



Words from the Well

Canon Sally Theakston



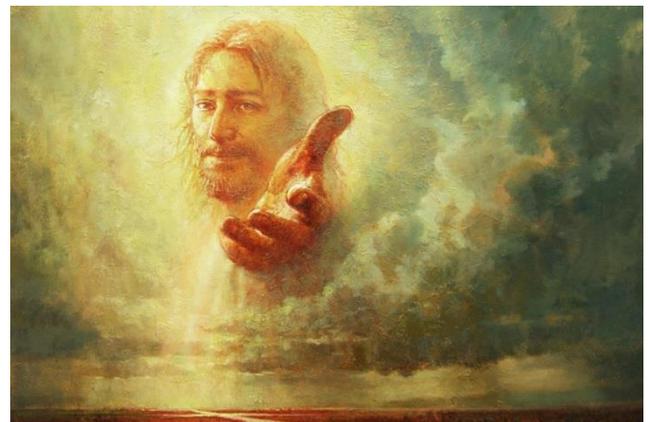
During December people often ask me how things are going. 'It's your busy time,' they say. Of course December does bring its own challenges but it is also a month when some of our more routine meetings and activities do not take place. It is our church building that is most especially busy. Last year over the period of Christmas Eve and Christmas Day more than a thousand people attended worship at St. Nicholas.

Before term ends we will be delighted to see children from our local schools taking part in plays, concerts and services. Families and friends will be entranced by quantities of angels with tinsel halos and shepherds with tea towel headdresses. Several crates of oranges will be used for the making of Christingles!

In a recent survey I learnt that only 14% of adults knew the story of the Nativity. Sometimes I think that even those of us who know it well need to be reminded about the vulnerable baby born in a country under Roman occupation and whose family soon afterwards had to flee as refugees to Egypt. Yet he was born to change our world.

But before all that, December begins in church with Advent. It begins with darkness and not light. In the Anglican tradition the church is decked in purple which is a colour of penitence and preparation. For before the feast of Christmas there is a time for waiting and watching and getting ready. Advent reminds us that God is infinitely mysterious even though soon we shall know and worship him as a babe in a manger.

I am sure that December will be a busy time for you. But why not pause and come and journey with us to Bethlehem and so be ready to welcome Christ into your hearts and lives this Christmas.



Dereham's OMF prayer lead promotes Third Age Mission

79 year old Janet Barrow, the coordinator of the OMF Prayer Group at Eckling Grange, and a former missionary in the Philippines during her retirement, has a passion to see more retired people experience the benefits of Third Age Mission. Janet talks to us about the benefits of serving as a missionary in retirement and her own experience.

When Janet Barrow's late husband Roy, a Deputy Head at Alderman Peel High School in Wells next the Sea retired in 1995, the couple accepted an opportunity with the Christian mission agency OMF International to teach at a school for missionaries' children in the Philippines. The couple were based at the school for four years, before taking a break and then going back to the Philippines for another year to do an administrative role with the mission.



Janet Barrow, who now lives in sheltered accommodation in Eckling Grange, the Christian residential complex on the edge of Dereham, continues to lead an OMF Prayer Group and is eager to promote mission opportunities to people of retirement age.

“The whole thing was just a thrilling experience. “Whilst at the school on the edge of Manila, Roy taught a range of GCSE subjects and Janet, who is also a trained teacher, helped in the school library, took the occasional class and encouraged mothers with young children within missionary families. Janet said: “The great thing for Roy was, after having the responsibility of being a Deputy Head, he was now able to teach, which was what he loved to do. He said, ‘it was the Lord’s bonus at the end of his teaching career.’”

Roy and Janet met at an OMF conference and throughout their married life led OMF prayer meetings at their home. Janet, who attended the recent Celebrate exhibition in the Forum in Norwich, as an OMF representative, now has a passion to encourage other retired people to engage in overseas mission. She said: “There is a lot of opportunity for people of retirement age to go and be missionaries. Our children were grown up. It was a great adventure; it really was.”

One of the benefits, Janet has found, is the result of not accepting the conventional path of settling down in retirement, but instead trusting in God to go outside of your comfort zone. She said: “It was a help when we were downsizing because I knew that we had gone to the Philippines with just two suitcases. And all the stuff we left at home, we didn’t actually need.

