



Partnership News

Putnoe Heights & St Mark's Church
29 December 2013
First Sunday after Christmas



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

Today – 29 December 2013

9.30 St Marks - Morning Worship and Baptism

Preacher – Mr Richard Ledger
Leadership Team – Mr Mick Ovenden
Intercessions – Mrs Morag Stewart
Organist - Mr Clive Simmonds

11.00 am Putnoe —Holy Communion with PCH

Preacher – Mr Richard Ledger
Leadership -Mrs Sue Allen
Intercessions -Dr Tim Wilkes
Organist - Mr Clive Simmonds

5 January 2014 - Epiphany

9.30 St Marks – Family Worship

Preacher – Reverend Canon Charles Royden
Leadership – Mrs Wendy Waters
Intercessions – Mrs Margaret Appleton
Organist - Mr Clive Simmonds

11.00 am Putnoe – Family Worship

Preacher – Reverend Canon Charles Royden
Leadership Team - Mr Gordon Evans
Intercessions — Young People
Organist - Mr Clive Simmonds

Readings 1. Isaiah 60: 1-6 2. Ephesians 3: 1-12
3. Matthew 2: 1-12

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

Thank You

The flowers at Putnoe Heights Church this week have been kindly given by Derrick Wren in loving memory of his wife Betty.

The flowers at St Mark's Church have kindly been given by Mike Cooper in memory of his parents and wife Helen.

Welcome

We welcome you all to our worship today we especially welcome to St Mark's the family and friends of Jacob Foolkes who has been brought for baptism.

Prayer for Sunday

Lord Jesus Christ. Your birth at Bethlehem draws us to kneel in wonder at heaven touching earth: accept our heartfelt praise, as we worship you our Saviour and our eternal God. Amen.
Common Worship Shorter Collect

Marriage

We publish the banns and pray for the marriage of Alan John Stewart Graham and Gail Jacqueline Preston both of this parish to be married at St Mark's Church

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

Partnership Pastoral Support Team Co-Ordinator

Mrs Mary Stubbs 406784 Mary@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 - 5pm, Friday 9am - 1pm
Tel/fax & Answering Service 365630 putnoe@thisischurch.com
Centre Manager Mr Geoff Gypps 365630 mob 07947 902846
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 - Mr Michael Ovenden 826738
Treasurer - Mr Ian Farthing 210892
treasurer@thisischurch.com

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 (see contact details below)

1.30pm Chat & Make. For babies and toddlers 0-5.

Crafts, toys, songs, story and refreshments £1. More details email-chatandplay@hotmail.co.uk

2.00pm U3A Calligraphy at St Mark's (2nd week in the month) Mrs Yvonne Francis 405119.

12.00 noon Story box 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(see contact details below)

2.00pm U3A Italian Putnoe Heights– fortnightly

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

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 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 92nd week each month) Cheryl Green 07729187399

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

7.30pm Whist Drive. St Mark's (3rd & 5th week in the month).. Next meeting– 20 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

Tuesday

9.30am Jo Jingles. St. Mark's. Music & movement for pre-school children. Charlotte Williams 07968207442

9.30am Candlewicking (Needlework). Putnoe Heights. Pat McCart 365507

9.30am -12.30 & 4-9pm Slimming World St. Mark's. Helen Skinner 07989080389

10am Autism Beds Adult Support Group. St Mark's. Sally Cripsley 350704

11.15am U3A Keep Fit Putnoe Heights (see contact details below)

1.15pm U3A Cinema Group. St Mark's Mrs Yvonne Francis 405119

1.30pm U3A Choir. St Mark's Mrs Yvonne Francis 405119

2.00pm U3A Book Group 1 St Mark's (3rd Week in month) Mrs Yvonne Francis 405119

2.00pm U3A Book Group 2 St Mark's (2nd Week in month) Mrs Yvonne Francis 405119

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) Mrs Yvonne Francis 405119

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

7.30-8.30pm Pilates St Mark's Church Jane Butcher 0789187957

7pm - 8.30pm Daisy Birthing Putnoe Heights Susie 07980447390

6.00-7.00pm Zumba at St Mark's. Contact Denise Worker 07900 232648

7.00pm Keep Fit. St. Mark's Jan Gregory 328455

7.30pm Ladies Tuesday Club at Putnoe Heights (Meets fortnightly). Afternoon meeting at 2.30pm on 7 January Details Janet King 313946

8.00pm Hearts in Beds Committee St Mark's (4th week 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. Mrs Yvonne Francis 405119

