

CSJ Parish Magazine

April and May 2026



“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” — Galatians 3:28

Welcome to the April and May 2026 Magazine Resurrection and Renewal

Dear Friends,

April and May take us on a remarkable journey in the life of the Church — from the joy of Easter to the fire and power of Pentecost. At Easter, we proclaim the heart of our faith: *Christ is risen*. The resurrection is not simply a past event we remember; it is a present reality that reshapes our lives. The stone is rolled away not only from the tomb, but from the places of fear, disappointment, and uncertainty within us. Easter reminds us that death does not have the final word, and neither do despair or failure. God's life is always stronger.

As the weeks unfold, the Easter season invites us to live as resurrection people — people of hope, courage, and new beginnings. In our parish, this is reflected in the many signs of renewal we are seeing: strengthened mission, growing children's work, building projects moving forward, and deepening community life.

Resurrection is never abstract; it becomes visible in ordinary faithfulness and shared endeavour.

Then, in May, we look towards Pentecost — the gift of the Holy Spirit poured out upon the Church. The frightened disciples become bold witnesses. The Spirit does not remove difficulty, but gives courage, wisdom, and unity. Pentecost reminds us that the Church does not rely on its own strength. We are empowered, guided, and sustained by the Spirit of God.

The same Spirit who hovered over creation, who raised Christ from the dead, and who filled the upper room is at work among us still — equipping us for service, stirring new ideas, strengthening tired hearts, and drawing people into faith.

As we move through these great seasons, may we be open to resurrection life and the renewing power of the Spirit. May our homes, our parish, and our neighbourhood reflect something of Easter joy and Pentecost courage.

With every blessing for a joyful Easter and a Spirit-filled season,
Mthr Martha

Parish Magazine Printing – Gifts of Generosity

If you would like to make a donation to support future issues of the magazine, contributions would be most welcome. Please use the bank details on the inside back page, marking your gift with the reference “**Magazine**”. Every donation, large or small, helps us to keep sharing the life and ministry of Cowley St John more widely — thank you for your support.

Your Voice Matters

We warmly invite **articles, stories, reflections, poems, photos, memories, recipes, prayers, or book recommendations.**

You might write about:

- something that has inspired you
- a moment in church life that has stayed with you
- an act of kindness you witnessed
- a book that challenged or nourished you
- a memory from parish life in years past
- something creative or joyful you want to share
- or suggest a hymn or prayer for the back page

Whether long or short — a paragraph or a page — **your contribution helps us reflect who we truly are: a community made up of many voices.**

To contribute to the next edition (deadline 10th May), simply email:
vicar@cowleystjohn.co.uk

Thank you for being part of this community, in whatever way you are able.

May this issue of our parish magazine be a blessing to you — a sign of hope, warmth, and belonging.

With every blessing,
Mthr Martha

Jesus is condemned to death
Jesus carries His cross





Holy Week & Easter Services

You are invited to experience the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus through the Liturgy.

At **St Mary and St John's Church**, Cowley Road; at **St Alban's Church**, Charles Street; and at **Bartlemas Chapel**

www.cowleystjohn.co.uk



Palm Sunday, 29 March 2026

- 10:00 am Procession from St Alban's Church to St Mary and St John's Church, followed by the Eucharist and Liturgy of the Passion

Monday, 30 March 2026

- 8:00 am Morning Prayer at St Mary & St John
- 5:15 pm Evening Prayer at St Mary & St John
- 6.30pm Stations of the Cross at St Alban's
- 7.00pm Eucharist and Reflection at St Alban's

Tuesday, 31 March 2026

- 8:00 am Morning Prayer at St Mary & St John
- 5:15 pm Evening Prayer at St Mary & St John
- 6.30pm Stations of the Cross at St Alban's
- 7.00pm Eucharist and Reflection at St Alban's

Wednesday, 1 April 2026

- 8:00 am Morning Prayer at St Mary & St John
- 5:15 pm Evening Prayer at St Mary & St John
- 7.00pm Tenebrae (a liturgy of shadows) at Bartlemas Chapel

Maundy Thursday, 2 April 2026

- 8:00 am Morning Prayer at St Mary & St John
- 10.30 am Children's Service for Holy Week (with hot cross buns) at St Mary & St John
- 5:15 pm Evening Prayer at St Mary & St John
- 7.00pm Eucharist of the Lord's Supper and Watch until Midnight, at St Mary & St John

Good Friday, 3 April 2026

- 8:00 am Morning Prayer at St Mary & St John
- 10:15 am Good Friday Walk of Witness, which starts from Cowley Road Methodist Church
- 12:00 noon Reflections at St John's Home
- 12:00 - 1:45 pm Good Friday Reflections at St Mary & St John
- 1:45 - 3:00 pm The Liturgy for Good Friday at St Mary & St John



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Holy Saturday, 4 April 2026

- 8:00 pm Vigil and First Eucharist of Easter at St Mary & St John

Easter Day, 5 April 2026

- 8:00 am Eucharist at St Mary & St John
- 9:30 am **Festival Eucharist** at St Alban's, followed by an Easter Egg Hunt for children
- 10.30am **Festival Eucharist** at St Mary & St John, followed by an Easter Egg Hunt for children.

First Sunday of Easter, 12 April 2026

- 10:30 am Joint Parish Eucharist at St Mary & St John

Holy Week: Holy Spirit, Lord of the Harvest

As we enter Holy Week, we walk with Christ through some of the most profound and solemn moments of the Christian story — from the joy of Palm Sunday to the sorrow of the Cross, and ultimately to the hope of the Resurrection.

