



St Mary  
Magdalen  
OXFORD

# **Parish Notes**

**January 2025**

## **Parish Clergy:**

### **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

The Reverend Canon Dr Peter Groves  
Telephone: 01865 247836  
peter.groves@theology.ox.ac.uk

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#### **Associate Priest**

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

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#### **Parish office:**

admin@stmarymagdalenoxford.org.uk

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#### **Website**

[www.stmarymagdalenoxford.org.uk](http://www.stmarymagdalenoxford.org.uk)

## **Events and Notices**

### **January Feasts**

The Epiphany is celebrated this year on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> January. The Baptism of the Lord will be the following Sunday, 12<sup>th</sup> January, after which Ordinary Time begins again.

### **Scripture on Saturday**

Our online Bible study group restarts on the morning of Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> January at 10am. We will be looking at some of the non-canonical or apocryphal gospels alongside the text of the New Testament.

### **Churchyard gardening**

On the morning of Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> January at 10.30am, there will be a gardening session to clear the leaves in the churchyard and continue the improvements made during the last year. There has been significant planting, the fruit of which will be visible before very long, and it would be good to take the opportunity to prepare the ground as thoroughly as possible. Please come along from 10.30am onwards. Warm clothes and gloves are strongly recommended.

### **Anne Dalziel RIP**

Anne was a stalwart member of St Mary Magdalens for several decades, and along with her husband Malcolm, worked tirelessly for the good of the parish and the wider community. She died peacefully on 13<sup>th</sup> December with her family around after receiving the rites of the church. There will be a High Mass of Requiem for her funeral on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> January at 11am.

### **Cleaning**

Since October, the church has enjoyed the attentions of our new cleaning team headed up by Iria, who deal with the porch, paths and graveyards as well as the interior (while still leaving jobs for our own cleaning volunteers several Saturday mornings a year!) Iria is happy to take on more work, especially in North Oxford, although she is ready to drive elsewhere. If you need such help, please ask Nigel in the church office and he will give you the necessary contact details.

### **Poem of the Month**

If you have a favourite poem or excerpt of no more than 25 lines which has a religious or spiritual theme, and you would like to see it featured in our series here, please forward it to [admin@stmarymagdalenoxford.or.uk](mailto:admin@stmarymagdalenoxford.or.uk) with or without a note or two on why you like it.

## Midnight Mass 2024

*"When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.' Luke 2.15*

How often do we associate angels with anything other than Christmas. Christmas and angels just go together: on our cards, in our carols, on top of our trees. When the fateful casting day arrives and the parts in the nativity play are being distributed, what more could we wish for our children and grandchildren than to be cast as the angels we know them to be. Or think that they are. Or wish that they were. In the last few days, the sports desks of every newspaper and media outlet have been rejoicing that the Arsenal striker who has returned to form so dramatically at Christmas is blessed with the names Gabriel and Jesus.

Of course, angels aren't only for Christmas, but we're not very good at realising that. "It came upon the midnight clear" is one of my favourite hymns, and if you're bored during this sermon you can look that hymn up – it's number 29 – and discover that only one of the four verses is actually about Christmas. The message of the angels – the peace and justice of the Kingdom of God – doesn't confine itself to this time of year alone. It's bad enough having to work on Christmas Day, but, unlike St Nicholas, the messengers of God are hard at it all the year round.

However, in our minds, angels arrive at Christmas, whiter than bleached laundry, covered in tinsel and singing Christmas Carols. They appear particularly tonight, in the middle of this night, above the hills outside Bethlehem, frightening the living daylights out of those poor shepherds, ordinary and insignificant people going about the necessities of their daily business, those who had drawn the shortest straw and were given the night shift in watching over the animals who were their livelihood. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. Who wouldn't be?

Here we have angels behaving as angels are supposed to behave. Appearing out of nowhere, announcing the news that God is at work, and not missing the opportunity for a big finish, conjuring a whole choir from the ether to make up the very first Christmas flash mob, flash in so many ways. Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth. Peace, presumably, after they have finished making all their racket.

And then.... The angels went away from them into heaven. Christmas and angels do indeed go together, but they go together as the John Lewis advert goes with December, as last-minute revision goes with exams, as cricketing optimism goes with an English batting collapse. The one points to the other, and then it's gone. The job of the angels at Christmas is to tell us that it's Christmas, to announce the birth of the Christ child. But the most important thing that they do is disappear.

