



Methodist
Church

Partnership News

23 December 2007

Advent 4



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 - Morning Worship

Preacher - Revd Charles Royden

Leadership Team - Mrs Morag Stewart

Intercessions - Mrs Pat Leusby

11.00am Putnoe - Morning Worship

Preacher - Revd Charles Royden

Leadership Team - Mr Alan Cooper

Intercessions - Dr Tim Wilkes

6.30pm Carols by Candlelight

30 December

First Sunday after Christmas

9.30am St Mark's - Holy Communion with prayer for Christian Healing

Preacher - Wycherley

Leadership Team - Mrs Delia Shephard

Intercessions - Mr Mike Elloitt

11.00am Putnoe Heights - Holy Communion with prayer for Christian Healing

Preacher - Mr Wycherley

Leadership Team - Mrs Linda Hoar

Intercessions - Mrs Claire Peck

Bible Readings

1 Isaiah 62:10-12, 2 Hebrews 2:10-end

3 Matt 2:13 - end

Thank You

The Christmas flowers at St Mark's have been given by

Beryl Mallows in memory of her husband George

The family of Dorothy and Roy Hudson, in their memory,

Tommy Hulatt in memory of her husband Maurice

Barbara Mingard on the 57th anniversary of her marriage, "God bless you Charles".

Catherine Corfield in loving memory of her husband John.

Prayer for Sunday

Loving God, Help us remember the birth of Jesus, that we may share in the song of the angels, the gladness of the shepherds, and worship of the wise men. Amen

Special Christmas Services



St Mark's

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 January 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 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 15 January 'Talk about Acorn Vets. 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 ☎Loxley 347073

7.00pm U3A Sky at Night 2nd Wednesday of the month.

Mr Farish ☎824984

7.45pm Badminton Club Putnoe Heights All welcome.

Ken Marriott ☎214867

8.00pm Tudor Reeds Folk Dance Club St Mark's, 1st, 3rd & 5th Wednesday. Next meeting 16 January 2008
Graham ☎406359 or Danny ☎401668.

8.00pm Bedford Wine and Social Club St Mark's 1st week in the month. Mrs Gansfield ☎215016

Thursday

9.30am Thursday Prayer Group. Putnoe Heights in the quiet room. Sylvia Cohen ☎343424

Request for prayer can be written in the prayer diary on the information table.

9.30am Jo Jingles. St. Mark's. Music & movement for pre-school children. Jayne Phillips ☎01582 485333

9.45am Yoga Putnoe Heights Lena Holland ☎244970

9.45am Chat and Play weekly at St. Mark's. A group for Mums & toddlers. £1.75 for first child. More details from St. Marks Office ☎342613 or Emma Strangwick ☎211070

1.30pm-3.00pm NHS Baby Clinic. St. Mark's ☎267444

12pm Storybox weekly at 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 Emma Strangwick ☎211070

1.30pm Toddler Playtime. Putnoe Majella Atkinson ☎325293.

2pm Putnoe Bridge Club. Gerald Palmer ☎345991

5.30pm Police Surgery. St Mark's Foyer.

6.15 pm Weightwatchers. St. Mark's. Mrs Margaret Ralph ☎01767 224978.

6.15pm Brownies. Putnoe Heights Helga Nash ☎218521

6.15pm Bedford Junior Chess Club. St. Mark's

Mr C Hill ☎772922

7.00pm Club 2000 Putnoe Heights

Nina Ovenden ☎825059

7pm U3A Folk & Poetry Group. St Mark's 2nd & 4th week of the month. Doug Ovenden ☎825059

7.00pm British Cardiac Patients Assoc. at Putnoe bi monthly Mrs. E. marriot 303834

7.30pm Bedford Senior Chess Club St Mark's Mr P Housden ☎376597

7.30pm Bedford Embroiderers' Guild St Mark's 3rd Thursday of the month. Mrs C Smith ☎344544

8.00pm Bedford Writers Circle. St Mark's 1st week each month. Mr Newton ☎01525 378193

