



Partnership News

**Putnoe Heights & St Mark's Church
21 December 2014
Fourth of Advent**



Sunday Services

8.30am Holy Communion every Sunday
1st, 3rd and 5th Sunday at Putnoe Heights
2nd and 4th Sunday at St. Mark's Church

21 December - Fourth of Advent

9.30am St Mark's - Holy Communion

Preacher - Rev. Caroline Weaver
Leadership - Mrs Jean Bank
Intercessions - Mrs Margaret Appleton
Organist - Mr Clive Simmonds

11.00 am Putnoe - Holy Communion

Preacher - Rev. Wendy Evans-Wood
Leadership - Mr Barry Southam
Intercessions - Mrs Sue Allen
Organist - Mr Clive Simmonds

28 December - First Sunday of Christmas

9.30am St Mark's - Morning Worship

Preacher - Mr Richard Ledger
Leadership - Mr Mick Ovenden
Intercessions - Mr Warwick Holden
Organist - Mr Clive Simmonds

11.00 am Putnoe - Morning Worship

Preacher - Mr Richard Ledger
Leadership - Mr Martin Fannon
Intercessions - Ministers
Organist - Mr Clive Simmonds

Readings 1. Isaiah 61:10 - 62:3 2. Galatians 4:4-7
3. Luke 2:15-21

Thank You

Special thanks to everybody who has helped to make our Christmas special in church this year. The many services are greatly enhanced by the decoration, preparation and presentation of our churches. It is very much appreciated.

Sam, Jane and Charlie

Prayer for Sunday

Day by day, O Lord, let us ardently seek your presence, lovingly walk with you and willingly spend ourselves in your service. At the day's end let us not be found hiding our talents nor at the end of our life be unready to rise up and meet you in the feast of your kingdom; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Richard Baxter (1615-1691)

Midweek Holy Communion at St. Mark's Chapel every Wednesday at 10am and at Sir William Harpur House on first Monday of every month at 10.00am.

The Reverend Dr. Sam Cappleman

107 Dover Crescent, Bedford MK41 8QR
Tel: 266952 nsm@thisischurch.com

Deacon Jane Mills

c/o Putnoe Heights Church Centre
Tel. 348091 Mobile 07807 146535
jane@thisischurch.com

The Reverend Canon Charles Royden

The Vicarage, Calder Rise. MK41 7UY
309175 Mobile 07973 113861 vicar@thisischurch.com

Partnership News is sent out by email every Saturday in a colour edition. If you would like to receive a copy please send an email entitled 'Partnership News' to vicar@thisischurch.com. Please note that any items submitted for inclusion in Partnership News will automatically be posted on our website and may appear in other local media sources.

Partnership News is also archived on our church website www.ThisChurch.com

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Partnership Pastoral Support Team Co-Ordinators

Mrs Wendy Waters 342613 office@thisischurch.com
Please inform us if you know of anyone who is ill, bereaved, housebound, requires a visit, home communion or counselling services. Please also ask us if you would like a home visit for any reason.

Churchyards Administrator

Mrs Avril Williams 01234 342613

Putnoe Heights Church Centre

Open Monday to Thursday 9am - 5.30pm, Friday 9-1pm
Tel/fax & Answering Service 365630 putnoe@thisischurch.com
Centre Manager Geoff Gypps 365630
Leadership Team Mrs Jenny Snelson 344417
Treasurer Mr John Hitt 404186 treasurerph@thisischurch.com
Gift Aid Administrator Mr Lawrence Wyatt 350188
Youth Team Leader Carolyn Morris youth@thisischurch.com

St. Mark's Church Centre

Open Monday - Friday 9am - 5.00pm
Tel/fax & Answering Service 342613 office@thisischurch.com
Centre Manager Miss Wendy Rider 342613
Leadership Team - Mrs Jean Bank 355698
Treasurer - Mr Ian Farthing 210892
treasurer@thisischurch.com
Gift Aid Administrator Mr Jim Williams 360605

Regular Weekly Activities - A Guide To Our Churches

Monday

Hazeldene Heights Pre-school. Sessional and Full Day care available—open Mon.—Fri. Full Day Care 8.30am to 5pm Sessional times 9am—12noon and 12.45pm - 3.45pm

For more info please contact Laura Leggett 01234 326685 or www.hazeldeneheights.com

8.30-12.30pm St Mark's Pre-School Nursery

Headteacher Mrs. Helen Harpin 312634

8.30-5.30pm Pre-school Mon-Fri St Mark's

9.00-3.45pm Top Marks Mon-Fri St Mark's

Headteacher Mrs. Helen Harpin 312634

(See website for more details)

9.45am - Body Control Pilates –Putnoe Heights

Stephanie Smith 357787 or 07973174430

10.00am Bakers Barn Art Group. St Mark's Mrs M. Berry 211955

10.30am U3A Play reading Putnoe Heights Contact Janet King 313946

11am-12noon Pilates St. Mark's. Liz Mason

07816522200 (starts 8 Sept.)

