



Methodist
Church

Partnership News

31 December 2006

Christmas 1

Methodist Church & the Church of England in Partnership at both
Putnoe Heights Church & St. Mark's Church



Church of
England

Church Services Today

8.30 Holy Communion at Putnoe
9.30am St Mark's - Holy Communion with PCH
 Preacher – Revd Dr Sam Cappleman
 Leadership - Mr Mike Cooper
 Intercessions - Ministers
11.00am Putnoe - Holy Communion with PCH
 Preacher - Revd Dr Sam Cappleman
 Leadership Team - Mrs Jennie Emsley
 Intercessions - Mr Edward Peck

Sunday 7 January 2007

8.30 Holy Communion at St Mark's
9.30am St Mark's - Family Worship
 Preacher – Revd Charles Royden
 Leadership - Janet Day
 Intercessions - Alison Holden
11.00am Putnoe - Family Worship
 Preacher - Revd Charles Royden
 Leadership Team -
 Intercessions -

Thank You

The flowers at St Mark's this week have been donated by Mrs Corfield in loving memory of her husband.

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

God in Trinity,
 eternal unity of perfect love,
 gather the nations to be one family,
 and draw us into your holy life,
 through the birth of Emmanuel,
 our Lord Jesus Christ

Common Worship Shorter Collect

Contact Details

The Reverend Dr. Sam Cappleman
 107 Dover Crescent, Bedford MK41 8QR
 266952 Fax- 402624 NSM@ThisisChurch.com
 (Sam also works full time as a General Manager for Hewlett Packard)

The Reverend Dr. Joan Crossley (Day off Friday)
 30 Cutcliffe Grove, Bedford. MK40 4DD.
 Home 344536 Crossley@thisischurch.com

The Reverend Charles Royden (Day off Thursday)
 The Vicarage, Calder Rise. MK41 7UY
 309175 Mobile 07973 113861 vicar@thisisChurch.com

Partnership Youth and Children's Worker
 Mrs Liz Spavins 302349 youth@thisischurch.com

For Data Protection Purposes
 Please note that any items submitted for inclusion in Partnership News will automatically be posted on our website.

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 9am—5pm Monday to Friday

Tel/fax & Answering Service 365630 putnoe@thisischurch.com
Centre Manager Mr Barry Snelson 365630 & 344417
Leadership Team - Mr Alan Bayliss 268101
Treasurer Mr Ian Morse 216428 treasurerph@thisischurch.com
Gift Aid Administrator - Mr John Hitt 404186
Junior Church Co-ordinator - Mrs Liz Spavins 302349

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 - Mrs Janet Day 295592
Treasurer - Mr John Day 295592 treasurer@thisischurch.com
Gift Aid Administrator Mr Jim Williams 360605

Regular Weekly Activities - A Guide To Our Churches

Monday

9.30 - 12.00 pm Mon-Fri Putnoe Heights Pre-school Mrs Janet Smith 326685

8.30 - 5.30 pm Mon-Fri St Mark's Pre-school Mrs. Helen Harpin **312634**

(See website for more details)

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

Mini-Strikers Sport for Children at Putnoe aged 2-4 years. Contact Andy Carey 01908 313751 or 07766 142754, or www.ministrikers.co.uk

12.00pm - 1.00pm Story box Putnoe Heights church welcome the under 5's and their carers to join them between 12noon and 1pm for a sandwich lunch followed by a Bible story, singing and activities. Lots of fun, donations. Contact Liz on 01234 302349

2.30 - 4.30pm Bedford Arts Society at Putnoe Heights contact Malcolm Smith on 01234 400741 (weekly from 25 September 2006)

4pm Monday Club at St. Marks for 3—8 year olds meet at 3.30. for refreshments , between 4 & 5 Bible story, craft activities & songs. Lots of fun. Contact Liz 302349

4.15pm - Rosemary Conley Diet & Fitness. Putnoe Heights. Miriam Adcock 01908 565044

4.15 - 6.00pm Kumon Maths at Putnoe Heights. Contact Ms Raksha Mistry 01908 392698

6.00pm Brownies St Mark's. Mrs C Mathew 826190

6.15 pm Brownies Putnoe. Penny Fulham 406045

7.30pm Sugarcraft Guild meets first Monday every month at St. Mark's Mrs Pauline Parrott 768419

7.15 m Guides -St. Mark's. Mrs Gill Lake 218091

7.15pm Yoga at Putnoe Heights Church. Contact Karen Simpson 244970

7.30pm Creative Needles at Putnoe Heights. Jacky Hayward 307648. New members welcome.

