



St Mary's Newsletter

St Mary's – at the Heart of Your Community

Challenge of the Passion

It's set to become the hottest ticket in Whitley Bay this Easter - St Mary's own production of 'The Passion', the extraordinary play by Northern poet Tony Harrison which stormed the National Theatre a couple of decades ago.

Over these past few weeks members of the church have been rehearsing, devising, laughing – sometimes crying – and generally scratching their heads. Can they re-tell the greatest story ever told with enough style, enthusiasm and wit to rock the aisles at St Mary's? The news from the pews is that yes, they can!

St Mary's doesn't have any professional actors among its congregation, nor too many folk who have performed in public since their schooldays. But it has enough committed members to form a temporary theatre company with all the excitement – and the fear – that such an enterprise generates.

Also, St Mary's has a card up its sleeve in the form of one-time Church Warden Eric Peel, for many years a semi-professional theatre director and drama teacher. Eric has directed 'The Passion' once before, at The People's Theatre in Newcastle, and he still remembers the impact on audiences.

"They were stunned when the performance ended," he recalls. "It's the only time I've ever known an audience



leave a theatre in total silence. It's a very powerful piece with a definite Northern flavour. I guarantee that seeing it will be a moving experience."

He adds: *"As with the original mystery plays, it's about ordinary people mucking in and doing it. We're not trying to present a Hollywood-style life of Jesus. But the big surprise is just how contemporary the whole thing feels. There is a ring of truth about the events and emotions portrayed, and we feel it can increase our understanding of the modern world, what the Passion means in the 21st Century."*

The first performance is on Palm Sunday, 16 March (See inside for details). Admission is free.

February 2008



Jesus and Judas

talk about their roles



Playing Jesus

On the face of it I was invited to play the role of Jesus largely on the basis that I was male, of a similar age to Jesus when he was crucified, and because I am relatively light and therefore easier to man-handle.

I certainly did not feel adequate to taking the 'star role' among an enthusiastic cast blessed with fantastic talent. The last time I did any acting was in Primary School! Perhaps I was just gullible. Not many people would openly offer to face the repeated jeers, taunts, beatings and suffering I have to endure at every rehearsal.

But hang on a minute, I must stop whingeing! Jesus went through this for real – and not because he was compelled to do so by those around him. In Tony Harrison's words, which Jesus speaks to Peter in the play: "If my will were, as thou well wit, I might have power in great plenty of angels full many to muster my might." Jesus saw that God's will was fulfilled. Consider also that, by means fair or foul perhaps so too did some of the others, Pilate and Judas among them.

It seems a small sacrifice to give my time and energy to attempt the role of Jesus in what, I promise, will be a powerful and moving evening. I am somebody who finds it extremely difficult to experience God through prayer, hymns or church ceremonies.

As with doubting Thomas, for whom faith only became possible when he saw and touched the risen Lord, playing Jesus has given me a spiritual slap in the face – a confrontation with the reality of Christ Crucified. In Tony Harrison's words once more: "But since ye set nought by my saw, I'll wend my way. God grant you grace that you may know the truth some day".

Alex van den Bos



Playing Judas

My wife was shocked that I could be portraying the person who betrayed Jesus!

But Judas has always puzzled me. Why did he need to identify Jesus when it must have been obvious who he was? It was Jesus' high profile that had attracted the attention of the Jews in the first place.

And what was motivating Judas to bring Jesus' teaching, preaching and miraculous works to an end? Hadn't it dawned on him that Jesus was God incarnate, in spite of being one of his close followers throughout his ministry? Or did he know exactly what was going on, that he had to be the one to start the procedure that would lead to salvation for all? Including him?

Tony Harrison's play sheds little light on my puzzlement. His version of Judas is pompous, small-minded, with an inflated ego easily punctured when Jesus gently reprimands him for criticising Mary as she pours precious balm over her Master's head. For Judas, that meant losing his ten per cent fiddle – the cost of the balm being valued at 300 'pence', or pieces of silver. 'Selling' Jesus to Pilate for 30 pence seemed to him an appropriate response!

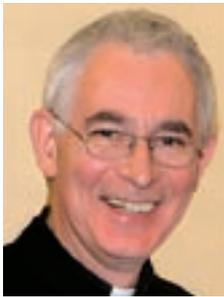


It's only when Judas realises that Jesus will not only be flogged and humiliated, but killed on the cross, that the penny drops and remorse sets in.

