

Services at St Michael & All Angels Cuxton		
2 nd February Candlemas	5.00 pm The Bread of Life and the Light of the World (followed by tea 5.45)	Malachi 3 vv 1-5 Luke 2 vv 22-40
4 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
11 th February Quinquagesima	9.30 Holy Communion	II Kings 2 vv 1-12 p369 II Corinthians 4 vv 3-6 p1160 Mark 9 vv 2-9 p1012
14 th February Ash Wednesday	7.30pm Holy Communion	Isaiah 58 vv 1-12 p744 II Corinthians 5 ²⁰ – 6 ¹⁰ p1161 John 8 vv 1-11 p1073
18 th February Lent 1	8.00 Holy Communion	Epistle & Gospel BCP
	9.30 Holy Communion	Genesis 9 vv 8-17 p10 I Peter 3 vv 18-22 p1219 Mark 1 vv 9-15 p1002
25 th February Lent 2	9.30 Holy Communion	Genesis 17 vv 1-16 p16 Romans 4 vv 13-25 p1131 Mark 8 vv 31-38 p1012
4 th March Lent 3	9.30 Holy Communion	Exodus 20 vv 1-17 p77 I Corinthians 1 vv 18-25 p1144 John 2 vv 13-22 p1065
11 th March Lent 4 / Mothering Sunday	9.30 Holy Communion	Numbers 21 vv 4-9 p158 John 3 vv 14-21 p1066
Services at St John the Baptist Halling & the Jubilee Hall Upper Halling		
4 th February Sexagesima	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	II Corinthians 11 vv 19-31 p1165 Luke 8 vv 4-15 p1037
	11.00 Holy Communion	Proverbs 8 vv 1-31 p641 Colossians 1 vv 15-20 p1182 John 1 vv 1-14 p1063
11 th February Quinquagesima	11.00 Holy Communion	II Kings 2 vv 1-12 p369 II Corinthians 4 vv 3-6 p1160 Mark 9 vv 2-9 p1012
	5.30 Evening Prayer Jubilee Hall	Genesis 12 vv 1-20 p13 Acts 26 vv 1-32 p1123
14 th February Ash Wednesday	9.30 am Holy Communion	Joel 2 vv 12-17 p912 Matthew 6 vv 16-21 p970
18 th February Lent 1	11.00 Stop! Look! Listen! & Holy Communion	Genesis 9 vv 8-17 p10 I Peter 3 vv 18-22 p1219 Mark 1 vv 9-15 p1002
25 th February Lent 2	11.00 Holy Communion	Genesis 17 vv 1-16 p16 Romans 4 vv 13-25 p1131 Mark 8 vv 31-38 p1012
4 th March Lent 3	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	Ephesians 5 vv 1-14 p1176 Luke 11 vv 14-28 p1043
	11.00 Holy Communion	Exodus 20 vv 1-17 p77 I Corinthians 1 vv 18-25 p1144 John 2 vv 13-22 p1065
11 th March Lent 4 / Mothering Sunday	11.00 Holy Communion	Numbers 21 vv 4-9 p158 Ephesians 2 vv 1-10 p1174 John 3 vv 14-21 p1066
	5.30 Evening Prayer Jubilee Hall	Genesis 43 vv 1-34 p48 I Corinthians 4 vv 1-17 p1146

Officially, the Last Day of Christmas is Candlemas (2nd February) when Mary and Joseph took the 40 day old baby Jesus to Jerusalem for His Presentation in the Temple and Mary's Purification. It too, is a festival of light – Jesus the Light of the World – and traditionally the church candles were blessed at this service. Two very elderly people – Simeon and Hannah – recognised the baby Jesus for Who He truly is and Simeon sang the song we call Nunc Dimittis. In 2018, we shall meet at St Michael's at 5.00 pm (after school for the children, not too late for older people who might not want to be out at night.) There will be a "different" Communion service, followed by tea in the Rectory.

Holy Communion Wednesdays 9.30 am St Michael's		Holy Communion 9.30 am St John's	
7 th February	I Kings 10 vv 1-10 Mark 7 vv 14-23	8 th February	I Kings 11 vv 4-13 Mark 7 vv 24-30
14 th February	See above for 7.30 pm service	14 th February Ash Wednesday	Joel 2 vv 12-17 p912 Matthew 6 vv 16-21 p970
Thursday 15 th February @ St Michael's	Deuteronomy 30 vv 15-20 Mark 7 vv 24-30	Service 15 th at St Michael's	
21 st February Ember Day	Jonah 3 Luke 11 vv 29-32	22 nd February	Isaiah 55 Matthew 7 vv 7-12
28 th February	Jeremiah 18 vv 18-20 Matthew 20 vv 17-28	1 st March St David	Jeremiah 17 vv 5-10 Luke 16 vv 19-31

Sound System at St Michael's

I think most people agree that this has been a very good thing in helping people to hear the service. This has cost in the region of £4,000 of which we have received £550 so far in donations. If anyone else would like to contribute towards the cost of the system, it would be much appreciated, as I hope the system is. Roger.

