

Issue 10:
December 2021



The Taizé
Annunciation Window

A candle in...

THE
WINDOW
News and Views from the Parish of Abingdon-on-Thames

O Emmanuel

O come, O come, and be our God-with-us
O long-sought With-ness for a world without,
O secret seed, O hidden spring of light.
Come to us Wisdom, come unspoken Name
Come Root, and Key, and King, and holy Flame,
O quickened little wick so tightly curled,
Be folded with us into time and place,
Unfold for us the mystery of grace
And make a womb of all this wounded world.
O heart of heaven beating in the earth,
O tiny hope within our hopelessness
Come to be born, to bear us to our birth,
To touch a dying world with new-made hands
And make these rags of time our swaddling bands.

Malcolm Guite

You can read his blog about the poem [here](#):
The poem is from *Sounding the Seasons*, Canterbury Press 2012
and used with the author's permission

The Christmas Issue

This is the final issue of the year. I feel as though it should be celebratory. Christmas is a celebration isn't it? However it isn't Christmas yet, it's Advent - which is a time where we consider the four last things: Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell. At least that is what Rosalind's book 'Times and Seasons' says. So, with no apology, we include some articles about significant issues. These include reflections on COP26, the needs of the foodbank, modern slavery etc. The mismatch between the liturgical season and secular culture is significant. Rosalind tells me this was the starting point for her sermon at St Nicolas' on Advent Sunday (available [here](#)).

So we encourage you to reflect on the state of the world, to consider how we can be the body of Christ and to pray with Advent Hope. RR

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The Coming

David Bevington

May I invite you to spend a few moments reading and reflecting on this poem by R S Thomas (1913 - 2000), the Welsh priest and poet?

The Coming

And God held in his hand
A small globe. Look, he said.
The son looked. Far off,
As though through water, he saw
A scorched land of fierce
Colour. The light burned
There; crusted buildings
Cast their shadows; a bright
Serpent, a river
Uncoiled itself, radiant
With slime.

On a bare
Hill a bare tree saddened
The sky. Many people
Held out their thin arms
To it, as though waiting
For a vanished April
To return to its crossed
Boughs. The son watched
Them. Let me go there, he said.

In the poet's vision, we are 'flies on the wall' as God the father and God the son together gaze at our world. They are not revelling in its natural beauty, but contemplating 'A scorched land . . . crusted buildings', its fertility compromised – 'slime' – and the suffering of many of its people - who 'Hold out their thin arms' – desperate, perhaps starving, perhaps enduring an unending winter as they wait 'For a vanished April'.

God's response? Infinite pity and compassion.

The son resolves to go there. He knows it will be no red-carpeted state visit: he foresees the bare tree on a bare hill with 'its crossed boughs', pointing to desertion and unimaginable suffering.

Perhaps you can imagine yourself holding out your 'thin arms' this Advent, this time of waiting. What are your deepest needs and longings?

God's response as he gazes at you and at me? Infinite pity and compassion.

The son came. Deo gratias! Thanks be to God!

With grateful acknowledgments to *Frequencies of God: Walking through Advent with R. S. Thomas* by Carys Walsh (Canterbury Press 2020), from which the poem is reproduced – and a good possible book for Advent reflections.

Reflections on COP26

From a scientist's point of view the conference was a 'failure' in as far as the agreed actions are insufficient to achieve 'net zero' carbon emissions in time and to limit the global mean atmospheric temperature increase to 1.5 degrees C. But some momentum towards these goals has been established.

Roderick Smith

On the conclusion of COP26, the Rt Revd Graham Usher, the Bishop of Norwich, also the Church of England's lead bishop for the environment, and the Rt Revd Olivia Graham, the Bishop of Reading shared a joint statement:

At COP we called for keeping global warming to below 1.5 degrees, ending fossil fuel subsidies, and securing finance for the world's most vulnerable people who are already affected by climate breakdown. Progress was made in all these areas, plus cutting methane emissions and halting deforestation. We were particularly inspired to hear powerful testimonies from young people and representatives of indigenous peoples.

We pay tribute to the work of Alok Sharma MP, the COP26 President, and his team. Negotiations always have some compromises and disappointments. These impact the world's economically poorest the most. We must now keep up the moral pressure so that pledges are urgently turned into measurable action.