8.00pm Magpies Women's Group St Mark's 2nd & 4th week Mrs Cotchin ☎402089

8.00pm Brickhill Wives St Mark's 1st and 3rd week Next meeting Mrs Woods ☎404702

Friday

9.30-12.30pm & 12.30 - 2.30pm U3A Photography Group St Marks 4th week Joyce Fildes ☎353086

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

1.30pm Stars School of Dance Putnoe Heights Contact Esther Sancto ☎295862 or ☎07917 582468

2.00pm U3A Gardening Group Putnoe Heights Eve Whitehead ☎356875

6.30pm Line Dancing. St Mark's Christine Rushton ☎782360

7pm Bedford Arts Society fortnightly Putnoe Heights from 8 September. Malcolm Smith ☎01234 400741

7pm Youth Club for age 10-15. St Mark's Church.

Contact PC Dave Hawkey ☎349179

7.45pm Astrology Group St Mark's as from 11th January.

Mr Kenworthy ☎402792

Saturday

9.00pm Stars School of Dance. Putnoe

Esther Sancto ☎295862 or ☎07917 582468

10.00am Theatretrain St Mark's. Dancing acting, singing.

Kate Randle ☎01234 782414

1.30pm Young Embroiders bi monthly Terry Fletcher Tel 357198

7.00pm Duplicate Bridge. St Mark's Mrs Pillinger ☎212066

Sunday

9.30 - 10.30 Church and Sunday School at St Mark's with crèche for under 3's

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.

1pm Tabernacle of Truth Church Putnoe Heights Revd. Tarr ☎360188 or ☎07866775515

6pm T.N.T. Putnoe. For 9-12 year olds (fortnightly) join us for fellowship, fun, games & outings. Liz ☎302349

Diary Dates

St Mark's Church Council – 29th Jan 08, 17th June 08

St Mark's Leadership Team – 5 February 2008, 13 May 2008

Putnoe Heights Leadership Team – 4 February
Putnoe Heights Management Meetings 14th Jan., 14th April and 14th July.

St Mark's Church Forum Meeting - 12noon 15 January

Putnoe Heights Centre Management -

Putnoe Church Council - 28 January 2008

Pastoral Group Meeting – 4.30pm 15 January

Churchyard Committee - 16 January 2008

Putnoe Heights Mission Group Next meeting Weds 16 Jan 2008 at 14 Flint Way 7.30pm

Partnership Council -

Brickhill Parish Council Meetings 10 January

Deanery Meeting -

Circuit Meeting - 10 March 2008, 12 June 2008

Woodland Burial Trustees - January 21st 2008

Putnoe Heights Children & Youth-

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

Advent 4

Opening Verse - Psalm 80:7

Restore us, O God; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved

Collect Prayer for the Day

God our redeemer, who prepared the Blessed Virgin Mary to be the mother of your Son: grant that, as she looked for his coming as our saviour, so we may be ready to greet him when he comes again as our judge; 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 7: 10-16

Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, "Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights." But Ahaz said, "I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test." Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right. But before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste. (This is the word of the Lord - **All: Thanks be to God**)

Second Bible Reading - Romans 1: 1-7

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God— the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. (This is the word of the Lord - **All: Thanks be to God**)

Third Reading -- Matthew 1: 18-25

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, "God with us." When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus (Reader: This is the Word of the Lord. **All: Thanks be to God**)

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

When Mary discovered that she was pregnant she was betrothed to Joseph. This was not full marriage but it meant much more than our casual form of engagement, and it lasted about a year. Betrothal was similar to marriage except for lack of sexual rights. Mary had entered into a contract before witnesses which gave the man legal rights over a girl. This could only be broken by death or a formal process of divorce, perhaps if the girl was guilty of adultery. Mary would most probably have been 12 or 13 years old, and we should expect that her parents and the parents of Josephs would have arranged the marriage, perhaps some years previously.

It was during this engagement period that Mary became pregnant, we are told 'by the Holy Spirit.' Joseph is shown to be a remarkable man. Even before he is visited by an angel, he does not seek justice and rightful punishment. Instead he decides to divorce Mary quietly so that he might not cause her unnecessary pain. So the Gospel of Matthew starts with an act of kindness and forgiveness, it is a new era of grace! It was after he had decided upon his actions that an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." This is the first of three occasions in which an angel appears to Joseph in a dream (see also 2:13, 19). In each instance, the angel calls Joseph to action and Joseph obeys.