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

10am U3A Card Making, St Marks Mrs Yvonne Francis 405119

10am U3A Diet and Nutrition- Putnoe (contact below)

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 15 January Putnoe Heights Office 365630

1.00-3pm Police Surgery at Putnoe Heights (Fortnightly)

1.15pm Bridge Club for the Retired. St. Mark's. Mr Barnes 261811

2.00-4.00pm U3A Craft at St Marks. Mrs Yvonne Francis 405119

2pm U3A Gilbert and Sullivan Putnoe Heights

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 15 January 2014 Wendy Waters 401834 Jean Bank 355698

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

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

6.15pm Yoga and Relaxation Putnoe Heights Racheall Monton 01234 297138 or 07910835994.

7.00pm Bunyan Bridge. St. Mark's Colin Jackson 363398

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 344600

7.00pm Line Dancing Putnoe Mike Del-Boyer 348378

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 15 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 (1st week 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. Valerie Capon 356306. Request for prayer can be written in the prayer diary on the information table.

9.30am Spanish for total beginners.at Putnoe Heights. Elena 01234 266968

9.45am Chat and Play St.Mark's. A term time group for Mums & toddlers.0-5 Jo Garner 400071 or 07932616468

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

1.30 - 3.00pm NHS Baby Clinic at St Mark's (1st and 3rd week in 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

2-4pm U3A Indoor Games. St.Mark's Mrs Yvonne Francis 405119

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 Watkins .

7.00pm Club 2000 Putnoe Nina Ovenden 825059

7pm U3A Folk & Poetry St Marks (2nd and 4th week in month)Mrs Yvonne Francis 405119

7.15pm Putnoe Art Group Bob Wardale 406094

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

7.30pm Gentle Birthing St Mark's. Pat Wood 07946 847231

8 -10pm 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). Mr Newton 01525 378193

8.00pm 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

10am -12.00 U3A Photography St Marks.(4th week in month) Mrs Yvonne Francis

10am - 12 & 1.15 - 3.15pm U3A Beginners French St. Marks Mrs Yvonne Francis 405119

2.00-4.00 pm U3A Whist St Marks. (2nd week in month) Mrs Yvonne Francis 405119

2pm U3A Gardening - Putnoe Heights

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

6.15pm Yoga and Relaxation Putnoe Heights. Racheall Monton 297138 or 07910835994

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.

7-9pm Tae Kwon Do St Mark's Adrian Felice www.bedfordtkd.com 07964356355

Messy Church Dates Weds 20 Nov, 15th Jan., 12th Feb., 19th March, 16th April, 21st May, 18th June.

Diary Dates

St Mark's Church Council –

St Mark's Leadership Team - 21 January 2014

Annual Congregational Meetings

Putnoe Heights Leadership Team -

Putnoe Heights Management Meeting

Putnoe Church Council -

Pastoral Group Meeting - 10 January at 10.00am

Churchyard Committee -

Commemoration Service

Circuit meeting - Deanery Meeting -

Woodland Burial Trustees– 15th December 12.30pm

Putnoe Heights Children & Youth Meeting –10th February 2014 1.30pm

New Year Lunch 19 January at Putnoe

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

First Sunday of Christmas

Sentence of Scripture - Psalm 148:11

Kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on earth, young men and maidens, old men and children. Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his splendour is above the earth and the heavens.

Collect Prayer for the Day -

Before we read we pray

Almighty God, who wonderfully created us in your own image and yet more wonderfully restored us through your Son Jesus Christ: grant that, as he came to share in our humanity, so we may share the life of his divinity; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen. Common Worship



First Bible Reading - Isaiah 63:7-9

I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the LORD has done for us-- yes, the many good things he has done for the house of Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses. He said, "Surely they are my people, sons who will not be false to me"; and so he became their Saviour. In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

(This is the Word of the Lord— **Thanks be to God**)

Second Reading - Hebrews 2:10-end

In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises." And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again he says, "Here am I, and the children God has given me." Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death-- that is, the devil-- and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

(This is the Word of the Lord— **Thanks be to God**)

Gospel Reading - Matthew Chapter 2:13-23

When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son." When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more." After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead." So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene."