In the opening verses of Genesis, we read that “*the Spirit of God hovered over the waters*” when the world was formless, empty, and covered in darkness. Before creation took shape, the Holy Spirit was already present — bringing order, life, and possibility where there had been uncertainty and void.

That same Spirit continues to work today. In times when the Church may feel fragile, when communities face hardship, or when the future seems unclear, the Holy Spirit remains the Lord of the harvest — the one who renews, restores, and brings new life.

This Holy Week we are invited to pray especially for the work of the Holy Spirit among us. Let us pray for the rebuilding and renewal of Christ’s Church here in East Oxford. Let us pray for courage, wisdom, and faith as we seek to serve our community. And let us ask that the Spirit will guide us in the work God has entrusted to us.

The harvest belongs to God, and the Spirit is already at work among us. May this Holy Week be a time when we open our hearts afresh to the Holy Spirit — asking that he renew his Church and strengthen his people.

With every blessing,
Mthr Martha



Jesus falls the first time



Jesus meets His mother



Simon of Cyrene helps
Jesus to carry His cross

Verona Harris – A Life of Sacrifice and Service

It is not often that a parish is blessed with someone whose quiet faithfulness shapes its life for decades. Verona Harris was such a person.



Until her death at the remarkable age of 100, Verona served as Sacristan with devotion, precision, and deep love for the Church. For many years, often unseen and always dependable, she prepared the sanctuary, cared for the vessels, tended the linens, and ensured that every Mass was offered with dignity and reverence. Long before most of us arrived, Verona had already given a lifetime of service.

To be a sacristan is not simply to organise practicalities. It is to hold the sacred rhythms of worship with care. Verona understood this instinctively. The altar was never “just” an altar; it was the place where heaven and earth met. The vestments were not fabric alone; they spoke of beauty offered to God. Candles, flowers, chalice, paten — all were prepared prayerfully, attentively, and without fuss.

Her ministry was marked by sacrifice. She gave her time, her strength, and her energy well into advanced age. Even when her steps slowed, her commitment did not. She taught others patiently, leaving careful notes and passing on knowledge with both clarity and high standards. She cared deeply that things were done properly — not for perfection’s sake, but because she believed that God deserved our best.

Verona also embodied a certain steadfastness that has anchored this parish through many seasons. Buildings changed, clergy came and went (plenty), projects rose and fell — but Verona remained.

There is something profoundly reassuring about that kind of constancy.

As her Vicar, I give thanks for her life and witness. I am personally grateful for her guidance, her wisdom, and her support. She showed me — and many others — that faithfulness in small things over many years is a powerful form of discipleship. She demonstrated that service, offered quietly and consistently, builds the Church more surely than any grand gesture.

We now honour her memory not only in words, but in continuing the work she loved so much. The new chairs in the North Chapel, at St Mary and St John's — which she herself saw — will stand as a visible sign of her enduring legacy. Yet her truest memorial lies in the reverent worship she helped sustain, and in the generations (clergy and laity) she formed by her example. "Well done, good and faithful servant."

With gratitude for a life so generously given,
Mthr Martha



Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

Verona's Funeral Donations Thank you to everyone for your kindness, prayers, and generosity following Verona's funeral. As you know, she requested that donations at her funeral service be made to St Mary & St John's Church. We are grateful to share that the total raised so far is estimated at £2,000. Verona's nephew, Ivor John, has donated a further £2,000 to St Mary and St John's Church in her memory. The PCC thanks Ivor and his family for their generous gift.

Verona Violet Harris
(4th April 1925- 16th January 2026)

These are just a few memories from one of Auntie V's 13 Great Nieces, 7 Great Nephews, 3 Nephews and 6 Nieces, but of course it is definitely not a eulogy: March 2026.



Verona also known as: VV Harris, Miss VV Harris, Harry, Rhona, Auntie Verona, Great Aunt Verona, Auntie V, Miss Harris-To-You, or more recently (according to her treasured four-year-old friend) Verr-rO-nuh or The Boss. Verona's many different names reflect the many different worlds Verona was part of, and the many different lives she touched. The 250 plus attendees at her Requiem Mass on Valentines Day 2026 further emphasises this deep connection she had with so many different people from so many different areas of her life and is a testament to how many people were part of who she was. After all, having spent more than 100 years in this world, witnessing 20 Prime Ministers, 5 Monarchs, and 7 vicars at SS Mary & John, it is not surprising that she left footprints in the hearts of so many.

She was named Verona Violet Harris after her beloved mother Verona Violet Jones of Coln St Aldwyn, Gloucestershire. Her mother was allegedly named in honour of a visit to northern Italy by the man who went on to become the first Earl of St Aldwyn. Born in William Street, Swindon Wiltshire, our Verona was the eldest of four siblings, having a younger brother Cyril (Sid) and twin siblings Ivor and Audrey. As a child the family moved from Swindon to Dagenham Essex for a short period of time before settling at 42 Aston Street, Oxford. From then on, Verona did not move too far, spending the

remainder of her life in East Oxford at various addresses, including: Hill Top Road, Iffley Road, Cowley Road, Southfield Park and eventually spending the last 13 years of her life in Stanley Road (which is a street adjacent to Aston Street- the very street where her Oxford life began).

