



St Mary
Magdalen
OXFORD

Parish Notes

May 2025

Administration

Parish office

admin@stmarymagdalenoxford.org.uk

Phone: 01865 246143

Website

www.stmarymagdalenoxford.org.uk

Safeguarding

The PCC is committed to making St Mary Magdalen's a safe environment for everyone. If you have any questions about safeguarding matters or wish to report a concern, please talk to the Parish Safeguarding Officer **Peter Dockrill** or send an email to: safeguardingsmmox@gmail.com

Treasurer

"Mary Mags Oxford costs £400 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"

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

The Reverend Canon Dr Peter Groves
Telephone: 07931 310786
peter.groves@theology.ox.ac.uk

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Associate Priest

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

Events

Scripture on Saturday

Our online Bible study mornings continue weekly from Saturday May 3rd, from 10am via Zoom. We continue to look at John's gospel. All are welcome, no previous experience or participation required. The link will be circulated via the parish email list.

Annual Parochial Meeting

4th May

The Annual Parochial Church Meeting takes place on Sunday 4th May after mass. At this meeting, we shall elect our churchwardens for the coming year. We shall also elect several representatives to the Parochial Church Council. The parish's accounts for 2024 will be presented by the Treasurer, and reports on various bodies and activities will be provided, along with the Vicar's annual report to the parish. Please make a note of this in your diary and join us.

Ascension Day

29th May

Ascension Day falls this year on Thursday 29th May. There will be a said mass at 12.15pm and a Sung Mass at 7.30pm. Also on Ascension Day our neighbours from St Michael's will be beating their parish bounds, and will come to St Mary Magdalen's shortly after 10am. Members of our church are most welcome to join them in their progress round the city centre.

Notices

2025 Oxford Lent Concerts with Thanks and a Story

First, a thank you to everyone who *prayed* for us and for all those who took part in these evening concerts in Lent: singers, instrumentalists, artists and the congregations who filled Queen's Chapel on both nights. Second, our thanks to all of you who were *present* and who have let us know you relished not only the music and arts but the silences, too. People who had never been to the OLCs commented that even sitting in silence among strangers they realized that the silence was somehow 'special'. And third, we thank all those who were able to contribute to the voluntary retiring collections. In all, £1,794.47 was raised for our two designated charities: Médecins sans Frontières and the Guideposts Trust. Médecins is widely recognized for its international work in some of the world's toughest areas of suffering. But the Guideposts Trust – even though it is 'local', working in Oxfordshire, Herefordshire and Gloucestershire – may be unknown to many. It has for decades worked with adolescents, adults and the aged who live with learning disabilities, mental health problems and dementia - people who would otherwise remain marginalized and horribly isolated, beyond the pale of the healing power of community, acceptance and friendship. It runs regular, weekly person-to-person and inclusive 'hubs' which bring the isolated together with trained facilitators and also runs a supportive phone-link for carers. Your donations mean that they have received nearly £900 to support this work. If you'd like to know more about the Trust's work (their head office is in Witney) you can read about it

at info@guideposts.org.uk. They deserve our thoughts and prayers and need funding and accept volunteers, too.

Finally, a story. After the final concert, as the chapel was being cleared of people, chairs, music stands and icons, I left the chapel with a tall young woman whom I'd seen arrive accompanied by three others (including a gentleman in a heavy wheelchair). I didn't know them, but as she and I stood in silence together we gazed back across Queen's Front Quad, the path before us lined with small blooming cherry trees, a world apart from the one rushing outside the college's main portal in the High Street. I turned to look at her and saw her eyes were brimming with tears. She whispered, 'You know, we are Europeans, too.' She was one of four Ukrainians who turned up at the concert not knowing that the penultimate piece we would hear was Myroslav Skoryk's 'Melody in A Minor', which has become one of the great spiritual anthems of the composer's – and her – homeland, Ukraine. Another reason for us to be thankful. So thank you again for your prayers for the OLCs. None of us knows the many mysterious ways in which the Lord works to bless and bind us in solidarity with each other.

Jan Spurlock Stockland

Easter Day 2025

Ralph Vaughan Williams had a mixed relationship with Christianity. Any churchgoer who has sung from the original English Hymnal has benefited from his editorial genius, and he composed a number of works which are standards in the world of Anglophone church music, as well as apparently secular works which are nevertheless theologically profound. He himself, however, was what he called a "cheerful agnostic", having grown into that disposition in later middle age. As a young man, he was an avowed atheist and remained so at the time when he composed the Five Mystical Songs, settings of four poems by the priestly genius George Herbert.

Your pew sheet contains the words to the first of those songs, Easter, which you will hear sung after receiving communion, and both the lyric and its setting illustrate an essential truth of resurrection faith, whether the composer liked it or not.

