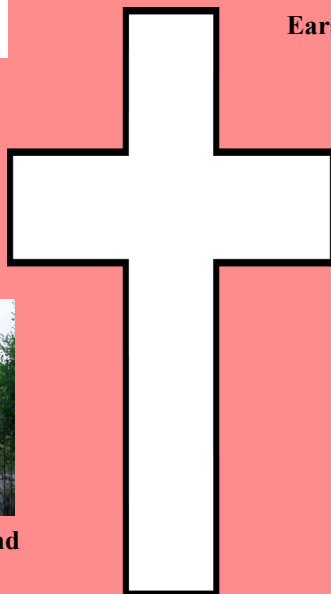




St. Alban's Earsdon



Earsdon Methodist



CHURCH VIEWS

**January
2021**

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Immaculate Heart of Mary

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

January 2021

This time, our ‘Thought for the Month’ consist of two Christmas sermons, because they are really relevant to current events. Those of us who heard them might like to read them again, and those who were not able to be at these services will get a chance to read them.

The great light

Midnight Sermon 2020: Isa 9.2, 6-7; John 1.1-14

The people walking in darkness: the opening words of our first Bible reading tonight. In many ways this year, we have been **people walking in darkness**. The Covid pandemic has gone on, and on, and on, and shows no sign of abating. As I was writing this, the news broke of a mutation in the Covid virus which made its transmission significantly quicker. Neighbouring countries acted quickly to close their borders to UK freight and travel. No-one knows how many chapters of this story are yet to be written. This year of pandemic, people the world over have been **walking in darkness** – the darkness of isolation... the darkness of fear... the darkness of grief.

The darkness of *isolation*. One of the symbols of the pandemic has been empty buses sweeping past, their drivers keeping the route open but no-one on board. For their own safety, people have been *self-isolating* but that’s been difficult for many people. Prisons use solitary confinement as a *punishment*, and I’ve heard of elderly people ‘going up the wall’ in their loneliness. What an awful time for this to hit younger people too. Children and teenagers are busy working out who they are. In normal times they do that in the company of friends and peers – those going through the same experiences as themselves. It’s no surprise that keeping the schools open is a government priority, amid an epidemic of poor mental health among the young.

The darkness of *fear*. That moment when someone you love has shown symptoms and is waiting for their test result. That hot feeling at the back of the throat when you know you’re going down with something and you think ‘heavens, is this it?’

And always the fear of the unknown future: what's going to happen with the Brexit trade talks? Will the vaccine work on the new variant? How effective will the vaccine be, and how long with that effectiveness last? How much worse might the pandemic get before it begins to get any better?

And the darkness of *grief*. Heartbreaking stories, this plague year, of what people have gone through. Normally fit people ravaged by the virus and losing limbs and kidney function. Athletic young adults hit by long Covid and having difficulty even climbing the stairs. A funeral in a nearby church cancelled on the day it was due to take place because members of the congregation had tested positive. People dying in hospital apart from loved ones who in normal times would have surrounded them with love and reassurance in their dying. We are **the people walking in darkness**.

But. In our first Bible reading **the people walking in darkness** see a **great light**. And in our second reading we find out who that light is. Jesus, whose birth we celebrate tonight is **the great light**. **In him** John writes **was life, and that life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it**. Jesus is **the true light that gives light to everyone**.

And to those who walk in the darkness of *isolation*, Jesus offers the light of *community*. He called twelve disciples to follow him, because following Jesus is a team game. You can't do it on your own: we are called together. And in response to the call of Jesus, members of this church have organised groups to go walking together to call on isolated members of our community. They have stood at a social distance, and offered community – togetherness. We've discovered other ways of being together this year, like the seventeen Sundays across the summer when our worship moved online. Our Zoom worship enabled one elderly person to worship with her church family [albeit online] for the first time in seven years.

To those walking in the darkness of *fear*, Jesus offers the light of *reassurance*. To his terrified disciples on one occasion he said **take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid**. Those words echo down the centuries to anyone who is in the grip of fear. As quite a fearful person myself I know that every time I am fearful, and take the time to be still in the presence of God, that reassurance is always there. *All shall be well*, wrote another, much later disciple of Jesus [Lady Julian of Norwich]

and *all manner of thing shall be well*...because, as we reflected here the Sunday before Christmas, everything that is rests upon the bedrock of the love and faithfulness of God.

