



Methodist
Church

Partnership News

16 December 2007

Advent 3



Church of
England

Partnership Church Services Today

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

9.30am St Mark's - Holy Communion

Preacher - Revd Joan Crossley
Leadership Team - Mrs Linda Parry
Intercessions - Mrs Morag Stewart

11.00am Putnoe - Holy Communion

Preacher - Revd Joan Crossley
Leadership Team - Mrs Sam Ware
Intercessions - Mrs Sue Allen

23rd December

9.30am St Mark's - Morning Worship

Preacher - Revd Charles Royden
Leadership Team - Mrs Morag Stewart
Intercessions - Mrs Pat Leusby

11.00am Putnoe Heights - Morning Worship

Preacher - Revd Charles Royden
Leadership Team - Mr Alan Cooper
Intercessions—Dr Tim Wilkes

6.30 Carols by Candlelight

Bible Readings

1 Isaiah 7:10-16 2 Romans 1:1-7
3 Matthew 1: 18-25

Thank You

The flowers at Putnoe Heights Church this week have been given by Pat Pollard in memory of her mother.

We are always grateful for any donations for flowers perhaps to celebrate a special occasion, an anniversary or in memory of a loved one. Please contact Miss Marion Prior 303254 (St Mark's) or Miss Jennie Cooper 404950 (Putnoe Heights)

Prayer for Sunday

Heavenly Father, who sent your messengers and prophets to prepare the way of your Son. Grant that when our Lord Jesus comes, he may find in us a dwelling prepared for himself.

May your love fill us with joy and peace that the message of the angels may be proclaimed in our lives.

So may the whole world come to believe in your unfailing love for all people. Amen.

Special Christmas Services



St Mark's

Carols by Candlelight

with the Bedford Town Brass Band
Saturday 22 December 6.30pm

Christmas Eve Crib Service

3.00pm Christmas Eve

Midnight Mass

11.30pm Christmas Eve

Christmas Family Worship

Christmas Day 9.30am

Putnoe Heights

Carols by Candlelight

Sunday 23 December 6.30pm

Christmas Eve Crib Service

4.00pm Christmas Eve

Midnight Mass

11.30pm Christmas Eve

Christmas Family Worship

Christmas Day 11.00am



Regular Weekly Activities - A Guide To Our Churches

Monday

9.30-12.00pm Mon-Fri Putnoe Heights Pre-school

Headteacher Mrs Janet Smith ☎326685

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

Headteacher Mrs. Helen Harpin ☎312634

(See website for more details)

9.00am Clubhouse at St. Mark's for those with Learning Disabilities. Karen Bywater ☎315460.

10.00am Bakers Barn Art Group.

St Mark's
Mr Kellie ☎721063

10.45am U3A Playreading

St Mark's C Birks ☎219607

12.00pm Story box 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. ☎Liz 302349

1.45pm U3A History Group St Mark's 2nd & 4th week of the month. ☎ David Fowler 824474

4.00pm Storybox Plus Putnoe Heights for 4-9 year Old. Meet at 3.30 for refreshments & games. Then till 5pm 'follow the year' through stories, drama, singing & craft activities. We then make a short presentation in church on first Sunday in each month. ☎Liz Spavins 302349

4.15pm Rosemary Conley Diet & Fitness. Putnoe Heights. Margo Needham 843747

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 ☎07720712735

6.15 Pilates at Putnoe Heights Jane Butcher 300859

7.30pm Sugarcraft Guild St Mark's 1st week every month Pat Nicholson ☎353518

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

7.15pm Yoga. Putnoe Heights Lena Holland ☎244970

7.30pm Whist Drive. St Mark's 3rd & 5th week each month . Next one 17 December Judith Stanton. ☎823313

7.30pm Housegroup 30 The Ridgeway. The home of Eddy & Margaret Peck ☎267567.