1.30pm Chat & Make. Term time for babies and

toddlers 0-5. Crafts, toys, songs, story and refreshments

£1. More details contact St Mark's Church Office on 01234

342613 or Janine 01234 297481 Restarts 12 January

12.00 noon Storybox Putnoe Heights We welcome the

under 5's and their carers to join them between 12noon

and 1pm for a sandwich lunch followed by a Bible based

story and singing. Contact Carolyn Morris

youth@thisischurch.com 365630

2pm U3A Music Appreciation Putnoe Heights Contact Janet King 313946

2.00pm U3A Italian Putnoe Heights— fortnightly

4.15pm Kumon Maths Putnoe Heights. Mrs Raksha

Mistry 01908 392698

5.30 - 8.30 NHS Eat Smart Think Active at Putnoe

Heights. For more details contact Emily Taverner 01234

792013

6.00pm Brownies St Mark's. Mrs C Mathew 826190

6.15 pm Brownies Putnoe. Sharon Tanner

01767699399 or 07720713738.

6.15 Pilates at Putnoe Heights Jane Butcher 300859

6.15pm-8.15pm Fit for Life Yoga - Putnoe Heights

Contact Jane Butcher 07891879571

6.30pm-8pm Cubs at Putnoe Ages 8 –10.5

Email:phxg.enquiries@gmail.com Tel Tom 07974566509

6.30pm Boot Camp Putnoe Heights – Laura Amor

341152 / 07976259081

7.00pm Sugarcraft Guild St Mark's (1st week in month)

Pat Nicholson 353518

7.00pm Cancer Care Society. St Mark's. (1st week in

month) Mr J Dewhurst 01908 377020.

7.00-8.00pm Laughter Club at St. Mark's 2nd week each

month) Cheryl Green 07729187399

7.15pm Guides. St Mark's. Mrs Gill Lake 218091

7.30pm Whist Drive. St Mark's (Weeks 3 & 5 in the

month).. Next meeting— 19 January Judith Stanton.

823313

7.30pm No Fear Bridge Club St. Mark's Mrs. Susan Ford 300218.

7.30pm House group 30 The Ridgeway. The home of

Eddy & Margaret Peck 267567

7.45-9.15 Get Fit Keep Fit at Putnoe Heights Diane

Field 01234 404976

Tuesday

9.30am Candlewicking (Needlework). Putnoe Heights.

Pat McCart 365507

9.30am -12.30 & 4-9pm Slimming World St. Mark's.

Lorrie Pearson 01234 340473

11.15am U3A Keep Fit Putnoe Heights Contact Janet King 313946

1.15pm U3A Cinema Group. St Mark's Contact Janet King 313946

1.30pm U3A Choir. St Mark's Contact Janet King 313946

2.00pm U3A Book Group 1 St Mark's (3rd Week in

month) Contact Janet King 313946

2.00pm U3A Book Group 2 St Mark's (2nd Week in

month) Contact Janet King 313946

2.00pm Library Walk W.I. Putnoe Heights, meets

monthly. Morag Tomkins 356895

2pm U3A Photography Group 3 St. Mark's (1st Week in

month) Contact Janet King 313946

2.30pm Mother Teresa Support Group. St Mark's (1st & 3rd week in month). Wool and knitting needles provided. Mrs Maureen Watling 262225

2.15pm Tuesday Afternoon Housegroup. St Mark's (2nd & 4th week in month) Mary Stubbs 406784.

4.00pm-6.15pm Stars School of Dance at Putnoe

Heights. Esther Richardson 295862 or 07917582468

7.15-8.15pm Pilates St Mark's Church Jane Butcher

07891879571

7pm - 8.30pm Daisy Birthing Putnoe Heights Susie

07980447390

7.30pm Ladies Tuesday Club at Putnoe Heights (Meets monthly Next meeting 6 January Afternoon Tea 2-3pm. Details Diane Bayliss 268101

8.00pm Hearts in Beds Committee St Mark's (week 4 in month) Mrs N Aspey 309816

Wednesday

9.30am Body Control Pilates. Putnoe Heights.

