

Issue 1:
February 2022



By Rembrandt
See Issue 1 2021

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A candle in...

THE

WINDOW

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

Rebirth

Ice crystals haze the air,
drifting and spinning,
shimmering as the sun's pale beams
lift the land from darkness.
Trees locked still in winter
rise black against a lightening sky,
their leaf buds tightly curled.

Frozen cobwebs, lacy-white,
are draped over bushes and
hang from window ledges.
Grass crunches with frost,
while below the hard ground,
earthworms sleep.

Yet out of sight,
there are sighings and stirrings as
the pulse of life awakens.
Roots stretch,
shoots push up,
while above,
snowdrops shyly peep.

A new creation is before us,
as winter slowly
loosens its iron grip,
and the miracle of
new light and life
begins to grow.

Susan Gee
22nd January 2022



Photograph: Norman Gee

A Sermon preached on St Nicolas' Day 2021

Rev Dr Emma Percy, Chaplain of Trinity College Oxford and Bowles Lecturer at St Nicolas'

My younger son who is 25 visited last weekend. We talked about Christmas as he will be head chef. Having agreed the menu and shopping plans he said 'you know we didn't have stockings last year, that was just a Covid thing wasn't it because I have some suggestions for Santa'. Of course, he does not believe in Santa Claus, but he loves the tradition of waking up to a stocking full of small gifts, many practical (Santa has always been keen on underwear and toiletries) and others silly frivolous and amusing. He also knows that I find pleasure in channelling Santa Claus.

I do not need to tell the good people of St Nic's about the history of Santa Claus, originally St Klaus, the shortening of Nicolas, and how in the Netherlands and communities shaped by Dutch cultures, the gift giving of Christmas happens on the feast of St Nicolas when shoes and stockings are left by the fireside to be miraculously filled. This Bishop from the earliest days of Christianity has legends that have been handed down over the years and one in particular has led to our tradition of stockings.

The joy and frivolity of stocking filling underplays the darkness at the heart of the legends around Bishop Nicolas. His gift giving was about alleviating the consequences of extreme poverty. The girls down whose chimney he dropped bags of coins, landing in their shoes or stockings, were not concerned about Christmas gifts but about being sold into sex work in order to feed the family. The boys revived from the sausage factory were being exploited by unscrupulous tradesmen, even at the cost of their lives. The Nicolas who is remembered was a bishop who made an effort to understand the impact of poverty on the most vulnerable people in the community he served. His giving alleviated the worst consequences, offering different opportunities, even miraculously restoring life.

The stories told and retold about the lives of the saints from long ago in our Christian history have been told not simply to honour a good man but to point us to truths about a life lived well. 'Godliness with contentment is great gain' writes Timothy. He then reminds us that we need the basics of life – having food and clothing, but after that we need to be wary of the temptation of too much money, possessions etc. If we can find our security in God then, beyond the basics, we can give. I remember a young man who had set up a successful business coming to talk to me about helping to finance a youth worker in the parish when I was a vicar. 'We are very comfortable' he said. 'We have a lovely house and enough to live well but it is a heinous crime to die a wealthy man. I need to find ways to share my bounty with others'. Nicolas's legends remind us that we should use what money we have to ensure that those basics are provided for all, especially the vulnerable children who cannot yet help themselves.

There are three things I want to suggest we can take from the legends of St Nicolas for our lives today.

Firstly – he noticed what was going on because he took the time to really look and listen. In a week in which we have heard the harrowing accounts of the death of a child whose suffering went unnoticed or when noted, under investigated, we are called to acknowledge that children can be abused, exploited, neglected and worse. This was a case of human cruelty. There are also children suffering from poverty, famine, war and preventable diseases across our world. As Christians we need to be aware of the possibilities of human cruelty, to be concerned about the inequalities of our world, to look and listen although that is sometimes so very hard to do. In all of the joys of family Christmases we must not shut our eyes to the reality that many children do not have the basics.

Secondly- he did something. He used money appropriately to provide different opportunities for the children he encountered. He used his position to question those exploiting children commercially. We as Christians are called to think about how we can use our money appropriately to give children different futures. We are also called to challenge the people and systems that exploit them. This means understanding the powers of our world and informing ourselves about climate change, social media algorithms, cheap fashion and other systems that exploit the vulnerable.

