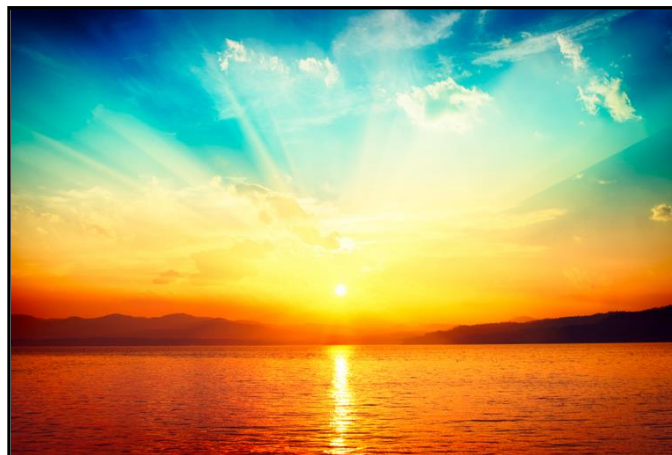


## **Arise Shine...**

*Arise, shine for your light has come and the glory of the Lord rises upon you... (Isaiah 60:1)* is a favourite text of this Epiphany Season.



I was very moved by the Christmas message of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth. She told us how she valued the text of John's Gospel of light coming into the darkness in the birth of Christ. That 'light' is born and yet soon has to flee, to become a refugee in a foreign land. Our faith might leave us standing in the warm glow of the crib, or it might swiftly move us onwards into the darkness. During baptism preparation I was just telling a young couple how Christ was led into the wilderness by the Spirit after his baptism. There was no hiding place for Jesus. We too cannot avoid the reality of life which is a mixture of light and darkness.

*For darkness shall cover the earth and thick darkness the peoples...*

Jesus met with temptation in the desert. Thick darkness threatened him, challenged him, but by God's grace, he was saved at the time of his trial...

*The Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will arise upon you...*

There is so much darkness in the world, yet where there is sin and darkness light and grace abounds the more. In Christ there is hope and life and light!

*Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.*

There is challenge to all that Christ stands for. Dare we stand firm with him? There are principalities and powers that oppose God. 'For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil'...

*Lift up your eyes and look around...*

In this special 90<sup>th</sup> year of our Queen, we are so blessed to have a *king* who not only comes to, but proclaims the 'brightness of the dawn' that is ours in Christ. All nations who come to the dawn of Christ will see and experience God's grace and truth.

*Arise shine; for Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders...*

Our hopeful and faithful Epiphany prayer for the church and the world is that God may indeed be the bright splendour whom the nations seek and that we, with all wise men, might be drawn by your light to discern the glory of your presence in your Son, the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The world craves a new dawn, to leave the darkness and not be overcome.

## **IN or OUT?**

D.C. has been negotiating hard on our behalf with the 'powers' that have authority over us. He will only propose that we stay 'in' if he can establish the 'right way' for our future, otherwise he says he is prepared to lead us 'out'.

Soon we will have our say. We have the free opportunity to consider all the various factors but in the end D.C. is trusting us to make an informed and right-minded decision. At the end of the day the vote is ours. Do we value what being 'in' provides or is it best to be 'out' and trust rather in ourselves. Attitudes change as time passes – ideally each new generation needs to wrestle with the truth and commit themselves (or not) to the 'grand vision'.

The punters say that a third of us are believers and want in; one third are unbelievers and want 'out'. A third are agnostic. I'm uncertain if our faith is really that clear cut. Many will change their mind during the course of the campaign; the decision cannot be reliably forecast. Life is all too uncertain.

What about you? I think I know what I prefer for life and where I hope to go. I hope everyone will remain open-minded and consider all the arguments.

J.C. presented lots of 'intel' on whether to be 'in' or 'out' but in truth many have never had the interest to consider his proposition. Nevertheless there is a decision to be made and the 'day of the great poll' approaches and cannot be avoided. I suppose many are rather busy keeping the 'immediate' together and will find it difficult or impossible to make time to consider the 'end-game'.

