

Services at St Michael & All Angels Cuxton		
3 rd February Sexagesima	9.30 Family Communion	Genesis 2 vv 4-25 p 4 Revelation 4 vv 1-11 p1236 Luke 8 vv 22-25 p1037
10 th February Quinquagesima	9.30 Holy Communion	Exodus 34 vv 29-35 p94 II Corinthians 3 v12 – 4 v2 p1160 Luke 9 vv 28-36 p1040
13 th February Ash Wednesday	7.30 Holy Communion	Joel 2 vv 1-17 p912 II Corinthians 5v20 – 6 v10 p1161 Matthew 6 vv 1-21 p970
17 th February Lent 1	8.00 Holy Communion	Epistle & Gospel BCP Lent 1
	9.30 Holy Communion	Deuteronomy 26 vv 1-11 p203 Romans 10 vv 5-13 p1137 Luke 4 vv 1-13 p1030
24 th February Lent 2	9.30 Holy Communion & Holy Baptism	Genesis 15 vv 1-18 p15 Philippians 3v17 – 4 v1 p1180 Luke 13 vv 31-35 p1047
3 rd March Lent 3	9.30 Family Communion	Isaiah 55 vv 1-13 p742 I Corinthians 10 vv 1-13 p1151 Luke 13 vv 1-9 p1046
Services at St John the Baptist Halling & the Jubilee Hall Upper Halling		
3 rd February Sexagesima	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	Genesis 1 v1 – 2 v3 p3 Matthew 6 vv 25-34 p971
	11.00 Holy Communion	Genesis 2 vv 4-25 p 4 Revelation 4 vv 1-11 p1236 Luke 8 vv 22-25 p1037
10 th February Quinquagesima	11.00 Holy Communion	Exodus 34 vv 29-35 p94 II Corinthians 3 v12 – 4 v2 p1160 Luke 9 vv 28-36 p1040
	5.30 Evening Prayer Jubilee Hall	Exodus 3 vv 1-6 p59 John 12 vv 27-36a p1080
13 th February Ash Wednesday	9.30 Holy Communion	Joel 2 vv 1-17 p912 Matthew 6 vv 1-21 p970
17 th February Lent 1	11.00 Stop! Look! Listen! & Holy Communion	Deuteronomy 26 vv 1-11 p203 Romans 10 vv 5-13 p1137 Luke 4 vv 1-13 p1030
24 th February Lent 2	11.00 Holy Communion	Genesis 15 vv 1-18 p15 Philippians 3v17 – 4 v1 p1180 Luke 13 vv 31-35 p1047
3 rd March Lent 3	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	Genesis 28 vv 10-19 p30 John 1 vv 35-51 p1064
	11.00 Holy Communion	Isaiah 55 vv 1-13 p742 I Corinthians 10 vv 1-13 p1151 Luke 13 vv 1-9 p1046

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There is an **After School Club** at St John's on Thursdays at 3.45. **Saints Alive** (formerly Sunday School) meets in the Church Hall, Cuxton at 9.30 on 2nd, 3rd, 4th & 5th Sundays of the month in term time. There is a parish lunch to which all are invited every first Wednesday at 12.00 in the Church Hall. If you are prepared to **gift aid** your monetary contributions to the Church, please use one of the envelopes provided. Contact Jack Payne to **gift aid** all your donations.

Copy Date March Magazine: 8th February 8.30 am Rectory.

Holy Communion Wednesdays 9.30 am St Michael's		Holy Communion Thursdays 9.30 am St John's	
6 th February Accession HM Queen	Hebrews 12 vv 4-15 Mark 6 vv 1-6	7 th February	Hebrews 12 vv 18-24 Mark 6 vv 7-13
13 th February Ash Wednesday	See above for 9.30 at Halling and 7.30 pm at Cuxton.		
Thursday 14 th February Cuxton	Deuteronomy 30 vv 15-20 Luke 9 vv 22-25	14 th February	Service at Cuxton, not Halling.
20 th February Ember Day	Jonah 3 Luke 11 vv 29-32	21 st February	Isaiah 55 vv 6-9 Matthew 7 vv 7-12
27 th February	Jeremiah 18 vv 18-20 Matthew 20 vv 17-28	28 th February	Luke 16 vv 19-31



Rector or Grinch?

Every year people ask me why we don't put up the church Christmas trees earlier? It seems such a shame not to have a tree in church when all the shopping centres, pubs, schools, hospitals and many private houses have had them since November. It's also a time of year when we get more people, including children, coming to church than during the rest of the year. Why not put up our tree for them to enjoy? Is the rector really the Grinch in disguise? I hope not. So I'll try to explain the reasoning.

Christmas is really an amalgam of celebrations. Long before the Birth of Jesus, pagan people had festivals at midwinter. You needed something to cheer you up at this dark, cold time of year and a reason to hope that Summer would return. People feasted and drank, exchanged presents and worshipped in the shrine or temple. It is as natural as holding a feast of the dead at the end of October, a fertility festival at the beginning of May and a summer solstice ritual in June. So the Church gave us All Saints 1st November, St Philip & St James 1st May and St John the Baptist 24th June to rebalance.

