



Parish Notes

February 2026

Our new Vicar Announced!

The PCC is delighted to announce that our new Vicar will be Dr Jonathan Lewis-Jong. Father Jonathan served his Curacy here a decade ago, when he also worked on Psychology and Religion at Coventry University. He celebrated his first Mass at Mary Mags and soon after married Ella-Mae here, so we shall have a young family in the Vicarage. He has since served as a Parish Priest at Cocking with Bepton in the Diocese of Chichester.

A very warm welcome back, Jonathan and Ella-Mae.

Services

Sundays

Eucharist at 8 am and 5.30 pm,

Matins 10 am High Mass at 10.30 am

Weekdays

Eucharist at 12.15 pm and 6.00 pm
Morning Prayer 8.15 am, Evening Prayer
5.40 pm

Confessions

Daily after the 12.15 pm Mass,
Wednesdays & Saturdays at 6.30 pm
Baptism, Confirmation, Marriage by
appointment with the Parish Priest

Parish Clergy

We are in Interregnum just now,
awaiting the appointment of a new Vicar.

Associate Priest

The Reverend Dr Mel Marshall
Telephone: 01865 436243
mthrmelanie@gmail.com

Administration

Parish office

admin@stmarymagdalenoxford.org.uk

Phone: 01865 246143

Website

www.stmarymagdalenoxford.org.uk

X

Parish: @marymagsoxford

Choir: @magschoir

Facebook

stmarymagdalen.oxford

Safeguarding

The PCC is committed to making St Mary Magdalen's a safe environment for everyone and two new Safeguarding Officers, Henry Jestico and Francesca Holloway have just been appointed. If you have any questions about safeguarding matters or wish to report a concern, please email:

safeguardingsmmox@gmail.com

Treasurer

"Mary Mags Oxford costs £470 per day to run and is supported by your generous donations. We have to be self-funding. This means that we do not receive any funds other than the income we raise through planned giving, fundraising, etc.

We are constantly aware how the cost of living is affecting every one of us differently. We want you to know that we appreciate every penny you give and do not take your generosity for granted.

If you would like to discuss giving options, please contact the Treasurer, Oscar Riba-Thompson at marymagstreasurer@gmail.com"

Notices

There is a lot to sort out before Father Jonathan and Ella-Mae can move into the Vicarage, but another four appointments have taken immediate effect. Francesca Holloway and Henry Jestico have kindly agreed to share responsibility for our Safeguarding, while Matthew Watts has taken over Parish Administration from Nigel Speight and will work in the Office from 9.30 to 1.30 Tuesdays to Thursdays. Finally, our new Director of Communications is Suzanne McInroy.

Events

PCC

The next Parochial Church Council meeting will be on **Tuesday, February 3rd** at 7pm in church. Please note that this is the new regular time.

Tallis in Wonderland

Exciting news about the next fundraiser led by our musicians. Saturday 25th April is the date. Ten hours of Tallis in a single day! If you want to make a donation online please follow this link

<https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/tallisinwonderland>

The Bishop of Oxford

Bishop Steven has announced that he is retiring this year, but he will be presiding and preaching for us on Sunday, February 15th. Do come.

Church cleaning

And come the day before too! To make sure we are spick and span for his farewell visit. We shall be having a cleaning session at St Mary Magdalen on Saturday 14th February. Please come and help if possible; any time you have between 9.30am and 11.30am will be much needed and appreciated. Cleaning materials and refreshments will be provided; it is an opportunity to meet new people and enjoy good company.

Concerts

We have two on successive days on the 27th and 28th. On the Friday, starting at 7.30, we welcome "A Charm of Finches", two young Australian singers with a modern program, slightly reminiscent of The Corrs. Sample them at https://youtu.be/Eo4EJr_gBts.

On the Saturday, at 6pm we are hosting Trinity Girls School from Croydon, whose choir are singing "When Spring Sings" which will feature a Sound of Music medley plus work by Sarah Quartel, Bob Chilcott and Alexander L'Estrange. Entry is free.

Volunteers

Two ladies are stepping down for the time being, Jane Allingham who has church-watched for many years, and Susan Weavers who, among many other roles, has been on the door several Sunday mornings a year for an equally long time. We owe both a big debt of thanks. Would anyone like to have go replacing them? Please let Matthew know if you do. There will be plenty of help and advice to get you started. The church watching will be one two- or three-hour stint a week in the company of another, while the Sunday sidespersoning will be once every five weekends or so.