From the Rector



A few weeks ago, I was talking to a class of junior school children about the Reformation. They were very bright and we ranged over a whole variety of topics with them asking some extremely intelligent questions. My theme was that the Reformation really took off because Martin Luther felt that he could never be good enough to please God. We all want to be good (I hope) but some of us are never really comfortable with ourselves. We judge ourselves harshly or we feel that other people don't respect us or maybe we feel that God could never love us as we are. Luther's fear was that, if we are not good enough for heaven, then we shall surely finish up in hell - and that none of us is good enough for heaven.

The Church in Luther's day seemed to teach that you could do enough good in your lifetime to qualify for a place in heaven, but only a very few people would achieve that. There was no hope for very bad people who were doomed to hell. But, for most Christians, who were neither especially bad nor especially good, there was an intermediary state called purgatory after you died – neither heaven, nor hell, but a sort of waiting room for heaven where you remained until you had acquired enough merit to go to paradise. Purgatory wasn't as bad as hell, but it was very unpleasant and your time there could be shortened by good works, by the prayers of other people, as well as your own, and by masses said for the weal of your soul. The system had become corrupt because fear of purgatory had become a good money raiser for the Church, with people paying

cash for what were called indulgences, which were said to reduce your time in purgatory.

Luther felt deeply that none of this helped him. So he read his Bible and thought and prayed about what it says. He realised that the Bible is the only authority we need to accept to teach us about God. So, Sola Scriptura, only the Bible, became one of the three great principles of the Reformation. Every man and woman should read the Bible for him or herself and make up his or her own mind prayerfully in the light of what he or she reads. So Luther and other reformers were very keen to translate the Bible into the languages of the common people (not just Latin) and to make it freely available so that people could read it for themselves.

What the Bible says about it is that God loves us just as we are. He doesn't love us because we are good or clever or wise or good-looking or rich or powerful or athletic or for any other reason. He just loves us as we are. We don't have to judge and condemn ourselves. We don't have to worry about what other people think of us. God loves us and that is all that matters. A relationship with God is God's free gift to us. Eternal life is God's gift. It isn't something we have to earn. Our place in heaven isn't a reward for our being such good people, neither is it a benefit secured by prayers or masses. It is God's free gift to us. It is God's grace to us that we are forgiven, that we dwell in Him and He in us, and that we shall live in His love in all eternity. By grace alone, Sola Gratia, is another one of the principles of the Reformation.

And how do we know all this? Because we are smart? Because we are virtuous? No. We know all this by faith alone. Faith alone, Sola Fide, is another of the three principles of the Reformation. Faith in Jesus Christ is all we need.

It's all there in the Old and New Testaments. Good works follow from our relationship with God. Our relationship with God is His free gift to us, even though we don't deserve it. All we need is faith and faith too is the gift of God. It all depends on Him. It is our relationship with God which sets us free and empowers us to live good lives. He doesn't love us because we are good. It is because He loves us that we are made good.

This was the substance of what I was trying to say as the discussion in class ranged over Europe and Palestine, from the Roman Empire to the Tudors and beyond: different languages, history, science, the nature of education. There was so much they wanted to know and so little time to talk about it. We finished with one child asking an extremely good question which there was no time even to attempt to answer. "If God loves everyone, why doesn't everyone go to heaven?" So let me try to suggest how we might try to answer it here and now.

There are verses in both the Old and New Testaments which indicate that God doesn't desire the death of sinners and that His will is that everyone should be saved. We might think, then, that, because God is all powerful, it is inevitable that He'll get what He wants and everyone will be saved. God is love. He loves everyone of us. Surely He would never allow anyone of us to be lost eternally.

There are, however, other perspectives. Both Old and New Testaments bear witness very definitely to the justice of God. God is all powerful. Everything is in God's Hands. Therefore people will get what they deserve. The Old Testament says very little about the afterlife and, generally speaking, bears witness to the way in which justice works out on earth. Our actions have consequences, which you might well think of as rewards and punishments. Generally speaking, our lives run much more smoothly when we follow our Maker's instructions. It is in the New Testament mainly where we read about the eternal

consequences of the way we live our lives. The New Testament is quite clear that there will be a final judgment when our eternal destiny will be justly settled – heaven for the good, hell for the bad.

Back to what we said earlier. Nobody is good enough for heaven (except Jesus). So we might all expect to go to hell except that God is merciful as well as just. He loves us just as we are. He saves us by grace. Heaven is His free gift to us, His gift which we only have to accept in faith.

So maybe, we might think, hell exists because Jesus said so, but perhaps hell is empty because God is always ready to forgive sinners.

But then what happens to justice? Where is the justice if a merciful God just lets us off for our sins? We can think of some very wicked people in history and in the world today. Maybe we personally know some very wicked people. Does God just let them off simply because He is merciful and He loves them? Is hell empty and heaven crowded out with mass murderers, rapists and paedophiles?

