

# INSPIRE

MARCH 2026



The monthly magazine  
for the Parish of  
St John The Baptist, Frome



**March 2026**



*Spring from the church office window.*

*Photo: Karolyn Curle*

## The Vicar's view

In the film *Lady Bird*, an exasperated mother turns to her daughter and says "I just want you to be the best version of yourself you can be." The daughter is struck by this, but soon responds, "But what if this is the best version of me?" I often worry that this scene summarises my experience of Lent. With all the rules around fasting, the extra services to be done, the need to keep mindful of your sins and repent, and the more general attempt to be more holy, Lent can make God seem like some domineering parent with unrealistic expectations of their children, disappointed and punishing every moment we fail to meet their expectations. I can often be left feeling discouraged and inadequate, having failed to meet the expectations I perceive God as having had for me, and indeed which I have had of myself. Is this really all I am capable of? Am I now the best version of me that there is?

The problem is that, if we allow Lent to become primarily a time for insular self-pity, for feeling guilty, then it will naturally become a punishing chore to be endured and make our relationship with God overbearing. It will become like a scene in the Simpsons where Bart attends a Catholic school. As he walks in, there's a large crucifix on the wall with the words above it: "He suffered for our sins; now its your turn!" But Lent isn't so much about making us feel guilty for all that we are not, and it isn't God trying to get us to microdose on the same sufferings he underwent for us all those years ago. Lent, and especially Holy Week, is an invitation to grow more perfectly into our full potential, strengthened by the great love that Christ has shown for us and empowered by the knowledge that, in Christ, God is with us in our battles. In Lent our vision is drawn, starkly, to Jesus wandering in a wilderness beset by temptations, carrying the cross of human weakness and contempt, precisely to show us that if we leave the context of comfort with the ways it diminishes us with false illusions of how little we are worth, or how limited our abilities are, then, yes, we might meet with resistance to this quest for freedom, to alluring calls back to where we started, but if we persevere, we might well find ourselves close to God, more conformed to the image of Christ.

There comes a time we cannot avoid failure by never setting ourselves challenges too difficult, but rather that we must accept that, easy or difficult, failure is a reality of human living and we must confront it. If we limit what we what we try to do, for fear that we might fail in doing it, we will forever limit ourselves, and the breadth of our persons, lives and abilities which are open to the loving light and transforming power of God. A good Lent is not when we become more aware of our failures, our flaws and desperately try to hide them from God and others, like a teen trying to hide their packet of cigarettes from their parents. Instead, a good Lent is when we turn and face our failures, our sins, and see them in the light of a God who made the grave to be the launch pad for a new and transformed life, a God who stretches out their hand to us in failure and calls us beloved even in the mist of our worst deeds.

For us who follow a God who came back from the seemingly worst failure in history, let us see our failures as steps upon the way to a deeper revelation of who we are, as a necessary part of inviting God into our whole selves, good and bad, weak and strong. We go through Lent with the Church as a reminder that Christ is present in the dark and scary, not just the warm and comfortable. May this Lent transform our failures, our darkness, our faults into an open door, a fertile bed in which God may be invited. St Paul wrote “When I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor 10). I think this is because God’s measure of us is not whether we failed; God’s measure of success isn’t necessarily the outcome; it is by the fact that we sought to act at all. God’s measure is “Were we willing to be adventurous?” To draw close to God in even the dark and wild places, did we love God enough to risk failure for the chance to be a little more the person he made us, a little closer to him in our lives. In the wilderness of Lent we are asked to strip our lives of comfort, of luxury, not as a punishment but because “power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 9). If in this Lent you are confronting failures – be they present or past – do not be afraid of them, do not be ashamed of them. They may just be the beginnings of the transforming outworking of God’s power and glory in your midst.

**Rev Seamus Hargrave**

## 4th @ 4.00

### Informal worship for the young at heart

A new fixture on our Sunday afternoon worship pattern has been the “4th @ 4.00pm” service which, as the title suggests, happens at 4.00pm on the 4th Sunday of each month. These services follow a more relaxed liturgy and are designed very much with the younger generation in mind, but I hope they will also have something valuable



for the more mature members of our congregation.

In January we made this service our Christingle service, and it was lovely to welcome several families alongside other members of the St John’s family who all gathered to assemble their Christingles before forming a circle around the front half of church for prayers. On a January afternoon it was already quite dark outside by the time we lit all the candles, and the circle of candle flames was quite magical – something that never really had the

same effect when we held this service on a Sunday morning.

February’s service fell on the first Sunday of Lent, and so it was planned as an exploration of a Lenten wilderness, with a series of prayer stations based on some of the lines in that well-known hymn ‘Forty Days and Forty Nights’: a lamp shining on a sand tray borrowed from Focus for ‘sunbeams scorching all the day’; the night sky backdrop beside the font for ‘chilly dew drops nightly shed’ and a fine



selection of toy animals (including a shark, somewhat removed from its natural habitat) for 'prowling beasts about thy way'. We may not have had the company of so many families with school-age children this month – possibly due to it being half-term, and I forgot to put it on the church Facebook page – but following a map and collecting stickers proved to be an activity enjoyed by everyone, regardless of grey hairs and walking sticks.



In March the fourth Sunday will be the beginning of Passiontide, and the service will focus on gardens within the Holy Week and Easter story.



I am very keen to avoid labelling these services as 'Family' or 'All-Age' worship, as I feel these terms are both somewhat over-used and might be open to different interpretations. For the time being, therefore, we will advertise them simply as 4th @ 4.00 (until someone thinks of a better name), and I would like them to be seen as an opportunity for more informal worship to which everyone is welcome – and there will always be singing and cake.



Please spread the word about our service on 22nd March: 4th @ 4.00 'Surprises in the Garden' – bring your friends.

**Rosemary McCormick**

**Watch out for the hats again!**

First Rosemary got the Blue Scarf ... then it was the bishop's mitre (see Feb magazine) ... and now it's a crown! (Actually a prop for the 'Exploring the Wilderness' service on 22 Feb).

## How lovely is your dwelling place?

Many of the entries in our church visitors book comment “beautiful”, “inspiring” or “magnificent”, but recently as I have been walking around the pews I have been noticing the post-winter accumulation of dust, leaves and cobwebs that have gathered in dark corners. Our regular cleaner, Jonathan, works hard to maintain the hospitality and toilet areas, but the church is a very big place, and he can’t cover all of it! Now that the daffodils are out, the sun is shining (sometimes!) and the season of spring cleaning is upon us, perhaps we can channel some of this seasonal energy into tidying up the church.

