

DEC 2009/JAN 2010

The Spire

Inside
Children's hospice
is five years old

Your complete guide to

Christmas

at St James's Church

The Spire

St James's Church
Registered Charity No 1129286

This Spire is produced nine times a year on behalf of the PCC of St James's Church.

We make no charge for this magazine but hope that you will contribute towards the production costs, enabling us to expand our important outreach across the parish.

If you are a regular reader please consider making an annual donation. Cheques should be made payable to 'The PCC of St James' and sent to Spire Appeal c/o the Parish Office.

Thank you.

GET IN TOUCH

STORIES, FEATURES

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WELCOME

DECEMBER 2009/JANUARY 2010



The shops start their Christmas preparations earlier each year and we seem to get swept up in all the frizzeries, until it becomes a real challenge to concentrate on the true meaning and purpose of Christmas. The giving and receiving of cards and letters is an integral part of it too, so the truce in the postal dispute is welcome.

Here at St James's many of the local schools will be holding their carol concerts in our church, as will the Voluntary Care Group. We too, have our services to celebrate Christmas and you will be very welcome at any of them.

The centrespread features the Shooting Star hospice in Hampton. Christmas is a special time for all children and the hospice needs help to be able to continue its wonderful work.

On behalf of the entire editorial committee may I wish all our readers a happy and peaceful Christmas and we look forward with hope to 2010.

Best wishes

Janet

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For the latest news: www.stjames-hamptonhill.org.uk

Services for December and January

Christmas at St James's

6 December - 2nd Sunday of Advent

8am and 11.15am Holy Communion

Malachi 3.1-4; Philippians 1.3-11;

Luke 3.1-6

9.30am Christingle service

John 1.6-14

13 December - 3rd Sunday of Advent

Zephaniah 3.14-20; Philippians 4.4-7;

Luke 3.7-18

20 December - 4th Sunday of Advent

8am and 9.30am Micah 5.2-5a;

Hebrews 10.5-10; Luke 1.39-45

6.30 Carol Service

Thursday 24 December - Christmas Eve

4.30pm Crib Service

11pm Midnight Mass

Isaiah 9.2-7; Titus 2.11-14; Luke 2.1-14

Friday 25 December - Christmas Day

8am Holy Communion

(Book of Common Prayer)

9.30am Parish Communion

Hebrews 1.1-4; John 1.1-14

Saturday 26 December

St. Stephen's Day

10am Holy Communion

27 December - 1st Sun after Christmas:

St. John Exodus 33.7-11a; 1 John 1;

John 21.19b-25

Friday 1 January - New Year's Day,

Naming and Circumcision of Jesus

12 noon Holy Communion

3 January - 2nd Sunday after Christmas

Epiphany of the Lord

Isaiah 60.1-6; Ephesians 3.1-12;

Matthew 2.1-12

10 January - Baptism of Christ

Isaiah 43.1-7; Acts 8.14-17;

Luke 3.15-17, 21-22

17 January - 2nd Sunday of Epiphany

Isaiah 62.1-5; 1 Corinthians 12.1-11;

John 2.1-11

24 January - 3rd Sunday of Epiphany

Nehemiah 8.1-3, 5-6, 8-10;

1 Corinthians 12.12-31a; Luke 4.14-21

31 January - Candlemas

Presentation of Christ in the Temple

Malachi 3.1-5; Hebrews 2.14-18;

Luke 2.22-40

For details of regular weekly services over the holiday period please check in church, contact the Parish Office or go online

OUR CLERGY



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Revd Peter Vannoizzi

Peter was born in Hanwell in 1962, but owes his surname to his Italian great-grandfather who came from Florence to the UK in the late 19th century.

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These should be made in person in church on a Saturday morning from 10-10.30am.

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We have room only for selected contacts this issue. The full list is available online and will return in the February issue of *The Spire*.

The sound of silence



Christmas 1973 saw me receive a present that was the height of modern technology - a cassette player and recorder. With great enthusiasm I set up my new toy, and proceeded to record a great deal of the conversation of that Christmas Day. It sticks in my mind that my late father allowed his rendition of a *Slow boat to China* to be recorded!

There was one moment on the tape, though, when everyone went silent. It was not that we had all nodded off after Christmas lunch. Rather, I recall an air of embarrassment in the face of this new-fangled technology. Though the tape has long since gone, I remember hearing the recording of my own rather squeaky voice demanding 'What's everybody so quiet for?' Most likely because my family was sick to the back teeth of me and my new toy!

What's everybody so quiet for?