And to those walking in the darkness of *grief*, Jesus offers the light of *compassion*. Compassion – that great word sums up everything Jesus stands for. The ‘com’ bit means ‘with’, and the ‘passion’ bit means ‘suffering’. Put them together and ‘compassion’ means ‘suffering with’. And the absolute pinnacle of the compassion of Jesus is his agony on the cross. The baby of Bethlehem did not come to live a life of luxury. On the contrary, he came to die in unspeakable pain. The third Wise Man brought myrrh, a spice for the anointing of a dead body. There are so many things we don’t understand. We don’t understand why there is so much suffering in the world God made good. But the mind of faith trusts that one day we will understand. We will see the bigger picture, and know what it was all about. And for *Christian* faith, the one who explains it will still bear the scars of Roman nails, driven through hands that had healed the sick.

Jesus, at your first coming,
your own did not receive you.
They rejected you, and nailed you to the cross.
This Christmas help us not to repeat history.
Not rejecting you, may we receive you,
and in receiving you, receive true light. Amen.

Comfort and joy

Christmas Day 2020 Luke 2.4-16

You walked into church this morning past a fairy lit banner, reading ‘Comfort and Joy’. You are holding in your hands a service leaflet entitled ‘Tidings of Comfort and Joy’. Tucked into the service leaflet is a carol sheet which contains those very words. Months ago, as it prepared for Christmas at the end of this plague year, the Church of England adopted these words – ‘comfort’, and ‘joy’ – as its watchwords.

Yet Monday December 20th was described as ‘one of the worst days for this country since the Second World War’. The Covid virus had mutated into a more transmissible strain, causing the government to act quickly in putting London and large parts of the South East into a new Tier 4. The quickly-spreading new variant caused France to close its border with the UK, and scores of countries to suspend flights from this country. Meanwhile ‘normal’ Covid cases were increasing, putting huge pressure on our hospitals. And the two sides in the Brexit negotiations were still deadlocked, with dire predictions for both sides in the event of ‘No Deal’.

With a backdrop like this, what comfort can we find? What joy can we know? Well the other day at Zoom Daily Prayer some words jumped off the page at me. They are from the prophet Isaiah, chapter 51 verse 12: I, even I, am he who comforts you. In the original, the phrase reads ‘I, I the one comforting you’. And the word ‘I’ – a single letter in our language – is in the original a really strong word of three syllables. It’s as if God is leaning out of heaven to say ‘It’s really me – it’s really me – and I am here to comfort you’.

A few chapters on in Isaiah [66.13], the same word is used in this image: As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you. If you’ve ever got up in the night to comfort a child who has had a bad dream you will have an inkling of what this picture means. You hold the child, with their tousled hair and sweaty pyjamas, and reassure them: ‘it’s alright – it’s all alright’. In the same way God – ‘I... I...’ – holds and comforts the creation. We are not alone in the universe eking out our three score years and ten on a tiny ball of matter lost in the vastness of space [now there’s a nightmare]. We are held in the comforting embrace of almighty God, who sees and witnesses our pain.

Last night at Midnight we thought about Lady Julian of Norwich, and her famous words that *all shall be well*. Elsewhere in her writings Julian tells us *God showed me in my palm a little thing round as a ball about the size of a hazelnut. I looked at it and asked myself: 'What is this thing?' And I was answered: 'It is everything that is created.'* I wondered how it could survive since it seemed so little it could suddenly disintegrate into nothing. The answer came: *'It endures and ever will endure, because God loves it.'* And so everything has its being because of God's love.

Tidings of comfort... and joy! The greeting 'Happy Christmas' only has any meaning when we remember what there is to be joyful about on Christmas Day. We're happy because of *Jesus* – because he was born and came into this world.

Wherever Jesus went, huge crowds followed. They followed because Jesus was a man of the people who spoke the people's language. He told stories about the joy of harvesting – the miracle of a hundred grains growing from a single seed. He said that finding God was like stumbling across buried treasure. He was a cartoonist, who said that people with the wrong priorities carefully take a gnat out of their hot chocolate, but then swallow a camel who happens to be sitting in the mug.

And one day Jesus was in a house, teaching. And the place was packed out because he was telling them about the love of God. And four friends brought their paralysed friend to Jesus. And they couldn't get to Jesus because of the crowd. So they climbed up onto the flat roof and dug through the dried mud. They lowered their friend down on his mat, right to Jesus' feet. And Jesus maybe laughs out loud at their resourcefulness and neck. What we do know is that Jesus then takes everyone by surprise. Everyone is expecting Jesus to say 'get up, take your mat, and walk'. But he doesn't. He looks down at the man, and with a voice of kindness itself he says **take heart, son; your sins are forgiven**. 'Call him 'Jesus' Gabriel says to Mary, because he will save his people from their sins'. The name 'Jesus' is a code-word, which means 'God to the rescue'. And one of the things God loves to do is offer people the joy of a new beginning with him. Sin forgiven, I hold my head high, and walk into my forgiveness. And it's only when Jesus' opponents question his right to offer this reassurance that he then says 'get up, take your mat, and walk'. And he does so. And everyone says 'blimey! We've never seen anything like that!

