

st JOHN^ts

Living God's Love

Parish Magazine

SPRING 2021

st JOHN'S

Living God's Love

*Spring 2021
in this issue*

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ADDRESS

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Introductory Letter

Looking to a brighter future

12 months ago, few of us would have heard of Wuhan in China, apparently the place where the virus Covid19 originated. It is scarcely creditable what has happened since then. In our wildest dreams we could never have predicted how the world and our lives have been turned upside down. And certainly, for us fortunate enough to lead generally sheltered and secure lives in the West, the pattern of daily life has had to be abandoned, not by choice but by diktat. In the face of lockdown, we have been rendered impotent and forced into new ways of living. But maybe we have learned at least two very valuable lessons.

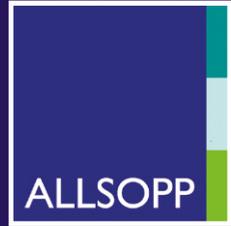
We had to learn to care for each other. Suddenly, we were joined to the neighbours in our street through WhatsApp or similar groups. We kept an eye on the housebound and those living alone. As a nation we stood on our doorsteps every Thursday evening to clap for the wonderful people of the NHS. We seemed to reclaim that sense of community, the desire to love and support those who needed help. In so many small actions of compassion, we became more caring, more understanding, more aware of each other.

We realised that assumptions long held about managing every aspect of our lives were not, after all, infallible. We couldn't easily put things right ourselves and we couldn't control our own day to day living after all. We weren't self-sufficient and independent.

Christians have always believed that they are totally dependent on a God who is the creator of the world and the sustainer of life. In ways that we do not always appreciate or understand, he works through us and through others to show how much he loves each one of us. Through lockdown, we were given the opportunity to put into action the command of Jesus to love and care for one another. And we were reminded that the really important aspects of life, such as the love received from family and those dear to us, the beauty of the natural world around us and our health and welfare



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were gifts from God. They were free and they were undeserved.

What will this year bring? Above all, Christians believe in a God who, through the return of Jesus Christ, will one day usher in a new world which will be heaven on earth. We live with that wonderful expectation and hope. For now, we experience the long days of Lent, then Holy Week and Good Friday. We walk with our Lord as he endures the pain and the agony of the cross. But with Easter Day comes his glorious resurrection when new life is snatched from the jaws of death and defeat. Christ is triumphant and will reign forever. Sometimes we may feel the sorrow and the pain of the cross and that life cannot get any worse. But the darkness of those days will not overcome the light of Christ who will transform all things. Soon, we will all be vaccinated and life will return to something familiar and comforting.

At St Johns, we were all saddened to hear the news that Berkeley was to leave us. We have benefitted hugely from his enthusiasm, from his energy and dedication, from his prayerfulness and his humility. He is greatly missed. We continue to pray that he will know God's peace and healing. Yet God will not ignore our plight and in due course, a new incumbent will be appointed and our despondency will give way to joy and celebration. May we all then know the peace and joy of our risen Saviour at Easter time and always.

David Nye

St John's Ministry team



Churchwardens' Report

The happiest possible New Year to everyone, even though there is still some time to go before we come out of the pandemic. Just as the spring bulbs are shooting up, and the days are lengthening a little, so we are looking forward to the turn of the season and the pleasure that gives us.

Advent and Christmas reminded us of the core of our faith – the first coming of Jesus Christ into the world, and the light that dawned in dark times and cannot be extinguished. Many of our visiting clergy used this theme to cheer and enliven us and renew optimism for the future. In comparison to past Christmases, this one seemed sombre; however, the Junior Church Nativity (on You Tube) was delightful, the church was decorated beautifully by the Flower Guild, and the tree and the crib shone out too. As we write this we are still in the special time between Advent and Candlemas, which reflects

the revelation of Christ in the world. We continue to live stream our Sunday services on You Tube, and special recordings from the Junior Church are also available there.