We don't know at what time of year Jesus was born. The Bible doesn't tell us. (Some people think He might have been born in the Autumn at the Feast of Tabernacles, the third of the great Jewish Festivals from the Old Testament. After all He died and rose at Passover and the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost. John 1¹⁴ could be translated, *The Word became flesh and pitched His tent among us.*) Be that as it may, the Church instituted the Christ Mass to celebrate His Birth at the time of the existing midwinter festival in a not wholly successful attempt to elevate men's minds above drunkenness, gluttony, greed and the worship of false gods and to lead us to an understanding of what life is really all about, the love of God.

Christmas is in part still a midwinter festival which has not entirely lost all traces of its pagan origins. (That's why some Christians {like Cromwell's puritans} have wanted to ban Christmas and why Presbyterian Scotland preferred Hogmanay to Yule.) The midwinter festival runs naturally from the winter solstice (21st December, once kept by Christians as St

Thomas's Day) until New Year (the Circumcision and Naming of Christ in the Christian calendar) or Twelfth Night (the eve of the Christian Epiphany, the visit of the wise men).

Another Christmas is the school Christmas. Schools are closed at midwinter. So the school Christmas has to run up to the end of term from the date on which pupils begin to rehearse the Christmas play and make cards and decorations. The school Christmas will include elements inherited from the pagans like Christmas dinner and Christmas lights; elements of the charity Christmas, thinking of people in need; and elements of the Christian Christmas – the story of the Birth of Jesus, though the Christian element may become attenuated in an increasingly multi-cultural and secular society.

The Charity Christmas takes advantage of the spirit of goodwill around Christmas to garner support for the good work charities do. Obviously charities want to start Christmas as soon as possible and keep it going as long as possible. There are charity Christmas cards and Christmas appeals and they are all to the good. We celebrate birthdays by giving people presents. It is not inappropriate to celebrate by giving to other people on the Birthday of the One Who said, *Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.* If we really think in these terms, however, we will be generous throughout the year, not just at Christmas, and as ready to receive as to give.

Then there is the commercial Christmas. It is the commercial Christmas that I feel most negative about. So to be fair, let's remember that we need shops in which to buy our festive fare and our cards and presents. There is nothing wrong with having a good time! We appreciate the theatres being open, the pantomimes, the pubs, the Christmas music. People are entitled to the opportunity to earn a living! There is nothing wrong with profit in itself. Without commerce, we'd have pretty thin Christmases and a lot of people would be out of work and unemployed.

However, when commerce makes gods of money and profit there is a devastating loss of perspective. Our baser instincts are exploited for profit – our materialism, greed, gluttony, propensity to drunkenness, our selfishness. Even

our better impulses can be twisted in the interests of making money – scams in which we think we are being generous to people in need but are actually lining the profits of unscrupulous profiteers. Selfishness and self-indulgence may blind us to our responsibilities beyond having a good time and perhaps providing a good time for our own families. God and neighbour may well be forgotten altogether.

The commercial Christmas naturally begins as soon as possible – as soon as Hallowe'en is over in many shops. It tends to downplay the specifically Christian in an effort to appeal as well to people of other religions and to people of emphatically no religion and to people who are not particularly interested in religion at all. It glosses over religious strictures on excess, over-indulgence and selfishness. The commercial Christmas comes to an abrupt halt when the shops close on Christmas Eve and some unfortunate shop workers have to spend 25th December clearing Christmas away and preparing retail emporia for the next marketing opportunity – the Boxing Day sales. All Advent means to the commercial Christmas is the chocolate Advent calendar, something else to make money out of, one more aspect of our annual frenzy of greed and over consumption. There is no doubt also money to be made from dealing with the epidemic of childhood obesity.

The Christian Christmas obviously celebrates the Birth of Christ. Christmas Day is 25th December! I have been tempted sometimes to say somewhat rudely that the clue to the reason why we shouldn't put up Christmas trees in Advent is in the name **Christmas** tree! The Nativity is a beautiful story, but Christians are not simply sentimental about it. The story of any birth is wonderful. The story of a poor family forced by an oppressive government to give birth in an overcrowded town where the only available accommodation was a stable is a remarkable piece of history in itself. It would make you think whatever your religious beliefs. For many of us the memory of small children sweetly acting out this moving tale in the annual nativity play brings a lump to the throat – for them, for Jesus and for the children we once were.

What is significant about this special Birth, however, is that the Baby is the Son of God. The default Gospel reading for Christmas Day is not

And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. It is And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. This is what makes all the difference – that Jesus is human and divine. I can't say too much about this here. I tried in the December magazine to say something about it. The point is that Who Jesus is changes everything about who we are. We are not merely mutant apes whose end is to return to the dust out of which our ancestors crawled and then it's over. We are morally responsible beings of infinite worth who will give account to God for our lives and ultimately we shall all receive what we deserve – or, rather, if we put our faith in Jesus Christ, we shall receive what He has won for us, the gift of eternal life. What we deserve is something we should not like!

I can't explain the mystery of faith in a magazine article. The Church's year, however, takes us through the story of our salvation in Christ. As we live and worship Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, Ascension, Whitsun, Trinity, our knowledge of God is deepened. To know Him is to have eternal life. In my experience and in the experience of millions of Christians the Church's year is one of the means of grace which God uses to teach us about Himself, to sanctify us, to form us as Christians, to transform us into the likeness of His Son Jesus Christ. I will not give up easily on observing each of the seasons properly.

