

BEMA

The Parish Magazine of St Bernardine with St Martin

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Christmas

2009



“Christ the babe was born for you”

BRACKLEY

BUCKINGHAM

THE REAL MESSAGE OF CHRISTMAS

It is time to celebrate the Nativity once again. The baby Jesus born in a stable at Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph, the visitation by the shepherds, the wise men asking Herod where to find Jesus, the star shining over the place where Jesus lay, the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, the flight into Egypt and the slaughter of the innocents are all events which we know so well – so well in fact that they are liable to pass us by almost unnoticed; leaving us untouched by their wonder.

Of course, we all cherish the nativity plays in school, which have a uniquely innocent charm. We are touched by the magic of children performing the story, year by year, and never cease to be moved by the qualities they bring to the plays from one generation to the next. But amused as we are by the innocence of the children, their portrayal of the story and the funny little moments that inevitably occur, how often do we witness the production but remain blasé about the familiar story that is told?

Similarly, we may go to a Carol Service and to Mass on Christmas Day, because that is what we always do. It is traditional – it is part of the package – Christmas would not be the same if we didn't. It is all part and parcel of building the cosy feeling that we like to wrap around us, to make our Christmas special and separate from the cares and humdrum of our normal workaday lives. But is the real message of Christmas passing us by?

Of course, it is time for celebration. It is time to 'let go' and enjoy ourselves. But before we become totally wrapped up with the festivities, surely we owe it to ourselves and to him whose birthday we celebrate to reflect quietly for a while on the story we know so well. There is so much to ponder in those few events, which should profoundly affect who we are and what we do. To quote the well known carol: "Christ the babe was born for you;" God humbling himself to become man to save us from ourselves. Surely, this should move us deeply every time we hear it? So, will we be allowing Christ just into our thoughts this Christmas or into our thoughts and our hearts?

I would like to take this opportunity to thank, once again, all those who contribute in any way to the production of BEMA, particularly Noeline who is responsible for the printing and all those who have contributed articles for it. I wish them and all our readers a very joyous celebration of our Saviour's birth and God's blessings for a healthy and peaceful New Year.

Deacon John

A REGRET FROM A BYGONE CHRISTMAS

Some years ago, in Belgium, we were enjoying a sherry with our priest and other members of the congregation after the English Mass on Christmas Day. The gathering took place every year in a small room at the back of St. Nicholas' Church in the heart of Brussels. As we had lived there for some time we were expected to help host the occasion by chatting to any newcomers and generally mixing in with everyone.

A young Canadian in his twenties came over to chat to us. He said he was not going anywhere that day – Christmas Day! Bob and I both had the same idea at the same moment, "should we ask him home to our family lunch?", but obviously we could not discuss this together, at that precise moment, so nothing was said. After we left the church we were both bothered by the fact that this man would be alone in a foreign country on Christmas Day. "Let's look for him," we said, so we drove around the surrounding streets in Brussels, but the Canadian had gone and there was no sign of him anywhere.

We drove home to our Christmas lunch with a conscience about what had happened. We never saw him again so we had no idea who he was nor even why he was in Brussels. We hoped his Christmas had not been too lonely. It is a memory though, that surfaces from time to time and, we both feel that we should have been quicker off the mark on that Christmas Day many years ago.

Ann Keating

COUNTDOWN TO CHRISTMAS

With the Catechists

As we approach the First Sunday of Advent, the children are busy preparing their Mass. They feel particularly excited this year because it will also be the Baptism Mass for baby Finley. Catechists are dusting down Advent candles and choosing hymns while the children are rehearsing readings, creating beautiful pictures expressing 'Beginnings' (the theme for this part of the term) and composing Bidding Prayers. This is truly their Mass and they enter wholeheartedly into it – as do parents.

Besides being the moment when our thoughts turn to the birth of Jesus and our spiritual preparation for that momentous event, our Mass is also a celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation which some of our children have just received for the first time. A tradition is emerging whereby the older group prepare refreshments and serve the parents and newly reconciled girls and boys a little 'party' to mark the joyousness of the occasion. It was reported to me that one little girl demolished 17 biscuits - I am hoping that this was an exaggeration. The members of the older group then have the opportunity to receive the Sacrament themselves the following week; the greater maturity of their approach and the spiritual depth of their examination of conscience are quite moving and humbling.