Tidings of comfort and joy. In our gospel reading today **an angel of the Lord** appears, and says to ‘certain shepherds’ **Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.** Then the sky is filled with angels **praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.’**

Happy Christmas!

Rev Tim Mayfield.

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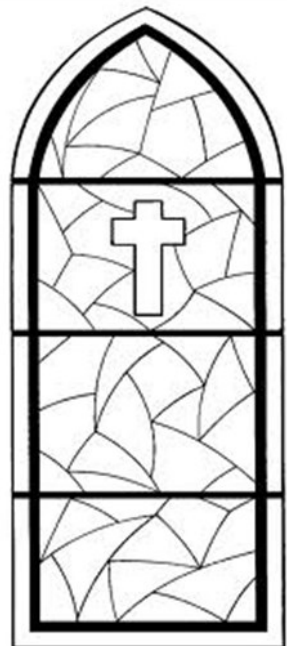
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A lovely message from a very appreciative Rev Tim Mayfield ...

Dear, imaginative, committed and creative team,

THANK YOU SO MUCH for all the work that went into our 'Journey to the Crib'. I thought it was a tremendous success, and I know was enjoyed by everyone who came. Thank you particularly to everyone who just made the church building look so BEAUTIFUL. At my station as first welcomer it was my privileged position to hear the happy gasps of surprise when people stepped into the porch and saw it transformed. But this first impression will have continued as people made their way around: the beautifully-presented nativities, the lovely stars on the floor, the crib itself, the spectacular pew-ends, the engaging prayer tree in its beautiful pot, the Christmas tree, and the kindly presented Christingle kits. Everything about it said 'we care' and I was very proud of St Alban's and what we offered people yesterday. These things really count.

I just jotted some things down I overheard during the day: 'you've made two children very happy... it was all so well-organised... we're amazed by the number of volunteers... what you've done is really beautiful: awesome'. A particular memory that will stick with me is Will Jordan on his way home dancing for joy in the moonlight and saying 'we cracked the code: GOD LOVES US!!!'

I'll paste below some comments that have come to me by email.

THANK YOU and WELL DONE!

PS for the record 158 people journeyed to the crib yesterday – 79 children and 79 adults. To this we add 13 stewards not already counted taking to 171 the number of people touched by this special thing x

I'd just like to say thank you to everyone involved in yesterday's Journey to the Crib at St Alban's. My three children enjoyed every second, and it was nice to do something almost normal. Obviously the chocolate treats were a hit too! We will miss our usual Christmas services but this helped plug the gap. We are making our Christingles today and will proudly display them over the next few days.

Well done to all those involved in the organisation of 'Journey to the Crib' from our welcome and journey through from Santa the quiz, prayer tree, viewing the cribs and stunning floral arrangement and garlands which set the scene beautifully. After taking in the effect from the chancel step to continue our journey to the end then kindly receiving a Christingle kit when leaving was so nice, however the star of the show was the little baby Jesus lying in a manger in a stable shed, the real meaning of Christmas. It was such a lovely experience and thank you to all.

Today's crib event was really good, Alice loved walking around it.

I would just like to say a big Thank you to you and all involved in this afternoons activity the children really enjoyed it.



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Welcome to “**The Secret Life of St Alban’s and St John’s Folk**”.
This month our interviewer has become interviewee, as we talk with Gillian France, who attends St Alban’s.

1) Where were you born?

At my parents’ home in Durham city. We were living in temporary accommodation belonging to Durham School, whilst a house in the Cathedral Close was being modernised for us to live in (my Dad had a job at Durham Cathedral).

2) What do you do during the week, when you’re not at church?

I work part-time in admin at Newcastle University, and I bring up my two children. I wish I did more running in my spare time, as I took that up as a hobby last year, but I’ve become a bit lazy about it recently (I blame lockdown...)

3) Surprise us with one of your hobbies, or something we may not know about you

When I was 19, I lived for a year in Brussels with a community of French-speaking Belgian and Italian nuns who ran a retreat house/conference centre for local Catholic people. I was the washer-upper!

