

# GRAPEVINE



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## His name Emmanuel

*Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Emmanuel. Isaiah 7:14*  
© New King James Version

*"And is it true? And is it true,  
This most tremendous tale of all,  
Seen in a stained-glass window's hue,  
A Baby in an ox's stall?  
The Maker of the stars and sea  
Become a Child on earth for me?"*  
'Christmas' v6 by John Betjeman

We are confronted today with many challenges for our attention and our faith. We are also surrounded by claim and counter claim of what truth is – 'that's my truth' people say as if truth were a negotiable thing with no absolutes. Or 'I will only believe it if I can see it'. This is clearly nonsense. Gravity exists. An absolute truth – or we could fly unaided, and yet we cannot see it, we can only experience its effects. For 2,000 years people have believed in the Virgin Birth of Jesus to Mary, as foretold 700 years before by Isaiah, and that Jesus, the Son of God, walked on earth among us and died to put the relationship between God and humanity back on track. This is either true or it is not. How can we believe? I would argue that we need to look at the effects of the truth. Lives turned round, lives devoted to His service and to the service of humanity.

For me, the truth became real through the lives of some teenagers in Hildenborough, who had met Jesus and had been set on fire by His love. I knew I wanted whatever they had – so I asked Jesus to become part of my life. I have never looked back. He gives peace, and joy and purpose, and when he came to live in me, he changed my life and the Holy Spirit came in and gave me power to serve Him.



So yes. It is true. Tinsel and turkey are great, but the truth of Christmas is far more important.

*No love that in a family dwells,  
No carolling in frosty air,  
Nor all the steeple-shaking bells  
Can with this single Truth compare -  
That God was man in Palestine  
And lives today in Bread and Wine.*  
'Christmas' v8 by John Betjeman

Happy Christmas,  
Adam

Rev Adam Foot, Vicar, St. John's Welling

## St John's News

Although November 5<sup>th</sup> is over a week gone fireworks are continuing to bang and crackle; on reflection, maybe it's Divali? The last few weeks have seen comings and goings. Welcomes and farewells bring challenges, but we were all delighted to have **Adam and Kate** back from their mini Sabbatical. The **Uganda team** went and have re-



turned. Those of us who went experienced so much including many welcomes and farewells during our three week visit. The welcomes were amazing and heart warming. (Do check out Linzi's videos on FB and Instagram).

The goodbyes brought us to tears, but don't ask me about the chicken gifted to Sue and Steve which clucked happily while we ate our lunch, but by dinner the same day clucked no more. Dinner was roast chicken. I DID NOT eat.

The first Sunday after our return there was the lovely **Bring and Share** Lunch enabling us to begin our goodbyes to Gordon and Csilla. As I write, **Gordon's final Sunday** with us is tomorrow. We have long known just what a privilege it has been for us to have Gordon as our Curate. We will miss him enormously but are so



glad that other Churches will have the benefit of his gracious Pastoring, great Assemblies, and clear powerful preaching. The **Current Alpha Course** is continuing, a great time of learning, sharing and allowing God to work. Two of them even did three of the sessions in Rukungiri!

The Life Service and **Lights@Life** on Nov 5<sup>th</sup> was a wonderful time of worship, learning and fun as 150 or more enjoyed fireworks, toasting marshmallows and, of course, Hot Dogs. The team running the evening worked tirelessly—thank you sooo much.

**October was our Gift Month** and we are looking forward to being able to start the renovations on our cloakrooms, kitchen and hall.

As I write, **Gordon's final Sunday** with us is tomorrow, and his institution at Northfleet is on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dec.

So, on to Advent, the Lamplighter Fayre, and of course Christmas.

Have a lovely Jesus filled Christmas and New Year.  
**Estelle Woodcock**



Isaiah 6:8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!' The question the Lord asks in the presence of Isaiah still resonates; it provokes a response from each of us today. That is the reality of the Christian life, we are called, we are sent, and we have a destination that is provided by God in his everlasting mercy. John 14:2 The Father's house has many rooms, prepared for us, and Christ himself shall take us to be there with him. I've found that I no longer am concerned about the means of the journey, but rather the purpose of the journey. The destination is secured, the journey is the time of sharing the Gospel News of Jesus. What is always amazing is that we often find ourselves arriving at a new destination in our journey to find that God was there before us, preparing the way and opening doors of opportunity we never imagined would exist. Ephesians 2:10 For we are God's handiwork, creat-

# Send me!



ed in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Our walk of faith is one that is held in God's hands, faithful, strong, healing, redeeming hands. One thing I have learned in my time at St John's is that seeking God's presence is more important than trying to do things without him. More happens when we seek to be in His presence, because then our priorities are reset. We become children of God, seeking after the Father's will, and living out in the power of his Holy Spirit. 1 John 3:1 "See how much our Father loves us, for He calls us His children - and that is what we are!" NLT We have confidence in the promises of God because he is faithful, he gave his Son to save us and bring us into the fulness of eternal life. May we know the grace and truth of following the Lord as we pilgrimage in this life into the fulness of life that is to come.