The words which the angel uses are all important. The angel calls Joseph, 'son of David.' This is important, for it shows Joseph as being of the house and line of David. Joseph is also told that Mary will give birth to a son and he is to be named, Jesus. Mary's role is to bear a son, and Joseph's role is to name him. By naming him, Joseph will make Jesus his son and bring him into the house of David. The angel declares that the name is important because it points to the role of Jesus in salvation and forgiveness, 'for he will save his people from their sins.' The name, Jesus, is the Greek form of the Hebrew Yehosua, which means 'YHWH is salvation.' It is worth remembering that this was not necessarily what the people wanted. What they wanted was a Messiah who would kick Roman oppressors out of Israel. They wanted a mighty warrior, they needed forgiveness from sin. This forgiveness will be important throughout the gospel of Matthew, Jesus will even be shown to forgive those who kill him. (Luke 23:34).

We are told that this all took place to fulfil a prophecy of Isaiah 7:14.
"Look, the virgin (Greek: he parthenos) shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Immanuel," which means, "God is with us."

It is helpful to understand what was going on in the passage which Matthew quotes from Isaiah 7:1-17. Isaiah was speaking to King Ahaz of the southern kingdom of Judah in the eighth century BC. The original passage was written at a time when Judah was threatened with military invasion. Isaiah tells King Ahaz God will give him a sign, a young woman, already pregnant will give her child the symbolic name Immanuel. Immanuel is a phrase meaning 'God with us.' Isaiah then tells King Ahaz that before the child is old enough to know the difference between right and wrong, the crisis will be over. The passage therefore promises deliverance to Ahaz and Judah, all will be well. Matthew takes this passage and he bestows upon it a new meaning in relation to the birth of Jesus. Matthew uses this prediction - fulfilment formula 13 times. As a Jew he wants to show that Jesus was the fulfilment of Jewish scripture. Some say that this means Matthew made up various stories to show Jesus 'fulfilling' Old Testament scriptures. Christians will always disagree, but of course it is also true that just because Matthew says that something fulfilled scripture doesn't mean it didn't happen! *Charles Royden*

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

1. Come thou long expected Jesus 211,
2. A messenger named Gabriel (On Partnership News page 8)
3. What child is this 749,
4. Hark the herald angels sing 102,

Meditation

Much debate takes place each year about whether the birth stories found in Matthew and Luke are all literally true. Most probably our faith would not be affected at all if we had none of these chapters. However they are true for all of us in different ways. In one of his Christmas sermons, Meister Eckhart a 13c Christian mystic, theologian and preacher spoke of the virgin birth as something that happens within us. That is, the story of the virgin birth is the story of Christ being born within each of us through the union of the Spirit of God with our flesh. Ultimately, the story of Jesus' birth is not just about the past, but about the internal birth in us in the present.

Prayers for Sunday and the Week Ahead.

Loving God, accept our glad thanksgiving for all you have given us, and hear now our prayers for the world.

We pray for those for whom there is no celebration in this season of joy—the poor and the hungry, the homeless and the sick, the lonely and the bereaved, the oppressed and the persecuted.

Loving God, may your light reach into the darkest places of the world, so that there may be hope rather than despair, joy rather than sorrow, and love rather than hatred. Come now to our world through Jesus Christ, Immanuel, God with Us, To save us from our sins and Help us to reach out and respond in love to all who are in need this day.

Lord God, in whom we live and move and have our being, open our eyes to your Fatherly presence forever around us. Draw our hearts with the power of your love and teach us to be anxious for nothing. Take from us all doubt and mistrust and lift our thoughts heavenwards into the light of your glory; through Christ our Lord. Amen. *Brooke Foss Westcott, 1825-1901*

Fourth Candle - Jesus The Son of God Mary the Mother of Jesus (Pink Candle)

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

Leader Today is the Fourth Sunday of Advent and we will light a candle to remember Jesus, Son of God . Last Sunday we lit three candles to remind ourselves of Jesus the Son of David, Jesus the Prince of Peace and Jesus the Lamb of God. (*A person lights the three candles*). Today, as we light the fourth candle of Advent, we remember Jesus the Son of God.

