

Vicars' Vista Feb 2007

Gazing on Jesus with young eyes...

...what a joyful Christmas Season we have celebrated at St Mary's church and in our schools and village. Thank you all for your individual contributions – it has served to strengthen our community.



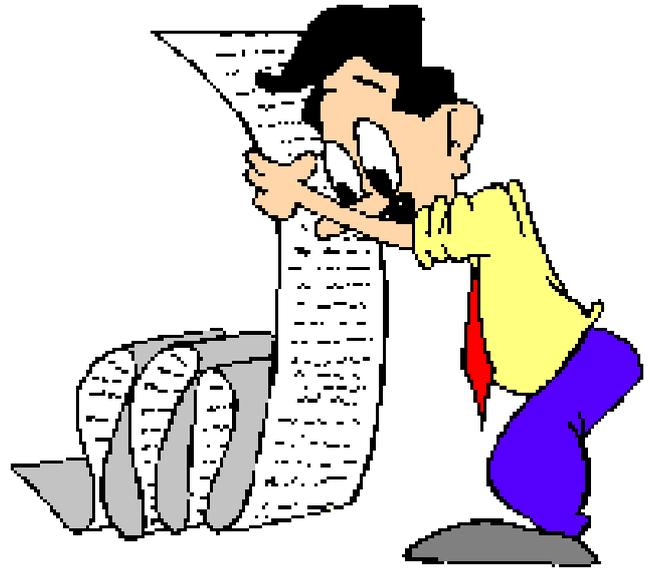
Most of us have seen Christmas many times, I think it is best seen with and through the 'naïve' eyes of children - just see how they gaze into our new crib. My prayer is that they and we may see Jesus in fresh ways, and that we may remember that we are all God's children, and open our eyes to see what wonders our faithful God is doing amongst us.

We are preparing to run our next Alpha Course on Wednesday evenings through February and March and this gives 'older children' the opportunity to find out more about the Christian faith, perhaps to see Jesus in a new way. If you know of any who might wish to participate either now, or in the future, please let me know.

Ash Wednesday falls in February (21st) this year. I ask all regular church members to attend either of the 10.00 am or 7.30 pm Eucharistic celebrations in order to quite literally mark the beginning of Lent. As we wear the sign of the cross we see what God was ready to do for each of us. If our eyes were opened at Christmas to the incarnation of God in the Christ Child, so we should recognise that baby grew and became strong, was filled with wisdom – the grace of God upon him. We too then, God's children, are called to grow and Lent is an excellent season to take time to study and reflect on our faith. How have you and I grown since last year? Are our hearts more receptive, our eyes open wider and seeing more? Gaze upon Christ the Lord and see all that the Lord has done, is doing, and will do for you! In His name - Andrew

What a 'to do' this Lent!

This is not the list of things that I have agreed to do this Lent! It is not a 'wish list', nor my shopping list, nor is it my Easter Sunday Sermon (it's not long enough). It is not what I'm giving up this Lent and it's not one of our many PCC



action plans. It is a fact that we are in the main a very busy people and each have an everlasting 'to do' list. But do we really do all we can?

When I ran businesses we had to be careful that we were running the business and it was not running us. Busy-ness is not necessarily good business. Being a Christian is about *being a Christian* and not about being everything else..., and a Christian as well.

