

# ST JOHN THE BAPTIST, TIMBERHILL with ST JULIAN, NORWICH

September 2021



# PARISH PEOPLE

## Parish Priest

Fr Richard Stanton  
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## Churchwardens

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## PCC Secretary

Liz Kilshaw

## PCC Treasurer

Chris Bushnell

## Gift Aid Secretary

Michael Watson

## Organist

Keith Buxton

## Head Server

John Foottit

## Electoral Roll Secretary

Elizabeth Sutherland

## Safeguarding Officer

Sue Bisley

**Deanery Synod representatives** Liz Kilshaw, Rhys Lewis

## Parochial Church Council

Fr Peter Barnes-Clay, Mary Barnes-Clay, Sue Bisley, Harry Emerson, Judy Hall, Andrew Knights, Susan Snasdell, Elizabeth Sutherland, Melissa Symes, Jeremy Warren

## Sidespeople

Linda Baldwin, David Baldwin, Mary Barnes-Clay, Barbara Donnelly, Judy Hall, June Halls, Michael Halls, Patrick Hawes, Susan Snasdell, Elizabeth Sutherland, Dorothy Tinkler, Stuart Tinkler, John Woodrow

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## The Julian Campus

The Julian Centre, Rouen Road, Norwich NR1 1QT (*closed for refurbishment*)  
01603 767380 • [www.julianofnorwich.org](http://www.julianofnorwich.org)

## Curate (Wed – Sat)

The Revd Edwin Wilton-Morgan  
01603 218300 • [curate@cathedral.org.uk](mailto:curate@cathedral.org.uk)

# Angels and ministers of grace

Dear friends,

Fr Edwin (if we were being strictly correct, we would call him *Deacon* Edwin, but Father rolls off the tongue) has been settling in over the summer to his new role as Assistant Curate at the Cathedral with four days' ministry each week at St Julian's. I have been glad to have his assistance at the Masses there, his company at the daily offices of Morning and Evening Prayer (and anyone is welcome, remember, at these short services of psalmody, scripture and prayer) and his stimulating ideas and initiatives for the ways in which we might develop the ministry offered at and from St Julian's and our relationship with the community within which we are set.

I hope that as this autumn progresses we will have more news to share in this regard, and that our whole Church Family will continue to develop in our catholic understanding of the commission which the Lord lays on us to be a distinctive Christian presence rooted in our community and alive to its opportunities, challenges and opportunities for service. Much has been written in the press over the past year – sometimes as much heat as light, I fear – about the importance of the parish system as the bedrock of the mission and ministry of the Church of England, but it is up to *us* who value it to show why it matters, what we mean to do with it, and how in the context of our modern cities 'the parish' can continue to offer us a mechanism by which to live the Christian life and to take seriously our responsibilities to those who would not claim to be of 'the household of faith' but with whom we share our neighbourhood.

A Christian concept of 'service' is at the heart of all this, and the presence among us of a newly-ordained deacon offers us excellent material for reflection as we see him exercising his ministry. Sometimes, about a year after a parish gets a curate, the members of the congregation look faintly surprised and confused when they're told that there's a second ordination coming: 'Didn't we do all that last year?!' they ask. Perhaps they worry that they've been given a 'dud' who needs to go back to the workroom for a respray! But of course the truth is that the Church of England shares with the historic Churches of the East and West, including the Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, the threefold ministry of Bishops, Priests and

Deacons. When someone is first ordained, it is always as a deacon; usually (but not always) ordination to the Priesthood follows after a while; and then, for the singularly unfortunate, there may in due course be another Ordination, this time as a Bishop. The ministry of a deacon is not a probationary year before the Priesthood, or a kind of stepping stone: it is a distinctive ministry in its own right, and it is to the Church's detriment that we often forget this. No matter how far a cleric goes or for how many decades, the indelible Ordination as a Deacon is always at the core. That's why (as the eagle-eyed among you may have noticed) when Bishop Norman comes to celebrate Mass at St John's, he often wears a white dalmatic – the square-edged tabard-like vestment which belongs to the deacon – *underneath* all the rest of his pontifical vestments. It reminds him, and us, that he continues to have a diaconal ministry, a ministry of service.

