

Owing to Covid 19, it is impractical to print & distribute a paper copy of this magazine.

This electronic version can be found at

<http://cuxtonandhalling.org.uk/magazine.htm>

It can also be emailed to all those who may be interested. Please feel free to forward to whomsoever.

Unless things change dramatically, there will be no services either in St John's Church Halling or St Michael's Church Cuxton or the Jubilee Hall Upper Halling during the month of June. Many of you like to look at the readings we would have had and are singing the hymns at home. See below. A sermon for each week will be found at <http://cuxtonandhalling.org.uk/teaching.htm>. National worship material is available <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-liturgy-and-prayer-resources>. There are also TV and radio broadcast services.

Services at St Michael & All Angels Cuxton			
7 th June Trinity Sunday	9.30 Family Communion	Isaiah 40 vv 12-31 p724 II Corinthians 13 vv 11-14 p1167 Matthew 28 vv 16-20 p1001	A&M 95 Holy, Holy, Holy <i>Gloria in Excelsis Deo</i> Psalm 8 181 May the Grace 96 Bright the Vision 431 We Have a Gospel
14 th June Trinity 1	9.30 Holy Communion	Exodus 19 vv 1-8 p76 Romans 5 vv 1-8 p1132 Matthew 9 v35 – 10 v23 p974	SoF 607 Who Is on the Lord's Side? Psalm 100 620 Ye Servants of God 330 Let Us Break Bread 64 Colours of Day
21 st June Trinity 2	8.00 Holy Communion	Epistle & Gospel BCP 1 St. John 3. 13-24. St. Luke 14. 16-24	
	9.30 Holy Communion	Jeremiah 20 vv 7-13 p779 Romans 6 vv 1-11 p1132 Matthew 10 vv 24-39 p975	A&M 207 Praise to the Lord the 220 Fight the Good Fight 237 Take Up Thy Cross 430 We Find Thee Lord 510 Sent Forth By God's
28 th June Trinity 3	9.30 Holy Communion	Jeremiah 28 vv 5-9 p788 Romans 6 vv 12-23 p1133 Matthew 10 vv 40-42 p976	A&M 203 O Praise Ye the Lord 99 O God our Help 515 There's a Spirit 219 Soldiers of Christ 421 Strengthen for Service
Services at St John the Baptist Halling & the Jubilee Hall Upper Halling			
7th June Trinity Sunday	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	Revelation 4 vv 1-11 p1236 John 3 vv 1-15 p1065	
	11.00 Holy Communion	Isaiah 40 vv 12-31 p724 II Corinthians 13 vv 11-14 p1167 Matthew 28 vv 16-20 p1001	A&MR 167 O Worship the King <i>Gloria in Excelsis Deo</i> Psalm 8 96 Bright the Vision 160 Holy, Holy, Holy 165 O God our Help
14th June Trinity 1	11.00 Holy Communion	Exodus 19 vv 1-8 p76 Romans 5 vv 1-8 p1132 Matthew 9 v35 – 10 v23 p974	SoF 13 All People That on 44 Blessed Assurance 197 I Am a New Creation 238 In Heavenly Love 525 The Church's One 544 There Is a Redeemer
	5.30 Evening Prayer Jubilee Hall	Joshua 5 v13 – 6 v20 p219 James 5 vv 1-20 p1216	

21st June Trinity 2	11.00 Holy Communion	Jeremiah 20 vv 7-13 p779 Romans 6 vv 1-11 p1132 Matthew 10 vv 24-39 p975	HHT 3 All My Hope 1 A Man There Lived in 10 Be Thou My Vision 84 Praise We Now 32 (tune A&MR 260) God is Love 98 We Have a Gospel
Wednesday 24th June St John the Baptist	11.00 Holy Communion	Isaiah 40 vv 1-11 p723 Luke 1 vv 57-80 p1027	EH 12 On Jordan's Bank 388 Jesus Shall Reign 469 To Mercy, Pity, Peace & 273 And Now O Father 485 Thy Hand O God Has
28th June Trinity 3	11.00 Holy Communion	Jeremiah 28 vv 5-9 p788 Romans 6 vv 12-23 p1133 Matthew 10 vv 40-42 p976	HHT 9 Awake, Awake 45 Jesus Good Above All 23 Father, Lord of All 20 Eternal Ruler 34 God of Grace 89 Tell Out My Soul
Wednesday Holy Communion 9.30 am Cuxton		Thursday Holy Communion 9.30 am Halling	
3rd June	II Timothy 1 vv 1-12 Mark 12 vv 18-27	4th June	II Timothy 2 vv 8-15 Mark 12 vv 28-34
10th June	I Kings 18 vv 20-39 Matthew 5 vv 17-19	11th June Corpus Christi	I Corinthians 11 vv 23-26 John 6 vv 51-58
17th June	II Kings 2 vv 1-14 Matthew 6 vv 1-18	18th June	Isaiah 63 vv 7-9 Matthew 6 vv 7-15
24 th June Nativity of S John the Baptist	11.00 Halling followed by lunch & pudding party	Isaiah 40 vv 1-11 Luke 1 vv 57-80	25 th June Cuxton
			II Kings 24 vv 8-17 Matthew 7 vv 21-29

Copy Date July Magazine: 12th June 8.30am the Rectory.



