



Benefice Bugle!



May 2021

Church Services

Please note: We are holding a reduced number of services while we begin to emerge from lockdown. There will normally be two services per Sunday in the benefice. You are most welcome to attend, but please do so ONLY if you are not experiencing Covid19 symptoms. If you attend worship, please wear a face covering and be carefully to observe social distancing.

There will continue to be a Zoom service at 1000 am each Sunday.
Please email akemanbenefice@gmail.com for joining details.

2 May Easter 5

0930	Middleton Stoney	Holy Communion
1100	Chesterton	Young Families' Service

9 May Easter 6 (Rogation Sunday)

0930	Kirtlington	Holy Communion
1100	Weston o/t Green	Morning Worship and Beating the Bounds

13 May Ascension Day

1900	Zoom Service	Preacher: Canon Richard Peers (Sub-Dean of Christ Church)
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16 May Sunday in Ascensiontide

0930	Wendlebury	Morning Worship
1100	Chesterton	Holy Communion

23 May Pentecost

1030	Hampton Gay	Pentecost Eucharist (open-air, weather permitting)
1800	Bletchington	Evensong

30 May Trinity Sunday

0930	Middleton Stoney	Morning Worship
1100	Kirtlington	Holy Communion

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

Ministry team

Rector: The Rev'd Gareth Miller
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Retired priest: The Very Rev'd Bob Wilkes
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Licensed Lay Minister:
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If you are reading this on a notice board in a printed version, do also look on the website www.akemanbenefice.org.uk or email joannaclifford.akeman@gmail.com for the rest of the Benefice Bugle, which contains...

- The Rector's Letter
- News from around the parishes
- Thoughts about the Holy Spirit, at the time of Pentecost
- Welcome to new members of our congregation, the Milne family
- Introducing Marc Swan, warden in Middleton Stoney
- In tribute to Prince Philip and some of his concerns



Rector's letter

I am writing this while waiting for the funeral of the Duke of Edinburgh to begin. I wonder how many of you met him? It's surprising how many people did. I was once presented to the Queen and he was standing behind her - that's the nearest I got!

Some are fans of the monarchy and of the royal family, others less enthusiastic. But whatever one's position, the death of a national figure, whose life has embraced a whole century, is a moment of great significance and tends to open up the national psyche.

I was amused to hear the recollection of Jean Chrétien, former PM of Canada. At their first meeting the prince spoke to the Québécois PM in excellent French. The PM complimented the Duke on his command of the language, for an Englishman, to which he responded, "I'm not English, and I was speaking French, dear boy, long before you were born." Prince Philip was born, famously, on the dining table at Mon Repos in Corfu, and had a hugely disturbed childhood, spending some of it in France. Of British, German, Danish and Russian extraction, he represented the cosmopolitan (if perhaps slightly incestuous) nature of European royalty.

In these days when DNA tests are all the rage, we are reminded that we are all a mixture of genes, sharing ancestry with people from all over the globe. I heard a fascinating programme recently about the discovery of King Richard III's remains in a Leicester car park, and how they identified him through the DNA of a Canadian cabinet-maker, fourteen generations removed, who was eventually asked to make a coffin for the king's re-interment.

We all come from the same stock, and we all end up in a wooden box. Or, as scripture says, 'we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we take nothing out.'

Prince Philip was not always politically correct, indeed rarely so. A creature of his times, we can perhaps forgive his occasional lapses into various isms, and they certainly added a dash of colour to our national life. Though these days we are rightly more careful about what we say and how we say it, it would be a sad day indeed if all individuality and eccentricity were knocked out of our human conversations.

Cynics will claim that the Duke was a representative of an elite, outdated institution. But that would be a mistake. He was, I think, a man of intelligence and insight, modern and forward-looking, albeit living his life in rather rarefied circumstances.

So we can, I think, properly give thanks, for someone who lived a life of service - for his energy, his devotion to the Queen, for his care for the young, for the conservation of the planet and its wildlife, and for his awareness of how difficult it is to come from outside into that unusual family.

Something that is less well known is the Prince's interest in things spiritual. He it was, together with Robin Woods, the then Dean of Windsor, who set up St George's House, where senior clergy are invited to spend time in reflection and theological discussion and to develop their leadership skills. The Duke not only helped set it up but was a regular participant in meetings. It is also said that there were more books about theology on his bookshelves than about the navy.

As I said earlier, not everyone is in favour of monarchy, and certainly there should be room for alternative views. But a head of state, be it Queen or President, puts a human face on the operations of government, and provides images with which people can identify. Through a family we are reminded that we are not just figures on a central computer, or an income tax code number, but that we are all members of a family where common interests and kinships exist beneath and beyond our divisions and conflicts.