The holy Angels, whom we celebrate at Michaelmas, that wonderful feast with its beautiful hymns which comes at the end of this month (don't forget High Mass at 7.30pm on Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup>), are also often shown in art wearing the vesture of a deacon: the dalmatic. You can see them dressed in just this way on the reredos behind the high altar at St Julian's (bearing smoking thuribles with incense) and at St John's, where angels in dalmatics kneel either side of the Virgin and Child. If you look upward in St John's (or cast your eyes three lines up this page!) you can also see *Celeste*, our lovingly cleaned and regilded angel atop the organ casing, blowing a trumpet and clad, yes, in a rose dalmatic, the garment of the deacon.



The angels' ministry of service, and its association with the ministry of service which we perform as Christians on earth, is brought out neatly in the opening prayer at Mass on the Feast of St Michael and All Angels: 'Everlasting

God, you have ordained and constituted the ministries of angels and mortals in a wonderful order: grant that as your holy angels always serve you in heaven, so, at your command, they may help and defend us on earth.'

So, when we see angels dressed in their dalmatics in artwork, and when we see a deacon exercising his ministry at the altar, we are reminded that we are *all* called, through our baptism, to a life of Christian service. Our response to this call is expressed in as many different ways as there are Christians to express it, but the work of a deacon gives us a useful way in which to think about it.

At the beginning of an Ordination, the Bishop says: 'Deacons are ordained so that the people of God may be better equipped to make Christ known. Theirs is a life of visible self-giving. Christ is the pattern of their calling and their commission; as he washed the feet of his disciples, so they must wash the feet of others.'

In part, this ministry and service is expressed liturgically, which is why a deacon (when present) always proclaims the Gospel at Mass, prepares the altar for the celebration of the Eucharist, and dismisses the people to go and glorify the Lord with their lives. But this ministry in the Church's worship leads into a pattern of life beyond the steps of the sanctuary, a life in which the Gospel is *always* proclaimed in deed as in word, a life in which the way is *always* being prepared for the Lord's coming, a life in which others are also being constantly sent to announce that the kingdom is close at hand.

And so, at an Ordination Service, the Bishop continues: 'Deacons are called to work with the Bishop and the priests with whom they serve as heralds of Christ's kingdom. They are to proclaim the Gospel in word and deed, as agents of God's purposes of love. They are to serve the community in which



*A thurible-bearing angel,  
dressed in dalmatic, on the  
rededicated altar  
at St Julian's (blessed  
at Michaelmas 1931)*

they are set, bringing to the Church the needs and hopes of all the people. They are to work with their fellow members in searching out the poor and weak, the sick and lonely and those who are oppressed and powerless, reaching into the forgotten corners of the world, that the love of God may be made visible.'

This ministry may be exercised by deacons, but it belongs to the whole holy People of God. A true Eucharistic attitude naturally and unavoidably turns us out outward, outward to the community around us, outward to the hunger and the needs of the world in which millions starve while others hoard plenty. As a new season gets underway with its many opportunities for daily worship, for growth in faith and understanding and for service within the Church and the community, may you and I hear afresh the call to accept the way of service and so to deepen our conformity to the Lord Jesus Christ, 'who came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.'

Your friend and parish priest,

Fr Richard

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## What's on in September...

### **Wednesday 8 September • Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary**

10am Low Mass (*St Julian's*)

12 noon Low Mass (*St John's*)

followed by Church Family lunch at Middletons, Timberhill

### **Friday 10 to Saturday 19 September**

Heritage Open Days: Labyrinth at St Julian's

### **Saturday 11 September**

9am to 5pm 'Ride and Stride' for the Norfolk Churches Trust

### **Sunday 12 September • Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

11am High Mass (*St John's*)

Preacher: Fr Kevin Smith,

Administrator of the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham

## **Tuesday 14 September • Exaltation of the Holy Cross**

12 noon      Low Mass (*St John's*)

## **Saturday 18 September**

9am to 7pm    Parish Day Pilgrimage to Walsingham

## **Sunday 19 September • Harvest Thanksgiving**

9am            Low Mass (*St Julian's*)

11am          High Mass (*St John's*)

## **Tuesday 21 September • Feast of St Matthew**

12 noon      Low Mass (*St John's*)

7pm            Low Mass (*St Julian's*)

7.30pm       PCC meeting (*St Julian's*)

## **Friday 24 September • Feast of Our Lady of Walsingham**

10am to 12 noon    Macmillan Coffee Morning (*St John's*)