Sunday readings

Sunday 1st February: Malachi 3: 1-4. Heb 2: 14-18. Luke 2: 22-40

Sunday 8th February: Isaiah 58: 7-10. 1 Corinthians 2: 1-5. Mat 5: 13-16.

Sunday 15th February: Ecclus 15: 15-20. 1 Cor. 2: 6-10. Mat 5: 17-37.

Sunday 22nd February: Gen 2: 7-9; 3: 1-7. Rom 5: 12 (13-16) 17-19. Mat 4: 1-11.

Intercessions

Please pray for the long-term sick and those in special need, among them: Sophie Brown, Eleanor Sartain, Corinna Lloyd Roe, Guy Westwood, Edward Llewelyn Jones, Vernon Porter, Susannah, Susan Weavers, Karen Jones, Graham Davies, Rene, Anna, Phoenix, Barbara Duncombe, Isla, Sarah Murray. Joyce Day.

If you would like any name added to this list (or removed from it, post recovery) ask admin@stmarymagdalenoxford.org.uk. Please note that unless we are advised that the illness could be protracted, names may be taken off after three months.

My Mary Mags

*Every month we highlight a feature of the Church (**Our Mary Mags**) or invite members of the community to describe how and why they hooked up with it (**My Mary Mags**). This month, it is the turn of Nigel and Helen Timms to describe how they arrived...*



Before coming to Mags, Helen and I spent several years going to various Oxfordshire churches, a time which saw us involved in some difficult entanglements with recalcitrant rural parish choirs and wobbly organ benches—and also, it has to be said, with wobbly clergy. By 2013 we'd had enough of this, and set out on a year-long tour, visiting a different church most weeks, looking for somewhere we could call a spiritual home. One Sunday in 2014 we arrived at Mags, to find an atmosphere of jubilation: now thank we all our God! Yes, Queens Park Rangers had just been promoted to the Premier League. Father Peter Groves' passion for football was, we soon discovered, only matched by his passion for liturgy, music, and preaching. For the first time in years we saw the Eucharist being celebrated solemnly and with purpose, immaculately choreographed.

The choral and organ music was frankly stunning compared to what we'd endured over the last few years, and was clearly a highly valued part of the worship. The preaching was incisive, often funny, showed a depth of learning, and was always challenging.

We looked up from our pew one morning to find Rowan Williams mounting the pulpit steps. This, we felt, was a church we could stay with; and before long Peter made me a churchwarden, possibly to make sure that we did! Certainly I did not feel well qualified for the rôle, but the support I had from Peter and Nigel Speight— at that time the other churchwarden— was magnificent. In fact, mutual support is a characteristic of the Mags community, which we found to be intelligent and caring, and mercifully free of the ignorance and bickering which we had, alas, experienced elsewhere.

It was, however, in many ways a problematic time for the church. Sunday services had to be moved to Keble while the interior of Mags was being redecorated, and then there was Covid to contend with; but the resilience and patience of the congregation was admirable. And what a truly remarkable congregation it is: you can't swing a thurible without braining an author, a composer, or a Regius Professor of something or other. Then there is the constant flow of bright young students passing through, many of them studying for the ministry. Helen and I both feel immensely grateful that we have become members of this remarkable community; Deo gratias!

Sermons

Parish Notes has grown by 50% this month and will henceforth contain two sermons delivered in the previous month. We start with one from Father Hugh Wybrew and another from Mother Naomi Gardom. Our thanks to them.

Preached on the Second Sunday after Epiphany by Father Hugh Wybrew...

Sin doesn't feature much these days in sermons. But the first sentence of today's gospel makes it inescapable. 'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.'

What is the sin of the world? At the beginning of the human story in the Bible stands the Tower of Babel. It's a symbol of human arrogance and pride, of lust for power and wealth, self-centredness both individual and national, aggressive nationalism, hatred of the other, exploitation of other human beings, and so on and so on and so on. It's the symbol of the divisions and enmities that have always afflicted human life.

The biblical counterblast to Babel is Pentecost. 'The church of God, those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints' in Paul's address to the Corinthians, is God's answer to the human Babel. The Holy Spirit enables those speaking different languages to understand one another. She implants the love of God, revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, in human hearts and minds, and so enables divine love to reconcile human hostility. The Letter to the Ephesians speaks of the 'unity of the Spirit' and affirms that 'there is one body and one Spirit'. The one body is the Church, the body of Christ; and the one Spirit is the Holy Spirit who unites us with Christ and in Christ. The Church is called to be the beginning of a renewed human society, in which people live together 'in the bond of peace'.