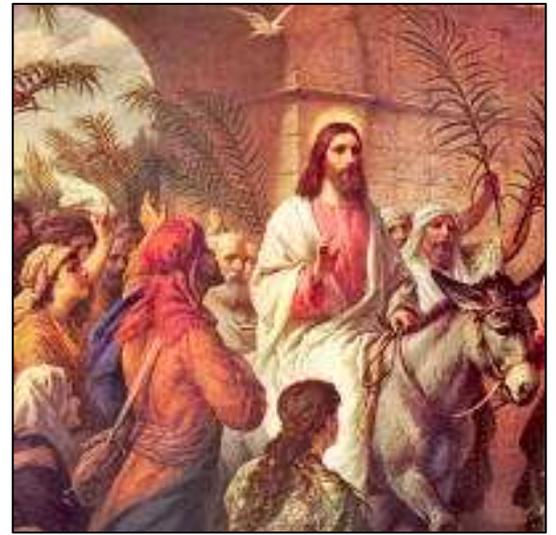
So instead of imagining things to give up – or extra things to do this Lent, I would ask each of us to make time, to take stock and consider our priorities. Lent is preparation for Holy Week – it may include acts of personal discipline – not doing this, but doing that... Jesus Christ spent some three years in a public ministry which revealed the nature and essence of God. The doings of Jesus culminated in the events of Holy Week. Jesus did a lot and he also did not do a lot. He is the example for each follower (Christian) *to follow*. What did Jesus do, what did he not do? What does that mean for me – does it do anything for me? What do I do? What should I do? What does God ask me to do? How can I know more about all of this?

Jesus revealed God's priorities and put aside any human doings. He did for God before all other things. What he did, was done in God's name, in the Spirit of God, in the mercy and love of God who does. When human's 'did' for Jesus, there was an almighty 'to do', but Jesus was prepared to do it, that God's will be done. What was done was done for us – what we in turn will do, is for us to *will* to do! I encourage you to think about it, as I do too.

Doing it in Christ - Andrew

“Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord” Please appreciate!

Jesus was warned to stay away from Jerusalem; it was a place where he might be killed. Jesus would not be put-off completing his prophetic journey from the cultural ‘margins’ to the ‘centre’.



“Today, tomorrow and the next day I must be on my way” ... (Luke 13: 31-35)

In a sense this is the thoughtfulness and determination I hope each of us are able to apply in our *following* of ‘The Way’ – the way in which we seek to *appreciate* the life, passion, death and resurrection of the man and Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth. At church we will re-enact this story during Passion and Eastertide, *not* as a matter of history – but because it is *his*-story and has become *our*-story through faith. It lives!

Perhaps, once, “The Followers of The Way” (Christians) were at the centre of life, culture and belief in West Moors. Now, seemingly we are returned to the margins as other ‘ways’ of life prove more immediately valuable to our villagers – should you now feel part of a dwindling crowd then appreciate it was only a proportion who welcomed and heralded Jesus with Palms as he entered Jerusalem. Within a week he was brutally executed and his first followers shattered and scattered.

Today, tomorrow and the next day are three days, and on the third day Jesus rose from human death to new, *resurrection* life. His-story had actually just begun, not ended as those who opposed him had intended.

Our personal story also has its ‘Today’ – it’s where we are now along the *way of life*. ‘Tomorrow’ life can change quite suddenly and then all we can do is look backwards wistfully – for the ‘Next Day’ belongs to those *who have appreciated God’s Way in Jesus*. We should not be warned off, or put off by some other way of life. We follow the Way of truth and life in the risen Lord. “Blessed are those who come in the name of the Lord” - *your way* is just beginning - if your Today is not delayed until Tomorrow, or the Next Day, which might be never!

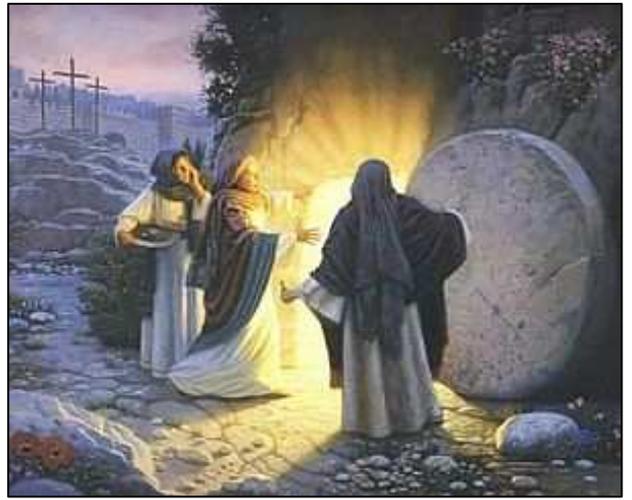
A.R.