5pm            Low Mass (*St Julian's*)

## **Sunday 26 September • Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

9am            Low Mass (*St Julian's*) followed by breakfast at the Rectory

11am          High Mass (*St John's*) followed by drinks  
celebrating the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of  
Fr Tony Snasdell's Ordination to the Priesthood

## **Wednesday 29 September • St Michael & All Angels: Michaelmas**

10am          Low Mass (*St Julian's*)

7.30pm        High Mass (*St John's*)

Preacher: Fr Taylor Wilton-Morgan,

Assistant Curate of the United Benefice of St Benedict

...and later

## **Sunday 10 October**

Preacher at 11am High Mass: The Venerable James Ridge, Chaplain General of HM Prison Service and Archdeacon of Prisons. (*Start of Prisons Week.*)

## **Saturday 16 October**

10.30am      'A flower of light in a field of darkness':

a talk by Jeremy Warren on Prison Chaplaincy (*St John's*)

## Sunday 24 October • Feast of the Dedication of the Church

Preacher at 11am High Mass: The Very Revd Jane Hedges, Dean of Norwich

## Tuesday 2 November • All Souls' Day

10am Low Mass of Requiem (*St Julian's*)

12 noon Low Mass of Requiem (*St John's*)

7.30pm High Mass of Requiem (*St John's*)

Advance notice

### Tuesday 21 December • 7.30pm

## A Baroque Christmas at St John's Timberhill

**Eboracum Baroque** perform a festive concert of baroque music including instrumental and vocal works by Handel and Bach, with period instruments

## Labyrinth at St Julian's

**H**eritage Open Days begin on Friday 10 September and run until Sunday 19 September.

During this time there will be a labyrinth

at St Julian's, accompanied by excerpts from the *Revelations of Divine Love* for reflection as you walk. The first weekend of HODs coincides with the annual **Sponsored Bike Ride, Walk and Drive** in aid of the Norfolk Churches Trust: hundreds of people will be out across Norfolk exploring our beautiful churches and raising much-needed sponsorship, and of course both our churches will be open and participating!



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## Parish Day Pilgrimage to Walsingham

**T**wenty-seven pilgrims have already 'signed up' for our Parish Pilgrimage to England's Nazareth on **Saturday 18 September**: the coach leaves Ber Street at 9am. There'll be Mass, intercessions in the Holy House, Sprinkling, Benediction and free time, before we leave the village at 6pm. The cost for the day is **£12**, including two-course lunch (children £6); sign up on the list in church. *Payment must be received in advance of the day, please!*



# Come, ye thankful people, come!

**W**e give thanks for the Harvest and 'all good gifts around us' on **Sunday 19 September**. The High Mass at 11am will include favourite Harvest hymns: do be sure to join us, and bring your friends.

We warmly welcome your gifts which will be sent to the Norwich Foodbank (particular needs include long-life milk, long-life fruit juice, tinned sponge pudding, snack bars, tinned fruit, individual wrapped biscuits such as Penguins, jam, sweets and bars of chocolate) and St Martins Housing (who especially need shower gel, soap, shampoo, deodorant, toothpaste and toothbrushes).



Help in decorating either St John's or St Julian's with beautiful Harvest flowers will also be warmly welcomed: speak to Lynton Johnson at St John's or Shirley Buxton at St Julian's.

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## Macmillan Coffee Morning

Friday 24 September

10am to 12 noon

St John's Timberhill

Join us for coffee, cake and a chat with friends old and new as we raise money for Macmillan Cancer Support.

Help on the day, and home baking in advance, will be much appreciated!

One in two of us will be diagnosed with cancer during our lifetime: since 1990, the 'World's Biggest Coffee Morning' has raised over £290 million to help Macmillan continue its work with patients and families.

