

Advent & Christmas at St George-in-the-East

Advent (which this year begins at the end of November) is a powerful four-week season of preparation and penitence, with its own special hymns and liturgical features, which we should try to observe carefully, even if it gets squeezed by the anticipation of Christmas! It marks the start of a new Christian year – in which, for 2010-11, the gospel readings are primarily from Matthew. Each Sunday children will light a new candle on the Advent ring, with a song and a prayer about those who prepared the way for the coming of Jesus: the themes are (1) all God's people, (2) the prophets, (3) John the Baptist and (4) Mary. In all our busyness, let's try to make time for spiritual preparation alongside everything else that needs to be done to get ready for Christmas.

The annual **News International Carol Service** is on Thursday 16 at 1pm, followed by refreshments, and all are welcome. This year it is being organised by a new team, but it will include, as usual, music from three choirs – NI's own Wapping Great Voices, the choir of St Bride Fleet Street (the church of the press, printing and journalism) and our own school choir. We're grateful to News International for providing our Christmas tree (which this year they will also dress and light), and for their support for their local church, including the grant from their Community Affairs fund which we acknowledged last month.

Having thought carefully about the timing of **our own carol service**, we decided on the following Sunday, 19 December, at 5pm, followed by a 'Christmas tea' at 6pm, so that it's possible for families with children to attend. Some of the carols will be sung by candlelight, and around the tree. We hope – nay, expect! - our regular congregation will come to the morning service as usual, and return for the carol service.

This will be the first Christmas with our new organist, **Hannah Brewer**, and although she is new in post we hope it will be possible to include some simple choral items from members of the congregation as well as the familiar congregational hymns and carols. Hannah is American, a graduate in music and organ studies and a gifted performer, whose referees speak very highly of her abilities and character. She has been a regular church organist since she was a teenager, in churches of various traditions; currently studying art history at the Courtauld Institute (and living in central London), she is keen to continue playing regularly, and we extend a warm welcome to our parish community and look forward to getting to know her. We only hope that the District and Circle lines are not closed for improvement works too often at weekends (as happened on her first Sunday with us – so she walked here!)

St Paul's School Christmas Service is on the last day of term, Friday 17 at 9.30am. The service will include items from their Christmas production, on which they are working hard. Again, all are welcome to come and celebrate with our children, and support our school.

News from our committees

Our Parochial Church Council has a number of committees working on particular practical issues, in line with our Mission Action Plan.

Here are a few action points from the **publicity and communications committee**:

- ◆ we need to update our contact information – for all church members, not just newcomers – so we have produced a **card** which we're asking everyone to fill in, so that we have up-to-date addresses, phone numbers and email addresses. We can then circulate this newsletter, and other news and information, to an email list. Unlike the Electoral Roll, which is a published list of names only, this list, and all other details provided, will be kept strictly confidential; you can ask to be removed at any time.
- ◆ we're grateful to Cathy Matthew for keeping the **noticeboards** in church, and the table with information from church and other groups, tidy and up-to-date. We receive a vast amount of material from missionary societies, the local council and many other bodies, which we try to display for anyone who is interested, but it needs a watchful eye, and that is what Cathy is providing! Thanks for this.
- ◆ is the format and content of this newsletter (which is free – unlike more elaborate parish magazines) appropriate? We hope to include some personal stories from members of the congregation, who have fascinating stories to tell, about their lives, their work, and organisations with which they are involved, and the Rector will be 'commissioning' some contributions – but you don't need to wait to be asked; he'd be delighted to receive a couple of paragraphs from you at any time. The range of activities with which our congregation, small as it is, is involved is quite staggering!
- ◆ this newsletter includes a simple flyer about Christmas services. If anyone would like to design something more fancy – suitable for enlargement to A3 size, to be displayed around the church exterior and be readable at a glance by passers-by, please let the Rector know as soon as possible.

