

ST. MARTIN'S CHURCH

Winter Review



AMWSS

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

(Registered charity no. 1132976)

www.stmartinswestacton.co.uk

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Articles for the next issue of magazine should be sent to

Anna Sargent at annasorensensargent@gmail.com

Please title your email 'Magazine' in the subject heading

Articles should reach the Editor by 15 March.

The next magazine will be on sale by 1 April.

UPCOMING SERVICES AND EVENTS

- Tue 1 Mar:** **Shrove Tuesday**
 10am - Stay-and-Play Group
 5-7pm - Pancake Party at The Vicarage
- Wed 2 Mar:** **Ash Wednesday**
 11am - Holy Communion (BCP) with Ashing ceremony, St. Martin's Church
 8pm - Holy Communion with Ashing ceremony and choral setting (Taizé)
- Sun 6 Mar:** **First Sunday in Lent**
 8am - Holy Communion (BCP)
 10am - Holy Communion All Age Service with guest preacher, Richard Bartlett (USPG)
- Sun 13 Mar:** **Second Sunday in Lent**
 10am - Holy Communion
 Junior Church
 2pm - Memorial Service - 11th anniversary of the Japanese earthquake and tsunami. St. Martin's Church.
- Sat 20 Mar:** **Third Sunday in Lent**
 10am - Holy Communion
 Junior Church. Baptism
- Sun 27 Mar:** **Fourth Sunday in Lent - 'Mothering Sunday'**
 8am - Holy Communion (BCP)
 10am - All Age Service (no Communion)

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Review: Advent to Candlemas

We have much to be grateful for at St Martin's...

The coronavirus pandemic has taught us that our plans are often frustrated by events beyond our control, but this Winter, we have succeeded in completing the programme that our PCC and clergy had arranged. For this we must thank God and all the people who made extra special efforts in the organisation that was required.

It was fitting that the Winter season should start with a memorial service that was open to everyone who had suffered a loss in these socially restrictive times. This was a quiet and gentle service during which the clergy and choir gave people the opportunity to reflect, and grieve the loss of loved ones. There was space to acknowledge our personal sadness and pain, but also to look for strength for the future. We were grateful to Haven Funeral Services for their help in organising this service.

The Christmas season is a special time for most people and, after the lockdowns in 2020, we were looking forward to the celebrations of 2021. There was great excitement amongst our young people, and on 5 December we held the Christingle Service and followed this with our Christmas Bazaar.



We had been prevented from holding bazaars for the previous 18 months and we must congratulate Camilla and Shelley, together with all the other stall holders and their helpers, for the careful organisation and huge effort which ensured the success of the occasion.



This year, as well as the traditional stalls in the church hall, there was Japanese music in the church and tables in the church where our Japanese friends sold a wide variety of goods and gifts. For the young families, the highlight was probably the arrival of 'Father Christmas', who patiently met so many in a beautifully-decorated starlit grotto, and heard all about their Christmas wishes. We welcomed many to the Bazaar who were not regular visitors to our church, and I am sure that the happy atmosphere helped them all to enjoy the day. The raffle was a huge success, thanks to the generosity of the donors of the wonderful prizes. Congratulations to all concerned!

We were fortunate to have a visit from the Springs Dance Company on 12 December, as part of our Advent events. They are a group of professional dancers who helped us to prepare for Christmas in their show which is based on T S Eliot's "Journey of the Magi". This both entertained and encouraged us to reflect on our own journeys towards Christmas. It was good to see the church being used for this performance, which was enjoyable and well received.

We must also give thanks for all those who make music for services at St Martin's. Under Becky Stockland's direction, the adult choir has consistently offered us an ambitious and varied programme to enhance our services. For this, we must thank all the musicians, but especially Becky Stockland and Tony Legge, who have applied the highest standards of professionalism and dedication to both the choice of repertoire and the rehearsal of the choir.



The children's choir led the singing at our Christingle Service and some subsequent All Age services, and we are always impressed by their effort, enthusiasm and obvious enjoyment.