Christmas and its approach may be a time for us when quiet is at a premium. The two weeks preceding the week of Christmas Day itself is anything but quiet. St. James's Church will, like many other churches, resound to the sound of school children practising and then performing in their Christmas productions.

I take great delight in school involvement with the Church at Christmas. They will be very welcome at St. James's, along with Teddington Choral Society and the Voluntary Care Group, for their respective Christmas events. The church building will not be quiet.

How about elsewhere? Certainly not the shopping centres. The roads? Unlikely. Pubs? No, Christmas will be in full swing. The parks? Perhaps. So is nobody quiet at Christmas? It seems not.

The only really quiet time I find is early on Christmas morning, at about 7am, before the early morning Christmas Communion at 8 o'clock.

Why mention, then, something so obviously daft - quiet at Christmas? I sometimes worry that our society at the moment cannot resist the need to speak. The 'speaking'



Peter Vannozi

may take written, electronic form - comment on Facebook, the odd 'Tweet' here or there in the midst of activity. Comment can be immediate - the reaction is spontaneous, uncensored.

Potentially dangerous. Yet wonderfully free. Quiet, though, involves something counter-cultural. Stopping. Pausing. Thinking. Reflecting. Not responding to a text. Turning off the mobile phone. Removing the ear plugs of the I-Pod.

Not proffering a running commentary on life. Just shutting up! Stilling the mind. Calming the emotions. Why?

In silence, in stillness, a person can really ponder. Christmas has plenty for us to contemplate if it is for us more than a secular winter festival of benefit to the economy.

At the heart of the Christian celebration of Christmas is a belief that something quite wonderful happened on our planet some 2,000 years ago. Cheerfully we sing a quite extraordinary theological statement:

*'He came down to earth from heaven,
who is God and Lord of all,
and his shelter was a stable,
and his cradle was a stall:
with the poor, and meek and lowly
lived on earth our Saviour holy.'*

What's everybody so quiet for?

Is it not obvious? We should be quiet in the face of what can only be the most surprising event in history - that God did not remain distant from a world that seemed far from him, but came to it, lived in it, died in it, and rose in it.

This Christmas, can you and I be quiet for a moment, and consider what this might mean for us? How do you feel about being so loved? What will you and I do as we enter a new year to put love into practice?

What's everybody so quiet for?

If only - but we can be quiet.
Will you be quiet this Christmas?

IN THOUGHT AND PRAYER

Christina Rossetti (1830-1904) was part of a well-known literary and artistic family. Her father was in exile from Italy, and was professor of Italian at Kings College, London. Her brothers were leading figures in the Pre-Raphaelite arts movement. Christina was a model for several artists. She was also a poet and a writer of books of devotion. Two of her poems became Christmas carols and are still used in worship today.

Love came down at Christmas

In this poem, Christina expresses a conviction that God is love, and this love has taken human form in Jesus. This requires a human response.

Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, love divine;
Love was born at Christmas,
Star and angels gave the sign.

Worship we the Godhead,
Love incarnate, love divine;
Worship we our Jesus:
But wherewith for sacred sign?

Love shall be our token,
Love shall be yours and love be mine,
Love to God and to all men,
Love for plea and gift and sign.

In the bleak mid winter

Allowing for poetic licence about the 'bleak mid winter' Rossetti again expresses her conviction about God's descent to earth in Jesus. He whom the angels of heaven worship is now satisfied with the humility of the stable. Again, this demands our response 'give my heart'.

In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,
In the bleak midwinter, long ago.

Our God, Heaven cannot hold Him, nor earth sustain;
Heaven and earth shall flee away when He comes to reign.

In the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ.

Enough for Him, whom cherubim worship night and day,
A breastful of milk, and a mangerful of hay;
Enough for Him, whom angels fall before,
The ox and ass and camel which adore.

Angels and archangels may have gathered there,
Cherubim and seraphim thronged the air;
But His mother only, in her maiden bliss,
Worshipped the beloved with a kiss.

What can I give Him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a Wise Man, I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give Him: give my heart.

NEWS BULLETIN

A NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION; A CHRISTMAS RESOLUTION

Will you make smaller footprints in 2010?

What do the *Guardian* newspaper, B&Q, Microsoft, London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, Young Vic, sculptor Anthony Gormley, government ministers and 40,000 other individuals have in common?



The answer – they have all signed up to the 10:10 campaign.

Launched in September, this campaign aims to get individuals, companies and institutions to reduce their carbon footprint by 10% during 2010. The government has committed the UK to an 80% reduction in CO2 levels by 2050, but for this to have any chance of being met we all have to start our own carbon reduction plan now.

