

Oxon Fourth



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In this issue the Rev Tony Price writes his last letter as our spiritual adviser. We shall miss his encouraging words. His successor is due to be appointed at our AGM in October and I hope he will agree to fill Tony's slot in the magazine. Also in this issue you will find tributes to Johanna Raffan, who died suddenly in June. Don't miss our book reviewed on pages 14 and 15 – I think it would make a good Christmas present!

Deadline for our spring issue is March 15th.

*Please send articles and ideas to me, Vivien Leeming at
v.leeming05@tiscali.co.uk*



Letter from our Spiritual Director the Rev Tony Price

The prophet Joel has a post -Covid message for us

How can we make any sense of a pandemic that will soon have had the world in its grip for two years? The prophets of the Old Testament would no doubt have proclaimed it was a judgment, a punishment, or a warning from God, sent to make a backsliding people return to their God. But any preacher who said that in public nowadays would be howled down. We simply don't believe in a God who sends plagues or calamities, any more. The God we want to believe in is one who intervenes in the world to do good things – answer prayers, heal the sick, create peace – but we don't want to believe in one who intervenes to do bad things. And we rarely stop to ask ourselves if this is an honest, realistic or consistent theology.



It can sometimes feel that the years 2020 and 2021 have been 'lost years' in our lives. It's not just the holidays that were cancelled, the overseas travel we weren't able to enjoy. For some, for many in fact, there have been much greater losses: loss of employment, earnings, health, education, relationships, even of life, or the lives of people they have loved. It would be a mistake for any of us who have survived relatively unscathed to think of it as a large part of our lives that has been 'lost'. Because even with the restrictions and constraints we've had to accept, each day has brought its own opportunities, and many

people have found lockdowns have brought advantages: being able to work from home instead of commuting for long hours; time to spend on our hobbies, or learning new skills. Even catching up on the reading or the box sets we've never been able to finish. Nevertheless, after living with uncertainty and restrictions for 18 months, it's quite natural to feel weary, anxious, despondent, and wishing it was all over.

The prophet who has come to my mind is the prophet Joel. We know little about him, because the short book that bears his name contains none of the personal details we find in some of the other prophets. He proclaimed the Word of the Lord at a time when there had been devastating plagues of locusts which had ruined the harvests. Joel describes them in imagery of a horrific invading army coming upon the land, destroying everything in its path like a raging fire. Terrible though it has been, it is a time for the people to return to the LORD in sincerity, humility, joy and hope. For God promises, *I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten*, (Joel 2.25) and there will be times of plenty, praise and a fresh outpouring of God's spirit on his people.

The message of Joel is that after calamity, and in spite of calamity, we can have hope: because our God is a loving, faithful and merciful God who cares for His people. Of course the way in to that hope is to return to God. That doesn't mean we have fallen away and become hopeless backsliders or idolaters. Even for the most fervent believer, every day, every hour and every moment is a fitting time to return to God, just as we would want to turn to the love of our life, the source of all our joy and delight.

I don't think we're out of the woods yet, and we may well have to learn to live with Covid for ever, just as we have to live with flu. I plan to continue to be careful and take precautions for as long as it feels necessary. But there are hopeful signs that many things in life are beginning to return to a sort of 'normal'. We are actively looking into ways to bring Oxford Cursillo out of the virtual existence of Zoom meetings, and find possibilities of meeting again 'in real life', with Ultreyas and other activities planned for 2022.

Keep praying, hoping, grouping, believing in God's promises ... and, Ultreya!

**Cursillo is a movement of the Church
providing a method by which
Christians are empowered to grow
through prayer, study and action
and enabled to share God's love
with everyone.**

National Ultreya at Norwich



Jan Jeffreys and Liz Brandom travelled together to Norwich joining over 100 Cursillistas for our National Ultreya held in Norwich Cathedral in September

Jan writes: Liz and I set out for Norwich on a sunny Saturday morning. We had pre-booked a parking space for the car in the cathedral meadow and were given firm instructions by the warden that we must on no account return later than 6pm or we would be unable to get out before Monday morning! He then directed us to the Cathedral, a few minutes' walk away. We paused to see if we could catch a glimpse of the peregrine falcons nesting in the tower. They were not at home.

