

Methodist
Church

Partnership News

25 December 2011

Christmas Day



Church of
England

Partnership Church Services Today

8.30am Holy Communion every Sunday

1st, 3rd and 5th Sunday at Putnoe Heights
2nd and 4th Sunday at St. Mark's Church

25 December

9.30 am St. Mark's - Morning Worship

Preacher - The Reverend Charles Royden
Leadership – Mrs Elizabeth Bean
Intercessions – Ministers

11.00 am Putnoe - Morning Worship

Preacher – Revd Charles Royden
Leadership - Mrs Linda Hoar
Intercessions - Ministers

1 January - Epiphany

9.30am St Mark's - Family Worship

Preacher - Deacon Jane Mason
Leadership – Mr Mike Ovenden
Intercessions -

11.00 am Putnoe - Family Worship

Preacher - Deacon Jane Mason
Leadership - Mr Gordon Evans
Intercessions - Young People's Fellowship

Bible Readings 1. Isaiah 61: 10 - 62:3

2. Galatians 4:4-7 3: Luke 2:22-40

Midweek Worship Holy Communion at St Mark's Chapel every Wednesday at 10.00am and at Sir William Harpur House on first Monday of every month at 10.00am

Thank You

Our thanks to all of those who have helped decorate our churches with flowers this Christmas and to all of those who have contributed flowers throughout the year.

Special thanks to Ann Hitt and Marion Prior who work all year round to support this important ministry of our church.

We are grateful when people make donations towards flowers perhaps to celebrate a special occasion such as an anniversary or in memory of a loved one. Please contact Miss Marion Prior 303254 (St Mark's) or Ann Hitt 404186 (Putnoe Heights) or add your name to the rota in the foyers.

Prayer for the Week

Send, O God, into the darkness of this troubled world, the light of your Son:

Let the star of your hope touch the minds of all people with the bright beams of mercy and truth;

So direct our steps that we may always walk in the way revealed to us, as the shepherds of Bethlehem walked with joy to the manger where he dwelt.

We ask this through Jesus who now and ever reigns in our hearts.

The Reverend Dr. Sam Cappleman

107 Dover Crescent, Bedford MK41 8QR
266952 Fax- 402624 nsm@thisischurch.com
(Sam also works full time as a Vice President for Hewlett Packard)

Deacon Jane Mason

12 Hartop Close, Bedford MK41 8HE
348091 Mobile 07807 146535
jane@thisischurch.com

The Reverend Charles Royden

The Vicarage, Calder Rise. MK41 7UY
309175 Mobile 07973 113861
vicar@thisischurch.com

For Data Protection Purposes

Please note that any items submitted for inclusion in Partnership News will automatically be posted on our website and may appear in other local media sources.

Partnership News is also archived on our church website www.ThisIsChurch.com

Partnership Pastoral Support Team Co-Ordinator & Churchyards Administrator

Mrs Mary Stubbs 406784 Mary@ThisIsChurch.com
Please inform us if you know of anyone who is ill, bereaved, housebound, requires a visit, home communion or counselling services. Please also ask us if you would like a home visit for any reason.

Putnoe Heights Church Centre

Open Monday to Thursday 9am - 5pm, Friday 9am - 1pm
Tel/fax & Answering Service 365630 putnoe@thisischurch.com
Centre Manager Mr Geoff Gypps 365630 mob 07947 902846
Leadership Team Mrs. Linda Hoare 782717
Treasurer Mr Ian Morse 21428 treasurerph@thisischurch.com
Gift Aid Administrator John Hitt 404186
Youth Worker Emma Gordon email - 07593266091 youth@thisischurch.com

St. Mark's Church Centre (Open 9am - 5.00pm)

Tel/fax & Answering Service 342613 office@thisischurch.com
Centre Manager Miss Wendy Rider 342613
Leadership Team - Laura Farthing 210892
Treasurer - Mr Ian Farthing 210892 treasurer@thisischurch.com
Gift Aid Administrator Jim Williams 360605

Regular Weekly Activities - A Guide To Our Churches

Monday

9.15 –3.45 pm Mon and Wed/ 9.15-12.15pm Tues/Thurs/ Fri. Putnoe Heights Pre-school. See website for more details www.ThisChurch.com