Despite not ever moving very far, Verona had a love for travel. As a child she spent many summer holidays with her father's family in the Bristol area. Including picking beans at her grandfather's allotments in Air Balloon Road and staying at her Aunt Phyl's pub in Hanham. She recounted visits to Minchinhamton near Stroud in Gloucestershire, recalling fun times spent with distant cousins at Bubblewell Farm: climbing trees and enjoying the countryside. These childhood pleasures of spending time outdoors and visiting fun places, were very much the blueprint for Verona's adult life.

Verona loved to play tennis as a young woman, and there are tales of her playing mixed doubles at one of the University college grounds with: a long-time friend; the college groundsman; and a local farmer. Additionally, Verona had a love of skiing as a young woman, and a life-long love of boats, but most of all she loved to travel. Verona would recall times of hitch hiking around Europe just after the Second World War with a friend. Carrying a heavy pole tent between them, they had many adventures which included being befriended by a French Chateau owner as well as by an English Madam of a local French brothel. Travelling with this friend continued for another five decades and included places such as Israel in the early 1950's and again in the 1980's; Italy, more trips to France; Greece; Turkey; Morocco; Majorca / Mallorca and the Canary Islands.

This was not the only long-term travel companion, there were other good friends with whom Verona had multiple trips in Europe, including an Adriatic cruise as well as most of the UK. Additionally, Verona travelled with family to Ireland, the USA (California, Florida, Arizona, Oregon) as well as on a transatlantic and Mediterranean cruise. She crossed off events on her Bucket List, such as the Edinburgh Tattoo, the Harrowgate and Bath Flower Festivals, the Tall Ships in Gloucester, and more recently to see the cathedral in Liverpool (having been unable to see it on a previous day trip- due to it having been bombed during World War 2). On more than one occasion Verona made it to the filming of Songs of Praise such as at

the Albert Hall and had a memorable visit to Maastricht to watch André Rieu in the rain! She visited friends in Holland; Germany and France; as well as journeys to Prague; Belgium; Switzerland and of course she had multiple trips to the Channel Islands, primarily, but not exclusively camping with the scouts. During her last few days Verona chatted with visiting friends about her trip to Egypt and recalled one of her favourite memories, which was a flight in a hot air balloon over Luxor. Verona looked forward each September to going on pilgrimage to Walsingham, and whenever she could, she went also on pilgrimage to Glastonbury.

Aside from travel, Verona had a passion for clothes and shopping. Ever stylish and very contemporary in her fashion, Verona was known for her elegance and love of designer clothing. She was also known for being able to outshop others half her age! Verona was not one for being at home very often. She took any opportunity to have lunch out (perhaps, with a sweet white wine or a small glass of sherry); whether it was a sandwich at the local cafe or a full-blown lunch at Le Manoir. Of course, her inclination for dining out was in part due to her love of good food, and in part due to her enjoyment for spending time in the company of others, but also it was due to her intense dislike of cooking. Food was not the only part of life which kept Verona out and about. Until her late 90's she was a regular attender at a local keep fit group, and until shortly before her 90th birthday she could be seen cycling all over Oxford. Prior to the early 1970's Verona could also be seen on her moped. It was only the legal requirements to wear helmets which put an end to this, as Verona could not abide the impact a helmet (or any hat) had on her carefully coiffured hair.

For Verona, protecting her newly styled hair led to trouble when she broke her wrist in her late 80's as she braced herself while trying to protect it. Her other wrist, she broke in her late 70's, when she fell from standing on the countertop in her kitchen. This exemplifies Verona and her determination to never let her age dictate the actions she would take. For those who knew Verona, her appearance belied her age. Many were surprised to discover she was going to celebrate her 100th birthday in 2025. Not least because of the number of hours she put into being an active volunteer right up to the last few weeks of her life. She was recognised by the Lord

Mayor of Oxford with a Certificate of Honour for her many commitments. She volunteered across decades with: the 2nd Oxford Scout Group; Oxfordshire Association for the Blind; Flexicare; Archway; and most recently with Alice's Tea Party. Additionally, until the last few years, Verona was a lifelong campaigner for the Conservative Party: happily supporting local candidates and even more happily attending lunches.

The one occasion when Verona was willing to forego a fine lunch was during her visit to Christchurch College, Oxford in 2013. Then, her service to others was recognised by HRH Queen Elizabeth II through the distribution of Maundy Money. Verona was willing to skip lunch in order to have just one more glimpse of the Queen. A firm supporter of the Royal Family, Verona was more than slightly put out when her Royal 100th birthday card needed to come from King Charles (rather than Queen Elizabeth) and even more put out by the fact that the card arrived late! Regardless, she still took pride in showing the card to her friends. One other passion which cannot go without mention, was her love of children. Right up until her last years of life, she continued to make new, very much younger friends, and could often be found scouring the shops in Oxford for just the right gift for one of her little pals. Almost certainly Verona honed her ability to engage with the youngest members of her community through working for more than 40 years as a nursery-school teacher, primarily in Grandpont. She started in 1943, when aged 17 years, she completed “... a special war-time course of instruction in the care of children under 5 years of age... together with 50 hours of practical work” and she was “..duly enrolled as a Junior Member of the ChildCare Reserve.” Today, the willow tree planted by Verona and the nursery school head can be seen towering over what had once been the garden play-area at the front of the nursery school (and is now Pegasus Grange) on the Abingdon Road.

