

Services at St John the Baptist Halling & the Jubilee Hall Upper Halling		
1 st February Candlemas	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	Haggai 2 vv 1-9 p948 John 2 vv 18-22 p1065
	11.00 Holy Communion	Malachi 3 vv 1-5 p961 Hebrews 2 vv 14-18 p1202 Luke 2 vv 22-40 p1028
8 th February Sexagesima	11.00 Holy Communion	Proverbs 8 vv 1-31 p641 Colossians 1 vv 15-20 p1182 John 1 vv 1-14 p1063
	5.30 Evening Prayer Jubilee Hall	Genesis 2 vv 4-25 p4 Luke 8 vv 22-35 p1037
15 th February Quinquagesima	11.00 Stop! Look! Listen! & Holy Communion	II Kings 2 vv 1-12 p369 II Corinthians 4 vv 1-18 p1160 Mark 9 vv 2-9 p1012
18 th February Ash Wednesday	9.30 Holy Communion	II Corinthians 5 v20 – 6 v10 p1161 John 8 vv 1-11 p1073
22 nd February Lent 1	11.00 Holy Communion	Genesis 9 vv 8-17 p10 I Peter 3 vv 18-22 p1219 Mark 1 vv 9-15 p1002
1 st March Lent 2	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	Genesis 12 vv 1-9 p13 Luke 14 vv 25-35 p1048
	11.00 Holy Communion	Genesis 17 vv 1-16 p16 Romans 4 vv 13-25 Mark 8 vv 31-38 p1012
Services at St Michael & All Angels Cuxton		
1 st February Candlemas	9.30 Family Communion	Malachi 3 vv 1-5 p961 Hebrews 2 vv 14-18 p1202 Luke 2 vv 22-40 p1028
8 th February Sexagesima	9.30 Holy Communion	Proverbs 8 vv 1-31 p641 Colossians 1 vv 15-20 p1182 John 1 vv 1-14 p1063
15 th February Quinquagesima	8.00 Holy Communion	Epistle & Gospel BCP Quinquagesima
	9.30 Holy Communion	II Kings 2 vv 1-12 p369 II Corinthians 4 vv 1-18 p1160 Mark 9 vv 2-9 p1012
18 th February Ash Wednesday	7.30 pm Holy Communion	Joel 2 vv 1-17 p912 Matthew 6 vv 1-21 p970
22 nd February Lent 1	9.30 Holy Communion	Genesis 9 vv 8-17 p10 I Peter 3 vv 18-22 p1219 Mark 1 vv 9-15 p1002
1 st March Lent 2	9.30 Family Communion	Genesis 17 vv 1-16 p16 Romans 4 vv 13-25 Mark 8 vv 31-38 p1012

Wednesday Holy Communion 9.30 St Michael's		Thursday Holy Communion 9.30 St John's	
4 th February	Hebrews 12 vv 1-17 Mark 6 vv 1-6	5 th February	Hebrews 12 vv 18-24 Mark 6 vv 7-13
11 th February	Genesis 2 vv 4-17 Mark 7 vv 14-23	12 th February	Genesis 2 vv 18-25 Mark 7 vv 24-30
18 th February Ash Wednesday	9.30 am Halling & 7.30 pm Cuxton. See above.	19 th February @Cuxton	Deuteronomy 30 vv 15-20 Luke 9 vv 22-25
25 th February Ember Day	Jonah 3 Luke 11 vv 29-32	26 th February	Isaiah 55 vv 6-9 Matthew 7 vv 7-12

Copy Date March Magazine 8.30 am Rectory 13th February

St Michael's Draw November: £10 each for Joyce Haselden, Valerie Cosford, David Fenton-Scott, Viv Balsom.

Humour

A man's doctor says he must have a hearing test. "Go to the other side of the room," he tells him, "and I'll whisper a sentence. Then you say it back to me." The doctor whispers the sentence and the patient repeats it accurately. "Ay!" says the doctor.



