

JANUARY 2010 – FORTHCOMING EVENTS						
Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
				1	2	3
Key to abbreviations: HC = Holy Communion HotS = Healing on the Streets HPM = Homegroup Pastor Meeting LEF = Ladies' Evening Fellowship SoW = Service of the Word TES = The Evening Service						
						7.45am HC 10.30am SoW 7pm TES
	9am Re:Fresh 12pm Restore 3.30pm Blend 6.45pm (for 7pm) Elements Celebration	10am Bumps & Babes 11am HC	9.30am & 11.15am Toddlers 3.30pm Blend	9am Re:Fresh	9am HotS 9am Walking Group 7pm Mix	7.45am HC 10.30am SoW 7pm TES
9am Powerhouse prayers						
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Power House Day (9am & 8pm) 4.45pm KIC Cell	9am Re:Fresh 12pm Restore 5pm Elements (y7-9) Cells 7pm Elements (y10-13) Alpha launch party 7.30pm LEF	10am Bumps & Babes 11am HC	9.30am & 11.15am Toddlers 3.30pm Blend	9am Re:Fresh	9am HotS 11am PreachersClub 12.30pm Marriage Prep	7.45am HC 10.30am Baptism 7pm TES (inc. HC)
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
9am Powerhouse prayers 4.45pm KIC Cell 8pm S&F 8pm Y&C Resource	9am Re:Fresh 12pm Restore 5pm Elements (y7-9) Break:out 7pm Elements (y10-13) Alpha 1 8pm Prayer Ministry Team	10am Bumps & Babes 11am HC 8pm Marriage Course	9.30am & 11.15am Toddlers 3.30pm Blend 8pm STEPS Committee	9am Re:Fresh	9am HotS 7pm Mix	7.45am HC 10.30am SoW 7pm United Service (St. Stephen's)
25	26	27	28	29	30	31
9am Powerhouse prayers 4.45pm KIC Cell 8pm PCC	9am Re:Fresh 12pm Restore 5pm Elements (y7-9) Cells 7pm Elements (y10-13) Alpha 2	10am Bumps & Babes 11am HC 7.30pm Marriage Preparation 8pm Marriage Course 8pm HPM	9.30am & 11.15am Toddlers 3.30pm Blend	9am Re:Fresh	9am HotS 6.30pm 'Reel' Celebra-tion	7.45am HC 10.30am Service of Thanksgiving /Rededication 2pm Open Church 7pm TES

Plus some key dates for your diary:

2 Feb Baptism Course
 14 Feb Home Group Celebration
 8 Feb Powerhouse & Vision Evening
 Join us every day in church for prayer - 9am on Mondays (an hour), and 8.50am Tuesdays-Fridays (10 mins)

St Stephen's Church Office: 34d Quarry Hill Road, Tonbridge

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JANUARY 2010

EPIPHANY

The 12 days of Christmas ends on 6 January which happens to be Epiphany, the day that is set aside in the church calendar to remember the wise men bringing gifts to the infant Jesus. This year, it will also be the start of our mid-week communion services, so why not come along at 11.00am as a finale to your Christmas celebrations.

In thinking about Epiphany, I caught the very end of the Radio 4 programme 'Any Questions' just before Christmas, and the final question was 'What would the panellists consider to be appropriate presents for the three wise men to give to Jesus today?' Most of the responses given reflected more what the panellists wanted and portrayed the fact that the panellists either did not really understand the question or do not know who Jesus is, one suggesting that as her favourite present would be a white Christmas, perhaps this would have been appropriate for the baby Jesus as well. I am not sure how well snow would have fared on the Magi's journey through the heat of the Middle East!

Another panellist suggested humility would be a good gift, as if the incarnate God, born in a stable into an earthly home, was not the ultimate symbol of humility already. But this response began to move away from selfish desires to a more altruistic gift, and we might well make suggestions such as world peace, healing for a loved one, the end of suffering and pain, or justice for the poor. Yet surely these are not gifts that any human can give.

The presents the Wise Men did give Jesus all said something about who he was and is:

Gold – a symbol of royalty, reminding us that Jesus is the King of kings.

Frankincense – a symbol of worship, reminding us that Jesus is worthy of our worship and praise.

Myrrh – a symbol of death, a reminder that Jesus was going to die on behalf of all people, the Saviour of the world.

