

INTERCESSIONS Please pray for the long term sick and those in special need, among them:

Holly Ryan, John Bason, Wendy Webb, Ann-Marie and Andy, David Games, Daniel Argov, Abigail, Melanie, Dan, Angela, Anna and Phoenix, Philip, Chris, Lewis, Timothy, Ilona Zimon, Steven Wiltshire, Jenny Hey, Julie, Michael, Sara Ali, John Cuff, Sue Goodall, Alex Underwood, Janet Semper, Peter Parsons, Richard Gurney, Brian, Ray Hey, Dick Thomas, Birthe Biddle

THE CLERGY would like to thank all those who kindly sent them cards and gifts at Christmas.

ADVENT FUNDRAISING The Advent sales, stall and raffle raised a magnificent £813. Thanks are due to all who contributed, in particular Anne Dalziel, Elsie Hinkes, Muriel Hunt, Sally Lawton, Susan Purver and Ruth Wynne-Davies. Sales included around 50 preserves, 20 pints of winter soup, and nearly 2kg of pate, lots of cakes, biscuits, confectionary and flower arrangements. If you have the opportunity, please thank those involved in person for this marvellous effort.

ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS at St Mary Magdalen's matched our high standards and expectations. Stephen, Alex and the choir must be congratulated on all their efforts, and thanks is due to all those who helped to clean, decorate and staff the church for the various services, especially Joyce Day, Peter McCullough, Tish Baker, Jenny Farthing, Hannah Milner and Imogen Black.

SUNDAY CELEBRANTS

3 January — 8am Fr John, 10:30am Sr Margaret Anne

10 January — 8am Fr Richard, 10:30am and 5:30pm, Fr Peter

17 January — 8am Fr Peter, 10:30am Mthr Leanne, 5:30pm Fr Peter

24 January — 8am Fr Richard, 10.30am Fr Peter, 5:30pm tbc

31 January — 8am Fr Richard, 10:30am and 5:30pm Fr Peter

THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY runs from 18–25 January. On Sunday 24th January the preacher at the High Mass will be the Very Revd Dr Richard Finn OP, Regent of Blackfriars. Fr Richard is the latest in a distinguished line of scholars to have held this position, which now involves being the “head of house” of Blackfriars Hall, a Permanent Private Hall of the University of Oxford. Blackfriars—the Dominican Priory of the Holy Spirit—is the only church of another Christian denomination within our parish boundaries.

THE GOOD BOOK is the title of a series of lunchtime talks to be given on Thursdays at 12.30pm in our neighbouring parish church of St Giles. The series begins on 21st January with a discussion of “The History and Formation of the Old Testament” by Dr Hywel Clifford of Ripon College, Cuddesdon. On Thursday 28th January our own Fr John Muddiman is speaking on the title “Proclaiming the Gospel: Paul or Jesus”.

THE PARISH WEBSITE is now under new management, thanks to Glenn Sheasby who has kindly volunteered to take it over. We will shortly restore and update its regular features, and add new ones. Any suggestions can be made to Glenn or to Fr Peter.

WARD ON DAWKINS ON GOD One of the new features on the website will be the publication of theological material and reflection, from our own study sessions and other sources. Last year Dr Ruth Wynne-Davies and Professor John Bishop (a visiting Fellow of St Catherine's, professor of Philosophy in Auckland) teamed up to produce a response to Professor Keith Ward's study morning concerning his book “Why there almost certainly is a God”. The ensuing paper is a fascinating response to Ward's ideas, and combines the expertise of a genetic scientist and a philosopher of religion. As well as publishing this work on the website with, we hope, a response from Professor Ward, we shall be producing it in booklet form for sale in church.

GIANTS OF CHRISTIAN THOUGHT A new series of study mornings on major thinkers from Christian history will begin this coming Lent. We hope that

this will be a continuing series for the months and years to come, with sessions taking place approximately every six weeks. Most of these study sessions will be on Saturday mornings, from 10am—12noon, and each will be led by an established scholar in the relevant field. The first session will be on Augustine of Hippo (354–430), perhaps the most important of all Christian thinkers since St Paul. It will be led by Dr Stan Rosenberg, Fellow of Wycliffe Hall, and Director of SCIO (Scholarship and Christianity in Oxford), the visiting student scheme with which we have developed strong links over the last few years.