Christmas Day is 25th December when we celebrate the Nativity of our Lord. Christmas segues into Epiphany during which we contemplate some of the ways in which God makes Himself known in Jesus Christ. The Christmas Season formally concludes on 2nd February (Candlemas), the day on which Mary and Joseph brought the baby Jesus to the Temple and Simeon recognised Him as the Light of the nations and the Glory of Israel. There is then an awkward gear change to the Easter Cycle, beginning with Sundays before Lent. It is awkward because Christmas is calculated on the solar calendar like most other things in the modern western world, but Easter is calculated on the lunar calendar like Jewish and Moslem holy days. So sometimes there are too many weeks before Lent and some years there are too few!

Inconvenient, but you'd need worldwide agreement to change it.

The commercial Advent, the commercial opportunity of the chocolate Advent calendar, runs from 1st December. Real Advent starts on 4th Sunday before Christmas. Advent means coming or arrival and it anticipates the coming of Jesus. It is thus a preparation for Christmas. It is also a preparation for recognising Jesus as He comes to us in our daily lives – in the faces of other people, in the wonders of nature, in the pages of the Bible and in the experience of prayer. In part, Advent is a preparation for our death, when we shall see Jesus. More especially Advent is a preparation for the end of the world, Christ's Second Coming, when He shall come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. His First Coming two millennia ago in humble Bethlehem was a vital part of the fulfilment of God's Promise to redeem the whole of Creation, but God's promises are only finally fulfilled at the end of time, when heaven and earth shall pass away, when there will be new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. That is when we shall see Him face to face, when we shall know as we are known, when we shall be made like Him. This is our fulfilment as human beings, the consummation which we as Christians devoutly desire.

Advent. Joyful anticipation of the coming of Christ to welcome us into His Kingdom. We light one more candle on the Advent Crown each week as we anticipate the coming of the Light of the World. However, when we think about Christ's coming, we have to ask ourselves whether we are worthy to stand in His Presence. What will the Light of the world reveal about us? Are we so holy as to stand confidently in the presence of the holiness of God? Or shall we be consumed by the fire of His perfect Love? On the Day of Judgment, how will you and I measure up? Did we love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength? Did we love our neighbour as ourselves? If not, we are condemned. God is just and justice will prevail. The unjust will suffer the consequences of their unjust natures.

So, although we light the Advent candles in hope, Advent is also a time of reflection. We use purple frontals on our altars. The clergy dress in purple – the same colour as we use for Lent. We refrain from singing *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*. Advent is a

time when we examine ourselves to see if we are worthy to stand in Christ's Presence when He comes. The prescribed Bible readings and prayers reflect these themes of anticipated judgment and redemption. Traditionally Advent is about the four last things: death, judgment, heaven and hell. The Christian account, the realistic account, is that we are not worthy. Human beings have rejected God. We don't love God and we don't love one another. We don't deserve to live eternally in the Presence of God. We deserve to die. God, however, has not left it at that. He has sent Jesus to effect atonement between us and Him, to restore to us the possibility of eternal life. We celebrate this in our Christmas services with white frontals and vestments, a crib scene, wonderful flower arrangements, beautiful music, bells pealing out over homes and fields, and an evergreen tree decorated with baubles and lights and a star. We lose out if we push the Advent themes to one side and start celebrating Christmas in early December. It is no more appropriate to put up the church Christmas tree in Advent than it would be to give out Easter eggs in Lent.

However. Once more, however. Unless we are monks or nuns, we live in the world which celebrates the commercial, school and charity Christmases from the Autumn onwards, a world which hasn't entirely left behind the pagan Christmas. Even I feel a bit schizophrenic in December, singing carols with schools and WIs and scouts and guides, but singing Advent hymns in church; worshipping in a bare church, but shopping in Santa's grotto; meditating with my congregation on Advent bible readings and prayers, but also joining with them in Christmas dinners, fairs and entertainments.

Also. Christmas celebrates God's connection of Himself to humanity. So if humanity is celebrating Christmas from, say, 1st November until 24th December, can it be right for the Church to turn its back on the world and keep Christmas from 25th December until 2nd February? Aren't we missing out on a missionary opportunity?

So, do we turn our backs on the world or do we sell out to the world? Instead of warning the world of judgment to come and offering a sinful world God's gift of redemption in Christ, do we go along with the world's view that we should eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die? Do we affirm contemporary culture in its apparent belief

that there are no moral absolutes, nobody is responsible for himself and that we are all entitled? Do we preach the Gospel to empty churches or do we fill our churches by telling people what they want to hear?

I don't think there is any point in either of the above. So, under my leadership, we compromise. We keep Advent so far as we can but we welcome outside organisations to keep their Christmases in

our churches maybe allowing a bit of temporary Christmas decoration to mark their celebration of the Birth of the Lord, and we hold our own Christmas carol services on Advent IV when most people would like to come to them, and make those services the first with our fully lit and decorated church Christmas trees. That way I think we can keep Christmas special and properly experience Advent – both of which experiences are profitable to our souls! Roger.



Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal.

Some people wondered why St Michael's collection was not listed with the other Cuxton village organisations' collections in the *Cuxton Noticeboard*. The reason is that the Anglican Parish of Cuxton and Halling obtains its collection tins and poppies from Halling Parish Council. You will be pleased to see that the two churches together collected £90.67 this year.

Christmas Gift Services

The Elaine Centre thank us for the toys and gifts we collected for the families they care for in December.

St Michael's Draw: (November) Mrs. Gill Bogg £20.00, Peter Hills £10.00, Sue Townsend £5.00.

