

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: "Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown."

And he replied:

"Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."

So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night. And He led me towards the hills and the breaking of day in the lone East.

**The Parish Church of Saint Faith,
Great Crosby**

NEWSLINK

January 2017

Worship at Saint Faith's



SUNDAY SERVICES

11.00 am SUNG EUCHARIST & Children's Church
Holy Baptism by arrangement
6.30 pm 1st Sunday: Evensong

WEEKDAY SERVICES

Interregnum arrangements

Please consult the weekly service sheet (in church and online) for all information. Morning Prayer is usually said daily at 9.00 am Monday to Friday, and Evening Prayer on Fridays at 6.00 pm. There is usually a eucharist on Fridays at 6.30 pm. For regular updates see the weekly church **website bulletin**:
<http://www.stfaithsgreatcrosby.org.uk/bulletin.pdf>

Around Waterloo: The Eucharist

2nd and 5th Mondays & Feast Days as announced - Liverpool Seafarers' Centre 10am; Wednesdays 10.30 am - St Mary's; Wednesdays 7 pm - Christ Church.
See the weekly online bulletin as above for full details of services and any variations.

SACRAMENT OF PENANCE AND RECONCILIATION

The Clergy are available by appointment to hear confessions or to talk about any matter in confidence. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is always available in preparation for Christmas and Easter and at other advertised times.

HOME VISITS to the sick and housebound and those in hospital

If you, or someone you know, are unable to get to church and would like to receive Holy Communion at home, the Eucharistic Ministers are happy to undertake this - please call 928 3342 to arrange this, or to arrange a visit to someone in hospital or at home.

IN A PASTORAL EMERGENCY

Please telephone as for home visits, or a member of the ministry team.



From the Ministry Team - January 2017

‘On the twelfth day of Christmas, my true love sent to me... twelve drummers drumming...’ But there is more to commemorate on the twelfth day of Christmas – sensational though the arrival of twelve drummers drumming might have been.

January 6th is also the Feast of the Epiphany, that is, the occasion when the Church remembers the showing forth of the Christ-child to the Gentiles, or non-Jews. In some countries this celebration is regarded as more important than that of Christmas Day. Its origins can be traced to a verse in St Matthew’s Gospel (2:1): ‘When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the King there came wise men from the East...’

The first part of this sentence, that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, is a clear statement of fact and we have no reason to doubt it. There is certainly no lack of evidence for the existence of King Herod and we know from historical records that in about 33 A.D. – roughly at the time that Jesus was crucified – there were disturbances in Palestine connected with ‘one who was a Jew called Christus’. There is strong evidence that Jesus too was an historical figure. It is, however, with the words ‘there came wise men from the east’ that our difficulties begin.

We do not know the country of origin of these ‘wise men’, for ‘the East’ could be anywhere beyond the River Jordan. The biblical text does not even tell us how many wise men there were. Yet this part of the nativity story has caught people’s imaginations through the ages. It has been embellished so that the wise men have turned into Kings and their number has been fixed at three. They have even been given names, with which we are familiar as a result of singing the carol ‘We Three Kings of Orient are’, and they have been described as Gentiles, not Jews.

The story of the wise men, although no one can prove that it is historical, has been used over the years to express what people believed about the person of Jesus. In early Christian art and literature, the wise men became Kings because the Christian Church believed that Jesus was King of Kings, who was to be worshipped and who was the source of authority of all earthly kings. Yet, as Kings, the wise men remain wise, for it was as a result of their search for truth that they were led to the source of all wisdom.

From the beginning, Christianity proved to be not only a religion which could be accepted by people like the shepherds with a simple faith but also one which appealed to philosophers and scholars. Thus it could be defended by the sharpest intellects of the ancient, medieval and modern world. Intellectuals found satisfaction in the doctrines of the Christian creeds, just as the wise men were satisfied and brought their search to an end when they found the Christ-child.

The reason why their number was restricted to three was presumably because of their three symbolic gifts. Gold was a sign of kingship, frankincense of divinity and myrrh a symbol of suffering. Thus, even these proclaimed the belief that Christ was a king, who was God, yet a man, who like all men would suffer and whose divine nature would be made known through that suffering.

The reference in the story to the eastern origin of the wise men must not pass unnoticed, for that was the territory of the Gentiles, thus implying that Jesus' birth was of universal significance. It affected not just the course of Jewish history but that of the whole world. For two thousand years, theologians and scholars have attempted to write commentaries and books about the nature of the person Christ and the significance of his birth. None of them, however, has managed to do this as simply and as effectively as the writer of St Matthew's Gospel has done in twelve simple verses in which he describes that purposeful journey of a group of wise men.

Through them he has proclaimed Christ as the source of all wisdom and authority, as God and yet man, as King of Kings and Lord of all. Having made these points, the writer concluded his story as simply as he began: 'Being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their country by another way.'

With the mention of Herod we revert to historical fact, and the wise men disappear from St Matthew's Gospel, having served a useful purpose.

'Eternal God, give us clearness of vision so that we, like the wise men, may be led to the truth revealed in your Son and that the brightness of his presence may shine on our hearts.'

May the joys and blessings of Epiphanytide be with you and all whom you know and love.

Fr Dennis



Jackie's Countdown Report



Dear friends

I'm now coming up to mid-point of my second and final year of ordination training at All Saints Centre for Mission and Ministry. I can't believe how quickly time is flying by! I'm still enjoying the course, although I must admit that the training has stepped up a large notch and so I'm keeping very busy with study and lectures.

