

Services at St Michael & All Angels Cuxton			
1 st March Ash Wednesday	7.30 pm Holy Communion	Joel 2 vv 1-17 p912 II Corinthians 5 v20 – 6 v10 p1161 John 8 vv 1-11 p1073	
5 th March Lent 1	9.30 Family Communion	Genesis 2 v15 - 3 v7 p4 Romans 5 vv 12-19 p1132 Matthew 4 vv 1-11 p967	
12 th March Lent 2	9.30 Holy Communion	Genesis 12 vv 1-4 p13 Romans 4 vv 1-17 p1131 John 3 vv 1-17 p1065	
19 th March Lent 3	8.00 Holy Communion	Epistle & Gospel BCP	
	9.30 Holy Communion	Exodus 17 vv 1-7 p75 Romans 5 vv 1-11 p1132 John 4 vv 4-42 p1066	
26 th March Lent 4 Mothering Sunday	9.30 Family Communion	I Samuel 16 vv 1-13 p287 John 9 vv 1-41 p1075	
2 nd April Lent 5 Passion Sunday	9.30 Family Communion	Ezekiel 37 vv 1-14 p868 Romans 8 vv 6-11 p1134 John 11 vv 1-45 p1077	
Services at St John the Baptist Halling & The Jubilee Hall Upper Halling			
1 st March Ash Wednesday	9.30 am Holy Communion	Joel 2 vv 1-17 p912 John 8 vv 1-11 p1073	
5 th March Lent 1	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	Deuteronomy 6 vv 4-25 p185 Luke 15 vv 1-10 p1048	
	11.00 Holy Communion & Holy Baptism	Genesis 2 v15 - 3 v7 p4 Romans 5 vv 12-19 p1132 Matthew 4 vv 1-11 p967	
12 th March Lent 2	11.00 Holy Communion	Genesis 12 vv 1-4 p13 Romans 4 vv 1-17 p1131 John 3 vv 1-17 p1065	
	5.30 Evening Prayer Jubilee Hall	Numbers 21 vv 4-9 p158 Luke 14 vv 25-33 p1048	
19 th March Lent 3	11.00 Holy Communion	Exodus 17 vv 1-7 p75 Romans 5 vv 1-11 p1132 John 4 vv 4-42 p1066	
26 th March Lent 4 Mothering Sunday	11.00 Family Communion	I Samuel 16 vv 1-13 p287 Ephesians 5 vv 8-14 p1176 John 9 vv 1-41 p1075	
2 nd April Lent 5 Passion Sunday	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	Lamentations 3 vv 19-33 p826 Matthew 20 vv 17-34 p968	
	11.00 Holy Communion	Ezekiel 37 vv 1-14 p868 Romans 8 vv 6-11 p1134 John 11 vv 1-45 p1077	
Wednesday Holy Communion 9.30 @ St Michael's		Thursday Holy Communion 9.30 @ St John's	
1 st March Ash Wednesday @ St Michael's	7.30 pm Joel 2 vv 1-17 p912 II Corinthians 5 v20 – 6 v10 p1161 John 8 vv 1-11 p1073	1 st March Ash Wednesday 9.30 @ St John's	Joel 2 vv 1-17 p912 John 8 vv 1-11 p1073
Thursday 2 nd March @ St Michael's (S Chad)	Deuteronomy 30 vv 15-20 Luke 9 vv 22-25		See St Michael's
8 th March	Jonah 3 Luke 11 vv 29-32	9 th March	Isaiah 55 Mathew 7 vv 7-12
15 th March	Jeremiah 18 vv 18-20 Matthew 20 vv 17-28	16 th March	Jeremiah 17 vv 5-10 Luke 16 vv 19-31
22 nd March	Deuteronomy 4 vv 1-9 Matthew 5 vv 17-19	23 rd March	Jeremiah 7 vv 23-28 Luke 11 vv 14-23
29 th March	Isaiah 49 vv 8-15 John 5 vv 17-30	30 th March	Exodus 32 vv 7-14 John 5 vv 31-47

Copy Date April Magazine: 10th March 8.30 am Rectory.

Contributions of articles, opinions, questions and historical and nature notes are welcome for possible inclusion – anything in fact which might be of interest to the inhabitants of Cuxton and Halling. Please send e mail or paper contributions to the Rectory by 8.30 am on copy day. Advertisements are also welcome at an extremely reasonable yearly rate £40-£80 depending on size. If you think this magazine is good value, please encourage your friends and neighbours to take it. Ask your street distributor or the Rector to add new subscribers.



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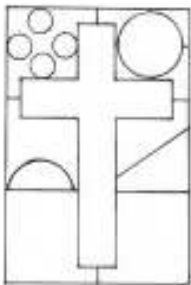
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A Warm Welcome For Our Bulgarian Orthodox Friends

A few weeks ago, the archdeacon circulated a request to churches in the area from the Bulgarian Orthodox Church who were looking for a place where they could worship together. I invited them to come and have a look at our churches, which they did, and then they went to see one or two others and then they chose St Michael's, which is very pleasing. At first, a couple of the Orthodox just met Tommy and me. Later they came to one of our Sunday services and felt warmly welcomed by our regular congregation and stayed on for coffee in the hall. We decided that, when their priest came over from Bulgaria, they would hold a service one Saturday morning and, if it went well, and we could all obtain the necessary permissions, there could be a more regular arrangement, meeting in St Michael's on Saturday mornings, perhaps monthly.