Last year, during the summer months, Neil organised a successful series of Saturday morning working parties – the church was swept, the brasses were polished, the gardens were tidied up, and some of the cupboards were cleaned out; but we all know that these tasks need to be revisited, and so we are proposing to re-launch these monthly events, starting on Saturday 14th March. As the days get longer and sunnier we don’t want our visitors to start noticing the dust and grime!

**Saturday working parties** will also be an opportunity for meetings, and for some bigger tasks that need a team of people, such as Whit branches in May, and for that reason they may not always be on the second weekend of the month. In April we will need as many people as possible to help dress the church for Easter on the first Saturday, April 4th, when there will be flowers to be arranged, altars to be



dressed and brasses to be polished. In May the Whit branches will need to be installed on the fourth Saturday, the 23rd, so please make a note of that date in your diary – especially as the morning will start with the annual Well Dressing event.

We are also looking to restart the pattern of 'open doors' meetings – when the teams of people who do so much to ensure our Sunday services run smoothly have the chance to catch up with new initiatives and share good practice. On Saturday 14th March the Welcoming Team will meet at 10.00am, and anyone who would like to know more about what that job involves is invited to come and find out: is it just handing out hymn books or is there more to it?

**So to summarise:**

- 2nd Saturdays, 10.00 am–12.00 noon starting 14th March.

*Sometimes it might be a different Saturday if there is a special service to prepare for.*

- Can you spare an hour to help keep our church looking splendid and inviting?
- Tea and cake will, of course, be available – this is the Church of England after all!
- Different tasks for different skills/ abilities – no previous experience necessary.
- Opportunities for teams to meet and share information. In March this will be the Welcoming Team at 10.00am and Mothering Sunday posies to assemble at 10.30 am



Please note that in April it will happen on the first Saturday: the 4th April, as we prepare the church for Easter – flowers, altar frontals, brasses polished – it is always one of my favourite days of the year as everyone works together to prepare for the Easter Services – come and join us!

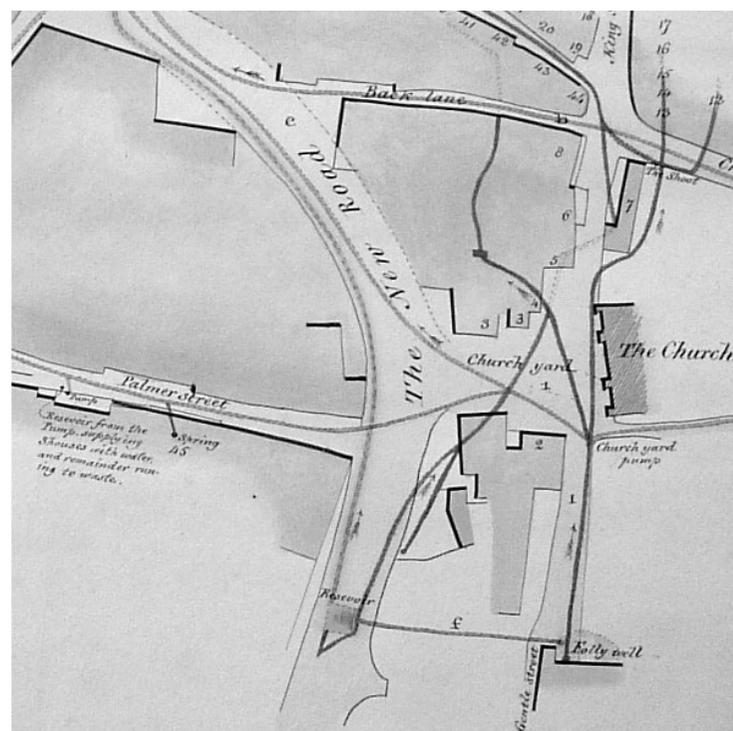
**Rosemary McCormick**

## Unholy water

In the nineteenth century the fountain at the bottom of the church steps, sometimes called St Aldhelm's Well or the Lion Well, was an important source of fresh drinking water for many properties in centre of the town without their own water supply.

Wouldn't it be a fine thing to have drinking quality water flowing from the fountain again! It could be a small step towards resisting the commodification of natural water by global corporations, providing massive profits for the likes of Nestlé and Coca Cola, who extract free water from natural aquifers and sell it, often in the form of highly polluting single-use plastic bottles.

Well, a small band of volunteers, endorsed by the PCC, are looking into this. We've tested the water and sought advice from Somerset Environmental Health (SEH). Unfortunately the water is currently contaminated with coliform bacteria and E. coli, which suggests that



*Water courses from Folly's Well*

sewage is somehow getting into the water, probably from the Gentle Street area. In fact, this can be treated fairly easily with a UV system, but SEH say we need to identify the source of the pollution for it to be considered safe. Some detective work is required.

The spring supplying this and the leat in Cheap Street was known as Folly's Well (*see opposite*), named after a house at the bottom of Gentle Street (now demolished). If we can identify where this is then we might be able to trace where the bacteria are coming from. There are other springs in the area, and it may be that some of these are clean and could provide an alternative source. I don't know whether this is achievable, and at the very least we should fairly easily be able to install a drinking water fountain fed from the mains. I'd like to think we can do better than this, though, and want to keep alive the dream of restoring the fountain to its original function of refreshing the town.

Do get in touch if you're interested or have any ideas.

**Simon Keyes**, [simon@onion.org.uk](mailto:simon@onion.org.uk) 07968 440684

	<h1>BEING PEACE</h1>
	<h2>7 MARCH 10-4</h2>
	<p><b>Bath and Wells Peacebuilding Network consider what it means to be a peaceful presence in a troubled world</b></p>
	<p><b>Suggested donation £10 - includes a soup lunch</b></p> <p>Mary's House is a new community for the spiritually curious, exploring what Christian wisdom might teach us about how to live more fully in an uncertain world.</p>
<p><b>WWW.MARYSHOUSE.ORG</b> <b>INNOX HILL</b></p>	 <b>mary's house community</b>

## March at St John's

*Eds: March has turned into a very busy month for St John's: the next three pages give you some details of what's happening.*

