

# intouch

NEWSLETTER

The Kingswood Benefice of Clothall, Rushden, Sandon, Wallington, and Weston



## KINGS WOOD BENEFICE

## Welcome to this issue of In Touch.

Well January is nearly behind us and February just about to start, the snowdrops are up so the crocuses and daffodils will surely not be far behind. According to the old rhyme *'February brings the rain to thaw the frozen lake again'* – I rather hope that we do not get much more rain as I feel we have been rather more blessed with it than we could have wished for. It was lovely to have the snow for a couple of days, I feel like I have missed winter if there is no snow, so I was delighted to stand at my window and watch it fall and there have been some lovely photos of the fiery pink and red dawns that came with it. The world under snow looks so different, so calm and pure, the invitation to go out and make footprints in it is almost irresistible especially when it crunches underfoot. It definitely brought people out to make snowmen and the sound of children laughing was in the air again – a wonderful noise that we have so missed. Let's hope that the Spring comes early and warm and we can all come out of our cocoons again. Stay well and stay safe.

With blessings Fiona



Dawn on Roe Green

St James the Least of All -

The Rectory

## On why our church does not need health or safety...



My dear Nephew Darren

I appreciated your recent concern when you heard one of our parishioners had slipped on a gravestone. Your desire to help was entirely commendable, and I do know that sending your own church's health and safety officer to give us some advice was kindly meant. But the 200-page report was not welcome. If we implemented even half of your officer's suggestions, life would become unbearably safe.

St James the Least of All has survived perfectly well for the last 600 years without gutter cleaning inspections, path degreasing and electrical safety certificates, so I think we may survive a little longer without them. As far as I am aware, the only disaster to hit us was when Cromwell's soldiers stabled their horses in the nave – which I suspect a few of our oldest members still clearly remember.

The shock the sidesmen sometimes get when switching on the lights occurs only occasionally, is relatively mild and soon over – and if it happens when preparing for the 8am Service, helps to wake them up. The weight of the Duke of Clumber's marble sarcophagus is slowly detaching the south aisle from the rest of the church, but it is very slow – and the pews in that area are used only once a year when his relations visit from America to commemorate his death at Agincourt – which is probably just beyond remembrance of the oldest of our congregation.

Leaks from the ceiling in the north aisle are solved with a row of buckets – and even you must concede that the fungi on the oak beams look really rather attractive when the sun catches them. The sapling growing out of the spire is certainly an issue – although it looks so attractive in Spring when in blossom. As for our fire extinguishers, they were serviced when my predecessor-but-two was in office, and I have the certificate to prove it.

So, do thank your health and safety officer for all his work and tell him we will bear his recommendations in mind. Also tell him I was so sorry he slipped and broke his leg in our choir stalls while he was with us. But that bit of floor has been out of alignment since 1748, and it seems a shame to disturb it now. If only he had arrived encased in bubble wrap, it would never have happened. Perhaps you could put that on the agenda of your next health and safety meeting.

Your loving uncle, Eustace

### A prayer for all those affected by coronavirus

Keep us, good Lord,  
under the shadow of your mercy.  
Sustain and support the anxious,  
be with those who care for the sick,  
and lift up all who are brought low;  
that we may find comfort  
knowing that nothing can separate us from  
your love in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.

If you would like to donate to any of our churches in the current crisis - details are below. We would be very grateful in your help to keep our churches going.

Thank you.

#### PCC OF RUSHDEN

LLOYDS BANK: 30-94-30 A/C 01845350

#### SANDON PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL

BARCLAYS BANK: 20-73-26 A/C 53610802

#### PCC ST MARYS CHURCH WALLINGTON

LLOYDS BANK: 30-94-30 A/C 01845466

#### WESTON PCC

BARCLAYS BANK: 20-41-12 A/C 40946850

#### PCC OF CLOTHALL

LLOYDS BANK: 30-94-30 A/C 01845245

## Rembrandt van Rijn: *Nunc Dimittis* (c.1669)



Among the thirteen paintings remaining in his house on the Rosengracht in Amsterdam at the time of his death was Rembrandt's final depiction of Simeon in the Temple with the Christ Child, and his return to the subject invites us to identify the artist with Simeon at this moment of valediction.