Are there modern day equivalents of these? Perhaps we could suggest a crown or a royal standard instead of gold, a beautiful flower, a Mozart symphony or a Graham

Kendrick CD instead of frankincense, and a silver cross or a coffin to symbolise death instead of myrrh. Yet none of these suggestions really do it for me and I have been left pondering whether the three gifts that the Wise Men brought can be bettered?

It is a good question that has left me thinking, and it maybe an interesting conversation starter with family or friends as you sit down for a meal in the New Year, and if you have any good suggestions then I would love to hear them.

In the meantime may I wish you a happy New Year and 2010, and may God continue to guide us and bless us with his gift of amazing grace, so that we may bless each other and this community in which he has placed us.

Mark Barker

Homegroups meet on:

Tuesday 8pm
 Wednesday 10am and 8pm
 Thursday 8pm
 Friday 9.30am (Woman to Woman)

If you are interested in joining one of our homegroups, please contact the Church Office

INTRODUCING

Rhiannon Ravenscroft

I'm Rhiannon Ravenscroft, which is a little bit of a mouthful so Rhiannon is just fine. Although my name is Welsh I am in no shape or form Welsh, not that there is anything wrong with being Welsh!

I have been appointed Children and Families Pastor while Vicky is off to have a baby! Which is very exciting! You will quickly realise that I can get very excited about exciting things.

I grew up in Hildenborough with my parents, sister and brother. I went to Bennett Memorial School and through my friends there was introduced to Bedrock (the predecessor to Sublime). I just went along to hang out with them and soon realised that hanging out with God was a pretty good reason as well. I got quite involved in the youth band and even ran a girls' prayer group that involved chocolate fondue.

I studied Education Studies and Music at Cambridge University and stayed on in Cambridge after I graduated to complete my Primary PGCE. For the last year and a bit I've been living in Bury St Edmunds teaching in Year 4. God spent the year challenging me about what life is about. Is it about possessions and climbing the career ladder or is it about God? Over the last five years, I've had the privilege of going to two very different churches. It's taught me so much about how we should value the church we have, whatever it is like, and the amazing way that St Stephen's is touching the community.

Other pieces of useful information to know about me: I have three pet fish called Jamie, Delia and Nigella. I really enjoy visiting museums, with the V&A being my favourite. I'm really looking forward to getting to know all the children and families at St Stephen's and everyone else. I love a good chat so feel free to grab me and have a natter.

Rhiannon.ravenscroft@ststephenstonbridge.org



WHO'S WHO

Lucy Maclean

Hello, my name is Lucy Maclean and I have taken on the organising of the Re:refresh team from Caroline Warwood. I felt that

God was calling me to help with our local community, after visiting a friend's church in Birmingham and seeing what they were doing for their local community, which was furthered by talks at St Stephen's, about sharing our faith to our local communities. Not everyone is called to be a missionary abroad and ministry should start closer to home.

It's an exciting time as we look forward to opening the church to our community and look to help them where they are.

Re:refresh is open for coffee, cake and a chat on Tuesday and Friday mornings 9am-12pm, 52 weeks of the year.

Re:refresh is a time for people to meet with friends or to make new friends. It's also a time to unwind, relaxing over fairtrade drinks and delicious homemade cakes.

Re:refresh is a time where we can share our faith by offering companionship in welcoming surroundings and a time where we are able to invite non-Christians, into the church to a non-threatening environment.

Next year we are hoping to expand Re:refresh to other mornings, with the possibility of a lunchtime, and would also like to be open all year round, which would need a larger team of volunteers, either regular or people that we can call on when we need them. We will be running Re:refresh teams alongside various courses being run at the church, such as the marriage course. If you are interested in joining the Re:refresh team as a volunteer on the day, as cake maker or washer upper then please contact me at lucymaclean@hotmail.co.uk or 07748 941101.

I am looking forward to meeting the local community over the next year with your prayer and support.



THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

God and climate change

In the run-up to the Copenhagen climate-change conference, the argument between believers and unbelievers rages on. Are we doomed and about to fry, or is climate change a big conspiracy to give politicians an excuse to raise taxes?

Personally I've no idea. But the question does throw light on our relationship with God.

We like a good scare, don't we? Deep in our psyche is the thought that the human race has done something seriously wrong and unless we make amends we're going to be punished. In the ancient world, people sacrificed babies to appease angry gods. Today, the angry god is arguably the climate (following on from The Bomb, The Millennium Bug, Sars and all the other things we thought were about to annihilate the human race). If the price for appeasing this particular god is to carpet the land in wind turbines, so be it.

