

Fr Hoyal writes

2011 RETROSPECT

In accordance with what is now tradition, I take advantage of this issue of the new year as we take pause to look back over last year. Inevitably, many significant events and activities will not figure under the categories given. So much of what happens is unseen or taken for granted, but nonetheless often very important.

Guest Preachers

Epiphany (6 January) – **Canon Ray Brazier** (Hon Chaplain to the Queen, formerly Vicar of St Matthew's with St Nathaniel's, Bristol)

Candlemas (2 February) – **Fr Andrew Goodman** (Parish Priest, Holy Cross RC Church, Bedminster)

Annunciation (25 March) – **The Dean of Bristol** (The Very Revd David Hoyal – at a joint service hosted by Holy Nativity Knowle)

Ebbsfleet Chrism Mass (18 April) – **The Right Revd John Ford** (Bishop of Plymouth)

Ascension Day (2 June) – **The Revd John Masding** (Chairman, English Clergy Association)

Corpus Christi (23 June) – **The Dean of Bristol** (at All Saints)

SS Peter & Paul/Confirmation Mass – **The Bishop of Plymouth**

Michaelmas (29 September) – **Fr Robert King** (RC Chaplain to University & Clifton Diocese Vocations Director)

All Saints Day (1 November) – **The Revd Paul Langham** (Priest in Charge, Christ Church, Clifton)

Conception of BVM (8 December) – **Fr Christopher Kinch** (Priest at Holy Nativity Knowle & Chaplain to TA)

Special Events

All Saints children's Epiphany party (8 January)

Talk on *Ministry Opportunities* to PCC by the Revd Samantha Rushton, Diocesan Advisor for Licensed Ministry (26 January)

Parish Retreat at The Abbey House, Glastonbury conducted by Fr Thomas Seville CR (18-20 February) – Theme: *Light from the Book of Tobit*.

'*Ordinariate or Society*' - Discussion evening on options for Church of England traditionalists, led by Emma Forward (Catholic Group in General Synod) and Fr Paul Spilsbury (8 March).

Lent 2011: overall theme '*I Have Chosen YOU*' - with weekly Tuesday Lent Evenings on "*Ministry Tomorrow?*" Our guest speakers were: **Peter Rushton** (diocesan Lay Ministry speaker) on '*Priestly Duties: The Lay of the Land*'; **Fr Robert King** (Vocations Director for Clifton Diocese) on '*Ministry for the Future – an RC View*'; **The Right Revd Mike Hill** (Bishop of Bristol) on '*Ministry – Diocesan Overview*'; **Canon Wendy Wilby** (Bristol Cathedral) on '*Ministry – a Personal View*'; and **the Revd Philip Rowe** (Vicar of Almondsbury, former Bristol West Area Dean) leading us on '*What about All Saints?*'.

Passion Sunday *Come-and-Sing* Sacred Concert (10 April) led by All Saints choir: Faure Requiem and Mendelssohn *Lord, hear my prayer*.

Lent appeal for Bristol Samaritans and the Sue Ryder Malawi Foundation.

Easter Monday parish walk (24 April)

Barton Camp Weekend for church children and parents (3-5 June)

All Saints coach to consecration of new Bishops of Ebbsfleet and Richborough at Southwark Cathedral (16 June).

"*The Opera Picnic*" with Ian Yemm and WNO singers – opera concert in church with picnic suppers in the gardens (25 June).

July – All Saints' month for Churches Together's Saturday soup run

All Saints participatiAll Saints participation in the Christ Church City King James Bible 'Readathon' (4-8 July).

St John's School End of Year Service with presentation of Bibles from All Saints to leavers (20 July)

Summer Fun Day for All Saints & All Hallows children, arranged by our Children and Young People's Committee (28 July)

'Cotswold Treat' – Summer Sunday outing to Chipping Sodbury, including walk to St James's, Horton, a slide show on local celebrity William Tyndale, cream tea, and Evensong at St Adeline's, Little Sodbury (preacher Ian Yemm).

Bristol Doors Open Day (10 September) with All Saints participating

"*Start-Back Sunday*" – post-holidays regrouping opportunity for Family Service congregation (11 September)

Presentation Evening on Hildegard of Bingen led by Dr Steve D'Evelyn (13 September)

Day Pilgrimage with Bristol Church Union to Gloucester Cathedral and Holy Innocents' Highnam (17 September).