J.C. put way more than his career on the line for the sake of the 'right way'. He did everything possible to persuade us of what is in our best interest. We each get a vote and he's still out on the hustings, knocking on our doors and giving us ways of getting the message. The sad thing is many are absent or absorbed in other things, or just too plain frightened to come to the door and open it...even just a crack. Fear shouldn't motivate us though. Have you noticed how often fear is used to worry us and create unnecessary anxiety. The trouble is that, human nature being what it is, fear and self-interest is a great motivator. Remarkably J.C. used love, not fear, in his manifesto.

What about you – how are you deciding? Perhaps you feel like you're just not ready to decide. I do think it is a pity if we don't use our 'God-given' and miss the opportunity to shape our future life whilst we have one! Times-up!



## Refugees and Migrants

noun: **refugee**; plural noun: **refugees**

a person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster.

"tens of thousands of refugees fled their homes"

displaced person, DP, escapee, fugitive, asylum seeker, runaway, exile, émigré, stateless person, outcast, returnee;

synonyms: *informal:reffo*

"she had fled to England as a refugee"

noun: **migrant**; plural noun: **migrants**

a person who moves from one place to another in order to find work or better living conditions.

immigrant, emigrant, incomer, newcomer, asylum seeker, settler, expatriate, expat, exile;

synonyms: nomad, itinerant, gypsy, traveller, vagrant, transient, rover, wayfarer, wanderer, drifter, displaced person, DP, homeless person

"economic migrants"

I've given basic dictionary definitions for Refugees and Migrants above because both describe a person or persons. The term should never be depersonalised. We are speaking of the human people of God's family!

My role is to offer a theological insight towards refugee and migrant persons.

Who are they? All of humanity are refugees and migrants according to Genesis 3:24. "He (the Lord God) drove out the man" (from the Garden of Eden). Disobedient and faithless Adam & Eve become outcasts from God's presence. Life becomes instantly hard. Relationships are subject to enmity, the ground is cursed, hard work and toil are necessary; 'by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread' and finally man is to die and return to the earth, 'you are dust and to dust you shall return' (Genesis 3:15-19).

We are displaced from God's presence, exiled, and of our own means cannot return. God has enabled a means of homecoming. By the grace of God, the way back is through the Lord, Jesus, who was both a refugee and migrant in human terms but not in spiritual terms. Jesus renewed the eternal covenant, through, "a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world" on the cross of 'Good Friday' and by his faithful obedience to the will of God. He is the salvific gate to *better living conditions*.

Yes, we are refugees, and also migrants. Indeed, our spiritual ancestor was a 'Wandering Aramean' (Deuteronomy 26:5). Peoples of the covenant are to remember their status as refugees and migrants before God and thus to offer respite and hospitality to the aliens within our midst. Jesus taught this and if we are true followers in His Way, we will do well to appreciate this!

## Upwards and Onwards

This month of May we celebrate Ascension and Pentecost. Upwards and Onwards so to speak! The Ascension of Christ is a mystical event that took place near Bethany (the village of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, which was a Sabbath day's journey from Jerusalem) recounted in Acts 1:9-11 and Luke 24:50-53 wherein the resurrected Christ is taken up into heaven. They had faced the disaster of the crucifixion and then the surprise and joy of the resurrection. Forty days had passed. Even now they wanted to know if now Jesus was going to restore the kingdom to Israel. This misunderstanding of the mission and purpose of Jesus runs deep and is evidenced in the gospels. Jesus simply assured them of an empowerment through God's Spirit and then is taken from their sight.

*Upwards!*

The disciples went into Jerusalem as the master had instructed. Luke's gospel ends by telling us how they worshiped Jesus, staying continually at the Temple and praising God. As The Acts of the Apostles begins we are reminded of Jesus telling his disciples to wait, in Jerusalem, for the Father's promised gift. They are to be baptised with the Holy Spirit. We know that just a few days later they receive the promised spirit and were changed from confused and timid men who had fearfully hiding themselves away in a locked room. When Jesus appears in their midst they are empowered and emboldened.