Post Communion Prayer

O Lord our God, make us watchful and keep us faithful as we await the coming of your Son our Lord; that, when he shall appear, he may not find us sleeping in sin but active in his service and joyful in his praise; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Hymns (Please distribute Mission Praise and Morning Worship, & baptism booklets at St Mark's)

1. Come now with awe 98
2. It came upon the midnight clear 345
3. Child in the manger 71
4. Love came down at Christmas 451
5. Thou who wast rich 700

Commentary

*"Not throned afar, remotely high,
Untouched, unmoved by human pairs,
But daily, in the midst of life
Our Saviour in the Godhead reigns"*

Yes that is a verse from a Easter hymn, but it links to the message of Christmas – that God comes to dwell with us, born as a vulnerable baby, and experiences all that life throws at us. He knows what we go through because he has gone through it too. So he understands all about us. And he does this out of love for the whole world.

God's nature is described in our Isaiah reading : compassion, love and mercy – and these are reflected in actions – in many kindnesses to the people of Israel – God is also distressed to the people of Israel. God is also distressed in their distresses : he is involved : he cares. This is good news. The theme is continued in Hebrews where we see that Jesus shared human nature and experience in every respect. Because he himself suffered and was tempted, so he can help us in those situations. He isn't a detached God : he identifies with us so he is able to sympathise with us. And because he has met our sorrows and faced out temptations he knows what help we need and he can give it. Life for Jesus was certainly not full of sunshine and roses, any more that it is for us. He was " a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."

And it all started very early on as the gospel reading tells us Jesus is born with a price on his head! There are plots. It was not to be expected that Herod would calmly accept the news that a child had been born who was to be King. In our Messy Church Nativity Herod explains " I am the King!" He carefully asks the wise men where they had seen the star ; he's working out the child's age so that he could be sure he didn't miss him when he orders that every child in Bethlehem under two years old to be killed. Herod was not a nice man. He thought nothing of killing members of his own family ; so he was not going to bat an eyelid at the thought of killing lots of little babies in case one of them should be regarded as a royal pretender.

So Jesus was born in a land where there was trouble, tension, violence and fear. We shouldn't dwell too much on peaceful, beautiful Christmas scenes. Jesus, the Prince of Peace was a homeless refugee with a price on his head before he had learned to walk and talk. But Matthew wants us to see that even when things are at their darkest, this is how Israel's Redeemer was to appear; this is how God would set about bringing freedom and justice. Tom Wright writes "No point arriving in comfort when the World is in misery." No point having an easy life when the World suffers violence and injustice! If he is to be Emmanuel, God with us, he must be with us where the pain is -----In Jesus, not despite the frantic and tragic events that happened around his birth but because of them, God is providing the salvation and rescue that Israel longed for and through that, his justice for the World.

The news this Christmas 2013, of Syrian catastrophe suggests that there is still a long way to go before that is realised. It is no easy road, yet as the carol say." The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight." *Richard Ledger*

Meditation

"With sorrow brought by sin and strife the World has suffered long, and, since the angels sang, have passed two thousand years of wrong. For man at war with man hears not the love-song which they bring, O hush the noise you men of strife, and hear the angels sing. And still the days are hastening on by prophets seen of old – towards the fullness of the time when comes the age foretold; then earth and heaven renewed shall see the Prince of Peace, their King; And all the earth repeat the song Which now the angels sing."

Prayers for Sunday and the Week Ahead

As the World is reminded of love and peace in the words of the carols, may the reality of a God who loves us so much transform our social and political thinking; and energise our plans and negotiations; We remember all who are forced to escape from their homes and live without security; we think especially of those with young children who are homeless or in danger. *Susan Sayers*

Jesus new-born child of all time, we greet your birth with wide-eyed delight. You are precious beyond words, for our World needs your presence more than ever. Let the angels' promise of your good news offering joy and peace to all the World, be heard by those who lead and guide. Let Kings bow down and all creation greet this holy moment, as we seek to grasp its magnitude. For you are God's gift silently delivered to every human heart. *From Further Everyday Prayers*

Compassionate and Holy God, we celebrate with joy, hope and peace your coming into our midst, for you have come to save us. By your grace we recognise your presence in people in all parts of your World. Through your strength may our lives proclaim joy and hope, through your love may we work for peace and justice. You are the source of our being, you are the light of our lives.
(from a Latin American prayer)

When was Jesus Born ?

For some people the date of a birth is really important and they believe that they can predict what you are like and what will happen to you by noting the time and date of your birth, hence Jesus was a typical Capricorn, dedicated to his goal and good with his hands. The Bible is not so positive towards these things and only two people are mentioned as celebrating their birthdays, Pharaoh (Gen40) and Herod ! Remember it was those mysterious visitors from the east who were focused upon the stars who predicted the birth of the Messiah. The Jewish historian Josephus noted that Jewish families did not celebrate birthdays.