Head teacher Mrs Janet Smith ☎326685

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

9.30-3.15pm Top Marks Mon-Fri St Mark's

Headteacher Mrs. Helen Harpin ☎312634

(See website for more details)

.9.45am - Body Control Pilates –Putnoe Heights

Stephanie Smith ☎ 357787 or 07973174430

10.00am Bakers Barn Art Group. St Mark's Mrs Berry ☎211955

10.30am U3A Play reading St Mark's (see contact details below)

12.15pm Story box Putnoe Heights We welcome the under 5's and their carers to join them between 12.15 and 1.15 for a sandwich lunch followed by a Bible based story and singing. Contact Emma Gordon ☎07593266091

2.00pm U3A History Group St Marks.(see contact details below)

2pm U3A Music Appreciation - (see contact details below)

4.15pm Rosemary Conley Diet & Fitness. Putnoe Heights. Margo Needham ☎843747 or 07881730747

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

☎01767699399 or 07720713738.

6.15 Pilates at Putnoe Heights Jane Butcher 300859

6.15 - 8.15pm

6.30pm Weightwatchers. St. Mark's Sam Thompson ☎07766421000

7.15pm Fit for Life Yoga - Putnoe Heights Contact Jane Butcher ☎07891879571

7.00pm Sugarcraft Guild St Mark's 1st week Pat Nicholson ☎353518

7.00pm Cancer Care Society. St Mark's. 1st Week. Mr J Dewhurst ☎01908 377020

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

7.30pm Whist Drive. St Mark's 3rd & 5th week . Next meeting– 16th January Judith Stanton. ☎823313

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

8pm 'Get Fit, Stay Fit' Putnoe Heights. Mrs Diane Field ☎404976

Tuesday

9.30am Jo Jingles. St. Mark's. Music & movement for pre-school children. Renu Elston ☎07790206016

9.30am Candlewicking (Needlework). Putnoe Heights. Pat McCart ☎365507

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

10am Autism Beds Adult Support Group. St Mark's. Sally Cripsley ☎350704

11.15am U3A Keep Fit Putnoe Heights (see contact details below)

1.15pm Toddlers Playtime/Sing & Stomp - Putnoe Heights for toddlers and their carers.Run by Putnoe Childre's Centre Trudy Hamilton ☎340552

1.15pm U3A Cinema Group. St Mark's (see contact

details below)

2.00pm U3A Book Group 1 St Mark's (3rd Wk) (see contact details below)

2.00pm U3A Book Group 2 St Mark's (2nd Wk) (see contact details)

2.00pm Library Walk W.I. Putnoe Heights, meets monthly. Morag Tomkins ☎356895

2pm U3A Photography Group 3 St. Mark's (1st Wk) (see contact details below).

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

2.15pm Tuesday Afternoon Housegroup. St Mark's Fortnightly. Mary Stubbs ☎406784.

3.45pm-6.15pm Stars School of Dance. Putnoe Heights. Esther Richardson ☎295862 or 07917582468.

6.30pm Creative Card making. Putnoe Heights Church. Carol Houghton ☎346718

6.15pm Pilates St Mark's Church Jane Butcher ☎07891879571

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

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

7pm Tabernacle of Truth Church Putnoe Heights Bible study & prayers. Sacha Ojo ☎07590597891 or www.tabernacleoftruth.co.uk

7.30pm Putnoe Heights Ladies Tuesday Club - Meets fortnightly. Next meeting January 3 Afternoon Tea at 2.30pm at Putnoe. Details call Janet King 313946

8.15pm - 10.15pm Bedford Advanced Dancers St. Mark's 1st Tuesday in month. Shirley Sadler ☎01767 651767

Wednesday

9.30am Body Control Pilates. Putnoe Heights. Stephanie Smith ☎357787 or 07973174430.

10am-2pm Open House at St Mark's for those with learning disabilities., their friends, family , carers and supporters ☎342613.

