

TRIO

April 2016

The Parish Magazine of
St Mary, West Malling,
St Michael, Offham &
St Gabriel, Kings Hill

Contributions welcomed



An Evening of Easter
Music and Meditation
with Maidstone
Salvation Army Songsters

Pilsdon at Malling
27 Water Lane, West Malling, Kent ME19 6HH
Saturday 2nd April at 7pm
A retiring collection will be taken



From the Editor

On Good Friday evening, I stumbled across the second of Mary Berry's programmes about Easter traditions. She'd managed to persuade the great and the good of a wide variety of communities and Christian denominations to share the food they traditionally serve at Easter. Intrigued to discover more, I located the first episode on iPlayer: Russian and Greek Orthodox, Filipino, Italian and Polish Roman Catholics and Caribbean Baptists took part – amongst others – including the Anglican Archbishops of Canterbury and York. The climax was an Easter banquet in her local church hall with all of her new friends.

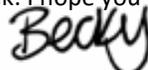


Do you know the origin of hot cross buns? St Alban's Cathedral lays claim to that. In 1361, Thomas Roccliffe, a monk at the abbey, made small spiced buns marked with a cross to be given to the poor and needy passing the refectory door on Good Friday. The Alban bun is spicier than traditional hot cross buns and contains only currants (and the 3,000 the cathedral commissions from a local baker to its secret recipe sell like hot cakes in the cathedral café). In the 14th Century the abbey had an uncomfortable relationship with the locals so it wasn't just an act of generosity – it was a useful and effective PR exercise.

Although there were some differences – the Eastern Orthodox church, because it follows the Julian calendar, celebrates Easter after the Western church – there were remarkable similarities. Eggs – in various guises – figured greatly. Breads, enriched with ingredients traditionally abstained from in Lent (eggs, spices, butter, fruit) were lovingly home-made to inherited recipes, almost all of which involved a great deal of time and patience. Often preparations began on what many call 'Clean Thursday' (Maundy Thursday, the day we remember Jesus washing the disciples' feet and teaching them how to remember his death through the sharing of bread and wine). All of the recipes came with stories. Particularly poignant was the Polish Babka made by Damien. His Grandma was in a concentration camp when she was 18, during the second World War. She lived on potatoes and not much else – bread was considered a luxury. She survived the camp and lived to a ripe old age but, for Damien, making that Babka bread kept that connection with his Grandma (and his Mum) alive. Making the bread nurtured those relationships: it reminded him of their stories.

It struck me how food has the capacity – literally – to stir really important memories and feelings in us. It was something I experienced at the Seder meal hosted by Pat Dickin at St Lawrence, Mereworth the previous evening. As we re-enacted elements of the meal Jesus would have celebrated with his disciples, the story of Exodus was retold – the distress of the Israelite slaves, the intransigence of Pharaoh, the plagues and the escape through the Red Sea. Bread was also an integral part of this story, but not, like the Easter breads, made to complex recipes. It was bread made without yeast; made in a hurry. It would keep for a few days, even in a warm climate, without going mouldy. The stories of the escape from Egypt and the Last Supper resonated very deeply in that context.

Both Mary's programmes and the Seder meal were full of Easter hope: hope in the Bread of life which sustains us. Hope that through the darkness the dawn will break. I hope you have a wonderful Easter season!

With very best wishes, 

From David

As I sit down to write this article, I have just completed the journey of Holy Week. Having started with the joyous entry of the King of Kings on Palm Sunday, we've descended to the depths on Maundy Thursday and known the desolation of Good Friday and the death of Jesus. Now, in four very different services today, I've led God's people in the celebration of Easter joy.



When I came home after the last service, my son showed me a picture from his National Geographic: Kids magazine (see picture). Dutch photographer Maurice Mikkers has made a study of what tears look like under a microscope. As they crystallised, imagine his surprise as he discovered that each tear is unique and different. 'Reflex tears', for example from chopping onions, look different to 'basal tears', from something like a cold wind blowing in your face. Emotional tears and tears of pain look different again.

With the emotions of Good Friday and Easter Sunday fresh in my mind, the photograph showing the amazing delicacy of God's creation as it is to be found in human beings, has reminded me of a verse from the Psalms:

"You have written down my poem of sadness,
you have put my tears in your bottle.
Are they not in your record, O Lord?"