Thirdly- he did not act for his own glory. His story is about secret giving. He gave not to give glory to himself but out of his faith that taught him that all he had was from God and to be used in the service of God. The beautiful passage from Isaiah outlines the calling of one anointed by God's spirit.

*The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
³ to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.*

Each of us received that same spirit at our baptism. So how do we live up to our calling. What gifts can we give? What good news can we bring to the oppressed, how do we bind up the broken-hearted, proclaim liberty and release to the captive, comfort those who mourn?

This church is dedicated to St Nicolas – how does this church live out that calling?

What are the needs of central Abingdon that should be noticed? How does this place champion the vulnerable of our world?

What kind of garlands could be given, do we possess the oil of gladness and the mantle of praise to offer to those who are hurting for whatever reason. These are questions for you to ponder on.

We do need to find and experience the joy and comfort of our faith in order to be able to give to others. Nicolas reminds us that the heart of our faith is service. Service to those in our locality, service carried out not for our own gain but for the love of God. Service that is about looking and giving, making a difference where we can. He has also come to stand for the joy of giving, which made me think of that oil of gladness in Isaiah's reading.

So my gift to you today is a poem.

The Oil of Gladness

When setting out on a journey
I pack a phial of precious ointment.
This is the oil of gladness,
a gift given me by the good angels at my baptism.
It is distilled from the love of God for frail humanity.
Perfumed with the sound of the dawn chorus, babbling brooks
and the giggles of contended children.
It has miraculous powers.
When the way is uneven and unclear,
when the water is choppy or tempestuous,
when my body is weary and aching,
when my mind is fearful and depressed,
a few drops can lift my spirit,
sooth my soul and restore my strength.

Like all Holy gifts
it is not diminished by usage.
It is remarkable.
There is no use by date.
The perfume does not fade nor the oil decay.
It is in fact replenished through being shared.
In worldly terms it costs little
and can be had for the asking.
So, I urge you to get yourself some.
All you need is an open heart and a capacity
for joy.

The Parish of Abingdon and Living in Love and Faith

Bishop Henry Scriven, St Nicolas' Day 2021

The recent sessions of Faith Forum have been dealing with the Church of England's latest report on human sexuality called [Living in Love and Faith](#). Sincere thanks are due to Charles Miller for tackling this massive subject; it is a 400-page book, a course, a podcast, films and an online library. LLF invites us all to '*pray, study and learn together - play your part in discovering what is God's call to the Church of England today*'.

The aim of the whole exercise is to open up the subject of human identity and sexuality for the church to discuss. It is not directive in any way but lays out a vast amount of material giving opinions and lived experiences from all sides of the possible spectra that exist in the church.

We are expected to give our reactions and feedback because at some point in the future the bishops and the synod will be making vitally important decisions about the doctrine and liturgy of the Church of England. This is necessary if, as many people hope and pray, the Church changes its practice and begins to bless same-sex 'marriages' or unions and decides openly to ordain practising homosexuals as deacons, priests and bishops in the church.

Though the LLF exercise does not give a steer as to where the church is going, as we see above our bishops want us to play our part in discovering what God's call to the church is.

So, does the parish of Abingdon have an opinion? Or is it possible or desirable for us to forward any feedback to the church? The follow up will be done by a group of bishops named [the Next Steps Group](#), one of whom (Karen Gorham) was until 2016 Archdeacon of Buckingham, and another (Philip Mounstephen) used to live in Abingdon while working at CMS and was made Bishop of Truro in 2018. This subject should occupy us in serious thought and prayer as it is about the future course of the Church of England. Is the Church ready to change its doctrine of marriage? What would be the consequences if it did so? Would those who believe in the historic teaching of Scripture and Tradition be able to co-exist with those who are not in agreement with them? In other words, is the doctrine of marriage as traditionally taught in Scripture and tradition a core doctrinal issue or is it marginal and inconsequential? The Greek word introduced in the [Windsor report](#) (page 38f) was 'adiaphora'. Please read those few pages in the Windsor report to see whether you think that the main issue raised in LLF is central or adiaphora (indifferent).

We all as members of the Church of England need to know what is going on in our church or we might find that it has moved on and left us behind. You may be aware of clergy leaving the church, either to go to the [Roman Catholic Church](#) (Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali, former Bishop of Rochester) or to other churches often affiliated with [GAFCON](#).