The whole world needs to do more for climate justice. More quickly. More generously. More together. During its presidency year, the UK can be a key player. And this includes all of us within the Church of England.

At Glasgow, the world glimpsed the possibility of a hopeful future. Hurting God's creation and contributing to the suffering of God's poorest people is not the 'love God and your neighbour' that Jesus commands of us. COP showed us the unity of purpose people of faith can bring. This encouragement should reignite in all of us hope for our future."

COP26 did not provide all we hoped for, but it has given some positives to build on. The UK, with Italy, retains the presidency of COP until it is handed to Egypt later next year, so we need to keep up our advocacy pressure to get pledges made into policies. The Climate Coalition make it simple to contact your MP and you can sign the Giant Christmas Card to tell No. 10 'the proof is in the pudding' for climate action after COP26.

The environment is sometimes seen as an external resource that can be used to promote economic growth for the benefit of humankind; the need for sustainability is recognized, but narrowly defined as the level of activity that can be maintained without damaging the prospects of future generations. However, a problem arises because individuals, firms, or countries, acting in their own short-term self-interest, typically over-exploit natural resources. The key issue, therefore, is how to align long-run societal and individual priorities. Back in 2006, the Stern Review of the Economics of Climate Change argued that the economic benefits of moving to a low carbon economy heavily outweigh the costs, but delay is dangerous and costly. Deferring decisions to future meetings is inadequate.

One of the difficulties in changing perceptions occurs because humans are generally not viewed as one element in a complex integrated ecology. That view is slowly changing, partly because new diseases are arising from closer contact between humans and the natural world. Epidemiologists suggest that disease outbreaks will become more frequent. Until Covid-19 we had simply been lucky. More than forty previously unknown conditions have emerged since 1970. Epidemics are not random but exploit the characteristics of different locations, which may be social, economic, and environmental. Solutions require a multi-disciplinary perspective adding insights from medicine, biological systems, sociology, and psychology to those of economics.

Geoff Meen

My part at the COP26, the UN's Climate Change Conference, was a small one. I was in Glasgow representing a London-based health foundation and speaking to delegates and policymakers about the links between climate change, air quality, and health and wellbeing. Alongside the central gathering of world leaders and policymakers, COP brings together charities, businesses, activists and academics from across the globe for a vast array of events, meetings and stunts. I spent my time in this hive of activity just outside, and trying to influence, the high-stakes summit happening behind closed doors.

This was the first time the UN Climate Change Conference had been held in the UK. It certainly felt like a unique occasion, even more-so given that for many of us it was our first in-person event in 2 years. It certainly wasn't plain sailing and some of the haphazard and last-minute planning which had made headlines was readily apparent. But the people of Glasgow, and those who travelled from further afield, decidedly rose to the occasion; laying out the urgency of action through music, art and events which lasted from the first morning to the weary last evening.

It's always difficult to know how much activist voices are heard by leaders, even when they are only a couple of hundred metres away. I suspect they played their role. The hard-won agreement at the end of the conference left many questions unanswered, and certainly wouldn't have pleased all of those in attendance. But it was vitally important that agreement was reached, and it keeps hopes of mitigating the worst impacts of climate change alive.

For my work, we were heartened by the many conversations we had with delegates from across the world, and the growing recognition that climate change represents a health crisis alongside an environmental one. But it was disappointing, if not surprising, that the last-minute agreement failed to recognise this link, or commit nations to tackling air pollution. As with so much at the conference, it felt like a positive step forward, but with so much left to do.

Mark Heffernan

A Personal Perspective of COP26, green economics, and the UK's "Net Zero Strategy".

COP26. The COP26 meeting in Glasgow followed a familiar pattern - discussions late into the night leading to disappointing outcomes but also some good news. The fossil fuel lobby forced weaker wording about the phasing out of coal, the long-established target of \$100 billion to support developing countries was postponed yet again, and the new nationally determined contributions (NDCs) to reductions in Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions are still not sufficient to keep the rise in global temperature below 1.5°C. On the other hand, agreements were reached about reducing methane emissions, deforestation and fossil fuel subsidies as well as new rules on carbon offsets, and payment to developing countries for loss and damage resulting from climate change was put on the agenda for the COP meeting in Egypt next year. Perhaps the most encouraging development at Glasgow was the strong participation of young people around the fringes of the main meeting directed towards holding national governments to account.