We've said that we are all sinners and none of us deserves to go to heaven and yet we shall through faith in God's grace. God's love takes very seriously both justice and mercy. There isn't space to write about it here, but God's seriousness about justice and mercy is resolved in the Cross of Jesus. That is how much God loves us; that is how serious God is about justice; that is how deep is God's mercy, that Jesus dies on the Cross for us. Our sins are washed away in His Blood. He has paid the price for us. He has effected the atonement between the just God and a creation alienated from its God by injustice. He has borne the punishment we deserve. All of us can be forgiven, no matter how bad our sins – even mass murderers, rapists and paedophiles. [Sorry, I know some people can't stomach that thought, but it is the Christian Gospel.] Justice and mercy are swallowed up in love in the crucifixion of Jesus.

So, it's all all right then? The Cross of Jesus satisfies all the demands of justice and mercy and everyone goes to heaven, no matter how wicked he or she might be? God's perfect will is

accomplished; all are saved and no sinner dies eternally?

There is still the question of human freedom. We believe that one of the greatest of God's gifts to us is our freedom to reject His love. He doesn't compel us to love Him. How could love be genuine if we didn't love of our own free will? You can't be forced to love anyone. It has to be your own choice. So does God, in the end, take away that freedom of choice? Does everybody go to heaven because in the end God takes away our freedom to reject Him and we are compelled to dwell in His love in all eternity? Some people think that, if, at the end of our lives or on the Last Day, we are enabled to see what the choices are,

to look up into heaven and to see its beauties and its glories, and to look down into the abyss of hell and to understand for ourselves its horrors, surely everybody would choose heaven. Maybe. I don't know, but I would be suspicious that if everybody made the same choice it might not be a free choice and God would have taken away from us that great gift of freedom.

I don't claim to know all the answers or to have dealt with all the issues and possibilities, but, partly thanks to Luther and the other reformers, you all have access to the Bible. Read it for yourselves prayerfully and make up your own minds as members of the people of God. Roger.

Psalm 51. *Miserere mei, Deus*

HAVE mercy upon me, O God, after thy great goodness : according to the multitude of thy mercies do away mine offences.

2. Wash me thoroughly from my wickedness : and cleanse me from my sin.
 3. For I acknowledge my faults : and my sin is ever before me.
 4. Against thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight : that thou mightest be justified in thy saying, and clear when thou art judged.
 5. Behold, I was shapen in wickedness : and in sin hath my mother conceived me.
 6. But lo, thou requirest truth in the inward parts: and shalt make me to understand wisdom secretly.
 7. Thou shalt purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean : thou shalt wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
 8. Thou shalt make me hear of joy and gladness : that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.
 9. Turn thy face from my sins : and put out all my misdeeds.
 10. Make me a clean heart, O God : and renew a right spirit within me.
 11. Cast me not away from thy presence : and take not thy holy Spirit from me.
 12. O give me the comfort of thy help again : and stablish me with thy free Spirit.
 13. Then shall I teach thy ways unto the wicked : and sinners shall be converted unto thee.
 14. Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou that art the God of my health : and my tongue shall sing of thy righteousness.
 15. Thou shalt open my lips, O Lord : and my mouth shall shew thy praise.
 16. For thou desirest no sacrifice, else would I give it thee : but thou delightest not in burnt-offerings.
 17. The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit : a broken and contrite heart, O God, shalt thou not despise.
 18. O be favourable and gracious unto Sion : build thou the walls of Jerusalem.
 19. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifice of righteousness, with the burnt-offerings and oblations : then shall they offer young bullocks upon thine altar.
- Glory be to the Father, and to the Son: and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be: world without end. Amen.

Disabled Lavatory for the Church Hall

The Coop are giving us a grant for this from their community fund. If you would like to help and are a Coop member, please register by calling 0800 023 4708 or on <https://membership.coop.co.uk/register> Then, every time you spend money on Coop goods at the Coop, they donate something towards our fund.

A Miscellany of Silly Jokes

"I'd like to start with the chimney jokes – I've got a stack of them. The first one is on the house."

How do you keep cool at a football match? Stand next to a fan.

"The advantages of easy origami are two-fold."

"This policeman came up to me with a pencil and a piece of very thin paper. He said, 'I want you to help trace someone for me.'"

"I'm so lazy I've got a smoke alarm with a snooze button."

"Conjunctivitis.com – that's a site for sore eyes."

"I was reading a book – 'The History of Glue' – I couldn't put it down."

"I went to buy a watch, and the man in the shop said 'Analogue?' I said 'No, just a watch.'"

"This bloke said to me: 'I'm going to attack you with the neck of a guitar.' I said: 'Is that a fret?'"

"I used to go out with an anaesthetist – she was a local girl."

