

# **Seek**

**December 2025**



## **The Church and Parish of St Mark Cambridge**

**[www.stmarksnewnham.org](http://www.stmarksnewnham.org)**

**50p**

## The Vicar's Letter



Dear Friends,

I recently had the pleasure of preaching for a college evensong. Such an invitation is a real joy for me: I owe everything to my college chapel, and chaplain, and still find such services uniquely refreshing and restorative.

As is usual with colleges, there was a theme which the chapel community was exploring for the term, and in this instance it was 'holy habits'. I wonder which habits you would include in such a sermon series? Sadly, staying up all night listening to the Ashes commentary from 'Down Under' would probably not make the cut, but I will persist in doing that nevertheless!

Anyway, I was given the habit of 'church' to tackle for my sermon. There are a thousand reasons not to go to church. I know this because I have heard them all. One of the side effects of wearing a dog collar for a living is that people, upon meeting you, feel the need to confess that they are not regular church goers; and usually they let you know why. And this ranges from not liking it, not having the time for it, not seeing the point of it, to not feeling worthy of it. Yet many of these people will at the same time tell me that they have a Christian faith. Somehow belief, however strong or not it may be, has become detached from belonging, and I think this is partly because we have come to live with a rather impoverished idea about what *worship* is - perhaps one reinforced by experience.

If indeed there are a thousand reasons why you might not come to church, I heartily believe that there are a thousand more why you



should. But I don't have the space to cover them all here. Moreover I don't wish to pretend to have a window into other people's souls, and pass judgement. So I will offer, if you will indulge me, a more personal perspective, using this photograph.

I took it, when I was an undergraduate, studying ancient history and spending my summer vacation at the British School in Athens. The photo depicts the east end, the sanctuary, of the church

of Hagia Sophia - Holy Wisdom, one of the many churches, monasteries and palaces, which make up the fortified Byzantine city of Mystras, all still clinging improbably, despite their now ruined state, to the towering hillside overlooking ancient Sparta.

If I am very honest, I was more interested that day in seeing ancient Sparta. All this Christian medieval stuff I considered outside my field of interest. But it stayed with me. I was haunted by the place and by this image in particular, which over time changed how I viewed the church, all churches. Not as the ruin of a lost civilisation, but a representation of the whole cosmos and of our place within it.

I have the photograph framed on the wall in my study, where it serves as a sort of sustaining icon for my own church going. A reminder- often a necessary one- of the mystery and the beauty and the strangeness and the seriousness of our collective calling.

What we can see, from the light filtering through the high upper windows, is the outline of the curved apse, a characteristic feature

of Byzantine ecclesiastical architecture. What is harder to discern is the mural of Christ, amazingly preserved on the back wall. He is haloed, enthroned and in the act of blessing, with angels interlocking above him in adoration.

A slab of sunlight illuminates his right foot, but most of what I have described is shrouded in darkness.

This scene of heavenly splendour is thus veiled by the design of the church. It is Plato's cave, a stone screen upon which are projected hints of a hidden reality. The fact that the inky darkness seems to extend into the foreground, enveloping the viewer, emphasises the limitation of our sight at this stage of our soul's journey. Reminding us of that fundamental but so easily neglected line in the Creed, that we believe in the visible *and* the invisible. That there is more to existence, to life, beyond the material, the testable, the here and now.

But also that the visible is not just in opposition to the invisible but alerts us to it. It is St Paul's poetry in stone: 'now we see darkly; then we will see face to face'. And even in the dark, we are surrounded by saints, angels and all the company of heaven, who embrace us already as one of them.

In Orthodox Christianity, the curved apse signifies the cave in Bethlehem where Christ was born. So, just as it veils Christ, so also it reveals him, brings him to us - signified by that rising light catching his feet.

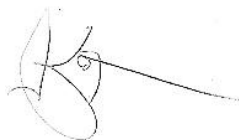
A sign that we are not left in the darkness, to our own devices. God is at work here. But neither is Holy Wisdom, or salvation for that matter, given like a dose of medication or a download of information. It is a process of growth, like the seeds planted in the dark, good earth of Jesus' parable of the sower. A place where we go to enter into mystery as gift, as part of the divine order, to

encourage us along the path of contemplation, attentiveness, and hopefulness.

It also represents the cave from which Jesus rose from the dead. But it is us who are being remade. For when we look upon Christ in our worship, we are looking at humanity brought to its final perfection, its divine life in Christ; the fulfilment of Jesus's prayer on the night before he died, that 'all may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us'. The photograph reminds us that to worship is to align ourselves towards that common destiny. For Christ is our alpha and our omega, our beginning, the one through whom we were created, and our end, the image of God with whom we are being conformed by the Holy Spirit through the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church.