Psalm 56.8

The Easter story is one of great joy and triumph, but it's a triumph borne out of suffering and brokenness. As I said in my sermon today, we live with that question, "What's wrong with the world?" on a daily basis. Recent events in Belgium and before that in France, ongoing conflict in Syria, our own individual troubles and frailties, stories of abuse and power misused, relationships in difficulty and pain in our bodies. It's all there and tears of all kinds are all too frequently shed.

But the thought that each tear is unique can, perhaps, encourage us. It was for those tears and brokenness that God entered into our world in the person of Jesus. Each tear is gathered into his bottle and not lost. He sees our pain in the broken world we have created for ourselves, and He loves us from all eternity in such a way that it drove him to take action and make that journey from the cross to the empty tomb and beyond.

It means that there are some more words we can say with the Psalmist:

"Those who go out sobbing as they carry seeds to plant
will come back singing. They will come home with shouts of joy."

Psalm 126.5-6
David Green



Experience Easter

This year both St Mary's and St Michael's hosted classes from West Malling and Offham Primary Schools respectively to *Experience Easter*. Pupils were told the Easter story in full, then split into small groups to explore different elements of the story.

The experience begins with Palm Sunday, the start of Holy Week, with all its hopes and dreams. The 'Servant King' station follows on, when Jesus showed us how we should behave towards others. The Last Supper with its symbolism of breaking bread and drinking wine (grape juice) was next. Children moved on to the loneliness of the Garden of Gethsemane where they were asked to think about their fears and talk about them if they wanted to share them. Finally, they came to the cross – a place of death, but also a beacon of hope for all who suffer. Children held newspaper covered crosses as they prayed for people suffering all over the world and made their own prayers.

Finally, the class congregated once more to be shown the empty tomb and imagine what it must have been like for the first few who discovered what had happened almost two thousand years ago.

It was a great way for the children to immerse themselves in the Easter experience and think about the events leading up to Jesus' resurrection in more depth. *Becky Clifford*



Kent Recorder Ensemble Concert

including solo performances by Marion Scott and guests

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What's on at St Mary's

Annual Parochial Church Meeting | Sunday 24th April | 10:00 am

There will be just ONE church service on this special Sunday, 24th April at the different time of **10:00 am**. Please mark this date in your diary and be sure to come along.

As part of our worship, we will give thanks for the blessings we have received over the past year and elect our Churchwardens and PCC. There is currently a vacancy for one Churchwarden, Secretary and Treasurer.

We will also take a glimpse at what our future might look like and consider:

- the outcomes of our stewardship campaign
- the sale of the Church Centre (pending Diocesan/Charities Commission requirements and having the right restrictive covenants in place)
- progress so far to reorder St Mary's to include toilet and refreshment facilities

It's an exciting and pivotal time in the future of our church. We need everyone to join in. Your voice is vital, whatever your views – we need 'critical friends' just as much as we need those who fully endorse the embryo proposals to make sure the finished plans are the best that they can be.

Refreshments will be served. There will be opportunities to discuss plans with members of the PCC, ministers and (hopefully) Churchwardens!

You can read more about our current situation on pp. 16-20.



Our Annual Service was taken by Rev. David Green last month and he spoke about the effect of Sunday Trading in relation to family life. We enjoyed tea afterwards. Our speaker this month will be Nick Crutchfield who will be talking about Hand bells and we will be able to try hand bell ringing.

Anyone interested is welcome to come along and try your hand at 2:30 pm on April 11th in St Mary's Church tower. This will be followed by tea. *Gail Crutchfield*

Christian Aid Collection



We are planning a street collection for Christian Aid which will be held in West Malling High Street, near Tesco, on Friday 20th May and Saturday 21st May between 8:30 am and early afternoon. Collectors

will usually be in pairs.

The theme for this year's Christian Aid Week is 'Love every neighbour', and focuses on helping people in difficult situations, such as living in flood-prone Bangladesh, providing both immediate assistance and long-term solutions. Last year, Christian Aid Week raised an amazing £11 million across the UK, and we are hoping for the same generous response in 2016.

If you could help collect for an hour, please contact me: ☎ 01732 845559 | 07947 725408 (text or phone) ✉ debsutch@btinternet.com. Many thanks.