He is not here; he has risen!

The belief that Jesus Christ rose from the dead and was seen with his close friends and followers and then seen by five hundred is essential to our faith.

“If Christ did not rise then our faith is in vain” – not my words, but those of

Saint Paul, who had a vision of the risen Christ on his way to Damascus



In this age of knowledge, science and discovery the desire for empirical evidence i.e. absolute proof is strong. I would believe if only I could be personally convinced...but then in reality even that is not enough to change human behaviour. We know that things are harmful to us – like smoking, excessive eating, drinking...anything! We know that we take foolish risks at times, we are having to come to terms with the very strong evidence of climate change and the effects it will have on all life. We have long since been aware of the plight of the ‘two-thirds world’ where people live on a pittance (‘Less than a Dollar a Day’), where infant mortality is so unnecessarily high and resources of water, food and medication so inequitably shared. So is this just another rant to tug at your heart strings – it is not intended to be! The point I’m trying to make is that even when we know about things we often don’t take much notice! I don’t *know* that Jesus rose from the dead – but I *believe* he did. I trust the ancient witnesses. I look to the wholesale change in his follower’s attitudes and their brave (foolhardy?) preparedness to give up their lives for the sake of the risen Christ who now was not just an earthly Lord, but Lord of all things. I see how all life changed A.D.

To follow in the Way of Christ is a daily choice to live as an Easter Christian – someone who sees God at work in Jesus. I believe because of the perfection of Christ. He did not look the other way, cross the road, or ignore the needs of mankind. He was visionary – you can see it if you want to look in to it, or you can keep your eyes wide shut and have no vision for life. How do you see it? Do have a look with us!

Blessings in the name of Jesus who is risen and truly Lord!

Andrew

Looking Outside Ourselves

This is a photograph of a village meeting in Africa, in The Sudan to be precise. Such a meeting in Igboland of Nigeria was known in Igbo dialect as a 'Palaver', hence the word that we now use in English to mean a long, drawn out discussion.



There is a 'palaver' going on about the impact our lives are having on the wider world. Our relative wealth is built on the relative poverty of others and our *advanced* way of living may well be 'costing the earth'. It is time for us all to consider what we can do to minimise our relative over-consumption of the world's finite resources, how we can reduce our impact on the global climate change – I write this following the hottest April for three hundred years another weather statistic broken. It must all be related! It is high time for a Palaver!

In Salisbury Diocese we have a particular link with The Sudan and its Episcopal church. Our Wimborne Deanery has been linked to Yambio Diocese and soon we will welcome a Sudanese Priest, John Zeburuna, to tour our Deanery. He will be with us in church on Sunday 10th June and I hope to take him into our schools on Monday the 11th. It is good for us to look outside our immediate community and I pray that Revd. John's visit will give us a greater insight into the life of other Christians. The church in The Sudan is growing fast and its members are ready to share the good news of Jesus Christ, wherever they are. From our point of view they are poor and yet I will not be at all surprised to find that we will change our view and actually consider the Sudanese Church as rich and us as relatively poor in comparison! We need to 'Palaver' - to help us find out more. As we plan to grow the church, we must feel the relationship of all God's creation – we need to look outside ourselves. The best way we can do this is to build relationships with Christians in other places. I deliberately emphasise the words *relative* and *relation*. Let's look outside ourselves and 'palaver' with *relatives* and *relations* that we might find out more about ourselves.

Yours in Christ A.R.

