

The LINK

digital edition

December 2021



**The Parish Church of
St Michael Braintree
www.stmichaelsbtree.co.uk**



The Perfect Gift

Dear Friends,

I wonder if you have ever spent time, looking for the “perfect gift” for someone. I don’t know whether you ever found it, or whether it proved elusive and impossible to find.

“The Perfect Gift” is the title of our Christmas services this year. That’s because we will be celebrating God’s Perfect Gift to us all ... the gift of his Son, coming into the world that first Christmas. Jesus, a tiny baby, yet one filled with hope – God’s answer to the problem of the human condition – sin. An answer that gives us the opportunity of peace with God, forever.

On the next page, there is an outline of our Christmas services. We plan at present to have all those services in the church building, whilst continuing with our online YouTube and “St Michael’s by Phone” services.

We have made some changes to our services this year:

- There will be two “Carols by Candlelight” on Sun 12th & Sun 19th December, both at 6.30pm. Both will be broadly the same.
- As well as the Christingle service on Christmas Eve, there will also be a “Join in Nativity”, where children can attend dressed as part of the Nativity and join in.
- The Christmas Eve Communion will be at the earlier time of 6pm.
- There will also be a Boxing Day Family Communion on Sun 26th Dec at 10am

It would be great if you are able to join us, as we celebrate the birth of our Saviour Jesus. And please consider if there is anyone you could invite to come to a service.

With our love and best wishes this Christmas time,

Nigel



The Perfect Gift

We would be delighted to welcome you to St Michael's Church,
Braintree

Sunday 12 AND Sunday 19 December
6.30pm Carol by Candlelight

Saturday 18 December
4.30pm Join in Nativity

Christmas Eve
4pm Christingle service
6pm Christmas Eve Communion

Christmas Day
8.00am Holy Communion
10.00am Family Celebration

Boxing Day
10am Family Communion

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, Nepal and Kenya.

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

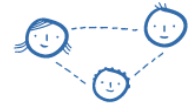
This is child-centred care.

Truly caring for each child begins with considering the needs of the child, their family, and their community



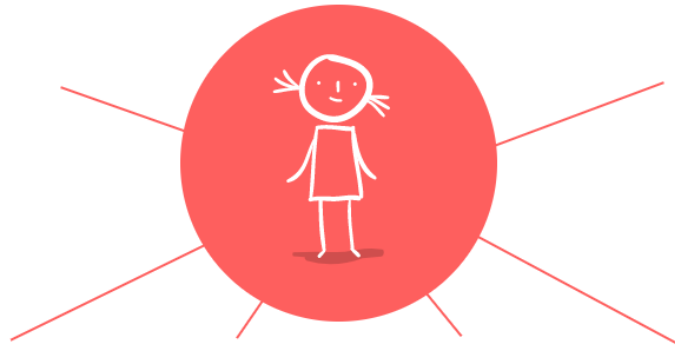
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A reason for hope

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Rachel Grove Smith

CLIMATE CHANGE & CHRISTMAS

Snow rarely falls in Palestine or on, what we now call, the 'West Bank'. The last major snow fall was recorded at Kefar Etzion in 2013 in the hills south west of Jerusalem not far from Bethlehem. John Kerry, the USA envoy, had to cut off his visit in 2013 to the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas for fear of airports being snowed in and so preventing him being able to get back to the USA.

Snow is so rare in this particular region that the last major fall of snow that settled before 2013 was in 1950! So, meteorologically speaking, the chances of snow in Bethlehem around the time we traditionally think of the birth of Jesus are extremely remote. Matthew and Luke make no mention of snow when they describe the birth of Jesus.

SEE AMID THE WINTER SNOW BORN FOR US ON EARTH
BELOW....'

So why did Edward Caswall write those words in his famous carol in 1858? If there was only the very remotest chance of snow at the time we customarily ascribe to the day when Jesus was born, why did he want us to think about snow on that very day?

Snow in the 1850s didn't bring the pleasure of skiing, sledging and skating for all. For the poor in those early years of Queen Victoria's England, snow was a threat. It meant hunger, illness, suffering and death. Cold killed, hunger grew, illness and disease got the upper hand.

THE LORD STEPS IN

But God became man to save us from deprivation of all kinds. Caswall, I suggest, may be using poetic licence to bring home to us why the Son of God came. He came to a world of human hardship to save us from the toughness of life and to bring in an age when suffering would simply be like a dream forgotten.