Deb Sutch



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St Michael's Offham News & Muse

This year, our **Annual Parochial Church Meeting** will be held as part of our Sunday Service on **17th April** after a short act of worship at 9:15 am. We want to encourage attendance and engagement with our annual meeting, since attendance at the mid-week evening APCM in previous years was disappointing. Please put the date in your diary and come along both to worship God, to review the last year and to look ahead together.

All are welcome to come and hear of all the wonderful things that have happened in 2015. It's at this meeting we elect the Churchwardens, PCC and office holders.

Easter Dawn Service

Thirty brave souls assembled around the blazing log fire at 6:15 am on Easter Morning at St Michael's to herald the rising of the sun, but this year we were met with cloud and rain, so we imagined the sunrise from the lightening sky. David Green led the brief Dawn Service, which opened with the uplifting words:



"Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, to you be glory and praise for ever. Your steadfast love extends to the heavens and your faithfulness never ceases. Illuminate our hearts with your wisdom and strengthen our lives with your word, for you are the fountain of life; in your light we see true light. Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit." - to which we replied, "Blessed be God for ever."

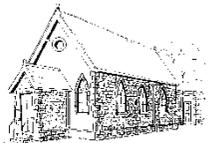


We sang a Taizé chant – Wait for the Lord, whose day is near – and David lit the Easter candle while saying a prayer. After a reading from St John's Gospel we were able to give the Easter Acclamation - "Alleluia, Christ is Risen" and "He is risen indeed! Alleluia!" to celebrate the resurrection and greet one another with wishes for a Happy Easter.

We were invited to breakfast on hot sausages, tea and coffee in the warmth of the farmhouse. Another very memorable event. Many thanks to Stephen and Anne Betts for their hospitality.

Offham Methodist Church

On **Saturday 9th April** we hold our second annual Coffee Morning between 10.00 am. and noon in aid of Maidstone Christian Care. Their work of supporting the homeless and vulnerable continues to be in demand. Please come along to support a very worthy cause.



Our **“Tea & Chat”** continues on the first Tuesday of the month – **5th April**, meeting in our hall from 2:00 until 4:00 pm. You are invited to come and join us to meet old friends and maybe some new ones over a cup of tea. Next month we’ll meet on 5th May.

The April Open House Meeting will be held on **Thursday, 7th April** for a Coffee Morning and Quiz at 10:00am; the meeting will be held at Ann Frost’s house at Amberley Lodge, Teston Road.



The meeting the following month on 5th May will be at Spadework with a hanging basket demonstration by some of the trainees and a “Gardeners’ Question Time”.

Offham May Day will be held on Saturday, 30th April from 12.00 noon.

May Day News May Day News

A wide variety of stalls includes cakes, chocolate tombola, bottles, toys and games, coconut shy, skittle alley, tea tent, BBQ, raffle, sweet tombola and face painting.

For those with a competitive streak, we are calling bakers of all ages to take part in the *Great Offham Bakeoff*. The Dog Show returns with even more classes: is your pooch a champ? Aspiring athletes may like to get in training for The Offham Dash, which includes both adults’ and children’s races

Stalls will open on the Green at noon and the May Queen will be crowned at 1:00 pm. The Wadard Morris Men will delight with their traditional dances, after which there will be Maypole Dancing by pupils from Offham Primary School.

The children of the village have elected Alicia Saunders as May Queen; her attendant will be Lizzie Hales; her flower girls Maia Davis, Olivia Hammond and Louise Spooner and Crown Bearer, Jacob Lloyd-Williams.

Other events taking place on May Day include the ever popular tug of war and plank walking. Neither are to be missed.

The Offham Society AGM will be on **Thursday, 7th April** at 8:00 pm. in the Village Hall - followed by ‘The Madness of Gardeners’ - an illustrated talk by Sally Berkeley, garden historian and an expert on Renaissance gardens. Her entertaining and amusing talk covers plant hunters and avid collectors throughout history, who have gone to great lengths to discover and collect rare and new plants – *join us for drinks and canapés at 7:30 pm, prior to the meeting.*



Offham Parish Council will be holding its **Annual Parish Meeting** on **Tuesday, 26th April** from 7.30 to 10.00 p.m. in the Village Hall. This is an open meeting for residents - it is not a normal Parish Council meeting and is your opportunity to raise any issues, concerns or ideas that you may have about the village.