All Saints Harvest-tide appeal for *Farm Africa's "Give Poverty The Boot!"*

All Saints parish pilgrimage to Walsingham, jointly with St Gregory's, Horfield (3-7 October)

Parish Day Conference (8 October) on All Saints and the future, chaired by the Revd David Hart, Superintendent of Bristol Methodist Circuit.

Bristol Church Union open annual lecture: Fr Darren Smith, Secretary of the Additional Curates Society, on 'A Certain Call in Uncertain Times' (11 October).

'Uganda Evening' in aid of Bristol West Deanery Uganda Committee's work, including an excellent supper with wine, news updates from recent diocesan visitors to Uganda, and a charity auction conducted by Andrew Morgan (14 October).

Open-to-all PCC meeting (25 October) for follow-up discussion of matters raised at the Parish Conference.

Remembrance Day observance at Whiteladies Road War Memorial with representation from St John's C of E School, Clifton College, Clifton High School, SS Peter & Paul RC School and Belgrave School (11 November)

"Advent Voices" - special service for Advent Sunday (27 November) with guest readers **the Ven Christine Froude** (Archdeacon of Malmesbury), **Stephen Williams** (MP for Bristol West), **Mr Ricky Winn** (Chairman, Bristol West Deanery Uganda Committee) and **Mr Jonathan Swithinbank** (Crisis Centre Ministries).

Christmas appeal for Crisis Centre Ministries.

Belgrave School carol and christingle service (8 December)

University of Bristol Chamber Choir/Bristol University Music Society carol service (12 December)

St John's School carol service (14 December)

107th birthday of longstanding All Saints member Vera Price (16 December)

All Saints carol singing in aid of CCM outside former St John's church (17 December)

All Saints Service of Lessons & Carols for Christmas (18 December)

In addition our monthly Walsingham Cell Masses, *MU-Plus* Masses, requiem Masses and Masses for healing have continued, as have our occasional Sunday parish lunches after Solemn Mass and our monthly services at Carlton Mansions and Whatley Court residential homes.

Occasional Offices

7 children baptised, and 1 adult

5 All Saints members confirmed – 4 children (Charlotte Rudd, Isobel Sutton and Thea Griffiths – and Daniel Davey, confirmed at Walsingham) and 1 adult (Mr David Jones)

4 weddings and 1 wedding blessing

4 church funerals and 2 crematorium services (untypically low figures)

People and Events

In 2011 we welcomed the births of Freya to Fiona and Fergus Brown, Martha to Hannah and Jason Dickson, and Michael to Karen and Ben Thorpe.

Among our 2011 wedding celebrations, it was a particular delight to see Sarah, daughter of Liz and Barrie Badman, marry Paul Flook in September. Fr Robert Pyne, a former All Saints curate and recently retired as a naval chaplain, kindly returned to conduct the service. In the course of the year, Frances and David Perkins celebrated their golden wedding, and Ruth and Richard Harding celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary, as did Muriel and I.

Over the year we sadly lost a number of All Saints friends. These include Jenifer Cooper (widow of Scott), a staunch lifelong supporter of All Saints, who continued to join us from her Dorset home whenever she could and has left us a generous legacy. Gillian Barron, wife of Hugh, died in November, following many months of indisposition, throughout which she was most lovingly cared for by Hugh. A devoted nurse, wife and mother, and a most lovely Christian soul, Gillian thoroughly merited the wonderful tributes paid at her funeral requiem last month.

2011 also saw the deaths of Donald Hawley (father of Richard), Gwyneth James (widow of the late Leslie James), Dorothy Emery (mother of Claire Chandy), John and Elaine Sanders (brother and sister-in-law of Vera), Brian Haigh (father of Karen Rudd), Sarah Hurst (aunt of Hugh Hurst), and Mary Harris (formerly of Glenavon). The departed and their families remain in our prayers, as do all with All Saints connections who have lost family and friends.

For much of the year Canon Brendan Clover was officiating at least three weeks out of four at Holy Nativity Knowle. With the arrival of Fr Christopher Kinch at Holy Nativity, Fr Brendan is available to us a little more often again, subject to the constraints that Fr Kinch's appointment is part-time and he also has duties as a forces chaplain.