BAPTISM On Sunday 10 January, the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, we will welcome Zachary Palmer to baptism. Thanks to his parents Nigel and Hannah, Zachary has been a regular on Sundays in the first six months of his life, and we look forward to welcoming his family and friends as we celebrate his being a full member of the body of Christ.

VICARAGE TEA The next Vicarage Tea will take place on Wednesday 20th January from 3:30pm at 15 Beaumont St. Dr Martin Henig will offer a short talk on Christian churches in Roman Britain.

SERMON FOR MIDNIGHT MASS **by Fr Peter**

Statistics are inescapable. Facts and figures, percentages, proportions, categories and classifications surround us in everything we do. 87% of all statistics are made up on the spot, so the saying goes, and everyone has heard the words “lies, damned lies, and statistics”: the phrase was attributed by Mark Twain to Disraeli, but can't be found anywhere in his speeches, letters or writings—the attribution is, it seems, as misleading as the statistics it damns. Statistics don't tell the truth and, all too often, neither do the people who quote them.

In times of economic hardship, statistics suddenly become sexy. I don't deny the importance of economic science, but I do find it bizarre that our politicians and our media wait with their tongues hanging out for each little morsel of statistical evidence as to how the economy is shaping up, as if the fact that it shrank or grew by 0.2% makes any difference to those who have lost jobs, homes and livelihoods because of the irresponsibility and greed of those who have never known significant material need, and never will. This gripe has been renewed in me recently by the sad spectacle of our neighbours across the road, Borders, reducing their prices and dumping their stock ever more desperately. The billboards and the crowds which tell us that larger and larger reductions are on offer tell nothing of those who relied on being employed there—hardly for large amounts—and as we rush for those 80% discounts it has probably never occurred to us that there are many in central Oxford for whom the shop provided a welcome place of safety and warmth when the streets are dark and the central heating at home too costly to use. A Prime Minister later than Disraeli, David Lloyd George, is one of several people credited with remark “You cannot feed the hungry on statistics”, a statement far closer to truth than any collection of facts and figures.

If it is hard to escape statistics, it is also hard to escape the thought that statistics are the property of the powerful. That is certainly the impression we are given at the beginning of Luke's gospel. The context for his narrative of Jesus' birth at Bethlehem is a statistical one: the most powerful man of them all, the ruler of the Roman world, the one declared divine by his own people, has ordered that all the world must be taxed. Luke is probably exaggerating an ancient memory of such things, but his narrative choices are telling: all the world must be enrolled so that all the world can offer financial tribute to the people who need money less than anyone else alive. Joseph and his pregnant wife are two more pieces in this almost infinite jigsaw, just two more statistics in the endless round of the powerful subjecting the poor to their will.

These two statistics are about to produce another. A young couple, anxious with the weight of expectation. This very night that anxiety, that hope bursts forth in the miracle of birth in all its pain and all its joy. Another child comes into the world,

one of hundreds and thousands born that same night, another one with perhaps an evens chance of making it to maturity, a peasant child of peasant parents, neatly and safely hidden away in the social class that our statistics call C2, the child of a skilled manual labourer. Statistics don't promise much for his future, for his education, his opportunities, his health or material satisfaction. He is, after all, just another statistic.

The Christian doctrine of the incarnation dares us to believe this most ridiculous of things, that God himself became a statistic. Another child born that night, another labourer in what we now call northern Israel, another religious fanatic who left his home and family and wandered off to spread the word, another messiah figure in whom so many people hoped, another criminal condemned to that most brutal of deaths. You see, statistics are of no use whatsoever unless we can safely say that some things are the same. Unless there is classification, division into groups, unless people and places and objects have things in common, exist in a common framework, we can't say anything about them at all. It is our ability to decree that things are the same as other things, that people are the same as other people, which allows us to produce statistics and allows us to play games with them.

God knows us all too well, better than we know ourselves. He indulges our game playing and our desperation to control, our determination to reduce people to numbers, need to quantify, suffering to statistics. And so he comes among us as another one of us, as one who is the same, one who can be classified: a baby, born in uncomfortable surroundings; a child of honest and ordinary parents; a worker with a trade. Unnoticed, within the very statistical determinations of the rich and the powerful, God himself slips into the analysis, numbers himself with the innumerable powerless, chooses to become a statistic to be wielded by the whims of others, chooses to make himself part of the same old story precisely so that that story will never be the same. Though people are statistics, statistics will never be people. God in Jesus Christ becomes a statistic because he becomes a person, a person who lives and breathes and starves and weeps and bleeds. He becomes one of us, the same as us, submits himself to the classifications, institutions and mechanisms of human power so that those who know themselves to be in control can make even their maker do precisely as they please, bend to their will even this most stubborn of statistics, the one who speaks the truth about God, the one who challenges us to love the statistics around us which we ought to call people.