Mobile Library

Pat Lander has asked me to bring proposed changes to the Mobile Library service in Offham to your attention. At present the library visits the Offham Village Hall Car Park on a Thursday for 20 minutes from 11.10 to 11.30 am.

The proposal is to change it to **Fridays** for 30 minutes from **15.20 to 15.50 pm**.

If this valuable service is to be continued it is important that we give it our support. As the saying goes, "Use it or lose it".

Mike Rowe

Seder Meal on Maundy Thursday

As mentioned in the editorial, this was a terrifically emotive experience as well as being a really good time to get to know others better and eat some delicious food.

Foreshadowing (or should it be the opposite?) the Easter service, the meal began with lighting a single candle, from which all the other candles on the tables were lit.

When telling the story of the Israelite's escape from slavery in Egypt, some unleavened bread (matzo) was reserved for unexpected guests and the doors left open – albeit briefly, due to the howling winds and lashing rain – to welcome passing strangers.

After we'd enjoyed a terrific meal of lamb stew and baked potatoes, salad and cheese, we were treated to some exceptional puddings. During the meal, the reserved bread was hidden. After everyone had had their fill, the children played a game of hunt the matzo. That was then broken and shared as Jesus would have done at the last supper.

Once the final grace had been said, we stripped the church of its hangings and left in silence. It was a powerful moment. Do come next year if you can. It's so special.



Left to Right: Tables set and ready, lighting the candle with matzo adjacent.

Becky Clifford Photos: Mark Montgomery

Good News from St Gabriel's

Message from Mark

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my hand in his side, I will not believe.' ... Then Jesus said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.' John 20.24-29



After the cross came confusion, uncertainty, for the first few days. People were not sure what was going on. Jesus appeared to some, but not all at the same time and that led to doubt. The most famous doubter was Thomas, one of the disciples, one of Jesus' closest friends.

To have doubts is a natural thing: we can't always be certain about everything. Some people doubt that the resurrection took place at all, but then again, so did one of Jesus' closest friends. Christ rising from the dead for us is the most amazing thing, but it takes faith to believe – and sometimes faith brings doubts. However, the answers to those doubts come through faith!

When Thomas actually saw Jesus, he exclaimed, 'My Lord and my God!' He recognized Christ's role in his life and his doubts disappeared. Jesus' response was that those of us who have not seen, but believe, are more fortunate or supremely favoured. That's what we are, and that's why we worship all the Jesus does for us, even though sometimes we have doubts, just like Thomas.

Even though Thomas doubted at first, God still used him to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. Even if at times you have doubts in your faith, know that Jesus is close by, and know that God wants to use you in amazing ways to proclaim Christ in this community.

Annual General Meeting

On Sunday, 24th April 2016, our Annual General Meeting will take place, after our service at 9:30 am at Discovery School. It's a really important event, so please try to come.

Diary Dates

Monday 4 th April, 8:00 pm	Cluster Prayers	27 Ames Way, Kings Hill
Tuesday 5 th April, 8:00 pm	Homegroup	27 Ames Way, Kings Hill
Wednesday 6 th April, 1:00pm	Knit & Natter	5 Cellini Walk, Kings Hill
Wednesday 13 th April, 7:30 pm	Shine Brighter	Venue tba
Tuesday 19 th April, 8:00 pm	Homegroup	27 Ames Way, Kings Hill
Wednesday 20 th April, 1:00 pm	Knit & Natter	5 Cellini Walk, Kings Hill
Sunday 24 th April, after service	Annual General Meeting	Discovery School, Kings Hill
Wednesday 27 th April, 7:30 pm	Shine Brighter	Venue tba

Easter at St Gabriel's

It was a busy Easter at St Gabriel's this year. As well as joining in the Cluster Seder Meal on Maundy Thursday, the Walk of Witness in West Malling and the Dawn Service, we held our own intergenerational services on Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

On Good Friday we launched what is set to become an annual exploration of Easter. Similar to our Messy Nativity held on Christmas Eve, the service combined crafts, activities and refreshments, with a multi-sensory exploration of the Easter message for all ages. With take home activities and bags, young and old alike joined in crafts, followed by a multi-sensory talk which invited people to do things like hammering nails in to wood, share in unleavened bread and grape juice, before sharing a broken Easter egg in recognition that the goodness of Jesus beating death is for everyone.

