



Holy Trinity



St.  
Gabriel

# The Parish of The Good Shepherd, Ashton-under-Lyne



St. James



St. Peter



St. Michael and All Angels

**FEBRUARY 2021**

**Price 50p**

## Editorial

*I can resist everything but temptation*’ (Oscar Wilde). During Lent we remember Jesus’ experience in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11), when *‘He was led by the Spirit.. to be tempted by the devil.’* (1). Temptation is a test of *obedience*, whether we do things our way or God’s way. After 40 days of fasting Jesus was tired, hungry and vulnerable. Like Him, the Devil will attack us at our most vulnerable moments, especially during this pandemic.

**The first temptation was to turn stones into bread:** Jesus’ ministry was not about meeting His own needs, but being nourished by God’s word. *‘We do not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God’* (Deuteronomy 8:3). Like Jesus, we are called to make God our priority and trust Him completely.

**The second temptation was to put God to the test:** Jumping off the Temple pinnacle would have been a dramatic way for Jesus to gain popularity, but this is not God’s way! *‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’* (Deuteronomy 6:16). We too need to learn this lesson!

**The third temptation was to worship Satan:** Finally, the devil took Jesus to a mountain to offer Him worldly power. In contrast, His calling as Messiah was marked by suffering and honouring God. *‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only’* (Deuteronomy 6:13). This is often our experience in living for God.

Jesus stands with us in our temptations. As we claim the promises of Scripture, we will find strength in the power of the Spirit and the victory of the Cross.

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*The views expressed in articles in this magazine are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Parish of The Good Shepherd. The editor reserves the right to amend articles as appropriate, for editorial purposes. Please consider writing something for the magazine yourself! And, if you have any comments to make on the Magazine you can contact the editor, Roger Farnworth on 0161 330 2771 or talk to a member of your DCC or PCC who will pass on any comments that are made.*

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## The Parish Prayer

Father God, whose Son came to bring love and peace to the world, help us to grow in faith and share our hope and joy with all whom we meet, so that we can work together to build your kingdom in Ashton, welcome new people into our churches, and be relevant to those around us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

# The Symphony of God's Grace

As I write, we are celebrating the Baptism of Christ and it is Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> January. The authors of our lectionary placed the Old Testament reading (Genesis 1: 1-5) alongside the Gospel reading (Mark 1:4-11) for 10th January 2021 for a reason. They wanted us to see them in parallel. You might want to read them again.

.....

In both cases God is doing something new.

I am not an expert in classical music, a bit of a Philistine really, but as I thought about these two readings from Genesis and Mark it seemed to me that they could be described as two different movements from the same symphony. I'm told that the classical composers used variations on the same theme to develop their composition and that if you listen carefully to the music you can hear the main theme being repeated. ....

Perhaps you can imagine a heavenly orchestra playing the first 5 verses of Genesis. Dark, brooding music portrays an overwhelming sense of chaos and darkness. I imagine that the composer would use discordant modern themes to convey a sense of disorder. Then over this music comes the main theme of the



symphony – quietly at first, starting with flute and piccolo, and gradually engaging the whole orchestra. Like a wind gradually rising from a gentle breeze to a violent gale. God's mighty wind (his Holy Spirit) sweeps across the universe. God is speaking, and his very words change the universe for ever. "Let there be light" and light appears. God saw that it was good, and Night and Day were born.

God breaks into the history of the universe with a powerful word of creation.

Our second reading comes much later in the same symphony. The main musical themes are now well developed – we've heard them over and again throughout the symphony. When John the Baptist appears we return to that same discordant, abrupt and harsh theme

that we heard right at the beginning of the symphony. His harsh manner, his odd clothing, his strange habits all seem to echo the chaos and darkness of Genesis. The sound from the orchestra builds and noise of the crowds coming to John for baptism shake the concert hall and then John's voice can be heard as a sharp solo, perhaps, by the oboe cutting through the surrounding noise.

Then quietly at first the main theme appears again. The theme that represented God at work as Creator gradually supersedes the chaos of the early part of this movement.

Jesus has come for baptism.

The Word of God, from the beginning of John's Gospel, is beginning his work. And as Jesus comes up out of the waters of baptism the whole orchestra joins the theme – the heavens are rent open, the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus and God speaks, a strong solo voice: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased".

Can you see the common themes in the two passages?

- The milling crowd, longing for God to act in their lives; and the universe awaiting God's creative action.
- The wind of God, and the Spirit of God hovering over the waters

of the deep and the waters of baptism.

- The word of God bringing creation, "Let there be light"; and the Word of God, Jesus, God's Son, whose ministry brings redemption.

