

It's only a short ride from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, seven miles or so. Only 2 shekels (50p) each in a service taxi, less in a bus, - and as for a donkey, they are still to be seen too. Leave the hubbub of Jerusalem and its extended suburbs behind and the view on each side of the road hasn't changed much in 2,000 years. To the east the Judean Wilderness, to the west the coastal plain down to the Mediterranean, through olive groves, worked stony ground on which Palestinians, Arabs and Jews, have attempted to eek out a livelihood for as long as memories hold. The road forks just after Rachel's tomb - straight on to Hebron and then the Negev Desert, left to Bethlehem which means The House of Bread.

Set up on a hill the town has a square at its centre, Manger Square, with banks, shops and Town Hall on two sides, the Church of the Nativity on the third and the enormous police-station complex on the fourth side. Bethlehem has a long history in the Bible - first mentioned in connection with Jacob's wife Rachel giving birth to Benjamin (Genesis 35). Centuries later Ruth came back with her Mother-in-Law Naomi, to her home town after her husband's death. Her great-grandson was David, annointed King by Samuel (1 Sam.16). And Jesus was born in Bethlehem, for Joseph, whose family had its roots there, had to return for the census.

His journey wasn't as quick or comfortable - and Mary's certainly wasn't. Yet Mary in her anguish on the journey, in the last stages of pregnancy, Joseph in his search for accommodation and concern for his wife, his totally dependent new-born baby in a grimy cattle stall in a cave, were the instruments of God's action in the world. God made himself, through them, so very vulnerable.

Today Manger Square is dominated by high barbed wire and search lights and police vehicles and personnel - and for all that it is a place of great vulnerability; the people of the town vulnerable to the Israeli occupation, the policemen behind barbed wire vulnerable to attack.

Yet, that's how God offers us himself - vulnerable in Christ at his birth in his ministry, in betrayal and in the cross. That's how we have to be, as followers in the way - not hiding behind barbed wire or tinsel and wrappings, but prepared to share the feast, enter the vulnerability of God, working in the world today.

Yes we celebrate with joy and generosity and love - for so has God acted; but do we respond not just at Christmas, but every day with joy and generosity and love - to a world as fragile and vulnerable now as it was at our Lord's birth? Join us during Advent and at Christmas to celebrate and to live with joy, generosity and love.



Christmas Arrangements

Sunday 22 December	6.30 pm	Parish Carol Service
Christmas Eve	4.30 pm	Crib Service
	11.45 pm	Midnight Eucharist
Christmas Day	8.00 am	Holy Communion
	9.30 am	Parish Communion
St. Stephen (Thursday 26 December)	10.00 am	Holy Communion
Sunday 5 January	9.30 am	Christingle Service

Several local schools are also having Carol Services in our Church - see Dates to Note.

What Christmas means to me . . .

Peace and Goodwill . . . Christ . . .

Celebration . . . Parties . . . Presents . . .

Family and friends . . . Christmas play . . .

Carols . . . Trees . . .

Chocolate, turkey, stilton and roast potatoes.

Karen and Mark Scruby of The Jays

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When asked for a contribution on my feelings at Christmas, I began a dissertation on motherhood and the pitfalls; on classroom technique and teaching; on my desire to know that I am a successful parent, that my children are loved and joyful and are able to say thankyou. I explored my thoughts on responsibility and parenthood; I poured out the song of the weary shopper; I discussed the vices of avarice, greed, acquisition; I marked the dangers of over-eating and reflected on starving babies and peace on earth when the world is so full of dischord, on how 'Away in a Manger' makes me cry and on when I tried to buy a Crib Scene at Bentalls and was firmly told that the kings were an optional extra! After a while realised that at Christmas my thoughts (when I have time to think) are of all that I have to be thankful for. My actual contribution became:

It will be the small hours of Christmas morning when I sit back, sigh and survey a tree dressed, holly hung, food prepared, turkey stuffed and stockings furtively delivered. It will be a moment of tiredness and satisfaction, a moment of quiet thought and thanksgiving.

