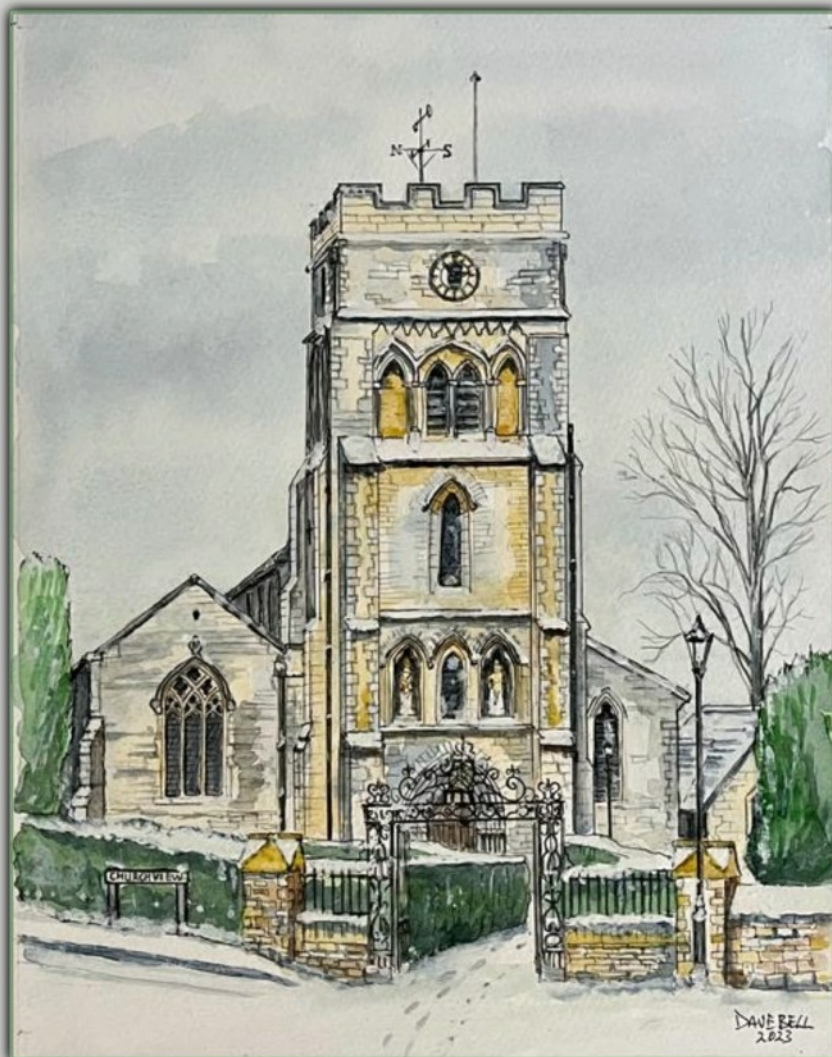


ST PETER'S CHURCH. BRACKLEY



“LOVING GOD,
LOVING EACH OTHER,
LOVING BRACKLEY”



"Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's"



The vicar writes...

2023 was obviously a big anniversary for St Peter's and the service on 7th January will give us a chance to thank God for all that took place. Now, though, we turn our attention to 2024, which has been dubbed the Year of Democracy. More than 2 billion people will go to the polls in 65 countries across the world, in the biggest election year in history.

Given this includes UK and US voters, we should be prepared for politics to dominate the headlines in the coming months, for better or for worse. They say, 'Never discuss politics or religion in polite company.' Apologies that I'm about to do both. These magazine articles give a vicar the perfect chance to 'go off on one', so please forgive these ramblings (based heavily on an excellent little book called 'God and Politics' by Mark Dever), or feel free to flick on to the next section!

I thought Jesus was a revolutionary?

When Jesus uttered the famous words, "Render unto to Caesar what is Caesar's" (Mark 12:17), and didn't challenge Roman taxation, it is hard to state how revolutionary this was, precisely because it was so anti-revolutionary. If Christians could support Rome, what political power could they not support?! This authority, after all, would execute Christ and his followers (and he knew it). Jesus' shocking statement shows that legitimacy is not tied to whether a government supports the worship of the Christian God, or even allows it. It shows that Christians should obey a political power even if it lacks a democratic mandate, is blighted by corruption, or outlaws the practice of our faith.

