



Methodist
Church

Partnership News

25 December 2005

Christmas Day

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 No Service of Holy Communion

9.30am St Mark's Church - Morning Worship

Preacher - Revd Charles Royden

Leadership Team - Mrs Avril Williams

Intercessions - Mrs Alison Holden

11.00am Putnoe Heights - Morning Worship

Preacher - Revd Charles Royden

Leadership Team - Mrs Sue Allen

Intercessions - Ministers

1 January 2006

8.30 Service of Holy Communion Both churches

9.30am St Mark's Church - Family Worship

Preacher - Revd Dr Sam Cappleman

Leadership - Mrs Janet Day

Intercessions - Mrs A Holden

11.00am Putnoe Heights - Family Worship

Preacher - Revd Dr Sam Cappleman

Leadership Team -

Intercessions -

Reading 1 : Isaiah 61: 10 - 62: 3

Reading 2 : Galatians 4: 4 - 7

Reading 3 : Luke 2 : 15 - 21

Thank You

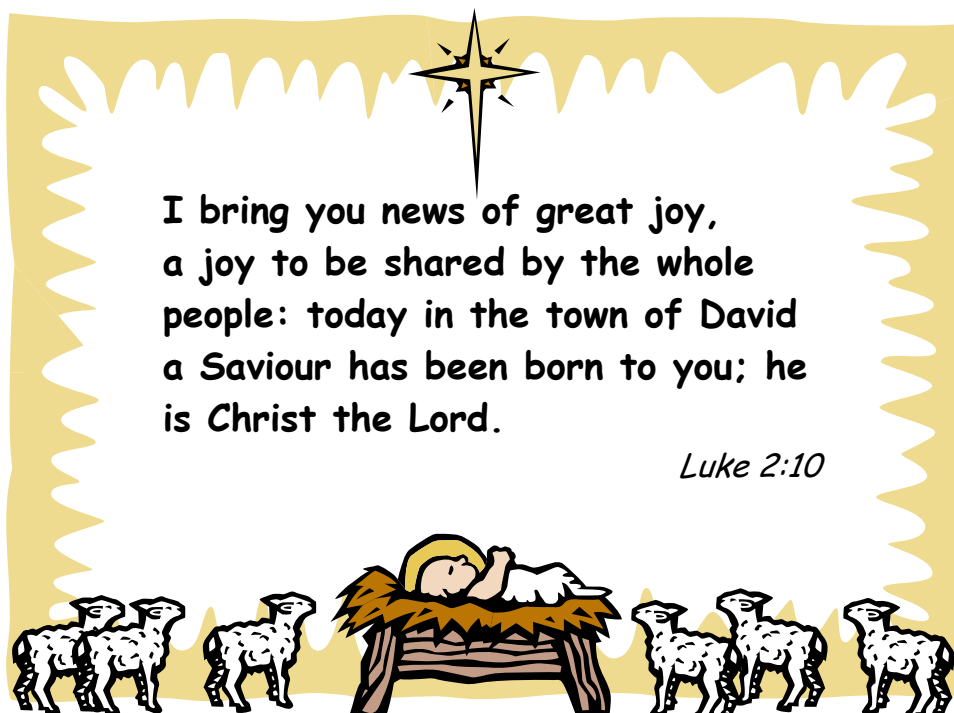
The flowers at Putnoe Heights Church during the Christmas period have been given by Carolyn and Tim Morris to celebrate an anniversary, and by Pat Pollard in memory of her mother, Eva Hopkins.

Thank you for the donations given to St Mark's for flowers over the Christmas period.

Prayer for Sunday

Moonless darkness stands between.
Past, O Pat, no more be seen!
But the Bethlehem star may lead me
To the sight of him who freed me
From the self that I have been.
Make me pure, Lord: Thou art holy;
Make me meek, Lord: Thou wert lowly;
Now beginning, and always;
Now begin, on Christmas Day

Gerard Manly Hopkins



Regular Weekly Activities - A Guide To Our Churches

Monday

9.30 - 12.00 pm Pre-school (See website for more details) Mrs Janet Smith 326685 (Putnoe Heights) or Mrs. Helen Harpin **312634** (St. Mark's).