From the Rector

In these times of lockdown, the days of the week and even the hours of the day can all seem much of a muchness. Time seems to drift. Dinner time already?

Thursday again? But at least for me, the days of the month are firmly anchored. Despite our being excluded from our church buildings, I still say Morning and Evening Prayer each day, using the monthly cycle of psalms as is in the Book of Common Prayer (1662), which I also use for the prayers and canticles. Psalm 139? It must be 29th morning of the month!

Psalms generate mixed feelings in worshippers. Some of them are hard to understand. Some of the sentiments expressed in them are quite alarming. Compared with most hymns, they are not easy to sing. On the other hand, psalms have a tremendous spiritual power. They are a wonderful resource for Christian faith. There are psalms of sublime praise. There are celebrations of God's

work in creation and redemption. There is utter and complete repentance for sin. There are pleas and intercessions. There is lamentation for the sorrows of the individual and of the whole people of God. The LORD Himself is interrogated as well as worshipped. There is counsel as to how we should live, together with accounts of the consequences of the choices we make. The Book of Psalms couldn't deal with the whole range of human experience and all our human emotions if it did not include passages which are difficult to understand and express some alarming emotions. You can keep yourself grounded reading the psalms by remembering that they are the words that Jesus Himself used in public worship and private prayer. While it is an authentic expression of our only too human emotion that, for example, the psalmist demands the death of his enemies, we also know that, while Jesus fully understands how the psalmist feels, He does not pray the same prayer in the same way. Christian people are called to pray the psalms the way Jesus prayed them, indeed to pray the psalms with Jesus today.

When we pray *Thy Will be done*, our prayers are at one with the prayers of Jesus and the Holy Spirit for the good of all that God has made.

Also, we don't have to sing the psalms. Sometimes it can be better to say them or to read them slowly and meditatively. But they were composed to be sung and another dimension is added when they are sung to the best our human ability to the glory of God.

Having said all that – that the whole Book of Psalms, like the whole of the Bible is of infinitely

value as the Word of God – I still have to admit that there are some psalms which mean a lot more to me than others. One of those is Psalm 139. Reading it this morning, it seemed to have a lot to say to me in our present troubles and it seemed good to me to share these thoughts with you in this magazine. Please do share the magazine with those who can't receive it at the moment. You can forward it by email, draw their attention to my webpage or even print off the odd copy for a friend.

Day 29. Morning Prayer.

Psalm 139. *Domine, probasti*

O LORD, thou hast searched me out and known me : thou knowest my down-sitting and mine up-rising, thou understandest my thoughts long before. Thou art about my path, and about my bed : and spiest out all my ways. For lo, there is not a word in my tongue : but thou, O Lord, knowest it altogether. Thou hast fashioned me behind and before : and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful and excellent for me : I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go then from thy Spirit : or whither shall I go then from thy presence? If I climb up into heaven, thou art there : if I go down to hell, thou art there also. If I take the wings of the morning : and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there also shall thy hand lead me : and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Peradventure the darkness shall cover me : then shall my night be turned to day. Yea, the darkness is no darkness with thee, but the night is as clear as the day : the darkness and light to thee are both alike. For my reins are thine : thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks unto thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made : marvellous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well. My bones are not hid from thee : though I be made secretly, and fashioned beneath in the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect : and in thy book were all my members written; Which day by day were fashioned : when as yet there was none of them. How dear are thy counsels unto me, O God : O how great is the sum of them! If I tell them, they are more in number than the sand : when I wake up I am present with thee. Wilt thou not slay the wicked, O God : depart from me, ye blood-thirsty men. For they speak unrighteously against thee : and thine enemies take thy Name in vain. Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee : and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? Yea, I hate them right sore : even as though they were mine enemies. Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart : prove me, and examine my thoughts. Look well if there be any way of wickedness in me : and lead me in the way everlasting.