The authorities are God's servants

The apostles Paul (in Romans 13:1-7) and Peter (in 1 Peter 2:13-17) entirely agree with Jesus in affirming human leadership, despite their audiences living under the threat of state-sponsored persecution. Governments, we discover, are actually (for all their many failings) a gift from God. This seems to be borne out by history. Many a failed state flounders today because a despot was succeeded by the one thing that is worse: anarchy. Almost any government is better than none.

Christians should be good citizens

All this means that Christians should be model citizens. It means we cannot jump on the bandwagon of extreme libertarianism (both right-wing and left-wing) that rejects any encroachment on personal freedom, or join in with the automatic contempt for all those in authority that consumes some corners of society and the press. Instead, the default mode for Christians is to pray for authorities (1 Tim. 2:1-2), obey the law (Rom. 13:5), pay taxes (Rom. 13:6), show respect (Rom. 13:7, 1 Pet. 2:17), do good in society (1 Pet. 2:12) and seek the peace and prosperity of local towns and neighbourhoods (Jer. 29:7), all out of reverence for the God who has supreme authority. No doubt, that also means we should be politically engaged, where possible, and use our voting privileges responsibly, in an informed, thoughtful and prayerful way.

Civil disobedience has its place

Despite all this, Jesus' timeless proverb also contained a counterpunch, "Render to God what is God's" (Mark 12:17). If we give to Caesar that which bears his image, then Christians must also give to God that which bears *his* image: our whole selves. Even if that lands us in prison. Jesus was deliberately challenging the inscription on the Roman coins that he had being asked about. A denarius claimed the Emperor was the son of the divine Augustus (and therefore a god himself). But Jesus clearly says Caesar and God are two separate beings. In other words, allegiance to earthly authority is not blind. It is limited. "Just following orders" is no defence. And during Jesus' trial at the hands of Pilate, it became all too clear who had the greater authority (John 19:11). In a similar vein, the apostle Peter told believers to both fear God and honour the emperor (1 Pet. 2v17), but when push came to shove in the early Church, there was no doubt who came first, "Peter replied, 'We must obey God rather than human beings'" (Acts 5:29). Ever since that time, conscience-led civil disobedience has had a long and rich tradition in Christianity (Google 'Pastor Wang-Yi letter' for a good, recent example).

Biblical balance

So where does this all leave us in this so-called Year of Democracy? It is increasingly recognised that modern democracy owes its ideals less to ancient Greece and more to a balance of the Christian doctrines of *creation* (humanity created equally in God's image) and *fall* ("no [person or group] is good enough to be trusted with uncontrolled power over

others”, as C. S. Lewis wrote). We should give thanks for hard-won universal suffrage, whilst sharing Winston Churchill’s healthy dose of scepticism, “Democracy is the worst form of government – except for all the others that have been tried.” We should strive to improve our nation, without being surprised by the ability for power to corrupt those in the political arena (Jeremiah 17:9). We should be obedient, but not to a fault; submissive, yet speak truth to power. We should pray for our leaders, without putting our trust in them (Psalm 146:3). We should seek both the good of the United Kingdom and the growth of the Heavenly Kingdom. In other words, let’s aim for biblical balance in 2024. Let’s render to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.

800 Appeal progress



For every £10,000 raised for the 800 Appeal, another pane of glass is coloured in. Thanks to those who have already contributed. We look forward to watching the colour spread and hope that by the end of the year we have a full window!

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Sing-Alongs – December 2023

I should like to thank the 3 care homes in Brackley, and St Rumbolds in Buckingham Road, for welcoming the Carol Sing-Alongs this December. And also, of course, very many thanks to those brave souls who joined the teams of about 7 people on each occasion, and allowed themselves to be coerced into reading poems, reading Bible passages, singing (of course), even taking part in the now famous Papa Panov story; and then mingling with residents so as to help them choose carols themselves. And all this wouldn't have been at all successful without Sally Hughes (on the piano at Juniper House) and Chris Bazeley (on his keyboard at the rest of the places) who provided the vital live music – thank you so so much. Thank you also to the various ministers who gave us all a brief 'thought' and a blessing at each venue.

When we got going at each place we made it quite clear that we were not coming to the residents as a choir, but rather that we were hoping they would do all the singing! And sing they did, taking in their stride about 7 carols; as well as 'Rudolph' and 'Jingle Bells' especially for me as my Christmas isn't complete without those two Christmas favourites!