I will think of Mary and her maternity (how differently I view that since I have been a mother) - what were her hopes, her aspirations for her new born son? Did she wonder at the new life given, was she aware of the responsibility that was hers? With sadness I shall think of the lonely and the poor, the starving, the infirm. With joy I shall think of this birth. I shall go to bed tired and grateful, knowing that dawn will bring a Happy Christmas morn.

Jane Ormerod

* * * * *

'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us . . .'

At last, Christmas morning again - very early at the Midnight Eucharist, or later in the comparative calm of the Parish Communion. The wonder - not so much at the birth of a baby at a particular time and place - but that God, in Christ, should come, as one of us, to share this world, that our darkness should be so illuminated!

I well remember how, some years ago, as we left the church after the Midnight Eucharist, we literally found a new brightness outside, a wonderful transformation, for, in its sparkling purity, a fresh fall of snow shone in the darkness. My Christmas was complete!

But, oh dear, the months before! Perhaps the joy of Christmas, when at last it comes, is made more real by the pre-'christmas' battering we receive from the agents of consumerism. The first 'christmas' catalogues - generally from charities, obliged to join in the frenetic sales campaign - crash through the letter box before the summer holidays are over! How many trees are cut down in the cause of persuading us to join in the mad rush to buy, buy, buy? How many hours of TV are devoted to the cause? So pressing our young children that the arms of their elders are twisted into buying the latest this, that or the other? Poor Father Christmas with his oh-so-heavy loads!

Yet, others starve. And even in our own land, so often 'christmas' only increases the misery of many lonely and truly poor people.

I am one of the lucky ones. I can, and do, look forward to happy family parties and to the joy on children's faces in that other world of christmas trees and fairy lights and of paper chains. And, on a crisp winter's afternoon, there's always the 'wind on the heath'.

Ron Bridges

When I was young, my mother and father always did the decorations when we five children had gone to bed on Christmas Eve. I remember vividly the thrill of waking up in the morning and feeling the stocking full of goodies. When we came downstairs to our large hall, it looked like fairyland - the tree standing in the corner with presents all around it.

My three brothers were choristers at St. Paul's Cathedral, so of course they did not get home for about a week over Christmas. I was seventeen by the time my youngest brother left St. Paul's.

They were entertained by many people and were taken to pantomimes etc. They enjoyed themselves, but how I missed them. I also went through the heartache when two of my own sons were St. Paul's choristers.

Years ago, a great part of the preparations for Christmas was in the making of the mincemeat, Christmas puddings and cakes, then nearer the great day, sausage rolls, mincemeat tarts, éclairs and so on.

The midnight service was very important to me, especially during the twenty two years that I was in the choir. Many years ago, there was a Communion service at 7 and 8 am with Matins, when we sang carols, at 11 am. That was quite difficult for the mothers, and the younger members were not very enthusiastic.

As a very young child I understood what Christmas meant, Jesus's birthday, so we always went to church to 'wish him a happy birthday'. To me, today, that is still very important. The next thing I like is to see as many of my family as possible with the excitement of giving and receiving presents, the children standing around to see the expression on my face as I undo all the wrappings which they so carefully have arranged.

Christmas was, and still is, such a special day. A Happy Christmas to all.

Vivienne Prentice



Help Wanted please

The Churches Together in Teddington are helping to provide lunch on **Christmas Day** for lonely and elderly people at Elleray Hall. Help is needed for:

- Transport for guests to arrive between 10.30 and 11.30 am and leave at 3.30.
- Kitchen help from 9 am onwards. An hour or two would be useful.
- Greeting and chatting to guests and waiting at table.
- Serving teas, washing up and wrapping presents.

Please give your name, as soon as possible, to Stella or Trevor King on 977 3891, or to the Vicar.

Recipe for Christmas Joy

Angels? God's messengers! 'In waiting?' Yes, ready to serve.

Sounds like a recipe for Christmas Joy. Let's try it!

Ingredients: Any number of assorted busy people (marinated in prayer and scripture)

25 days of frenzied activity

Selection of needy people (home-grown or imported)

Generous helping of the Holy Spirit

Method: Drop the busy people into the 25 days.

Stir in the needy ones, well-seasoned with problems.