Stephanie Smith 357787 or 07973174430.

10am-2pm Open House at St Mark's for those with

learning disabilities., their friends, family , carers and supporters 342613.

10am U3A Gardening Group 3 St Marks. Contact Janet King 313946

10.00am Holy Communion. St. Mark's Chapel. A half hour service followed by coffee. All welcome.

10am U3A Card Making, St Marks Contact Janet King 313946

10am U3A Diet and Nutrition- Putnoe Contact Janet King 313946

11.15am U3A Keep Fit at Putnoe Heights

12.30pm –4pm St Mark's Nursery

Headteacher Mrs. Helen Harpin 312634

12.30pm Luncheon Club. Putnoe fortnightly. Next meeting 14 J anuary Putnoe Heights Office 365630

1.15pm Bridge Club for the Retired. St. Mark's.

Mr Barnes 261811

2.00-4.00pm U3A Craft at St Marks.Contact Janet King 313946

2pm U3A Gilbert and Sullivan Putnoe Heights Contact Janet King 313946

2.15pm - Fifty plus Keep Fit. Putnoe Heights

Mrs Webster 856966

3.45.- 5.30pm Messy Church. St Mark's (3rd Week in month). for children of lower school age and their carers. Bible-based story, crafts, singing and a meal. Next meeting 21 January.

2014 Wendy Waters 401834 Jean Bank 355698

4.15pm Kumon Maths. Putnoe Heights Mrs Raksha Mistry 01908 392698

5.00–6.00pm Rainbows at Putnoe Heights Mrs Gill Lake 218091

6.00pm Brownies. St Mark's. Mrs C Warden 219731

6.15pm Yoga and Relaxation Putnoe Heights Racheall

Monton 01234 297138 or 07910835994

6-7pm ATSK Karate at Putnoe Height Kevin Stark Tel. 01234 353865

7.00pm-9.00pm Scouts at Putnoe ages 10.5-14; Email:phxg.enquiries@gmail.com Tel Tom 07974566509

7.00pm Bunyan Bridge. St. Mark's Colin Jackson 363398 or Brian Sallows 407725.

7.00pm Archaeological & Local History Society Putnoe Heights monthly. Sylvia Woods 365095

7.00pm Putnoe Guild Putnoe 3rd Wednesday in every month except August Mrs Jo Street 3446008

8.00pm Badminton Club Putnoe Heights All welcome. Ken Marriott 214867

8.00pm Tudor Reeds Folk Dance Club at St Mark's (1st,3rd & 5th Wednesday in month). Next meeting will be 7 January Everyone welcome. All dances called, only £1 including refreshments. Rosemary 405594 or Graham 406359 for more details.

8.00pm Bedford Wine and Social Club St Mark's (Week 1 in the month) Greta Cansfield 215016

Thursday

8.30am-12.30pm St. Mark's Pre School Nursery Headteacher Mrs. Helen Harpin 312634

9.30am Thursday Prayer Group. Putnoe Heights. Will meet again on 8 January 2015

Valerie Capon 356306. Request for prayer can be written in the prayer diary on the information table.

9.15am Spanish for beginners Plus. at Putnoe Heights

10.30pm Spanish Holiday Survival at Putnoe Heights. Elena 01234 266968

9.45am Chat and Play St.Mark's. A term time group for Mums & toddlers.0-5 Contact St Mark's Church Office 01234 342613 or Janine 01234 297481 Restarts 15 January 2015

12pm Storybox . St Mark's welcome the under 5's and their carers to join them between 12 noon and 1pm for a sandwich lunch followed by a Bible based story and singing. Lots of fun. Contact Jaana Swaby 342613 Restarts 8 January 2015

1.30 - 3.00pm NHS Baby Clinic at St Mark's (Weeks 1 & 3 in the month)Contact 897401

1pm-2.30pm Drop in (small hall) Next Steps 9-24months Putnoe Children's Centre.Please call Trudy Hamilton (centre assistant) for more information 340552. 2pm - **Friendly Chicago Bridge** at Putnoe Heights £2 per session inc. refreshments. New members welcome. Contact Pat 01234 294220.

