

Services at St Michael & All Angels Cuxton		
Sunday 2 nd March Lent 4 Mothering Sunday	9.30 am Holy Communion	Ephesians 5 vv 8-14 p1176 John 9 vv 1-41 p1075
Sunday 9 th March Passion Sunday	9.30 am Holy Communion	Ezekiel 37 vv 1-14 p868 Romans 8 vv 6-11 p1134 John 11 vv 1-45 p1077
Sunday 16 th March Palm Sunday	8.00 am Holy Communion	Isaiah 5 vv 1-7 p689 Matthew 21 vv 33-46 p990
	9.30 am Holy Communion	Matthew 21 vv 1-11 p988 Philippians 2 vv 5-1179 Matthew 26 v14 – 27 v66 p996
Thursday 20 th March Maundy Thursday	7.30 am Holy Communion and please see Halling.	
Friday 21 st March Good Friday	10.00 Family Service	
Sunday 23 rd March Easter Day	9.30 am Holy Communion	Jeremiah 31 vv 1-6 p791 Acts 10 vv 34-43 p1104 Colossians 3 vv 1-4 p1184 Matthew 28 vv 1-10 p1000
Sunday 30 th March Easter 2	9.30 am United Parish Eucharist	Acts 2 vv 14-32 p1093 1 Peter 1 vv 3-9 p1217 John 20 vv 10-31 p1089
Services at St John the Baptist Halling & the Jubilee Hall Upper Halling		
Sunday 2 nd March Lent 4 Mothering Sunday	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	James 5 vv 1-14 p1220 John 3 vv 14-21 p1066
	11.00 am Holy Communion	1 Samuel 16 vv 1-3 p287 Ephesians 5 vv 8-14 p1176 John 9 vv 1-41 p1075
Sunday 9 th March Passion Sunday	11.00 am Holy Communion	Ezekiel 37 vv 1-14 p868 Romans 8 vv 6-11 p1134 John 11 vv 1-45 p1077
	5.30 Evening Prayer Jubilee Hall	Lamentations 3 vv 19-33 p826 Matthew 20 vv 17-34 p988
Sunday 16 th March Palm Sunday	11.00 am Holy Communion & Stop! Look! Listen!	Isaiah 50 vv 4-9a p737 Philippians 2 vv 5-1179 Matthew 26 v14 – 27 v66 p996
Thursday 20 th March Maundy Thursday	9.30 am Holy Communion	1 Corinthians 11 vv 23-26 p1152 John 13 vv 1-35 p1081
	7.00	Passover Supper.
Friday 21 st March Good Friday	12.00 Three Hour Devotion	
Saturday 22 nd March Holy Saturday	11.30 pm Easter Vigil	
Sunday 23 rd March Easter Day	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	Revelation 1 vv 12-18 p1233 John 20 vv 1-18 p1089
	11.00 am Holy Communion	Jeremiah 31 vv 1-6 p791 Acts 10 vv 34-43 p1104 Colossians 3 vv 1-4 p1184 Matthew 28 vv 1-10 p1000

Holy Communion will also be celebrated at St Michael's at 7.30 am on Monday 17th & Tuesday 18th and at 9.30 am on Wednesday 19th. The Offices on Good Friday (21st) and Holy Saturday (22nd) will be said at St Michael's at 8.45 and 5.00. In Easter Week, there will be Holy Communion at St Michael's on 23rd, 24th, 25th, 26th, 28th, 29th & 30th at 9.30 am and at the Jubilee Hall at 8.00 on 23rd, St John's at 11.00 on 23rd, St John's at 9.30 on 27th and no other services at all.

Copy Date April Magazine 14th March 8.30 am Rectory.

On Thursday afternoons we have a **Mother & Toddler** service at Halling at 2.00 and at Cuxton every Wednesday also at 2.00. **Sunday School** is at Cuxton Church Hall at 9.30 (not first Sundays or school holidays). **After School Club**, Thursdays @ St John's.

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Because I Say So

Some years ago a young man turned up for a court appearance with no shirt on. When the magistrate said that this was unacceptable, the lad insisted that it was his culture not to wear a shirt in the Summer and no-one had the right to force his cultural norms on anybody else. The young man was reprimanded and made to put a shirt on.

