understand cricket and know how to queue. Kings belong to a world that has nations and governments and rules, where you do things your way and I do things properly. Kings belong to a world of divisions and difference.

In order to make kingship work, we set it apart. It sits on platforms and stands on balconies. Kings (and Queens) belong to a world of divisions and difference.

Now, let's turn to the gospel reading, that story of sheep and goats, and examine a very different way of proceeding. To us it all read very oddly, that strange and slightly alarming beginning for example

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. Matthew 25:31

It is a scene a faithful Jew would recognise lifted from Daniel Chapter 7. A heavenly court is set up, thrones are put in place and the nations gather

One like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. Daniel 7:13

When Jesus talked about the Son of Man coming in glory they would not have hurried past looking at their sandals, they would have known the reference, they would have thought this is the old story we have been taught. Even when Jesus changes register and drops the references to Daniel and talks about animals instead, the Jewish audience would still have understood

he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats Matthew 25:32

That is what Judean farmers did night after night, goats would be gathered in to shelter, sheep left on a hillside. They separated sheep from goats all the time.

All this separation and judgement is *familiar*. So too is the extraordinary list of virtuous conduct

I was hungry ..., I was thirsty ..., I was a stranger ... I was naked ..., I was sick ... I was in prison Matthew 25:35-36

This too the audience knew. They knew where to direct charity, they knew who to care for, the hungry, strangers and aliens... The story, for all its oddity to us, was something that the faithful would have understood all those years ago,

Except, except for one thing; one element in this story was radical, unfamiliar and strange. Nowhere in Jewish tradition was it ever suggested that the king who would come in glory *and* the hungry and the stranger and the prisoner might be one and the same thing. That was not familiar at all. Jesus was, he claimed, the King they waited for and the powerless one they pitied.

This king does not belong to a world of division and difference. He is found in power and weakness. He holds all things together.

When Jesus talked about the 'Kingdom', and he talked about the Kingdom a lot: in all those parables where the kingdom was compared to a mustard seed, or a net, or a vineyard, he was not talking about the King of Spain or Queen Elizabeth and her other territories and dominions. Kingdom and King is actually a pretty poor trade for the language Jesus spoke. He was talking about rule, authority and right. He was talking about the Kingdom of God, the place where God has the rule and the authority and the right and where all things created are known and valued.

The Kingdom of God is not one of the nations, a place where you have property, a place where some people belong and others do not, a place of taxes and national anthems. It is not a bit of land between Wales and Watford. It is not a place at all, it is the future, it is the reign of God, it is salvation. Nor is it a kingdom of division between rich and poor and powerful and weak. In this Kingdom Christ is present equally in all.

Confronted by the kingdoms of this world, at the judgement seat of Pilate, Christ did not summon an army and fight. He did not trade or negotiate, he did not compromise. No

politics as the art of the possible, no playing to his strengths, no exploiting another's weakness. That is how the kingdoms work, how you separate this from that, it is the way we build our communities always leaving some on the outside so that we on in the inside can know we are special.

Christ the King does not conform to any of those expectations. He is put to death for failing to be the kind of King we want. We talk about him turning over the tables, but have we actually noticed what it is he overturns? Every community we belong to has limits and boundaries, every community we join leaves people out. This King, Jesus, turns those tables over. He builds a new community in which Samaritans precede Jews, where neighbour comes before husband, parent and child, where servants are as important as masters, where latecomers are made welcome and where the sick and the sinful sit at table. It is a community that is not defined by good manners or class, does not depend on a love that admits only members of the family, or on a Law that excludes those we do not trust. It is a community that does not deal in blame, or bargain over power.

When we call Christ 'the King' we lay claim to that Kingdom where all our divisions are set aside and all the things that keep us safe from other people are thrown down, because there aren't any *others* any more. To call Christ our King is to become a radical, a social revolutionary. It is to lay claim to the future. It is to give voice to hope.

On the feast of Christ the King, the Kingdom is offered to all. We must never suggest that only some are welcome.

All Saints Organ and its progress

What a surprise I had when I returned from Hong Kong on Remembrance Sunday! It was good to see that work had started on the organ at last, and I knew that it was going to be dismantled whilst I was away, but that area does look very bare without the organ console and all the pipes!

Since then, structural engineers and concrete experts have cut the access doors in the concrete surround – a messy job, which left the church with a nasty film of dust. A big thank you to those who helped clean up.