Warmest congratulations are due to Fr Brendan for the tremendous special services he planned and promoted for the 200th anniversary last year of the birth of Nathaniel Woodward, the remarkable founder of the Woodard Schools. These included simultaneous celebrations of the Eucharist on Nathaniel Woodward's birthday at all the 50 or so schools (21 March), the great National Woodard Thanksgiving Service at Westminster Abbey in November, and the superlative choral evensong recently broadcast live on Radio 3 from a major Woodward school, Worksop College

There was sadness on all sides when, just before Lent, Fr John Morley-Bunker and Edna, along with several other All Saints members, left us to become Roman Catholics within the Ordinariate set up by Pope Benedict to accommodate former Anglicans. Fr John's links with All Saints go back to his days as a pupil of our former school, and he served at the consecration of the new All Saints in 1967, so it was no small step to be taking.

James Patrick, who left us in 2010 to take up his London appointment as a circuit judge, has also become a member of the Ordinariate. He is now a deacon within the Ordinariate, and Fr John is an Ordinariate priest.

While we naturally miss the regular fellowship of dear All Saints friends of long standing, one understands the dilemma in which Synod's persistent unhelpfulness towards traditionalist Anglicans (myself included) has placed many of us. Please God, Synod will relent of its intransigence before more feel they have no course but to leave the Church of England.

One encouragement in a difficult situation was the Archbishop's swift appointment of new bishops of Ebbsfleet and Richborough to succeed Bishop Andrew Burnham and Bishop Keith Newton. For the first half of

the year, the Bishop of Plymouth most kindly did duty for the Ebbsfleet constituency. But it was a great pleasure to be at the packed (and charged) consecration of the new bishops at Southwark last June, and we greatly look forward to Bishop Jonathan Baker's first official visit to All Saints this month as our new Bishop of Ebbsfleet and Provincial Episcopal Visitor.

2011 was a special year for Fr Roger in two respects. In the summer we celebrated with him one Sunday after Mass for his 70th birthday, and on the Sunday before Christmas we celebrated the 25th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood. Friends and colleagues from all the churches Fr Roger has been connected with were able to join us. Congratulations from the Bishop of Ebbsfleet were read out, following which Bishop Lee of Swindon, in the congregation incognito, stepped up and eloquently expressed the diocese's gratitude for Fr Roger's ministry, 17 years of which have been at All Saints. A presentation from the congregation was made, and lots of cake and bubbly was consumed.

Music

The monthly Saturday Concert Matinees at 4 pm sponsored by All Saints Arts (ASA) continued with a varied programme of contributors, both instrumentalists and singers.

They included: Organ Recital by Matthew Redman (5 February); Dorian String Quartet (5 March); Recorder Concert by Jacob Warn with Andy Warn, guitar (19 March); Jennifer & Trio Sirvantes, with Ralph Lane, clarinet, and Aurelia Jonveau, soprano (7 May); Ystavaa Piano Trio (4 June); Song Recital by Jeremy Watkins, baritone, with David Naysmith, piano (2 July); Concert of works for two pianists by Jennifer Carter & Helen Mills (6 August); Piano Concert by James Drinkwater (3 September); Flute Recital by Catherine Maytum (1 October); Organ Fireworks from Eric Tyson (5 November); and a Cello Recital by Jane Jewel (3 December).

ASA presented a May Music Festival Weekend with a Friday concert '*Hearts, Hands, Voice*' by All Saints singers and players (13 May), a Saturday concert of '*Music for a Royal Occasion*' sung by the

Fitzhardinge Consort and Players (14 May), and fully choral Festival Evensong on the Sunday (15 May) sung by All Saints choir.

ASA also sponsored a lunchtime recital by Julia Rodriguez, soprano (3 June); 'RAGA' – an evening of Indian classical music and traditional food in aid of SEEDS India (8 July); and an anniversary Fitzhardinge Singers performance of the sublime Victoria Requiem (29 October)

Other concerts/musical events have included: Cabot Choir Concert (2 April); Bristol University Symphonia Christmas Concert (26 November); and City Voices in Concert for Christmas (10 December) – an inaugural concert for this large new choir.