Even longer than she was a nursery-school teacher, Verona was part of Cowley St John, and a member of the wider Oxford church community. For around 75 years she was the Sacristan, and for a short spell the Church Warden also. She took a special interest in ensuring everything was straight and in its proper place carefully ensuring there was no waste. An advocate for High Church, Verona was an ever-presence at SS Mary & John on the Cowley Road, fiercely

ensuring standards were maintained; simultaneously, warmly welcoming new members to the congregation. Always, she took an interest in the younger members of the church- eagerly following their progress and keeping up to date with their going-ons. Throughout, she showed the true character of a Christian- full of charity, tolerance and love for her neighbour. She was not afraid to share her opinion but never judged others. She did this with grace and wisdom, and a lot of humour (and if you have ever heard her Sid James laugh you won't have forgotten it).

People will find it difficult to believe Verona is no longer with us physically, as she has been a reliable constant throughout many people's memories. Even after her death, she maintains an influence on so many. From the written instructions she left for the flower arrangers in the church, to her gentle reprimands in the back of our minds, many of us will be wondering what next. Many of us will share the sentiments of her four-year-old friend (concerned to find out she would not be going to church one Sunday) "...but she's The Boss!".

If you would like to contribute to a wider obituary of Verona, please email jodysambell@yahoo.co.uk

Verona's family would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to the community of Cowley St John.

Your kindness and thoughtfulness has surrounded us with more warmth and support than we could have ever hoped for. We are appreciative of every one of you who was able to attend the requiem mass held to mark Verona's life; thank you for helping to make it such a beautiful and uplifting day. We send an even bigger thank you to all of you who were not able to attend in person but kept us in your thoughts and prayers.

For your generosity, compassion and friendship, from our family to yours- thank you.

News from St Alban's



The removal of the old gas heaters and the complete redecoration of the church, upper room and sacristy have been a great lift to our spirits. Fados and his brother have done a wonderful job. With the help of our friends from the Serbian Orthodox congregation, we were able to sort out and put many things back on Saturday 21st February. Denise, Emma, Kirsty and Miriam have been able to give the church a deep clean, and to make all the candleholders look beautiful. With an ongoing team effort, we had everything ready for reopening on Sunday 8th March, including a reorganized children's play area with a new carpet.

Save the date!

On Saturday 20 June 2026 we are planning a parish pilgrimage to St Albans Cathedral. There is a St Alban Festival that day and the whole town will be full of celebration. Please join us and let David Gimson or Susannah Reide know of your interest. Further details to follow.

Wildlife in the churchyard

Well, we have always aimed to manage the churchyard for wildlife – but did we expect a Muntjac deer to take up residence, joining the resident fox and the visiting badger? It's been here for a year now and keeps quite hidden – you might see a disappearing brown animal the size of a large dog. Easier to see are the hoof prints in soft mud. It probably also visits the convent garden and other gardens nearby, and luckily so far has not caused much damage though Muntjac are notorious for eating everything. The Council tree expert was here last week checking the health of all our trees, and he reports seeing Muntjac even in tiny city centre gardens. We'd be very happy if it returned to Oriel Wood from where it probably came.



At the time of writing in early March, the succession of spring flowers is well underway and particularly good this year. We planted many more in the strip including the SSJE memorial in the Garden of Remembrance; they are coming up, but native bulbs always take a few seasons to really settle in. Many thanks to those who helped with the planting and with donations for them.

Ruth Ashcroft

Music & Music Scholars Update

While the refurbishment work has been going on at St Alban's it has been wonderful to sing with the joint choirs of St Mary & St John and St Alban's throughout much of January and February. Of course, the standout was Verona's funeral, when the choir of nearly twenty singers would have made Verona very proud with the full liturgical performance of Fauré's *Requiem*.

Jesus falls the second time



There is plenty to look forward to musically as Holy Week and Easter approach, but also a Save the Date: we will have a Parish Fundraising Concert on Saturday 6 June, featuring our choirs with solo contributions from the choral scholars and from other talented musicians - we look forward to seeing you there!

900 Years of Bartlemas

There are copies of local author Martin Stott's newly published 'Bartlemas: A Hidden Sanctuary' at both St Mary and St John and St Alban's. The book includes photographs taken by Martin over the last 36 years. It celebrates the contribution Bartlemas has made to Oxford for the last nine hundred years, exploring the connection of chapel, care, and community, from its origins as a refuge for lepers to its current role as a haven of peace just a minute's walk from the Cowley Road. Martin's photos and text show how the building continues its medieval use as a place of prayer, and how its history interacts with Oxford and beyond more widely – there are some beautiful images of services at Bartlemas, and of plot holders at the local allotments. The book also contains an essay by Dr Ian Forrest about the role of Bartlemas as a medieval hospital. There is a very good review of the book on the popular Oxford blog, the Oxford Sausage (<https://theoxfordsausage.com/a-ramble-back-in-time-to-the-bartlemas-leper-hospital/>).

Anniversary Programme of Events: May - September 2026

BARTLEMAS Chapel Sunday 10th May, 4pm

Concert - *Feather on the breath of God*

Voice Trio for the Oxford Festival of the Arts

This special programme celebrates Bartlemas Chapel and its founding in 1126 by Henry I with a programme of original medieval works by Hildegard, and contemporary music inspired by her performed by vocal trio Voice.

Part of Bartlemas 900 and Oxford Festival of the Arts For ticket information go to <https://artsfestivaloxford.org/>

BARTLEMAS Chapel Sunday 17th May from 1pm

DRARA event on Sunday 17th May (free, open to all)

"Last night I dreamt of stars..." Music for gongs and voice

Remembering the Chapel's history as a hospital for outcast lepers, electroacoustic musician Lawrence Casserley will lead music for gongs and voice inspired by the poetry of Babek (a victim of

imprisonment and torture). At 1pm and 5pm, Lawrence will lead community improvisatory sessions - turn up if you want to join in or just listen.