Today was the day (21st January) and I'm writing it all up while it is still fresh in my memory. Of course, you are all welcome to come. There were

people not only from Cuxton and the Medway Towns, but also places like Woking and Oxford. We are all welcome, but the way they conduct the service is unfamiliar and a lot of it is in languages other than English. I think you would still feel, however, the warmth of Christian fellowship and experience something of what it is to worship. Our public worship seeks to take us up into the worship of heaven so that our prayers and praises on earth are joined with those of the angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven. That is true whatever denomination or part of God's Church we belong to.

It was appropriate that this first Orthodox service at St Michael's was in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. You see, you are either a Christian or you are not. If you know Jesus as your Saviour, you are a Christian. If you are Christians you are members of the Body of Christ. You are the Bride of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. You are the family of God, His adopted children, brothers and sisters with all your fellow Christians, members one of another, participants in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. The things which divide us - the way we conduct worship, the way we govern the Church, even

points of doctrine - are all secondary to that essential unity which we have in Christ. He prayed that we might be one, He in us and we in him; God in us and we in God; the unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit encompassing the unity of God's Church, all in the unity of divine love, which is eternal life. The Orthodox do things differently from what we are used to. They are, nevertheless, our brothers and sisters in Christ.

I expected that the Orthodox priest would be a venerable old man with a long beard and possibly rather severe and stern. In fact, the Rev. Dr. Dobromir Dimitrov is young enough to be my son and a very joyful young man. In fact, the whole occasion was characterised by Christian joy and loving fellowship. He read parts of the service from a tablet computer, rather than from beautifully inscribed manuscripts as you might have supposed!

They had brought an icon of Michael the Archangel and also icons of St Alban, the first British martyr (a Roman soldier who gave his life to save another Christian from execution); Queen Bertha (who supported St Augustine's mission to Kent in 451); St Cuthbert (missionary to the North of England) and St Hilda, Abbess of Whitby (who played a major role in the Synod of Whitby which brought reconciliation between the divergent Celtic and Roman churches in England in 664). All these saints played key roles in the witness of the Church in our country. Father Dobromir presented us with an icon of St Paul, which he had himself painted. Paul wrote that wonderful XIIIth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians in which the apostle tells us that of the three great Christian virtues of faith, hope and love, love is the greatest. Faith and hope will no longer be needed in heaven, but love is for ever. (By the way, if you think icons are old fashioned, this one has an email address on the back, Fr Dobrimor's, not St Paul's.)

Old fashioned or not, icons have always been controversial in the Church. If they were regarded as images, of course it would be contrary to the Ten Commandments to make them and it would be a serious sin to worship them or what they might be thought to represent. If, however, we think of icons as the pictorial equivalent of sacred music or of an inspiring sermon, something to focus our hearts on God and His Love so that we are lost in wonder, love and praise, then we may

see them as potentially means by which we might grow closer to God.

The service itself was conducted in three principal languages: Old Church Slavonic, Bulgarian and English. I'm only familiar with the last! Hebrew or Aramaic words like *Alleluia* and *Amen* are used in the Orthodox liturgy just as we use them. Christos is not hard to recognise. Normally, I believe in the Church of England principle of *speaking in the Congregation in such a Tongue as the people understandeth*. St Paul reminds congregations where speaking in tongues is practised that they at least need to be interpreted and, better still, that worship leaders and preachers speak in a language that members of the congregation and visitors can follow. There are, however, exceptions. This morning, there were people from different parts of the world. So there was no one language that would have been everybody's first language. Also it is sometimes precious to retain and use words and forms of words used by our predecessors in the Church. We are in fellowship with them (the Church triumphant in heaven) as we are with Christians all over the world today (Christ's Church militant here in earth). Traditional words convey the authority and wisdom of the eternal Church. And sometimes they just fit the music better. One popular hymnbook is called *Ancient & Modern* for a reason. We need both (Matthew XIII⁵²)!

Throughout the service, there was beautiful singing. I didn't understand the words they were singing, but there was a real sense of worship, of turning our eyes upon Jesus. Incidentally, not having to take the service myself, I noticed much more about the way different generations over hundreds of years right down to us today have built and decorated and modified the church building which has come down to us, each seeking to express the insights they were granted by God. There are many different ways to worship and, sadly, we sometimes quarrel over what is the best way. Jesus told us, however, *God is a Spirit and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth*. That's what matters in worship, that we worship authentically, which means that we worship in love for God and for one another.