Rise heart; thy Lord is risen. Sing his praise
Without delays,
Who takes thee by the hand, that thou likewise
With him mayst rise:
That, as his death calcined thee to dust,
His life may make thee gold, and much more just

The heart of the believer is led forth into new life by Christ, just as Christ is raised from the dead by the Father who is the origin of all life. And just as the death of Christ brings humanity to its original dust, as the alchemist pounds his substance into powder before remaking it into gold, so Christ's bursting from the tomb remakes everything about human beings – gives them the rich value of gold but much more, makes them just, righteous, restored to a right relationship with the God their creator

. Building on Psalm 57 – Awake up, my glory, awake lute and harp – Herbert then reflects that the strings of his lute, made from animal gut, are tightened over the wood

of the instrument just as the sinews of Christ himself were stretched out upon the cross. That cross – the instrument of death which brings about new life – now becomes the archetype of all wooden instruments, transforming things of nature – the wood, the gut – and things into which they are manufactured – the lute, the harp – into the new creation which has been remade to offer itself in praise to the God of risen life.

So instead of harp and lute, Herbert has heart and lute – my very self, and the efforts of my life – consorting, coming together to sing the victory of the resurrection in the musical vocabulary of his age. And, in case we have missed what, for Herbert, is obvious, we are reminded that all music is but three parts vied and multiplied: everything which is played, reflects the eternal polyphony which is the Holy and Blessed Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The coming together of heart, lute and Spirit maps onto the triune God – who creates, who redeems, who gives life. In the wonder that is Easter that life - breathed into us by the Holy Spirit - is now transformed, and the defects of our human efforts are made into the perfect artistic offering by the breath of God himself.

George Herbert is, with John Donne, the Church of England's greatest priest poet, but he was not acknowledged as such until relatively recently. When the Five Mystical Songs were written, before the First World War, Herbert was only beginning to be fully appreciated. However, Vaughan Williams clearly appreciated him, whatever his own position on matters of faith. Led by the poem, he captures in this setting the combination of sudden surprise and quiet reflection, of heaven and earth combined, which is the essence of Christ's resurrection. What has always spoken and sung to me so powerfully about this piece is the way in which it brings together the overwhelming joy which is suddenly manifest by Christ's overcoming of death, and the gentle but firm realisation of faith that the victory of Easter is something ongoing, something which continues to give life in the day-to-day reality of human living. Today we rejoice to our uttermost, as we should, as Christ bursts the bonds of death. But tomorrow and the next day and the next day we go about our Christian lives in the knowledge that those lives are transformed and given anew by the creative love of God.

This idea sounds perhaps most clearly at the end of the first verse, when Vaughan Williams has the full choir repeat the first line in the glorious ecstasy of the top register, only for it to be repeated again, by the soloist, alone and lower down. Heaven and earth combined – the explosion of Christ's resurrection, and the assurance of peace and ongoing joy which is life lived in the knowledge of that resurrection, life which knows itself to belong to God and not to be lived in the fear or the grip of death.

Mary Magdalen's words are often ours: "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Her assumption is as reasonable as can be. She saw the body being buried; she saw the tomb being sealed. If Jesus is no longer there, he must have been taken away, and of course she knows not where. The male followers who come next – Peter and the beloved disciple – fare little better. They see inside the tomb, but in essence what they see is nothing. They do not know where Jesus has been put, because he hasn't been put anywhere, at least nowhere other than in the lives and the hearts of those who love him.

Herbert's poem Easter is in two parts, set as the first two of the five songs. The second part begins, "I got me flowers to straw thy way, I got me boughs off many a tree,

but thou wast up by break of day and broughtst thy sweets along with thee.” But thou wast up by break of day – the Lord is risen long before we think to seek him. Our attempts to locate God will always be confounded by the truth that he finds us first. Rise heart, thy Lord is risen. The heart can rise, because it is Christ who lifts it up. The life given in Christ is the life remade at Easter, the life which opens up a world in which love, mercy and forgiveness make up what we call creation. What it means to live, day to day, in triumph and disaster and everything in between, what it means to live is to be risen with Christ, to know the presence of the living God in our hearts, to sing and shout for joy on this most holy day, yes, but also to breathe that life in and out in every moment of our existence, to walk in the presence of the Lord all the days of our life.

Poem of the Month

From Geoffrey Hill’s *The Book of Baruch* by the Gnostic Justin (section 197)

Old Malc: back in Northampton, the tragic-grotesque mask of rage clamped on.

Some shortcoming of the soul indelibly stamped: immoveable that snarl.

Perfidious the irritant solace of alcohol. I want! I want!

Symphony nine unwinds as though in unison on two staves, like a parody of

Mahlerian benison.

Being ignorant of human physiology, surgery or medicine I would conclude

the core of his brain gone, as with the snory noise of a shot man caught
on the wire in that war memoir:

Which old Malc did not have to emit or hear or otherwise endure.