(December) £20 Mary Morren, £10 Matthew Wells, £5 Patricia Dowling. The Annual Bumper Prize - £40 - Matthew Wells - Drawn by John Bogg. Please contact Jeanne Harris if you would like to join St Michael's Draw.

St John's Draw: (November) £25 to Miss L Thorne (24) & £10 each to Mrs Homewood (36) & Mrs Smitherman (140) – drawn by Mr Sharp.

(December) £5 each to Mrs Chidwick (27), Mrs Warman (51), Mrs Potter (120) & Mrs Garrot (122) – drawn by Mrs Acott. Please contact Betty Head if you would like to join St John's Draw.

A Nice Story

A council officer turns up to a farm and demands to inspect the premises for any possible breach of regulations. The farmer says, "You can go anywhere you like except that field behind the hedge there." The council jobsworth says, "Look at my badge. I have the right to go anywhere and look into anything I please. Step aside." He pushes past the farmer and goes through the gate into the field behind the hedge. Suddenly there is a terrific bellowing noise and the council officer is shouting and screaming, running round the field with a bull in hot pursuit. The farmer leans over the gate and shouts, "Show him your badge. Show him your badge."



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Forthcoming Attractions.

23rd March: Cuxton & Halling Have Talent (Watch this space!)

28th March : Passover Supper Church Hall.

20th April: Christian Aid Supper.

5th May: The Bishop of Tonbridge will preside at our 9.30 & 11.00 services.

8th June: 10.00-4.00 Deanery Quiet Day at Aylesford Priory. All welcome. No charge, but please indicate if you are coming.

29th June: Bellringers' Outing.

29th September: Confirmation at St Michael's 6.30 pm.

Annual Meeting Alert (27th April 10.00 Halling)

This is the year everyone has to fill in a form (available in church) if you wish to be on the church electoral roll. You are eligible if you are 16 years old or older, baptised and live in and/or worship regularly in the parish.

From the Registers:

Baptisms:

2 nd December	Harrison Lovell Shelton	Wouldham
23 rd December	Victoria Jane Morris	Kent Road

Weddings:

17 th November	Nathan Pascall-Smith & Rachel Bowman	Cuxton
24 th November	David Andrews & Cassie Hubbard	Halling
24 th November	Sam Bunn & Amy Mulley	Halling
1 st December	Daniel Fearn & Kirsty Oliver	Halling
22 nd December	Joshua Rowe & Samantha Moore	Cuxton

Funeral

12th January George William Swain (92) Rochester Road North Halling

Gordon Damper RIP

Parishioners will be sorry to hear of the death of Gordon Damper who was a server and sacristan at St Michael's until the family left the parish about twenty years ago. Gordon had been a dedicated servant of the Church and he and Pat have kept in touch over the years. The funeral was on 3rd January at St Edmund's Downham Market.

The whole of life is a progressive realization of what Baptism effectively declares in a single sacramental moment.

Christmas 2012

Once again, on behalf of all parishioners, I should like to thank those who worked so hard for our Christmas celebrations in both churches: cleaning and polishing, arranging flowers, singing or ringing, playing the organ, preparing Christingles, putting on Nativity plays, setting out cribs, coming along and taking part. Thank you all once again. I do not think that I have ever seen so many people in St Michael's as there were on Christmas Eve. If there are as many people every week we shall have to consider building an extension. Roger.

P.S.: I have seen St John's even more crowded, but on that occasion some of those present complained to the bishop because they did not get the individual attention they thought was their due, which just goes to show that the clergy cannot win!

Philippines Evening



On 29th November we had a good time enjoying Filipino food and watching a DVD about the Philippines and the work of St Andrews Theological College in Manila at which our mission partners Paul and Charitas Cho are working with the local Church to train students for the ministry. The brochures and DVDs which the Philippines Embassy sent us did not arrive in time (because the courier could not find the Rectory!), but they were given out at our services on 16th December when we again thought about what life is like in the Philippines and how Christians there are our partners in worship and service. Then on 2nd January we donated the proceeds of our parish lunch to supporting Paul and Charitas.

There is, however, a great need for more funds and, if you would like to contribute, you could give any donations to the churchwardens or treasurer or to me or send them direct. Please make your cheque payable to Church Mission Society. If your gift is for a specific area of work, please state this in a covering note. Please send cheques and/or Gift Aid forms to: CMS, Watlington Road, Oxford OX4 6BZ or go on to the CMS website.

The newsletters Paul and Charitas send us are displayed in both churches and you can arrange to have them sent to you by e mail. So please keep praying for Paul, Charitas and their son Hayoung. Roger.

Nature Notes November 2012
"Winter the Huntsman" by Osbert Sitwell

Through his iron glades
Rides winter the Huntsman
All colour fades
As his horn is heard sighing.

And the red Reynard creeps
To his hole near the river,
The copper leaves fall
And the bare trees shiver.

Is it Winter the Huntsman
Who gallops through his iron glades,
Cracking his cruel whip
To the gathering shades?

For through the forest
His wild hooves crash and thunder
Till many a mighty branch
Is torn asunder.

As night creeps from the ground
Hides each tree from its brother,
And each dying sound
Reveals yet another.