There is a ton of information available apart from the exhaustive resources of LLF. [The Church of England Evangelical Council](#) have produced a film called the [Beautiful Story](#) which I can recommend as a clear exposition of the 'conservative' view. If you want a different perspective on the film you have only to go to [an article by Jayne Ozanne](#), Lay member of General Synod from Oxford.

There is another perspective which needs to be noted; that is, that the Church of England is a tiny part of the worldwide [Anglican Communion](#). There certainly are provinces of the Communion which are more liberal in their views than the C of E, but there are many more that are more conservative. Should the questions that LLF is discussing take into account our global fellowship? Or should we follow the handful of provinces that have separated from the majority and followed the predominant culture of their countries? What does God want? How is he leading his church?

What is God's call to the Church of England today?

A Journey begun on Christmas Day

Rob Rutherford

The one I am thinking of did not start in the fields above Bethlehem. This journey is more prosaic than poetic but remarkable even so. It was a journey that required detailed planning which began about 30 years ago.

My Christmas Day was probably like yours – a service, some food and presents, and a good deal of sitting around. For a significant number of scientists there was nervous anticipation and important activity. The James Webb Space Telescope was about to launch.

The size of it, the complexity of it, the ambition of it – they are all impressive. At 6500 kg, the telescope has a mass of about half a double decker bus. The Ariane rocket that launched it from French Guiana was the fruit of European collaboration. At 10 billion dollars the price tag of the mission is hefty. Like the best ‘pure science’, it is a cultural project. The aim is to explore the early universe and also to look at the atmospheres of exoplanets – a project that could only be dreamed about until quite recently. Like much pure science, there will be unexpected benefits too.

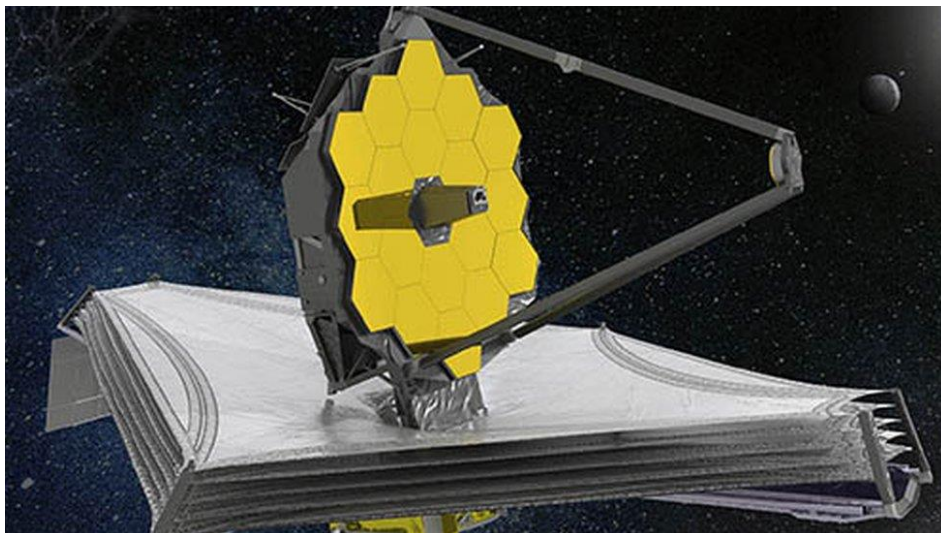


The telescope had to be folded up to get it into the nose cone of the rocket so much thought had to be given to unfolding it. For a start there was the heat shield - the size of a tennis court. Then the mirrors had to be moved into position and focussed.

All of these manoeuvres needed hundreds of pulleys, motors, cables, actuators not to mention the controlling software to work faultlessly.

So far so good. There is no hurry, the telescope has a long way to go. The top of the atmosphere and the start of space are about 100km up (you could get there in an hour if you could drive vertically) but the JW telescope is heading for what is known as Lagrange point L2 which is 1.5 million km from earth (about 4 times the distance to the moon). By the time you read this, it should be there but it won't produce any images until all the setting up has been done. This might take six months so we will have to be patient.

“First light” is the name given to the first time a telescope is used. It is also the ambition of the telescope – to see some of the earliest stars and galaxies in the Universe. This awakening is the start of a journey. Who knows where it might end.



The desert awakens:



All it takes is a shower of rain.

There hadn't been one for 20 years.

I hope David Attenborough forgives me for pinching these stills from The Green Planet broadcast on Sunday 30th January 2022.