After a long absence for ill-health, the vicar, Berkeley, resigned formally a couple of weeks before Christmas, and his message was read in church by Bishop Michael of Hertford. We wish him and Alex a happy future. Although a very sad outcome for us, with the support of the Diocese, we are now moving forward in the process of looking for a new vicar to lead us into the future.

We held our APCM in October on Zoom and this went smoothly and kept to time, resulting in all the official items being voted for, and resolved. This has meant that we can confidently revise our Parish Profile in preparation for advertising for a new incumbent, which it is hoped will take place in the





spring, after due processes have been gone through. We are fortunate that Jill Suttie, from St Mark's in Colney Heath, is continuing to support us in sustaining our church through this vacancy. Our Ministry Team and all the visiting clergy will also continue, and enhance, our worship for the foreseeable future.

Before this current lockdown, many people worked quietly and unseen in a huge variety of roles to enable the church to open for private prayer and for live streamed services. Unfortunately, in this lockdown we have had to adjust to only being open for filming and private prayer on Sundays. A small army of daily cleaners did a sterling job in keeping the building a safe space. Matt Barter and the Premises Committee were active in dealing with minor and major building issues. Bill Moore conveyed all contributions to the Food Bank on a regular basis. There is a group of people who deliver paper copies of services to those without the internet. Sophie Crowley has edited this magazine. Margaret Creighton coordinates the pastoral care for those at home. Julie

Burkitt in the parish office has effectively 'held the fort' for a long time. Neil Middleton and a few others are key to the live streaming, and all things technical. Music has accompanied services – thanks to Roger, Derek, and Tom. The wardens have facilitated and completed all kinds of odd jobs, as well as more formal duties. The readers and intercessors have enhanced our worship. The Ministry Team have planned and implemented services, and a successful Advent Study Group. Steve the gardener has kept our grounds in wonderful condition, and as mentioned above, spring shoots are making an appearance. If we have forgotten anyone, we are sorry and assure you that we appreciate everyone at St John's for everything that they do to support and enhance our church.

Look forward to the Spring, to Lent and Easter! Keep reading the weekly newsletter for news of services and other activities. ●

James Hillman

Jane Donati

Churchwardens

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IN GOD'S HANDS

You, me, a lump of clay, a lump of clay in God's hands –
 Though even then His thumbs, His fingers leave their mark.

This unformed lump of clay,

This me, this you,

Is strongly shaped into a ball and thrown upon the potter's wheel.

The wheel is spun and I, you go with it.

Those hands and fingers gently, firmly holding us in place.

And as we spin a shape emerges.

First stretched high and thin

Then squashed back slowly towards the wheel

And the pressure of fingers and thumbs gently hollowing out

To make the space that can be filled.

Then, finally formed, the shape's cut free from the wheel.

But that is not the end.

No.

Next comes the firing, that blast of unbearable heat

To ease out the moisture, harden the clay,

To fix the shape for the work today.

The journey from that lump of clay

To the shape, the form for the working day

Is long and hard but must be done.

But not alone.

No.

God's hands, those fingers, thumbs and the wheel of life

Mould and shape and gently bend

To draw the form from that lump of clay;

A cup perhaps from which others may drink;

A jug maybe to be poured out;

A thing of beauty to store His treasures.

Who knows.

The potter did right from the start

As He eyed the shapeless lump of clay,

That shapeless lump that once was you or me.

Anne Edwards

(Written following a silent meditation with slides on Jeremiah's visit to the potter's House)

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A Message of Thanks

Following a very successful and joyful 100th birthday celebration at the end of October, Joan Allen would like to thank the many parishioners from St John's Church who sent cards, flowers and good wishes for her very special day. She also sends her thanks for all the Christmas cards received and hopes for a healthier year in 2021 and apologises that there are some people who she may have missed sending a personal note to.

Many thanks
Sally Wilkinson



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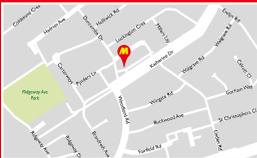
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“Once upon a time.....”



“Are you sitting comfortably? Then I’ll begin...”