A new month begins with blue skies and golden sunshine after overnight heavy rain and strong winds. I walk round the lake at Bluewater with Murphy and espy a grey heron flying across the rippling water. Grey clouds drift across the west but the sun is not hidden. A heavy shower falls in the early afternoon of the next day then the skies clear leaving a cold feeling in the air. The lilac leaves are falling, leaving bare branches. On 3rd, bright sunshine beams from a blue, cloud brushed sky as I walk round the lake at Bluewater with Murphy. A moorhen scuttles along the grassy path ahead of us and later I see a coot gliding on the water. The sun continues to shine brightly well into the afternoon, after which grey clouds build up in the sky. The brisk west wind eases and the shrubs and trees become motionless. The 4th and 5th are grey and wet with cold east winds. The morning skies of 6th are a clear blue as the sun rises over Bluebell Hill. We rescue a collared dove which has been attacked and is lying on the drive. We take it to the vet at Snodland but they are unable to save it. Later in the morning I walk to the library via Six-acre Wood. New cow parsley plants are growing on the woodland floor where I find a single hedge woundwort flower. I walk to the end of the path and stop to admire the view across the valley to Mill Hill Wood where the trees are displaying their Autumn colours. The hedges up in Church Fields are straddled by old man's beard and red hips and haws gleam in the sunlight. Blackberries, ripe and unripe remain for the birds and there is a wealth of deep pink spindle berries. A blackbird perches at the top of a hawthorn, a pair of magpies fly across the field and cows graze, momentarily watching me as I pass. The river sparkles in the sunlight. The afternoon skies become grey and rain falls. The early morning of 8th reveals beautiful clear blue skies. Billowing white clouds drift across the sky in the middle of the morning and the sun shines brightly and with warmth. I feel it on my face as I work in the garden. At Bluewater on 9th, I see a number of wild flowers. Along the path I watch three large black crows foraging in the meadow area then a moorhen scuttling ahead of us. While we have been walking David has been watching a green woodpecker as it

explored the grassy paths and the trees by the rippling lake. Rain falls throughout the next day as grey clouds drift across from the west. Doves and a feral pigeon feed on the seed while wood pigeons devour the holly berries. The golden maple leaves on the embankment look beautiful bringing brightness to an otherwise grey day. Fog blankets the countryside in the early morning of 11th but later, the sun shines. The ash trees above the church are bare. As the sun dips down the sky in the afternoon, the air becomes damp and cold. On 13th, the temperatures rise to a mild 16 C. On 14th, after early grey skies, the clouds disperse revealing blue skies and golden sunshine. I walk round the lake at Bluewater with Murphy. Straw coloured reeds are reflected in the rippling water and the colours in the trees, especially the maples, are so beautiful. I even feel some warmth on my face from the sun. It feels more like Spring than Autumn. Fog persists all day on 15th and 16th. I notice the next day that the sycamores on the embankment have lost all their leaves. There is bright sunshine on 18th as I walk to church but there is a chill in the air for there has been a frost some of which I see on the churchyard grass. A marsh tit comes to the garden feeders and a squirrel puts in an appearance after an absence of several weeks. There is a beautiful sunset later in the afternoon. Two damp and dismal days follow. The ash trees above the church are bare but silver birches still cling on to some of their Autumn colours. While drinking my early morning cup of tea on 22nd, I watch a magpie as it digs up earth and grass with its beak. It shakes the grass and appears to extract an insect from the lump of earth. Westerly winds drive low, grey clouds across the sky. It remains very mild, 13 degrees centigrade. A wood pigeon flies across from the holly tree and perches on ivy near the greenhouse and then pecks at the ivy berries. I walk round the lake at Bluewater with Murphy. The sun shines from a blue sky brushed with white clouds and leaves scurry across the grass and paths by the strengthening west wind. Later, as the light fades I hear the cawing of rooks coming home to roost. By 24th, most of the holly berries have been devoured by the birds. The morning of 25th is beautiful with sunshine and the pale blue sky

is brushed with wisps of white cloud. There have been strong winds during the night and they continue to rock the trees. The afternoon becomes enveloped in grey cloud. As we drive to Maidstone on 26th, I notice golden gorse in bloom along the M20. The next two days are wet and cold with north winds blowing. There has been a frost in the early hours of 29th and north winds continue to blow. I walk with Murphy at Bluewater beneath a pale blue Winter sky. The

colours left in the trees are fragile but still beautiful. In the evening I see an orange ring has formed round the moon. The final day of the month is bitterly cold. The sun rises over Bluebell Hill and lights up the frost covered grass. The skies are a pale blue and are flecked with wisps of white cloud. In the evening, as the light fades, the bare branches of the trees stand like sentinels against the clear sky.

Nature Notes December 2012

The following verse by Spenser is taken from "The Diary of an Edwardian Lady"

And after him came next the chill December,
Yet he, through merry feasting which he made
And great bonfires, did not the cold remember,
His Saviour's birth, his mind so much did glad;
Upon a shaggy bearded goat he made,

The same wherewith Dan Jove in tender years;
They say was nourisht by th' Icean Mayd;
And in his hand a broad deep bowl he beares,
Of which he freely drinks an health to all his peeres.

