



St Mary
Magdalen
OXFORD

Parish Notes

July 2026



INSIDE:

“Our Mags” – A Fátima Madonna at the Stoup (See left). Read Charl Engela’s fascinating study of the Portuguese tile panel by our South door.

One sermon and one funeral address by Fr. Jonathan.

Details of our Patronal Festival, St Giles Fair sale and “Ride & Stride.”

Poem of the Month – the second of Gerard Manly Hopkins’ “Dark Sonnets”

Services

Sundays

Eucharist at 8 am
Matins 10 am; High Mass at 10.30 am

Saturdays

Eucharist at 12.15 pm and 6.00 pm

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

Vicar

Fr. Jonathan Lewis-Jong
FrJonathan@stmarymagdalenoxford.org.uk
Whatsapp 07799 271913

Associate Priest

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

Administration

Parish office

Parish Administrator: Matthew Watts
admin@stmarymagdalenoxford.org.uk

Phone: 01865 246143

Website

www.stmarymagdalenoxford.org.uk

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Parish: @marymagsoxford

Choir: @magschoir

Facebook

stmarymagdalen.oxford

Safeguarding

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

safeguarding@stmarymagdalenoxford.org.uk

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 –
treasurer@stmarymagdalenoxford.org.uk

Our 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, our Churchwarden Charl Engela examines the Portuguese tile panel on the wall near our South door, featured on the cover.*

The vision that seized young Lúcia de Jesus Rosa dos Santos in 1917 was not merely a moment of piety, but a sudden widening of the world into radiance. For her, the sunlight at the Cova da Iria did not simply fall on the olive trees: it opened. Standing before the small azulejo panel just inside the south door at Mary Mags, one senses an echo of that same astonishment: the Virgin not simply painted, but revealed, as though the glazed surface were a thin veil between the everyday and the luminous. The colours, the gilded edging, the gentle downward gaze all work together to create a moment of stillness, inviting the passerby to pause before stepping further into the church.

The panel's provenance remains obscure and its presence in an Anglo-Catholic church is intriguing. Portuguese devotional tiles belong to a visual world shaped by Mediterranean light and the domestic intimacy of wayside shrines; they are not the usual vocabulary of English high church aesthetics. Yet here, above the holy water stoup, the panel functions exactly as it would in its native setting: a calm threshold marker, a reminder that one crosses from the ordinary into the realm of the sacred. It is signed, too: "F. Batista," followed by the small inscription "Sp. M. in Portugal," a formula used by late twentieth century tile workshops to mark pieces "specially made in Portugal" for devotional export. This small detail confirms what the eye already suspects: that the panel was crafted with care in its homeland before finding its way, somehow, to Oxford.

The iconography is unmistakably that of Fátima. The Virgin stands slender and composed, hands joined over the rosary that identifies her as Nossa Senhora do Rosário. The crown, delicately rendered, reflects the devotional developments that followed the apparitions, when the crowned statue became a national emblem of intercession. Her mantle, edged with gold and patterned with soft vegetal motifs, carries the gentle decorative language of Portuguese tilework, where ornament is meant to soothe rather than dazzle. Even her gaze - composed, lowered, almost shy - belongs to the Fátima tradition, conveying a maternal nearness rather than the more formal majesty familiar in English Marian art. It is a small, glazed window into a devotional world shaped by tenderness, prayer, and the quiet gravity of the rosary.

And so the panel stands as a modest but luminous anomaly within Mary Mags: a devotional accent from another Catholic culture that nonetheless deepens the church's own sacramental atmosphere. Its position above the stoup turns a simple gesture of dipping one's fingers into holy water into a moment of encounter, linking the worshipper with a tradition shaped by Lúcia's wonder more than a century ago. Unusual though it may be in an Anglo-Catholic setting, it feels entirely appropriate: a reminder that the Church's beauty is never confined to one aesthetic lineage, and that devotion, like grace, often arrives from unexpected directions and gently makes itself at home.