Yet historically the Tower of Babel is almost as much a symbol of the church as of the world. Christians speak different languages and belong to different cultures. They – we - speak different theological languages; and from the C4th the one Church of God has become increasingly divided. Divisions still multiply: Christians now take divergent views about the relationship between the Gospel and contemporary culture; traditionalists and liberals hold difference views about human sexuality, and that has caused yet another semi-split within the Anglican Communion and within the Church of England. A senior clergyman in this city once said to me that it was impossible for people who took differing views on same-sex relationships to live together in the same church. In so many ways the Gospel has been subordinated to the divisive human factors it is meant to overcome, not least the aggressive nationalism which calls Christianity in aid to support it.

In the past century many Christians have become aware of the contradiction between the Gospel and the facts of church life. The World Council of Churches, and local ecumenical bodies, have come into being to overcome the Christian Babel. They have perhaps had more success than the United Nations Organisation. Christian divisions still make it difficult for the Church to proclaim the Gospel as effectively as it should. But most churches are now on friendly terms; and some, like the Anglican Church, welcome members of other churches to share in the Eucharist. When I was ordained in 1960 that was only beginning to be the case among Churches of the Reformation. It was unthinkable then that the head of the RC Church and the Supreme Governor of the C of E would one day happily pray together. Progress has been made. A year or two ago I was at an Anglican eucharist celebrated by a woman priest at which a Roman Catholic laywoman received communion; and I was once invited to concelebrate the Divine Liturgy in a Romanian Orthodox church, and so am technically a Romanian Orthodox as well as Anglican.

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity was first observed in 1908. It's now a routine observance in most churches, and so perhaps not taken as seriously as it should be. Prayer for the unity of the church is closely linked with prayer for the unity of humankind. Prayer may seem the only thing we individual Christians can do. But there is something else we can do. In his Letter to the Ephesians: Paul writes: 'I therefore...beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.' Putting love in all its forms into practice, in all our circumstances and relationships, makes a positive difference, not just in the Church but in the human family. The Lamb of God is still taking away the sin of the world. His Spirit rests on us as on him, to strengthen us in our Christ-given vocation to 'maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace', in the Church and the people among whom we live and work.

Preached on the Third Sunday after Epiphany by Mother Naomi Gardom...

+In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
'I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.' Words from our Epistle, the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians, the first chapter and the tenth verse.

These words seem especially pointed when set for the Sunday which closes the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity; a reminder that the divisions which keep us from perfect communion and community with all other Christians have been present from the very beginning of the life of the Church. Indeed, in comparison to the actual divisions and schisms that have torn the Church apart for centuries, the Week of Prayer for its unity is still in its infancy, dating back only to 1908. Another 19 centuries of prayer, and we might get somewhere, perhaps.

But as well as being a reminder of the wounds that divide us from one another, this reading from Paul's epistle to the Corinthians is a reminder that the signs at the heart of the Christian life and Church are not signs of unity or perfection, but division and brokenness. The two signs which define us as Christians are the signs of the cross and the sign of communion: an instrument of torture and a meal of broken bread, broken body and poured-out blood. In First Corinthians Paul follows this passage with his hymn to the foolishness of the cross, the imbecility in the eyes of the world of those who follow in its way. This is sign that he, that they, that you and I, that our Christian siblings across the world, have all chosen to follow. What unites us is not some kind of cheap perfection, or unity for its own sake, but a shared willingness to accept as our blazon the ultimate signs of weakness and folly.

And this is costly; it has always been so. Turning to our gospel, we hear immediately of the cost to John the Baptist of his unwillingness to capitulate to the values of the world. Jesus' response to the arrest of John is to withdraw to Galilee, but not to Nazareth: instead, he goes to the town of Capernaum, the lakeshore. We might reasonably infer that Jesus has withdrawn to this more provincial region out of fear that what has happened to John might happen to him, were it not for the fact that Matthew tells us that Christ here begins to preach repentance in exactly the same terms that John the Baptist did. 'From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."' This is hardly a retreat. And it's there that he calls to his first disciples. Andrew and Simon, and James and John, two brace of brothers who rise up at his word to follow him. They could not have known, how should they, how monumental this decision would be for them, or for the world. Nor could they have known how costly this decision would be, leading them through danger and disgrace to

death. So what did they know, in that moment? What were they promised? 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.' In other words, they were already known and valued for who they were. Their skills and experience, all that made up who they were already, had a place and a value in this new venture. Just as they were called, exactly as they were, and transformed into the church's first saints, so we are called, exactly as we are, into this broken body we call the Church – imperfect, full of division and foolishness, and yet sanctified by the faithfulness of the one who calls us.

