

ST. MARTIN'S MONTHLY

December 2021



AMWSS

50p

St Martin's Church, Hale Gardens, London W3 9SQ

(Registered charity no. 1132976)

www.stmartinswestacton.co.uk

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The Vicar is available for consultation and enquiries by appointment.
Please ring the Parish Office on 020 8992 2333.

Articles for **next month's** magazine should be sent to

Anna Sargent at annasorensensargent@gmail.com

Please title your email 'December Magazine' in the subject heading

Articles should reach the Editor by 22 December.

The January magazine will be on sale by 1 January.

The Humble Robin

Many people I have spoken to recently have said they hope that Christmas 2021 will be 'normal'. What they mean is 'let's hope it won't be like last year', in a lockdown, not able to see our family or friends, etc. Not having something does help us to appreciate what we *do* have, and there is also a sense of being 'grateful' for activities and traditions we have taken for granted in the past. Those things we may have regarded as 'the trappings' of Christmas turn out to be much missed in their absence.

So, this Christmas, if the Omicron variant doesn't deprive us of the opportunity once again, we should enjoy our celebrations all the more *intentionally* and recognise the value of the shared traditions, and the tradition of sharing.



Shutterstock

One of the enduring visual symbols of Christmas that remind us of the theme of care and generosity of spirit is the image of the robin, a favourite for Christmas cards since the 19th century when the first commercially produced cards became available. The following story, called 'The Legend of Robin Redbreast', by Louise Betts Egan, gives us one version of how this traditional association started.

'On the first Christmas, there was a chill and the small fire in the stable was about to go out. Mary worried her baby would be cold. She turned to the animals and asked them for help. She asked the ox "Could you blow on the embers, so the fire might continue to keep my son warm?" But the ox lay sound asleep on the stable floor and did not hear her. Next, Mary asked the donkey to breathe life back into the fire, but the sleeping donkey did not hear Mary either. Nor did the horse or sheep. She wondered what to do. Suddenly, Mary heard a fluttering of little wings. Looking up, she saw a plain, brown-coloured little robin fly into the stall. This robin had heard Mary calling to the animals and had come to help her himself. He went over to the dying fire and flapped his wings hard. His wings were like little bellows, huffing and puffing air onto the embers, until they glowed bright red again. He continued to fan the fire, singing all the while, until the ashes began to kindle. With his beak, the robin picked up some fresh, dry sticks and tossed them into the fire. As he did, a flame suddenly burst forth and burned the little bird's breast a bright red. But the robin simply continued to fan the fire until it crackled brightly and warmed the entire stable. The Baby Jesus slept happily. Mary thanked and praised the robin for all he had done. She looked tenderly at his red breast, burned by the flame, and said "From now on, let your red breast be a blessed reminder of your noble deed." And to this day, the robin's red breast covers his humble heart.'

So... back to Christmas 2021, at the close of another pandemic year, and what of those amongst us whose 'normal' has *often* meant deprivation and loneliness, those living without the support of family or friends, and those without homes? How do we extend the generous spirit of the season of Christmas to others in a humble but tangible way? Whose fire should we be fanning with flames of human kindness?

At St Martin's, we are doing a special Christmas collection for Emmaus House (Acton Homeless Concern – Emmaus House & Damien Centre). They are caring for over 900 individuals, and feeding over 300 people a day. They also run a Night Shelter.

They would like, specifically for Christmas Day, donations of chocolates so each person can have a chocolate on the day.

Beyond the Christmas season, Emmaus House also needs foil oven-proof food containers (single portion), so that they can serve each person without using crockery, and they need financial donations to support their excellent Oyster Card scheme to ensure that people can get across London to hospital appointments if necessary. Donations for Emmaus House should be left at the back of the Church, where there is also a collection box for money donations.

There are many other ways that we can show the love and care of God through our cherishing of others, and so I wish you a very happy and grateful Christmas, remembering the robin's humble, caring heart. I look forward to seeing you in Church for our 'normal' services!

Rev Julia Palmer



(R Stockland)

Bonfire Party 2021, St Martin's Vicarage

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The Oxen

Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock.
"Now they are all on their knees,"
An elder said as we sat in a flock
By the embers in hearthside ease.