7.30pm Whist Drive - At St Mark's each month next January '07 Contact Judith Stanton. 823313

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

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

Tuesday

9.30am Candlewicking (Needlework) at Putnoe Heights. Mrs Olive Shotbolt 267203

10.00am Keep Fit at Putnoe Heights. Mrs Stileman 822230

1.30-3pm Toddlers Playtime at Putnoe Heights. Geraldine Skeel 406828

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

2.00pm Library Walk W.I. at Putnoe Heights meets monthly. Contact Morag Tompkins 356895

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

2.15pm Putnoe Heights Women's Fellowship - Next meeting 9 January 2007 Contact Betty Wyatt

350188.

2.15pm Putnoe Heights Men's Fellowship. Next meeting. Contact Lawrence Wyatt 350188.

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

2.30pm Tuesday Afternoon Housegroup. Meets fortnightly at St. Mark's. For details of next meeting contact Mary Stubbs 406784.

3.45 - 5.30pm Stars School of Dance at Putnoe Heights. Esther Sancto 272517 or 07917 0582468.

6.30 - 7.30pm Yoga at Putnoe Heights. Rachel Leontyne 783129

7.00 - 8.00 pm Keep Fit at St. Mark's - Jan Gregory 214107.

Tuesday - 7pm-9pm MT Karate [all ages] at Putnoe Heights. Please

contact Karen King 07941 264885

7.00 - 10pm Card Makers Club meets fortnightly at St Mark's. Carol Houghton 346718

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

7. 45 pm Putnoe Heights Ladies Tuesday Club - Meets fortnightly. Next meeting 12 December Members Christmas meeting. Contact Madge Walsh 359088

8.30pm St Mark's Church Qi Gong. Contact Mrs D Steele 356384

Wednesday

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

9.30am - Body Control Pilates at Putnoe Heights. Stephanie Smith 357787.

9.00 a.m. Clubhouse at St Mark's for those with Learning Disabilities. Contact Karen Bywater 315460.

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

10am Sewing & Chat Putnoe Heights Contact Valerie Russell 01462 815966

10.30 am U3A Art Appreciation meets fortnightly at Putnoe Heights - For details of next meeting Contact Audrey Hancock 365915.

Luncheon Club at Putnoe Heights fortnightly. For details of next meeting 10 January 2007 contact Putnoe 365630

1 - 3pm Police Surgery at Putnoe Heights .

1.30 - 4.00pm. Bridge Club for the Retired at St. Mark's. Mrs Truss Boyce 781133

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

4.15pm - 6pm Kumon Maths at Putnoe Heights Ms Raksha Mistry 01908 392698

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

6.15pm - 7.45pm Yoga and Relaxation at Putnoe Heights. contact Racheall Monton 01234 297138

6.30 - 7.30 at St Mark's Karate contact Karen 079412 64885
7.00pm Bunyan Bridge at St. Mark's. Brian Sallows 407725
7.00pm Archaeological & Local History Society meets monthly at Putnoe Heights. Contact Sylvia Woods 365095
7pm Putnoe Guild meets monthly at Putnoe Heights. Janice Loxley 347073
7.45pm Badminton Club at Putnoe Heights - all welcome. Ken Marriott 214867

Thursday

9.30am Thursday Prayer Group at 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 at St. Mark's. Music & movement for pre-school children. Jayne Phillips 01582 485333
9.45am Yoga at Putnoe Heights. Karen Simpson 244970
1.30pm - 3.00pm Clinic at St. Mark's 267444
12pm Story box St Mark's Church welcome the under 5's and their carers to join them between 12 noon and 1pm for a sandwich lunch followed by a Bible story, singing and activities. Lots of fun, donations. Contact Liz Spavins on 302349
1.30-3pm Toddler Playtime at Putnoe Geraldine Skeel 406828
1.30pm St. Mark's Church Toddler Group. Debbie Coppenhall 356828.
2pm - Putnoe Bridge Club. Gerald Palmer 345991
4.00 Story box Plus at Putnoe Heights for 4-11 year old. Meet at 3.30 for refreshments & games. Then till 5pm make props, sing & rehearse a short play to perform in church on the 1st Sunday of each month Lots of fun And it's free! Liz Spavins 302349
5.30 - 7.30pm Police Surgery. St Mark's Foyer.
6.15 pm Weightwatchers at St. Mark's. Mrs Margaret Ralph 01767 224978.
6.15pm Brownies at Putnoe Helga Nash 218521
6.15pm Bedford Junior Chess Club. St. Mark's Mr & Mrs Pike 823795
7pm Street Dance at Putnoe Heights. Contact Curtis Ritchie 349255 or 07984 525147
7.00pm Club 2000 at Putnoe Mrs M White 404992
7.30pm - 11.00pm Bedford Senior Chess Club at St Mark's Mr P Housden 376597
7.30 - 9.30pm Embroiderer's Guild at St Mark's 3rd Thursday of the month. Mrs E Rigby 344442
7.30 - 9.30 Tabernacle of Truth Church at Putnoe Bible Studies every 2 Thursday— Pastor Tarr 360188
8.00 - 10pm Bedford Writers Circle at St Mark's 1st Thursday each month. Mr Broadhouse 740271