"I went in to a pet shop. I said, 'Can I buy a goldfish?' The guy said, 'Do you want an aquarium?' I said, 'I don't care what star sign it is.'"

"My next door neighbour worships exhaust pipes. He's a catholic converter."

"When I was younger I felt like a man trapped inside a woman's body. Then I was born."

"I was playing chess with my friend and he said, 'Let's make this interesting'. So we stopped playing chess."

"One in four frogs is a leap frog."

"Is it possible to mistake schizophrenia for telepathy? I hear you ask."

"You know you're working class when your TV is bigger than your book case."

Silence is not only golden; it is seldom misquoted.

They laughed when I said I was going to be a comedian. They're not laughing now.

"I have kleptomania, but when it gets bad, I take something for it."

"Police arrested two kids yesterday. One was drinking battery acid, the other was eating fireworks. They charged one and let the other one off."

He said, "You remind me of a pepper-pot." I said, "I'll take that as a condiment".

What's ET short for? He's only got little legs.

"I'm not a fan of the new pound coin, but then again, I hate all change."

"As a vegan, I think people who sell meat are disgusting; but apparently people who sell fruit and veg are grocer"

A backward poet writes inverse.

In a democracy it's your vote that counts; in feudalism, it's your Count that votes.

If you don't pay your exorcist you can get repossessed.

When a clock is hungry it goes back four seconds.

You are stuck with your debt if you can't budge it.

A boiled egg is hard to beat.

When you've seen one shopping centre, you've seen a mall.

West London police wish to alert local residents about the activities of the infamous cross-eyed burglar. If you see this man staring in your windows, warn the people next door.

A ship carrying red paint collided with another one carrying purple paint. Both crews are thought to be marooned!

A cement mixer has collided with a prison van. Motorists are asked to look out for 16 hardened criminals

Two cannibals were eating a clown. One says to the other, "Does he taste funny to you?"

A frustrated teacher confronts a recalcitrant pupil: "Are you ignorant or just apathetic?"

The response from the pupil, "I don't know and I don't care!"

St Michael's Draw December 2017: £10 Trudy Fenton-Scott (38), £5 each Anne Sadler (33) & James MacDonald (26).
If you would like to join this draw, please ask Mary Pitt.

Flowers at St Michael's: The flower arrangers would like to thank all those who contributed towards the cost of the Christmas flowers. Donations for flowers are always welcome for both churches.

Gift Aid Contributions to Cuxton & Halling Parish

I am pleased to be able to tell you that we were able to reclaim £4,881.57 from the Inland Revenue this year in respect of gift aided donations made in 2016. This compares with £4,857.71 for the previous year. Thank you so much for your support for this scheme which is a tremendous help with Parish Church finances.

Many thanks, Jack Payne, gift aid / covenant secretary.

If you are a taxpayer and gift aid your contributions HMRC will refund to us 25p for every pound you give - which is a tremendous help to us. Just bear in mind that we cannot claim back more tax than the amount of tax you pay in any particular year! If you would like to know more please contact Jack on 716368.



The Rector's Shorts

There was a bit of a kerfuffle in the parish just before Christmas about whether or not the Rector should wear shorts. I unexpectedly received an email informing me that lots of people in the village (both churchgoers and non-churchgoers) were offended by the sight of me in shorts. Some people, it was said, didn't come to church because of my shorts. I hasten to say that there are prescribed vestments for church services

which I always wear on Sundays. What I wear under the prescribed vestments (if anything) is nobody's business, but mine.

I've got to be a bit careful here because it's only too easy to offend people. I know I'm a bit like Mr Spock in "Star Trek". I work things out logically, but don't always pick up the emotional vibes and I can't quite see why people get upset about things with which there is nothing actually wrong on strictly rational terms. However, thinking about the issue, it raises so many important points (and a few mildly comical ones) that I thought I should write an article about it.

I start with some sympathy for the anti-shorts brigade. I'm quite a traditionalist myself. When I first saw a vicar in shorts, I was mildly shocked. I think I was about thirteen at the time. So it would have been around 1967 and things have moved on a lot since then. Many men wear shorts in the Summer and a few of us do so throughout the year. There's an oddity here in that I have heard it said that some people are not offended by shorts in Summer, but that they are unacceptable or even indecent in Winter. That's where I can't see the logic. If the sight of bare knees is inoffensive in warm weather, why does it become indecent in colder weather? At what temperature do the rules change and who makes the rules?

Leaving that aside, if it is acceptable that most men these days on occasion wear shorts, why do some people say that it is indecent for the Rector to wear shorts? Clergy legs are no different from anybody else's.

I doubt that anyone would tell me that I must wear long trousers (or a cassock) when out running or cycling or playing sport, but (here's my rational mind working again), if I can run or cycle wearing shorts, what's the problem if I'm wearing shorts when I'm walking, gardening or sitting in the park? Nobody objects to swimming trunks on the beach or in the sea.