# St Michael and All Angels

## Wednesday 29 September

10am Low Mass (*St Julian's*)

7.30pm High Mass (*St John's*)

Preacher: Fr Taylor Wilton-Morgan,  
Assistant Curate of the  
United Benefice of St Benedict  
*followed by drinks*

*'Still let them succour us; still let them fight,  
Lord of angelic hosts, battling for right,  
Till, where their anthems they ceaselessly pour,  
We with the Angels may bow and adore!'*



## From the Parish Registers

### Communicants and collections

	Sunday	Weekday	Collection (envelopes and cash)
Week beginning 25 July	60	45	£157.00
1 August	55	65	—
8 August	56	48	£210.00
15 August	82	31	£122.00
22 August	64	38	£147.00
29 August	70	44	£173.00

*The collection figure above does not include the amount given by standing order, which averages £3,000 a month.*

### Holy Baptism

*'As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ'*

7 August João Pedro DOS SANTOS JALO  
Maria Ntufa DOS SANTOS JALO  
Naarah Chloe DOS SANTOS JALO

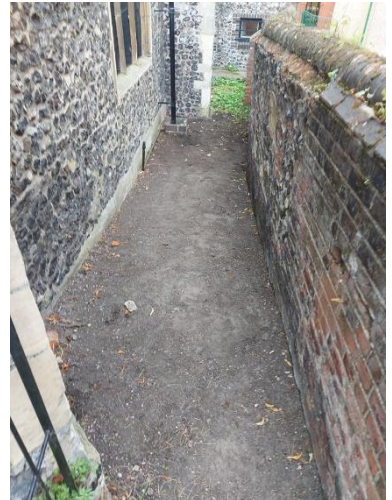


It was a great joy to baptise **João Pedro, Maria Ntufa and Naarah Chloe** during the Mass on Saturday 7 August, and to welcome many of their family and friends. We pray for them that they may continue in the new life they have received.



At the first Mass on the Feast of the Transfiguration, the celebrant blessed a **new baptismal shell**, gilded, which was then used for the first time to administer the water of the font at the Baptisms the following day. This beautiful gift to St John's, specially commissioned from Jo Green of Reepham, has been presented anonymously by one thankful for mercies received since Holy Baptism.

**Our warmest thanks** to Harry Emerson, Crystal van Zyl, Dylan Trumore and Jeremy and Gudrun Warren who have worked very hard on recent Saturday mornings to clear the passage at the side of St John's sacristy of all the tangled undergrowth and weeds, not to mention more unsavoury 'leavings'.



# September 2021

1	Wed	St Giles
2	Thu	Holy Martyrs of Papua New Guinea
3	Fri	St Gregory the Great
4	Sat	St Cuthbert
5	Sun	<b>The Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time (Trinity XIV)</b>
6	Mon	Feria
7	Tue	of Requiem
8	Wed	<b>Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary</b> LM 10am & 12 noon
9	Thu	St Peter Claver
10	Fri	Feria
11	Sat	Our Lady on Saturday
12	Sun	<b>The Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Trinity XV)</b>
13	Mon	St John Chrysostom
14	Tue	<b>The Exaltation of the Holy Cross</b> LM 12 noon
15	Wed	Our Lady of Sorrows ( <i>Ember Day</i> )
16	Thu	SS Cornelius Day
17	Fri	Ember Day
18	Sat	Our Lady on Saturday ( <i>Ember Day</i> )
19	Sun	<b>The Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Trinity XVI): Harvest Thanksgiving</b>
20	Mon	Holy Martyrs of Korea and the Pacific
21	Tue	<b>St Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist</b> LM 12 noon & 7pm
22	Wed	Feria
23	Thu	St Pius of Pietrelcina
24	Fri	<b>Our Lady of Walsingham</b> ( <i>comm. Dedication of the Cathedral</i> ) LM 5pm
25	Sat	Our Lady on Saturday
26	Sun	<b>The Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Trinity XVII)</b>
27	Mon	St Vincent de Paul
28	Tue	St Wenceslaus
29	Wed	<b>St Michael and All Angels</b> LM 10am; HM 7.30pm
30	Thu	St Jerome

# We pray for...

St Giles-on-the-Hill in their interregnum	1
Our Diocesan links with Papua New Guinea	2
Pope Francis	3
Missionary work in our own land	4
<b>Our Parish and People</b>	<b>5</b>
The care of creation	6
The Departed: Year's Minds for September	7
Thanksgiving for our Lady, full of grace	<b>8</b>
Victims of modern slavery	9
The people of Afghanistan	10
Norfolk Churches Trust	11
<b>Our Parish and People</b>	<b>12</b>
This week's Diocesan Clergy Conference	13
Thanksgiving for the Cross of Jesus	<b>14</b>
The bereaved	15
Norman and Graham, our Bishops	16
Those preparing for Ordination	17
Pilgrims to England's Nazareth	18
<b>Our Parish and People: Thanksgiving for the Harvest</b>	<b>19</b>
Our persecuted brothers and sisters	20
Christians Against Poverty (CAP)	<b>21</b>
Vocations to the Religious Life	22
Friends of Julian of Norwich	23
The conversion of England	<b>24</b>
Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham	25
<b>Our Parish and People</b>	<b>26</b>
All who serve the poor	27
The people of the Czech Republic	28
Thanksgiving for the Holy Angels	<b>29</b>
Students of the Scriptures	30



