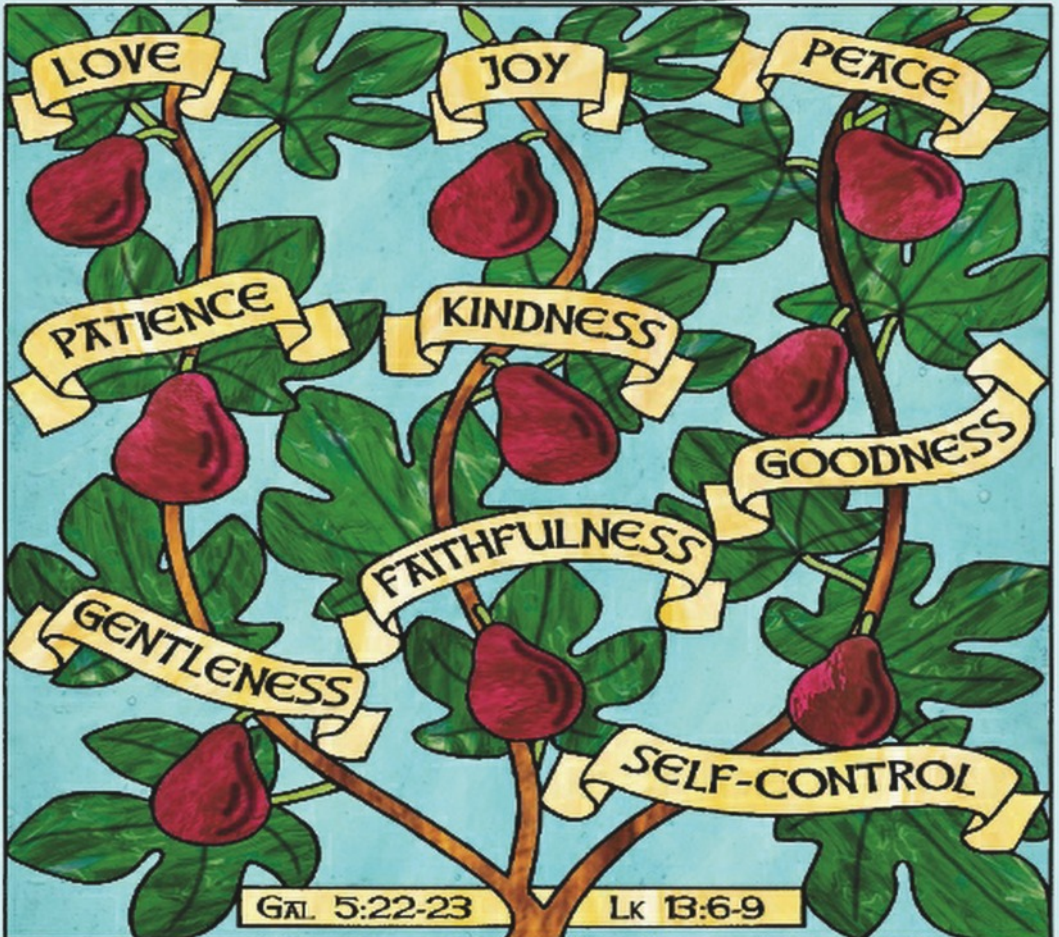


ST PETER'S CHURCH. BRACKLEY



“LOVING GOD,
LOVING EACH OTHER,
LOVING BRACKLEY”



The Beauty of Baptism

Rev. Rich Duncan writes...



If May was a month for marriages (3 of them), June is a month for baptisms (4 of them).

On Sunday 29th June, at our quarterly All Age Service (10am), we will be baptising four members of the St Peter's congregation by full immersion in a pool outside on the grass. Let's hope the weather's warm for them! The Book of Common Prayer describes

baptism as "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace." In others words, baptism is a symbol. But what does it actually symbolise?

A BATH



Baptism involves water to symbolise the cleansing bath we all need (Acts 22:16).

The agnostic writer Kingsley Amis once told a reporter, "Christianity's got one enormous thing right: sin. For one of its great benefits is that you can be forgiven your sin, which must be a wonderful thing." At that moment, Amis paused for a long time and buried his head in his hands. Then he looked up and said, "I mean, I carry my sins around with me." All of us need the burden of our guilt to be removed and our sins washed away, and baptism reminds us that's exactly what Jesus offers to anyone who asks.