I have heard whisperings that 'it would be so good to do the same again at Easter' ... and of course next Christmas as well. The booklets of words for hymns and carols, and outline programmes, are all ready and waiting. But now I am standing down. So anyone is welcome to take on the organising!!

Anne Mellor, St Peter's Church



Treasurer

John Carter has given wonderful service as Church Treasurer for the last fifteen years; I remember that he reluctantly took on the role but now it is difficult to imagine anyone else doing it! He has not only kept the books for us but also undertaken regular analysis and given advice to the PCC to understand the financial situation at St Peter's. John has also done many things in addition to the role of Treasurer. We hope that he will be able to continue some of these after he retires at the Annual Parochial Church Council Meeting on 21st April 2024. We will need someone to take on the role of Treasurer. Ideally from early in the New Year to give a smooth transition.

The core elements of the Treasurer role.

Manage cash and cashless collections. Settle agreed invoices. Keep a register of transactions for analysis. Manage St Peter's Bank Accounts. Report the financial position regularly to the PCC. Prepare the financial section of the Annual Report and Accounts and Organise the examination of the accounts and their sign off.

The role is a PCC appointment. Ideally the Treasurer should join the PCC, but it is not essential.

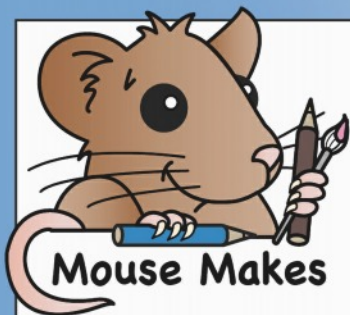
Key traits: trustworthy and organised. There is good support and training available from members of the Finance Committee and John Carter is not planning to emigrate!

How we manage our resources is a fundamental part of our Christian life.

We need a Treasurer for us to be able to continue as a Christian Community.

Please give this careful prayer and thought.
If this might be for you, please talk to John Carter or me.

John MacMahon Chair Finance Committee



EPIPHANY is the time in the Church year that we remember when the 'wise men' or 'Magi' followed a star that led them to the Christ child Jesus. They bowed down, worshipped him and left *three* special gifts.



Where was Jesus born?

 Luke 2:1



What three gifts did the wise men give Jesus?



Who was the king?

 Luke 2:1

and -----
 Luke 2:11

Where did the wise men come from?
 the -----

Luke 2:1

How were the wise men warned not to return to Herod?
 In a -----

Luke 2:12

What had the wise men seen?

a -----
 Luke 2:2



Look up the Bible verses, fill in the blanks, find them in the word search then look for the words opposite.

C H I L D S T A R J D K
 J E S U S W A E B O B I
 E S R E J O I C E Y O N
 W H A C H R I S T H R G
 S E E E O S J C H U N O
 Y P L A U H R U L E R L
 G H I S S I T H E R O D
 I E M T E P I P H A N Y
 F R A N K I N C E N S E
 T D R S W I S E M E N E
 S M Y R R H D R E A M I

JESUS
 WISEMEN
 WORSHIP
 SHEPHERD
 KING • JEWS
 CHRIST • CHILD
 BORN • RULER
 ISRAEL • REJOICE
 JOY • HOUSE • MARY
 GIFTS • EPIPHANY

How many other words can you make from the letters in EPIPHANY?

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A simple way to reduce your risk of a heart attack

This is so easy that most of us can do it at home: simply climb about five flights of stairs a day.

So says a recent study, published in the journal *Atherosclerosis*. It found that climbing stairs on a regular basis may reduce the risk of strokes, blood clots, and heart attacks by as much as 20 per cent.



Climbing stairs is also good for burning fat. This is because you use your largest muscle groups, and so burn more calories. For example - stair climbing burns 23 per cent more calories than running; 250 per cent more calories than swimming, 63 per cent more than cycling, and a staggering 400 per cent more than walking at about three km/h.

As one biomechanics coach explained: "You can take the steps as fast - or slow - as you like, and still see benefits. That's because the muscles are contracting and shortening under tension as they push the floor away."

Climbing stairs is easier on the knees and hips than running, because there is less shock through the body.

Would you like to hear more from St Peter's?

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