More recently a young Moslem woman turned up for a court appearance wearing a veil. The magistrate objected and asked her to remove the veil. The young woman insisted that it was her culture to wear a veil when out in public. This time it was the magistrate who was reprimanded.

So what is the difference? I guess most of my readers would agree with me that the young man should have put a shirt on to come to court and the young woman could reasonably have been expected to remove her veil. But, whether you agree with me or not, how might government go about justifying treating the two differently? The following is an imaginary conversation between a government spokesman (G) and a baffled member of the public (P).

P: Can you explain why a white man gets reprimanded for turning up in court without a shirt, whereas a magistrate gets reprimanded for asking a Moslem woman to remove her veil? After all, the shirtless man might look hideous, but at least we know that he isn't hiding anything, whereas the woman in the veil might be concealing all sorts of things - from a shifty expression to a weapon.

G: The white man with no shirt was showing disrespect to the court.

P: A lot of people would say that the veiled woman was also showing disrespect.

G: It is a question of what is culturally acceptable.

P: Does the Government regard all cultures as equal or are some cultures more acceptable than others?

G: We cannot make value judgments. There are no moral absolutes. Therefore we must treat all cultures equally.

P: Then why did the court respect the Moslem woman's right to wear a veil but not the white lad's right not to wear a shirt? Both claimed their culture as justification.

G: The cases are different. Not wearing a shirt is a trivial matter, whereas wearing a veil is very important to some Moslems.

P: Who are we to say that one person's cultural practices are trivial, whereas another person's are deeply significant?

G: The cases are quite different.

P: In what way? Ought we to respect the Moslem because she is black?

G: We do not distinguish between people on the basis of race or colour?

P: Was it, then, because the Moslem was a woman?

G: We do not distinguish between people on the basis of gender.

P: Does the Government let some religious groups get away with things that other people would not be allowed to do because it is afraid of terrorism?

G: We do not allow terrorists to influence public policy.

P: So why should we respect the Moslem woman's choice of attire, but not the white man's?

G: Islam is an ancient religion with millions of followers world wide. We should, therefore, respect Moslem culture.

P: Christianity is an even more ancient religion with even more followers. So why does the government not respect the right of a Christian hotelier to refuse to let a room to a homosexual couple?

G: Discrimination against people on the basis of their sexuality is wrong.

P: Is that an absolute moral wrong?

G: There are no moral absolutes.

P: So why does the homosexual couple's right to share a room trump the religious hotelier's right only to let his double rooms to heterosexual married couples?

G: Well, it just does.

P: So, if the shirtless lad in court had claimed to be homosexual, he would have got away with it?

G: I don't think that being of a particular sexuality carries with it any obligation to dress in a certain way, whereas some religions do.

P: Suppose the young man claimed to belong to a nature cult that required its devotees to go shirtless – or even naked – would the court respect his religious rights?

G: Some minority sect doesn't carry the same clout as a major world religion.

P: So the Government judges religions by size? Christianity is the best because it is the biggest? Judaism is less worthwhile than other major religions because it has fewer adherents?

G: We do not make distinctions between religions or, indeed, between having a religion and not having a religion.

P: So why support the Moslem woman's right to wear a veil but not the Christian's right to let his double rooms only to married couples?

G: Look. We are the democratically elected government. In the end, we have to make these decisions and the public have to obey the Law or take the consequences.

P: What is the moral or philosophical foundation on which you make laws?

G: There are no absolute moral, philosophical or religious truths. We make the laws because we are the democratically elected government.

P: Are you completely open and honest with voters so that people know exactly what they are voting for at elections? Do you pay attention to public opinion? Do you hold referenda on major issues?

G: In reality the public does not always know what is best for the country. Leadership means taking tough decisions. Sometimes it means leading public opinion, rather than following it. It means being brave enough to do what is unpopular, to ignore opinion polls and referenda. If any political party were entirely honest with the electorate, it would probably never get voted in and then where should we be? Government sometimes just has to decide what's right and do it. That is being statesmanlike, not shallowly populist.