Other Activities

All Saints has been the venue for a surprisingly varied selection of meetings and activities. Some have been weekly, like Alcoholics Anonymous, Kindermusik, Tai Chi, GH Fitness Club, and Weight Watchers; others have been monthly, like Soroptimists, Bristol Psychology Association, and the Embroiderers Guild. Hollis Morgan have held several Wednesday evening auctions at All Saints.

Other groups we have hosted include the Friends of Suburban British Railways, Abbeyfield Bristol, Ebbsfleet Lay Council, a local Writing Group, Bristol Deanery Lay Ministers, a Diocesan Child Protection meeting, our local Churches Together, various private parties, and Bath University *20th Century Society*.

Christians in Science has met three times at All Saints, attracting packed and knowledgeable audiences on each occasion. Presentations ranged between *Self-Assembly and Evolution: Models, Metaphors & Meaning* from Dr Ard Lewis (Reader in Theoretical Physics, Oxford), *God and the Multiverse: A Response to Stephen Hawking* from the Revd Dr Rodney Holder (Faraday Institute), and *Necessary Evils? From Forest Fires to Disease* from Dr Rhoda Hawkins (Lecturer in Physics, Sheffield University).

At a time when believers find themselves challenged by the scientists and philosophers of the 'new atheism' associated with Richard Dawkins and

the late Christopher Hutchins, it is particularly gratifying that we are hosting these important and helpful discussions at All Saints.

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These notes inevitably omit mention of many regular church activities, and of the enormously valuable work done by among others our tremendous team of assistant clergy, our parish readers, treasurer and assistants, choir, director of music, assistant organists, servers, cleaners, sacristy helpers, PCC and committees, family service and children's helpers, children and young people's committee, social and welcome committee, and other parish organizations and church groups.

Once again I ask that we remember with gratitude all who work so faithfully at All Saints. Please pray that in our worship, witness and service we continue celebrate to the full God's faithfulness to us.

With very best wishes for 2012,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Richard Hoyle".

CTCCR LENT LECTURES 2012- Advance Notice

Last summer's disorder on the streets has prompted a most impressive Churches Together Lecture Series for this Lent. All 7.00pm for 7.30pm. Make a note now!

1. Thursday March 1st 2012

Chaos or Order? Keeping The Queen's Peace

The Lord Dear Kt QPM DL

Christ Church Clifton, Clifton Park BS8 3BN

2. Thursday March 8th

Law = Justice?

His Honour the Rev Judge James Patrick with Elizabeth Watkins of the University of Bristol

The Friends' Meeting House, 126, Hampton Road, Redland BS6 6JE

3. Thursday March 15th

The Individual in the Community; an Olympic ideal?

Matthew van Duyvenbode, The Bible Society

Tyndale Baptist Church, Whiteladies Road, BS8 2QG

4. Thursday March 22nd

Chaos and Hope: Gospel in Community

The Rev Helen Matthews, United Reformed Church, Bromley-by-Bow, London

Clifton Cathedral, Pembroke Road, Clifton BS8 3ED

‘SETTING OUR HEARTS ON PILGRIMAGE’
Affirming Catholicism Quiet Evening held on 29 November in Bristol
Cathedral

This is the second year Bristol branch of Affirming Catholicism has held an Advent Quiet Evening, and it was a wonderful calming and thoughtful start to Advent, which I always find such a hectic season. Last year about 30 people came, this year it was nearly 50. It was, as all our events are, open to all.

Canon Wendy Wilby, the Cathedral Precentor, led us in a pilgrimage using all the senses. The cathedral was in darkness except for the odd small group of candles here and there to light the path around the cathedral, with more clusters of candles around the various ‘Pilgrim Stations’. We each carried our own Pilgrim candle – a tea light in a small rounded glass tealight holder. There was incense burning, gently – not the usual ‘in your face choking smoke’ type, but delicate scent.

The evening was divided into five parts, each of which included some introduction by Canon Wendy, lots of silence and finished with music before we moved onto the next ‘station’.