We pictured the meek mild creatures where
They dwelt in their strawy pen,
Nor did it occur to one of us there
To doubt they were kneeling then.

So fair a fancy few would weave
In these years! Yet, I feel,
If someone said on Christmas Eve,
"Come; see the oxen kneel,

"In the lonely barton by yonder coomb
Our childhood used to know,"
I should go with him in the gloom,
Hoping it might be so.

Thomas Hardy
1915



(AMWSS)

UPCOMING SERVICES AND EVENTS

- Sun 5 Dec: Second Sunday in Advent**
8am Holy Communion - Book of Common Prayer (BCP)
10 am - Christingle Service (All Age)
No Junior Church.
12.00 – 3.00pm - St Martin’s Church
Christmas Bazaar in Church and Hall, including Japanese stalls and music
- Sun 12 Dec: Third Sunday in Advent**
8am - Holy Communion (BCP)
10am – Holy Communion (Common Worship). Junior Church.
6.00pm – ‘The Journey of the Magi’ – professional theatrical and dance production, based on the poem by TS Eliot, in St. Martin’s Church
- Sun 19 Dec: Fourth Sunday in Advent**
8am – Holy Communion (BCP)
10am – Holy Communion (Common Worship)
6.30pm – Carols By Candlelight
- Fri 24 Dec: Christmas Eve**
4.00pm - Crib Service
11.30pm – Midnight Mass (Choral Service)

Sat 25 Dec: Christmas Day
8am - Holy Communion (BCP)
10am – Holy Communion – ‘Family
Communion’ for Christmas Day

Sun 26 Dec: Boxing Day
10am – Holy Communion (Common
Worship)

Christmas Unmuted with Questors Choir at St Martin’s!

Christmas is definitely ‘Unmuted’ when Questors Choir returns, in full voice, for its first live concert in two years! Our exciting programme ranges from Bach to George Michael, plus brand-new seasonal songs and arrangements (and Rudolph, of course). Come and join us on Saturday 11 December, 19.30 at St Martins Church, Hale Gardens, W3 9SQ - and be prepared to sing along!

Tickets £12/£10 concessions. Accompanied children under 12yrs free, BUT MUST BE BOOKED. Book here at:

<https://www.questorschoir.org/xmas>

Or contact: more@questorschoir.org



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St Martin's Church Choir: together we stand, united we stall?

Many of you will be familiar with the passage from Isaiah, Ch 6: "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple". What has this to do with Choir stalls? Well, not very much, honestly, but the 'high and lifted up' bit came to mind when considering an issue currently facing our Church Choir.

The existing 'choir stalls' are ordinary pews bolted on to two raised wooden platforms on castor wheels; flat floats, essentially. The original idea for the raised floats was twofold: firstly, that the choir would be more easily seen by the congregation if they were raised up, and secondly that the choir stalls could be moved to allow for different usages for that area of the Church. The old arrangement of stalls fixed permanently to the floor was too rigid a configuration for the very varied uses to which the building is put over the course of a year. And the stalls look very attractive, being in keeping with the other decorative woodwork in the church, much of which has been gifted by benefactors over the years.

The front screen-sections, with the carved woodwork and the narrow book rests, are screwed on to the floats separately from the pews, with small metal brackets. However, the brackets are unstable, some have actually broken, and the screen fronts are now actually dangerous, being top-heavy. Larger brackets would be unsightly, and connecting the stall-fronts to the pews behind would cause a trip hazard to choristers, who have to move in and out of their seats at least three times during a Communion Service.

Originally, the choir screens had proper Cathedral-style deep music-stands, on metal stilts, to support large books side by side, as well as the narrow book rests that now remain. The

raised book rests were removed so many years ago that nobody recalls when it was done.

The choir needs to be properly accommodated, and seated safely, especially allowing for the distancing now necessary for everybody's health. The choir members have to sing without masks, so they need to be seated with air space between each row, and not standing directly behind each other.

