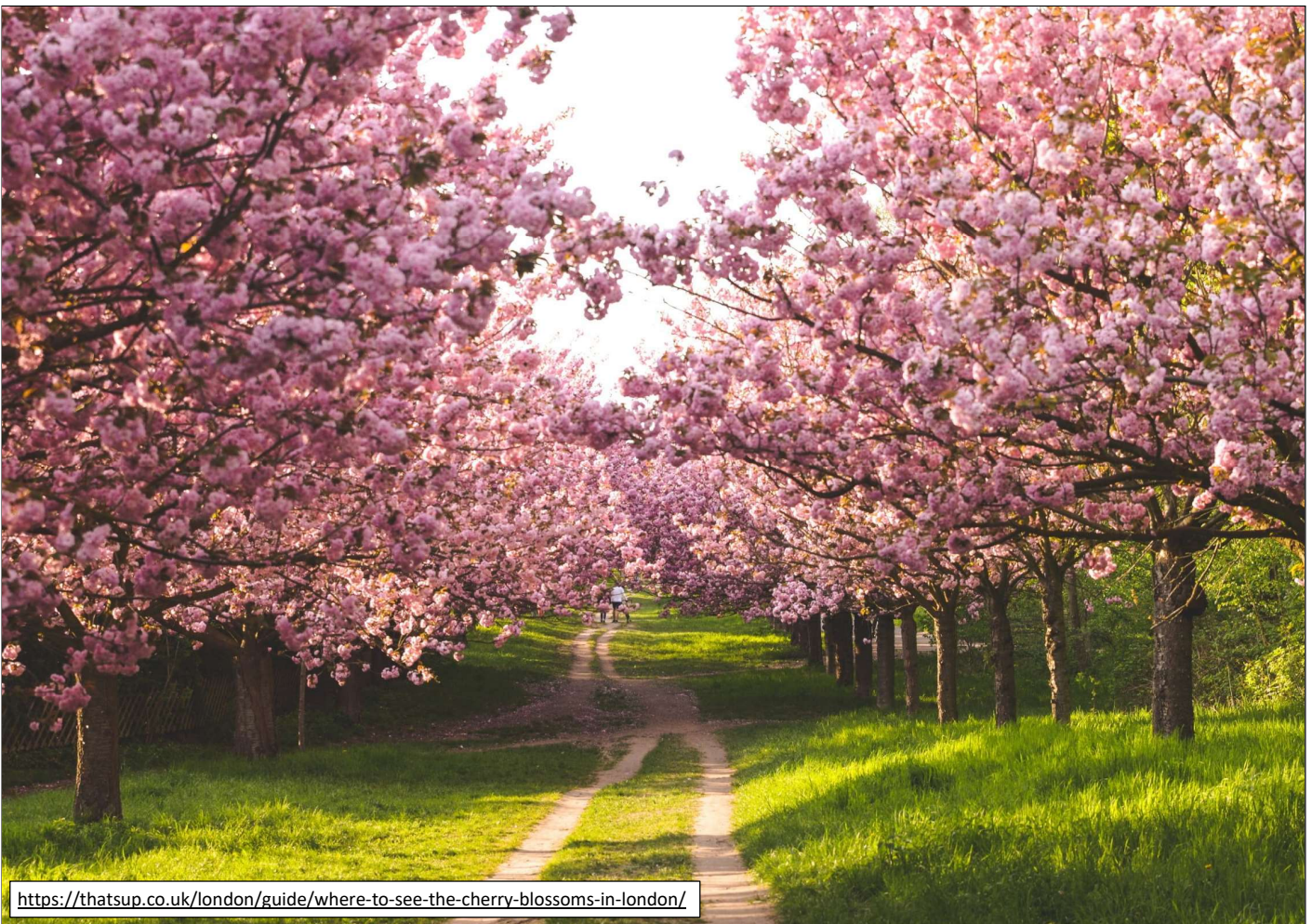




Easter is a season of Faith and Hope and Love – of Renewal and Life, of Joy and Excitement

And boy don't we need those things just at the moment. The world seems so lacking in these qualities. But that lack is part of the story of the Easter weekend, where following Jesus' crucifixion, the disciples found themselves at their lowest ebb – and after Easter, before Pentecost, they must have been on edge – not quite believing the joy of it all, and wondering what would happen next.

Jesus himself joins together our humanity and God's identity – God's very self, making a bridge between heaven and earth – between human and divine. In so doing he drags us out of a hopeless life of separation from God, offering the hope of reconciliation and forgiveness: opening, as we hear in our communion service "the gate of glory".