Max's Party Piece

It was suggested to Master that I might be the one to write up the account of his 60th birthday on 30th November last year. It was something he was very much looking forward to and I had very little trouble waking him up soon after 5.00 that morning. As usual, on a Sunday, he made tea, took me down the garden and said Morning Prayer in the comfort of his kitchen. (He's reverted for his private devotions to the psalms and readings set in the Book of Common Prayer because they provide a more consistent and complete overview of Scripture than the Common Worship bible readings which are more concerned to mark the Church's year. Both the Church's year and regular bible reading are effective in Christian formation. So both have their place in our devotional lives.)

He then opened the birthday cards which had already arrived (except the one on the doormat which he only found later because we so seldom use the front door). He was amazed and deeply moved by the number of cards he received and, what he did not know then, there were a lot more still to come as he met people during the day – and balloons, his first birthday balloons in 50 years, even if he did have them when he was a child, which he can't remember. If he did, they certainly weren't helium filled because helium hadn't been invented then.

Then, hardly having run in the last few months because of knee pain, he decided that it was symbolic to go for a run on his 60th birthday and disappeared off to Halling. After that there was just time for a quick walk with me in Six Acre Wood when he came back. (We've been avoiding the field with the bullocks in it since they attacked me.) Shower, shave, quickly cook and eat breakfast (fried eggs, one for him, two for me), washing up in to soak and off he went to the usual two Sunday morning services, leaving me to fend for myself till dinner time.

Looking ahead to the party, he provided a simple dinner of sausages, saving one for later for my tea, and at last there was time for my proper walk up through the woods to Upper Halling. Master says there is a plus side to global warming when you can walk in the woods on the last day of November wearing only shorts and tee shirt, but, then, I only ever wear a collar whatever the weather and it doesn't bother me. It was quite a dark afternoon which makes the yellowing Autumn leaves almost seem to glow. Wonderful!

After the walk, the magic really began, as we took a wheelbarrow full of beer, lager, cider, wine and soft drinks to the church hall. We found the hall being transformed into a vision of birthday celebration and a splendid buffet being laid out on the tables.

Home for tea (sausage for me, jam for him) and the guests started to arrive with more presents. Plan A was that, if the two other dogs arrived, I would keep them company while Master was at church and at the party. However, he saw the expression on my face and I had already seen what was going to happen in the hall; so I came too.

Evensong is a rare treat in these decadent times. I may have slept through his sermon, reviewing 60 years in the light of the Advent hope, but if you want to read it, go to <http://www.cuxtonandhalling.org.uk> and look under teaching.

Now, what can I say about the party? So many people from so many walks of Master's life – some from quite a distance. More cards and presents. He would like to thank everybody. On a couple of presents, however, he couldn't find any indication of whom they came from – including the pen and the RTW, both much appreciated, and he would like to know who gave them. A lot of people also made donations to parish funds to mark the event. I hope I shall be able to give you the total by the time this goes to press, but Master is quite overwhelmed by people's generosity and the warmth of their friendship and fellowship. Saints Alive had made a card, featuring, among other things, pictures of me, and signed by the children.

So many people have said that they enjoyed the event and Master is so happy that they did and so happy that you all combined together to give him such a splendid birthday. He even stayed up after the party was over, still opening cards and presents and we went to bed what was quite late for us, tired but happy. He says thank you, thank you, thank you, once again. Max, the Rectory Spaniel.

A Disappointment for the Churchwarden

A man came up to a churchwarden and said that he had been clearing out his attic and found an old violin and an old picture. He would like to donate them both to the Church to be sold for church funds. The churchwarden was delighted and took them to be valued at the auction house. The valuer said, "What you have here is a Stradivarius and a Rembrandt. Unfortunately Stradivarius was a lousy painter and Rembrandt made rubbish violins."

THANKYOU SO MUCH, MARGARET

Margaret has been our Flower Arranger Extraordinaire for many decades here at St. Michael's & All Angels, and over these years has organised exquisite displays for every occasion with her amazing Flower Arranging Team. Margaret has felt the need to retire from her duties now, and we send every good wish to her and her husband Harry (a stalwart supporter) with grateful thanks for all her generosity, and hard and wonderful work on our behalf. Thank you so much Margaret from all of us at St. Michael's.