I hope, over this bracing and exciting season, that you will find your way to worship with us.

In friendship and faith,



Jim

## **St Mark's Church Mission Statement**



To be the people of God in this place and to work to make God more real in our community.

## **The December Charity : Embrace the Middle East**



Embrace the Middle East - formerly the Bible Lands Society - is perhaps best known to us from its 'Bethlehem Carol Sheet' that we have often used at St Mark's.

Throughout its 170-year-old history, Embrace the Middle East has had at its heart a vision of Christian love in action, inspired by Jesus' call to care for those most in need. It works in partnership with fellow-Christians in the Middle East, all similarly inspired by the Gospel, all sharing in their witness to the people of this area, and all helping meet both urgent and chronic need.

Embrace the Middle East's main focus at present is, inevitably, Palestine. They described 2024 as their most difficult year ever, but 2025 has been immeasurably worse. In Gaza, buildings have been destroyed, lives completely shattered. There has been little or no food or medication; even now, the situation is dire.

Yet in the midst of all this, Embrace has brought help and hope. It has enabled the Al Ahli hospital in Gaza City to keep going. Despite suffering danger and having to move twice, it is one of the few hospitals still there. All year, it has treated 300-500 emergency cases a day - more than twice its proper capacity - despite the constant shortage of medicines and equipment. As well as treating serious physical afflictions, it also has a special clinic to provide psychological help and support for those (especially children) traumatised by what they have seen and are having to live through. None of this would be possible without the funding Embrace provides.

It is Gaza that is always in the news, but this has also been an exceptionally difficult year for Palestinians living in the West Bank. They have had to face increased violence and killing from Israeli settlers, and military raids, but also an economic crisis

because of restrictions imposed on them. Bethlehem has been affected more severely than anywhere - and here Embrace has helped support a project that enables some of the people in Bethlehem to make a living.

But it is not only in Palestine that Embrace has helped bring Christian love and hope. In Lebanon, it is helping the Al Kafaat Foundation rebuild three of its disability centres in Beirut, hit by Israeli airstrikes. In Syria, it has helped the Christian community in Homs with their support centre for young women who have suffered violence. And in Egypt, Embrace supports the Arkan Centre that offers courses that help young people find work, and also helps bring Christians and Muslims together.

As Christmas approaches, and our minds are drawn to Bethlehem, and to Jesus being born into a hostile world, we have the chance to help the people of the present-day Bethlehem, Gaza and the Middle East more generally in their desperate need. Please give as generously as you can, to help Embrace the Middle East in all its vital work.

**Andrew Chester**

## **Happy Birthday, Perrin**

Congratulations to Perrin Hardy who celebrates her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday on the 20th December. We wish her a very Happy Birthday and many happy returns.

# ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS AT ST MARK'S



## CHURCH DECORATING

### PIZZA PARTY

Friday 12th December, 5pm

*Young people and their families are invited to help us decorate the tree and set up the crib. Followed by a short service to bless our work, and pizza! Email the vicar to let us know you're coming!*

## CAROLS AT CROFTERS

Sunday 14th December, 2pm

*Informal carol singing  
with mulled wine  
by the café on Lammas Land*

## CAROL SERVICE

Sunday 21st December, 5pm

*A traditional service of lessons and carols,  
aided by our wonderful choir, and new junior choir.*

## CRIB SERVICE

Christmas Eve, 4pm

*A service for all the family as we journey together to Bethlehem. Come dressed as a character from the Nativity!*

## MIDNIGHT MASS

Christmas Eve, 11.15pm

*The first Communion of Christmas,  
full of wonder and hope as light  
shines out in the darkness*

## CHRISTMAS DAY

*8am: Traditional Said Communion*

*9.30am: Communion & Carols for  
all the parish*



## **Cantus Singers Concert**

The next concert at St Mark's Church by the Cantus Singers will be on  
Saturday December 13th at 8.00 pm.

The programme comprises settings from across the centuries of the  
Antiphon

**Alma Redemptoris Mater**

**(Loving Mother of the Redeemer)**

together with an assortment of related much loved carols

Tickets, £12 in advance, can be obtained from Margaret Hay  
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<https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/cantus-singers-of-cambridge>.

Under 18s free.