8.00pm 'Get Fit, Stay Fit' Putnoe Heights. Mrs Diane Field ☎404976

Tuesday

9.30am Candlewicking (Needlework). Putnoe Heights. Judi Staughton ☎341821

9.30am -12.30 & 4-9pm Slimming World St. Mark's. Helen Folbigg ☎351223

10am -Bedford Arts Society starting at St Mark's on the 11th September. ☎Mrs Brown 771676

1.30pm Toddlers Playtime. Putnoe Heights Majella Atkinson ☎325293.

1.30pm U3A Cinema Group. St Mark's last Tuesday of the month. Mr Austin ☎365184

2.00pm U3A Book Group. St Mark's 3rd Tuesday of the month Mrs Berman ☎364723

2.00pm Library Walk W.I. Putnoe Heights, meets monthly. Mrs C Allen ☎363878

2-5pm Police Surgery. St Mark's Foyer.

2.15pm Putnoe Heights Women's Fellowship. Next meeting 8 January 2008 'Reflections on the New Year' Betty Wyatt ☎350188.

2.30pm Mother Teresa Support Group. St Mark's alternate weeks. Wool and knitting needles provided. Mrs Maureen Watling ☎262225

2.30pm Tuesday Afternoon Housegroup. St Mark's alternate weeks. Mary Stubbs ☎406784.

3.45pm Stars School of Dance. Putnoe Heights. Esther Sancto ☎295862 or ☎07917582468.

7.00pm Hearts in Beds Cardiac Support Group

St Mark's 1st Tuesday ☎Parsons 351150

7pm Creative Card Making St Mark's 2nd & 4th Week of the month Carol Houghton ☎346718

7pm Keep Fit. St. Mark's Jan Gregory ☎328455

7pm MT Karate [all ages] Putnoe Heights. Karen King ☎07941 264885

7.30pm Tabernacle of Truth Church Putnoe Heights Bible study & prayers. Revd.Tarr ☎360188 or 07866775515

7.30pm Chartered Management Institute St Marks 3rd week of the month. Mrs Dimmock ☎01525 862374

7.30pm Putnoe Heights Ladies Tuesday Club - Meets fortnightly. Next meeting 18 December Members Christmas Evening Audrey Wilkins☎365068 or Margaret Gentle ☎309043

Wednesday

9.15am Paint Tots St Mark's Jacqui Hanahan ☎824475

9.30am Childminding Support Group Putnoe Heights. Mrs S Longman ☎313949

9.30am Body Control Pilates. Putnoe Heights. Stephanie Smith ☎07973174430.

9.00am Clubhouse at St Mark's for those with Learning Disabilities. Karen Bywater ☎315460.

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

10am Sewing & Chat. Putnoe Heights Valerie Russell ☎01462 815966

10.30 am U3A Art Appreciation Putnoe Heights Fortnightly. Audrey Hancock ☎365915.

Luncheon Club. Putnoe Heights fortnightly. Next meeting 9 January 2008 Putnoe Heights Office ☎365630

12.30pm Men's Fellowship Lunch St Mark's 2nd week each month. Chris Izzard ☎212164

1.00-3pm Police Surgery at Putnoe Heights .

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

1.45 Scots Society Whist monthly .All welcome Nancy Barr 268147

2pm U3A Whist Group St Mark's 3rd week of the month Ken Silvester☎400584

2.15pm - Fifty plus Keep Fit. Putnoe Heights Mrs Webster ☎856966

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

6.00 pm Brownies. St Mark's. Mrs Carol Warden ☎219731

6.15pm Yoga and Relaxation Putnoe Heights Racheall Monton ☎01234 297138

6.30pm Karate. St Mark's Karen ☎079412 64885

7.00pm Bunyan Bridge. St. Mark's Brian Sallows ☎407725

7pm U3A Whist Group St Mark's 4th Wednesday of the month. Ken Silvester ☎400584

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

7.00pm Yoga St Mark's Dorothy Turner ☎721763

7.00pm Putnoe Guild Putnoe Heights monthly Janice ☎

Advent 3

Opening Verse - Luke 1:46

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord. My Spirit rejoices in God my Saviour

