

# intouch

NEWSLETTER

Benefice of Clothall, Rushden, Sandon,  
Wallington, and Weston



## Welcome to the latest In Touch!

Well we have all been trying to take a bit of a break from routine over the last few weeks and I hope that most of you have either had a chance to get away or have had time to spend with family and friends. The benefice has been busy over the last few weeks and some new things have arrived!

At Sandon we had the wonderful wedding of Jules and Reggie (so glad the weather held for them), and a new arrival in baby Jude born at home to Kate our lovely administrator and her husband Simeon. That is going to be one very busy household as Jude is number three – good job his older brother and sister are just about to start school and nursery.

The harvest is safely in and we are just about to start our round of socially distanced Harvest Festivals in the benefice – try to get to one if you can. I hope the weather holds and we get some golden autumn days to warm our hearts before winter.

*With blessings Fiona*



*Baby Jude – just hours old!  
Congratulations to Kate and Simeon on  
your new son and new brother to Ben  
and Megan.*



## St John Chrysostom living a public faith (347 – 407)

John Chrysostom (347 – 407) is the saint for anyone who applies their Christianity to public life, and also for anyone who hates travelling in bad weather. Chrysostom did both, and had trouble both times.

Born into a wealthy home in Antioch, John Chrysostom studied both oratory and law. In 373 he became a monk, where his talents were soon spotted by the bishop, who put him in charge of the care of the many poor Christians in the city.

Chrysostom's oratorical skills made him a popular preacher, even when he spoke out against the riots against the emperor's taxes. The emperor, in fact, liked him so much that he had him made Archbishop of Constantinople in 397. Then the trouble began: because Chrysostom had firm moral views, and wanted to reform the corrupt morals of the court.

Nobody at court liked that at all – especially the Empress, whose make-up, clothes and behaviour were all criticised by Chrysostom. (It's as if Justin Welby began calling the Queen's dress sense or Kate's lipstick immoral.) When his enemies claimed that he had gone on to call her a 'Jezebel', the emperor had to exile him – until an earthquake scared everyone into recalling this strict Archbishop – just in case God was trying to tell them something. Even the Empress was shaken – for a while.

A few years later, Chrysostom was exiled again over another false charge – and forced to travel for many miles in appalling weather. If you've been stranded in any heat-waves or thunderstorms this summer, imagine walking up the M6 in that – for weeks on end. In the end, Chrysostom died in September, on the road to Pontus.

His body was later brought back to Constantinople, and over the ensuing centuries, the Church came to see him as having been a great church leader, in fact, one of the Four Greek Doctors (with Athanasius, Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus).

## St James the Least of All Beware what lurks in the church vestry...

The Rectory  
St James the Least

### *My dear Nephew Darren*

*I am unsurprised that the cleaning lady took exception to you dismantling your motorbike in the church vestry. Clergy vestries are the final repositories of rotting hymn books, ancient cassocks with a certain aroma, buckets with holes in, which are kept "just in case" and dead animals in various states of decomposition; but they are no place for bike chains, disc brakes and inner tubes.*

*I will concede that vestries seem to attract all those objects no one quite knows what to do with, but which parishioners can't bear to throw away. Flower arrangers creep into my vestry, looking for space for boxes of twine. Decorators arrive with cribs and Easter gardens they are hoping to store. And even the choirmaster occasionally sidles in, trying to slip some anthems past me. I repel them all with vigour, and a firm broom.*

*One thing I can't keep out of the vestry are the portraits of all my predecessors, who stare down at me reproachfully. The most recent, in colour, stare smugly, knowing that I am still being compared to them, and falling short. Earlier incumbents, in black and white, look mildly reproachful, reminding me that they all held doctorates from Oxford. The hand-drawn*

*portraits from pre-1870 are the worst – they all look as if they drank vinegar for breakfast and argued Pelagianism over lunch, just for fun. I am already rehearsing my own look of pained forgiveness for my leaving photo that will stare down on my own successor, and perpetually irritate him*