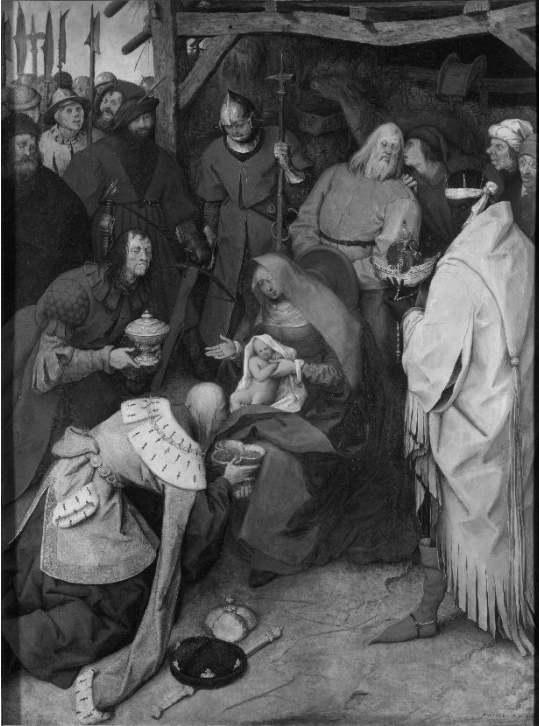
## **From the Registers**

Baptism	21st September	George Cadbury
Funerals	11th September	Tom Challis
	30th October	Graham Plows

## **The January Edition of Seek**

In the next edition we will be greeting the New Year.  
Contributions will be very welcome. Please send them to Jane  
Plows at [janemp@virginmedia.com](mailto:janemp@virginmedia.com) (01223 350120) by  
Wednesday 14th December.

## The Adoration of the Kings



The Adoration of the Kings, or to be more accurate the wise men or magi, is a popular subject in art. The event is recorded in chapter two of Matthew's Gospel when wise men from the east come to worship the newborn Jesus bringing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. It is well known from nativity plays. Many artists use the opportunity to depict sumptuous clothes and expensive gifts.

The picture by Pieter Bruegel the elder, dating from 1564, in the National Gallery, London is somewhat different and rather unsettling. Bruegel was a pioneer of landscape painting and this picture is unusual being so tightly focused on the Adoration as to exclude the surrounding countryside. The composition seems traditional. Mary is located centrally nursing the baby Jesus on her knee with Joseph standing beside her. Two kings are kneeling to the left, the third is standing to the right. Their robes are lavish.

Look more closely. The king on the middle left has long unkempt hair and a tired wizened facial expression, his mouth frowning. Has the long journey exhausted him. Beside him an older king,

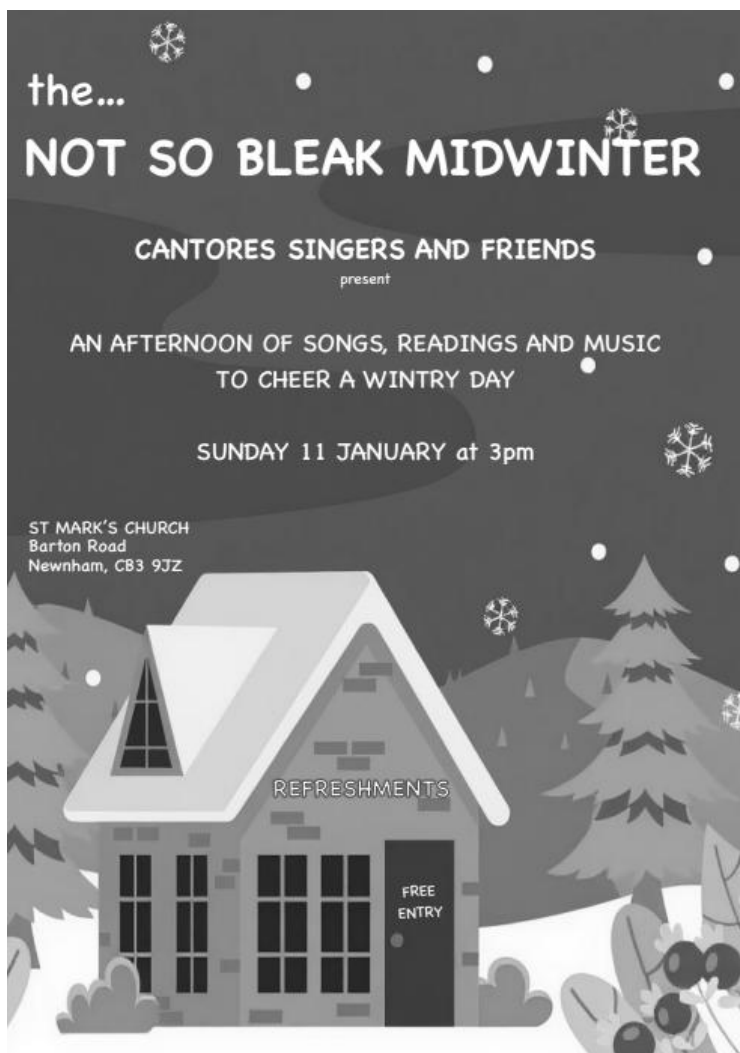
again with long hair, is presenting a gift to Jesus contained in an opulent vessel. This is almost certainly myrrh, a symbol of death. Jesus seems to be recoiling away from this, as if anticipating his future crucifixion. A soldier at Mary's shoulder stares wide eyed at it.

