

ST. JOHN'S CHURCH DONISTHORPE

# GRAPEVINE

JANUARY 2024



## HAPPY NEW YEAR

### A BRIEF LOOK BACK AT 2023 BEFORE WE SET OFF INTO 2024

Dear Friends,

The end of one year and the beginning of next often provokes us to ask the big life questions and to assess where we are on our journey through life. We tend to look back on what we have achieved or accomplished or failed to do over the past year and say "What if...? If only...? Did I make the right decision?" whilst at the same time looking forward, often making "Resolutions" on actions or commitments we hope to achieve in the coming year. This New Year will probably be no different and I guess many of you have already made some resolutions for 2024 - maybe eating fewer biscuits and taking more exercise are on your list.

2023 has been a different, exciting and challenging year in many ways for us at St. John's. The church building being closed since June for transformation of the interior, required that we thought a bit 'outside the box' when we considered how we could continue to maintain a visible Christian presence for the people of our parish. While we could have easily gone along to worship in any of the churches in the Woodfield Team; we felt it important to be still seen and available even though the church building was out of action.

Our Sunday gatherings took on a new look.

Since June we have held Sunday service in the lounge bar of The Halfway House thanks to the generosity of Peter the owner and landlord at the time and now Mitch who has taken over since Peter moved on.

For our Harvest Festival we joined in with the village Apple Day celebrations, and held an open air service in The Orchard amidst all the other Apple Day activities.

Remembrance Day Service found 70 of us, including the Donisthorpe Girl Guides, again in the open air but a little wetter this time, at the War Memorial Gardens to give thanks for the sacrifice made by local men and women in war since 1914 to the present. 'We will remember them'.

At Christmas we were invited by Wesleyan Reform Church for a joint Carol Service while our Christingle Service on Christmas Eve took place in Moira Village Hall.

We have been in vacancy since Vivien retired in 2021 and unable to recruit to the vacancy while the Diocesan wide moratorium in lieu of our major restructuring into Minster Communities was in place. Fewer ordained clergy in the Woodfield Team of Churches means we are only able to put on 3 services a month.

We are grateful indeed to all who come along to lead us in worship at our services especially those of you who have taken on the role of service/worship leader at times when ordained or licensed ministers are not available. Your contribution is highly valued and much appreciated.

We don't anticipate 'getting our church back' until mid-August 2024 and so our changed pattern of worship will continue until then and maybe much further into the future even after our church building is open for business again.

All this we have accomplished while having to deal with other changes going on around us. Work to form the Parishes of Leicester Diocese into a group of Minster Communities is on-going and will occupy us through 2024 and beyond.

Towards the end of 2023 the moratorium on recruitment was lifted and we participated with other churches of the Woodfield Team in an effort to recruit to the Team Rector vacancy. Sadly the first advertisement in

November failed to yield any applications; it's proposed to re-advertise the post in January 2024 so we continue to pray that God will bring the right person along to join us.

St. John's first opened its doors to worshippers in 1838 and has learned to do things differently as required since that time, 2024 will see us facing up to that challenge again. Indeed, as we face up to the significant changes on the horizon, it is particularly pertinent to be thankful for all that has gone before. This year will see St. John's emerge as 'A Building for All', for the wider community.

Through all this we will not lose sight of our purpose as God's House. We will remember our roots and the many who have called St. John's 'their spiritual home' over the years; whose prayers and praises still echo silently in the very bricks and stones of the building; while we look forward to a sustained position where the Church plays a prominent and valued role in our community.

But primarily the Church, (and I mean the people this time not the building) is here to bring and share the Good News of God's love, as revealed in Jesus Christ, to the people we meet. Perhaps this coming year we will once again be inspired and reinvigorated by God's most generous act of deigning to come among us as one of us in the stable of Bethlehem, living as one of us in the streets and villages of Judea, teaching us the values of his Kingdom, setting us the example of love to follow, and giving us his gift of forgiveness through his death and resurrection. My prayer for us all is that the Christ-child may find room in each of our hearts to dwell.

Every blessing for the New Year.

Derek Tomlin - Lay Chair St. John's PCC

## **JANUARY SERVICES in THE WOODFIELD TEAM of CHURCHES.**

( services start at 10am unless otherwise stated).