We had a super time at our **Church Family Quiz** in St John's on Friday 27 August. The highlight was surely the magnificent supper served in the interval. After nine closely contested rounds the team 'Sine Nomine' scored 159 points, beating their near rivals 'The Indecisives' with 150.5 points. We warmly thank everyone who worked hard behind the scenes to produce such a successful and enjoyable parish evening!

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## Sunday evenings

The Sunday evening Mass which was part of our response to the pandemic and which has been part of our schedule for the past fourteen months was discontinued from the last Sunday of August. From Sunday 5 September, there will be **Evening Prayer** according to the form in the Book of Common Prayer, **every Sunday at 6pm** at St John's. You are most welcome. We may experiment with the singing of (parts of) the Office *a capella*, and on occasion Benediction will be given after Evening Prayer or, from time to time when singers are available, the Office will be sung with the assistance of a choir.

## Fr Tony Snasdell

On Saturday 25 September Fr Tony celebrates the fifty-fifth anniversary of his Ordination to the Priesthood, a wonderful milestone and a sign of a lifetime's service of Christ and his Church. He will be the celebrant at the 11am High Mass the following day, **Sunday 26 September**, and afterwards Father and Susan will be providing drinks for the Church Family so we can continue rejoicing. After a long ministry, Fr Tony continues to be actively involved in our parish, and we are very thankful for the contribution which both he and Susan make to our Church Family life. *Ad multos annos!*

# The Feast of the Assumption

The Feast of the Assumption of Our Lady was celebrated with joy and style in August. We began with Evensong and Benediction at St Julian's on the eve, the congregation singing the office to plainsong and then enjoying pink sparkling wine in the garden afterwards. On the feast itself, the highlight was High Mass in St John's, magnificently decorated with flowers. A double choir composed of parishioners and friends from around the city sang the *Missa Bell' Amfitrit' altera* by Orlande de Lassus, as well as motets by Rachmaninoff and Parsons. After Holy Communion a procession formed and made its way through the streets of the parish, joyfully singing the glories of Mary and the worship of her Son, a wonderful and exhilarating act of witness. When we returned to church *Salve Regina* was sung, then we all spilled out into the churchyard for drinks and a magnificent bring-and-share lunch. Thanks to all who worked so hard!

Photos: JW







# Choose today

A Sermon preached by Fr Richard Stanton, Parish Priest,  
at the High Mass on the Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time:  
22 August 2021

**Lections** Joshua 24.1-2, 15-18: *We will serve the Lord, for he is our God*  
Ephesians 5.21-32: *Christ loved the Church and sacrificed himself for her*  
St John 6.60-69: *You have the message of eternal life*

**‘Simon Peter answered, “Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life.’** (*St John 6.68*)

**A**n uppity minx who’s the author of her own misfortunes.’ Not an extract from a senior cleric’s report on your Parish Priest, but the words of the housekeeper, Mrs Hughes, describing Lady Mary Crawley in one episode of Julian Fellowes’ *Downton Abbey*. But, says Mr Carson the butler, ‘you didn’t know her when she was a child. She was a guinea a minute then. I remember once she came in here, can’t have been more than four or five years old; she said, “Mr Carson, I’ve decided to run away, and I wonder if I might take some of the silver to sell.”’

You don’t need to have spent much time with critics of our faith to know that it’s often thought to be a means of escape, a form of retreat from the difficulties, challenges and perplexities of life, a withdrawal from the hard facts of the observable, the empirical and the rational into the hazelnut glade at the bottom of the garden where ‘all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well’. In other words, the Christian faith which we profess is essentially a highly elaborate form of running away. In St Peter’s declaration of faith today – ‘Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life’ – some may hear an echo of just this retreat, this inability to stand on one’s own two feet, even as the dust settles after ‘many of Jesus’s disciples left him and stopped going about with him’, finding what he had said about the Bread of Life ‘intolerable language.’ Those who remain are those who really, *really* cannot cope on their own.

