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Manna Mailing June 2025

Here in times of sorrow and of joy

As we head into the time that is often referred to as ‘wedding season’, it is an opportunity to reflect on how people often turn to the Church at significant moments in their lives. Whether they are times of celebration or sorrow, people seek the Church’s presence to bless and witness, and to offer prayer, hope and meaning at weddings, baptisms and funerals. In every parish, these life events allow us to walk alongside individuals and families, many of whom might not have a connection with the Church but who may seek something deeper at life’s turning points.

Several years ago a couple approached Revd Martin Little, Vicar of St John the Evangelist Church in Highbridge, to ask about a baptism. Martin says when he chatted to the couple, he discovered their request was less straight forward than most baptisms he’d been asked to do, “A local couple who are very young, just still in their teens, approached me and they wanted to have their little boy baptised. When I probed a bit more, I discovered they were part of a show called Teen Mom UK, on MTV and they asked if they could film the whole process.

“After I agreed we talked about baptism for their little boy, and what that means. The father hadn't been baptised, so we baptised him as well in the service, which was lovely.

“When I watched the programme online, the mum, Angel had shared some lovely comments about how meaningful it had been for her to introduce them to the Christian faith. I still see the couple in Highbridge, and they have come to Christingle and Nativity services. They’ve now had another little boy and so we did it all again a few months ago.”

Martin says of these life events, “I get lots of enquiries about baptisms, funerals, and sometimes about weddings, too. We’re delighted when people ask about the church and services. It really helps us to connect with the wider community. If you do one of these services well, often people will come back, and they’ll tell their friends.”

News in brief

**A thank you from Bishop Ruth**

Following her farewell service at Wells Cathedral in April, Bishop Ruth sent a message of thanks to the Diocese of Bath and Wells for the wonderful farewell she received and for all the cards and gifts she was sent. Bishop Ruth was welcomed by the people of Liverpool in a service at Liverpool Cathedral led by Archbishop Stephen. In her letter Bishop Ruth said, “I will be holding you in my prayers in the coming months and ask that you do the same for me.

Never forget that you are ‘God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved’ and keep on living and telling the story of Jesus! With much love and gratitude for you all

+Ruth

**On St Cuthbert’s path to artist residency**

Revd Gill Sakakini, Pioneer Priest in the Arts, in Shepton Mallet, has been following in the footsteps of St Cuthbert by walking the 62-mile St Cuthberts Way pilgrimage from Melrose in Scotland to Holy Island in Northumberland. Gill walked the pilgrim trail on her way to take up her Artist Residency at the St Cuthbert's Centre on Holy Island. She has been working with St Cuthbert's Junior School, in Wells and St Aldhelm's School, in Doulting and will incorporate art made by the pupils in the work she undertakes during her residency.

**Prayers and support for seafarers**

95% of all we buy is transported by sea. Each July on Sea Sunday we remember and pray for all the men and women who work at sea to bring us these goods. At Royal Portbury Dock near Bristol, chaplains from the Mission to Seafarers visit ships in port each week offering practical support and a listening ear. Sea Sunday gives churches the chance to give thanks, offer prayers for the role that seafarers play in our daily lives. Revd Lucy Blows one of the chaplains at Royal Portbury, says, It’s a reminder that they are out there all year working long hours away from their families and we are called to care.”

Dean’s letter

Christ beside us in the joys and sorrows of life

One of the great gifts of the Church, and to the Church, is the way in which we are invited to share in the significant life events of our communities. As we share in baptisms, confirmations and weddings, there is a great opportunity for us to be a part of people’s real lives in real ways.

A key moment in the Christian journey is the moment of Baptism. John Chrysostom in the C4th said, ‘When we immerse our head in water, just as if in a grave, the old man is buried, and having sunk down, is entirely hidden once for all; that, when we emerge, a new man arise again. Just as it is easy for us to be immersed and to emerge, so it is easy for God to bury the old man and raise up the new.’

For Christians baptism is important as it puts us in the place of Christ and we start a new way of life. We become part of Christ’s body. Titus 3.5 describes baptism as ‘the laver of regeneration’; it is an antitype of the Exodus (as we see in 1 Cor 10.1-2). It is us being born again from above (John 3.5). Above all, Baptism is the giving of the Spirit - which is the principle of the Christian Life.

It is our entire life, and indeed death, which are united in the death and resurrection of Christ. In Baptism we are united to God by adoption, having access to the divine life. And in Baptism we find ways of sustaining ourselves on the journey of life. As Lancelot Andrewes put it, ‘By Him taught all our life long that we know not, put in mind of what we forget, stirred up in what we are dull, helped in our prayers, relieved in our infirmities, comforted in our heaviness’.

Toby Wright  
Dean of Wells

A privilege to be involved

Revd Dr Ian Mills, Rector, Chew Valley West Benefice, reflects on the significance of life events, baptisms, weddings, and funerals and shares how these sacred moments offer space for faith and connection.

**Why are life events, such as weddings, baptisms and funerals so important?**

Because they involve people choosing to come to the church or include the church in some way in these moments of great joy, great sorrow, and vulnerability.

**What does it mean to you when someone chooses the church for these life events?**

It is a privilege to be involved. It means the church still holds a place in people’s hearts. I also think everyone has some level of spiritual curiosity. These occasions let them explore that safely, without pressure.

**Why do you think people still seek God’s presence at these times?**

Grief, love, new life–these stir a desire for connection and meaning. I think these occasions often give people an opportunity to push at the door a little bit, it gives them an excuse to open a conversation and to explore their faith-curiosity a little bit more.

**How does the Church ensure people see weddings as more than just a ceremony taking place in a church?**

I always ask couples why they’ve chosen to marry in church, and we discuss their different journeys together. One couple who both worked and lived in Glasgow and didn’t have a local link, but wanted to marry in one of our churches. To do that, they needed to worship here for six months. At first, I worried they would see it merely as a legal hurdle to jump over, but over time, it became something they really valued. They still talk appreciatively about establishing a connection with the parish here.

**Why do funerals touch people so deeply and sometimes stir questions of faith?**

We have had many families who have been bereaved and received pastoral care from the church. Over time, some have found their way back. Perhaps their faith or church attendance had lapsed, but the process of reconnecting through their bereavement gave them a reason to return.

**What makes a baptism such a special moment for a family?**

We see families who we welcome for the first time through baptism and then we see them again over the years at school services and church events. It’s a lovely journey and there is a sense that the children are growing up with the church very much a part of their journey.

**Why are life events such an important part of the church’s ministry?**

I think it's important that we frame these events in a way that will involve people and will give them a sense of the occasion, while at the same time, not being so unfamiliar that they feel they can never be part of it again. These special Life Events should feel familiar enough that people can connect, but also beautiful enough that they’re drawn into the mystery of God.