And from the worship and nurture committee:

- ◆ despite the shortage of helpers, we are trying to run Children's Church on as many Sundays as possible (apart from the monthly all-age service), and are looking at activities that involve less preparation for leaders for those occasions when cover is a problem.
- ◆ we are also going to improve the area in the north aisle where parents can sit with younger children during the service, with a rug, a bookcase, and a cabinet of drawing and colouring equipment and suitable toys (in addition to those in the children's bags already provided)
- ◆ we are going to get some children's communion books to help them follow the service
- ◆ we are discussing social activities for next year – including some summer day trips – to bring the congregation together.

New Step

We have offered to host a study course, run by Irena Edgecumbe from the Stepney Area ministry team, early next year; it will depend on good participation from our church, as well as membership from other local congregations. It requires commitment, to two terms'-worth of weekly sessions and a residential weekend, but it is a course that others have found stimulating and very rewarding. The Church Council is giving a lead in making this commitment, and members will be inviting others to sign up once we have some dates. The course will fill a real gap in what we offer, both for established and newer members of our church.

Charitable giving

Thanks to those who made suggestions for our year-end giving; it is always good to support causes with which members have some personal connections. Having looked at the balance of causes (local, national and international, and Christian and other charities) we decided to share the available funds – we don't yet have the exact figure – between the following:

- ◆ **RADICLE** (2 shares) - providing practical and emotional support for isolated and vulnerable people in Tower Hamlets and other parts of London, with residential schemes, drop-in centres, a lunch club, a nursery and a children's centre.
- ◆ **Leukemia & Lymphoma Research**: Beating Blood Cancers – with which Paul Kellaway is involved; such research work is vital
- ◆ **Crisis at Christmas** – whose work over the hardest month of the year for homeless people needs no introduction (the sad news is that Colin Slee, Dean of Southwark, who wrote this year's appeal letter, died suddenly of pancreatic cancer a few days ago).
- ◆ **The National Society** – the Church of England's main agency for work with schools, celebrating its bicentenary in 2011 with a range of special projects and activities. The Society funded many of our own parish's schools in the 19th century, and continues to do great work; the Queen mentioned it in her opening address to the new General Synod, and will return to the Abbey for a special service to mark the event next year. Part of Jan's job, as the Church of England's chief education officer, is to act as its General Secretary, and she will write more about its work next year. We'll be marking Education Sunday on 20 February, and there will be a national RE Celebration in March.
- ◆ **Send a Cow** – an African church charity which provides animals, tools and equipment to help local villagers develop sustainable living: Sibyl Yates' daughter-in-law is a local speaker for its work.
- ◆ **The Leprosy Mission** – a Christian charity working worldwide with those who still suffer from the scourge of leprosy: our children have been looking at what they do, and when Alex Nelson recently visited a leprosy hospital in India she was able to take them some funds they had raised from baking biscuits, and was given some hand-printed jute bags from their workshop. She will be writing a little about her trip in a future newsletter.

Congregational news

The family of the late **Alice (Lally) Britton** have asked to give something useful to the church in her memory, and we shall be replacing our worn-out offertory bags, and also buying three useful service books for Sunday and midweek worship. These will all be dedicated in due course; meanwhile, we are grateful to the family for their kindness in helping us to remember a long-standing worshipper at our church.

We continue to remember **Olive Wagstaff**, frustrated by her long absence from church, **Rodney Sawers**, and **Alice Daniels**. **Edith Wyeth** has had a further spell in hospital, but is glad to be home and to do what she can. And we welcome onto the site new occupants of flat 4 – **Henry and Tom**, twin brothers who are

working as 3D animators in Shoreditch.

Recent visitors

The Rector's good friend from **Finland**, the Revd Mika Pajunen – who is ordained in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, but also licensed (under the Porvoo agreement) to the Anglican Church in Finland – recently brought a dozen colleagues, mainly synod secretaries and church lawyers, to the opening sessions of the new General Synod. The previous day, after some time at St Paul's Cathedral with Canon Mark Oakley (who was formerly the Anglican Archdeacon of Germany and Scandinavia, so knows Finland), they visited our school and church on their way to the Finnish Church in Rotherhithe (see below).