Look again at those poor old shepherds. They've jumped three feet in the air because of fright, they've endured the heavenly Huddersfield Choral Society, and now they're left to themselves. What do they do? They don't turn to one another and say, "Well, that was nice!" They don't start running around telling the world what an extraordinary thing

has just happened. No. They decide to go and see. They decide to go and see, because what they have so far seen is not what is important. One might have thought that an angelic visitation and a celestial choir was enough for anyone. But no. Let us go to Bethlehem, and see this thing which has happened, which the Lord has made known to us. The angels have made it known, but it, the real thing, is yet to be seen.

“The angels went away from them into heaven.” Christmas is the celebration of the angels’ departure. Christmas is the destruction, and the reconstitution, of all our ideas about God, about ourselves, about heaven and earth and everything there is. Whilst we remain so determined to keep divinity in a safe place, to imprison God behind the Wizard’s curtain in the Emerald city, to believe in a wonder worker who flashes tricks upon us from time to time but mostly leaves us to get on with our business, Christmas contradicts and condemns our snug self-regard desires. The angels went away from them into heaven because the angels are no longer needed. Heaven is not elsewhere, and God needs no intermediaries, no more messengers to carry his communications from far away. God does not zap as from a distance, he comes among us as a child.

At first glance, this might seem rather normal. After all, babies, families, human reproduction, this is the stuff of everyday life. Nothing to worry about, we can feel at home. A sure refuge from the scary world of angels, a divine domestic bliss which looks basically like our own. But let us pause and think. This is not the God of distance, not a deity who dwells afar. There is a security in the Almighty of the angels, in the crash bang wallop of the Hollywood Biblical epic, in the sights and sounds of Gods who do what we think Gods ought to be doing. But just suppose we are wrong. Just suppose God is one of us. Just suppose what it means to be divine is not, in the awful words of *Away in a Manger*, to look down from the sky, but rather to surrender one’s all powerful self to the absurdity of human weakness, to identify the creator of all things with the helplessness of a homeless, crying child.

The angels went away from them into heaven. But the message did not go with them, because the message, far from being a news report to be trumpeted on high, is now a person, a mewling, puking infant, a child who lives in the world which pretends not to know him. Consider the ludicrous suggestion that the infinite distance of heaven has become the intimate life of the world; that the unfathomable divine mystery has become the ordinary life of men and women, the mundane reality of everyday stuff, the stuff of which everyday life is made. No wings, no fanfares, no visions, no flash mob. No thunderbolts, no stardust, no fireworks from on high. God in the midst of us. God with us, in the rubbish of our everyday lives, in the hopes and dreams and failures and loves and hates of every one of us, God in the midst of what it means to be human. Not somewhere else, not once a year, not then, not there, but here and now and always and for ever. God in the midst of us.

The angels went away from them into heaven. Even for the angels, this truth is too much, and they retreat to their place of safety. The angels went away from them into heaven. And that just leaves you and me. Or rather, you and me, and God.

## **Intercessions**

*Please pray for the long term sick and those in special need, among them:*

Jo Laity, Sr Mary Bernard, Sophie Brown, Pamela Rogers, Sophie, Adrian, Ann, Alison, Johanna Merz, Maggie, Michael, Gordon Scott, Michael Starford, Helen Bell, Jenny, Susan Barnes, Roy Dicker, John O'Leary, Jennifer Larcombe, Bob Guthrie, Eleanor Jamison, Anna, Phoenix, Elwyn Knight, Andrew Linzey, Sancha Maya-Rai, Vernon Porter, Helen Peramatzis

## **Sunday readings**

Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> January: Isaiah 60.1-6; Ephesians 3.1-12; Matthew 2.1-12

Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> January: Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7; Acts 10:34-38; Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> January: Isaiah 62.1-5; I Corinthians 12.4-11; John 2.1-12.

Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> January: Nehemiah 8.1-6, 8-10; I Corinthians 12: 12-14, 17; Luke 1.1-4 & 4.14-21

## **Poem of the Month**

### **Sonnet 146 by William Shakespeare**

Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth,  
[.....] these rebel powers that thee array,  
Why dost thou pine within and suffer dearth,  
Painting thy outward walls so costly gay?  
Why so large cost, having so short a lease,  
Dost thou upon thy fading mansion spend?  
Shall worms, inheritors of this excess,  
Eat up thy charge? Is this thy body's end?  
Then soul, live thou upon thy servant's loss  
And let that pine to aggravate thy store;  
Buy terms divine in selling hours of dross;  
Within be fed, without be rich no more.  
So shalt thou feed on Death, that feeds on men,  
And, Death once dead, there's no more dying then.

