



Bruton Pitcombe Redlynch Brewham Wyke Champflower Shepton Montague



'Choose Life'

At the end of his life, Moses gathered the people of Israel together and addressed them (Deuteronomy Ch. 30). He urged the people to remain faithful to the covenant God had made with them, and promised them that

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they would flourish as a people if they did so. Moses offered them a choice: obedience or disobedience; prosperity or adversity: 'I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him' (Deut. 30: 19-20).

We may not be in quite the same situation as the people of Israel in their wilderness wanderings, yearning to establish a safe homeland, but I think that, as a small, rural church community, we face the same choice between flourishing and decline, between 'life' and 'death'.

We can choose to despair about the future of the Church in this place. We can listen only to statistics about falling numbers, about living in a 'post-Christian' culture, about financial deficits and crumbling buildings and a seeming lack of interest among younger generations for the things of God and particularly for the Church. We can become gripped by issues that could divide us from one another, like whether we are willing to pray God's blessing on same-sex couples, or whether resources should be devoted to setting up new church communities which might further reduce support for existing church communities. We could choose 'death'.

Or we can choose to be hopeful. We can listen to the whispering of the Spirit as visitors come to our church buildings for solace, sanctuary, peace and find a hospitable welcome. We can allow ourselves to be encouraged by scenes of fellowship and joy at our social events and at our Christmas services. We can offer worship that comes from the

heart and prayer that lays bare our soul. We can see moments of awe and wonder as the planting of a seed and we can decide to water that seed. We can choose 'life'.

Let's choose life in 2024, shall we?



If you have something to contribute to a future edition of this newsletter, do please send it to the Rector at the benefice office address.

Easy-to-follow details of how to receive this newsletter by email can be found on the St Mary's website (www.stmarysbruton.org), or email benefice@stmarysbruton.org. If you are aware of someone who might like to receive it but does not use email, please consider printing a copy yourself and delivering it to them.

13 September: Bruton PCC meeting

News from our Parishes

This month's film at Shepton Montague is 'The Old Oak', which will be shown at 7.30pm on 11 January.

Bruton Choral Society gave a stunning concert on 18 December at St Mary's and we very much look forward to their next performance.

St Mary's was also the venue for a breathtaking performance of pieces from Handel's Messiah by the vocal ensemble 'The Echoing Air', featuring Bruton couple Tim and Amy Dickinson, and the baroque instrumental ensemble 'Music for a While'. This was a world-class performance and all who came left buzzing. We very much hope to be able to attract these artists back to St Mary's in the near future and perhaps repeat the Messiah next Christmas.

Please note: there will be no 11.00am service at St Mary's on 28 January. Instead, there will be a service of choral evensong at 6.30pm to celebrate the feast of Candlemas.

Wanted: does anyone have a wooden blanket box or storage trunk that they are willing to lend or give to St Mary's for use to store donations for Brue Larder (food bank)? It needs to have a lid. The large wardrobe that we currently use is too big and is beginning to fall apart.

Generous January



Thanks to all who contributed so generously to the Christmas hampers for the households supported by Brue Larder.

We packed the hampers in St Mary's church and they made quite a sight.

Many foodbanks see a serious dip in donations in January and February. We would like to try to help avoid that with our own small foodbank. Please be generous in January and bring donations to the donation point in St Mary's so that we can continue to help those households who are struggling this winter. Thank you.

Benefice Council Meeting

The Bruton Benefice Council will meet on 8 January to finalise the benefice budget for 2024 and agree the 2023 benefice accounts. The benefice budget covers central costs like the Rector's expenses, fees for retired clergy when they take services, the Benefice Administrator's pay and office printing and copying costs.

The council will also consider together the appropriate process for discussing in our parishes two significant issues that we need to engage with in 2024. One is the proposals for reform of the formula used to calculate Parish Share (see the previous issue of this newsletter). The other is our response to the issue of approved prayers for couples in same-sex relationships, the so-called 'Prayers of Love and Faith'. You can read more about this via the Church of England website: Prayers of Love and Faith. Please follow this link:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/prayers-love-and-faith>

Prayer Ministry



Prayer for 2024

'We give thanks that we are able to bow before the King of Heaven and, because of His great mercy and grace in sending His beloved Son Jesus amongst us, that we here in this benefice will all be strengthened in our innermost being by the Holy Spirit. We pray that the Babe of Bethlehem will reign in our hearts, homes, workplaces and schools throughout 2024 so that we will grow stronger in His love, faith and grace and be filled with the fullness of God. Whatever we do, we pray that we will do it all as unto the Lord for the praise and glory of His Name. Amen'.

At a prayer meeting every Wednesday morning some of us meet to pray for our community. Anyone is welcome to join us – we meet in St Mary's at 8.30 am after the daily service of Morning Prayer. If you have any requests for prayer, please send them to the Rector and he will advise us of the requests.