They were keen to see a multi-cultural school – Finnish cities have long been mono-cultural, but they are having to learn rapidly how to cope with new immigrant communities – and ask what it means for this to be a church school. Children showed them round, and lots of other children asked them questions (the Rector had 'briefed' them at assembly that morning, and taught them the word *kiitos* – 'thank you'), and the visitors were very taken by their confidence and excellent behaviour. A good question session followed with Terry Bennett, Darren Rubin (head and deputy) and John Allison (a foundation governor), and then we came to look at St George's – which is not unlike many modern Finnish churches – and over coffee and cakes at the Rectory (an essential Finnish institution) had further discussion about church politics with Jan.

When we visited the Finnish Church in Rotherhithe was in the midst of their annual bazaar, held over two weekends, it is their main fundraiser of the year, from which they expect to raise £200,000. They ship over a container full of Finnish produce, and have a refrigerated wagon full of rye bread, to sell to the ex-pat community and others. The Rector resisted buying a small tin of bear meat priced at £15....

We have had two **school visits** at church recently – a class from Kobi Nasrul primary school, and children and parents from Mary Sambrook nursery. Both groups were delightful, took lots of pictures and asked loads of questions. They enjoyed lighting candles, listening to the organ, having a mock wedding and learning a little about baptism and the eucharist. Many of these children (and their parents) are Muslim, and it was their first visit to a Christian place of worship, so it is very important to make it a positive experience, and in particular to show them how we reverence our scriptures.

In December, we shall be welcoming **Green Gables** for their Christmas presentation on Wednesday 15 December.

What's in a name?

The accurate naming and numbering of premises for the purposes of civil registration, postal deliveries and giving precise information to emergency services is a complex matter, governed by very specific rules for 'primary' and 'secondary' designations. Our site was recently reviewed, and following a lengthy session with a helpful officer and a series of subsequent exchanges, an Order has been issued which names and renames premises in the church thus (note the changes from '16' to '14'):

- ◆ Parish Office, St George-in-the-East Church, 14 Cannon Street Road
- ◆ Flats 1-4, St George-in-the-East Church, 14 Cannon Street Road
- ◆ Green Gables, St George-in-the-East Church Crypt West, 14 Cannon Street Road
- ◆ NTMTC/St Mellitus College, St George-in-the-East Church Crypt East, 14 Cannon Street Road
- ◆ The Rectory remains number 16, and the Rectory [not 'Garden!'] Flat 16A, and the postcode for everyone remains E1 0BH.

Local history

The East London History Society has recently published **Wapping 1600-1800** by Derek Morris and Ken Cozens, which has chapters on St George-in-the-East and Wellclose Square (available for £9.60 from the Bancroft Library, or you can borrow the Rector's copy). It's very fully documented, illustrated and a fascinating read, and we'll mention it on our website in due course.

Archaeologists are at work on the vacant lot between The Highway and Tobacco Dock prior to its redevelopment (on which it's a matter of 'watch this space'). They expect to find quantities of Roman remains. They will be taking photographs from our tower, and would be willing to show visitors round the site early next year.

Three final snippets

CLAAS (the Centre for Legal Aid and Settlement) works on behalf of persecuted Christians in Pakistan, and sends the Rector regular emailings. If you would like to receive them, go to <<http://claas.org.uk>>

Ian Bhullar has taken over from Canon David Driscoll (who was a good friend of our parish) as coordinator of the education programme at the Royal Foundation of St Katharine. (He is also churchwarden at St Mary Cable Street.) He he organised a **Seminar Supper** of 8 December, on the subject of 'Responding to the Drug Trade in Tower Hamlets', with various speakers. More details from the Rector.

Jude Padfield, who leads a group from St Paul Shadwell, which is now meeting regularly at Peter's Pie & Mash Shop in Watney Street – the Rector is going to meet them in the new year and talk about the religious history of the area – invites any of our congregation to join them in **Watney Market** on Saturday 11 December from 9.30-12.00, when they will be distributing leaflets giving times of Christmas services in the local churches. Watney Street is the boundary between our parish and St Mary Cable Street.