At 3pm, Lawrence will be joined by vocalist Clemmie Franks and other artists for a performance of "*Last night I dreamt of stars...*".

BARTLEMAS Chapel 16–25 May from 12 noon till 6pm

Oxford Artweeks: Bartlemas 900 Exhibition

Bartlemas-themed exhibition in the chapel, based around Martin's photo book, exploring the history and significance of Bartlemas Chapel.

ST MARY & ST JOHN Church Saturday 23rd May at 6.30pm

Talk by Martin Stott

The History of Bartlemas Chapel and the Leper Hospital

BARTLEMAS Chapel Sunday 24th May at 6.30pm

Concert

Small-scale concert or recital TBA

BARTLEMAS Chapel Sunday 31st May 4-5pm

May Song in Bartlemas

Medieval music, poetry and readings celebrating Oxfordshire in May. Featuring local performers - The Comper Singers, Anna Tolputt (actor), and Kate Wakeling (poet).

For ticket information go to <https://artsfestivaloxford.org/>

24th August 2026 - St Bartholomew's Day Service

September 2026 - Oxford Open Doors

**Practising the Presence of God:
a response and a memory**

When I read the article on this book in the most recent parish magazine it triggered a memory which I thought I would share. Over 50 years ago when I was the young mum of a small baby boy, I attended a church which had a small group for 'Young Wives' which I

went to. On one occasion we were thinking about the line in the hymn which goes: 'who sweeps the floor as to the Lord makes that and the action fine'. Google tells me it is actually 'as for thy laws' and that it is written by George Herbert, but I am sharing a memory!! During our session we thought about how to make this more real in our everyday lives and one idea was to put some marker in places we go to regularly to remind us to that this action could be our 'floor sweeping'.

I remember thinking this could be something I did so I got some yellow paper and cut it up into small squares. I didn't buy a pack of coloured stickers as I am not sure they even existed!! I took my squares and used Sellotape to attach them to several places which I thought would be appropriate. I remember one place was on the underside of the lid of my plastic nappy box which had all I needed to change my baby. It didn't actually contain nappies, as I was using towelling ones which would have been far too big!!! Naturally I had to open this box very often and as I did there was the yellow sticker to encourage me to bring the presence of God even into this mundane task. As it did it also helped me rejoice in the small precious life which lay on the changing mat and place him in God's hands.

As I didn't have disposable nappies, I spent a lot of time doing the washing and I had a 'twin tub' to help me. If you have no idea what this is then please come and ask me????!! The machine had a lid which turned it into a work surface when not in use, so another yellow sticker was stuck onto it!! Once again as I took the lid off to load the machine with yet another load of dirty nappies, I was reminded that God can be part of even this smelly and hot job!! I can't remember where else I put them and, of course, after a while I didn't notice them anymore but for a while they did help me 'practice the presence of God'.

If I did it again or if you tried it out, I wonder where we would put the stickers?? On the steering wheel of our car?? On the TV remote???

Thanks for letting me share this memory and I hope that it amuses and also gives food for thought.

Gillian Burr

Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem



Would You Like to Be Baptised or Confirmed?

An Invitation to Explore Faith More Deeply

From time to time people ask, quietly and sometimes a little nervously, “How do I know if I’m ready to be baptised?” or “Is confirmation for me?” These are beautiful questions, because they arise from a heart that is awakening to God — a heart sensing that there may be a next step on the journey of faith.

Baptism and confirmation are two of the most joyful moments in the life of the Church. They mark not only individual commitment, but also the welcome and support of the whole Christian community.

Baptism — Beginning the Journey

Baptism is the gateway into Christian life. In baptism, we are named as God’s beloved children, washed in the grace of Christ, and welcomed into the fellowship of the Church. It is a sign that God’s love comes first — before our achievements, before our mistakes, before our questions.

People of any age can be baptised. Some come as infants, carried in the arms of parents and godparents; others come as adults, choosing freely for themselves. All are equally precious in God’s eyes.

Confirmation — Owning the Faith for Yourself

Confirmation is the moment when someone who has been baptised (often as a child) chooses to affirm their faith publicly, with the support of the Church and the blessing of the Bishop. It is a step of maturity: a way of saying, “This faith matters to me. I want to follow Christ and grow deeper in his love.”

Preparation for confirmation usually includes a short course of teaching and discussion, space for questions, and time to reflect. It is not about having all the answers — it is about being willing to explore.

Both Are About Relationship

At their heart, baptism and confirmation are not ceremonies to "get done," but relationships to enter into. They are about discovering who we are in God, and how God calls us to live.

You do not have to feel holy, clever, or certain to begin this journey. You simply need to be open.

Is This Something You Are Thinking About?

If you are curious, sensing a nudge, or simply wondering what these steps involve, I would love to talk with you. There is no pressure and no obligation — just an open conversation about where you are and what God might be stirring in your heart.

We also warmly welcome young people and adults who have never been baptised, as well as those baptised as infants who now wish to explore confirmation.

A Community That Walks With You

In this parish, no one journeys alone. Whether you are brand new to faith or have been attending for years, you will be supported by prayer, friendship, teaching, and the love of the whole church family. If you would like to explore baptism or confirmation — for yourself or for a child — please do get in touch with me on 0747 290 90 11 or Vicar@CowleyStJohn.co.uk

I would be delighted to walk with you.