A SAVED WORLD FOR OUR GRANDCHILDREN

Christians are rightly praying for the nations of the world to cope with climate change. They are confident in the fact that God loves this planet, as it says of him when he created the world - 'rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the children of man' (Proverbs 8:31). He did not become man to see his favoured planet freeze to death or shrivel in the heat of the greenhouse. Christians can be confident that Jesus Christ cares about this planet and more especially for those in any kind of need who live on it. So maybe Mr. Caswall uses 'winter snow' to picture both the hard lives that many face and also what we call 'sin' that affects us all, to bring home to us that our hope can be in the Lord Jesus Christ.

CASWALL'S LAST WORD

Consequently, Edward Caswall went on in his hymn boldly and quaintly to put it like this: 'hail redemption's happy dawn'.

Genuine Christian faith travels from the cradle to the cross.

Stephen Bailey

FARMING SEASONS

The winter weather has arrived and we have recently performed our last pass on the fields this year by spraying the wheat crops for the control of aphids. Aphid populations have been high this year because of our relatively mild autumn and they can be a danger because they spread a disease called Barley Yellow Dwarf Virus (BYDV which also affects wheat crops). This stunts the growth and turns the plant yellow.



The next job has been drying the wheat grain from this years harvest before it is sold to the mill. The picture shows our mobile grain drier, which is a machine we rarely use, but thanks to our unusually wet and dull summer the wheat was harvested with a higher moisture content than they would accept without a price penalty, so it's well worth getting it out.

In my last article I wanted to look into ways of how to lower our carbon footprint, but before we look at the technical solutions I will be looking at the simple solutions we can all be taking to help the agricultural industry achieve this.

My grandparents lived throughout the twentieth century and both sets were farmers. While they might have been bemused by some of the technology we have today they had a good understanding and knowledge of the food they produced, what was available in the countryside around them and how to make

the most of what they had. Both my Grandmothers food always tasted good and the smells from their kitchens, till this day, I have not come across since. Who better than then to imagine what advice they could give us today so we can all do something in our everyday lives to help improve the carbon footprint of the food we eat.

The first point I think is obvious to us all, but they would have been quick to point it out, and that is waste. Food is wasted for a number of reasons but what can we do about it? Supermarkets have done a fantastic job in presenting us with good quality foods and amazing choice but do we really need fruit and vegetables which are uniform and packed to exacting standards and what happens to the produce that doesn't make the grade? This can become so undervalued that it isn't even worth anything to the farmer at all. In the book of Ruth, in the bible, Ruth seeks permission to 'glean' the field being harvested, meaning she would go behind the harvesters picking up the leftover crop so that less would go to waste.

The next point I think my grandparents would make is why don't we make more use of our seasonal produce? Today people forget that different crops are harvested at different times of the year because our supermarkets supply the same foods throughout the year. They achieve this by importing fruit and vegetables from around the world, which means although our choice is always there imported food creates extra transportation, refrigeration and packaging. Buying seasonal food not only supports local producers but lowers our carbon footprint. Both my Grandmothers loved fruit picking and blackberry picking in the hedgerows after harvest used to be a family affair. I used to love helping as a young child often getting black sticky fingers in the process. Much of the fruit picked would either be made into something or end up in jars or the chest freezer to be preserved for later in the year. My

Grandmother would often remark if she saw fruit rotting under a tree, which I'm embarrassed to admit often happens in our garden. My Grandad too loved making wine from the fruit he picked such as sloe and elderberry and it was usually offered to an unsuspecting visitor.

Perhaps the best thing they could have recommended is to grow your own food if you can. It might sound simple, but it isn't. Both sets of grandparents took this seriously and their own veg patches could be found in the best part of the garden. To get results you need dedication and discipline which is why I struggle today, when buying what you need and when is such an easy option. The benefits of this go beyond the satisfaction of growing your own food. My Dad once said that a good veg patch is the most productive land of all and the produce can often be entirely organic with no need for artificial fertilizer, which gives arable farming its largest contribution to greenhouse gases not to mention the savings in transport and packaging.

This approach is clearly not for everyone but making the most of the food we do buy is. Again my grandparents would have had a thing or two to say about this. Coming from a mend and make do generation throwing anything away was bad, especially food. It's probably a good time to think about this with Christmas approaching when sometimes some of us can get carried away with the festivities.

When I was young we always celebrated Christmas with both sets of grandparents and looking back now I realize how fortunate I was to have done so. I loved the fun and games we used to play, however I wasn't so keen on Grandad's slide show on Boxing Day afternoon when often he used to forget the names of the people in the picture. Hopefully the Bond film would have already started instead!