Catching this transition in character is a challenge, but the play has such power, and Eric's ideas on presentation are so inspired and provocative, that the company as a whole is confidently tackling all sorts of challenges. We're not so much acting a play as presenting an immensely moving and inspirational piece of worship. The closing speech is a shocking challenge to us all to wake up to what Christ's passion meant for mankind and for each of us as individuals.

Tony Garland

The Vicar, Canon Robin Greenwood, writes:



I'm proud to issue an open invitation to the parish to come and experience 'The Passion' at St Mary's on Palm Sunday and the following

two evenings (see our Easter Programme right) when you will be able to meet Pilate and Jesus, Peter and Mary, the disciples, and John the Baptist.

Following a centuries long habit we are living the first Holy Week through drama. But this is not a 'performance'. Rather it's a meeting or conversation about God's life with the world, and the hope we can draw from that.

Talking with the director, it's clear that the cast have been stretched and deepened. A temporary community of people aged 8 to 80 has been spending hours in St Mary's week after week. Together they have been working out how to make the text live again. Each of them has been learning so much through their roles – things that had never occurred to them before. And they've been enjoying themselves too.

The impact is waiting for all of us. Through comedy and tragedy, moments of quiet and of noisy crowds, we ask about the men and

women who were there - how the same people who cried "Hosanna!" can also spit out the word "crucify!". In the events that make up the last days of Jesus, and especially his time on the cross, we learn about God and the true nature of power and of love.

The God Jesus reveals is one of self-emptying, self-giving. We are invited to make a world of intimate relationships where this self-giving is all. So I invite you to come and share the experience with head, heart and body.

At St Mary's we are moving from being a collection of people who often 'go to church services' to 'being' or 'doing church' together.

We need the nourishing experiences like 'The Passion' so that we can be church for the whole neighbourhood and in all aspects of life.

We believe our world needs such conversations and communities, and we hope you'll want to join in.



Easter programme of worship and celebration

You will be very welcome to join us for any or all of our week of remembering and celebrating the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus.

If you're thinking of coming to a Eucharist (Holy Communion) service, don't be concerned if you're not confirmed, or if you don't receive communion in some other church. You're still most welcome. You can always come up for a blessing at communion time (just keep your hands down when the bread and wine are offered), or stay in your seat if you prefer.

"The Passion", our dramatic presentation about Jesus' life from baptism in the Jordan to his death on the cross, runs for just over an hour.

The Vigil from the end of the evening service on Maundy Thursday through the night is kept by small numbers in one-hour slots.

For the service of meditation on Good Friday afternoon, there will be several breaks; no one need stay for the full three hours. The children's programme, for children 3+, is called 'Good Friday Lunch Box Special'. It too will run from 12 noon to 3.00 pm. There will be activities, stories, crafts, fun and a shared picnic lunch. We will finish in Church from 2.30-3.00 pm. Please e-mail the church office by 10 March to book a place. Cost to help with resources: £2.00.

Palm Sunday (16 March)	8.00am	Eucharist
	10.00am	Eucharist
	6.00pm	"The Passion"
Holy Monday (17 March)	9.30am	Eucharist
	7.30pm	"The Passion"
Holy Tuesday (18 March)	9.30am	Eucharist
	7.30pm	'The Passion'
Holy Wednesday (19 March)	9.30am	Eucharist
	7.30pm	Eucharist
Maundy Thursday (20 March)	9.30am	Eucharist; no sermon
	7.30pm	Eucharist with washing of feet
	9.00pm	
	to	Vigil
Good Friday (21 March)	8.00am	
	9.30am	Ante-Communion
	12.00 - 3.00pm	Good Friday meditations, with children's programme
Holy Saturday (22 March)	9.30am	Prayers
Easter Day (23 March)	6.00am	Easter dawn service
	8.00am	Eucharist
	10.00am	Eucharist
	6.00pm	Sung Evening Prayer

On Maundy Thursday we are invited to Newcastle Cathedral for a special service:

Maundy Thursday (20 March)	11.00 am	Sung Eucharist with blessing of the oils and renewal of commitment to service
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What St Mary's means to me



Over the past 11 years St Mary's has been a place where I have felt happiness and sadness, peace, madness,

friendliness and, particularly during my stint as church warden, occasional frustration! The opportunities I have had since joining St Mary's have helped me to grow in so many ways, and I've come to realise that the smallest contribution can make a huge difference. Just greeting each other with a smile, and a hug, on a Sunday morning can set you up for the entire week. I feel lucky to be able to sing in the choir and to have played in the band, although playing the organ still scares me! My time as a warden was great fun and leading learning has been a great experience. Even PCC meetings are not all bad! St Mary's for me, however, is really about the people and they are an amazing bunch. I have found so many new friends and the number keeps growing. Long may it continue.