Our term finishes for the Christmas break on 5th December since the Buckingham Parade takes place the following week and parking could be a problem for parents. This year, the Communion children are staging a Nativity scene for all the groups followed by carols and, naturally, a party. I shall be supervising the consumption of biscuits!

We catechists – all eight of us now – although dedicated to our task of supporting parents in bringing knowledge of the love of Jesus to our groups, are not always confident that we are using the best resources or teaching the most appropriate material. We have asked for advice from Fr. Dan, Deacon John and the Diocese. Alex Heath from NORES is coming to talk to us and Deacon John is tailoring his Advent Group to the needs of parents and others who seek reassurance in their faith.

Next May we shall welcome Bishop Peter to St. Bernardine's to confirm young people from our parish and St. Martin's. A significant number of boys and girls have already put their names forward to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation and a meeting is being arranged for these young people and their parents in December so that the course may be explained and dates written into diaries. Those parents who have already completed forms will be contacted directly; if you are interested and have not filled in a form please do get in touch either by phone or email(see below)

These have been difficult months, financially and socially, for many of us and Christmas presents may perhaps be less expensive than in previous years. Yet the greatest gift of all costs nothing and we need no money to find happiness in the coming of Jesus. We wish every family, every member of our parishes peace and joy in this season of celebration.

Maggie Shinkwin
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ADVENTUS REDEMPTORIS

The Spirit of creation
stirred within her being.
The Child unborn
moved tiny hands,
rubbed eyes as yet unseeing.
The Mother pressed
and gently caressed
the Baby Son within.

The night was starlit and still;
Lambs in the cold on distant hill.
Now the time had come
for the birth of the One –
God's will to be done
by the saviour Son.

No birth pain for the Maid –
(the sword yet hides its blade)
but streams of light,
blazing wings,
amazing love,
all heaven sings.

The Infant blooms in beauty bright,
Tiny hands stretch out to hold,
held out to me so lovingly,
held out to you so joyfully,
held out to all so generously.

To those hands hold fast
so our love will last ...
eternally.

Ann Moore-Martin

ST. BERNARDINE'S & ST. MARTIN'S

200 CLUB DRAW

September 2009

DRAWN	No.	WINNER	PRIZE
First	26	Mary Jones	£45
Second	62	Marie Celine Taylor	£15
Third	124	Mithelda Medoba	£10

October 2009

DRAWN	No.	WINNER	PRIZE
First	8	Susan Simpson	£45
Second	18	Moira Coughlan	£15
Third	199	Mrs J. Alesworth	£10

November 2009

DRAWN	No.	WINNER	PRIZE
First	92	Zoe Bayley	£45
Second	164	Madge Swanson	£15
Third	8	Susan Simpson	£10

Gill Craik

Bring Flowers of the rarest...

As we approach the end of the Calendar year so the Church's year begins. Advent is the beginning of the Christian Year. It is marked by a spirit of expectation, of anticipation, of preparation, of longing; just as Mary was longing for the birth of her Son. We celebrate once again the birth of the Saviour of the world: a Messiah who brings peace, justice and righteousness to the world.

Enjoy this wonderful season with your family and friends, safe in the knowledge that Jesus Christ loves us unconditionally.

The Flower Alphabet



Queen Anne's Lace

Queen Anne's lace, also known as the Wild Carrot is one of many umbelliferous plants to be found growing around the world. As a member of the carrot family it has a long taproot and lacy leaves. If you dig up and crush a Wild Carrot root, you will find that it smells just like a carrot. There are several anecdotes about the name.

The name describes an occasion when Queen Anne (1655-1714) pricked her finger while making lace, staining the lace with blood. If you look closely, you'll notice that each large "flower" has many small white florets with a reddish/purple dot in the middle.