2pm U3A Current Affairs - Putnoe Heights Contact Janet King 313946

2-4pm U3A Indoor Games. St.Mark's Contact Janet King 313946

2.30 - 4.30pm Bedford Art Society St Mark's Jean Paterson 307210

3.15-5.15pm Social Care Solutions Drama Group Claire Creek 262650

5.45pm Weightwatchers. St. Mark's. Clare Martin 07805408811.

6.15pm Brownies. Putnoe Heights Lou Brenna. 07919402797.

7.00pm Club 2000 Putnoe Nina Ovenden 825059

7pm U3A Folk & Poetry St Marks (2nd and 4th week in month)Contact Janet King 313946

7.15pm Putnoe Art Group Bob Wardale 406094

7.00pm Bedford Embroiderers' Guild St Mark's (3rd week in month). Carol Plant 01832710504

Bedford Folk Dancers (formerly Barn dancers) Meet weekly at Putnoe Heights Different guest callers each week.Except August. All welcome, cost £2.50 Including refreshments. More details Ron 825574 or Shirley 01767 651767

8.00pm Bedford Writers Circle. St Mark's (1st week in month). John Broadhouse 01525 404014

7.30pm Magpies Women's Group St Mark's (2nd & 4th week in month) Mrs Marie Cotchin 402089

8.00pm Brickhill Ladies Group St Mark's (1st and 3rd week in month) Susan Perugi 300219

Friday

8.30am—12.30pm St. Mark's Nursery Headteacher Mrs. Helen Harpin 312634

8.30am Diabetic Centre St Mark's (1st week in month) Deborah Hennessey 792013

9am -1pm Machine Knitting group at Putnoe Heights, fortnightly . Contact Marion Sutton 217647 (9.30 am— 3.30pm from January.)

10am -12.00 U3A Photography St Marks.(4th week in month) Contact Janet King 313946

10am - 12 & 1.15 - 3.15pm U3A Beginners French St. Marks Contact Janet King 313946

2.00-4.00 pm U3A Whist St Marks. (2nd week in month) Contact Janet King 313946

2pm U3A Gardening - Putnoe Heights Contact Janet King 313946

4.50pm-8.15pm Stars School of Dance Esther Richardson 295862 or 07917582468

6.30pm-8.00pm Beavers at Putnoe Ages 6-8 Email: phxg.enquiries@gmail.com Tel Tom 07974566509

7.00pm-9.00pm Meditation St Mark's.Cheryl Green 07729187399

7.45 - 10.45pm Bedford Astrology Club. St Marks(2nd week in month)Carol Brown 01438 233385

Saturday

9.00am Faith Temple Ministries St Mark's (1st week in month) Dawn Kelly 07863762593

10.00am Theatretrain St Mark's. Dancing acting, singing. Kate Howard 01234 782414

Young Embroiderers bi monthly Putnoe Heights Terry Fletcher 357198

2.15pm Society of Recorder Players at Putnoe Heights. G Parry 01462 674792

Sunday

9.30 - 10.30 Church and Sunday School at St Mark's with crèche for under 3's

10 - 5.30pm Bedford Stamp Fayre. 1st Sunday Feb/Apr/ Jun/Aug /Oct/Dec. Contact P Harris 01623 621143

11.00 - 12.00 Church and Junior at Putnoe Heights for the under 9's and Young Peoples Fellowship (Y.P.F) for our young adults. A crèche is also available.

2- 4.30pm Indoor Bowls at St. Mark's 2nd & 4th Sunday. Ray Seymour 305695 or church office.

Messy Church Dates 15 Oct,19 Nov,10 Dec



Diary Dates



St Mark's Church Council –

St Mark's Leadership Team - 26 January 2015

Annual Congregational Meetings - 26 April 2014

Putnoe Heights Leadership Team -

Putnoe Heights Management Meeting -

Putnoe Church Council - 20 February 2015

Pastoral Group Meeting -

Churchyard Committee -

Commemoration Service -

Circuit meeting –

Deanery meeting -

Woodland Burial Trustees–

Putnoe Heights Children & Youth Meeting - Monday

19 January 2015

Please advise St Mark's Church Office of the dates of your meetings.