The 10:10 campaign stresses that this journey towards sustainability should not be seen as what we might have to give up. We should think not of a 'standard of living' but of 'quality of life'. An example would be to 'fly less, but holiday more'.



To sign up to the campaign, go to www.1010uk.org. There's more information, including how to make a difference, plus technical advice, at www.guardian.co.uk/10-10. Perhaps signing up could be your New Year's resolution for 2010!

'It is more blessed to give than to receive...'

Most of us, unlike the widow of **Mark 12:44**, probably give to charity out of our wealth rather than our poverty. It is hard to change this overnight and we need guidance and examples to help us. One way in which people may easily be encouraged to give more is by adopting a principle of **50/50 giving** at Christmas, whereby we aspire to give at least as much as we spend on our own Christmas gifts and celebrations. Perhaps all those *Alternative Gift* catalogues should be renamed *Preferential Gifts*. There is a huge educational challenge here, but we can rise to it. It will not happen overnight, but it could help to restore Christ to Christmas, and make us talk about our faith as never before.

Religious art leaves you shaken and stirred

National Gallery *The Sacred Made Real: Spanish Painting and Sculpture 1600-1700* is a landmark reappraisal of religious art from the Spanish Golden Age with works created to shock the senses and stir the soul. Once seen, never forgotten is a sculpture by Gregorio Fernández of the deposed body of Christ laid out on a table. By



displaying works — some for the first time in the UK — side by side, the exhibition explores the intense dialogue between the arts of sculpture and painting. It runs until 24 January 2010. Tickets £8 (concessions £7).

Stamps Even the ordinary 2nd and 1st Class stamps are a very valuable fund-raiser for all sorts of charities. This Christmas please save the stamps from all your cards. To be of use to the charities they need to be cut from envelopes with 1cm of paper round the stamp. There are two sweet jars for stamps in the South Aisle in church – one for the Leprosy Mission and one for the Multiple Sclerosis Society.



Christmas last posting dates
1st class **Mon 21 December**
2nd class **Fri 18 December**



REGISTERS FOR OCTOBER

Wedding

3 Rupert Alexander Colin Gowrley and Rebecca Suzanne Neale

Funerals

15 Ian Coombes, 58, Hampton

21 Herbert Leonard Williamson, 96, Hampton Hill

COVER STORY SHOOTING STAR

Hampton's Shooting Star Children's Hospice is five years old in 2010. It provides care, support and advice to families who have children with life-limiting conditions. Each year it needs to raise £3m to keep open. **Gill Gostling** works at one of its charity shops and has been to see where the money goes.



Reach for the stars

In 1995 Kathryn Turner started a charity to enable the building of a hospice for children with life limiting illnesses. Such hospices are not funded by the government and much work was required to raise the money to build such a badly needed facility.

The Shooting Star Children's Hospice was officially opened by Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall in 2006, although it had in fact been receiving children since August 2005.

It provides care, support and advice for children and young people with life-limiting conditions and their families. These care services are offered free of charge to families, 365 days a year.

Shooting Star supports more than 250 families. The care services are based around the needs of the whole family, so as well as caring for the children and young people, there are activities and support groups for siblings, parents and other relatives. This makes a real difference to families, enabling them to live life to the full as well as helping them through the tougher times.

Families benefit from Shooting Star's care services in the community, in their own homes and at Shooting Star House, the purpose-built facility in Hampton. These services include short breaks (respite care), daycare, outreach care, family support and therapies, and end of life care.

It costs £3 million every year (£8,000 a day) to maintain these care services and the majority of this comes from voluntary donations.

The centre recently opened a cosmos therapy zone that I was able to see during an open day. A

purpose-built therapies unit provides massage, whilst there are other rooms for music, play and counselling.

Shooting Star House is a very special place - a home from home for families who find themselves in truly unimaginable circumstances. Facilities include a sensory room, a hydrotherapy pool and spa, and arts and crafts

opened on 13 November.

The work can be divided into two areas: the shop itself and the back room. Out front volunteers operate the till, assist customers, tidy the rails and monitor security. Another important task is the sale of the weekly lottery tickets.

Even if customers cannot find an item to purchase they can always buy a lottery ticket. In the back



Father Christmas and his elves are always kept busy

rooms. It's easy to forget during an open day tour that for some children this is also where they end their lives. In a private garden is the Memory Tree, made of wrought metal. Families are invited to tie a silver star, with their child's name engraved on it, to one of the tree's branches.