Thereafter the Acts recounts how Saint Peter preaches in the Temple and is taken into captivity by the Temple Guards at the behest of the Chief Priest and Council. Peter is rescued by an angel and is soon back preaching in the Jerusalem Temple again! The focus soon moves on to the travels of Saint Paul and in particular his ministry to the Gentiles (non-Jews) – that's us.

*Onwards!*

The photograph depicts an Easter highlight when the family (parents and grandparents) of young Leon Gornik presented me with a special basket of food to bless on Easter Saturday (a Polish custom). Leon will receive his First Communion during the Eucharist on Pentecost Sunday. Bless him and the Lord bless us all, as we go *Onwards and Upwards!*



## **God save our Gracious Queen!**

Have you ever considered that our National Anthem is a prayer? Every time we sing this anthem, we are entreating God for long life, health and welfare on behalf of our sovereign lady, her Majesty, The Queen.



God answers prayer and especially in respect of the Queen. Long may she reign over us – now the longest reigning monarch in British History, surpassing that of Queen Victoria (63 years and 216 days) and now over 64 years and 112 days at the beginning of this month.

We are truly in the second Elizabethan Age – she has defended our laws, giving assent to over 3,500 of them under twelve different Prime Ministers (and has as Supreme Governor of the Church of England has appointed six Archbishops of Canterbury, can you name them?). She was married 20<sup>th</sup> November 1947 to Phillip, Duke of Edinburgh – so they're approaching 69 years of marriage. Who will send them a telegram?

These are indeed 'happy and glorious' years for the Queen who acceded to the throne on 6<sup>th</sup> February 1952 on the death of her Father, King George VI.

We celebrate with the nation this very special, Christian person who has given her life to her peoples in her coronation promise to serve us:

*"The things which I have here promised, I will perform, and keep. So help me God," before kissing the Bible and putting the royal sign-manual to the oath as the Bible was returned to the Dean of Westminster. From him the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, James Pitt-Watson, took the Bible and presented it to the Queen again, saying "Our gracious Queen: to keep your Majesty ever mindful of the law and the Gospel of God as the Rule for the whole life and government of Christian Princes, we present you with this Book, the most valuable thing that this world affords. Here is Wisdom; This is the royal Law; These are the lively Oracles of God".*

The Queen has lived long and upheld our laws 'ever giving us cause to sing with heart and voice, God Save the Queen!'

We pray: Heavenly Father, thank you for 'pouring your choicest gifts in store' on Elizabeth II. Thank you for her more than ninety years of loving and gracious life and service which is the utmost example to one and all. Amen.

God Save the Queen!

## ***Celebrating HMQ90***

Homily given at the Civic Service 12.6.16

Thank you for coming to join in with the church's celebration of Her Majesty The Queen's 90th Birthday...the official one that is... Because her actual birthday was on April 21<sup>st</sup> Monarchs in Britain have two birthdays because they are VIP's, yes?



No...it's a tradition that started with Edward VII who didn't want it to rain on his parade – The Trooping of the Colour – which has been the mark of the Sovereign's birthday since 1748. I hope it doesn't rain along The Mall today.

We think also of Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh whose 95th birthday was on Friday. The vast majority of the British Public has been born within the Queen's lifetime and many of us born after February 6th 1952 have only known her as Queen (that's 64 years and four months). We are truly in the second Elizabethan age. When we consider such a span of years we think of the changes to the world and the countries where Elizabeth was or is Head of State. I can't go back that far – but before decimalisation I remember Farthings, three-penny bits – sixpences, shilling, half crowns, ten bob notes, etc. A penny was worth something and we collected them – looking for all the different monarchs – Queen Victoria, King Edwards VII & VIII and the Georges V & VI - a Bun Penny with elderly Queen Victoria's Head was prized. She looked old and formidable, unknowable to my youthful eyes!