On Easter morning, our service welcomed visitors and regulars for hot drinks and pastries before we started our Easter morning worship. With a mix of songs, videos and even an Easter egg hunt as part of our worship, young and old explored the message of the resurrection. As part of the service children and young people made giveaway bags and bunnies to give them away to friends: the message of the resurrection is not just to be kept to ourselves. The adults were challenged to explore the resurrection as the start of a great journey that we are all invited on.



A selection of the crafts and activities the congregation enjoyed on Easter Day.



Mark Montgomery

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How Easter Killed my Faith in Atheism

It was the worst news I could get as an atheist: my agnostic wife had decided to become a Christian. Two words shot through my mind. The first was an expletive; the second was “divorce.”

I thought she was going to turn into a self-righteous holy roller. But over the following months, I was intrigued by the positive changes in her character and values. Finally, I decided to take my journalism and legal training (I was legal editor of the Chicago Tribune) and systematically investigate whether there was any credibility to Christianity.

Maybe, I figured, I could extricate her from this cult.

I quickly determined that the alleged resurrection of Jesus was the key. Anyone can claim to be divine, but if Jesus backed up his claim by returning from the dead, then that was awfully good evidence he was telling the truth.

For nearly two years, I explored the minutia of the historical data on whether Easter was myth or reality. I didn't merely accept the New Testament at face value; I was determined only to consider facts that were well-supported historically. As my investigation unfolded, my atheism began to buckle.

Was Jesus really executed? In my opinion, the evidence is so strong that even atheist historian Gerd Lüdemann said his death by crucifixion was “indisputable.”

Was Jesus' tomb empty? Scholar William Lane Craig points out that its location was known to Christians and non-Christians alike. So if it hadn't been empty, it would have been impossible for a movement founded on the resurrection to have exploded into existence in the same city where Jesus had been publicly executed just a few weeks before.

Besides, even Jesus' opponents implicitly admitted the tomb was vacant by saying that his body had been stolen. But nobody had a motive for taking the body, especially the disciples. They wouldn't have been willing to die brutal martyrs' deaths if they knew this was all a lie.



Did anyone see Jesus alive again? I have identified at least eight ancient sources, both inside and outside the New Testament, that in my view confirm the apostles' conviction that they encountered the resurrected Christ. Repeatedly, these sources stood strong when I tried to discredit them.

Could these encounters have been hallucinations? No way, experts told me. Hallucinations occur in individual brains, like dreams, yet, according to the Bible, Jesus appeared to groups of people on three different occasions – including 500 at once!

Was this some other sort of vision, perhaps prompted by the apostles' grief over their leader's execution? This wouldn't explain the dramatic conversion of Saul, an opponent of Christians, or James, the once-skeptical half-brother of Jesus.

Neither was primed for a vision, yet each saw the risen Jesus and later died proclaiming he had appeared to him. Besides, if these were visions, the body would still have been in the tomb.

Was the resurrection simply the recasting of ancient mythology, akin to the fanciful tales of Osiris or Mithras? If you want to see a historian laugh out loud, bring up that kind of pop-culture nonsense.

One by one, my objections evaporated. I read books by skeptics, but their counter-arguments crumbled under the weight of the historical data. No wonder atheists so often come up short in scholarly debates over the resurrection.

In the end, after I had thoroughly investigated the matter, I reached an unexpected conclusion: it would actually take more faith to maintain my atheism than to become a follower of Jesus.

And that's why I'm now celebrating my 30th Easter as a Christian. Not because of wishful thinking, the fear of death, or the need for a psychological crutch, but because of the facts.

Lee Stroble

Editor: The blog, which can be shared, can be found at:

<http://blogs.wsj.com/speakeasy/2011/04/16/how-easter-killed-my-faith-in-atheism/>

Churches Together in Malling Good Friday Walk of Witness

Good Friday dawned bright and sunny – and unusually for this March, stayed that way – for the Walk of Witness. The service started at St Thomas More and wended its way to St Mary's Church via Swan Street Baptist Church, the beautiful grounds of St Mary's Abbey and the High Street. So many took part it took several minutes to settle everybody into the different venues.

Opening with a prophecy from Isaiah, at each station there were readings to mark the way of the cross which Jesus walked: praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, his betrayal, arrest, trial, crucifixion and burial. The service closed with everyone sharing the peace.

