



I hope that everyone is keeping safe and well and that you all manage to enjoy Christmas.

I know I have used the following poem before but I do think it is lovely and relevant for today. I hope you do too.

The Four Candles

The Four Candles burned slowly.
Their Ambiance was so soft you could hear them speak...

The First Candle said, "I Am Peace, but these days, nobody wants to keep me lit." Then Peace's flame slowly diminishes and goes out completely.

The Second Candle said, "I Am Faith, but these days, I am no longer indispensable." Then Faith's flame slowly diminishes and goes out completely.

Sadly The Third Candle Speaks, "I Am Love and I haven't the strength to stay lit any longer. People put me aside and don't understand my importance. They even forget to love those who are nearest to them." Waiting no longer, Love goes out completely.

Suddenly...A child enters the room and sees the three candles no longer burning. The child begins to cry, "Why are you not burning? You are supposed to stay lit until the end!"

Then The Fourth Candle speaks gently to the little child,



"Don't be afraid, for I am Hope, and while I still burn, we can re-light the other candles."

With Shining Eyes the child took the Candle Of Hope and lit the other three candles.

Never let the Flame Of Hope go out of your life. With Hope, no matter how bad things look and are...Peace, Faith and Love can shine brightly in our lives.

Aino Makoto

To Zoom or not to Zoom

With apologies to Prince Hamlet of Denmark : "To Zoom or not to Zoom", is that a question or an imperative? Whether 'tis nobler in the minds of some parishioners to suffer the slings, arrows and isolation of outrageous Covid 19, or to take arms against them by tuning in to Zoom.

In January 2020, not many people had heard of Zoom Video, the online conferencing software, when the share price on the US stock exchange was US\$62. On the 8th December 2020 the stock price was US\$407.85, an increase of 567% year to date.

The success of Zoom and other such communications platforms this year is a reflection of the real need and desire that we human beings share for contact with others. Sadly, across the country and even in our own community many people experience loneliness every day and especially at this time of year. We can all do something to change this.

So whether we use computer based systems, letters, cards, phones or face to face contact let us reach out to families, friends and complete strangers and show Christian love in action.

Remember yours may be the only communication that person has today.

Kevin Matthews



A man goes into the Optician for his annual eye test. The optician puts a contraption on his face and asks him what he can see.

“I see empty airports and empty football grounds”, he says. “I see closed pubs, restaurants and theatres”.

“That’s perfect” says the optician, “you’ve got 2020 vision”.

The Christmas Octave

Following a recent Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales the following will apply this coming Christmas.

Like Easter the Nativity of the Lord is one of the 2 solemnities of the Church’s Liturgical Year that has its own Octave. The Church regards each day of the Octave as if it were the solemnity itself. Despite having days within the Octave that are the feasts of St. Stephen, John the Baptist and the Holy Innocents and the Holy Family concluding with the solemnity of Mary the Mother of God, the Roman Missal states that they ‘are a day within the Octave of Christmas’. This means that liturgically each of the days from the 25th of December to the 1st of January is “Christmas Day”.

This means that whatever day you attend mass during the Christmas Octave it is ‘Christmas day’ liturgically speaking.

Although the ‘obligation’ to attend mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation is still suspended I know that many people will wish to come to Mass at Christmas. However, as we are still restricted by COVID19 regulations numbers will be limited, even if we are able to use the Hall for overflow.

I would like to suggest therefore the following:

- a) that people think about which day in the Octave they might wish to attend Mass
- b) that out of consideration for others please don’t try and come each day so as to allow as many as possible to attend.

Fr James

Sea Sunday

Every year churches around the world celebrate Sea Sunday. A time to give thanks to all seafarers for the work they do bringing food, medicines and vital machinery to all the countries of the world.

Many of those seafarers are away from home for months at a time and it can be a lonely and anxious time for them.

Due to the pandemic, Sea Sunday has been re-arranged for the 20th December although, of course, you can celebrate and remember seafarers at any time.

