

CHRISTMAS

Three gifts that are never put away

What would you like for Christmas? The toy industry is well aware of this phenomenon and is equipped to keep up with it. Remember the Rubik cube? Hula hoop or Space Hoppers?

The baby Jesus Christ received gold, frankincense and myrrh. Nobody knows what he did with them. What we do know is the result of those human gifts to Our Lord.

The gifts that the Wise Men brought would eventually perish, but the life of Jesus will never perish.

Everything he ever did has become eternal. Every age of mankind hears the same stories of his three years of ministry.

Not only are the stories eternal, but so are the gifts he offers to us. Wisdom is a gift of God. We haven't got it. We ask him, and he gives it to us, a little at a time as we need it.

Faith comes next in the list from Corinthians 12. Even when we 'lose faith' God has plenty more of it to hand out to us. Healing is next. Just look at the advance in treatment for every ailment under the sun.

There are many more. All last forever. You won't need to leave mince pies or wine. Hang up your stocking of trust; Jesus will fill it with your needs.

Christmas Prayer

Let your goodness, Lord, appear to us, that we, made in your image, conform ourselves to it. In our own strength we cannot imitate your majesty, power and wonder; nor is it fitting for us to try. But your mercy reaches from the heavens, through the clouds, to the earth below. You have come to us as a small child, but you have brought us the greatest of all gifts, the gift of eternal love. Caress us with your tiny hands, embrace us with your tiny arms, and pierce our hearts with your soft, sweet cries.

Bernard of Clairvaux 1090-1153

REGISTERS

For October

BAPTISMS

15 Ottilie Anna Kemp Day, Teddington; Maxwell McDonald, Hampton.

FUNERAL

6 Stephen Charles Cooper, 49, Teddington.

LEADER



Ann Peterken reminds us that Christmas is the perfect time to focus on the gift of the Holy Spirit and how it can help us mirror Jesus' ministry in our own lives and actions

God's presence in all we do

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only Son, full of grace and truth. John 1:14

These wonderful and familiar words from John's Gospel will be read out in St James' Church in the first minutes of Christmas Day, as in countless other places of worship.

The birth of Jesus Christ was the start of an amazing Ministry of Presence: through the birth and life of Jesus Christ two thousand years ago, God showed us a way to live and love that is still so relevant in our world today. Emmanuel - 'God with us' - in fulfilment of the promise made to the people of Israel and of prophetic witness up to the time of John the Baptist.

After Christ's short life on earth, believers were not left helpless. The Holy Spirit enabled them to follow Christ's perfect example of the Ministry of Presence. The same Holy Spirit enables us to be the eyes, the ears and the hands of Christ in our time and times to come.

Examples of the Christian Ministry of Presence abound here in Hampton Hill - helping somebody get to church, visiting the housebound and bereaved, teaching and developing the skills of our children and young people, enjoying meals with family and friends, sharing worship week by week, being there for one another in so many different ways.

Brian and Ramani's seventeen years in Hampton Hill were a wonderful example of the fruits that flow from such a ministry.



ANN PETERKEN

Emmanuel takes on a special significance for me this Advent having met several people with that name during my recent trip to Rwanda.

Throughout my travels I saw many examples of the Ministry of Presence in the lives of people far away from Hampton Hill.

I saw church projects run by dedicated Rwandans that give people hope of a better future, and mission partners from Europe and the States sharing their skills with humility and love.

The presence of my fellow travellers was deeply valued by our hosts; we demonstrated that we thought of Rwanda as it is now and not just as defined by the terrible events of 1994. My own presence enabled me to meet Immaculée, the lady with me in the picture above - but that's another story.

'Ministry of presence' is a lovely phrase, but as with many spiritual truths there is a hard reality behind it. For some Christians it can mean facing constant danger, whilst for most of us it means wrestling internally with a different view of what is important.

Are we set ourselves new priorities in the busy weeks before Christmas: to be more present for those beyond our immediate friends and families?

During this Advent season, my hope is that we can each make time to ponder on the wonderful gift of 'God with us' and to think about how we can best express it in our daily lives.