My modules this year are Introduction to Christian Doctrine (just finishing this), Introduction to Christian Ethics, Introduction to Christian Worship, Developing Preaching, Leadership and Theology for Ministry and Mission, Old Testament Text Study in Context, and an independent learning project (other faiths). I attend weekly lectures at the University of Chester (Warrington Campus), although many in our group are on different pathways but on similar modules, with different universities; for example, University of Chester, Durham University (me), All Saints Certificate and private study (Masters), so there is a mixture of students in each module.

We also attend four weekend residentials (all students/all years) in Crewe, and the final year students will attend Easter School for one week, and those who are to be ordained in 2017 also attend a few days' preparatory residential prior to ordination. I've been advised that my date for ordination is 25th June 2017, although I have a lot of study to do and modules to complete, and hopefully pass, before then! I'm very excited and also nervous, but continue to feel incredibly privileged that God has called me for ordained ministry, and looking forward to the next step in my ministerial journey.

I am pleased to have been offered, and accepted, a post as assistant curate in St Luke's, Great Crosby which, if all goes well, I will begin at the end of June/early July 2017 for a fixed term of four years. This, of course, means that I will be leaving St Faith's and St Mary's in June 2017, and I admit to having a mixture of emotions about this. Sadness because I will be leaving a church of which I have been a member for over 30 years and where I have made so many wonderful friends, excitement as I start my curacy and ministry in St Luke's; and nervousness at the thought of it! However, I must say that I am truly blessed by the love and support I have, and continue to, receive from my family and friends, as well as the family of St Faith's and St Mary's. The encouragement and support I am given is truly humbling, and I thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

But, there's a lot of study and training to do before (and after!) June 2017, so please continue to keep me and my fellow ordinands in your prayers, as we continue on our journey of faith and ministry.

With my love and prayers,

Jackie

Services Support Group



Our Carol Services during the Christmas Tree Festivals have always been really lovely evenings but somehow this year's was very special indeed. Our magnificent church filled with beautifully decorated trees, a Military Band (even better than previous years as it transpired) then add the carols to make a perfect evening. With the church well filled, approx 180 people, sounding wonderful when singing favourite carols, what could be better!

To add to all this, the retiring collection reached £302 which will be divided equally between the charities of Combat Stress, BLESMA, and The Royal British Legion. Our Christmas Tree box collection was £99 and together with some donations I received, I was able to send Scotty's Little Soldiers a cheque for £150 (there's a "Thank You" from them at the back of church). So a great big thank you from Rev George Perera and myself for all your generous support this year and previously; it has been tremendous and we are very grateful and so are the charities.

Our next meeting is on Wednesday 1st February, when we there will be a talk from a local charity for veterans. Everyone is welcome so come along at 7.30pm in church. We hope you can join us.

Happy New Year

Eunice



Registering the Past reaches 1958

Without a partner priest, Fr Hassall devotedly sustains alone the full pattern of worship, eucharists and offices alike, for many a page in the register. For the record, Sundays see him shouldering the burden of five services. The day begins with the 8.00 am Low Mass, with anything up to 90 communicants in the first few weeks of 1958. No numbers are ever logged for Mattins at 10.00am, Sunday Schools at 3.00 pm or Evensong at 6.00 pm. For the 10.45 am (non-communicating) Sung Eucharist, where a few years earlier only the celebrant received, we now see numbers sometimes creeping up to double figures. Weekdays see a daily Low Mass (Mondays at 1030 am, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays (variable) at 8 am, and Wednesday and Friday at 7 am). Evensong is said daily at 6 pm; communicant figures are almost always in single figures. Fr Peter Ryan pops up on two January weekdays, and Fr Harold Cawley begins to help out in the pulpit as the weeks go by.

There are 'New curtains in Vestry' in February, 104 communicants over three Ash Wednesday eucharists, a visit from H.J.Carpenter, Archdeacon of Salop and, shortly after this last, 'heavy falls of snow'. Among those signing in in Lent, we see Messrs

Urwin, Harry Bradshaw, J.Mockford, Harold E. Crewdson, Gwyn Rogers, A. White, C.H Telford, W.W.Langford, T.S.Wetherall and Clifford Liverpool. This last is of course the diocesan bishop: most of the others are at present known only to God, as neither they nor the vicar adds illumination.

Weekday attendances reach double figures as Holy Week draws nigh. Good Friday sees The Liturgy at 8 am, the usual Three Hours at noon and Passion Tableaux at 8 pm. Holy Saturday at 7.30 pm provides Solemn Evensong, Procession and Blessing of the New Fire and Paschal Candle.

Easter Day, suitably emblazoned, is headed by a musical line ('O let the song of praise be sung') from 'The Strife is O'er'. Not so for William Hassall, taking services at 7, 8, 9, 10.45, 3 pm and 6.30 pm. 420 communicate at the three fasting eucharists (223 at 8). Thereafter the routine continues. The next notable entry is the signature of +Mark Masasi – none other than one-time curate Mark Way, now a bishop, dropping in for a short stay. Then in early May there are four successive worship-less days, with the entertaining caption VICAR IN RETREAT. Thereafter we spot a collection earmarked for New Heating System, two more masses from Peter Ryan. And then, as if the vicar didn't have enough to do, we read on Monday June 2nd: 'With Effect From This Day – Mattins is said Daily before The First Low Mass'. The office is not recorded daily, but it makes a total for a full week of no fewer than 23 services, and sometimes more.