Our Old Testament reading reminds that kings and the court that surrounds them have been part of human society for a long time. The Jewish peoples for many generations had no king – except God. God was their king...but in time they wanted an earthly king to lead them out in battle against their foes and to help form a great nation. The prophet Samuel told the people that this was not going to end well and they would all end up as servants of the king. God granted them their request and Saul, David and then Solomon were the original kings – all proved quite demanding of their peoples and – things didn't go to well...a long succession of kings proved to be faithless and the nation withered, the peoples suffered. (1 Kings 1:32-40)

In the time of Jesus the Jewish peoples had a vassal king Herod, appointed by the Roman colonisers under the authority of the Emperor. They tried to trick Jesus – where did his loyalty lie – with God or with the Emperor and his vassal? Jesus pointed out that there was a clear distinction between Almighty God and the temporal authority of an earthly ruler. (Mark 12:13-17)

In my lifetime we have had a good Monarch and our political system, though far from perfect, has happily enabled a balance between God and state. We have a Queen who serves under God in a righteous and faithful way. Jesus said, look at the coin, what face is on it? It was the Emperor's – pay the earthly due to him then, with his money!

Nowadays all the coins (and stamps) are of Elizabeth II and show us the decades through which she has reigned as her image has changed with age. She was not born to be Queen, but in 1936 at the age of ten she became heir presumptive with the abdication of her uncle, Edward VII. Since the Coronation in 1953 her royal title has been Her Majesty Elizabeth the Second, by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and of Her other Realms and Territories, Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith.

Countless hospitals, buildings, bridges, schools, highways have been after her throughout the commonwealth and beyond so she has left her mark on the world. I have written in the current parish magazine about the nature of the National Anthem – being prayer that has been truly answered by Almighty God. Elizabeth is more than our long-serving sovereign lady - She is a committed Christian. She pays unto God what is due to God!

Our schools have been given a booklet by The Scripture Union entitled:- The Servant Queen and the King she serves. In it the queen writes:

“The world has changed remarkably in the past 90 years. We have witnessed great triumphs and terrible tragedies. In my first Christmas broadcast in 1952, I asked the people of the Commonwealth and the Empire to pray for me as I prepared to dedicate myself to their service at my Coronation. As I enter my 91st year, I remain eternally grateful for those prayers, and to God for his steadfast love. I have seen his faithfulness to me, as I have sought to serve”. Elizabeth R

And the Queen has served us by making 97 state visits all over the world, she has advised 12 Prime Ministers, has given assent to more than 3,500 Acts of Parliament, awarded more than 412,750 honours and has been patron of more than 600 charities and organisations, she has met millions... Yes, she continues to work a 40-50 hour week – no retirement for her and...being the Supreme Governor of the Church of England goes to church every week (even on holiday) but she doesn't tell anyone else to go. What an example of service and personal commitment!

It truly is a second Elizabethan age and we are part of that history. What sustains her prodigious effort? She says it is her faith – we learn about it during her Christmas broadcasts. In 2002 the Queen said,

“I know just how much I rely on my faith to guide me through the good times and the bad. Each day is a new beginning. I know that the only

way to live my life is to try to do what is right, to take the long view, to give of my best in all the day brings and to put my trust in God”.

In her 2011 broadcast the Queen said,

“Forgiveness lies at the heart of the Christian faith. It can heal broken families, it can restore friendships and it can reconcile divided communities. It is in forgiveness that we feel the power of God’s love”.

The Queen is the head of a unique and special family, her own kin - and then there is the rest of us, her subjects in Britain and in the Commonwealth. We have joy in celebrating with her, all together and hope for many more birthdays.

I conclude with the thoughts that the Queen shared in her 1978 message:-

“Christians have the compelling example of the life and teaching of Christ and, for myself, I would like nothing more than that my grandchildren should hold dear his ideal, which have helped and inspired so many previous generations”.

Thank God for a servant Queen – long may she reign. God save the Queen!

*Vicar’s Vista* September 2016

## **All change at the top?**

The 13<sup>th</sup> July 2016 when Mrs Theresa May became Prime Minister seems an age ago. “Events, dear boy, events”, is what principally worried her predecessor Harold MacMillan



back in 1962. We’ve certainly had a lot of ‘events’ this summer. A vote to leave the European Union (Brexit) is the greatest political event that I have lived through – it triggered a political eruption that led to the sudden end of the Cameron - Osbourne government and a complete change of ministers.