It's about time that Shakespeare put his head above the parapet to appear here. This sonnet has been seen by some as his most religious poem, while others feel, less convincingly, that he is addressing not his soul but his mistress. It was included in the Penguin Book of Religious Verse (1967).

As you can see, a bit of it is missing: when it was first published, the compositor made a mistake and opened the second line with the phrase that ends the first - "my sinful

earth.” It is a powerful phrase suggesting that his soul is of the earth as well as in it, but the repetition is ugly and uncharacteristic, and while this poet sometimes takes his iambic pentameters to 11 syllables with a feminine ending, if that unwoke term can now be used, that is where he calls a halt, so he would swerve using 12.

Needless to say, this has prompted scholarly debate that is now into its fifth century with “Fooled by” and “Fed by” the leading candidates, but there is nothing to stop you joining this debate yourself with the verb you prefer.

The form is actually interesting because of its regularity: all bar one of the lines are end-stopped and 13 of 14 lines end with a stressed monosyllable. That sets up a regular little hammerbeat concluding the iambic fall and rise. There is only a little mild drama as they open too, with four double beats and two more where the stress pattern is reversed for emphasis. All this maintains a relative calmness throughout and there is no violent change of direction between the octave and the sestet either - or before the final couplet. If Shakespeare were a bowler playing cricket, this would be described as “Military medium.”

Shakespeare was not just a dramatist, poet and actor, but also a shrewd businessman - hence flattering new King James I by whitewashing his ancestor Banquo in “Macbeth” for instance. I wonder if he gave his soul a ticking-off for doing that... He uses plenty of mercantile or legal imagery in his sonnets. Here he is quite calm, like a lawyer summing up his case or a merchant suggesting a deal. Note the increasing intensity of the four questions in the octave - the first after four lines then another in line six before two in line eight before he rests his case.

Of those sonnets not addressed to his friend or mistress, some read like soliloquys that Shakespeare has written for himself instead of a dramatic character and this one, like a few in “Hamlet” and “Measure for Measure,” is about the state and possible destiny of the soul. However, the last line could hardly be said to be ecstatic at the prospect of eternal life. And compared with the self-disgust and anger elsewhere in his sonnets, he is not that angry with his soul here.

For sure this is a poem that draws on Biblical commonplaces, but its tone, imagery and frame of reference is materialistic. How typical of the poet and the man that his “most religious” poem is anchored solidly in secular activity.

If you would like to read more widely about Shakespeare and religion, do try “Religion in Shakespeare 1592-1604” in the OUP Texts and Traditions series (2006). It is by Doctor Beatrice Groves, our Vicar’s wife.

# January 2025

<b>Sun</b>	<b>Mon</b>	<b>Tue</b>	<b>Wed</b>	<b>Thu</b>	<b>Fri</b>	<b>Sat</b>
			<b>1 Mary, Mother of God</b>	<b>2 Basil and Gregory Bs</b>	<b>3 Christmas</b>	<b>4 Christmas</b>
			Thanksgiving for the incarnation	Steven our Bishop	The homeless	Peace in the Holy Land
<b>5 Epiphany of the Lord</b>	<b>6 Feria</b>	<b>7 Feria</b>	<b>8 Feria</b>	<b>9 Feria</b>	<b>10 Feria</b>	<b>11 Feria</b>
Parish community	Famine relief	Oxford City Council	The Gatehouse	Colleges in our parish	Sacristans and servers	Monthly Requiem
<b>12 Baptism of the Lord</b>	<b>13 Hilary, B Dr</b>	<b>14 Feria</b>	<b>15 Feria anointing 6pm</b>	<b>16 Feria anointing 12.15</b>	<b>17 Antony, Ab</b>	<b>18 Feria</b>
Parish Community	Universities	Oxford Deanery	Healing Ministry	Oxford's hospitals	Religious Communities	Church musicians
<b>19 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of the Year</b>	<b>20 Feria</b>	<b>21 Agnes V M</b>	<b>22 Feria</b>	<b>23 Feria</b>	<b>24 Francis de Sales, B</b>	<b>25 Conversion of St Paul</b>
Parish Community	Ecumenical Work	Children	Christ Church	The faithful departed	Confessors	Preachers
<b>26 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of the Year</b>	<b>27 Feria</b>	<b>28 Thomas Aquinas</b>	<b>29 Feria</b>	<b>30 Feria</b>	<b>31 John Bosco, Pr</b>	
Parish Community	College chaplains	Theologians	The PCC	The King	Teachers	