We started in the Chapter House where the theme was ‘To Be a Pilgrim’. Unfortunately for me the acoustics weren’t right here and I couldn’t adjust my hearing aids to catch all that Canon Wendy said. But that didn’t matter, because I was able to start to relax and wind-down from a busy day. There were six large candles burning down the sides of the Chapter House (three a side), and on the wall opposite the door was a PowerPoint photo of Jerusalem. Our twenty minute meditation ended with a recording of Psalm 84 sung by the Sons of Korah.

We then moved on to The Crossing. Here, in front of the choir screen, we found a circle of chairs around a huge plain wooden cross which was surrounded by candles. The title of this station was, ‘Pilgrim through this barren land’. We were reminded that as pilgrims we are on a journey and so we are always moving on, so any pain, controversies etc that are worrying us now, will be left behind as we move on, though the memories may not fade altogether. Canon Wendy told us about a visit made on her recent pilgrimage to the Holy Land. They had heard of a new site that had been opened up as the place where John baptised Jesus, so they decided to visit it. They travelled through rough scrubland with barbed wire fences either side of the road, they came to high locked gate which someone eventually unlocked for them. Once through the gate it was locked behind them and there was another obstacle on the road; also there were notices either side of the road saying ‘landmines’. The coach driver drove off the road, through the landmined area, around the obstacle and back onto the road again. When they

came to the place on the Jordan where John Baptised Jesus, it was beautiful and peaceful. They all got into the Jordan and renewed their baptismal vows. This reminds us that our Christian pilgrimage is at times met with landmines. The silence was getting deeper and there was less rustling of paper etc. This station ended with 'Guide me O thou great Redeemer', sung by the choir of Tewkesbury Abbey.

We were invited to walk up through the dimly lit Cathedral, holding our small candles, and then back down and make our way to the High Altar. I found this a special experience seeing small dots of gentle candlelight moving through the dark as we slowly made our way through the vast building, each at their own speed. I felt like a medieval pilgrim.

'Journey from heaven to earth.' Here there was a large icon of the Virgin *hodegitria* in front of the altar, surrounded by candles above, below and around. We were reminded of the Joyful Mysteries, especially of the Annunciation, where heaven and earth were fused together in a young woman's womb, on Mary's joy. The silence was deeper, was almost tangible, no more coughing, sniffing or fidgeting. The music here was The Word made Flesh (Philip Wilby).

We then moved across to the Berkeley Chapel. Here there were candles in all the wall niches and on the altar, which was free standing in the middle of the chapel there was a candle tree. The metal branches circled round in an open ball and on the branches were red and white tea lights. We were reminded again of the Joyful Mysteries and concentrated on the Visitation and Elizabeth's joy as an older woman still having a role to play in God's Plan; of the joy of both women in their pregnancies. We were reminded of John who 'leaped' in his mother's womb as he recognised the mother of Jesus – a kick start in his ministry of going before. The silence ended with Vaughan Williams 'The Lark Ascending'.

The final station was in the Eastern Lady Chapel, 'Let us go to Bethlehem to see.....'. This glorious chapel, restored to its colourful medieval beauty was again gently lit by candles and in front of the altar were the half-life sized figures of Mary, Joseph and the baby with the shepherds. Lurking in the shadows in the niches where the servers sit were the figures of the kings on their journey. This was the fulfilment – God made human in the form of a helpless baby who became an illegal immigrant in Egypt, then a quiet adolescent and a simple carpenter before taking up his ministry. We were reminded that the way to know God was to be truly humble and come to God in humility. The final music was the carol, 'The Infant King' sung by the choir of King's College Cambridge.

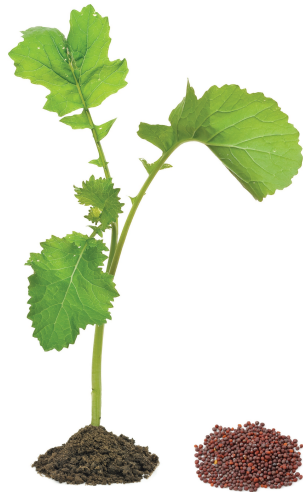
Canon Wendy ended our pilgrimage with a final prayer and Blessing.