Sermons

There follow two June sermons by Father Jonathan, with the second his address at the funeral of Tim Moore last month. Tim was once a regular member of our congregation. Note that Sermons from the St Mary Magdalen's pulpit are now available on Spotify and Apple Podcasts:

<https://open.spotify.com/show/4XxAshYMLSchKstPm0hux0...>

<https://podcasts.apple.com/.../oxford-st.../id1896857676...>

Trinity 3 (The 12th Sunday of the year)

Matthew 10.26-33: *You are of more value than many sparrows.*

Yes, but how many sparrows?

In our modern academic culture that fetishises productivity, so aptly captured by the phrase “publish or perish”, it is a rare thing indeed to find a very important thinker who has published very little. Peter Higgs—he of the Higgs Boson—once noted that had he been subject to such pressures, he might never have made it: throughout his 65-year career, he published fewer than 30 papers.

There are even starker examples in philosophy. Edmund Gettier is probably the most famous case, whose paper on whether knowledge is justified true belief remains a classic in epistemology. It was his second and last paper; after which the only other thing he published was a book review. But, for my money, John Taurek takes the cake. As far as I can tell, he only published one paper in his lifetime, but it is one that has spawned a large and lively secondary literature.

Taurek's 1977 paper *Should the Numbers Count?* is a notorious provocation in ethics, inspiring much argument, sometimes rigorous, often vociferous. The question of the paper is a familiar one: if we have to choose between saving one person or saving a greater number of people, are we obligated to choose the latter?

And the answer, to most people, is obvious: of course, if we had to choose, we must choose to save the many over the few, and certainly, over only one. But Taurek disagrees. And, worse still, his preferred method of choosing which to save—the few or the many—is to flip a coin, thereby giving everyone, equally, a 50% chance of being saved. And he would do this, not only in the case of the one-versus-five, but even one-versus-fifty. For Taurek, the numbers simply don't count as a feature of moral decision-making.

He makes several arguments for his case, but only one concerns us this morning, and it has to do with what sorts of things are amenable to summation and comparison. Mass is an obvious example of a property of physical objects, including human persons, which is amenable to summation and comparison. We can weigh one person and compare her mass to that of the rest of his family combined, for example, though it may be impolite so to do. By contrast, a person's skill at playing chess is not thus amenable. It makes perfect sense to compare one player's skill against another's, but it makes no sense at all to compare one player's skill against that of a whole group's combined. Chess skill is not summable. Taurek argues that some important morally-relevant properties are similarly unsummable, such as pain and suffering, and life and its loss. For him, then, it is not at all obvious that it is better for one man to die than for a whole nation to be in peril, as Caiaphas the high priest opines in John's gospel.

This debate has recently found expression in the applied ethics of fishing. Shrimp Welfare Project was founded in 2021, and is premised on the notion that the the suffering and death of the 440 million shrimp farmed each year is very morally significant indeed, not because each shrimp suffers very much, but because when combined together, even any minor suffering of 440 million individuals amounts to a lot of suffering, certainly enough to deserve our moral priority.

Perhaps that's right—but then we begin to make real comparisons. If we had to devote our resources to either alleviating the suffering of 440 million shrimp or, say, the 50 million people living under conditions of slavery, which should we choose? How many shrimp are worth just one human? How many sparrows are you worth?

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If there is a Christian answer to this question, it must surely be that the value of human life and flourishing is incalculable, is infinite. There is no number of shrimps and sparrows that outweighs a single human being, not because other species are of less value, but because human dignity resists quantification altogether. Maybe this is unfashionably anthropocentric, but if so, then let it also be unapologetically so, Christian faith being rich ground for an uncompromising humanism.

The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith put it this way in its 2019 declaration, which caught some controversy, *Dignitas Infinita*: "Every human person possesses an infinite dignity, inalienably grounded in his or her very being, which prevails in and beyond every circumstance state, or situation the person may ever encounter".

