

THE OLD CHURCH NEWS

O P E N T O A L L - O P E N T O G O D
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THE CHURCHING OF WOMEN

Childbirth is a dangerous business. Mother and baby hover between life and death. Those of us with access to modern medicine may easily forget this, but Mary and Joseph must surely have been aware of it as they sheltered in the stable. She risked her life in order to bring Jesus into the world. In her culture, as in many others, a rite of passage was provided to give thanks for her survival, and to ease her back from contact with the ultimate realities, symbolised by blood, into her normal routines. She went to the temple to offer a pair of turtledoves.

The Book of Common Prayer provided 'The Thanksgiving of Women after Child-Birth, commonly called The Churching of Women' for the same purpose. There is some historical evidence that women appreciated the rite of churching. In the sixteenth century, after childbirth, the mother enjoyed a privileged month of confinement, in order to recover physically and emotionally. Churching was the opportunity for a last celebration with her women friends – her gossips – before returning to her usual duties. But the ceremony could also be interpreted in more damaging ways.

Back in October I talked to women from Old Church who were churched in the 1950s, and they report being left scarred by the experience. They were made to feel that

childbirth was shameful and sinful. Before their churching they were not allowed to enter shops, or even friends' homes, in case they brought bad luck. And if the baby was baptised during that time, they were forbidden to attend. In their minds, the point of the rite was penitence: the church insisting that new mothers needed forgiveness. Yet the words of the Book of Common Prayer say nothing of the sort, instead giving thanks that a time of great danger has been safely negotiated. Psalm 116 is included, with its references to 'the snares of death' and 'the pains of hell'. This is the final prayer:

O ALMIGHTY God, we give thee humble thanks for that thou hast vouchsafed to deliver this woman thy servant from the great pain and peril of child-birth: Grant, we beseech thee, most merciful Father, that she through thy help may both faithfully live and walk according to thy will, in this life present; and also may be partaker of everlasting glory in the life to come; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

It prays for the woman's continuing vocation, not only as a mother, but in the whole of her life, physical and spiritual. As we return to our normal routines after Christmas, we pray that we too may walk according to God's will.

Ann Conway-Jones

HIS UNFAILING PRESENCE

Another year I enter
Its history unknown;
Oh, how my feet would tremble
To tread its paths alone!
But I have heard a whisper,
I know I shall be blest;
"My presence shall go with thee
And I will give thee rest"

What will the New Year bring me?
I may not, must not know;
Will it be love and rapture,
Or loneliness and woe?
Hush! Hush! I hear His whisper;
I surely shall be blest;
"My presence shall go with thee,
And I will give thee rest".

HAPPY NEW YEAR

May the new year
Bring these wishes to all of you
Warmth of love, comfort of home
Joy for your children,
Company and support of family and friends
A caring heart that accepts
And treats all human beings equally
Enrichment of knowledge and
Richness of diversity
Courage to seek and speak the truth
Even if it means standing alone
Hopes and dreams of a just world and
The desire to make it happen
A light to guide your path
Helping hands to strengthen unity
Serenity and peace within your mind,
Heart and soul
Food for thought and soul
A hand to hold.

PAST MONTH'S NEWS

The Old Church Christmas Fayre at the end of November was well attended with bustling crowds browsing amongst the many stalls whilst enjoying festive songs beautifully sung by the choir of Uplands Manor Primary School. Many thanks to all those who helped set up, serve and provide items for the stalls. A total of £1,450 was raised towards the upkeep of the church.

An afternoon of fine food and festivities was enjoyed by the Discoverers at a local Toby Carvery where they celebrated the season with a traditional three course Christmas meal.

The Old Church hosted a service of nine readings and hymns to mark the beginning of Advent. Many came together to reflect upon the forthcoming weeks of preparation to celebrate the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ at the first Christmas.

Some Old Church members gathered together once again at ASDA, Cape Hill where they were warmly welcomed by staff and customers alike. Their tuneful rendition of some favourite Christmas Carols resulted in £168 being raised for CLIC Sargent charity that supports children with cancer.



JANUARY

- 5th 5.00 pm Service of Readings and Hymns to celebrate the **Feast of the Epiphany** (the Magi - "Wise Men" visit the Manger)
- 13th 7.30 pm **Pantomime**: 'Jack and the Beanstalk' at the Oldbury Rep
- 23rd 12.00 noon **Discoverers'** Planning Meeting in the Dorothy Parkes' Centre
- 30th 2.30 pm meet for **Prayers** in The Old Church (see Rosemary for details)
- 30th 7.00 pm **Compline** in The Old Church (see Wendy for further details)

2014

Here are some thoughts of how to give special meaning to the New Year

- Make a wish list that gives you purpose. Fill it with wishes for yourself and the people you love.
- Read children's books to enliven your imagination.
- Let go of an angry heart. Forgive someone to refresh your soul.
- Take a nature walk to find little miracles in the song of a bird, beauty of a tree, clouds making shapes ranging from dragons to angels floating by.
- Listen to those in your life who may need you to step back, slow down and be there for them. Then create quality time to share with them.
- Take a first step towards making a big dream come true.
- Start a gratitude book even if you can only think of one happy moment per day.
- Open your heart to find love. Express your feelings by saying the words "I love you" to children, parents, friends, lovers and spouses.
- Practice acts of kindness - if you do good you'll feel good.
- Search for serenity and ways to refresh your spirit