4) What’s your favourite book/film/TV programme?

Book - the book I’ve enjoyed most recently is called “A Man Called Ove” about a grumpy man who is softened by his lovely neighbours. It’s a bitter sweet comedy, and enormously touching.

Film – I watched the film of “A Man Called Ove” on Amazon Prime recently, which was not as good as the book but still a lovely watch.

TV programme – I’ve just started watching The Crown on Netflix, and I’m hooked!

5) Tell us about somewhere interesting you’ve visited

Canada in 2006 was wonderful – we had three weeks visiting the east coast and then the west coast. We went on the Rocky Mountaineer train which went slowly through the beautiful mountain and lake scenery from Vancouver to Banff.

6) Tell us about one of your childhood memories

I was about thee and I was at my brother's ninth birthday party which was a boating party on the River Wear in Durham. I was convinced I should be allowed to row the boat single-handedly for a while, but everyone else was convinced otherwise, and there was a bit of a showdown. I didn't win.

7) Tell us something that's on your bucket list

I don't have a fully-formed bucket list, but I would love to look down to the earth from a hot air balloon – although I'm sure I'd be terrified too!

8) Sum up what being a Christian/being part of the church family means to you

I've been a churchgoer all of my life, except for a period in my teens where I stopped going. It's always been part of my being, and I try to uphold the ideals of the Christian faith in my everyday life (although I'm not as good at it as I would like). I like going to church in order to 'keep myself on track'.

9) Do you have a favourite book of the Bible?

I have a soft spot for Mark's Gospel, because I studied it for GCSE Religious Education. I got to know parts of it almost word-for-word, and I used to discuss it with my Dad. He thought it was funny because my knowledge was always from Mark's Gospel and he would say "but what about the other three gospels?"

10) What's your favourite hymn and why?

There are so many! But I can't sing 'When I survey the Wondrous Cross' without getting a huge lump in my throat.



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CHURCH VIEWS FOR JANUARY 2021 FROM THE PARISH OF OUR LADY, STAR OF THE SEA

Mini Christmas Cakes



Luncheon Club members in Our Lady Star of the Sea have been kept in touch by telephone calls throughout the pandemic, but lunching together has not been enjoyed since February. It looked like Christmas Lunch would be yet another victim of lockdown restrictions until organisers decided it should still be made special. They might not be able to present the usual three course meal followed by carols from the children of Star of the Sea Primary School but they could still mark it with a seasonal treat.

Ann Garland, Deirdre James and Christine Gunning baked more than forty identical mini cakes from the same recipe at home, used the same decorative wrapping, and came together at Immaculate Heart of Mary church to allocate members' addresses. They then delivered all the cakes and cards personally to each of the delighted members, making it a very special and memorable Christmas for so many people.

(Sanitising and social distancing were carefully observed throughout all of these processes, and masks were removed only for this picture.)

Food Bank Reverse Christmas Calendar

Collections of special items were made throughout November and up to 8 December. The final collection was so generous that it spilled out of the church door before being taken to the Bay Food Bank. A big thank you to everyone who made this such a success.



Christmas shared online

In the run up to Christmas, parishioners were invited to join in hymns and listen to Advent Readings by Zoom. The words of the hymns appeared on-screen and everyone who wished could sing along by themselves - everyone was on 'mute' so no one was distracted by hearing others singing seconds later because of the electronic time delay. Everyone could see each other so when the mute was lifted at the end of the service people could chat and exchange Christmas wishes.

We wanted everyone, whether shielding or isolating, together or alone to feel that the family spirit of our parish was still with them. Parish children and readers prepared a pre-recorded Nativity and everyone who wished shared short video clips of their own Christmas messages. The theme was light in the darkness, so many of them included candle-light or Christmas lights. Those attending weekend Masses were also offered the opportunity to film messages; volunteers were even available to do doorstep recordings for anyone who didn't have a smart phone but wanted to add their greetings.

On Christmas Eve, thanks to the very dedicated Nativity Team, everyone could share the results via parish Facebook pages and You Tube. It was a much needed lift to see so many familiar faces and hear the usual blessings we look forward to every Christmas.

The darkness only wins if you let it!

On 20th December St John's congregation hung out their Angels for the community to collect. The Angels are symbols of good news and the joy that Jesus brings. Here we hope they will bring comfort and joy to all especially in these uncertain times.

(Many thanks Barbara Golightly.)