One of our earliest childhood memories has to be snuggling up next to someone to have a story read to us. It was a wonderful opportunity to leave behind the weariness and routine of everyday world and be transported into a make-believe realm of adventure and excitement – always accompanied by beautiful, colourful pictures. Such moments were precious oases of calm and tranquillity and often restored a much-needed equilibrium. The talented illustrators taught us how to use our imaginations, to visualise and vitalise the power of the words, just as the authors trained our emotions and

feelings to react and respond to the stories themselves. Gradually, as we got older, the number of pictures on the pages of our books decreased, just as the number of words increased, but we didn’t really notice because, by then, our inbuilt imaginations had been sufficiently trained to respond to the words and to paint pictures in our minds. Stories are the most powerful way to experience life unconstrained by our personal circumstances of time, geography, wealth or physical capability.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, a young, and very good-looking, Spaniard lived his life like the

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hero in a story book. He charged off into battle, a knight on a white charger, and dreamt of achieving such great feats on the battlefield that all the beautiful ladies would fall in love with him. He would be famous, and his life would be fulfilled. Like all good stories, there was an unexpected twist: out on the battlefield one day a cannon ball virtually destroyed his knee, his days of derring-do were over. Our decidedly vain hero was so anxious that none of the ladies would be attracted to his disfigured body that he suffered many excruciating operations – to be more aesthetic was the goal, no anaesthetic was the painful reality. A cousin kindly offered his home as a place of convalescence for our crest-fallen friend – he had a couch to lie on, food was brought to nourish his body and, for his mind... Well, the cousin only had a few books to offer him, including a couple of story books. This was a lock-down scenario with which we are all too familiar: months and months of nowhere to go, nothing to do, reduced social contact and just two books to read. To occupy his mind, our beautiful, war-wounded, young knight who preferred to dream of his own life and the heights of glory he might attain in matters of bravery and beauty, read, and re-read, and read yet again these stories. He absorbed them and imagined them and placed himself within them and over time they transformed him. The story books were a biography of the life of Jesus and a telling of the lives of the saints. The wounded knight was Ignatius Loyola, who would go on to establish the Society of Jesus, the order of Jesuits.

Ignatius emerged from his convalescence a changed man. The stories he had read had profoundly affected him. He knew that he must let go of anything that detracted him from his life's desire, which was simply to draw closer to God by experiencing a friendship and intimacy with Christ, our living Lord, in the word around him. Gone was the obsession with self-glorification replaced entirely by an overwhelming desire to serve God in gratitude. The power of stories. The power of words.

As Lent approaches, all of us who struggle to live lives of faithful discipleship, consider once again what we should give up. Last year, writing in this magazine both my article and that written by James Brown, advocated giving nothing up but concentrating instead on living in the present and finding Christ in the world around us. At the time of





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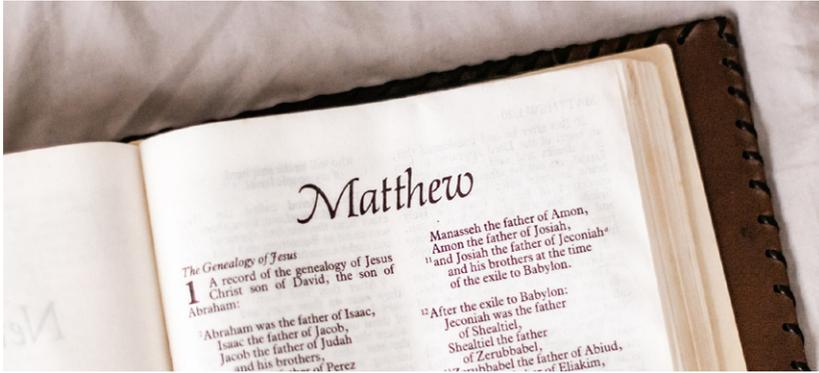


writing, neither of us had the benefit of a crystal ball to know quite how long last year's Lent would seem to last. Of course, Easter came, and we celebrated in our homes, if not our churches, the hope of the resurrection the comfort and the promise of the Cross. We stopped, to celebrate the truth that Jesus is alive and present in our lives now; that we can find him in the hands and faces of the doctors and nurses who care for the sick, the reassuring voice of the friend on the phone, the willingness of the neighbour who shops for the shielding, but it didn't feel like we were able to leave the wilderness. Easter did not bring an end to the difficulties that social distancing and lockdown had placed upon each and every one of us. Our wilderness journey continued then and

continues even now. Despite the hope of the vaccination programme being rolled out, there is still no definite end in sight, no date on which we can begin to return to "normal" life.