It was, therefore, a delight to be able to enjoy the Carol Service by candlelight on 19th December. Emily Merrick's solo first verse of 'Once In Royal David's City' was an early highlight, and the atmosphere and music at this service was a lovely distillation of all the best elements of a traditional Christmas at St Martin's – the lights twinkled on the Christmas Tree and the altar, and the few who gathered from out of the darkness were treated to a truly celebratory musical feast. Sadly, by then, the Omicron variant of Covid had again restricted church attendance in person, and this was also true of the various services over the following Christmas weekend. By then, many Londoners were either unwell themselves or having to self-isolate because of contact with the illness. This certainly limited the numbers who were able to attend church services, but did nothing to limit the excitement and fun which the children had at the popular Christmas Eve Crib Service. We are really grateful to Julia and Bryony and all the others who worked extremely hard over the Christmas time.

2022 started with a renewed desire to build on our strong intentions to serve all who live nearby. It was particularly exciting for us to hold an Education Sunday special service at the end of January, supported by St. Martin's Church Choir directed by Becky Stockland. Pupils from Twyford CofE High School, Christ The Saviour Primary School, and the Japanese School, as well as the Guides and Brownies. Leaders of different areas of the life of St. Martin's were also invited to attend and speak on the subject of Education and its role in their lives. Rev David Brammer (Chaplain at Twyford), preached the sermon, and played his saxophone with the excellent Twyford School band and singers! We were delighted that a large number of Japanese students and their parents were able to attend - there was standing-room only by the start of the service!

We were especially thrilled and moved by the beautiful singing of the large choir of Japanese students and their extremely skilful piano accompanist, and we hope that they will visit us again.

We are really pleased that the Japanese congregation has been able to resume its Café and table sales, and give thanks for Yuki Johnson's hard work and enthusiasm in facilitating another successful meeting on 5 February.

Our full Christmas and Epiphany season concluded with the Candlemas service on 6 February. Over these last few months, we have been encouraged to think about the many people who came to understand the significance of Jesus's birth. Perhaps it is fitting that the key figures in the Candlemas story of Christ's presentation in the Temple should be two older people who were able to recognise that Jesus had come as the one to show God's light in the world. Just as we have had to wait for the ending of the pandemic, Simeon and Anna had waited for the arrival of the Messiah – not passively, but with vigilance, always alert for the signs of God's presence. They lived to rejoice at witnessing God's presence in the world. They had persisted in their love for God throughout their long lives, and although they foretold that there would be difficulties ahead for Jesus and his parents, they understood that God's love is with us; that this love always protects, always trusts, always perseveres and always hopes. We join with them in believing that God is with us and that, as Christian people, we seek to share God's love in the world.

Dr Margaret Jones

Eco Church update

As you will have seen in our December 2021 magazine, we hosted an Eco Church event in November, attended by representatives of at least 12 other churches. Eco Church (<https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/>) is a national scheme designed to help churches celebrate what they're doing to care for the environment, and to decide what to tackle next as part of caring for God's world. There are three levels of award: Bronze, Silver and Gold. An outcome of the event in November was that we have committed to working towards a Bronze Eco Church award here at St Martins.

This will mean considering how we are doing in relation to creation care and climate justice, and what we can do to improve, in each of these five areas:

- Worship
- Global engagement
- Buildings
- Land
- Lifestyle

We know that there are some things we are already doing – for example, we use 'green' electricity, we have cycle racks, we compost our garden waste, we have changed many of our lights to be low energy, and we regularly pray for issues relating to climate care in our services. We also know that there are some harder-to-tackle issues – our heating system uses gas, and our buildings cannot easily be insulated or double glazed.

However, there are lots of relatively “quick wins” to get us on a better footing - these are what we would like to look at from now on, to improve not just our ‘Award’ status going forward, but because it’s the right thing to do!

We arranged to meet again, on Thursday 13 January, and at that meeting we worked through the baseline audit questions together. We discovered that we were only a very few questions away from being able to submit St. Martin’s for a Bronze Award!