The Pilates Element

Pilates is a body conditioning exercise programme suitable for all ages and abilities. My classes are friendly, fun and enjoyable.

Emily Pollington, member of FHT, qualified instructor.

Pilates classes are held in the church hall on Tuesdays from 7.00-8.00 pm. For more information, please contact instructor Emily Pollington, 01634 256942, 07940233296, emilypollington@btinternet.com Also on Facebook.

Then there is the question of woman ministers. If the sight of clerical legs is so offensive, must female clergy wear long trousers or ankle length skirts? I rather like the idea of archdeacons acting like the headmistresses of girls' schools and going around with a tape measure to check on hem lines, but, in these days of enforced equality, I don't see how you can have different rules for men and for women.

My e correspondent assured me that there were no objections to men in general wearing shorts. It was only me that some people regarded as indecent if not fully trousered right down to the feet. And that's where the discussion becomes interesting. Why would there be different rules for the clergy? I'm not closer to God than other Christians. I'm not holier than other Christians. I'm not called to live my life to a higher standard than other Christians. We use the word "priest" for Christian ministers, but it is somewhat misleading. In the Old Testament, priests came between God and ordinary members of the people of God, but that is all done away with in the New Testament. In the New Testament, the word "priest" has just two meanings. Jesus is the only high priest. He alone is truly holy. Only He is worthy to enter into the Presence of God, to offer the sacrifice, to make intercession for the world, to judge the world, to bless and to sanctify, to

deliver God's grace to the world, to pour out the Holy Spirit onto the world. Only Jesus is holy, because He alone has fully kept God's perfect law of love, loving so perfectly that He offered Himself as a sacrifice for the redemption of the world. You don't need me to represent you to God or to represent God to you. You need only Jesus.

And that brings me to the other meaning of the word "priest" in the New Testament. All Christians are priests. All Christians have access to God through faith in Jesus Christ. He makes us worthy. If you come to God in faith, He hears your prayers and He uses you to accomplish His purposes in the world. There is nothing special about me or any other minister of religion. Our task is to make it easier for you to come to Jesus and enter yourself into the Presence of God. All baptised people are priests. All Christians have access to the Father and all Christians are called to be conduits of His grace to the world. All Christians are righteous by the grace of God in Jesus Christ and by His grace alone.

I'm no closer to God, no holier, than any other Christian believer. Neither am I held to a higher standard. What God requires of all of us is that we love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and that we love our neighbours as ourselves. Jesus tells everyone who desires to follow Him to be perfect even as our heavenly Father is perfect. The people of God are called to be holy as God is holy. That means all the people of God, not just those who can write "Reverend" before their names.

To be a minister, as I am, is a vocation, a calling. Ministry is not, however, the only calling. Every Christian ought to regard his or her life as a vocation. Whatever you do, whoever you are, you should seek God's guidance. Ask Him what He wants you to do with your life: if you should marry, whom you should

marry; what you should do for a living; where you should live; how you might best spend your leisure hours; how you should spend your money. God has a purpose for every life, including yours and mine. And whatever you do do, see it as a vocation. Do your best for God's sake, not because you'll be rewarded if you work hard or punished if you don't.

And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, *do* all in the Name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him. (Colossians 3¹⁷).

It is concerning that some people might be influenced by the Rector's leisure attire in deciding whether or not to come to Church. It would be just as worrying if people came to church mainly because they liked me as if they stayed away because they didn't. We don't come to Church to worship the Rector; we come to Church to worship God. In Church, we experience the fellowship of the Holy Spirit; we hear God's Word; we participate in the Sacrament of Holy Communion as Christ commanded us to do. We really ought not to be influenced by our own personal likes and dislikes – how we get on with the Rector and other members of the congregation, our personal preferences about music, forms of service, etc.. It is a privilege to take part in worship, one which depends on the grace of God alone. Given that, as Christians, we are called to love one another as Christ loves us, it is extremely regrettable that we don't always like one another much even in the same congregation. We are, however, only human and we shan't be made perfect till we get to Heaven. In the meantime, the best we can do is to ask God's forgiveness for our failure to love Him wholeheartedly and our failure to love our neighbours as ourselves, and to ask God's grace to become better people. The Church is rather like a family. We do love one another even though we sometimes rub one another up the wrong way. It is a tragedy, whether in a church or a family, if people get to the point where they have so far fallen out that they no longer love one another.

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. (John 4²³).

I don't think I want to leave this before we have considered the danger of judging by appearances. The Bible makes it quite clear that God doesn't do this. God knows the heart and it is the heart which matters. As Christians, our calling is to be like Jesus. That surely means that we don't go by appearances. What matters about people is not whether they are well dressed or good looking. What matters is what kind of people they are, their character, what is in their heart. Whether it's children getting laughed at at school because their parents can't afford top branded trainers or old ladies trusting confidence tricksters because they are wearing smart suits, it's wrong to judge people by what they look like. It's a weakness on our part if we judge by appearances. I'm sorry to say that, even in the Church, too many people pay attention to worldly status. Some people are deferred to because they have prestigious jobs or because they are relatively wealthy or because they have some honourable position in the community. We are all equal in the sight of God and, as Christians, the people of God, we too ought to value everybody equally. We should be equally attentive to their needs, to treat their contributions with equal respect, and, if we can't avoid judging people, to judge, as Jesus told people who were judging Him, "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7²⁴).

