



St HELEN'S WINDOW

Baptism matters: Baptism matters?

The Revd Dr Simon Thorn

Baptism is one of the universally recognised sacraments of the Christian Church. Jesus and his disciples are reported to have baptised (*John 3, v22 & 26; John 4, v1-2*), and the Gospels also record Jesus' command to the Apostles to baptise in his name (*Matthew 28, v19; Mark 16, v15*). From the earliest times, it became the custom to initiate new converts into the Church through a process which included baptism performed in a river, pool or domestic bath-house. It is uncertain whether infants and young children were baptised as well as adults, but *Luke 18, v15-16* certainly presents a very positive attitude towards accepting children. Origen (233-251) claims in his homily on Luke that "*the baptism of infants is the custom of the church*". Currently, the practice of infant baptism is common to and mutually recognised by the Anglican, Roman Catholic, Orthodox and many reformed churches. Baptism not only incorporates a young child into the family of God, but also extends support and encouragement to the parents, charging them to bring up their child in an atmosphere of love and faith. Indeed, the Common Worship liturgy explicitly demands of the parents and godparents: "*The Church receives these children with joy. Today we are trusting God for their growth in faith. Will you pray for them, draw them by your example into the community of faith and walk with them in the way of Christ?*"



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Pageset in
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by David Pope

Since becoming Curate in Abingdon, I have taken on the responsibility of preparing families who wish to have their children christened at St Helen's, St Nicolas' or St Michael's. They attend two evening sessions where experiences of parenting and Church are shared and the particular significance of baptism is discussed. At the second class, the various symbols used in the liturgy are explained in detail. We study the biblical passages where the spiritual significance of the cross, oil, water and light are developed, and we explore the importance of prayer. For a number of young parents, this is their first formal encounter with the Church. Many will only have attended Christmas carol services and possibly a wedding or funeral. To enable them to appreciate more fully what they might be missing, families are asked to attend as many Sunday services as they can prior to the baptism. I also offer to hold an intimate service of Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child where there is no need to dress up, invite distant relatives, or worry about other arrangements. It is a very short liturgy when the couple and their baby can pray together in Church, and be presented with a copy of the Bible as a gift from the Church. This is a wonderful opportunity to support young people in their journey as parents, and share in their joy on starting a family.

OUR CONSTITUENCY and some of its MPs

Our first constituency was just the Borough of Abingdon, a small area with few voters, the Mayor and Burgesses. The right to elect 'a discrete and honest man to serve in Parliament' was part of the Charter given to the town by Queen Mary and King Philip in 1556. MPs were not paid and got no expenses so the job was not very popular!

By the 19th Century, more elections were contested and the electorate gradually increased. Political parties became more organised (Liberal and Conservative - Labour were not formed until 1900). Voting took place over several days and until 1872 was open, which added to the tension and excitement. On some occasions troops were made available in case things got out of hand. As Poll Books were published afterwards we know the names of the voters and how they voted. Several MPs of this period are remembered in street names, Knapp Close, Bowyer Road, Maberly Close, Duffield Close, Thesiger Road, Norris Close and Lindsay Drive.

The last MP for the Borough was John Creemer Clarke. He was elected as a Liberal in 1874 though nationally it was a Tory victory. His opponents ridiculed him for his lack of education and oratorical ability. He had a high profile in the town; with a clothing factory at the bottom of West St Helen's Street employing many local women. He contributed to the Cottage Hospital in Bath Street and the new Methodist Church in Conduit Road (nicknamed 'Clarke's Chapel' by his workers). His home was Waste Court, now an Abingdon School boarding house.

Our second constituency was also called Abingdon but now extended over a large area of North Berkshire (not transferred to Oxon until 1974). From 1885 the idea was to have a similar number of voters in each constituency with periodic revisions when necessary. Abingdon Borough, with fewer than 900 voters (still only men!), was too small on its own. Probably its best known MP was Airey Neave, elected in 1953. He sat on the Science and Technology Committee and championed the scientific establishments on his patch. He is probably

chiefly remembered for his wartime escape from Colditz and his violent death. As Mrs Thatcher's Shadow Northern Ireland Secretary he was a target for the IRA and was blown up in the Members' car park in March 1979. It is the sort of event you remember; it was a Friday and our turn to do the swimming club run.