Friday

9.00 am Clubhouse at St. Mark's for those with Learning Disabilities. Karen Bywater 315460.
1.30 - 2pm Stars School of Dance at Putnoe.

Contact Esther Sancto 272517 or 07917 582468
2pm U3A Gardening Group at Putnoe Heights Contact Eve Whitehead 356875
7 - 10pm Bedford Arts Society meets fortnightly at Putnoe Heights from 8 September. Contact Malcolm Smith 01234 400741
7.30pm Youth Club for age 13-18 at St Mark's Church. Contact PCSO Rowland Gilbey 349179

Saturday

9.30 - 11.30am Stars School of Dance at Putnoe. Contact Esther Sancto 272517 or 07917 582468
10.00am - 1.00pm Theatretrain at St Mark's – dancing acting, singing. - Kate Randle 01234 782414
5 - 7pm Bethesda Church . Contact Pastor Denis Baka 07944 749357
7.15pm - 10.30pm Duplicate Bridge at St Mark's Contact Ann or Peter 212066

Sunday

Junior Church with crèche for under 3's
9.30 - 10.30 at St. Mark's
11-12 at Putnoe Heights.
1 - 4pm Tabernacle of Truth Church at Putnoe Heights - Worship. Contact Revd. Tarr 360188 Mob. 07866775515
6-7.30pm T.N.T. for 9-12 year olds (fortnightly) join us for fellowship, fun, games & outings. At Putnoe. Ring Liz 302349.
6 -7.30pm T.X.T for 13 + fortnightly , join us for fellowship , debate & discussion at Putnoe. Ring Liz 302349

Diary Dates

St Mark's Church Council –6th February 07
Circuit Meeting -
St Mark's Leadership Team – 22nd January 07
Putnoe Heights Leadership Team -
 19 February 2007 at Wendy's house
St Mark's Church Management Meeting -
 12.30pm 6 December
Putnoe Heights Centre Management - 15 January
Putnoe Church Council 29 January 07
Pastoral Group Meeting – 31 January 07
Churchyard Committee - 15 February 07
Putnoe Heights Mission Group Meeting – 7.30pm
 17 January 07, at 14 Flint Way
Partnership Council - 20 February 07 at St Mark's
Brickhill Parish Council -
Deanery Meeting
Putnoe Heights Children & Youth—

Calendar dates appear on our church website
www.ThisChurch.com. Please advise St Mark's
Church Office of the dates of your meetings.

Christmas 1 Year C

Verse of Scripture - Ps 148 v 11 - 13

Kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on earth, young men and maidens, old men and children. Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his splendour is above the earth and the heavens.

Collect Prayer - Before we read we pray

Almighty God, who wonderfully created us in your own image and yet more wonderfully restored us through your Son Jesus Christ: grant that, as he came to share in our humanity, so we may share the life of his divinity; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen



Jesus teaches in the Temple

First Bible Reading - 1 Sam 2 v 18 – 10, 26

But Samuel was ministering before the LORD— a boy wearing a linen ephod. Each year his mother made him a little robe and took it to him when she went up with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice. Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, saying, May the LORD give you children by this woman to take the place of the one she prayed for and gave to the LORD. Then they would go home. And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favour with the LORD and with men.

(Reader: This is the word of the Lord. All: Thanks be to God)

Second Reading - Col 3 v 12 – 17

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

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

Third Reading - Luke 2 v 41 – 52

(When the Gospel is announced: Glory to Christ our Saviour)

Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they travelled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you. Why were you searching for me? he asked. Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house? But they did not understand what he was saying to them. Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men.