Jeanne Harris, Churchwarden at St Michael's.

Wise Words from Thomas Merton

"For me, to be a saint means to be myself.

Confirmation 2015

I am pleased to be able to say that we shall be holding a service of Confirmation next year on 24th June at 7.30 pm at St John's Church. This is, of course, our Patronal Festival at Halling.

If you wish to be confirmed, please let me know. Classes will begin in the new year. Candidates should be twelve years of age or older, but, with the bishop's permission those who are ten or eleven may be confirmed if they are ready for the commitment involved. What is required of candidates for Confirmation? Simply that they take seriously the promises we all make at Baptism (or our godparents make for us). The classes are an opportunity to consider what this means at a level appropriate for you.

Not Just Names

For the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War last year, we collected some of the personal stories of the people commemorated on our war memorials. We obtained some very interesting information, but, sadly, we had left it too late to find out about some of their stories. So, if anyone can tell us anything about those from Cuxton and Halling who gave their lives in the Second World War, especially if you knew them personally, please let us have this information for the magazine and put it on record so that future generations will be able to keep the pledge "We will remember them."



Justice and Mercy

Old time preachers, it is alleged, used to terrify their parishioners into submission with threats that only good Christians would go to heaven and that everybody else would go to hell. Some churches seemed untroubled by the thought that only a few might be saved and that the rest of humanity would endure eternal torment. It is hard to reconcile this way of thinking with the biblical truth that God is

love. St Paul writes of *God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.* (I Timothy 2^{3&4}).

Nowadays, people generally disbelieve threats of hell and a lot of people seem to think along lines such as these: "If there is life after death, then surely everyone must go to the right place, to heaven. God can't surely be judgmental or discriminatory!" If people think about it at all, which mostly I don't think they do unless

confronted with a death in the family or the diagnosis of a serious illness, they believe about God much the same as children in November are encouraged to believe about Santa. Theoretically, there won't be any presents for naughty people, but we know that really it's an idle threat. God is too nice to withhold His gift of eternal life just because we haven't measured up to His exacting standards.

And yet, would we really want to live in a world where there was no justice? Surely people ought to get what they deserve. Now, our actions in this life do have consequences in this life. It is true that we may well suffer for our foolish or wicked actions. Certainly we make other people suffer by our foolish and wicked actions. We also cause or fail to prevent pain (for ourselves and for other people) by our failure to perform wise and good deeds. In the Prayer Book Confession, *We have left undone those things which we ought to have done* comes before *We have done those things which we ought not to have done*, which rather implies that sins of omission may be more important than sins of commission.

Again, in the past, uncharitable people may have found it only too easy to blame other people for their problems. *They must have done something to deserve it!* The pendulum has now swung too far the other way and we no longer recognise that actions have consequences, that we are responsible to a large extent for what happens to us and for the impact we have on other people's lives. We do have real choices about how hard we work and study, whether we take care of ourselves properly, how we behave in relationships, whether we are honest, decent, generous, thoughtful, unselfish, what we do with our money. All these things are up to us and there are consequences to what we do and don't do – both for ourselves and for other people. We cannot control our circumstances. Some people have it easy and some people have it hard and it may be very unfair, but we can all make the best of the opportunities that we have. No one can blame us for what is beyond our control, but we are responsible for the genuine choices we take.

Under the influence of 2,000 years of Christianity, and our Jewish and classical roots, until very recently we have had a culture based on ethics and