Add the Holy Spirit and allow to ferment till love, joy and goodwill bubble out.

Serve whenever and wherever possible.

H'm! I wonder if it will work?

From 'Angels in Waiting' by Ruth Russell



The Secret Christmas edited by Fiona MacMath

Published by Darton, Longman and Todd, price £5.95 (Royalties to Crisis)

'Most people keep two Christmasses. One is blazing with greens, reds and gold, a public-spirited family affair, an undignified, untidy row - it is the Christmas we love to hate. The other Christmas is secret - blue and silvery white for those who have the eyes for that kind of thing - but for most a fleeting sense of joy and wonder.

'Fiona MacMath leaves the familiar outward celebrations and goes in search of people's deepest thoughts, feelings and memories at Christmas. She finds protest and doubt as well as anticipation, faith and delight revealed in the writings of Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, G.K.Chesterton, C.S.Lewis, Noel Streatfeild, Rumer Godden, and many others from home and abroad.

'Such a blend of protest and faith characterises the work of Crisis - a charity which first responded to the peculiar hurt of homelessness at Christmas and now offers its transforming, practical love all the year round. That direct experience of the Christmas message is the keynote of this collection, which embraces the whole of the Christmas season, giving pleasure from the first faint stirrings of hope in Advent, through the twelve days of Christmas, to Candlemas and beyond.'

I can't wait to enjoy this lovely book. It would make a very special gift for Christmas. Why not buy it for one of your family or friends and help Crisis at the same time?

Janet Jeffries

Crisis

Although a site for this year's Open Christmas has yet to be found, plans for this year's shelter are under way. Wherever the venue, we are intending to open for 8 days from 23 December through to 30 December. Over this period we anticipate that around 1,800 homeless people will use the services on offer with about 600 sleeping overnight.

Organising such a feat is a tremendous task and is only possible due to the goodwill and sacrifice of the hundreds of volunteers who give up their Christmas holidays to help out and the generosity of countless businesses who offer their services free of charge.

Because the Open is reliant on volunteers and voluntary donations it would not be possible to keep it running for a longer period.

Although our housing advice team tries to secure more permanent accommodation for our guests, we know that when we have to close our doors on the 30th December many of them will have to return to the place from where they came: for the vast majority that means returning to the pavements, shopfronts and alleyways of central London.

Knowing this is the saddest aspect of the Open. However, we always stress that by offering the services available at the Open Christmas we are not trying to find permanent solutions to the problem of homelessness. We keep the project going for eight days over the Christmas holiday because at that time of year the plight of London's street homeless is particularly acute.

Many of the places homeless people normally use, such as libraries, tube stations, cafés and many day centres are shut. They therefore have nowhere to seek shelter from the cold and gain a few hours respite from the miserable reality of life on the streets.

The other reason, perhaps more important, is psychological. There is a widely held perception that Christmas is a joyous occasion celebrated with friends and family. As homeless people often have no family and certainly have nothing to celebrate, Christmas is a time when the misery, suffering and sense of rejection which are always endured, become even more intense.

Chiropody, dentistry, a doctors surgery, hairdressers, a clothing store, counsellors, housing advice and three meals a day are all important services in themselves, but brought together by Crisis at the Open Christmas they can help homeless people get through this particularly difficult and distressing time. With volunteers on hand who have time to offer friendship and companionship and who treat them with the common decency and respect everyone deserves, when our guests leave on the 30 December it is hoped that they will do so with a little more self-respect and confidence for the future.

This in itself is a good enough reason for running the Open and Crisis will continue to do so whilst the need remains. Come the new year we do not, however, forget the needs of homeless people. By funding hostels, day centres and resettlement schemes we work throughout the year to help them secure decent housing, and with it, the chance of a decent life.

Adam Woolf

Pilgrimage to Poland

Last summer, a group of about 200 members of communities of the Neo-Catechumenate began a pilgrimage to Poland, firstly to celebrate the Feast of the Assumption with the Pope at the shrine of the Black Madonna in Czestochowa and secondly to meet with the initiator of the Neo-Catechumenate, Kiko Aguello, in Warsaw.