This pandemic has had devastating consequences for many, and the news continues to bombard us with tragedy, the untold stories of suffering represented by ever larger numbers, as well as words and pictures. Lent approaches once more and we are weary of our wilderness journey. Finding a way to remain positive and a way forward is increasingly hard. Do we really need Lent this year? Do we really need to deprive ourselves of what little joys we have left in our much-reduced daily lives to draw closer to God? Aren't we already on a journey in a wilderness that has already lasted a year?

The danger is that we may allow our wilderness experience to become a time of self-absorption. Our own life, "my story", becomes all that we think about. Many books on mindfulness will declare that their goal is to provide a path to better self-knowledge. Reflection and contemplation are indeed essential tools for growth, but they need to look outwards too. Our own experiences, our own thoughts, our own anecdotes, our own desire for self-promotion and dreams will only satisfy us for so long – when that cannon ball comes along to shatter our knee, will we literally have a leg left to stand on? Like Ignatius, like our infant story times, we can continue to allow stories and poems to feed us in this period of metaphorical convalescence. They take us out of ourselves, expand our understanding of life and



nourish us by the visions they present and the emotions they elicit.

This Lent, read a good story book – read *the* good book even, it contains many great stories. Immerse yourself in the prose or the poetry and allow your soul to respond to the words. Reflect, if you can, not simply to the surface meaning of the ink on the page, but on how the words can transform you and enable you to grow in the way you respond to people and things. Listen too to the stories that other people, old and young, tell you about their lives – really listen and respond. If we are

hoping to be drawn nearer to God this Lent, closer to discovering his will for us, we need to read and hear the stories that fill our lives and allow our souls to respond, not simply as a pastime for our leisure but as a means of reaching outwards to our brothers and sisters, to finding Christ in everything around us.

“... for what is left is the internal silence at the heart of all stories and replacing silence, the soul’s response.”
(From “Jonah’s Prayer” by Aviva Dautch)

Emma Bresslaw

Parish registers

Baptisms

Welcome to the family of God

There were no baptisms in this period

Marriages

Joined by God

There were no weddings in this period

Funerals

May they rest in peace

26 October 2020

Michael John Blackmore Squires

11 December 2020

Emily Alice Herbert-Scott

22 December 2020

Charles Douglas Troward

Quiz Night – Lockdown 2!

After the success of our first Zoom quiz night back in June, we decided to do it all again and add some cheer to the dark winter nights.

Our second virtual quiz took place during the second phase of Lockdown in November and was a very enjoyable evening, raising funds for our new Parish Centre.

65 people joined us on Zoom, ready and willing to be challenged by Quizmaster Paul Bedding's tough questions, on topics as wide-ranging as mountains, sport, music at the movies, flags and internet codes and words from the Christmas story. After a close-fought contest between the eleven teams, Pick 'n' Mix were the victors with 43 points and were awarded the coveted St John's virtual trophy. Congratulations to them on a fine performance, and well played to all the teams who took part, particularly the three teams who tied for second-place: The Also-Rans, From Up North and the Special Ks.

The mood was fun and festive with the hosts sporting Christmas hats and jumpers against a snowy backdrop.

We are happy to report that plans are afoot for our next Online Quiz #3! Many thanks to everyone who participated, and to Paul Bedding, Neil Middleton and Liz Sergeant for organising the event.

Our written Christmas quiz also kept people pondering with a series of 60 questions (some deviously cryptic). The answers are still available on our website – so give it a go if you haven't already!