Collect Prayer for the Day

O Lord Jesus, who at your first coming sent your messenger to prepare your way before you: grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready your way by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at your second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in your sight; for you are alive and reign with the father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen. *Common Worship*

First Bible Reading - Isaiah 35:1-10

The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendour of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendour of our God. Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you." Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow. And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it. No lion will be there, nor will any ferocious beast get up on it; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there, and the ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away

(This is the word of the Lord - **All: Thanks be to God**)

Second Bible Reading - James 5: 7-10

Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door! Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord

(This is the word of the Lord - **All: Thanks be to God**)

Third Reading - The Holy Gospel is taken from Matthew 11: 2-11 - **Glory to Christ our Saviour**

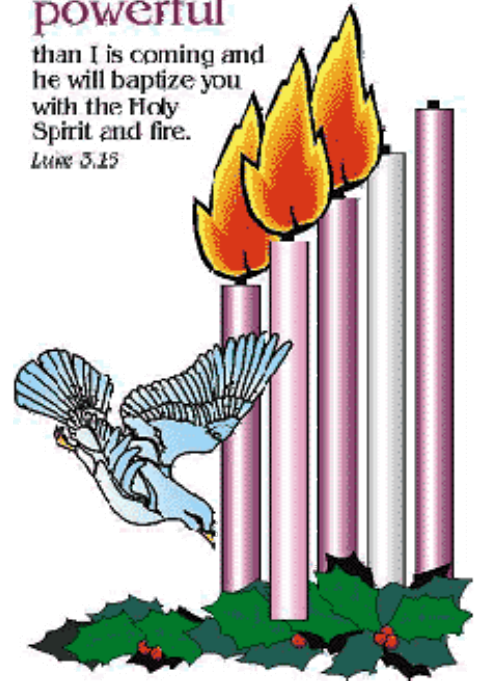
When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.

Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me." As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: "I will send my

One who is more powerful

than I is coming and he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Luke 3:16



messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you. 11I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

(Reader: This is the Gospel of Christ **All: Praise to Christ our Lord**)

Post Communion Prayer

We give you thanks O Lord for these heavenly gifts; kindle in us the fire of your Spirit that when your Christ comes again we may shine as lights before his face: who is alive and reigns now and for ever. Amen

Commentary What a glorious crop of readings today! The magnificence of the reading from the prophet Isaiah strikes us afresh every year. The prophet spoke of the coming of the Messiah in terms that everyone in his culture would have experienced: the visual miracle of the blooming of the desert after the coming of the rains. The desert would cast off its bleak emptiness and flower into a dazzling array of colourful blossoms and plants. It is a powerful symbol of rebirth after bleakness and it is one that we all cling to at sometime in our lives. It is a rare person who has not experienced the wasteland of hopelessness. The writer of Isaiah then adds more images of vibrant transformation, “Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs.” The message speaks to our deepest human need to believe that God will be with us in the midst of darkness and despair. We too can be transformed by God. We can be made whole spiritually, our blindness to God’s mercy can be banished in a sudden explosion of insight. Our inability to express our love and trust for God can be overcome. We can be better. We can transform. The reading from the epistle of James, strikes a note of warning. We must expect miracles but they will come in the proper season. As a farmer waits for the correct season in agriculture, so we can expect transformation in due time. The author of James, believed to be the brother of Jesus, was preaching forbearance and patience in the face of disappointment and delay. We should believe in miracles but we must wait patiently, reverently for their coming. As we prepare for the hope that is the incarnation of God as a human we are invited to experience rapturous joy but also to display patient faith. *Joan*

Hymns (*Please distribute Mission Praise and Holy Communion Booklets*)

1. The angel Gabriel from Heaven (Partnership News)
2. The trumpets sound 667
3. What child is this 749
4. Joy to the world 393

Meditation

There is a particularly annoying little ditty which you will hear played in shops from the beginning of November. “I wish it could be Christmas all the time” it goes. I always shudder and think, that I am glad it is not given the confusion and rush that we experience at this time of year. But at times we do get a chance to enjoy the magic and joy of this most optimistic of seasons. Even if we are sad and jaded, we all still hope that the feelings reportedly natural at Christmas will somehow come back to us. This dream for humanity is central to our Faith. But can these hopes be sustained and built upon? This beautiful meditation by Audrey Stanley appeared in the Magnet this month, an excerpt from her “Poem for January” . I share it with you so that you might begin to think now about how to keep the hope of Christmas, the joy and desire for peace alive in the dull days of January.