Reader : (This is the word of the Lord. All: Thanks be to God)

Post Communion Prayer

Heavenly Father, whose blessed Son shared at Nazareth the life of an earthly home: help your Church to live as one family, united in love and obedience, and bring us all at last to our home in heaven; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Hymns (Please distribute Hymns and Psalms and morning worship)

Brightest and best, 123; Make me a channel of your peace, 776; Lord of all hopefulness, 552; Thou didst leave thy throne, 154

Commentary A Holy Family

Raising children has never been easy in any culture. Sometimes the only thing that parents can do is to ponder the mystery and hope the child will (continue to) grow in wisdom, maturity, and favour among human beings and God.

According to Deuteronomy 16 v16, every Jewish male was required to appear before the Lord (in Jerusalem) to make an offering three times a year: Passover, which commemorates the deliverance from Egypt; Pentecost, which commemorates the giving of the Law on Sinai; and Booths (or Tabernacles) which recalls the forty-year sojourn in the wilderness. Today's gospel reading shows Jesus' family in the company of other devout Jews fulfilling the requirement of the Law during the Feast of Passover.

As his parents bring the child Jesus on the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Jesus finds himself in the great Temple and in the midst of teachers. Without His parents knowledge, when they leave Jesus stays behind in Jerusalem. Its only when they can't find Him among their friends and family they search the whole caravan, eventually returning to Jerusalem to look for Him there. Eventually they find Him in the Temple with a group of adult teachers (doctors) discussing matters with them on, at least, equal terms. It seems safe to assume that Jesus has made the transition into the adult world at this stage in His life. But the transition has consequences that are evident in Jesus' dialogue with Mary. Mary's irritation, expressed in her question, "Son, why have you treated us like this?" is perfectly understandable. Jesus is (now) supposed to begin to behave like a responsible, adult male but clearly told no-one of His intentions to remain in the Temple and as such His behaviour is irresponsible and disrespectful. Jesus replies in the plural to both Mary and Joseph, "Did you not know . . .?" Male maturity in the Mediterranean world entails becoming liberated from the female control that characterizes early childhood. For Jesus it was also a transition in obedience from His earthly father, Joseph, to His heavenly Father. For Mary and Joseph this Passover journey involved more than a trip to Jerusalem for a religious festival, they were to "pass over" to new ways of understanding who they and Jesus was and who He would become. For while Jesus was (and would always be) the son of Mary and his foster father Joseph, he was most profoundly the Son of God who "must he in His Father's house." Paul in Colossians invites us too to "pass over" to a deeper understanding of who we are, God's chosen people, called to love one another as members of God's family.

Biblical scholars tend to classify the story of Jesus at the Temple as a "legend". This does not necessarily mean that the incident is wholly unhistorical, but that its purpose is not necessarily purely historical. So why did Luke include it in his gospel? The story about the Holy Family's pilgrimage to the Temple gives an insight into their devout adherence to the Jewish law and the family structure which provided the environment in which Jesus would develop as a child, just as Samuel had developed in our Old Testament reading. Jesus' development was a critical factor which laid the earthly foundations which would enable Him to fulfil His role as the eschatological prophet and the bringer of redemption to Israel and the wider world. The first reading tells the story of a young boy in "the temple of the Lord." Samuel's barren mother, Hannah, had made a vow to God that if she should have a son, she would dedicate him to the Lord's service. It is in fulfilment of this vow that Samuel is brought to the Temple where he will now live and study under the tutelage of the priest, Eli. In the gospel reading another male child is brought by his family to the Temple to fulfil religious obligations; both will be dedicated to the Lord's service, even from youth. *Sam Cappleman*

Meditation

The writings of St. Paul are insistent and urgent: Christ is strategic to the world. The birth and life of the Lord Jesus are not just more of those events that might or might not have happened. They are the fulcrum of human destiny. By the coming of Jesus we are delivered from the law, and we become

adopted children. We are no longer slaves, but heirs. And this is by God's design. Jesus is how God blesses us, more than Moses might have imagined. In his face God shines upon us and is gracious to us. In him God reveals eternal kindness and wishes us lasting peace. In him we know God's name and appearance and attitude. The blessing that the Lord gave to Moses for the Israelites is the blessing that God gives to all humankind, the blessing of the adopting parent who wants only our joy: "May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord let his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord look upon you kindly and give you peace."
John Kavanaugh, S. J. of Saint Louis University