Christmas Quiz

Round 1

1. How many gifts altogether are given in the song ‘12 days of Christmas’?
2. What is the best selling Christmas song of all time?
3. Mariah Carey’s iconic Christmas hit ‘All I want for Christmas’ was released in which year?
4. Which group sang ‘Don’t leave me alone like this, don’t say it’s the final kiss’?
5. In Wham’s Christmas song are the lyrics “Once bitten, twice shy, keep your distance.....” what comes next?

Round 2

1. Before turkey, the traditional English Christmas dinner included a pig’s head covered in what?
2. What should you eat one of for each of the 12 days of Christmas if you want good luck?
3. What is the name of the German yeast cake often served at Christmas?
4. What are you eating if you are enjoying Marchbread?
5. Which biblical town’s name means ‘Home of bread’ in Hebrew?

PARISH CENSUS

Completed Census forms are still ‘trickling’ in but there is still a long way to go. A reminder please to respond—even if your details have not changed since the last Census. If you would like a further copy of the form please call or email the office.

What do Santa's little helpers learn at school?
The elf-abet!

Shops of Bygone Alton

Occasionally I meet and talk with the daughter of the late Mrs Kerridge, who used to own and run a wool shop in the town. The shop was roughly situated on the site of the old post office, before it moved to W.H.Smith. Now it is half empty, the other half a barbers.

Not only did Mrs Kerridge sell wool and haberdashery, but we could take our laddered stockings there to be sent away for repair! Sounds incredible today, but they came back as good as new. I have no memory of the cost, maybe a sixpence!! (5p) How times have changed down the years.

A lot of shops and houses in the High Street were demolished in the 1960s and redeveloped. All of this brings back memories of ALL the shops there used to be in town, say from the 1940s onwards, and there were a lot.

Johnsons, the drapers was on the corner of High St and Market St. Boots new shop now occupies that space. Seamstresses would alter clothing etc. Another drapers was CHESTER-FIELDS, situated in the area of Barclays Bank.

The one etched into my memory is LONDON HOUSE, now the site of the Cancer charity shop. It housed several departments, mens, ladies, material, haberdashery and baby clothing.

The fascinating feature of this shop was the way bills were paid. This was by way of the RAPID WIRE SYSTEM LINE, with a wooden cup screws into its top, then catapulted along fixed wires from each department to my little office. Change was put into the cup along with a stamped paid receipt, then catapulted back to its rightful department. This system was also housed in the Army and Navy store in Liverpool and a department store in Ayr.

Now, may I please ask for all you Alton residents down through the years, to respond to this article with any shops and memories you have of our town.

The town was dying of shops before Covid, now at least three more have closed. For the era I have mentioned the shops were many, grocery, ironmongers, electrical etc. Please help my memory, as it is limited these days, to build up a picture of our town in previous years.

Pam Barbour

Advent Giving Tree

At a recent PPC meeting it was decided that we would have our 'giving tree' after Christmas. There will be labels to take and we are asking for items for the Apostleship of the Sea and also Alton Women's Refuge. These will include toiletries and similar items to last year. If anyone would like to knit some warm hats for this the pattern is here.

Stella Maris Woolly Hat Pattern

Aran is the best wool to use, although D.K can be used but the hats are not quite as cosy, however it is a matter of choice for the person doing the knitting, this is the pattern that some have found to be the best for them.

Size needles, no.6 (5mm) and no. 7(4.1/2mm)

•With no. 6 needles cast on 108 sts. and k2. p2 . for approx 2 to 3inches.

•Change to no. 7 needles and continue in rib until work measures a total of 9 inches, then you start the decreasing as follows,
1st row. Rib 9, slip 1 k. 2 tog. p.s.s.o. repeat to end of row.

•2nd and every alternate row rib in pattern.

•3rd. row Rib 7, slip1, k.2 tog.p.s.s.o. repeat to end of row.

•5th. row Rib 5 etc. and continue decreasing every other row until on the 9th. row it will be Rib 1. etc.