Blessings,

**Revd Gordon MacBean**

## Growing Leaders



Growing Leaders (GL) is a year long course we run across Churches in the Deanery, though it's mainly populated by delegates from St John's, Welling.

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there is one teaching session a month, taught by Rev Jim Charles from St Peter's and supported by Rev Adam Foot and Rev Gordon MacBean (for this last course) from St John's. Each delegate has a mentor with whom they meet monthly, and the content of the mentoring meeting is guided by the course framework. There are also two 24 hour residentials, which are high points for everyone. The last course we ran was in 2022-23, this is what the course members thought of it:

Ben: "Growing leaders course challenged me in so many ways. The topic we covered called "the calling" helped me to clarify the direction my faith would take me. The course empowered me to take up leadership roles such as leading the men's fellowship and cleaning dates in Christ Church."

Bob: "I found it very good. It has particularly helped me to try to keep what I do connected with what I might be called to do."

Danny: "Growing Leaders has been such a valuable experience that has really helped me to develop my understanding of calling and leadership. The course teaching and mentoring have been great and provided a supportive atmosphere to both learn and reflect. Being part of a group exploring the course has also been a particular highlight as it has been so good to develop friendships, learn from others and see people grow and become confident to pursue what God is calling them to."

James: "Growing Leaders was an engaging course that prompted me to think in alternative ways. It helped me to see how best

to integrate the Bible into my personal leadership within and without the Church."

Jim: "The course gave me time to reflect and see how best to serve. It was also great getting to know those we worship with better and being a part of their journey."

Michelle: "I really enjoyed the course, the experience has helped me grow and develop in my ministry and calling. It's given me confidence and gave me a space to really listen to his voice."

Mushi: "I really found that the Growing Leaders Course taught me concepts about life and leadership that were really helpful and I have been able to share this teaching with others."

Steve: "GL is an ideal platform for giving a person a path and understanding to progress in church leadership. We are one church family. GL helped me to recognise that for a church to grow, it is a team effort. We can have personal opinions but must listen to others who might be more knowledgeable in certain subjects. When an issue has been discussed as a team, the best way forward can be achieved."

The course aims for delegates "To be led more by Jesus, to lead more like Jesus, to lead more to Jesus", and is divided into 3 phases:

- Part 1 Firm foundations for Christian leadership
- Part 2 Key skills of Christian leadership
- Part 3 Keeping faithful in Christian leadership

We are hoping to run GL 24 starting after Easter. Delegates are normally invited to join the course, but if you're interested, speak to your small group leader or a church leader and visit <https://www.cpas.org.uk/browse/everything/growing-leaders-course-download>.

**Kate Foot**



St John's Welling: Hannah Wood, Danny Branch, Michelle Cronin, Jim Golding, Bob Morris, Ben Milton-Cole (Christ Church, Erith), Steve Read, Charles Barlow, James Belsham, Mushi Rahman

# Another Rubbish Article

Thank you to those who have been putting empty crisp packets and milk bottle tops in the special recycling boxes.

You might wonder if it's worth the bother-those crisps packets are only flimsy little bits of plastic. However, I reckon we have collected close to a thousand crisp packets already, so that is quite a lot of plastic after all.

And not only has it gone to a specialist recycler so that it can be used well to make new things like fence posts and benches, as it is not mixed with other unknown plastics; but it has made us think about the surprising amount of waste that we as a church produce. As custodians of God's Creation, we have to at least do something.

So keep them coming- there is a small round, red box under the kitchenette counter and a big rectangular, black box by the other bins outside the kitchen door.

**Bob Morris**

# News from a House-Group



*Behold I make all things new...Rev 21 v 5*

Our housegroup has gone through quite an upheaval with 3 different venues this year. We were known as the Park View Road housegroup but as I sold up my house there in March and did not move into my bungalow until July we also had a temporary home in the Prayer room at church for 3 months. We now squeeze into a bungalow in St John's Road but it doesn't seem quite right to call us the St John's housegroup, we will have to think of another name.