For if there come into your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment: And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? (James 2²⁻⁴).

We've covered priesthood - its privileges and responsibilities. All baptised Christians are God's priests with free access to Him through Christ and called by God to offer to Him "ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto thee" (BCP). There's nothing special about us ordained folk. We're set apart to serve God and the Church and the world in our own particular way; and so is every other

Christian person. We've considered the risk of respecting persons. "If ye fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convicted¹ of the law as transgressors (James 2^{8&9}).

Finally we come to role. As an ordained minister and as Rector of Cuxton and Halling, I do have certain rights and responsibilities – some of them, given that we are an established Church, enshrined in law. Coming back to the shorts question, it has been suggested that they are OK for leisure, but not when I am on duty. That's not straightforward, however. Rector is what I am, not what I do. What I am, I am all the time. If you need me as Rector at any time, I shan't tell you to go away and come back when I'm on duty. Conversely, I don't have set hours of work. If I'm free at any time of day, I might take Tommy for a walk, but, if I meet someone who wants to know how to book a wedding when I'm shopping in the Co-op, I'll stop to help them.

There is a point that clergy ought to dress so that they are recognised as clergy wherever they are, but that is only tangential to the shorts question. A vicar in a suit, wearing a collar and tie, is no more evidently a minister than a vicar in shorts and tee shirt or a skirt and blouse. I do wonder about that sometimes, though, whether people these days know who I am.

I don't really see the need to look clerical for social events unless there is a reason to be recognised or I have some official role in the proceedings. I have to confess that I'm not really a party animal (Spock, not Kirk), but I try to enter the spirit of the event, rather than dominate it. I do dress formally for visits on solemn occasions. It's a matter of judgment (which I can obviously sometimes get wrong) for lighter-hearted matters. When young people come to arrange weddings or christenings, perhaps a little nervous about meeting a clergyman for the first time, it can be helpful to be informal. It's a matter of sensitivity to what people will find helpful, rather than having fixed procedures or rules. I try to do my pastoral work on the basis that my relationship with people in Cuxton and Halling is ideally based on friendship. I don't see you as customers or clients. When you come to see me for some reason, it's not like applying for benefits or arranging insurance or a job interview or asking help from a social worker. I'll always do what I can to minimise the bureaucracy and to make it possible for you to get what is right for you, not to bury you in paper work, confuse you and make you feel as though you were in an inferior position as a supplicant, rather than as an equal member of the Body of Christ, like me, created in God's image and redeemed by Christ's Blood. I have been told that I ought to dress up for meetings and I have wondered whether power dressing would help to impose my authority, but I don't particularly want to do that. When church meetings go as they should, we're Christian friends working together in a prayerful atmosphere, seeking God's Will for the Church today in the light of the Scriptures and the teaching of the Church. Such meetings respond to gentle guidance; they don't need to be dominated. When, however, things go wrong and people do behave badly at meetings, I have learnt, over the years, that there is nothing I can do except get into a fight which nobody can win because we've all lost if the unity of the Church is broken. So it's best to let it go. Being really cynical, I know that there is nothing important church councils can do unless they work with the Rector. So I can afford to wait until people are prepared to listen and to include everybody with equal respect.

And then, as I said, there are robes for public worship. They are normally required by Canon Law. They are not vital. What is vital is that we worship God in spirit and in truth. They do, however, mark out those who are called to lead worship, to lead the whole congregation into the Presence of God, to preside at the Sacraments of God's grace and to proclaim His Word. It is a wonderful privilege to be set apart for such work, but it doesn't make me holier or more special or more important than anyone else. All Christians constitute the people of God. All Christians are holy in Christ and in Him alone. All Christians, if not necessarily in these words, inevitably (if we really think about it) pray "And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto thee".

Roger.

¹ convicted

From the Registers

Baptisms:

26 th November	Katie Laura Buhler	Hillcrest Drive
Epiphany (6 th January)	Francesca Jean Gushlow	May Street

Confirmation & Renewal of Baptismal Vows:

19 th November	Philippa Lindsay MacDonald	Rochester
19 th November	Margaret Booth	Bush Road

Wedding Blessing:

25 th November	Christopher Potter and Jayne Taylor	Halling
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Funerals:

16 th November	Gillian Ann Bryant (67)	Strood
7 th December	Pamela Watts Schofield (86)	Cuxton
12 th December	Pauline Le Grove (74)	Strood
19 th December	Joan Hannah Harding (88)	Cuxton
20 th December	Marjorie Wretham (90)	Upper Halling
28 th December	Donald James Hicks (80)	Maximilian Way
4 th January	Dorothy May Taylor (88)	Cuxton

Roger Long RIP

Parishioners will be sorry to hear of the death of Roger Long last October. Although he lived in Chislehurst, Roger had many friends in Cuxton and Halling, visited when he could and supported our Church.