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

10.00am Supple Strength at Putnoe Heights. Louise Woodcock 270302

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

4pm Story Box Plus at St.Marks for 4 -11 year olds meet at 3.30. for refreshments & games, then till 5pm make props, sing & rehearse a short play to perform in church the 1st Sunday of each month. Lots of fun. Free. Contact Liz 302349

4.15 - 5.45pm Kumon Maths at Putnoe Heights. Contact Ms Raksha Mistry 01908 392698

6.00pm Brownies St Mark's. Mrs C Mathew 400987

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 the next 16 January Mrs. 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

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

10.00am Keep Fit at Putnoe Heights. Mrs Stileman 822230

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

12 noon - 10.00 pm Slimming World at St. Mark's. Sessions start at 12, 1.30pm, 4pm, 5.30pm & 7.15pm Val Careless 345213.

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

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

1.30pm Body Control Pilates at Putnoe Heights. Stephanie Smith 357787

2.15pm Putnoe Heights Women's Fellowship - Next meeting 3 January -Revd Sam Cappleman Betty Wyatt 350188.

2.15pm Putnoe Heights Men's Fellowship. Next meeting 3 January with Ladies Fellowship 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. Mary Stubbs 406784.

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

6.45pm Guides at Putnoe Heights. Emma Holloway 293792

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

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

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

7. 45 pm Putnoe Heights Ladies Tuesday Club - Meets fortnightly.at 7.45pm Next meeting 13 December Christmas Madge Walsh 359088

8.30-9.30pm St. Mark's - Qi Gong (Self help healing group) - Mr F Steele 355937

Wednesday

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

9.30am Bedford U3A at Putnoe Heights meets bi-monthly. Next meeting . Jenny Coggins 266379

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

Luncheon Club at Putnoe Heights fortnightly. Next meeting 11 January 2006 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

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

6.00pm Self Defence at Putnoe Mr James 07711 687449

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

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

7.00pm Archaeological & Local History Society meets monthly at Putnoe Heights. Next meeting . Sylvia Woods 365095

7pm Putnoe Guild meets monthly at Putnoe Heights. Pam Holley 771964

7.45pm Kick Boxing Junior classes at St Mark's. Contact Mr James 07711687449 or 07810234890

7.45pm Badminton Club at Putnoe Heights - all

welcome. Ken Marriott 214867

8.45-9.45pm St. Mark's - Qi Gong (Self help healing group) starting Mr F Steele 355937

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.*

9.45am Yoga at Putnoe Heights. Karen Simpson 244970

1.00pm - 3.00pm Clinic at St. Mark's from 5.1.06 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 1234 302349

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

1.30pm St. Mark's Church Toddler Group. Debbie Coppenhall 356828.

2.30 Bedford Arts Society at St. Mark's. Celia Maddison 782901

2pm U3A Indoor Games at Putnoe Heights. Radmila Dancer 404811

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. 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 Heights. Helga Nash 218521

7.00pm Club 2000 at Putnoe Pat Stidolph 345247

6.15pm Bedford Junior Chess Club. St. Mark's Mr & Mrs Pike 823795

7.30pm - 11.00pm Bedford Senior Chess Club at St Mark's Mr P Housden 376597

7.30 - 9.30pm Embroiderer's Guild St Mark's- 3rd Thursday of the month. Mrs K Sage 771525

Bibleway Church 7.30—9.30-Putnoe Heights Bible Studies every 2 Thursday- Pastor Tarr 360188

7.45pm. Housegroup- Meets fortnightly at 3 Little Headlands. Newcomers always welcome. Betty Wyatt 350188

8.00 - 10pm Bedford Writers Circle meets at St Mark's 3 Thursday each month. 1 Thursday as from January 2006 Mr John Broadhouse 740271