Once inside we registered and received a welcome pack from Norwich Cursillistas and an even more welcome cup of coffee. Then we plunged into the throng, meeting friends old and new, even more special this year because of Covid.

We were delighted to find Stu and Margaret, Mary and Sue already there. We were very proud of Sue, a new Cursillista from Oxford #19, when it was announced she had won first prize in the quiz, part of the entertainment and buffet held the previous evening.

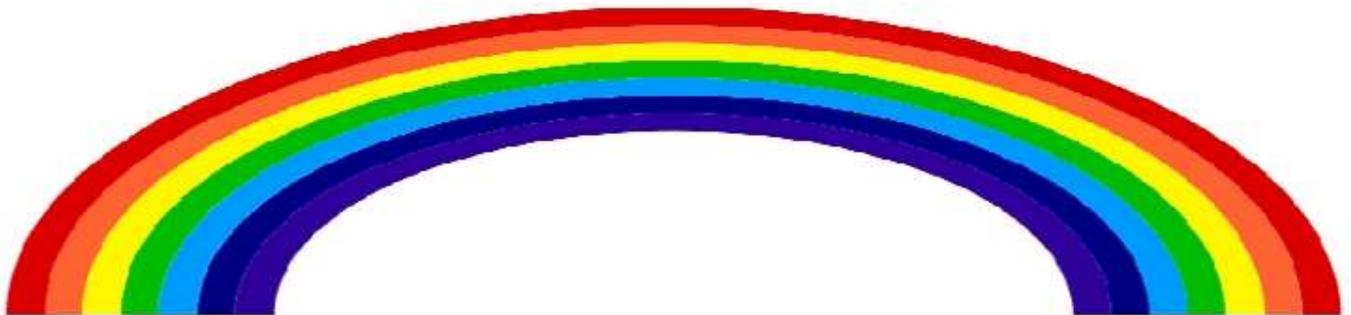
The day followed its familiar pattern starting with a service at 10am. It was so good to have the organ thundering away and to sing well loved hymns at full throttle. Budge, the cathedral cat, was curled up on his cushion in the choir stalls and slept undisturbed throughout. A well named cat!

Then we had a floating group reunion and a witness talk and response, lunch, which was a cheerful affair with lots of chatter and networking going on.

After lunch we assembled for the walk of witness round the precincts and into the cathedral with all the banners flying in the wind. The Eucharist was beautiful and the service concluded with the passing of the national banner to Southwark who should have hosted us last year (it was cancelled due to Covid) and hope to do so next year. This promises to be a wonderful day when we will meet on the steps of St Paul's

Cathedral and march across the Millennium bridge with all our banners to Southwark Cathedral where we will spend the rest of the day. It would be really good if we could have a large contingent from the Oxford diocese so do put the date in your diaries - September 3rd 2022.

Dippy the dinosaur was on display in a cordoned off area of the nave and, after a quick look at him and a visit to the cathedral shop, Liz and I made our way back to the car (before 6pm!) and drove home, weary but elated, after a very enjoyable day. Well done and a big 'Thank you' to all the Norwich Cursillistas for a lovely day.



THE ARK

Eleven things I have learnt from Noah's Ark:

- 1. Don't miss the boat.*
- 2. Remember we are all in the same boat.*
- 3. Plan ahead. It wasn't raining when they built the Ark.*
- 4. Stay fit. When you're 600 years old someone may ask you to do something really big.*
- 5. Don't listen to critics. Just get on with the job that needs to be done.*
- 6. Build your future on high ground.*
- 7. For safety's sake, travel in pairs.*
- 8. Speed isn't always an advantage. The snails were on board with the cheetahs.*
- 9. When you are stressed rest awhile.*
- 10. Remember the Ark was built by amateurs, the Titanic by professionals.*
- 11. No matter the storm, when you are with God, there is always a rainbow waiting for you.*

A new way of spreading the Good News

Canon Toby Wright, Rector of Witney, explains a new national initiative to plant new churches



Some of you may have heard of the national initiative for *Greenhouses* within the Church of England. No, it's not an environmental initiative to become more self-sustaining in our food production; rather, it is about a means of birthing new Christian Communities. It is an initiative that has grown out of *Fresh Expressions* which many of you will have heard of. The premise is to seek out ways of building new communities alongside our existing ones. Importantly, it is not *instead* of traditional church communities, but recognises that whilst this works to attract some people, there is also a clear imperative for us to be 'sent', to go out into our communities and to find Christ there ahead of us.