Christmas Thanks

Thanks for Christmas. Both churches were decorated beautifully as usual, with Christmas tree, cribs, candles and flowers. Thank you to all those responsible. Also for making all those Christingles and for ringing the bells and for all the music. It's wonderful to see both churches full and the whole community celebrating the Birth of our Saviour. There were also the wonderful Christmas lunch on 6th, and the Christmas Fayre & the Christmas Concert on 9th December. Thanks to all who organised and took part.

I WANT TO KNOW by JOHN DRINKWATER

I want to know why when I'm late
For school, they get into a state,
But if invited out to tea,
I mustn't ever early be.

Why, if I'm eating nice and slow,
It's "Slow-coach, hurry up, you know!"
But if I'm eating nice and quick
It's "Gobble-gibble, you'll be sick!"

Why, when I'm walking in the street
My clothes must always be complete,
While at the seaside I can call
It right with nothing on at all.

Why I must always go to bed
When other people don't instead,
And why I have to say good-night
Always before I'm ready, quite.

Why seeds grow up instead of down,
Why sixpence isn't half a crown,
Why kittens are so quickly cats,
And why the angels have no hats.

It seems, however hard they try,
That nobody can tell me why,
So I know really, I suppose,
As much as anybody knows.

St John's Draw: November £10 each Mrs Head (1), Mrs Thorne (3), Miss Mitchell (74) – drawn by Mr Silver, .
December £5 each Mr Head (2), Mrs Chidwick (79), Mrs Cheeseman (135) & Mrs Botten (160) – drawn by Mrs
Tapson. (Please contact Betty Head if you would like to join this draw.)

More Problems with Trees in the Rectory Garden

There is an odd ash tree near the Rectory boundary which neighbours fear might fall and damage their own homes and which interferes with their reception of satellite TV. The diocesan authorities and I were happy to have this tree reduced in height and the neighbours were happy to contribute to the cost of the work. The best plan would be to cut the tree down altogether, but we were prepared to accept merely a reduction in height because it is subject to that egregious tree preservation order imposed on my property in 2002. We still needed the council's permission, however. Mike Sankus, Medway Council's Senior Tree Officer, persuaded the tree surgeon we intended to employ to withdraw our application. He said that pruning might make the tree more unsafe. (Actually it needs felling.) He didn't believe the guy from the TV company who'd said that it was this tree which was damaging my neighbour's reception. He didn't really care anyway, making the somewhat chilling comment, ***It's also worth mentioning that people have no right to receive a satellite reception.*** Because the application was withdrawn, we can't appeal and Medway can claim it has no liability in the event of any injury or damage caused by that tree. So we're getting the application reinstated by a different tree surgeon.

One moral of this story is that, if you are ever tempted to contact a mate in the council offices in confidence to ask to impose a tree preservation order on someone's garden, you are hurting not only the person concerned, but his neighbours, his successors and, if he has one, his landlord. Roger.

HALARA (Halling Active Retirement Association)

Members enjoy many activities throughout the year. Rambles, Speakers, Lunch Club, Short Mat Bowls, Ten Pin Bowling, Board Games, Art Class, Theatre Trips, Outings and once a year members have a Christmas Lunch. It was at Cobdown Sport & Social Club in the Winter Wonderland Room that members celebrated. The entertainment was provided by singer, Peter Kneebone. The club is open to anyone who is over 50 and retired or semi-retired, living in Halling and the nearby area. If you would like more information please contact Carole on 01634 716 049.

Women's World Day of Prayer

This takes place on Friday 2nd March. Locally, S Michael's will host the service this year at 7.00 pm. All welcome (including men!)

An extract from No Matter What by Debbie Gliori

"Does love wear out" said Small, "does it break or bend? Can you fix it, stick it, does it mend?"

"Oh help," said Large "I'm not that clever. I just know I'll love you forever".

Small said: "But what about when you're dead and gone - would you love me then, does love go on?"

Large held Small snug as they looked out at the night, at the moon in the dark and the stars shining bright.

"Small, look at the stars – how they shine and glow. Yet some of those stars died a long time ago. Still they shine in the evening skies... love, like starlight, never dies".

St Michael's Draw (January): £10 Mrs Saunders (29), £5 each Mssrs MacDonald (26) & Bogg (22).

Quotation

John Austin Baker: "I am proud to be human not because of my own history or that of the race – I know too well what these have been – but because of Jesus; and I claim the right to exist not for what I am in myself but as his brother."

Would You Have Agreed?