Incense was also extensively used which again can be controversial. Many English people don't like incense. We can't condemn its use, however. It is commanded in the Bible in the Old Testament and nowhere is it ever forbidden. Where God says He hates incense and all their feasts in Isaiah I, the

reason is not that there is anything wrong with incense or the feasts in themselves. The point is that their worship has become mere ritual. It is not worship in spirit and in truth because the people pretending to love God don't care about the poor, the widow and the orphan, they've got blood on their hands and have perverted the course of justice. Properly used, incense is an offering of a sweet scent to the Lord just as we may offer Him sublime music or beautiful things to look at. Incense reminds us of the essential mystery of God, His hiddenness wonderfully revealed in Jesus Christ and signifies the prayers of the people of God ascending to the Throne of Grace.

The parts of the service in English were the epistle (Philippians IV) and the Creed, which is the same as the form we use except that it omits the words *and the Son* after *We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father...*I'm not sure that I understand the reason and there isn't space to go into it here. We are allowed to use that form of the Creed on ecumenical occasions (Common Worship p140). So it shouldn't be a cause of division but in fact it is an aspect of one of the most serious splits in the Church. Let's pray with Jesus that we might be one. I don't know what language the Gospel was in, but they told me that it was the healing of a blind man.

I said the Lord's Prayer in English on behalf of us all. Other prayers in English included the Church and the world, our country, her majesty the Queen and all in authority everywhere, Cuxton and all other communities in this country and overseas, those gathered together for worship, the poor, the sick and prisoners and captives. To be healed from sickness of body, mind and spirit is to be made whole. If you read your Bible carefully, you will see that Jesus distinguishes between mere physical healing and being made whole. To be forgiven for our wrong-doing and to be made at one with God is to be made whole. It seemed very appropriate to me that the sick and those in prison were remembered together. Christ sets us free from sin and from the fear of death. In the light of His holiness, we pray for His mercy. O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name *shall be great* among the Gentiles; and in every place incense *shall be* offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name *shall be* great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts. (Malachi I¹¹).

We exchanged the Peace as we usually do at our Parish Communion. They mix hot water with the wine, whereas we just use cold! (We do this because water flowed from the side of the crucified Christ mingled with His Blood, signifying the outpouring of the Holy Spirit). The consecrated bread for Communion is put in the cup with the wine and people receive communion in both kinds from a spoon. The children receive Communion too. Before the Liturgy of the Eucharist, a baby had been baptised – Basil (after the great Saint Basil of Caesarea). He too received Communion on a spoon. In the Church of England, we usually wait till we have been confirmed before we become communicants, though some churches admit children (but not that young). We think that communicant members of the Church should have a level of understanding, knowing the Creed, the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer. The Orthodox and the Roman Catholics highly value the Sacraments as means of God's grace. We Protestants tend to emphasise preaching and teaching. One might soften and strengthen the heart, the other furnish the mind with wisdom, but we need both. We are heart and soul and mind and strength and we are called to love God with our whole being, to be made whole in fact. That is why I insist so vehemently that we should all every Sunday participate in our Parish Communion with its Gospel sermon.

After the service, there was blessed (but not consecrated) bread to share with everyone, communicant or not. This is something we do occasionally here, about once a year. After the service, there was more fellowship and more food. We enjoyed freshly baked bread. There was also wine and a special food to share as we prayerfully remembered those who had died from the congregation recently. The special food is wheat mixed with sugar and refers to the way grain appears to be dead when it is buried but, in the power of God, springs into wonderful new life. (See John XII and I Corinthians XV.)

Altogether, it was a wonderful occasion and I hope we shall be able to repeat it soon and often. Roger.

P.S.: Some of the children wondered why Tommy wasn't at the Liturgy!

Psalm 96: O sing unto the Lord a new song : sing unto the Lord, all the whole earth. Sing unto the Lord, and praise his Name : be telling of his salvation from day to day. Declare his honour unto the heathen : and his wonders unto all people. For the Lord is great, and cannot worthily be praised : he is more to be feared than all gods. As for all the gods of the heathen, they are but idols : but it is the Lord that made the heavens. Glory and worship are before him : power and honour are in his sanctuary. Ascribe unto the Lord, O ye kindreds of the people : ascribe unto the Lord worship and power. Ascribe unto the Lord the honour due unto his Name : bring presents, and come into his courts. O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness : let the whole earth stand in awe of him. Tell it out among the heathen that the Lord is King : and that it is he who hath made the round world so fast that it cannot be moved; and how that he shall judge the people righteously. Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad : let the sea make a noise, and all that therein is. Let the field be joyful, and all that is in it : then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord. For he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth : and with righteousness to judge the world, and the people with his truth. 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.**

An Unusual Meteorological Phenomenon

Following days of hard frosts, the 23rd January was still very cold, but also misty and foggy. The humidity was nearly 100% and thick frost had condensed out of the atmosphere so that the trees and bushes looked as if they had had a fine, but thick covering of snow. When the sun periodically shone through the mist, its rays lit up these twigs and light branches with crystalline brightness, an incredibly beautiful sight. What I think I had never seen before was that the path was strewn with ice crystals which had obviously fallen from twigs and branches, an amazing phenomenon. Have you ever seen anything like it? Roger.

Lent Course on Prayer, Led by Susanne Carlsson and her Team

Venue: St Nicholas Church, Strood, Swain Vestry, accessed through the new entrance at the back of the church.