Arts Events

Echo - Saturday January 27th 7.30pm.

***A performance art piece created and performed by
alternative folk artist ALVIRA.***

This piece explores the sounds, sentiments and movements of the echo through music, spoken word, and dance.

With special guest Nick Sorensen (saxophone).

Tickets £10 on door or book online/scan QR code:

linktr.ee/alvira.artist

Notes from an Absent Organist

Our organist at St Mary's writes:

With the manifestation of Christ to the Magi (Epiphany) on January 6th, we come to the end of the Christmas festivities. The season of Epiphany leads us up the feast of Candlemas, the presentation of Christ in the Temple. We will celebrate this feast at St Mary's at Choral Evensong on 28 January. This will include the singing of the Nunc Dimittis as aged Simeon departs in peace. Mindful of the solemnity of the occasion and the coming of Lent, I shall resist the temptation to play a fast, flippant organ voluntary. Instead, you will hear Bach's Fantasia in c minor BWV 561, which was played at the funeral of the late Queen Elizabeth II, and which I learned in readiness for Advent Evensong in 2022.

This will be my last performance for some time as I shall be spending February enjoying the warm climate and warm hospitality of Sri Lanka. My twentieth anniversary of visiting the tear-drop island in the Indian Ocean! My first trip back in 2004 was the result of a recommendation from two Brutonians, Dave and Brenda Jephcott, who then ran the fish & chip shop in the High Street. To put it briefly, after nearly forty visits, Sri Lanka has become a second home for me. Brenda has a lot to answer for! (I tease her about this when we meet.)

In Sri Lanka only about 6% of the population are Christians, with Buddhism (70%) the main philosophical code., followed by Hinduism (15%)) and Islam (9%). Some Sri Lankan Christians claim that their faith arrived with the Apostle Thomas in the 1st century AD. Small settlements grew up along the coast in the following centuries, Christianity, specifically Roman Catholicism, became firmly established when the Portuguese took control of the island in the 16th century. The first ships of the next colonists, the Dutch, arrived in the 17th century, with trade being their prime objective. Their religious legacy was Protestant – the Dutch Reformed Church. Not all the natives who converted to Christianity in these years did so willingly, for the sword as well as the Bible played a significant and inhumane role in the colonists' missionary zeal.

Christianity remains well-established in a number of areas. Colombo, the capital, boasts the largest church, the enormous St Lucia's Cathedral (RC) which can hold 5,000. I dislike overcrowded Colombo and prefer visiting the basilica of Our Lady of Lanka in a peaceful

sylvan setting at Ragama, well away from the conurbation. Peaceful, as I say, but I've only visited in mid-week: I'm told it's absolutely packed on Sundays and at major festivals. What a shame it lacks an organ: there is only a dilapidated keyboard, currently not in working order. Interestingly, the Ragama Basilica was built as recently as the late 1940's / early 1950's after the Pope agreed to a plea from the Church authorities in Ceylon to allow the building of a new Cathedral in thanksgiving for the island being spared almost all the horrors of WW II.

There is much mixing among religious groups in Sri Lanka. Some holy sites are places of pilgrimage for Buddhists, Hindus, Moslems and Christians alike. Tolerance is almost universal, and different faiths almost seem to overlap. One Sri Lankan was heard to comment, 'I praise Lord Buddha, I praise Lord Hindhu and I praise Lord Catholic'. When my closest friends (proud Buddhists) take me to visit the Ragama Basilica I am always struck by the sincerity of the respect they show to the place and to the images of Mary and Jesus. This is as it should be...

We wish David a very happy holiday in the sunshine.



Benefice Discussion Group

The discussion groups will not meet in January, but we plan to meet again during Lent.

Diary Dates

- 8 January: Bruton Benefice Council meeting, 6.30 pm at the Rectory
- 11 January: Shepton Montague Film Night, 7.30 pm at St Peter's
- 12 January: Memorial service for Malcolm Hord, 2.00 pm at St Mary's
- 17 January: Bruton PCC meeting, 5.30 pm at the meeting room, Plox
- 27 January: Echo: A Performance Art Piece by Alvira, 7.30 pm at St Mary's
- 28 January: Choral Evensong for Candlemas, 6.30 pm at St Mary's

Further ahead:

- 1 February: Roman Catholic Mass, 11.00 am at St Mary's
- 9 February: Pitcombe PCC meeting, 2.30 pm at Hadspen Farm
- 14 February: Ash Wednesday service, 6.00 pm at St Mary's
- 19 February: Brewham PCC meeting, 7.00 pm at Colinshays
- 27 February: Shepton Montague PCC meeting, 6.30 pm at the village hall

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