Green Economics. Developments over the last few decades have led to the concept that economic growth, as measured by global Gross Domestic Product (GDP), can be uncoupled from global warming through technological advances to reduce GHG emissions; thus a ‘green’ economy is based on maintaining or increasing GDP while, at the same time, reducing GHG emissions to minimise further warming of the climate. The necessary technologies are well described in the book by Bill Gates, “How to Avoid a Climate Disaster” (2021). Furthermore, it is generally agreed that significant financial support will be needed by developing countries as soon as possible if they are to reduce their usage of fossil fuels to keep short-term increases in GHG emissions to a minimum.

The Problem of Inequality. What is less well understood is that the rapid rise in GHG emissions since 1990 has tracked changes in GDP rather than in global population. This relationship suggests that greater consumerism, mainly by the wealthy, is now driving global warming as well as environmental degradation linked to the over-exploitation of natural resources (biodiversity loss, air and water pollution, deforestation for agriculture and mineral extraction, soil health etc.). The OXFAM report, “Confronting Carbon Inequality” (2020), indicates that between 1990 and 2015 the richest 10% of people (0.63 billion) accounted for 52% of global CO₂ emissions compared to the poorest 50% (3.10 billion) who were responsible for just 7%. We urgently need new ways for thinking about our future that reduce inequality and prevent yet more damage to the environment.

Recent developments in economics address the GDP problem. All place emphasis on resource limits rather than resource efficiency and some even question the relevance of capitalism. Greater importance is attached to the role of civil society than to financial institutions, with particular attention given to social justice and wellbeing and to changes in lifestyle that involve behavioural adaptation and resource sharing. One way forward is described by Kate Raworth in “Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist” (2017); the doughnut defines ‘an ecologically safe and socially just space’ in which all people can live. An immediate challenge for the rich, developed countries is responding to inequality nationally as well as internationally when about half the world’s population has inadequate basic resources (food, water, health etc.). Another is that we have little time; for example, if GHG emissions continue at the current rate, the cumulative limit consistent with a temperature rise of 1.5°C would be reached by about 2030.

“Net Zero Strategy”. Published by the UK government in October 2021, the strategy is a plan for reaching zero GHG emissions by 2050. It represents a big step forward from having no plan but has significant shortcomings (little about the agriculture sector, no mention of tidal or geothermal energy, reliance on some as-yet untested technology, improper carbon accounting etc.) and does not define intermediate milestones for achieving the transition to a low carbon economy. We are already falling behind with GHG emission targets once imports and international aviation/shipping are accounted for (the UK is the biggest net ‘importer’ of CO₂ emissions per capita in the G7), and we remain very slow to invest in green technologies, low carbon housing, energy markets, upgrading of the electricity grid etc. The UK is hardly the ‘world leader’ we are led to believe!

Perhaps our main concern should be about the image provided by the Foreword to the “Net Zero Strategy” of a United Kingdom that will *unleash the unique creative power of capitalism to create hundreds of thousands of new high skilled, high-wage, green jobs levelling up our country without so much as a hair shirt in sight*. It implies raising national GDP and individual wealth. A safer world, however, depends on adapting our behaviour towards lower consumerism (*downshifting* in the language of economists) and healthier lifestyles at the same time as investing properly in our infrastructure (buildings, public transport, waste disposal and so on) and natural environment (soils, forests, peatlands, coastal zone). As a developed nation, we will also be expected to contribute more to supporting developing countries in their transition to sustainable low carbon economies. These large, long-term economic commitments can only happen with support by local and central government, and the leadership of young people committed to making a better future for everyone.

Patrick Holligan

The Nativity by the Master of the Vyšší Brod Altarpiece

Caroline Cannon-Brookes

Among the many representations of the Nativity there has always been one which has sparked my imagination and today is to be found in the Convent of St Agnes in Prague where the medieval collections of the National Gallery of Prague are exhibited. This painting is one of nine panels representing scenes from the life of the Virgin Mary and Christ which made up an altarpiece in the Cistercian Monastery of Vyšší Brod (Hohenfurth) in South Bohemia close to the border with Austria.