P: So you do have a vision for this country. You do believe you know what is right and you will impose your blueprint on society, whether the voters like it or not.

G: Ultimately, yes.

P: So when are you going to share with the rest of us the philosophical foundation on which your vision is based?

Quotation

“The nearer we draw to the Crucified, the nearer we come to one another; in however varied colours the Light of the world may be reflected in our faith.” WCC precursor cited in *Expository Times*.

The Difference Between Roman Catholics and Anglicans.

RC: (Priest's telephone rings.) “Mum's taken a turn for the worse, Father. Can you bring her the Sacrament, please?”

C of E: (Priest's telephone rings.) “Mum's taken a turn for the worse, Rector. Better give Communion a miss this month, if you don't mind.”

"ICE" (In Case of Emergency) Campaign

The concept of "ICE" is catching on quickly. It is a method of contact during emergency situations. As cell phones are carried by the majority of the population, all you need to do is store the number of a contact person or persons who should be contacted during emergency under the name "ICE" (In Case Of Emergency).

The idea was thought up by a paramedic who found that when he went to the scenes of accidents, there were always mobile phones with patients, but they didn't know which number to call. He therefore thought that it would be a good idea if there was a nationally recognized name for this purpose. In an emergency situation, Emergency Service personnel and hospital Staff would be able to quickly contact the right person by simply dialling the number you have stored as "ICE". For more than one contact name simply enter ICE1, ICE2 and ICE3 etc.

Halling Historical Society 2008

Thursdays at 7.30 pm in the Jubilee Hall

April 17th: Dr A Kneif - Leeds Castle.

June 19th: Mr. F Turner – History of

Gravesend Airport

July – Outing to Be Announced

August 21st Mrs. Mortlock – Tonbridge Castle

October 16th Dr Quinlan – History &

Development of Fruit Farming

December 18th Mr Jones – A History of Medals.

Please bring any medals you may have.

Apologies to Halling Historical Society

Two members kindly submitted reports of the meeting in December 2007 regarding stained glass in Kent. Both were combined and faithfully transcribed into the computer but, sadly that was the last that was seen of them and they quite literally disappeared from the magazine. Please accept apologies. Editor.



Halling WI

It was a dark and stormy night for our first meeting of 2008, but we had almost a full house of members including our four new ones. Mary started the meeting by thanking everyone who had helped make our Christmas lunch, the Christmas party and the District Carol service, great successes. After our two birthday girls had received their roses, the minutes were read (They almost seemed like history) and signed. Names were taken for the forthcoming Band concert in April, the first of many activities to celebrate the County Federation's 90th anniversary, and the Annual Home Economists day.

Our speaker for the evening was Mrs. Margaret Barrow from Wrotham who had stepped in as the original speaker had moved to Birmingham. Margaret went on to explain to members how her daughter and her husband had acquired a derelict water mill in the centre of France in a very deep gorge, by a fast flowing river next to an old worked out gold mine, and how the pair of them have restored it into a very nice holiday home. Margaret (that is Margaret's daughter's name) and her husband are very keen bird watchers, but she drew the line when Terry was watching the birds

while travelling at 90 miles an hour on the French motorways, her words were "pretty scary". Margaret told us she had tried panning for gold in the river but without any success, and next time she goes to what she jokingly calls her daughter's French shed, she is going by EASYJET as eight hours in the back of a van knitting a cardigan for her youngest great-granddaughter was too much of a good thing. The members seemed to enjoy the talk and she was warmly thanked by Betty. Our cup of tea was very much appreciated and our competitions were judged.

Flower of the month was won by our green-fingered Evelyn, who earlier in the meeting had received the annual cup from Mary for 2007. The item beginning with M was won by Ann Heaseman with her cycling Medal. The cup for the yearly competition was won by Margaret Sullivan. The weather had improved a little when it was time for us to go home.

Our speaker for February is Mr. Robin Walton on "Hop Farming in Kent". I could tell him a thing or two about that as I was taken hop picking from four months old until I was eleven, I can hear my gran saying "Pick those blooming leaves out!" Ah those were the days. Phyllis.