### Sunday 1st March

#### St John's Café and Mini Market

11.15am to 2pm

Teas, coffees, soup and rolls, cakes, books, bric-a-brac



### Friday 6 March

#### World Day of Prayer

**I Will Give You Rest: Come**

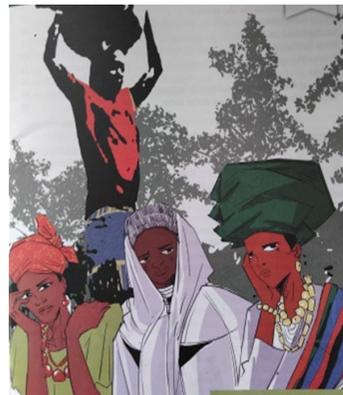
Matthew 11:28-30

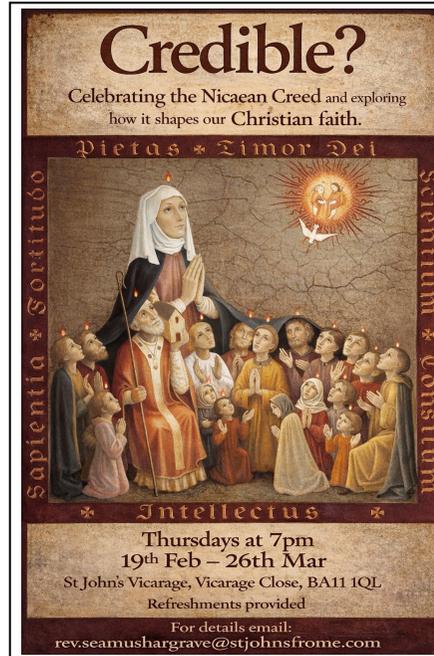
**2.30pm at St John's**

People from different congregations – Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, Congregational and United Reformed Church – will share in the service which has been prepared by Christian women from Nigeria, featuring testimonies which reflect their experiences and mirror the struggles faced by many around the world.

A Nigerian proverb states, 'The pain of one is the pain of all.'

Everyone is very welcome to join us in what promises to be a powerful and moving service.





Lent course at St John's

## Exploring the Creed

Thursdays at 7pm  
March 5, 12, 19, 26

at

St John's Vicarage,  
Vicarage Close BA11 1QL

Refreshments provided

For more details email:

[rev.seamushargrave@stjohnsfrome.com](mailto:rev.seamushargrave@stjohnsfrome.com)

### Friday 6 March (continued)

#### Flutter ... Flutter ... Flutter

... coping with a gambling addiction

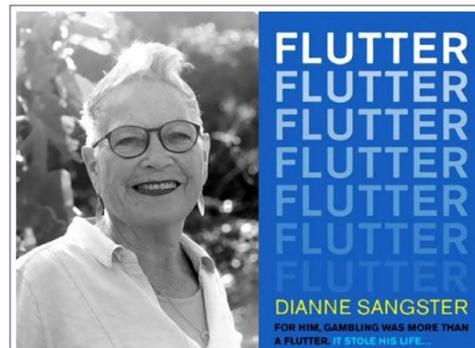
7pm to 9pm at St John's

Free entry



For some people, one flutter is not enough. Dianne Sangster's book is an honest and passionate account of coping with her husband's gambling addiction – and of finding help, hope and joy along the way.

Dianne will be in conversation with Eleanor Talbot from Frome FM, and this will be followed by a tea break and discussion.



## Saturday 7 March

*St Johns Women's Group*

### **Afternoon Tea Planning Meeting**

**3.30pm at the Bennett Centre**

Bring a small raffle prize. Free – no booking needed

## Saturday 14 March

### **Second Saturday working party**

**10am to 12 noon in church**

### **Welcome team meeting**

**10am in church**

### **Mothering Sunday posy making**

**10.30am in church**

## SONGS & SCONES

SATURDAY 14 MARCH

2PM IN ST JOHN'S CHURCH

BACK BY POPULAR DEMAND, JOIN LOCAL CHOIRS SONGBIRDS,  
FROME YOUTH CHOIR AND SVITLO FOR AN AFTERNOON OF HOPEFUL  
SONGS – BRING A CAKE TO SHARE!



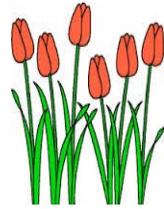
## Sunday 22 March

### **4th @ 4.00: 'Surprises in the garden'**

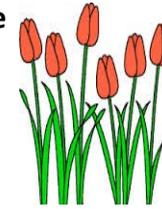
An informal service on the 4th Sunday of the month at 4.00pm

**Songs, gardens and cake – do come**





There will be no April mini-market on the first Sunday of April as it's Easter Day, but instead we are planning:

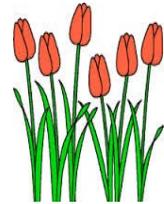


## A Spring Fair on Saturday 11 April 10am to 2pm

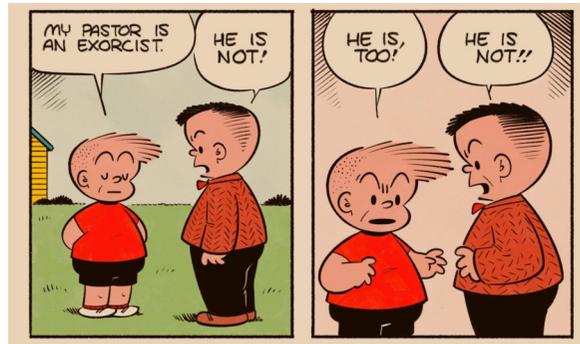
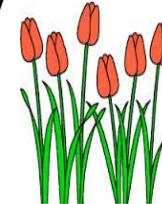
Cakes and Refreshments – Tombola and Raffle  
Books, Jewellery, Crafts – Bric-a-brac and Toys

Donations of goods and offers of help very welcome.

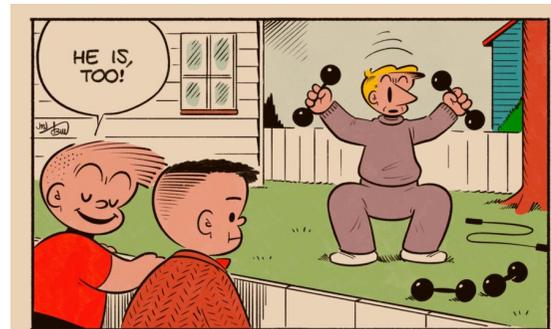
Please put donations behind the South Porch curtain.



More details in the April magazine



Cartoon time



## News from other churches

### St Katharine's, East Woodlands

Our Daffodil service will be on 1st March and our Mothering Sunday service on 15th March.

We have replaced the brass plaque that disappeared from a memorial bench in the churchyard. We are grateful to Margaret Nuth for noticing it was missing and to Nigel Coleman who funded the replacement.