It must therefore have been a great relief when, a week or so later on June 15th, T.S. (Tom) Stanage signs in. The new curate is still only a deacon, but he takes the offices and other appropriate acts of worship, as well as preaching duties, thenceforth. It's not long before he is more or less running things: from August 30th Fr Hassall is absent for two weeks, doubtless on holiday, and until he returns there are several days without eucharists and stand-in celebrants (Frs Cawley and Lancaster) signing in.

After the vicar's return Peter Ryan once more celebrates on a fair number of weekdays, with the vicar taking two requiems (one for Canon Storer, the other for Mrs H.Duggan, at the ripe old age of 104), followed by a visit from what looks like Frank Hamburey (S.P.G. Area Secretary). St Faith's day and late autumn come and go, with what is possibly a unique service time shoe-horned in on November 2nd, when Vespers of the Dead are offered at 7.35 pm precisely.

On Friday December 12th Peter Ryan presides over a requiem for Ernest Ryan. Now Christmas is coming, and the congregations are getting fat. There are 320 (+60) communicants at the Midnight; this and all remaining services until the New Year are taken by W.H. The old year ends with 7,947 communicants recorded (a small drop from 8011 in 1957), as the good ship Saint Faith launches out into the deep of 1959. The captain will be missing from the helm for many weeks at the start of the year – but that's another story.

Chris Price





A New Year Reflection

The famous prayer for peace, full of the thought and spirit of St Francis, is heard in these first days of the New Year. The theme of peace is on the hearts of many among the world's nations.

It is worth noticing, however, that after the opening request: 'Lord, make me an instrument of your peace, a channel of your peace,' there are other requests. One of these concerns hope. 'Where there is despair, let me sow hope.' That prayer backs up the first which longs for peace. In fact, hopefulness is one of the contributions which a peace-maker can make to a troubled and needy world.

At the New Year, we have hopes. There are wishes, resolutions and great expectations associated with the fresh start.

Many of these fade swiftly and leave a trail of disappointment behind them. For the Christian, there is a different and definite approach to the future and the unknown, whatever the time of year. The word 'hope' deserves to be examined. There is a distinction to be drawn between our hopes and that spiritual attitude outlook marked by the gift of hope!

Hope is indeed a gift; it ranks with faith and that most excellent gift of love, sometimes distinctively called charity. In the psalms of Israel we find stirring descriptions of famines, wars, troubles of every kind, conflicts among nations and tribes, natural disasters with storms at sea and earthquakes with their toll of destruction.

Yet, through the darkness and the near-despair, the note of hope is heard at every stage. Over and over again God is praised: he is the hope and strength of both individual and nation. Out of the deep he hears the cries for help and responds to those who turn to him in trustfulness. Hope expresses deep and unshakeable faith.

This hope in God's way and God's guidance was still more movingly illustrated by the experiences of Christ himself. His cross strangely became a source of light; the love which he showed by the sacrifice he made drew many people to share sufferings with a courage and a confidence that still persists in the darkest spots of a troubled world to surprise and humble us all.

Christian hope is a hope bred of a love and concern for lives at every level. Those who see the seamier side of life are often the most cheerful among the company we meet. They are not so much optimistic about sickness and oppression, as resourceful in their positive approach to signs of new life and growing points of recovery and restoration. The optimist may, indeed, be shallow and superficial. His bright and airy view of life does not always bring comfort. Light-heartedness is a fragile quality in dangerous and anxious days. Hope strikes more deeply into human problems; those who found in the

Cross, a symbol of defeat and shame, fresh inspiration for the future, discovered that they themselves found new possibilities and newly-discovered riches in a life devoted to the service of God's gifts of love and faith. The destruction of a life increased their reverence for life.

The pessimist turns sour and cynical in self-defence; he feels trapped in circumstances beyond his control. The bad news, with its weary catalogues of disasters and cruelties, clouds the last remnants of his former vision. The hope which has power to transform such despair is anything but superficial or heartily cheerful. Solid hopes emerge from patient waiting and watching; hope grows strong not from what is seen, but from conviction that hidden beneath the surface of human suffering, however grim, there is a purpose to be found, and a meaning to be grasped.

Travelling hopefully is a pilgrimage in itself. The four words strung together by the apostle Paul, no facile optimist, provide us with a New Year guide-line: 'Tribulation produces patience; patience, experience; experience, hope.'

Fr Dennis

Look! North



Many will recall the visit of Philip North to St Faith's a while ago (a lofty prelate, definitely High Church in both senses). He has recently hit the national headlines, as reported below. Some may well think we need more like him. Other views are available...

A Church of England bishop has accused his colleagues of failing in their duty to stand up for the family and of being embarrassed in the face of patriotism.

Bishop of Burnley the Right Rev Philip North said the C of E is run by academics and moneyed elites and has been ignoring the interests of the people. He said if it had really been listening to the poor it would not have been surprised by the Brexit vote and the concerns of those who 'feel frozen out'.

The bishop's attack follows the embarrassment of senior Church leaders headed by Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, after voters disregarded their appeals to vote to remain in the EU in last June's referendum.

His criticism in a Church Times article effectively accuses other prelates, who have repeatedly underlined their concern for the poor, of hypocrisy. It makes him one of the rare senior clergy in recent years to break ranks by voicing dissent.

The bishop, who was 50 recently, said the Church had allowed gay rights to dominate its concerns, and 'all too often middle class clergy squirm nervously during Remembrance Sunday and excise any hymns that hint of nationalism'.