O LORD, thou hast searched me out and known me. God knows everyone of us personally. Jesus says that not a sparrow falls to the earth without God and that we are worth more than many sparrows. He is my God. He is my Father. Jesus is my friend. He is my Brother. My body is the Temple of the Holy Ghost. These are words that every Christian can say knowing that everyone of us is a much-loved child of God. How much loved? So much loved that He was prepared to lay down His life for us.

Thou knowest my down-sitting and mine up-rising. Whatever we do, wherever we are, God is with us. His loving Presence is everywhere and we dwell in His love. (I sometimes smile at the fact that it is customary to sit at the colon in the first verse of a psalm, just before these words in this particular psalm!)

Thou understandest my thoughts long before. God knows our thoughts. He knows our worries and our sorrows. He knows our delights and our hopes. He knows all about us. And of course He knows any sinful thoughts too. *O worship the*

LORD in the beauty of holiness. We are not holy if we have thoughts of anger or hatred of other people in our hearts, if we desire revenge or refuse to forgive what people have done to us. *Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.* We are not holy if we are dishonest or violent, if we seek to exploit other people or to advance ourselves at somebody else's expense, if our hearts are hardened against those who are in need, if we entertain thoughts unworthy of those who are temples of the Holy Ghost.

Thou art about my path, and about my bed : and spiest out all my ways. When the angel says to Joseph, *Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost,* he tells Joseph that this child Jesus fulfils the prophecy because He is Emmanuel, which means *God with us.* So, when you are lying in bed, walking down the High Street, digging your garden, catching the bus, sitting at your desk, God is with you. There is nothing to fear. You can talk to Him in prayer if you like. Equally, your calling is to behave as in the Presence of God wherever you are. *Thou hast fashioned me behind and before : and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful and excellent for me : I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go then from thy Spirit : or whither shall I go then from thy presence? If I climb up into heaven, thou art there : if I go down to hell, thou art there also. If I take the wings of the morning : and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there also shall thy hand lead me : and thy right hand shall hold me.*

If I say, Peradventure the darkness shall cover me : then shall my night be turned to day. Yea, the darkness is no darkness with thee, but the night is as clear as the day : the darkness and light to thee are both alike. There is no reason to be fearful. Wherever you are, God is with you. This is so if you are living in isolation or are in hospital or in a care home. It is true whether we are sick or well, whether we are rich or poor. There is nowhere that God will not be with you. You can always talk to Him and He always hears our prayers even though, for reasons we may not understand, we may find ourselves in some very dark places.

It occurs to me, as I write this meditation, that you and I may well be God's instruments in bringing

light into the darkness of other people – a kind word, a helping hand, a charitable donation, prayer offered on their behalf. Given that it is more blessed to give than to receive, we shall be richly blessed in so doing.

For my reins are thine : thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks unto thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made : marvellous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well. My bones are not hid from thee : though I be made secretly, and fashioned beneath in the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect : and in thy book were all my members written; Which day by day were fashioned : when as yet there was none of them. It is wonderful how a child grows in the womb. We understand the processes better now than people knew them in biblical times, but they are no less amazing for the knowledge that we now have. *Fearfully and wonderfully made.* We are God's workmanship. No wonder we are called to respect ourselves and to respect one another. *By the grace of God I am what I am* and so are you. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Ghost. *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

In other biblical passages, this is taken further still. Not only did God know us in the womb, not only has He made our physical bodies, not only has He made us the people that we are in this world, He has known us in all eternity. He has made us to be His children and He has prepared lives for us to lead, good works for us in which we are called to walk.

And there is much we cannot understand and much that we question. Why Covid 19 is a very good question just at this time. It is right to question and sometimes the answers we can discover point the way to solving our problems. But as S Paul says in Romans 9 and as God Himself says in the last chapters of Job, there will always be much that we weak creatures cannot understand of the infinite wisdom of our Creator.

Wilt thou not slay the wicked, O God : depart from me, ye blood-thirsty men. For they speak unrighteously against thee : and thine enemies take thy Name in vain. Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee : and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? Yea, I hate them

right sore : even as though they were mine enemies. When praying Psalm 139, especially at a public service, it is very tempting to leave out these verses (19-22). They don't seem very Christian. They don't look like sentiments which Jesus would share. Quite the contrary! *God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ did for us.* So what do we say about sinners who oppose God and lead blood-thirsty lives? Don't we send armies to fight for justice and employ police forces to catch criminals and bring them before the courts for punishment? If we love God, aren't we indignant with those who despise Him and mock our faith? What would Jesus do? He prayed, *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.* Do we leave out or gloss over such difficult verses or do

we seek God's grace to reconcile the claims of justice and mercy?

Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart : prove me, and examine my thoughts. Look well if there be any way of wickedness in me : and lead me in the way everlasting. We conclude the psalm by asking God's grace to conform our lives utterly and completely to His Will for us, that God will lead me in the way everlasting. What is the way everlasting? It is the path through this world set out in the counsels of the everlasting God – His holy law. Jesus is the eternal Way, just as He is the eternal Truth and eternal Life. The way everlasting is the path we follow through this world of time and space into the eternal life which is God's gift to us in Jesus Christ. Roger.

A Little Anecdote

A city dweller takes a country walk one extremely cold morning. To his horror, he sees that a large group of cows with their calves have actually become frozen to the frost bound turf. As he stands wondering what to do, an old lady strides purposefully out from behind some trees and commences to sing hymns. Slowly the cattle warm sufficiently to escape their icy prison and make their way to the relative comfort of the barn. The old lady's name? Thora Hird.



Christian Aid

Many people like to give to the work of Christian Aid in Christian Aid week which falls in May. This year, for obvious reasons, many of the normal fund-raising events have not been possible, but, as with many other missions and charities in a similar position, the need is greater than ever. If you would like to send a donation to Christian Aid this year, the best plan is probably to use this website. <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/appeals/key-appeals/christian-aid-week>

If that is not possible, you could leave a cheque (payable "Christian Aid" or cash at the Rectory clearly labelled for Christian Aid and I'll send it on to them.

Nuggets From Science and Christian Belief April 2020

Peter Bussey explains brilliantly why humanity should not lose faith in what has been called Natural Law. Right and wrong truly exist. There is justice and there is injustice. Natural Law is the same always and everywhere. It applies to every human culture. It makes rational sense. It resonates with a good conscience. It is the way we are made to live. It conforms to our essential human nature, as made in the image of God. It is guaranteed by the authority of God Himself. It is revealed in Scripture and, above all, in the life of Jesus Christ. It is because God redeems us that we become re-attuned to its truth. Bussey warns that our subjectivity, moral relativism, etc., have not brought us freedom so much as a curtailment of our liberty. He says, *In the search for freedom (by abandoning Natural Law) we lose it, along with our own true nature. In the end, there may be more freedom in God's Law in our hearts than in state-imposed penalties for every misdemeanour.*

Mark Boone quotes C S Lewis brilliantly on how we come to know God.

"Theology is, in a sense, an experimental science. I mean that it is like the other experimental sciences in some ways, but not in all. If you are a geologist studying rocks, you have to go and find the rocks. They will not come to you, and if you go to them they cannot run away. The initiative lies

all on your side. But suppose you are a zoologist. That is a bit different from studying rocks. The wild animals will not come to you: but they can run away from you. Unless you keep very quiet, they will. There is beginning to be a tiny little trace of initiative on their side. Now a stage higher; suppose you want to get to know a human person. If he is determined not to let you, you will not get to know him. You have to win his confidence. In this case the initiative is equally divided — it takes two to make a friendship. When you come to knowing God, the initiative lies on His side.”

Finally, Tim Middleton quotes Bethany Sollereder, who asks us to think of the whole of creation as being like a computer generated picture. “Christ,” says Sollereder,, “can be thought of as both the central pixel and the organising algorithm.” Compare Colossians 1¹⁵⁻²⁰.

St Michael's Draw: £10 to Mr Beaney (20), £5 each to Mr Maxwell (6) & Mr McCabe (8).

From the Registers

Funeral:
May 6th

Brian William (Bill) Underdown

Ladywood Road

Cuxton to Halling

I completed this walk, alone, for personal exercise during the ‘lockdown’ measures as a consequence of the covid-19 outbreak. The parish magazine is to be published on-line only so this is a marvellous opportunity to include photographs in colour. Spring is in full flow. Young lambs and calves are out in the fields. Birds are busy nesting. The temperature outdoors is rising and there is a welcome increase of sunshine.



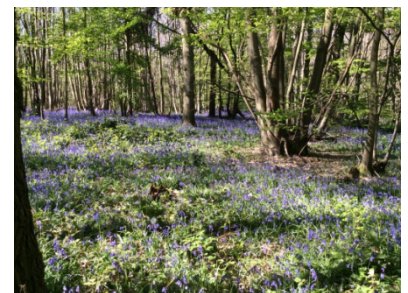
My walk begins at St Michael & All Angels Church, Cuxton, and follows a well known route along the woodland footpaths to Halling and then to St John the Baptist Church, Halling. It is such a clear day that I can not resist taking photographs. I look back towards Rochester and then across the fields and River Medway. As soon as I leave the churchyard to go up Church Hill. I can see Rochester. I can pick out the castle, the Cathedral, the motorway bridge and a few other landmarks. The

views from the top of Church Hill are amongst my favourites and remind me of just how privileged I am to live in Cuxton.