personal responsibility. King Alfred set the Ten Commandments at the head of our English Laws. God has revealed how human beings ought to behave and we are answerable to Him for whether we behave properly or not. In the last few decades, however, we have reverted to a more primitive shame culture. No longer believing in a God of Justice Who takes a close interest in our lives, we no longer think in terms of right and wrong, of moral absolutes and personal responsibility. Instead, like the pagans of old who had no knowledge of revealed religion or classical philosophy, we rely on shame to ensure social conformity. Our behaviour is regulated not by our personal consciences (tuned by God) but by what other people will think of us, what they will say or tweet about us or, if we are sufficiently famous, what will appear about us in the newspapers or on television. This is the world in which it is as shameful for a celebrity to go out in unfashionable clothing as it is for him or her to commit adultery. It is also a world in which the only real "crime" is getting caught. This is a world in which there are no moral absolutes, only the threat of public disapproval. Hence all these injunctions by which people in the public eye try to conceal their private lives from the public. (I often point out that if a film star or footballer does not want the reputation of an adulterer, he should simply not commit adultery. If he does, he should confess his sins to God *Who is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* (I John 1⁹). Hence also the fact that businessmen, politicians and public officials are untroubled by lying as they attempt to defend their undeserved reputations for integrity and competence. PR, in a shame culture, matters more than truth. Hence also all these insincere apologies from people who first say what they really believe, only to discover that it is unacceptable to social media trolls and then perform public, but dishonest penance. Moreover public opinion is fickle. What is acceptable varies from one year to the next (if that long) whereas what is just never changes.

Who would want to live in a world without justice? When Hitler stands before the judgment seat of God, do we expect God simply to say, "Don't worry about it old chap. These things (holocaust, world war, etc.) happen, but it's nobody's fault. I'm not blaming you"? Nearer

home, I sometimes think at funerals of people who have cheated on their wives, beaten their children, spent their money on drink rather than their families, are we really entitled to say that he was a diamond geezer who is now probably propping up the bar in heaven's local?

We wouldn't really want to live in a world without justice. Surely, people should get what they deserve. Quite clearly in this life, it doesn't always work out that way. Only too often, the wicked flourish like the green bay tree and terrible things happen to good people. Surely it will all be sorted out in the world to come. If there is a good God, if God is love, there must be eternal justice. Otherwise all those innocent victims will never be vindicated and the wicked who have got away with it in this life will get away with it for ever. Do you really think that suicide bombers and jihadists go straight to a paradise of seventy two virgins?

On the other hand, would we want to live in a world without mercy? Justice without mercy? Would we really want to get what we deserve? I think there is a problem of complacency, especially perhaps for us church people. We set the bar too high for other people. We may feel that people who are less good than we are somehow don't belong in our fellowship. Maybe they are not acceptable to God. Maybe they don't belong in the church and will only get to heaven, if they get there at all, by the back door. They need God's mercy, whereas we deserve His favour! The Bible makes it quite clear that this attitude is very wrong. God loves people as they are, even Hitler, even paedophiles, even jihadists, even that wife beater who lives down your street. God loves people as they are and so do we if we are the people of God. We also know that, if we are the people of God, it is because we have been found by the Good Shepherd, not because we were too virtuous to get lost in the first place. (Luke 15¹⁻⁷).

As we set the bar too high for other people, so we may set the standard too low for ourselves. The standard is perfect love – to love God with all our hearts, souls, minds and strength and to love our neighbours as ourselves. Anything less than that is sin. One man, one man alone, has ever lived as human beings should live and that man is Jesus.

Insofar as we fall short of the standard Jesus set, we are sinners. We do not deserve a place in heaven. There is only one alternative to heaven. So the old time preachers are right when they tell us that what we deserve, if justice is to be done, is the other place.

We wouldn't want to live in a world without justice. We wouldn't want to live in a world without mercy. But surely mercy and justice are contradictory principles? If there is justice, the perpetrator is punished appropriately. If there is mercy, the perpetrator is let off.