The Shooting Star Hospice relies on volunteers for everything from fundraising events to helping at the centre.

Volunteers also staff the six charity shops, which raise £100,000 a year. More than 130 volunteers give their time to keeping the shops running.

I first became involved with Shooting Star in 2004 when I noticed they were opening a shop in Teddington. I was looking to do some voluntary work and applied. I started work when the shop

room donations are received, sorted, cleaned or steamed, priced, dated and put out for sale.

There are usually two or three volunteers working at a time (not necessarily the same ones each week, although most people have their regular days).

It is hard work as there is always job that needs doing, but it can also be great fun. I remember when we had three ladies looking for outfits for a 60s fancy dress party. They each tried on different dresses, wigs or hats and paraded round the shop whilst the volunteers and their friends offered suggestions and comments.

On another occasion the volunteers wore hula skirts and garlands which had just been donated. Some of the questions we are asked raise a smile too. I

Stella's story

Six-year-old Stella Parkinson and her family, who live in Twickenham, are one of the 250 families currently supported by Shooting Star.

In her short life, Stella has already faced more than 12 operations, including surgery to repair holes in her heart, a hernia operation, two ear implants and plastic surgery. She's had more than 70 blood transfusions and nearly died on three occasions.

Shooting Star gives the family a break from the practical and emotional pressure they live with on a daily basis. Stella's mother, Margurite, said: 'When I visited for the first time I wanted to cry, because it felt like a weight had been lifted.'

'The hospice is like a sanctuary where we aren't being stared at, and the sympathy and understanding from every member of the staff is palpably powerful.'

Margurite continued: 'We love it. It's a place where we can get some relief and the children can experience a wonderful time. We don't know what the future holds, but having Shooting Star gives us such peace of mind.'



have been asked: 'Do you have this in my size?' Sorry, we rely on donations.

Pricing is often done 'by committee' – someone will suggest a price and we eventually reach a consensus. For clothes, though, we have a guide price list.

Items of real value are checked on the computer by our shop managers. Clothes and books that are not suitable for sale are recycled as best we can.

Many people ask me how they can help the hospice. I suggest they to pop into their local shop and pick up a bargain, or donate their unwanted saleable items. A bag of good quality second hand clothing can raise £40, enough to pay for a family visit from Shooting Star's specialist Bereavement Team.

Don't worry, if we consider the items to be too worn for sale, they are sold on for reprocessing and onward sale to needy countries.

Of course, you could volunteer to work in one of the shops. Helping in a shop is a rewarding experience and a great way to interact with colleagues and the general public looking to support Shooting Star.

Working in the shop I am always meeting new people; we have our regulars too, such as our jigsaw lady, Joyce, who calls in for 500 piece jigsaws, takes them home, checks them and then returns them for us to re-sell.

There are occasional evenings out with other volunteers at the shop and, once a year, a thank you party for the volunteers is organised by the staff. The food, drink and entertainment for the party are all donated; it costs Shooting Star nothing, but goes a long way towards boosting the morale of volunteers and good

relations between staff and volunteers.

There are also volunteer days when volunteers have the chance to put forward ideas for fundraising events, discuss ideas for improving communication and learn what is happening at the hospice.

One event I particularly remember was at a volunteers' day. As part of the programme three mothers had agreed to tell us what the hospice had meant to them as they cared for their very sick children. They described feelings of helplessness and fear, wondering what sort of a place the Hospice would be. All spoke most movingly of the support and care

and seeing the siblings of others perform was an amazing experience. We were all asked to write on a star and these were then collected by the children and hung over a Christmas tree.

It is very rewarding to know that in a small way I am contributing to making this difference in peoples' lives whilst making some good friends at the shop.

Shooting Star's Chief Executive, Dalton Leong, said: 'Five years from now, I would love to be able to say we are supporting many more families in our local area. During this time of financial uncertainty, however, our fundraisers are constantly



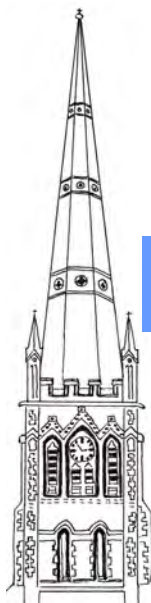
Helping hand: Eileen Lowres cares for one of the centre's young children

they and their families had received from the staff and said they did not know what they would have done without the hospice. There were very few dry eyes at the end and the mothers got a huge round of applause for their courage in relating their experiences.