I am sure I have missed some important things out, but it was a most deeply spiritual and moving and beautiful Quiet Evening. I came away feeling refreshed and ready to go on in my Christian pilgrimage. Our thanks must go to Canon Wendy for her devotion in putting this evening together for us. Many of the people there were not members of Affirming Catholicism and many came from different traditions in the C of E in the Diocese, a group had travelled from Chippenham to join us, but we all came together on pilgrimage.

Our next event is an evening discussing the book 'Vision upon Vision' by George Guiver who is the Superior at Mirfield. The book *'examines the changing nature of Christian worship from the scattered and isolated communities of the earliest years of the church to the liquid modern world'*. If anyone would like to join us for that evening please have a word with me after Mass one Sunday.

Liz Badman *Parish Reader*

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2012



**We will all be
Changed**

UNITED SERVICE

Churches Together in Clifton
Cotham & Redland

**6.00 pm
Sunday 22 January**

All Saints Church Pembroke Road Clifton

Do be with us to welcome our guests.

SERMON

Preached at 11 am Solemn Mass, All Saints Clifton, Advent 3

11 December 2011

John 1.6-8;19-28

* * * * *

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

He came as a witness to testify to the Light, so that all might believe through him.

We heard last week how John appeared in his skin tunic and rough belt. I imagine he must have looked a bit of mess, to say the least, after spending time in the desert, living on locusts on wild honey. Would we, who are used to seeing our preachers, our politicians and other public speakers looking reasonably smart, have listened to someone looking like that?

But there must have been something special about him because people did listen to him and they followed him to the extent that the Pharisees were obviously concerned about this. He refused to tell them who he was, he defined himself by telling them who he was not.

John knew what his vocation was, right from the very beginning, he was there to prepare people to receive the Messiah, the true Son of God, who was already among them, but as yet they did not recognise him. He is among us here this morning - He is present in the sacrament, he is present in each one of us.

I say the 'true' Son of God, because at that time there many proclaiming to be the Messiah, the land was unsettled and under Roman occupation and the people longed for the coming of the Messiah to set them free.

So John knew his vocation from the beginning. As a baby in his mother's womb he recognised Jesus when Elisabeth and Mary met, Mary was newly pregnant with Jesus and Elisabeth was further advanced in her pregnancy. The poet Rainer Maria Rilke wrote a poem called The Visitation and I would like to read you the final verse as Elizabeth and Mary met each other.

And the need pressed on her now to lay her hand
On the other body, which had gone on further.
And the women leaned to one another, and
They touched each other on the dress and hair.
Each one filled with her own sacred good
Used the other as shield in her plight.
Ah, the Saviour in her still was bud,
But in her cousin's womb, the Baptist could,

And did, leap in rapture of delight.¹

Elisabeth's baby shared the two women's joy and we are told it 'leapt in her womb'. He leapt in her womb – God kick-started John's ministry before his birth and here we are reminded of God telling Old Testament prophets 'I knew you in your mother's womb'.

John can be seen, in a way, as the last of the Old Testament prophets. Israel had been in darkness, but Jesus, the true light, came into the world to enlighten us all.

The theme of darkness and light weaves a thread throughout John's Gospel.

To prepare for Jesus's coming, for his public ministry, to 'make straight the way of the Lord', John went into the desert to pray, to fast, to cleanse himself spiritually.

All four gospels tell the story of John coming from the desert to proclaim and baptise Jesus, but in Luke's version we see that John was a very outspoken man, single-minded in his vocation of proclaiming his cousin Jesus as the Messiah. In all the Gospels he is the 'voice' Isaiah spoke of. John is like a siren clearing the path for the one who is coming behind.

John is a very special person, though he is of secondary importance to the Messiah. Though he comes before Jesus in time sequence, but that is because he has to, to clear the way ahead. This is the position that John occupies in all the Gospels, and also to the Christians in the early Christian Church. The movement looked back to John as it's launch pad.

John did not preach about himself, he preached of Jesus Christ as Lord and we should follow his example. He insisted that people should follow Jesus and not himself, he said I am 'only a voice', and there we see his humility and his greatness.

He would have known Jesus all his life, after all they were cousins and would meet up for Jewish festivals. They probably played together as boys.

Then at some point John went into the desert. The desert is a cleansing place and John would have had a deep and cleansing, and possibly terrifying experience there. Coming into the presence of God is not a comfortable feeling. We do not know how long he had spent in the desert, but I will stick my neck out and say it must have been quite some time from the description of his appearance.

