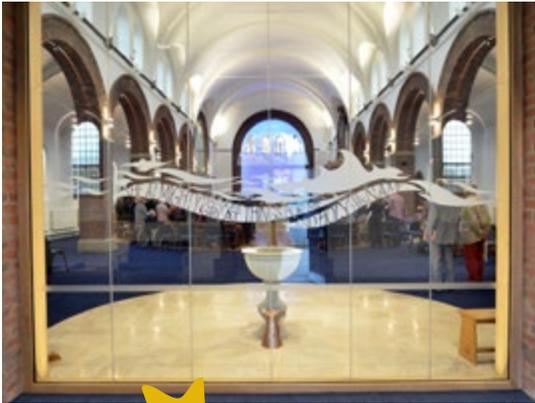


Good St Mary's/news

December 2015



Christmas at St Marys

Christmas is about God being born as a human being, Jesus. What does that mean for us humankind? Why the season of celebration and good will? It seems incredible. God with us is one way of putting it; God in our everyday lives, in all the joys and sorrows, all the orderliness and the messiness, all the challenges, all birth, life and death. But by living a life like us God in Jesus showed us how we can live our life to the full. In this issue we look at what that means for the church and community of St Mary's. Read about the changes in the building now that the refurbishment work is done, but it's not just about creating a building to make you go "Wow! this must be an awesome God who is worshipped here" – though we do hope you will think that. It's also about how the building is a resource for the community and how the church helps us understand God in our everyday lives now.

There's a story about a body builder appearing

on a chat show. He made his entrance and began to flex his muscles and show his power. The audience were amazed and cheered him on. The first question the chat show host asked him was "What do you use all those muscles for?" The body builder just flexed his muscles

...there is a purpose in God being born as a baby in Bethlehem...

as the audience cheered again. Again he was asked "What do you do with those muscles?" Again he flexed his muscles but it was clear he had no answer to the question.

He was all power, but his power had no purpose other than to show off and draw attention to himself.

For something to have meaning it has to have purpose. So there is a purpose in the work which has been done at St Mary's and that is explored in the articles which follow, just as there is a purpose in God being born as a baby in Bethlehem all those centuries ago.



See back page for details of our Christmas services.

“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Immanuel’ (which means ‘God with us’).” Matthew 1:23



This verse from the New Testament is often heard at this time of year. We remember the virgin, the angels and the baby Jesus who Christians proclaim, wonderfully and mysteriously, to be “God with us”.

But did God just pay us a visit for about thirty-three years until Jesus was killed, was raised from death and then wonderfully and mysteriously was taken back to God the Father on the day of Ascension?

The answer to that question is an emphatic “No”. The Old Testament is the first part of the Bible and it describes God’s involvement with people long before the virgin and her baby in Bethlehem. God with people from the start of human existence. God with people as they are good and faithful. God with people when they fail and fall. God with people in sickness and oppression. God with people in the quiet of the wilderness. God with people in the splendid worship of the temple.

A few weeks after Jesus returned to God the Father, we then read in the New Testament of the Holy Spirit coming to dwell in people and giving them new strength to proclaim that then, and through into our own age, ‘God with us’.

That is still the task of the church, the task of St. Mary’s Church. We celebrate week by week in our

lovely church building ‘God with us’ as we pray, as we take bread and wine, as we baptise, and as we learn from God’s word - the Bible.

But church is not just about worship and friendships on a Sunday. We are also called to proclaim ‘God with us’ in our community through the way we live and work and through sharing the Good News with others Open the Book www.biblesociety.org.uk/about-bible-society/our-work/open-the-book/ is a programme which brings some cracking stories from the Bible to primary school age children; a group of people from St Mary’s have been privileged to dramatically recall these wonderful Bible stories to young people in our Parish in the Springtime of their lives; we have ‘Opened the Book’ in Coquet Park First School. Then at the autumn of the other peoples’ lives, we have taken regular worship and a Lent discussion group into Eastbourne House, the only care home in our Parish. We have had great fun and enjoyed each other’s company. And in many, many other ways the

people of St. Mary’s seek to live out their lives as best they can knowing for ourselves and sharing with others the great news of Immanuel - ‘God with us’. Rev Peter Knibbs, vicar of St Mary’s.

Happy Christmas and every blessing in 2016.



What St Mary’s means to me...

My work brought me and my family to Whitley Bay in August 2006. We knew nothing about Whitley Bay, and prior to this move we had moved seven times in fourteen years to find and maintain work to bring up our family. It is through our Church membership that we have always found new friends and community where-ever we have found ourselves living. It has been a joy to discover Whitley Bay, and in particular to discover St Mary’s Monkseaton.