English botanist Geoffrey Grigson suggests that the name comes not from Queen Anne of England but from Saint Anne, the mother of the Virgin Mary and the patron saint of lace-makers.

Veronica Barnes

Bring blossoms the fairest..'

ST. BERNARDINE'S PASTORAL COUNCIL

Approaching the end of the year, it is good to look back at what has been done, and to start planning for the future.

Notably, under Bishop Peter's leadership, changes in the organisation of the Diocese are starting to take place, with a "Steering Group" in each of the new "Pastoral Areas" trying to find the best way forward in the management of the Diocese.

This year, we have had a full programme of classes for the children, with a large group receiving First Holy communion. Some of our long standing Catechists and Youth group leaders decided to stand down. The time and effort that they have put in is acknowledged, and we thank them for giving so much of themselves to the parish. We hope that the new volunteers will be able to grow in knowledge and experience to fill the gaps.

Musically, there are some new initiatives being started. There has been a request for some ladies to come forward to join the "Men's Choir", and also there is a possibility of starting a new Folk Group. A new training programme for altar servers has also been held.

Since the last edition of BEMA, we have had our annual barbecue, when this year's regular rain storms kept away, and in September, the Parish Gift Day and produce sale. Both events were a great success, socially and financially and I must thank all those who helped with the events, or who came and supported us.

It has obviously been a good year for apples and plums seeing the fruit, jams and pies that were offered for sale. A new idea for the Gift day was to have a competition for the children. 13 entries for a cake decorating competition were received, and these were divided up into 3 age groups. The judging was quite a challenge as the entries were all very different and the children had worked hard, coming up with some very different ideas – I think we might repeat the competition next year.

The social event on Friday 16 October was a "Race Night", with the profits going to CAFOD. There was a full house in the Parish Room for a fun evening, racing wooden horses down a track by means of throwing dice, and playing other games in between (marshmallows and spaghetti!!!) A delicious supper was provided and in all nearly £300 was raised. Currently, we are preparing for the usual raffle with the draw taking place on 20 December.

All these activities show that the community of St Bernardine's parish is alive and well and in good heart.

Looking forward, those who organise the rotas for various church duties will always welcome new volunteers, and maybe you would consider serving on the Pastoral Council.

In the meantime if you wish to bring any matters to our attention, contact me, Father Dan, Deacon John or any member of the Council.

I wish you all a happy, and peaceful Christmas.

*Margaret Vince
Chairman*

ST. MARTIN'S PASTORAL COUNCIL

The last time I put pen to paper, or rather tapped out a few words on my computer, summer was here. Now we are enduring the start of a wet and cold winter.

During those few months we have seen quite a few new faces attending our Services. Welcome to you all. But we have lost other parishioners too, some of whom have passed on to higher service. We shall miss them.

For those of you, who attended the Parish Lunch at The Brackley Bowls Club, here is an advanced notice that we will be holding a similar event next year. Our grateful thanks to Una for organising the event, and persuading many of us to attend. We will avoid school holidays and half terms so that more families can take part.

We are now looking forward at the beginning of Advent to the Celebration in a few weeks of the Birth of the Baby Jesus. Please note the times of the various Masses during the Christmas Season.

Our thanks to John Canning and the merry band of Altar Servers for all their commitment during the year.

On behalf of all the Pastoral Committee may I wish you all a very Happy Christmas, and a Peaceful New Year.

Finally our thanks to Father Dan and Deacon John for their continuing support and leadership.

*David Connolly
Chairman*



JESUS IS BETTER THAN SANTA

Santa lives at the North Pole – JESUS is everywhere.

Santa rides in a sleigh – JESUS rides on the wind and walks on the water.

Santa comes but once a year – JESUS is an ever present help.

Santa fills your stockings with goodies – JESUS supplies all your needs.

Santa comes down your chimney uninvited – JESUS stands at your door and knocks
and then enters your heart.

You have to stand in line to see Santa – JESUS is as close as the mention of His name.

Santa lets you sit on his lap – JESUS lets you rest in His arms.