Our present constituency was created in 1983. Abingdon had become one of the largest constituencies in the country with over 90,000 voters and was consequently involved in the extensive boundary changes that year. We became Oxford West and Abingdon, held by John Patten for the Conservatives until his return to academia in 1997. I remember him addressing a lunchtime election meeting at St Helen's School. I taught a class of 11 year olds immediately after who were full of indignation. Like many politicians, 'he didn't answer the question!'

In 1997 the seat was won by Dr Evan Harris for the Liberal-Democrats. The Conservatives would dearly love to regain it, regarding it as one of their target seats. Both parties will fight hard. See page 6 for details of Election Hustings with all the candidates organised by the Church in Abingdon.

Silvia Joinson

A Prayer before the Election

God our Father,
direct the mind and wills of the people
of this country at this present time; that men
and women of integrity and ability, strong and
compassionate, may be chosen to represent us in
Parliament. May they be men and women of truth,
committed to the governance of this nation, hating
covetousness and not seeking personal rewards.
Give to us, now and always, the blessing
of a wise and just government, to lead
our nation in the ways of freedom
and peace; through Jesus Christ
our Lord. Amen

Why we have chosen to have our children baptised

"Baptism - that's what I had!"

So spoke our older son Philip last year, watching a christening taking place at a 10am family service at St Helen's. It was not long after the third anniversary of his infant baptism, and lighting his baptism candle to celebrate must have made some impression, at least to remember the word.

Our younger son Edmund is now coming up to his own baptism in May, at one year old. Why, as parents, are we putting a child forward for a religious ceremony he won't remember directly, and whose significance he won't understand for years?

Baptism is more accessible than many rituals in Christianity. Despite theologians agonising over the detailed meaning, it is a tradition that directly links us to the past. In the Bible, Jesus himself is baptised by John, and the version in Matthew's Gospel has the twist that John initially protests, recognising Jesus for who he is and saying it should be the other way round. Jesus insists, and following this ritual he goes out to the wilderness for forty days in inner turmoil as to how God wants him to live his life. It is the beginning of his journey.



Some Christian denominations discourage infant baptism - they want children to be allowed to make their own decisions as to whether to commit to Christianity, when they are ready. We respect that point of view; but when are you fully ready to make a decision? The Church of England supports confirmation as a later commitment, and our faith continues to grow through confirmation and beyond. If you wait forever, you never start. Our spiritual life, developing our understanding of this astonishing universe, is central to the human condition. When we take our children to church we are infusing them with our values, just as when we take them shopping, or go for a bike ride, or watch television together. That influence is unavoidable.

Ultimately the Christian faith is strikingly inclusive and lives on through sharing, participating communities who embody the love of Christ. As we develop and reflect on our own commitment, we invite our loved ones to walk along the road with us, wherever they will find it takes them. Baptism - that's what we had - may it enrich our children as much as it has ourselves.

Catherine and Martin Kimber

A Prayer for those elected

God our Father,
grant to those elected to Parliament at
this time special gifts of wisdom, under-
standing, wise counsel and strength, that they
may consider all issues calmly, reach clear and
unbiased judgements, act wisely and promptly,
upholding what is right and abhorring
what is wrong, so that in all things
your will may be done. We ask this
in the name of Christ
our Lord. Amen

From the Toddler Corner

From Linda Cole - mum to Timothy ...



Toddler corner is more than just a carpeted space, containing toys and fenced off with a few pews and the obligatory pushchair or two. It is a happy, lively space where our babies grow into outgoing toddlers. Apparently they may grow into members of Junior Church and the Choir.

My son loves the toys there, especially the train set and plastic tea set. He likes playing with the other children, is in awe of everything the older ones can do, and yet is fascinated by the babies too.