Practically as soon as we arrived, we became aware of the Parish ambition to redevelop it’s building. The heating was the original 1930’s boiler, the wiring had last been renewed half a century ago. The task ahead was daunting, but could not be deferred any longer.

At the same time, a new Treasurer was needed to fill a vacancy, and although new to the Parish St Mary’s offered that opportunity

to me. We have much skill within the Parish, and St Mary’s offers an opportunity to harness my skills with others for the benefit of the community. We do not always recognise how our skills will be relevant to Church; who would think that my experience of developing warehouses could be of relevance to organising the finances behind a once in a generation Church re-development.

Now that the main re-development is complete, we think of how to make this beautiful resource an asset of the community. In Whitley Bay, I have also joined a local choir that, with St Mary’s, offered a community event at the Redevelopment Celebration evening on 28th November. Here we recognised that the Church is a resource built by donations of various kinds from the community for years to come. I see St Mary’s as an inspiration, that working as a community we can achieve great things.

The Treasurer role is challenging. Working through those challenges a great community resource emerges, truly God With Us. It has been a real privilege to serve St Mary’s as Treasurer during this period of renewal, an opportunity I was not expecting when I first arrived those years ago.

Neill Porter



Back in church

At the first service back in church five children celebrated their first holy communion after one of them was the first person to be baptised in the newly positioned font. Baptism is seen as the start of the Christian journey through life and holy communion is food (ie. resources) for the journey.



Returning to church 15 October.



Bishop Frank came to rededicate and bless the refurbished church.



All Souls Service - each candle lit in memory of a loved one who has died.

Why Refurbish St Mary's?

"Oh worship the King, all glorious above. O tell of his might, O sing of his grace, whose robe is the light, whose canopy space". These are the opening words of the first hymn we sang on the first Sunday back in our newly refurbished church on October 18th. For centuries people have built churches which seek to reflect the height of the heavens and the wide canopy of space – think of the high ceilings, the towers and steeples, the soaring arches in some of the best known churches. During the years of discussing how to renovate and refurbish St Mary's we thought carefully about how the use of space in our church communicates what we believe about God? How does it encourage everyone who comes into the church to find a new way of understanding God and themselves. At the service held on October 15 to rededicate the church after the completion of the work, Bishop Frank preached that a church building is sacramental. A sacrament is something whose outward and visible form reflects an inwardly experienced grace. In what ways is our new church sacramental?

The use of space in our church is centred on the use of circular shapes. The altar is placed on a circular stone plinth. Seats for the congregation are arranged in a circular pattern around



the altar. The newly sanded floorboards form a circular pattern in the centre of the building. The font is placed on a circular shaped stone floor. Circles speak of wholeness, of no hard edges, of gathering together without one person being above or ahead of another. We are close to one another and physically close to the altar, where we come to share with each other. Here we see and experience the belief that God is with us, God has come among us. This is a God who is part of our lives, not remote or distant but not without mystery or awe either.

When we look around the church we experience both the beauty of God and the simplicity of our faith. The beauty of the original carved oak and stained glass have been retained but we have simplicity in white walls and a wooden and stone floor. When we look up our attention is drawn to the pattern and colour of light, the light that God brings into the world. Glass reflects that light;



the new glass screen creates an open view of the main body of the church encouraging the community to feel welcomed in; in equal measure the congregation are invited to look out into the community in which we live our everyday lives and offer service to others in God's name.

So our newly refurbished church has not just been repainted and decorated. It has been re-designed to reflect the order and symmetry in the world that God made and to be a special place for worship, to be a place of welcome to all who enter, a place to help us find God in our lives.

Is this the end of the process of the last few years? Yes, of course it is the end of a period of enormously hard work. But it is also the end of the beginning, the beginning of the next part of our Christian journey as we reach out into the community, into God's world.

Martin and Mary Cooper

What St Mary's means to me...

In the area where I grew up most of the population was Catholic. Although my family were all baptised in the Church of England they were not church goers. I envied the



dedication my Catholic friends had to their religion. So, on Sundays I would tag along to Sunday School at the catholic church (also called St Mary's as it happens) to be 'snuck in' by my friends. However, once inside I was in mortal fear of being found out by the priest. I would be given a plastic rosary and told just to mouth the words. This was my first experience of church and it was terrifying.

My introduction to St Mary's Monkseaton was when our two youngest children were baptised. From then it was a natural progression of confirmations, including my own. I enjoyed being part of church life and all the groups and activities that were on offer for me and my family. However, as our family grew up and took on new interests I was drawn away from St Mary's.