Every blessing as you consider the next step of your journey with God.

Mthr Martha



Jesus' clothes are taken



Jesus is nailed to the cross



Jesus dies on the cross

New Church Chairs Appeal

As part of the renewal of St Mary & St John's Church, we are delighted to share plans for the installation of new church chairs and choir stalls. The total cost of this project is estimated at £25,000 (£150 per chair).

These chairs will replace the much-loved but ageing ones that have served the church for many decades and are now affected by woodworm and wear.

The new seating will be comfortable, durable, and designed to last for generations to come.

Because it is difficult to secure external grants for church furniture, we will try to raise these funds within the parish. Any contribution, large or small, will make a real difference and is deeply appreciated. Donations may also be made in memory of a loved one or an anniversary. A small commemorative plaque can be attached to a chair to honour their name and legacy within our worshipping community or registered in a book for record keeping.

If you would like to contribute, please use the reference “**Chairs**” when making your donation (payment details on inside back page), and contact Mthr Martha or the Parish Office for details about plaques and the book of memory.

Thank you for your generosity and for helping us continue to make our church a beautiful, welcoming space for all.

Latest update: we already have 12 chairs in the North Chapel and have raised an additional £6500 so far. We are now looking to raise about £6,000 for the main church. Thank you for your support.



Vespers by A.A. Milne from When we Were Very Young
(As shared during the amazing Talent Show on Shrove Tuesday!)

*Little Boy kneels at the foot of the bed,
Droops on the little hands little gold head.
Hush! Hush! Whisper who dares!
Christopher Robin is saying his prayers.*

*God Bless Mummy. I know that is right,
Wasn't it funny in the bath tonight?
The cold's so cold and the hot's so hot
Oh! God Bless Daddy --- I quite forgot.*

*If I open my fingers a little bit more,
I can see Nanny's dressing gown on the door.
It's a beautiful blue but it hasn't a hood.
Oh! God bless Nanny and make her good.*

*Mine has a hood, and I lie in bed,
And pull the hood right over my head,
And I shut my eyes and curl up small,
And nobody knows that I am there at all.*

*Oh! Thank you, God for a lovely day.
And what was the other I had to say?
I said 'God bless Daddy' so what can it be?
Oh! Now I remember it. God Bless Me.*

*Little boy kneels at the end of the bed,
Droops on the little hands little gold head.
Hush! Hush! Whisper who dares!
Christopher Robin is saying his prayers.*

Children's Work Update: Growing Faith, Growing Community

A Vision Rooted in Faith and Welcome

Children's work is not an "extra"—it is central to our calling as a parish. Jesus places children at the heart of the Kingdom of God, and so we, too, rejoice in placing them at the heart of our community. Our vision is to offer spaces where children are safe, seen, loved, and encouraged to grow in faith and confidence. Please continue to hold our Children's Worker, our schools, and our families in your prayers.

Baby and Toddler Group

The group meets at St Mary and St John's church every Wednesday morning during term-time between 9 and 10am. All welcome.

Regular Visits to St Frideswide and SMJ Schools

Our Children's Worker continues to make regular visits to both *St Frideswide* and *St Mary & John* primary schools, helping at assemblies, supporting classroom learning, and helping staff create worship that is creative, inclusive, and rooted in Christian hope. We have also enjoyed welcoming classes into church. It is always a delight to hear their voices filling the church space with curiosity and enthusiasm.

Growing Connections with East Oxford Primary School

Our relationship with *East Oxford Primary School* has strengthened, with new opportunities for engagement. This partnership reflects our deep commitment to serving the whole community of East Oxford — offering hospitality, shared learning, and practical support wherever we can.

Comper Nursery: A Joyful Starting Place

Our youngest neighbours at *Comper Nursery* continue to bring smiles to our faces. We look forward to welcoming Comper children and staff to the church at key moments in the year, helping even our smallest community members feel that the church is a familiar and friendly place.

Miriam Atoro, Children and Families Worker

Join In – Groups, Teams & Volunteering

Our parish life is shaped and sustained by the many hands and hearts who give their time, gifts, and presence. Whether you have been part of the church for years, have only recently begun attending, or are simply curious to try something new, we would love to welcome you into the rhythm of our shared life. There is no experience required for any role — simply a willingness to join in. Training and gentle support are always provided.

Ways to Get Involved

- Hospitality Team

Help with refreshments, serving at special events, or welcoming at services and events.

- Choir & Music Group

All voices welcome — whether confident or quietly curious.

- Churchyard & Gardening Group

A friendly outdoor team meeting every Wednesday morning caring for our green spaces, wildlife areas, and memorial garden.

- Toddler Group Helpers

Come and support play, chat with parents and carers, and help create a warm, safe space.

- Pastoral Visiting Team

Visiting those who are housebound, isolated, or in need of companionship and prayer.

- Serving, Reading & Intercessions Rotas

Take part in our worship by reading, and leading prayers.

- Altar Servers & Sacristy Team

Assist in preparing the altar, serving at the Eucharist, caring for linens and vessels, and helping ensure our worship is reverent and beautiful. A wonderful way to learn the rhythm of liturgy.

If you are unsure where to begin, simply speak to Mthr Martha or one of the curates after a service or email: vicar@cowleystjohn.co.uk

There is a place for everyone, and your presence — whether weekly, monthly, or occasionally — truly makes a difference.