On the first day of the month, frost covers the grass in the morning, when I watch a golden sun rise up over the hill brightening the bright blue sky. By mid-morning, light grey cloud lies like a blanket across the sky and the air is still. A robin, great tits, a magpie and feral pigeons come to feed. The next day frost covers the grass in the garden and in the churchyard. A golden sun shines from a pale blue sky which lasts through the daylight hours. The frost does not melt away and the water containers for the birds are full of solid ice. However, the pond provides sufficient water for the birds. A very cold night is forecast. It becomes quite mild on 3rd reaching 11C and rain falls. The night sky is lit up by the moon and stars. The next morning is beautiful with clear blue skies and golden sunshine. I watch gulls circling high up in the sky. I walk Murphy round the lake at Bluewater where the water sparkles in the sun's golden light. Almond blossom blooms in its pink beauty and weeping willow leaves have become golden while many trees are now bare. Clouds build up in the afternoon but no rain falls. Sleet and snow fall the next day but it soon melts away. It is a bleak day. We awake to frost the next day. The sun rises over Bluebell Hill lighting up the garden. I walk the frosty paths at Bluewater with Murphy whose nose is down on a scent trail, probably a fox. Some trees still bear Autumn colours including hazel and weeping willow but many have now shed their leaves. The sky, once a pale blue becomes rather grey but no rain falls. It becomes brighter in the afternoon. On 7th, north easterly winds drive dark clouds across the sky and it is bitterly cold. Rain and sleet fall during the morning. The morning skies of 10th are a clear blue lit up by golden sunshine. I walk round the lake at Bluewater with Murphy. The water ripples in the northerly breeze. Most of the trees are bare then I notice a hazel, though lacking leaves, bears

tightly formed catkins. The next day the grass is covered with frost and the trees' bare branches stand black against a clear, pale sky. The sun gradually rises above Bluebell Hill and I watch an aircraft leaving a vapour trail of sunlit pink across the sky. The frost on the grass remains all day and damp areas of pathway near the road begin to freeze once more. Evening skies are clear; fog and frost are forecast. The following day the countryside outside my window is beautiful for all the trees and shrubs and grass are white with frost. As the sun rises and beams down its golden light, the frost on the branches of the trees glistens. The pond is frozen. I walk to the village enjoying the blue skies, sunshine and crisp air. As the sun sets mid-afternoon, the air becomes even colder and more frost forms. I put out some more food for the birds before darkness falls. On 13th frost lies on the grass but not on the trees as yesterday. There are Jack Frost patterns on the greenhouse glass bringing back memories of childhood before central heating. Rain pours down during the morning of the next day. The birds venture out from among the branches of the trees for some food but they soon return to their shelter. In the middle of the afternoon, westerly winds begin to drive the grey clouds away to reveal salmon pink clouds and patches of blue sky. Rooks congregate high in the sky. I have seen little of the collared doves for they have been frightened off by the feral pigeons. The following evening, a crescent moon hangs in the sky. On 17th, bright sunshine lights up the garden as it beams down from a blue sky flecked with white clouds. Later, as I walk with Murphy at Bluewater, I watch a kestrel hovering high over the chalk bank as it hunts for a juicy morsel. The afternoon remains sunny until the sun dips down below the tree line mid-afternoon and the bare twigs and branches are motionless for there is no breeze.

The night sky is filled with stars. A goldfinch and a squirrel come to the garden the next day. Rain falls during the next two days when I hear the welcome song of a great tit, reminding me of Spring. There are blue skies on the shortest day but rain is forecast for the Christmas period. This is proved to be accurate because Christmas Day begins overcast and wet and more rain falls during the day. A goldfinch and two thrushes come to the garden and a hen blackbird explores the patio wall. I hear the great tit again. There is pale sunshine in the morning of 26th when long tailed tits come to the garden. They are such beautiful little creatures. Later I walk across Church Fields where yellow lichen coats some of the hawthorn branches. Red haws, pink spindle berries and a few hips still linger while old man's beard straddles the hedges. I walk the muddy leaf-strewn



Cuxton WI December & January

We held our annual Christmas Party in December and nearly all our members managed to attend. The evening started with Jerusalem and then people were invited to help themselves to the delicious buffet provided by the members. After that, plates and dishes of sweets made by the committee. After all that, it was time for the entertainment which this year was "home grown". Carols were incorporated into the programme and poems were read and a lovely solo carol sung by Maureen ably supported by Isobel on piano. A crazy skit from the Goon Show had us roaring with laughter and then an equally daft play rounded off the event. A most happy evening which shows what a friendly village can do. Unfortunately a horrid accident on the A228 involving three members cars spoilt the end of the evening. But at least no one was hurt and metal can be more easily replaced than bodies.

January saw us back to normal with loads of business to discuss and many forms that had to be

Hymn Writers – by John Bogg

Amongst the presents we give and receive in the choir for Christmas and Birthdays, I was given by a friend a book entitled "Great Christian Hymn Writers" which gives accounts of various composers and wordsmiths within hymnody and how they have established themselves in writing the songs of praise that we enjoy singing as part of the worship of the Christian Church. People often ask where did that piece of music come from, or is that mediaeval music you were playing, or I did like that melody and because of this interest I thought it might be a good idea to share the stories of some of these hymn writers with you.

Before technology burst into our lives, most of us would have been introduced to singing and music by the hymns and choruses we heard in church, Sunday school or at home. Some people sing very well, other very loud, and others out of tune, but generally speaking humans like a good sing irrespective of ability. Martin Luther, the father of evangelical hymnody who reintroduced the congregation to the singing of hymns, said, "Next to the Word of God,

paths in Mays Wood and as I near the top of Dean Valley I see fresh elder leaves. Cow parsley plants and tender new grass have emerged. I skirt the field where badger setts are revealed then return across the fields. The early morning sky of 27th is red and it is not long before rain is falling. The long tailed tits are becoming regular visitors. The 29th is blustery and dry. So I do some work in the garden. The month and the year end with rain but it is fairly mild. I watch birds come to the garden to feed. For a third day in a row I watch the pretty long tailed tits dart in and out of the bare lilac branches before landing on the feeders especially those containing fat balls. The rain falls through the afternoon and into the evening. We say goodbye to 2012 and welcome in 2013.