Because God is love, He is just, and, confronted with a world full of sinners, justice demands that He punishes us, all of us. Because God is love, He is merciful, and, confronted with a world of sinners deserving punishment - well, as the prophet says, *He desireth not the death of a sinner.* (Ezekiel 18). God is love and love demands both justice and mercy. How can this be? *Greater love than this hath no man, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.* (John 15^{13&14}). The paradox of justice and mercy is resolved in the Cross of Jesus Christ – the greatest possible love. The Cross does not say that sin does not matter. Think what it meant for Jesus. Justice is upheld. The Cross also says that sin and sin's consequence, death, does not have the last word. Mercy is upheld. God in Christ has resolved the paradox of love, the paradox of justice and mercy, on the Cross. What is required of us is that we repent – that we take sin seriously – and that we have faith, faith in the faithfulness of God *Who desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness and live.*

I do not know how many will be saved. I do not know who will be saved. We are saved by the grace of God alone. We are saved by grace through faith. It is not of ourselves, lest we should be tempted to boast. It is the gift of God. *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God before hath ordained that we should walk in them.* (Ephesians 2⁸⁻¹⁰). It deserves to be taken seriously, more seriously than anything. Roger.

Christmas Thanks

Another wonderful Christmas at St Michael's and St John's. Thank you all of you who make music and ring bells, prepare the children for their nativity, and for the children who take part, for those who make all those Christingles, and for those who maintain, clean and tidy our church buildings and their surroundings, and for all those who arrange flowers and put up Christmas decorations, and for all those involved in catering our Christmas festivities. Thank you all for participating in our Christmas worship in whatever way you did. Happy New Year! Roger.

The idea of having one big Christmas card and donations to the Church instead of sending individual cards at St Michael's raised nearly £200.

Christmas Grammar: What do you call Santa's helpers? Subordinate clauses.

St Michael's Draw December: £10 each for Jack Payne, David Joyce, Gill Bogg & Laurence Curnow.

The Christmas Bumper: £30 Andrea Harris and £20 Michael Lofthouse - drawn by Alex Fenton-Scott.

St John's Draw November: £25 to Mr G Mitchell (68), £10 to Mrs Hesketh (115,119) – drawn by Mrs Tapson.

St John's Draw December: £5 each to Mrs Thorne (3), Mrs Swatton (6), Mrs Mattingly (65) & Miss Crowhurst (158) – drawn by Mr Payne.

If you would like to join the Cuxton draw, please contact Jeanne Harris. If you would like to join the Halling draw, please contact Betty Head.

The Management Virus

This a story told by the late Tony Benn and recollected in the "Times" 30th December. The NHS (It could have been any government or local government body, any of several major corporations, or, alas the good old C of E as she becomes increasingly infected with the management virus.) entered a boat race against a Japanese crew. After Japan won by a mile, a working party discovered that the Japanese had eight oarsmen and a cox, whereas the British had eight coxes and one oarsman. The British team spent £5,000,000 on management consultants and, on their recommendation, adopted a new structure for the crew – four assistant steering managers, three deputy managers and a director of steering services. The oarsman was offered an incentive to row harder. This time Britain lost by two miles! So they sacked the oarsman for poor performance, sold the boat and used the proceeds to pay a bonus to the director of steering services.

Rector's 60th Birthday

Thank you everybody who made donations to the church to mark my sixtieth birthday. They amounted to £615 apart from what was put directly into the church collection plate. So thank you all very much indeed. Roger.

Nature Notes November 2014

O wild West wind, thou breath of Autumn's being
Thou from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
Are driven like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,
Yellow and black and pale and hectic red.

These lines open Shelley's poem "November" and describe in detail the sadness of Autumn. On the first day of the month, grey clouds soon obscure early morning sunshine. Eventually at Bluewater with Murphy, sun returns. Rain falls during the night. Rain falls throughout the next day until the sun dips down in the west. Rooks fly across for their evening roost. Silver birches on the embankment look so fragile and beautiful in the last rays of the setting sun. The 6th is a fine, sunny day with north winds blowing. I walk Murphy round the lake at Bluewater where all the grass has been cut for the winter. The sun shines from a pale blue sky. The 7th, 8th and 9th are mild days with

intermittent rain and sunshine. The 11th is fine and sunny with west winds driving cloud across the sky. The water on the rippling lake sparkles in the sunlight. A heron is perched on a wooden float in the middle of the lake. I hear a coot's call. High cloud covers the sky in the afternoon. On the 12th, grey clouds march across the sky driven by west winds. A lone chaffinch comes into the garden. I haven't seen one for many days. The jasmine in the garden is still in flower. The weather remains very mild. The evening skies are beautiful for clouds are tinged with pink from the setting sun. Night skies are clear. On 15th, I walk Murphy round the lake after rain has ceased. The sun