10am U3A Gardening Group 3 St Marks.(see contact details below)

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

10am U3A Card Making,St Marks (see contact details below)

12.30pm Luncheon Club. Putnoe Heights fortnightly. Next meeting 4 January 2012 Putnoe Heights Office ☎365630

1.00-3pm Police Surgery at Putnoe Heights (Fortnightly)

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

1.45 Scots Society Whist Putnoe monthly .All welcome Nancy Barr ☎268147

2.00-4.00pm U3A Craft St Marks.(see contact details below)

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

3.45.- 5.30pm Messy Church. St Mark's (3rd Wk). for children of lower school age and their carers. Bible-based story, crafts, singing and a meal. Next meeting 18th January Jean Banks 355698.

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

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

6.00pm Shooting Stars. Youth Group for 9-13yrs at Putnoe Heights fortnightly. Contact Emma Gordon 365630.

6.15pm Yoga and Relaxation Putnoe Heights Racheall Monton ☎01234 297138 or 07910835994.

6-8pm Karate. St Mark's Karen King ☎079412 64885

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

7.00pm Archaeological & Local History Society Putnoe Heights monthly. Vanessa Aykac 268098 or 07917385987

7.00pm Putnoe Guild Putnoe Heights monthly Janice Loxley ☎347073

7.00pm Line Dancing Putnoe Heights Mike Del-Boyer ☎348378

8.00pm Badminton Club Putnoe Heights All welcome. Ken Marriott ☎214867

8.00pm Tudor Reeds Folk Dance Club meet at St Mark's 1st,3rd & 5th Wednesday in month. Next meeting will be 4th January 2012. Everyone welcome. All dances called, only £1 including refreshments. Ring Valmai 219555 Rosemary 405594 or Graham 406359 for more details.

8.00pm Bedford Wine and Social Club St Mark's 1st week in the month. Jean Ross ☎771870

Thursday

9.30am Thursday Prayer Group. Putnoe Heights. Valerie Capon ☎356306.

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

9.45am Yoga Putnoe Heights Denise Green ☎244970

8.00am Chat and Play St.Mark's. A group for Mums & toddlers. Jo Garner 400071 or 07719670624 Restarts on 12 January 2012

12pm Storybox . 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 Jaana Swaby ☎363283

1.30 - 3.00pm NHS Baby Clinic 1st and 3rd Thursdays St. Mark's ☎267444

1.30pm Toddler Playtime. Putnoe Majella Atkinson ☎325293

1.45 Friendly Chicago Bridge at Putnoe Heights £2 per session inc. refreshments. New members welcome. Contact Pat 01234 294220.

2pm Putnoe Bridge Club. Gerald Palmer ☎345991

2-4pm U3A Indoor Games. St.Marks.(see contact details below)

2.30 - 4.30pm Bedford Art Society St Marks Mary Rich ☎272470

6.15 pm Weightwatchers. St. Mark's. Clare Martin 07805408811.

6.15pm Brownies. Putnoe Heights Lou Watkins

6.30-7.30pm Bootcamp/Circuits. (Fitness) St Marks. Laura Amor.341152. 07976259081.

7.00pm Club 2000 Putnoe Heights Nina Ovenden ☎825059

7pm U3A Folk & Poetry St Marks (2nd and 4th week) (see contact details below)

7.15pm Putnoe Art Group Bob Wardale ☎406094

7.00pm Bedford Embroiderers' Guild St Mark's 3rd week in month. Carol Plant ☎01832710504

8 -10pm Bedford Folk dancers (formerly Barn dancers) Meet weekly at Putnoe Heights . Different guest callers

each week. All welcome, cost £2 Including refreshments. More details Ron Law 825574.

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

8.00pm Magpies Women's Group St Mark's 2nd & 4th week Pat Cass ☎294220

8.00pm Brickhill Ladies Group St Mark's 1st and 3rd week in month. Ann Pallister ☎272906

Friday

10am -12.00 U3A Photography St Marks.(4th week)((see contact details below)

10am - 12 & 1.15 - 3.15pm U3A Beginners French St.Marks (see contact details below)

2.00-4.00 pm Whist St Marks.Patricia Holland.☎262823

5-8pm Stars School of Dance Putnoe Heights Contact Esther Richardson ☎295862 or ☎07917 582468

6.00-7.00pm Zumba at St Mark's. Contact Laura Harrow ☎07834529833

6.15pm Yoga and Relaxation Putnoe Heights. Racheall Monton ☎297138 or 07910835994

7.45 - 10.45pm Bedford Astrology Club.St Marks(2nd week) Carol Brown ☎01438 233385