Following the meeting, Liza Ambridge and others kindly investigated the answers to the last questions left outstanding, and then I was able to submit our entries to A Rocha who will assess St. Martin’s for a Bronze Award. This is just the first step on the ladder to being ‘an Eco Church’, but we should all be very proud of our collective achievements to date and recognise every valuable stage as we arrive at it!

Rev Bryony Franklin

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Junior Church Update

We've been having a whole lot of fun in the Hall every Sunday Morning at Junior Church! From creating our own Remembrance wreath for the War Memorial on Remembrance Sunday (whilst learning about the different poppy colours and their meanings) to making decorations for the Christmas Tree, discussing different kinds of love in the lead up to St Valentine's Day, and what the Light of Christ means in our everyday lives.

I started in September 2021 as the Children & Young People's Apprentice and since then I've been slowly making changes to Junior Church to make it feel as welcoming and safe for the children as possible. For those who haven't seen Junior Church in action, we now sit in a circle and the leaders sit in a different place each week, so everybody is on an equal level. There's now a quiet zone in the corner, where any child who's feeling overwhelmed or overstimulated can spend some quiet time in the pop-up cube with a cuddly toy, weighted blanket and a book or sensory toy.

Coming soon is a worry/prayer box (for both children and grown-ups to put their concerns and prayers into the box to be prayed for over the coming week - sometimes problems don't feel so big on a small piece of paper, and if you know somebody is praying for you in the week, it can lighten the load.

PJ Grayson



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Turning to the Light

This combined Winter Review edition of St Martin's Church magazine is being compiled just as the natural world turns back to the light from the darkness of Winter, so it's the perfect moment to look back at 'the points of light' that shone out for us over the last couple of months before we turn to Lent and Easter. By the end of this week, as I write, we will be enjoying 25 mins more daylight than we did at the beginning of the week, and the speed of change in our surroundings quickens accordingly.

The Church's celebration of Candlemas, at which we recall the moment when the infant Jesus was recognised as the Light of the World by old Simeon (who also recognises the darkness that Light implies), falls annually at exactly the same time as the pagan peoples of these Isles used to celebrate the Celtic 'fire festival' of Imbolc.

Candlemas is another of the Christian festivals that adopted many of the aspects of much, much older 'indigenous' practices and rituals associated with marking the seasonal changes in the natural world. Imbolc fell between the Winter Solstice and the Vernal (Spring) Equinox, as the light takes over from the dark, awakening buds and bulbs and animals from hibernation.

The earliest Christian Church in Britain and Ireland made saints of some pagan gods and goddesses - missionaries encountering resistance to conversion created Christian 'back-stories' or legends to explain, or promote, the continued veneration of a cherished local deity amongst populations otherwise reluctant to give them up. Celtic deities were important 'spirits of place' with whom people entirely identified, and the people of these sacred places refused to take on the message of Christianity and be baptised unless these 'familiar spirits' were effectively 'Christened' alongside them.

The goddess most associated with the Celtic festival of Imbolc was Brigit, and Candlemas, 1 February, is marked in the Roman Catholic calendar as St Brigit's Day to this present time.

Brigid or Brigit was formerly a pagan goddess, venerated right across the Celtic world (France 'Brigandu', England 'Brittania' [Roman Latinised version of Brigit], Scotland 'Bhrìghde' or 'Bride', Wales 'Ffraid', Ireland 'Brigid' or 'Brigit', 'Brighid', 'Brìd', etc; Isle of Man 'Breeshey'). Her name means 'bright' or 'high one', and she gave her name to Britain, Brittany in France, and the name of the largest Celtic tribe living in pre-Roman Britain, the Brigantes – essentially, the pre-Christian peoples of Britain and Ireland were 'the people of the goddess Brigit'.

When the Roman Catholic Church 'took over' from the Celtic Church in Britain and Ireland, St Brigit, the Celtic saint and former 'fire goddess' of healing, poetry, birth/midwifery and smithing (forging from fire) became Patron Saint of Ireland, alongside St Patrick. Christian legends developed around 'the life' of the new saint, one being that she was the Virgin Mary's mid-wife at the birth of Christ. That legend helped new converts to accommodate the pagan goddess's former association with birth, new life and new objects forged in fire.