He said working class people were frozen out of the economy and suffered shrinking wages, but they are routinely accused of xenophobia, or worse, when they express concerns about changes imposed upon their communities by those who live far away'. Bishop North said working people felt abandoned by their own institutions and 'if the C of E was still adequately present in areas of deprivation, it would not have been surprised at the revolution in popular politics this anger caused'.

He added: 'The Church's agenda is being set not by the poor, but by academics, the moneyed elites, and certain sections of the secular media. 'We then listen to the poor on condition that what they say backs up our own preconceived arguments.'

'Across many communities, extended family life remains very strong, for all its frustrations, it is where most people find support, self-identity and purpose. But too many Anglicans seem embarrassed to stand up for the sanctity of the family.'

The bishop said that in the referendum campaign the 'leave' side had called for voters to take back control of the country, and this had resonated with them. 'It was less an anti-immigration vote than a patriotic vote from people who were fed up with having pride in their nation, its flag and its armed forces misrepresented as intolerance or racism, he said.

100 Club Winners, December

1	54	Rosie Walker
2	24	Cathy Taylor
3	32	Ken Bramwell



From Russia with Love

Paula O'Shaughnessy

I have been learning Russian at Manchester University and took the opportunity to visit Russia. It was a ten day trip with daily Russian language classes in the northern town of Petrozavodsk. Students stay with local families in their homes. This piece is a description of my visit there in August 2016.

The aircraft touched down in St Petersburg; it was time to disembark. I was so frightened, as though rooted the spot. All at once, I realised how the news stories I had ever read or heard about Russia had seeped into my subconscious mind. Something bad would happen, a shadowy figure would leap out and do something to me. Images of authoritarian figures viewing military parades in Red Square were like a backdrop to a

stage in my mind, which was now only too real. I was totally alone, with a 7 hour train journey north to Petrozavodsk in Karelia, ahead of me. I knew only a little, basic Russian. But there was no going back!

As I walked through the airport I was struck by the profound quiet, hushed sounds, everything bathed in a vaguely green light. But the banalities of life are always around the corner – first stop, the toilets! At first glance, it is like toilets in any airport, except toilet paper is to be put in bins, not flushed. Then, it is time to go through passport control. All is calm and efficient – but with greater hush and quiet than in European airports; I verify with an official which queue I am to join. He stands at a central post beneath a sign that says 'English' and he wears one of those large militaristic, peaked caps and confirms with understated command where I need to go.

The rouble is a closed currency (only available in Russia), so next stop is the bureau de change in the airport. My combined limitations in Russian and maths elicit an impatient response from the cashier there. With some persistence and patience, I obtain enough roubles to see me through the next few days. Then, I find my way to the mini bus which shuttles frequently to the metro underground station. The cost is around £2. Then, down steps to the metro – with my heavy suitcase. Except, what kindness is everywhere! Each time I was seen carrying my case down or up steps, a helpful gentleman would stop to carry it for me. And I do mean *every* time. I was then trying to get a ticket from the electronic machine, puzzling and unclear... Then a gentle tap on the shoulder and a young man who spoke good English said: 'No, these machines are for long term travel. You need to get a ticket from the office. I will help you.' He asked the teller at the booth, and I get two Metro tokens (one for me and one for my case), costing less than £1 in total. The official on the barrier said only one token was needed after all, so I had a token for the return journey. Then down to the platform, on incredibly long escalators, all in a 1930s utilitarian art deco style – shabby and faded now. More steps, and more help from kindly gentlemen with my case. Changes on the metro, then destination, the long distance railway station with a five hour wait in the hall. The fear of Russia was starting to fade gradually.

At last it is time to board the train, at around 11.30 p.m. A young female steward, in a military pilotka style hat asks for my documents. She frowns and says something I can't understand; at first I think it is that my ticket isn't valid, but it isn't that – as she lets me board the train. She escorts me to the first class sleeping berth; it is very plush in soft pink and burgundy, warm and welcoming. Shortly after I think I realise what she was trying to tell me; my fellow passenger in the other bed is a man! When I had booked the berth online, the first class female only berths were all taken. I am so tired by now I simply don't care; sleep is all I can think of. I slept so well that night, as I had been travelling for many hours.

Then, at around 7.00 a.m. the train reaches its destination – Petrozavodsk. My hostess, Valentina, a doctor meets me from the train. I am staying with her for the next ten days. She is friendly and smiling, but speaks little English; then a short walk to her car. We drive to her apartment block; the grounds look quite shabby, an uneven tarmac path, and

cars parked on bare earth under trees. The apartment block is typical of those seen on television of Russia, utilitarian and run down looking from the outside. Valentina laughs and says to me in Russian 'This is Russia!'

We walk into the apartment block; the entrance hall is dark and uninviting. Together we carry my suitcase up three flights of stairs, then into the apartment. What a contrast! It is modern, centrally heated and comfortably furnished. I have my own room, complete with sofa bed, computer and Russian icons on the wall.

