

## Dates for your diary

**January 1** **Christmas 2**  
8.00 am BCP Holy Communion  
10.30 am Holy Communion  
5.30 pm Evensong  
*There is no 7.00pm service today*

**January 8** **Epiphany**  
8.00 am BCP Holy Communion  
10.30 am Family Service  
7.00 pm **A special Communion Service to celebrate Epiphany and mark the New Year, followed by refreshments**  
*There is no 5.30pm service today*

**January 15** **Epiphany 2**  
8.00 am BCP Holy Communion  
10.30 am Holy Communion  
5.30 pm Evensong  
7.00 pm Iona Service

**January 22** **Epiphany 3**  
8.00 am BCP Holy Communion  
10.30 am Holy Communion  
5.30 pm Evensong  
7.00 pm Reflective Service with organ music, readings and prayers

**January 29** **Epiphany 4 / Candlemas**  
8.00 am BCP Holy Communion  
10.30 am Holy Communion  
7.00 pm **A service of light for Candlemas**  
*There is no 5.30pm service today*

**February 5** **3rd before Lent**  
8.00 am BCP Holy Communion  
10.30 am Holy Communion  
5.30 pm Evensong  
7.00 pm Reflective Service

**First Tuesday at St John's:** the sermon preached at 8am and 10.30am on 1 January will be discussed in the Elm Shades pub on Tuesday 3 January at 8pm and the sermon preached at 8am and 10.30am on 5 February will be discussed on 7 February. All are welcome. The sermon in question is posted on the parish website [www.stjohnsredhill.org.uk](http://www.stjohnsredhill.org.uk) beforehand.

## From the registers

**Funeral**  
9 December  
Clare Xanthe Else, aged 48

## ● Copy dates

The next magazine will be published on 5 February. Material can be left in the magazine pigeonhole in church, or emailed to [judith.calver@btinternet.com](mailto:judith.calver@btinternet.com) by 29 January. **A colour version of the magazine is posted each month on the church website: [www.stjohnsredhill.org.uk](http://www.stjohnsredhill.org.uk). And if you would like this version emailed to you each month, email [judith.calver@btinternet.com](mailto:judith.calver@btinternet.com) to be added to the list.**

## 'In the beginning was the Word'

When the first Christians read – or more probably heard – the opening words of John's gospel, they would have understood straight away quite a lot more than we do. They would have remembered, many of them, that in Hebrew 'word' and 'thing' are the same, and they would all have known that in Greek the word used has a huge range of meaning – at the simplest level, just something said; but also a pattern, a rationale, as we might say, even the entire structure of the universe seen as something that makes sense to us, the structure that holds things together and makes it possible for us to think.

Against this background, we can get a glimpse of just what is being said about Jesus. His life is what God says and what God does; it is the life in which things hold together; it is because of the life that lives in him that we can think. Jesus is the place where all reality is focused, brought to a point. Here is where we can see as nowhere else what connects all reality – all human experience and all natural laws. 'In him was life, and the life was the light of men.'

But this shouldn't make us forget the underlying image. The life that lives in Jesus, the everlasting divine agency that is uniquely embodied in him, is like something that is said – a word addressed to us. Because, like any word addressed to us, it demands a response. What we say or do in our response to Jesus is our way of discovering for ourselves and showing to one another what is real in and for us.

There is the question we cannot ignore. It's been well said that the first question we hear in the Bible is not humanity's question to God but God's question to us, God walking in the cool of the evening in the Garden of Eden, looking for Adam and Eve who are trying to hide from him. 'Adam, 'where are you?' The life of Jesus is that question translated into an actual human life, into the conversations and encounters of a flesh and blood human being like all others. Very near the heart of Christian faith and practice is this encounter with God's questions, 'who are you, where are you?' Are you on the side of the life that lives in Jesus, the life of grace and truth, of unstinting generosity and unsparing honesty, the only life that gives life to others? Or are you on your own side, on the side of disconnection, rivalry, the hoarding of gifts, the obsession with control? To answer that you're on the side of life doesn't mean for a moment that you can now relax into a fuzzy philosophy of 'life-affirming' comfort. On the contrary: it means you are willing to face everything within you that is cheap, fearful, untruthful and evasive, and let the light shine on it. And we say this because we trust that we are loved by this unfathomable mystery who comes to us in the shape of a newborn child, 'full of grace and truth'.

The most pressing question we now face is who and where we are as a society. Bonds have been broken, trust abused and lost. Whether it is an urban rioter mindlessly burning down a small shop that serves his community, or a speculator turning his back on the question of who bears the ultimate cost for his acquisitive adventures in the virtual reality of today's financial world, the picture is of atoms spinning apart in the dark. And into that dark the Word of God has entered, in love and judgment, and has not been overcome; in the darkness the question sounds as clear as ever, to each of us and to our church and society: 'Britain, where are you?' Where are the words we can use to answer?

**† Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury**  
*Extracts from the sermon preached by Archbishop Rowan on Christmas Day 2011*

# St John the Evangelist, Redhill

Revd Nicholas Calver January 2012  
01737 766562  
email: [nicholas.calver@btinternet.com](mailto:nicholas.calver@btinternet.com) Registered charity no. 1135368

## The greatest present

Angels, elves, ballerinas, princesses, footballers, cuddly toys, chocolate, excited children and even a cyclist all featured in the Junior Church Christmas presentation



As Father Christmas rested after a busy night, two children were up so early wondering what might be in store for them under the Christmas tree that they soon fell back to sleep and started to dream... To their delight they discovered that two of Santa's elves could bring them whatever they fancied

and gradually the pile of presents under the tree grew bigger and bigger. But the arrival of two angels turned the focus away from the tree to another present: a baby called Jesus who is God's present to us and everyone this Christmas. "In the excitement of opening presents at Christmas," said

an elf, "Don't forget Jesus, the greatest present of all." "Jesus, God's gift of love and life to everyone at Christmas," agreed an angel.

A rousing song reinforced the message: 'Jesus! He's the greatest present of all time. Jesus! a better Christmas gift you'll never find.'

# Follow the star

As the Advent Course has drawn to a close, some of the participants reflect on the three talks and the different ways in which the speakers encouraged us to 'Follow the Star':

We have always enjoyed the Advent courses at St John's as they help us to fully appreciate the importance of the period leading up to Christmas and forget for a while the many pressures put upon us by modern living. During Advent this year we were asked to focus on the star of Bethlehem in many different ways. In the first week's session, Garth Barber, Rural Dean of Reigate, who is also an astrophysicist and cosmologist, introduced the subject of the star which was seen in the sky as Jesus was born. He offered suggestions as to what the star could have been (a comet or nova) but then explored the whole concept of the vast realms beyond what can be seen. We began to consider our own position in the universe and most of us felt extremely humbled at the thought that our planet was just a tiny part in God's creation but also overwhelmed at the vastness of His design.

The following session, led by Chris Chapman, Spiritual Adviser for Southwark Diocese, continued the theme of the star, but instead of looking to the heavens, asked us to find and follow our inner star. The star of Bethlehem called the three wise men to take a risk and search for the truth and in that spirit we should also seek to discover our true potential, make a difference to others and deepen our relationship with God. This was a quieter, more reflective, evening and we came away with a sense of relief that although we

cannot do everything, if we choose to do one small thing we can do it well and it will be a step towards change.

The final session explored what the star meant to people alive at the time of Jesus' birth and how it was seen as a sign of the coming of the Messiah, predicted repeatedly in the Old Testament. Rt Rev David Atkinson, Assistant Bishop in Southwark Diocese, explained, by using paintings of the adoration of the Magi, that in each period in history, people interpret the birth of Jesus in their own way, seeing it as a political as well as religious event. He asked us to think deeply about what it might mean for us today and to go on our own journey of faith during Advent and beyond.

The overwhelming impression of the course was that, like the wise men, we are all being called by the star in many ways. We can view it as a comet or a divine symbol but its real truth lies in our spiritual response. The speakers encouraged us to share our thoughts and feelings during the sessions and this continued over mulled wine and mince pies afterwards which added to the atmosphere of friendship and togetherness. We are very grateful to have been given this opportunity to step out of the usual busy routine of life and consider what is meaningful in a world where the true significance of Christ's birth is often forgotten.

Mark and Christina Turner

To me the three Advent Studies, 'Follow the Star', provided a very special opportunity to enter into the Season of Advent in a personal and exciting way – provoking awe, curiosity and challenge. The lectures were based around the Gospel of Matthew, leading up the Birth of Christ and took the theme of a journey following a star, with biblical and scientific references.

There were varying suggestions as to the date that an especially bright star had appeared in the Heavens, recorded by early astrologers, philosophers and artists which coincided with the prediction of the Birth of a New King. With the aid of the recently developed Hubble Space Telescope we were enabled to see wonderful colour photos of immense beauty, displaying all the majesty and glory of the Heavens invisible to human eyes from earth (see *December magazine*). And it was explained that the Universe is still expanding and everchanging. It was amazing to hear

that there are many aspects of our universe making it "just right for the existence of life". Very humbling and challenging, I thought.

We also considered whether "the star" really did "stop over the place where the child was" (Matthew 2 v9) and words from TS Eliot's Quartet seemed, for me, to speak of the very special moment of the birth of The Saviour – 'At the still point of the turning of the world. Neither flesh nor fleshless, neither from nor towards: at the still point, there the dance is. But neither arrest or movement.'