Read Ann's story about her meeting with Immaculée at: www.london.anglican.org/NewsShow_6631

A very happy Christmas to everyone...



The churchwardens and the Parish Council of St James wish everyone in our parish at Hampton Hill a very happy Christmas and hope to see many of you at our Christmas services.

THE JAYS

1. Why do we keep Christmas on 25 December? It is a fixed or immovable feast, though Christ's birth has never been understood to have happened then. One scholar wondered if Jesus was born on 20 May. The day was probably chosen as an alternative to a pagan festival.

2. Why do we have Christmas trees? Prince Albert (Queen Victoria's husband) brought over the tree and the custom from his native Germany. Ever since Adam and Eve, trees have been strong religious symbols.

3. If Joseph was not the father of Jesus, why is his family tree in the Bible, and not Mary's? Matthew was writing for the Jews, to show them that Jesus was the Messiah. Legally, Jesus belonged to Joseph's family, stretching back to the royal family of David.

Women's genealogies were not considered as important. Jesus' actual father, was God - for He was 'conceived of the Holy Spirit'.

4. Why was Jesus born at Bethlehem? Because there was a census, and Mary and Joseph weren't exempt. Bethlehem was also where King David had been born, and the prophets had foretold that from Bethlehem one day would come the Messiah.

5. What exactly are swaddling clothes? Long strips of cloth to wrap round a tiny baby, keeping him warm, snug and secure.

6. Can we really believe that the shepherds saw angels that night? Luke 2 highlights the shining glory of God, not supernatural beings. Yet, at this supreme moment in history, when God became Man, why shouldn't a glimpse of heavenly glory shine down on earth?

7. What was the star that the three kings saw? The Bible does not say there were three kings. 'Magi' is all we get, and we know they studied the stars. Astronomers say the 'star of Bethlehem' could have been a comet.

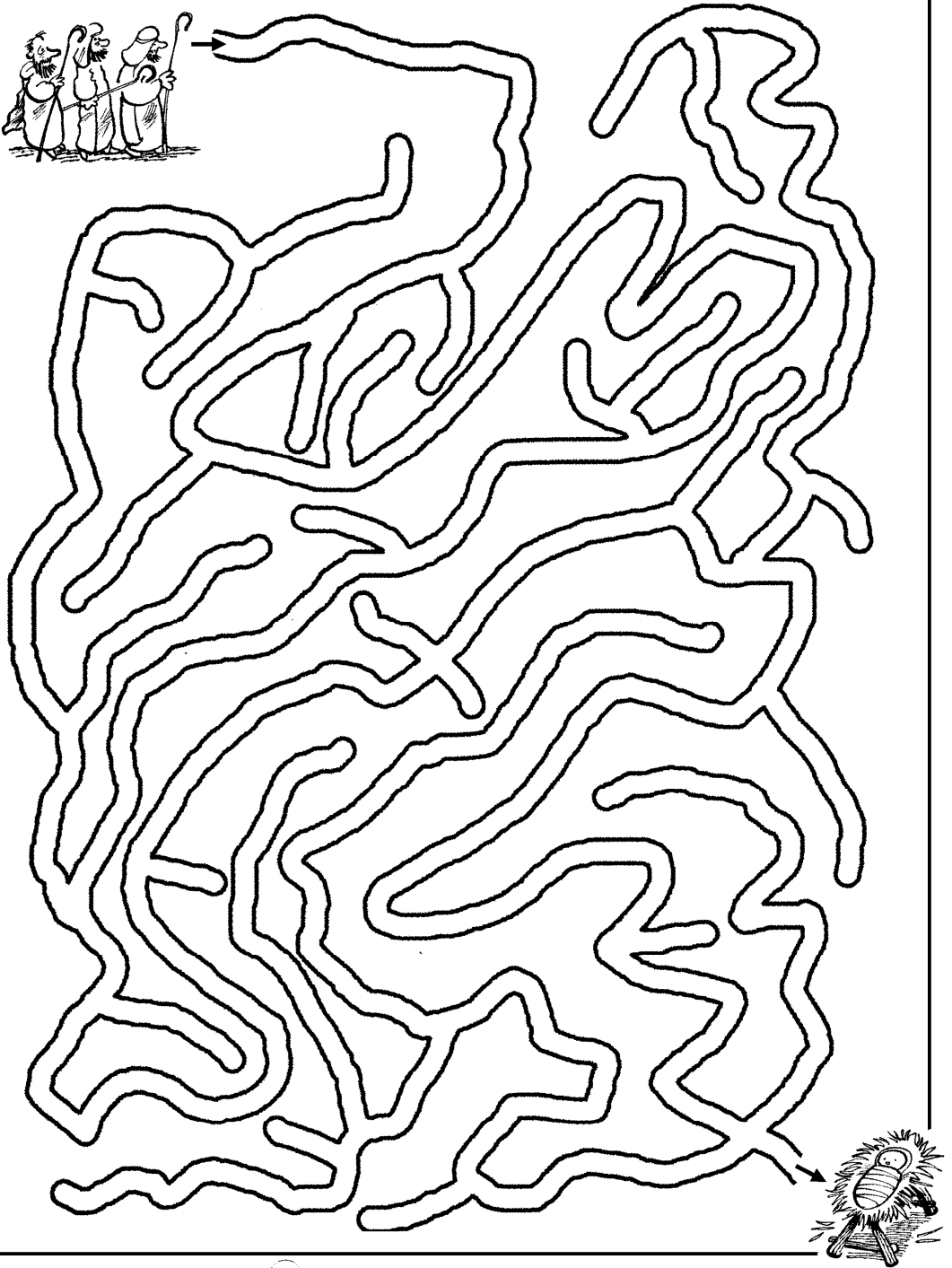
8. What use to a baby are gold, frankincense and myrrh? Gold was clearly for a king. Frankincense was used in sacrifice (Jesus on the Cross is the supreme sacrifice). Myrrh was used in death, but was also as a present of joy.