Another powerful memory is the Shooting Star Christmas Service at All Saints, Hampton. Hearing one of the children read a poem

challenged to meet our rising care costs and we remain indebted to our supporters and volunteers for all they do to support our vital work. Long may it continue!

If you would like to volunteer, or find out more about the work at Shooting Star, please contact Vernon Watts, Shooting Star's Community Volunteer Manager, on 020 8481 8190, or email: vernon.watts@shootingstar.org.uk



AROUND THE SPIRE

NEWS FROM HAMPTON HILL AND BEYOND

Four births and a wedding...

It has been a bumper period for babies — and several members of our congregation have been celebrating the birth of grandchildren.



Val and Mike Butterfield's elder daughter, Sara, gave birth to a son, Ambrose Giles Christopher, on 28 September. He was born two months early but mother, baby (and father Chris) are all doing well.



Many of you will remember that Liz Butler wrote movingly in our December 2007 edition about her son Toby, who had received a kidney transplant from his wife Rachael. We are delighted to hear that, exactly two years later, Toby and Rachael have a son, William Michael Roy. It was a double celebration for the Butler family as Liz's daughter Kirsty gave birth to Matilda, a sister for Gabriel, in the same hospital the previous day! We hope to have a picture of them in our next issue.

Congratulations also to Robin Smith, son of Prill Hinckley, and Abi on the birth of their son Toby on 27 October, a brother for 13-month-old Erin. He's pictured here, right, with proud grandparents Martin and Prill



Yet another happy event was the wedding of Liz Wilmot's son William to Karima Romanello on 24 October in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. The couple are pictured here, left, with Liz.



The ghosts of Christmas past...or present?

- What will you be doing this Christmas? According to one survey:
- Just 3% of people still put a penny in the Christmas pudding
- A whopping 69% haven't heard of putting tangerines in stockings
- Only 18% of us toast the Queen at Christmas lunch, though 26% will watch her speech on television.
- Some 29% still douse the pudding in brandy and set it alight
- Nearly half have a homemade Christmas cake, while 25% opt for German stollen and 14% prefer Italian panettone
- About 5% of us will roast chestnuts, while 64% will be indulging in chocolates and 65% will enjoy a Champagne breakfast
- 28% of us play charades, while 42% prefer TV or computer games.
- Amazingly, only 16 per cent of us will bother to sing any carols.

A big thank you to all who bought charity Christmas cards at our two recent sales. The total taken was £696, an increase on last year's figure of £654.





The Christian Year is made up of five seasons: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent and Easter. The rest of the year is referred to as 'Ordinary Time' as there is no special celebration. The year also consists of Saints Days, Festivals and Holy Days. These seasons and days make up the Christian calendar.

Fill the gaps above using the following words:

darkness, birth, symbol, angels, beginning, King, morning, white, purple, light, son.



Advent is the of the Christian Year. The word Advent comes from the Latin word *adventus* which means arrival or coming, as we look forward to the or arrival of Christ the at Christmas. The colour during Advent is, a sign of royalty. The Advent Wreath, circular with four candles and a fifth candle in the centre is a of Advent. The unlit candles represent and as the outer candles are lit week by week during Advent this darkness gradually gives way to the of God coming into the world through the birth of his, Jesus. The candle in the centre, called the Christ candle, is lit on Christmas, to mark the birth of Christ, the light of the world. It is, the colour associated with and the birth of Jesus.



The season of **Christmas**, with the story of the Nativity, follows Advent. The church colour for Christmas is white. The word Christmas (or Christ's Mass) comes from the Old English words *Cristes Mæsse* which mean the mass, or service, of Christ.

Christmas begins on Christmas Eve, when Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem. They found that all the inns were full and had to stay in a poor stable. Then on Christmas morning the baby, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was born.

Over the high altar in St. James's sanctuary is a stained glass window, part of which shows the Nativity.

Here are two pictures of that Nativity scene. There are 16 differences between the two pictures. Can you spot them all?



Epiphany is the time when we remember the coming of the wise men, Magi, (traditionally named Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar) bringing gifts for the Christ child. The name Epiphany comes from the Greek *epiphaneia*, meaning to show or appear. The church colour during Epiphany is white. Find the 11 Epiphany words hidden below (they are from the text above):

H	U	O	W	W	O	V	C	Z	X	A	F	R	D	T	J	E	N	R	I	M	Z	T	E
O	F	E	P	I	P	H	A	N	Y	Q	M	I	S	C	G	A	A	G	R	E	E	K	D
S	P	L	X	S	K	T	S	I	U	P	G	D	A	Z	S	I	P	I	E	N	D	S	H
H	R	N	X	E	Q	I	P	P	F	A	V	C	H	I	L	D	J	F	Z	H	M	R	P
O	R	B	L	S	A	O	A	M	M	H	O	O	I	X	R	C	F	T	K	F	B	E	R
W	H	I	T	E	J	C	R	B	S	F	Y	B	A	L	T	H	A	S	A	R	P	B	T