I pass the beacon at the top of the hill and the field with sheep and two black horses then on to the start of the woodland pathway. The trees and bushes are at various stage of rejuvenation. Some are in bud, some have or are growing new green leaves and a few have blossom. Coupled with dappled sunlight this is a beautiful sight which lifts my spirits. I walk on to the Warren and I am greeted with the scent of wild garlic with lush green broad leaved ground level foliage. As I walk further I start to see larger clumps of bluebells.



These are a joy to see. For me they herald the serious onset of spring moving towards summer. Most years I go to Emmett's Garden to see the bluebells but our woods have a marvellous display across quite a wide area. I cannot resist taking a few more photos. It is interesting to compare my photos from Emmett's Garden and our woods.



Emmett's Garden. Photo taken in May 2018 (Published by kind permission of the National Trust) above, 'Our' woods 2020. The bluebells at Emmett's Garden seem more dense but 'our' bluebells are every bit as beautiful. Perhaps they have more space to grow and develop without over-crowding.

The pathway is clear and free from the mud experienced just before lockdown. There are many birds flying high and nest building in the bushes. They chatter incessantly. What a joy to hear and see.

My route takes me down a sharp incline to the field above Chapel Lane. Part way down this narrow path I find a little den made from branches. I have never seen it before although I have traversed this path on many occasions. It is deserted at the moment but I guess that it is favourite spot for young adventurers and explorers.

I walk down Chapel Lane and cross over The



Street to Meadow Close. I pass several houses on my left and then take the first footpath on my right. The footpath is enclosed, thankfully. On my right there is a



very steep drop into a quarry. Gradually the path, although still fenced, opens out to fields on my left. Part way down the hill I stop to take in a fabulous

panorama across the River Medway stretching from the view point on Bluebell Hill, through Wouldham with All Saints Church near the water front, onto Rochester, the Medway Bridge and even round to Cuxton.

(You may need to enlarge the photos to identify these features!)

My footpath leads down to Whittings Farm and the roundabout on the A228 at Peters Bridge. From here I cross the main road and head into Halling. I take the first road on my right, Howlsmere Close, and walk passed Halling Primary School on route to the river front. The footpath along this stretch of the River Medway is always interesting with plenty to watch and see. There is a fresh breeze making constant movement of the water and a rushing sound amongst the reeds. A pair of swans are gliding serenely up and down the river and dipping their beaks into the water at random objects. A grebe surfaces mid river then bobs down again before re-surfacing some distance down stream. Gulls or Common Terns fly high observing every move trying to

spy a tasty morsel. It is a pleasure to walk along this lovely river path. St John the Baptist Church



comes into view with its characteristic tower and clock face.

This is the end of my journey. I have had a lovely walk, in beautiful sunshine, through some outstanding countryside. There may be a lockdown, there may be restrictions, without doubt these are scary times yet we have so much to enjoy and for which we should be truly thankful.

Stay safe - Take care
Holly Croft



24th June

This picture portrays the procession from St John's Church to the Lower Recreation Ground for the first Halling Fun Day on 24th June 1988. The two people apart from me at the front are Michael Turnbull who was then Bishop of Rochester and Bob Smith, then chairman of Halling Parish Council. The reason it was on 24th of June is that this is the Feast of the Nativity (birthday) of St John the Baptist, our patron saint. We processed to the Rec (many in fancy dress) after the service in Church for



a traditional village fete. The plan for this year was a pudding party after our service on June 24th. I'm afraid that it seems unlikely that we shall be able to proceed with these kinds of events this year, but, who knows? Whatever happens about lockdown, as Bishop Simon (of Tonbridge) says: "We know that 'The word of God is not chained' (2 Timothy 2:9) and that the Holy Spirit will be doing a lasting and graceful work in the hearts of many."

So what about John the Baptist? Who was he and what did he do? Six month's older than Jesus, he was the child of Mary's much older cousin, Elisabeth. Elisabeth was married to an elderly priest, Zacharias. They had given up hope of ever having children until, one day, Zacharias had a vision when he was ministering in the Temple at Jerusalem. The angel Gabriel told him that Elisabeth would conceive and bear a son. This son was to be called John. He wouldn't drink alcohol, but he would be filled with the Holy Spirit. He would grow up to prepare the people for the coming of God's Kingdom. Zacharias didn't believe the angel! So the angel said that he would be dumb until the child was born. Nine months later, the family were summoned to the naming ceremony (the circumcision of a Jewish boy). The guests wanted to call the boy Zacharias after his father, but the old priest wrote on a tablet that he should be called John. As soon as he had done this, he recovered his power of speech and the first thing he did was to sing a hymn of praise to God.