I have also been to Nicholson's factory near Malvern, and have been very impressed by their care and pride in doing their work. Guy Russell, who, as an apprentice at Walkers worked on the building of the organ in 1967, was busy revoicing some of the pipe work; another craftsman showed me the new rank of 'Diapason' pipes for the swell organ, whilst Mike Lane showed me what is happening with the chassis and action. Since then I have tried out Nicholson's latest instrument, at Dean Close School in Cheltenham – an absolute delight to play and listen to. Their craftsmanship is second to none, and they and I are convinced that all the fund-raising efforts will produce the instrument that All Saints deserves.

All being well, re-assembly will begin in late-February. Wouldn't it be good to have it in fine voice for Easter? Let's hope so!

Meanwhile, our fund-raising efforts have to continue, and any help that members of the congregation can give in raising awareness, publicising and supporting events, selling tickets etc. will be welcome.

John Davenport

IN THIS MONTH..... DECEMBER 1894

A LETTER TO THE EDITORS OF THE PARISH MAGAZINE

Dear Sirs,

Allow me to suggest that Kneeling Hassocks, similar to those in use at the Cathedral, should be provided for worshippers at All Saints'. The present Hassocks in use at the latter church are so frightfully hard that it is absolute torture to kneel on them for any length of time. Weak or sickly people cannot endure such unnecessary suffering; it is cruelty to animals to inflict it upon them.

Yours truly,
MERCY.

20th November 1894

[The Churchwardens would gladly renew the Hassocks if they could, but in the present state of the Finances of the Church they do not feel justified in incurring the outlay - EDs.]

**From the Bishop
Closed doors, open doors...**

"She laid him in a manger because there was no guest room available for them." Luke 2:7 (NIV)

I think this is my 38th Christmas as an ordained person! Early on in my ministry I worried that I might run out of things to say about Christmas after say, ten years. After dozens of talks at family services, eucharists, and carol services, I am amazed to observe that each year I can still see something new to me in these stories of old.

I read Luke 2:7 and it struck me. We're told that there was no room for Jesus then, and my observation is that in our society today, Jesus seems to be increasingly shut out. In particular shut out of public discourse.

Let me explain. As our culture moves towards a more secular worldview and the atheists in our society seem ever more confident, our institutions seem to be more and more uncertain as to what input faith might make in contributing to the common good. On a local radio phone in it was put to me by a caller that I seemed "too sensible to believe in fairy stories!"

The Chairman of one of our major political parties has attracted criticism simply because he made the comment that it was his belief in God that drove his passion for social justice. He wasn't claiming that everyone who is passionate about social justice is somehow deficient if they don't have faith; simply that for him, his faith committed him to this concern.

All this hostility doesn't seem to me to be particularly rational. Here's my point: the space for the input of faith in our public spaces getting smaller and consequently faith is being marginalized in the very culture which it had a major part in forming.

But does this matter? After all I have throughout my ministry constantly been told, even by some Christians, that faith and politics don't mix.

Well, I want to say that it really does matter and I want to see Christians and other faith groups make their contribution to public debate and the outcomes of such debate. In other words I think that the common good is immediately undermined by shutting out people of faith.

I think we have much to contribute to education, social ethics, holistic community and social justice. According to Peter Brierley church membership across all churches totals over 5 million. Add to that other faith communities and you are talking about a significant number of people. Anglicans make up about one million of that number. If our contribution to the common good was taken away, communities up and down the country would be significantly less than they could be. Our contribution, though sometimes undervalued, would certainly be missed.

So what do we do? I think there are three things we might consider. First, before the door in the public place slams on us we need to, metaphorically speaking, put a foot in the door. I think we can't keep quiet about this, and we need to develop a more defiant tone in this process of being marginalised. 'We have a Gospel to proclaim' and I don't think we should be ashamed of telling it.

Second, a form of Christianity, or any faith, which is not lived out beyond the comfort zone of our local places of worship will seem empty to a critical world. Think of one thing, more if you like, you could do this Christmas that would bless another person or group. This might be through a donation to a Charity or through a simple act of kindness.

Thirdly, in your mind's eye come to that manger of old where the door is open to anyone. When you confront the Christ child, you meet the One who came to usher in a new way of living that will bring a bigger and better world for all human beings. The great news is that no one who pushes at this door will be shut out!

Have a joyful and blessed Christmas.

+Mike