This wonderful mystical painting focuses on Mary nursing the new born Christ child and is composed in layers against a schematic landscape and a golden sky. She is resting against a richly decorated pillow on a bed beneath an open-sided wooden shelter and she embraces her new born in a very human way her

face pressed close to his. A monumental figure, she is a mother of joy and sorrow because she is aware of her mission and foresees what is to come. Although the large Christ child is almost naked, he is partly covered by her pinkish red gown and she tenderly holds his hand while his little foot beguilingly pokes out from his white swaddling clothes.

In the foreground of the scene we see the preparation of the infant's bath as more commonly found in Byzantine art. Joseph pours warm water from a ewer and the temperature is tested by her mother, St Anne. These two solid figures with their serious faces and expressive hands are kneeling on the ground on either side of a large wooden tub. They add a domestic touch to the scene which also pre-figures Christ's later baptism in the River Jordan.

The angel's annunciation to the shepherds is recalled in the nativity scene and here represented by only one shepherd, a small unworldly figure his arm raised in wonder at the sight before him. From a patch of blue sky with a decorative pattern of clouds above symbolising heaven appears the angel with a scroll and the insistent pointing finger as found in medieval art. What is delightful are the wonderfully observed animals, not least a group of sheep huddled together, while silhouetted against the gold background is a grey one and a goat. Behind and above Mary are the Ox and the Ass looking on unconcernedly. The foreground of the rocky landscape is studded with flowers, and bottom left, is a strange schematic tree typical of the Vyšší Brod Master.

However, it is the kneeling figure at the bottom right side of the painting that captures our attention. He is richly dressed in a blue cloak with ermine collar and a ducal cap hung from his shoulders and he holds up a model of a church. Beside him prominently displayed is a large shield emblazoned with the five-petalled red rose which was the coat of arms of the Rožmberks who ruled much of South Bohemia. This gives us a clue as to the likely donor of the altar-piece, most probably Petr I of Rožmberk. He held the highest office in the court in Prague, appointed the supreme chamberlain and the country's regent in the absence of the King. He died in 1347 so the cycle of panels which comprised the altarpiece would have been started around then with the scene of the Nativity in which his own figure is included. It was undoubtedly painted in Prague and completed under Petr's son, Jošt, before being sent to the Cistercian Monastery at Vyšší Brod which had been founded by Vok of Rožmberk in the 1260s and was the dynastic burial site of the Rožmberk family.

Following the Velvet Revolution of 1989 the Cistercian monks have returned to their monastery but their precious altarpiece remains in Prague.



"One can never have enough socks," said Dumbledore. "Another Christmas has come and gone and I didn't get a single pair. People will insist on giving me books."

— J.K. Rowling, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone

Advent windows 2020

Last year creativity blossomed at Christmas and colourful Advent Windows appeared. Here are some from the Waysmeet area and from Thesiger Road





Christmas Foodbank 2021

Linda Hobbs

Christmas is again around the corner, preparations are already in hand to ensure that families in our community needing a helping hand receive a food parcel containing some of the Christmas extras we all like to have.

Clients will be asked to come to collect their Christmas parcels on the 17th December, these parcels are in addition to the “normal” food parcels they receive. The Christmas parcel contains items such as stuffing, cranberry sauce, tins of ham, biscuits, crisps etc.

Regrettably, the last year has seen a 25% increase in the number of weekly referrals, with 40-50 clients/families needing food support each week. It is with the support of our generous community that demand continues to be met. Donations have continued to be received, whilst a willing and able group of volunteers receive donations, pack parcels and hand them to the clients, all with a welcoming smile. We are fortunate in that several of the supermarkets now contribute fresh fruit, vegetables and bread nearing its sell by date. These have allowed us to offer more fresh produce, which clients appreciate.

People frequently ask if a donation of money is acceptable, which of course it is. See page 20 for details of how to do this. Money allows food to be purchased where there are shortages. This Christmas, donations of food or money as well as gifts of small toiletries for both men and women would be very welcome. Toiletries will be given as a small gift, together with the parcel, children will be given an age-appropriate gift.

If it is possible for you to make a donation, in any way that suits you, your help will be much appreciated. We want to ensure that everyone in our community has a Christmas, free of the worry caused by not having sufficient food to feed themselves or their families. The attached list details items currently needed. Donations of food can be dropped off during the normal food bank hours, Tuesday and Friday 10.30-1.00p.m.

