

December 2014 – forthcoming events

Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4.45pm Kic cell 8pm PCC	9am Re:Fresh 3pm Blend 5pm YE 7pm OE	10am B&B 11am HC	9.45am Toddlers 10am MITM 3.30pm Blend 4pm Nativity rehearsal	9am Re:Fresh	9.30am Nativity Rehearsal 10am HotS 7pm The Mix	7.45am HC 10.30am SOW 6.30pm TES
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
4.45pm Kic cell	9am Re:Fresh 3pm Blend 5pm YE 7pm OE	10am B&B 11am HC	9.45am Toddlers 10am MITM 3.30pm Blend	9am Re:Fresh	9.45am WLTD0 10am HotS 1pm Nativity Dress Rehearsal	7.45am HC 10.30am Nativity 6.30pm HC
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
5pm Kic cell Christmas party	9am Re:Fresh 3pm Blend Elements Christmas Extravaganza	10am B&B 11am HC	10am MITM 3.30pm Blend	9am NO Re:Fresh	9am Refresh 10am HotS 7pm The Mix Christmas Special	7.45am HC 10.30am Family Carols 6.30pm Carols by Candlelight
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
	9am Re:Fresh 10am Christingle making	3.30pm Christingle 4.30pm Christingle 11.30pm Midnight communion	7.45am HC 10.30 Christmas celebration		10am HotS	7.45am HC 10.30am HC
29	30	31	Key to abbreviations LTF= Ladies Thursday F'ship MITM = Men in the morning B&B = Bumps & Babes WLTD0= Who let the dads out YE = Younger Elements OE = Older Elements HC = Holy Communion SOW = Service of the word TES = The Evening Service HotS = Healing on the Street			
		11am HC				

Men in the Morning

We are a group of men who meet at Row Wills' house every Thursday at 10am. Over coffee and biscuits we put the world to rights as only mature men can!

Generally, we have a speaker home grown, or from outside, and over the past year we have had a diabetic nurse. She wasn't diabetic, but we all seem to be heading that way, if we don't improve our lifestyle. One of our group talked about life in Hong Kong, another about 'You Tube'. We've discussed poetry and model railways. We've learnt about The London City Mission, about life coaching, even how a power station works.

There is the occasional outing; last summer we visited David Salamon's house and its museum. This October we visited the Imperial War Museum with all its memories, for some of us from our childhood, but also to see the excellent WW1 exhibition with graphic photos and memorabilia. If you are a man and free on a Thursday morning come and have a cuppa with us, meet new and old friends.

Details from Row Wills or Dave Wilson

ENC COMPASS

THE MONTHLY ST STEPHEN'S CHURCH NEWSLETTER

Advent

December 2014

I cannot quite believe that Advent starts today. The last few months have gone by in a whirl, or perhaps more to the point seem to have lurched rapidly from one crisis to another, with lots of struggles and pain for many different people, let alone the dreadful situations we see around our world.

Yet one of the recurring themes of Advent is hope. Without hope people die. When hope dies people die. And so at the start of Advent I thought it might be good to use this call by Daniel Berrigan to enter Advent in hope, even hope against hope.

It is not true that creation and the human family are doomed to destruction and loss:

This is true: For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him, shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

It is not true that we must accept inhumanity and discrimination, hunger and poverty, death and destruction:

This is true: I have come that they may have life, and that abundantly.

It is not true that violence and hatred should have the last word, and that war and destruction rule forever:

This is true: For unto us a child is born, and unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, the Everlasting, the Prince of Peace.

It is not true that we are simply victims of the powers of evil who seek to rule the world:

This is true: To me is given authority in heaven and on earth, and lo, I am with you, even unto the end of the world.

It is not true that we have to wait for those who are specially gifted, who are the prophets of the Church, before we can be peacemakers:

This is true: I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your young shall see visions, and your old shall have dreams.