Gradually downsizing for when I came here was not as difficult for me as it can be for some people. Also we had already experienced this moving from out of our comfort zone into somewhere different, so simply moving was much easier.”

Janet also found that the experience of living as a foreigner brought meaning to the teaching of being a citizen of heaven. She said: “We were foreigners – we weren’t citizens of that country. That is a lead into remembering that we are strangers on earth and we are travelling to a heavenly home.”

Roy was a Reader at St Mary’s Heacham before and after living in the Philippines. The couple attended a Filipino Baptist Church whilst in Manila which Janet describes as a ‘revelation’. We were sharing in the lives of people who lived in real poverty, and knew how to trust God in all circumstances. Seeing the poverty and experiencing the heat, pollution and typhoons of a tropical country such as the Philippines were real challenges to us, who had never been to Asia before. She said: “People said that the time in the Philippines really enriched Roy’s preaching. So from that point of view we had more to give to the local congregation on our return”.

Janet said: “There are many mission organisations now which have opportunities for people in their retirement. And it isn’t like it used to be in the old days when you went to the other side of the world and it was a seven week journey by boat. Now you can fly there for a short time, and return quite easily. The benefits and the joy of doing something different in retirement are just amazing.”

*Editors: Our mission partners
Andrew and Shona Goodman
work with OMF in Thailand.*

*‘OMF’ describes itself as a
global fellowship of Christians
with a heart for East Asia;
serving the church and sharing
the gospel. Its’ work is diverse as is the communities it
serves – from planting churches to running
businesses – from practicing medicine to training
Sunday school teachers.*



Sarah Meeson tells us of A New Addiction

It was December 28th 2009 when my little boy Max was born. On this day, little did I realise the interest he would have in clocks, churches and, of course, bells.

It all began when Max went to nursery. We had to walk past the church on the way and Max always ran on in front of me. Most mornings the church would be open and in he would run. I would shout at him to come back, but it was too late, because he was already gone. This is how I first met David Webster and I told him about Max's obsession with bells. David allowed Max to ring the old ship's bell at the front of the church.

At the time we lived up near the golf course when one evening Max could hear the sound of the bells on the wind, so we got in the car and using Weatherspoon's car park we sat and listened. We did this several times and one winter's evening we got out of the car, and a nice man, who later we learned was Bill Dingle

invited us up to the ringing chamber in the tower.

We found everyone to be so welcoming, but I discovered Max was too young to ring. I

think he was about three years old at the time. As the year went on, Max used to beg us to take him to the tower and so we would pop every now and then.

When Max was about six years old we moved to Becclesgate and the urgency to go bell ringing grew. So once a fortnight we went to the tower and Max began to learn to handle the rope. Progress was fast, but every week I was asked if I would like to 'have a go' and eventually I was persuaded to give it a try. It took me just under a year to get the hang of bell ringing with the help of Chris, Paul, Bill and Mark, to whom I will always be grateful. I never knew I would find such an addictive hobby. I asked my friend and her son to come and join us and they are now getting the hang of it as well.



Max in the meantime is making good progress and I hope he will be ringing solo very soon. We look forward to our Monday practice nights and to meeting up with our many new friends both old and young. I would like to thank everyone at St. Nicholas Bell Tower for their kindness and for making me feel so welcome. Max and I will stay ringing for as long as we can.

Note from Editor: A young Mum, Sarah, with the help of her family, has become a committed ringer in the last year. In early October the Western Branch of ringers organised a striking competition and Dereham tower entered a band which included Sarah and Jayden Stebbings as new ringers.

The band came third and Sarah won the certificate for the bravest new ringer and Jayden for being the youngest. Our tower and church are the richer for having two enthusiastic and personable members.

Being Useful from Revd Canon Derek Price

One of the glories of the C of E is the wealth of ancient churches. Norfolk has lots. Most of them have memorials to people of the past and are very elaborate with flowery descriptions of their 'over the top' virtues. Perfect males!

Women and wives are unfortunately secondary and sometimes not even mentioned as mothers of children. Did fathers give birth in those days?