Finally I would like to wish all my readers a Happy Christmas and I look forward to writing more farming articles next year.

Adam Grove Smith

A LESSON FROM A BALLOON!

“And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.” (Acts 4:31)

According to a study reported by Bloomberg, Americans can add as many as two years to the nation's life expectancy if they stand up more often and watch fewer hours of television. What a concept -- move around and you'll live longer!

Watching the report reminded me of an incident that happened during a party that we threw for our daughter Elianna. Her little one-year-old brother Obadiah was playing with a leftover balloon which suddenly popped in his face. Obi was startled, and about to burst into tears.

Thinking fast, I grabbed an uninflated balloon from the table, blew it up real big, and then let it go. Boy did he love that! He laughed hysterically as he watched this balloon zipping around the room until it ran out of air and plopped down on the floor. Obi was fine, and as we played this new balloon game, a funny analogy floated into my mind.

I was thinking ... we need to be like these balloons, filled to the max with God's breath, and then ... let go, to experience the ride of our lives! And...equally important, we need to recognize when we're running out of air -- when we're deflated and depleted of His power and anointing. Then we need to run back to Him for more because receiving the infilling of the Spirit is not a single event, but a lifetime of repeated refillings, so that we aren't living or serving in our own strength.

The Lord hasn't entrusted us with His power to sit around and

watch TV -- but to activate us for the work of the Gospel, and the blessing of the saints; to do great things for Him in the power of His Spirit wherever He may take us. Let's be filled again today! Ask, seek, knock, read, worship, meditate on His promises, get FILLED -- you don't want to sit idly watching life pass you by.... do you?

Supplied from "The Worthy Brief" by Peter Schaad

MEETING POINT

Meeting Point Bible study started during the mid-1980s following the Ian Knox mission. It was originally for ladies and a crèche was provided. We met in Church House and have had several different venues in people's homes before returning to Church House. We took the decision a few years ago to include men into the group, but so far none has been brave enough to be "the first".

During lockdown, studies were sent out and some of us were able to meet over zoom. We are now able to meet in person at Church House at 9.45 on a Wednesday during term time. Studies are being sent via email for those who are unable to attend in person.

If you would like further information, please contact me on hkemp@stmichaelsbtree.co.uk.

Helen Kemp

MORE ON THE HOLDING OF THE ROPE



In the November "Link", Peter Schaad shared a story about a young boy having confidence to descend into a steep ravine because it was his father who would be holding the rope. The story struck me very forcibly because only days before I had been sharing with a member of St Michael's a parallel personal testimony. So I thought that maybe I should share it with "Link" readers too.

In the late summer of 1985, I had been living back in Braintree for five years, commuting to an interesting and challenging job in Whitehall as Deputy Chief Librarian of the then Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. I had been a widow for eight years and, as a rather independent person, had absolutely no thoughts of changing that status or even wanting to do so. I was, however becoming increasingly convinced that for some unknown reason I needed to consider leaving my London job for something more local. I was an only child, my parents and a childless widowed aunt were all getting older and, to be honest, more dependent on me, and something in me felt that I ought to change.

So I did something I have never done before or since, I planned a "retreat" for myself over the August Bank Holiday weekend. I had access to a caravan at Walton on the Naze, so took myself off there to spend the weekend reading, praying and seeking God's guidance for the future.

At one point during the weekend I was sitting on the beach reading. Nearby was a family with a little boy about three. He was on the water sitting on an inflatable on quite a lively sea, but he showed no fear and was laughing happily. Why? Because his father had tight hold of the rope attached to the inflatable! Now I am not one who claims regularly to hear a direct voice from God, but for probably the most definite time in my life, I was conscious of God speaking to me and telling me not to be afraid of the unknown future because He, my Heavenly Father, had hold of the rope. I went back to Braintree on the Bank Holiday Monday, with that certainty.

So what was that future? Not, as I thought, a local job, but a completely different challenge - to be a wife and stepmother. Out of the blue, as it seemed to me, Tom contacted me shortly after my return from Walton. Love followed.

Yes, my Heavenly Father did have His hold on the rope. The unknown future was not a job in the local library, but 35 years of a happy marriage and four lovely stepdaughters, for all of which I truly thank God.

Margaret St John-Coleman

BELFRY BULLETIN

WOW we have been busy up in the tower with our regular service ringing and practice nights we have rung 8 Quarter Peals, 3 not completed QP's, hosted the Ridgman Competition and rang for Remembrance Day.

Here are the details...