Friday

9.30am U3A Exercise at Putnoe Heights. Carole Maunder 301325

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

6pm Self Defence at Putnoe. Mr James 0771 687449 or 07810 234890

7. 30pm Bibleway Young Peoples meeting Contact Pastor Tarr 360188

Saturday

9.30am Stars School of Dance at Putnoe Heights. Contact Esther Sancto 272517

10.00am - 1.00pm Theatre Train at St Mark's - dancing acting, singing. - Kate Randle 01234 782414

2.30pm Calligraphy Group at Putnoe Heights. Meets monthly next meeting. Philip Jones 350295

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- 3pm & 7-9pm Bibleway Church at Putnoe Heights - Worship. Contact Revd. Tarr 360188 Mob. 07866775515

6.00pm TNT (The Nearly Teens) meet fortnightly at Putnoe Heights for various fun activities. Contact Putnoe Office 365630

Diary Dates

St Mark's Church Council

8 February 2006

Circuit Meeting 16 March 2006

St Mark's Leadership Team - 2006 17 January, 24 April, 6 June,

12 September

Putnoe Heights Leadership Team

St Mark's Church Management Meeting

All meetings to start 7.00pm

Putnoe Heights Management - 16 Jan 2006

Putnoe Church Council 6 February 2006

Pastoral Group Meeting - 6 February 2006 2.00pm

Churchyard Committee -

Putnoe Heights Mission Group Meeting-

18 January 2006 7.30p.m. at 14 Flint Way..

Partnership Council - 24 January 2006

Brickhill Parish Council - 24 November 2005

Joint Deanery Circuit 18 January 2006

Annual Congregational Meeting 7 May 2006

Mission Group Meeting - 18 January 2006, 7pm at 14 Flint Way.

Calendar dates appear also on our church website www.ThisChurch.com.

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

Bible Notes

Christmas Day - Year B



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.

A Collect Prayer - Before we read we pray.

Lord Jesus Christ. Your birth at Bethlehem draws us to kneel in wonder at heaven touching earth: accept our heartfelt praise, as we worship you our Saviour and our eternal God. **Amen.**

First Reading –Isaiah 9: 2-7

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder. For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this. (This is the word of the Lord -- **Thanks be to God**)

Second Reading - Titus 2: 11-14

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. (This is the word of the Lord -- **Thanks be to God**)

Third Reading - Luke 2: 1-20

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to his own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests." When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this

child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told (This is the word of the Lord—**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 Day Family Worship)

1. God rest 103, 2. Christmas Bells and Come and Join—on Partnership News, 3. See him lying 118 4.. O little town 113, 5. Good Christians all rejoice 104 6. O come all ye faithful 110

Commentary

She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

We read this story of the birth of Jesus time after time and year after year and still we discover new truths about our God and our faith. Take this simple statement, 'because there was no room for them in the inn.' In one sense it is just a descriptive note, but in another sense it is penetrative comment upon the fact that when Jesus was born nobody made room. There was loads of room in the inn at Bethlehem on the famous night. There were many other people who could have spent the night in the cave or the stable, or wherever it was that Jesus was born. We would expect that a mother about to give birth would take a high priority over most other people. But the point is that nobody would make room. Mary was just not important enough to make people loose their room and go to the inconvenience. You can imagine the comments directed towards the young pregnant teenager, 'it's her own fault', 'she's brought it on herself,' and 'we all have to take responsibility for our own actions.' She was just another example of the undeserving poor. Would we have behaved any differently?

How do we react when we hear of the plight of the other Mary's of this world. The story challenges each one of us to be different. This year we have as our church appeal the work of Mildmay. This is a charity which helps victims of Aids related diseases from London to Africa. The Christmas challenge to us all is that we have to make room for those in need. Jesus takes his place alongside the rejected and the despised, the weak and the vulnerable. That is the message of the Christmas story, are we prepared to do the same?

This year in the Advent course we looked at the nativity stories and we asked 'are they true?' We saw that on one level people have raised all sorts of questions as to whether pieces of the nativity events really happened. The truth is that we will never know the exact historical details and we do have to be careful about filling in the gaps with our own ideas - something which perhaps the church has done with the added information about Mary and the Magi. But whatever misgivings we might have about the nativity stories, the truth of the message which they convey should never be in doubt. As Christians these stories are true for us and they remain as a challenge to us for all time.