Elizabeth Summers.

read and filled in. The two resolutions to bring forward at the AGM of the WI in Cardiff were discussed and voted on with "The decline of High Street Shops" being the one of most concern. The WI college of Denman has been fund raising to keep the building in good repair and provide money for maintenance work. So far about £83,000 raised but, as is the usual story these days, more is still needed. We do not bother with a speaker in January as often the weather is bad and we have to cancel. Therefore we had a beautiful display of work from members and the craft group in particular. It is really a pleasure to be able to see what they have been producing over the year and we have an extremely talented group of ladies in our village who should be very proud of themselves. So all the form filling out of the way for now and we have lots of interesting days to look forward to in the new year.

It is my pleasure to thank you all for reading my little reports and to wish you all a very happy New Year. Sheila.

the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world". The study of hymns in a good hymnbook utilizes the Bible, poetry, literature, biography, music and church history. It allows you to be in the sense of time that the hymn writer almost subconsciously compels you to share with him/her, opening the door to thoughts, styles and philosophy of the moment in which it was written.

Ambrose of Milan
(340-397)

The first hymn writer I have chosen to share with you is Aurelius Ambrose who in the fourth century made hymns popular and some say invented musical notation so that people could for the first time 'read' the music. Concerned that in the Mass one individual sung all the psalms and hymns whilst the congregation merely listened, he introduced antiphonal singing allowing the congregation to sing alternating parts of the music. This was unusual because the first thousand years of the Church's life the music for worship was the unaccompanied melody of plainchant, or Gregorian chant, and this new style by Ambrose didn't properly reach England until the Middle Ages. There were apparently three factors that caused Ambrose to assert some authority over music for his church in Milan. Firstly, he realised that not everyone's range fitted well into singing the music and some found it difficult to sing even the simplest of melodies 'in tune', singing notes either above or below the melody and creating therefore a sort of counter-melody over the original which they then began to embellish. This musical style was eventually termed "organum". Ambrose anticipated problems with controlling this within the church and so invented a system of stave notation similar to that which we use now to regulate how music was to be used and to stop street or folk songs being used for worship, his second factor. In the third place Ambrose would fascinate and inspire the congregations in his compositions by using styles from the Eastern church who loved the simple rhythms and joyous tunes which were often unlike those of the Western church; some of Ambrose works can be found in our hymn books.

Born into a rich aristocratic family, he grew up in Rome and was destined to become a lawyer. He served so well as a provincial governor that the Catholic laity demanded that he be appointed the next Bishop of Milan, changing his status in eight days from un-baptised layman to bishop of the church. He sold all his possessions and, entering into his duties with fervour, became one of the most famous bishops of all time. Adviser to three Roman emperors, he established the mediaeval concept of a Christian emperor serving under Christ and so subject to the advice of his bishop. The relationship Ambrose had with the Emperor Theodosius provided the template for church/state relations in the Middle Ages. He defended the doctrine of the Trinity against that of the Arians who believed that only God the Father was completely divine. The Empress Justina, who favoured the Arians tried to make Ambrose open his churches to them, but he insisted that the state has no right to interfere in matters of doctrine. She sent soldiers to the new basilica in Milan to enforce her decree but the people rallied around their bishop, singing and praying in the church with such impression that the soldiers, it is said, joined in.

On Easter Day 387, Ambrose baptised his great convert Augustine, the great Christian theologian, who in turn stated that the hymns and preaching of Ambrose made a profound impression on his soul. It is said that two improvised 'Te Deum Laudamus' (We praise Thee, O God) were sung; it was the practice of the early church to create hymns with the inspiration of strong religious feeling.

St. Ambrose was a great scholar, organizer, statesman and theologian who was of strong character and a model bishop. His sermons are acclaimed as masterpieces of Latin eloquence. In Milan today, his feast day on December 7th is still celebrated. After his death congregational singing declined and Gregorian chant was again confined to clergy and choir. At the Reformation, and at Luther's insistence, singing returned to a central place of worship once again. Luther praised Ambrose's hymns enough to translate and include "Saviour of the Nations, Come" in his first hymnbook in 1524 and his work can still be found in the hymnbooks we use in Cuxton and Halling over fifteen hundred years after his death.

Saviour of the nations, come,
Virgin's Son, make here Thy home;
Marvel now, O heav'n and earth,
That the Lord chose such a birth.

St. Ambrose.

Cuxton Community Infant School News

Dear Friends of our School,

The end of last term seemed busier than normal. I think it was because we finished for Christmas later and by the last week we were all on our knees, including the children who were very tired and fractious! We had also seen a huge amount of illness in school. Sadly I think for many this continued over the holidays. The long term did mean that we had a lovely rest after New Year and the children had a chance to enjoy their new toys at home and to truly have a rest.