Vicar's Vista July 2007

Church of the Holy Wisdom of God (Hagia Sophia)

When the Eastern Roman Emperor Justinian I completed this cathedral he said, "Solomon I have surpassed thee!" And this huge church stood as Christendom's greatest church for



1,000 years until the completion of the great cathedral in Seville. However after the Turks invaded Constantinople (Istanbul) it became a Mosque 1453 and finally a museum in 1935. This photograph features the four Islamic minarets added in the 16th century, but the original foundation was in the 4th century. So here is one of the greatest buildings of human history, which has stood for some 1700 years as a witness of man's worship of God and in two faiths. I had been looking forward to my recent *pilgrimage* here; after all it was Saint Justinian in Byzantine times who strove to finally establish the orthodox faith, the Nicene Creed and the doctrine of the Trinity. Did Justinian surpass the great and wise Solomon? Only God can be the judge of that, for His wisdom is unsurpassed! The wisdom of man however is suspect. In a sense I travelled to this church to add to my insight, knowledge, and experience – wisdom. What did I learn? Wisdom comes from reflection on insight and experience; it is about discerning the truth and exercising good judgement. Perhaps the truth is that one doesn't have to travel thousands of miles to know that perceptions of God throughout the world; East, West, North and South are widely different and also that rulers, clerics and politicians have consistently, misappropriated God for their own purposes. Such is human wisdom, but what of '*Hagia Sophia*' – the Holy Wisdom of God? The wisdom of God from a Christian perspective is that he allowed himself to be doubted, despised, rejected, humiliated and crucified.

God is not about human power, expressed in massive buildings and powerful and despotic rule. God's power will outlast our best constructions; his rule is a gentle invitation to follow and the absolute freedom to choose. God rewards all, deserving or not – this is divine and not human wisdom. It is truly holy – set apart and distinguished. Yes, I feel steeped in history in great churches and grand places, but God is in every humble place where He is invited. God is to be found in secret, lowly places and at opportune times when the human heart is open to Him. On reflection my best use of available knowledge is to trust in God and to be open to experience Him and thus to gain further insight. This is '*Hagia Sophia*', I believe!

Andrew

Faith, hope and ...rain!

Summer does not seem to have really got going this year and as I write this article it is pouring down with rain, outside, once again.

We all know how erratic the weather of good 'Ol Blighty can be, so we're not overly surprised at the variable weather, the dull cloudy weekends, with the sun only coming out once we're back to work on Monday – or perhaps this year – once school resumes. We are all used to occasions when outside events are spoiled by 'unseasonable weather'. One of the great hallmarks of 'Britishness' is our refusal to be beaten by adverse weather. We may have to retreat for a while, or postpone and reschedule – but every new day holds out hope for something new and better.



For a small island we have such complex weather patterns and I often get frustrated at the length and detail of the national TV weather report, which is then followed by an equally lengthy regional report...and then later you find it turned out quite differently to the predictions. For years I lived in countries when you knew it would be hot and dry until the rains started then it would be wet for a few weeks/months – until it was dry again. It seems to me the Briton is particularly called to have quite a measure of faith and a deep propensity to hope – and this year more so than ever!

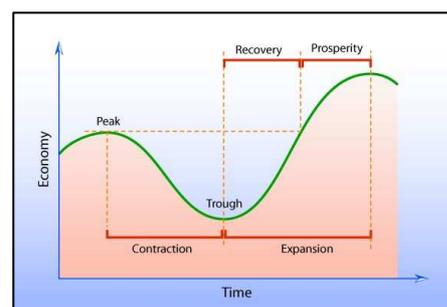
Perhaps the spiritual life might be similar. Our hopes build, especially during 'sunny times' when all is well. Then it rains! Life clouds over and sometimes the clouds are dark and all but block out the light; we lose faith. That's when we need to fetch out the umbrella of love. Our 'trinity' of characters depicted here above, have such 'umbrellas' and their spirits are not too dampened. One points upwards encouragingly as the other two look on and smile. The pointer is to the sign of a rainbow and under its bow the gloom is lifting already.