•11th. row k2 tog. to the end of the row thread wool through remaining stitches, stitch up and fold back the brim,

They are so easy to knit, handy to just pick up any time and do a few rows. The woolly hats are very popular with seafarers and it will remind them of the prayers you offer for them at sea and the thoughtful support you provide to them. This hat holds on to your head, keeps you warm and does not blow off in the wind!

Christmas Quiz

Round 3

1. How old is Kevin McAllister in 'Home Alone'?
2. According to 1946 Christmas classic 'It's a wonderful life' what happens every time a bell rings?

3. In Will Ferrel's 'Elf' what is the first rule in the Code of the Elves?
4. In 'Love Actually' name the British Boy Band Billy Mack is competing against for Christmas Number 1?
5. In 2009 'A Christmas Carol' who play Ebenezer Scrooge?

Round 4

1. In 'Little Women' which sister grumbles "Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents?"
2. In Harry Potter & the Philosopher's stone, what do the Dursleys give Harry for Christmas?
3. In Dickens' 'Christmas Carol' who declares "Merry Christmas to one and all"?
4. In which children's classic is it 'always winter but never Christmas'?
5. What year was the poem 'The night before Christmas' published?

St. Mary's 200 Club

Don't forget to place your entry for the Christmas Draw Guaranteed prize fund 1st Prize £100, 2nd Prize £75, 3rd Prize £50, 4th Prize £25 It is very easy to join—just email the office for an entry form and you will be issued with a number. Once your £5 per number chosen has been received, your entry will be placed in the draw. All entries from 1st—31st December will be included in the draw.

The Book Smuggler

Charles was a country man working with horses. He also smuggled highly illegal books into the country, books liable to bring the merciless wrath of the state down on his head if caught.

One night the village policeman told him to leave that very night for they were coming to arrest in in the morning.

He went, crossing the watched-over border under water, breathing through a hollow reed.

His wife and daughter followed later and, after some time in Hamburg, they settled in Lanarkshire, where the country man became a coal miner.

His new land did not outlaw his language and literature unlike the Russian Czarist occupiers of his homeland.

He served in the Royal Scots Regiment in the First World War, raised a goodly sized family

and fell into the welcoming arms of Jesus in 1962.

Charles (Kazis) was my Lithuanian maternal grandfather.

Tom Barbour

Were Mice Responsible for Silent Night?

202 years ago in the small village of Obendorf in Austria, the parish priest was concerned that the church organ was broken. Some say the mice were the culprits. There was no chance of it being repaired before Christmas.

Having taken a walk around the snow-laden village, Josef Mohr was reminded of a poem he had written some years before. It would make a good carol especially if the church organist Franz Xaver Gruber could put a melody to the words. After all he had a few hours!

'Silent Night' was first sung on Christmas Eve by Mohr and Gruber accompanied by a guitar.

When the organ was repaired, Gruber played his new melody. The repairer was so impressed he took some copies of the music and words home with him. Some traveling folk singers in his village then took the carol across the country and so began its journey throughout the world.

Today the carol is sung in over 300 different languages.

In the Garden

Many of us have been spending more time in our gardens, I know that mine is beginning to look as if someone is looking after it.

If you are out in the garden over the Christmas period, there is still time to take some hardwood cuttings.

There are many advantages to these cuttings;

- A) they have no leaves so will not lose moisture
- B) Stems are already mature and won't rot so easily
- C) You just stick them in the ground or pot and forget about them
- D) It is the most successful way of propagating new shrubs

The main disadvantage is that you have to be patient, they will take longer than Spring or Summer cuttings.

Almost any shrub can be propagated from hardwood cuttings – those that make good strong straight stems will produce the best shaped plants. Blackcurrants, dogwoods, shrub roses, viburnum and Physocarpus are good examples, While you are wandering around the garden why not have ago?

Don't Pick the Dandelions

(On curds and honey will he feed until he knows how to refuse evil and choose good. Isaiah.7:15)

How would you like someone to take the vegetables from your allotment? The bees watch from their hive entrance, this vandalism by the person in green overalls removing dandelions and shake their heads in despair. Do we really understand the balance of nature and the contribution each plant and creature however small makes to our world? We follow the modern trend of clinical gardens and ignore the insects that depend on the wild plants to survive. From March to October dandelions provide an important food source of nectar and pollen for honeybees.