Time: Coffee/tea from 7.30pm to begin session at 8.00pm

Dates: The following Tuesday evenings:

7th March: Finding God in silence and stillness

14th March: Praying with the Bible – Lectio Divina: Holy Reading.

21st March: Praying with Music

28th March: Praying with the Bible – using your imagination

4th April: Multi-sensory Prayer – using images and symbols

You are very welcome to attend all or any of these sessions, but please leave a message with the Revd David Green to let him know you will be attending, so that we have an idea of numbers: Email: revdavidgreen@blueyonder.co.uk Tel: 01634 719052.

Do Try This at Home

If Jesus were writing a letter to your church, what would he say? Try writing such a letter and, if you'd like to, send it to me (Roger) personally or for inclusion in this magazine or for use in wider discussions.

Our Conversation; Our Future asks just three questions:

- What may the Holy Spirit be saying to us about our area?
- What do we currently spend our energy and resources on?
- What do we need to change about who we are and what we do?

Our Conversation; Our Future is part of our process to develop a strategic framework for the Diocese. A diocesan strategic framework isn't new. As recently as 1954 the Diocese of Rochester published 'Your Diocese', a sepia-tinged document setting out the circumstances and future opportunities for the area. Those opportunities included massive new housing developments throughout south east London, Kent and Medway. The diocesan leaders of the time saw the opportunity and grasped it, setting out an ambitious plan to build twenty church buildings. Through God's power, these were all completed, and now play an important part in the life and work of God's people. What should we (the diocese, the parish) do now? Please share your thoughts within the parish. You can also respond online. Don't forget to pray about your response. <http://www.rochester.anglican.org/strategy/conversation/take-part/>

Marriage and Communion

Very Rev. Dr. Dobromir Dimitrov

[Fr Dobromir kindly offered me this very thought-provoking article on marriage and family life for our magazine. I think you will find it gives us all something to consider. RIK.]

Analyzing the joyless family life we are witnessing, psychologists and sociologists today are worried about the instability of marriage and the pain this instability causes to both spouses and children. The situation indicates that the original meaning of marriage has proved incomprehensible to modern man. Many people see marriage either as the marital institution or simply as a private contract, thus lending it a utilitarian character. Others look at marriage from a purely social perspective or from the viewpoint of the state. Such an approach, on the other hand, turns the family into a small particle, a cell from the state organism bearing a heavy burden – often one beyond its own strength.

Proceeding, however, from their own fields of study – which, of necessity, limit them in terms of formulation of problems and areas of research – psychology and sociology are unable to reach to the fullness of marriage and its destination as revealed in the experience of the Church.

Led by its salvific mission in the world, the Church assigns marriage a special place. It provides the man and woman entering into holy matrimony with a special blessing called “sacrament”, and sacrament in St Nicholas Cabasilas’ words is the *door* through which Christ comes back in order to dwell in His Church. Proceeding from this, *sacrament* is not a religious form of “registration”, but a living communion with Christ.

The meaning of marriage as a sacrament is in the glorification of the newly-wed couple and their children in the Kingdom of God. The Church blesses the bridal couple for giving birth to children and multiplying the human race, which is a commandment given in the beginning to our ancestors, but the Church also sees them as glorification before God: “*and the two shall become one flesh.*” *This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church* (Eph. 5:20-33). It is for this reason that Apostle Paul calls marriage *a mystery*, meaning that marriage is preserved in the Kingdom of God and in communion with the Giver of Life.

Therefore, what comes first in the holy sacrament of Matrimony is the experience of the reality of the Kingdom of God in the communion of the Holy Eucharist, and second come the biological relations which are built as a result of the love between the man and the woman in the family, and which lead and accompany them in the present life towards the future life.

The Church intervenes in these biological relations in order to give sexual love its true dimensions, to release the power of love in man from its submission to natural necessity, and to reveal the image of the Church and the gift of the new life in the unity of communion between the man and the woman. This is only made possible through the gift of God’s grace, but in order for this grace to be effective, human cooperation is required (συνεργία).

Orthodoxy teaches us that the only way in which the physical consummation of sexual relations can be directed towards good and can have purpose, is the monogamous (μονογαμία), heterosexual, blessed and marital life. Marriage, therefore, requires exclusive and complete dedication to each other. That is, the two to become one flesh (Mat. 19:5).

Marriage is *heterosexual* because of the fact that God *created them male and female* with the clear purpose of having children, *being fruitful and multiply* (Gen. 1:28), that is, continuing His creative work through joining two lives in one loving unity, a union which is a new creation making the two “one flesh”. Therefore, from erotic and passionate, love should be transformed into *αγάπη* (selfless, self-giving love) which is a love that unites and brings the soul into eternal communion with one’s fellowman and God. By mutual denial of the individual, egoistic will and acceptance of the will of the other, the communion of the man and the woman starts building up not on the natural basis of sex drive, but on the foundations of church communion which presuppose self-overcoming and self-offering.

Marriage receives its identity not from the natural relations, but from the relations in the Heavenly Kingdom. Thus the Christian family becomes a “small church”. Sexual relations outside marriage cannot

achieve their original purpose, and today's cohabitation – *concubinage* corrupts marriage and is not even “the beginning of marriage”.