### Village Hall, East Woodlands

Dates for your diaries:

Fri 6 March and Fri 3 April, Pop-up Pub 7pm onwards.

Tue 24 March, Daffodil Coffee Morning, 10.30-12.30pm

**Pam Chapman**



### A local horse has become the face of an international knitwear brand

Who'd have thought that two St Katharine's choir members would be behind the start of the international modelling career of a flea bitten Grey 20 year old, answering to the call of Lexi? In between a quick round of 'Ave Verum Corpus' and 'All Things Bright and Beautiful', Emma Uffindell and Deborah Bee have been photographing Lexi for an Instagram post for cashmere brand, Baker Miller Pink. To celebrate The Year of the Horse this Chinese New Year, Lexi modelled a scarlet Hoodie before an early morning Hoolie. Lexi's agent, Sandra, also responsible for hair and make-up, which took several hours in this muddy weather, said, "Lexi is not available for comment although she'd like it known that in future she won't get out of her stall for less than £10,000 or some fresh hay."

Bringing bible stories  
to life

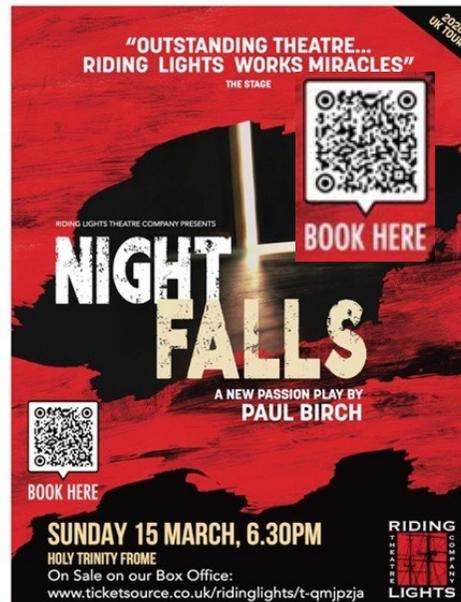


Open the Book (OtB) is an exciting storytelling project where Bible stories are shared with children in a way that is fun, interactive and memorable. Storytelling teams – made up of trained and safely recruited volunteers from local churches and organisations – prepare and present a 10–15-minute Bible story to a school assembly, involving the children as much as possible. .

We are running a taster event for anyone who would like to find out more:

- **on Tuesday 3 March, 7pm-8.30pm**
- **at Holy Trinity Church Hall**

The evening is free, but please book a place by using the QR code above or emailing [office@holytrinityfrome.com](mailto:office@holytrinityfrome.com)



A Frome Deanery event  
with  
Riding Lights Theatre  
Company

## Night Falls

A new passion play  
**Sunday 15 March**  
**6.30pm**  
at Holy Trinity Frome.

Tickets from:

[www.ticketsource.co.uk/  
ridinglights/t-qmjpzja](http://www.ticketsource.co.uk/ridinglights/t-qmjpzja)  
[office@holytrinityfrome.com](mailto:office@holytrinityfrome.com)



## Links in a Golden Chain 1

### St Catherine of Genoa

Readers who bear the name Catherine will know that there are many historical figures who have borne that name. We are familiar here at St John's with the martyr of Alexandria, who I have already written about, and there are more canonised saints of the Western church – the Catherines of Siena, of Sweden, and of Bologna. Other holy women bear this name, as well as members of royal families, past and present, throughout Europe, to this day. The name can, of course, be spelt with a K, and there are a large variety of spellings in many languages. The popularity of the name lies in its linguistic root in the Greek term *katheros* which means pure or clear, implying virtue and clarity of thought. Those of you who bear the name have many exemplars to look up to.

I picked the saint who lived in Genoa from 1447 to 1510 as she is sometimes overshadowed by some of her namesakes, and she was the patron saint of St Catherine's Hospice in Crawley, Sussex, where I had the privilege of being part of the chaplaincy team many years ago. She was chosen for that dedication as she dedicated her life to the care of the sick and needy.

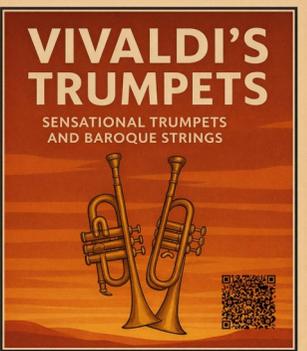
Catherine Fieschi was born into a prosperous and aristocratic family and propelled into a marriage at the age of sixteen. It turned out to be deeply unhappy as her husband, Julian Adorni, was a selfish and dissolute person. After ten years of suffering she was aroused from her sadness and from indifference to her Christian background by an intense spiritual experience: "... her heart was pierced by so sudden and immense love of God, accompanied by so deep a sight of her miseries and sins and of His Goodness, that she was near to falling to the ground; and in a transport of pure and all-purifying love she was drawn away from the miseries of the world." This was in the year 1474 when she was twenty-six. She went on to found the first hospital in Genoa, which became her home and the centre of her pastoral work. The great change in her life resulted not only in her

realisation of a call from God, but also in the transformation on her husband, who supported her and joined in the work of care. She demonstrated not only care of the sick, and scrupulous efficiency in the administration of the charitable work, but also a deepening mystical awareness of the presence of God in all aspects of her life and ministry. Her love and compassion passed beyond humanity to all the created order. She is recorded as saying that she could not bear to see an animal killed or a tree cut down without a sense that they had lost their God-given being. Her life at both the practical level and in the depth of her soul, showed the presence of God:

*“My me is God, nor do I know my selfhood, save in Him!” “My being is God, not by simple participation but by a true transformation of my being.” “God is my being, my self, my strength, my blessedness!”*

Catherine’s life demonstrated that principle expressed in the doctrine of the Incarnation of God in Christ that the physical and the spiritual can be embodied in a whole. It showed that the limitations of life in the world, which may involve pain and suffering, can be transcended. As we reflect on what may seem to be the negative aspects of our own lives, and those of others, we could take comfort from Catherine’s example, and pray for a clearer sight of God’s presence in what seems to be gloom or darkness.

**Kevin Tingay**



**VIVALDI'S TRUMPETS**  
SENSATIONAL TRUMPETS  
AND BAROQUE STRINGS

ST JOHN THE BAPTIST CHURCH, FROME  
8TH MAY 2026 7.30PM

BRISTOL ENSEMBLE [www.breathe-music.co.uk](http://www.breathe-music.co.uk) 

**Friday 8 May 2026**  
**7.30pm at St John's**

The Bristol Ensemble returns with a sparkling evening of Baroque music for strings and trumpet, featuring Vivaldi's *Concerto for Two Trumpets* and Geminiani's *La Folia*.