Over the years plants and honeybees have co-evolved and are dependent on each other. Plants need to be pollinated and honeybees need the nectar and pollen from the plants. Plants attract honeybees by having large colourful petals, blue is attractive but not red ones. Flowers that appear plain to us have coloured ultraviolet patterns visible to the bee. That together with the scent enables the bee to find sources of nectar. The plant secretes nectar as a reward to the bee for visiting and pollinating the plant.



When the honeybee discovers a good source of nectar and returns to the hive, she performs a waggle dance in a figure of eight pattern which indicates to the other honeybees the location and direction of the new source of nectar. If more bees are required to help collect the nectar, they perform a jostling dance where they run at other bees pushing them in an attempt to make them to watch a new performance of the Wagtail Dance.

The honeybee sucks nectar from the plant's nectary into its honey sac, adding enzymes to break down the sugars and to destroy any bac-

teria. The Pollen covering its body (looks like a child when playing with powder paint) is scraped off, a little nectar added and compressed into a pollen press which forms part of the rear leg joint and placed into its pollen basket on its rear legs. You may have seen bees with large, coloured lumps on its rear legs.

The nectar collected contains about 80% water and needs to be converted into honey by the house bees, to a moisture content of less than 20%. On return to the hive the foraging bee, transfers the nectar to a house bee who takes it into the hive for processing into honey. The house bee adds more enzymes to further break down the sugars. Whilst some bees start fanning other house bees roll the nectar up and down their proboscis many times to reduce the moisture content then paste it around the inside a cell, where the drying out process is completed by the fanning. The conversion from nectar to honey being completed, the filled cells are sealed to prevent the danger of fermentation. Fermented honey is used to make mead, which is another story all about honey-moons.

Honey has been used in the past, in early religious ceremonies and later by the Christian church as a constituent part of communion, but the practice was discontinued by the Roman Church in the seventh century. *(St Gregory Pope from 590 to 604 wrote: When the grace of the Holy Spirit bathes us, it fills us with honey and butter equally. Honey falls from above, butter is drawn from the milk of animals, so honey is from the air, butter from the flesh).*

Honey is used in food and healing, in early times it was especially useful for dressing wounds and burns and is incorporated into many different products, so it has more uses than to put on your toast in the morning. In medieval times it was used to make medicines more palatable.



Honey is composed of water, sugars, vitamins, amino acids, minerals. Pigments, aromatic compounds, and plant enzymes. Nectar is collected from a variety of plants within a 3 mile radius of its hive. A bee makes between 5 and

8 journeys a day and collects an average of 40mg each trip. So quite a few trips to fill a jar of honey.

Honey is extracted by spinning it out of the honeycomb and then cold filtered. Once out of the hive the honey naturally crystallises and goes solid and you would struggle to get out of the jar. Once it is solid it can be slowly reheated to hive temperature and run into jars. Over time honey will again start to crystallise, hence the saucepan of hot water treatment. honeys which contain a greater proportion of fructose sugars stay naturally runny, but glucose sugars crystallise very quickly. Because of the minimal treatment of honey, it retains the original flavour and scents. When you open a jar of natural honey you can smell the blossoms and taste the strong flavour of the plants from which the nectar was collected.

Commercial or supermarket honey is treated differently, it is heated to a high temperature then forced through fine filters to remove any particles to prevent it crystallising and extend its shelf life. This filtering includes the pollen in the honey, which helps with allergies and most of the benefits of honey. The treatment also removes most of the scents and flavour of the honey and its taste is bland compared to natural honey. Commercial honey is, unless a specified type of honey, a blend of honeys from many different places.

To help the bees, you can sow a patch of wildflowers and remove un-necessary concreted areas and let the weeds grow.