<https://thatsup.co.uk/london/guide/where-to-see-the-cherry-blossoms-in-london/>



Easter brings a message of hope in the darkest times – the Saturday between Good Friday and Easter Sunday passes rather unmarked and perhaps unnoticed – but it is a powerful sign for us that hope is dear, cannot be extinguished – Jesus “descended to hell” – was drawn deeper than any of our depths and despairs – and shows us that there is always a way back with God.

The challenge we face is to embrace that hope (salvation) in the face of an uncertain and chaotic world. To find in our lives anchors that keep us firmly attached to this true hope: that is a hard thing to do – we have the story of Peter in denying Jesus: a close friend who we might expect to have the strongest bond – Peter who so wants to get it right, who pledges all his strength and loyalty, and still fails. Peter, who Jesus picks up and says, come on, I am still with you, whatever you have done. Peter is a reminder that we cannot do this in our own strength or alone.

I’ve been leading a group this Lent in the course “Being With” – it has been an interesting experience, using new language and ways of thinking to test whether we have really understood the words we use all the time for God and faith and church and salvation – whether there might be more to the Gospel than we have yet realised. For me it has done one thing that has been challenging already – it is starting to get me to tell the story of my own life as if that is part of the Gospel story – I am no longer separate from the story of Easter, but am starting to be part of it.

The second thing is that it offers a challenge to commitment and accountability – starting to ask about the kind of community that Jesus built and left behind, and how we might be part of community, and what matters when we are. I am finding my own faith renewed and refreshed by taking part.

As we celebrate Easter with the Easter greeting “Alleluia, Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia!” Let us remember that this is a signal of life and joy and hope in an uncertain world – and perhaps wonder how we can spread that infectious message to the world around us.

**Happy Easter.
Mark**

Moving on

This Easter we are saying thank you to two people who have made major contributions in the life of our parish here in Thatcham. My colleague Nicola is moving on to the Hermitage team, where she will be taking charge of six parishes and seven churches from Cold Ash to Compton. And our organist, Tim, is stepping down from his weekly duties.

We will be saying a proper farewell to Nicola on 19 April – Saturday evening, at 7:00pm before our service of Easter Light so that Nicola can also be part of the Easter Sunday service at St Barnabas. It is always a special service and I hope that people will join us in our celebration of Nicola’s ministry and also of Easter!

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Looking back over Nicola’s time with us, she contributed to our ministry over lock-down and COVID and has done significant work with families and children, including running a “muddy church” group – first at the Nature Discovery Centre, and more recently in the grounds of St Mary’s. She has had a significant impact too in our working with Thatcham Park School, where her ability to tell stories and to engage children of all ages has been a significant part of her ministry. She has been a fine colleague too – noticing things that I have missed and offering quiet but effective challenge. And she will be missed too for her gentle and nurturing style as a teacher. Do pray for Nicola and the family as they move on – I am sure the Hermitage team will benefit greatly from her care and skill.

Tim’s final service as our organist will be at St Mary’s on Easter Sunday morning. His ministry and care has been incredible over many years – Tim has been involved with music at St Mary’s from before I joined the parish. When I came I did not realise what a jewel we had in our midst. Over the years I have been stunned at Tim’s range – standard and classic organ pieces, of course – but he has also produced the occasional special arrangement for a wedding, to the delight of bride and groom. Taking communion at St Mary’s is occasionally more hazardous than I would like – though the hazard does not appear in any risk assessment – as I am concentrating on my role I catch a snatch of Music, and am drawn in as Tim improvises variations on a familiar tune, and I almost forget what I am doing – a couple of times I have stopped dead and almost dropped something. And of course he has accompanied concerts as well as being a major part of fundraising for the organ. And it is worth saying too that Tim has made magic from an organ that is gradually failing and which has sometimes been barely playable.

It will certainly feel to me as if we are moving to a new phase of our common life, and as we reflect on what Tim and Nicola have brought to our parish, let’s give thanks for the richness of the common life they have helped us to nurture.