Saturday

10.00am Theatretrain St Mark's. Dancing acting, singing. Kate Howard ☎01234 782414

Young Embroiderers bi monthly Putnoe Heights Terry Fletcher ☎357198

2.15pm Society of Recorder Players at Putnoe Heights. G Parry ☎01462 674792

6.45pm 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

U3A For information on the U3A groups meeting at St Mark's and Putnoe Heights Church please contact Yvonne Francis ☎405119



Diary Dates



St Mark's Church Council – 21 February 2012

St Mark's Leadership Team - 16 February 2012

Putnoe Heights Leadership Team - 25th Jan 2012

7.30pm at 24 Loring Rd. Sharnbrook.

Putnoe Heights Management Meeting - Mon. 23rd

Jan 2012 7.30 Putnoe Meeting Room

St Mark's Forum Meeting - NA

Putnoe Church Council - 13 February 2012

Pastoral Group Meeting -

Churchyard Committee -

Brickhill Parish Council Meetings -

Circuit meeting - 8 February 2012 @ Kempston East

Deanery Meeting

Woodland Burial Trustees – 5th February 12.30pm

Putnoe Heights Children & Youth – 16 January 2012

Please advise St Mark's Church Office

Christmas Day

Opening Verse of Scripture - John 1:14

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth..

Collect Prayer *(Before we read we pray)*

Almighty God, you have given us your only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin: grant that we, who have been born again and made your children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Common Worship, Methodist Worship



Detail from the side facing the apse of the so-called "Sarcofago di Stilicone" ("Stilicho's sarcophagus"), an Ancient Roman Christian sarcophagus dating from the 4th century. It is preserved beneath the pulpit of Sant' Ambrogio basilica in Milan, Italy.

First Bible Reading - Isaiah 52:7-10

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes. Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God. (This is the Word of the Lord — **Thanks be to God**)

Second Reading - Hebrews 1:1-4

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. (This is the Word of the Lord — **All: Thanks be to God**)

Gospel Reading - John 1:1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (This is the Word of the Lord — **All: Thanks be to God**)

Post Communion Prayer

God our Father, whose Word has come among us in the Holy Child of Bethlehem: may the light of faith illumine our hearts and shine in our words and deeds; through him who is Christ the Lord.

Hymns (Please distribute Hymns and Psalms and Christmas service sheet)

1. What child is this (On service sheet)
2. It was on a starry night (On service sheet)
3. Come and join the celebration 97
4. See him lying on a bed of straw 118
5. God rest you merry gentlemen 103

Commentary

Today we have a reading from the Gospel of John which starts,
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

So let me ask you what does that remind you of ? I suspect that many of you will immediately think of the very first verses in the Bible from Genesis Chapter 1
In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

John starts his Gospel just like Genesis, with the picture of God creating the world through his pre-existent or word. According to standard Jewish belief, this word existed before the rest of creation, John wants the reader to know that Jesus also is not created but is truly divine. From this we should be left in no doubt that John the Gospel writer sees his Gospel as being like Genesis. The appearance of Jesus on the earth in human form was every bit as important as God creating the world in the first place. God the creator was acting in a dramatic new way and a new order was being established in Jesus, a new creation was taking effect. In Genesis God had spoken and his words had caused things to be brought into life. Now we see Jesus as the living embodiment of God, he is God's living word.

Throughout the Old Testament scriptures 'the word' of God is connected with God's powerful activity in creation and deliverance.

- It was by the word of the Lord that creation occurred. God simply speaks and his powerful word creates Gen 1:3, 6, 9
- When some of his people faced illness and were on the brink of death, God sent forth his word and healed them, he rescued them from the grave Psalm 107:20
- The word brings deliverance and judgement Isaiah 55:11, Ps 29:3

This personification of the word is also seen in the later writing composed after the Old Testament such as Wisdom. John wants to show how Jesus is the embodiment of all God's revelation in the scriptures, and so only those who accept Jesus fully accept the law.

It was a masterstroke to use the term 'Word' or the Greek 'Logos' to describe Jesus, since the 'Logos' was a word rich in meaning for Greeks as well as Jews. Greek philosophers believed that the world had order. The Stoics for example believed that the world was not a cosmic accident but had logic to it. This is why there were seasons and created order. They would understand what was meant by logos or word.