Saturday January 6 <sup>th</sup>	<b>St Johns Prayer Group meeting at Winnie Meadows home at 10am</b>
Sunday January 7 <sup>th</sup>	Measham (HC), Normanton (MP), Swepstone (MP), Snarestone (HC)
Sunday January 14 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Donisthorpe (HC) at Halfway House</b> , Appleby (HC), Measham & Packington (MP)
Sunday January 21 <sup>st</sup>	<b>Donisthorpe (Lay Led at Halfway House)</b> , Normanton, & Swepstone (HC) Norton (BCP – HC), Measham – Breakfast Church Lay led
Friday January 26 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Lunch Light Fellowship Group at The Woodlands, Bath Lane Moira</b>
Sunday January 28 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Donisthorpe (MP) at Halfway House.</b> Measham (MP), Packington (HC), Appleby (MP), Swepstone (Christingle at 4.00pm)

## **LENT GROUPS**

Lent starts early this year with Ash Wednesday on February 14<sup>th</sup>, so look out for more information about Lent Groups within the Woodfield Team in next month's Grapevine.

## **THE FORMATION OF MINSTER COMMUNITIES**

Regular meetings between Diocesan Officers managing this transition and local Representatives of PCC's of the Deanery are taking place, our representatives are Norma Morris Chapman and Dawn Perry. Additionally, Ruth Salt the Team Administrator attends these meetings to report back to all the PCC's in our Team. The article below titled *Oversight Ministry - A Conversation*, appeared in Diocesan Diomail for December, aimed at Ordained Ministers and I reproduce it here simply to keep those of you who are interested aware of and informed about developments.

Last October we completed a 'storyboard' and submitted it to Diocese. It simply gave information about our church by answering the questions; Who are you? Where have you come from? Where are you going? What are you doing now? These have now been collated and uploaded to the Diocese's website where if you are

interested you can read them for St. John's and other churches that have submitted their 'storyboard' on <http://www.leicester.anglican.org/sbgt/minster-communities/mc-formation-downloads/nwl-area2.php>. We are encouraged to share these with our church leaders and congregations. More information relating to Formation of Minster Communities is available on the Diocese of Leicester Website.

### **'OVERSIGHT MINISTRY - A CONVERSATION**

*As we continue the roll-out of Minster Communities, we are now at the point of wanting to begin conversations with clergy who would consider taking on the role of "Oversight Minister" for a Minster Community.*

*In time, there will be a formal appointment process for each Minster Community, but at this stage, Bishop Martyn and Bishop Saju simply want to begin a conversation about what this role will involve and how clergy can best prepare for such roles.*

*We want this process to be completely open to all licensed priests (stipendiary and self-supporting) – the only restriction made by Diocesan Synod was that the Oversight Minister must be a priest. So we would like to invite any priest who is interested to a gathering on **Monday 22 January** at 7pm at Bishops' Lodge (although the venue may change if we get lots of interest!)*

*By attending, you are not committing yourself to take on such a role in the future. Nor are we committing to offering you such a role. It is a purely informal conversation. Similarly, if you can't make the gathering (for whatever reason), you are not excluding yourself from exploring such a role in the future. There will be follow-up meetings and we will explore on the evening.*

*If you would like an informal conversation about this invitation beforehand please feel free to contact Claire Bampton ([Claire.Bampton@leicestercofe.org](mailto:Claire.Bampton@leicestercofe.org)), Stuart Burns ([Stuart.Burns@LeicesterCofE.org](mailto:Stuart.Burns@LeicesterCofE.org)), Kim Ford ([Kim.Ford@LeicesterCofE.org](mailto:Kim.Ford@LeicesterCofE.org)) or Jessie Tang ([Jessie.Tang@LeicesterCofE.org](mailto:Jessie.Tang@LeicesterCofE.org)).*

*If you recognise in someone else the potential for oversight ministry, please do encourage them to come along and hear more.*

*It would help us greatly if you could let us know if you want to attend – please email [bishops.office@leicestercofe.org](mailto:bishops.office@leicestercofe.org)*

## **REFLECTION**

### **GROWN BY GOD**

Matthew 13:31-32 (NIV)

*He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.'*

The idea that wonderful things grow out of something very small and simple is not an easy one to grasp, but it has always been God's way. I can't imagine any earthly committee, however wise, agreeing that the birth of Jesus in a stable in Bethlehem would make the ideal start for a salvation plan. God sees mustard seeds where others see none. Take my own case. Imagine the scene: a decision-making meeting in heaven about twelve years ago. Around the table an angelic committee is studying files, each of which has the words ADRIAN PLASS embossed on its front cover.