Prayers for this month

**Most Loving Heavenly Father,
We bring before you our prayers for
the church and the world...**

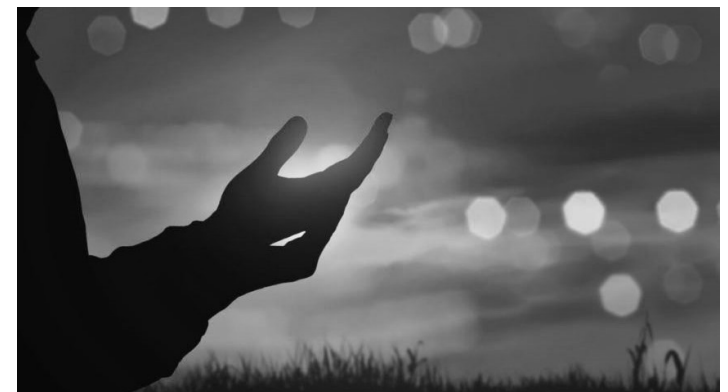
Lord, you already know what things are on our hearts and those of which we pray for this month, but we bring them before you anyway in prayer because you long to hear us and maintain that cosmic relationship with your people. We are

incredibly humbled and forever mindful that we have been called by you. Your Word reminds us that you chose us first – even while we were still in our mother's womb, and for that we are eternally grateful and give you the praise and thanksgiving due to you now.

o-O-o

We continue to pray for the ongoing work of your church as it seeks to spread the good news of your love and share your message of hope and new life in Jesus with those on the edges and those who have yet to make the life-altering decision to let you into their lives. Be with all preachers and teachers as they evangelise, giving them the words and courage they will inevitably need, especially when faced with persecution or danger. Bless, guide and protect each soul wherever they go.

We uplift the churches in Thatcham working together to make a difference and asking for your wisdom and inspiration to be conferred on our clergy team. Pour your Spirit on each person as they work to make difference. We give thanks for our Team Vicar Nicola as she leaves to head up the team in Hermitage may



Who's Who in the Thatcham Team Ministry

Team Rector

Mark Bennet 867342

Team Vicar - St. Barnabas

Nicola Hulks 864916

Associate Clergy:

Brenda Harland 865064

Angela Brennan 07498801479

Parish Administrator

Ann Watts 864567

(not Wednesdays)

Parish Office temporary

address: 29 Exmoor Road,
Thatcham RG19 3UY

Email:

office.stmarysthatcham@gmail.com

Churchwardens

Sue Ball 07702468712

Sarah Goode 07802472651

Mike Watson 07766531038

Future copies

Connect is published ten times a year and is available from St. Mary's and St. Barnabas Churches, Thatcham, or by post from the Parish Office, tel. 864567.

Article Deadline

Please give articles for the **May** edition to Steve Rice (860431) or any of the clergy or churchwardens or email julie@dunwell.org by **15th April**.

Services at St. Mary's Church

Sundays

8.00 am Sunday Service

10.00 am Sunday Service

6.30 pm Sung Evensong
(1st Sundays only)

Wednesdays

9.45 am Holy Communion

10.30 am 'ABC' Adults, Babies, Children

Every Weekday

9.30 am Morning Prayer
(In the chapel)



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www.stmarysthatcham.org.uk

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Services at St. Barnabas Church

10.00 am Sunday Service

(meeting in the hall at Thatcham Park School)

<https://stbarnabasthatcham.weebly.com/>

Serving to Build Community



For the Record...

Baptism

- 23 Feb** Theo Benjamin Nice
- 9 Mar** Archie Norman Vokins
Arlo Albert Vokins
Lacie Alice Lily Ralph
Arabella Betsy Margaret Ralph
- 23 Mar** Cassida Louise Buckey
Maeve Eilish Jane Cox
- 30 Mar** Benjamin Xavier Skelt-Sousa

Weddings

None

Funerals

- 14 Mar** Edith Millicent Hutchings 90
- 25 Mar** Alan Stanley Pullen 88



Dates for your diary

7 Apr **CAMEO** - 2 pm (ever Monday)

13 Apr **Palm Sunday**

Holy Week

14 Apr **Evening Service** - 8.00 pm (Revd Brenda)

15 Apr **Evening Service** - 8.00 pm (Revd Angela)

16 Apr **Healing Service** - 8.00 pm (Revd Mark)

17 Apr **Maundy Service** - 8.00 pm

Good Friday

18 Apr **Lent Lunch at St Mary's** - 12 noon

The Last Hour - 2.00 pm

Easter Eve

19 Apr **Service of Light** - 8.00 pm

Easter

20 Apr **Easter Sunday**

22 Apr **Baby Café** - 10.30 am The Old Bluecoats School (every Tuesday, term time only)

23 Apr **A B C** - 10.30-11.45 am (every Wednesday)
We are taking a break over the Easter Holidays so no sessions on 9th or 16th April

11 May **ANNUAL PARISH MEETINGS** – 3.00 pm

11 May **CONCERT - Cold Ash Brass** - 7.00 pm



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Welcome back Gill

We are delighted to announce that our incumbent organist from May 4th will be Gill Blythman a well-known and talented local organist. Some may remember Gill from her previous incumbency last century. We are looking forward to welcoming her back into our Church family.