Christian unity is costly. And Christian unity is imperfect. And yet the pursuit of it is vital to the outworking of the kingdom on earth. This is not because there is anything particularly holy or transformational about ecumenical prayer meetings: they are much like other meetings, though if our Orthodox siblings are represented, the biscuits tend to be rather more interesting. No, Christian unity is not an end in itself, but rather it is another sign, like the cross, like the broken bread, that a different world is possible.

In a world that is being torn apart by greed, by chauvinism, by fear, any community that is willing to look beyond its own interests and find common ground with others is a community worth cultivating. Any community that admits of the possibility of goodness in those with whom we do not agree is a community with something to say to the world. Any community which affirms the worth of every human being, regardless of status is a community with radical possibilities. Any community with the courage to admit to brokenness at its heart, is a community with radical potential for healing. We are called, as Simon and Andrew, as James and John were called, away from our ordinary work with its anxieties and preoccupations. We are called to follow in the costly work of Christ, to repent ourselves and to preach repentance in every place where power is going astray. But we are called as we are, not as we would like to be, and we are called to the world as it is, not as we would like it to be. We are called to the picket lines, called to the homeless shelters, called to the difficult conversations and to the re-examination of our own values. We are called as individuals made in the image of God, as the Church of St Mary Magdalen, as the Church of England, and as the whole body of Christ, to witness to the wounds of the cross and the brokenness of the bread. For it is by these wounds that we are healed. Amen.

Poem of the Month

A Christmas Candle by Lawrence Sail

It begins as a crackling star
on the soft flesh of tallow,
draws up to a little arch,
burrows a molten pool
tremulous as a tear.

Vowel of Christ and child,
its bodied brightness invests
the dark with wild shadows,
the old conspiracies
that hope must still compile.

And this recurs, where before
there was only a dull stump,
an opaque pronoun; where the
snuff,
black, curled over above
the rim, hung there merely.

Though time will bring it down,
It accepts the alighting flame;
Though in the night-time draughts
it gutters and sweals, yet
fiercely it burns. Again. Now.

Lawrence Sail has published ten books of poetry and been Chairman of the Arvon Foundation and Director of the Cheltenham Festival of Literature – and he is the twin brother of Catriona, the lovely lady who has helped with Mary Mags flowers for well over a decade. The bouquet from which this particular bloom was plucked is “Songs of the Darkness – Poems for Christmas” which was published in 2010 to raise money for African schools.

This month began with Candlemas and we are a church where people light around 500 candles a month. Do any church watching and you will see visitor after visitor stoop slightly and perform the ritual which Sail describes at the start, only his words suggest the fusion of divine (“crackling star”) and human (“soft flesh”) that we celebrate at Christmas. The symbolism stretches its legs in the next stanza with humanity like a candle that is being re-lit, a “dull stump” being brought back to life after resembling a lower case “i”.

You'll find a typical Sail poem full of little shifts and shimmies, and unexpected expansions of implication. The third stanza heads off in a direction like that of the Magi of T S Eliot we looked at in December where the narrator goes gloomy as he contemplates the political upheaval ahead. There may be trouble coming. However, the candle of Christmas derives strength from the "night-time draughts" and "burns" all the more "fiercely". "Again"? Well it comes round every year doesn't it? And here it is again. "Now."

February 2026

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 Candlemas	2 Feria	3 Blaise M	4 Feria	5 Agatha V M	6 Paul Mika and Companions Ms	7 Feria
Parish Community	Steven our Bishop	The PCC	Sarah Archbishop-elect	The Persecuted church	Missionary work	Oxford Deanery
8 The 5th Sunday in Ordinary Time	9 Feria	10 Scholastica V	11 Feria	12 Feria	13 Feria	14 Cyril and Methodius
Parish community	Christian Aid	Religious Communities	Sacristans and Servers	Healing Ministry	Vocations	The church in Europe
15 The 6th Sunday in Ordinary Time	16 Feria	17 Feria	18 Ash Wednesday	19 Feria	20 Feria	21 Feria
Parish community	World peace	Confessors	Penitence	Famine relief	The faithful departed (Monthly requiem)	The Gatehouse
22 1st Sunday in Lent	23 Polycarp B M	24 Feria	25 Feria	26 Feria	27 Feria	28 Feria
Parish Community	Bishops	Emergency services	Choir and musicians	Oxford City Council	Ordinands	Spiritual Directors