'No,' says one angel, shaking his head as he leafs through the file, 'not much here. He's cracked up and useless. Doesn't go to church any more, he's left his job. How he can do that with three kids depending on him.. .'

'Look at this.' Another heavenly being takes up the dismal story. 'Getting drunk most nights and disappearing for hours on end. I don't know how his poor wife has put up with it. He seems to enjoy letting himself sink into a moral swamp.'

'Have you read what he's saying to people about the Church?' A third angel holds up his opened file and taps the page with his finger. 'So scathing and destructive. It's hard enough keeping that outfit going as it is, without this kind of negative talk.'

'So,' says yet another committee member, shutting his file with a bang, 'what we have here is a drunken, critical, irresponsible, spiritually bankrupt, morally deficient no-hoper. An ideal case for dumping. Am I right?' A murmur of agreement passes round the table as, one by one the angels close their files and sit back in their chairs. Only one member of the committee has not yet expressed an opinion. God, who has been listening silently at the head of the table, gazes thoughtfully into the distance, and speaks for the first time. 'I think,' he says quietly, 'we'll give him an international writing and speaking ministry. ...'

*Father; some of us have reached the bottom. You once planted a mustard seed of faith in us. May it begin to grow now. Thank you.*

*(Reproduced from 'When you walk' - 365 readings for ordinary followers of Jesus who sometimes find the going a bit tough by Adrian Plass 1997)*

## **GOD IS THE GOD OF SURPRISES**



The story of the Astrologers who came to worship 'Christ the new born King' is so familiar that we can miss one of its central features.

They had studied the stars – their nightly occupation. Travelled a long way. Asked the right questions in the right places. Obeyed directions. And ended up in a very ordinary

looking house (not stable), finding a very ordinary looking Baby, with an ordinary looking Mother and so would have presumed a very ordinary looking Father in the background. Haloes were not invented until the Middle Ages!

Wouldn't you or I have questioned the whole thing? Were not the Magi mystified? Didn't the Wise Men wonder? They can never have thought it would be like this. Talk about 'Surprise, Surprise'!

But they didn't go away and look elsewhere. 'And when they came to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him'.

They recognised the truth that God is the God of Surprises, who moves in a mysterious way, who reveals Himself to people of all nations in unexpected ways.

It's not only at Christmas that we can get surprised. It has happened through the centuries – God turning up in all sorts of strange places. Christ revealing Himself when not expected. The Holy Spirit opening eyes and ears to see and hear God's message in the most unforeseen circumstances.

So be prepared to be surprised! Be on the look -out for Him in 2024! We have His promise that he will reveal Himself in Word and Sacrament. We can know His presence in our homes, His companionship in our journeys and His peace in our hearts. But look out too for the revelation of Himself in the unexpected. Be ready to be surprised again and again in the most unlikely areas of your life in this new year.

But this is not quite all the Epiphany Story. They presented unto Him, gifts of gold, incense and myrrh. So how are we to react to the Surprising Revelations that He has in store for us? What have we to give?

Truth – Obedience – Love.

The truth about ourselves. Come as we are, with New Year resolutions already broken

Obedience to His call. We don't need to follow a star, we follow a living, loving Lord who says to us in this new year 'Follow Me'.

And Love. Love in response to His great love for us shown in the cradle and on the Cross.

**MAY GOD BLESS YOU AND KEEP YOU AND MAKE HIS FACE TO SHINE UPON YOU  
AND BRING YOU PEACE THROUGHOUT 2024 AND FOR EVER MORE**

<https://www.stjohnschurchdonisthorpe.org.uk>