

The St John's Messenger

Come to faith, grow in faith, and live out faith
– News from St John the Baptist, Grove



Spring is a time of new beginnings and fresh starts. Flowers and plants begin to bloom, hibernating creatures wake from their winter sleep, the days lengthen. For



many of us, this season brings new energy, and the will to tackle jobs left for too long – time for spring cleaning!

For Christians, this season of Easter also has a deeper meaning. It is a time to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus, not only as a past event, but as a present reality and a future hope. For Christians in pre-modern times, it was no coincidence that Easter took place in the spring. The turning of the seasons, the dead earth coming back to life, was a sign of the deeper truth of God's redemption. After all, the quickening of the trees after winter and the resurrection of the dead both find their source in the same life-giving power of God. Medieval images of the cross often show it with new buds and blossoms growing from the dead wood: a wonderful image of God bringing life out of death.

If there is one word that sums up the church's worship during this Easter season, it is 'Alleluia', Hebrew for 'Praise the Lord'. This joyful shout of celebration from the book of Psalms becomes our song as we celebrate. The Resurrection of Jesus means new life for us, and for the whole world. St Augustine of Hippo considered the many 'Alleluias' of the Easter liturgy a kind of practice for the eternal worship of heaven, and the season of Easter a time of preparation for our life with God. He also encouraged his listeners to remember that praise is more than just a song, it is a lifestyle: "when you praise God, praise with your whole selves; let your voice, your life, your deeds, all sing." The joy of Easter brings a burst of energy for a spring cleaning that goes far beyond the literal cobwebs and smudges, and instead targets our whole lives. - **Rev Miriam Jones**

Benefice Sunday Services in April

Sunday 5th April - Easter Day

8:00 AM BCP Communion, Grove
9:00 AM Holy Communion, Denchworth
9:30 AM Parish Eucharist, Hanney
10:15 AM Holy Communion, Grove
11:00 AM Parish Eucharist, Challow

Sunday 12th April

8:00 AM BCP Communion, Grove
9:30 AM Parish Eucharist, Hanney
10:00 AM Holy Communion, Denchworth
10:15 AM Morning Worship, Grove
11:00 AM Parish Eucharist, Challow
8:00 PM Worship Evening, Grove

Sunday 19th April

8:00 AM BCP Communion, Grove
9:30 AM Parish Eucharist, Hanney
10:00 AM Holy Communion, Denchworth
10:15 AM Holy Communion, Grove
11:00 AM Parish Eucharist, Challow

Sunday 26th April

8:00 AM BCP Communion, Grove
9:30 AM Parish Eucharist, Hanney
10:00 AM Holy Communion, Denchworth
10:15 AM Morning Worship, Grove
11:00 AM Morning Worship, Challow

GOD, NATURE AND US

Environmental issues are in the news all the time, whether it is sewage in our rivers or the new British 'monsoon season' each winter, or the decline of many of our wild animals, such as hedgehogs. It's not a very cheerful message, so how should we respond as Christians?

Psalm 24 begins: "The Earth is the Lord's and everything in it." All life on this Earth belongs to God – he has created it and loves everything that he has made. This means as Christians that we should care for God's creation as part of our Christian faith. It is not an extra, that we might do if we have time, but something at the heart of what it means to be a Christian.

The Old Testament has much to say about this. In Numbers 35:34, it says: "Do not defile the land where you live and where I, the Lord, dwell." Just as we make our own homes, welcoming spaces for our families, so we should care for God's nature around us by keeping it free of pollution and rubbish.



In Leviticus 25, there are instructions about giving land rest every seven years, and, in the Ten Commandments, the day of rest is for animals as well as humans. In our modern world, we ask more and more from nature, and it is essential that we do give it rest by making spaces for God's nature to thrive. In the New Testament, Jesus reflects God's care for nature. In Matthew 10:29, he says "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care." So, as nature begins to spring into action this spring, let's see if we can take extra care to protect and nurture the living world that God loves.

- **Martin Hodson**

Eco Tip

If you have a garden, why not let a corner of it go wild and maybe try 'no mow May' for your lawn? If you don't have a garden, you might sow a window box with some wildflower seeds.



Newsletter Article Ideas

With the new newsletter layout we have the opportunity to explore many of the activities we participate in at St John's in more detail, some ideas are listed below.