Bluebell Walk For Eve Appeal

The Eve Appeal raises funds for the specialist research programme at University College, London, which hopes to halve death rates associated with ovarian cancer in ten years. The date is 26th April. The distance is about 4 ¼ miles and leaves the Browndens Road car park at 10.00. There is a service bus from Lower Halling c 9.20. Buses pick up from Browndens Road at 11.45, 13.45 & 15.45. The walk is being organised by Pat Lawry in memory of his wife Greta. The bluebells ought to be in full bloom on this date. If you would like to take part, to be sponsored or to sponsor anyone else, please contact Pat at 13, Meadow Crescent.

Halling Bell Ringers

Halling ringers rang in the New Year for the first time in half a century. Jane Adams and Michaela Willy are joining KSACR, bring our numbers up to eight, the highest for many years. Peter Silver.

St John's Church Draw: £% each to Mrs Thorne (3), Mrs Baker (46), Mrs Brown (59), Mr Mitchell (70) & Mrs Wallis (76) – drawn by Mrs Gyde.

Slimming World meets every Thursday at 7.00 pm at Halling Community Centre. For more information, contact Sharon on 01634 243198.

Nature Notes and Reflections January 2008

On the first day of the month, I looked out of the window in the morning to view a grey, misty world with the bare trees standing still as statues. There was not a sound of a bird, although as the day was breaking, I heard a bird chirping. During the middle of the day, I walked through the churchyard where moss grew on the top of the wall. I continued through Six acre Wood where more clearing had taken place and where I noticed orange fungi on a dead tree trunk and where I heard a robin, a blackbird and the strident call of a great tit. In Mays Wood new cow parsley plants were emerging and a sycamore sapling still bore autumn leaves. As I skirted the ploughed fields I noticed six catkins, which had broken into flower. Along my secret paths, I saw a moss covered log and a branch on the path bearing white fungi. In Church Fields green and yellow lichen covered hawthorn branches and a mass of spindleberries, once bright pink, had turned a deep orange. A bush still contained bright red hips. I always enjoy the stillness of the woods in winter.

Bare branches crackle in the mild westerly breeze. Twigs, like fingers, point to the sky where billowing grey clouds drift across from the west. The rippling river glistens when the sun eventually shines and streamlets meander across the mud flats. Gulls circle overhead and large crows hop along the paths by the grassy banks. Redshank call from the water.

Mild, changeable weather continued for two weeks. The 14th was grey with billowing clouds from the west bringing heavy showers. At mid-day the skies cleared to reveal bright sunshine and blue skies before another downpour. Blue skies and sunshine re-emerged allowing me to take Murphy to the leisure park where I gave him a training session. The wind whipped up small wavelets on the river, which sparkled in the golden sunlight. The clouds were salmon pink. As the daylight was fading, I could hear blackbirds pinking on the embankment.

Stormy clouds drop their rain which pounds against the windows and runs in rivulets along the path and down the steps to the grass. Chaffinches and a robin perch in the holly tree to keep dry. A collared dove joins them while a pair of wood pigeons perch in the branches of an elm on the embankment. The rain ceases, clouds break and the sun emerges.

Grey skies greeted the 20th but later there were brief glimpses of the sun. We took Murphy to Hope Hill where the ground was very wet and muddy. Grey, billowing clouds scudded across the sky but no rain fell. Birds sang in the bare hawthorns bringing a special cheer to the scene. The light was fading as we made our way home. On the 22nd, I watched the golden sun rise above Bluebell Hill. The sky was a clear pale blue against which the bare branches were silhouetted like statues. There was no breath of wind. The sun continued to shine throughout the day and it was very pleasant with a fresh breeze. I took Murphy to the river walk where the gulls circled in the air and congregated on the mud flats. The sun sparkled on the water, which reflected the blue of the sky. It was still light at 4.45pm.

I watch the sun as it disappears behind the trees and the sky takes on a golden hue. Clouds are salmon pink. Rooks fly across from nearby woodland to roost in the trees near the river and the air is full of their cawing. As the light fades their sound dies as they settle for the night.