The methodology is simple. First, you find a small group or community you want to work with, and you **listen** to them: you hear their concerns, hopes and fears. Having listened carefully you find ways to express **love** and care for them, to abide alongside them and grow with them. Then you focus on building up **community** – a coalition of the willing of all those concerned with the common good. Only then does the model suggest we start to gently **share faith** and tell stories of our experience. Following that it is a chance to see what emerges from them in terms of beginning to form a **church** and to explore what worship might look like. The process then continues to learn and grow as you repeat the cycle.

I find the model of **listen, love, community, share faith, church, repeat**, to be a really helpful one. For those of you influenced by the Rule of St Benedict you'll know that the first words of the Rule are '*Listen with the ear of the heart*'. It's a beautiful reminder of the importance of honouring those to whom we are sent, and reminding us in the words of the Native American Proverb, 'Listen or your tongue will make you deaf.'

So often we are in danger of thinking that we have the answer and fail to listen attentively – and that can be especially so when we are planting new church communities. We are a community of those who believe in the words of Psalm 66:

'But truly God has listened;

God has given heed to the words of my prayer' Ps 66.19

As such, this listening phase is important. Those of you involved in pastoral care within your parishes will know powerfully the effect that deep listening can have on people. This is listening with the ear of our heart – truly meeting people where they are and entering deeply into incarnational presence with them.

The second stage is to **love**. As St Paul reminds us, *'If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.'* (1 Cor 13.1). The model invites us to bring God's love into the everyday places and people we meet. So often people interpret an hour in the week as their 'church' time. This model reminds us of the integrated way we are to bring love into all our lives and to share that with others around us in our normal daily encounters. The basis for this work is that we share in the *Missio Dei* – God's own 'self-sending' to redeem and transform creation. It reminds us that we participate with Christ in expressing the love of God to the world and that we find the kingdom breaking in through unexpected means and in unexpected places. Never let us forget that as the Church, we follow Christ into the world and grace is already there to be discovered, so let's tread lovingly and be generous and open.

Only then do we begin to build a wide **community** with people outside and beyond the confines of faith. It's like the parable of the sower – broad, inclusive and expansive. And following this, we start to **share the stories of faith** which have formed and shaped our belief and then work out what the context of church and faith might be. So, for example it might start with a group who like dog-walking, or a pram-pushing group, or a book group – anywhere that has like-minded people who might form some community. Currently I am working with colleagues to start a greenhouse on a new housing community and we are in the listening stage as we build relationships.

The whole idea of the Greenhouse is that we are part of God's mission of 'sentness'. I often use the image that as the Church we are not called to be a vacuum cleaner sucking people in, but a leaf-blower energising people and sending them out. This movement of 'sentness' is seen in Abraham to the Promised Land, Moses to Egypt, Ruth to Bethlehem, Jonah to the Ninevites, Jesus to the world, Mary Magdalene to the disciples, the Spirit to the Church and the Church to the world. In terms of the gospels, the concept of being sent is most strong in John's Gospel: *'As the Father has sent me, I also send you'* (Jn 20.21) and this verse is important, I believe, to understand the whole concept. The Greenhouse initiative invites us to walk on a journey of discovering God in the world and invites us all to consider where we might be being sent by God.

So why do I think this is a good thing? Well, my starting point is that once upon a time every church was a church plant and a fresh expression. We all had to grow from a tiny shoot when somebody had a vision and heard the Spirit draw them into an adventure. The Cursillo Method has taught each of us that Jesus's prayer is that the disciples would remain committed to the strategy of building community (Jn 17.21). I see the Greenhouse initiative as a really positive way of doing this. One of the joys of it is that it doesn't require lots of people (the average Greenhouse has about 5 people setting it up, some less!). Another is that you get great support from the Diocese and from the wider church. In the process you

become part of a reflective group where you learn from others and gain ideas to help develop your own initiative.