Several theological grounds for this claim have been suggested, all of which share a common theme. There is the idea that our createdness in God's image is what confers our infinite dignity, which is a share in God's own absolute value. The Incarnation then takes things up a notch: in Christ, divinity and humanity are united, and so our share in God's dignity is inextricable and inviolable. And the sacrifice of Jesus for us is yet another sign of what God deems our worth to be: we are worth dying for.

The common theme is, of course, that human dignity and value is grounded not in any contingent facts about us—our intelligence and beauty, our productivity and achievement, even our goodness and piety—but in the absolute and faithful love of God, who loves us in our weakness and sinfulness as in our strength and virtue.

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You are of more value than any quantifiable commodity, and your value has nothing whatever to do with quantifiable commodities. This should be obvious, and yet it doesn't seem to be, so dominant is the economic logic of our modern age, even in our moral and metaphysical considerations.

Certainly, for so many people, our self-esteem is tangled up in all kinds of countable things: the number of papers we publish, and grants we obtain, and social media followers we have, and sprockets we sell, or whatever. And at a political level, it is now possible, even commonplace, to ask whether we can afford for the sick and elderly to continue living; and to rate and rank migrants according to their worth. [By the way, a Malaysian clergyman with a doctorate does not make the cut as a "skilled migrant", achieving only 60 points, under the minimum of 70.] We talk about war as costly, as if that is the primary moral problem with it.

All these are signs that we have, as a society, forgotten the gospel truth of our infinite and indelible worth. And when we proclaim this gospel in this world, we will doubtless be told that we are being impractical and unrealistic, and that we must be numerate in our moral and social and political reasoning. But the truth is that we don't. You are worth innumerably many sparrows. Don't tell the RSPB I said that.

Fr. Jonathan's Address at the Funeral of Tim Moore

Our two poems share a sort of serenity, but express two quite different attitudes towards death. Tennyson's "and may there be no sadness of farewell" finds its opposite in Hugo's "I will walk...sad, and the day for me will be as night" - I shan't attempt the French. Perhaps the subject and circumstances of each death accounts for the difference. Tennyson is writing towards the end of his long life. Hugo is reflecting on the death, by drowning, of his nineteen year old daughter. It makes sense to us that our responses of these two cases might be - even should be - difference.

And yet, why should this be so? To lose a loved one is to lose a loved one. In both cases, they are equally lost to us, death being the great equaliser in so many ways. And in both cases, it is a tragedy to the extent that the loss of any good thing is tragic. Having heard and read these tributes, it is obvious that Tim was a good thing; and so the world's loss of him must be, concomitantly, a tragic thing.

Whatever else its virtues, this view of death as a tragedy happens to be the Christian one, which is clear-eyed about death and its awfulness. Christians do not—and certainly must not—pretend that death is a small matter, unworthy of tears. It is common to hear, nowadays, people talking about how death is just a natural part of life. But, of course, it isn't: it is, rather, the end of life, its cessation. And to confuse the natural for the good is the kind of mistake that can only be made by those of us who have spent too little time in nature. Lots of things are natural that are far from good.

The Christian doctrine of death is that it is bad, and is entailed by the Christian view of life, which is that it is good, even very good. And among the evidences that this is the Christian view of death is the fact, which so often escapes our notice, that Jesus never once meets a dead person whom he does not bring back to life. He does not meet the bereaved with platitudes about the naturalness of death, nor even with assurances about their loved one now being in a better place. For him, the only appropriate response to death is life: he returns their brother to Mary and Martha, her son to the widow of Nain, his daughter to Jairus.

Indeed, the whole story of Jesus himself is interpretable as a response to the problem of death itself. The immortal God takes on mortal flesh to redeem it from its finitude: Christ dies to destroy death. Death is so awful a thing that it takes nothing less than the self-giving of God to vanquish it.

And is vanquished: the stark frankness of the Christian assessment of death is matched only by the exuberance of the Christian hope in Jesus Christ, who has conquered creation's greatest foe. Victor Hugo's "the day for me is night" is

reversed by the Light of the World, for whom—as the Psalmist says in the 139th Psalm - “the night is bright as the day; for darkness is as light”.