Saturday 23rd October to celebrate the completion of the Bell Restoration Project and to thank all those who have contributed and helped we rang 1260 changes Plain Bob Royal in 50 minuets 1 Ellie Gray, 2 Nigel Taylor, 3 Kath Downs, 4 Debbie Hill, 5 Pat Cresshull, 6 Peter Smith, 7 Simon Ward, 8 Andrew Taylor, 9 Ian Cresshull, 10 Bradley Hill [c]. Ellie's 1st on 10 bells, Bradley's 1st as conductor of Royal.

Monday 25th October 1260 Stedman Doubles in 39mins 1 Ellie Gray, 2 Simon Ward, 3 Peter Smith, 4 Debbie Hill, 5 Bradley Hill [c]. because we could

Sunday 31st October in 44mins 1260 Grandsire Triples 1 Vicki Elliot, 2 Ellie Gray, 3 Debbie Hill, 4 Jim Green, 5 Peter Chapman, Bradley Hill, 7 Simon Ward [c], 8 Peter Smith. On the eve of All Saints Day.

Sunday 14th November for the Civic Service of Remembrance 1344 Plain Bob Major half muffled in 51mins 1 Pat Cresshull 2 Debbie Hill, 3 Jim Green, 4 Vicki Elliot, 5 Simon Ward, 6 Peter Smit, 7 Ian Cresshull, 8 Bradley Hill [c]

Monday 15th November again Half Muffled 1440 Cambridge Surprise Minor in 43mins 1 Debbie Hill, 2 Jim Green, 3 Peter Smith, 4 Simon Ward, 5 Vicki Elliot, 6 Bradley Hill [c]

Saturday 20th November in memory of Debbie's Father and Bradley's Grandfather on the anniversary of his birthday 1260 Plain Bob Royal in 51mins 1 Ellie Gray 2 Simon Ward, 3 Debbie Hill, 4 Peter Chapman, 5 Jim Green , 6 Andrew Kelso, 7 Ian Cresshull, 8 Brian Meads, 9 Andrew Taylor, 10 Bradley Hill [c] 1st Quarter on the new carpet.

November 21st in 51mins 1296 Plain Bob Caters 1 Vicki Elliot, 2 Ellie Gray, 3 Kath Downs , 4 Debbie Hill, 5 Pat Cresshull, 6 Ian Cresshull, 7 Ellis Whitehouse, 8 Maurice Downs, 9 Bradley Hill [c], 10 David Learmonth. 1st in method Ellie and Ellis. 1st as conductor in method Bradley.

Monday 22nd November 1440 Cambridge Surprise Minor in 43mins 1 Ellis Whitehouse, 2 Ellie Gray, 3 Simon Ward, 4 Vicki Elliot, 5 Debbie Hill, 6 Bradley Hill [c] Ellie's 1st in method.

Congratulations to all that achieved 1st's.

Quarter Peals were attempted on Sunday 24th October Stedman Doubles, Saturday 6th November Cambridge Major, Sunday 7th November Grandsire Caters. Unfortunately these were unsuccessful.

On Saturday 30th October we were hosts for the Ridgman Competition , 6 Bands representing 6 East Anglian Associations all rang the same composition of Grandsire Caters.

I would like to quote with their permission from the "Ringing World" and Alan Winters [Secretary of the Ridgman Competition] who wrote the article. "The local arrangements worked well [Thanks to Andrew Kelso and the Essex County Association and the Braintree ringers led by Bradley Hill]. As the day closed I heard many compliments on the refurbishment of the ring at Braintree, making a bright lively ten which are a pleasure to ring

[and please can we come back soon]. And thanks to the church authorities for allowing this event in these uncertain times.

Remembrance Day Thursday 11th November 2021, before the 2 minuets silence the Tenor was tolled 103 times the number of years since the end of the First World War. At the end of the silence the Tenor was again tolled, this time 76 times the number of years from the end of World War 2.

AWAY FROM THE TOWER

Bradley was interviewed by Vicki Chapman the Essex Associations Communications Officer about his Belling, the St. Michael's bell refurbishment and his other hobbies.

View the interview via our Youtube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SuxAkYbEs0M&t=64s>

Well worth a look

Peter rang for the Remembrance service at Black Notley
Peter was thrilled to be asked to ring in a Quarter Peal at Built Wells on the 40th anniversary of Laura Childs [ex St. Michael's] 1st Quarter Peal.

Peter Smith

Just for a Smile! – Snippets From Church Magazines.

Say 'Hell' to someone who doesn't care much about you.