We don't hear anything more of John until he is a grown man preaching the Kingdom of God in the desert and baptising vast multitudes in the River Jordan. He tells people to prepare for the coming Kingdom of God. They are to repent of their sins and to be baptised. So what ought they to do? Well, we all know what we ought to do, to share the good things we have with other people, especially those in need, to live honestly and without violence, etc., etc., etc.. You fill in the gaps.

John told the people that someone much greater than he was coming. There was a great deal of interest and excitement and, one day, Jesus appeared on the banks of the Jordan asking John to baptise Him. Although he feels unworthy to baptise Jesus, Jesus tells him he must. So he does. The Holy Spirit is seen to come on Jesus. God acknowledges Jesus as His Son. John proclaims Jesus to his followers and they follow Jesus and begin to recruit others. So the band of faithful people grows.

One of the King Herods (not the one who killed the baby boys in the Christmas story, but all the Herod family were a rotten lot) imprisoned John for criticising his disgraceful behaviour in forcing his brother to divorce his wife so that he could marry her himself. At Herod's birthday party, the daughter of this woman danced so entrancingly that Herod told her she could have anything she wanted up to half his kingdom. The girl's mother told her to ask for John the Baptist's head on a plate. I could have ended by saying, "And that was the end of John?" but, if it was, why are there millions and millions of Christians in the world 2,000 years later, trusting in the same Jesus John trusted in, working for the Kingdom of God which John proclaimed and indeed celebrating John's birthday six months before Christmas every year?

Saint John Baptist's Day.

The Collect.

ALMIGHTY God, by whose providence thy servant John Baptist was wonderfully born, and sent to prepare the way of thy Son our Saviour, by preaching of repentance; Make us so to follow his doctrine and holy life, that we may truly repent according to his preaching; and after his example constantly speak the truth, boldly rebuke vice, and patiently suffer for the truth's sake; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

For the Epistle. Isaiah 40. 1.

COMFORT ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain:

And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever. O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.

The Gospel. St. Luke 1. 57.

ELISABETH'S full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son. And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her. And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father. And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John. And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name. And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called. And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all. And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God. And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judaea. And all they that heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be! And the hand of the Lord was with him. And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; The oath which he swore to our father Abraham, That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life. And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.



Tommy's Talking Points

We may not be able to go anywhere, but we do like it here. By here, I mean the Rectory, the parish and the surrounding countryside. Master took a fresh photograph of me for this magazine because he wanted to show you something of our forget-me-nots. I complained that the picture is not well-composed, but he blamed me because I wouldn't stay still while he was trying to compose it!

There is a story to these forget-me-nots. When Master came here, there was in the garden a large bed with currants and other soft fruits. This had become rather unruly and, one church fete, an elderly gentleman was sitting on the slope just above it, when his chair overturned and deposited him amidst the thorns. Master had probably already decided to replace the fruit bushes with roses, which he did. At the time, however, roses were rather too expensive to plant as many as there should have been to fill up the area. Since then, a couple of extra bushes (including a gift from the Mothers' Union) have been planted, but rather more have died. So there is quite a lot of bare earth which doesn't look very elegant and needs a lot of hoeing, but he stuck with the principle that only roses should grow in a rose bed.

Master also has a number of flower pots along his front wall. For the Spring, these are normally planted with bulbs. This year there were some beautiful hyacinths, including some of a remarkable purple hue. In the Summer, the idea was bedding plants, but we have a plague of slugs and such flowers as petunias, salvias, lobelia, etc. are just eaten within days of their being planted. Busy lizzies were fine until they all succumbed to some disease nationally. Geraniums do well and are not eaten by slugs, but one year, for a change, he decided to plant some half hardy fuchsias. These did not die off as expected in the Autumn and, as it seemed a pity to take them out while they were still flowering, he left them where they were and we had no bulbs the following Spring. He topped up the soil in the pots with home made compost from our own heap (This is vital to the story.) and we had another Summer of beautiful fuchsias. The next Autumn, they had to come out to make way for some spring bulbs, but they were still flowering. So he used them to fill up a bare corner of the rose bed where they now flourish. It turned out that the home made compost contained forget-me-not seed and gradually the forget-me-nots are taking over all the bare parts of the rose bed and there are swathes of pale blue spreading out over the bare soil, which means much less weeding. The stalks in the foreground are the remains of this year's hyacinths and we are back to geraniums in the pots.