9. Where was Christ before He was conceived? Before our conception, we were nowhere. But not so with Jesus. He comes from the Father and is going to the Father; the Bible never gets sentimental over the baby. It requires us to honour God's eternal Son.

10. Why can't Christmas merge with other faiths for one great festival? This hardly show much respect for Christianity, never mind other religions. Jesus arrived in this world making devastating claims; they stand on their own.

The Christmas Journey

The most wonderful story of all time tells of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. Some angels gave the good news of Jesus' arrival to shepherds in nearby fields. Can you help the shepherds find their way to the manger?



Our prayers

Remembrance Sunday



Dear God, Help all of those who lost close ones during the First and Second World War. Be by them through hard times. Amen. (Alice Coaker)

Dear God, Say to all the men in heaven that fought in the war, thank you, thank you so much for all you did - 4 Saving us. Thank you. Amen. (Katy Tucker)

Dear God, I pray you bring peace to the world as heaven is above, and wipe clean the sins of the world. Amen. (Emma-Lee Peterson)

Dear God, Please let people remember what poppies actually mean. Let them remember all the brave soldiers who helped us to be here today. Amen. (Isobel Nettleton)

Dear God, Please help everyone to remember what people past and present did for the country. Amen. (Stella Young)

Dear God, Please let everyone remember who fought in the war. Amen. (Ben)

Dear God, I pray for those men past and present who served and serve for us nobly and bravely. Amen. (Alice Calder)

A SAINT FOR DECEMBER

John of the Cross 1542-1591

The painful path of self-sacrifice has its rewards



John set aside his feelings to follow the example of Jesus, yet, as **Val Traylen** discovers, he was punished by those who were desperate to discredit him

Christianity is a religion of paradox. The divine becomes human. The dead are alive. Give up your life to save it. One man who grappled with those paradoxes was born near Milan in 1542. Juan de Yepes was the third son of a couple who had married without parental consent.

From affluence they fell into poverty, working as weavers. Left virtually destitute at his father's death, Juan tried and failed to learn a trade. He found work as a nurse in a hospital for the poor, somehow finding time when not nursing patients or soliciting funds to pursue academic study alone.

His intelligence and willingness won him a patron who sent him to the Jesuit school. But later when asked to become the hospital's chaplain, Juan chose instead to enter a religious community.