Vicky



Tom and Cheryl's paths to St Mary's were different. Cheryl had been taken to church as a child – and soon

found every excuse not to go! Then when the couple moved to Whitley Bay and found the church was very close, Cheryl began to go with their young family. They decided to have their marriage blessed in church and later they were confirmed. "So we began our spiritual journey together."

Now St Mary's has a pivotal part to play in their lives, they say, through services, sermons, group events and helping out with the church grounds. It has provided a challenge to their understanding of the Christian life, whilst deepening and broadening their faith. "It questions our commitment to Christ and encourages us to allow Him to play a larger part in our lives," Cheryl says. "The services are uplifting, the music is great, and often immense fun, and we have both felt great peace and comfort from the sharing of worship."

They add: "We are lucky to have such an enthusiastic clergy providing a sense of growth and commitment to a common direction. They provide many opportunities for us to join in and we feel an integral part of the church. Our involvement is part of our worship, part of our journey in faith and part of becoming willing, active participants in the community that is St Mary's." **Cheryl and Tom**

Looking Ahead

Pentecost

Pentecost? What's that? Well, we used to call it Whit. Once upon a time we all knew about Whit Sunday, if only because the schools were on holiday for 'Whit week' and we had a Bank Holiday for 'Whit Monday'! Now the day on which we recall and celebrate the Holy Spirit descending on the frightened but delighted disciples is properly known as 'Pentecost'. And we have a Spring Bank Holiday, and a school break neither of which are related to the date of Pentecost (this year it's **Sunday 11 May**).

The first Pentecost was the day when the Holy Spirit filled the disciples with a burning passion to tell the whole world the good news of Jesus' resurrection and what it meant for all of us. So in a sense, Pentecost is the birthday of the Church, the day it really all began.

We'll be celebrating our birthday with Eucharist services at 8.00 am and 10.00 am.

Activities for young people

There's a busy and varied programme of activities for young people this summer. A group aged nine and over will be going away for a weekend of fun and adventure in July; during August there are two opportunities for those over the age of 12: 'Staying Alive 08' is a Diocesan Youth weekend being held at Seahouses; 'Harvest' is a long-established youth event lasting over five days in mid August at Calbeck Grange on Teesside.

Young people from St Mary's will be going to all these events. Our youth group – COGs – meets fortnightly for those in year 8 and above. If any young people are interested in joining us in September to find out more about faith and have fun please contact Val Cowan, via the Parish Office.

A Date for your Diary?

St Mary's Baptism Support Group is organising a Celebration Party for all those who have been baptised in the church since the year 2000. The party is to be held on **Sunday 6 July** at 4.00 pm and invitations will be sent nearer the time.



Summer – remember that?

You'll be very welcome at a 'Celebration of Summer' service, aimed at younger people and their families, at 4.00pm, **Sunday 22 June**.

St Mary's - at the Heart of Your Community

Church is at the heart of what we do at St Mary's, and these are our weekly services:

Day and time	Worship
Sunday 8.00am	Holy Communion
Sunday 10.00am	Parish Communion with children's church and crèche, followed by breakfast
Sunday 6.00pm	Evening Prayer (Healing Service on 2nd Sunday of month)
Monday-Friday 9.00am	Morning Prayer
Tuesday & Wednesday 9.30am	Eucharist (Book of Common Prayer on Tuesday; coffee after service on Wednesday)
Mon-Fri 7.00pm	Evening Prayer

If any of the many other activities at St Mary's interest you, please ring the office, and we'll put you in touch with the right person:

- baptisms and weddings,
- Bible Study Groups,
- prayer cells,
- Mothers Union,
- choir singing,
- Praise Band,
- Menzone (a group for men to share fellowship and to learn more about the faith),
- COGS (a young people's group offering the opportunity for teenagers to explore more deeply issues of faith and life),
- a lunch club,
- Mums and Toddlers Group,
- Badminton Club,
- Church Hall for group events or parties.

Information about all of the above is available from St Mary's Parish Office which is open Monday – Friday 10.00am – 12.00 noon.

Telephone: (0191) 251 4216 (answerphone outside office hours).

Email: newsletter@stmarysmonkseaton.org.uk

Web: www.stmarysmonkseaton.co.uk

You'll find us at the junction of
Claremont Gardens and
Davison Avenue, Whitley Bay.

stMary
THE VIRGIN
MONKSEATON