

The Feast of Christ the King is also known as 'Stir-up Sunday'. By tradition on this Sunday it is customary to give the ingredients of your Christmas pudding a good stir! But the phrase comes from the Prayer Book Collect which begins "*Stir up, O Lord, the wills of your faithful people: that they, plenteously bring forth the fruit of good works, may by you be plenteously rewarded*".

As Christians, as members of Christ's Church, we are not called to be successful but *faithful*. We are called to live out of the faith that we proclaim. We are called to live by the stirring not, of a wooden spoon, but of the Holy Spirit of God.

But our faith ultimately flows from the faithfulness of God ("*He who calls is faithful*" - *1 Thessalonians 5.24*). I know that however stretched we might be, and on those occasions when we might feel discouraged, that God has his hand on his Church in this parish. And so as we give thanks today for all that has been this past year, we recognise also that God always calls us to look to the future. In faith we are called to trust to his good purposes.

Our recent parish day was a positive experience which is already bearing fruit. As the Marden Vale Team Benefice we are already beginning to grow closer together. We are looking forward to Rev'd Linda Carter beginning her ministry in this benefice on the 6th December. And we hope and pray that 2018 will be the year when God will send us another House-for-duty priest. There is much to look forward to, if we let 'Christ be our King'.

Next Sunday is Advent Sunday and the beginning of the Church's year. It's the Sunday when we begin not only preparing for Christmas but looking further ahead to a future that God alone knows. Please use this season of Advent as a time to ask how God may be calling us to serve him and his Church. What new responses might he be asking of us and what might renew our hope? Dare we ask the Holy Spirit to do some stirring in our midst and to lead us to a new place in faith and love?

With my love and prayers for a fruitful Advent,

Bob

From Rev'd Bob Kenway - Team Rector of the Marden Vale Benefice

Christ the King Sunday, 2017

Dear friends in Christ,

The *Feast of Christ the King* stands at the end of the Church's year. In many ways it sums up what we have been learning about the kingdom of God through the year in the company of Jesus and in the words of Matthew's gospel (each year is associated with a particular gospel writer). On *Christ the King Sunday* we give thanks that Jesus not only taught us what his kingdom looks like but we also recognise that Christ reveals the character of the kingdom in his very person. Jesus turns the idea of kingship on its head. His kingship is not about power and wealth but about humility, service and generosity of spirit. And so in the final gospel in Matthew's year (Matthew 25:31-46) Jesus tells the parable of "*The Great Assize*" in which the king in that parable makes judgement:

"Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me."

Christ the King provides an opportunity for us to reflect on the past year on the many blessings that God has brought us both individually and personally and together, as a Christian community, to consider in what ways we may have grown in Christian discipleship.

This time last year we were preparing for the great outdoor nativity in Calne in which 1,254 people appeared in a world record-breaking event. It was a truly joyous occasion in the life of Calne. The Season of Advent and Christmas brings great opportunity to share the Good News of Christ with the wider community.

Here are some of things I give thanks to God for over the past year:

- The many acts of worship offered across the parish and benefice - some services with large numbers such as on Remembrance Sunday or over Christmas at the Carol and Crib Services and some with much smaller numbers as during our weekday services. For those who minister within these - in setting up and serving at the altar, making music, reading, leading intercessions, serving refreshments afterwards etc
- The fact that people, in this more secular time, still seek out their parish churches to mark those fundamentally important times of their lives around birth, marriage and death.
- Our links with the schools of Calne especially those with a church foundation: Holy Trinity and Marden Vale Academies and St Mary's and St Margaret independent schools. It was lovely to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Holy Trinity school when Bishop Nicholas came to preach at a special service on Trinity Sunday.
- The life of Messy Church which meets twice each term at Holy Trinity Academy. The weekly meeting of SMUFs (St Mary's under Fives) and for their worship in church each term.
- For the Marden Vale Holiday Club which met for two days both at St Mary's and Christ Church, Derry Hill last Summer
- The establishing of 'Open the Book' ecumenical story telling team in September that currently visits Holy Trinity, Marden Vale and St Edmund Academies.
- The work and witness of Mothers' Union
- For those who clean and help maintain 4 historic buildings in the parish. The Friends' groups which raise funds to support this. We should especially note this year the work done at Holy Trinity church in the installation of a new toilet.
- For the considerable work that is done with the administration and looking after the finances of the parish.

- For the life of prayer that goes on within the parish. Some of it is public as in our Sunday and weekday services or each Tuesday evening 6.30pm at St Mary's. Most recently we have an opportunity to experience meditative prayer on Thursday evenings through Advent.
- The Deanery Confirmation Service at St Mary's last April conducted by Bishop Ed. Of the 17 confirmed that day 15 were from Calne and Blackland.
- The ministry of pastoral care that goes in many ways across the parish by many people including the 12 Lay Pastoral Assistants involved in preparing people for baptism and marriage, supporting people in bereavement visiting residential care homes and taking the sacrament of Holy Communion to people unable to attend church.
- Support for people in need via Church House which is the main outlet for the Calne Food Bank and where people can be sign-posted for further support.

Many of these activities reflect the concerns set out in the parable of "The great Assize" or in Jesus' words in the beatitudes (Matthew 5.3-12).

But the year has been full of challenges too. Our resources are at a stretch both in terms of personnel and in terms of our parish finances (please see what our Treasurer has to say about this in the parish notices).

When I first came to Calne 21 years ago there were 3 full-time stipendiary clergy in Calne and Blackland alone. Seven years ago when the Marden Vale Team was formed there were 2 full-time stipendiary and a house-for-duty (HfD) priest (Meg Kirby) for 4 parishes. The population has grown considerably over the last 21 years (Calne alone has grown from 13,000 to c 20,000 people). We have been without our HfD priest since Meg left 3 years ago. Then in June Ann Massey (team vicar based at Derry Hill) retired ... and then there was one! Except there hasn't been just one because ministry in the Christian church is a collaborative endeavour. We are called to be a community and to act as a community. All ministry begins with our baptism in which God calls us to follow and to serve.