Jesus Christ was not overly interested in a person's status, nor with expressions of piety. Look at the ramshackle group of men he associated with: impulsive, hot-tempered, vain, ambitious. I think there will be room in his heart for someone with all the complicated characteristics of Prince Philip. I pray that we may all share something of Prince Philip's vitality, however long we live, and that we too might live lives of public service and faithful witness.

Gareth

News from around the parishes

Palm Sunday saw us congregating outside, for the donkey procession in **Middleton Stoney** churchyard, with an obedient 'donkey' and a diminutive 'Jesus'. It was lovely to be able to sing in the open air.



By Easter, we were back in churches. Ann Mowat reports from **Kirtlington**: "We were blessed with a beautiful day on Easter Sunday. We had a Holy Communion Service in a beautifully decorated Church— masked ,socially distanced and door open. After the service we had an Easter Egg Hunt in the churchyard much enjoyed by the children who'd been at church and some who were just passing by! It was suggested we might sing a hymn outside with Trevor playing inside and it was lovely to be able to sing with others- a beautiful Spring day giving us all hope for the future.





Since then we have also had an Evensong in Kirtlington church which was well attended. Gradually we are progressing to normality I hope.”

Chesterton has been busy. Sue Ashdown tells us, “We were all delighted that the sun shone for our Easter gathering outside St. Mary’s, Chesterton on Easter Sunday. It was so lovely to have our Young Families back in person, and to welcome some new faces too. A good crowd came together for a prayer, a reading and a hymn - Lord of the Dance - of course, as it’s one of my favourites. Bob Wilkes had a few words for us as well before we headed off for our annual Easter egg hunt around the churchyard. Other members of the congregation went inside the church for the fuller Easter service.

Jill Peck was awarded the Colin Cup this year in recognition of her dedication to keeping our church clean, organising a team of cleaners, sorting rotas, and extra cleaning for weddings, funerals and christenings, which is all often done by Jill alone. Not to mention keeping the bat poo under control! Well done Jill and well deserved.



The Colin Cup was created by me, Sue Ashdown, in remembrance of my dear neighbour and friend, Colin Board. Colin did a lot for the village as well as the Young Families service. He and Erika always served and provided the refreshments for us as well as helping with props, Easter egg hunts, keeping my book up to date and constant encouragement and support. Colin is dearly missed, as is Erika his wife. The cup is awarded for ‘Generosity of Spirit’ and support for the Young Families Service in all manner of many different ways.”



Also in **Chesterton**, Shuba and Nick Ktorides, with a cheerful team of helpers, held a sociable event in the churchyard selling interesting plantain fries and rosette cookies from Kerala, and raised an excellent £258.00. This will be going to the UNESCO Vaccine Aid Programme for poor countries.

Wendlebury has been undergoing a very Paschal process of destruction and re-build: a fantastic team of village volunteers gathered on a lovely sunny Saturday morning in April to begin to take down some of the dry stone walls surrounding the churchyard, which were in very poor condition. The following Saturday they were tutored in the art of reconstructing them. Many thanks to everyone who has volunteered to help with this significant job, and to all who provided refreshment! Charles Darby explains, “We made better than expected progress with great numbers & enthusiasm & hope to continue now with the momentum gained.”



Wedding: Congratulations to Joseph Harris and Amelia Temple who were married at All Saints', **Middleton Stoney**

Treasure on earth. Hugely grateful thanks to the church treasurers who are standing down this year: to Ian Gedling in Bletchington who has done it for 25 years, and to Steve Rice who stepped in at Kirtlington for 18 months. And a big welcome to Kate Ehrman and Hilary McPhee who are taking over, respectively. Also huge thanks to Sue Macready who has given an amazing 17 years to being Benefice Treasurer in which she did a fantastic

job, being diligent, prompt, efficient and uncomplaining about the Rector's idiosyncrasies. Welcome to Paul Clifford who replaces her as benefice treasurer.

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It has been wonderful to start meeting together again to worship, but Zoom has its advantages... as Eric Bohm explains, "This is the view from my wife, Diane's study window when we are attending a Zoom service. Please be assured that I took the picture after the service and paid attention to the entire thing! Unfortunately we had snow the following day and the blooms were destroyed. Now I am spending my days sweeping up falling petals."

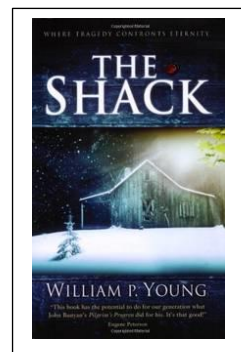
Pentecost

“The Holy Spirit may without exaggeration be called the heart-beat of the Christian, the life-blood of the Christian Church” begins the 1991 report of the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England, We believe in the Holy Spirit.

