

NEWS FROM THE PEWS

St John's: A place of worship where all are welcome

Church Services in February

Someone once said, "If you want to make God laugh, just tell him your plans!" And sure enough, just after January's edition of *News from the Pews* was published, a new lockdown was announced and we had to take the painful but very necessary decision to close the church building for public worship. This decision will be reviewed in February but it is likely that the closure will remain in place until the lockdown ends.

Our 10.30 Sunday morning service will however, continue to be streamed on our Facebook at:

www.facebook.com/stjohnashton/

Please do tune in and join us but in the meantime, should you need pastoral support for any reason, please do not hesitate to contact us using one of the telephone numbers or e-mail addresses listed below.

Contacts

Vicar:

Phil Weston 01829 752272
vicar@ashtonhayes.church

Readers:

Alan Downen 01829 751174
alan@ashtonhayes.church
Philip Goodall 01829 752130
philip@ashtonhayes.church

Pastoral Worker:

Margaret Papworth 01829 759086
margaret@ashtonhayes.church

Churchwardens:

Hilary Clegg 01829 458453
Alan Goodall 01829 752130

Notable Dates

During a time of lockdown, when one day seems to blend into another, here are some 'milestone dates' for your diaries.

16th February — Shrove Tuesday

17th February — Ash Wednesday

(The first day of Lent)

14th March — Mothering Sunday

28th March — Palm Sunday

1st April — Maundy Thursday

2nd April — Good Friday

4th April — Easter Sunday

A View from the Vicarage

My parents have a fridge magnet in their home which says "The best is yet to come!" But is this really true? In the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, living under grey winter skies, many of us are feeling low, unsure what the future holds. Education and employment prospects for young people have been damaged by lockdown, while those of us who are older may fear that our best years are behind us. Even the arrival of Spring currently seems a distant hope!

But for Christians of any age, the Bible promises that the best is yet to come. God's Word holds out enticing promises to his people, even a whole new creation free of death, disease and every other possible cause of despair. Reading Bible passages like Revelation chapter 21 is enough to lift the spirits on even the most depressing midwinter day!

But how can we be sure that the Lord will deliver on his great promises for the future? How do we know they are trustworthy and true? One reason is that God is utterly reliable, he never breaks his promises: "The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever" (Isa 40:8).

But the greatest ground for hope is the resurrection of Jesus. On the first Easter day God raised his Son to new life as a foretaste of what he will one day do for all creation. All that was fragile, mortal and transient in Jesus' earthly body was made immortal, majestic and impervious to death and decay. It was a sign of Spring like no other. It was an historical event without precedent. It was proof of God's redeeming and renewing power like no other.

So my parents' fridge magnet is quite right - for Christian believers the best is yet to come. As the apostle Paul puts it: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard and no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor 2:9).



God bless,
Phil Weston

News

- **Bible Study** — Our study of the Book of Ezekiel will continue each Monday evening until 15th February. Normally we would take a one-week break before beginning the next study but, with only six Mondays available before Easter, we shall continue through the season of Lent with a series of reflections called 'Teach us how to pray' based on the Lord's Prayer.

Following Easter there will be a two-week break before the next study, yet to be decided, begins. For further details of any of the above please send an e-mail to alan@ashtonhayes.church.

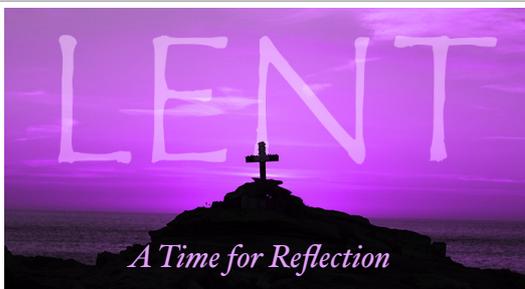
- **West Cheshire Food Bank** — In the run-up to Christmas and despite the Covid lockdowns, Lesley Groves was able to deliver over 200 items of food to our local food bank kindly donated people from our community. **Thank You!**

A Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
you taught us to love our neighbour,
and to care for those in need
as if we were caring for you.