As a Carmelite friar he went on to study and then teach theology at the university of Salamanca. There he was respected but not popular: in his religious fervour, he had become so rigid, extreme and critical that everyone avoided him.

Shortly after he was ordained in 1567, he met Teresa of Avila who inspired him with her vision of a monastic life that brought together solitude and community, work and contemplation.

At 52 Teresa had already established several convents following the original, stricter Carmelite rule. She now chose Juan as one of the men to take reform to the friars.

For a short time he lived in a tiny and very primitive monastery where he was entirely happy. Then he became chaplain to the unreformed convent in Avila, living in a cottage nearby. He acted as spiritual director to the nuns and ministered to his

poor neighbours until 1574 when the traditionalists began trying to limit reform.

Regarding him as a particular danger, the traditionalists kidnapped Juan and imprisoned him. For months he was kept alone in a dark cell which was little more than a cupboard next to the latrines.

Starving and unwashed, his clothes disintegrating, he was taken out only to be publicly humiliated and beaten.

He lost all sense of God's presence. His health - physical and mental - began to break down. This was the experience which led him to write his famous treatise *The Dark Night of the Soul*.

Had it continued much longer he would have died, but he managed to escape and took refuge at a nearby convent.

When Juan denied himself the solitude he loved to nurse and teach and befriend others, it was because he loved them. He was following Christ who gave up heaven for earth, because he loves us.

Smuggled back to his friends, he was elected head of a monastery in Andalusia. He was able to recuperate and at last write down the poems and commentaries he had composed in prison.

When the Order finally split in 1580, Juan became administrator for the reformed communities. Based in Grenada he travelled extensively over the next eight years, acquiring a reputation as a confessor and spiritual director of penetration and gentleness.

The rigid, judgemental piety of his youth had matured into a compassion and sense of proportion which, ironically, a few people began to regard as laxity. A faction arose which sought to discredit him. Deprived of office and already ill, Juan retired to a small monastery where he died on 14 December 1591.

Juan's writings are central to Christian mysticism. But knowing his emphasis on self-denial without being aware of his devotion to his family, his love of music and poetry, his delight in nature, his humour and cheerfulness, many people have dismissed him as a life-denying ascetic.

Yet a scrutiny of his writings as part of the canonisation process found they merely restated the teaching of Jesus. Self-denial is essential because we cannot truly love until we are prepared to set aside our preferences and accept people - and circumstances - as they are.

We sacrifice ourselves because we love, not to show how self-controlled we are or how 'spiritual'.

When Juan denied himself the solitude he loved in order to nurse and teach and befriend others, it was because he loved them. He was following Christ who gave up heaven for earth, divinity for humanity, because he loves us.

In one of his poems Juan urges us to open our hearts to this Saviour whose approach we anticipate in Advent and celebrate at Christmas:

*Heavy with the Word of God,
The Virgin comes along the road:
If only you will give her shelter!*

■ John of the Cross was the final saint. In January we begin a new series featuring members of the congregation.

WHAT'S ON
Events for December

Light in the Dark: Advent Quiet Day
2 December, 10.00-16.00, Convent of St Mary at the Cross, Priory Field Drive, Edgware. Cost £6. Booking essential. 020 8958 7868

Fair Trade Fair
8-10 December, 12.00-18.00, Westminster Central Hall. Three-day event with ethical products from all over the world. Cost £3 (£1 concessions) For more information, email: director@ethical-events.org

The Imam and the Pastor
9 December, 19.00, Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London NW1. First public UK showing of documentary, narrated by Rageh Omaar, about Muhammad Ashafa and James Wuye, former militant leaders who found reconciliation. Both will be present for after-film discussion. Admission free. 020 7798 6020.

A Quiet Day Preparing for Christmas
20 December, 10.00-16.00, St Peter's Bourne, Christian Education & Spirituality Centre, 40 Oakleigh Park South, London N20. Cost £20, including lunch/tea. 020 8445 5535.