Modern 'Celtic Christians', and particularly those involved in the new Forest Churches (which gather outdoors 'in nature'), interpret the turning season and this moment in the Church calendar as an opportunity to reconnect with Creation through the meditative contemplation of passages in the Bible that refer to the presence of God in nature. The pagan Celtic 'spirit of place' translates in this Christian context to 'sensio divina' (sensing the Divine) in a place or object or natural environment.

Passages for contemplation might include:

Jeremiah 23: 23-24

*"Am I only a God nearby,"
declares the Lord*

*"And not a God far away?
Who can hide in secret places,
So that I cannot see them?"
declares the Lord.*

*"Do I not fill heaven and earth?"
declares the Lord*

And

Romans 1: 20

*For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities –
His eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen,
being understood from what has been made, so that people are
without excuse.*

As Christians in modern Britain, on the cusp of Spring 2022, we can perhaps draw renewed strength from the message of this regenerative season ourselves, and go forward having been 'forged anew' by the fire-bright messages of Christmas, Epiphany and Candlemas.

Anna Sargent

Sonnet for Candlemas

They came, as called, according to the Law.
Though they were poor and had to keep things simple,
They moved in grace, in quietness, in awe,
For God was coming with them to His temple.

Amidst the outer court's commercial bustle,
They'd waited hours, enduring shouts and shoves.
Buyers and sellers, sensing one more hustle,
Had made a killing on the two young doves.

They come at last with us to Candlemas,
And keep the day the prophecies came true.
We glimpse with them, amidst our busyness,
The peace that Simeon and Anna knew.

For Candlemas still keeps His kindled light,
Against the dark our Saviour's face is bright.

Malcolm Guite

Where God Lives

When I was driving home from Church, 'Halleluja' by Leonard Cohen came up on my Spotify app and, for the first time, I actually listened to it. Not just "Ah yes, this is nice. Good job, Lenny!" but I really *listened* to it (as much as you can whilst driving), and I was so overwhelmingly moved by everything about it that I couldn't stop hitting re-play for the next ten minutes of my drive.

I drove along Barnes High Street and felt incredulous because *I* was having what I felt to be a divinely inspired experience, listening to a song that's older than I am, right there in my car, and the people walking past me didn't know it was happening! What are you supposed to do with *that* transcending experience, in the moment? Other people were just having an ordinary day, shopping on the High Street, while I was experiencing the immediate presence of God.



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For the rest of this weird drive home, I reflected on the everyday spaces and times where I feel God's presence, and where God *lives* to me.

Of course, the Church building is 'God's house', but that's not the only space He *lives* in. Leading Junior Church, I've seen God in the faces of all the young people - He lives in the silence while we all think about answers to some of the big questions; He lives in the eager 'hands up' to give an answer; the breaths in between laughter; the stammering over words we're not sure how to pronounce. When I go home with glitter and marker pen all over my hands, I can see Him in the mess we make together too.

And God doesn't only dwell in the loud, positive moments, or only in the actions of people who are actively serving in the church. God has planted a roof over my head when I've been scared about housing, and when I haven't got the results I needed. Sometimes God lives in the pain of crying too hard, and sometimes He lives in the sting of hands from applauding someone else.

And He might surprise you - he might show up on the intake of breath in a Leonard Cohen song. And then make you think about Him for the rest of the journey home, as He sits beside you.

PJ Grayson

White hyacinths

A married couple lived in a small suburban flat. He worked as a bus driver, and she had just lost her job as a sales assistant in a failing department store.

Life seemed to be on a down-turn for them... Because she was unemployed and not bringing in any income, he started nagging her about money, and she felt resentful and gave up pointing out that she *was* going to the jobcentre and looking in the paper every day. She started going out when he was at work, wandering aimlessly round the shops and drinking coffee after coffee. Then, when she returned home, instead of hunting for a new job with any degree of hope, she took to watching the soaps on television, worrying about money, and reflecting endlessly on 'life'.