Thank you to everyone from all at Abingdon food bank for your continued support



Abingdon Foodbank Christmas Collection 2021

foodbank

Last Christmas we gave out Christmas hampers to over 200 local households. As well as Christmas goodies, the parcels contained gifts for children provided by Abingdon Community Events' Toy Drive.

This year, we are doing the same and so are asking for donations of the items below with best before dates of 26th Dec or later:

Tins of ham	Mince pies
Tins of salmon	Tins of fruit
Tins of potatoes	Jars of pickles/chutney
Tins of carrots	Crackers for cheese
Tins of peas	Sweet biscuits
Gravy granules	Seasonal cakes
Cranberry sauce	Sweets
Stuffing	Chocolates
Christmas puddings	Crisps and savoury snacks
Tins of custard	Toiletries

Small donations can be dropped off during normal Foodbank sessions but **for larger group donations please contact us on christmas@abingdon.foodbank.org.uk for a slot between 29/11 – 10/12** so we can be there to meet you. We do need to stagger receipt of donations to avoid a logjam!

Thank you for your support!

Registered Charity Number 1153844 | Registered in England & Wales
07562 247443

Events – past, present and future



Friday, 26th November was the start of the annual MU campaign, “16 days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence”, and Abingdon branch held a service in St. Nicolas’ Church, focusing on those caught up in this horrific practice. We were also pleased to be able to host a diocesan display about modern-day slavery, which included nearly 1,500 chains, knitted and crocheted by members to represent known victims in the Oxford diocese. A poignant reminder that slavery is not just the concern of history books and statues.

Elizabeth Dawson

St Helen’s ‘West Porch’ at Christmas

Charles Masheder

News about Covid make our plans for Christmas a little uncertain - particularly for our Christingle service. The plan at the moment is that we will have two services on Christmas Eve and these will be bookable (see the Website and Newsletters for details) up to 200 people at each.

If these are not to happen then, like last year, we will be giving out Christingle bags at the West Porch in the days leading up to Christmas for people to make their own at home. Hopefully this will not happen!

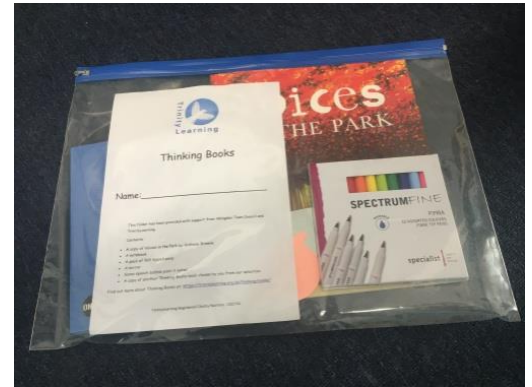
If the services can happen, the West porch will still have the Nativity scene, just for the few days Monday 20th - Thursday 23rd and will be stewarded by people greeting passers-by with a small bag of information about Christmas....and spreading good will!!

TrinityLearning – On the Journey!



It has been a varied term at TrinityLearning. Starting back in September we had high hopes that we would be able to fully restart our volunteer projects and that all would be back to normal by Christmas. The reality has proved to be more varied but has offered much joy along the way.

Our Thinking Books training was completed, after a slight delay, on 12 October and we started running Thinking Books in two of our four schools in early November. A generous grant of £900 from Abingdon Town Council enabled us to provide Thinking Book packs including books and other resources to children involved in the project in three schools in the town and funds from our regular giving donations enabled us to offer similar packs to the village school taking part. Unfortunately, rising Covid cases in schools have meant we have had to pause our restart but we feel confident that we will be able to continue in all schools as soon as it is safe to do so.



The Kingfisher Singing group restarted after half term in early November and has been met with huge enthusiasm from both children and staff. The group meets regularly on Wednesday mornings throughout the school year. They sing nursery rhymes and simple action songs with groups of severely disabled children. We are currently advertising for extra members to join the group. You don't need to be a particularly brilliant singer but enthusiasm is essential! TrinityLearning is committed to safeguarding and follows safer recruiting procedures. All our volunteers working in schools are supported in gaining an enhanced DBS check and receive Oxfordshire Safeguarding Training. If you can spare around an hour a week and are interested in joining this incredibly rewarding volunteer activity, please email Nicola at nic.trinitylearning@gmail.com.