Snowdrops

Alexandra Green

It is a custom in my household to have snowdrops on the breakfast table for my birthday (February 12th). I have been fascinated all my life by *Galanthus nivalis* but of course there are numerous varieties and the bulbs of which are greatly coveted and apparently traded at substantial cost. Peeping through the soil, or even the snow if there is any, their drooping white heads herald the coming of spring.

In medieval times snowdrops were known as Mary's tears as she stood at the foot of the cross of Jesus.

This poem sums it up:

Deep sleeps the Winter, cold, and wet and grey:
Surely all the world is dead: Spring is far away.
Wait! The world shall waken: it is not dead, for lo
The Fair Maids of February stand in the snow!



Poem by Cicely Mary Barker; Photo by Norman Gee

Henri Nouwen's words quoted in *Spiritual Direction*:

Suggested by Sue Sheppy

Introspection and contemplative prayer is the ancient discipline by which we begin to see God in our heart. Interior prayer is a careful attentiveness to the One who dwells in the centre of our being. Through prayer we awaken ourselves to God within us. With practice, we allow God to enter into our heartbeat and our breathing, into our thoughts and emotions, into our hearing, seeing, touching, and tasting, and into every membrane of our body. It is by being awake to God in us that we can increasingly see God in the world around us.

Some GOOD News

Claire Bolton

It is difficult not to feel overwhelmed by all the bad news that we have thrown at us daily.

However I received some good news last week from the charity Send a Cow. They are a charity I have supported for over twenty-five years because I love the way they work; I trust that the money I give will be used to help families in rural Africa and not disappear into a middleman's pocket. (Incidentally they were the first charity to have virtual gifts). Send a Cow works alongside communities, offering a hand up NOT a hand out; knowledge and training is passed on until communities are self sufficient.



The Charity began in 1988 when a group of UK farmers, who had had enough of having to slaughter their dairy herds, decided to send a cow to Africa. The receiver of the cow was trained in looking after the cow, and promised that the first female calf would be passed on to another family. And the charity grew from there. There were no handouts or imposed technologies - they worked alongside smallholder farmers, helping them use the best techniques and the best crops, and taking climate change into consideration. They are working primarily with women, and almost half of those helped are widowed. I could go on, this is just a taster of what Send a Cow can do - if you want to find out more do look at their website, sendacow.org

And the GOOD news? the latest Send a Cow newsletter, entitled *Impact* reviewed its 2021 achievements. One that struck me most forcefully was the success of a project in Ethiopia, in remote Dawuro, where the community was living in extreme poverty and battling very difficult climate change events. Send a Cow had been supporting 4500 families to develop their farms, and nourish their soil so they had enough to eat, and even some surplus to sell. At the end of the project 99% of the families are now food secure. 99%!!! Some *Impact* indeed! This success means Send a Cow can move onto another area - they have projects in five other African nations.

This may seem like a drop in the ocean of what is needed, but everything that Send a Cow does helps encourage self sufficiency, and ultimately helps African nations become stronger in face of huge monetary and political investments from some other countries. And I feel I can be part of this change.





Christ's Hospital of Abingdon

Christ's Hospital of Abingdon is seeking to appoint a new Governor.

Christ's Hospital is the oldest of Oxfordshire's charities and dates from 1553. It is controlled by The Master, twelve Governors and support staff managed by The Clerk to the Governors. The Master and Governors meet monthly, around the oak table in Long Alley Hall, as Christ's Hospital Governors have done for the past four hundred and seventy years. As a Governor you will play a very important role, responsible for governing the charity, providing strategic oversight of the charity's operations, and likely taking responsibility for one of our aims and objectives.

Christ's Hospital are fortunate in having sufficient resources to allow them to maintain the annual funding of their prime objectives which are:

- The care and maintenance of the town's historical Almshouses to the standards required of listed buildings and of comfortable modern living, so providing accommodation for 30 residents.
- Providing grants to those referred to the Charity by care agencies.
- Providing educational grants to school pupils from Abingdon in case of special need.
- Supporting local organizations deemed by the Governors to be of benefit to the residents of Abingdon.
- Providing a public service to the town by maintaining Albert Park for use by the people of Abingdon.

Although an ancient charity, Christ's Hospital Governors are ambitious about our service development, ensuring that we are responding to the current and future needs of our beneficiaries.