You'll remember from your Cursillo weekend that each of us is reminded we are called to be active apostles – bringing Christ to the world and the world to Christ. My experience suggests that this can be a helpful tool to help us consider where we might be called by God to go. We are not left to flounder alone, but God promises us time and again 'I will be with you' – supremely in the gift of Jesus (Mt 1.23 & 28.20) and of the Spirit (Ezekiel 36.27; John 14.16 & 16.13).

So, regardless of whether you have green fingers, by virtue of our baptism each of us is called to have missionary green fingers! Maybe you can think of some areas where there is an opportunity to live out the reality that the Church's pilgrimage to God's kingdom takes her through the world in mission. Bring on those green fingers!

Some people will push back about how this relates to traditional church and our existing communities. I don't see them in competition, but as complementary ways of engaging people. The experience which I have is that there can be movement between them and, importantly, that there are those we are not reaching in our current form. I think they are a blessing to us. Some people are anxious at the moment about whether the reforms in the Church of England are abandoning clergy posts and seeing these as restrictive of growth. I look back to the reforms of the monastic tradition in the C12th and see the power of when we work together that great things can happen. I believe that Greenhouses can be a small creative step to help us in our mission and evangelism.

If you'd like to find out more then do have a look at <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/fresh-expressions/what-greenhouse/get-involved-greenhouse> or Will.Donaldson@oxford.anglican.org.

Alternatively, do get in touch with me:

Canon Toby Wright

Rector of Witney

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Sue Campbell, who attended Oxford #19, gave this action talk at an Ultreya held in May on zoom

A lifeline for people living with alcoholics



When I came to Oxfordshire in 1982 I lived in a village, where I still attend the local church. I was welcomed with open arms and my children all went to Sunday school and were confirmed. However my husband did not share my faith; I lacked self-esteem and in my longing for intimacy I have always made choices in relationships far too quickly. His initial support and agnosticism turned to atheism and then complete antagonism, especially when our marriage began to fail. His attitudes greatly affected our children who have not retained their faith.

After my first marriage failed I met somebody who suffered from alcoholism and in my arrogance, I thought I could help him. However, all I did during our 10 years of marriage was to enable him to continue with his destructive pattern of behavior – I was always there to pick up the pieces.

However, God can and does bring so much good out of our poor choices. He gave me the gift of my 5 children in my first marriage, and in my second marriage the gift of a 12-step programme called Al-Anon which is for families and friends of alcoholics. This has also helped me deal with all aspects of everyday life, and it, more than anything else has deepened my faith and brought me into a personal daily relationship with a living God.

Al-Anon follows the same 12 steps as Alcoholics Anonymous, but its purpose is helping those living with alcoholics. I am evangelical about Al-Anon because it is a programme for living, which has been incredibly helpful during this last 12 months when we've all been so affected by things totally outside our control.

It is not a Christian programme, but it is a spiritual one, and the 12 steps of AA were written by two committed Christians and it is accessible to everyone. The 12 steps suggest acceptance of 4 primary ideas:

1. We are powerless over alcohol and indeed most things outside of ourselves, including the Covid pandemic and lockdowns. When we can accept this truth, it brings a feeling of release and hope. We can then turn our full attention to getting our own lives into order, leading to spiritual growth and the comfort and peace to be gained from the entire programme.
2. We can turn our lives over to a power greater than ourselves. This is something many people struggle with but of course, for those of us with a strong Christian faith it is no problem. We know that trying to do things on our own ends in failure but if we turn to God then He can direct us.
3. We need to change both our attitudes and actions. This programme is not about trying to change somebody else - trying to stop the alcoholic from drinking (although that is why many people initially come to the programme). Jesus tells us in Matthew 7 v3-5 to look at ourselves, not to judge others, and to take the plank out of our own eye before we try to remove the speck in another's eye. So much of our thinking is often distorted. Many of our actions have been unloving, revealing how unhelpful many of our attitudes are. God is love and as Julian of Norwich, asks 'Would'st thou know the Lord's meaning? Know it well. Love was his meaning.' God loves us unconditionally; He accepts us as we are. And this is the basis of the Al-Anon programme, God has already accepted us, so we need to accept ourselves. The only person we can change is ourselves. We do not need to try to change or judge anybody else; we can leave that to God. One of my favourite slogans from the programme is 'Let go and Let God'.