<https://www.breathe-music.co.uk/event-details/vivaldi-trumpets-at-st-johns-frome>  
or from Mandy Crook  
07561 305888  
[amandacrook@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:amandacrook@blueyonder.co.uk)

## SERVICES at ST JOHN's – MARCH 2026

### Regular weekly services in March

#### Sundays

- 8.45am Online service via Zoom – contact admin for link & code
- 10.00am Choral Eucharist\*  
\* Palm Sunday 29 March
- 5.00pm Evening worship in the Lady Chapel:  
(4.00pm on Week 1: Evening Prayer  
the 4th Week 2: Benediction and Evening Prayer  
Sunday) Week 3: Come and Sing Evensong  
Week 4: 4th @ 4.00 – note earlier time of 4.00pm  
Week 5: Flexible Fifth

#### Mondays

- 8.45am Morning Prayer in the Ken Chapel

#### Tuesdays

- 7.00pm Lenten Compline

#### Fridays

- 12.30pm Lunchtime Eucharist in the Lady Chapel

#### Saturdays

- 5.00pm Evening Eucharist in the Lady Chapel

### Additional services in March

- Tues 17 12.30pm Eucharist: St Patrick
- Thurs 19 12.30pm Eucharist: St Joseph
- Wed 25 8.45am Mattins: The Annunciation  
12.30pm Eucharist: The Annunciation

## DIARY DATES – MARCH 2026

### March

Sun	1	11.15am-2pm	Café & Mini Market
Tue	3	7pm for 7.30pm	Open the Book—see p 15
Wed	4	6.30pm	<i>Inspired to Read</i> Book Club (BC)
Thurs	5	2pm-4pm 7pm	Craft and Conversation (BC) Lent course on The Creed
Fri	6	2.30pm 7pm	World Day of Prayer service (SJ) - p 10 Flutter flutter flutter (SJ)—see p 11
Sat	7	9am 10am 3.30pm	United Prayer at St John's Being Peace (Mary's House) - see p 9 St John's Women's Group meeting (BC)
Tues	10	7pm	PCC meeting
Thurs	12	7pm	Lent course on The Creed
Sat	14	10am-12 noon 10am 10.30am 2pm-4.30pm	Saturday working party (SJ) Welcome team meets (SJ) Mothering Sunday posy making (SJ) Kindness Festival 'Songs and Scones' (SJ) see page 12
Sun	15	6.30pm	Night Falls (HT) – see p 15
Thu	19	2pm-4pm 7pm	Craft & Conversation (BC) Lent course on The Creed (vicarage)
Sat	21	10am	Worship Committee Meeting
Sun	22	4pm	4th@4.00: Surprises in the Garden—see
Thurs	26	7pm	Lent course on The Creed
Fri	27	2pm	Hospital Service
Sun	29		BST begins - Clocks forward
Tues	31	11am	Julian Meeting

**Sacred Art 3**  
**The Annunciation: 25th March**



*(National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., Open Access Collection)*

The Feast of the Annunciation falls on 25th March, nine months before Christmas Day. In Luke 1.26-38 God sends the Angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary. When he tells her that 'The Lord is with you', she is afraid. When he tells her, that 'You will have a son, Jesus', she is bemused. 'But I'm a virgin'. Gabriel assures her that God will send his Holy Spirit to 'overshadow' her. Mary responds: 'I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled.'

This dialogue between heaven and earth, mediated by an angel (which means 'messenger' in Greek), marks the 'announcement' of God's plan for saving humanity from the consequences of its

tendency to sin – to think and act disastrously through selfishness. There must be a fresh start, to be initiated through Jesus (a Hebrew name meaning ‘God is Saviour’); but it cannot begin until Mary unselfishly accepts God’s message.

This, for Christians of all schools of thought (Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant), renders Mary the most important person for the salvation of humanity after Jesus himself. She is human, not divine; but through her the incarnation – the coming of God in human form – will be made possible. Her ‘Yes’ to God makes it possible for Jesus, both Son of God and Son of Man, to be born: for the infinite and eternal to save us dwellers in time and space.

Masolino’s ‘Annunciation’ from around 1425 was intended as an altarpiece for a chapel in a Florentine church. In terms of dimensions it is an imposing 149 x 115 centimetres, and in terms of technique the panel balances between two epochs: the International Gothic and the Florentine Renaissance. The medium is mainly tempera (pigment bound by egg yolk), but there are oil glazes (transparent layers of paint providing luminosity).

International Gothic paintings are associated with aristocratic patrons. Look at the Angel Gabriel on the left, wearing a stunning garment of voided velvet (an expensive material in which a raised motif appears against a plain, flat background). But Gabriel descends into a room which is Florentine Renaissance. Masolino is up to date, with an interest in perspective and a central vanishing point to give a sense of three-dimensional space.

No artist in AD 1425 would have thought to portray with historical accuracy the scene set in the house of a Galilean peasant family living in Nazareth during the era of the Roman Empire. If they had, they would have shown a one-room dwelling, very sparsely furnished, with a floor of beaten earth, walls of rough stones held together by mud mortar, and a roof of wooden beams and reeds.

The artist’s patron was probably a rich Florentine merchant who wanted some bling. Masolino provided a palatial setting. Mary is sitting on a throne-like chair, and the room is panelled in marble, with

the roof upheld by an elegant column. Behind her is an extravagant panel of 'opus sectile' in which pieces of different coloured marble are put together to form geometric shapes. The room is worthy of the future Queen of Heaven.

Then there is Mary herself. A first century BC Jewish peasant girl would have had olive skin and long crinkly black or brown hair. Her homespun clothing would have been of muted undyed wool.

Masolino provided instead a young woman worthy to be the daughter of an upwardly mobile Florentine banker. She is fair skinned and golden haired, never having done a day's work in the fields and having dyed her hair a fashionable shade of blonde.

The historical Mary was probably illiterate. Scholars think that the literacy rate for Jewish women in Roman times was maybe 1-2% (apologies, but it was higher for men: 10-15%). Mary, however, is shown holding a book, and this symbolises the perfect moment of the Annunciation. Mary is thinking about the prophecy of Isaiah: 'Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son.' She realises that it applies to her ... and accepts her destiny.

