

St Peter & St Paul West Mersea

Newsletter – January 2021



A New Year Message from Rev. Keith Lovell

"We wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year". The song is well known and originated in the West Country at least three hundred years ago and was sung by poor carollers seeking donations from the rich. 2020, including its Christmas, has gone and in our human condition most of us will probably say "Thank God for that"! ... but it has been part of the experience of our lives, for good or bad!

In wishing you now a "Happy New Year", do I hear murmurings of "Bah Humbug", well known words from Charles Dickens' 'A Christmas Carol'? If so, I can understand and empathise, but it is hardly the best approach to 2021, is it?

In her Christmas Message to the nation, Her Majesty the Queen was, I thought at her best. At the age of ninety-four to be able to put together the words that she did was brilliant. They were all inclusive but at the same time centred strongly on facets of the Christian faith.



At its conclusion she hit the nail on the head of the reason for the Nativity. Above all, in showing Love for His Creation, the Nativity brought Joy and with it, HOPE!

Look up the word *hope* in any reliable Thesaurus and among the synonyms for it will be the word *wish*. A Hope or a Wish is the feeling that what is wanted can be obtained or that events will turn out for the best.

Her Majesty's obviously continuing and real *faith*, (another synonym for *hope*!) shone through as she looks forward "*with hope after a challenging year.*" It was almost as though she was saying "humbug" to it and stating that Life has to go on.

You cannot get more positive than that. I hope we can all take her positivity to heart, and it is in that vein that, with the Christian message of Hope, I sincerely Wish everyone better times ahead and greetings for a Happy 2021.

Blessings in Our Lord!
Keith Lovell.



A New Year Message from our Editor

Dear Friends,

I wanted to start this year with some thanks.

Firstly by thanking all our contributors. Our newsletter would be nothing without the people who send in such interesting articles and photos.

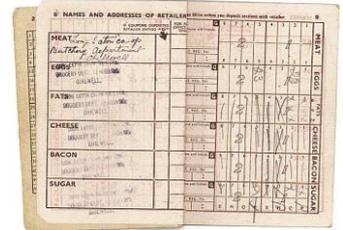
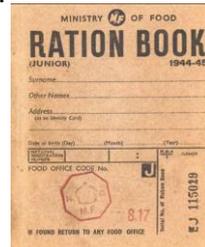
Then I would like to thank all our clergy who have taken time to bring you our front page each month. I apologise that last month Terry's name did not appear with his article.

I would also like to thank Lucy Hurst our church secretary who takes my suggestions and collection of emailed contributions and so expertly places them on each page.

I would also like to thank all those who deliver your copies to your door Alan Brook, Sue Hammond, Carolyn Sexton, Sandra Wheeler, Pauline Low, Georgie Hewes and Terry Walker. In the midst of their busy lives they bless our readers each month.

There is a lot to be thankful for even in the middle of a pandemic.

Many of you will remember the rationing of food during and after the war and doing the weekly wash by hand including the nappies.



So can I encourage you to look around for the blessings and riches that are there and thank God. As we move into this new year let us look for opportunities to bless others.



As the days lengthen and the warmth strengthens may the love, joy and peace, which are free gifts from God for all of us, overflow and bless all whom we come into contact with.

We all look forward to the time when we can all meet together again.

God bless you all.
Your Editor Val.

Congratulations Stan Polgaze

Stan celebrated his 101st birthday on Dec 20th. He was able to get to church at St Peter and St Paul's on Christmas morning. Well done Stan - you are an inspiration to us all. God bless you.



WINTER THOUGHTS

So many faces of winter.
For the elderly a time of struggle.
Cold and isolated.
When the home becomes a prison with
Short daylight hours and long ones of darkness.
When the clock ticks slowly, mockingly, marking the passage
Of time, of life.

Gnarled hands clutch the hot water bottle and pull the blanket tighter around the shoulders.
The last few lumps of coal on the fire.
The wind howls.
The rain beats against the windows.
It's a cold, grey world.

Not so for others.
For the working woman it is a time of relief.
Evenings are welcome.
A time to retreat into warm, cosy homes.
Close the curtains, turn on the lights,
Throw another log onto the fire.
Relax.
Take time out from the continual demands from outside.
No grass to cut; no seeds to plant; no leaves to rake.
Bliss.
Sit back. Relax and listen to the music.

The music will drown out the sound of the blizzard raging outside.
The blizzard that brings the snow.
The white blanket that will soon cover the ground
Bringing the country to a standstill.
A nightmare for the lorries delivering their cargoes to the people.
Motorways blocked by abandoned cars.
Desperate drivers trying to find a way home.
Misery for cold, frustrated commuters
Stuck on cold, friendless railway stations
Anxious wives, mothers, girlfriends waiting patiently at home.