So, we do our bit, but we let go of the outcomes. They're in God's hands, and He can see things and solutions that we can never even dream of.

We can share these gifts with others, meeting weekly in our groups, now all on Zoom. helping one another in a safe place where we love and are loved unconditionally. Our greatest obligation is to those still in need, the leading of others from despair to hope and love brings comfort to both the giver and the receiver. That's one of the many reasons why I keep coming back even, after 25 years in the programme and 15 years since I've lived with active alcoholism. We are also encouraged to find one special person with whom we can share more deeply and personally, and I have been fortunate enough to be asked by several members to be their sponsor. It is through doing service in Al-Anon that we put our love into action and compassion This is the type of love we find, share and give away in Al-Anon. We focus on self-care and learn that love is not lessened when given away but the more love we offer the more love we will find within ourselves. Sponsorship is one of the ways I have undertaken service in Al-Anon and my main action during the Covid pandemic. I sponsor three people and several others share regularly with me. It is a great privilege to be able to hear or be trusted with the intimate secrets of another. I spend several hours every week sharing with them, currently on zoom, People know they can say anything, and will be listened to with compassion and without judgment, as we work through the steps together. It's a slow process because it does actually involve looking at ourselves very deeply and discussing the changes we want to make for our own spiritual growth.

Steps 4 to 7 are for spiritual discovery, taking a thorough look at ourselves, share our findings with God and another person and then ask for God's help to change.

Steps 8 and 9 are where we make amends for past wrongs. This is part of our healing of ourselves and our relationships. In the same way we forgive as part of our healing process, because if we don't, we are storing up resentment in our hearts which damages us far more than it damages anybody else. Hatred is one of the greatest causes of soul sickness and I quote from Richard Rohr when I say 'The body can live without food easier than the soul can live without meaning'. I firmly believe that the health of the body, mind and spirit are totally interwoven, and this is why encouraging self-care and building self-esteem are central to the Al-Anon programme.

Steps 10-12: Maintenance steps where we continue to monitor our attitudes and actions, undertake prayer and meditation and carry the message to others as well as living it on a daily basis. What a challenge! This has brought me unconditional love and intimacy, and where I have found peace and serenity.

Before we can move on to successful living in the present we have to come to terms with our past. Through this programme and through my coming to Cursillo I feel that God is taking me into the second half of my life. Whilst I do not directly talk about my Christian faith in Al-Anon meetings most members are aware of my beliefs and I know that, as I was reminded the other day in a reading from *Lectio 365, 'I am a letter from Christ'* which is being read by everyone I meet.

My favourite prayer which epitomises the spirit of Al-Anon and is on the back of our membership cards is:

Just For Today

*Lord make me an instrument of Your peace,
Where there is hatred let me sow love.
Where there is injury, pardon.
Where there is doubt, faith.
Where there is despair, hope.
Where there is darkness, light.
Where there is sadness joy.
O Divine master grant that I may
Not so much seek to be consoled as to console,
To be understood, as to understand.
To be loved. as to love
For it's in giving that we receive
And it's in pardoning that we are pardoned
And it's in dying that we are born...
To eternal life.*



Every Al-Anon meeting ends with:

Serenity Prayer

*God grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change
Courage to change the things I can
and the wisdom to know the difference.*

Johanna Raffan RIP

Johanna Raffan, an Oxford Cursillista, died peacefully at the Thames Hospice in Maidenhead on June 15th after suffering a severe stroke.

A woman of deep faith and prayer, Johanna was a member of St Luke's Church, Maidenhead and she was a Benedictine oblate of Mirfield.

She attended Oxford #13 as a guest and went on for a staffing hat-trick on later Weekends: Table leader on Oxford#17, lay rector on #18 and chapel gofor on #19. To all of these she contributed a special warmth and humour. I imagine no-one who was there will forget the joke about God creating men and women that she told on Oxford #18.

She will be greatly missed.

**May she rest in peace
and rise in glory.**

Tony Price, Spiritual Director



A life well lived

Johanna lived a very full life with a teaching career and an active social life with much public service including supporting her husband Sandy's Masonic activities and her own huge involvement with the Soroptimists. Her professional life centred on education. She became a well loved and respected head teacher, and later became a involved in helping gifted children, becoming a founder member of NACE - The National Association of Able Children - in which capacity she travelled widely, lecturing in Norway, Denmark, USA, Spain, and elsewhere. She was awarded the MBE for her work in this field.