Finally, there is the star on Mary's blue mantle. The star was a key symbol in the medieval literary and visual representation of Mary. It labels her as the 'Stella Maris' (Star of the Sea), the guiding light promising humanity that the safe harbour of heaven is attainable. It also labels her as 'Queen of Heaven', which is about her depth of holiness, not her equality with God. Note how the star on her mantle echoes the stars on the ceiling in Masolino's painting.

**Mark Golder**

## Where you there?

One of the most haunting hymns that I hear over the period of Passiontide is an African spiritual 'Where you there when they crucified my Lord?' It's a seemingly easy question to answer, and yet the question is surprisingly provocative. No, we were none of us physically there, but yet, in the denial of St Peter, the indifference of the crowd, the betrayal of Judas, the steadfastness of Our Lady and courage of St John, we can each of us read ourselves. The characters were different, but we as much denied and stood by Christ as they did. Time may separate us, but God's Spirit in the Church re-presents these moments, so that, year by year, we may, through worship and liturgy, touch the hem of those events which took place so long ago, offered the startling chance to do what our forebearers could not: that is, with hindsight, live the story and be the people we wish we could have been – rather than the people we fear we might have been – conscientiously training our conscience to choose the right and to be faithful to Christ through the events of Holy Week, in the hopes that we may then remain faithful when true discouragement and persecution faces us. The times may have changed, but the opportunity to stay and keep watch is still there, the opportunity to follow to the foot of the cross and not flee is still there, the opportunity to keep faith and look for the resurrection is still there. We can make each of these choices year on year as we are given the opportunity to fulfil them in our observance of the Holy Week.

Every time we choose to attend a Holy Week service, to keep that week quite literally holy, set apart, we are training our souls to more readily choose God, and by extension good, over temptation and self. Every time we participate, we open our hearts to receive and give the same love we see Christ living for us through them. This Holy Week St John's will celebrate services which mark all the pivotal moments of our salvation, and God's revelation of his divine love. I warmly encourage all of you to participate as fully as you can in these, not just because we enjoy the company, but for the love of Christ and Christ's work in our lives, so that we can be, in this time and place,

the disciples we would like to have been, were our narrative recorded in the Gospel events.

On Maundy Thursday we dramatically relive the events of the Last Supper, as we gather to celebrate the Eucharist on that night when the first eucharist was celebrated. We walk with Christ, in the Blessed Sacrament, to the Altar of Repose (Gethsemane), and there we stay awake and watch (for about an hour and half) until, after compline, the Blessed Sacrament is taken away, marking the arrest.

On Good Friday, the Church will mark the hours from twelve till three, the time Christ spent on the cross. We will start with a journey along our Via Crucis, where we stay whilst the crowd walks past bemused and indifferent. This culminates in the Good Friday Liturgy at 2pm, where we show our love through the final hour of Christ's life, recounting the narrative of the crucifixion, venerating the cross on which he died, praying for the world he came to save, and receiving the pre-consecrated communion as a witness we are all joined into the saving death of Christ, then departing in silence, in respect for the death of Christ.

The Easter Vigil is the most solemn, and elaborate, of all the services of the Church (outside a coronation). The Easter vigil begins at 7pm and is there to celebrate, specifically, the moment our Lord rose from the Dead. It is precisely this service's connection to that universe-changing moment that gives it its rich diversity of rituals: lighting the paschal candle to show the unconquered light of life in Christ; reading the different passages of the Old Testament to show how our human narrative was always working towards this gift from God; renewing the baptismal waters and vows to show how the events and effects of that first Easter are ours to claim through the life giving waters of baptism; the celebration of the Eucharist to show that, risen from the tomb, Christ is now living, always with us, giving us his very self every time we join together in Holy Communion.

On Easter Sunday the Church will be decked in flowers and light, the hymns joyful, and we will renew our baptismal vows and remember that the resurrection we celebrate is our gift and inheritance by our

being born into Christ, and then we will celebrate the Eucharist, the eternal covenant that the Risen Christ is with his people, feeding them, joining with them, embracing them as they gather as one around his altar.

Where you there when they crucified my Lord? No, historically. Neither I nor any of us were there, but by the grace of God's living Spirit given to the Church, through our participation in these liturgies we can be there, we can be encouraged, challenged, and renewed by them, year on year. Let us join in these solemn festivals and not simply pass by.

**Rev Seamus Hargrave**

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### **Salamanca's Cathedrals**

Salamanca is an ancient city in west-central Spain, first settled by the Romans. Its architecture today covers all ages since then. The cathedrals stand above the 1st-century bridge over the River Tormes. A little bigger than Bath, Salamanca has a world-famous 12th century university that developed the Gregorian calendar, supported Columbus in his bid to sail to America and hosts the Archive of the 20th century Spanish Civil War.

In 2010 I was part of a musical tour of the area by my university choir and orchestra. We gave five well-attended concerts, in Salamanca and surrounding towns, mainly showing the variety of English religious music and well-known English orchestral music such as the *Planets Suite* and the *Enigma Variations*. There was plenty of time to explore the fascinations of Salamanca, especially the cathedral. Its massive buildings tower over the multitude of narrow mediaeval streets thronged with tourists that dominate the main part of the town.

In fact, Salamanca has two cathedrals that stand side by side. It took me a whole day to explore them: the Romanesque Old Cathedral, dating from the 12th century and the Gothic New Cathedral, begun in 1533 and completed 200 years later. It took so long to build because of shortage of money throughout most of the 17th century. The reason there are two cathedrals is that the old cathedral was left



undisturbed for people to use during the 200 years when the new one was being built. By the time the new one was ready, people had got used to having two of them, so they just left them as they were.

The Old Cathedral is basilica-shaped, with a Latin cross and three naves, a transept and three apses. As Salamanca lay on the constantly changing border between Christian Europe and the Muslim south, it was also designed as a fortress, although most of the battlements have vanished. The dominant part of the cathedral is the great dome of 1150 that rises over the transept supported at its corners by four triangular segments known as pendentives. On the inside it is shaped like an open orange segments: on the outside it is almost conical.

The original main front was covered by another of the 13th century, which is flanked by two towers; the one on the left remains under the tower of the new cathedral, and the one on the right, which was never finished, is called the Torre Mocha. The new doorway, shortly after being built, was partially covered, on the left side, by the stone slope that had to be made to reinforce the bell tower after the 1755 'Lisbon' earthquake. Other attractions are the main altarpiece and the upper fresco, representing the Last Judgement, both 15th century. The apse houses 53 tableaux depicting the life of Jesus and the Virgin Mary. At the foot, under the Torre de las campanas, is the chapel of San Martín, painted by de Segovia in 1262. In the cloister there are some frescoes from the 13th-14th centuries that decorate the sepulchres and a series of open chapels.