When he had retired from being Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher gave this advice regarding his successor to the prime minister, Harold MacMillan. "Whomever you choose, under no account must it be Michael Ramsey, the Archbishop of York. Dr Ramsey is a theologian, a scholar and a man of prayer. Therefore, he is entirely unsuitable as Archbishop of Canterbury. I have known him all his life. I was his headmaster at Repton." Actually Ramsey was appointed. Macmillan reminded Fisher that he wasn't his headmaster.

Both the above cited in *Theology* Volume 121 Number 1.



Tommy's Talking Points

Happy New Year, though I suppose it will be well into 2018 when you read this. Well, be happy anyway. That's one of my main characteristics, everybody says. The other two are to be active and loving. Not everybody can be active, but everybody ought to be able to be loving. Being loving goes with being happy. Actually, I also think that being good looking is one of my chief points, but Master says that that is not for me to say. But just look at my picture.

We haven't had so much walking as we usually get. 21st December was the shortest day and Master promised that it would start to get lighter after that. Traditionally, the shortest day was St Thomas' Day and I'm a bit of a doubting Thomas about it getting lighter each day from then on. [Master says that what Thomas doubted was the Resurrection of Jesus, the Light of the world. Thomas did eventually see and believed and Jesus told him that everybody who believes, even though he has not seen, is blessed because it is through faith in Jesus that we have life.]

Master said that we would have a bit of a holiday Christmas week, getting up later maybe, going out when we felt like it instead of fitting our walks in around the church and that then we would see a difference. Well, let's talk about Christmas first. Our main party at the Rectory was on Christmas Eve. This was arranged at very short notice, but the whole family suddenly said they would like to come over for tea. So, on 23rd, some emergency shopping. Happily, there was still lots of good stuff in the shops and we had a fun party. After they all left, he took me up the woods for a walk before the Midnight Mass. He has this romantic notion that looking down from the open countryside onto the village Christmas Eve might be a bit like the shepherds in the shepherds' fields above Bethlehem the night Jesus was born. The only angels he actually saw were in the nativity plays at Halling and Cuxton, but who knows whether there were angels we didn't see? More prosaically, he has to keep moving and get plenty of fresh air when he has a late night. Otherwise, he'd fall asleep. Christmas Day and its octave were good. We had some relaxation and some fun.

One of my presents was a bigger food bowl. Please take the hint, Master. I also had some more toys, a new kind of biscuit (to me) and some chews.

Back to work from 2nd January (which was 31st anniversary of his coming here). But it doesn't seem to get much lighter. The leaves have mainly fallen from the trees and blow everywhere when it's windy - into the house and into the church. One churchwarden gave up trying to sweep them out to be blown straight back in again and just swept the dead leaves into a corner inside the church. They also blocked the outside drain. Master just loves stretching his arm into dirty, icy water to unblock it. It's even more fun when it's fat, rather than just leaves, blocking the pipes. Anyway, when the branches are bare, it's easier even for a short-sighted 5' 10" biped to keep to the path, especially if there is a moon as well.

We do go out in the dark, morning and afternoon. Some people have bright halogen torches. Once we saw two mysterious coloured lights up ahead at Upper Halling and Master wondered what they could be. I just barked, as I tend to at unexplained lights. It turned out that they were two dogs with red and green illumination on their collars so that their Mistress would know where they were. We later saw two spaniels with amber lights. I think that just makes it too easy for their owners! What are we? Dogs or traffic lights?

Investigating a halogen torch in the woods, I met an old friend, a runner who always makes a lot of fuss of me. So that was worth it.

The dark's OK for Master so long as it isn't really, really dark, unless it's also slippery. That doesn't affect me - four legs, sharp claws and a low centre of gravity - but it causes him big problems. One morning, in the dark, he slipped over suddenly and his glasses fell off. He had to feel around on his hands and knees in the mud until he found them. Had there been anyone to see him feeling for his glasses, he would have made quite a spectacle of himself. At least he did find them, unlike the time when he lost his other glasses in the river. The days actually only lengthen incrementally at this time of year and on many occasions the darkness has been deepened and extended by a depressing anticyclonic gloom.

It's not so slippery when it doesn't rain, but Master says it's a bit selfish to hope that it will be dry all the time. Apparently, there is actually a water shortage. Still, he'd rather go out in the dry. All credit to him though, so far this Winter, there's only been one day when he hasn't given me my total of four miles, which he considers to be my minimum daily requirement. I've been a bit worried about today. We didn't go far this morning and it's been dismal and drizzly ever since. I'm sure he won't let me down, however. He just can't sit still and stay indoors for more than a few hours at a time. One friend was thinking about getting a spaniel puppy. In another context, she had indicated that she would never walk more than seven miles in a day. When Master said that I get that or more most days, she seemed to change her mind!

Anyway, Spring is on the way. The snowdrops were blooming in Cuxton churchyard in December, there was the odd primrose in January and daffodil and hyacinth buds are showing today, 11th January. Tommy.