But, oh what delight for the children.
Waking to a winter wonderland of white
When schools are closed
And fun is on the menu.
No 3Rs today.
Bundle up. Hat, Scarf, Coat, Glove, Boots.
Get out the sledge.
No sledge? No matter.
A tray: a dustbin lid: a plastic sack.
Anything will do.
Make for the nearest hill.
No matter how high or long.
Any slope will do.
Shrieks of laughter fill the air.
Delighted friends racing each other.
Tumbling, falling, wet.
It doesn't matter.
It may not be here tomorrow.
Enjoy this Winter, today.
The faces of Winter are many.

Pauline Sanderson.



The support for our Porch pantry has been simply amazing over the past few months, 2020 is certainly a year we will never forget but being blessed living on this Island has undoubtedly demonstrated our love, kindness and resilience.

The Porch pantry would like to thank each and every one of you who have supported it and helped raise awareness. Including: Cowabunga, The Gilt Rooms, The Art Cafe and Seaview Cafe for providing hot meals for our school children during half term in October... Coastal Coffee for their hugely successful 'tip match' initiative...all who donated items from their Government food boxes....Sparrows Playgroup, our Brownies and Cricket Club members for donating unbelievable amounts of food.



Our under 12's Rugby Club member for raising over £1,000 to buy Christmas food and make 36 hampers (our thanks also to Lee at Strood Constructions for storing all of the food!)



...Bob for numerous hamper deliveries.....our Co-Op for providing a donation drop-off location at the end of their tills and boxing it up on a weekly basis...Moores Estate Agents-bringing so many bags full of Christmas treats for the Pantry...Tina for donating a £100 voucher for Home Bargains....

Wendy for raising just shy of £1,000 by making facemasks, sold by Cathy at No4. Wendy also made and donated a beautiful selection of home crafted items for our hampers.



Emily for raising £100 by holding a virtual raffle for an authentic German Hamper.



The staff at DB Attenuation for a massive team effort of food and pet food donations. The donation of a fresh turkey...a beautiful bespoke chocolate Yule Log...from two different individuals on Mersea.

The Probus Club of Mersea...Paul Button for his hilarious Sunday nights Lockdown Quiz....all those who have donated on our Just Giving Page, popped financial donations through my letter box ...for every tin, packet and bottle you have left in the Porch Pantry and importantly, those who have requested our help for others.

WOW...an overwhelming list of acts of kindness by Mersea - for Mersea.

We sincerely hope 2021 brings brighter days and may we go from strength to strength with our Lord as our guide. Love Emma and the team xxx



The Church Bells

We all enjoy hearing the church bells ring out over Mersea, and it is important to ensure they are kept in a safe condition. They were last inspected in 2009. Early in 2020, John Talbot made contact with messrs. John Taylor & Co. Bell Founders of Loughborough, to visit West Mersea church, inspect the tower and bells and report on their present condition. In July, 2020, a member of staff from Messrs. Taylor & Co. came to Mersea, made an inspection, and gave a very satisfactory report. Historically, St. Peter & St. Paul's church is known to have had a ring of four bells from at least the 17th century - or earlier. In the year 1717 these bells, were removed from the church, taken to the firm of Thomas Gardiner, Bell Founders, Sudbury, together with additional material, these bells were used in the casting of five new bells. Then in 1987 a new, 'treble', bell was added to make a set of six. In the year 1935, an inspection of the tower showed the structure unsafe for heavy bells to be 'rung'. The bell frames were then altered to hang the bells in a static position, with each bell being struck by a special – Ellacombe – hammer, which means the bells are "Chimed" – not 'rung'!

John Talbot - December 2020

Nativity Rocks 2020

The Nativity Rocks initiative resulted from a bracing, socially distant walk on the beach with Cathy, Emma and Michelle, brainstorming ideas to help families engage with the Christmas story, in the absence of our usual Christmas services and activities. (David's initial reaction to our plan was not favourable, having worked in an urban priority parish, where all rocks were potential missiles, but he was soon persuaded that Mersea is different!!)

The Mersea Rocks group kindly allowed us to use their Facebook page to display rocks which had been hidden and found, and several wonderful people set about painting nativity characters on rocks to be hidden around the village – a BIG THANK YOU to you all – You know who you are! A lovely, unexpected bonus was that people who weren't church members offered to paint some too.



The idea was to collect about 5 different rocks to make a Nativity scene. My collection eventually featured in a doorstep decoration (below left), but Sue Hammond's grandchildren, Emily, Abi and Sam were the very first to create a full set (below right). Have a look at Mersea Rocks Facebook page to see more.