THE QUESTION

Last month's final question asked: *How can we say the Creed when we are doubtful about some of its components?*

You replied: The creed is the outcome of the Council of Nicea in AD325. Like many of the earlier doctrines of the church we can now accept the spirit but not necessarily the literal truth. The doctrine of the Trinity, the most difficult to many people, has a wonderful deep meaning whether we believe in people sitting on thrones in heaven or not.

Name and address supplied

If the creed, or any other congregational response, is a problem, just say the bits you feel comfortable with. Over time you may find yourself becoming comfortable with more of it.

Name and address supplied

FOR SALE

Old fridge from Church Hall, working but spring on freezer door defective. £5, or it will be dumped mid-December. Wendy Baker, tel 020 8979 3654.

Finding God in the wilds of Scotland

Visiting Iona, the birthplace of Christianity in Scotland, was a spiritually uplifting experience for
Greta Rosten



At the end of September, I was very privileged to go on a pilgrimage to Iona, led by Bishop Dr David Hope (the former Archbishop of York).

Iona is a small island west of Mull, in the Scottish Western Isles. It measures about 1 x 3.5 miles and has a small population in a village on the eastern coast, where the ferry from Mull arrives.

The abbey and monastery buildings, the ruins of the nunnery and the ancient Celtic crosses are the main centre of attraction for tourists. The island itself has an immense wild, natural beauty, with picturesque coves and bays and beaches, steep rocky hills and cliffs, heath and marshland. The only farming there now is for sheep and cattle, which seem to roam all over the place.

It also has a very special spiritual beauty. It is said that there heaven and earth come very close together, and that many people who go there have life-changing and spiritual experiences. Over the years it has become a centre for pilgrimages; a place of retreat for people seeking peace and healing; as well as a place of historical and archaeological interest.

In 563 AD St Columba arrived from Ireland in a coracle with 12 companions, seeking to convert

Scotland to Christianity. He founded a monastery on the site of the present abbey, which became the centre of Christianity for Scotland.

In the 13th century a Benedictine abbey replaced the Columban monastery and an Augustinian nunnery was built nearby. After the reformation these all fell into disuse and gradual ruin. In the 19th century the 8th Duke of Argyll formed a trust for the restoration of the abbey and other sacred buildings, on condition that the abbey church should be a place of worship for Christians of all denominations. The restoration of the abbey was completed in 1910.

To be led on our retreat by Bishop David was the experience of a lifetime, never to be forgotten

In 1938 the Iona Community was founded and completed the restoration of the cloistered monastery buildings in the mid-1960s. These now form a retreat centre and the community organise regular daily services in the abbey. They also provide guided tours of the abbey and other archaeological sites nearby, as well as walking trips around the island including visiting St Columba's bay.

We stayed in the Bishop's House, which is the retreat centre for the Scottish Episcopal Church. It houses St Columba's Chapel, where there are daily celebrations of the Eucharist and evening prayer or compline.

Staying in this holy place was wonderful, but also to be led on our retreat and in our worship by Bishop David was the experience of a lifetime, never to be forgotten. He is a very holy man and a gifted speaker, but one who feels also that his feet are firmly on the ground.

He gave us daily talks, told us about St Columba and about the early Celtic Christians. He also gave us four talks about living with Jesus in various situations, bringing him into our own lives.

During our time there, we had two days when we kept silent within our retreat house. I took the opportunity to go for long rambles (perhaps I should say scrambles) all over the island with just God, the sky, sea, rocks, hills, bogs and the sheep for company. I didn't meet a soul for ages, and just felt really aware of the glory and beauty of God in that wonderful, wild place. I feel very blessed to have been there.

At the end of our last Eucharist, Bishop David said: 'Go in peace to love and serve and *enjoy* the Lord.' And I am sure he does.



Congratulations to James and Melanie Robinson on the arrival of their daughter Ella Mae, a granddaughter for Coryn and Ian Robinson and great-granddaughter for Eila and Hal Severn. Best wishes to all the family.

A big thank you to everyone who bought charity Christmas cards at the recent sale. The total takings were £612.

The south porch now looks very tidy after the installation of new cupboards. Many thanks to Jack Gostling and Dick Wilde.