The desert strips you of all your pretensions, and layer by layer, like an onion, it takes away all the distractions we use in our daily life.

There is silence.

That is terrifying to some people, those who have the radio or a CD, or the television on all the time as background noise, even if they are not watching or listening.

The desert is lonely and it is wild.

¹ *Visitation of the Virgin* by Rainer Maria Rilke

One thing the desert is not is dead.

There are wild creatures, some of which are not pleasant to think of like scorpions and snakes.

Food and water are in short supply and this can bring on visions.

We read of all these in the writings of the Desert Fathers.

But the desert is beautiful and the night sky has been described as brilliant with stars like glimpses of heaven showing through the darkness. When all is stripped away and we come to face to face with our true selves, here we meet God and hear his voice.

Yet we do not need to literally go into the desert to experience our true selves and meet God. The desert experience is here, all around us if you let go.

Carlo Carreto, who died in 1988, was a member of the Little Brothers of Jesus and he had times when he went into the real desert. He wrote many books on prayer, spirituality, and the desert experience.

In his book *The Desert in the City* he says,

*You can find the desert anywhere, even in the city. It is quite possible once you know how to love. It is a little more difficult, that's all. Remember, the desert does not mean the absence of people, it means the presence of God.*²

We can all be John the Baptist figures, because we are called to go and proclaim Jesus Christ in the world. But how do we prepare ourselves? Last week Fr Richard told us that we should cleanse ourselves as we prepare for a special guest – the Christ child who comes at Christmas.

When I was received as an Oblate of the Community of St Mary the Virgin in Wantage, I had to make a Rule of Life, which was I expected to live out each day. Although I have now withdrawn from the Oblate Fellowship, I still keep the Rule. We made our personal Rule as simple or as complicated as we knew we could keep it. I am going to suggest that those of you who don't have a Rule as such, might consider it, to cleanse and prepare oneself for the coming of the Lord.

It should contain at least:

- Commitment to daily prayer and bible reading – and this is best done within the framework of Morning or Evening Prayer. When I was doing my Reader training with the ordinands we were told that if we didn't read the bible regularly we lost touch with God.
- Attendance at Mass at least once a week.
- A Quiet Day or retreat once year, if at all possible.
- Confession. Oh yes, Confession. This is not the terrifying exercise one might think and to go possibly three times a year (more if you feel you

² CARRETO, Carlo *The Desert in the City (Foreword)* pub Fount 1983

can), say before the great Feasts – Christmas, Easter, Pentecost or All Saints, is healing and you feel a release and can make a fresh start with God and with your neighbour.

- It helps to have a Spiritual Director, or Soul Friend as a guide.

These are all ways of preparation for ourselves and to prepare others.

We all have John the Baptist figures in our past – and they need not be priests, and they may be more than one person. But they will have brought us to an awareness of the Living God present in our lives. And sometimes they are the most unlikely people.

So cleansed, healed and prepared, we can rejoice, be like the African-American spiritual and,

*'Go tell it on the mountains,
Over the hills and everywhere,
Go tell it on the mountains
That Jesus Christ is born.'*

AMEN

Liz Badman, Lay Minister

PRESS RELEASE, 5 January 2012

The Dean of Bristol Cathedral, the Very Reverend David Hoyle, has today issued a final, personal plea to those occupying College Green in Bristol to clear the site so it can be restored to full public use.

At a meeting with a number of people who occupy this important city centre space, the Dean made it clear that he and the Cathedral Chapter strongly respect the right to peaceful protest but that it remained the earnest desire of both the Cathedral Chapter and Bristol City Council that the protest ends, as it began two and a half months ago – peacefully, and with the focus on the global issues that inspired it.

Reiterating what he has said at numerous meetings since the occupation began two and a half months ago, he said:

“This protest, as with those around the UK and abroad, has laid down a real challenge for us and for others to reflect on issues of privilege, greed and justice.

Many of the global economic, sustainability and social justice issues espoused by some in the camp have always been of equal concern to the Church.

The Cathedral community is responding to that challenge and we will continue to do that in the weeks and months to come.