Children need to be told that we have a Saviour who was God made flesh, who chose to be born in the muck of the stable not the comfort of a royal palace. The Christmas story is a message that Jesus is involved in our ordinary lives and it is also a challenge to each one of us that we have to make room.

In our reading we also read the story of the shepherds. We tend to think of shepherds as decent country sorts, looking after sheep. But these were not valued members of the community. They were unclean in terms of their way of life and also spiritually. They were not able to keep the Jewish laws and they were despised and looked down upon. Yet the nativity stories, tell us that these were the people who were told about Jesus first! You might not believe in flying angels with wings, but what you cannot get away from is the fact that, right from the start, the stories of Jesus show that God goes out of his way to invite the very ones which society disapproves of. God has a special place for the waifs and strays, God cares most for those we do not make room for. We are told that the angels told the shepherds, the angels are messengers of God, the point is that God spoke directly to the hearts of ordinary folk, with no religious or community prestige. Luke knew that God did that when Jesus was born and he wanted the reader of his Gospel to know that this was how God operated. Luke knew that you didn't have to be rich and famous, his Gospel was full of this teaching that everybody mattered. So today we have to be God's angels. To us the task is given to proclaim the message of the birth of Jesus in word and deed. The uncomfortable truth is that Jesus has told us that we have an opportunity to do that every day of our lives. When we care for the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, those without the necessities of life, the sick. We care for Jesus. When we show kindness to those in need, or those whom society overlooks or despises. We show kindness to Jesus. The message of Bethlehem and the first Christmas is just as important today as it ever was, the big question is 'what will be our response?' *Charles Royden*

Meditation

O God, it is easy to love the whole world, but hard to love the person one works next to;

O God it is easy to campaign for world peace, but hard to contribute to the peace within my own home; O God it is easy to be fascinated with some new truth, and miss you in the thing I have known so long; O God, it is easy to share my home and possessions with people I like. Teach me how to be generous towards others. Enable me today to say something that will make a difference to the discouraged, to the inexperienced, to the despairing. Let no selfish concern with my own affairs sut me off from any today. For your love's sake. Rita Snowden.

Prayers for Sunday and the Week Ahead

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; and 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 who now and ever reigns in our hearts, Jesus Christ our Lord. *John Wallace Suter*

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.

Almighty God you have given us your only begotten Son to take our nature upon him and 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. **Amen**

News, Views and Information

Odd Job Dave. Decorating, Carpentry and all your odd jobs! No job too small, call for a free quote. Cheap rates for OAP's 01234 401184 / 07788 862609

Footprints New Year Walk Monday 2 January 2006. Meet at Sharnbrook Methodist Church at 10.30 for coffee followed by 3 mile circular walk (may be muddy). Please park carefully in the village. Optional lunch afterwards at the Bedford Arms Souldrop. All welcome.

Putnoe Heights New Year Lunch 1pm Sunday 15 January Tickets now available £8 (£4.50 children under 10). 3 courses, wine, coffee & seasonal festive atmosphere. Proceeds to Mildmay Charity and Putnoe Church Funds.

St Mark's Church Office will be closed from Saturday 24 December and re-open Wednesday 4 January 2006.

Congratulations and best wishes to Frank and Delph Coleman who will be celebrating their Diamond Wedding at Christmastime. The Putnoe Leadership Team send their thanks to Frank and Delph for all the years of loyal service to Putnoe Heights in so many ways.

This week St Mark's Preschool received notification from Beds Foundation Stage Team that as a result of both Ofsted Early Years Education and Child Care Inspections their setting has been placed at *Green 1*. This equates to outstanding and indicates a minimum level of support needed. No better result could have been awarded. Congratulations to all the Preschool Staff.

Visual Prayer is a series of reflections & meditations on CD suitable for use on home computers by Christopher Herbert, the Bishop of St. Albans. Collection 1 is now available at a cost of £10 inc. P & P. from St Mark's

Church. Cheques payable to St. Mark's Church.