The Christian Year		
Season	Colour	Dates
Advent	Purple	Nov 29 - Dec 24 2009
Christmas	White	Dec 25 - Jan 5 2010
Epiphany	White	Jan 6 - Jan 31 2010
Ordinary Time	Green	Feb 1 - Feb 16 2010
Lent	Purple	Feb 17 - Apr 3 2010
Easter	White	Apr 4 - May 23 2010
Ordinary Time	Green	May 24 - Nov 28 2010



Revelations

Christian Guidance

By 18 December, when the Copenhagen Conference on climate change closes, we shall know whether the attempts to improve the agreements reached in Kyoto Conference in 1997 have been successful. Few people now are unaware of the seriousness of global warming. The recent Operation Noah lecture by Archbishop Rowan Williams in Southwark Cathedral was a powerful statement of a Christian response to the impending crisis. The lecture is an annual event arranged by the Climate Change Campaign which was founded by the Christian Ecology Link. Dr Williams has a clear vision of the urgency of a change of direction and a change of heart if we are to prevent irreversible damage to our planet. He warmly welcomed the book, *Hell and High Water: Climate Change, Hope and the Human Condition*, by Alastair McIntosh, who uses the word: 'ecocidal' for our present way of living, which he sees as inexorably destroying our environment. The pursuit of prosperity at the expense of the well-being of others and the sustainability of the planet's resources is leading us to despair rather than happiness. To recover we need to understand our interdependence on each other and the material world, and our responsibilities in this. Perhaps the Copenhagen Conference will see we need to change our goals as well as our light bulbs.

Higgs Boson Escapes Again!

The CERN Large Hadron Collider was due to start smashing protons in June 2008. A trial run in the summer last year was thwarted by some misbehaving cooling units, and a new date for the first big boson bang was scheduled for spring 2009. Apparently mysterious new problems have developed, and there seems to be no publicly announced date for a new trial of the machine. While the delays do not rival the surreal overruns of defence contracts, some of the reasons given, as one would expect from such an advanced project, are much more interesting and imaginative. John Gribbin reports that some physicists fear that the collider will generate a black hole, which will swallow our planet and possibly the galaxy. They are suggesting that 'ripples from the future' are deliberately stopping any progress to prevent such a catastrophe. Fantasy writers Douglas Adams or Terry Pratchett couldn't have given a better explanation.

New Exhibitions at the V&A

The newly updated display of pottery on the sixth floor of the Victoria and Albert Museum uses the natural lighting of the partially glazed roof to great advantage, and its imaginative layout and notes and explanations will probably interest children as well as adults. There is an historical layout of examples from 3,500 BC to the present day, and looking at them in date sequence some visitors may feel we have passed our finest period. The meaning of the various terms such as stoneware, earthenware, bone china and porcelain are described, and the materials, their mixing, decoration and firing also carefully explained. There is no entrance fee to the museum, though a donation is invited. As well as the other many treasures in the V&A there is a special exhibition: *Maharaja – the Splendour of India's Royal Courts*. This closes on 17 January. It has an entry fee.



St James's Ark

Carers and Toddlers' Group, 10.15am to 12.15 pm every Monday during term time, St James's Church. Come and share in conversation, refreshments, play time, story time, crafts and worship. £2 per session, per family. Contact Debbie Nunn 020 8979 3078.

Initiatives of Change

Tuesday 1 December, 7.15pm, *Saving the Earth*, 24 Greencoat Place, London SW1P 1RD
The Rt Revd James Jones, Bishop of Liverpool, is author of *Jesus and the Earth* and founder of Faiths4Change, engaging faith groups in the transformation of the environment. There are light refreshments from 6.30pm. The talk is free, with a collection for expenses. To book places, please telephone 020 7798 6000

Annual Leaf Sweep and Gutter Clean

Saturday, 5 December, 9.30am, St James's Church
Please help us and bring along buckets and brooms.