Scripture Luke Chapter 1:30

But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

Commentary

The title Son of God expresses the unique and special relationship which Jesus has with God the Father. Jesus called God 'Abba,' Father, and even at the age of 12 he regarded the Temple as his 'Father's House.' Son of God is a title used in key places in the Gospels. At baptism the voice of God was heard to call Jesus, God's Son. At the transfiguration the voice of God acknowledged Jesus and the way of suffering he had chosen. It is because Jesus is the Son of God that when we look at the life and teachings of Jesus we gain the very best picture of what God is really like. (*The fourth candle is now lit*)

Leader Jesus is the Lamb of God
All **Jesus the name high over all**

Leader Let us pray

Lord Jesus, we call you Son of God, and we acknowledge that you and the Father are one. Therefore we trust your promises of forgiveness of sins, and life everlasting. Thank you for helping us to know that you love us with an everlasting love and show compassion for all of your creation.

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.

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.

Putnoe Heights Women’s Fellowship. The next meeting will be on 8 January 2008. “Reflections on the New Year”

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

The next Children and Youth Meeting will be held at Putnoe Heights Church on Monday 21st January at 1.10pm.

Another Charity Performance for Cancer Research UK Bedford Dramatic Club is performing “Habeas Corpus” a satirical farce by Alan Bennett in January and has kindly donated 50 tickets for the performance on Tuesday, 22nd January for our fundraising. They are £6 each (£5 for concessions). This will be an enjoyable evening to look forward to after the rush of Christmas and the new year. Tickets are available from Sue and Richard Butler (Tel: 354183) or Howard Lawrence (Tel: 267837).

Anyone who wishes to donate flowers for a particular Sunday during the next few months is invited to enter their name(s) on the rota on the notice board in the welcome area at Putnoe.

A huge thank you to Judith Stanton and her supporters for their generous donation of £305 and their continued support throughout the year.

Hall Refurbishment Plans Underway. St Mark’s were delighted last week to receive news of a £50,000 grant from WREN towards the refurbishment of the Large Hall. The hall will now have roof repairs, new ceiling, lighting, doors, windows and a new floor. This will bring the hall up to the same high standard as the rest of the premises.

Christmas message from the President of the Methodist Conference

The President of the Methodist Conference, Revd Dr Martyn Atkins offers this message for Christmas 2007; “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for someone else?” This is the crucial question the imprisoned John the Baptist asks his disciples to pose to Jesus (Luke 7:19).

‘Who we are expecting to come at Christmas, is a crucial issue for many of us today, and we are not always helped by the romantic images of an essentially Victorian image of Christmas. So I thought I’d write a devotional piece.

‘When Jesus Christ came into our world he was more ordinary and human than many expected – both then, and now. The ancient Jews had expected Messiah for a long time, and their expectations increased over time. Older expectations of the coming of a great but essentially human King became anticipation of a more supernatural figure. They expected a mighty warrior who, Superman like, could remove invaders from the land, and purify the Temple with a wave of his hand. Or he would be the perfect Law keeping machine, the immaculate Pharisee.

‘And into the world God comes, self sent, as a baby. Among all the super expectations, Jesus Christ comes, plainly human. “Our God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man.”

‘It’s ironic that many people today are so perturbed by the miraculous nature of the Christmas story. “You do realise stars can’t switch on and off, don’t you?” “A virgin birth? Yeah, right!” It’s ironic because the people of the period were more perturbed by the very ordinariness of it all. “The Messiah, here in this barn? Born of folk like this?”

‘The coming of Jesus, against many expectations, today as then, is of one who comes near, is like us, involved with the here and now and not just the there and then. There is stupendous height involved in the coming of Jesus, but not remote distance. His name makes that clear – he is Immanuel – God with us.