From a first-time Mum's point of view, it makes going to Church on a Sunday so much easier. Surrounded by other Mums and Dads who are happy to cuddle, play with, sing to, or pull faces at each others' children, the Toddler Corner provides somewhere comfy to feed, change and entertain a toddler.

With the toddlers entertained, parents can listen to the sermon, enjoy the peace of the church and the music, (and help the toddlers build an enormous wooden railway around the babies.) It has also been a place where we've formed friendships, passed on baby clothes, and helped each other out when somebody forgets the vital packet of baby wipes/toy/banana.

From Georgina Jarvis - mum to Eliza ...

Eliza has been a regular in the Toddler Corner ever since she could crawl. She feels very at home there, and always looks forward to coming to church, which she sees as a kind of extra-good playgroup, with singing and candles.

It's great for me too - I get to participate in the service without worrying about Eliza too much, and the other parents have become good friends.



A pig's bladder and a fox's tail

Tony Legge

I was first persuaded to attend a Morris Dance practice in 2001. A rich culture and tradition, of which I'd previously had absolutely no awareness, were revealed to me, along with how unfit I was and how many left feet I had.

St Helens' records mention Morris Dancing in 1556, but otherwise the Abingdon Morris Dancing tradition (like the siege of Troy) has come down to us largely by word of mouth. After a monumental punch-up in 1700, the horns of an ox which had been roasted in the marketplace came into the possession of the inhabitants of Ock Street where they were adopted as one of the artefacts surrounding the Morris dancers and the annual election of 'the Mayor of Ock Street' during the Horse Fair. Such mock Mayors were commonly elected to ensure civic Mayors' awareness of the feelings of ordinary folk in those days. Many of the Morris Side's ('Side' is the proper name for a Morris team) dances date from then and steps reflect the ploughing, planting and soldiering activities of the Berkshire country folk of those times. One of the dances: "*The Duke of Marlborough*" is characterised by militaristic stamping and clapping and was introduced to celebrate the Battle of Blenheim in 1704. In fortunate contrast, the steps of our oldest



dance '*Sally Luker*' honour a 'working girl' living in the Black Swan, but provide no such graphic illustration of its subject. Dress has changed, and nowadays we dress in white, with baldricks of yellow and green representing Berkshire's growing and ripen-



ing corn. In Abingdon we only do our own dances and other Sides (from Northumberland to Kent to Cornwall) refrain from copying them.

Eventually the Side recognised me as shameless, loud, brash and possessed of other personal characteristics too delicate to mention here. Accordingly they promoted me to the position of 'Fool'. The Fool's job is to pick up dropped hankies, flowers, false teeth, hearing aids and the like, to treat traffic like Moses treated the Red Sea when the dancers need to cross the road to get to or from the pub, and to keep the audience informed and entertained. That's where the pig's bladder and fox's tail come in. A top quality bladder can produce an almost lyrical (but largely painless) "whack" when properly applied to a lady's bottom. The action is all in the wrist, as the best Fools will tell you, and the reply "*I'm sorry Madam, it's supposed to bring you luck, and after all, it is my job*" works every time. Well, nearly every time.

I'll be giving demonstrations outside the Brewery Tap at 4pm on 19th June 2010, when the next Mayor of Ock Street is installed. Between now and then, there's a winter's worth of practice and a few public performances of Abingdon's traditional Mummer's Play. But that's a different story . . .

News from the Abingdon churches

St Helen's Church

Sunday 2 May
Newcomers' Lunch
 12.00 for 12.30 in Church Centre
 Details from Susan Scott 522960

Mondays 10 & 24 May
Silent Prayer
 18.50-19.00 in Lady Chapel
 Details from Ann Moss 527344

Tuesday 11 May
Mothers' Union talk
 20.00 in Church Centre
 Ken Smith on '*Sobell House Hospice*'

Wednesday 12 May
6.19 Men's group
 20.00 at Old Anchor pub

Thursday 13 May
Ascension Day Sung Eucharist
 19.00 in Church

Thursday 13 May
Bereavement Support Group
 19.30 in Church Centre

Sunday 16 May
Promenade Concert and tea
 15.30 followed by
Choral Evensong with Deanery Choirs
 at 16.30

