

# **The LINK**

**digital edition**

## **December 2020**



**The Parish Church of  
St Michael Braintree  
[www.stmichaelsbtree.co.uk](http://www.stmichaelsbtree.co.uk)**



## Unexpected times

Dear Friends,

This has been a most unexpected year. None of us would have anticipated such a year as we have just had with social distancing, face coverings and closed churches (by Government instruction). More significantly, none of us would have anticipated a pandemic that has made so many people very ill, and caused so many deaths, worldwide.

As the roll out of vaccines begins, we hope for a better year to come, though the restrictions are still likely to be in place, both on us as individuals and as a church, for many months to come.

I have been enjoying reading the Advent book, recommended by Stephen Bailey, called, "*The Christmas we didn't expect*" by David Mathis. The author highlights the many unexpected things about that first Christmas. No-one would have expected a virgin birth, angels or such an important person being laid as a baby in a manger. But the most unexpected aspect of that first Christmas is that Jesus is none other than the Son of God. That God should choose to send his own Son as a tiny baby to save the world.

Both the coronavirus pandemic and the first Christmas remind us that, though we may think we have worked out how the world works, there is still much to surprise us.

Perhaps one of the most surprising things is that God sent Jesus because he wanted to have a personal relationship with each of us. God sent Jesus out of love. He sent him to a hurting and troubled world (of which we have seen much this year). God sent Jesus to die and rise again, to save us from our sins and to give us the gift of eternal life.

I hope you will be able to join us as we celebrate the unexpected good news of Christmas. Whether it's online, by phone, on Zoom, in church or Church House, do please take time this Christmas to reflect on the wonder of that first, highly unexpected, Christmas. And consider if there is anyone you could invite to come to a service, whether in person or remotely.

With our love and best wishes this Christmas time,  
Nigel

## St Michael's Braintree Christmas services 2020

<b>Date/time</b>	<b>Online services</b>	<b>St Michael's by Phone</b>	<b>In church</b>	<b>Church House</b>
Sun 13.12.20, 10am	Advent Family Praise			
Sun 13.12.20, 6.30pm	Carols by Candlelight	Carols by Candlelight	Carols by Candlelight	
Sun 20.12.20, 10am	Christmas Family Praise	Christmas Family Praise		
Sun 20.12.20, 6.30pm	(See 13.12.20)		Carols by Candlelight	
Tues 22.12.20, 4pm				Christingle
Thurs 24.12.20, 4pm	Christingle on Zoom			
Fri 25.12.20, 10am	Family Service	Family Service	Family Service	
Fri 25.12.20, 11am				Family Service
Sun 27.12.20, 10am	Family Service		(No service)	
Sun 3.1.21, 10am	Church Family Worship	Church Family Worship	Church Family Worship	

## Online services

Our pre-recorded YouTube services can be accessed via the Worship tab on the St Michael's Church website – this is the link to them ...

<http://stmichaelsbtree.co.uk/website/index.php/worship/adult-service>.

There is no need to book to watch these. They can be seen from the times shown and are then available anytime after that.

For the Christingle by Zoom you need to pre-book a seat by Friday 18<sup>th</sup> December – you can do this via the link that will appear on the Home Page of the St Michael's Church website ([www.stmichaelsbtree.co.uk](http://www.stmichaelsbtree.co.uk)).

If you book in for Christingle by Zoom, a Christingle kit and book will be delivered to you in time for Christmas Eve.

## St Michael's by Phone

You can listen on the phone to our most recent service – just dial 01376 333565. Phone calls are charged at the local rate. “St Michael's by Phone” services are available from the time shown until the next week's service replaces it.

## Services in church and

## services in Church House

You will need to book your seat in advance:

- For **Sunday services** – by the Thursday before
- For the **Christingle service** (on Tues 22<sup>nd</sup> Dec) – by Fri 18<sup>th</sup> Dec, and
- For the **Christmas Day** services – by Mon 21<sup>st</sup> Dec

You can book seats either via the St Michael's website (Worship tab) or by leaving a message on the church office answerphone (01376 321248). You will be contacted two days before the service if you have a seat – **please only attend if you have been told you have a pre-booked seat.**

On Christmas Day, all our Family Services will be similar, but the I I am one in Church House will be particularly suitable for primary school aged children and younger, as there will also be a craft activity around tables.

If you are coming into church or Church House, you will need to comply with the following:

1. That you have not had COVID-19 symptoms in the last 14 days (fever, continuous cough, loss of sense of smell or taste)
2. That you are fit to attend the church, in line with government guidance on shielding and isolating
3. That you agree to maintain a 2-metre social distance from others and to wear a face covering in church, unless exempt

## MISSION OF THE MONTH STAND BY ME

**Stand By Me** have been rescuing children since 1995. They provide child-centred care as they consider the needs of each child, their family and their community.