Now, there is a very important sense in which this is true: those who have found life in Christ freely declare that they are limbs of a body, branches of a vine, dependent on one greater than they are; as we’ll sing today after Holy Communion,

*Father, we thank thee who hast planted*

*Thy holy name within our hearts;  
Knowledge, and faith, and life immortal  
Jesus, thy Son, to us imparts.*

But this does not mean that our faith is a mechanism by which we escape from or anaesthetise ourselves to the pain or inexplicable harshness of the world. A faith which is mature, which has grown up in every way into Christ, is able to look at, for example, the indescribable turmoil and anguish of the people of Afghanistan over the past week and not shrug or turn away with the self-satisfaction that we, the elect and the justified, are OK (thank you Jesus), but rather our faith fires our passionate concern for justice, for the progress of peoples, for the wellbeing of the nations so that all may share in the 'abundant life' which Christ came to bring. 'Did not our hearts burn within us?' asked the disciples at Emmaus, and Christian hearts should burn, like the Sacred Heart of Jesus, with 'compassion for all who have gone astray and with indignation for all who have suffered wrong'. Our faith does not permit us to flee from the world, which 'God loved so much that he gave his only Son'.



*Low Mass at St Julian's: the daily offering of the Eucharist is the heart of our parish life*

St Peter's declaration of faith, 'Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life,' is not the statement of a last resort, the desperate settling for the least-worst option like a hungry pair walking round an unfamiliar city seeking a meal and saying 'Well, I suppose we could go in here... it doesn't look too bad.' Our faith does not constitute the observing of a moral code designed to keep us predominantly on the straight and narrow; it is the positive and joyful acceptance of positive principles for positive living, the determination to always walk in newness of life because we have a share in the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the first reading today,

Joshua's declaration to the tribes of Israel – 'As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord' – and their own response – 'We too will serve the Lord' – is an illustration of this kind of positive, life-shaping commitment. The acceptance of Jesus Christ, the decision for Jesus Christ, which has to be made over and over again and is never simply a one-off event, commits us to a vibrant way of life, not to a few extra rules like an appendix of the Highway Code.

The intimacy of that relation between Christ and the members of his Church is expressed in a majestic and beautiful way by St Paul in today's Epistle: a man 'never hates his own body, but he feeds it and looks after it; and that is the way Christ treats the Church, because it is his body – and we are its parts.' This Church, this living family of which you and I are the members through baptism by water and the Spirit, is the object of Christ's passionate love: 'Christ loved the Church and sacrificed himself for her to make her holy... so that she would be glorious.' In her institutional life here below, the Church often struggles to outwardly express this inward reality, this glory which is to be revealed, but that's precisely why it's important for us to attend closely to these scriptures and be renewed in our understanding of who we are and what we are about:

*His new creation,  
By water and the word;  
From heaven he came and sought her  
To be his holy bride,  
With his own blood he bought her,  
And for her life he died.*

We are bound together, whether we always like it or not, within this living body, this family which draws its life from an inexhaustible Source beyond itself, and whenever we gather as the People of God we should find ourselves confirmed and strengthened in this identity, gathered together from scattered and disparate lives into one family as surely as the 'grain once scattered on the hills and the grapes once dispersed on the hillside' are united on the altar in bread and wine. After the unspeakably awful mass shooting in Plymouth two days before the Feast of the Assumption, I wrote on your behalf to the parish priest assuring him of the prayers of fellow Christians in Norwich as he ministered in such a heart-rending situation; in his reply, he said, 'We have been greatly helped by your prayers.' We are closer than we know.

And this is so because we live in the Spirit. For those disciples who heard Jesus's teaching about the Bread of Life, found it intolerable and turned

away from him, the heart of the problem was their inability to understand what he said about the *spiritual*, the realm of the Spirit. 'It is the spirit that gives life,' he said; 'the flesh has nothing to offer. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.' St John is clear in his Gospel, over and over again, that the realm of the Spirit is absolute reality, as opposed to the flesh and the material, which is a secondary kind of reality; the spirit is reality and truth and alone can give life. We experience the truth of this in the Eucharist: bread and wine are simply material food, but this matter is a means of spiritual union with Christ, who is from above but took flesh for us and for our salvation. Every time we receive Holy Communion, we are nourished for life in the Spirit and service in the world.

