

*St Nicholas, Marston and St Thomas of Canterbury, Elsfield*

## **MARSTON & ELSFIELD MESSENGER**

*January 2021 ~ a church newsletter during the pandemic*

### *Light will come bursting in*

I read this version of a verse from Psalm 112 on the morning of the day when we realised that all our Christmas plans had to change. Usually it's written as light 'dawns' or 'shines', which are encouraging images, but I loved this more powerful expression of the difference God makes, and it stayed with me throughout the day.

'Light bursting in' is the hope that Christmas brings and that John is thinking of when he talks of the light shining in the darkness. It captures for me the brightness of the love of Christ, the light who came so powerfully to a dark world.

There are beautiful quiet images of hope, like the popular words of Emily Dickinson: "Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul – and sings the tunes without the words – and never stops at all." But that particular day felt so depressing to me – we had very much wanted to see our grandchildren; I had to explain to my mother that my sister and nieces would no longer be able to visit her – that I needed the strong sense of light bursting in to bring some hope into the gloom.

Light transforms everything. Like sun breaking through a brief gap in storm clouds and lighting up the beauty of a hillside, those words from the daily reading changed my perception of the day. They brought into focus the eager enjoyment on the faces of the children coming to the Nativity trail; they cast a warm light on the friendship and fellowship of the people around me; I felt very sad at missing the chance of seeing the family but without that oppressive sense of darkness.

Looking back at Advent, I realise that light was a key part of the events I most enjoyed. As the Advent calendar windows were revealed around the parish, there was always that moment of waiting until a dark, blank window was transformed into a blaze of creativity. On St Nicholas Day, the service around the church Christmas tree included the switching on of the coloured lights and the flames of the bonfire in the fire pit. The light on the children's faces as they gazed at the tree and the fire brought real brightness into the dusk.

As I write this, we have passed the winter solstice and the days are already a few minutes longer, though the difference is too small to perceive easily. By the time you read it, we will have quarter of an hour more daylight. I am always surprised how much the changing season's light affects me. It makes me realise how glad I am of the unchanging hope, peace, joy and love symbolised in the light of our church Advent candles.

The familiar Christmas readings in Isaiah, John's gospel and many more have seemed especially encouraging this year. I hope and pray the light of Christ will come 'bursting in' for us all in this New Year.

Gill Hale

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### **The St Nicholas Christmas Bazaar 2020 – but not as we knew it!**

This was a very different Bazaar, but despite everything, a very successful one. We offered cakes, jams, soups, memorial decorations/table centres plus Good Gifts for Divya Shanthi and all went down very well. Marmalade and chutney were very popular as were the Good Gifts. In total we raised £2,100, more than our usual Bazaar does..... but don't worry, we all agreed it was nothing like the traditional one: meeting friends, having a chat over coffee and cake, guessing the weight of the cake or name of the cuddly toy... no, we will return to this format as soon as we can!



## St Nicholas Parish Advent Calendar 2020

Despite everything this went ahead and some wonderful windows have been displayed. If you missed them there are photos on the website. Well done to all the contributors and thank you all who turned up and were very carefully social distancing. We didn't have the singing, mulled wine and mince pies of last year, but it was great to celebrate Advent together.

Judith Piggott

### **A message from Skye**

This morning I read 'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble' (Psalm 46).

As we face another Lockdown and another season with closed church buildings and schools, do keep your eyes on the star over the stable. We are in the season of Epiphany, a time when we are still guided by the light that gives us a sudden revelation of clarity in who Jesus was born to be and who still is as he remains close to us in this very present moment.

When we feel we are at the end of our resources, bereft, stressed or alone, let your eyes and hearts wander to the star, let your fears and worries be stilled and know that the son of God came to be a refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble

**Marston and Elsfield Benefice**  
**NOTICE - SUSPENSION OF SERVICES IN**  
**CHURCH BUILDINGS**

In the light of the rapid spread of the new COVID variant, the vulnerability of many in our congregations, and the pressure on our local NHS; and following consultations with our Churchwardens in both Marston and Elsfield parishes, **I have taken the decision to suspend worship in our church buildings with immediate effect from today, Wednesday 6th of January 2021.**

This suspension will be reviewed before Ash Wednesday which falls on February 17th. We will continue to offer our online services via YouTube on a Sunday morning, available from 8am and at 10:45am you can join the church family for coffee via Zoom.