The following points explain the work of **Stand By Me** in their own words...

- **Loving care**

*We get to know each child — their hopes, history, needs and dreams. We delight in our children and want the best for them. We invest our time, love and attention raising them to know that they're loved and accepted for who they are.*

- **Strong families**

*Usually the best place for a child to thrive is in their family – that's why we work hard to help families stay together. In the absence of a stable family, we place children who are at risk into our loving family homes.*

- **Great education**

*A great quality education is key to escaping poverty. Our education programmes equip our kids with the skills they need to rise above their circumstances and help change their communities.*

- **Access to healthcare**

*The health of our children is vital to their development and happiness, so we go the extra mile to make sure that they are fit and well, and can enjoy their childhood.*

- **A reason for hope**

*It's a privilege to teach our kids of Jesus' love for them, and to demonstrate this through the quality of our care. As their desire for spiritual answers grows, we encourage them to discover a love, respect and knowledge of God for themselves.*

- **Caring relationships**

*It's incredibly important to each child's sense of value and stability that they're raised by parents and teachers who care about them. Child sponsorship supports this further by giving our kids a relationship with a sponsor who loves them and helps them feel part of a wider family.*

**Stand By Me** has developed four care programmes to meet the individual needs of the children they work with. These programmes are Children's Homes, Schools, Care Centres and Family Support.

They are currently working in the following countries...Dominican Republic, Myanmar, Colombia, Romania, Ethiopia, India and Nepal.

Our Junior Church continues to sponsor and support Tsion from Ethiopia through **Stand By Me** and we receive letters and updates.

If you would like to find out more about **Stand By Me** then do visit their website [www.standby.me](http://www.standby.me)

*Rachel Grove-Smith*

## **CPAS**

CPAS is an Anglican Evangelical mission agency working in the UK and Republic of Ireland.

Their mission is to help every person hear and discover the good news of Jesus Christ through the ministry of local churches.

They are patrons of our church. They help provide evangelical ministers to churches and also provide lots of courses for ministers, other leaders and PCC groups. They also run ventures and Falcons young people's holidays where up to 4000 children attend various camps and house parties during the summer months mainly.

This year of course was particularly difficult as venues had been booked but, in the end, had to be cancelled. However, CPAS provided an online holiday for the children sending out to them 'Falcons-in-a-box' which included all sorts of activities and the holidays were conducted online. They are currently considering next year's ventures and Falcons and would value prayer in guidance.

Praise God for the success of virtual ventures and thank him for his provision of ideas, technology, energy, and enthusiasm in the midst of challenging circumstances. Pray that the children who received a falcon-in-a-box would continue to remember the generosity, kindness and teaching they received on Falcon holidays in the past.

Praise God also for the hard work and adaptability of the hundreds of volunteer leaders who dreamt up virtual games, lead Bible studies from afar, sent exciting post and built a sense of Christian community.

Praise God also for CPAS delivering a series of free web teaching series and is currently running a leadership web course entitled Leading in Uncertain Times.

They have also been doing virtual learning as well as in person sessions with social distancing, to clergy, ordinands, and MA students on a range of topics including leadership and mission.

One of the key strategic goals over the next five years is to equip 1000 ministers and focal leaders to lead and be more effective in evangelism.

A key piece of work is now underway in partnership with the Church of England and others to develop an online learning process for clergy and lay leaders to help churches see more people become disciples of Jesus. Further information on CPAS can be obtained from their website [www.cpas.org.uk](http://www.cpas.org.uk)

*Derek Chapman*

## CORRIE TEN BOOM

This is the rest of the story that I used in a Sermon Illustration recently... and I promised to be put it in Link

### From the Sermon

*Corrie Ten Boom ( A Dutch Christian who saved many Jews from the holocaust and herself spent many hard years in a concentration camp, then many years throughout the world telling others of Jesus and his forgiveness.) tells of an incident in her life*

*I recall the time, some 15 years ago, when some Christian friends whom I loved and trusted did something which hurt me.*

*For weeks I seethed inside. But at last, I asked God to work His miracle of forgiving others in me. And ... it happened: first the decision to forgive, then the flood of joy and peace.*

*I had forgiven my friends; I was restored to my Father.*

*Then, why was I suddenly awake in the middle of the night, hashing over the whole affair again? My **friends!** I thought. **People I loved!** If it had been strangers, I wouldn't have minded so.*

**CONTINUED** (And bell ringers will understand!!)

Corrie Ten Boom sat up and switched on the light. "Father, I thought it was all forgiven! Please help me do it!"

But the next night I woke up again. They'd talked so sweetly too! Never a hint of what they were planning. "Father!" I cried in alarm. "Help me!"

His help came in the form of a kindly Lutheran pastor to whom I confessed my failure after two sleepless weeks.