The stalls are now so unstable that they have had to be moved aside until a decision is reached as to their future. The Choir are currently experimenting with the use of individual music stands, and some members have generously bought top-of-the-range heavy-duty stands to serve in the interim. However, individual members of St Martin's Choir should not have to pay circa £85 of their own money for a stand to sing for services for which they are not paid. And music stands, however sturdy, do fall over, and the choir have to move about a lot. Stands are either set at standing height or at seated level, not both, so whichever height you set them at, they will be at the wrong height half the time in any service.

This is *the moment* to consider what we do about seating our Choir, and setting aside or creating funds for whichever solution we resolve to accept.

A) Should we fund the services of a competent joiner to reconstruct the Cathedral-style stands with proper end-to-end folder rests, and put the stalls back on the floats, to restore the original look of 'The Choir' as far as possible?

B) Should we support the purchase of as many high-end music stands as necessary, which would give us optimal flexibility in terms of lay-out for any service or event?

The PCC would like your opinion on this – so please tell Julia, Bryony, or any member of the PCC what *you* think...

Lynne Armstrong
PCC Secretary

EcoChurch at St Martin's – the beginnings...

On 11 November, St Martin's hosted its first full scale EcoChurch event, and it was very well attended by representatives of at least 12 other Churches, from inside and outside the Diocese. It was an extremely inspiring evening, and the discussions went on well after the meeting had officially closed! Bryony's cakes had disappeared long before that...

This is only the beginning of St Martin's involvement in the Project – the Church of England has committed to making our Churches carbon neutral by 2030, and that means 'us', so inactivity on this front is not an option. It is also our duty, as Christians, to play our individual and collective parts by reducing our individual carbon footprints and working together as 'the St Martin's Church team' to do whatever we can to contribute to the national and global efforts. It *is* possible to make a significant difference locally!

There will be a much more comprehensive report on the EcoChurch Project and 'Creation Care Champions', and how we are going to get involved, in the January 2022 magazine, but for the moment, here are some links to resources that you may find interesting and instructive. Please contact Bryony in the meantime if you have questions, or want to flag up your interest in getting involved in future.

- The EcoChurch website and many related resources:
<https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/>
- The video we were shown at the first meeting:
<https://drawdown.org/climate-solutions-101/unit-5-putting-it-all-together>

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Christ's Nativity

Awake, glad heart! Get up and sing!
It is the birth-day of thy King.
Awake! awake!
The Sun doth shake
Light from his locks, and all the way
Breathing perfumes, doth spice the day.

Awake, awake! Hark how th' wood rings;
Winds whisper, and the busy springs
A concert make;
Awake! Awake!
Man is their high-priest, and should rise
To offer up the sacrifice.

I would I were some bird, or star,
Flutt'ring in woods, or lifted far
Above this inn
And road of sin!
Then either star or bird should be
Shining or singing still to thee.

I would I had in my best part
Fit rooms for thee! or that my heart
Were so clean as
Thy manger was!
But I am all filth, and obscene;
Yet, if thou wilt, thou canst make clean.

Sweet Jesu, will then. Let no more
This leper haunt and soil thy door!
Cure him, ease him,
O release him!
And let once more, by mystic birth,
The Lord of life be born in earth.

Henry Vaughan

1621-1695

St. Martin's Bonfire Party

This took place at the Vicarage on the evening of 4 November, and went very well from the outset. We started with an expertly laid fire, courtesy of Bob Reid and some old wooden chairs and lumps of pallet - that went up, literally, in good order, as the pictures testify. There was slight concern initially for the survival of nearby trees with overhanging branches, but fears proved groundless! The fire fell in on itself, into a pit that Rev Julia and family had spent lockdown perfecting, so all was well.

We were fed the most excellent bonfire feast by Camilla Reid and her team, with more and more lovely things appearing at intervals from a steamy kitchen out into the dark. Delicious, perfectly cooked bonfire food is very rare, and was extremely welcome! The fireworks were truly epic, and very generously provided by a number of kind people, ably managed by Anthony Stockwell, who MC-ed with just the right blend of safety-awareness and showmanship.



He was supported from the wings by experienced Scout Leader and fire-setter, Howard Sargent, who also supplied the hot mulled cider and the most enormous marshmallows ever seen outside the US. The assembled kids had lots of sparklers, and the marshmallows were a hit especially for those who had never mallowed over live embers before. A great night was had by all – here's to next year!