We are a fairly stable and mature bunch of 13 having weathered the loss of two members this year. It is fair to say that none of us will see 50 again – some of us even recalling it only as a distant memory, so we battle on supporting each other through a number of challenges with aging bodies and expanding concerns for friends and family.

It would be tempting to say our best is behind us and to start every sentence with variations on

**I remember when../It wasn't like that in my day. / We've tried that. /Why don't they do it like we used to?**

However getting stuck into God's word each week keeps us looking forward, and the years of Christian experience we have between us give us a real appreciation that God is always doing new things in our lives, in our church and in the world. We continue to marvel at the changes in our lifetimes in technology for instance, but are also reminded that people are still the same, ignoring God's ways, making a mess of things and needing to be forgiven to make a new start. We aim to keep moving on with God.

Kate Finney

# My Faith Journey: Pat Wootton

as a midwife. Pat and John were married at St John's in 1963. John had become

Pat was born into a nominally Christian family living in Danson Lane, and was baptised as a baby at St John's. From early childhood, she was taken to Sunday School and continued into her teenage years when a Bible class was formed called King's Own. Towards the end of 1953 she gave her life to Jesus Christ then in January 1954 a group of young people were taken to the Royal Albert Hall for an evangelistic rally where Tom Rees (father of the late Jennifer Rees Larcombe) was preaching. A number of other young people from St John's recommitted their lives and made a public declaration of their new faith including

Pat's mother, Mrs Ward, began to become involved with



Pat. In 1955, she was confirmed, together with about fifty other contemporaries.

Pat was educated at Hook Lane Primary School, and then Bexley Technical School (now Townley Grammar School). At fourteen, she began to know that God wanted her to be a nurse, and she was able to complete a two-year pre-nursing course at school.

At eighteen, Pat began three years' nursing training at the Royal Free Hospital, in Grays Inn Road, London. She met her future husband John at the Hospital as he was then working as the hospital engineer.

After four years she began training as a midwife at the British Hospital for Mothers and Babies in Woolwich. This was a Christian Hospital where morning prayers were held regularly together with thanksgiving prayers after a mother was delivered. Pat then went on to complete her midwifery training at West Hill Hospital, Dartford where her mother was also working

life at St John's. Some people will remember when she made a large amount of marmalade to help raise funds for the new church hall.

The children came along, and were both baptised at St John's. Pat went back to work part-time as a nurse in the operating theatre at Erith Hospital in 1974, because that work gave her regular hours and weekends off which suited the family needs. She moved to Queen Mary's Hospital in 1980 when Erith Hospital was reorganised, and after a period of full-time work reduced her hours. She also joined the bank staff at the Greenwich and Bexley Community Hospice during her final three years of employment.

Pat led a house group until sadly John died in 2014, a year after their golden wedding anniversary. She now distributes the Grapevine magazine to former members of St John's, and helps to produce our prayer diary together with hosting Zoom Compline when the clergy are unavailable.



# Return to Uganda



Saying, 'Goodbye'

October 2023 saw the team return to Uganda - new and returning members—Linzi, Estelle and Roulla returning and Danielle (Dani) and Youbab (two youngsters!) going for the first time. We began our journey with what was probably our best safari ever.

On arrival in Rukungiri, we were met with the marching band, palm leaves and a bouquet of flowers for Sue.

We settled in to a routine and found many jobs that needed doing including admin, school photos, craft with nursery, teaching and of course shopping with 57 sponsored children. Stevo (me) was a big hit as usual with the customary water pistol. We



Washing hands before lunch

made our usual 2500 Mandazi (doughnuts) which were greatly received and quickly eaten.

We delivered some to the deaf school that Sue and I raised money for. We handed over all the money that you our church family and other friends kindly donated. This was a very emotional moment as Sister Bonny gratefully received the money.



Writing Sponsored letters

The toilets are almost finished, later than hoped due to delays because

of Covid and planning permission, but by Christmas they will be functional.

We were all overwhelmed with the faith the children have and how they worshipped and prayed. At times it was very



Crafting in the Nursery

Worshipping during Assembly



emotional. Youbab is staying out there and will be returning in December.

Thank you for your prayers over some difficult times. It



Shopping with the Sponsor boys

was encouraging to know that you were praying. Alice has now recovered and is out of hospital.

October is the rainy season and we saw plenty of it; having said that it was still warm and very hot on many days. We are reverting back to going in February, so if anyone is interested in going in Feb 2024, then speak with one of us. You don't need specialist skills, none of us are experts, we just have a passion to serve God amongst the children and other needy people. You will come back humbled and will learn a lot from your time spent with the children and teachers.



Making doughnuts

God Bless

Steve Read