We invite interest from individuals of all ages and cultures. We are keen to hear from individuals who will bring different backgrounds, knowledge and ideas, alongside a desire to develop their personal and professional skills within a team of experienced and dedicated Governors and staff. Please note that previous Governor or Trustee experience would be beneficial but is not essential. Your 'lived' experience is as important and full induction will be given to support new Governors. The role of Governor is a voluntary position. The time commitment will be a minimum of a day per month, made up of monthly Governor meetings and time to input on other charity matters.

Traditionally Governors are recruited from individuals with strong connections (residency or employment) with the Town of Abingdon.

How might you personally benefit from becoming a Governor Christ's Hospital?

- The satisfaction of playing an important role in a charity at the heart of the Town of Abingdon.
- An opportunity to exercise and share your skills and knowledge for the benefit of the local community.
- A chance to contribute to the Charity's strategic growth.
- A chance to augment your experience of charities and gain new skills.
- An opportunity to work alongside other skilled and committed Governors.
- High-quality induction and training in the operation of Christ's Hospital.

If you are interested in becoming a Governor of Christ's Hospital, in the first place, send a letter of application to Mrs Gillian Kent, Clerk to the Governors, at the address shown below explaining your connections with the town of Abingdon, how you believe you can contribute to the skills and diversity of Christ's Hospital and what about the Governor role excites you and made you want to apply. If you have further questions, please also write to Mrs Kent. Closing date for applications is end of February 2022

What's on

**The Pavlova Wind Quintet, with
Glynne Butt piano, presents:**

Mozart Quintet for piano and wind K452
Beethoven Quintet for piano and wind Op
16



at St Nicolas' Church,

February 13th, 3pm – 4pm. Cost £ 10.00

Visit www.abbeychamberconcerts.org to
book tickets.

Faith Forum will take place on Sunday 6th February at 9am in the parish centre. For those unable to attend in person, it will be Zoomed and recorded. The Zoom code will be the same as usually used for St Helen's services. Our speaker will be the Revd Polly Falconer, UKME Development Enabler for the Oxford Diocese, speaking on 'Does God See Colour?'

The March meeting will be on Sunday 6th March.



✠ **WORLD DAY OF PRAYER 2022** ✠
FRIDAY 4 MARCH
A SERVICE FOR EVERYONE

at

Salvation Army

West St Helen Street

2:30pm

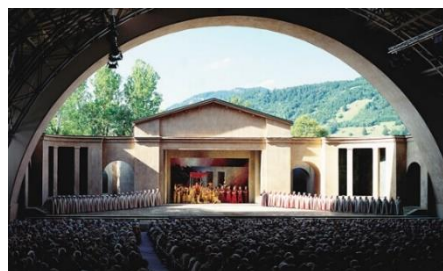
Light refreshments will be served after the Service

This year the Service has been prepared by the women of
England, Wales and Northern Ireland

Creche facilities can be arranged
For further information, please contact
Debra McKnight on 07896 860 381

**Pilgrimage to Oberammergau – July 2022**

The 2020 Oberammergau Passion Play pilgrimage led by the Team Rector, originally scheduled for 2020, has been re-scheduled for July 13-21 2022. The 'pilgrims' are accommodated in the Gutshof outside charming Salzburg for most of the week then travel to Oberammergau for the famous Passion Play itself. For those interested in joining the pilgrimage, let Charles Miller know of your interest either directly or through the Parish Office (01235 520144).



Can you recognise these hymns which feature ‘Awakening’?

Eluned Hallas

1	Awake, my soul, and sing of him who died for thee,	9	Dawn on our darkness and lend us thine aid
2	Welcome the heavenly guest in whom the dawn has come:	10	Grant us thy peace upon our homeward way; with thee began, with thee shall end the day.
3	The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,	11	But, lo! There breaks a yet more glorious day;
4	Soon shall come the great awaking, soon the rending of the tomb;	12	Look unto me thy morn shall rise and all thy day be bright.”
5	New life, new hope awakes	13	They fly forgotten, as a dream dies at the opening day.
6	As o’er each continent and island each dawn leads on another day,	14	And from three days’ sleep in death as a sun hath risen;
7	Awake and harken, for he brings glad tidings from the King of kings!	15	God’s re-creation Of the new day!
8	My heart awaking cries, may Jesus Christ be praised!		

All words taken from Common Praise (with apologies to St Michael’s)

Answers on page 12

The North Wind Doth Blow

Eileen Duckett

The north wind doth blow
And we shall have snow
And what will poor Granny do then, poor thing.
She’ll read a good book
Or maybe she’ll cook
And stay indoors until spring, poor thing.