We began with a Celebration of Penance to 'clear out the rubbish from our hearts'. Then, travelling by coach through the night, our first stop was in East Berlin where we had the privilege of participating in a Eucharist in a small church, something unthinkable a couple of years ago.

The following morning we travelled on to Poland where, joining with pilgrims from all over the world, we celebrated the Eucharist led by the Pope. He spoke of the role of Mary as faithful servant of God, and the one who can help us in our knowledge of her son because who knows the child better than the mother? He also spoke of the importance of the young people who should not be afraid to be different, but should follow their faith and stand up for Christ.

In Warsaw - a beautiful old city - we all gathered in a vast stadium to hear Kiko challenging us not to be afraid to allow the Lord to work in our lives - to uphold the sanctity of life - to be faithful to Christ, the perfect partner whether we are single or married, and not to put the things of this world between ourselves and Christ. Just how powerfully the Spirit was working became evident when Kiko called for young men who felt the Lord was asking them to become priests to go forward. A trickle became a flood as 700 young men offered their lives to this ministry. It was the same when he called for young women to enter the convents. Kiko had simply asked us to let down our barriers, put away our plans for our lives and listen to the Spirit in our hearts.

Another sign of the Spirit working was the hospitality we received from the Polish people - they have so little, yet gave gladly of what they had, going to immense trouble to ensure we were well provided for. This in truth was Christianity as we are called to practise it.

For me, the pilgrimage was a wonderful, yet humbling experience.

Gillian Gostling

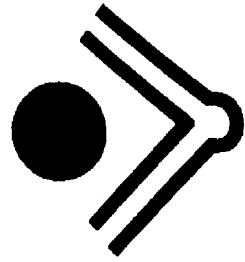
Stewardship

Stewardship giving over the past four quarters, and for the preceding four quarters, was as follows:

		£		£
October - December	1990	5,862	1989	5,883
January - March	1991	6,802	1990	7,080
April - June	1991	5,992	1990	5,493
July - September	1991	<u>5,713</u>	1990	<u>5,436</u>
Twelve-month totals		24,369		23,892

Bible Sunday (8 December)

Year after year sales of the Bible outstrip those of any other publication. You will find Bibles in hotel rooms, prisons, hospital wards and in countless homes throughout the country, yet a vast number are hardly, if ever, opened. For many the Bible has almost come to be seen as an 'optional extra' to their Christianity.



The Decade of Evangelism has caused many to stop and think. If we are to be able to share our faith with others we need, first of all, to get to grips with it for ourselves. Where better to begin than with a fresh (or perhaps even first) look at the Bible and what it has to say. It tells us about God, about his relationship with his people, about his son, Jesus Christ, of his love for us and most significantly in these turbulent and uncertain times, of the hope and security for the future that God offers us, if we can come to him and put our trust in him.

You may already read the Bible regularly. If you do, why not make a point of sharing with others why you do this and what it means to you. If you haven't opened a Bible, you'll find there's lots of help available. In January next year, the Bible Reading Fellowship celebrates its seventieth year. Its 'New Daylight' offers a Bible-based thought for the day, with a printed passage, brief comments and prayer or meditation. 'Guidelines' offers more in-depth weekly running commentary designed to be read alongside a Bible. And for younger readers 'First Light' involves them in the Bible with puzzles, activities and quizzes based on the ASB Sunday readings. For more information ask Jean Western (979 3358) who runs our church Bookstall and can get any of these notes for you.

Let's open the Bible and allow God to speak to us, transform us and enable us to do his will.

? Hampton Hill Playhouse ?

A 'live' theatre in Hampton Hill High Street is quite an exciting prospect. A chance to see shows regularly on your doorstep at a very modest cost in comfortable and friendly surroundings. Or if you enjoy taking part in any way, in putting on plays, an opportunity to do this by joining the club where everybody is welcome.

Teddington Theatre Club which is at present at Hampton Court Theatre on a lease for another 7 years, has been asked to vacate and terminate its lease by Richmond Council who own the property. It wishes to sell Hampton Court House and it will get a better price if offered with vacant possession. So TTC has been offered a piece of land behind premises in the High Street, near to the Gulf garage, on a lease for 125 years, plus £250,000 towards the building costs which will be taken from the better selling price of Hampton Court House.