And this conviction that this is so, that death is no more, that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is our Easter gospel of everlasting life, is not a function of deficient biological knowledge on the part of Christians. We know as much about programmed cell death as anyone else. It is no surprise to us that the dead, as a matter of course, stay dead. No: our insistence that death has been denied its finality has such more to do with something else altogether, captured by another of our readings this morning, from St Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians.

These three remain: faith, hope, and love—but the greatest of these is love. Love, we assert with every fibre of our being, is greater than anything, even than death. Easter Day is the festival of this truth; the Resurrection of Christ its sign—the sign that such love as that Christ has for us cannot be killed, cannot be extinguished, is not subject to entropy. Thus, the God of the same Jesus Christ, and whom the New Testament insists is love itself, honours our love for one another, endowing upon it a share in the divine life itself, even in its eternity. All of which is to say that God honours the love that you so obviously have for Tim: this love, which has power enough to give life.

Poem of the Month

“I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day...” by Gerard Manly Hopkins

I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day.
What hours, O what black hours we have spent
This night! what sights you, heart, saw; ways you went!
And more must, in yet longer light's delay.

With witness I speak this. But where I say
Hours I mean years, mean life. And my lament
Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent
To dearest him that lives alas! away.

I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree
Bitter would have me taste: my taste was me;
Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed the curse.

Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours. I see
The lost are like this, and their scourge to be
As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse.

Just in case “No worst...” the sonnet we tackled month, fell short as a summary of what despair feels like, Hopkins has another go. This time however, there are the slightest hints of upturn. Not at the start, mind: “the fell” hints at the fallen or even The Fall, but as a noun it meant furry pelt, so “the dark” becomes tangible, smothering and suffocating. He then addresses his heart not as a part of him but as a partner, that has shared visions and journeys which are presumably so nightmarish that he leaves us to imagine them without imagery or adjectival assistance.

And it is not just Hopkins who is waking up. So is his faith. Christ, simply an absentee in the first poem, is now re-instated as a “witness.” And thus presumed to be taking an interest in him. He is a loved one too - “dearest” - and in the second quatrain the poet projects his own situation of feeling exiled and an outcast in Ireland on to Christ who “lives alas! away.” The repetition of “hours,” “mean,” “cries” and “me” plus interjections of exclamations like “O” and “alas” all help to maintain a high level of emotiveness.

At the opening of the sestet, there is more Victorian melodrama - “I am gall, I am heartburn.” It is as if he has become an allegorical figure representing the pain induced by such physicalities. Physical and metaphysical get fused. He is tasting bitterness and tasting of it. With “brimmed,” a newly transitive verb, “the curse” is physically present and running through his veins.

The directness of the statements is advanced by simplicity. Most of the poem is monosyllabic – five whole lines in fact, including the first three. But it wouldn’t be Hopkins without a little neologism. In “Selfyeast” he seems to imply that if attempts to raise his spirits are made without divine inspiration, but are simply the result of his own will, then the product will fall short. He would have encountered more “sour dough” in Ireland than in England one imagines...

In the final two lines however, you could argue he answers the opening declaration of “No worst, there is none,” because he dissociates himself from “the lost.” It as if he knows that salvation for himself will be secured. He may feel lost, but now believes again that he will be found.

Notices

Churchyard and railings

Our ironmongers Donkeywell Forge should complete the most awkward part of the scheme – the Northeast corner - towards the middle of this month, with the hawthorn tree roots removed and a new stonework base in place. Weather permitting, we hope to have the northern graveyard open for people to enjoy lunch out there during our Patronal Festival on Sunday, July 19th. We would love for people to support the **churchyard project** in order to preserve this wonderful

green space in the heart of Oxford. We have raised a substantial amount of money, but maintenance will be ongoing once Donkeywell are finished.

www.justgiving.com/campaign/smm-churchyard

St Giles Fair and Ride and Stride

Two of our main fundraisers are just two months away. We are looking at ways of revamping our St Giles Fair operation, but recycling stuff remains a major theme, so if you are considering a de-clutter, we would love to help you out. Absolutely everything will be either sold or relayed to charity: books, clothes, pictures, bric-a-brac, small furniture, jewelry, even CDs and DVDs (remember them?!) are welcome. We also do well selling home-made cakes, jams and chutneys, so contributions on that front would be welcome. Everyone who made our recent Bake Off event such a success (£239 raised) is invited to go again.