According to the Bible, we're right to be scared. We are guilty before God and amends do have to be made. It's interesting that even a secular society like ours cannot erase this ancient, buried memory of The Fall. Even if we suppress it in religious terms, it pops up in other guises – like our sense of guilt over climate change.

But human guilt is just one aspect of the Bible message. The other is God's love – both in dealing with our guilt through Jesus and in constantly upholding the world he has made.

Life on earth only exists by the most amazing coincidences. Our planet is exactly the right distance from the sun which in turn is exactly the right size and gives out its energy at precisely the right rate to keep us alive. There's more good luck in that Jupiter diverts the debris of space away from our part of the solar system and saves us being pounded. The moon is just the right size to keep the earth at a perfect tilt of 23 degrees. There's just enough gravity to give us an atmosphere... and so on.

The Bible speaks to both sides of the climate debate. Its command to take care of the natural world is far more compelling than anything that's likely to come out of Copenhagen. At the same time, for all our messing it up, it tells us that the world is God's and remains cradled in his love and mercy.

Graham Jones



GEORGE GILBART-SMITH

After over three years at St Stephen's, George Gilbert-Smith returned to the Parish of St Peter and St Paul at New Year. He reflects on his experiences with us.

'You must be mad, walking away at a time like this!' I've said this frequently to myself over the last few months, while weighing the decision to return to the place where I'd worshipped for over 40 years. But if it's madness, there's method in it. And if it only seems like madness, I'm in good company: Jeremiah, Ezekiel, even Our Lord himself, were all thought to be mad at one time or another. And it's been a really close call: with the unparalleled opportunities coming up at St Stephen's, my reason for leaving now is that if I don't, it'll be ten times harder later on.

So why am I going?

One answer is I never knew how long I'd be staying. I came to St Stephen's for a much-needed sabbatical year from church responsibilities, and might have returned at the end. On my very first Sunday at St Stephen's Mark outlined God's vision for the church and the building project, and my heart leapt! This was the vision given to the town years before Mark came: churches working together as a beacon to the town, discerning the purpose of God and getting buildings and people fit for purpose. Now it's the turn of St Peter and St Paul to discern its part in that overall vision, and I'm going back bringing my experience of a God who's done the impossible here.

What am I taking?

Lots of happy memories! I've been welcomed into your fellowship and had the privilege of being included in your preaching rota. It's been a joy to make new friendships and renew old ones and I've loved the free and sincere style of worship. In particular it's been great to support the building project and to see Phase 2 to completion, and doing the Three Peaks Challenge to raise funds was a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

What am I leaving?

A church full of friends! A vibrant church, which has a fantastic future, for both young and old. But I'll be back, particularly for the celebration at the end of January, and also at evening service from time to time.

It's been wonderful to be with you. Thanks so much, and every blessing.



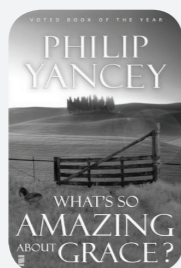
George Gilbert-Smith

BOOKSHELF

What's So Amazing About Grace? by Philip Yancey

What the book says: 'We speak of grace often. But do we understand it? More important, do we truly believe in it... and do our lives proclaim it as powerfully as our words? [Yancey] gives us a probing and impassioned look at grace: what it looks like... what it doesn't look like... and why only Christians can and must reveal the grace the world is looking for. He asks, How can Christians contend graciously with moral issues that threaten all they hold dear?'

What we say: This book takes us through the radical grace revealed to us by God in Jesus Christ, and shows why it is so key and fundamental to our day by day faith.



From here, he shows not only that a good understanding of God's grace can transform our own relationship with God, but also the relationships we have with others and the way we relate to the world.

Who should read this? All Christians, bar none. The subject matter is universally relevant, and the book is written in a readable style, using story to illustrate the points being made. It would make a good book for an individual or a group learning together.

Quote: 'And grace means there is nothing I can do to make God love me more, and nothing I can do to me God love me less. It means that I, even I who deserve the opposite, am invited to take my place at the table in God's family.' (p71, 1997 Edition)

What's So Amazing About Grace? by Philip Yancey
Published by Zondervan (New Edition 2002)
ISBN: 0-310-24565-6 UK RRP: £9.99