'Nay, indeed, the law does not permit us to make festivals at the birth of our children, and thereby afford occasion of drinking to excess'

Origen of Alexandria (c. 165–264) goes so far as to mock Roman celebrations of birth anniversaries, dismissing them as “pagan” practices—a strong indication that Jesus' birth was not marked with similar festivities at that place and time. Little wonder then that there was no big celebration about the birth of Jesus and the date was soon forgotten. Indeed the earliest Christian writings of Paul and Mark make no mention of the birth of Jesus at all.

The date of Christmas as 25 December has been floating around for a long time. Saturnalia was an important festival throughout the Roman Empire and it lasted until December 25, which was the date of the winter solstice according to the Julian calendar. It was a date also celebrated as the birth of the pagan sun god Mithras and Sol Invictus (The Unconquered Sun). According to Tertullian December 25 was also nine months after March 25 which was the date upon which Jesus was believed to have been crucified. This date of course is also the Vernal/Spring equinox, the date upon which we still celebrate Easter, named after the pagan goddess of Spring! It was later also recognised as the Feast of the Annunciation, meaning Jesus was born and died on the same day!

Augustine wrote (On the Trinity (c. 399–419))

“For he (Jesus) is believed to have been conceived on the 25th of March, upon which day also he suffered; so the womb of the Virgin, in which he was conceived, where no one of mortals was begotten, corresponds to the new grave in which he was buried, wherein was never man laid, neither before him nor since. But he was born, according to tradition, upon December the 25th.”

However Christians do still disagree and the Armenian Church, followed by some Orthodox churches said Jesus was born on 6 January and still follow this tradition today. The Armenian Church celebrates the Annunciation in April.

Today Christ's Mass from which we get the English word Christmas is an important celebration of the birth of Jesus. It was only a minor celebration until 1223 when St Francis obtained permission to set up a manger surrounded by wise men, shepherds and live animals. This was when the traditional nativity was born. Once Constantine became a Christian in the fourth century, Christians who at first distanced themselves from the world around them, began to positively recognise all things pagan as a means to a greater good. By adapting pagan religious festivals and practices and making them Christian they could 'take over' pagan habits and give them new meaning. We usurped the ever fertile Christmas trees which proclaim new life, so too holly and we have even stolen the poor British Druids mistletoe ! Jesus birthday has since gathered a whole host of different traditions, many of them a lot more speculative than even the date of his birth. *Charles Royden*

Christmas closure at St. Mark's Church Office
The office will be closed from 1pm Tuesday 24 December and will reopen 9am Monday 6 January.

Christmas closure at Putnoe Heights Church Office. The office will be closed from 1.00pm Friday 20th December and reopen on Monday 6 January.

Chat and Play at St. Mark's restarts on Thursday 16 January 2014

Chat and Make at St. Mark's restarts on Monday 13 January 2014

Story Box at St Mark's starts again on Thursday 9 January 2014.

Footprints Walking Group. New Year's Day Walk. Wednesday 1 January, 2014. All welcome to join us at the start of the year. Meet at St. Mark's Church at 10.30am for gentle 2-3 mile walk via Anjulita Court and Clapham Wood. Lunch afterwards at Putnoe Heights Church. Sue Allen

Putnoe Heights New Year Lunch Sunday 19 January 2014. Starter, roast, dessert, wines and coffee. Tickets now available from Putnoe Office or after Sunday services. £8.00 (£4.50 children under 10)

Nominations for High Sheriff's Awards Sought
Nominations for the High Sheriff's Citizenship Awards in Bedfordshire are now being sought. If you know of someone who has given their time freely to their community and who deserves to be recognised, nominate them now. For more information, <http://voluntaryworks.org/news/nominations-high-sheriff%E2%80%99s-awards-sought> here

Thank You to Judith Stanton whose whist drive raised a magnificent £230 for St. Mark's Church.

St Mark's Wednesday Communion There will be no Communion service on Wednesday 1 January.. Commencing again on 8 January 2014

Putnoe Prayer Group will meet on Thursday January 9 2014.