Politically it seemed that those who won seemed to lose and vice versa. The greatest winner was undoubtedly Mrs May. Events rapidly overtook “The Mighty” who were “cast down”. Another Harold, (Wilson) in 1965 famously said, “A week is a long time in politics”. I think we have all come to accept the truth of his maxim, but this summer a day was an age in the political life of the nation. The climatic upheaval following the Brexit vote may have resulted in, ‘all change at the top’ but the ramifications for parties and their leaders are still ongoing.



Unless the present Labour Members of Parliament and the Party Members can agree on a leader there might well be a revolution in the Labour Party as we know it. This week Jeremy Corbyn, facing a leadership challenge, is being widely accused by some in the Labour movement of torpedoing the 'Remain' vote by being underwhelming in his application to it... but from a media perspective Mrs May didn't seem to me to emerge as a high profile 'Remainer' either, and now she's in charge of 'Leave'. How strange it all is in retrospect!

Boris Johnson, who led the Leavers, aspiring to be Prime Minister, won the referendum vote but lost out in such a way that events conspired to make him Foreign Minister and now he's kept busy travelling to 'meet and greet' the very politicians he regularly affronted through his acerbic newspaper columns. Being a bit of a Churchillian character I offer him this famous Winston saying: "Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts". I feel he may eventually mature to inherit the top job.

David Davies is the highest profile anti-EC Tory and he is now in charge of the complicated Brexit negotiation. This will mean that he cannot snipe at whatever inevitable delay or compromise results, let alone the cost!

Putting Europe to one side, because I believe it will take years to Brexit (there will be plenty of opportunity for me to comment further) and feeling that Brexit is now being revealed as no simple in/out matter, there are other immediate and weighty issues of great national importance to consider.

Mrs May has risked the ire of the French and the Chinese Governments as she orders a reconsideration of plans for the proposed Hinkley Point C Nuclear Power Station. The current deal, inherited from the defunct Cameron administration, controversially includes a clause to allow China to finance and build a further wholly owned nuclear plant on British soil and effectively control a whole chunk of our national power supply (Hinkley C alone would be 7% of capacity). The Chinese are now sabre rattling about withdrawing £100 billion of other investments from Britain if we jilt them!

Perhaps then an unpredicted effect of the Brexit vote is to exit this very risky multinational joint venture. It is also a question of sovereignty! Could you imagine China allowing Britain to finance and control any key project on their territory? No, of course not – it's forbidden by their law! Hmmm.

We do need a diverse low-carbon power supply system (for better or worse & for richer or poorer). Nuclear will foreseeably remain part of the strategy. I was however, very interested when a government spokesman conceded that we could save four times the total output of Hinkley C by more readily affordable efficiency saving initiatives. Apparently we need both, he said.

If Hinkley C goes ahead it would be amongst the most expensive buildings on planet Earth (estimated cost £24.5 billion). The only existing man-made edifice having cost more is the International Space Station at £75 billion. We should not ignore that EDEF, the French nationally owned contractors, have not completed either of their two current nuclear projects which are stalled with technical issues and massive cost overruns. The French government has consequently had to bale EDEF out by several billion Euros (ironically, questionable under European Community subsidy laws).

As Christians we must pray for wisdom and resilience for all our leaders; for Mrs May and all who are in power – that they may be raised up by our Lord God who never changes and is always at the actual top. Happily our new PM is a worshipping member of the C of E and so the changes at the political top should bode well – she immediately positioned herself in the centre ground as a ‘One Nation Conservative’ - Scotland please note!

It was Enoch Powell who observed that, “All political careers end in failure”. His did, but I don’t think this is always true; I pray that the recent changes at the top will offer a better way forward, together, in the common good.

*Vicar’s Vista October 2016*

## **Harvest AMDG**

We kept the traditional annual Thanksgiving for Harvest on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> September. The church was richly and appropriately decorated with flowers, fruits, vegetables and one or two harvest creatures. A luncheon for 60+ was provided wherein the food was



mostly prepared and donated by us, for ourselves. There was ample meat, veg. and deserts – and even cheese and mints, all washed down with tea & coffee. It was a veritable feast. For me the joyous thing is being part of a joyous shared meal with the church family. Holy Communion indeed! At the end when the donations were ‘gathered-in’ there was the customary surplus of food and funds, AMDG (Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam).