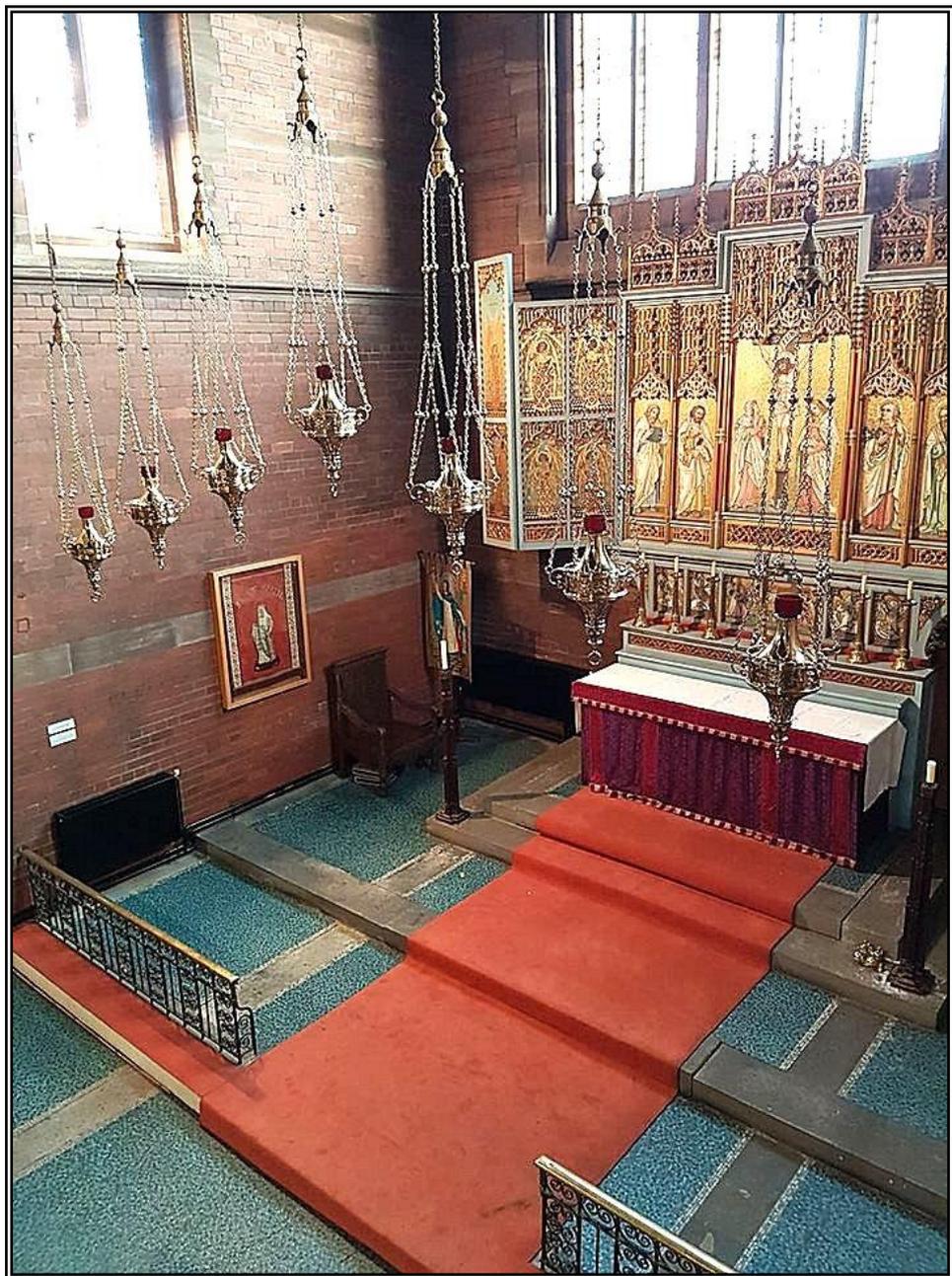
Later on, we go to Valentina's friend Galina's house, where another student (an older Italian called Rafaele) is staying. Valentina must go to work at the hospital, so Galina is charged with taking us to the language school. She has no car, so we walk about a mile to the school together.

The next ten days in Petrozavodsk are remarkable. For the first two days I am homesick and find everything so strange and unfamiliar. Quickly, though I adjust and feel comfortable and relaxed. We have classes for three hours each morning, in small groups – of varying levels of Russian speaking ability. I am in the basic level group, along with Claudia – who is a class mate of mine from Manchester University, Rafaele, Jort (from the Netherlands) and Francesca (from Italy).

In the afternoons, there are events organised; on the first day, young local volunteers take us on a tour of the town – down to the promenade by the lake, to the eternal flame war memorial, past the theatre and museum. It is very hot and humid; I feel my skin starting to burn. Other events include a visit to a local cafe, meeting young high school students who are learning English. They introduce us to traditional food and drink, including Kvass (a drink made from fermented rye), another one made from and of course blinis (pancakes). We, as the group of students, establish a daily routine ourselves. The young Italians generally go round together and the English speakers form a separate group. When I say English speakers, I don't mean English people; I mean everyone except for the young Italians. We are a mixed bunch – Claudia is Portuguese (though she is a Manchester University student), Jort is an architecture student, Kayla is American but studies at Glasgow University. Then there is a young Polish girl, living in Dublin; for all the world she sounds Irish!

Our group has the routine of going to lunch together then on to the organised event of the afternoon. Strangely, in Russian restaurants the waiters bring each person's dish at intervals. The Polish girl and Laura (an advanced Russian speaker from England) advise us to start our meal when it arrives, as it is unusual for everyone to be served at once.

Routine is the order of the day. Each evening, Valentina and I speak together in a mix of Russian, German, mime and drawing over supper! She works late and typically serves supper about 9.00 p.m.; each time announcing it is ready – knocking on my door and saying 'ужин' (oozjen/ supper). Food is plain but filling, usually pasta, sausage or chicken with gherkins or salad.