'Choose today whom you wish to serve,' said Joshua to the People of Israel. The gods of your ancestors? The gods of the land where you live now? The gods, we might add, of money, power, status, security? Our sharing in this Mass is itself a sign of the choice we are *trying* to make, the decision by which we want to live. But then, wasn't the choice made long ago by another, by one whose words are spirit and life, by one whose Father has drawn us, often in spite of ourselves? 'You did not choose me, but *I chose you*, and I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.'

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## Surrender, never defeat

A Sermon preached by Fr Richard Stanton, Parish Priest,  
at the High Mass on the Feast of the Beheading of St John the Baptist:  
29 August 2021

**Lections** Jeremiah 1.17-19: *They will fight against you but shall not overcome you*  
Hebrews 11.32-12.2: *We are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses*  
St Mark 6.17-29: *I want you to give me John the Baptist's head*

**'Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus.'**  
(Hebrews 12.1)

**F**amously disguising himself by wearing a burqa, the BBC's world affairs editor John Simpson was one of the first Western journalists to enter Afghanistan when the Taliban regime fell in 2001. Writing two weeks ago as the fall of Kabul seemed imminent, he reflected on his memories, saying: 'I spent a good deal of time in Afghanistan during the Taliban's period of power, and found it deeply scary. Sharia law in its fiercest forms was in

operation everywhere, with public executions, stonings and whippings commonplace... The Taliban minister of health, Mullah Balouch, complained to me that the International Red Cross refused his request to provide surgeons to cut off the hands and feet of convicted thieves, so he had to do the job personally – though he seemed to quite enjoy it.’

It would be too easy for us to think that the macabre, gothic overtones of the Gospel we have heard today belong to an uncivilised world of two thousand years ago, in the disordered court of the tetrarch Herod Antipas, but the reality is that political instability, fear, cowardice, intrigue, brutality and violence characterise the lives of the majority of people around our world today. Injustice and inhumane treatment, corruption and bloodshed scar the face of the earth and constitute the ferment from which so many of the world’s suffering peoples cry out for that justice and freedom which we call ‘the glorious liberty of the children of God.’ The unfolding humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, the evacuation processes and the chaos unfolding at Kabul airport – live in front of us – over the past week are, we know, only the tip of a monolithic iceberg in the dark waters of the cruelty which humanity inflicts on its own, deaf to the Gospel call to peace, reconciliation and human dignity.



*St John’s Altar on the Feast of his Beheading,  
29 August 2021*

It may, then, seem strange that the Church gives us a feast, falling this year on a Sunday, of the Beheading of St John the Baptist – or, as our brothers and sisters in the Roman Catholic Church now call it, the *Passion* of St John the Baptist. As if there isn’t enough brutality and misery in the world, you get a penny dreadful when you come to church as well, when we all know that the purpose of coming to church is to forget the pain of the world and leave it

behind, where it belongs, while we sink into the feather-bed of sweet incense, beautiful flowers and noble words.

We've arranged the incense and the flowers, though I can't promise the noble words... but, of course, that's *not* why we come to church, and we mark the Beheading of our Patron St John with a feast not because of the wicked and cruel way in which he died but because of the meaning which we see in that death. It was not a purposeless end to a purposeless life: a bizarre half-comic, half-offensive figure, shut away for being a nuisance and condemned to a vicious end through the caprice of a conniving woman who resented his outspokenness. No, more than that: this death was a death which pointed forward, which anticipated the sacrifice of the Lamb of God whom John had pointed out, that Lamb who takes away the sins of the world. We call John the Baptist 'the Forerunner', the one who *went before* the Lord to prepare his way before him, in death as well as in birth. 'When John's disciples heard about this,' our Gospel finished, 'they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.'

Echoes, here, almost word for word, of the evening of Good Friday, that sad little gaggle of figures standing by the new tomb hewn out of the rock, in which no-one had ever been laid, and because it was near at hand, and the Passover was approaching, they laid Jesus there. John and Jesus, cousins, both victims of 'those who kill the body'. The difference between the two deaths is that the stone rolled over the tomb of Jesus was not the giant full stop that it appeared to be, not the end of the story. Every Sunday the Church rejoices to proclaim that in the Passion and Death of Jesus God was doing a new thing, and the Resurrection followed to seal the victory which Calvary had won.