God's delight is obvious in both passages. Looking at creation, 'God saw that it was good'. Looking down on his Son, God said, "You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased".

The theme from each movement of our symphony is the same. God creating his world and God redeeming that same world. All part of the same plan. In our symphony, both represented by the same theme.



And now, in these years between Christ's first and second coming, we are participating in what the Bible calls the end times. We are participating in what we might call the final movement of the symphony."

In the first movement, God saw that everything was good. What does he see now, at the start of this new year, in Ashton, in our churches, in our families and personal lives? Where are the signs of new creation? Where are the dark,

formless voids that still await God's creative action?

In the later movement God expressed overwhelming pleasure at the baptism of his Son. What things in our world, our town, our churches or in our lives today, give God pleasure?

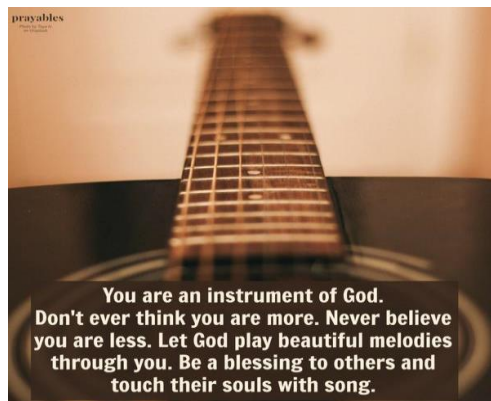
Where might we begin to hear that same musical theme of God's intervention here in Ashton-under-Lyne? What do we long that God would do in our town and in our world at this time?

At this moment the pandemic looms increasingly large and we can feel the discordant notes of fear and anger. The discordant music seems to dominate our lives, yet quietly, almost unheard in the chaos of noise that theme of hope is still present quietly picked out again by flute and piccolo bringing a measure

of calm in the midst of the noise of the pandemic.

How might the final movement of our symphony be being played out now? What should I do? What should we do to participate in God's work here? Now, in these difficult times? Which of the musical voices are we contributing to? The discordant chaos or the still, small, haunting voice of calm and hope? As people of faith, we have something significant to offer our communities. We can hear, even if only faintly, the beautiful, haunting melody of hope and faith. And we can help others to begin to hear the music of hope.

I guess this is all a little prosaic, but it is true. We can speak gently of hope and faith in the midst of fear and despair, even if we feel worried and concerned ourselves.



## Truth at risk of being auctioned to the highest bidder - Archbishop of York

Truth is becoming a commodity, up for auction to the highest bidder, says Archbishop of York Stephen Cottrell in a recent article published in Radio Times.

Lamenting the decline of truth in public life, the Archbishop explains “The echo chambers of social media and the fake news that often goes with it have led us to mistrust and cynicism.

“In other parts of the world, even news channels seem to be mouthpieces of certain political parties or vested interests.”

Commenting on the US Presidential election, Archbishop Cottrell says “Look at how divided and mistrustful of each other the people of that nation have become. Most alarming of all, there seems to be no common understanding of what is true or who can be trusted. Truth itself seems to have become a commodity, bought by the highest bidder.”

The Archbishop’s words echo those of former President Barack Obama, who told the BBC that the US was more sharply divided now than when Donald Trump won election four years ago.

Using the term ‘truth decay’ to describe a rise in conspiracy theories

and disinformation in the US, Barack Obama said, “I think at some point it’s going to require a combination of regulation and standards within industries to get us back to the point where we at least recognise a common set of facts before we start arguing about what we should do about those facts.”

The Archbishop of York, who took up the post last July, is warning that the divisions in the US could come to the UK. He believes that the BBC and other UK ‘public service broadcasting’ channels like Channel 4 have a vital role in holding the country together.

He says “I know that there are many across the country who feel that during this terrible pandemic year, others have been favoured at their expense. The vision of the united but diverse nation that we see on TV programmes such as ‘Gogglebox’ is not always what we see around us.”

The Archbishop is worried that the rise and spending power of US broadcasting giants Netflix and Amazon places “our British way of doing broadcasting under threat. A voracious, unchecked market may just sweep it away. Even some of our own politicians don’t always see this.”

He adds: “Along with the NHS, and even the Church of England, the BBC

and other public service broadcasters are a precious part of our cultural ecology. They help us to see ourselves clearly. They can be trusted.”

Meanwhile, a project running in the CofE’s St Albans diocese has brought together journalists, scientists, representatives of Big Tech and authors with people from a range of faiths to consider how the rising tide of disinformation and fake news can be stemmed.



## **Fairtrade Fortnight: 22<sup>nd</sup> February – 7<sup>th</sup> March**

It has been a terrible year for farmers and workers in the global south.