On holiday many of us love to traipse round churches to gaze at these very florid tributes. Have you got a favourite monument that you tell others about? The one I like most is in a free church in Thetford. The person commemorated is described simply as 'a useful member of the church' that's all. 'Useful'.

I increasingly appreciate the many members of the church in Dereham who lovingly serve the church by simply doing 'useful things' – flower arranging, cooking, making drinks, cleaning, polishing pews, sweeping the floor, selling tickets, washing up etc etc. I like to think they are not forgotten as 'useful' members of our church. We don't all have to be knights in shining armour. Just make a cup of tea!



Ruth Hodson informs us of Thy Kingdom come

By the time you read this article, the 'Thy Kingdom Come' Communion Service will have taken place and you will, hopefully, have experienced the prayer stations based on the Lord's Prayer. On the website created to support the Archbishop's recent initiative there were many resources and ideas to develop prayer. It was, however, the section 'Bright prayer ideas for your church' that took my attention, particularly 'The Lord's Prayer Stations'. It appeared to be like Messy church for adults! As our congregation has embraced the concept of Messy Church so fully, I thought it would be good for us to do the receiving rather than the delivering. Sadly, there were no crafts to take home, but it was my prayer that though experiencing the 6 prayer stations together there would be something for everyone to draw closer to our Lord and Father.



#PLEDGE2PRAY

Our Father in heaven: an invitation to connect with God as the perfect Father.

Give us today our daily bread: an opportunity to thank God for his provision.

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven: an opportunity to reflect on what it means to acknowledge God as king.

Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us: an invitation to accept God's forgiveness.

And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil: an opportunity to reflect on the fact that God leads us through life.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen: an invitation to accept Jesus as king. Amen!

Theology made easy says Adam Pyke

I have just finished reading a book called "God curious". The author says about the book "As I have been writing this book, I have been reading several others including...'What the best college teachers do' and it occurred to me that the arguments of the two books are similar in that they are both very much in favour, not of informing people, but of helping them to think in a more informed and wise way about the things that really matter'.

Speaking personally, this reader is certainly better informed and without being conscious of any hard work in the process (although whether he is wiser is perhaps for others to say). The author is the Rev Dr Stephen Cherry, Dean of King's College, Cambridge. He must be a very modest man as in the book, after commenting that with the advent of the computer and the Internet you can now buy an amazing range second-hand books very cheaply, he writes "*I recall the strange feeling I had when my first book became available for one penny on Amazon. Should I be proud or broken hearted? I decided that provided the notes with the book said 'signs of wear' I should be happy*".

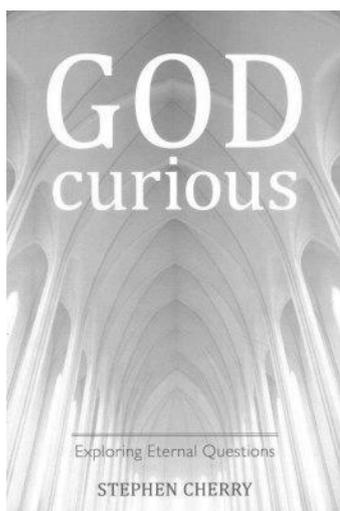
The book was originally intended for sixth formers to encourage them to study Theology at university but the number of prospective readers was soon widened to include anybody who might be interested in the

subject. Indeed, although the subtitle is "Exploring eternal questions" it might well be "A gentle introduction to Theology". To quote from the introduction, or as the author calls it, "Welcome", "*Theology is something you will enjoy if you find yourself asking questions like these: 'Why are we here?' 'What might become of us in the very long term future?' 'Why do some very good people have to endure very painful experiences?' 'Does the word "God" have meaning?' 'To what extent are religions similar or different?' 'Are human beings born bad or are they fundamentally good?' 'Why are special books so important in many religions?' 'What do religious traditions have to teach us about justice or truth, peace or hope?' 'Is "Love" merely a romantic phase of life, or does it lie at the heart of the deepest reality?' "*

Dr Cherry has a very light easy style to which he adds a touch of humour every now and again. He is keen to encourage the reader so, for example, he concludes each chapter with something like “If you find any of this intriguing, please read on.....” or “If you think you might like to travel a little with that community (of theologians), then do read on”.