Putnoe Cards During the past few months our hand-made card sales have gone very well. We sent £100 to St. John's Mogerhanger in October and we have just sent a further £100 to Keech Cottage Hospice in Luton. Our next project - the Mildmay appeal. Thank you for your continuing support. Margaret and Claire Peck.

Flowers at Putnoe Anyone who wishes to donate flowers at Putnoe Heights Church during the next few months, is invited to enter their name on the rota displayed on the notice board in the foyer.

Communion Please note there will be no Communion on Wednesday 28 December.

Thank you to Judith Stanton and all supporters of her Whist Drive group for their recent generous donation to St. Mark's. Their continued support is very much appreciated.

Putnoe Heights Church Office will be closed from Monday 26th December 2005 to Monday 2nd January 2006 inclusive. The office will reopen on Tuesday 3rd January 2006 at 9am. From this date the office opening hours will be 9am-5pm, closing at 12 noon on Monday and Friday.

Kasia sends her love and a Happy Christmas to all her friends at Putnoe and St Mark's.

Sam, Charlie, Neil, Joan and their families would like to express their gratitude to you all for the kind messages and cards this Christmas. We are extremely pleased to be able to share together in celebrating the joy of Christmas with you, may God bless you in the year to come.

Christmas Message from the Archbishop of Canterbury

Perhaps the two images most of us will carry away from the last twelve months are those of the devastation caused by the tsunami just after last Christmas and by the hurricanes that devastated the southern states of America in the autumn. The natural world became a place of terror and disaster. The question never quite goes away of why God made a world in which such tragedy is possible. But Christmas reminds us of the one thing we know for sure - and that is God's way of responding to suffering. He doesn't wave a magic wand, or descend briefly from the sky to clean things up. He arrives on earth as a human being who will change things simply by the completeness of his love. Jesus is dedicated to the will of the one he calls Father, the divine source of his own divine life. Never for a moment does he put any obstacle in the way of that ultimate, total outpouring of love that is the wellspring of his own life. He gives himself to this transforming purpose in every moment, whatever it costs. And the world changes - even the physical world: death is overcome and the material world reveals God's glory in its depths. So we are changed. New things become possible for us, new levels of loving response and involvement. As has often been said, the Christian answer to the problem of suffering is not a theory but the story of a life and a death, Jesus' life and death. And for that answer to be credible now, that story has to be visible in our story. We must give an answer to suffering and tragedy in what we do - because the one thing we know is that this is what God does. Faith is restored and strengthened not by talking but by witness in action. And one of the moving things that this year has brought for me is the awareness of how generously so many have responded to the desperate needs of the tsunami victims and those who suffered in New Orleans.

I have had moving letters describing the sacrificial work of Anglicans in the Province of South-East Asia, and in the diocese of Kurunagula in Sri Lanka, to name only two instances, clearly witnessing to the willingness to respond first and ask theoretical questions afterwards. And only a few days ago, I listened to a woman from Texas speaking of her work day and night over many weeks in Houston with those who had been made homeless by Hurricane Katrina. Here are stories of people who know how to answer the challenges of terrible suffering in God's way - by obedience and service and love.

There is something about Christianity that always pulls us back from imagining that everything will be all right if we can find the right things to say - because for God, the right thing to say at Christmas was the crying of a small child, beginning a life of risk and suffering. God shows us how, by his grace and in his Spirit, we can respond to the tormenting riddles of the world. And, as we agonise over the future of our beloved church, with all its debates and bitter struggles at the moment, it does us no harm to remember that God will not solve our Anglican problems by a plan or a formula, but only by the miracle of his love in Jesus. If we want to be part of the solution, we must first be wholly and unconditionally pledged to that love, with all its costs. May God who works in the weakness and smallness of the Christmas child work in our weakness and smallness; may he bless and strengthen you all at this season. +Rowan Cantuar

Christmas Message from the President of the Methodist Conference, The Revd Tom Stuckey