Whilst Jew and Greek would understand what John meant by 'word', nevertheless this was still an amazing new thought, since neither Greek philosophers or Jewish teachers would ever suggest that the word could become flesh. Since the time of Plato it was thought by Greek philosophers that the ideal was invisible and eternal. There was a rationality or logic which lay behind created order, but to suggest that the divine could take corrupted human flesh presented a radical change. Likewise for the Jews this was a remarkable new way of thinking, even Moses was only able to see a part of God's glory (Ex 33:20). John is presenting a radical new truth, that in Jesus the heart of God is available for the whole world to see. Jesus is not a divine messenger, one through whom God speaks, Jesus is God come fully into human life. *Charles Royden*

Prayers for Sunday and the week ahead

Good and gracious God, on this holy night you gave us your Son, the Lord of the universe, wrapped in swaddling clothes, the Saviour of all, lying in a manger. On this holy night draw us into the mystery of your love. Join our voices with the heavenly host, that we may sing your glory on high. Give us a place among the shepherds, that we may find the one for whom we have waited, Jesus Christ, your Word made flesh, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, in the splendour of eternal light, God forever and ever. Amen

On this holy night in which God joins heaven and earth, let us offer our prayers for the church, the world, and all those in need. Let us pray for the Church around the world as it celebrates the birth of Christ. Bless

all those who are entrusted with Christian ministry that your Word might be proclaimed with truth and courage across our world. Bestow your wisdom on all who govern, that in honouring the earth and its diverse races, cultures, and religions, we may celebrate the light of this holy night.

Grant reconciliation to those besought with conflict and violence, that they may live in the peace of this holy night.

Let us pray for all who are cold, hungry, or alone this night. Embrace with your tender care all who wander alone or have no place to lay their head, they may experience the hope of this holy night.

Let us pray for all who are anxious, depressed, or ill. Draw near to those who find this season a source of pain or grief, and to all who are suffering or sick, especially those we remember in our own hearts ... that they may feel the comfort of this holy night.

Let us pray for parents, families, and children. Strengthen families in the bonds of love and commitment, that our homes might be places of joy and peace.

Let us pray for ourselves and for the blessings of Christmas. Open our hearts to your presence, that we may be transformed by the new birth of this holy night.

Let us give thanks for all our loved ones from whom we are parted this Christmas. Give us grace to entrust those who have passed before us into tender loving care, that we might join with them in singing your praises this holy night.

May God grant unto us whatever we need that we might serve him in showing his love and compassion to our world, allowing the light of God to illuminate the dark places with grace and truth.

Meditation Christmas Messages from the Methodist Church and the Church of England

Challenge your pre-suppositions this Christmas, says Methodist President

The Revd Leo Osborn, President of the Methodist Conference, has challenged people to push past their assumptions about the nativity story this Christmas.

"Each year the Connexional Team send out a Christmas Card from Methodist Church House and this year the Vice-President and I have been allowed to use it too! It's from a painting by He Qi. When I looked at it, at first I could only see two wise men. "Where's the third?" I immediately thought and then not long afterwards thought again, "But why should there be three anyway?" Yet we all bring our pre-suppositions to the Christmas story, don't we, perhaps expecting to find not only three wise men but kings and innkeepers not to mention donkeys, holly, ivy and snow! But you'll be hard pushed to discover any of them in the Gospel narratives - not even in the Authorised version! Even the wise men themselves of course had pre-conceptions that a king would be born in Jerusalem, not Bethlehem. But when I glanced for a second and third time and in a different light I could eventually see where the third Wise Man was - and although it doesn't add anything to the Gospel story it made me feel sentimentally better!

"Well perhaps this Christmas each of us needs to come again to this oh so familiar story, asking that God would take away the pre-supposition that we've seen it all or know it all and help us to reflect on things in a new light. Or perhaps to have light shed on something long since known but forgotten or ignored. For, if we look carefully, this simple story may have important things to say to us about many of the personal, social, religious and international issues facing us and our world today, and God's part in them all.