Santa doesn't know your name, all he can say is "Hi little boy or girl, What's your
name?" –

JESUS knew our name before we did. Not only does He know our name, He knows
our address too. He knows our history and future and He even knows how many hairs
are on our heads.

Santa has a belly like a bowl full of jelly – JESUS has a heart full of love.

All Santa can offer is HO HO HO – JESUS offers Health, Help and Hope.

Santa says "You better not cry" – JESUS says "Cast all your cares on me for I care for
you".

Santa's little helpers make toys – JESUS makes new life, mends wounded hearts,
repairs broken homes and builds mansions.

Santa may make you chuckle – JESUS gives you the joy that is your strength.

While Santa puts gifts under your tree – JESUS became our gift and died on the tree.

Obviously, there is really no comparison.

We need to remember WHO Christmas is all about.

We need to put Christ back into Christmas.

JESUS IS STILL THE REASON FOR THE SEASON.

Bob Henderson

A Poem for the Year of the Priest

THE BEAUTIFUL HANDS OF A PRIEST

We need them in life's early morning,
We need them again at its close;
We feel their warm clasp of true friendship.
We seek them while tasting life's woes.

When we come to this world we are sinful,
The greatest, as well as the least.
And, the hands making us pure as angels.
Are the beautiful hands of a priest.

At the altar each day we behold them,
And the hands of a king on his throne
Are not equal to them in their greatness,
Their dignity stands all alone.

For there in the stillness of morning,
Ere the sun has emerged from the east,
There God rests between the pure fingers
Of the beautiful hands of a priest.

When we are tempted and wander
To pathways of shame and of sin
Tis the hand of a priest that absolves us,
Not once, but again and again.

And when we are taking life's partner,
Other hands may prepare us a feast.
But the hands that will bless and unite us,
Are the beautiful hands of a priest.

God bless them and keep them all holy,
For the Host which their fingers caress,
What can a poor sinner do better
Than to ask Him, who chose them to bless?

When death's dew on our eyelids are falling,
May our courage and strength be increased,
By seeing raised o'er us in blessing –
The beautiful hands of a priest.

CAFOD

In the second half of the year the Parish have made further progress in the support of CAFOD. Activities in this period include:

Friday Fast Day on 2nd October raised over £1500 – a generous contribution again.

The Race Night on 26th October, a very enjoyable evening – mainly because of the effort put in by Terry, Catherine and Kerry and all the ladies who prepared the delicious meal. We raised £295 during that evening.

Donations continue through the envelopes and the collection boxes (pyramids).

As you can see contributions continue from St. Bernardine's and St. Martin's and we are looking at ways of improving the CAFOD link between the two churches. At the moment Tom Jacobson takes most of the responsibility of liaising with St. Martin's. Also, arising from the new Pastoral Area boundaries and responsibilities, we have started developing a working understanding with Bletchley.

The involvement with schools is also developing:

At Thornton school, Peter Van Cauwelaert continues to give the schools presentation annually – which is always well received. We are building on an initiative started last year when a presentation of detailed information to two forms on the disproportionate distribution of money, food, healthcare etc. throughout the world led to a significant project by the pupils on the topic. The project results were presented to the Governors of the school.

A similar approach is being discussed with the school based on a theme of climate change/environment to develop a project, which will fit into the curriculum.

With the new boundaries Bishop Parker's junior school now falls into our area and initial contact has been made to discuss what they may require.

Project Africa has been the main funding target. However, to support "virtual projects" has been a difficult theme to grasp as it does not generate particular feedback on how "our" money has been spent. We have (among others) made these points to CAFOD and they appear to be taking them on board to improve this situation.

"An evening with CAFOD" was held on 24th November when Frank Sugden from CAFOD, Northampton gave a talk on the background of the Charity, covering what we had been doing and outlining proposals of next year's activities. There was a good attendance and when further detailed information is available we will decide how best to communicate this to you – watch this space.