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Sentence of Scripture - Isaiah 9: 6

Unto us a child is born, to us a son is given, the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Collect Prayer for the Day *Before we read we pray* God our Redeemer, who prepared the Blessed Virgin Mary to be the mother of your Son: grant that, as she looked for his coming as our saviour, so we may be ready to greet him when he comes again as our judge; who is alive and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever Amen. Common Worship



Readings at St. Mark's

First Bible Reading - 2 Samuel 7:1-11,16

After the king was settled in his palace and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, he said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am, living in a palace of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent." Nathan replied to the king, "Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the LORD is with you." That night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying: "Go and tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?' "Now then, tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men of the earth. And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies. "The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.' (This is the word of the Lord – **Thanks be to God**)

Second Bible Reading - Romans Chapter 16:25 - 27

Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him - to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen. (This is the word of the Lord-- **Thanks be to God**)

Gospel Reading - Luke 1: 26-38 (When announced - **Glory to Christ our Saviour**)

In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called

the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God." "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her. (This is the Gospel of Christ - **Praise to Christ our Lord**)

Readings at Putnoe Heights

First Bible Reading - Exodus 3:1-8

Meanwhile, Moses continued tending the sheep that belonged to his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian. He led the sheep to the western desert and came to Horeb,[b] God's mountain, where the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flaming fire from the center of a bush. As Moses continued to watch, amazingly the bush kept on burning, but was not consumed. 3 Then Moses told himself, "I'll go over and see this remarkable sight. Why isn't the bush burning up?"

When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from the center of the bush, "Moses! Moses!" He said, "Here I am." "Do not come any closer," God said. "Remove your sandals from your feet, because the place where you are standing is holy ground." Then he said, "I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. The Lord said, "I have certainly seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and I have heard their cry caused by their slave masters. I really do understand their pain, so I have come down to deliver them from their domination by the Egyptians and to bring them out of that land to a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the territory of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

Gospel Reading - Luke 1:47-55 (When announced - **Glory to Christ our Saviour**)

My spirit exults in God, my Saviour, because he has looked favourably on his humble servant. From now on, all generations will call me blessed, because the Almighty has done great things for me. His name is holy. His mercy lasts from generation to generation for those who fear him.

He displayed his mighty power with his arm. He scattered people who were proud in mind and heart. He pulled powerful rulers from their thrones and lifted up humble people. He filled hungry people with good things and sent rich people away with nothing. He helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful, according to the promise he made to our ancestors - to Abraham and his descendants forever." (This is the Gospel of Christ - **Praise to Christ our Lord**)

Post Communion Prayer

Heavenly Father, who chose the Blessed Virgin Mary to be the mother of the promised saviour: fill us your servants with your grace, that in all things we may embrace your holy will and with her rejoice in your salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Commentary. *This week we are pleased to reproduce the Dean of St Albans Christmas letter which was severely truncated in See Round*

Years ago I led a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, including a visit to Bethlehem. I remember the bus arriving in Manger Square. It was a drizzly, grey November day. Bethlehem is a bit of a dump at the best of times, but this time there was a security scare, so the tacky souvenir shops around the square were boarded up, there was barbed wire everywhere, and lots of young Israeli soldiers walking about nervously clutching machine guns, trying to look hard.

The place was poor and drab and tense; and it struck me that it probably felt the same when Jesus was born there. Even in scripture Bethlehem is described as the poorest bit of Judah; and in Jesus' time it was under military rule, as it is today. To us it seemed about as welcoming as when Mary and Joseph arrived there, and there was no room at the inn.

When we got to the Church of the Nativity it got worse. It was like Bedlam – heaving with people, with dozens of different denominations worshipping in different languages in different chapels. I was annoyed because we had booked a chapel for our service, but some American preacher

was ranting at his lot in it, and refused to move. All I could do was fume and mutter darkly about colonial heretics. Peace and goodwill did not abound. Then we tried to get down to the crypt, which is said to be the place of Jesus' birth. Hundreds of people were trying to squeeze down a one-person-wide staircase, all elbowing and shoving. So my remaining Christian tolerance took another knock, and by the time I got there I was in a murderous mood.

Still, once we'd got there, our group went and knelt down at the back of the crypt, and gradually we calmed down. As we knelt, watching the people filing past the place Jesus was born, little by little the mood changed. It was quieter, and it began to dawn on us where we were and what it meant. Then somebody started to sing "Away in a manger", very quietly, and people began to join in. Now I have to tell you, I am not keen on "Away in a Manger". I think it's an awful piece of sentimental goo. But on that occasion, in that particular place, I admit it brought a tear even to my eye. Somehow I think it was all the more powerful because we were only able to get there through all the awfulness of everything that had gone before.

