

Saint for March

Whatever happened to St Joseph? A friend asked me that quite recently and I had to admit I hadn't given it any thought.

We learn very little of Joseph in the New Testament or even the earliest Christian writings. From his brief appearances in Matthew and Luke we learn he was a 'tekton'—an artisan who worked with wood, iron or stone a word which is the origin of 'technician' and 'technology'.

Joseph was born in Bethlehem but working in Nazareth. He was betrothed to Mary and when she became pregnant her shame was his shame. As still happens in some countries she could have been stoned to death for adultery. However Joseph was a good, kind man so he decided to privately divorce her.

The actual voice of Joseph is never heard in the Gospels, but God communicated with him in dreams, the first of which told him that Mary's baby was the Son of God. Joseph must have had a strong faith because he promptly married Mary, probably with understandable opposition from his family.

We all know the Christmas story so the next time Joseph appears is in the Temple when he and Mary present Jesus for circumcision as was the custom. We can infer some degree of poverty as two doves were presented for sacrifice instead of the usual lamb (unless the doves were symbolic).

God spoke to Joseph twice more in dreams. First to warn him to flee to Egypt and then to tell him to return to Nazareth. The last mention of Joseph is when he and Mary lost Jesus in Jerusalem and then found him in the Temple 'about His Father's business'.

So.— what happened to Joseph? He doesn't appear at the wedding in Cana at the beginning of Jesus' ministry nor was he at the Cross. Had he been, Jesus would not have commended his mother to John's care and Joseph of Arimathea wouldn't have arranged the tomb which was a father's privilege and pain.

Here then is Joseph - a shadowy but essential figure in the story of Jesus; a good man who bravely fulfilled God's plan for him which was to be a loving, earthly father to the Son of God.



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Sorry I didn't manage a February edition. We never seem to have a quiet month and now its Lent again! There were five priests who died within a few weeks as well as a number of other parishioners. Two of the priests Fr Stephen Cross and Fr John Danson were attached to our two parishes. Sadly Lesley and I didn't know either of them but we gather many parishioners remember them well. If you have a fond memory please write a few lines and we will put it in the next edition.

We do have plenty of memories of David Boyd, who accompanied by his wife Pat was a familiar sight at both parishes and parochial events. We pray for him, Pat and his family.

Another reason for my tardiness was that at the beginning of March. I was on a wonderful course in Icon Writing with Sr Mary Stella at Hynning Hall. I have written a little about it.

Last week the grounds at Hynning were beautiful with drifts of snowdrops, croci, celandine and cyclamen Hopefully, several people will be able to join us for the 'quiet day' when there should be 'hosts of golden daffodils'.

On Thursday we had the first weekly ecumenical service with lunch at St Wilfrid's. This year's theme is '**I am**' with reference to Jesus. Capt. Carole Babstock talked about '**I am the bread of life**'. Next week it's Fr Tom's turn at the Lune Street Methodist church with

'I am the light of the world'. The week after is at the Minster and then St Igs is hosting the service on **March 31st** – Please come!

There is a lot going on in Lent, in both churches and the deanery, so that people have plenty of choice about making this time of preparation special and doing something extra.



Parish Walk

Eventually, after one cancellation due to bad weather, four of us managed to complete a five and a half mile walk near Clitheroe. It was a lovely afternoon with plenty of sunshine. We walked along the banks of the Ribble, crossing from one side of the river to the next, over

Brungerley, Grindleton and West Bradford Bridges.

We managed to see a pair of goosanders fishing in the river. Their colouring is striking. The male has a brilliant green head and white plumage while the female is a red head. They both have serrated bills.



Of course there was,

as usual, lots of mud and of course someone managed to lock their boots together and fall flat on their face landing up with a muddy nose. The sting in the tail was to be a steep descent into a quarry but, whether by mistake or design, on Fr Tom's part, we managed to avoid it altogether and instead found ourselves in a lovely pub, The Shireburn Arms, in Hurst Green.

Sorry about pictures in greyscale but Enigma is now on the website in full colour!

Prayer of St Ephraim

This is a prayer said during Lent by the Orthodox Churches and Catholic churches in the Byzantine rite (and by icon writers).

Lord and Master of my life do not give me a spirit of laziness, indiscretion, ambition and gossip.

But grant to your servant a spirit of wisdom, humility, patience and charity.

Lord God grant that I may see my weakness and not condemn my brother or sister, for you are blessed for ever and ever.

Amen.

Icons

Anyone with a computer will be familiar with the word icon. They are the little pictures on the desktop, and when you click one it opens up whole worlds of information. In a similar way religious icons are not just pictures, they are doors into another place, namely heaven. I'm a mere novice at writing icons but working with Sr. Mary Stella has made me appreciate how special they are and how their very construction and brushstroke is a form of prayer.



We began each session with the prayer of St Ephraim. The work requires a great deal of concentration so we were mainly silent with reflective music in the background. We worked on specially prepared, white, gesso boards which we smoothed down. Then we copied the image of John the Baptist on to tracing paper and after covering the back with red pigment we transferred it to the board. Using very fine sable brushes we began to paint in layers. The paint used is egg tempera using earth pigments and the yolk of an egg mixed with water and a few drops of vinegar. The materials used are a mix of animal, vegetable and mineral and each of these are considered sacred as they are God's creations. Some of the students

used gold leaf for their halo but I felt my work still needs to improve so may be next time! We worked hard for over four days and, on the Friday, Fr McKenna blest our icons at midday prayer.

We also visited a tiny Greek Orthodox church in Dalton - in - Furness to see some icons. Our guide Alice explained their significance. The icons mediate between heaven and earth. They are a window to paradise. When people pray they are in the company of God and the angels and saints, who are depicted on the icons, so as we pray with them and their images this makes the images holy.

Sr. Mary Stella, and her advanced pupils, have been working on icons of the Stations of the Cross for an Irish Church. The work is nearly finished and just before Easter there will be an Exhibition at Hyning of the completed works. See the Parish News for details. *Margaret Nelson*