(Eat honey my child, since it is good; honey that drips from the comb is sweet to the taste: and so, for sure, will wisdom be to your soul: find it and you will have a future and your hope will not be cut short. Proverbs 24:13-14)

David Parkinson

Honey in the Bible

Honey appears a number of times in the Bible. In Genesis 43:11, Jacob sends honey with his sons as a gift for the overlord of Egypt (i.e. Joseph). In Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Joshua the text mentions “a land flowing with milk and honey” many times. Also, the manna from heaven is said to

taste like cakes made with honey (Exod 16:31). Yum! Judges 14 relates a strange story about the judge Samson who eats impure honey from a beehive in a lion carcass. “Honey from the rock” is mentioned twice (Deut 32:13; Ps 81:16).

A “jar of honey” shows up in 1 Kgs 14:2. The Psalms compare God’s words to honey (Ps 19:10; 119:103). Proverbs instructs us to eat honey and wisdom (Prov 24:13), but then warns that eating too much honey will cause us to vomit (Prov 25:16) and that it is not good to do so (Prov 25:27). The lover in the Song of Songs eats honey (Song 4:11; 5:1). Honey is often associated with curds (2 Sam 17:29; Isa 7:15, 22)

In the New Testament, John the Baptist eats locusts and honey (Matt 3:4, Mark 1:6). And John eats a scroll as “sweet as honey” (Rev 10:10).

Holy Scripture, especially the Old Testament, speaks quite often of bees. Dense armies of soldiers are compared to bees (Is. 7:18) chasing man (Deut. 1:44) and surrounding him (Ps. 117:12). “The bee,” says Ecclesiasticus (11:3), “is small among flying things, but her fruit hath the chiefest sweetness.”

The Fathers of the Church draw many lessons from bees. Following in their footsteps, spiritual writers like Saint Francis de Sales and Saint Teresa of Avila see holy wisdom in these tiny humming insects.

Honey roasted parsnips

500g parsnips

1 tbsp flour

1 tbsp honey

2 tbsp sunflower oil

2 tbsp butter

Method

Top and tail 500g parsnips, cutting any larger ones in half lengthways, then put in a large saucepan, cover with salted water, bring to the boil and cook for 5 mins.

Drain in a colander and let them steam-dry for a few mins.

Heat oven to 190C/170C fan/ gas 5.

Sprinkle 1 tbsp flour and 1 tbsp honey over the parsnips and toss to coat.

Put the parsnips in a roasting tin with 2 tbsp sunflower oil, 2 tbsp butter and seasoning.

Roast for 40 mins, turning halfway, until golden.

The Twelve days of Christmas

From 1558 until 1829, Catholics in England were not allowed to practice their faith openly. Someone during that era wrote this carol as a catechism song for young Catholics.

Each element in the carols has a code word for a religious truth, which the children could remember.

1. Partridge in a pear tree was Jesus
2. Turtle doves were the Old and New Testaments
3. Three French hens stood for Faith, Hope and Love
4. Calling birds were the gospel writers Matthew, Mark, Luke and John
5. Gold rings recalled the Pentateuch—the first 5 books of the Bible
6. Geese a-laying were the days of Creation
7. Swans a-swimming were the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit
8. Maids a-milking were the eight beatitudes
9. Ladies dancing were the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit
10. Lords a-leaping were the ten commandments
11. Pipers piping stood for the eleven faithful apostles
12. Drummers drumming were the twelve points of belief in the Apostles Creed

Hymn of the Day

This is a Church of England site where you can listen to the Hymn of the Day and a prayer, then learn a bit more about the composer and the history of the hymn.

0800 8048044

It happened on Christmas Day

352AD First definite date Christmas was celebrated on 25th.

800AD Pope Leo 3rd crowns Charlemagne Holy Roman Emperor

1066 William the Conqueror crowned King of England

1223 Francis of Assisi assembles the first Nativity scene

1643 Christmas Island was discovered and named

1818 First known carol sung which was 'Silent Night'

1914 Truce in WW1

1990 First communication on the World Wide Web

A Year dedicated to St Joseph

Pope Francis on Tuesday announced a special year dedicated to St. Joseph starting from 8 December 2020 until 8 December 2021, on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the proclamation of St. Joseph as the Patron of the Universal Church, as well as the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady.

