



March 2022 LENT

Services

Wednesday 2nd March Ash Wednesday

1000 Holy Communion at Weston-on-the-Green

1930 Holy Communion at Bletchingdon

Sunday 6th March Lent 1

0800 Holy Communion* at Chesterton

0930 Holy Communion at Bletchingdon

0930 Matins* at Middleton Stoney

0930 Matins at Wendlebury

1100 Family Service at Chesterton

1100 Holy Communion at Kirtlington

1600 Evening Worship at Weston

Sunday 13th March Lent 2

0930 Holy Communion at Wendlebury

1000 Benefice Zoom service

1100 Holy Communion at Chesterton

1100 Matins* at Kirtlington

1100 Matins* at Weston-on-the-Green

1600 Evening Worship at Middleton Stoney

Sunday 20th March Lent 3

0930 Matins* at Bletchingdon

0930 Holy Communion at Middleton Stoney

1100 Matins* at Chesterton

1100 Holy Communion at Weston-on-the-Green

1600 Evensong* at Kirtlington

1600 Evening Worship at Wendlebury

Sunday 27th March Lent 4 Mothering Sunday

0930 Holy Communion at Kirtlington

1100 Benefice service (not HC) at Weston-on-the-Green

*indicates that the service is
Book of Common Prayer

Contact details

Do feel free to contact a member of the ministry team if you would like to chat over anything, or a churchwarden if you would like information

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Forthcoming events in the benefice

WOMEN OF FAITH

The Akeman Lent Lectures 2022

*A series of talks by some notable speakers
on women of faith across the ages.*

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- 8 March** Old Testament women
The Rev'd Clare Hayns, Chaplain of Christ
Church, Oxford
- 15 March** Medieval women
The Rev'd Dr Paula Clifford, retired academic
and assistant priest, Akeman Benefice
- 22 March** New Testament women
Dr Rebecca Dean, Lecturer in New
Testament, Ripon College, Cuddesdon
- 29 March** Victorian women
The Rev'd Mia Smith, Chaplain of Hertford
College, Oxford
- 5 April** Twentieth Century women
The Rev'd Dr Laura Biron-Scott, Vicar of
Headington Quarry

Tuesdays in Lent
Kirtlington Church at 1930

Live stream details from akemanbenefice@gmail.com

Background Art:
© Micah Hayns

Taster for the Lent Lectures:

The Lent Lectures are going to be given by women about women - Women of Faith. Our editor walked round to see Paula Clifford who will be delivering the 2nd one, on “Medieval Women”. Paula, who in an earlier existence was a university lecturer in Medieval Studies, has recently published a book, intriguingly called “Tuscany’s Noble Treasures”. The treasures are not works of art but holy women.

Ed: So how did this book come about, Paula?

Paula: By accident, really. I was invited to write a book on Catherine of Siena and, in looking at the women who came before her, I became distracted by this group of women.

Ed: What fascinated you about them?

Paula: It was so strange that, over such a short period, just 150 years, and in the same area of Italy, but without knowing each other, they were each doing their saintly thing. At first I thought they were just bonkers, with their wild utterances, but then I grew to admire their courage in doing their own thing, in following their calling, and standing out against the pressures of their families to conform, be normal, get married and so on. It was fascinating to capture this slightly odd moment in time.

Ed: What lay behind this, do you think?

Paula: Historically, lay people were becoming more significant and popular religion was thriving, with people bringing back relics from the Holy Land, and the creation of shrines to the big names. It was a relatively stable period, and women were becoming more significant. Their husbands may have been away fighting the Crusades and they were left to run things.

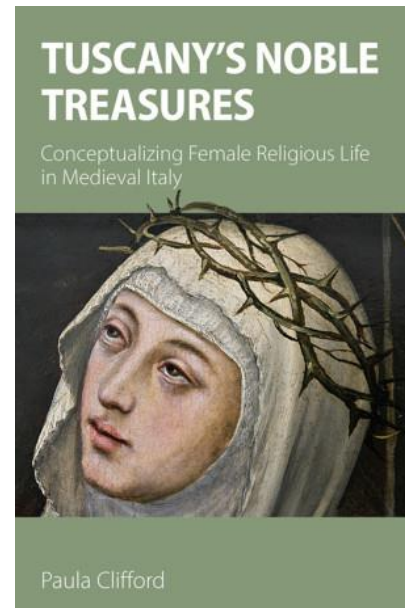
Ed: What did they actually do?

Paula: It varied. They generally had ecstatic experiences, and lived in response a deeply ascetic life. This could be disruptive to normal church life and embarrassing to their families. But communities such as the Dominicans offered a refuge for them and created a community of women alongside their own. In communities they flourished. They would study together, read the Bible, and share theological reflection. One or two produced writings, (some of which are remarkably difficult to follow!) And they would be out in the community earning a living and doing good works - Margaret of Cortona for example founded a hospital.