The New Cathedral is dedicated to the Catholic belief that the Virgin Mary did not die but was assumed directly into heaven, both body and soul. This cathedral is parallel to the old one, of freestone and in Gothic Style. It is rectangular with three naves and is one of the last Gothic style Spanish cathedrals. The plan of the building maintains a Gothic uniformity, and the exterior presence of flying buttresses and buttresses, as well as the interior elevation of the naves show this.

The interior of the cathedral gives the impression of great height, breadth and luminosity. The side naves are not at the same height as the central nave. The triforium, typical of buildings from the late Romanesque period, is replaced by



two tribunes running around the perimeter of the cathedral, allowing the aisles to be raised higher. The pillars collect the weight of the vaults where each of the ribs of the vaults descends to the floor by the pillar in a thin column that helps to unload the weight. The vaults have all kinds of combinations of ribs, cambered and tercelet, which make them very attractive for their variety and complexity of work.

The Main Chapel is rectangular, covered by a starred vault with the same design as the rest of those of the central nave, but with the difference that it is angled and multi-coloured. The Chapel lacks an altarpiece, as the original was dismantled in 1743, and its proposed replacement proved too expensive. The marble and jasper tabernacle where the consecrated bread and wine are kept stand out as do two silver urns with the remains of Saint John of Sahagun and Saint Thomas of Villanova. There are over a dozen side chapels, each with its own individual character. In a 1992 restoration of the north door, a sculpture of an astronaut was added to give a modern character to the restoration, although some see it as an anachronism.

The New Cathedral has two organs. The Epistle Organ was built in the 16th century; the Gospel Organ, of Baroque style, was built in 1744 but deteriorated over time, and most of the keys became mute for many years. However, in the 1990s, with Japanese support, Hiroshi Tsuji, a reputed Japanese organ builder based in Gifu, restored the organ and its angelic voice. As part of an exchange of cultures, Tsuji then created a beautiful replica of the restored organ in Gifu, as Japan's first genuinely Spanish-style organ.

A short walk from the cathedrals is the massive main square of Salamanca, flanked by numerous cafes and bars for relaxation.

**Chris Lewis**

## Jean Purdy



Jean never married or had any children of her own, and she died of cancer in 1985 when she was 39, cutting short her work in pioneering *in vitro* fertilisation (IVF).

This work during the 1970s was often criticised and talked down.

But today an average of 1 child in every classroom in each UK school has been born using IVF, and 13+ million mothers worldwide have been able to conceive instead of remaining childless. Her colleague Robert Edwards was awarded a Nobel Prize in Medicine in 2010, and, had Jean survived, she would probably have been awarded one as well.

Jean was 23 and a qualified nurse when in 1968 she joined Dr Robert Edwards as a research assistant at Cambridge University. Edwards had started a collaboration with gynaecologist Dr Patrick Steptoe, working in Oldham, 160 miles away. Their intention was to collect eggs from a woman's ovaries, fertilise them in the laboratory and place the embryos in her womb, overcoming the problem of blocked fallopian tubes, a major cause of infertility.

However, little was known about human embryology or how to maintain the embryos; the research also provoked some moral outrage. Funding for the research was often refused. The team only had a small lab space and permission to do their research in their spare time: they had to finance the equipment themselves. They also had to travel frequently between Cambridge and Oldham, making their research very inefficient.

Steptoe and Edwards had to give priority to their main jobs. So it was Jean only who could work fulltime on IVF. This involved managing the laboratory, preparing the samples, analysing and recording the results, as well as reassuring and supporting the wives and husbands who were undergoing IVF as volunteers. She played an increasingly

vital role, to the extent that, when she took time off to care for her sick mother, work had to pause. Without Jean's systematic approach to research, the IVF project would have faltered. She never took a PhD, so her contribution was regarded by many as limited, but her contribution to the scientific literature was enormous, and, although mainly self-taught, she was a better embryologist than many who had PhDs.

During this time the team endured criticism and hostility from the national funding agency, the Medical Research Council, who were annoyed by the applicants' high media profile and viewed IVF as experimental and too ambitious with the resources available. In February 1971, funding was declined. In mid-1974, Edwards became depressed by a lack of funding, as well as the long journeys to Oldham. He suggested that Jean should work on a different project, but she encouraged Edwards to continue their IVF research.

Progress was slow but steady. Together the team successfully produced the first human blastocyst, an 8-cell embryo, outside the body. 1977 saw the first successful implant of a fertilised embryo, leading to the first IVF baby, Louise Joy Brown, being born in 1978. This led to enormous publicity as a 'first for Britain', as well as renewed criticism from those who opposed the work.

Despite their success with Louise in 1978 and the first IVF baby boy, Alastair, born in January 1979, the NHS refused to support the service financially. Mainly through private donations, the team were able to buy a private clinic close to Cambridge where they could work together, and Bourn Hall became the world's first IVF clinic, and still functions as such. In 1980, Jean helped to launch fertility services there as the Technical Director. Jean died from cancer in 1985, at just 39. During her illness, a room was arranged for her in Bourn Hall where she could still be part of the team and receive guests. She is buried in Grantchester Churchyard, just up the river Cam from Cambridge.

Jean was brought up as a Christian and took her religion very seriously. She became very unhappy when public knowledge of her

work on IVF drew criticism from her nearest and dearest, including her mother and the local vicar, who, according to a film made after her death, attempted many times to get her to choose another form of nursing. But she would not change. Her attitude to IVF was that it was simply a way of using our God-given talents to benefit humankind, analogous to providing spectacles, hearing aids, antibiotics or palliative care to the dying. Others felt she had crossed a line in interfering with the natural order of things, and many Christians still feel this way about IVF.

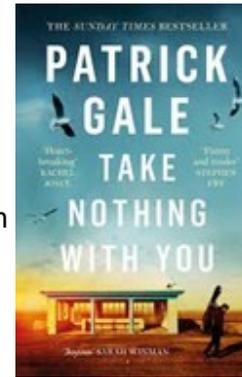
Not all women can benefit from IVF. Jean herself was diagnosed in her late teens with severe endometriosis which makes it very hard for a woman to conceive naturally or, in severe cases, like Jean's, to undergo IVF treatment. IVF does not always work: my wife Tina had several unsuccessful attempts at IVF treatment during her 30s. IVF treatment is also available on the NHS, but there are often strict rules about who is eligible: for example, many NHS Trusts exclude women who are smokers, those who have already had children, those who are severely obese or are over 40.