Countdown to Christmas - We are now looking forward to supporting local schools as they hold their Christmas services, Nativity Plays and Carol Concerts in Trinity Church. The Trinity Church Trustees have issued some very sensible guidelines to ensure COVID safety. These include a limit on attendance numbers and requesting schools to ticket events to ensure audiences remain within safe levels. Both we and the schools remain hopeful that Christmas Events, although in a simpler form, will be able to continue this year.



The frequently changing COVID situation this autumn has led us to add to our virtual video based offer to schools. Our workshop leader Taz has created some short Mindful Christmas Pauses which can be used with children at home or at school. These focus on a particular sensory aspect of Christmas, for example Christmas smells, and allow time for quiet exploration of this one aspect. This approach has been found to be really useful as a coping strategy in overwhelming situations and we are very aware that many people, both children and adults, are currently finding many situations challenging. Our Mindful Christmas Pauses will be available on our website from early December.



Crafty Volunteers needed: We are looking for confident crocheters to help make tiny teddies for our TrinityLearning Bereavement Packs. These packs are designed for adults working with bereaved children. We send one bear out with each pack. Deacon Selina from Trinity Church got us off to a great start by creating ten of these bears during lockdown last year. Sadly all of her bears have gone out to bereaved children in the Abingdon area so we now need more. We can supply the pattern, wool, stuffing, buttons etc. We just need your crochet skills!

TrinityLearning will be holding our second AGM on Monday 17th January 2021. This will again be held via Zoom. Please contact Nicola to receive the Zoom link. We'd love to see you!

If you're interested in finding out more about any of our volunteering opportunities, we would love to hear from you so please email nic.trinitylearning@gmail.com

Perfect gift for Christmas 2021!

YET MORE TRYING TIMES £5

THE DOUBTING THOMAS GUIDE TO RECOGNISING JESUS

HANDS FACE SPACE

Cartoons for a pandemic by Jim Godfrey

"Finding something to smile about is vital in the midst of adversity." - Bishop Steven Croft

includes p&p!

Trying Times book with over 30 hilarious cartoons

Finding something to smile about is vital in the midst of adversity. Jim Godfrey's cartoons are a real tonic in testing times.
The Rt. Revd. Dr. Stephen Croft, Bishop of Oxford

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www.wesleymem.org.uk or call 07876 282721
All profits will go to Action for Children.

**St Helen's**

Sunday 19 th December	5.30 pm	Christmas Music and Readings - Carol Service
Friday 24 th December Christmas Eve	3.30 pm	Christingle Service - places will need to be booked (see website/newsletters)
	5/5.30 pm	Christingle Service - places will need to be booked (as above)
	10.30 pm	First Eucharist of Christmas
Saturday 25 th December Christmas Day	8.00 am	Holy Communion
	10.30 am	Sung Eucharist with all-age address
Sunday 26 th December St Stephen's Day	8.00 am	Holy Communion
	10.30 am	Sung Eucharist

St Michael's

Friday 24 th December Christmas Eve	3.00 pm	Crib Service
	6.00 pm	Carol Service
Saturday 25 th December Christmas Day	10.00 am	Sung Mass for Christmas Day
Sunday 26 th December St Stephen's Day	9.30 am	Sung Mass

**St Nicolas'**

Sunday 19 th December	6.00 pm	Christmas Carols and Readings
Friday 24 th December Christmas Eve	4.00 pm	Crib Service
Saturday 25 th December Christmas Day	10.00 am	Holy Communion for Christmas Day
Sunday 26 th December St Stephen's Day	11.15 am	Holy Communion

The saga of Aloe Vera

Rob Rutherford

I don't know if you have had this experience: you are at a Church Christmas Fair and you are looking round anxiously to find something that you actually want to buy. This problem has recently been made easier by providing bacon butties with their irresistible aroma. (apologies to vegetarians who might be reading this). Soon after we moved to Abingdon, I don't think the bacon buttie solution had been thought about. I wanted to show willing and was persuaded to buy an innocent looking, small Aloe Vera from the plant stall. (Nicola you know you are responsible for this! - but in a good way!)



Now unknown to me at the time, I seem to have very selective green fingers as Aloe Vera is the only plant I can grow effectively. In the space of about three years this one Aloe Vera turned into about thirty four. You may not know that it reproduces by sending out shoots that can be easily detached from the parent plant and potted and ignored. Then these in turn send out shoots of their own. It reminds me of the Sorcerer's Apprentice where, in the Disney version, the brooms and the buckets of water seem to reproduce exponentially.