In total we have raised nearly £1000 on our Just Giving website for our new Parish Centre from quizzes, face masks and delicious jam sales. Thank you for all your donations and generous contributions. If you have any other ideas for online fundraising, do get in touch!

projectparishcentre@stjohnsharpenden.org.uk



HOW GREEN IS YOUR GARDEN?

Sadly, lots of classic gardening techniques, which we may have grown up with, could be damaging to the environment. The St. John's Eco Church group would like to share some thoughts and ideas to help keep your garden green.

Materials

If you are planning a garden make-over or new patio, look into the source of your raw materials. Have they travelled far? Could you use recycled or repurposed items? There are lots of new products available which are more environmentally thoughtful. Try the 'Living Ethically Directory' for ideas. If you are using new wood, check it is FSC-approved.

How can you avoid buying plastic in the garden centre? There are alternatives to plants in plastic pots such as containers made from coconut or wood pulp. Use wooden plant labels and jute netting for protecting your fruit and vegetables. Use natural twine and make your own plant supports from pruned shrubs. Hazel sticks are particularly good for this.

Thinking of laying Astro Turf? Please don't! It is plastic, has zero biodiversity, no carbon storage in roots, no water storage. Real grass is good. I encourage daisies and other flowering weeds, they are often tougher than the grass, are great for insects and look pretty!

Plants

Are the plants you are buying locally grown? Can you, your friends and neighbours share cuttings, seeds, excess plants? Can you grow your own? Make pots out of newspaper for seedlings. Pots can be made in varying sizes; using a wooden mould or a glass or origami style, a bit like making a paper hat, there are lots of You-

Tube videos to help you out! You could also simply repurpose an egg box.



Water

Have you considered the watering needs of the plants you plan to use? Some plants are happy in drier conditions and many others can manage if left unwatered as they train their roots deeper into the soil. Try Red Valerian, Hebe, Sedum, Pelargoniums, Portulaca, Verbena, Wallflower, Poppy, Sage, Rosemary, Thyme, Lavender, Globe Thistle, Rose Campion, Rock Soapworts. Adding compost and using mulch can also help retain water.

If you are watering, water the roots and don't use a sprinkler as much of the water is wasted. Also, wait until the sun is down. Watering in the heat of the day can damage foliage and can cause the water to evaporate before it has had a chance to soak in. When planting in pots, larger pots are better as they don't dry out as easily. Don't cut the grass too short in dry spells either.

Have you got a water butt? Have you got two? Look to see if you have a down pipe with space below it and collect as much of the excess rain as you can. Don't forget the shed and garage as locations for a water butt.

Compost

Look out for “peat-free” compost. There is plenty of it out there now, so no excuses! Could you make your own? It would be good not to have the plastic bag.

Are the plants you are buying grown in peat free compost? Try asking, the more this is highlighted the more growers will act!



Bugs and slugs

Discourage bad bugs by encouraging good ones! To encourage the good ones, create great places for them to thrive by leaving areas less well kept. There are some great ideas for creating bug gardens using lots of lovely, repurposed materials and an old pallet. Dill and Fennel encourage hoverflies, which, like ladybirds, will eat the greenfly. If the problem gets out of hand a water spray can be used.

A hedgehog will eat your slugs if you have a garden that encourages them; leave leaf piles and cosy corners. It is better to have holes in leaves than to poison a hedgehog! Remember to share your hedgehogs with your neighbours, leave holes at the base of your fence to allow them to have the size



of territory they need. In the meantime, there are lots of solutions like copper rings, orange peel or even hair!

Birds will eat your aphids and caterpillars if you provide them with good nesting areas. Untidy hedges and ivy are popular with birds or you could put up a bird box.

Plant in combinations that detract bugs from your actual crop. Carrots and leeks detract each other's bugs, so this is a win-win here! You can also try French Marigolds to deter carrot fly.