With Rembrandt we enter the scene of the Presentation precisely at Luke 2.28-29, Simeon taking the Christ child in his arms and praising God, saying 'Lord, now you let your servant depart in peace, according to your word...' We sense a quiet, exalted joy as Simeon opens his mouth to say or perhaps softly to sing those words. His large hands are shown in the attitude of prayer, though parted so that his extended forearms become a firm support, almost a raft, for the baby he holds. Behind him is the prophet Anna, though as paintings left by Rembrandt at his death were deemed 'unfinished', she may have been inserted or amended by another hand.

In his later years Rembrandt became more determined than ever to paint the truth of his subjects, to show not merely the appearance of a face but also the character it revealed, rigorously applying that intent even to his self-portraits. He offers us Simeon as a man of patient integrity, painting the beauty of old age undimmed by despair and unafraid of mortality.

Rembrandt shapes his figures in the freer style of those later years but nevertheless applies his granular paint with infinite care and delicacy. Simeon's eyes are closed. Does Rembrandt think of him as blind? If so then Rembrandt declares that what can be seen with the eye is less important than what is perceived by inner sight, so Simeon can close his eyes, seeing nothing yet seeing everything. He sees the salvation 'prepared in the presence of all peoples', a light to reveal the Father's glory to the world. In his sight all is fulfilled, hope and expectation are reborn in this child. His spirit receptive and arms outstretched, Simeon receives the grace he has long awaited.

And here is a baby of much more natural humanity than many of the extraordinary prodigies depicted in the art of previous centuries. The image of the Christ child presented here to the world is a truly universal symbol, standing aside from the controversies which can make the cross divisive. All people save those who lose utterly their humanity share the instinct to love and to protect such a child, who can indeed be any child, mine, yours, everybody's. Simeon and Anna, proud grandparents, touch and feel his presence in hope. They can entrust the future to him.

### HOLY DAYS

## 2nd Feb: Candlemas, The Presentation of Christ in the Temple

In bygone centuries, Christians said their last farewells to the Christmas season on Candlemas, 2nd February. This is exactly 40 days after Christmas Day itself.

In New Testament times 40 days old was an important age for a baby boy: it was when they made their first 'public appearance'. Mary, like all good Jewish mothers, went to the Temple with Jesus, her first male child - to 'present Him to the Lord'. At the same time, she, as a new mother, was 'purified'. Thus, we have the Festival of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple.

So, where does the Candlemas bit come in? Jesus is described in the New Testament as the Light of the World, and early

Christians developed the tradition of lighting many candles in celebration of this day. The Church also fell into the custom of blessing the year's supply of candles for the church on this day - hence the name, Candlemas.

The story of how Candlemas began can be found in Luke 2:22-40. Simeon's great declaration of faith and recognition of who Jesus was is of course found in the *Nunc Dimittis*, which is embedded in the Office of Evening Prayer in the West. But in medieval times, the *Nunc Dimittis* was mostly used just on this day, during the distribution of candles before the Eucharist. Only gradually did it win a place in the daily prayer life of the Church.

### THE BIRDS AND BEES

*Here is some good news: all new major roads will have wildflower-friendly verges that could boost our numbers of birds and bees.*

*Highway England has said that vibrant road verges will be created as standard on new roads over 300 miles in England, using low nutrient soils which will be seeded with wildflowers or left to grow naturally.*

*A staggering 97 per cent of our meadows have been destroyed since the Thirties, due to modern agriculture. This means that the 238,000 hectares of road verges across the UK could become a vital habitat for pollinators.*

*The Government has pledged to build 4,000 miles of new road by 2025.*