Anyway, out of the garden, we are still taking our daily mandatory exercise in the woods and fields. This is usually a run now, which he is really enjoying tremendously, albeit slowly. We meet more people and dogs than we do in normal times, partly because they need to get out once a day too, partly because we are sometimes a bit later now that we can say Morning Prayer when we like, not necessarily at 7.15. It is really nice to see families out with their children and generally to see neighbours enjoying their local countryside. There is still plenty of room for social distancing.

The air is cleaner. The birdsong is easier to hear. We saw a great tit in the birdbath. He thought he heard a cuckoo begin the dawn chorus on 5th May, but he was still in bed and half asleep and he might have dreamt it. The stars are more clearly seen, though he hasn't yet managed to spot that comet which we were promised at the end of April. Everything is fresher because there is much less pollution during the lockdown. Master's friend said that it reminds him of his rural childhood in the 1960s. Master said the same thing. You let all this pollution catch up with you gradually so that you hardly noticed it, though Master says he does remember taking his then dog out for evening walks when he was in his teens (say 50+ years ago) and first noticing that it was no longer possible to see the night sky for the orange glow of the streetlights reflected by the polluted atmosphere we all have to breathe. Then, quite suddenly, we all notice how much fresher things are when the air is clean. Shall you go back to your old ways when the virus is conquered if it ever is?

Master read in the paper that, while sadly so many have been dying of the virus, the improvement in air quality has actually saved the lives of quite a lot of people who might probably have died of other respiratory diseases this year. Did high levels of pollution worldwide make human beings more susceptible to the Covid 19 pandemic? So, are you human beings going to go back to polluting the atmosphere at pre-virus rates or are you going to try to keep the world green? Maybe, if you have realised how much work you can do from home and that a nice walk in the local woods is as enjoyable as a drive to some distant beauty spot or place of entertainment, you'll keep on driving and flying less?

There also seems to be a great spirit of cheerfulness and helpfulness about during the pandemic. Long may it continue!

So what have we seen out and about? There are some almost black pheasants in Dean Valley, along with all the more conventionally plumaged birds in the woods. In the wooded and fenced area at the bottom of Dean Valley, you can sometimes see the woodland cattle and the magnificent sheep. There are some rabbits in the field opposite, though they are hard to spot if you are as short-sighted as Master. One creature he thought might be a rabbit turned out to have a long bushy tail, suitable for jumping from branch to branch at the tops of the trees. Higher in the valley, the lambs and calves are growing up. As you walk from Cuxton up through the woods to Upper Halling, before you reach the best of the bluebells, there is a carpet of white

flowers with a fairly strong aroma. These are wild garlic or ramsoms. If the food shops run short again, you can eat every part of these plants.

There are plenty of blue bugles, also some speedwell (a bit like forget-me-nots, only a deeper blue). Buttercups carpet Cuxton churchyard and the fields above. There are white anemones in the woods and blue ones in Halling Cemetery. There are common daisies in our lawn and dandelions in the drive! We've seen plenty of white dead nettle and yellow archangel, though not as much of the latter, I think, as last year. Then there was an area at Upper Halling almost covered by it. Perhaps that is yet to come. More of them do seem to be coming out as the days go by.

He took the flower book on one of our essential walks because he wanted to tell you the name of one particularly attractive flower – white with quite delicate foliage – but at first he couldn't find any and then, when he did, he couldn't get beyond "probably some kind of daisy". Another white flower he decided was probably a type of bedstraw. It has flowers like the garlic, but leaves like bedstraw, only the nearest resemblance he could find in the book grows to 3' and these were more like 3'!

It was worthwhile because he took pencil and paper and used it to note down the things he did recognise. There is an abundance of white may blossom and a profusion of cow parsley. Still in the white spectrum, there are plenty of wild strawberries – possibly supplying dessert if lockdown continues. There's the odd mauve mallow and quite a lot of purple vetch. Clover is coming into flower too. So there's a lot to see if you keep your eyes open, though the scents are more interesting to me and there is an abundance of them too. Hence running around with my tail wagging across the fields and in and out of the bushes. Last Sunday morning, before our Holy Communion taken by him alone, we saw a cowslip in Cuxton churchyard as we deviated from the concrete path for reasons of social distancing.

The evenings now are light till nearly 9.00 and I like to sit in the porch or on the upstairs landing surveying my domain. As dusk descends, the foxes come out and I have a good bark at them. Master told me off for barking (through the window) at what he called a dear little cub come up to the birdbath for a drink. He pointed out that I have a bowl of clean water regularly refilled and the poor wild animals just have to find their own food and drink. When we go out at 10.00 into the garden, I soon chase off any foxes or badgers, though he warns me that I'd be in trouble if they turned on me. I suppose he'd have to save me! I find it's generally a waste of time chasing squirrels. So I don't bother.