"And challenging our pre-suppositions and opening our eyes is surely what God is always about, as I have discovered during my first six months as President, when, although some situations and people have been as I'd imagined, many haven't and I've had to learn to look at things in a different light. And for the coming year you may already have imagined - or planned out - how life or faith or church is going to be. Well prepare to be surprised like Mary, Joseph, the shepherds and wise men were long ago! But remember too that the one who came and comes is named Emmanuel - God with us - so whatever may be different from what you imagine and however things may seem as a result, God remains the same - dwelling alongside you in grace, truth and love.

"May that same God bless you this Christmas and beyond!"

The Bishop of St Albans Christmas Message 2011

The Bishop of St Albans, the Rt Revd Dr Alan Smith has used his Christmas message to the people of St Albans Diocese to call for everyone, of all faiths and none, to actively demonstrate peace and goodwill to others this Christmas.

"Apparently we Brits are getting nastier, meaner and more judgmental. It's bad for business if you are a Bishop trying to encourage people to celebrate the season of peace and goodwill to all.

Mission Update. Thank you for all who have given so generously to our appeal this year for Bechar. We have raised from Putnoe £2,000 and from St Mark's £2,370, this means a total of £4,370. There are still some donations being made so if you have not yet picked up an envelope containing details (or you've lost the one you did take!) please pick one up from either of the church offices after the service. Thank you everyone who has supported such a worthwhile cause.

Putnoe Heights New Year Lunch. Sunday 15 January 1.00pm. Tickets available from Putnoe Office or from Sue on Sundays after morning service. £8.00 adults, £4.50 children. Festive three course lunch with drinks included. Book early for this popular event.

Footprints New Year's Day Walk. Monday 2 January 10.30 am. Meet at Aspects (Cinema) Car Park (park on far side nearest the river). Easy 3 mile riverside stroll, no stiles, followed by lunch at Putnoe Heights. All welcome to join our traditional start to the New Year

Irene McKenzie and family would like to thank everyone for their cards, flowers and kind words following the death of Eddie. Special thanks to Charlie and Eric for the beautiful service. The sum of £265 was raised for Cancer Research.

Christmas Closures

St Mark's Church office will close at 5pm Friday 23 December and re-open Monday 9 January. **Putnoe Heights** will close at 5pm Thursday 22 & reopen 9am on Tuesday 3 January.

Christmas Greetings to everyone at St Mark's from Vera Tippett.

Brickhill Community Safety Forum, The next meeting which is also the Annual General Meeting, will be held on Monday 9 January 2012 at 7.30pm at St Mark's Church, Calder Rise.

Women's Network / MWiB The annual Daffodil Day celebration will be held on 5 March 2012 at Methodist Central Hall, Westminster. Corinne Thomas is organizing a coach- cost is £11. Anyone wishing to go please phone Corinne ASAP on 01525 403936.

Prayer Group will not meet on December 29.

St Mark's Church Craft Stall Thank you all for your support. We made over £570. If anyone would like to come and join us you would be very welcome. Our next meeting will be on Tuesday January 10 at 1 Hailes Close at 7.30pm. Contact Maureen 262225 or Rosemary 405594

Christmas Greetings from Doreen Smart to all her friends at St Mark's Church. Thank you for all the Christmas Cards gratefully received. God Bless.

Story Box would like to thank all their volunteers. Story box restarts on Thursday 12 January

Bishop of Bedford Farewell Service. Please would you let us know if you would like to attend the special service to say thank you and farewell to Bishop Richard who is retiring. The service will take place at St Paul's on Saturday 3rd March 2012 at 4.00pm. Please tell Charlie as soon as possible.

Thank You Sam, Charlie and Jane would like to say a big thank you to everybody for their kindness and best wishes for Christmas.

A Concert to Celebrate the new organ at St Mark's Church Sunday February 12th at 6.30pm From Clive Simmonds. I have asked two friends of mine to join me on Sunday, February 12th 2012 at 6.30pm for a concert to celebrate the arrival of our new organ at St Mark's. They are both professional musicians and singers and they live in the Scottish lowlands in almost the highest village in Scotland. Stewart Kempster is a bass who sings both solo and chorus work professionally in a wide range of venues. He has sung in a number of Covent Garden productions and is frequently involved as soloist in oratorios and a wide range of other solo performances both in this country and abroad. His wife, Taylor Wilson (Tracey to her friends) is a mezzo-soprano and has, for many years been involved in Scottish Opera. She performs regularly as soloist in a wide range of different styles - from cabaret and jazz to many varied classical styles - in many different countries. She is also often involved in Scottish Opera's Educational projects taking suitable productions into schools. We plan to share a time together at St Mark's of very varied music - songs from many styles, plus a few organ lollipops (Bach - Toccata and Fugue in D Minor and Widor's Toccata) and a couple of favourite hymns, so that there is plenty for all to enjoy. Please book the date in your diary and bring others with you who might appreciate the occasion.

