

Dairy Dates

7 th Dec	St Peters Service Team meeting
9 th Dec	Ashford Baptist Church 'ABC 2-10'
17 th Dec	St Peters 10.30am
23 rd Dec	St Mary Acton 1.30pm
11 th Jan	St Peters Service Team meeting
14 th Jan	St Nicholas 3pm
17 th Jan	Laleham Church Playgroup
18 th Jan	Trustees Meeting
21 st Jan	St Peters 10.30am
23 rd Jan	Tiddlers Toddlers
24 th Jan	Little Fishes Toddlers
25 th Jan	Seedlings Toddlers
26 th Jan	Minnows Toddlers
1 st Feb	Little Tots Toddlers
2 nd Feb	Playtime Toddlers

Covid!

Much to my irritation, I caught Covid for a second time in Mid-October. It put me out of action for a week and meant I had to cancel a number of Toddler groups and an Intergenerational Service. Everyone was very caring and wished me a speedy recovery.

Just as a point of interest to those who may not realise, Covid is no longer considered to be an illness where you have to isolate. The NHS treat it the same as any other respiratory disease. If you are unwell then take the necessary time off but if you feel well or as you return to full health then you can go about your normal daily activities. I only discovered that after taking a week away from everyone!

How big is God?

This is the theme for the January Intergenerational Worship. It's easy to fall foul of reducing God to our own understanding or ability to comprehend Him. So we're going to try and expand our thinking, and with it, our encounter of God. To do some of that I will be borrowing from the thinking of Dr. Barnabas Aspray, a Systematic Theologian. Like all good thinkers and teachers he has the ability to contemplate the profound and yet explain it simply. So how big is God? Would you like to engage in some Intergenerational Worship that will seek to answer that, and encounter how big He really is?

Get in touch to explore it further.

Christmas Worship

This December I will be offering Intergenerational Worship on the Nativity at three different churches in three different towns. Each event will be very different to the others. One on a Saturday morning, one on a Saturday afternoon and one on a Sunday morning. One will be within a Christian Craft morning, another will be within a Eucharistic service and the other will be a stand alone event after carol singing from the congregation on their church steps to the community. After which we will enter the church to take part in all I have prepared.



Once we've set aside the bleak midwinter nonsense, the mythical Inn-keeper and stable we can allow our gaze to fall on that history changing moment where God took on human form and stepped into His creation because of His great love. A real Wow moment that doesn't need wrapping in glitter to make it sparkle. Just a moment to allow it's radiance to illuminate our souls. The shepherds got it, they worshipped the child and then left to tell everyone they could find. That's what we need to do!



Faith Awareness in Children Trust



The veneration of the mother of Jesus, Mary, is steeped in Christian history and theology. Without doubt she was the Theotokos (God-bearer) and someone who had known the visitation of an angel (messenger of God). Her elevation in status was written about in the Gospels noting she was 'highly favoured' by God and when her cousin Elizabeth, prompted by the Holy Spirit, meets her, she reinforces her high status. While recognising her stature, we mustn't at the same time elevate Mary to being a super human. Mary's response is one of humility and wonder at God. We're not told her age but it would be reasonable to think she may have been very young, possibly a teenager.

The narrative in Luke for the actual birth is brief and a little matter of fact. She accompanied her husband to be, on a four day journey on foot (no donkey!) to his ancestral home. I can't help but wonder if there were moments of doubt during her pregnancy about what she had experienced at it's commencement. What made her so special, why had God chosen her for this monumental honour?

There she was, amongst strangers, experiencing the birth of a child for the first time. No great lodgings of comfort, even the guest space was taken and she and Joseph had to make do with being amongst the animals. I doubt that this is what she had anticipated when the angel had popped by nine months previously!

The visitation of the shepherds offering their stories of angels and worshipping her son must have seemed both bizarre but also, at the same time, somehow very right. There is no indication in the story as to her comprehension of what was going on but we are told she noted it all, storing it away in her memory that she could

recall at will. In the years that followed, Jesus grew and developed. Little is recorded of those events but, again, I wonder if there were times when Mary pondered and reflected on the uniqueness of the child she was caring for. I wonder if she worried whether she was 'getting it right', whether she was taking every opportunity, whether she recognised what was important and what wasn't. Would some things be a waste of time, effort and cost? All that would have been a very human response.

God had chosen her to be the mother that Jesus needed. With all her abilities and inabilities, all her strengths and weaknesses. They would all play their part in the nurture of Jesus.

The bond between Jesus and His mother is very visible in His adult ministry, particularly during His crucifixion where she watched His agony and death. I think that in that moment it would have been normal to consider if His life had been wasted. We sit 2000 years on and have the benefit of hindsight. We know that nothing was wasted and it's good to be reminded of that reality in our own lives.

A newsletter to keep supporters informed, inspired & involved.