A BIRTHDAY



Baptism, especially by full immersion, is a stark picture of dying to our old life and being born into a new one (Romans 6:4).

New birth is often celebrated with birthday cake. Obviously, you don't need a cake in order to be born and cake isn't what caused your birth, but birthday cake affirms, marks and celebrates that birth. Baptism is the same: it isn't needed in order to be born again and baptism isn't what causes you to have new life in the Spirit, but it's a lovely way of affirming, marking and celebrating that new birth. And if we go big on birthdays, how much more should we celebrate being born into a life that lasts forever?

A BADGE

Badges can show you belong to a community. Baptism is Christianity's badge of belonging to the people of God (Galatians 3:26-27).

The World Health Organization has declared loneliness a pressing global health threat and in 2023 the US Surgeon General said its mortality effects are equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Into that context, the Church can offer a worldwide family of brothers and sisters, called to love another. It's often a dysfunctional family, but it ought to be the antidote to loneliness. And baptism is the public act of initiation into this family.

All this means that baptism is a *humble* thing (admitting we need a bath), a *joyous* thing (celebrating a birthday) and a *communal* thing (a badge of belonging). It represents the **new start, new life, and new family** that we're given when we follow Christ. Whether it's infant baptism (which emphasises God's grace in our salvation) or believer baptism (which emphasises our response to that grace), this precious sacrament points to the spiritual bath, birthday and badge that God offers to anyone who will put their trust in Jesus.

You are most welcome to come along on the 29th to witness the beauty of baptism, or get in touch if you would like to consider being baptised yourself.



What's the Big Idea?

An Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament: Job



'Why does God allow suffering?' This is a frequently asked question of Christians, because we believe in a God who is both good and powerful and it is explored in the book of Job. This book is part of the wisdom literature, along with Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon.

Job was both wealthy and righteous, yet he experienced catastrophic suffering, losing all his wealth, children and health. This is portrayed as a result of Satan's challenge to God, testing

whether Job's devotion to God was dependent on his circumstances or not.

The main body of the book (3:1-42:6) consists of dialogues between Job, his friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar) and God. Job and his friends assume that God is almighty and just, and that no human being is wholly innocent. In the three cycles of speeches they wrestle with the reasons for Job's suffering, remembering his morally upright character.

Finally, all are silenced by God, as He speaks Himself (chs 38-42). He points out that Job knows very little about the universe when he reflects on God's power. Job confesses his lack of understanding and weakness, but then goes on to confess his confidence and trust in God. This puts suffering in a right perspective. Job is not condemned, and the book ends with the restoration of his family and possessions.

The importance of this book is that it realistically addresses the painful questions of life, without offering simplistic answers. It focuses on *how* we should respond to suffering, rather than on *why* God allows suffering: *'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.'* (1:21)



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Kitchener and that poster from the First World War

Some 175 years ago, on 24th June 1850, Herbert Kitchener, the 1st Earl Kitchener, was born. This Irish-born British Army officer and politician became Secretary of War during the First World War, when he appeared on an iconic poster asking people to join the army.

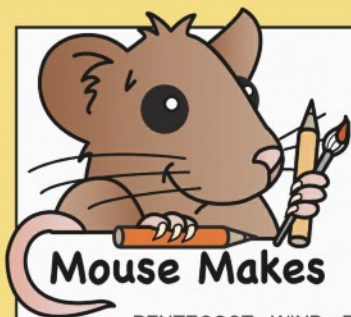


Kitchener already had a fearsome reputation, having been responsible for big colonial victories in Sudan and South Africa. He was very widely admired by the British people, though his cool personality and eagerness to push his men to the limit made him disliked by fellow officers. But he was also described as a godly man “who did noble deeds and obtained noble results”.

He had been on leave in England in June 1914 when he reluctantly accepted an appointment to the Cabinet as Secretary of State for War and was promoted to Field Marshal. Most people expected a short war, but Kitchener did not; he went about enlisting a great number of volunteers – a campaign symbolised for most people by Alfred Leete’s poster using Kitchener’s own face with the slogan ‘Your country needs you’.