shines brightly on the autumn leaves which are golden, purple and red. I see the heron again. A few sunny days follow until 21st which is damp and there is a chill in the air. Darkness falls quite early because of overcast skies. The next day, a sparrow hawk is on the grass in the back garden and it is gorging on a white pigeon. A pile of white feathers is left. The 24th is a bright, sunny day with a decided nip in the air. Late afternoon skies are clear with high pink clouds brushing the sky as the sun sets. Sycamores on the embankment have lost most of their leaves. Bare branches are motionless against the pale sky. In the evening Murphy disturbs a cock pheasant which has flown onto the drive. Murphy's barking soon causes it

to fly away. The 27th is grey and chilly but dry. The trees on the embankment are beautiful as more leaves fall, leaving the delicate tracery of fine branches and even finer twigs. The afternoon becomes bright in hues of pink and blue as the sun sets. Darkness falls. On 29th, the sun shines brightly throughout the day with clear blue skies and wispy cloud. The 30th is a grey day with dampness in the air. I walk to church. Leaves are falling from the churchyard trees. There are no glimpses of the sun. I walk there again in the evening when darkness has fallen. It is for a happy occasion, namely Roger's birthday service and party. It is an enjoyable occasion. Elizabeth Summers.

Nature Notes December 2014

From "In Memoriam" Alfred Lord Tennyson

Ring out wild bells, to the night 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 want the care the sin;
The faithless coldness of the times;
Ring out, ring out my mournful rhymes;
But ring the fuller minstrel in.

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 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.

On the first day of the month, which is cold and grey, I hear a robin singing from the conifer tree. It is a sweet sound. The 3rd is cold with north winds blowing. A jay flies across the garden in the morning. I just caught a glimpse of it. The next morning I watch a wood pigeon tucking in to ivy berries and chaffinches chasing each other through the bare lilac branches. The 5th is a cold, wet day with north winds driving grey clouds across the sky. Feral pigeons and great tits come to feed. On 6th I watch the golden sun rising over Bluebell Hill. I hear birdsong in the trees which are motionless for there is no breath of wind. We drive up the M2, where gorse is in bloom, to Bluewater. A heron balances on a wooden platform in the middle of the lake shimmering in the sunlight. A few leaves still adorn the trees and frost covers grassy paths which have not been penetrated by the sun's warmth. The air is clear and cold. The next day, winds are from the west and grey and pink clouds drift across the sky. Silver birch and sycamore trees on the embankment are now bare. There are a few patches of blue sky before the sun sets. The early morning of 9th is flushed with red as the sun rises over the hill but this soon gives way to grey. There are a few glimpses of the sun during the morning. Rain falls during the evening. The next day, rooks are perched in trees near the river in the morning. The birds and the bare trees are black

against the pale blue sky. The sun rises then the birds begin to fly over towards May's Wood. The sun shines brightly during the morning and into the afternoon. In the late afternoon the rooks fly back to their roosts. Heavy rain has fallen during the night of 11th and strong winds have blown the bench seat and cover around the garden. The day is damp and chilly. Two days of frost follow. The morning of 15th is bright and sunny as we drive to Bluewater with Murphy. I see many vapour trails across the pale blue sky, so many planes in a confined space. We walk round the lake which is bathed in golden sunshine. A light westerly wind blows. Hazels are bedecked with tight young catkins which herald the Spring in perhaps two months' time. Later, high, grey cloud envelops the sky; then by late afternoon, as darkness falls, the cloud cover is complete. At 11.20pm, we listen to a blackbird singing in a tree near the main road. Street lights make it think daylight has come. The 18th is a mild, grey day. The early morning sky of 19th is grey but skies clear to become a pale wintery blue and a golden sun shines to give a beautiful day. A north-west wind blows on 20th. On 22nd, clouds march across the sky in a warm, westerly wind. I walk with Murphy round the lake. Willows have been woven into a fence along the top path. Below, weeping willows still retain some of their leaves which have turned a greeny-