But TTC has to raise the balance, another £200,000. At the end of October, I can report that we have nearly reached the first £50,000 which is good but there is a long way still to go. We know we have a great deal of support from the people of Hampton Hill and we hope that many of you will show that, by sending a donation of any size, whatever you can afford. All donations will be acknowledged in the new theatre.

Affiliated to TTC is a Children's Theatre which performs in the theatre and is available for any child to join. In addition, there is Youth Action Theatre, for young adults aged 16 to 25. They have just returned from performing in the British Culture Week in Berlin.

Donations and any details from Eric Yardley, 17 The Wilderness, Park Road, Hampton Hill, TW12 1HS (Tel. 979 7904).

Around the Spire

It is with great sadness that we report the death of Margaret and David Taylor's only grand-daughter, Hannah, who died quite suddenly of a rare complication of meningitis. Her parents, Sandy and Andrew, live in Holland and were looking forward to celebrating her second birthday in November. All our thoughts and prayers are with them at this very sad time and comforting words are hard to find.

Two other deaths which have occurred recently are those of Bert Holmes, Kathleen's husband, and Ada Atkins. Our love and prayers go also to those they have left behind.

We will have celebrated, on 23 November, the marriage of Helen Lawrance to Thilo Rensmann from Bonn. They will be returning to Germany to live. We wish them every happiness in their future life together.

Some recently returned visitors to the parish were Michael and Yvonne Childs whose grandson, Nathan, was baptised here.

The church re-decorating is now finished and the transformation is quite breathtaking. The nave looks larger and the lighting of the roof makes it so much lighter. Many, many thanks to all those people who have turned out on Saturday mornings for the past two months to clean up for the Sunday services. And at our Services, we shall soon be using the new hymn books 'Ancient and Modern Revised Standard' which were recently purchased.

Thanks . . .

Kathleen Holmes and family wish to thank all their kind friends for their support and sympathy in their sad loss of a dear husband and father.

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Disbelief Shaken An atheist was preparing a notice 'God is nowhere'.
His spacing went wrong and it became;
'God is now here'!

From the Registers - October

Baptisms

6	Sam Stuart Freeman	98 Crispen Road, Hanworth
	Carly Ann Leybourne	179 Uxbridge Road
27	Corinne Evans	140 Connaught Road, Teddington

Funerals

28	Ada Atkins	6 Park Place	Aged 79
29	Herbert William Joseph Holmes	59 St. James's Avenue	Aged 78

Dates to Note

Dec.	1	18.30	Advent Meditation, Church
	2	14.00	Editorial Board, 19 St. James's Road
	3	20.00	Tuesday Club: Schools in the 1990's, Wayside
	4	14.30	Mothers' Union: the Vicar 'On Keeping Advent', Wayside
	6	19.15	Bishop Wand School Service at St. Martin-in-the-Fields with the Bishop of London (in connection with the retirement of Mr. D.G. Jones, Headmaster)
	7	18.30 to 20.00	Mince Pies and Punch, 16 Cranmer Road
	10	19.30	Rectory School Carol Service, Church
	11	20.00	PCC, Vestry
	12	19.00	Hampton Hill Junior School Carol Service, Church
	13	11.00	St. James's Nursery School Carols, Church
		14.00	Lady Eleanor Hollis Junior School Carol Service, Church
		19.30	Do-It-Yourself Messiah, Church
	17	20.00	Tuesday Club: Christmas Party, Wayside
	18	20.00	Taizé Service, United Reformed Church
	22	18.30	Parish Carol Service
	24	16.30	Crib Service
		23.45	Midnight Eucharist
	25		Christmas Day
		08.00	Holy Communion
		09.30	Parish Communion
	26		St. Stephen the first Martyr
		10.00	Holy Communion
	27		St. John the Evangelist
	28		The Holy Innocents



Advance Notices

Jan.	1		The Naming of Jesus
	5	09.30	Christingle Service
	6		The Epiphany of our Lord
		20.00	Taizé Service, St. Richard's, Hanworth