Wednesday 19 May
Wednesday Club
 20.00 in South Aisle
 Music with Chris Fletcher-Campbell

Thursday 20 May
St Helen's at lunch
 Waterfront Café Benson
 If you need or can give a lift contact Susan 522960

Saturday 29 May
Coffee Morning
 by Charitable Giving Group
 10.00-12.00 in Church Centre

St Nicolas' Church

Saturday 8 May
Medieval Banquet
 in Abbey Building
 Details from Pauline Burren 521873

St Michael's Church

Thursday 20 May
St Michael's Fellowship
 14.15 Talk on '*H ome Farm Trust*'

Wednesday 26 May
Luncheon Club
 From 12.30
 To book a place ring 522591 or 538758

Church in Abingdon

Thursday 29 April
Election Hustings for Oxford West and Abingdon
 Meet the candidates, hear their policies
 and local priorities.
 Questions may be sent to cia35abingdon@aol.co.uk

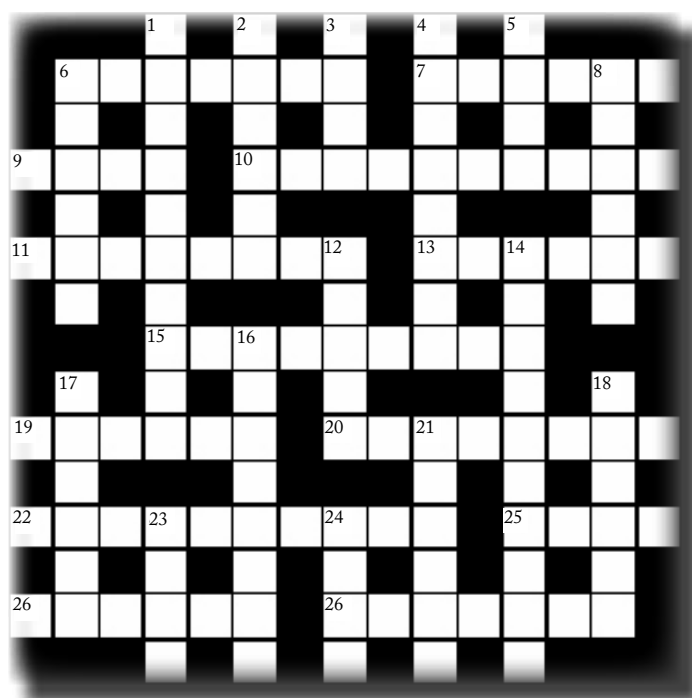
Thursdays 6 & 20 May
'Back to 35'
 10.30 -11.30 Baptist Church Hall
 Opportunity for chat and fellowship
 Thursday 6 **Step 5 Students**
 Thursday 20 **College Performing Arts** group

Saturday 8 – Sunday 9 May
Launch of Christian Aid Week
 Saturday 9.30 - 12.30 Market Square Sale
 Sunday 9 **United Service**
 15.00 Baptist Church

Saturday 22 & Sunday 23 May
Pentecost Weekend Celebrations
 Saturday 22: **Activities** for all the family
 10.30 - 13.00 in the Market Square
 Sunday 23: **Open Air Family Service**
 15.00 in the Market Square
 CAKE! Could you make one for this special occasion?
 Bring it to the Market Square on Saturday at 10.00
 or contact 529261 (chrisbrown46@tiscali.co.uk)

If you would like an event listed on this page let us know by the 10th of the previous month and we will try to include it. Contact Silvia at alan@phoncoop.coop or telephone: 01235 521247

Crossword by Ian Miles



**Asterisked clues reflect the Flavour of the Month*

Across

- 6* Caper about this spring election announcement (7)
- 7* Is timely permission request in order? (2,1,3)
- 9 Misheard as crew e.g. near Chiswick bank (4)
- 10* A lady calmly makes distress signal (6,4)
- 11 Don weaponry offering a hefty embrace (4,4)
- 13 Bewail limp Christian scriptures (6)
- 15* Budding settlers' vessel (9)
- 19 Less inhibited utterer of 13 (6)
- 20* Crestfallen on 1st June (8)
- 22* Granny, mom & I merrymaking in Oxford? (3,7)
- 25 Reportedly moored, it goes in & out (4)
- 26 Newly key Religious Education class (6)
- 27 Initially referred to henchman during morning (7)