“Today I packed Christmas in a box: for by mid January the berries wizen, the card-camels seem to leer. And the grinning Santa mocks at the anachronistic glitter; so I wrapped festivity for another year. Will the gifts of Christmas stay with us? I asked; will the hope and joy outlast the tree, shining for twelve nights? Or will our love soon be hidden in tissue like the brittle bauble—relegated to the attic while we get on with the work? And will my faith shine. Thrive, survive—endure another unknown year?” *Joan*

Prayers for Sunday and the Week Ahead.

Once upon a time, in the beginning, a labour of love was undertaken. It started with a sign, to show that something was about to happen. Light came forth from the deep darkness, bright and clear and unmistakable. And it was very good. (Kathy Galloway)

Late have I loved you, beauty at once so ancient and so new. Too late have I loved you. I searched the world for you: clumsily, I blundered through the loveliness of your creation. (You were already at home within me). You called to me and you shouted (my ears were plugged) but at last your voice broke through. Your light cast itself before me. (My eyes were veiled). Opening my mouth, I inhaled your fragrance. (Tasting you now, I am ravenous.) Now I am burning with your touch flaming with love, love of your peace. (St Augustine (354-430) Confessions, Book 10)

Heavenly father. We pray that you will come to us in the dark night of our sorrow and despair. That our lives will blossom with hope as the desert blooms again after spring rain. We pray that we too will find the miracle baby in the manger this Christmas time. Amen

Third Candle - Jesus the Lamb of God

John The Baptist

Leader Light and peace, in Jesus Christ our Lord
All **Thanks be to God**

Leader Today is the Third Sunday of Advent and we will light a candle to remember Jesus the Lamb of God.

Last Sunday we lit two candles to remind us of Jesus the Son of David, and Jesus the Prince of Peace (*A person now lights the two candles*) Today as we light the third candle, we remember Jesus who John the Baptist called 'The Lamb of God.'

Scripture John Chapter 1:29

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."

Commentary

In their old age God gave to Zechariah and Elizabeth a son called John. When John called Jesus 'The Lamb of God,' he brought to mind the greatest act of salvation in the history of the Jewish people, the release of the people from captivity in Egypt. This was celebrated every year in Passover. Jesus was led like a lamb to the slaughter, he is our Passover lamb, sacrificed for us, once for all. We have been redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus. When John called Jesus the Lamb of God, he saw him as a Saviour who would take away the sin of the world. As we light this candle we remind ourselves that Jesus is God's final sacrifice for the sins of the world. (*A person now lights the third candle for Jesus the Lamb of God.*)

Leader Jesus is the Lamb of God
All **Jesus the name high over all**
Leader Let us pray, using the words of the Agnus Dei
All **Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world,
have mercy upon us.
Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world,
have mercy upon us.
Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world,**

A Hymn for Sunday

The Angel Gabriel from heaven came,
his wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame;
'All hail', said he, 'thou lowly maiden Mary,
most highly favoured lady.'

'For know, a blessed mother thou shalt be,
all generations laud and honour thee,
thy son shall be Immanuel, by seers foretold;
most highly favoured lady.' Gloria!

'For known a blessed mother thou shalt be,
all generations laud and honour thee,
thy son shall be Immanuel, by seers foretold;
most highly favoured lady.' Gloria!

Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head,
'To me be as it pleaseth God', she said,
'My soul shall laud and magnify his holy name':
most highly favoured lady. Gloria!