"Up in that church tower," he said, nodding out the window, "is a bell which is rung by pulling on a rope. But you know what? After the sexton lets go of the rope, the bell keeps on swinging. First **ding** then **dong**. Slower and slower until there's a final **dong** and it stops.

“I believe the same thing is true of forgiveness. When we forgive someone, we take our hand off the rope. But if we’ve been tugging at our grievances for a long time, we mustn’t be surprised if the old angry thoughts keep coming for a while. They’re just the ding-dongs of the old bell slowing down.”

And so, it proved to be. There were a few more midnight reverberations, a couple of dings when the subject came up in my conversation. But the force—which was my willingness in the matter—had gone out of them. They came less and less often and at last stopped altogether.

And so, I discovered another secret of forgiveness: that we can trust God not only above our emotions, but also above our thoughts.

## **BUT THERE IS MORE!**

Because many years later, in 1970, an American with whom I had shared the ding-dong principle came to visit me in Holland and met the people involved. “Aren’t those the friends who let you down?” he asked as they left my apartment.

“Yes,” I said a little smugly. “You can see it’s all forgiven.”

“By you, yes,” he said. “But what about them? Have they accepted your forgiveness?”

“They say there’s nothing to forgive! They deny it ever happened. But I can prove it!” I went eagerly to my desk. “I have it in black and white! I saved all their letters, and I can show you where—”

“Corrie!” My friend slipped his arm through mine and gently closed the drawer. “Aren’t you the one whose sins are at the bottom of the sea? And are the sins of your friends etched in black and white

Can not many of us relate to this?

*Jennifer Bailey*

## OUR DAILY BREAD NOTES

I know many people have Bible reading notes to help them to read and understand the scriptures. Due to Covid 19 restrictions we have not been able to put a supply of the free Our Daily Bread notes in church. However, these are still available on-line. You can read online, or download the pdf through the following link: <https://odb.org/>

Alternatively, you can receive them by email, an app, or their Facebook page, so there is no need to go without.

Our Daily Bread have produced the following free booklets, these reflections will bring comfort, hope and encouragement in these hard and difficult times.

Hope in Hard Times

<https://odb.org/resources/hope-in-hard-times>

Hope in the Psalms

<https://odb.org/resources/finding-hope-in-the-psalms-reflections-from-our-daily-bread>

I do hope you find them helpful and you can check out other booklets that are also available to you and as soon as we are able we will put some hard copies in church, either standard size ones or large print.

*Norma Huxter*

## **BLIND WILLIE JOHNSON.....**

.....was born into an Afro-American share cropping family in Pendleton, Texas in 1897. He and his family were poor, but Blind Willie could sing and play what was called a 'cigar box guitar'. His singing and guitar playing, together with his faith in Jesus Christ, was nurtured by his local Baptist church.

### **BLUES MUSIC**

'The Blues' in the early years of the 20th Century was unpopular and thought 'devilish' by most Americans until the 1920s. However, Blind Willie Johnson was a singing evangelist. He sang the Blues. He and his music became popular.

Here is the chorus of one of his Blues songs, made known in the UK by Eric Clapton,

*'We've been told that God done warned us, Jesus coming soon.  
We've been told that God done warned us, Jesus coming soon.'*

### **'YOU WILL SEE THE SON OF MAN COMING.....'**

According to Mark, these the final words of Jesus to his prime accuser, sealed his fate. Mark tells Our Lord answered his (the High Priest) that the next time they met; the High Priest would see Jesus coming from heaven as God's messiah.

Blind Willie Jackson grasped the significance of the return again of Jesus Christ: 'God done warned us.....'.

### **GET READY NOW**

He will come to put the world right and it will be so good that it is beyond our imagining. One of the things that is certain is Willie Johnson will see again.

But putting things right means our Lord will have to throw out all that is rotten and bad. I would be proud to stand with Blind Willie Jackson who, one way or another, sang that the Lord Jesus saves rubbish. We don't have to be thrown we can be saved by turning our hearts to Jesus Christ.

## **CAN'T WAIT!**

The High Priest dared not wait for the coming of the Son of Man on the clouds. Blind Willie Jackson couldn't wait. It will be good to meet Blind Willie Jackson when, as he put it, 'Jesus comes again'.

*Stephen Bailey*

## BUILDINGS UPDATE

I am writing to share some of the progress that has been made on the Fabric of the church and Church House over the last few months.

Whilst we have been closed over the last month, work has continued to take place in the Bell Tower; the walls behind the organ and in the Jesus Chapel repaired; and the restoration of the Remembrance boards has taken place. In the WWII board, the gold has been restored so it can be read clearly.

The works have been funded through gifts, legacies, and a grant we have received for building works, for which we give thanks.