I said a Christmas prayer for you
Because the season's near.
I didn't ask for riches
But for gifts so much more dear.
I asked for joyful gatherings
With your family all around,
And for carols to inspire you
With their old familiar sounds.
I asked for quiet moments
In your heart on Christmas morn,
For a special time to celebrate
The saviour who was born ...



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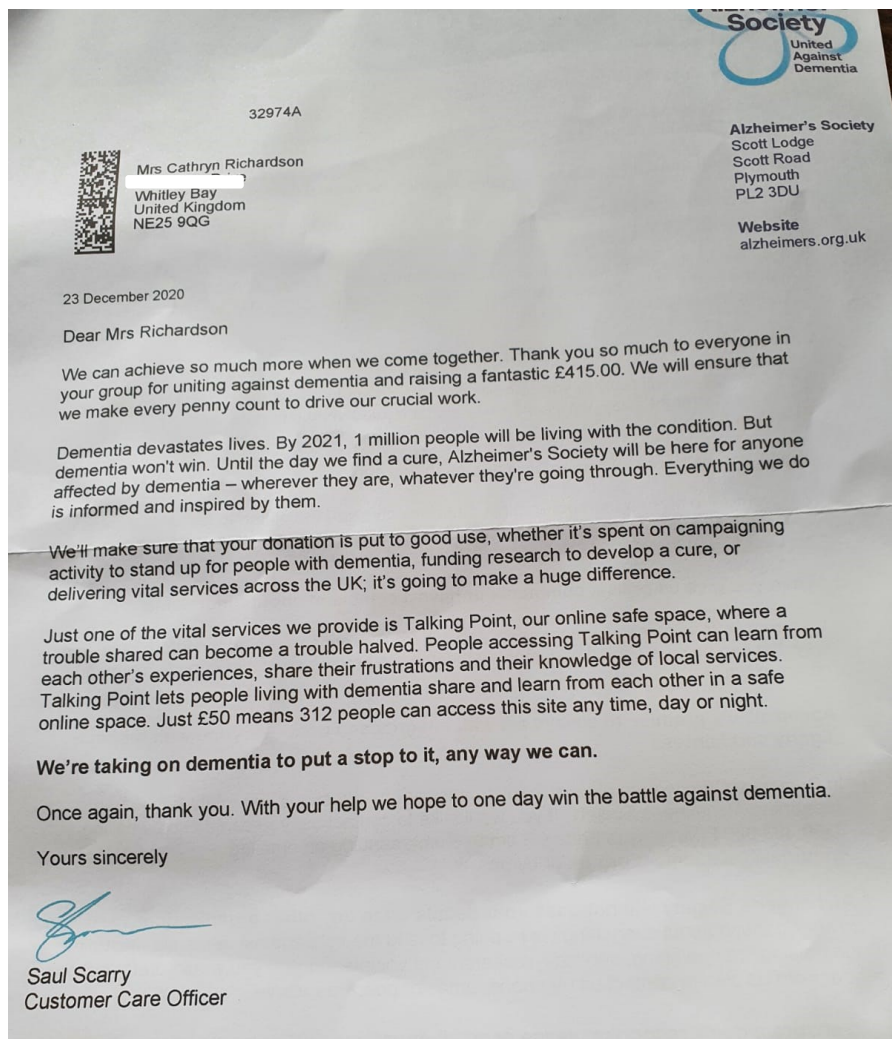
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Cathryn Richardson would like to thank everyone who has contributed so generously to the Parish Christmas card this year. We have raised an overwhelming £426 to go to the Alzheimer's Society. Cathryn says, "I can't thank you all enough as it is a charity very personal to me and also to many others in this present time." xx

Very well done Cathryn, and THANK YOU ! (The letter shows £415.00 received, but this was later increased to £426 following another donation.)



Earsdon Methodist Church

January 2021

Prayers for the New Year have recently been sent to our congregation. We shall miss our January covenant service, and these prayers do not replace it, but give focus to the new year and prayers of thanks for all that is past and expectant hope for that which is to come.

**

We all miss not meeting together, but continue to keep in regular touch by phone – not the same but at least we try to keep up with the news from each other.

**

Our Minister Rev John Mason is on sabbatical from 27th December until 27th March. We wish him well for these months and trust that his sabbatical programme will be helpful, instructive and give that space to be refreshed for his ministry. Rev Wes Blakey will be covering in his absence.

POEM FOR THE NEW YEAR

Every day will have its problems
Blots that we cannot avoid
Matters which will hurt and haunt us
Lingering on until annoyed
we sink.