This year, courtesy of a talented team organised by John Musker, a new, solid wood cross was carried from Lucks Hill to the parish church to help us focus our thoughts.

Many thanks to Viv Ashworth and the team at Pilsdon who catered for so many hungry pilgrims with hot cross buns and tea after the service.

Left: the final part of the service is about to start

Right: David Green and John Musker carry the new cross into St Mary's.

Becky Clifford

Photos: Mark Montgomery





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Sermon preached at St Mary's, West Malling on Sunday, 13th March - Lent 5

2 Chronicles 31.2-10 & Matthew 6.19-34

Lord Jesus, before whom all things lie open, bless the words of my mouth, direct my purpose and my heart. Help us all as we listen, not to turn aside to the right or be distracted to the left, but to walk always in your footsteps. Amen.

During Lent, as you may know, we have been talking Stewardship: time and talents and treasure... and I've deliberately taken our time with that, but also taken time to talk not just about church but all of our lives - how we use all our time, talents and treasure. Because God does care about all of it: when we're working, resting, sleeping, cleaning, reading, or here in church, or with family, God loves us and he desires that we allow our hearts to open... and our hands to open, to let him in.

But today, having deliberately stayed at that high level and talked about all of life, I do want to zero in, as we finish this Stewardship series before Palm Sunday next week, and talk about our church community here.

And I want to ask you a question...and the question is this: *What if...?*

What if...?

What if...? is a phrase that can strike fear. In all our hearts and minds, from time to time, even if we don't mean to, we run the *What if...?* scenarios in our heads. We consider all the things that can go wrong in our world, perhaps especially when it comes to our finances.

We don't like feeling insecure. Some of our most basic instincts concern self-preservation and survival and security is, therefore, important. Thinking about all the *what if's* of life can cause panic and anxiety when we think about our future plans.

What if I lose my job?

What if she leaves me?

What if that investment goes down instead of up?

What if I get sick?

What if the roof needs repairing?

What if the car fails its MOT?

But what if the *What if* question wasn't as much about fear as about possibility? What if, when we trust God, He is able to do far more with what we have, in our lives and in the lives of others, than we could possibly imagine, or do on our own?

What if...?

We read today from Matthew chapter 6 and the context is important here. This is a very famous passage from the *Sermon on the Mount*. Jesus has taken to a mountainside by the Sea of Galilee. His disciples are with him, around him. But there's also a massive crowd there and he begins to teach. One of the most incredible two or three chapters in the whole of Scripture. And all kinds of people are there. We're told there were

northerners there. There were uneducated fishermen - people that couldn't read or write. There's posh people there, there's religiously serious people there, including those who didn't go a bundle on how Jesus would mix with all these riff-raff who were around him. There were people from Judea there, the middle classes... the home counties if you like... and even people from overseas... foreigners were there too. It's all described for us in Matthew chapter 4.

And to this incredible mix of humanity Jesus has the same message: a message of blessing.... 'Blessed are the meek, those who mourn' and so on.

But also a message of challenge.

A number of challenges are put before people - some of them controversial in their day. But amongst them, he advocates a proactive generosity. He puts his finger on a pressure point that few of us like and points out that money, our possessions, our security can become a god.

And he says you cannot serve two masters. If you serve one, the other will lose out... you will be diminished.

It's a straightforward choice. Will you serve the Lord? Or will your possessions be your god?

In the Old Testament too, we read part of the story of King Hezekiah. You may have seen in the parish magazine that archaeological evidence of his reign and reforms has been turned up recently just south of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

Hezekiah was a good King, a godly King, well known amongst the Jewish people for his reforms and attempts to return the people of Israel to their first love, their identity as the people of God. And in the story we read today, as the Temple is re-established and renewed, the people bring their tithes.

There is so much in this passage in 2 Chronicles, I could preach just that for the whole of Lent and still have stuff left over to say. But briefly, let me point out that the people bring, it says, 'the first fruits' of grain, wine, oil and honey. They didn't bring God their leftovers, their spare change in their pocket, whatever was left at the end of the month.

He got what was first... he had the place of priority.

They brought their tithes not just of money, but 10% of everything they were - their cattle and sheep, the dedicated things of the temple... it was all there. They ended up with heaps of it. So much that Hezekiah had to question what was going on.