It is not true that our hopes for the liberation of humanity, for justice, human dignity, and peace are not meant for this earth and for this history:

This is true: The hour comes, and it is now, that true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

So let us enter Advent in hope, even hope against hope. Let us see visions of love and peace and justice. Let us affirm with humility, with joy, with faith, with courage: Jesus Christ - the Life of the world.

Testimony: The Word Made Flesh, by Daniel Berrigan.

Can I encourage each one of us to make the best use of Advent in a 'watching' and 'waiting' sort of way, thinking about and praying that the God of hope may shine his light brightly into our lives and into the darkness of our world this Advent season.

And if you are wondering how to take a few regular quiet moments for prayer or reflection during Advent, here are a few suggestions to choose from:

- Dreaming of a 'White Christmas'? Why not dream of a green one instead? Better still - do something about it. A Rocha has an online Advent Calendar 2014 with daily 'life-altering tips and ideas for a greener Christmas and beyond'. <http://arocha.org.uk/advent>
- Jon Kuhrt has a simple Advent challenge to use between 1st and 24th December. The idea is to set aside 10 minutes a day for silence, short readings, reflection and prayer. It is based on Jesus' words and actions in the gospels. <http://resistanceand renewal.net/rrs-advent-challenge-2014/>
- Christian Aid has an online Advent journey 'designed to give you a daily moment of calm and reflection in the midst of what can be the busiest time of year.' <http://www.christianaid.org.uk/getinvolved/christmas/advent.aspx>
- Read a new book over the next few weeks - the shorter and simpler the better. A suggestion may be Stephen Cottrell's. *Walking Backwards to Christmas*.
- Get an Advent candle from Tonbridge Christian Bookshop with different names of Jesus for each day of Advent, and use them to reflect on who Jesus really and fully is.

Perhaps you have some other suggestions?

Have a blessed and hope-filled Advent.

Mark Barker



Sizewell report

During the October half-term many of the St Stephen's youth attended a five-day retreat at Sizewell Hall, Suffolk . There were activities in the day (eg a social action day and a day at Suffolk ski centre) and in the evening we gathered to praise God. Our tag verse for the week was from Colossians 1:27 – 'the mystery in a nutshell is this: Christ is in you – it's that simple...'

Some of the youth wrote:

'Before Sizewell, I didn't particularly want to go and was feeling quite doubtful about it, and didn't think I would enjoy it. I had sort of convinced myself of this, and despite some of my friends and a few leaders persuading me to go, I decided I didn't want to. However, about a week before the trip, something made me suddenly consider going. By the end of the trip I was so glad I'd gone, as I felt so much more sure of my faith, and as if I'd come to know God a lot more than I had done before. The atmosphere, particularly at the evening sessions, felt so full of the presence of God, and I felt really moved - which again made me feel more certain about being a Christian and belief in God.' – Daisy Widdicombe

'My best day at Sizewell was the Wednesday. At the ski centre we went on the toboggans which was quite fun but I

kept losing to Jack. I tried to be very Christian-like but I didn't always succeed. If you fell off the toboggan you got really wet, which I did many times. On the high ropes I was second to last in my group. When I got to the jump I was too scared to do it by myself and the instructor had to come get me. It was very embarrassing. Then it was the skiing which was fun. Jack and I were on the medium slope and Danny kept stopping the rope lift when we were halfway up. During the mini-golf I decided to swing my putter like a normal golf club and the end flew off. Fortunately it hit no one.

In the evening we had a question and answer session, with Mark, Sylvie, Jonny and Kat on the panel. Ryan presented and gave all the hard questions to Mark. He answered them really well. This helped me to gain a better understanding of Christianity, as many of the questions I had were answered, not just by Mark but by the rest of the panel. On the Thursday Jonny prayed for me in Souled Out. He told me that I was a leader and that if I do something others will follow. This was a great confidence boost.' - Ben Hams

These are just two stories of the fun we had and the ways that God was moving in our midst. It was an absolute privilege to be part of this week. Until next year!

Jonathan (on behalf of the youth and children's team)

It's not Lost, It's not a Gospel, It's a very naughty Marketing Campaign.