She much enjoyed travelling and made three pilgrimages to the Holy Land. She and her husband had a time share in Gran Canaria, which she continued to use after he died.

When she was a teenager Johanna wanted to become a nun, but was dissuaded from doing so. After her husband died she explored the religious life, taking a vow to the Single Consecrated Life. She then became one of the first members of the Society of the Resurrection, based at Mirfield, which she called her spiritual home.

VL

An inspirational woman

Jane Watkins (Oxford 15) describes Johanna's involvement

with Soroptimists International

I first met Johanna through Soroptimism. Always a busy lady with many interests, I was touched that she found the time to come to Douai Abbey for my Clausura. She will be greatly missed by so many.

Johanna joined Soroptimists in 1987, first with SI High Wycombe and then SI Thames Valley, as a founder member in 1990. She had held most offices at club and Regional level, becoming a Federation Councillor for four years and Director Without Portfolio for two years. She was also Chair of Trustees of the Kori Development Project in Sierra Leone, raising funding for the library and schools, a continuing major project for the club. Her club, Soroptimism International of Thames Valley was so proud of her when she became the Federation President of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in its hundredth year.

Johanna's support for her club was exemplary, especially in encouraging newer members to get involved in Programme Action work. She was delighted when her club became one of the first clubs to raise funds for the Tissue Banks set up by Breast Cancer Now. She was always ready to support club activities like the five-year Missing Miles project when over 50 other clubs joined Thames Valley in walking, publicising and supporting the walkers who raised awareness of the need for more support for the families of missing people. She was there when the club first planted trees to commemorate their tenth anniversary, again when we planted a cedar tree in the Lebanon. She was, as Federation President of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, enjoying this year's Centenary project of planting trees throughout the world to help the environment.

She had always supported the work of our London Chilterns region and was looking forward to taking part in our 100th anniversary celebrations organised by our newest club, SI Milton Keynes and our oldest club, SI Oakland in California in June 2021. Johanna will be greatly missed by all who knew her. She was an inspirational woman and leaves her club with many treasured memories.

Tribute from former Oxford Cursillo Communications Rep, Dr Elizabeth Taylor, Lay Minister (Reader), Benefice of Weedon Bec, Everdon and Dodford

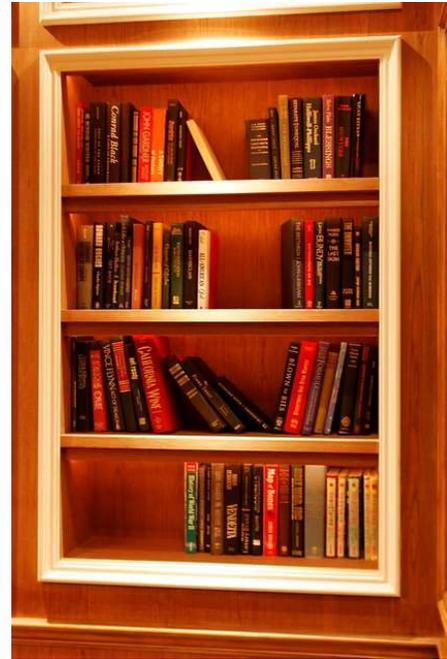
I was so sorry to hear about the passing of Johanna. She was a very significant person in my journey with Cursillo. At one of my first Ultreyas Johanna gave the action talk about her journey of faith with the important place which reading had in her spiritual growth. Subsequently, I shared two Weekends with her when we were both on the team, Oxford #17 and Oxford #19. She always brought a quiet, deeply thoughtful presence to proceedings combined with great efficiency and friendliness. I feel privileged to have known her.

Joseph And The Three Gifts

by Brian Sibley

Book Review

by Caroline Kallipetis



Throughout Lent in lockdown 2021 the church of All Saints, Ascot Heath, where I worship and sing in the choir, ran a book club via Zoom. One of the chosen books was *Joseph and the Three Gifts* by Brian Sibley, published in 2019 by Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd. The author is an award-winning writer and broadcaster (best known for his radio adaptations of *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Lord of the Rings*) who also happens to be a member of our congregation.