Hopefully there is something here that everybody can try. The St. John's Eco Church group meet about once a month to discuss ways to share and encourage environmentally friendly ideas with the whole community. If you would like to join us, please email:

margarethcharlston10@virginmedia.com

Debbie Knight and Martin Myers



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Welcome to Lent @ Home

Lent @ Home includes:

- Reflections for prayer to download and use
- Eco Challenge for 40 days to download and complete
- Two activities for colouring and reflection
- A book to read, with optional Zoom discussion group to join
- An Introductory YouTube to invite people into Lent

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, which falls on 17th February this year. Before Lent begins, many people like to follow the tradition of eating loads of pancakes! Pancake Day, known as Shrove Tuesday in churchy circles, is symbolically marked by eating up fat things (aka "Mardi Gras") on the night before the fasting season of Lent begins. Now is the time to find your favourite pancake recipe! Which kind do you prefer?



OR



Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the 40 days of Lent, which ends with the joyful celebration of Easter. On Ash Wednesday, we seek forgiveness from God for what we have done wrong. Traditionally, the priest will take some ash and use it to mark a cross sign on the forehead of each person. It is a symbol of our remorse.

During Lent, Christians continue to focus on repentance: remembering especially Jesus' temptations in the wilderness, and on prayer and on our own need to repent, to begin anew. Some Christians fast during Lent. They give up meat or luxuries such as chocolate, crisps, or social media. For many Christians, Lent is a time where they make space to pray, read the Bible and reflect on God's love.

This year we cannot gather for services in church or for bible study and prayer together. But we can – apart but together – mark Lent at home. You can find a variety of resources for Lent@Home on the St John's website. These include:

- Reflections and prayers to download and use, including for Ash Wednesday
- An Eco Challenge to download and complete
- Two activities for colouring and reflection
- A suggested book to read, with optional Zoom discussion group to join
- An introductory YouTube film to invite people into Lent.



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St Luke's Cell prayer group

Would you like us to pray for you?

We pray for anyone in the parish who has asked for our prayers for themselves or for their loved ones. St Luke's Cell prayer group is named after the disciple and physician Luke, who is the patron saint of doctors. We are continuing to pray individually as a group during the current situation and include members from St John's and Southdown Methodist churches.

If you would like us to pray for you or someone else, then please be in contact with Michael Hughes 01582 765576



Loving God, because we trust you, we come to you with our concerns. When illness or injury cause us disruption, uncertainty and the prospect of long-term change; when we find our lives spinning out of control; give us the knowledge of your total loving and unchanging presence, so that in all the changes and troubles of this life we may be assured of your everlasting protection. Amen

(by Susan Sayers, in *Prayers for Healing*, published by Kevin Mayhew Ltd, 2013)

Mothers' UNION

Christian care for families

Diocese of St. Albans

Members of the St John's Branch of Mothers' Union were incredibly lucky to be able to gather in church for a service on November 4th at 2.30pm. A day later and restrictions would have made it impossible. This will have probably been our last opportunity to worship together as a Branch for some time.

Anne Edwards led a service of prayer with appropriate poems and some beautifully recorded music. It was lovely to see masked friends sitting apart but nodding to each other with warm smiles in their eyes. We had planned a Christmas service but of course that was not possible.

We are so grateful to the ministry team, their supporters and the visiting Presidents and Preachers for the recorded services which have allowed us to worship as a St John's family. The brightly lit Christmas Tree and the beautiful flower arrangements remind us of the team of willing helpers who do so much to make our House of God special. Many of these are members of Mothers' Union and I take this opportunity to thank them.

Many of our members were able to support the Big Give Christmas Appeal which raised £66,400 in seven days for women in the Democratic Republic of Congo. A great achievement.

The Diocese Project Fund provided dozens of soft toys for the radiology





department at Watford General Hospital for use by children to help ease their fears during scans and x-rays. The fund also provided 50 hand creams for the nursing staff to counter the drying effects of hand sanitizers.

There was an inspiring Virtual Carol Concert for all members on Thursday 17th December with contributions from countries around the world. I felt so blessed to be worshipping with so many members from our worldwide Charity.