The British Library recently played host to the launch of a book by Simcha Jacobovici and Barrie Wilson provocatively entitled *The Lost Gospel – Decoding the Sacred Text that reveals Jesus' Marriage to Mary Magdalene*.

Arun Arora, of the Church of England Communications Unit, wrote in his blog following this launch:

According to reports in *The Sunday Times*, the book - which is described as historical - claims that Jesus married Mary Magdalene and fathered two children with her. It also claims that there was a previously unknown plot on Jesus life when he was 20 and an assassination attempt on Mary and her children. Diarmaid MacCulloch, professor of the history of the church at Oxford University summed up his view of the book succinctly to *The Sunday Times* saying: 'It sounds like the deepest bilge'.

The book is based on the authors' interpretation of a 6th century Syriac language manuscript (purchased by the British Museum in the 19th century), but a number of problems have been identified with the book.

- The first problem is that the manuscript is not lost.
- The second is that it is not a Gospel.
- The third - and most noticeable - is that there are no mentions of Jesus or of Mary Magdalene in the entire ancient manuscript on which the book is based.

Or put another way, in the words of Professor Dr. Robert R. Cargill of the Univeristy of Iowa, the book is little more than 'speculation wrapped in hearsay couched in conspiracy masquerading as science ensconced in sensationalism slathered with misinformation' – all of which is designed to

sell books and get viewers to watch the accompanying documentary in the weeks leading up to Christmas.

So how is it that a book co-authored by someone who has previously made sensational claims including discovering the lost nails of Jesus' crucifixion, the discovery of the route of the Exodus, the lost tomb of Jesus' family and Atlantis (in Spain) is being treated with such seriousness and attracting such media attention ?

One uncharitable answer would be to suggest that there is now such a high degree of religious illiteracy in society that people lack the rigour to tackle such spurious claims in the same way they would if the author had written a book saying the moon was made of blue cheese.

An alternative suggestion would be that ever since Dan Brown found an audience with *The Da Vinci Code* an industry has built up around 'direct-to-the-public pseudo scholarship' in which a combustible combination of conspiracy theorists, satellite channel documentaries and opportunistic publishers have identified a lucrative income stream.

A more charitable interpretation is to recognise that the life of Jesus remains as fascinating as ever and consequently if there is one way to guarantee an audience it is to make speculative claims about his life or teaching – the more speculative and sensationalist the better.

The Gospels as they stand make extraordinary claims about Jesus. They talk about his life, death and resurrection; the way he transformed the lives of the sick, the poor and the oppressed through word and deed. They relate teachings which remain the touchstone for billions of people thousands of years later. They tell of a man who claimed to be God and who was killed for that claim and of those people who, after his death, saw him again.

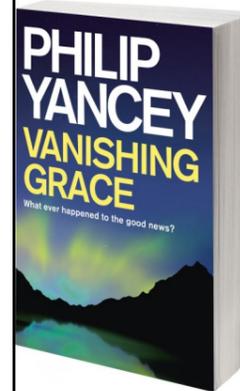
This is fantastical stuff. It is also life changing and transforming. There's no need to marvel at the claims of 'the lost gospel'. The genuine ones do the job well enough.

Suggested reading for Christmas

Surprised By Scripture – Tom Wright – SPCK £ 12-99

This is a thoughtful and provocative book, in the vein of CS Lewis's classic *The Weight of Glory*, in which Tom Wright provides a series of case studies that show how the Bible can be applied in today's world.

Tom Wright was recently acclaimed by *Newsweek* as 'the world's leading New Testament scholar'. In this challenging collection of his best recent sermons, he provides a series of case studies that show how the Bible can be applied to contemporary issues, including: how it is possible to love the Bible and affirm evolution; why belief in heaven means we should be at the forefront of the environmental movement; there Christians today have lost focus, and why it is important for us to engage in politics. Helpful, practical, and wise, *Surprised by Scripture* demonstrates how to affirm the Bible today - as well as mapping out new ways of applying its principles and engaging effectively with the society in which we live.