In order for the man and woman to become one flesh, in the sense given by God, they need to accept into their relations towards each other the same kind and quality of the faithfulness and self-sacrifice which Christ accepted for His people, that is, in the likeness of the crucified and salvific love of Christ. Marital life is the image, icon of the union between Christ and the Church. It is in marriage that relations of love between the man and the woman in the family, which lead and accompany them from the present life towards the future life, are built.

In the Orthodox Christian understanding, the purpose of marriage is marriage itself. Children are its component, and not a purpose. It is possible that for some reason the married couple may not have children, or may lose them, therefore, people should enter into marriage in order to live their lives in mutual love, that is, in overcoming their individualism and egoism, in extending the boundaries of their personality, and in preparation for life eternal.

Marriage is a dynamic phenomenon whose whole power is in movement, purposefulness, in its universal dimension. Marriage is also a symbol of martyrdom, and martyr is the one who bears witness to a certain value before the whole world. It is for this reason that the Church calls on every bridegroom and bride to believe in love, to believe in each other with such firmness that they bear witness – whatever that may cost them – to love, to unity, to the fact that true love can conquer all.

Today, however, it is universally acknowledged that modern man is highly secularized, and in contemporary West-European and American society even the notion of post-Christian culture has surfaced, traditional values are being replaced with new ones, while the man of today strives to produce more and consume more both material and *spiritual* products.

This situation inevitably affects the relations between the man and the woman, affects marriage, and children.

The last few decades have seen a dramatic increase in the divorce rate in the Western world. Trafficking of human beings and children for sexual exploitation has reached epidemic proportions, and the production of pornographic material earns billions of dollars of annual income. The easy access to this material via the Internet is further contributing to shaping a consumer attitude towards the man and the woman, and to losing the personal attitude towards them. Unfaithfulness (adultery) is regarded as normal, and divorce because of egoism is becoming a fact which has devastating consequences predominantly for children and their psyche. Communion in marriage increasingly proves to be at a psychological level, and can always be broken off. The roots of all this, however, are very ancient, they go back to the very Fall of Man. It is precisely estrangement, the severing of the existential relation and communion with God, that makes Adam and Eve adopt an autonomous existence, only drawing strength from their created nature. What is more, communion between them themselves is also destroyed. Our hiding from the other's presence, our hiding from God's presence, the feeling of nakedness and shame which accompanies sin is the expression of our awareness of the fact that the other now only regards us as an object of their desire, we are objectified, being stripped of our most profound uniqueness, and through shame we try to preserve our own personality.

These problems underlie our relations. Yet, how can we overcome this tragedy?

The only answer is that it is only in the Church, in the Holy Eucharist, that we can restore the lost communion between God and man, and return to the roots of the authentic prelapsarian relations.

This transfiguration of human nature and will demonstrates that we are created to be in communion. This is the main purpose implanted in man, which is reflected in marriage, children, and our attitude towards the other person in society. This communion should also continue beyond death.

This is the reason why we believe that the indissolubility of marriage is one of its essential characteristics: “what God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matt. 19.6). To the question why then today the Orthodox Church dissolves marriage, we can answer that the Church does not dissolve marriage, but only legally acknowledges that the basis of marriage – communion in *love* – has been destroyed between the spouses.

Divorce is one of the greatest and most widespread tragedies that can strike modern man. It is not only the end of the loving communion which marriage has established, but also the end of the hope of a life in its entirety, full of joy, profound and meaningful.

Why it is that two people who have loved each other until recently suddenly find out that the love between them has gone, and the only thing left to them is to part? The reason is found in the fact that too many marriages are entered into by people who are not mature enough, who neither protect their marriage nor take care of it. In such a marriage we found the spirit of individualism. That is why, we, Orthodox Christians, taking into consideration the *hardness* (Matt. 19.8), severity and unstableness of human heart, consider divorce possible, although we regard it as one of the greatest tragedies in our contemporary life. What is more, we take it upon ourselves because the responsibility for divorces is shared by the whole Church, which means that we, Christians, have to educate people, and not by words and sermons only, but first of all by example.

Regarding the contemporary view of the acceptability of abortion, it speaks in itself of crass insensitivity towards man, and towards society in general – towards the life of the individual person. Abortion is a denial of communion ending in the death of the most vulnerable.

It is wild and inhuman to think, to speak of the sanctity of human life, while allowing and giving legal status to the murder called *abortion*. Indeed, in a country where abortion has been legalized, no one – from the government to the ordinary citizen – has the right to assert that human life is holy precisely because abortion is murder.

A marriage in which children are unwanted is based on a damaged, egoistic and lustful love. Giving life to another person man imitates the creative act of God, while refusing to do so he not only rejects his Creator, but also distorts his own nature, since without the desire to imitate the Creator of life and Father in every possible way man ceases to be “the image and likeness of God”.

Abortion – whether had by a couple or a woman who has got pregnant with an unwanted child and now wants to get rid of that child – is nothing else but a crime – a murder. Besides, women having an abortion cannot know what the consequences will be – both psychological and physiological.