‘As the thunder crashed, little Carol leaped out of bed, ran downstairs to her mother and cuddled into her. Mum stroked her gently for a while then said, “there’s no need to be scared, God will look after you.” “I know that,” said Carol, “But I needed someone with skin on!” And God knew that was true for us all. Which is why Christmas is as it is.

‘So to those readers who feel God is far away, a remote figure, for a multitude of reasons, I hope and pray you experience God in Jesus Christ drawing near, Immanuel with you this Christmastide.

‘I think too that Jesus was more gracious than many expected, then and now.

‘For example, it is clear in the Christmas narratives that the One born of Mary is no merely national hero or king, but is King of all. His saving coming is for everyone, not just some. So that each time anyone tries to ‘capture’ him, or make him ‘theirs’ he refuses to be held captive

and goes beyond each and every restrictive expectation. God's graciousness in Jesus makes plain that God's love and saving intent is for all, not for some. Christmas is a universal declaration of God's desires and intentions for all, for the whole planet. There is nothing small or cosy about Christmas.

'But there is a second way in which God's great graciousness in Christ made clear at Christmas needs to be realized and received, and I have wrestled with this grace myself over many years. It is this. If God's saving grace and universal love is for all, then it extends to everyone, including us, and not, as so many of us seem to believe, everyone else except us. Jesus Christ is more gracious than we expect or deserve.

'So this Christmas, if you are being too hard on yourself, if you feel that you are just so unworthy or unforgivable, remember that God in Jesus is more gracious than you can imagine, and take heart.

'Lastly, I think Jesus was greater than many expected, then and now.

'This was the experience of Jesus' disciples. After many experiences with him, one day he turns to them and says "and who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter, speaking for them all, replies, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." We cannot begin to imagine what it took for a loyal, monotheist Jew to say such a thing. But it is clear that the more of Jesus they experience, the greater he exceeds their expectations.

'Often, usually, the more we know about someone the more we become aware of their failings and limitations. For example, by the end of the first week of a new year at Cliff College, students are waxing lyrical about their new friends – they are brilliant. But after three months, or three years together, they have usually tempered their judgement! But experiencing Jesus Christ works the other way round - it just gets better and better. There is always more to experience.

'So, in C.S. Lewis's Chronicles of Narnia, when the children return to Narnia a second time and meet the (Christ) lion, Lucy exclaims, "Aslan you've grown". The lion replies, "no child, you are older".

'Most of our Christmas cards will have arrived by now. But when the first card dropped through young Carol's letterbox she ripped it open eagerly as mum watched on. Carol's face fell. 'What's the matter?' asked mum. 'It's Jesus' she replied looking at the nativity scene on the Christmas card, 'he was a baby last year, I thought he'd be walking by now!'

'This Christmas, and as we approach the year of our Lord 2008, I don't know what conceptions of God in Jesus Christ you have, but I suggest you make them greater. 'A very blessed Christmastide to you all.'

A Hymn for Sunday

A messenger named Gabriel
came to the land of Israel;
and he proclaimed that Mary's son
was God's messiah, holy One.

O Jesus Christ, strong Son of God,
once born for us at Bethlehem:
we listen to the angels' song
and worship you for ever.

Angelic hosts of God most high
with radiant glory fill the sky;
enraptured voices joyful sing
to welcome Christ, the new-born king.

In awesome fear and bitter cold
the shepherds huddle in their fold;
then since the message is for them
they make their way to Bethlehem.

Within the sacred stable-shrine
they see the holy child divine;
the manger stands amidst the straw
and humble folk their God adore.

Since then have passed two thousand years
of human misery and tears;
yet Christ alone can bring release:
he loves us still - the prince of peace.

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

Les Gordon Temple

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

Christmas Tributes

Please note that all tributes left in the Garden of Remembrance at St Mark's will be left until twelfth night, then removed. If you wish to keep any tribute please remove it before this time. If you are leaving tributes with wire of metal frames etc, then please note these can become rusty and stain the granite stones. It is helpful to lay plastic beneath to protect the stone.



The funeral of Ivy Edith Channon will take place at Bedford Crematorium on Friday 4th January at 11.30