Vanishing Grace – Philip Yancey – Hodder and Stoughton - £12-99

This is a follow up to the bestselling book *What's So Amazing About Grace?* in which Philip Yancey asks 'Why the church stirs up such negative feelings?' for so many people. The question seems more relevant now than ever as many people increasingly link the church with intolerant, fundamentalist attitudes. Yet while allegiance to traditional forms of Christian religion is unpopular, indicators show that interest in spirituality is rising. Why the disconnect?

Yancey suggests grace can bridge the gap across the movement away from Christianity, inviting outsiders the chance to take a deep second look at what could reignite its appeal to future generations. How can Christians offer grace in a way that is compelling to a jaded society? How can they make a difference in a world of such wrenching need? Yancey explores how Christians may have contributed to hostility toward them by presenting the gospel in ways that come across as strident and judgemental. Then he explores what kind of news is good to a culture that thinks it has rejected the Christian version. Finally, he offers illuminating stories of how faith can be expressed in ways that disarm even the most cynical critics.

The Road To Daybreak – Henri J M Nouwen - DLT - £5-99

This is a reissue of the story of Henri Nouwen and L'Arche founded in 1964 by Canadian humanitarian and social visionary, Jean Vanier. Distressed by the institutionalization and the isolation and loneliness of people with intellectual disabilities, Jean Vanier invited two men from an institution to live with him in a small house which became a community of care named L'Arche. This book describes Nouwen's encounter with the people of that community; it is the start of a journey that would ultimately change life and cause him to find new meaning, insight and beauty in the most profound way. Beautifully and honestly written, as are all Nouwen's works, this series of diary entries captures the revelation of faith and change, the joy and even heartache of finding a new vocation, the reality of dealing with one's own bias and supposition and finding in that breakdown a miracle of insight. If you never read another book by Nouwen then read this one!

HENRI J. M. NOUWEN
THE ROAD TO DAYBREAK
A Spiritual Journey



Have you read the entire Bible?

Barbara Owen has

In the last edition of *Encompass* it was mentioned if anyone would like to give some thoughts on reading through the Bible. I would like to share my thoughts about this.

Over 20 years ago my husband gave me a booklet with a plan to read the Bible in one or two years. Although I had always read the Bible since becoming a Christian, sometimes it was a bit hit and miss, so I decided to read the Bible in two years. Going through the Old Testament was quite hard at times but so often I would come across a verse which was a real gem and really helped me. Eventually, I came to the end and I enjoyed it and decided to do it all again.

I was getting to know the plan of God's salvation and seeing Jesus Christ in all the scriptures. I have done this many times since and so often I have found a verse which has been relevant for the need of that time that I had not noticed previously.

Nine years ago one of our granddaughters died suddenly of a brain haemorrhage; she was 16 years old and so full of life. I was devastated. I was feeling heavy hearted and tearful when

I came across this lovely verse which brought me such peace from Psalm 119 v 26: 'I have declared my ways *and* opened my griefs to You and You listened to me' and v28 'My life dissolves *and* weeps itself away for heaviness; raise me up *and* strengthen me according to [the promises of] Your word.' I claimed that promise for myself that day.

Another verse was for guidance when we were moving to come to Tonbridge and I was bit disturbed. Again, in my reading systematically I came to this verse from Exodus ch 23 v 20: 'I send an Angel before you to keep *and* guard you on the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared.' This again brought me peace.

Finally, when one day my thoughts were all over the place as we know can happen, I had this lovely verse in Psalm 94 v 19: 'In the multitude of my [anxious] thoughts within me, Your comforts cheer *and* delight my soul!'

The Bible truly is an amazing book, as we read it, we're drawn to praise and thank God for his faithfulness, brought closer to Jesus and encouraged to pray for the lost.

I recommend you try if you haven't done so to read systematically through; it isn't a ritual, yes a discipline but well worth it. I have been blessed.

Verses quoted are from the Amplified Version of the Bible.