Faith, hope and rain! When it rains, as it does, shelter beneath 'God's Umbrella of Love'! Sunny, lighter days will return; my *faith report* provides me with this hope. Be someone who *forecasts* 'the light' out to others and encourages them. Be a Christian, *warm* in the knowledge of the whereabouts of the umbrella stand. Faith, hope and *umbrellas of love* at Saint Mary's church always! A.R.

A Matter of Confidence...



The story began several years ago when Western economies began to slow towards recession. Central banks in the USA (The Fed), Japan and Europe cut interest rates nearly to zero. This was to encourage people to borrow money and thus spend. Spend, spend, spend! The only way to stimulate the economy is to provide the means for people to generate activity. If they haven't got spare money, they have to borrow and borrowing at less than two percent is very attractive and proved irresistible. Folk borrowed ...and spent. They borrowed to buy goods and services and they borrowed to buy homes. House prices started to rise because demand for property outstripped supply. In the past one could only borrow twice your annual income and with average salaries at £20,000 (in those days) twice that, plus some savings meant one could scrape together say £50,000. Property prices shot up as more women worked and their income was counted in the equation. Then the 'multiplier' was increased so that some institutions would lend up to five times combined income. Some lenders stopped checking the applicants' income and just took their word for it! And the other factor was low start, interest free mortgages for two years, or reduced repayments and pegged interest rates – allowing the grateful borrower to get on the ladder whilst still able! House prices were rising ever faster and salaries too as the economy boomed. It wasn't affordable now – but it would be soon. It was now or never!



It was and is all a matter of confidence. As economies began to overheat, central banks had to raise interest rates. Consider this. If rates double from 3% to 6% then the interest payment doubles. Average mortgage repayments of £800 a month double to £1,600 per month. Ouch! Borrowers who took the biggest risks start to default in rapidly increasing numbers. What about the imprudent lenders – surely they should lose heavily as their irresponsible loans prove bad? But no, in seemingly clever manoeuvring they have 'parcelled' slices of debt and sold them to second parties who have mixed them with other tranches to mix and dilute the risky with the less. And this dilution has gone worldwide affecting us all! Ah – but what happens when individual higher risk loans (sub-prime) become very risky and no one bank knows how good the portfolio they hold is? The result is the break down of confidence. Banks can no longer trust each

other. They won't lend to each other and a credit squeeze occurs. Lenders often no longer have a close relationship with customers – all are just figures on a balance sheet, mere statistics that count towards the (once) Fat Cat City bonus. Naïve or foolish borrowers are not sufficiently scrutinized by business hungry, commission motivated, (greedy?) lenders and discipline and control has been much eroded.

What then will happen? If there is reduced liquidity in the system, as banks 'feel' the risk, then interest rates rise (even though central banks try to stop this). Lenders have lost billions so they need to charge more for their lending. Money is considerably more expensive so borrowers cannot afford homes and property prices begin to slip as supply outstrips demand. Our homes are our main assets, they devalue and we feel poor and we are less confident about spending – the economy declines and we head towards recession.

What ever can be done? Ah yes – reduce interest rates! That will begin to restore confidence and all will be well. Do you detect a cycle herein?