yellow. At home, rooks congregate in the trees on the embankment as the light fades. I enjoy the sounds they make as they gather together for the night. The 24th is bright with sunshine and is quite a mild day. High cloud, grey and white, coats the afternoon sky, then, as the sun dips down to the west, its golden light brings a special brightness in the sky and its beams transform the green of Bluebell Hill and the silver trunks of birch trees on the embankment. It is a beautiful sight. The 27th is a very cold day with north winds driving grey clouds across the sky. Frost coats roofs and gardens on 28th. I watch the sun rise over the hill and rooks in the trees gradually take flight. They and the branches of the trees are black against a very pale sky. The 29th is a cold, frosty day when I walk Murphy round the lake; then' in the afternoon, I walk across Church Fields, into May's Wood and round the

edge of the field overlooking Bush Valley. The air is very cold and the ground beneath my feet is hard. There is a beautiful sunset. Spindleberries and hips still adorn some hedges. There has been a hard frost early in the morning of 30th. The morning skies are a clear blue and all is still as the sun rises. The day is beautiful but very cold. As evening falls, temperatures continue to fall. I have watched, on BBC2 another beautiful programme featuring Gordon Buchanan, this time, with wolves in the Arctic. On the last day of the month and the year, there has been another sharp frost. The grass in the garden and on the rooftops are white. I watch the golden sun rise into a clear, pale blue sky. White mist hangs over the river. Trees stand motionless, their bare branches black against the sky. Elizabeth Summers.

Epiphany – Keep It Under Your Hat!

For the second year running a small, select company of us kept Epiphany on the 6th January at St Michael's with a celebration of Holy Communion at 9.30 am followed by brunch and a film show in the church hall. Brunch was scrambled egg and bacon roll, completed with trifle and cake in the intermission. Just under two dozen of us participated. Keep it under your hat!

Given our somewhat limited resources, our first Epiphany service at St John's was on Thursday 8th. Was it unkind of the person who wondered if the wise men were travelling Network South-East? Anyway keep it under your hat!

Keep it under your hat! What does Epiphany actually mean? It means revelation or appearing or manifestation. Epiphany is a celebration of the revelation of Christ to all nations, of God's manifestation of Himself to the whole world. Perhaps it isn't such a good thing to keep it under our hats after all!

To be a light to lighten the Gentiles: and to be the glory of thy people Israel. At least we'll get another chance to celebrate at Candlemas, which we'll observe this year on 1st February, another sign of weakness?

From the Registers

Baptisms:

16 th November	Edward James McLaren	Rochester
28 th December	Violet Arabella Webb	Ladywood Road

Wedding:

4 th January	James David Twidale & Fiona Jane Philippa MacDonald	St Michael's
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Funerals:

25 th November	Dennis Lear (72)	Rochester Road, Halling
8 th December	Terrence George Bryant (75)	Low Meadow

Ernie Clack RIP

Readers will be sorry to hear of the death of Ernie Clack, formerly of Pilgrims Road North Halling, on Christmas Eve at the age of 92.

News from the Cuxton Community schools

Dear Friends of our schools,

It has been extremely busy in the Cuxton schools during the last few months. In November the schools had an 'internal ofsted' organised by The Primary First Academy Trust with whom we have joined. Whilst the report is not published widely it has given us a benchmark as to how we are progressing. We were pleased with the outcomes. The Infant school remains a good school with a judgement of good also for the foundation stage. The junior school is progressing well, with all staff, infants and juniors, committed to joining the schools and making them jointly successful. Children are making good progress and there are rigorous systems in place for monitoring the teaching and learning in school, the tracking of children's data and how well they are achieving and the marking of children's work. Children are happy and well mannered feeling able to talk to staff. The environment is bright and stimulating and the curriculum is engaging. Needless to say we are pleased.