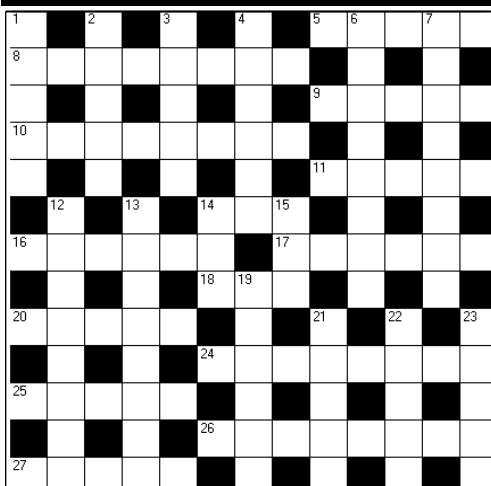
We raised £239.14 for Combat Stress at the Remembrance Sunday service on 12 November. Thank you.

The Brodowski Quartet once again thrilled us with an evening of string quartet repertoire on 10th November, which included movements from Smetana's String Quartet No. 1 'From My Life', Brahms String Quartet No. 3, and Beethoven's String Quartet, Opus 59.

They performed brilliantly and kept the audience enthralled with the vibrancy of their interpretations. The evening concluded with performers and audience enjoying socialising together over a glass or two of wine.

Congratulations to Andy Rowett, daughter of Anne and Pip, and Mike Johnston on their recent marriage

If you have a news item for inclusion in *Round the Spire*, please send it to the Parish Office at the address on Page Two.



Crossword

Across

- 5 Christmas song (5)
8 See 9 across
9 and 8 ac. His name has transformed into Santa Claus (5,8)
10 One of the first visitors to the infant Jesus (8)
11 you feet and cry out (Ezek 6.11) (5)
14 Where there was no room for Mary and Joseph (3)
16 Feed trough used as a cradle for the infant Jesus (6)
17 Season leading up to Christmas (6)
18 Shelled reproductive body (3)
20 Wireless (5)
24 and 27 ac Stage productions performed in many schools around Christmas time (8,5)
25 Comparatively unimportant (5)
26 Traditionally, the name of one of the Magi (8)

27 See 24 across

Down

- 1 Grind the teeth (5)
2 Threaded fastener (5)
3 Small hut (5)
4 Incapable of having children, like Elizabeth in Luke ch. 7 (6)
6 Having a tendency to change (8)
7 ..an to grace your neck (Pr 3.22) (8)
12 He made his offering on the eighth day in Numbers ch. 7 (8)
13 Yellow flowered wild plant (8)
14 Anger (3)
15 Incessantly find fault (3)
19 Small beard (6)
21 With which the papyrus basket in Exodus ch. 2 was coated (5)
22 Polite (5)
23 A gift of the Magi (5)

Answers from November Crossword

- Across: 1 Maize 4 Offal 9 Climbs
10 Molech 12 Lucid 13 Outcast
14 Zebulun 20 Torrent 22 Chair
23 Lloyd's 24 Levite 25 Myrrh
26 Ankle
Down: 2 Apiece 3 Zebedee 5 Frost
6 Ape-man 7 Scale 8 White
11 Locusts 15 Unclean 16 Atoll
17 Broody 18 Daniel 19 Green
21 Eider

The answers, together with a new crossword, will appear in next month's issue of *The Spire*.

CHARITIES & LINKS COMMITTEE

PRILL HINCKLEY



Children are our future



Supporting vulnerable children at this year's Christingle Service remains a priority, as **Ann Peterken** reports.

The collection at our annual Christingle Service always goes to The Children's Society. This year, the charity celebrates 125 years of life saving work with some of the most marginalised children in our society. Its work remains as important today.

In 1881 Edward Rudolf founded the Church of England Waifs and Strays' Society after two children who used to attend his Sunday school were found begging for food on the street.

He couldn't bear to see children so impoverished and without hope, understanding and support. And 125 years later the society he founded still feels the same way.

The world may be a very different place now, and The Waifs and Strays' Society is now the Church of England Children's Society, but sadly many of the problems that existed all those years ago still affect children today.