However, we enjoyed ourselves - the children dressed the large Christmas tree in the hall, they performed in year group concerts to their parents, they wore their home clothes to the Christmas party, and had a visit from the elderly bearded man clad in red, they ate a marvellous Christmas lunch provided by cook and attended a fantastic Christmas fayre supported by parents and village folk which raised the schools around £1300. Thank you.

Staff worked extremely hard to ensure every child made Christmas decorations, cards and calendars, and learned their lines for the play, rehearsed their dances and learned words to the many carols etc. Daily learning obviously has to continue during this busy festive time and so does the paperwork and planning. Staff also completed progress reports for parents to read about their child's academic progress and review children's targets.

Now in the New Year we are encouraging the children to think about the goals they would like to achieve both academically, socially and physically. Many of the children have hidden talents which we try to encourage them to share in school, for example some are gifted at football, dance, singing, and karate to name a few.

The children are now by the beginning of the third term fully settled into their classes, have grasped class routines and understand the expectations of their class teachers and teaching assistants. They make great strides in their learning and where some have found a concept difficult they seem to 'click' in this term.

We want our children to strive for the very best they can achieve and have self confidence. We want them to be happy young citizens who have respect for themselves and others. We want them to feel empowered. To enable us to continue to do this for our young folk we have to work in partnership with parents. We surveyed parents in November and the results have been very favourable. Please see our website for more information. However we are not complacent and know we can always do more and are open to new ideas.

Over the next couple of terms in school we have class assemblies to parents which give us a chance to talk afterwards, reading afternoons, parent's evenings, a book week focusing on poetry, dressing up day and a pantomime. We also hope to visit the Guildhall Museum with Key Stage One children, and also a Synagogue. That's all our news for now, Sandra Jones, Head teacher.

A Sad Story

An old man was boasting that he'd been teaching his donkey new tricks. It could sit for a carrot, play dead and jump through flaming hoops. The last trick was to teach the donkey to live without food. Each day the poor beast learned to manage with less hay until finally it was getting by on no fodder at all. "But," the old man complained, "Just as I'd taught it not to eat at all, the pesky critter went and died on me!"



Max's Tail Piece

Which is the only kind of animal willing to risk its life to protect a member of another species? The answer is of course the dog. Master read that in a book by a famous atheist (Daniel Dennett). Why dogs do this is one of those puzzling questions which are hard to answer if you don't believe in God. That is not to say that there isn't an answer that doesn't involve God nor to say that people who do believe in God shouldn't ask awkward questions. Of course they should. The problem, however, is that, if evolution "designed" every species to live to reproduce its own genes, why should any animal lay down its life to save a creature of another species?

I'll let Master add his clever dick question and then we'll get on to the more interesting parts of my contribution. Master says, "Perhaps the most puzzling question of all for the atheist is this, Why, if there is no God, do so many people believe in Him?"

Now, if you've answered that (or even if you haven't) let's get on. Yes we dogs do act as guard dogs. We protect our masters. We protect their flocks and herds. We protect their property. And that's not all we do. Not only do we protect the sheep, we also help to shepherd them. You must have seen sheepdogs herding the silly sheep into their pens to be counted or to get their food or to receive medical treatment. Why don't farmers fall asleep when they're counting their sheep? I guess it's because the sheepdogs keep barking.

We help huntsman to find game. Sometimes we help them to kill it. We may retrieve it for them, sometimes plunging into icy waters to do so.

We act as guide dogs for the blind and hearing dogs for the deaf. Some of us are trained to send for help if our masters or mistresses suffer a medical emergency. Some of us can sniff out medical conditions as an aid to diagnosis. We help police and customs by sniffing out drugs and contraband. We help security staff and bomb disposal by sniffing out explosives. Some of us have died on active service, saving human beings' lives in the process.

We are a great comfort to people. After the recent school shooting in America, dogs were brought in to comfort the children and to help them talk about their experiences. "Pat" dogs are a great boon in care homes and sometimes in hospices. If you stroke a dog, your heart rate slows and your blood pressure goes down. We are a great contributor to public health – much nicer than drugs and probably cheaper.

Having a pet is a good way for children to learn to care about another living thing. A pet is a wonderful companion for a child and children can have a lot of healthy fun playing with their pets. The dog is the most domesticated of all animals and the least likely to mind being treated as a surrogate human being. When Master and I do things with children, the children take far more notice of me than they do of him!

A dog is a good thing for an adult to have as well – a totally trustworthy friend who offers you unconditional love. He'll eat up your scraps (not too many if you really love him) and make sure you get a walk every day. People don't exercise enough and walking is one of the best things they can do. Nearly everyone can do it. There's no expensive gym membership or equipment to buy. It doesn't put strain on the joints or cardiovascular system as some more strenuous exercises do, making them unsuitable for the unfit. People who are nervous about walking alone feel safe with a dog. And lots of people make resolutions to exercise which they don't keep. But one look into your dog's appealing eyes and you're putting on your shoes and coat, no matter what the weather, how indolent you feel or how busy you are. Dog walkers are good for the community as well. You don't see many other people on foot, and places like woods and parks and beaches would often be deserted for much of the time if it were not for dog walkers. How often is it a dog walker who reports a crime or comes across evidence? How much safer are children playing because adult dog walkers are also in the park?

We hear nasty stories about dogs that go wrong and become vicious, nearly always the fault of human beings, and exaggerated concerns about alleged health risks associated with dogs, but, just think, we dogs do all of the above for you, and, more than that, we offer you unconditional love. Max, the Rectory Spaniel.