On the 26th I took part in the R.S.P.B Bird watch. The morning was bright with blue skies and golden sunshine, which brought warmth to the garden where I sat for a while at mid-day. In the hour which I chose to observe, I saw, in the garden, 1 blackbird, 1 bluetit, 2 chaffinches, 2 collared doves, 2 dunnock, 1 great tit, 1 robin and 1 wren.

On the 28th it was grey and cold after fog, which was slow to clear. The winter pansies and primulas brought brightness to the garden where there was birdsong from robins one of which was perched on a dead elm branch. In the afternoon I took Murphy along Pilgrims Road and back. He hadn't walked that route for several weeks so he had plenty of sniffs to catch up on. The sky was very grey but the wind was slight. Snowdrops bloomed along a garden verge and a single periwinkle was in bloom.

The month has been generally mild and spring plants, crocuses, snowdrops, primulas and daffodils have burst into flower in the garden. Birds have been singing their beautiful songs bringing a feeling of spring, my favourite time of the year.

Spring

Nothing is so beautiful as spring-
When weeds in wheels, shoot long and lovely and lush;
Thrushes' eggs look little low heavens, and thrush
Through the echoing timber does so rinse and wring
The ear, it strikes like lightnings to hear him sing;
The glassy peartree leaves and blooms, they brush
The descending blue; that blue is all in a rush
With richness; the racing lambs too have fair their fling.

What is all this juice and all this joy?
A strain of the earth being in the beginning
In Eden garden. Have, get, before it cloy,
Before it cloud, Christ, Lord and sour with sinning,
Innocent mind and Mayday in girl and boy,
Most, O maid's child, thy choice and worthy and winning.

Gerard Manley Hopkins
Elizabeth Summers

Shoe Box Collection



We had a letter thanking us for our participation in this Christmas Appeal. Blythswold were able to distribute 140,000 Christmas gift boxes to the poor in Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Moldova, Romania, Serbia, the Ukraine and India. 20,034 boxes were sent from our region alone. "We were able to give young and old alike a Christmas treat – folk that would never be able to give presents any more than they would ever expect to receive one. Our heartfelt thanks go out to all of you as you have played such an integral part in this Appeal.

Ash Wednesday 2008

The attendance (especially at St Michael's) was quite disappointing this year. I know this was in part due to illness and holidays. That still leaves a few thousand people in Cuxton and Halling who felt able to miss this service this year, many of whom probably thought it was unimportant anyway. I have run out of things to say to those people for whom Christ's invitation is insufficient incentive to come to Church.

It may be, however, that some of you regret not coming because you could not get there. Would it help if we changed the time or if it were possible to arrange lifts?

Small numbers do not invalidate an act of worship. Jesus said that two or three were enough and I am glad that seven times that number did our duty on Ash Wednesday, but I do feel sad that so many of you seem content to live without the grace God freely offers you in the preaching of His Word, the celebration of the Sacraments and participation in common worship.

Roger.

CUXTON COMMUNITY INFANT SCHOOL NEWS

Dear Friends of our School,

As I write this piece at the beginning of February, I know I am writing for the March edition of the magazine and time is passing quickly, as we are almost at Valentine's day and there are a plentiful amount of chocolate eggs in the supermarkets! As we approach half term, the children and staff are quite tired. A nasty virus has been lurking and that coupled with coughs and colds has pulled many of the children down. Hopefully the lighter mornings and evenings, and bright crisp days will make us all feel better.

Almost at parents evenings, it will be so pleasing however to discuss with parents their children's progress and next targets. Each child has their own individual targets in literacy and numeracy - very alien to when many of us were at Infant school (showing my age!)

The children have been thinking about healthy eating and keeping healthy, and to 'round up' a very successful topic, a chef/fitness expert is coming into school to cook with the children and teach them some healthy PE skills. I think we are all joining in too!

Today we have celebrated the beginning of Chinese New Year. Some children in our year 2 class organised a display for the hall and made labels, and Mr Tang's son came to talk to us in assembly about the Year of the Rat. The children are intrigued to know which year they were born in! Thanks also to Mr Tang for providing the school with a gift of fortune cookies, for each child. We really appreciate his kindness.