It might be worth noting what those tithes weren't, as much as what they were...

it wasn't a tax.

it wasn't the leftovers, as I said.

it wasn't a bribe to make God pleased with them.

it wasn't a fundraiser for the church either.

and it wasn't optional.

But it was a tenth and it was God's plan for how the people would be provided for...

and it was given freely

and it was regular

and it was worship

and it was a way through which God's blessing came.

What if...?

Now, I asked our Diocesan Stewardship Adviser to run some numbers for me about our Benefice: us here at St Mary's and for Offham too. I'm afraid to say it didn't make for very pretty reading.

Let me start with a positive... he told me that if everyone tithed their time across our Benefice a tenth of our time - even just a tenth of our waking hours, it would be the equivalent of 12 full-time workers. How much could we get done if we had 12 people working full-time in our benefice?

How much great children's work could we do?

Or provision for the elderly?

Pastoral visiting for the sick?

Meeting the needs of local people?

Sitting and chatting about Jesus on Alpha or Emmaus courses

You might say we can't afford 12 full-time people and financially you would be right. But actually, if we all tithed our time, that's exactly what we would have.

What if...?

The same holds true with our finances and I'm struggling to frame this in a way that is positive, so I'll just give you the facts and you can draw your own conclusions. Brian Pull, the Diocesan Stewardship officer, gave me some comparative figures: churches of a similar size to ours in terms of people and the average level of financial donation per week per head.

There's a Church in Orpington. Not massively affluent, is it, Orpington? Not poor either, though. Similar size church to us. The average donation per week is £19 per adult.

Two churches in Erith: that's quite a run down part of the Diocese; quite a poor area. Similar size churches to us. Average per adult in one was £12.81 a week, the other was £9.24 a week.

The Diocesan Officer gave me our figures too. Average per adult per week - £4.80. We were right at the bottom of the Diocesan comparative lists. It gives me no pleasure to say this, but you need to know that St Mary's per person per week, we give less than almost any other church of a similar size anywhere in the diocese.

Of course, we must remember St Paul's words:

Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

And the story too of the Widow's Mite that we looked at a week or two ago. For some of us, £4.80 is a huge sacrifice and for that I'm grateful to God and blessed by your discipleship. And I'm very conscious that the folk who will be quickest to respond to this will be the people who can least afford to be more generous and are already giving like that Widow in the Temple. But I struggle to believe in an affluent parish like this one that most of us are in the situation of the Widow's Mite.

Let me try to frame it in a more positive way: one of the things I love about the Church when it's working well, is that a small group of people, each committed to doing a bit, can achieve a lot. There's an American minister, Bill Hybbels, who famously said that "the local church is the hope of the world."

Tiny little us - St Mary-the-Virgin, West Malling? Alright, it's a big building. A fairly tidily sized town. But I know people could drive to fifty churches at further distance from their home that are more plush, have more facilities than ours, with better this or that... better worship, better children's work, better preacher... but "the local church is the hope of the world." Small groups of people, working together, making a difference.

What if...?

Now, there is a bigger picture for St Mary's: everyone involved in whatever they can be, in Sunday services, in our attempts to reach out to the community, pastoral visiting, the school, all sorts of things. But I do need to talk about a couple of particular needs right now and mention the roles of Churchwarden, Treasurer and Secretary.

John has done a year now on his own as a Churchwarden. That's a tough road to tread, and I've been deliberately not doing things, or asking John to do things, because it's not fair to put all that on one person.

Lesley has been our Treasurer for five years and again, has done a great job for us. But circumstances change, they changed for Becky last year when she became a lay minister, not a Churchwarden. Lesley needs to step away.

Deb has been our PCC Secretary for a couple of separate stints and done a great job for us, but again, feels that now is the time to step aside.

There's no harm or foul in that: all of us, from time to time, will find one chapter ends, a new chapter begins and with that, our role within our Christian community may change too.

But I can't begin to tell you how important it is that we fill these roles well. They are not only important for the good health and structure of our church community, but when the structure is right and working well, it ensures that other people are set free, including me, to participate and contribute in ways that God has called them to do.

At St Michael's Offham, I also need a Churchwarden. Rob is stepping down this year. I also need a new Treasurer there too.