We are thrilled with the positive feedback we have received, and there are lessons to be learned for future years, but we hope it provided the community with a helpful reminder of the reason we celebrate each year, and also a bit of light relief in the season of Advent, when so many other activities had to be cancelled.

Liz Willey

A message from Alan Brook:

I want to plagiarise a Christmas Message, one Sue and I received from Bishop Robert – Bishop of Gibraltar in Europe, heard via the Church in Majorca.

In one of our best-loved carols, Christina Rossetti situates the birth of Jesus 'in the bleak midwinter'. She paints a severe and freezing manger scene, with howling wind and deep snow. She represents the frosted earth and water with iron and stone.

From the biblical narrative, it seems unlikely that Jesus was born in the bleak mid-winter, as the shepherds would not be putting their sheep out to pasture in freezing conditions. But that does not stop us gladly enjoying Rossetti's romantic poetic licence and reminding ourselves that the conditions of the first Christmas were hard, extraordinarily hard by modern standards.



Mary was a young girl giving birth a long way from home. The town of Bethlehem was crowded with strangers registering with the tax authorities of the occupying Roman powers. Mary laid her new-born baby in an animal's stone feeding trough. And the first visitors were not close family but rough men from the fields.

It is extremely difficult to recover this first Christmas. The festival has become overlaid with medieval nativity scenes and Romantic or Dickensian winter scenes. In the twentieth century, Christmas became significantly, the run up to the commercial Christmas – the 'golden quarter' – is now a vital part of the retail industry's overall wellbeing, so that vast sums are expended on advertising to persuade us to acquire more goods and more debt.

But not in 2020. This year it has been very different. Travel bans, lockdowns and quarantines have meant it was harder, perhaps impossible, to get together with our loved ones. People are poorer. High Streets, at least at the time of writing, are closed in many countries. And even when they re-open, shopping will not be quite the same when you have to physically distance and wear a mask.

Of necessity, Christmas was simpler this year. And, for many, it will have been sadder, too.

As Covid-19 has progressed, more and more families have been affected by the virus and its frightening and sometimes long-term symptoms. Some of us have a relative who has been in intensive care, struggling to breathe. Many of us know someone who has very sadly lost their life, and some of us have faced the first Christmas without someone close to us.

This year, perhaps we have more intuitively sensed the harshness of the manger scene, the cruelty of death, the pain of a bleak mid-winter.

In far off countries, seemingly remote and foreign to us, we must also remember there are many, many Christians who have been suffering terribly, not from Covid, although that, too, has no doubt affected them, but who have been mainly suffering for their faith, our faith.

When we struggle to come to terms with our own restrictions and lack of freedom, let us all think of those in China, who are thrown into prison, just for reading a Bible; or of the Christians in Nigeria, who have their villages burnt and their children taken away captive, for indoctrination into another faith; or of the Christians in Afghanistan and Pakistan, who have their shops and livelihoods destroyed, or simply get murdered for having drunk water out of a Muslim's well; or of those who, having converted to Christianity in Iran or Iraq, and thereby having 'committed' apostasy, find their committal to their new faith means being punished, even with the death penalty.

Another well-known – and much older – carol speaks to us about 'tidings of comfort and joy'. In 2020 we have needed, and in 2021 we will continue to need to hear these tidings.

For Christmas is at heart the mystery of the incarnation, the eternal God, who wonderfully condescends to be born as a human baby, in the roughest conditions. He is 'Immanuel' – the God who is with us.

Whatever conditions you have faced this Christmas, I hope you will be able to reach out and find the God who is with us. I hope you will take comfort from the presence of God with you, and perhaps also find opportunity to comfort others.

For, let us be quite fully aware that, all around the world, there are millions of others who need our support and comfort, and who need to be reminded that God is with them, too.

'God rest you merry', in modern English, means 'may God grant you peace and happiness'. The unknown author continued:

'Let nothing you dismay
for Jesus Christ our Saviour was born on Christmas Day.
To save us all from Satan's power
When we had gone astray
Which brings tidings of comfort and joy'.



I wish each of you and your families comfort and joy, as we end this shocking year of 2020 and approach the New Year of 2021, in which, we pray, God will grant us all peace and happiness.

Notices

West Mersea

The church is closed until further notice
The Sunday Morning 10am Zoom
Services of United Worship & Spiritual
Communion will continue for the
foreseeable future.

East Mersea

The church is closed until
further notice

Great Wigborough

The church is closed until
further notice

If you have any news and/or photos for our February Newsletter, please send them to Val Bocking on bocking@keme.co.uk or phone 01206 386750. Stay Safe, Keep Praying and thank God for all the positives.
Val Bocking - Editor