CAFOD Head Office requested that we lobby our MP (John Bercow) in the run up the Copenhagen International Summit on the subject of climate change and carbon emissions to be held early December. CAFOD are particularly interested in helping emerging countries develop, but that this should be done directly with the people on the ground (not through political channels), in a non

discriminative way, and in an environmentally friendly method... This meeting was arranged and through Mr. Bercow representation of CAFOD'S manifesto on this subject was made to the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Shadow minister. Further feedback on this is expected.

Many thanks to the Parish Council who continue to support CAFOD initiatives and also all the individuals who support me when necessary and make sure things happen. Anyone requiring further information or wishing to help, please contact me on 01280 815600.

Here's hoping that you all have a happy Christmas whilst remembering those who are less fortunate.

Ron Cockayne

CHUCKLE TIME



Snowballing Father Fraser was not a good idea

CHRISTIAN UNITY

One Sunday, in an Irish village, three Protestant women visited a Catholic Church. Recognising them and wishing to show respect, the priest whispered to his server: "Quickly – three chairs for the Protestant ladies."

The server jumped to his feet and shouted:

"Three cheers for the Protestant ladies!"

The congregation rose, responded heartily and the service continued ...

Anon

*Apollo 8 cost a fortune, but nobody minded
because the astronauts were Protestants;
And from the moon they read the bible
To the delight and edification of all Christians
And on their return Pope Paul gave them a blessing.*

Leonel Rugama

WALKING HUMBLY WITH OUR GOD

In December 2007 Bishop Peter addressed a Diocesan Gathering. At that meeting he shared his vision for the Diocese. He explained that he drew inspiration from the prophet Micah, whose admonition to "act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with your God" [*Micah 6:8*] was incorporated in his Episcopal Crest.

Reviewing the history and challenges of the Diocese, he spoke of the need for "Three C's" namely:

- **C**onfidence in God, our faith, and ourselves.
- **C**onversation with God, with each other and with the world.
- **C**onnections, the outworking of "love God and love your neighbour" whereby the Church engages with its members and with the world.

Among other aims, the Bishop wished to establish a multi-skilled group of clergy and laity to think strategically and practically about the future of the Diocese; their remit being to consult deaneries and prepare "ground plans" for the life and mission of the Church in local areas. Translating this vision into action has been called the "Walking Humbly process". A "multi-skilled" group, convened in April 2008, labelled the "Stream Three Team", and during the period from November to March 2008/9, they proposed a Development Process of meetings with various bodies in the Diocese, including the former Deanery Pastoral Councils. During Lent 2009, all parishes and schools were invited to reflect on the Bishop's vision, and the experience in our communities. Despite all this effort, announcements at Mass and information printed in "*The Vine*" and our parish newsletters, it is still apparent that some have never heard of the "Walking Humbly process" or do not understand it.

One of the most high-profile changes brought about by this process is the replacement of the former eight Deaneries with thirteen "Pastoral Areas". Additionally, Local Steering Groups have been convened, consisting of clergy and lay people nominated for particular skills and qualities. Their current task is assisting our parishes to review their present activities and strengths and, by next Easter, they will have worked with all parishes, schools and Catholic bodies to prepare a "Ground Plan" identifying ways we may all move nearer to the ideal of a "Thriving Catholic Community." Then, as a refocused community the aim is to use our many strengths and make best use of our resources, to face the challenges ahead in being witnesses of our faith in an indifferent secular society, despite having to adapt to the new realities in our lives and parishes and having fewer priests.

Currently, during Advent, our parishioners are being invited to watch a short DVD produced by the Stream Three Team, which will feature a number of people from all around the Diocese speaking on what is called the "Twelve

Marks of a Thriving Catholic Community” – namely, the desirable characteristics of a living, active church or school. Using the DVD and a feature in the December edition of “*The Vine*” everyone will have the chance to say what they feel their community does well at present, and what they would aspire to build in the future. From the dissemination of this information and that generated by the Steering Groups a formulated Area Ground Plan will be derived sometime around Easter next year. Further information about the “Walking Humbly process” will be communicated and published as it becomes available. If you wish to discuss the process further, you can always speak to Fr Dan, or alternatively Deacon John and Peter Van Cauwelaert, who are members of our Pastoral Area Steering Group.

Deacon John