Down

- 1* Shady agent my May rents out (7,3)
- 2 March quickly after curt officer to twin town (6)
- 3 Reject any French before new year (4)
- 4 Bar girl pale (8)
- 5 Admiral's oral summary of periscope function? (1-2-1)
- 6* Seasonal dressline causing a stir! (6)
- 8 Narnian lion punctual but not upright (6)
- 12* Such happy days, with *Mayonnaise*? (5)
- 14* Triumvir Ron can't accommodate during this month (4,6)
- 16 Bobbin by which may hang quite a tale (4,4)
- 17 Exist, possess and conform (6)
- 18 Rarely finished models (6)
- 21 Saccharine little couple? (6)
- 23* This month's article on S American people (4)
- 24 Terrible he was, with just the single dray (4)

Solution to April Quiz

- Lady Astor
- letter bomb
- lady chapel
- Lake District
- lop eared (half for 'long')
- ladies' fingers
- landing gear
- light heavyweight
- labour intensive
- long johns
- little known
- lager louts
- like minded
- love nest
- last orders
- Lambeth Palace
- Latin Quarter
- Little Rock
- lang syne
- legal tender
- line up
- Las Vegas
- Lot's wife
- LX
- Light year
- London Zoo

May at St Helen's Church

Divine Services

Morning Prayer	09.10 every weekday
Evening Prayer	17.10 every weekday
Sung Eucharist	10.00 every Sunday with Junior Church
••• Ascension Day Sung Eucharist •••	19.00 Thursday 13th May •••
Baptism	10.00 Sunday 2; 15.00 Sundays 9, 23 and 30
Wednesday Church	10.30 every Wednesday (Holy Communion)
Silent Prayer	18.10 Mondays 10 and 24 in Lady Chapel
Wedding	15.00 Saturday 15

Sunday Evening Services

2 May	18.30 Eucharist
9 May	18.30 Taizé
16 May	16.30 Choral Evensong sung by the Deanery Choirs
23 May	18.30 Healing Service
30 May	18.30 Evensong

Meetings and Gatherings all in Church Centre unless marked

Baby & Toddler Group	09.30 & 11.00 Mon 10, 17 and 24
Baptism Preparation	20.00 Tues 4 and 18
Bereavement Support	19.30 Thurs 13
DCC meeting	19.30 Mon 10
Marriage Preparation	20.00 Weds 19 and 26
6:19 Men's Group	20.00 Weds 12 Old Anchor pub
Mothers' Union	20.00 Tues 11
PCC meeting	20.00 Mon 17
Wednesday Club	18.00 Weds 19

Events

Sun 2	12.30 Newcomers' Lunch
Sat 8	10.00 Peal of Bells
Sun 16	15.30 Promenade Concert and Tea, in Church
Sat 29	10.00 Charitable Giving Group's Coffee Morning



The services and events listed are correct at time of going to press - please consult the weekly NewsSheet if in doubt.

To arrange baptisms, weddings and funerals contact the Parish Office.
Clergy are available in the Church Office between 19.00 - 20.00 on a Wednesday
Please call the office to book an appointment.

Rector:	The Revd Dr Charles Miller
Assisting Priest (NSM):	The Revd Tim Hewes
Curate (NSM):	The Revd Dr Simon Thorn
Director of Music:	Christopher Fletcher-Campbell
Parish Administrator:	Linda Barker

St Helen's Church Office: St Helen's Court, Abingdon, OX14 5BS
01235 520144

[normal opening hours 09.00 to 14.15 Mon, Tues, Wed, Fri]

E-mail: administrator@sthelens-abingdon.org.uk

www.sthelens-abingdon.org.uk