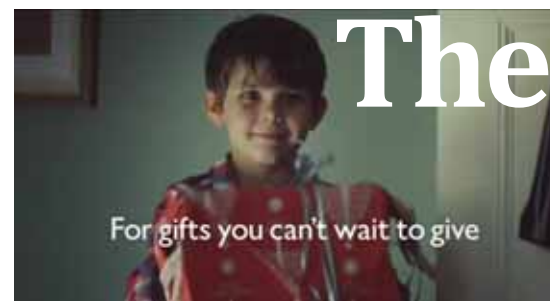
In the second lecture we thought about what the birth of Christ might mean for us. How we could live fully human lives through our relationship with God. And, with His Spirit in us, live generously for others. The wise men had a purpose for their journey; we were challenged to ask ourselves what is our Christian vocation – with what particular purpose are we travelling? We were reminded of the need to deepen our rootedness in God, to

become real, and find out who we truly and uniquely are. Perhaps it is only when we get to the 'still point' that we can let God find us?

I liked the words of St Bede – 'Unfurl the sails and let God steer us where He will'. Then we were reminded in the third lecture, before we begin our search and venture forth in this way of faith that, in the words of St John Chrysostom (c347): "We need much wisdom and much prayer". At this time of Christmas I love the words from a carol: "And God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His Heaven." I also really liked the early primitive woodcut of an explorer searching the world (see *December magazine*). Professor Brian Cox recently said, "Nothing is so fatal to science than supposing we know and understand all". Perhaps the same applies to faith in Christ? Thus our Journey to follow the Star.

Pat Stojanovic

(And the mulled wine and mince pies were lovely, too. Thank you!)



## The Gift of Christmas

The crowds gathered for the Crib Service on Christmas Eve – in all over 900 people of all ages

thronged the church and even with extra chairs, standing room was at a premium (see right). Nicholas invited those present to consider their part in the story of the nativity, recalling cribs he had seen in Rome which featured all villagers, not just those we consider the traditional participants in the nativity story. "The crib is not something you look at but something you are part of," he said. "As you sit here you are part of the crib because you are part of God. Where you are, God is."

The service concluded with an impromptu singing by the congregation of 'We wish you a merry Christmas', played by the music group. A moving and spontaneous way in which all present came to share in their part of the story.

At Midnight Mass, Phil also addressed the story of the nativity. "In the words of the Bible we prepare the way in our own hearts for the greatest story ever told. Because this story tells us that the world of our dreams is no longer a dream. It's a living, breathing reality and it's here among us, not as a fantasy but as real possibility." And he concluded: "So the story is not just a cultural tale perpetuated in primary school nativity plays. It's a vehicle which has from time immemorial passed on the counter-intuitive nature of salvation for the human race. It comes from the bottom not from the top, and it comes not by power or force but as each

of us is willing for the mystery of God's Spirit to become incarnate in our own lives. Would we be willing to sign up for something like that? I think I would."

On Christmas Day, Nicholas quoted the Gospel reading: 'This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger'. He then played the advertisement from John Lewis (see left) in which a little boy is desperate for Christmas to come, not to see what presents he might receive but because he is anxious to give a gift to his parents. "The gift you can see is not in the boy's hands but in his face," Nicholas said. "You can't buy the gift he's giving but you can give it and receive it. Because like the advert, Christmas is 'about a boy' – a boy born in Bethlehem. And at the heart of Christmas is the gift of love. Not wrapped in paper but in swaddling clothes. It is a sign to each of us, pointing to where we have come from – that we are an expression of God's love. And that light, life and love are the gifts that God can't wait to give."



## 'The Tree of Life' at Pentecost

The weekend of Pentecost (26th - 27th May) will be an occasion to celebrate the life of St John's. We are planning an event with the theme 'The Tree of Life' and want individuals and groups to

create displays or activities based around the eight elements of a tree – light, water, air, leaves, fruit, wood, roots and earth. A tree needs its different parts to give it life; the roots and wood of the trunk support and carry nourishment to the branches on which the leaves and fruit grow.

A tree can be seen to symbolise our own life. If we look at the elements needed for a tree to live and grow we realise that we also need those same elements. Water and the produce of the earth sustain and nourish us. Our roots give us a foundation and shape our lives. The framework of our body gives us stability. Light and air allow us to spread our branches that produce the leaves and fruit which are our gifts to others. We all need each other to sustain and support

us. What do the elements of a tree mean for you and how might you want to express that?

At Pentecost the apostles received God's gift of the Holy Spirit which enabled them to spread the good news of Jesus with words and actions. We have all been given gifts which are as individual as we are but together they form part of a whole. In his first letter to the Corinthians Paul says, "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good" (1 Cor. 12: 4-7). We all play an important part in the life of St John's and the festival of Pentecost offers us an opportunity to share and celebrate the gifts we have been given. Pentecost was a life-giving experience for the early Church and it can be a life-giving experience for us today.

This is an event for everyone. Please give some thought as to how you would like to be involved. Read the leaflet, available in church, which gives a few examples to get you started and let your imagination take you along paths of creativity. Speak to Nicholas, Sarah Walters, Frances Wood, Phil Bradshaw or Paul Stocker about your ideas or fill in the response form on the leaflet and return it by 29th January.

Frances Wood