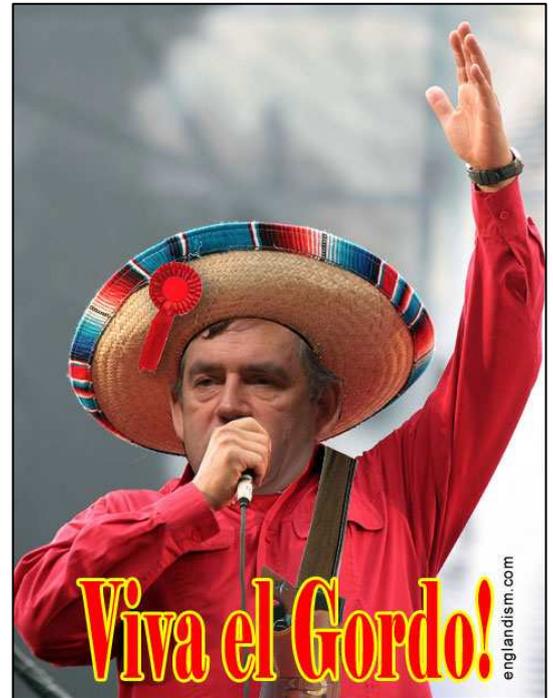
I remember in the early 1980's how our first mortgage stretched us towards breaking; there was a mortgage drought and rates rose from 12 to 15% in a few months. In the 1990's I ran businesses when banks lost confidence during the recession, called loans in and caused untold misery as companies folded under the cumulative pressure of bad debts and reduced order books. So I have experience in financial matters, but it is true that my academic qualification is in Theology and not Economics, so let me speak of God's Economy.

God is not motivated by greed, all people are equally valued – no-one deserves more 'pay' than any other. God is self-giving (proved through Jesus) and does not charge any interest, there is no 'quid pro quo' with Him. There are no booms and busts in God's economics. Confidence does not rise and fall on His part – He believes in you and me and He is willing to trust us always. You can choose to develop a relationship with Him, or not! When times are hard He will not call His loan in, close you down, or demand a higher payback. Take it or leave it, the currency of Heaven is freely given love without fear of recession.

God's door is always open. He will not leave you to sweat outside in a waiting room, awaiting some authoritarian or arbitrary decision about your future. It is quite the opposite, as His terms are clearly set out in the life of Jesus. There are two rules – be loyal to God and loving towards others, especially those who need your help, who are depending on you. So there is discipline and structure and everyone knows that there must be discernment & faithfulness in any successful relationship, because we are interdependent. I am fully confident in God's Economy and will not be withdrawing my life investment in Him! A.R.

Party Season...

As I write this we are at the end of the political party conference season. The prospect of an election has made the conferences slightly more exciting than usual, but after all things have been carefully considered and all prospects thoroughly analysed there is not going to be an early election. Politics moves on very quickly and by the time you read this I suppose all the fuss and drama will be a fading and distant memory. The party is over, time to go home and get back to routine matters.



At Saint Mary's the party is never over! Or put more accurately there is always another event just around the corner and when one 'party' finishes we can always look forward to the next. Our Harvest celebrations were much appreciated both in and out of church. The school service packed the church full to bursting! The six Baptisms of the extended Goodall family (Rachel, Richard, Martin, Rebecca, Ellie and Christopher) was another bumper occasion and we look forward to Bishop David's visit to Confirm seven adult candidates (Paul & Sarah, Denise & Malcolm, Debbie, Debs & Alistair) on Saturday 20th October. Then there is the Safari Supper which I specially asked Ken Dowsett to organise on November 10th – do get involved – it's such fun! Then of course we head into the Advent Season. The party is never over and that's not surprising because we have so much to celebrate. There may be particular events for each of us to look forward to, parties to organise – in my case our daughter's engagement and my parents' Golden Wedding, but these are the extras and sometimes I wonder if we aren't so busy that we fail to stop and wonder at all the good things we enjoy – peace, health, prosperity, family, friends, church, school, homes, toys. I have listed these in no particular order except to place 'peace' first. To enjoy peace of mind, body and spirit is the 'shalom' that God has brought in Christ. We all suffer setbacks and disappointments – even our amigo 'Gordo' – sometimes we feel the party is over...but ultimately the Christian believes that wholeness in life comes from a practiced lively faith. God in Christ is faithful and his kingdom is everlasting and awaits each of us whether we give Him our vote or not. God is the only one whose power does not rest on human election. Welcome to the eternal party at St Marys! Vote with your feet and join us!

A.R.