He organised British armies on a scale never seen before, but he was not to see victory. His life ended suddenly when he was drowned after the cruiser HMS Hampshire, taking him on a mission to Russia, was sunk in 1916 by a German mine. His body was never recovered, and the wreck is now a war grave. His death has been likened to the deaths of President Kennedy and Princess Diana – everyone remembered where they were when they heard the news.

A memorial fund launched by the Lord Mayor of London raised £500,000 to help war casualties and continues today. A Kitchener memorial was built by the people of Orkney on the cliff edge at Marwick Head.



Mouse Makes

PENTECOST • WIND • FIRE
 HOLY • SPIRIT • TONGUES • RESTED
 JERUSALEM • JEWS • GALILEANS
 HEAR • LANGUAGE • ARAMAIC • GREEK
 HEBREW • PARTHIANS • MEDES
 ELAMITES • MESOPOTAMIA
 JUDEA • CAPPADOCIA • PONTUS
 ASIA • PHRYGIA • PAMPHYLIA
 EGYPT • LIBYA • CYRENE
 ROME • CRETANS
 ARABIANS • GOD



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It was fifty days since **Passover**, and Jews from many countries had come to **Jerusalem** to celebrate Passover. As the **Apostles** were gathered together the **Holy Spirit** came upon them and they began to speak in other **languages** as the Spirit enabled them.

The crowd that were listening were amazed as they heard about God in their own language.

How many people heard, believed and were baptised that day?

DID YOU KNOW?

The Bible or parts of the Bible have now been translated into over 3,000 different languages since it was first written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek.

He gave us eyes to see them: El Greco's 'The Tears of St Peter'

In the 19th century John Bowes, the 10th Earl of Strathmore, built a museum in the French style, with landscaped gardens, at Barnard Castle in Teesdale. He bequeathed it 800 paintings, including a previously unknown Van Dyck.

But visitors to the Bowes Museum often make a beeline for its amazing 18th century silver swan automaton. As the music plays, there is the illusion of flowing water: the swan preens itself, bends down and catches a fish in the water. It is a thrill and a joy to watch. At the other extreme and striking a different mood and emotion is El Greco's painting of 1580: 'The Tears of St Peter.' It was reluctantly purchased in 1869 for a price less than that paid for the monkey puzzle tree in the grounds outside.

The gospels tell us that St Peter wept bitterly when he heard the cock crow, as he had denied knowing Jesus three times. El Greco shows the saint, his eyes welling with those tears of betrayal, kneeling and turning to heaven for forgiveness. The sky is overcast, reflecting the sad scene below, and we can see ivy growing as a sign of the constancy so lacking in Peter's life.

At the Last Supper he had been the opposite: ready to follow, brave and generous with his words. But Peter leaves Jesus to drink the cup of sorrow alone in Gethsemane. In the courtyard of the high priest, warming himself by the fire, he utters that threefold denial. This was the lowest moment in his life, when instead of being solid rock, he showed that he was merely shifting sand.

And then the wonder and glory of Easter. We glimpse it in the background of the painting with the angel and Mary Magdalene at the tomb. And we know that everything changes for Peter by the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Like the silver swan in the Bowes Museum looking for fish, the disciples have returned to their old way of life.

But it is the risen Lord who directs them to a marvellous catch, and the charcoal fire of betrayal in the courtyard is now the charcoal fire of breakfast, a new day, and a new way of life for Peter. No denial now – he answers the three questions of our Lord positively and realises that he is loved by Jesus in his failure and weakness. It might have seemed the end for Peter in the courtyard, but the risen Lord comes to tell him 'I make all things new' and that includes you.



Peter is often known as the stumbling saint. Here, in El Greco's painting, he has stumbled and fallen to his knees in prayer. We celebrate St Peter at the end of this month. As we look at him, we know ourselves to be as weak and fearful. But the Lord comes to us as He comes to Peter. He lifts us up and puts us back on our feet again. With Peter, we know Him as our crucified and risen Lord.

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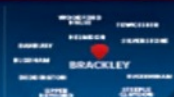


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