Since this is the Christmas edition here is a link to the excerpt from Fantasia: <https://vimeo.com/7878564>



I feel that I ought to start harvesting these Aloe Vera to make them pay their way – they produce a gel inside their spiky leaves that, by all accounts is good for the skin – but instead I thought I would return the compliment and return vast numbers of Aloe Vera to a Christmas Fair near you - for some other unsuspecting people to buy.

I did, though, hang on to this pot so the adventure continues...



Basildon Park in Autumn

Sue Pemberton

In the summer of 2018 I was taken on as a volunteer gardener by the National Trust at Basildon Park. The house at Basildon is late Georgian, but the gardens are a Victorian pleasure ground with a 1960s rose garden created by Lady Iliffe. I work with a team of five other volunteers one day a week throughout the year and we tackle every possible job imaginable in the gardens. As well as enjoying the work, our team has formed firm friendships and we kept each other going via our WhatsApp group whilst volunteering was paused for most of 2020. Happily we have been back working since March this year.

One of the joys of the job is seeing the gardens change throughout the year, from the cheerful optimism of spring bulbs, primroses and cowslips to the exuberance of the rose garden in June and the slightly melancholy splendour of autumn. Here is a snapshot of the gardens on the 9th November this year.



One of the first shrubs to catch my eye is one of our young spindle berry trees. Its bright pink fruit and exposed orange seeds hardly seem real, and provide a vibrant splash of colour.

Moving on I come to the Umbrello – a mound topped with a circular thatched shelter with seats. It is surrounded by curving beds which we plant with seasonal bedding in



a nod to its Victorian past. This summer we had two varieties of salvia, one is over but the other, although somewhat weather beaten, is still flowering. Some of the beds are in the full sun, and are covered with Red Admiral butterflies and an assortment of bees, all enjoying this autumn bounty.

Moving on towards the Rose Garden I pass one of our recently planted acers which is looking very splendid in autumn bronze foliage. Beyond it I can see the trees out in the parkland which are finally turning gold, autumn is quite late this year. However, no one seems to have told the Rose Garden it is November! The repeat-flowering roses are still in bloom, and the fuchsias against the house walls are still in full flower.

The lavender edging planted this year has done really well, and is still in flower and bits of ground cover such as lamium are still going.





I also notice that the gardens are full of food for wildlife. Apart from the lingering summer flowers mentioned, some plants are just starting their flowering season. These include ivy, Fatsia Japonica and viburnum. There are many different types of berries on various shrubs. On the ground there are plenty of fallen sweet chestnuts for the squirrels to feast on – will it deflect them from our newly planted bulbs?! However, we do have to clear the chestnuts where they fall on grass as they tend to turn into a mush which kills the grass. This isn't one of our favourite jobs as they are both prickly and heavy.



Down in the car park, once part of the kitchen gardens, the ancient grapevine on the wall is fruiting well. The grapes are small, but sweet and flavoursome. There are also fruits on and beneath the apple and crab apple trees dotted between the cars.



Returning via the Woodland Walk between the gardens and the stableyard area I'm reminded that Christmas is not far away as the lights are already up beside the path. We'll doubtless have some cold and wet shifts this winter – we all remember planting shrubs in a blizzard – but soon we'll be spotting the first spring bulbs again.

A tree through a year

Tony Richmond



Christmas Singalong

The aim here is to sing the song. Only problem is that we have taken away the last word in each line

Chestnuts roasting on an open ****
 Jack Frost nipping at your ****
 Yuletide carols being sung by a *****
 And folks dressed up like *****

Everybody knows a turkey and some *****
 Help to make the season *****
 Tiny tots with their eyes all *****
 Will find it hard to sleep *****

They know that Santa's on his ***
 He's loaded lots of toys and goodies on his *****
 And every mother's child is gonna ***
 To see if reindeers really know how to ***

And so I'm offering this simple *****
 To kids from one to *****
 Although it's been said many times, many *****
 Merry Christmas to ***

The Christmas Song" is a classic Christmas song written in 1945 by Robert Wells and Mel Tormé.



Carol Mix

Here are some anagrams of the first words of 5 well known carols. Can you sort them out?