Well, what does the future hold? The bishops are talking about easing the restrictions incrementally. Master is now allowed into the church buildings on his own to pray, but he can't let anyone else in with him. He would now be allowed to live stream the service from church if he had the equipment and the skill to use it. There is also the possibility of a Zoom conference call service, but, from what he hears, the technology keeps going wrong and the atmosphere can be more like a meeting than a service. So, probably, unless there is no sign at all of all this ever ending, he'll stick with what he's doing – saying Morning and Evening Prayer daily at home (including praying prayer requests) and celebrating Holy Communion at home alone on Sundays, with a sermon emailed to everyone who wants it and on his webpage cuxtonandhall.org.uk.

In the foreseeable future, it might be possible to recommence weddings, funerals and christenings in church, but with social distancing and it's not happening yet. In the longer term, normal services should return, but with social distancing unless the virus ceases to be a threat. Most people seem to be hoping for a vaccine. Another possibility would be the development of effective treatment for those who contract it. The "Spanish Flu" a hundred years ago just sort of fizzled out, despite humanity not finding a vaccine or a cure. It mutated into a less virulent form. As one of Master's doctor's friends said, it's not in the interests of a virus to kill its hosts, because it kills itself when it does. Anyway, pray, that one way or another, this virus ceases to be a threat. I want to meet up with all my friends again and I expect you do too. In the meantime, keep well all of you and let Master know how you are getting on, especially if you need help.

Tommy, the Rectory Spaniel.

Personal Memories of VE Day 1945

I was evacuated from Bexleyheath to Greater Nottingham, together with my mother and younger brother Bernard, late June or early July 1944 after two near misses from V2 flying bombs near our then home. By VE Day on Tuesday 8th May 1945, we were housed in our third billet in Bracken Close in Broxtowe. This in the far north-west corner of Greater Nottingham, about 1 ¼ miles from what is now Junction 26 on the M1 motorway.

Arriving back from school around 4.30 pm, I was greeted by people building a giant bonfire at the closed end of the Close, using any old wood or broken furniture or any other burnable material that came to hand. Upon enquiry, I was told that the German government had collapsed and that the most senior German officer that could be found, Admiral Donitz, had signed the German surrender and therefore the war in Europe had ended. There was to be a bonfire, fireworks, tea and buns when it became dark (about 9.00 pm). Also the weather was dry but cloudy. It would seem that the fireworks had been in store since before the war in a local newsagent's shop and had been intended for sale Guy Fawkes's Night 193!

The fireworks must have been selected because, after an initial big bang, at which the fire was ignited, the rest of the display consisted of rockets and units which climbed quite slowly, then to go "pop", leaving the sky filled with coloured flames that drifted slowly until they went out. Nothing at all seemed to fall from the sky onto those watching the display. After this had finished, came the tea and buns or lemonade. All very nice, if I remember correctly.

Mum, Bernard (aged 2 ½ years) and I had soon to leave, because it was long past his bedtime and I (10 ½ years) had to be in school on Wednesday morning for prayers in the school hall for 9.10 am. I arrived in time to take my place with other boys in class 4B. It was noticeable that something like a quarter of the school members were late and therefore not admitted to Wednesday morning prayers. Usually these boys would have been given a detention of one hour duration but I suppose with so many potential detendants and that nights such as the previous one only happen once in a lifetime, nothing more was said or done.

I asked my brother Bernard two days ago if he could remember anything about the VE day events that I have described? He could not! But he remembered me pushing him in a pram from Bracken Close to see the cows in a field beside the unmade up Mooley's Lane. This lane has now, along with Mooley's Farm, disappeared under the western outer loop road.

Would you believe it? Just ½ mile north-west of bracken Close (on a development built since I was evacuated there in 1944, there is now a Cuxton Close! Malcolm Curnow.

Isaiah 11 And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots:

² And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; ³ And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: ⁴ But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth: with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. ⁵ And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.

⁶ The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. ⁷ And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. ⁸ And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. ⁹ They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. ¹⁰ And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.

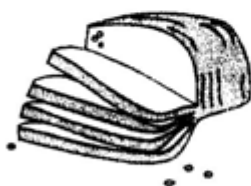
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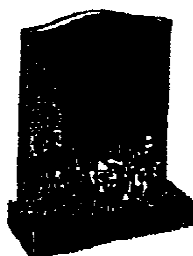
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