Whilst we are committed to listening to the Occupy Movement, we believe it is now time that this stage in their protest came to an end so that a wider community can once again benefit from access to College Green.”

The Dean made it clear however that the serving of Court proceedings would start today so that College Green could be restored to its primary purpose, as an open space for all Bristolians to use. He sincerely hoped that the Occupiers would now agree to move on peacefully.

As on previous occasions, the Dean was heard with courtesy and was engaged in a conversation of mutual respect.

Leader of the Council Barbara Janke added

“From day one of this protest, our respect for peaceful protest has been clear in our statements and visible in our actions. After two and a half months of occupation, the camp is less a symbol of widespread citizen concern about issues of social justice, and more an environmental eyesore and antisocial nuisance.

In lockstep with the Cathedral authorities throughout, I again join with the Dean in his plea. Those who have been protesting can leave with their heads high, and carry on the important debate around these global issues that they have highlighted in our city.

I hope that they will do so now voluntarily, but either way, after a 12 week period of patience which so many of their fellow citizens have criticised us for showing, it is time for this to end."

WHERE THEY LAY

TELL an enquirer that Bristol lies south of Gloucester and west of Swindon and there's no misunderstanding. "Lies" clearly means "is situated." But the word was formerly used of people as well as places. At Christmas time in my younger youth, with all this talk of "the babe *lying* in a manger," I remember being perplexed about "certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay," and more than that, "where they lay keeping their sheep," and wondering how such a task could be efficiently undertaken while recumbent..

As soon as it dawned that "where they lay" meant simply "where they happened to be at the time" the mist cleared, not only for that carol but for several others too. However. it would be a pity to miss a further play on this expression from the pen of Sir Henry Wotton, who had been our Ambassador in Venice and engaged on many other diplomatic missions beside. He wrote in a friend's album in 1604

"An ambassador is an honest man sent to lie abroad for the good of his country."

Ken Smith

Christmas Midnight

*Sermon preached by Fr Hoyal at Midnight Mass at All Saints
24.12.11 11.30 pm*

In the beginning was the Word. John 1.1

Where do you start? Where do you begin?

When a biographer sets out to write the life of some great person, the first problem is finding the best place to begin. With the birth, with the parents, with the circumstances of the time, or with a multitude of other possible starting points? St John, with amazing words that echo the opening words of the Book of Genesis, takes us back to eternity itself. In the beginning was the Word. At the beginning the Word already was – that modern translation captures the meaning well.

Jesus, the Son of God, was *born* in Bethlehem, yes. But he did not *begin* at Bethlehem. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. That is John's startling message. There never was a time when the Son was not with the Father. No, he was begotten of the Father before all worlds, as we say in older versions of the creed; that means (so to speak) prior to time itself.

Before our solar system wheeled through space, the Word was there; when our continents were molten lava, the Word was there; when dinosaurs roamed the earth, the Word was there.

As he comes into the world the Word brings the gifts that only the Creator can bring – light and life. In him was life, says St John, and that life is the light of all people.

But he did more than bring these wonderful spiritual gifts: he became flesh and lived among us – the original actually means: he became flesh and pitched his tent among us. God has become what we are, so that we might become something of what God is. That is a famous ancient way of putting the situation. A modern writer has put it like this: Jesus is what God means by man. He is what man means by God.

But perhaps all this isn't for you, not at this time of night anyway, even on this holy night. In any case, why did he do it? Why did the Word become flesh? Why did God make himself real for us in that child born of Mary?

Elsewhere in his gospel St John's tells us that God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. Jesus is the greatest Christmas present of all time. He is the Saviour of the world. But perhaps you still find this all too theological to feel its emotional power.

So hear how the writer Laurence Housman puts it. Perhaps it will help you see that the Word became flesh, not just in the sense of God became human, but in the sense, God became living, feeling flesh and blood.

Light looked down and beheld Darkness.
"Thither will I go," said Light.
Peace looked down and beheld War.
"Thither will I go," said Peace.
Love looked down and beheld Hatred.
"Thither will I go," said Love.
So came Light and shone.
So came Peace and gave rest.
So came Love and brought Life.

And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.

Does that help you grasp the wonder of Bethlehem and of this most holy night? It helps me.

May I was you all a most holy and happy Christmas?