Why, when these things coming to us
Are part of life's rich weave
Do we flinch? Instead of saying
"There you are . I do believe
you're expected!"

Only then will we feel lighter
Perhaps then we will with Grace
Tackle what it is before us
Resolute the problem face
with God.

Earsdon Methodist Church

I write just as I return from my daily walk, where I saw two young lads and their Dad in obviously new football jerseys, kicking a ball between them. This reminded me of an incident that happened many years ago where we once lived. Our neighbours had two young boys. Julian was the youngest and ever since he was old enough to understand, his Mum always referred to me in his company as 'John's Daddy'. For so I was, for so I am.

Some days, when I was out in our garden, a ball would come over the fence and although I could not see him, there would be a shout, "John's Daddy' John's Daddy – throw the ball back."

I would throw the ball back over, and we would sometimes have a chat, which really degenerated into silly waves and the pulling of even sillier faces and laughter all round.

As Julian got older, he would sometimes come into our garden with his older brother and kick the ball with me and John; and it was flattering that he always wanted to be on John's Daddy's side.

One day I said, "Listen Julian, my name is Wes; call me Wes."

But he was not ready for this disclosure for he looked at me with big, puzzled eyes and said, "Are you not really John's Daddy?"

Seeing his glum expression, I replied, "Yes, yes, of course I am,"

He brightened instantly and said, "Oh that's all right then, come on John's Daddy, let's play."

Never mind the complexities; the name Julian used, described the relationship.

Jesus said that we were to call God 'Father'. Not almighty mysterious force: but a name that described the relationship. It does not describe it perfectly, but it does say a great deal. To play ball with God means to trust in him as we would trust a good loving father and whatever the complexities around us – real though they may be – rely on his love and strength to go with us into all that lies ahead.

St. Alban's and St. John's



Diary Page for January 2021

Sunday	3rd		<u>2nd Sunday of Christmas</u>	
		8.30am	Holy Communion	St John's
		10.00am	Holy Communion	St Alban's
Wednesday	6th	9.30am	Holy Communion	St Alban's
Sunday	10th		<u>1st Sunday of Epiphany</u>	
		8.30am	Holy Communion	St John's
		10.00am	Holy Communion	St Alban's
Thursday	14th	9.30am	Holy Communion	St John's
Sunday	17th		<u>2nd Sunday of Epiphany</u>	
		8.30am	Holy Communion	St John's
		10.00am	Holy Communion	St Alban's
Wednesday	20th	9.30am	Holy Communion	St Alban's
Sunday	24th		<u>3rd Sunday of Epiphany</u>	
		8.30am	Holy Communion	St John's
		10.00am	Holy Communion	St Alban's
Thursday	28th	9.30am	Holy Communion	St John's
Sunday	31st		<u>4th Sunday of Epiphany</u>	
		8.30am	Holy Communion	St John's
		10.00am	Holy Communion	St Alban's

St. Alban's and St. John's

Sunday Gospel Readings January 2021:

3rd

Matthew 2.1-11

10th

Mark 1.4-11

17th

John 1.43-end

24th

John 2.1-11

31st

Mark 1.21-28





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	1						7	5
		8	9	5			3	
4	5			6				
				3			1	2
	9			7	2	5		
7	3						8	
6						1		

Please note - all material for next month's magazine (February 2021) will need to be in before Wed. 27th January 2021. Thank you, *Jean*.

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I hope everyone has had a restful and blessed Christmas, even if it was quieter than usual. We decided to don our finery anyway as it will always be a special day for Christians.

I was pleased to hear how many families had been to visit St Alban's for the crib event and the church looked so pretty with the garlands across the pews. I did notice that the Magi had already arrived in our scenes. They probably left early this year in case of movement into tier 4; I hope they got tested!

Wishing you all a healthy and happy 2021

Lots of rejoicing

Marti xxx



WORDSEARCH

The Christmas story carries on into the New Year, with Epiphany and the arrival of the Wise Men, led by the Star in the East. Through the eyes of faith, they saw Messiah in that small baby, and worshipped him, giving gifts that foresaw his life and work. New Year is also a time of new beginnings for us – resolutions about diets and paying the bills and doing better at work... Happy New Year!

- Epiphany
- Wise
- Men
- Camels
- Baby
- Jesus
- Star
- Herod
- Worship
- Gold
- Frankincense
- Myrrh
- New
- Resolutions
- Bills
- Work
- Study
- Running
- Gym



 * If you have any suggestions, comments or requests *
 * regarding the magazine, or for anyone thinking of *
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