In the upper right three local men are featured. One is whispering conspiratorially in Joseph's ear. What is he saying? One in glasses looks with open mouthed greed at the magnificent gift the Moorish king is presenting; this is indeed a splendid example of contemporary goldsmith's art, a golden ship constructed around a nautilus shell surmounted by a crystal orb. The third has an expression of possible hostility.

Rather than the elegant horses and riders of tradition, foot soldiers are positioned in the upper left section. Those with halberds and a crossbow seem incongruous in their close proximity to the mother presenting her child. At the Passion Christ was tormented by soldiers, reviled by the people and led to execution. Are these men who surround Mary and Jesus seeing not their heavenly king but only earthly riches, the same ones who will later mock and kill him? A donkey is dimly visible at the back of the scene and may suggest the words in Isaiah 1.3 "The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's crib: but Israel does not know, my people do not understand".

There is a lot happening in this painting and it is well worth spending time contemplating it.

**Chris Hammond**



Also in the **Arts & Events Productions for your Diary:**

Friday 13th February time tbc: BOUND BY LOVE - a words and music concert with Jane Bower and friends.

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## DialTUM

The idea of conversing with one's stomach by phone was one of many crazy ideas introduced as a regular feature by the humourist J B Morton's *Daily Express* column 'By the Way'. His column, written under the pseudonym of 'Beachcomber', appeared every day throughout WW2 and into the 1960s. Its weird and opiniated, gentle but anarchic satire was, according to Spike Milligan, an inspiration for the Goon Show and Monty Python. It was not appreciated by the newspaper's owner, the formidable Lord Beaverbrook, but the column's rock solid popularity with its readers made it untouchable, though he suspected that he himself was satirised in the character of Lord Seedcake. The wartime government concluded that the column was good for the nation's morale, as its more acerbic satire was directed at Nazi propaganda and prominent Nazi leaders, all of whom acquired degrading nicknames.

In fact, Morton was a genius at inventing bizarre names for his regular characters : I can recall after many years the caddish, skirt-chasing Captain Foulough, Dr Smart Allick, the genteel but ludicrous and criminal headmaster of Narkover School, the debutante Vita Bevis, the investigative journalist Mr Prodnose, the BBC science expert Dr Strabismus (Whom God Preserve) of Utrecht and Mr Justice Cocklecarrot, benign and incompetent, plagued by the persistently litigious Ten Red Bearded Dwarfs. It is hard to pin down why the name Lady Cabstanleigh is funny, but it is. And there were many more.

But in one other respect, he was ahead of his time: it would be 70 years before we started to hear of the microbiome and the billions (or is it trillions?) of microbes and bacteria inhabiting our



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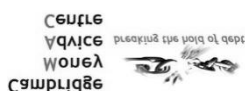
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gut and efficiently managing our digestive system, but with a strong neural pathway to the brain. Not quite DialTum (a play on the speaking clock DialTIM), but close. I remember well attending a public lecture here in Cambridge a few years ago, conducted by two young researchers talking about their daily study of faeces samples using the term microbiome which not many of the audience had heard before. I was fascinated by the idea that bacteria were not all bad and indeed their wellbeing is necessary for our good health. Beachcomber's regular reports on conversations with his gut via Dial Tum was exceptionally prescient ... and...

Oh, excuse me, my phone's ringing: *'Oh, hello again, sorry I didn't get back to you earlier. Yes, I'm planning to have supper in about an hour, if that's Ok with the team down there ....'*

**Derek Cummings**

## **The March Charity 2025 : Cambridge Money Advice Centre (MAC)**



The total raised for Cambridge Money Advice Centre was £695.00. A huge thank you to St Marks for their loyal and generous support, enabling us to continue this vital work in Cambridge. Providing life changing support for some of the most vulnerable members of our community. Helping them reduce debt, rebuild financial health and regain independence.