Footprints walk:- There will be a footprints walk from Shefford on Sunday the 12 of January 2014. Meet at the car park (Free) at the end of Old Station Way off of the High Street in Shefford 2.00pm. About 2 miles in length, a bit muddy in places, a steep longish hill to climb (Cockshoot hill) No stiles. Any queries contact Alan or Margaret at massey-1@tiscali.co.uk

Equipping God's People

There are many training opportunities for those interested in learning more about the Christian faith or discipleship. Courses range from leading church prayers to pastoral care. A leaflet entitled Learn and

Grow Together is available at the church offices or online at www.stalbans.anglican.org

The Very Reverend Dr Jeffrey John Dean of St Albans Cathedral will be returning to BELIEF to speak on '**Means of Grace**' Saturday, 22 February, 2014 10.00am to 1.00pm St Andrew's Church Centre, Kimbolton Road, Bedford MK40 2PF £10 per person, payable on the day
register in the 'Contact' section of www.beliefbeds.org, email belief@standrewsbedford.org or phone 01234 330314

The week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Is Christ divided?

Is Christian disunity a scandal before God? Or is it something we have grown accustomed to, as though it were a creaky door that we never seem to get around to fixing? St Paul's words challenge us as we reflect upon this question. To suggest that disunity is something acceptable is declaring that Christ himself is divided - and that really is a scandal!

2013 was the year in which churches from all inhabited continents of the world gathered in Korea for the 10th General Assembly of the World Council of Churches. We gathered for no other reason than to declare to the world that our disunity is a scandal and that we will go on praying for and working for that unity which is God's gift to the church and to the world.

The Churches of French Canada have chosen for us a key biblical text of the ecumenical movement and have invited us to think about what our divisions say to the world and to each other about the Christian faith. They have also suggested that we use the Millennium Goals as a focus for our prayers for the world.

Dates

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is traditionally observed from the 18th to the 25th January - the octave of St. Peter and St. Paul

Gracious God,

you sent your son in the power of the Spirit to redeem your people.
Unite us in our diversity
and heal our broken church
so that the world may be drawn
to the source of all healing in Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Archbishop Justin's Christmas Sermon

The vulnerable God was born into a world that rejected him, and yet he loved it without limits. As we look around our world at injustice and conflict he calls us to His pattern of love: we see victims and perpetrators, and in loving them without limits we imitate Christ and challenge every injustice and any demeaning of human beings.

Today, singing of Bethlehem, we see injustices in Palestine and Israel, where land is taken or rockets are fired, and the innocent suffer.

We see injustice in the ever more seriously threatened Christian communities of the Middle East. The Prince of Wales highlighted their plight last week. Even this morning a church in Baghdad, where there have been Christians since the 1st century, was bombed and 15 more people testified to their faith with their lives. Christians in the region are attacked and massacred, driven into exile from an area in which their presence has always been central, undoubted, essential, richly contributing, faithful.

We see injustice in South Sudan, where political ambitions have led towards ethnic conflict. On Saturday I was speaking to a Bishop under siege, in a compound full of the dying. God's passionate love for the vulnerable is found in the baby in a manger in a country at war. If that was His home, today it must be our care.

We see injustices at home. Even in a recovering economy, Christians, the servants of a vulnerable and poor Saviour, need to act to serve and love the poor: they need also to challenge the causes of poverty. Prospect magazine had a poll this month that suggested the church is more trusted on politics than religion. But the two cannot be separated. Christ's birth is not politics, it is love expressed. Our response is not political, but love delivered in hope. The action of the churches in the last five years is extraordinary, reaching out in ways not seen since 1945. Yet no society can be content where misery and want exist, unless through our love collectively we also challenge the greed and selfishness behind it.

We will speak and act best when we are caught up in following the vulnerable God as His disciples in His way. Then His love fills us, His compassion drives us on, compassion for every person, at every

point of life or wealth or power. When individual Christians and the church together believe, and act on that belief, every human attitude is challenged, especially about the poor, and the world changes. We follow the God who is Saviour, whose word of love was found in action and word. We are called to act, whether at home or around the world, not just lament. Jesus rescues us from our brokenness and makes us carriers of life and light. He calls for that great line of witnesses that has swept down through the centuries to be continued today by a church that is confident in the message of God's love and truth. It will always be an untidy church because we are in a vulnerable, untidy, broken world. Yet when we see the fact of Christ's birth, hear the witnesses, receive the life he gives and respond in passionate discipleship then all our vulnerabilities, muddles and weaknesses are carried in His strength. The Christian meaning of Christmas is unconditional love received, love overflowing into a frequently love-lost world.

- See more at: <http://>

www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/5214/jesus-makes-us-carriers-of-light-archbishop-justins-christmas-sermon-#sthash.J0aDxKxv.dpuf

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Please also remember the Easyfundraising link. This is really a very good way to shop as it has lots of voucher codes which can save you a fortune on purchases and we receive a commission.

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.

**Ethel Adair Wilcox
Kathleen Nash**

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



Forthcoming Funerals

There are no funerals this week