the move be straightforward and the transition smooth as we ask for your provision and guidance for Brenda, Mark and Angela as they go forward.

o-O-o

We lift up to you all those places in the world desperately seeking an end to war and civil unrest. For those places that lack even the most basic of needs such as clean water, sanitation, medicine and food. We pray for the many charities and organisations working to provide healing, help and hope. We pray especially for Christian Aid as it continues to be there for anyone and everyone, regardless of colour, status or background.

o-O-o

We pray for all who suffer in any way and there is indeed no shortage of candidates who meet this criteria. We lift to you all in hospital, nursing home or hospice. We pause to name them now, people perhaps known just to us and You Lord. May each know the comfort of your presence and receive your healing, wholeness and peace.

o-O-o

Lord, as we make our way through lent, a time for sober self-examination and repentance, we reflect on the things we may have said and done that we wish we hadn't and conversely those that should have been said and done but weren't. We ask for your forgiveness, trusting in your infinite mercy and grace to pardon us, that we might learn from our past mistakes and draw closer to you. We are all 'works-in-progress' and can never attain perfection by our own pathetic efforts to come anywhere near to your standards but that's what makes your love for us even more amazing. You love us despite our ourselves and we are forever in your debt, so thank you for sending Jesus to pay the ransom by His death and giving us a new hope and a new life that we might continue to serve you with the gifts and abilities bequeathed to us.

May we follow you more nearly, see you more clearly, and love you more dearly through Jesus Christ your son and our Saviour.

Amen



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Tim Cooke

Easter Day sees the last time that Tim will grace the organ bench as St Mary's incumbent organist. Tim came to St Mary's with Helen at Easter 2004 and said he would be glad to 'help out' and became our permanent organist shortly after that. Twenty years later, Tim has decided to leave the organ bench.

That Tim is an incredibly talented organist goes without saying. The organ recital a couple of years ago showed his versatility and knowledge of organ pieces. But his ability to accompany the choir is also extraordinary – he seems to have an innate sense of feeling and expression that doesn't compete with the singers. Who will ever forget Tim at his very best (or should that be most maverick?) accompanying hymns altering the sound to bring out the meaning of different verses and frequently creating interesting harmonies to the final verse – ones that challenged the choir let alone the congregation.

Having worked in Church service settings for most of his life, Tim adroitly and sensitively knits the service together not only playing the mass setting but also knowing when to fill in the gaps and, perhaps more importantly, when to stop. It probably isn't widely known that often the music at the end of the service was Tim improvised, which is yet another skill.

Tim has helped shape music at St Mary's over the time he has been in tenure. Many people have commented on how good the music is. He has supported the choir leaders that have been in place during his time never criticising but always being encouraging.

During the pandemic Tim gave his own time to help choir record hymns for several weeks once we were allowed to meet in small groups and to be able to use recordings enhanced our worship when we were unable to meet as a Church.

So thank you Tim for everything you have done to enhance worship at St Mary's. It is so much appreciated. Your little idiosyncrasies will be missed. And as Abba said *'Thank you for the music.... for sharing it with us!'*

Mary



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Theme: The Last Supper to Easter Day



Thursday, 17 April 2025

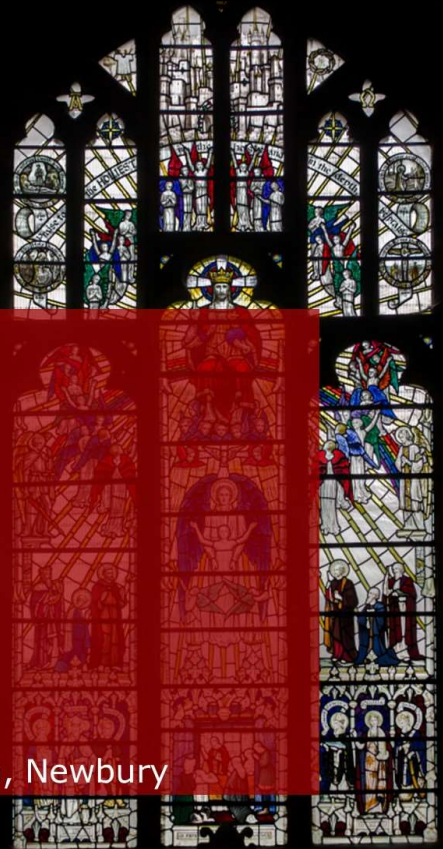
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