But, there! How can it haul itself from three craters in a row, that final untri-

umphing *lento* of twenty-odd minutes, which mimes infinites without

claims; can barely feel but persists in so rueing, though the wrists of the

violinists must be wrung with the sustaining of its near subliminal song.

“Old Malc” is the composer Malcolm Arnold (1921-2006), who suffered from mental illness towards the end of his life, and spent some time in the Northampton asylum (now St Andrew’s Hospital) which once sheltered the poet John Clare and more recently James Joyce’s daughter Lucia. The *lento* last movement of his ninth symphony (1986) is utterly bleak; three times it attempts to rouse itself from despair, like a first world war soldier hauling himself from cover to cover in no man’s land. Three sheltering shell craters, barbed wire, death. And yet there is a song, wrung from the wrists of the violinists; a dogged vibrato sustaining a kind of persistent hope.

One hears about the notorious “Hill difficulty”: it sounds like a feature of the Pilgrim’s Progress landscape. And certainly the 271 sections of *The Book of Baruch* by the

Gnostic Justin, Hill's last work, look at first glance to be a steep climb for the pilgrim poetry reader. Having an ear for the musical quality of the words makes the going easier. From Henry Lawes and Henry Purcell to Hugh Wood and Malcolm Arnold, composers influenced Hill throughout his career as he developed his characteristic musicality of discourse; words come alive for him, become multi-dimensional, having intrinsic sound value as well as sense.

That first line crackles with hard "k" sounds like distant rifle shots: Malc, back, tragic, mask; and the awkward juxtaposition of the "k"/ "g" velars in the middle of "tragic grotesque" holds the reader up, enacts struggle. At least— as so often in Hill— there is the comic relief of rhyming "Northampton" with "clamped on". And who but Hill could come up with "as though in unison" / "Mahlerian benison" / "surgery or medicine"? Baruch is held together by such sound effects; its reader is torn between applause and a kind of dad-joke groaning. Hear the play of vowels in "core" / "snory" / "caught"; "wire" / "war" / "memoir". But there is a fierce joy underlying Hill's intense levity. After all the horror of mental illness and the tragedy of the trenches, there is the consolation of poetry. As Hill puts it in *The Triumph of Love* (stanza CXLVIII):

What

Ought a poem to be? Answer, *a sad*

and angry consolation... That's

beautiful. Once more? *A sad and angry*

consolation.

You can hear the last movement of Malcolm Arnold's ninth symphony here:

<https://youtu.be/IFjKTB6iqdE> And Hill's Oxford Professor of Poetry Lectures are here: <https://www.english.ox.ac.uk/professor-sir-geoffrey-hill-lectures>

Intercessions

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

Jo Laity, Sophie Brown, Pamela Rogers, Sophie, Adrian, Ann, Alison, Johanna Merz, Maggie, Michael, Gordon Scott, Michael Starford, Helen Bell, Jenny, 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 4th May: Acts 5.27-32, 40-41; Revelation 5.11-14; John 21.1-14

Sunday 11th May: Acts 13.14, 43-52; Revelation 7.9, 14-17; John 10.27-30

Sunday 18th May: Acts 14.21-27; Revelation 21.1-5; John 13.31-35

Sunday 25th May: Acts 15.1-2, 22-9; Revelation 21.10-14; John 14.23-29

May 2025

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1 Ss Philip and James Aps	2 Athanasius B Dr	3 Feria (Easter)
				Steven, our Bishop	Theologians	The College of Carindals
4 3rd Sunday of Easter	5 Feria (Easter)	6 Feria (Easter)	7 Feria (Easter)	8 Feria (Easter)	9 Feria (Easter)	10 Feria (Easter)
Parish community	Our musicians	Helen and Douglas House	The homeless	The PCC	Oxford City Council	Sacristans and servers
11 4th Sunday of Easter	12 Feria (Easter)	13 Feria (Easter)	14 Matthias Ap	15 Feria (Easter)	16 Feria (Easter)	17 Feria (Easter)
Parish community	The Gatehouse	Christian Aid	Evangelists	Aid agencies	Monthly requiem	Children's church
18 5th Sunday of Easter	19 Dunstan B	20 Feria (Easter)	21 Feria (Easter): anointing 6pm	22 Feria (Easter) anointing 12.15	23 Feria (Easter)	24 Feria (Easter)
Parish Community	Bishops	World peace	Healing Ministry	Oxford's hospitals	Parish fundraising	Our universities
25 6th Sunday of Easter	26 Augustine B	27 Feria (Easter)	28 Feria (Easter)	29 Ascension of the Lord	30 Feria (Easter)	31 Visitation of the BVM
Parish Community	Anglicanism	Peace	Biblical Scholars	Thanksgiving	Those taking examinations	Family life