It was the Baptism of my eldest granddaughter in 2006 that brought me back. Many of the people were the same friendly faces who were there all those years ago along with a lot of new ones. I immediately felt the warmth that was given to me the first time round. It was like I had never been away.

To me St Mary's means friendship and steadfastness. It also means I will be able to give my grandchildren a more enjoyable introduction to church life than I had all those years ago.

Carol Nesbitt (Carol's granddaughter was one of those who celebrated their first communion on 18 October).

Shoeboxes for People's Kitchen

You'll have heard of shoeboxes of Christmas gifts for children abroad but did you know that the Mother's Union fills Christmas shoeboxes for the People's Kitchen in Newcastle with items such as hats, gloves and essential toiletries.

Make Christmas Special

As you can see from the photos of this edition of the newsletter, we have now moved back into our beautifully refurbished church. Part of the aim of the refurbishment was to make our building a more versatile and usable space at the heart of its community – a place where we could gather for worship, but also a place where we could gather for other purposes, and offer hospitality and welcome – and of course no better time to do that than at Christmas.

As in previous years, there are lots of things on offer at Christmas, but this year, on Christmas Day, St Mary's is hosting a drop-in Christmas tea from 5pm to 7 pm. Everyone is welcome – couples, families, people on their own, young and old, anyone who would like to get together on Christmas afternoon for some festive food, some good conversation, a few games, some entertainment, and some carol singing.

We always like to be hospitable at St Mary's but in doing this we are also joining with other people and organisations across the borough in the council's Make Christmas Special initiative.

So if you are out having a walk, or you want somewhere to come with the children for a while, or if you are sick of watching TV, or just curious, you would be very welcome, because in the end it is together that we make Christmas special.



**WHITLEY LODGE
COMMUNITY
SPIRIT 2015**

Christmas @ the Lodge

Lights on! Tues 24th November 2015

3.30 onwards...turning on the Christmas tree lights and all the lights at the Lodge, with carols from Whitley Lodge First School Choir.

Christmas Festivities Sat 19th December 2015

From 9.30am: carols and festive fun, Santa in his grotto. Come and join in the Christmas festivities @Whitley Lodge Shopping Centre.

Christmas Raffle December 2015

...lots of prizes, with all proceeds going to the work of Whitley Lodge Community Spirit - tickets on sale at shops throughout Whitley Lodge. Draw on Saturday 19th December.

Whitley Lodge Community Spirit is a group of shopkeepers, churches and local residents who work together to promote the community life of Whitley Lodge. This is a non profit making community group. Our logo was designed in 2014 by Evie Middleton from Whitley Lodge First School.



The BAY Foodbank

Every week of the year The BAY Foodbank provides food and other necessities for people across the borough. We can **Make Christmas Special** for many more people by donating special items for Christmas – small gift ideas – toiletries, gloves, Christmas foodstuffs, selection boxes, as well as tinned meats, biscuits and all the usual staples.

There is a collection box at St Mary's if you would like to use it but The Bay Foodbank are also doing a special Christmas collection at Sainsbury's, Monkseaton Fri 11th – Sun 13th Dec.



Continuing our Season of Invitation

In the last edition of St Mary's Good News we launched our Season of Invitation – a special invitation to occasions when the church marks several "once a year" days or events. Some people took the opportunity to come "back to church" for the first Sunday back in the newly refurbished church. Others were invited to join in the sermon with their ukulele band playing "When the saints go marching in" on All Saints Day. You're very welcome at any service at any time of course, but at the Christmas services it's unlikely you'll be the only one giving church a try.

B4 Christmas



Getting ready for Christmas – Sunday afternoon services for Advent

B-Peaceful! Sunday 13 December, 4pm

A service of healing and quiet contemplation

B-Merry! Sunday 20 December, 4pm

A traditional carol service for all the family, followed by refreshments.

Christmas services

Toddler Carol Service

Friday 11 December 10am

Simple worship around the crib, followed by refreshments

Crib Service Christmas Eve 6pm

Come and join us as we usher in Christmas with this much loved service

Midnight Mass Christmas Eve 11.30pm

The first celebration of Christmas

Christmas Day services 8am and 10am

Eucharist with Carols

Our weekly services

Sunday: Eucharist 8am & 10am;

Evening Prayer (Healing Service on 2nd Sunday of month) 6pm

Monday – Friday: Morning Prayer 9am

Wednesday: Eucharist 9.30am

(Book of Common Prayer, first Wed of month)

Each week's services are shown on the parish website, see below.

St Mary's parish office is open, Monday – Friday 10am - 12 noon.

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Registered Charity no.1131532