As is often the case when one is part of a large community, there was a corporate sadness in our midst at the loss of our beloved Baird Oldrey who passed to glory on Thursday 1<sup>st</sup>. For me, his passing has hastened the gloomier autumnal feel that we all get at the end of summer. A bright light has gone from us and our world seems darker. I will never forget Baird

often precariously hanging off ladders in church, replacing those awful old white-hot and very delicate halogen lamps that predated the modern LED lights we now enjoy. There were a myriad of things Baird did for us as our Technical Officer – including the fixing of the lighting half an hour before a wedding was to commence when the new fangled controller deliberately chose its moment to misbehave! He was also our man on the sound desk often to be seen adjusting the microphones. Baird truly was our man of Sound and Vision. Who can forget his mellifluous voice, or his charming, patient and yet fully determined nature? He loved us!

Losing Baird at Harvest-time sharpened the spiritual focus of the season. We can plant, we can sow – but it is God who gives the growth. Life itself comes from God. The life that is completed here on the beautiful earth He created is safely gathered in to heaven, by Him, at a time He chooses.

*We ourselves are God's own field, fruit unto his praise to yield;  
wheat and tares together sown, unto joy or sorrow grown...*

*...Grant O Harvest Lord, that we wholesome grain and pure may be.*

Baird's, and all our lives are given AMDG – to the greater glory of God!

*Come, ten thousand angels, come, raise the glorious harvest-home!*

*Vicar's Vista* November 2016

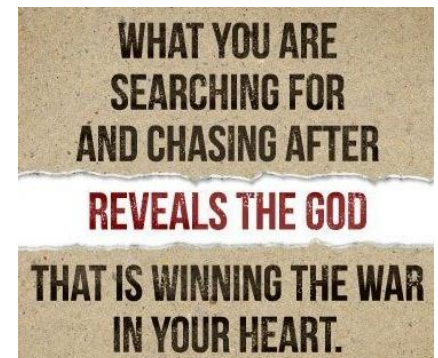
## Mingling

I've finally upgraded to a new computer because the old one, though still functioning had been left behind by the ever progressing (?) World!

My 'Office' was dated 2003, my O.S. Vista, when 7, 8 had come been and gone and '10' is now current. My i.e. was no longer compatible and crawled because my RAM and O.S. couldn't process the compulsory pop-up ads that can no longer be avoided! I suppose some readers will not understand what I'm going on about – let's just say I was left behind and thoroughly out of step. What am I chasing?

I had to invest precious time to determine the best long-term deal going forwards within a limited budget – and yet a million other things were more important priorities. I had to bone-up, to catch-up! This meant consulting friends, neighbours and family – as well as the blessed internet.

My new software behaves differently to the old – so I'm on a *learning curve*. I'm propelled into a *foreign land*. I'm sure it will all work out for the best in the end and with perseverance and forbearance I'll make it!



During Morning Prayer we read the Psalm of the day. Psalm 106 is longer than the average and was dragging somewhat (because it recounts all the essentials of the Exodus saga) but verse 35 did grab my attention:

*They mingled with the nations and learned to do as they did.*

In all my computer-related vexations I realised that I had been *mingling!* *When I consider all these things* I suppose it is all a metaphor for the spiritual life. As a Christian I have to live and move within the world and yet remain distinct. Too much *mingling* and I might end up learning their ways instead of the ways of righteousness. Lord have mercy!

In Psalm 106 the conclusion is that the Lord's people have conformed themselves to the tradition and culture of the people they now live amongst and have *prostituted themselves in their doings*.

And that remains a concern for each of us, that we only give worth to (worship) that which is wholesome. I don't wish to seem Luddite but progress for its own sake is a false idol. I do not regard technology as the answer to our problems. The psalmist declares, *Happy are those who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times*. There are kingdom priorities for the follower of Christ and consequences if we mingle without consideration. The only upgrade I seek is to reach heaven.