*“Now you are the body of Christ, and individually members of it.” —
1 Corinthians 12:27*

Mthr Martha

Events & What's On

Annual Parochial Church Meeting (APCM)

The Annual Parochial Church Meeting of the Parish of Cowley St John will take place on **Sunday 26th April** at **St Mary and St John's Church**, immediately following the Joint Service.

Everyone is warmly encouraged to attend. This is an important opportunity to reflect on the life of the parish, receive reports, elect churchwardens and PCC members, and look ahead to the coming year. Please do join us.

Home Groups

We are exploring the possibility of starting new Home Groups for prayer, fellowship, and discussion. If you would be interested in joining a group, please let Mother Martha know, indicating whether you would prefer a group meeting at 2pm or one meeting at 7pm. We look forward to growing together in faith and community.

Creative Writing Cafe: Imagining the Minoans

re-starting 21st February. 2.30 - 4.30pm

On Saturday 21st February, 2.30 – 4.30pm, we are delighted to announce a very special afternoon to restart our Creative Writing Cafe. We will be teaming up with Dr Efi Spentzou from Myth and Voice to explore the Minoans.

The Cafe will be exploring the beautiful murals of the Minoan Civilisation, and for those who would like to, there will be an opportunity to have a go at creative writing inspired by these murals. Whether you would like to sit and write, admire the beautiful murals, or have a drink and chat, you are most welcome! Visitors can drop in and out or stay for the full two hours.

The cafe is held at St Alban's Church Hall, Charles Street, Oxford. It is aimed at ages 14 to adult. It will run every fortnight from 21st February, with a different theme each time.

If you would like to attend, please email Lorna on lro@cheneyschool.org

JOIN US!

OUTREACH WEDNESDAY

**Join us every Wednesday
at St Mary & John's Church:**

Baby & Toddler Group @ 9:00am
Coffee Morning @ 10:00am
**Community Lunch @ 12:00noon (last
Wednesday of the month only)**
Churchyard Meal @ 4:00pm

For more information visit www.CowleyStJohn.co.uk

Sponsored by the Oxford Community Foundation

COFFEE MORNING



The church is open for everyone – whether you're looking for company, a listening ear, a quiet moment, or simply a good cup of coffee.



<http://cowleystjohn.co.uk/>

Where

Every Wednesday at 10:00am –
St Mary & John's Church, Cowley Road,
OX4 2AJ

Contact Us

Phone 0747 290 90 11
Mail vicarcsj@gmail.com
Website <http://cowleystjohn.co.uk/>

*Generously sponsored by the Oxford
Community Foundation.*

Sunday Morning Cafe Church St Mary & John's Church Cowley Road

Short **All Age** Service with
Continental Breakfast
Every Sunday 8:00 – 8:30am (Term Time)

Enjoy a light breakfast together with a simple time of
prayer and worship

Fresh pastries and drinks
Peaceful start to your Sunday before sports and other
events
Everyone warmly welcome

St Mary & John's Church, Cowley Road, Oxford
OX4 1UR



Baby & Toddler Playgroup

At St Mary & St John's Church, Cowley Road
Every Wednesday (term time) at 9:00am - 10:00am

01865 792717

children@cowleystjohn.co.uk






Stories · Strength · Scripture

Founded by *Miriam Atoro – Minamon the Storyteller*, **Faith-Driven MODA** is a faith-based fellowship and podcast that offers encouragement, reflection, and belonging for **migrant women 45 +**. Each month, the group meets for story-sharing, prayer, and friendship in a warm, supportive space.

Join our **Monthly Circle** — *First Friday, 9.30 – 10.30 AM* at **St Mary & St John's Church, Cowley**.

 Tune in weekly for uplifting stories, cultural proverbs, and devotionals that refresh the spirit.

 faithdrivenmoda@gmail.com  +44 7375 623 614

Little acts of kindness

‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these
brothers
and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

*Please send in stories of acts of kindness, however large or small,
which have had an impact on you or someone you know.*

A Prayer for tough times sent to me at Christmas

God has not promised skies always blue
Flower strewn pathways all my life through
God has not promised sun without rain,
Joy without sorrow, peace without pain
But has promised strength for the day
Rest from the labour, light for the way.

Grace for trials
Help from above
Unfailing sympathy



Open Space is a meal and reflective service for the queer community and affirming allies hosted at St Mary & St John, Cowley on the last Sunday of the month.

The meal is for everyone, of all faiths and none, queer and allies. The service is informal, held in the side chapel, with beanbags and chairs for us to gather around the altar. It is an ecumenical service drawing from across the Christian tradition. The service is formed of a repeated cycle of prayers, readings, reflection, music, and quiet space, woven around a different focus each month.

Our values are inclusive and relaxed, aiming to be fully accessible and adaptable to people with disabilities and intentionally neurodivergent friendly. The meal seeks to suit all dietary requirements and is always vegan and nut free. We encourage people to come to what they feel able to. Some come just for the meal and then leave. Others who find the socialising and the noise difficult, come for the quieter, more reflective part of our time together. If you would like to receive the service sheet in advance as an aid to participation, please contact us at: openspace.oxford@gmail.com

We founded Open Space because we – a parishioner and an ordinand on placement – saw that there was a need for an active community in Oxford for themselves and other queer Christians and their allies. There are lots of ways to get involved if you are interested. We would be delighted for volunteers to help with setting up and tidying away, reading, playing music, and giving reflections. Please do reach out to us if you are interested, or speak with Emma, Joel, or Matthew after a service.