*It also seems to be a tradition that retiring clergy donate their robes for their successors, probably because it spares them a walk to the dustbin. So, a five-foot, 18 stone incumbent will leave a cassock for his six-foot, ten stone successor. There will also be a spare 1960s nylon surplice hanging on the back of the vestry door, to remind you that should you ever forget your own, then this is the horror you will be obliged to wear throughout Evensong.*

*Notices on the walls will tell you that marriage fees in the 1920s were seven shillings and sixpence, that Communion wine can be obtained from a shop that closed down a generation ago and there will be a copy of the prayer of thanksgiving to be used on the Relief of Mafeking. My only advice is to remove your bike before it gets bundled up with the Scouts' tents – and lost forever in the churchwarden's shed.*

*Your loving uncle, Eustace*





## Elsie Anna Wood (1887-1978): The Last Supper

Reluctant young churchgoers were once enticed into Sunday School by the lure of stamps, each week's attendance a new one to lick and paste into the album, but every absence a gap of minor shame. Elsie Anna Wood was one of the artists whose work featured on stamps doled out to less than impressed youngsters like me. Paintings reduced to postage-stamp size, especially those relying on subtle variations of muted tones, rarely look appealing, so I'm afraid I dismissed poor Elsie Anna along with the dingy productions of other painters whose work came our way in miniature each Sunday.

But in that I was wrong. Most artists had only a tourist's experience of Palestine but in the mid-1920s Elsie Anna Wood was living in the Middle East and working as a Bible illustrator for the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. She acquired a deep understanding of the region, its towns and countryside, its architectural style both public and domestic, the way its particular light modulated colours and shade. More importantly she embraced its people and developed a close sense of their traditional culture.



In her Last Supper painting the participants recline in a fashion typical (if not universal) in the Middle East. Most 'Last Suppers', even that by the great Leonardo utilise trestle tables which look like they've been rescued from a church social, but Elsie Anna Wood's table is barely higher than the bowl on the floor behind it into which water from the jug held by Jesus is falling. Many of the disciples recline on their left elbows, leaving their right hands free for eating - to eat with the left hand was an insult to the host. Jesus and his disciples are authentic Palestinian characters, neither Europeanised nor mock-Orientalised. A judiciously placed lantern places Jesus at the centre of the light as he washes a disciple's feet, perhaps Peter, who at

first vehemently rejected Jesus' desire to do so. We see how the disciple, his left leg casually lifted, is already acquiring the easy grace of one who becomes used to being served, and indeed how quickly such a transformation occurs. Excluding himself from the circle, a troubled Judas sits sullenly, contemplating his final departure from the group. But in the other faces quiet intense concentration distils, their understanding of the meaning of this moment steadily growing, as does ours.

By 1971 I was working for SPCK myself and the poster-sized reproductions of Elsie Anna Wood's paintings lining our bookshop drawers and had ceased selling. I remember our deciding we must throw them away. And now I have to say, that seems rather a shame.



*Basil the pheasant on his daily visit to the Searle's garden in Ballater, Scotland*



*An unexpected arrival – this glorious sunflower at the Uttley's garden in Yorkshire*

### **A prayer for all those affected by coronavirus**

*Keep us, good Lord,  
under the shadow of your mercy.  
Sustain and support the anxious,  
be with those who care for the sick,  
and lift up all who are brought low;  
that we may find comfort  
knowing that nothing can separate us  
from your love in Christ Jesus our Lord.  
**Amen.***

If you would like to donate to any of our churches in the current crisis - details are below. We would be very grateful in your help to keep our churches going.

**Thank you.**

**PCC OF RUSHDEN**

LLOYDS BANK: 30-94-30 A/C 01845350

**SANDON PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL**  
BARCLAYS BANK: 20-73-26 A/C 53610802

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**WESTON PCC**  
BARCLAYS BANK: 20-41-12 A/C 40946850

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## Congratulations

*To Jules and Reggie Tully on their  
wedding at Sandon church in August*