As we welcome in the New Year with hopes for a successful vaccine programme and Spring on the distant horizon, we give thanks to God for his many blessings, but we weep for those who are ill, those who have lost loved ones, those who feel isolated and alone and those who do not feel the love of God.

Anne read a poem by Edwina Gateley at our service in November which members found comforting.

I finish with the last few lines.

God knows
 God understands.
 God loves you
 With enormous love
 And only wants
 To look upon you
 With that love.
 Quiet
 Still
 Be
 Let your God – love you.

Carol Cooke, Branch Leader

Lent and Holy Week at St John's 2021

Please note the services listed below and their times may have to be changed and / or cancelled depending on Government regulations. At the time of writing (January 2021) our regular 9.30am service on a Sunday morning will continue to be live-streamed on our YouTube channel (but held without a congregation).

Please visit our website at www.stjohnsharpenden.org.uk, our Facebook page, and our latest newsletter for up to date information on our services each week.

Ash Wednesday

17 February

Lent@home (for all ages) – YouTube and downloadable from our website

Sunday 21 February

9.30am

Lent 1

Parish Eucharist

Monday 22 February

8.00pm

Lent book discussion group - zoom

Sunday 28 February

9.30am

Lent 2

Parish Eucharist

Monday 1 March

8.00pm

Lent book discussion group - zoom

Sunday 7 March

9.30am

Lent 3

Parish Eucharist

Monday 8 March

8.00pm

Lent book discussion group - zoom

Lent and Holy Week at St John's 2021

(Continued)

Mothering Sunday

Sunday 14 March

9.30am

(Lent 4)

Parish Eucharist

Service for all ages - YouTube

Monday 15 March

8.00pm

Lent book discussion group - zoom

Sunday 21 March

9.30am

Lent 5

Parish Eucharist

Monday 22 March

8.00pm

Lent book discussion group - zoom

Palm Sunday

Sunday 28 March

9.30am

Parish Eucharist

Holy Week

Walking with Our Lord - YouTube

Easter Day

Sunday 4 April

9.30am

Parish Eucharist

Service for all ages - YouTube

When circumstances permit, we will be holding other services in church, with a congregation – see our website for details.

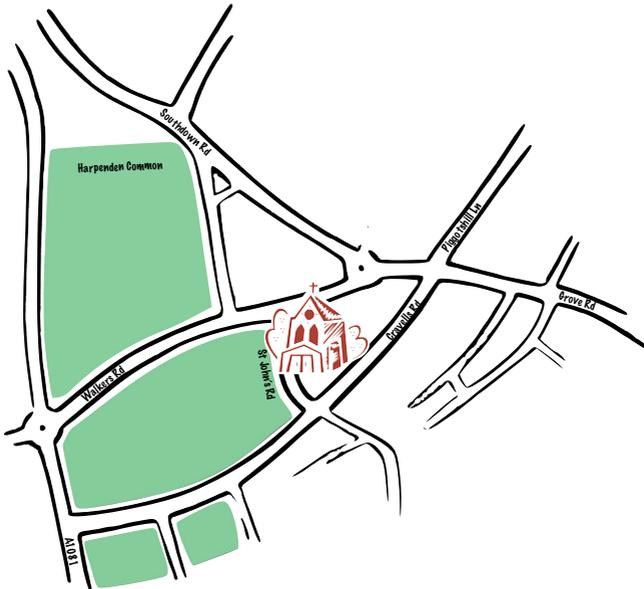


Services at St John's

Sunday:

9.30 am Service live-streamed [on our YouTube channel](#)

Until further notice, the church building is open for private prayer on Sunday only from 10.30am – 4pm.



PARISH OFFICE

For enquiries, including marriages, baptisms, funerals and hall bookings, please contact the parish office open from Monday 9am to 5:30pm and Wednesday to Friday 9:30am to 1:30pm.

Julie Birkett

Telephone: 01582 712776
parish.office@
stjohnsharpenden.org.uk

If you are in need of help or know anyone in need of support, please contact support@stjohnsharpenden.org.uk

Parish Directory

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