Over the coming month there will be final fixings to the lights in the church; preparation of the Jesus Chapel floor and possibly the return of some of the curtains in the Church.

In Church House the stage still needs to be sanded/varnished and the landing completed painting. (If anyone would like to complete the landing painting please let me know as the paint and tools are available.).

*Dave Marriott*

## DECEMBER DIARY

[www.stmichaelsbtree.co.uk](http://www.stmichaelsbtree.co.uk)

Worship on the Web online services are launched at the times shown as follows:

Adult & Family Services

<http://stmichaelsbtree.co.uk/website/index.php/worship/adult-service>

The services are available at the times shown, or to watch ~~or listen to~~ after those times, on catch-up

St Michael's by Phone – you can listen to our most recent service – just dial 01376 333565 (calls charged at local rate)

### **1 Tuesday**

2:00pm Bible reading group on Conferoo

### **2 Wednesday**

10:00am Meeting Point on Zoom

8:00pm Zoom Bible Study, led by Cyril Bamforth

### **3 Thursday**

11:00am Coffee@Home “Monthly Zoom Coffee morning” with Nigel & Jo Adams

### **5 Saturday**

10-Noon Women@St Michael's conference on Zoom with Jane Harpur

### **6 Sunday**

10:00am Family Service in Church – Book in advance

10:00am Worship on the Web – Family Service

11:00am After Church “Zoom Coffee”

### **8 Tuesday**

2:00pm Bible reading group on Conferoo

8 - 9pm First Priority Prayer Meeting on Zoom

### **9 Wednesday**

10:00am Meeting Point on Zoom  
2 – 3pm Church open for Private Prayer  
8:00pm Zoom Bible Study, led by Cyril Bamforth

### **13 Sunday GIFTS AND THANKSGIVING**

10:00am Worship on the Web – Advent Family Praise  
11:00am After Church “Zoom Coffee”  
6.30pm Worship on the Web – Carol Service  
6.30pm Carol Service in Church – Book in advance

### **15 Tuesday**

2:00pm Bible reading group on Conferoo

### **16 Wednesday**

10:00am Meeting Point on Zoom  
6 – 7pm Church open for Private Prayer (tbc)  
8:00pm Zoom Bible Study, led by Cyril Bamforth

### **20 Sunday**

10:00am Worship on the Web – Christmas Family Praise  
11:00am After Church “Zoom Coffee”  
6.30pm Carol Service in Church – Book in advance

### **22 Tuesday JANUARY LINK SUBMISSION DUE**

2:00pm Bible reading group on Conferoo  
4.00pm Christingle Service in Church House – Book in advance

### **24 Thursday**

4.00pm Christingle Service on Zoom – Book in advance

### **25 Friday CHRISTMAS DAY**

10:00am Worship on the Web – Family Service  
10:00am Family Service in Church – Book in advance  
11.00am Family Service in Church House (including craft activity – particularly suitable for primary school children and younger) – Book in advance

## **27 Sunday**

10:00am Worship on the Web – Family Service

11:00am After Church “Zoom Coffee”

## **30 Wednesday**

6 – 7pm Church open for Private Prayer

## **3 January - Sunday**

10:00am Family Service in Church – Book in advance

10:00am Worship on the Web – Family Service

11:00am After Church “Zoom Coffee”

## **BELFRY BULLETIN**

### **BELL RESTORATION UPDATE**

It is disappointing to have to report that, due to the Covid-19 situation and Bat restrictions, our bells will not be returned to the belfry until April 2021 which means we will be without bells for another 6 months.

On a brighter note the 10 new bell ropes have been delivered. Also, with a few grant applications outstanding we hope to secure the final £8,000 needed by the years end.

We have been very heartened by many comments from the church family and the general public saying how much the sound of the bells are missed.

This will be only the 2<sup>nd</sup> year that I can remember that the bells at St. Michael's have not been rung half muffled on Remembrance Day and Remembrance Sunday but we will remember them.

A 1<sup>st</sup> not happening this year, again due to the virus, is the ringers Christmas party. We will get round that by arranging a virtual party on the internet having cooked our own Christmas dinner. Now where did I put Pat's Christmas pudding recipe.

With the latest lockdown making tower bell and church services postponed again it is heartening to see how the Church of England and their ringers have shown imagination in keeping the work going.

This was brought home to me at my older brother Alan's funeral at St. Andrews Biggleswade which is in Interregnum. The church was made safe for the allowed 30 congregation with Zoom facilities put in place. Reverend's Guy and Kate Scot made the long journey from Midsummer Norton to lead the service. Because of the restrictions the ringers were unable to ring the tower bells so ringers representing all the

Bedfordshire Association Districts rang hand bells in the church yard on the coffin's arrival and departure. Alan had been a ringer for 76 years.

The efforts of all these people showed wonderful Christian love.

STAY SAFE

*Peter Smith*