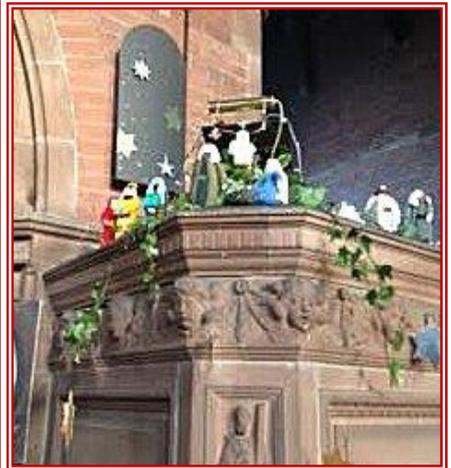
'Let there be lights!'

The seven splendidly refurbished sanctuary
lamps seen from the organ loft



Christingle 2016

Gathering in a darkened church by candlelight, children listen to Denise's special Christmas story. The starry night knitted tableau in the pulpit was a focus of the service



The following Sunday, Valentina and I join Galina at her house for a mid afternoon meal. There is lots of food, again plain but hearty. A friend of Galina's, Vladimir asks me to dance; so we do. The culture is so different, old fashioned – the dance style traditional. It is customary to remove shoes after entering the Russian home. Galina provides Valentina and me with floral mule slippers. There is such generosity of spirit and simplicity in everything.

The infrastructure in Petrozavodsk is not like in the UK. The people don't drink the tap water; the roads are pot-holed. There are though, no boarded-up shops like we see in the UK and there are many high street banks, usually one every block in the town centre. There is a shopping mall in town, like any we might see back home, and an indoor market.

Petrozavodsk has high humidity, so it feels hotter than it would otherwise. We had two days of torrential rain, with which the roads and drainage system do not cope well! In winter, apparently part of the lake freezes over (people can drive cars across) and temperatures plummet to -20 C.

As the daily routine establishes itself, it feels like this new life will go on forever. Suddenly though, our daily chats over coffee about world affairs are at an end. It is time to go home. I have had the time of my life; I have seen real Russia. I will never forget this – the kindness, the wisdom and the humanity of the people.



A Christmas Sermon

If Jesus is the answer, what then is the question? Or to put it another way: 'What's all the fuss about?' This story about a mother laying her baby in a manger, and angels and shepherds, and camels and kings? Is it just a lovely story to feed our imaginations and give us some songs to sing? Or does it really matter? At the end of the day does it make any difference to anybody?

Is Jesus the answer to anybody's question? What about this one: if there is a God what is he like? Or, why did my husband suffer? Or, why does God not step in and stop the slaughter in Syria or end the agony of Palestine and Israel? Or, why doesn't God smash the heavens apart and come and knock together the heads of the nations and force them to live in peace and harmony with each other?

The answer is that God is not like that. This is what God is like: a little baby thing that made a woman cry. He doesn't smash the heavens apart but creeps into the world in an outhouse of an inn of a remote village at the edge of the Roman Empire. There he is discovered by some shepherds waiting in the night for morning to come. God doesn't bellow from the ramparts of heaven for the earth to hear and be afraid, but breaks the silence, not only of *that* night but the silence of the ages, with the lusty cry of a human

baby. God doesn't bestride the earth like an avenging monarch, but comes in such a way that this humble, teenage mother grasps the truth that if she can give birth to the one in whom God announces his arrival, then the humble have indeed been lifted from the earth and the hungry have been filled with good things.

That is what God is like. This is what God does. He becomes a child like you and me. The Word that made the world becomes flesh and shares our human experience. The Lord God Almighty gave away his pride, his omnipotence, his power and his glory, to become like one of us. That is what God does. That is what God is like. This is why he is called Emmanuel, which means, 'God is with us.'

Imagine that: God with us. In the birth of a child, in the death of a man, God is with us. In a nurse's smile, in a patient's pain, God is with us. It is he who comes to us this Christmas and is with us always. He isn't far away, hidden in some other place. He is with us here and now.

If Jesus is the answer, what then is the question? The question, what is God like? Jesus is the answer. But there's another question and that is, 'What are men and women meant to be like?' Or, 'What does it mean to be human?' Jesus is the answer to that question. That is what we were meant to be like. This baby, whose birth we celebrate next Sunday, is the one who saves us from believing that we were meant to be cruel, violent, grasping and greedy.

Without him we would have some difficulty in believing that. All around us we see evidence of human cruelty. We see children born to failure and trained to expect it, their ears tuned to hate and their hands to violence, their bodies abused for adult pleasure, their minds twisted by adult greed. There is violence in the streets. Drugs make millions for some and mindless morons of others. Nations send pilotless planes to bomb people they cannot see at the other side of the world. Politicians play the system for their own benefit and banks play dice with the world's economy. The question is: 'Is this what we were meant to be like? Is this what it means to be human?'

At many times of the year we might be excused for thinking that it was. But not at Christmas. Christmas celebrates the birth of a Saviour – the one who points us in other directions, who gives us reason to believe that we were born for other purposes than this. We were not born to tear each other to pieces, to constantly take advantage of each other, to exploit each other until some are destroyed while others wave their tattered flags of victory over their neighbours' graves.

This is what it means to be human. We were created as God's children, to share with him in bringing the world back to its senses, to share his values in a world that lives by its own.

Impossible? No it isn't. Kenneth Kaunda, the then President of Zambia, in welcoming a group of clergymen to his country, said: 'It is good to see you in my country. It is especially good to see you preachers of the Gospel here, because you and I are in the same business. We are in the business of trying to make the world the sort of place that

God intended it to be. There is only one difference between you and me,' he said. 'You preachers talk about it. People like me, politicians, make decisions every day of our lives which result in either the world being more like the place that God wanted it to be, or less like the place that God wanted it to be.' *There* was a man who knew what it meant to be human.