On the St Nicholas Church Facebook page you can join *Bible Chat* on Wednesdays at 10am LIVE or *Compline LIVE* on Thursdays at 8:30pm, all can be watched later on Youtube ([St Nicholas Church, Marston, Oxford](#)). New to 2021 on Sundays, at 8.30pm, we will host a LIVE *Compline* service on Zoom (please email Alison for the link)

Although St Thomas will be closed in Elsfield, St Nicholas building will be open for PRIVATE PRAYER between the hours of 9am-6pm. (Please only enter one household at a time and use the star sheets provided so we know where to clean)

Although this is a difficult decision to have to make, I believe it is the right course of action at this time. *If you, or someone you know would like help in accessing our worship, or if you are in need of pastoral care, please do not hesitate to contact us.*

May you know God's blessing, peace and light as this difficult time.  
Skye x

Please look at our Website for all recent information - [St Nicholas Church, Marston, Oxford](#). Contact Alison (Tel: Ox 580354, [administrator@stnicholasmarston.org.uk](mailto:administrator@stnicholasmarston.org.uk)) for Zoom links, and for further information on our Confirmation Classes, Choir Practices, Fellowship and Home Groups, Pulse our Youth Group and Sunday Club and other events/activities that meet online such as our Benefice Book Group and Coffee after church services on Zoom.

## What to cook in January?

Well, marmalade, of course! We are sure that most of you are seasoned marmalade makers: one Marston resident makes 50 jars each January, so there is to be no teaching grandmothers to suck eggs here. However, if Delia Smith's recipe can persuade some of you to try, then hooray! You'll need 1kg Seville oranges, 1 large lemon, 2.5kg of granulated sugar and 2.5l water.

Squeeze all the juice from the fruit into a large, heavy saucepan, then chop up into shreds and add to the juice. Save all the pips and as much pith as you can be bothered to separate from skins and put this into a large piece of muslin. Add the water to the pan and tie the muslin bag to the saucepan, letting its contents sit in the mix. Heat the pan to a simmer and cook gently until the peel is soft. Remove bag, allow to cool and then squeeze to extract all the oozy pectin from the pith. Whisk into the pan and then add sugar, stirring until the sugar is dissolved. Put some small plates into the freezer. Now turn on the heat again and boil (remember that sugar syrup gets very hot,



so take care) for 10-15 mins. Put a teaspoon of the mix onto one of your cold plates, leave for a min or so and then push your finger through it. If it wrinkles you have a set; if not, try again at 2 minute intervals until you do.

Then turn off heat and leave for 20 minutes. Put several clean jam jars into a moderate oven to warm. Use a funnel (or a steady hand) to ladle marmalade into each jar and add lids. When cold, add a label. Enjoy!

## Nature notes: what to see during January

January is fox month with urban foxes often seen in the daytime. Listen out for the vixen's blood-curdling calls in the night. With the short colder days, birds are hungry so don't forget to put out food and fresh water daily. Keep an eye on rowan, hawthorn and cotoneaster berries – popular snacks for blackbirds and other thrushes. You may even spot waxwings, occasional winter visitors from the East. Look out for catkins (also known as lambs' tails), which are the male flowers of the hazel tree and the first snowdrops, a promise of spring to come.



And finally: what to quote?

**January** by John Updike

The days are short,  
The sun a spark,  
Hung thin between  
The dark and dark.

Fat snowy footsteps  
Track the floor.  
Milk bottles burst  
Outside the door.

The river is  
A frozen place  
Held still beneath  
The trees of lace.

The sky is low.  
The wind is gray.  
The radiator  
Purrs all day.