**Shev Roser**

*Go to page 18 to find the totals raised by other charities.*



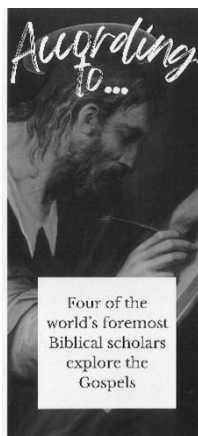
## PCC Meeting: 20th November

The PCC met on Thursday 20th November. Jim opened the meeting by reading two Collects appropriate to the season of Remembrance from the Book of Common Prayer.

The meeting covered many wide-ranging church affairs, including reviewing recent events and looking forward to Advent and Christmas. The Remembrance Sunday morning service was mentioned as a particular highlight, with the presence of both the local Scouts troops and the Junior Choir on its debut appearance.

Another major item of discussion was the church's finances, investments and ability to access money in particular accounts. Sandi Buss is making arrangements for Xanthe Langley as the new Treasurer to be added as a signatory.

The meeting closed with the Grace.



### According to...

The last of the series of explorations of the Gospels will be held in St Mark's Church on Sunday 7th December at 3.00 pm.

David Ford will be exploring the Gospel of St John.

3.00 pm – 4.00 pm

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## Charity of the Month Collections 2025

January, **ITAC/Crossways** £391.00

February, The **Arthur Rank Hospice Charity** £952.00

March, **Cambridge Money Advice Centre** £695.00

April, **Gombe** £549.02

May, **Christian Aid** £818.39

June, **Umoja** £515.00

July, **Camsight** £220.00\*

August, **Caring Together** £597.00

September, **A Rocha (In memory of Stuart Lingard)** £150.00

\*This does not reflect the full total raised as the inspirational volunteers made a bucket collection as the congregation left the church.

## Foodbank Dates

Please bring donations for the foodbank to church on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> December.

Or leave them on Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> December at 19 Kings Road (Eleanor Scott) 9.00 am - 3.00 pm, or at 1 Millington Road (Rosey Gardiner) 8.00 am - 6.00 pm.

There is also a Tuesday morning collection point from 11.00 am to 12.00 noon at the Gough Way island with the postbox. In addition donations may be left up to the Thursday evening in the black plastic box on the driveway of number 14 Wootton Way, the home of Sarah Smalley and Martin Richards.

There is a collection point at the Co-op too.

## **Prayers for December**

### **Prayers for Peace in our troubled world**

A prayer for peace and justice

O Lord our God, order the course of this world in peace that your Church may joyfully serve you in all godly quietness; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

Lord, we pray for world peace in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray for countries to find diplomatic solutions that will bring harmony between nations. We pray for wars to end. We give thanks for your promise that one day there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain.

Amen

God of love, show us our place in this world as channels of your love for all the creatures of this earth, for not one of them is forgotten in your sight.

Enlighten those who possess power and money that they may avoid the sin of indifference, that they may love the common good, advance the weak, and care for this world in which we live.

Amen

**Chosen by Shev Roser**

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## Regular Groups

### Monday Bible Study

10:30am, alternate weeks – contact: Sue Wagner, 07738 698884

### Tuesday Home Group

7:30 pm, fortnightly – contact: Mike Thompson, 07957 735860

### Thursday Home Group

7:30 pm, weekly – contact: Andrew Watts

aa.watts@hotmail.co.uk

### Choir

The choir sings every Sunday morning during term time and one Sunday evensong per month. Contact Marcus Cox at [singing@stmarksnewnham.org](mailto:singing@stmarksnewnham.org) Rehearsals every Friday evening during school term time (*Junior Choir: 5:15 pm – 6:00 pm, Adult Choir: 6:00 pm – 6:45 pm*).

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## Services at St Mark's Church, Newnham in December

**Communion (BCP) at 8.00 am every Sunday and Christmas Day**

### **Sunday and Christmas Services**

Sunday 7th December at <b>9.30 am</b>	Communion
Friday 12th December at <b>5.00 pm</b>	Church Decorating, Service and Pizza Party for families
Sunday 14th December at <b>9.30 am</b> <b>6.00 pm</b>	Morning Worship Evensong
21st December at <b>9.30 am</b> <b>5.00 pm</b>	Communion Carol Service
Christmas Eve at <b>4.00 pm</b> at <b>11.15 pm</b>	Crib Service Midnight Communion
Christmas Day at <b>9.30 am</b>	Christmas Communion
28th December at <b>9.30 am</b>	Communion with Grantchester

### **Regular Weekday Services**

**Monday - Friday at 9.00 am** Morning Prayer

**Tuesdays (except the 30th)**

**Weekly Communion (BCP) at 11.00 am followed by refreshments**

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