- My Spiritual Journey
- Book Reviews
- Sub-Committee Updates
- PCC Update
- School Outreach
- Explanation of Services in church (e.g. Christingle)
- Church Group Updates
- Mission Partners
- Church and Community
- Interviews with church members

If you have an idea for an article please get in touch with the Newsletter Team to discuss. Articles should be no more than 500 words in length, possibly with a picture.
news@valebenefice.org.uk

MY TRIP TO JERUSALEM

One of the oldest pubs in England is 'Ye Olde Trip to Jerusalem'. The name captures how important a journey to the Holy Land was to Christians in years gone by. An expedition from England to the Middle East was, in the Middle Ages, a daunting and dangerous, and extremely lengthy, undertaking. One might reflect on how things have changed - in some ways, not much.

I have long wanted to visit Jerusalem, more because of my fascination with history than for spiritual reasons. Before we met, my wife, Viv, had been on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem organised by a Christian group. So, when in October 2023, we had the opportunity to visit the Eastern Mediterranean on a cruise, we were both excited. I would finally get to go to Jerusalem, and Viv would see the pyramids (I'd already seen them on a trip to Egypt).

As we were guided on foot through the city, I was immediately impressed by the sights - including an orthodox Jewish busker, wearing all the garb, who played some very decent Blues on an electric guitar! Entering the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which is historically Christianity's most sacred place, I was excited. This church is supposedly on the site of Golgotha, where Jesus was crucified, and also the empty tomb: so it encompasses the scenes of both Christ's death and resurrection.



Sadly I was distinctly underwhelmed by the tawdry decorations. The vibe was of a tourist attraction rather than a place of worship, let alone a sacred site. My streak of Puritanism, which is never very far below the surface, combined with my professional cynicism meant I was disappointed. The one place that did move me was an unadorned rock tomb, slightly off the beaten track, which no one has ever claimed was Jesus' burial place. It was quiet in there, and we had a chance to reflect.



Later we went to the Wailing Wall, where we had a good view over the Temple Mount. Something strange happened to me there. My cynicism absolutely melted, and I felt - well, something that is difficult to explain. Thanks to the Holy Spirit, I had a feeling of awe, peace and reverence, that I have only experienced once before, at Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, a story for another time, perhaps. Looking at the place where Jesus once walked, where so many critical moments in the Old and New Testaments took place, was a truly spiritual experience - remarkable, given my reaction to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. We eventually had to leave, so I tore myself away and we got back on to our coach, heading for lunch in a hotel.

I look back at my trip to Jerusalem as an extraordinary and humbling experience, that lives with me still. Two days later, while we were flying home, the dreadful events of 7th October 2023 took place. I pray that one day we will be able to return to Israel. - **Gary Sheffield**

CHURCH FLOWERS

- Do you enjoy the flowers in church?
- Do they help towards your worship?
- Would you like to join the team?

Flowers in church are to remind us of the beauty and nature of God's world. Most Sundays you'll see a single pedestal to the side of the altar but at the major festivals of Christmas, Easter and Harvest, the whole church is decorated. We also have special single pedestals for Ascension Day, Pentecost and Remembrance Sunday. During Lent and Advent there are no flowers to reflect a season of simplicity and reflection.



Easter Flowers

Our church flower team members are **Carol Doughty, Wendy Bywater, Sue Parnell, Bev Rolls and Frances Hobson**. We'd love to have some new members join us, especially some younger people. No experience is necessary as we can train you, starting with simpler designs.

We work on the single displays individually throughout the year but together as a team at the festivals. We use mainly fresh flowers and greenery but at times we do use silk flowers, especially if the weather is very hot, and sometimes as an addition to the fresh.



Pentecost flowers

We have been using the traditional florist foam, Oasis, but as this is not environmentally friendly, we are having to look at new ways of putting the displays together. We will use up the Oasis we already have but will not buy more – this floral foam is non-biodegradable and has to go to landfill once used. We will therefore be going back to the older, traditional ways of arranging the flowers and you may well notice a difference in the type of displays in church.

Flowers are not cheap and although the church finances allow for the cost of flowers, we do welcome donations towards the cost at Christmas and Easter and are grateful for any received.

We mostly use greenery from our own gardens but buy flowers for the displays. If you have an allotment or garden where you grow your own flowers and have some to spare occasionally that could be used in displays, we'd love to hear from you.