Join us for our next meal and service on Sunday 29th March to celebrate our first birthday, at 6pm for the meal, or 7.15 for the service. This service will be on the theme of Passion to mark the beginning of Holy Week.

In April we will meet on Sunday 26th, to consider the theme of Growth.

Come as you are, you are loved.

Dates for your diary

MARCH			
Sunday 29 th Palm Sunday	10am	Procession from St Alban's to St Mary and John with Eucharist and Liturgy of the Passion	
	6pm	Open Space	St Mary and St John
Monday 30 th	6.30pm	Stations of the Cross	St Alban's
Tuesday 31 st	6.30pm		
APRIL			
Wednesday 1 st	7pm	Tenebrae: a liturgy of shadows	Bartlemas Chapel
Thursday 2 nd Maundy Thursday	10.30am	Children's Holy Week	St Alban's
	7pm	Eucharist of the Lord's Supper & Watch until midnight	St Mary and St John
Friday 3 rd Good Friday	10.15am	Walk of Witness	Starting at Cowley Road Methodist Church
	12pm	Good Friday Reflections	St Mary and St John
	1.45pm	The Liturgy for Good Friday	St Mary and St John
Saturday 4 th Holy Saturday	8pm	Vigil and First Eucharist of Easter	St Mary and St John
Sunday 5 th EASTER SUNDAY		Festival Eucharist & Egg Hunt	Times as usual in both churches
Sunday 12 th	10.30am	Joint service at St Mary and St John	
Sunday 19 th		Services in both churches as usual	
Sunday 26 th		Services in both churches as usual	
	11.45am	Annual Parochial Church Meeting at St Mary and John	
	6pm	Open Space	St Mary and St John
MAY			
Friday 1 st	10.30am	Seasonal Meditation	St Mary and St John churchyard
Sunday 3 rd		Services in both churches as usual	
Sunday 10 th		Services in both churches as usual	
	4pm	Voice Trio Concert	Bartlemas Chapel

Sunday 17 th		Services in both churches as usual	
	From 1pm	DRARA musical event	Bartlemas Chapel
Saturday 23 rd	6.30pm	Talk by Martin Stott	St Mary and St John
Sunday 24 th Pentecost Sunday	10.30am	Joint service at St Mary and St John with Bishop Steven, followed by parish lunch	
Sunday 31 st		Services in both churches as usual	
	6pm	Open Space	St Mary and St John



The body of Jesus is taken down from the cross



Jesus is laid in the tomb

Seasonal meditations 2026

**Fridays 10:30am to 11:30 – SMJ Churchyard – Come Rain or Shine
All Welcome!**

Seasonal Meditations in the churchyard is a gentle sharing of poetry, song and silence following the rhythm of Christian and Celtic festivals through the year. Together we explore how these seasons are reflected in the natural world and what they may offer us about faith, renewal and hope in our daily lives.

For further information:

gabyhock1@gmail.com or bethisolde@gmail.com

1st May- May Day – beginning of Summer, Beltane

19th June Summer Solstice – mid Summer

31st July – Harvest festival, beginning of Autumn, Lammas

25th September Michaelmas – Autumn Equinox, mid-Autumn

30th October All Souls, All Saints, Halloween – beginning of Winter, Samhain

18th December Winter Solstice –Christmas – mid-Winter

Support for Those in Need: Discretionary Fund

We are blessed to have a generous discretionary fund available to support those facing hardship. If you, or someone you know, is in need, please feel free to contact Mthr Martha in confidence. If you would like to contribute to the fund and help support others in need, please also speak to Martha. Thank you for helping us care for one another.

Comment from a beneficiary: Thank you again so much for the help, we were able to use it to put towards a cot and bedding for our daughter which will be coming tomorrow Thank you once again for all the help you have given to me and my family, it means the world to me.

Donations via Bank Transfer

Name: COWLEY SAINT JOHN PCC

Sort Code: 08-92-99

Account Number: 67325896

Donations via Cheques Payable to:

Cowley Saint John PCC, and send to:

The Vicarage, 271 Cowley Road, Oxford. OX4 2AJ

Please use the references: Verona, Chairs, Magazine

The parish is committed to promoting a safer church.

The **Parish Safeguarding Officer** is Miriam Atoro.

Miriam can be contacted **with any concerns** at
safeguarding@cowleystjohn.co.uk

Or you can contact the Vicar, Revd Martha Weatherill:

vicar@cowleystjohn.co.uk or 0747 290 90 11

The **Diocesan Safeguarding Team** can be reached on 01865 208295
or safeguardingreferrals@oxford.anglican.org for urgent safeguarding
concerns.

Seven prayer points

- For our parish of Cowley St John (St Mary and St John and St Alban's) — that we may grow in faith, unity, and love during this Easter season.
- For the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost — that we may be renewed, empowered, and guided in all we do.
- For our children and young people — that they may know they are loved by God and find joy and belonging in the life of the Church.
- For those experiencing loneliness, hardship, or homelessness in our community — that they may find practical support, dignity, and hope.
- For the ongoing building projects and mission initiatives in the parish — that they may serve God's purposes and bless future generations.
- For those who are sick, grieving, or facing uncertainty — that they may know Christ's peace and the comfort of the Holy Spirit.
- For ourselves — that we may be Easter people: courageous in faith, generous in love, and attentive to where God is leading us.



We wish everyone a wonderful, joyous Easter season.