Despite all this 'spare' time, she did not get around to housework and cleaning nearly as often as she had done even when she was busier, and since he had never lifted a finger in that direction, he didn't see why he should now, when she was 'at home all the time'! The flat became more cluttered and depressing, and the couple seemed to do nothing but bicker.

One day, she went on one of her wanderings, and found herself outside a brightly-lit church hall. There was a colourful notice saying 'Come in for a cuppa!', and guessing that coffee there would be cheaper than in a commercial café, she went in. It was warm and welcoming, and indeed, it was cheaper! She ordered some coffee and a cake, found an empty table, and picked up a magazine.

One of the workers was clearing a table, and said "Haven't seen you here before. Everything ok?" She was surprised to be spoken to. She went back a couple of days later, and started coming often after that. The staff were always friendly, and

nobody made her feel she had stayed too long, or that she shouldn't be there at all. However, she was very wary about being 'preached at' and she avoided going as far as the side-chapel at the end of the lobby. She never picked up one of the many Christian booklets lying around, either. One of the café staff who was there on Wednesdays was particularly nice and chatty, and she began to look forward to seeing her.

One Wednesday in late Autumn, she went into the café, and saw a long table laden with plants, cakes, and bright Christmassy things. Her 'favourite' server, who was called Mary (according to her badge), greeted her and said "Isn't it nice to see the Advent stall again? Always makes me cheerful!" But she responded in a surly tone saying "Nice if you've something to look forward to!" and went off to a more distant table feeling strangely upset by her favourite server's up-beat remarks. However, a little later Mary came to her table and sat down. "Sorry to butt in, but you seemed a bit down just now, and I was wondering if I could help?"

She found herself telling Mary all her troubles. Mary listened carefully, not making any judgements or suggestions, and said how sorry she was she was so down about life. Then Mary mentioned how going to Church on Sunday improved the view of the world for the rest of the week, knowing that such love was there for sharing. Mary went on to say that the 'regulars' at the café were all given a plant at Advent, so that they could enjoy the flowers which would bloom by Christmas. Mary got up and collected a fat hyacinth bulb in a pot, and put it in front of her, saying that she could have hers to take that day.

She thanked Mary, but added that she was not a Church-goer and did not want to be preached to. Mary smiled, and said gently that Christ would talk to her in a way she would understand, when she was ready to hear. Feeling a bit 'preached at', she went home, but she took the hyacinth with her.

A couple of days later, she went into the kitchen to make breakfast and smelt a wonderful scent. The bulb had burst open, and small stiff green leaves surrounded pure white bell-like flower heads just opening. Suddenly she noticed the kitchen blind behind the white flowers, and realised that it was really grey and grubby, as was the tablecloth on which her elbow rested... Finishing her tea, she pulled the table cloth off the table and put it in the washing machine. Then she took down the blind, sponged it down and replaced it. The floor was none too clean, either. By the time lunchtime came, she had given most parts of the kitchen a really good clean, and felt properly hungry for the first time for a while. And while she was in that frame of mind, she made a start on getting the dinner together.

Her husband came in from his shift later. "Something smells nice!" he said as he came into the kitchen. "It's the plant," she said. Looking around he saw the plant, and the difference in the kitchen. "Looks good in here!" he said. She looked at him, and saw that he was not being sarcastic, or making a snide point, for once - he was genuinely smiling. "I had a little clear up," she said, "Let's eat." And they did, without any argument.

The next morning, she felt her spirits lift as soon as she saw the plant. Fully open now, it smelt absolutely divine. The pure glowing white was reflected in the clean windows. The next Wednesday, she thought she might pop into the Church café and thank Mary for the plant, but when she arrived, the tables were absent. The chapel doors were wide open. A sea of white hyacinths were arranged in big bowls around the bottom of a large wooden cross standing in front of the stained-glass window. The low sun was shining through the glass, dyeing the flowers and the floor in rainbow colours. "How lovely," she said to herself, and went right into the little chapel for the first time.

Lynne Armstrong



The Parish of St Martin

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(Registered charity no. 1132976)



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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 December)

3pm Bible Study and Evening Worship in Japanese