We had to get there through the town, like a symbol of the whole world with its guns and barbed wire and bombs, and all the hatred and injustice which cause them. We had to get there through the Church, like a symbol of the whole Church, with all its different traditions pushing and shoving and fighting, and mostly being all too human and getting it all wrong. Hardest of all, I had to get there through me, through my own irritation and annoyance, before I could reach the other bit of me, the sane, quiet bit where Jesus can be born.

The whole point of Christmas, is that God doesn't come to us apart from the mess. He comes in the middle of it. He doesn't wait for us to make a perfect world without wars and poverty and hatred. He doesn't wait for us to make a perfect Church where we never quarrel. He doesn't wait for us to turn into perfect people who actually deserve him. Instead he comes to us as we are, and he loves us as we are. He is born in the middle of the mess to show that he's not God far away, but God with us: Immanuel. You might say: So what? It doesn't change anything. The world is as awful as ever. The Church is as awful as ever. We are as awful as ever.

Perhaps. But I think we were better people when we walked out of the Church in Bethlehem than when we walked in, if only for being reminded that the awfulness isn't the whole story. Because behind it all there is a God who loves us, and who is trying to get through to us, if only we'll listen. Because behind the Christmas tinsel and the turkey and the T.V. repeats, there is a golden truth: that humanity and holiness were combined in one little boy, all those years ago. And with that truth and his love inside us, maybe we can start to change the mess of the world, and the mess of the Church, and the mess that is us – and make them holy too.

Have a happy Christmas.

Jeffrey (*The Very Revd Dr Jeffrey John*)

Prayers for Sunday and the Week Ahead

Merciful Father our souls proclaim your greatness and our spirits rejoice in the salvation which you have given to us, you have done great things for us and we share with Mary in praising your name. May Mary be to us a model of witness and service. Give us your Holy Spirit that we may boldly proclaim your name and tell of your ways.

You are the friend of sinners, you show your deepest love to the weak, the vulnerable and those who are down trodden. May we faithfully live out your Gospel of love by caring for those who are in need, those who are hungry, those who are poor.

We pray for those who are in authority, that they may be instruments of justice and peace. Gracious God, you hear the voice of all who cry out in suffering or despair throughout the world. Visit all in need with the comfort of your presence, that they may live secure in the knowledge of your divine love.

We pray for families at Christmas, that children would be blessed by peaceful, kind and loving homes. We pray for those who task is to offer protection to those at risk, those who work to help struggling relationships. We pray for families struggling with debt and financial worries. Give strength in our community to those who work to offer help to the broken hearted, the sick and frail. Help us in your name to lift up the hearts of the humble and fill the hungry with good things.

Make space for Jesus this Christmas

The President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference have urged people to make space in their homes and lives for Jesus this Christmas.

In their Christmas message, the Revd Ken Howcroft and Ms Gill Dascombe ask people to consider what kind of dinner guest Jesus might be.

Make space for Jesus. What would it be like to leave a place for him at the table for the Christmas meal? To open the door and welcome him in to "our" Christmas, in our homes, our churches and the world around us (just like Jewish people often leave a cup and open the door to Elijah at a Passover meal)? Would he rush in and lift our spirits, the life and soul of the party? Or slip in quietly, warm and gentle, meek and mild, like a kindly uncle?

Or would he come in as a guest and then take over as the host, as he did with the two disciples walking on the road to Emmaus in the aftermath of his crucifixion and resurrection? For it is not "our" Christmas, but his. And he tends to come in unexpected ways, and therefore often unrecognised, the extraordinary appearing in the ordinary, a flicker of light that is often overlooked.

"Longing for light, we wait in darkness", as the hymn by Bernadette Farrell puts it. A world in which people are forced to move on from place to place. A world in which people try desperately to get to safer and better places for themselves and their families in leaking and sinking boats across the Mediterranean; or flee as refugees from persecution or oppression in places like Iraq and Syria. Just like Mary and Joseph who were forced to go and be registered in a distant place. Just like, later, they had to flee with their child from the power of Herod and go to Egypt.

Some people wait in the darkness of their own lives. Grief, pain and sorrow. Broken relationships, hopes and prospects. People excluded, marginalised or stigmatised - sometimes because of mental illness that is beyond their control. Christmas can be a hard time for those who are lonely or down.