He is a great enthusiast himself and in the chapter headed “Why engage with Theology?” he answers his question himself with sub-sections of the chapter entitled “It’s fascinating” and “It’s fun” and you can see what he means. Although he points out that you can be a follower of any religion or none to be a theologian, he writes from a Christian point of view.

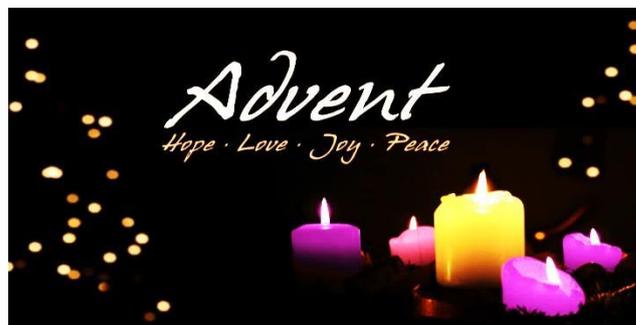
At one stage he summarises a history of Christian theology in fifteen tweets, although to be fair after setting out each tweet, he then follows it with a short explanation.



Although the book was only published earlier this year, I borrowed my copy from the library. I am just about to return it so if you think you might be interested, you can borrow it.... and read on.

Ding Dong Merrily at Christmas

Being a parent and latterly a grandparent makes Christmas a very special time, especially whilst the children are very young, because Christmas can be magical. Aside from the preparations for the annual visit from Father Christmas, there is the huge anticipation as we go through Advent with the candles on the Advent ring being progressively lit each Sunday morning.



I think these two aspects of Christmas make for an even greater sense of joy on 25th December. It is this whole package which makes this festival so very special to those of us who find our church such a solace.

December is for us ringers a very busy time, because for several years now we have ensured whenever possible that the schools who come to St Nicholas for their Christmas services are welcomed in exactly the same way as our regular church goes on a Sunday. Timing can be tricky and because the ringers are by nature of the separate tower, isolated from the activity in the church, it is sometimes difficult to know if we are ringing too early or too late.

Organising all of this requires the help of Michael Callow in Church House, who briefs me as to when and at what time each school is coming to St. Nicholas. I then prepare a spread sheet for the ringers, who in their turn commit to as many of the occasions as possible. A master sheet is made up and is distributed to all those involved and hopefully we are ready to go. Any service with less than four ringers has to be scrapped, but that to date has not happened very often.

Prior to the schools coming to the church, Christingle candles are prepared by each student. This is accomplished usually with the help of members of the congregation going to the school. On the day of the service, having completed our ringing session, it is great to creep into the church and watch each service unfold and to see the candles held by each student gradually lighting up the church.

The climax for the ringers is Christmas Eve when there are three Christingle services in the church. We usually manage to ring for two, because at soon after eleven o'clock we are back again to ring for the midnight service. It is always a bit of a joke when we

say to each other as we troop back down the stairs 'Well tomorrow you can come an hour later'. Thankfully the Rector too needs to have a slightly later start and we all certainly appreciate our lie in.



Our very last task of the year is to ring out Old Year's Night and to ring in the new. Now that is fun and we usually have a little something to celebrate having completed another year's work for our lovely church and congregations.

What do our continental friends eat at Christmas?

It seems that almost everyone just adores Christmas food whatever their nationality or their religious persuasion. Even Communist China celebrates Christmas with a bang, and we know that many of our decorations are made there. Everyone likes a happy, joyful festival, and it is even better when great food is served.

In some parts of Europe centuries-old dining customs are still observed. This is very noticeable in parts of Eastern Europe and in some of the out of the way areas such as the Basque country that borders France and Spain.

In Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine a very elaborate meal of twelve meatless dishes is served on Christmas Eve. In this area Advent is a serious time of fasting which is only broken on Christmas Day. The twelve dishes relate of course to the twelve apostles. Great care is taken to honour deceased relatives at the feast, which may even include the setting of empty places, with food servings placed for them on the table.