1. English tint
2. Acolyte helium offal
3. My Niagara wean
4. Acton eggs Klondike woodlouse
5. Haste sires whip



Useful Weblinks:

Services: for the latest news see the church websites:

<https://www.abingdon-st-helens.org.uk/>

<https://www.stmichaels-abingdon.org.uk/>

<https://www.stnicolasabingdon.org.uk/>

Page for Church of England links: services, daily readings etc

<https://www.churchofengland.org/>

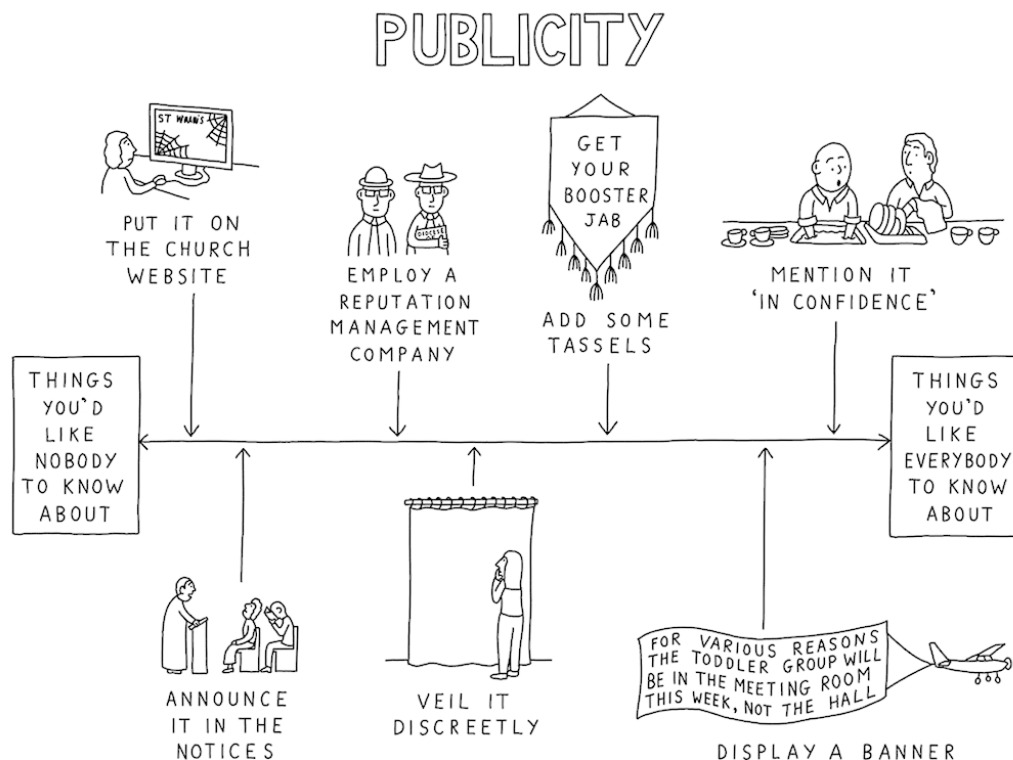
FOOD BANK. The Abingdon Foodbank is still very busy and anxious to keep up the support. **Northcourt Road (Christ Church) is open to receive donations on Tuesday and Friday mornings between 9.30 am and 1.00 pm.** Their main long-term needs are:

Long life milk (not soya), sugar, fruit squash, tinned meat and vegetables. They also give out a lot of washing up liquid, bleach and toilet rolls. You can also make donations by sending a cheque made out to *North Abingdon PCC Christ Church*, clearly marked 'for Food Bank'. You can also donate via the Foodbank website <https://abingdon.foodbank.org.uk/give-help/donate-money/> or the Parish office have details if you want to donate via online banking. See page 10 for details of Christmas giving.

Quiz Answers:
Don't peek yet

Missing words: fire nose choir Eskimos mistletoe bright aglow
tonight way sleigh spy fly phrase ninety-two ways you
Carols:
1. Silent night
2. O come all ye faithful
3. Away in a manger
4. Good King Wenceslas looked out
5. I saw three ships

And finally, from
Dave Walker of
Cartoon Church:



Happy Christmas and thanks to all contributors and to you, the readers.

The next issue will be published in February with the theme of 'Awakening': ideas and contributions to
Candle@abingdonparish.org.uk