In his great book on mission John Taylor described the Holy Spirit as The Go-between God.

“What makes a landscape or a person or an idea come to life for me and become a presence towards which I surrender myself? I recognise, I respond, I fall in love, I worship, yet it was not I who took the first step. In every encounter there has been an anonymous third party who makes the introduction, acts as a go-between, makes two beings aware of each other, sets up a current of communication between them. This invisible go-between does not simply stand between us but is activating each of us from inside... What is the immediate result of the coming of the Holy Spirit? -Communication. Awareness. They preached and everyone in that cosmopolitan crowd heard them speaking to them in their own language”

Controversially, in William Young’s novel *The Shack*, the Holy Spirit is presented as a shimmering Asian woman who is “Keeper of the Gardens, among other things” (but then, in the same novel, God, the Father (Mother) is a large black woman and Jesus is a Middle Eastern labourer, good with his hands). Read it, see what you think, it’s very moving.



Alastair Milne, trainee ordinand at Wycliffe Hall, has started worshipping with us. When asked how the Holy Spirit has led him to this point in his life, he answered as follows:



How has the Spirit led me?

My name’s Ali and I grew up in north-west London with my parents, Stuart and Hilary, and my younger brother, Kris. I attended a Baptist church growing up where my mother worshipped and spent my formative years participating in the children’s and youth groups they have. One memory I have, at something like the age of 8, is of lying on my bed and trying to imagine what God, a being who is immaterial and bigger than

the universe, would be like. It was an amazing feeling, something similar to the awe you feel when driving through the Cotswolds - especially as a London boy! Another memory, in relation to God and family, is a conversation at dinner time around the age of 10 about the

universe. My dad, who was an atheist, or at least an agnostic, had recently read Stephen Hawking's book, *A Brief History of Time*, and although in this book Hawking is ambivalent as to whether God exists or not, my dad had concluded that the Big Bang hypothesis explained everything that needed explaining about why the universe exists and so the existence of God was an unneeded hypothesis. I remember feeling that this didn't quite make sense but at that age I was unable to articulate why that was.

At the age of 12 my dad was diagnosed with cancer and after various rounds of chemo and surgery he died not long before I turned 15. This event set me off on a downwards spiral as the fleetingness of life and the thought that "this is all meaningless, death will rob us of any significance we build for ourselves" led me to the point of crisis. I knew that only if God existed and was a God who cared for us, could there ever be ultimate and lasting purpose to our lives. However, my encounter with atheistic worldviews, both from my father and the culture around me, left me struggling to do more than want God to exist. Where was the evidence or the reasoning that would mean I could justifiably do more than that?

This downwards spiral continued until I had dropped out of two undergraduate courses and was spending my life partying most nights to suppress the feeling of emptiness. At this low in my early twenties, I decided that the answer could only be God and that, whilst I still didn't see good enough evidence, all I could do was give it a go. I thus decided to "act as a Christian", doing what a Christian would do. I got up early before work (I had managed to get myself onto an apprenticeship scheme in an accountancy firm), went to a coffee shop, read my Bible, and prayed. Although most of the time when I read the Bible, I didn't feel that this could be the words of God - a lot of it was quite boring - or at least in the way that my inherited theological leaning wanted it to be, but when I prayed - I liked to write my prayers down - I enjoyed the attempting to put into words the indescribable and it felt good. Similar to trying to imagine the unimaginable.

After half a year or so of doing this, one of my friends, who now lives in Bicester, and who didn't know I was doing this, invited me to watch some debates that were going on around the UK. The debated topics were variations on the question, "Does God exist?" During these debates I heard some amazing arguments for the existence of God and, although they didn't prove God's existence, they made believing in God an intellectually viable option. These philosophical arguments "dethroned" the competing narrative set up by culture and gave me the justification I needed to believe that God existed.

There is much to say since then, such as how I met my wife, and about my beautiful daughter Annabelle, about my journey into theological study and the journey towards naming this God I believed in as Father, Son, and Spirit, and my commencement of ordination training at Wycliffe in October 2020. But most importantly, I believe that the Spirit is calling me primarily to a who, only secondarily to a what. That is, over time, to both experience and to live, a life of love.

A warm welcome from the Benefice to Ali, Carrie and little Belle.

Introducing... Marc Swan



Marc couldn't make our first scheduled interview, as he had an emergency operation to help the oncologists by removing a tumour from a 2-year old. That already says a lot about Marc Swan.

I have been honoured to serve as a churchwarden of All Saints' Middleton Stoney since 2019. Cher and I moved to the delights of Middleton Park in 2016 where we have since been blessed with two gorgeous daughters – Clementine and Pomeline. On the first weekend that we arrived in the village, we were made warmly welcome at our first communion service at All Saints'. We received dinner invitations and generous offers of help with our move; a reminder of how the church fosters strong bonds within our community. Whether raising our glasses at the annual Harvest Supper or supporting our thriving Middleton Stoney Cricket Club, we very much feel that Middleton Stoney is our home.