Abortion deprives the family of the greatest joy of giving birth to children and bringing them up, which is a blessing from God. There is no Christian marriage without the pure and ardent desire of the two parents to have this joy and share it between them.

Mentioning all this, we – who have been called to be *the light of the world* (Matt. 5:14) and bear the name Christians – face a huge number of challenges, to which we should respond with the catholic voice of the Church. Through our way of life, we should make society aware of the absolute uniqueness of marriage. Without fail, we should take part with our families in the Holy Eucharist because in it, through communion and love, our marriage is projected into the eternal Kingdom of God.

This is to say that we, the Orthodox Christians, cannot agree that marriage only exists “till death do us part”, but believe in its eternity because it is crowning with glory and honour in the Resurrected Christ – the true God and true Man.

We have to bear witness to the fact that in the sacrament of marriage, without losing its fullness, human nature participates in the higher reality of the Holy Spirit. This is the communion to which we are called, a communion of love, which has to come out of the family and leaven the world. In this way, we will be able to fulfil our unique destination to be a nation of priests (1 Peter 2:9) and mediators between God and creation. This is the gift of the new life which is realized in the unity and communion with God, between the man and the woman and every fellowman.

Looking Ahead

Bishop James is visiting our deanery 26th March – 2nd April. We are all invited to meet him at Evening Worship at 6.30 at Hoo on 26th March, the Deanery Synod (open to all) at Cliffe at 7.30 on 30th March and a Songs of Praise service at 4.00 on 2nd April at Cuxton with refreshments to follow in the hall.

Don't forget our annual meeting on 29th April at 10.00 at St John's. Make sure you're on the electoral role and ask yourself whether you are called to serve in any official capacity.

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There will be a Lent Course in the church hall Wednesday mornings from 1st March 10.30 am to study the course which ties in with *Our Conversation Our Future*. See p5 "Do Try This at Home".

The Archbishop of Canterbury will be visiting the diocese from the 17th – 19th July, arrangements to be announced.

Thy Kingdom Come is the Archbishops' prayer initiative for the period from Ascension Day to Pentecost – 25th May to 4th June. The Archbishops state the aim as being:

- To join in prayer with the whole family of God the Father;
- To pray for the empowering of God the Holy Spirit;
- That we may be effective witnesses to God the Son, Jesus Christ.

Some Lighter Thoughts

I used to believe that there was an ocean of orange soda, but it turned out to be a Fanta Sea!

How do we know Robinson Crusoe was a contortionist? The books says that he turned round and sat on his chest.

Is a dirty pub a vile inn? Only if the landlord is on the fiddle.

A certain cannibal had a very demanding wife and fourteen hungry children. Having only one arrow left in his quiver, he thought he had better shoot something large for lunch and not waste it on a rabbit or some such creature. To his amazement, in a clearing, he saw a pygmy resting on a log, completely unaware that a hideous python was slithering down and about to engulf him in its terrible coils. Calling on all his skills, the cannibal shot his arrow at just the right moment, transfixing both his prey in one go. He wrapped the serpent around his human victim, slung them over his shoulder and set out for home whistling a merry tune.

His wife met him at the hut doorway. "O no, not snake and pygmy pie again," she exclaimed.

Local History

We can still supply copies of "Cuxton Remembered" by Lillian Bennet and 100th Anniversary History of Halling School at £1.00 per copy. Apply to the Rector.

From the Registers

Baptism:

22nd January

Archie Richard Jon Miller

Petchart Close

Funerals:

17th January

Frederick George Grant (81)

formerly of Cuxton

26th January

Minna Wilkinson (76)