The north wind doth blow
And we shall have snow
And what will poor Grampy do then, poor thing.
He’ll bake lots of bread
Or make wine in his shed
And look forward to spring, poor thing.

The north wind both blow
And we shall have snow
And what will our grandsons do then, poor things.
They’ll play in the snow
Until it doth go
Making lots of snow angel wings, lucky things.

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/>

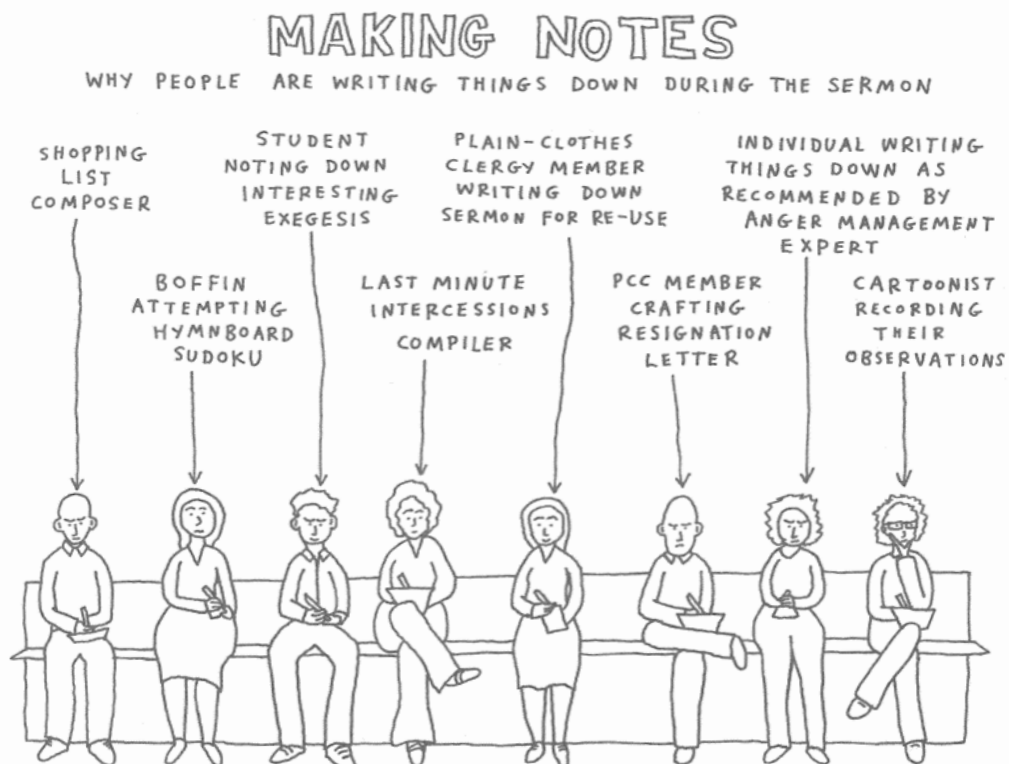
FOOD BANK. The Abingdon Foodbank is still very busy and anxious to keep up the support. **Northcourt Road (Christ Church) is open to receive donations on Tuesday and Friday mornings between 9.30 am and 1.00 pm.** Their main long-term needs are:

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.

Quiz Answers:
Don't peek yet

4	Through the night of doubt and sorrow onward goes the pilgrim band.	8	When morning gilds the skies,	12	I heard the voice of Jesus say, "Come unto me and rest;
3	Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,	7	On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry announces that the Lord is nigh.	11	For all the saints who from their labours rest,
2	Hills of the North, rejoice, river and mountain-spring,	6	The day thou gavest, Lord, is ended,	10	Saviour, again to thy dear name we raise with one accord our parting hymn of praise.
1	Crown him with many crowns, the Lamb upon his throne,	5	Christ is the world's true light	9	Brightest and best of the sons of the morning,
				13	O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, our hope for years to come, Come, ye faithful, raise the strain of triumphant gladness!
				14	Strain Come, ye faithful, raise the strain of triumphant gladness!
				15	Morning has broken Like the first morning.

And finally, from
Dave Walker of
Cartoon Church:



Thanks to all contributors and to you, the readers.

The next issue will be published in March: ideas and contributions to Candle@abingdonparish.org.uk

We would also welcome responses to any articles published here or in previous issues.