The Czech Republic enjoys the rather surprising main dish of fried carp and potato salad. Apparently this

tradition emanated from excessive fishpond cultivation during the 17th and early 18th centuries (an ancient case of waste not, want not!). Biscuit making is hugely important – every household prepares a wide variety of designs and flavours for visitors and family to enjoy, and the biscuits often find themselves being utilised as edible Christmas tree decorations.

Our friends the Danes love their pancakes and great care is taken when creating these spherical dumpty 'doughnuts', liberally sprinkled with icing sugar. Main courses can include roast pork with delicious crackling or perhaps a roast duck with apple sauce and a prune stuffing. A very special creamy form of rice pudding usually concludes the feast.

Portuguese families adore the beautifully decorated fluffy fruit cake known as a 'King Cake', while the Christmas dinner might comprise cod or boiled octopus, followed by roasted goat or lamb. Almond pie is a very popular pudding. It is interesting to take a peek inside our little Portuguese supermarket when Advent draws near and see the delicacies on offer.

France has almost too many wonderful culinary delights for the whole year, but of course their Christmas meal has to be really special. Menus can vary greatly from area to area but oysters, smoked salmon, pancakes, chestnut stuffed turkey (perhaps with truffles) with a quince cheese seem to appear frequently in menus.

Parts of Provence serve a 'Thirteen Dessert' course at the Christmas Eve feast which follows on from the Midnight Mass.

Wherever you go, you can be sure that the Christmas meal is a very, very serious matter, prepared with love and joy for family and friends.

*One Editor says;
Christmas Pud is
one of my
favourites for
Christmas food!
And definitely
sausage rolls –
yummy!*



Christmas if a time when we remember says Revd Jane Nursey

Christmas can be a time of mixed emotions for many people.

It can be a lonely time. For those who are bereaved it is a time of remembering loved ones who are no longer with us and remembering the joy and laughter shared in Christmases past. It can be painful time because of separation or division with families – and hence regret and pain. It can be a time of distance because modern day family life means that families may be separated by sea and continent. It can be a desperate time if you have no shelter or food – in this country, or in war torn places of conflict.

And for some it may be difficult because the ability to 'remember' isn't possible.

Once a month during the year, myself and a small but very loyal team from church, (Derrick and Josie Watts, and Veronica Marshall), attend Oak Manor Nursing Home in Scarning. The residents are gathered in the lounge and we bring 'church and worship' to them. The pattern is the same – some hymns, prayer and an interactive talk.

To some it may seem surprising that I say 'interactive' because if you were observing you may think it is only the leader and visitors who are participating.

But no, you would be wrong. Observe the lady sitting in her chair, who though sitting quietly with her eyes closed, is singing all the words of the hymns, and worshipping with us.

Welcome, the gentleman who comes forward and stands in the midst of us who enjoys shaking his tambourine to the hymns, and takes it very seriously.

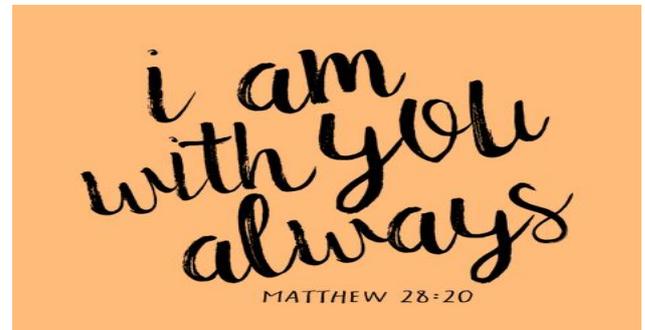
Reflect on the lady who one Christmas, came and took the baby doll 'Jesus' and walked around with him, rocking the doll in her arms.

And as I prayed one day, there was the lady who shouted to me, 'You need to pray for these people.'

Just recently on a visit, as we prayed the Lord's Prayer, the gentleman sitting in the corner opened wide his hands and joined in every word of prayer This he did remember.

Worship too, is an opportunity to affirm and acknowledge the staff, and give thanks for their care of loved ones.

A simple visit of taking the church out into the community to everyone - residents, staff and visitors. We bring God's Presence and Love with us, and leave enriched and blessed in return. We remember them.



Derrick Watts continues in telling us of how music brings enjoyment to those with dementia

For most of my life, as a hobby, I have been a singer in bands - M.O.R. and country music. Three years ago, my wife's Mum was placed in a care home where she was looked after very well.