Following half term we have a visit from the firemen to see the children (of course!) and talk about fire safety. Also a folk music afternoon for all the children to join in with.

Our Mother's day assembly will be on Friday 29th February in the afternoon, where each class will perform to their Mums. Our class assemblies will be performed to parents during the month of March - so possibly more news on those next time!

The FCS are holding a pamper evening on Tuesday 25th March in the Junior school which all ladies are welcome to attend. Many therapies will be available for you to book, including waxing, aromatherapy, Indian head massage, colour therapy, ear candles and reflexology to name just a few. Book now to avoid disappointment - tickets cost £3 (this includes a glass of wine!) and are available from May on 01634 714247.

As always the FCS continue to work tirelessly for our school and the Juniors, to raise money for much needed resources. Do think of us, if you work for a company who amazingly throw unwanted stationery, material or resources for making models away, or if you know your company supports local schools/projects. I am willing to write bids!

We continue to work hard and strive for the very best for the children in our care. It was lovely to show some new parents around recently, and for them to comment on the welcoming, warm and friendly atmosphere in our school.

After half term we have some visitors from the Department of Education and Skills to see the good work we do. Let's hope they go away wowed too, so Cuxton Infants is remembered!

Lastly, come and visit us, if you have some spare time to volunteer to help in our school or join us for lunch on a Wednesday - enquire at the office.

Take care and keep safe, Sandra Jones, Headteacher

A Sermon for Holocaust Memorial Day

Isaiah 9 vv 1-4, I Corinthians 1 vv 10-18, Matthew 4 vv 12-23

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.

These are very familiar words from our beautiful Christmas services when we are thinking about the coming of the promised Saviour. We celebrate Christ the Light of the World, but do we consider the abject horror of the darkness in which the people walked, the terrible depths of the shadow of death in which they dwelt? Holocaust Memorial Day plumbs the depths of human wickedness and the suffering which is the inevitable consequence of our rebellion against the Love of God. We are asked today to remember the Nazi concentration camps and the extermination of 6,000,000 Jews. We do not forget the Nazi murders of gypsies, homosexuals, the mentally deficient and all those other human beings considered to fall short of the Nazi vision of racial purity. Neither do we forget the genocides and the crimes against humanity perpetrated throughout the world and throughout human history by the children of Adam, who is himself described as the son of God. There are, however, three reasons why the Nazi Holocaust of the Jews troubles us more than so many other equally horrific events in the story of the human race. The first is that the Nazi Holocaust took place within living memory. The second is that the German nation which attempted this genocide was a civilised, Christian, European country, not too dissimilar from our own. We are uncomfortably reminded that anti-Semitism was a familiar feature of English life for hundreds of years. To say that it could never happen here would be to claim that we English are somehow inherently morally better than the Germans – a claim of racial superiority to equal the arrogance of the Nazis. I am afraid that, given similar economic and political conditions, similarly horrific events really could happen here.

The third reason why the Holocaust of the Jews troubles us is because of the Old Testament. The Jews were the chosen people. God saved the Jews from Pharaoh. He protected Jerusalem from the Assyrians. He sent Cyrus the Persian to undo the work of King Nebuchadnezzar who demolished the Temple and exiled the principal inhabitants of Judaea. God provided Esther to prevent the evil Haman from carrying out a genocide of all Jews throughout the Persian Empire centuries before Christ. If God could save the Jews in the centuries BC, why did He not save the Jews in the C20 AD? And if God could save the Jews in the past, why does He not save the gypsies, the homosexuals, the mentally deficient, the Armenians, the Bosnian Moslems, the Zimbabweans, the people of Darfur or any of the other afflicted and oppressed races of humanity?

Three answers. The first is that God has entrusted the human race with freedom. We are free to choose good or evil. You and I face choices every day. We can be good or we can be bad. It is up to us. The German nation chose Hitler

to be their leader and they carried out his mad, bad policies. Of course God knew that, when He gave us freedom, people would choose evil and that there would be terrible consequences. It was also His decision that making free people who could choose whether to love Him and to obey His Law of Love was much better than making robots who would always do the right thing because they had no choice. Freedom is one of God's greatest gifts to us and He does not lightly take it away even when we use our freedom to do the most terrible things.