"At Christmas, some of us will be bellowing out the hymn 'As with gladness men of old, did the guiding star behold.' Maybe before Christmas we should be singing Janet Lees' parody:-

*As with madness we prepare, for this festive time of year,
As we rush and count the days, Advent passes in a haze,
So may our feet take us to, places where we will meet you.*

For years consumerism has threatened Christmas. Yet I detect a growing disquiet with the secular agenda which rides on the back of the Christmas donkey, shoving off the Virgin Mary who gets trampled to death in the Christmas razamatazz:-

*As with madness we keep on, trying to ignore your Son,
Timely God now takes a risk, bawling babe now shakes a fist,
So may each of us now see, Christ has come to set us free.*

Dare we free ourselves? Some of us are starting to! Instead of buying presents for family members, we are sending each other sheep and goats with the animals going, I should add, to help farmers in Africa. Some churches are sending hospital wards and equipping surgeries. At home forget the Santas and flashing lights and build a crib scene. Through the cards you make or buy and the letters you send, become much bolder in affirming the Christian message. Tell people what God has personally done for you personally. We can encourage trips to see the new Chronicles of Narnia film and use it as a means of evangelism.

Now is the time to talk of God. We have outlets in the community that superstores would give their back teeth for. Make your church bright with the light of Christ. Reduce the spending; increase the sharing; spurn the madness and embrace the gladness. Christ has come to set us free."



Mildmay
'Continuing
the mission of Jesus'

Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out and touched the man. 'I am willing,' he said. 'Be clean!' Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured.

Mark 1 v 14 – 42.

Thank you for your gifts for the Mildmay appeal. We have already now collected over £1,000. Please continue to give generously to this appeal. Mildmay is a Christian charity which works with victims of Aids in London and sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Europe. We will conclude the appeal in February. On 15 January our speaker at both churches will be Dr Veronica Moss who is Mildmay's Chief Executive and Chief Medical Officer which is great news. Please support this important fundraising effort and help us make a difference for the men, women, children and babies who are afflicted by this terrible disease in our own country and across the world. **Sam**

What you gifts can do

£10 buys minibus fuel, to bring in sick children to our centre in Uganda

£28 pays for intensive counselling to help UK patients overcome the trauma of AIDS illnesses

£49 pays for the crucial services provided by our pastoral care team in Uganda

£75 pays for vital physiotherapy to get Ugandan patients back on their feet again after illness

£100 provides expert medical care at our UK hospital to keep patients free of pain and monitored for side-effects from strong anti-HIV drugs

£250 provide a special air-cushioned mattress to make a chronically ill patient more comfortable

£500 pays for a whole day's nursing care for 'family admissions' at our UK hospital

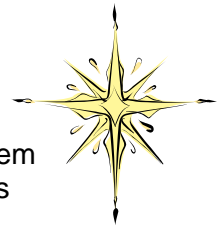
Rest In Peace

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.

Ronald Harris

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

Out of all the:
beautiful houses
Well-to-do families
Professionals in Bethlehem
Families of the Pharisees
Beautiful girls in Judea
Richest cities in the world



Jesus was born
In a cattle shed
To a poor, insignificant but obedient family
To a carpenter named Joseph
And a young woman, Mary
In Bethlehem

May your Holy Spirit enable us to realise that your birth indicates that our mission involves working with the:

- Marginalised
- Destitute
- Forgotten
- Aids victims
- Widows and orphans
- And untouchables

Whatever we do to the least of his brethren

Goodwin Zainga

Nova Property Services

17 Stratford Way, Lower Shelton
Tel: 01234 766056 Fax: 01234 767827
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**We wish you all God's blessing
this Christmas
and a His peace in the coming year**

Dave Allen

Rest in Peace

Forthcoming funerals
to be taken by our Ministers

The funeral of Mrs Doris Wilson will take place at 10.00am on Monday 9 January at Bedford Crematorium.

The funeral of Mrs Joan Elizabeth Voce will take place at 12.15pm on Thursday 5 January

The funeral of Mr Cyril Herbert Judd will take place at Bedford Crematorium at 1.45pm on Thursday 5 January