Cuxton

Harry Guest RIP

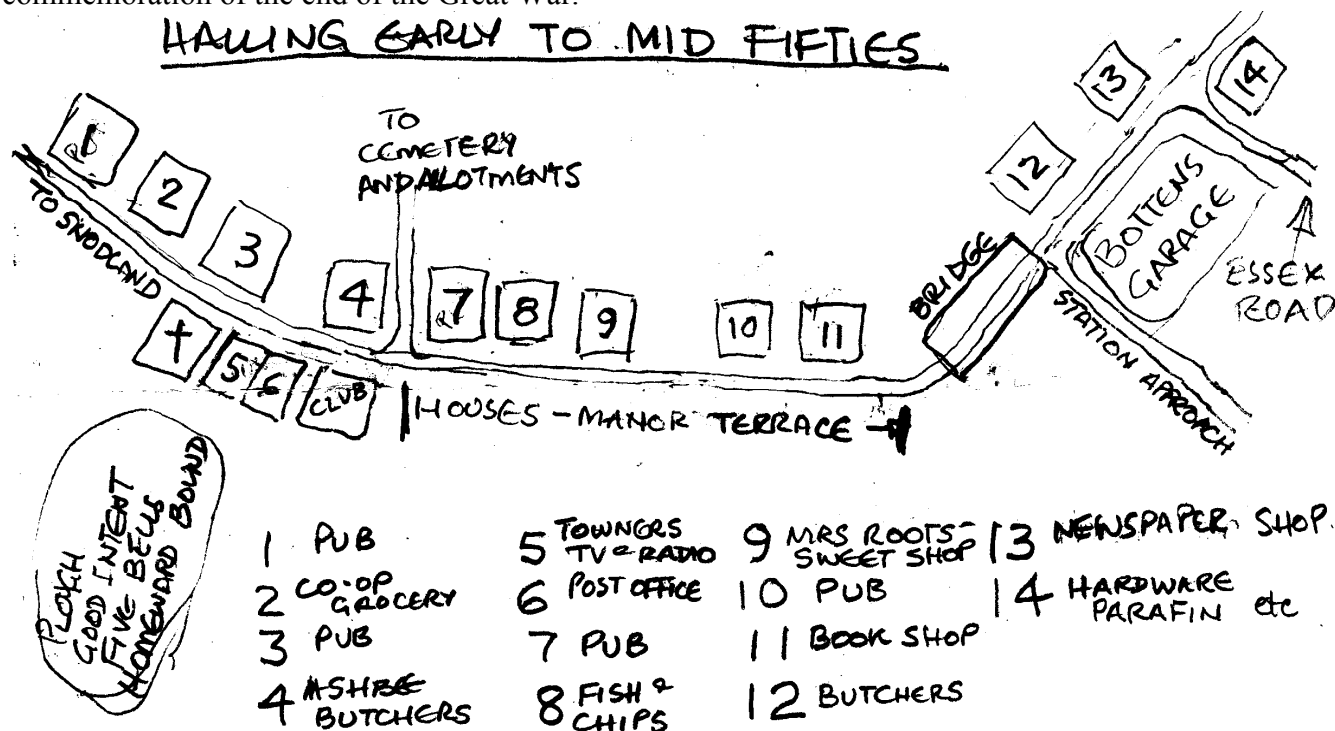
Parishioners were sorry to hear of the death of Harry Guest on 2nd February. Harry was a good friend to many and, while not a member himself, a great supporter of our Church and also of his wife Margaret in all the things she has done for the Church and the village.

Confirmation 2017?

Probably 29th September. If interested, please contact the Rector.

Halling Shops

Our article in the last magazine stirred up some memories. One reader drew up this sketch from memory of the High Street in the early to mid 'fifties. Another reader recalled a bicycle shop next to the post office at one time. Going back even earlier, there is somewhere a wonderful photograph taken from the Coop side of the road of the green in front of St John's in 1919 with the bells laid out on the grass waiting to be re-hung in commemoration of the end of the Great War.



The "Plough" was still there in 1987 (1) when I came here. The Five Bells (3) was refurbished and re-opened as the the "New Bell Inn" at about that time. I was there and remember a magnificent dray horse enjoying his beer from a pint glass (mine I think). The "Rose & Crown" (7) had not long closed. I don't remember the "Good Intent". I'm told there was the "Walnut Tree" where Walnut Tree flats now are, the same side as the church in the direction of Holborough. The Halling Institute (next to 6) was replaced by the community centre. Ashbee's butcher's closed in the 1980s. The garage is now replaced by houses. What other memories do people have to share? RIK.

Christian Aid



A Division of The British Council of Churches

Christian Aid Supper and Talk

Friday 5th May: 7.00 for 7.30 @ Hoo Church, admission £7.00.



Cuxton WI

Cuxton WI meet for the first time this year on the 5th January for our usual New Year Social evening with a chance to catch up and look at the exhibition of craft items and paintings that have been created by the talented ladies in our group. Our next meeting took place on the 3rd February when Jeremy Clark from the Guildhall Museum in Rochester gave an enlightening and entertaining presentation about the links between Charles Dickens and various

locations in the Medway Towns that appear in his writings and how he incorporated some events that he would have witnessed as a boy growing up in Chatham. Think we all came away with a lot of information about the local area and the Guildhall Museum definitely sounds worth a visit.

Our next meeting is on the 2nd March and there is to be a history of English Cheeses. All ladies are very welcome to come as a visitor, so give us a try.

From Our Tonbridge Correspondent

Carrying on the conversation about eggs, our Tonbridge correspondent knows from personal experience that they do go off. One she cracked into a bowl turned out to be bright green inside – which is why you shouldn't crack eggs directly into a bowl already containing food. Apart from the wartime government commandeering eggs to make dried egg, if you keep hens, there are times when they go broody and stop laying. So, if you have no other source of eggs, you need to preserve them. This is where isinglass comes in. It is a kind of gelatine or collagen obtained from fish swim bladders, originally, but no longer, especially sturgeon. You dissolve it in a bucket of water and immerse the eggs.

Spring Draws On

St John's Draw January: £5 each to Mrs Parris (54), Mr Pratt (97), Mrs Gyde (133) & Mrs Brunger (159) – drawn by Mr Wooding.

If you would like to join the St John's Draw, please contact Betty Head, 15H, Foxglove Row, Vicarage Rd., 240889.