At times, I feel like I'm in Harry Potter with the Defence against the Dark Arts teacher: I can only be honest with you and tell you that it's frustrating and really depressing to me

personally. It gets me down, constantly trying to twist the arms of the reluctant, instead of joyfully welcoming people into roles.

I'm really not confident at all that I'll be able to fill these roles at West Malling. You may be sitting there thinking 'I can't,' because I'm too old, too sick, too busy with work.

I do get that, I really do. For some of us, those chapters when we filled those kinds of roles are in the past.

But even if that is you, would you please pray? And would you look around and encourage someone to step forward who might be really good? Is there something that you could do to take off them that would release them to do this?

What if...?

Because the sad reality for many churches today is that if the 'What if' isn't grasped positively with a sense of possibility, then a very different 'What if' question will start to take root.

What if... the local church could be the hope of the world?

Let us pray:

Loving Father,
your hands are wide open to satisfy the needs of every living creature.
Make us always thankful for your loving providence
and grant that we, remembering the account that we must one day give,
may be faithful stewards of your good gifts;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns,
one God, now and forever. Amen.

David Green

For the Parish Registers

St Mary, West Malling

Funeral

2nd March Hilda Kemp

16th March Paul Nelson

Interment

21st March Peter Everson



St Michael, Offham

Funeral

11th March June Moyce

X:pire Easter

Children and parents packed into the Church Centre on Good Friday to enjoy exploring the Easter theme in a very active way. There was cupcake decorating, stained glass window colouring, scratch cards revealing parts of the Easter story, making nests with eggs in and decorating 'empty tomb' biscuits as well as having a chance to make the Easter garden ready for the service on Sunday.

Thanks to all who helped with the refreshments and activities on the day. Judging by the happy faces and full hands that left, it was a great success.

The afternoon finished with an Easter egg hunt – a foretaste of good news to come.

Becky Clifford Photos: David Green



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Calendar – Regular Events (*unless otherwise stated)

St Mary's, West Malling

Sunday 8:00 am Holy Communion (BCP)
 11:00 am Holy Communion*
 (Common Worship)
 Monday 7:45 pm Bell Ringing
 Tuesday 10:00 am Morning Prayer

St Michael's, Offham

Sunday 9:15 am Holy Communion*

Offham Methodist Church

Sunday 11:00 am Worship

St Gabriel's, Discovery School, Kings Hill

Sunday 9:30 am Holy Communion*

Barn Chapel, Pilsdon at Malling

Wednesday 12 noon Holy Communion
 Sunday 4:00 pm Open House Tea
 6:00 pm Holy Communion

April 2016

2 nd	7:00 pm	Easter Music & Meditation	Barn Chapel, Pilsdon at Malling
3 rd	Easter 2		
	9:15 am	All Age Service	St Michael, Offham
	11:00 am	All Age Service	St Mary, West Malling
		COFFEE Coffee and cakes after the Service COFFEE	
4 th	10:00 am	Church Cleaning	St Mary, West Malling
	8:00 pm	Cluster Prayer Meeting	27 Ames Way
5 th	2:00 pm	Tea & Chat	Offham Methodist Hall
	8:00 pm	Ransom/Fortnum Homegroup	27 Ames Way
6 th	1:00 pm	Knit & Natter	5 Cellini Walk
	8:00 pm	Cooke/Betts Homegroup	Old Manor, Offham
7 th	10:00 am	Open House	Amberley Lodge, Offham
9 th	10:00 am	Coffee Morning (see p. 8)	Offham Methodist Hall
10 th	Easter 3		
13 th	7:30 pm	Shine Brighter	Venue tba
17 th	Easter 4		
	9:15 am	Service & APCM	St Michael, Offham
19 th	8:00 pm	Ransom/Fortnum Homegroup	27 Ames Way
20 th	1:00 pm	Knit & Natter (p. 15)	5 Cellini Walk
	8:00 pm	Cooke/Betts Homegroup	Old Manor, Offham
23 rd	7:30 pm	Kent Recorder Ensemble	Barn Chapel, Pilsdon
24 th	Easter 5		
	9:30 am	Service & AGM	St Gabriel, Discovery School
	10:00 am	Service & APCM	St Mary, West Malling
27 th	7:30 pm	Shine Brighter	Venue tba
30 th	12:00 noon	Offham May Day	The Green, Offham