Key stage 1 children produced 'Humph the camel!', entertaining their parents and grandparents with a story of a camel who is a little grumpy and does not have much to say until he arrives at the stable! The Foundation stage children also entertained us. We listened and took part in a fabulous carol concert delivered by our year 3 and 4 children who sang beautifully and some of our youngsters sang solos.

The Friends of Cuxton school worked hard to hold a successful disco for the junior school, a film night for the infants and a Christmas fayre for all which raised over a thousand pounds. My continued thanks to them for giving their time to organise, shop and host these events especially at such a busy time of year. The children ate a fantastic Christmas lunch produced by the cooks and kitchen staff and staff served the children. Great fun was had by all especially at the Christmas parties where staff danced with the children and entertained them with 'sparkle and shine dancing'!! Year 3 and 4 children visited the pantomime in Maidstone, taking the train. They behaved impeccably and broke into renditions of the Christmas carols they had been learning on the station platform wowing the commuters! Of course by the end we were all ready for a Christmas break, spending time with families and friends and of course the children were tired.

They and we have returned refreshed ready for an action packed couple of terms. The good teaching of children and the learning and the progress of the children is paramount. There will be focussed monitoring of all these areas once again over the next few weeks. Class topics have changed. Children are learning about 'Bounce', foods, diet and keeping healthy and creatures/ animals, with visits to the Natural History museum, a visit from zoolab and pizza making. Class assemblies to families begin next week and parents receive progress reports as to how their children are achieving. I think that is all the news for now. I hope you all had an enjoyable time with your families and friends and wish you from us all at the schools a happy and healthy new year.

Sandra Jones, Headteacher.

Advent 4 2014 – The Advent Hope and the Christmas Promise

II Samuel 7 vv 1-17 p310, Psalm 89, Romans 16 vv 25-27 p1143, Luke 1 vv 26-38 p1926

Romans 16²⁵⁻²⁷: *Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Christ fulfils God's promises in the Old Testament. We have an example in today's Old Testament Lesson – God's promises to David, made almost 1,000 years before the Birth of Jesus, fulfilled in our Saviour for all eternity. This is so because the story of Jesus is God's eternal plan. It is in the very nature of God that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us because God is love. It is in the very nature of God that He laid down His life on the Cross for our Salvation. God is love. It is of the very nature of God that death can have no more dominion over Him because God is love. The promise of the Holy Ghost shed forth is of the very nature of God because God is love. It is of the very nature of God that He will come again in glory and that His kingdom will have no end.

This is God's eternal plan, the eternal purpose of the One Who is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, which is, which was, and which is to come. To put it another way, *He's got the whole world in His hands*. When God creates the heavens and the earth, when He creates us, He creates something different and separate from Himself, something to love. Not only does He love the world and everything in it, He creates and loves us, human beings made in His image and likeness, human beings capable not only of being loved but of loving in return. To put it another way, *He's got you and me, brother in his hands, He's got you and me, sister, in his hands*. It is His eternal purpose to bridge the gap created by our rejection of His love, our sin, by becoming one of us, by sharing every aspect of our lives, by dying for and by rising again and by giving us the Holy Spirit so that we may be prepared when He comes again in glory to bring us home to His realm of eternal love.

We speak of God as omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. We speak of Christ as all in all. The words mean that God is all powerful, all knowing and everywhere, but what does that mean? It means *He's got the whole world in His hands* and *He's got you and me, brother, in his hands, He's got you and me, sister, in his hands*. The Advent hope is that our lives will be fulfilled eternally in the love of God, the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life. The advent hope is that the whole of creation will be fulfilled eternally in the love of God. The Christmas promise is Emmanuel, God with us, God in Christ sharing every aspect of our lives. We live, you and I, in the embrace of the divine love. *He walks with us and talks with us, along life's narrow way*. Whatever happens we are in the embrace of the arms of the One Who loves us so much that He suffered those arms to be stretched out on the Cross for our Salvation. We dwell in Him and He in us – the Christmas promise and the Advent hope – God's eternal purpose revealed in so many ways in the wonders of the universe, proclaimed in the Scriptures and manifested to the whole Creation in Christ Jesus.