One Christmas Day a priest called the children in church to the font to show him and the congregation one of their presents. A girl carried a doll. 'Tell me about it,' said the priest. 'It was in the shop window and I wanted it, but mummy said it was too dear, but I still got it.' It *is* too dear, this Christmas story. It would be wonderful to have it.

God made man, sins forgiven, angels' song of peace on earth, starlit shepherds and Herod undermined. But the price! The witness and the death of John. The rising hope of the Twelve crushed by the Friday crucifixion. The carpenter nailed to a tree. The creator transfixed by his own creation. The eternal pain of God. It *is* too dear. Who would dare to ask for it? But we don't have to ask. He gives it to us – it's a gift. We mustn't forget to unwrap it.

Fr Dennis



Funny you should say that

Three men died on Christmas Eve and were met by St. Peter at the pearly gates. 'In honour of this holy season,' St. Peter said, 'you must each possess something that symbolizes Christmas to get into heaven.'

The first man fumbled through his pockets and pulled out a lighter. He flicked it on. 'It represents a candle,' he said. 'You may pass through the pearly gates,' St. Peter said. The second man reached into his pocket and pulled out a set of keys. He shook them and said, 'They're bells.' St Peter said, 'You may pass through the pearly gates.'

The third man started searching desperately through his pockets and finally pulled out a pair of women's glasses. St. Peter looked at the man with a raised eyebrow and asked, 'And just what do they symbolize?'

The man replied, 'They're Carol's.'

Christmas Tree Festival in Retrospect



Here we are, St Faith's 8th Christmas Tree Festival is over as I write and apart from a handful of trees awaiting collection and a good scattering of pine needles, which we will be brushing up until Easter, the church is back to normal. The trees and the parties of school children gone, it seems rather empty and quiet.

I am by nature a glass half empty man and so I am delighted to report that this year has been a success and we have increased our profits by 10%. It was so tiring for me watching our teams of dedicated volunteers, the catering team, the Stewards, the Jam Factory, the Pre-loved stall, Soft toys and rented tables arranged by Rosie. The visitors were very complimentary about the church, the display of trees and the food.

For me the high point of the week was the Carol Concert on Wednesday night with the Military Band. It was wonderful to see our church so full of people, heartily singing to the striking music.

I was reminded of the time I lived in Germany, accompanying my landlady to Midnight Mass, the children of the village had rehearsed and sang "O Little Town of Bethlehem", in English especially for me, I cried but felt so accepted.

For me the best memories of the week are of everyone working together, pulling in the same direction, just about everybody helped or contributed in some way, gave their time, shopped, cooked, gave raffle prizes, served on the stalls, washed up, thanks Chris, sold raffle tickets, greeted people, served food, shopped planned organised or just supported and came and ate the delicious Daily Menu (Thank you Fr Dennis)

I thank you all, I am proud to be a part of St Faith's.

Gareth Griffiths

Tree Meister



Poetry for the turning of the year

The House of Christmas

There fared a mother driven forth,
Out of an inn to roam;
In the place where she was homeless
All men are all home.
The crazy stable close at hand,
With shaking timber and shifting sand,
Grew a stronger thing to abide and stand
Than the square stones of Rome.

For men are homesick in their homes,
And strangers under the sun,
And they lay their heads in a foreign land
Whenever the day is done.
Here we have battle and blazing eyes
And chance and honour and high surprise,
But our homes are under miraculous skies
Where the Yule tale was begun.

A child in a foul stable,
Where the beasts feed and foam;
Only where He was homeless
Are you and I at home;
We have hands that fashion and heads that know,
But our hearts we lost - how long ago!
In a place no chart nor ship can show
Under the sky's dome.

This world is wild as an old wives' tale,
And strange the plain things are,
The earth is enough and the air is enough
For our wonder and our war;
But our rest is as far as the fire-drake swings
And our peace is put in impossible things
Where clashed and thundered unthinkable wings
Round an incredible star.

To an open house in the evening
Home shall men come,
To an older place than Eden
And a taller town than Rome.
To the end of the way of the wandering star,
To the things that cannot be and that are,
To the place where God was homeless
And all men are at home.

G.K. Chesterton



The Ending of the Year

When trees did show no leaves
And grass no daisies had,
And fields had lost their sheaves,
And streams in ice were clad,
And day of light was shorn,

And wind had got a spear,
Jesus Christ was born
In the ending of the year.

Like green leaves when they grow,
He shall for comfort be;
Like life in streams shall flow,
For running water He;
He shall raise hope like corn
For barren fields to bear,
And therefore He was born
In the ending of the year.

Like daisies to the grass,
His innocence He'll bring;
In keenest winds that pass
His flowering love shall spring;
The rising of the morn
At midnight shall appear,
Whenever Christ is born
In the ending of the year.

Eleanor Farjeon



Welsh New Year Carol

Now the joyful bells a-ringing,
All ye mountains praise the Lord!
Lift our hearts, like birds a-winging,
All ye mountains praise the Lord!

Now our festal season, bringing
Kinsmen all to bide and board.
Sets our cheery voices singing:
All ye mountains praise the Lord!

Dear our home as dear none other,
Where the mountains praise the Lord.
Gladly here our care we smother,
Where the mountains praise the Lord

Here we know that Christ our brother
Binds us all as by a cord:
He was born of Mary mother,
Where the mountains praise the Lord

Cold the year, new whiteness wearing,
All ye mountains, praise the Lord!
Peace, goodwill to us a-bearing,
All ye mountains, praise the Lord!