For 125 years The Children's Society has worked in partnership with the Church to support children in trouble with the law, disabled children, children at risk on the streets and young refugees, as well

as tackling abuse and drug and alcohol issues affecting children:

■ From enabling children to develop a trade to keep them out of trouble a hundred years ago, to current preventative and restorative justice work with young people.

■ From providing safe, secure housing for young 'waifs' on the Victorian streets, to rescuing homeless children from the streets today, often reconciling them with their families.

■ From assisting migrant children of the industrial revolution in the late nineteenth century, to supporting refugee children escaping persecution in the twenty-first century.

■ From championing the rights of disabled children, promoting education and apprenticeships in the early

twentieth century, to involving children with disabilities in the decisions that affect them to ensure they enjoy a full and active life today.

Times may have changed, and The Children's Society is now able to help over 50,000 children and families a year, but the challenges remain the same. That's why Christingle is so important.

The Christingle services provide vital funds to support today's vulnerable children. Thanks to the continued participation of churches around the country, and the generosity of many people, The Children's Society is in a stronger position than ever to continue its work for children. Your support on 3 December is vital.

Scenes from a previous Christingle service at St James'



BRIEFLY

Have you noticed that our notice boards now have titles? This is to try to rationalise what notices we put up in the church and hall and also to aid communication. In the church we now have notice boards for Rotas, Forthcoming Events, Our Giving, Social Events and Young People of St James' and in the South Porch the board welcomes people and includes general information notices. In the hall there are boards for Community Notices, The Parochial Church Council, Forthcoming Events and Outreach. The boards contain church and community oriented notices and advertisements (not commercial ones) which should be put up neatly and removed as soon as they are out of date. If you have any ideas about other notices, other ways you would like to hear about what is going on or anything about communication, please let us know.

One of the most amazing stories in the history of fundraising began 21 years ago this month. Comic Relief was launched on BBC One on Christmas Day from a refugee camp in Sudan, in response to the famine there. Besides doing something about that emergency, the founders were determined to tackle broader needs of people in Africa and in the UK. The fundraising began with a few live events until the first Red Nose Day in 1988. Comic Relief has raised £425 million. The next Red Nose Day is on BBC One on 16 March. Cash in Africa has educated people about HIV and AIDS, taught women to read, immunised children and helped communities rebuild after conflict. In the UK it has helped disabled people challenge prejudice, helped older people get their rights recognised and provided escape routes for women living with domestic violence.

ARCHIVE

100 years ago this month...

From the Hampton Hill Parish Magazine for December 1906. My Dear Friends,

Below will be found the Report of the Government Inspector upon the Day Schools, and it will be noticed that it is exceedingly good. The Government Inspector could scarcely have expressed himself more favourably, and the Inspectors in Religious Knowledge are equally emphatic in their approval. I hope every parent will read these reports, and that they will do their best by taking a personal interest in the work of the children, to keep up the standard reached.

I am glad to say that a new branch of teaching has just been commenced as part of the school work, about thirty of the older boys are being taught practical gardening by an efficient teacher. A quarter-of-an-acre of land has been taken and the boys have had their first experiences of active operations, and are as enthusiastic about it as if it were a game of cricket.

BOYS. The boys are well-behaved, manly and intelligent, and do their work willingly and well. The written exercises, Drawing and Brush work are exceedingly good, and the introduction of oral composition has been successful. There seems to be a need for more variety of Reading Books in all the classes.

GIRLS. This school is ably organized and superintended, and excellent influences are brought to bear on the girls. The work generally reaches a high standard.

INFANTS. These infants are bright, happy and natural, the result of earnest teaching by sensible and intelligent methods. The new desks used by the 1st class are too low, and are only suitable for very little children.

I am, my dear Friends,
Yours sincerely,
CHARLES R. JOB

HELP NEEDED!

Some of the church linen is in need of replacement, particularly the corporals and lavabo towels. It would be helpful if this could be done during the interregnum so that the new incumbent is welcomed with fresh linen. As funds are limited, the current thinking is to find some good quality material which can be made into the items required. If anyone is willing to contribute either money or expertise in sewing/embroidery please contact Liz Butler (020 8977 4227) or Gill Gostling (020 8941 4634). Thank you.