Recognition for her part in IVF development was slow to come after her death. Her obituary in The Times acknowledged her as *'the first person in the world to recognise and describe the formation of the early human blastocyst, a foundational stage for embryo stem cell technology.'* However, a book about IVF in 1980 by Steptoe and Edwards minimised her contribution, and she was not included on a 1990 IVF plaque. It was not until her 26 scientific papers on IVF were re-published in the early 2000s, which showed the critical part she played in its development, and following a campaign by her colleague Robert Edwards that she was fully recognised and her name added to a new 2013 plaque. Even then because a Nobel Prize can only be awarded to living people she never got the full recognition she so richly deserved.

**Chris Lewis**



Inspired to Read:  
***Take Nothing With You***  
by Patrick Gale



When we met in January to plan our reading programme for 2026 there was a lot of enthusiasm for the books of Patrick Gale. I had not previously read any of his work, although his books had been recommended to me several times over the past few months, so I was eager to find out what made him so popular.

About the author

With more than twenty novels to his credit, several of which have appeared in the *Sunday Times* bestseller lists, as well as being chosen by several prominent media book clubs, Patrick Gale draws extensively on his own life experiences for his books. As a boy chorister at Winchester, where he learned to play the cello, music is a recurring theme in his novels. He now lives in Cornwall, which is the setting for many of his books, although he chose to set *Take Nothing With You* in Weston-super-Mare after visiting that well-known seaside town, and wondering what it might have been like to grow up there.

From the back cover

Eustace, an only child, is leading a strange existence in a household of elderly adults. His life changes dramatically with the arrival of Carla Gold, his cello teacher, who casts a heady spell over everyone, including his mother.

As Eustace makes new friends through music, he also learns fresh lessons of love, survival and resilience, setting him up for life.

A short extract

*Eustace lived in Hell, or at least its antechamber. Or perhaps Purgatory was a fairer comparison, since he was not unusually abused, and he was clothed and fed, and with both parents still living. On the rare occasions when people asked him where he lived, they tended to exclaim:*

*'Oh, Weston -super-Mare! How lovely! Lucky boy! It must be like being on holiday every day.'*

*And he knew they were thinking seaside, sunshine, donkey rides on the beach. But Weston had estuary mud, not proper sand, and was no sunnier than anywhere else in England.*

This novel explores growing up on the edge – Eustace is a mis-fit in almost every sphere of his life. His family home doubles as an old-people's home; his parents send him to a private school where his lack of interest in sports and porn magazines sets him apart from the other boys. He is in some ways saved by his talent for music, which gives him both an identity and a place of refuge. But even there he quickly learns that, while he might show early promise, he has neither the ability nor the dedication to develop beyond the level of talented amateur.

The book also explores, in a somewhat disturbing manner, 1970s attitudes towards homosexuality, with , at one point, young Eustace being confined in a Christian institution to be 'cured' of his inclinations. As you might imagine, it sparked an interesting and wide-ranging conversation at our meeting.

I really enjoyed this book which I found easy to read and sympathetically written. I had previously read another book which explored similar themes: *Our Evenings* by Alan Hollingsworth. Again, it told the story of a young man coming to terms with his sexuality. Like Eustace, Dave Win was set apart from his school contemporaries by his unusual background (Dave Win was half-Burmese and the son of a single mother) and his artistic ability – Win became a professional actor. Hollingsworth is regarded by some critics as the finest living writer in Britain today, and this book has been reviewed as his 'best book to date', but I have to say that I enjoyed Patrick Gale's book far more. I found the Hollingsworth contrived and unsympathetic, whereas there was an honesty and sense of real understanding in Gale's writing. My advice would be: approach Hollingsworth with care, but enjoy Patrick Gale. I will certainly be reading more of his work in future; his latest book, *Love Lane*, is due to be published in March.

Future book group events:

**Wed 4th March**

A deep dive into the writing of Daphne Du Maurier.

**Wed 8th April**

Book: *The Devil You Know* by Dr Gwen Adshead:

“This book will challenge everything you thought you knew about human nature.”

If you would like to know more about the book group, please contact Rosemary.

**Rosemary McCormick**



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	1		8					5
		6		9				
5							6	
	2	4		7		8	3	
	6							2
				8		6		
6					4		2	
	4	1	9					8

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## SERVICES ROTA FOR MARCH 2026

Date/Week	Readings	Duties for the 10am Sunday service			
		Readers	Prayers	Sidespersons	Chalice
<b>Sunday 1 March</b> Second Sunday of Lent	Genesis 12.1-4a Psalm 121 Romans 4.1-5, 13-17 John 3.1-17	E Gilbert J Arnall- Culliford	Rev Seamus	C Holland D Bardgett	J Davies
<b>Sunday 8 March</b> Third Sunday of Lent	Exodus 17.1-7 Psalm 95 Romans 5.1-11 John 4.5-42	B Essex S Smith	J Caudwell	J Bruges M Smitherman	C Holland
<b>Sunday 15 March</b> Fourth Sunday of Lent	1 Samuel 16:1-13 Psalm 23 Ephesians 5:8-14 John 9	C Harrison S Caden	R McCormick	K Gurr M Veakins	J Davies
<b>Sunday 22 March</b> Fifth Sunday of Lent	Ezekiel 37.1-14 Psalm 130 Romans 8.6-11 John 11.1-45	A Barr-Sim R McCormick	L Bushell	B Essex J Davies	A Crook
<b>Sunday 29 March</b> Palm Sunday	Matthew 21.1-11 Isaiah 50.4-9a Psalm 31 Philippians 2.5-11 Matthew 26.14-end 27	C Holland N McCormick	J Bruges	A Crook M Smitherman	C Holland
<b>Sunday 5 April</b> Easter Day	Acts 10:34-43 Psalm 118 Colossians 3:1-4 John 20:1-9	B Essex S Smith	Rev Seamus	C Holland J Bruges	J Davies
Vicar: Revd Seamus Hargrave Reader: Janet Caudwell Reader: Rosemary McCormick	Sundays at 5pm Evening Worship (Third Sunday - Choral Evensong) Mondays at 8.45am Morning Prayer, Fridays at 12.30pm Lunchtime Eucharist Saturday at 5pm Vigil Eucharist Tuesday 31st at 11am Julian meeting				

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