St Michael's Draw is being revamped and revived. Entry is £1 per month payable over ten months by 5th March. Initially, monthly prizes will be one £10 & two £5, possibly increasing if the draw is well subscribed. In order to join, please contact Mary Pitt, 2, Hollycroft, 718373.

These draws are a fun way to contribute to our churches' finances. Please support them

Feedback



On 5th February, I started the sermon by turning out the lights. Then I lit a candle because Jesus is the Light of the World. In that day's Gospel, Jesus, the Light of the World, tells Christian people, "Ye are the Light of the World". We are supposed to be like Him. Then I covered up the candle with a biscuit tin in the shape of a bus. I was hiding our light under a bushel. (A bushel is a measure of 8 gallons). But why would you hide your light under a bushel? The world's dark enough. If we have the light, surely we should let it shine. So I asked the congregation why they thought we might hide our light as Christians. Here are some of the answers we came up with.

We might be ashamed of the Church, considering some of the wicked and stupid things it does. But the Church is a human as well as a divine organisation. The Church isn't perfect. The Church is us. It's the Church we've got, where our loyalties lie.

We might be afraid to shine with the true light. Jesus said that people would do to us what they did to Him and they crucified Him. Christians have often been persecuted for the faith. They are persecuted in many parts of the world today. Why should we be afraid of a bit of embarrassment if some people are dying for their faith? Jesus told us not to fear the one who can kill our bodies, only the one who can cast us body and soul into hell.

The Church is for some of us a refuge from the world, where there are all sorts of nasty people and bad things happen. Do we want to invite them into our safe place? Jesus has room for everyone. So we don't really have the choice to exclude anyone.

Religion has a pretty poor reputation these days. People put signs on their doors, “No religious callers.” Christians get lumped together with whacky sects and fanatical terrorists. We have to show people what it’s all about not just by what we say, but, much more importantly, by the way we live. What is it about our lives as Christians that makes us better people than we might otherwise be? What have we got that other people need? If they can see that we’ve got something they want, then we have the opportunity to tell them what it is.

I then removed the bushel from the candle. It had gone out, which is what is likely to happen if we don’t let our light so shine before men that may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven. Roger.



Do You Recognise This Locomotive?

Sorry the picture is difficult to see. It was taken in 1932. We are almost certain that the location is the arch under the railway which leads to Soldier’s Hard just the Cuxton side of where the Rugby Offices used to be at North Halling. The locomotive looks as if it was ancient even then. We believe it was a C class - a South Eastern & Chatham (Slow, Easy & Comfortable!) Railway 0-6-0 design, built between 1900 & 1908. Apparently they were used for freight and continued in service until the 1960s. Someone wondered whether this particular one belonged to one of the cement works, but I think they used tank engines. There is a preserved example on the Bluebell Railway.



Tommy’s Talking Points

Master says that the first day of Spring is 21st March. It is also the commemoration of Thomas Cranmer, which is of some interest to me. When Master was thinking of possible names for me two years ago it occurred to him that the 21st March might well be the day on which he could bring me home. Hence Tommy. So Spring is on the way – longer days, warm days, more walks perhaps if I’m lucky. We’ll probably spend more time in the garden too, though Master says that my being outdoors with him when he is gardening depends on staying where he can see me, keeping out of the way and not retrieving the weeds he throws away. That’s a lot to ask!

Winter’s been good too. He partly got round the problem of taking me out in the woods in the dark by getting up later. That means a shorter walk before Morning Prayer, but he generally makes it up to me in the afternoon. I’m entitled to at least four miles per day. In mid-Winter, we can’t get out of going out in the dark altogether. Some dog walkers carry torches which spook me a bit. Occasionally you see a light just floating a foot or two off the ground. People put lights on their dogs’ collars. Master just eats plenty of carrots. In any case, except on the very darkest days, a white dog isn’t too difficult to keep track of. That didn’t work in the snow, however! Nevertheless we had a lovely early walk the day it snowed. Then I’m afraid I disappointed him. In the afternoon, the sun had come out, he had an hour to spare and he thought we would have a lovely time with me running across the valleys in the snow. I did love rolling in it and bounding around in it in our garden. When we went out, however, I’m afraid I got carried away and ran off. He got quite cross looking for me in the woods. He was very grateful to the friends I teamed up with who took me back to the Rectory.

It hasn’t rained much and the hard frosts have frozen the mud. So the woods haven’t been too slippery this year. One morning, however, it had rained overnight. It was very dark. Master wasn’t sure he could stay upright. So we walked up bush Road to just past Cobhambury Hill. Master was horrified at the amount of traffic on that road first thing in the morning. So was I. I’m a bit afraid of cars, which Master thinks is probably a good thing. He says, we’re safe enough so long as we keep to the side of the road. Motorists don’t want to run us over. Anyway, he says controversially, pedestrians occupy the high moral ground. I don’t know where that is, but I suppose it must be somewhere safe!

On my birthday, we found a card stuck to the outside of our front door. It probably hadn’t been put through because I have been known to chew up letters and even cheques. This card contained some money for me to choose a present. I bought a tyre which can be used for tug of war or throwing games. I don’t suppose I shall ever get tired of it! It looks durable too. Tommy, the Rectory Spaniel.