The second answer is that another great gift of God is the reliability of natural laws. He does not, for example, switch gravity on and off so that a dropped brick normally falls to the ground, but remains hanging in the air if it would fall on someone. A poisonous gas is always poisonous. God does not suddenly make it non-toxic when it is used by bad people against good people. We might think that, if we were all powerful and all knowing like God, we could devise a world with much less pain and suffering. Harry Secombe used to sing *If I ruled the world, every day would be the first day of Spring*, but think about it. How could you have a first day of Spring if there were no 2nd, 3rd or 4th days of Spring? What would be the point of Spring with no Autumn, Winter or Summer? What would life be like in a world that was all Seedtime and no Harvest? OK, that is a trivial way of putting it, but I really do not see how we can say that we could devise a better universe than the one we live in unless we knew as much as God knows and, in that case, we should probably have to accept that this is in fact the best of all possible worlds.

Thirdly, how do we know that God did not intervene? Hitler's Reich was supposed to last for 1,000 years. In fact it came to an ignominious end in 1945. I believe that God does operate in our lives at the same time as respecting our freedom and without compromising the integrity of the natural world – but I cannot explain how this can be!

If we acknowledge the terrible depth of the darkness in which the people walked, what does it mean to welcome the Christ as the Great Light? He begins His preaching with the words, *Repent: for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand*. God is redeeming the world. If human beings want to share in that redemption, we must repent. We must turn to Christ. We must renounce evil. We must repent of all our sins. St Paul preaches the Cross of Jesus. He says, *For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God*. None of this makes sense to the unbeliever, but the reality is that it is through the Cross of Jesus that God saves the human race, indeed the whole of creation. Christ is the Light of this dark world because of His supreme act of self-sacrificial love on the Cross, when He offered Himself for the sins of the world.

This is true for two reasons, the first much easier to understand than the second. The first is that Christ's offering of Himself on the Cross shows that He shares our sufferings. Whatever the reason God that does not put an end to human pain, we know that He does not leave us to suffer because He does not love us. In Jesus He shares our suffering. He becomes the victim of humanity's sins and He endures the consequent pain. This is a great mystery and a great comfort. We know that, when we pray, He is with us. He understands. He quite literally sympathises. He feels with us. We pray, whether for ourselves or for other people, knowing that the depth of His Love for us, His understanding, is His Death for us on the Cross. The second point, which is very much harder to understand, is that Christ's Death on the Cross is not only in solidarity with the victims of human sin, it is also forgiveness for the sinner. And that is hard to understand. Why should the perpetrators of the Holocaust be forgiven? And yet it is in the nature of God that He longs for all people to be reconciled to Himself. He is the God *Who desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live*. God not only shares the pain of the victims of human sin; He also makes it possible for the sinner to return to Him and be saved. And that is just as well because we are all sinners and we are all sinned against. We need a Saviour Who knows what it is to be the victim and is still able to forgive.

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. So what do we do about all this? In today's Gospel, St Matthew reminds us of those words in Isaiah about the Light that shines in the darkness. He records Jesus starting that work by preaching *Repent: for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand*. Jesus then goes on to recruit apostles to work with Him. So, there you are. Are you for Him or against Him? Do you help Jesus to gather the wheat into His Father's barns or do you scatter? Jesus is looking for an apostolic Church which continues with the task the Father gave Him to be a great light to a world walking in darkness.

If I had time, I could say a lot about the situation Paul addressed in Corinth, where the people of Jesus, the apostolic Church, had already fallen from their high calling and fallen out among themselves. You see those Corinthian Christians were only human – like you and me. Yet God could use them as channels of His grace, as people in whom and through whom the Light of Christ would shine in this dark world. So there you are and here I am, people who once walked in darkness, but have now been called out of darkness into His own marvellous light. It says that people like us *shew forth his praises*. We do so as we ourselves become the light of the world. RIK.