The sub-title of the book is "An Angel's Story", and the narrator is the Angel Gabriel himself. Building on the few mentions of Joseph in the New Testament, and cleverly drawing on the many pictorial representations of him in classical art, the author paints a sympathetic portrait of the carpenter from Nazareth who stood by his betrothed, Mary, and shouldered responsibility for the infant Jesus. He is described as a "good man", bewildered by the seismic events that threw his uncomplicated life into disarray but determined to do his best for his wife and adopted son.

The story starts with two annunciations, Gabriel's visitation to Mary and Joseph's dream in which the angel explains that his betrothed will conceive "a child that is from God and *is* God" and that he should take Mary as his wife. The second chapter deals with the nativity itself. There are some delightful details about the journey to and arrival in Bethlehem, the birth, and the visit by the shepherds.

Chapter 3, Epiphany, charts the journey of the three wise men from the east and here comes the first mention of the three gifts of the title. The narrative is faithful to the biblical version of events while also speculating through Gabriel's eyes how the Magi might have appeared and how Mary and Joseph might have reacted. The gifts themselves are depicted in such loving detail that one can almost smell the frankincense "with its bouquet of citrus and spice" and the "bitter fragrance of myrrh" and touch the gold "gleaming with a heavy burnished warmth in the lantern-light". Even the containers catch the imagination with their intricate decoration ("studded with garnets as red as blood and pearls the colour of a summer moon") and above all their "astonishing value" which explains why Joseph cannot leave them behind when they leave Bethlehem.

These amazing gifts present Joseph with a dilemma which is resolved over the next three chapters. Before the holy family flee to Egypt to escape the wrath of King Herod they visit the temple in Jerusalem to present their son and make a sacrifice to God. Their momentous encounter with Simeon and Anna is retold with an added twist, involving Caspar's gift of frankincense joining the two turtle doves on the sacrificial fire. The second and third gifts travel with the family throughout their exile and their return to Nazareth. The angel tells of the childhood of Jesus including his teaching in the temple at the age of twelve. Although this is the last mention of Joseph in the bible, the author creates a scenario in loving detail which takes us through the early years of Christ's work with Joseph as a carpenter and his baptism in the River Jordan. This turning point and Jesus' consequent departure from home have a profound effect on Joseph and Mary and prompt them to give Melchior's gift of gold to the disciples to help them in their ministry to the poor, to buy food for the hungry, medicine for the sick and so on.

The story ends with the events of Good Friday, told through the eyes of Joseph on his deathbed, and I will leave you to read for yourselves the moving account of Mary's solution for the third gift, Balthazar's alabaster box of myrrh. Suffice to say that the angelic narrator witnesses the reunion of Joseph and his foster-son as Jesus "breaks asunder the age-old chains and flings wide the heavy iron gates of death with his nail-pierced hands".

In an Afterword, Brian Sibley recounts how the story came to him as a gift in a waking dream at Christmastide in Venice. It certainly flows with a confidence and clarity born of a vision. I loved the vivid descriptions of ordinary life in a Jewish home and the wonder felt by a humble man who finds himself in an extraordinary situation beyond his control. It is clearly a work of fiction and not gospel or legend, as the author concedes. However, I liked the direct quotes from the King James Bible which grounded the story firmly in familiar territory for Anglicans.

This slim volume proved a popular choice for the book club, and we had the privilege of a subsequent seminar on Zoom with the author himself, who was able to answer our many questions. I can thoroughly recommend it.

Price £9.99



De Colores

Dates for your diary

Cursillo Leaders' Workshops

October 15th – 17th 2021 at Shepherd's Dene, Riding Mill, Northumberland NE44 6AF

March 18th - 20th 2022 at Wistaston Hall, Crewe CW2 8JS

October 7th – 9th 2022 at Shallowfield House, Stone, near Stafford ST15 0NZ

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OXFORD AGM: Sat Oct 30th 2021 via ZOOM

**Thank you to all who have contributed to this issue of OxonFourth.
The next issue is planned for the spring and items for inclusion should be sent to:
v.leeming05@tiscali.co.uk to arrive not later than March 15th, 2022.
Please contact me with ideas for articles well before this date.
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