In 2020, on top of the pandemic, they had to deal with the growing impact of climate change: more droughts and crop disease, locusts, floods, fires, and heatwaves. No wonder their harvests were shrinking.

Yet with the help of Fairtrade, many of these producers of food, drinks and cottons can be equipped to meet more everyday needs, and to deal with the challenges facing them.

So this month, why not visit [www.fairtrade.org.uk](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk) and see how you can send some support

## **Church Action on Poverty Sunday, 21<sup>st</sup> February**

This month you can join churches around the UK in prayer, giving and action, on behalf of those who are struggling with poverty. Society should be “founded on compassion and justice, where all people are able to exercise dignity, agency and power,” says Church Action on Poverty.

For free resources to encourage prayer and fund-raising, go to: [www.church-poverty.org.uk/sunday/](http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/sunday/).

## **National Nestbox Week**

Our birds are short of nesting holes, and no wonder: gardens, parks and woodland are much neater than they used to be, and modern homes offer few crannies for nest building.

National Nestbox Week, which is celebrated from **14<sup>th</sup> February** each year, aims to encourage us to put up more nestboxes, and to consider planting shrubs or trees with fruit that birds eat. These can make all the difference to birds struggling to survive, especially blue tits, great tits, house sparrows, robins and starlings.

The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) offers a variety of ideas for building and placing nestboxes. Go to: <https://www.nestboxweek.com>

Do you see?



As I sit here (on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2021) enjoying a cup of tea before going to church, I am looking at the cards I received before Christmas Day, which are on display.

One in particular shows 2 mince pies as people, one with a moustache and magnifying glass, and one with binoculars, each wearing a Santa hat. The caption reads "Mince Spies". Until this moment, I had thought it said "Mince Pies"! So, as I suddenly exclaimed "Oh", I nearly dropped my cup of tea

How often do we see, yet do not see? Especially when we do not see beyond ourselves - tunnel vision. Which, of course, we should do as Christian.

Once again, it always takes a crisis to shock us out of our comfort zone, a realisation of just how much we take for granted. Tunnel vision - our worst trait.

God bless us all

P.S. And it is not even deliberate, it is just human nature. As Jesus said "Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do".

Barry Bowden

## New measures to protect children online

The Government is to give the communications regulator Ofcom new powers to protect children and adults when they are using the internet.

An Online Harms Bill will be introduced later this year, with the intention of allowing Ofcom to block access to online services that fail to properly protect children and other users. Giants like Facebook and Instagram could also be fined large sums if they fail to take proper action against posts that were legal but still harmful. That would include pornography accessible to children, bullying, and disinformation, such as fake claims about vaccinations.

The Digital Secretary, Oliver Dowden, says that the legislation should be in force by 2022. He said: "A 13-year-old should no longer be able to access pornographic images on Twitter; YouTube will not be allowed to recommend videos promoting terrorist ideologies; and anti-Semitic hate crimes will need to be removed without delay."





# **Coronavirus Pandemic**

## **Church Services**

**At the time of publication, our churches will not open for either public worship or private prayer.**

Due to another rapid rise in Coronavirus cases nationwide and the imposition of another lockdown, our Wardens have, with regret, decided that all of our churches should remain closed until further notice.

Clergy, Wardens and a team of volunteers will be keeping in touch via email, phone and post – if you are not receiving contact please ring Roger or Ben.

Should this situation change during February, we will let our parishioners know and there will be a notice on our website.

## **Pew Sheets**

Our normal pew sheets will not be available, but we shall produce a weekly sheet containing readings for each Sunday, the prayer and readings for the following week.

## **Book Review**

### **Opening our Lives – Devotional Readings for Lent**



By Trystan Owain Hughes, BRF, £8.99

Lenten disciplines are evolving, but whether you intend to give up, give to or take up something for Lent, BRF's 2021 Lent book will add another dimension to your devotions.

Trystan Owain Hughes offers six weeks of reflections designed to encourage and challenge readers to open their lives to God: to His presence, His call, His love, His will, His compassion and His peace. The final reflection, for Easter Day, invites us to open our world to God's hope.

# Parish Notices

From the January registers:

Funeral - Sarah Higginbotham

There were no baptisms or weddings in January

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## Free national phonenumber bringing worship and prayer



Government figures show that 2.5 million people aged 75 and above have never used the internet. And so, to help them, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, recently launched a free national phonenumber to bring worship and prayer into the homes of those without access to the internet.

Daily Hope, which is available 24 hours a day on 0800 804 8044 – offers music, prayers and reflections as well as full worship services from the Church of England.

## CONTACT DETAILS

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The Vicarage, Westbury Street, Ashton OL6 9NL 330 2771

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