My passion is reconstructive plastic surgery with the majority of my work involving children born with cleft lip and palate at the John Radcliffe Hospital. I am a trustee for the charity Interface Uganda which supports reconstructive plastic surgery in East and Central Africa and have been fortunate enough to be involved with training surgeons in the region for the past decade. In the developing world many children fail to survive infancy with an orofacial cleft and long-term outcomes are bleak; with timely high-quality intervention these children can look forward to a bright future where they are able to reach their full potential.

Beyond medicine I am a keen rower – although my lycra seems to have shrunk somewhat since the untimely arrival of Covid-19. I love water – whether swimming across it (including the English Channel in 2010), scuba diving beneath it, or flyfishing upon it (neither trout- nor salmon-loving readers of the Bugle need concern themselves as it has been some years since I successfully landed a fish – Cher is an infinitely more accomplished fisherman than I). I have always had a keen interest in exploring the natural world and am proud to be a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society.

Our gorgeous church is the cornerstone of our community. I hope that during my tenure as churchwarden I can make the church more relevant to those living in our parish – particularly young families of our generation. In addition, I would like to tackle the uphill task of maintaining (and hopefully improving) a substantial Grade II listed building in order that all

future generations of Middleton Stoney residents can benefit from everything that our church has to offer.

For those readers who have yet to join us at a service at All Saints' please call by at any time as you'll be assured of a hearty welcome!

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Pentecost Pause for thought



What are some names and descriptions for the Holy Spirit in the Bible?
See if you can fill in the blanks.

In his final discourse with his disciples before he leaves them, Jesus encourages his disciples about "The C..... who will (John 14:26) and who will (John 15: 26). He is the Spirit of T..... (John 16:13)"

Elsewhere he is described as the Spirit of A..... (Romans 8:16), and the spirit of W..... and R..... (Ephesians 1: 17).

What do we think this suggests about his role in our lives? How might that happen?

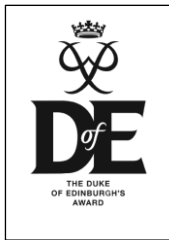
For children, mainly. Why don't you read the story of the church's birthday (Acts chapter 2), from a children's Bible, and then make wind and fire streamers and blow them into life? You could make them as small.....



or as **BIG** as you like!

Why are wind and flame the images of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and a dove elsewhere?





In tribute to Prince Philip

One of the things for which Prince Philip will be remembered is the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. Lola Holland, one of our young people, explains what the DofE has done for her...

I participated in the Duke of Edinburgh Award through school when I was 14. Not only does it give me a qualification to put on my CV but also exposed me to situations I had never experienced before and forced me to feel confidence and put myself in unique situations, particularly when completing the expeditions. Furthermore, this was the first time I had ever had to work in team circumstances over a long period of time, in which I learnt a lot about myself and the others in my team.

In addition, outside of completing the expedition, completing the physical, skills and volunteering all helped me to be engaged in the community and take an active role in citizenship. Now that I am 17, nearly 18, my friends and I still look back in fond memory. Overall, I think the Duke of Edinburgh Award is a great programme founded by The Duke of Edinburgh himself which gives young people great initiative.



Lola with the other members of the Second Sunday Youth Group on a break from DofE rigours!

Other links with Prince Philip: Eric Bohm from Weston on the Green writes:

Unfortunately, I never had the opportunity of meeting Prince Philip. However I ended my “business” career as the CEO of WWF Hong Kong with responsibilities for conservation in Hong Kong and the southern region of the People’s Republic of China. Prince Philip was instrumental in the establishment of WWF Hong Kong because at the time of WWF’s formation to preserve pandas in the PRC, western agencies were not permitted to operate inside China. Prince Philip and Peter Scott influenced the Chinese authorities to allow an operation from Hong Kong to carry out panda conservation within China, under strict supervision.

From my readings of minutes and articles of the time, Prince Philip was a passionate animal conservationist. He foresaw that the relationship between humans and animal life was important and under threat. He was an early ecologist and had a wide understanding of the interconnection between nature and human beings. I think he coined the phrase: “Mankind must live in harmony with nature.”

He was a man of considerable foresight.

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We will be having a series of articles from Eric in forthcoming Bugles on the subject of the environment and our care for God’s world. Watch (carefully!) this space!

Let’s give the Duke the last word. Prince Philip on long sermons:

“The mind cannot absorb what the backside cannot endure”.

(Thank goodness our preachers do not test that one to the limit).