Of her, Immanuel, the Christ was born
in Bethlehem, all on a Christmas morn,
and Christian folk throughout the world will ever say,
'Most highly favoured lady.' Gloria!

Tuesday Club invite you to join them in their Christmas Celebration at Putnoe on Tuesday 18 December at 7.30. Entry £1.50 including refreshments and a raffle ticket. All welcome.

Putnoe New Year Lunch - Sunday 13th January 1 pm. Tickets now available from Putnoe Office or Sue Allen (407264) Adults £8.00. Children under 10 £4.50. 3 courses including drinks Vegetarians please pre order. Proceeds 50/50 to Keech Cottage and Church Funds.

British Cardiac Patients Association Next meeting 20 December, 7.30pm at Putnoe Heights.

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

Horace Sydney Hoole

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

Concert by "The Melodians" Please join us for our Christmas get together and bring along your friends. We will be having refreshments, wine or fruit juice, so please bring a wine glass.

Footprints Walking Group— New Years Day Walk. Tuesday 1st January 2008 at 10.30am. All friends and families welcome to join us on our traditional start to the New Year. Park at Emmaus Village, Carlton (Signposted from Carlton - Turvey Road) for easy walk. Optional lunch afterwards at "the Swan" in Radwell.

Many thanks to all who supported the 'Christmas Voices' evening especially to the team of readers. £100 was raised and has been added to the Keech Cottage Appeal. Sue Allen

Christmas Post. The Brickhill Scouts will be delivering Christmas cards locally for 15p. There is a post box at St Mark's Church

Putnoe Heights Women's Fellowship. The next meeting will be on 8 January 2008. "Reflections on the New Year"

Putnoe Heights Church Christmas Carol Singing Carol singing at Library Walk on Saturday 22nd December at 12 noon. Refreshments will be served at Putnoe Heights Church from 11.15 am. Please come and join us.

Can anyone Help? Is there anyone who would be willing to offer help with the window cleaning at St Mark's Church. If you are willing to help, please would you contact Wendy in the Church Office 342613. Thank you.

Christmas card notice board. For members of St Mark's. Please hand cards in at the office to be posted as we need to use Velcro to apply them. A donation to 'Bechar' may also be handed in at the Church office if you wish to donate.

Christmas Card Post Box at Putnoe Heights. Send cards to your friends at Putnoe Heights, 10p per card or £1 for 12 cards. Please put money in the wooden box provided. Last day to post for guaranteed delivery is 23rd December. Proceeds this year will go to Keech Cottage. Thank you. Joy

Thank you to all who helped deliver the Christmas newspaper from St Mark's. We delivered thousands of copies to every home in Brickhill



The funeral of Mr Leslie Gordon Temple will take place at Bedford Crematorium on Friday 21st December at 10.45am Royden



A word in your ear... Great new resource from the Methodist Church

A Word in Time, the online Bible study for daily life, was launched at the

beginning of September and has been hugely successful, with around 300 visitors to the site every day. But now the team have decided to make the studies even more accessible. An audio file of each day's Bible study, and a bigger file with all of the studies for each week can easily be downloaded onto a computer or mp3 player, so that users can listen at a time convenient to them.

Alison Pollard, Web Writer and Researcher and the new voice of A Word in Time says; 'People find it increasingly difficult to make time to read and reflect on the Bible in today's busy world. A Word in Time made it easier by giving people access to a Bible study on the internet. Now we've taken it to the next level and you can catch up with your daily Bible study at a time most convenient to you – whether you're cooking dinner, doing your weekly shop or on the daily commute to work.'

A Word in Time features a daily Bible reading, background and an explanation of the text, reflections and questions to ponder from that week's contributor. It follows the readings in the Methodist Prayer Handbook bringing the 40,000 readers of the handbook together with online disciples in their search for daily spirituality. Each audio file is available in two formats – a high quality version for those using broadband internet connections and a lower-quality file for those using a dial-up connection. The audio files for past Bible studies are available online in the Word in Time archives.