After visiting Mum a few times I felt that most of the patients just watched TV or fell asleep in the afternoons. (Can I add, that there were activities most mornings.) On seeing this I thought it was a good idea if they had an afternoon of music. The care home agreed and I set about finding songs that they would sing along with. As most residents were in their 80's and 90's, I made up a programme of singalong songs about two hours long with a little bit of chat; they sang along, clapped hands, and some were able to tap their feet and with help from carers, some would dance around a while. I had lots of requests of favourites – some of which I had to learn as I am far too young to know them(ha, ha!!) I would go once a month and the people looked forward to the next time so with a bit of 'Mother Kelly', Tipperary, Cliff, Elvis, Engelbert and of course Tom Jones, we had a great afternoon. It got their attention and they joined in.

As the word spread around homes, now after three years, I play in six different care homes a month. I do look forward to going as I see their reaction. It feels good and folks are happy. Sometimes there is a tear or two shed as the songs bring back memories for them - happy ones I hope.

How wonderful music is to bring back memories and to stimulate minds of patients with dementia. Music gives them comfort.

So, what is a Carol?

Carols have a very long history. In very early times they were songs of celebration which often involved dancing. Initially there was no exclusive connection with Christmas or the church. The songs were frequently sung out of doors; out in the village fields or in processions around the neighbourhood. The words of the songs covered the entire Christian world from creation to resurrection. Songs such as 'Tomorrow shall be my dancing day' and 'The Cherry Tree Carol' include numerous verses that cover the many events found in the New Testament. Today, we just select the bits we need for Christmas.

In Parson Woodforde's diaries (circa 1780's) we read the regular Christmas request from his congregation 'May we sing a carol on Christmas Day? It was always refused!

Outside the parish church many village and town communities created their own local versions of folk carols, many with their special tunes. Both 'While shepherds' and 'God rest you merry' had many variants. Proper poets and composers didn't begin to be involved until the Victorian period. Only then, did the music we know today as carols, begin to seep into Church of England worship. The expansion of congregational singing led to the production of hymn books and carol collections. In time, the carol service was invented and pioneered in a Cornish shed.

In many areas of Britain, local carols are still heartily sung, often in pubs rather than in churches. Interestingly we have an example virtually on our very doorstep. A few years ago the very talented Sue Rockley from Scarning wrote a beautiful Christmas poem that cried out for a musical setting. Careful exploration revealed a lovely melody by Walford Davies which fitted Sue's words perfectly. 'The Scarning Carol' was learnt by the congregation and now holds a regular place in their church carol service. Perhaps one day, a gifted member of St Nicholas might be able to give us a present of a sparkling new carol for us to sing!

Reprise Concert 11th November 2017

St. Nicholas Church was lucky to engage the talents of the ensemble, Reprise which is made up of four men and four women. Linda Campbell directs the group who perform regularly in East Anglia and who are much in demand. It was well over a year ago that the Fund Raising Committee began negotiations to engage the group and the windows of opportunity in the end were very small. The concert is visually better if it is dark and there is no way we could black out all our windows. The date chosen was, in the end, the only one possible before Christmas. How easy it is to forget that at this time of year there are so many other things going on when the booking is being finalised in May. However our audience was enthusiastic and welcomed the programme which consisted of songs from popular musicals. Excerpts from Les Miserables, West Side Story, Carousel, Phantom of the Opera, to name but a few were sung by the group, who moved seamlessly through their programme. The members all took turns in singing solo, as a duet or as the chorus for big finales. A truly slick performance which pleased and thrilled the audience throughout the evening.

Thanks to their generosity in offering their services free of charge, the church is the richer by £662.00. Our thanks to them, to the audience for coming to see the show and to all those quiet people who donated refreshments, wine, raffle prizes, and generally 'mucked' in. We would be the poorer without you all.

From the editors

Our best wishes for a truly joyful Christmas and a very happy New Year. Big thanks to all our contributors who have brought this edition to life. We welcome new

material at any time either through email to ceegebarker@waitrose.com or by written/typed copy via the office. **Deadline day for the Spring Newsround is Monday 26th February.**