Also, if you have a special event such as a birthday or anniversary and would like an arrangement, we are happy to do that for you for the cost of the flowers – just speak to one of the team. - **Sue Parnell**



Flowers for Mothering Sunday

We are most grateful to the dedicated ladies who kindly prepared the posies for our Mothering Sunday service at St John's. Their care and attention ensured each posy was a beautiful expression of gratitude, bringing joy to everyone involved. The time and effort spent gathering and arranging so many posies was a generous act, reflecting the spirit of our church family. On behalf of the whole community, we sincerely thank them for their hard work and faithful service, which contributed greatly to the warmth and success of our Mothering Sunday celebrations.

ST JOHN'S DIARY OF EVENTS

St John's Toddler Group – Wednesdays in term time – 9.15am – 11am – Hall

BoW (Badminton on Wednesdays) – Every Wednesday – 2pm – 4pm – Hall

Thursday Bible Group – Bi-weekly (not August & December) Thursdays – 2pm – 3.30pm – Lower Room

Thursday Badminton – Every Thursday – 8pm – 9.30pm – Hall

Friends on Friday – Monthly (not August) - 1st & 3rd Fridays – 2pm – 3.30pm – Hall

(3rd Fridays is a Holy Communion)

Church Sunday Clubs – Weekly in term time – Sundays – 10.15am – 11.30am – Hall & Rooms

Board Games Afternoon – Monthly (not August & December) – Usually 3rd Sunday – 2pm – 5pm – Hall

Craft & Fellowship Afternoon – Monthly – 4th Sundays – 2.15pm – 4.30pm – Hall

St John's Senior Youth Group – Sundays during term time – 6.30pm – 8pm – Hall

(on Sundays where there is a Boardgames event in the hall, Youth Group starts at 7pm)

Grove & Wantage School Prayers – 3 times a year – Wednesdays – 4pm – 5pm – Lower Room

(once a school term = late September, January and April).

Saturday Morning Prayers – Every Saturday (not 2nd of month) – 8.30am – Frances Gillott's house, Grove

Additional Benefice Services in April

Wednesday 1st April

10:00 AM Holy Communion, Grove
7:30 PM Holy Communion., Challow

Thursday 2nd April

19:30 PM Holy Communion with washing of Feet, Grove

Good Friday 3rd April

10.00 AM Reflection Service. Hanney
11.00 AM W&GCP service on Green (End of Vale Avenue), Grove
1.00 PM Reflection Service, Challow
2.00 PM Meditation Service, Grove
3.00 PM Messy Church, Grove

Thursday 16th April

10.00 AM Mid-week Parish Eucharist, Challow

Friday 17th April

2.00 PM Friends on Friday Holy Communion, Grove

Thursday 23rd April

10.00 AM Mid-week Parish Eucharist, Challow

Thursday 30th April

10.00 AM Mid-week Parish Eucharist, Challow

NEWS FROM ST JOHN'S

Electoral Roll Revision for Grove Parish Church 2026:

The roll will be open for additions, revisions and removals from Sunday 29th March – 27th April. It will then be published on 30th April in time for the Grove PCC AGM on 16th May.

If you would like **to join** or **make amendments** to your entry on the Electoral Roll, please complete & sign a form (available on the Welcome Tale in the church foyer) and return to the Benefice Office by Monday 27th April.

If you are already on the electoral roll, and have no amendments to make, you do not need to complete another form. Alternatively, an electronic version can be obtained from the Electoral Roll Officer
chris.gray@valebenefice.org.uk

Useful email addresses

news@valebenefice.org.uk - Ideas for articles, news items or even if you have feedback

prayer@valebenefice.org.uk - If you have any prayer requests, please send them to the above email address. There is a group that meets regularly to pray together for those requests in confidence.

QuestionsOfFaith@valebenefice.org.uk - for any questions relating to faith, big or small. These are treated in confidence by our clergy team, only.

itsupport@valebenefice.org.uk - for any questions relating to St John's related IT issues
DP_Team@valebenefice.org.uk - for any data protection issues you might have

SCHOOLS PRAYER GROUP



Schools Prayer Group 4-5pm at St John's Rooms, Grove

- We really welcome new people to join us, 4.00-5.00, in the St John's Rooms at Grove Parish Church
- We start by socializing over a cuppa and a cake
- We have a brief time of reflection together
- We pray for local schools, pupils, teachers & other school staff too

We plan to meet three times each academic year, all from 4pm to 5pm in the St John's Rooms, Grove.