Miss Charlene Mason sang, 'I will not pass this way again', giving obvious pleasure to the congregation.

For those of you who have children and don't know it, we have a nursery downstairs.

Next Thursday there will be try outs for the choir. They need all the help they can get.

Irving Benson and Jessie Carter were married on October 24 in the church. So ends a friendship that began in their school days.

Supplied by Marion Richardson

OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD

This year we were able to resume our Operation Christmas Child Shoebox Appeal following a year off last year due to the pandemic.

To all those who donated filled shoeboxes, shoebox fillers, online shoeboxes and gave money towards transport and project costs, a very big thank you!

We received 21 completed shoeboxes for both boys and girls in all the age ranges, 9 online shoeboxes and with the very generous donations from you all, I was able to make up a further 10 shoeboxes (for 5 girls and 5 boys). This brought St Michael's Church total to 40 shoeboxes. Some of you had been very busy with knitting during lockdown and as a result, we received 147 hand knitted children's hats of various colours and sizes, many hand knitted scarfs, gloves and bags. We also received dozens of cuddly toys; other toys such as cars, trucks and dolls; hair accessories; stationery items including coloured pencils, pens, notebooks and pencil cases, plus hygiene items including flannels, bars of soap and toothbrushes. With the spare fillers left over, these were boxed up and taken with the shoeboxes to a drop off centre at Kingsland church in Colchester, (this coincided nicely with taking my son to a band practice session nearby). The fillers are greatly appreciated, as these will be used at the processing centre to fill any big gaps in shoeboxes or to replace any items that are deemed inappropriate to be included.



For those of you who made your donation for transport and project costs online and printed off the barcode to put in your box, Operation Christmas Child will let you know via email the destination country of your shoebox gift. This method of payment was used for the 10 shoeboxes I was able to make up, so I hope to let you know in due course of their final destination. The shoebox gifts for this year's shoebox online campaign will be delivered to children in Belarus, Nigeria and Liberia. Thank you for helping to send Good News and great joy to children in need around the world this Christmas.

Next year I hope to be able to arrange an Operation Christmas Child coffee morning, which Jenny Chapman had organised in previous years and was very popular. This is a great way to raise awareness of the appeal and to raise funds for transport and project costs for the shoeboxes that we make up. If we receive as many generous donations next year, I am also hoping to host a shoebox packing party in Church House. Watch this space! Any help with this for next year will be greatly appreciated.



Many thanks once again.

Sue Marriott

DECEMBER DIARY

www.stmichaelsbtree.co.uk

Our YouTube services can be accessed via the Worship tab on the St Michael's Church website (or through the "St Michael's – Worship on the Web" YouTube channel). The latest service is also available through "St Michael's by Phone" currently updated on a

Tuesday – just dial 01376 333565 (phone calls charged at the local rate). Both the online and phone versions of the service are available throughout the week

1 Wednesday

10:00am Meeting Point

2 Thursday

11:00am Virtual Coffee on Zoom with Nigel & Jo Adams

7:30pm Rose Hill Bible Study

4 Saturday

4:30pm Bell Ringers' Carol Service

5 Sunday

10:00am Church Family Worship

6.30pm Holy Communion

6 Monday

7:30pm White Horse Tavern: Bible group with Stephen Bailey

7 Tuesday

2:00pm Bible reading group in Church House

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

8 Wednesday

2:00pm Meeting Point (last meeting in December)

9 Thursday

7:30pm Rose Hill Bible Study

11 Saturday

10:00am "Men's Christmas Cracker!" in Church

12 Sunday

8.00am Holy Communion

10:00am Morning Worship

6.30pm Carols by Candlelight

14 Tuesday

12 -2:30pm Women@St.Michaels – Christmas Prayer Lunch

2:00pm Bible reading group in Church House

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

16 Thursday

7:30pm Rose Hill Bible Study

18 Saturday

4:30pm Join in Nativity

19 Sunday

9:00am Next Plus Breakfast (14-18s)

10:00am Junior Church (3-14s)

10:00am Morning Worship

6.30pm Carols by Candlelight

21 Tuesday

2:00pm Bible reading group in Church House

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

23 Thursday

7:30pm Rose Hill Bible Study

24 Friday

4:00pm Christingle service

6.00pm Christmas Eve Communion

25 Saturday

8.00am Holy Communion (with Carols)

10:00am Christmas Day – Family Celebration

26 Sunday

10:00am Family Communion

30 Thursday

7:30pm Rose Hill Bible Study

WISHING YOU ALL A VERY HAPPY CHRISTMAS