Ed: Is there anything we can learn from them nowadays would you say?

Paula: We can dare to be different, in personal devotion and public behaviour.

Ed: Mm, that’s a very good sound-bite! The Lent Talks are all by women and about Women of Faith. Do you think there is anything particular that a female perspective has to show us about faith?



Paula: It was the intensely personal relationship with Jesus and particularly his body that stands out with these women. Sometimes that was taken to a shocking extent: secular romantic poetry influenced the language. They really identified with and sometimes actually felt the physical pain of the crucifixion. The eucharist became very important to them, to take in the body of Christ.

Ed: What was the relationship between these women and the men around them, and particularly the establishment of the Church?

Paula: The church was (naturally) suspicious of women in ecstasy. They felt the need to control them - there was a danger of their intensity and individualism veering towards heresy - and their ascetism was a rebuke to them. The role of confessors was significant here: they kept an eye on them while also supporting them often - and didn't seem to feel the need to maintain the secrecy of the confessional, when it came to writing the biographies! Also members of local communities or orders wrote up the lives of these holy women and artists made images of them that added importance to their own community; there was an element of reflected glory on them. It is easier to portray ecstasy in an image than it is in text, so there are lots of paintings of them. I'd drag my daughter round art galleries in Italy and we'd spot all the characters in paintings... and we still find ourselves doing that independently!

Ed: Did they change the church or were they just an odd, isolated phenomenon?

Paula: Well, they made the ministry of women more acceptable, and also they and their followers were a key factor in the emergence of lay orders for women.

Ed: Aha! That's pretty significant! Well, Paula, we are looking forward to hearing the remarkable stories of some of these 'Medieval Women' at your Lent Lecture on 15th March.

Ambrogio Bergagnone, *Virgin and Child with St Katherine of Alexandria and St Catherine of Siena* (National Gallery, London)



Margaret of Cortona by an unknown (?14th-century) artist, showing her wearing a rough penitential garment

Come and join us for the benefice

Mothering Sunday service

(with choir)

at St Mary's, Weston-on-the-Green

on Sunday 27th March at 11am

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ALL WELCOME
Rise & Shine
CAFE

RISE AND SHINE CAFÉ

TERM TIME WEDNESDAYS 9.15-10.45
KIRTLINGTON CHURCH
LFT AND FACEMASKS REQUESTED

FAIRTRADE

WELCOME FOR THE WHOLE COMMUNITY, AND ALL AGES. HAVE A NATTER AND ENCOURAGE SOMEONE OLDER, OR YOUNGER! DELIGHT IN TEA, COFFEE AND HOMEMADE GOODIES. SHARE RHYMES, SONGS AND A BIBLE STORY FROM 10.40. EMAIL GEMMAMAYBANK.AKEMAN@GMAIL.COM WITH QUESTIONS, OR SIMPLY COME ALONG AND ENJOY!

The Akeman Church Community Choir is starting up again.

To find out more contact Gareth:
akemanbenefice@gmail.com



Forthcoming events further afield...

FTWeekend
OXFORD
LITERARY
FESTIVAL

Church Going Gone – A Biography of Religion,
Doubt and Faith

Brian Mountford
Interviewed by Angela
Tilby

Tuesday, 29 March 2022

10:00am

1 hour

Bodleian: Divinity School

£7 - £12.50



To buy tickets, www.oxfordliteraryfestival.org or 0333 666 3366

All are welcome

to meet
the Bishop of Oxford

at 7.30 pm on Thursday 7 April
at Emmanuel Church, Bicester.

Open question and answer session.

Recent events in the benefice: some participants reflect on their experiences



Philip Maybank (Kirtlington)

In his letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul tells us that we should love one another with a love that never fails (1 Cor 13.8). That he needed to remind his readers of this is perhaps a clue that since the birth of the church, we as Christians have found it a real challenge to imitate the love that God has for his people. The Living in Love and Faith initiative could perhaps be thought of as a kind of spiritual MOT. At one

level it is an MOT for the whole Church of England. But it may also be a kind of MOT for us as church communities and as individuals. If we take Paul's words from 1 Corinthians 13 (the text that formed the basis of the first session of the Akeman LLF day) as a kind of yardstick, how do we measure up against what God has called us to be?