The Wave: Stop Climate Chaos

Saturday 5 December, from 11am, Westminster Central Hall, London SW1H 9NH
The UK's biggest ever demonstration in support of action on climate change will flood the streets of central London, ahead of the crucial UN climate talks in Copenhagen. The day begins at 11am with a service, led by the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Wave, a carnival-style street procession, starts at 12pm from Grosvenor Square and ends at 3pm as it encircles the Houses of Parliament. Please wear or carry something blue. The event is organised by the Stop Climate Chaos Coalition, which represents 11 million members from 100 organisations. For further information, including the procession route, please go to: www.stopclimatechaos.org

Christingle Service

Sunday 6 December, 9.30am, St James's Church
As ever, this annual service supports the Children's Society and is a wonderful opportunity to bring together children, family and friends, forge stronger links between church and schools and celebrate the Christmas message. Money raised at the service will help to improve the lives of thousands of children trapped in poverty.

Vicar's View



Community Christmas Concert

Wednesday 9 December, 6.30pm, St James's Church
This annual concert, organised by the Hampton and Hampton Hill Voluntary Care Group, features a programme of carols, readings, and music. Admission is free, with a retiring collection. The concert will be followed by mulled wine and mince pies in the Church Hall.

Carols in the City

Thursday 10 December, 7pm, Southwark Cathedral, London SE1 9DA
A very special carol concert in aid of Marie Curie Nurses, who help terminally ill cancer patients and their families. Hosted by Martyn Lewis, and with baritone Rhydian Roberts, the event will feature readings from Dame Diana Rigg, Fay Ripley, Judith Chalmers and Griff Rhys Jones. Tickets £30 for the concert only and £55 for the concert and champagne reception. For more information telephone Katie Arnold on 020 7599 7308.

Festival for Christmas

Saturday 12 December, 7pm, St James's Church
Join Teddington Choral Society for carols. Tickets £9 (concessions £7) on door. For more information contact 020 8977 5986 or Email: teddingtonchoral.co.uk

Handel's Messiah

Saturday 12 December, 7.30pm, Duke Street Church, Duke Street, Richmond
The Barnes Choir presents the seasonal classic. Tickets £12 (concessions £10) on door. Children under 12 free.

Carols By Candlelight

Saturday 19 December, 7.30pm, Landmark Arts Centre Ferry Road, Teddington TW11 9NN
Concordia Voices join with Surrey Brass to perform their annual programme of seasonal music and song. Early booking is essential. Tickets £10 (under 16s £5). Box Office telephone 020 8977 7558

Christmas Concert

Saturday 19 December, 7.30pm, St Mary Magdalene Church, Richmond TW9 1SN
Join Cantanti Camerati (musical director Geoffrey Bowyer) for a seasonal concert. Tickets £9 (concessions £7) at the door.

St James's Theatre Club

Tuesday 12 January 2010, 7.45pm, *The Woman in Black*
Tickets are £14 (£24). To join us, please add your name to the lists on the church notice board or telephone Ria Beaumont on 020 8943 4336. Transport can be arranged.

Candlemas Choral Evensong

Wednesday 31 January, 6pm, St James's Church
Concordia Voices sing for Candlemas. The musical director is Neil Ferris; the organist is Alex Chaplin.

Parish Quiet Day

Saturday 13 March, *The Anglican Benedictine Abbey of Our Lady & St John, Alton, Hampshire GU34 4AP*

Our parish quiet day will be at an abbey that has been described in *The Times* as 'the best kept secret in the Church of England' and as 'the place to go when you need six weeks' holiday, but can spare only a day'. A real treat, so put it in your diary now! Further details will be given in the new year and in February issue of *The Spire*. There is more information about the abbey on their website: www.altonabbey.org.uk/ebp/alton.nsf



My faith in the NHS



Children are a great joy in most families and it has been a privilege to spend most of my working life as an obstetrician and gynaecologist looking after women and supporting their partners and families through the ups and downs of pregnancy and birth. During my training I also spent a year in a hospital children's department where I was often the first doctor to see sick children who came to the Accident and Emergency department. I spent many night hours in the Special Care Baby Unit treating tiny newborn babies.

Fortunately, the vast majority of mothers remain fit and well and give birth to healthy normal babies. Indeed, the tragic outcome of a mother or baby dying is now so uncommon that few people have experienced this within their own family or circle of friends. It is even rarer to be faced with the shock and sadness of learning that their previously healthy child has developed an incurable illness or disability.

The task of telling parents that their unborn baby has a serious abnormality, will be born with a significant disability or has died in the uterus was one of the most daunting responsibilities of my job; one that did not get easier with time. No amount of training or practice can adequately prepare for the range and intensity of the reactions of parents to such news. There is often disbelief, denial, anger and self-blame as well as sadness and grief.