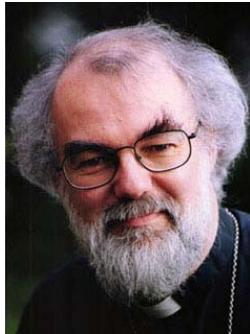
The audio Bible studies are also ideal for sharing with those who otherwise might not have access to daily Bible notes, perhaps because of a disability or simply not having access to the internet.

The Archbishop of Canterbury Christmas Message

One of the strangest yet most moving expressions in the New Testament is a verse in the Letter to the Hebrews (11.16): God 'is not ashamed to be called their God'.

The writer is talking about the history of God's people. When they have been faithful to God, faithful in keeping on moving onwards in faith rather than settling down in self-satisfaction, when they are true pilgrims, then God is content to be known as their God...

One of the strangest yet most moving expressions in the New Testament is a verse in the Letter to the Hebrews (11.16): God 'is not ashamed to be called their God'. The writer is talking about the history of God's people. When they have been faithful to God, faithful in keeping on moving onwards in faith rather than settling down in self-satisfaction, when they are true pilgrims, then God is content to be known as their God. He declares himself to be the God of pilgrims, of people who know that their lives are incomplete and that they are still journeying towards the fullness of God's promises. Visiting refugee camps in the Middle East, as I did this October, brings home so powerfully what it is to be literally and absolutely



homeless, not able to be confident in any resources, inner or outer. People in these terrible circumstances will never be complacent, they will always be looking for a future. They are in the most obvious way those whom God is not ashamed to be with, people whose God he is happy to be. He is at home with the homeless. But it is also an image of God's relationship with all those who are homeless or wandering in other ways.

What an odd expression, to say that God is not 'ashamed'! It's as though we are being reassured that God, in spite of everything, doesn't mind being seen in our company. Most of us know the experience of being embarrassed by someone we are with – children are embarrassed by parents, parents by children; I have sometimes found myself walking down the road with someone who is talking loudly or behaving oddly, and wishing I weren't there. But God is not embarrassed by human company when that company is turning away from self-satisfaction and ready to move on. We might think that God would be 'ashamed' of human company that was imperfect, confused, even sinful. But God is happy to be the God of confused and sinful people when they recognise their own confusion and face the truth of their need. That's what the great parables of Jesus in St Luke's Gospel are so often about, especially the Pharisee and the Tax Collector.

So at Christmas, God shows that he is not ashamed to be with us. He has heard our cries of weakness and self-doubt and unhappy longing, he has seen our wanderings and anxieties, and he is not ashamed to be alongside us in this world, walking with us in our pilgrimage. And because he is content to walk with us, we are challenged about whose company we might be ashamed to share. So easily we decide that we would be ashamed to share the company of the sinful, the doubting or the outcast. But God, it seems, is not ashamed to be seen with such people. If he is ashamed to be called the God of any human group, the text from Hebrews strongly suggests that he is most 'embarrassed' by those who think they have arrived at the end of their journey, who think they have already attained perfection (compare St Paul's angry and scornful words in I Corinthians 4.8 – 'Already you have become rich!'). And it is clear why God would be ashamed to be the God of such people: they behave and speak as if they didn't really need God, as if they didn't really need grace and hope and forgiveness. God loves the company of those who know their need, and that is why he comes at Christmas to stand with them, to live with them and to die and rise for them. He is the God who blesses the poor – not only those who are materially poor, but those who are without the 'riches' of self-satisfaction and complacency, those who know all too well how far they fall short of real and full humanity. And so we are to pass on that blessing to the poor of every sort, those who are without material resources and those who are 'poor in spirit' because they know their hunger and need. Let us ask ourselves honestly whose company we are ashamed to be seen in – and then ask where God would be. If he has embraced the failing and fragile world of human beings who know their needs, then we must be there with him.

May God give us every blessing and joy in the Christmas Season. +Rowan Cantuar