Prayers for Sunday and the week ahead

With the angels and saints, each day and each night, each shade and each light, I bend my knee in the eye of the Father who created me, in the eye of the Son who redeemed me, in the eye of the Spirit who cleansed me. In love and affection, in wisdom and grace, in love and in fear, for ever and ever. Amen.
Gaelic Prayer to the Trinity

O God, all holy one, you are our Mother and our Father and we are your children. Open our eyes and our hearts so that we may be able to discern your work in the universe. And be able to see Your features in every one of Your children. May we learn that there are many paths but all lead to You. Help us to know that you have created us for family, for togetherness, for peace, for gentleness, for compassion, for caring, for sharing. May we know that You want us to care for one another as those who know that they are sisters and brothers, members of the same family, Your family, the human family. Help us to beat our swords into ploughshares and our spears into pruning hooks, so that we may be able to live in peace and harmony, wiping away the tears from the eyes of those who are less fortunate than ourselves. And may we know war no more, as we strive to be what You want us to be: Your children. Amen
Desmond M. Tutu, Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town, South Africa

We thank you Lord, that we are citizens of a world made up of different races. Your grace touches us all, whatever our race and colour. We rejoice in the richness of our cultures, our music and dance, our folklore and legends. We thank you for all these gifts. We delight in the joy they bring to our lives. Amen.
(Women of Brazil)

The God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the eternal covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight; and may the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. Amen

Draw us, O Christ, by grace irresistible, to the centre of all faith and to the heart of all sacrifice; to the deepest of all wells and to a work that is not our own; even your holy cross, to which we cling and by which we are held; for your own name's sake. Amen. *Dora Greenwell, 1821-1912*



Telecare

Telecare is an extremely helpful way of helping your church in the ministry of pastoral care.

It is helpful for the Ministers to be able to have feed back, especially if somebody is poorly or in hospital. If you are elderly, live alone, or if you are the only person in your family who comes to church, then we may not know if you have not been able to come church. If you have not yet put your name down, please do so. It helps us make our churches more able to care.

News and Information

Chapel Chairs. Buy a chair for St Mark's chapel. Chairs can be donated for a cost of £60 which includes a plaque with inscription

Footprints New Years Day Walk Monday 1.1.07 at 10.30am. Meet at Milton Ernest Garden Centre for coffee followed by an easy circular walk suitable for all the family (some stiles) Option for a pub lunch afterwards. Contact Sue on 407264

Putnoe Heights New Year Family Lunch, Sunday 14 January 2007 at 1pm. A traditional 3 course lunch, including starters, roast with trimmings, wine, coffee and wonderful celebration atmosphere. Tickets £8, children under 10 £4.50 now available.

St Mark's Church Office is now closed for the Christmas period and will re-open Monday 8th January. The office staff would like to wish you all a special and very Happy Christmas and look forward to assisting you in 2007.

Books. Please save your books for our Mission Group Book Sale, planned for the end of February at Putnoe Heights Church. More details in the New Year, Sylvia Cohen 34342

Putnoe Heights New Year Family Lunch Sunday 14th January 2007 at 1pm. We look forward to our traditional 3 course New Year Lunch including starters, main course roast with all the trimmings, dessert, wine, coffee, and wonderful celebration atmosphere. Tickets now available - £8 adults, Children [under 10] £ 4.50p.

Christmas messages

**From the President of the Methodist Conference
Revd Graham Carter,**

"Christmas is a down to earth celebration. We celebrate a God who is not far off but one who is deeply involved in human life. Christmas is not about fairy tales and far-fetched beliefs. It is about the realities of human living and the acknowledgement that God is with us, even in the dark and dingy places.

"There are those who would hide the celebration of Christmas. Afraid of imagined dispute and conflict they want to have everyone celebrate 'Winterval' or 'Winterfest'. These are not people who have a genuine interest in equality. They are people who either want to enforce a kind of sameness or are afraid of religion. Genuinely religious people of all faiths are happy about celebrating Christmas, seeing it not as divisive but enriching the field of

faith. As Christians we would not want to stop Jews celebrating Hanukkah, Muslims celebrating Eid or Hindus celebrating Diwali. Nor do people of other religions want to stop the celebration of Christmas.

"Over the centuries, Christianity has shown a remarkable ability to use existing festivals and imbue them with deeper meaning. The Church took over a Roman celebration to celebrate the birth of Christ in mid-winter, and in Britain we still use the pagan name for Easter. Now that some people want to go back and de-Christianise Christmas, to secularise it or re-institute pagan ceremonies, we ought to be more particular about making sure ours is a truly Christian celebration. We should resist attempts to trivialise an understanding that brings a deeper meaning than simply the rising of the sun in the winter sky once more.