The Apostolic Penitentiary also issued a decree granting special indulgences for the duration of the special year to celebrate the anniversary and "to perpetuate the entrustment of the whole Church to the powerful patronage of the Custodian of Jesus."

In his Apostolic Letter "Patris corde," Pope Francis writes, "Every day, for over forty years, following Lauds I have recited a prayer to Saint Joseph taken from a nineteenth-century French prayer book of the Congregation of the Sisters of Jesus and Mary. It expresses devotion and trust, and even poses a certain challenge to Saint Joseph:

'Glorious Patriarch Saint Joseph, whose power makes the impossible possible, come to my aid in these times of anguish and difficulty. Take under your protection the serious and troubling situations that I commend to you, that they may have a happy outcome. My beloved father, all my trust is in you. Let it not be said that I invoked you in vain, and since you can do everything with Jesus and Mary, show me that your goodness is as great as your power. Amen.'

I wrote a poem to St Joseph many years ago after listening to Fr Peter talking about him. It made me think about what he must have been thinking and the responsibility he took on. I hope you don't mind me printing it here and I hope you like it.

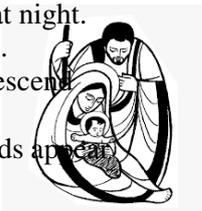
Joseph's Story

Was it worth it?
The journey long and tiring,
The nights, when chilled to the bone
We found no rest among the crowds.
Wending our weary way
To the home of our family's line.
Those days, blistering hot
Or freezing cold, never the same.
And such a long way.

Was it worth it?
Hiring the donkey from the charlatans.
And nothing easing the jolting,
The rocking, the swaying, the rolling
Along that awful way.
I fretted and wanted so to help,
To ease your way a little.
Never a complaint you uttered
Though your body ached.

Was it worth it?
The entry into Bethlehem,
The crowds, the noise, the smell.
The peddlers peddling their wares,
The visitors looking for beds.
We joined them at the innkeepers' doors
Unwelcome, unwanted, apart.
Was there really only a stable
In Bethlehem that night?

Was it worth it?
Holding your hand through that night.
Watching the birth of your son.
Feeling the calm and beauty descend
On a stable at peace.
Seeing the awe-struck shepherds appear
With gifts to a babe just born.
Hearing a host of angels declare
A joyous dawning.



Was it worth it?
Perfect, tiny fingers
Curled around the world.
A perfect, tiny face holding
Salvation in His smile.

Was it worth it?
Yes.

Bishop's Survey

Bishop Philip is asking all parishioners their views on the diocese; what is good in the parish, what are the challenges, what we think is important as we journey on our faith.

This is to help develop plans and priorities for the Diocese.

The online questionnaire will run over Christmas and into the New Year. The survey will take between 10 and 20 minutes of your time as there are a few areas to cover and he would like as much detail as we are happy to give.

There is a paper version for those unable to access the digital version: leave a message with name and address for Chris Smith our Director of Communications on 02394 216496. . To complete the questionnaire please



Do you need some space to think?. If you need to talk we are here.

admin@altoncounselling.oeg.uk

01420 89207

visit <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2XRKQDS>

Christmas quiz answers

Round 1

364 ,White Christmas, 1994, East 17, But you still catch my eye.

Round 2

Mustard, Mince pie, Stollen, Marzipan, Bethlehem

Round 3

8, An angel gets its wings, Treat every day like Christmas Blue, Jim Carrey

Round 4

Jo March, 50p piece, Tiny Tim, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, 1823

Magazine

Where can you leave contributions? Please ensure that all contributions are named. They can be sent to anne.bothwell@gmx.com. Thank you.

Parish Pastoral Council

Fr James

Anne Bothwell,

Andrew Croom-Johnson

David Hudec,

Cathie Joseph,

Steve Joseph

Gill Matthews