Now we all God's goodness sharing
Break the bread and sheathe the sword:
Bright our hearths the signal flaring,
All ye mountains, praise the Lord!

A Clarion Call for the New Year

Trumpet of God, sound high,
Till the hearts of the heathen shake,
And the souls that in slumber lie
At the voice of the Lord awake;
Till the fenced cities fall
At the blast of the Gospel call,
Trumpet of God, sound high!

Hosts of the Lord, go forth:
Go, strong in the power of his rest.
Till the south be at one with the north,
And peace upon east and west;
Till the far-off lands shall thrill
With the gladness of God's good will,
Hosts of the Lord, go forth!

Come, as of old, like fire
O force of the Lord, descend,
Till with love of the world's Desire
Earth burn to its utmost end;
Till the ransomed people sing
To the glory of Christ the King,
Come, as of old, like fire!



In Memoriam

Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,
The flying cloud, the frosty light:
The year is dying in the night;
Ring out, wild bells, and let him die.

Ring out the old, ring in the new,
Ring, happy bells, across the snow:
The year is going, let him go;
Ring out the false, ring in the true.

Ring out a slowly dying cause,
And ancient forms of party strife;
Ring in the nobler modes of life,
With sweeter manners, purer laws.

Ring out false pride in place and blood,
The civic slander and the spite;
Ring in the love of truth and right,
Ring in the common love of good.

Ring out old shapes of foul disease;
Ring out the narrowing lust of gold;
Ring out the thousand wars of old,
Ring in the thousand years of peace.

Ring in the valiant man and free,
The larger heart, the kindlier hand;
Ring out the darkness of the land,
Ring in the Christ that is to be.



Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Celebrating Choral Evensong

‘There was scarce a score of persons in the Cathedral besides the Dean and some of the clergy, and the choristers, young and old, that performed the beautiful evening prayer.’

There may have been few attending evensong in the 1850s, in that description by the novelist, William Thackeray. But today such cathedral worship is an important part of the life of the Church of England, and as such, much valued, not just by those able to attend in person, but also by those who are able to listen in on the radio.

That weekly broadcast on Radio 3 now attracts an audience of 250,000 people. In September of last year the BBC celebrated 90 years of outside broadcasting with Choral Evensong from Westminster Abbey. On 7 October 1926, all those years ago, the BBC began broadcasting this service from the same Abbey. It is a remarkable achievement – the longest running outside broadcast in its history!

Those years have seen many variations: Evensong once a week on Thursdays in the 1920s, twice weekly in the 1930s, moving to the Home Service in the years of World War II, and then to Radio 3 in 1967. In April 1970 with the BBC's reorganisation, there were three months without Choral Evensong. That gap resulted in 2,500 letters asking for its return. Later in that year broadcasts began again on Wednesdays at 4 p.m.

It has been 90 years of variety and change. In 1993 the first girls' choir sang Evensong from Salisbury Cathedral. In 2002 Evensong was relayed from Trinity Church in New York on the first anniversary of September 11. Then in June 2006 there was even a Jazz Evensong. Amid all this variety, at the heart of the service is the Book of Common Prayer Evening Prayer, bringing to listeners a wealth of choral and organ music, settings of the psalms and canticles, special anthems and more popular hymns.

But it is not just Anglican cathedrals and important churches that have taken part. There have been broadcasts of Roman Catholic Vespers, and in 2005 the Holy Cross Liturgy from the Danilov Monastery in Moscow. Izaak Walton, in his life of George Herbert of 1670, wrote that the poet said his time 'spent in prayer and cathedral music elevated his soul and was Heaven upon Earth.' We would echo those thoughts as we give thanks for this rich tradition of prayer and praise.

In a famous hymn, Herbert says that 'no door can keep out the worship of our God and King'. Thanks to broadcasting, no door can keep out the weekly offering of music and scripture as we tune our radios and become an extended congregation listening to Christian music from across the centuries. Thank you to the BBC for making this possible and for letting the glory of this music transport our lives and move our hearts to praise the Lord.

Postscript: Magazine Matters



Apologies to those whose Christmas may have been marred by the late appearance of this edition. It was indeed intended to be the usual joint December/January number, but the weeks slipped by and 2017 is here. A Happy New Year to all!

The editor has of late found it more difficult to get original material to fill a monthly issue. This belated edition contains more than the usual quota of poetic fillers and recycled articles – and much of the remaining space is occupied by the effusions of the ever-reliable Fr Dennis, whom God preserve. The current publication schedule provides for ten issues per year, but lack of material may reduce this from time to time.

The editor, as ever, is more than happy to receive material from readers. Religious or secular, personal or public, serious or flippant, bland or provocative – all are equally welcome. Comments, ideas and suggestions will be just as happily taken on board.

The Parish Directory and Church Organisations



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Vacancy

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CUB SCOUTS

Thursday 6.30 – 8.00 pm. Mike Carr. 293 3416

SCOUTS

Thursday 8.00 - 9.30 pm. Mike Carr. 293 3416

RAINBOWS

Monday 4.45 - 5.45 pm. Geraldine Forshaw. 928 5204

BROWNIE GUIDES

Monday 6.00 - 7.30 pm. Mary McFadyen. 284 0104

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The next magazine will probably be the February issue and will arrive as soon as it's reasonably filled. More than happy to print (almost) all offerings at any time.

Church website: www.stfaithsgreatcrosby.org.uk

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