'You are looking for Jesus,' said the young man in white to the grieving women outside the tomb. 'He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place where they laid him.' So the Good News of Easter has been the message of the Church from that day to this, a message of hope and confidence in the invincible, unconquerable power of love which brings 'joy out of grief and life out of death' – not the old life, not resuscitation, but *resurrection*, entry into a new life which through our baptism we have already begun to live in this world as children who have the first fruits of the Spirit even though, as St Paul says, 'we groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.'

It's possible that St Mark, whose gospel is generally quite brief and to the point, gives us this relatively long account of the death of John the Baptist

to make the point that he really is dead. You'll remember that when Jesus sent out the Twelve with authority to proclaim the Kingdom, healing the sick, casting out demons and preaching repentance, the power which was at work caused some people to say, 'John the Baptizer has been raised from the dead.' But Mark wants us to understand that the narrative of John's suffering and death ends there, even while it points forward to a greater story of suffering and death which ends not in a body laid in a tomb but in an empty tomb, a place of victory and deliverance which asserts that every grave is now, as one prayer puts it, a 'bed of hope'.

The Church exists to proclaim this faith, the faith of Easter, the faith that Jesus lives, and each of us who claims the name of Christian is invited to bear faithful witness to this with our manner of life. We may not be called to suffer the same fate as the saints of whom the second lesson spoke – 'tortured, mocked, flogged, chains and imprisonment, stoned to death, sawn in two, killed by the sword' – but to each of us comes the same call to know that we have died with Christ and been raised with him. This is a summons to *surrender*, to hand over our lives to God in the recognition that what I have and who I am does not belong to me, is not my own construction or my own possession, but a gift of which I am only the steward. When you died, drowned, in the water of the font, you, a new creation, were loaned back into life in this world to be a *martyr* – that is to say, a *witness* – and to willingly and joyfully share in Christ's own self-emptying. We do this not least through daily dying – dying to pride, dying to envy, dying to oneupmanship, dying to hatred, dying to self. Thus we too 'prepare the Lord's way before him', making a place in which he may reign, keeping a finger pointed in the direction of the God who is to come.

As today's feast challenges us to recognise the cruelties and inhumanities of the world and the fragility and uncertainty of life, it invites us too to renew our prayers for (and our solidarity with) our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world who continue to suffer for the name of Christ, for rebuking vice and for witnessing to the truth. Inspired by them and strengthened by the prayers of all the saints, that great cloud of witnesses who surround us as we journey on, we too will not offer to the Lord that which costs us nothing, but looking steadily to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of the faith, we will set ourselves to be the willing instruments by which the reign of Christ will be advanced, and so rejoice to be numbered among those who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

# WORSHIP WITH US

**We warmly welcome you.**

<b>Sundays</b>	9am Low Mass	<i>St Julian's</i>
	11am High Mass and Sermon	<i>St John's</i>
	6pm Evensong (said)	<i>St John's</i>

## **Weekdays**

<i>The Mass</i>	Monday 10am	<i>St Julian's</i>
	Tuesday 12 noon	<i>St John's</i>
	Wednesday 10am	<i>St Julian's</i>
	Thursday 12 noon	<i>St John's</i>
	Friday 5pm	<i>St Julian's</i>
	Saturday 12 noon	<i>St John's</i>

<i>The Rosary</i>	Monday 10.30am	<i>St Julian's</i>
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<i>Morning Prayer</i>	Tuesday to Saturday 8.30am	<i>St Julian's</i>
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<i>Evening Prayer</i>	Tuesday to Saturday 6pm	<i>St Julian's</i>
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*The Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession)*

Confessions may be heard at any time  
by arrangement with the Parish Priest

St John's and St Julian's are both **open daily** for prayer, quiet and visiting (except St John's which is currently closed on Mondays). The Blessed Sacrament is reserved on the High Altar of both churches for the Communion of the Sick and the devotion of the faithful.

We warmly welcome enquiries about **baptisms and weddings**.

We will be pleased to help you in any way we can.



[stjohnstimberhill.org](http://stjohnstimberhill.org)



[stjohnthebaptisttimberhill](https://www.instagram.com/stjohnthebaptisttimberhill)

### **On the cover:**

The Procession leaves the church on the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary  
*Photo: Jeremy Warren*