Issue number 162 December 2023

FACT enabling children and households to reflect on the Christian Gospel



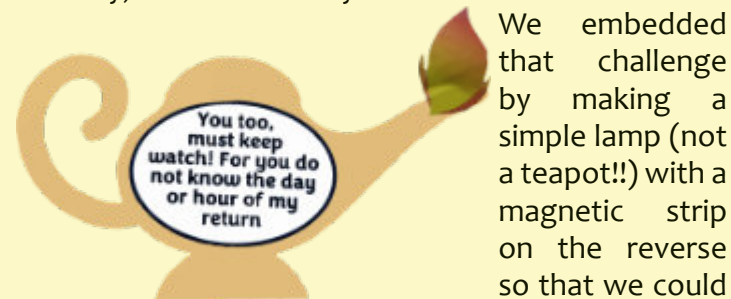
In the October services we continued our delving into parables in the latter part of Matthew's Gospel. We focused on the wedding banquet where the guests didn't come so others were brought in from the streets, but one of the guest was later thrown out for not having the correct clothes. The issue was that his clothes were not clean, it wasn't about having special clothes. One of our activities saw us write our names on paper T-shirts that we pegged to a 'washing line'. The front of the T-Shirt read, (name) 'Belongs to Jesus'.

November has seen us explore one final wedding parable from Matthew about 10 bridesmaids with varying degrees of readiness. We noted how language and words change their meanings over time and although scripture refers to '10 virgins' in their culture that simply meant an unmarried woman. So the more modern term of bridesmaids is more helpful to use today. We also considered how weddings went on for days unlike today where we have a quick service followed by an extravagant party, often all held in one place.

To unpack these cultural differences helped us understand that the original audience of Jesus' story would have understood how ridiculous it was that five of the bridesmaids were so unprepared for the arrival of the groom. We considered the difference between being clever and stupid and wise and foolish. Clever and stupid describe how much knowledge or understanding we have, while being wise or foolish is a response to what we do with that knowledge or understanding. All the bridesmaids knew the groom would be arriving at some point in the evening and that there was no set time.



Being unready was an insult. Either they didn't care about the groom or they didn't know him. That is why the groom's response appears to be so blunt. When they eventually returned, having bought more oil, and tried to get into the banquet, he says, "Truly I tell you, I do not know you." They had been foolish because they knew he was coming, yet chose to be unready. The challenge is obvious to us today, we know that Jesus will return one day, will we be ready?



We embedded that challenge by making a simple lamp (not a teapot!!) with a magnetic strip on the reverse so that we could place them somewhere prominent at home to help remind us of what we had learned, but much more importantly, as a reminder of our encounter with God that would hopefully make us wiser in our living as we left the service.

A quick look at the dates on the back page will show how many toddler groups are now getting a regular half termly visit. The more astute of you will notice a new name in the list, Laleham Church Playgroup.

My best guess is that during a two week period this half term I will have seen between 250-300 carers and toddlers. They have heard a story about Jesus blessing the children, even though the disciples tried to stop them, and have joined in with a song about Jesus being our friend. They have seen one of my many puppet friends who have re-enforced the theme for the day.



While I've been sat presenting, some have boldly approached me to show me their new shoes, others have dissolved into tears when the puppet appeared while others have simply sat mesmerised at a man sitting at the front (and that's just the carers!)

Attendees at some groups check out weeks in advance when I'm coming. They like to ensure they don't miss me (Well, let's be honest, it's not me they want to see but the puppet!)

This is one of these gentle ministries that rumbles along quietly in the background but for many years all some toddlers have ever known is my regular visits to share a little about Jesus. How do you measure it's value, worth, significance or longevity? Perhaps the mistake is to try and measure it at all, but instead to just simply allow it to happen.

The wisdom of Ecclesiastes as paraphrased by the Message version of the Bible says, ***I've decided that there's nothing better to do than go ahead and have a good time and get the most we can out of life. That's it—eat, drink, and make the most of your job. It's God's gift.***

P.S. I'm sure I could find room for some more groups if they are interested! 😊

It was good to have delivered training to ten people at St. Nicholas Church, Shepperton on Saturday morning the 18th November. The training opened up some of the recent history of the changing ways we worship in churches of all denominations. We noted that 'Family Services', 'All Age Worship' and 'Messy Church' had been movements for change and were of their time, but how none of them were what is needed for today's society. This set the scene for why Intergenerational Worship is so important at this time. We considered what is at the centre of the communities in which we live and how that has changed significantly over time. Where once that centre would have been located in the local church, that has long gone and now resides in our households or the people we live with. The challenge for churches is located in a very different place, and what we offer as opportunities to worship God and encounter His reality must change if we are to become relevant once again in the world of our everyday. We spent a lot of time tackling the 'Why' of Intergenerational Worship before considering the 'How, What, Where, When and Who' of Intergenerational Worship. There was plenty of time for questions and discussion as well as plenty of coffee and pastries!

It is hoped that a small team will develop from this training that will start to take on the current programme of services that I'm offering, with lots of support from me.

If you are curious to know more about Intergenerational Worship and what it might look like for you and your church then get in touch and start a conversation. At its very basic level, churches must engage with just two elements, Discipleship and Mission. Discipleship is inward looking while Mission is outward looking. Does your church have both? Intergenerational Worship offers a vehicle for both at the same time.



History of church services aimed at households.



60's - 70's	Family Services	Reaction
80's - 00's	All Age	Multi-generational
00's - 20's	Messy Church	3 key elements
20's - ?	Intergenerational	Encounter

And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and man.