In this time of anxiety,
give us strength
to comfort the fearful,
to tend the sick,
and to assure the isolated
of our love, and your love,
for your name's sake.

Amen.



Pause for Thought by Alan Downen

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting for forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread'. Matthew 4:1-3

Jesus' ministry didn't begin with a great show of miracles or healings but rather, following his baptism in the River Jordan, he withdrew into the wilderness to pray about, and reflect upon, all that lay ahead. He knew that things would get tough and he needed guidance and reassurance from his Father. However, and we shouldn't be surprised by this, whilst he was there he was tempted to stray — 'Feed yourself!' 'Put God to the test!' 'Bow down to materialism!' — but in each case he stayed focussed upon his true mission.

We are told that he stayed in the wilderness for 'forty days and forty nights' (biblical speak for 'a long time') and each year the Church sets aside 'forty days and forty nights', a period of time which we refer to as the Season of Lent, for personal reflection, fasting and self sacrifice.

Many of us will 'give something up' for Lent, symbolic of fasting, some will indulge in 'random acts of kindness', a symbol of self sacrifice and generosity, but how many of us will take time out of our busy schedules to pray and reflect? How many of us never make space in our lives to ponder the big questions like 'What am I being called to do?' or 'How does God fit into this?' — whatever 'this' may be. Lent begins this year on 17th February and lasts until Easter Day (4th April). During those six weeks I would urge everyone (including myself) to take some time to withdraw to a quiet place, to think and to pray and prepare for whatever lies ahead, just as Jesus did.

In Memory

We would like to mark the passing of four members of our community and offer our sincere condolences to their families and friends.

Jonathan (Jonty) Mort was a builder who has lived in Ashton for over 35 years, initially in Church Road but latterly in Brookside. He died in November 2020 but in these very strange times, we fear that his passing may have gone unnoticed and so we send our love to Jonty's daughters, Katie and Victoria and their families.

A funeral was held for **Vincent Smith**, of Pentre Close, on 21st January at Chester crematorium. He is mourned by his wife Margaret and their children Joanne and Paul.

The funeral of **Derek Challinor** took place in church on 22nd January. Derek lived in Smithy Lane. He is survived by his wife, Anita.

Dennis Derbyshire of Peel Crescent, suffered from Multiple Sclerosis for many years but he never lost his sense of humour and it didn't stop him organising the 'Men's Lunches' for the Timebank. Our thoughts go to Dennis' wife, Doreen, their children Janet, Curtis and Clive and their families.

Margaret Wright

16th April 1934 — 3rd January 2021

Many will remember Margaret in our village shops and around the village with great fondness. Sadly Margaret died recently whilst living in the residential home which she moved to in 2013. Jane Colville has written an obituary which was originally intended for publication here but, due to its length and not wanting to shorten it, it can be found on the church website. Read the full text at

<http://bit.ly/MargaretWright>.

Flooding

Our thoughts and prayers remain with those affected by the flooding in the village last week. The Parish Council has now set up a Flood Relief Fund to collect donations to help those affected. The aim is to use the fund to provide emergency support for the local families affected by the event and to provide equipment which will reduce or prevent the impact of any future event. A target of £7,650 has been set but nothing will be available unless the target is reached. Can you help?

Contributions can be made via this website — <http://bit.ly/FloodingRelief>



Toilet Twinning

This may seem like a strange topic for newsletter but thanks to a generous donation from David Lamb, the last vicar here in Ashton Hayes, our two new toilets in church have now been twinned with toilets in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Without proper toilets and clean water, people are trapped in a vicious cycle: they're likely to become sick through sanitation-related diseases and illness means they cannot work or farm their land, so they earn less or grow less food. Children often miss school, because they are sick or because they're busy collecting water and girls often drop out of school altogether when they start their periods if there are no toilets or changing rooms. Added to that parents have to pay for medicines or food, so they may fall into debt and women and girls risk being attacked or bitten by snakes as they go to the toilet in the open, especially if the culture dictates that they have to go out at night. This is a gift which will really make a difference. www.toilettwinning.org

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