Tonight this statistic, this baby, is born. When he is older he will say things and do things and then he will die. Perhaps that's all there is to it. If statistics tell the truth, then the truth is ours to control. After all, what is truth? Pontius Pilate thought he knew - truth is the power of life and death, the ultimate control to consign to a statistic that most stubborn of truths, the love of God himself: nail it to a cross, seal it up in a stone cold tomb. Gone, forgotten, dealt with. But here we all are, two thousand years later, witnessing to the truth which will not be silenced.

Today that truth comes among us as a person, a weak, homeless, screaming baby. Those screams from the manger and the cries from the cross are one and the same, the truth of God's love echoing endlessly in the world of human deafness. What is truth? Not numbers, not statistics, not reasoned and rational familiarity, but the absurdity of God himself, laid in a feeding trough and helpless at the hands of human beings.

Sunday Readings

JANUARY 3RD:	Isaiah 60.1-6	Ephes 3.2-3a, 5-6	Matthew 2.1-12
JANUARY 10TH:	Isaiah 62.1-5	I Cor 12.4-11	John 2.1-12
JANUARY 17TH:	Nehemiah 8.2-6, 8-10	I Cor 12.12-30	Luke 1.1-4, 4.14-21
JANUARY 24TH:	Jeremiah 1.4-5, 17-19	I Cor 12.31-13.13	Luke 4.21-30
JANUARY 31ST:	Malachi 3.1-4	Hebrews 2.14-18	Luke 2.22-32



ST MARY MAGDALEN

Services
Sundays : Eucharist at 8 am and 5.30 pm
 Mattins 10 am
 High Mass at 10.30 am
Weekdays : Eucharist at 12.15 pm and 6.00 pm
 Morning Prayer 8.15 am, Evening Prayer 5.40 pm

Confessions

Daily after the 12.15 pm Mass, Wednesdays & Saturdays at 6.30 pm

Parish Clergy

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Calendar for January 2010

1	F	Mary, Mother of God	<i>Thanksgiving for the Incarnation</i>
2	S	Basil and Gregory, Bs Drs	<i>John, our Bishop</i>
3	Sun	EPIPHANY OF THE LORD	<i>Parish community</i>
4	M	Feria	<i>Rowan our Archbishop</i>
5	T	Feria	<i>Oxfam</i>
6	W	Feria	<i>Oxford deanery</i>
7	Th	Feria	<i>World peace</i>
8	F	Feria	<i>Students</i>
9	S	Feria	<i>Children's church</i>
10	Sun	BAPTISM OF THE LORD	<i>Those to be baptised</i>
ORDINARY TIME BEGINS			
11	M	Feria	<i>Our choir and musicians</i>
12	T	Aelred of Rievaulx, Ab	<i>Christian Aid</i>
13	W	Hilary, B Dr	<i>Helen and Douglas House</i>
14	Th	Feria	<i>The homeless</i>
15	F	Feria	<i>The PCC</i>
16	S	Feria	<i>Monthly requiem</i>
17	Sun	SECOND SUNDAY OF THE YEAR	<i>Parish Community</i>
18	M	Feria	<i>Religious communities</i>
19	T	Wulfstan, B	<i>Christian Unity</i>
20	W	Feria: <i>anointing at 6pm mass</i>	<i>Healing ministry</i>
21	Th	Agnes V M: <i>anointing at 12.15 mass</i>	<i>Oxford's hospitals</i>
22	F	Feria	<i>Our sacristans and servers</i>
23	S	Feria	<i>Home communicants</i>
24	Sun	THIRD SUNDAY OF THE YEAR	<i>Parish Community</i>
25	M	Conversion of Paul	<i>Preachers</i>
26	T	Timothy & Titus, Aps	<i>Bishops</i>
27	W	Feria	<i>Churches Together</i>
28	Th	Thomas Aquinas, Dr	<i>Christian scholars</i>
29	F	Feria	<i>The persecuted church</i>
30	S	Feria	<i>Vocations</i>
31	Sun	PRESENTATION OF THE LORD	<i>Parish Community</i>