As a Christian, I am faced with the challenge of trying to fit such experiences of individual pain and suffering into a belief in the existence of a loving God but I am convinced that these losses are easier to bear for those who have the additional support of their faith.

'Why did this happen to us?' 'What have we done to deserve this?' Very often I have no adequate explanations as to what went wrong, how and why a problem arose. It goes against a fundamental of medical training to have to say 'I don't know'. After all, my job is to find out what is wrong and to put it right, isn't it?

There are occasions too when perhaps recognising the problem earlier, trying a different treatment, being more skilful might have brought a different outcome. If I can face up to my own shortcomings and doubts honestly and be open about this with patients and parents I can learn from these experiences and ultimately give them better support and provide higher quality care.

Sometimes parents have ideas and wishes about how their sick children should be treated that go against what I believe to be the best medical option we can offer. They may decline treatment, or more often, press for interventions that may bring more suffering without realistic chance of success. Paradoxically, I feel that having a set of personal beliefs that depend on something beyond the

limitations of evidence or proof helps me in these situations. As such, I feel better equipped to approach discussions constructively with people who have different values and priorities or express them in a different way. My faith supports my working relationships through helping me maintain a sense of self while respecting the diversity of beliefs in others.

Working with families also brought me into contact with the problems of abuse within the home setting. Domestic violence towards women happens more frequently when they are pregnant. Children suffer mistreatment and neglect.

Even if we accept that illness may be regarded as a chance happening, how can we reconcile wanton cruelty to children with a divine plan for our world? Are there people who are intrinsically evil or do we each have the capacity to do harm? Cruelty can and does occur in unlikely settings, at the hands of improbable people.

The teachings of the church encourage us to look for the good in everyone, but blind faith in the essential goodness of our fellow creatures can stop us seeing and acting upon violence and abuse when it occurs.

One of the few circumstances when I have no regret about breaking the confidentiality of information from patients is when I learn of possible harm to others, especially children. However, I also believe that even when I uncover thoughts and actions of others that are unacceptable to me I still have a responsibility to continue to provide appropriate medical care for them.

One of the most enjoyable aspects of my role is the opportunity to teach and train younger doctors and midwives and to provide pastoral support when they have difficult clinical situations to deal with. I also have the privilege of working as part of a multidisciplinary team in an environment that continues to offer new experiences to me. I hope that my colleagues see my underlying values in the way that I work and provide a role model to them. I know that their individual beliefs also add to the richness of my learning.

So do I wear my faith on my sleeve? In a professional context I do not think it is appropriate to volunteer my Christianity but I am happy to respond to questions from people about my beliefs and values and to be challenged about whether they have influenced (appropriately or otherwise) the information, advice or help that I offer. I would like to believe that the support of my faith enables me to work better as a doctor.

Janet Taylor has recently retired from her post as a consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist at West Middlesex University Hospital. She is currently working at the NHS Institute, which involves enhancing maternity services nationally, particularly in improving the chances of women having a normal birth.



A 'living' nativity scene

It can be surprising to discover that some things that just seem to be an automatic part of a church, may be more recent than we think. Pews, for example, filling the main part of a church were not found widely until the last few hundred years.

The Christmas crib is similar. It is probably only in the last hundred years that a crib or 'nativity scene' depicting the scene of the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem became widespread in Anglican churches.

St. Francis of Assisi (1181/2-1226) is credited with the first nativity scene in Greccio in Italy in 1223. His was a 'living' nativity scene with real people acting out the parts of the characters in the Christmas story. This became quite popular in some parts of Europe.

Static depictions (such as churches have now) developed, and some could be very elaborate. For St. Francis, a depiction of the nativity was a teaching aid. He wanted to get across his belief in Jesus as the 'poor Christ.' Jesus had made himself poor by pouring out everything for the sake of the world. He had put himself into human hands - literally into the arms of Mary, his mother. He had given up his divine nature.

For Francis the crib led to the cross, and then to the altar. The same Jesus gave all on the cross, once more giving himself into human hands. In the bread and wine of communion, Jesus gives himself still.

Christmas cribs or nativity scenes usually show us Jesus, Mary and Joseph together with the shepherds and animals found in the stable where Jesus was born. On 6 January, the feast of the Epiphany, the coming of the wise men to visit Jesus is celebrated. The shepherds and animals are removed, and are replaced by the wise men. Cribs used to remain in churches until 2 February when the presentation of Jesus in the Temple is celebrated. Now it is most common for cribs to be removed after the first Sunday of the Epiphany, the Baptism of Christ.



A typical nativity scene