Riders or Striders can either cycle or walk around churches in Oxford and Oxon raising funds to be split 50/50 between Oxford Historic Churches Trust (who have been generous with several grants for our benefit) and Mary Mags. This is on Open Saturday, September 12th and it is an excellent way to discover churches in the city or County you do not know. There are some 400.

If you can donate or help with either of these, please contact nigespeight@gmail.com or the office.

Event

Our Patronal Festival (as mentioned above) is on **Sunday, July 19th**. The Revd Dr A. K. M. Adam will be our preacher this year. Do remember to **register for the lunch**, which will this year be in the church and churchyard! The suggested donation is £15 (£10 for children over 5 yrs; else free). If you'd like to make an extra contribution to sponsor someone else to come, do let the Vicar know. And conversely, if finances are what's stopping you from coming, please don't let that be so, and get in touch with Vicar too - we have a few free spots already. Sign up here <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfFUwB-9gEMHlcZrFjuBmEdc3Vo-7EWCgu1KZecHLfnUioELw/viewform?usp=header>

It is customary for Patronal Festivals to also be Gift Days for many parishes, so let me take this opportunity to encourage everyone to contribute to the financial life of the parish. The most efficient way to do so is via the Parish Giving Scheme, either as a one-off or regular

donation: <https://www.parishgiving.org.uk/donors/find-your-parish/oxford-st-mary-magdalen-oxford> If you'd like to have a conversation about the financial health of the parish, the Treasurer and Vicar are happy to do this with you—just let us know.

Sunday readings

Sunday 5th July: Zech 9: 9-10. Romans 8: 9, 11-13. Matthew 11: 25-30.

Sunday 12th July: Isaiah 55: 10-11. 1 Rom 8: 18-23. Matthew 13: 1-9.

Sunday 19th July: Wisd 12: 13, 16-19; Rom 8: 26-27; Matthew 13: 24-30.

Sunday 26th July: 1 Kings 3: 5, 7-12; Rom 8: 28-30. Matthew 13: 44-52.

Intercessions

Please pray for the long-term sick and those in special need, among them: Beryl Dryden, Joyce Day, Vernon Porter, Sophie Brown, Eleanor Sartain, Guy Westwood, Jill, Joanna Hickie, Ro, Ann Garfit, Alison Mundy, Matthew.

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.

July 2026

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1 Feria	2 Feria	3 Thomas Ap	4 Feria
			Gavin our Bishop	Sarah our Archbishop	The church in India	Those being ordained
5 The 14 th Sunday of the Year	6 John Fisher and Thomas More Ms	7 Feria	8 Feria	9 Feria	10 Feria	11 Benedict Ab
Parish community	The persecuted church	Vocations	Helen and Douglas House	The Gatehouse	Theologians	Religious Communities
12 The 15 th Sunday of the Year	13 Feria	14 Feria	15 Bonaventure B Dr	16 Feria	17 Feria	18 Feria
Parish community	Oxford City Council	Keble College	Spiritual Directors	Healing Ministry	Famine Relief	Our church musicians
19 Patronal Festival	20 Feria	21 Feria	22 Mary Magdalen	23 Bridget R	24 Feria	25 James Ap
Our Church and Parish	St Margaret's Church	Sacristans and Servers	Penitence	Europe	Visitors to our church	Pilgrims
26 The 17 th Sunday of the Year	27 Feria	28 Feria	29 Marth, Mary and Lazarus	30 Feria	31 Ignatius Loyola Pr	
Parish Community	Children's Church	Missionaries	Family life	Those to be married	Campion Hall	