On the Akeman LLF day that I attended, after reflecting on 1 Corinthians 13, we heard the voices firstly of Bill, Jayne, and Luke, a family with traditional Christian values who had found a way of reconciling their faith with the fact that the son, Luke, was gay; then of Andrew and Gerhard, a gay Christian couple who had had to battle through fear of being rejected from their biological and church families. The message that came through from the first session is that Christian love can and does triumph over prejudice and defensiveness. I think we can say that Christian people do live in love and faith, albeit perhaps more so at the level of the individual relationships than at the institutional level.

We then broke into discussion groups where we were encouraged to mix across parishes. Listening to contributions from Weston on the Green, Middleton Stoney, and Kirtlington among others I had the sense we are a more diverse bunch than I had previously appreciated both in terms of identities and faith journeys. Most, if not all, of us present seemed to be fairly comfortable with the idea that there is a spectrum of human sexuality over which loving relationships exist; and also with the idea that church can be a place where people are free to ask questions about the Church's teaching.

Reflecting on Genesis and the liturgy of the Church of England marriage service helped us to understand where more traditional views of marriage originate. At the same time we were encouraged to see these texts as quite open in that they do not prescribe narrow boundaries on what it means to be fully human, or on what marriage should look like. As well as instituting marriage as a place where families grow and are nourished, many godly marriages have been built solely on the basis of mutual support and care, for example.

Listening to more voices from across the Church of England it was clear that some have not felt accepted for who they are. However the existence of more inclusive churches means that often those who have felt rejected have found church communities where they do not need to feel afraid of revealing who they are. I found myself wondering to what extent the Church of England is actually in communion with itself? There was the peculiar example of Julie who could not in good conscience put herself forward for ordination

because of her homosexuality but was subsequently licensed as a Lay Minister in her diocese. I still feel perplexed as to why one part of the church would reject someone from a position of leadership on the basis of their sexuality, while another part of the church does not see it as an issue.

I will follow the conclusion of the LLF initiative with interest in the hope that the Church of England might better embody at an institutional level the abundant love and faith that so many of its members have. I came away feeling blessed to be part of a community where there is so much mutual care and support.

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The Candlemas service in Kirtlington.

Firstly, Kate Ehrman (Bletchington) gives her impressions

“Candlemas, Christingle, Christmas. They all sound the same and all are celebrated within a month of each other. In fact, they have different significances. Candlemas falls 40 days after Christmas Day and brings closure to the Christmas period. Christingle is celebrated from the beginning of Advent and before Candlemas. I now know that Candlemas marks the purification of Mary in the temple after the birth of the Christ child, and Kirtlington Church went big on the celebration with a beautiful evening service on - actually - the thirty-eighth day. Forty is of course a resonant number in the Bible.

Kirtlington Church looked absolutely beautiful, with the altar table moved opposite the entrance underneath the medieval wall painting of St George and St Christopher, and the church chairs were placed in a half moon in front. Not pews, no aisle, but an elegance that matched the beauty of the service. Behind us, discreetly waited the stunning Hexachord Choir. And they lifted their voices and sang out, and the church was filled with a kind of glory. Partway through the service, Giles Dawson treated us to an aria from Handel’s Messiah. Honestly, Handel’s Messiah is quite Rock and Roll, the expressive range of singing combined with the liturgy from the Bible is a knockout, but it is always special to hear it sung live.

It was a church service, it was a concert and it took place in a beautiful place.”



Candlemas comments continued...



Malcolm McBride (Chesterton) comments:

“It was lovely to have so many different people contributing their different gifts.”



Paul Clifford, (Kirtlington), adds his take on it...

“Hugh White, Vicar of Minster Lovell, preached a thoughtful and rich sermon, notable for its positioning of Candlemas between Christmas and Easter. He made the point that it marks the end of the Christmas season and is the culmination of a series of revelations of Christ (to the shepherds, the Magi, to Simeon and Anna, all of whom, in varying degrees, recognise him as king and Saviour); hence, at least in part, its celebration with light (as the name implies). It also looks forward to Easter, only a few weeks away in the Church’s calendar, when Simeon’s prophecy about the infant Jesus and the grief that he will bring to Mary comes true. Thus Candlemas points us in both directions, towards both life and death. As TS Eliot put it in *Four Quartets*: ‘In my beginning is my end...in my end is my beginning.’ “

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A day's workshop in Bicester

No, it wasn't a conference to discuss energy conservation as some of us had expected, but a deanery meeting for the purpose, we were told, of 'Affirming, Inspiring and Energising' congregations in mission. This is both a duty - the diocese has signed up to a vision to reach out to attract others, so we need to do our bit - and also an exciting challenge, even if the comment, "Do you know what, in the Church of England we can be exciting?" was greeted with some laughter.