Yet to each of these situations, Christ comes like he did in the birth which we celebrate. Unlooked for, or searched for, or longed for or prayed for, he comes. Not tearing the skies apart. Not as a mighty alpha-plus person. Not as an alien being. But as a tiny baby, born into poverty and need, human, vulnerable and dependent.

God comes to the heart of our human experience in Jesus. The divinity of Christ is clothed with our humanity so that our humanity can be clothed in his divinity. As Charles Wesley wrote:

"Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail the incarnate Deity, Pleas'd as man with man to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel!"
So make space for Jesus this Christmas. Look for

him in the ordinary things, the light in the darkness that the darkness has never managed to extinguish. Celebrate him there. Respond to him there. Become like him. Let the light of his love show through the way you treat others.

May our lives and our churches be places of true joy and peace this Christmas time. May the grace that came into the world that first Christmas fill us and connect us together.

The blessing of God be with us all this Christmas time and throughout the coming year.

Christmas closure at St Mark's Church office.

The office will be closed from 1pm Wednesday 24 December and will reopen 9am Tuesday 6 January

Christmas closure at Putnoe Heights Church office.

The office will be closed from 1pm on Friday the 19 December and will reopen at 9.00am on Monday 5 January 2015

St Mark's Craft Stall would like to thank everybody for their support and are pleased to say they made £650 for church craft fayre funds.

Footprints New Year's Day Walk 2015

Meet at 10.30 am on 1 January at Danish Camp car park, Willington for easy circular walk on good paths. Lunch after walk at Putnoe Heights - please give numbers for lunch to Sue by 31 December.

The Christian Aid Christmas Appeal: The government will match pound for pound all donations sent to Christian Aid this Christmas to further support the work being done in Kenya with mothers and newly born children.

Our Songs of Praise teams and Putnoe Heights Church Youngsters have been invited to join the residents of Puttenhoe to sing carols at 11am on Christmas Eve. They would welcome any members of the congregation who would like to join them. For more details contact *Carolyn Morris*

Putnoe Provender Last Sunday's Sale raised the magnificent sum of £245 in aid of the Emmaus Mission Appeal. Many thanks to all who contributed. *John and Sally Gunning*

Junior Church at Putnoe Heights will have break on the 28 December. We will meet again at Family service on January 4 2015. *Carolyn*

Partnership Council are invited to the Vicarage today for lunch from

Christmas Message He came to pay a debt, he did not owe, because we owed a debt we could not pay! Jesus is the reason for the season. Unable to send cards because of long illness and parkinson tremors. Heaven blessings to everyone at Putnoe Heights and St Mark's. With christian love *Deborah Wallace*.

Fourth Candle - The Candle of Joy (Pink candle) Mary the Mother of Jesus

Leader: May your hearts be filled with joy as you hear the song of Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

All: Thanks be to God

Leader: Last Sunday we lit the Candles of Hope, Peace and Love
(A person now lights the Candles of Hope, Peace, and Love)

Today we light the Fourth Candle of Advent, the Candle of Joy, as we remember Mary the mother of Jesus



Luke Chapter 1 And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors."

Blessed are you, sovereign Lord, merciful and gentle: to you be praise and glory for ever. Your light has shone in our darkened world through the child-bearing of blessed Mary; grant that we who have seen your glory may daily be renewed in your image and prepared like her for the coming of your Son, who is the Lord and Saviour of all. Blessed be God for ever.
(Light the fourth pink candle now.)

Leader: Let us pray:

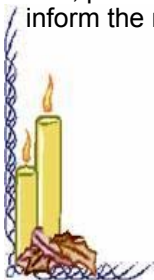
All: Lord Jesus, light of the world, blessed is Gabriel, who brought good news; blessed is Mary, your mother and ours. Bless your Church preparing for Christmas; and bless us your children, who long for your coming.

Advent 4 Hymn *(Angel Voices)*

Mary's gift, beyond all telling, was to give Christ room.
She gave God a human dwelling in a mother's womb.
Who could guess the final story? cross and glory;
Empty tomb!

Rest In Peace

On the Sunday following a funeral service we remember in church those who have died. We light a candle to symbolise the light of Christ which eternally shines and brings hope. If you would like a person remembered in our service when the candle is lit, perhaps on an anniversary or birthday, please inform the ministers, or telephone the church office



May the souls of all the faithful departed through the mercy of God, rest in peace and rise in glory. Amen.'



Forthcoming Funerals

The funeral of Derick Alan Butterfield will take place at Bedford Crematorium on Monday 29 December at 1.45pm