Upcoming dates:

Wednesday 22nd April 2026

Future dates likely to be on the fourth Wednesday of each of September 2026, January 2027, and April 2027

Please do advertise these dates in your school/churches or fellowships.

As you know, we are glad to welcome anyone who wishes to pray for our local schools.

Please send prayer requests or requests for more information to:

John Wilson johnmwilson2012@gmail.com

Helen Harwood -

andrewandhelenharwood@yahoo.co.uk



MISSION SPOT - As part of our mission giving at St John's, we support CMS partners Marcio Ciechanovicz & Noemi Celeti in Brazil "Connecting with people beyond the reach of traditional church, sharing the gospel in new ways & ministering to people's physical needs". Read their latest newsletter on the Mission notice board or online at churchmissionsociety.org. The website also has useful info on other work CMS is doing worldwide.



Cornerstone Café and Bookshop is located on Savile Way, Grove and is open from 9.30 until 4 on weekdays and 10.00 until 3.00 on Saturdays. We serve breakfast and lunch until 2.00 and drinks and cakes until closing. The award-winning Christian bookshop has a wide range of Bibles, Christian books, cards, gifts and fair-trade products.

If you are catering for an event, business lunch, away day or funeral, our buffet selection comes highly recommended. We provide homemade cakes & quiches, fresh filled sandwiches, all your favourite fillings, and we cater to gluten free or dairy free diets. Its great value and we can often deliver.

We have a marble jar which allows us to provide vouchers for people to eat with us for free. If you would like to contribute a Marble, at £1:50 each, please speak to whoever is on the till.

Email: office@cornerstonegrove.org.uk
Tel: 772280



Marie Curie

Chris O'Neil is running the London Marathon on April 26th in aid of Marie Curie. "Marie Curie provides practical, hands-on care for people with terminal illness, not just cancer. They also provide families with advice and support. For me, this support started when I was 12 and was invaluable when my mum was diagnosed with cancer when I was 15. They supported my Mum, Nan and Aunt through their battles to the end and offered family support after."

If you would like to donate toward this, please see Chris, Louise or go to www.tinyurl.com/chrislm26

Through His Eyes

Saturday 25th April 3.30pm

Refreshments available on arrival. Free Entry

Cornerstone Cafe, 10 Savile Way, Grove, OX12 0PT

Bruce A J McLauchlan



Author Bruce AJ McLauchlan is coming to tell us about this fascinating new account of Jesus' life. "In a stunning retelling of the most famous story of all, with portrayals of actual events, through flights of pure imagination, and through speculative enhancements, its an approach like no other. Aimed at both Christians and non-Christians alike, prepare yourself to be swept along as you experience the story of the greatest man who ever lived for yourself but with the story told from a truly unique viewpoint".



Worship Evening at St John's

Join us on Sunday evening, 12th April at 20:00 for a special extended time of worship in the church. This will be a relaxed and informal gathering, with uplifting music and space to slow down, reflect, and encounter God's presence more deeply than we often can in our regular services.

Come as you are, take time to pause, and be refreshed through worship together.



Celebrating Easter

St John's Church Hall
Main Street, Grove
Friday 3rd April 2026
3-4.30pm



Lego and
junk model
challenges



Craft and creativity



Refreshments
and cake



All ages
welcome

Toddler
activities



Prayer space
& worship



(Church - but not as you know it...)

Contacts

Vicar: Rev Alec Gill
07739563894
vicaralec@valebenefice.org.uk

Associate Vicar: Rev Miriam Jones
07474095190
vicarmiriam@valebenefice.org.uk

Licensed Lay Minister: Sarah
Shackleton 07587776609
SarahLLM@valebenefice.org.uk

Benefice Office: Grove Parish Church,
Main Street, Grove, OX12 7LQ
Open: Mon-Fri. 10-12 noon.
01235 771479.
office@valebenefice.org.uk

Looking Ahead...



PLEASE PRAY ...

- that someone will feel called to come forward to fill the role of Churchwarden. Please speak to Alec, Nick or Colin if you are being called to this role or have someone God is placing on your heart



Our APCM

This will be held on the 16th May at 19:00 in the St John's Church Hall.

Come along to find out what's going on at St John's and our vision for the future of the church.