"The Christmas message reminds us that Christianity is a world-affirming religion, not world-denying. In our Christmas story, God becomes human in a very ordinary way. The stories of Mary, the shepherds and the wise men may sound exceptional, but in their telling they emphasise how ordinary the event was. Mary's song, the Magnificat, reminds us that she was from a lowly family; there wasn't even a proper bed for Jesus when he was born; shepherding was among the lowest of occupations, yet the shepherds were the first to be given the news of the birth; the wise men thought Jesus would have been born in a palace, but even with all their wisdom, they got it wrong.

"The good news of Christmas is that the most ordinary of people are counted special in God's eyes and they have a special purpose. Well-being and good life do not depend on status or wealth or possessions. This means all of human life is valuable and the charitable acts so popular at Christmas are not just out of the kindness of people's hearts, but express the reality of how things are supposed to be. 'Winterval' and 'Winterfest' give rise to selfish indulgence. Christmas celebrates the good life for all."

The Archbishop of Canterbury—Christmas Message

'He comes the prisoners to release, In Satan's bondage held.' These are words from one of my favourite Advent hymns, 'Hark the glad sound!' And they draw our minds towards an aspect of Christmas that is often neglected because we prefer some of the 'softer' elements in the story.

Jesus of Nazareth was born, lived, died and rose because human beings were not free. Since the dawn of human history, men and women had been trapped – even the very best of them – by the heritage of suspicion and alienation towards God and fear of each other. They had been caught up in the great rebellion against God that began even before human history, the revolt of God's creatures against God out of pride and self-assertion. Satan, the fallen angel, stands as a sign of this primordial tragedy, showing that even the most highly endowed being can be corrupted by self-assertion. All of the intelligence and spiritual dignity belonging to the angels did not stop Lucifer from the ultimate madness of rejecting the God in whose presence he stood.

And this corruption of intelligence and dignity spreads like an epidemic through the universe. We know and sense that we are living in something less than truth or justice, but don't know how to get out of the trap. The birth and life of Jesus don't first of all change our ideas – they change what's actually possible for us. They set us free.

They set us free by re-establishing our dignity on a new footing. Because God himself, God the Son, has taken our human nature to be his, every human being is touched by that transforming fact. The epidemic of rebellion is countered by something almost like a benign 'infection', the touch of God communicated to human nature. We still have to choose to co-operate with God – but he has opened the door for us first by re-creating human nature in Jesus Christ.

In the coming year, we celebrate the 200th anniversary of the abolition of slavery by the Parliament of the United Kingdom. This was achieved not by enlightened and progressive

European intellectuals convinced theoretically of the equality of human beings, but by Christian people who were passionately persuaded of the dignity of lives touched by the incarnate Word of God, people who knew that slavery was both a terrible affront to the dignity of the slave - and a terrible wound to the spiritual health and integrity of those who owned slaves, and who in virtue of that fact were more deeply enslaved themselves by sin and greed.

Christmas sets us free; and if the memory of William Wilberforce and the great campaigners against slavery means anything, it sets us free to set others free. It breaks open the prison of blind selfishness, it challenges the lazy way in which we take for granted the misery of others as a background to our lives. So Christmas now should prompt us to ask, 'Whose misery are we taking for granted and not noticing? Where are today's slaves?' The coming year will have a lot of events that should help us look for answers to these questions – though most of us know some of the answers: child soldiers, victims of sex trafficking, people who have lived for decades in an environment of ceaseless violence or who have lost their homes or countries through this violence.

'He comes the prisoners to release.' Let him come again into this world through our own commitment to 'set all free'; and let us give thanks that we are set free by Jesus in all he is and says and does, from Bethlehem to Calvary and beyond.

Our glad hosannas, Prince of peace,
Thy welcome shall proclaim;
And heaven's eternal arches ring
With Thy beloved name.

Every blessing and happiness to you in this season.
+Rowan Cantuar:

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.

Lydia Susan East

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



Rest in Peace



The funeral of David John Woods will take place at Bedford Crematorium on Thursday 4 January *Royden*

The funeral of Twila Brown will take place at Putnoe Heights Church on Friday 5 January at 1.00pm *Royden*

The funeral of Joan Chandler will take place at Bedford Crematorium on Monday 8 January at 12.15pm *Royden*