So it was clearly a cynical and seasoned set of churchgoers that gathered in the attractive setting of Emmanuel Church, Bicester, but the gathering was much mellowed by the presence of the some of the largest slices of chocolate cake known to man, or woman. The Greenhouse idea is very much not to give us all extra work for the sake of doing something new and different, but to help us share ideas about what we are already doing and how to make it increasingly effective in spreading the word and making disciples.

We were asked to identify where our churches' activities sit on the different facets of this cycle. Do they concentrate on building up community or demonstrating love, bringing people to church or what? Where would you put yours?

Some of us do a lot of listening, others may be good at showing love, or building community, and others at sharing faith. We were encouraged to think about this as part of a cycle and to start to think about how we could help people to move from the shallows of faith into something deeper and more satisfying.

Pottery, bulbs and flowers

This could have been all a bit airy-fairy but in fact some very good ideas were given from people's experiences (always the most helpful part of any event). One group had organised a community bulb-planting event on Remembrance Sunday. People who joined in that had been invited to a meal at which someone had shared their faith. Those who were interested had been invited on to an Alpha course and some from that were baptised.

Another group had had a creative Sunday with a potter demonstrating his skill, and afterwards bringing God into it. Everyone had joined in and had a go and a lovely time. This had led to a worship and prayer evening.

Yet another group had asked their local school what they needed and how the church could help. They started with flowers put in the staff room and getting to know the staff team.

We heard from someone who had built up good relationships in a Care Home, and she emphasised that her policy was “be yourself and let God do the rest”. Look for opportunities to use your skill, whether it is motherliness, technology, music, or whatever.

Keeping it going

Lots of good ideas then, but sometimes the best of ideas and intentions get waylaid by life and time limits. In our small group we agreed to keep up contact so that we could encourage one another in trying to do our part.

So, not so much energy conservation as renewable energy, maybe... with people thinking strategically and sharing skills to make the best use of energy and time to cultivate healthy strong growth of faith in our communities.

Joanna Clifford, one of the Akeman Benefice delegates



Chesterton Café Church

Scrummy pastries were on offer as usual at the Chesterton Café Church in Chesterton School, to help us as we thought about being afraid, listened to a sketch about the Rich Young Ruler who was challenged by Jesus to give up his wealth and couldn't, and saw a film clip about Harriet Tubman who faced her own fears as she led her fellow-slaves to freedom through a deep river. How would YOU have answered our 3 challenging discussion questions:

1. Do you sympathise with the rich young ruler?
2. What do you think people are most afraid of?
3. “Perfect love casts out fear” according to the Bible. What does this mean to you?”

Schools

Showing the Love. For a post-Valentine's Day collective worship the children of Bletchingdon and Kirtlington Schools thought about caring for our planet. 'Show The Love' is a campaign run each February by the Climate Coalition. The children were very good at thinking up ideas for doing that locally, from planting to litter-picking to plastic re-use. Here are some of Bletchingdon's pupils with a 'Show The Love' green heart.



On the other side of the heart was written the first verse of Psalm 24: "The Earth is the Lord's and everything in it" which seems an excellent reason for taking extra care of the world.

and families

Lent activities for families.

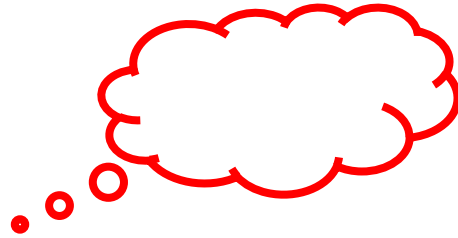
Can you manage to mark each day of Lent with an activity that is either Giving, Doing or Fasting? Here are some suggestions...

GIVE A hug, a flower, a card, a donation to a charity, an extra helping, a prayer for someone sad

DO Someone else's chore, something horrible without complaining, be creative, sit and look at a flower

FAST... from TV, from criticism, from sweets, from plastic

I am sure others have far better ideas. Do send them in...



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A thought and some questions

The Bulletin has now been going for 2 years. When it started it served a purpose, at a time when we couldn't get into churches to pick up information about what was going on.

But now we are able to meet in church once more, perhaps the Bulletin's time is past. **What do you think? Is there still a useful role that can be played by it? Or could it do something other than it is currently doing? Be more controversial? Have more jokes?**

If you have read this far I'd like to hear from you!

No, you don't get a reward (though you should) but it would be really helpful to know what the readership is out there. If it's just the few people who sometimes comment then this is probably not a good use of time. **SO DO RESPOND** and let me know, even if it's "Yes, I read it!" Hoping to hear from you.... Joannaclifford.akemanbenefice@gmail.com



Do write!

Contributions for a bumper April/May Bulletin are due in by Monday 21st March please.
Send to joannaclifford.akeman@gmail.com

The end.