Thank you to everyone at St Mark's and Putnoe for their prayers and support during the last week. I am delighted to say that Michael has had a successful operation and may even be home for Christmas. Wendy

The recently published British Attitudes Survey shows that we wrote the poor off as undeserving far more than a decade ago. We are more likely to think that poverty is caused by laziness than we used to. Nowadays fewer people are happy about paying for the National Health Service or supporting green policies.

The question put by the Chief Executive of the National Centre for Social Research is "are we really in it together, or just for ourselves?"

At the heart of the events of the first Christmas is the holy family who had to lodge in a stable because there was no room for them in the inn. No one was willing to offer hospitality to the young pregnant Galilean girl when she arrived in a strange place far from home.

I have just returned from a visit to our companion dioceses in the West Indies. While I was there we signed agreements to extend our links for a further five years. Wherever I went I was offered a warm welcome. It was humbling, not least because these countries are poorer than ours. Yet their hospitality was generous. However, on several occasions during my stay I heard the same salutary story. In the 1950s many people came from the West Indies to Britain. As Anglicans they were excited and expectant as they set off to come here. Often their congregation would commission them with prayer and they would be given a letter of introduction from their priest which would be handed to the Anglican priest when they arrived here.

In many cases their hopes were quickly dashed. Oftentimes they received no welcome from the local parish church. Indeed, many were made to feel very unwelcome. This is a story which we have heard before about employers and landlords, but when Holy Scripture says to us in the Church "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, all are one in Christ Jesus," then we really should feel chastened.

Hearing this story at any time would be hard enough, but as we approach the celebration of Christ's birth, it leaves me wanting to say a heartfelt "sorry" to the people who we treated in that way. As it happens, there is a community of Vincentians, from the Caribbean Island of St Vincent, in Luton, which is part of the Diocese of St Albans. And St Vincent is where I was told this tale.

So I say sorry to the Vincentians in Luton. I know that some of them have found a spiritual home in Church of England churches in their locality and others know that they are warmly welcomed there when they visit. Back to the British Attitudes Survey. Are we all in it together? The coming of Jesus Christ makes it possible. As we live out whatever the season of peace and goodwill means to us – and that's something we can all join in with whether or not we have a faith – I hope we will remember the call this Christmas to be people of welcome and hospitality. "

Christmas Prayers

Loving father, help us to remember the birth of Jesus, that we may share in the song of the angels, the gladness of the shepherds and the wisdom of the wise men. Close the door of hate and open the door of love all over the world. Let kindness come with every gift and good desires with every greeting. Deliver us from evil by the blessing which Christ brings and teach us to be merry with clean hearts. May the Christmas morning make us happy to be your children and the Christmas evening bring us to our beds with grateful thoughts, forgiving and forgiven, for Jesus sake. Amen.

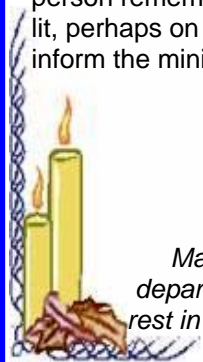
Gentle God, you know that for us, this is a season of hopes and fears. We are caught up in our excitement and plans. We worry whether everything will get done, and whether our relationships will blossom, bend, or break in the stress of the season. Slow us down, God, and help us to place our hope in you. Be our clam centre, that we may be channels of peace to the people around us; through the grace of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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.

Daphne Bates
Arthur Merryman

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



Forthcoming Funerals

The funeral of Sheila Neville will take place at Bedford Crematorium on Wednesday 28 December at 10.00am

The funeral of Doreen Joyce Hoole will take place at Bedford Crematorium at 10.45am on Wednesday 28 December.

The funeral of Gladys Hoyte will take place at St Mark's Church on Friday 6th January at 11.00am