Anna Sargent

Christmas journey

Some time ago now, before Morrison's took over the large supermarket site in Acton (it was still Safeway at this point), I went into Acton to do my shopping and saw that they had a large banner tied to the railings. To my shock, it said "Make Christmas Easier". As you can imagine, I was amazed! I parked my car and went to look at this banner more closely, before I complained. I was very glad that I had, because what it actually said was "Make Christmas Easier!"

I find the whole thing about being a Christian, and being aware of the real "story" of Christmas, makes it a little difficult to join in all the Jingle Bells stuff. I love the real Christmas story, and I am not keen on the over consumption and excess we are encouraged to indulge in, as if it were a compulsory part of the festival. As I write this, it's 18 November and the Christmas tree sales stand is being erected on Ealing Common – any tree bought now will be crisply desiccated by Christmas Day!

When you think of the reality of the time, with Mary and Joseph walking to Bethlehem (a journey of more than 90 miles), when Mary was heavily pregnant, and we are not talking about paved roads with handy places to have a meal and 'use the facilities' here. This couple had to walk to get there - they had no choice, and no car, no train, and no horse or cart, just a donkey to carry everything they needed, including water and food for the journey. They had to get there in within a certain time frame to register for the census, and there was a hefty penalty if you did not register or you were late.

So, they found that there was no room at the inn, nor anywhere else. The whole logistics of such a journey are amazing, from a modern viewpoint – you could not book somewhere to stay because there was no way of communicating in advance with hostelrys *en route*, and you could not know what was available anyway. No phones, no tourist bureau, no published 'Guide to Bethlehem and things to do in the area'. And the whole route was exposed to hot sun, marauding footpads and endless beggars. No wonder travelling was considered dangerous!

The story tells how they were finally able to sleep in stables in Bethlehem. The stables of the time were often caves in the hillside that had been enlarged to shelter the animals and their stores. So, it could have been a cave, which would probably have had an uneven floor and been unlit, and somewhat unhygienic and smelly with the animals. And of course, there would not have been any running water, so any water there would have been from a well, and in troughs for the animals. Very, very basic, and one might think it not conducive to the health and wellbeing of a young mother giving birth. Yet there it was, the shelter fit for a King.

The wonder of that Birth in that place at that time is truly awe-inspiring. This baby would be the Saviour of the World. He would take the sin of the whole World on Himself. The Magi came to Him, there in the lowliest of places, because that was where He was. There was no pre-visit venue make-over, or Your Stable Made Perfect transformation for the kingly visitors.

So, my message would be to encourage you to rise above the temptation to overspend or focus anxious attention on the trimmings of a commercial Christmas. Get back to the basics, contacting people with love, giving your care and consideration to those who need your help, or just your time, and you will arrive at the heart of Christmas.

Lynne Armstrong

p.s. The Manger was the first King size bed! Ok, folks, we're here all Christmas – feed the donkey on your way out!

Christmas Carol

The kings they came from out the south,
All dressed in ermine fine;
They bore Him gold and chrysoprase,
And gifts of precious wine.

The shepherds came from out the north,
Their coats were brown and old;
They brought Him little new-born lambs—
They had not any gold.

The wise men came from out the east,
And they were wrapped in white;
The star that led them all the way
Did glorify the night.

The angels came from heaven high,
And they were clad with wings;
And lo, they brought a joyful song
The host of heaven sings.

The kings they knocked upon the door,
The wise men entered in,
The shepherds followed after them
To hear the song begin.

The angels sang through all the night
Until the rising sun,
But little Jesus fell asleep
Before the song was done.

Sara Teasdale

1911

St Martin's, West Acton, London



The Parish of St Martin Hale Gardens, London W3 9SQ

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Usual Sunday Services

8am: Holy Communion, BCP

10am: Parish Communion (CW)

(All-Age Service – non-Communion -
first Sunday of the month)

6.30pm: Evening Prayer on Zoom

Junior Church (except first Sun of month)

Japanese Anglican Church UK

(third Sunday of the month,
except in December)

3pm Bible Study and Evening Worship in Japanese