

# St Mary's Monthly Message



May 2025

*Bluebells at Ashridge by Ken Adams*

## *A Note From Chris*

### **A reflection on Being Church and farewell to Sue & Jason**

When Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin became the first people to walk on the moon in July 1969, they left a plaque behind to commemorate the occasion which is still there today. It simply reads: "Here men from the planet Earth first set foot upon the moon, July 1969 A.D. We came in peace for all mankind."

In many ways it's a more dramatic example of something that lies deep within us all. The need to put down markers to remind us, and those that come after us, that this was a significant time in our story. At an important point in Israel's history Samuel erected a memorial stone and called it 'Ebenezer' which means 'thus far has the Lord helped us' (1Sam 7.12).

As a church family we are also at a key point in our journey as we anticipate the appointment of a new Rector and shortly say farewell to Sue as our Pioneer Curate. We are experiencing our own 'Ebenezer' moment as we reflect on how God has been so faithful in leading us this far and in giving us such Godly and gifted leaders and we are confident that he will continue to unfold his purposes in the days ahead.

Just as we did only a few months ago with David & Jo, we celebrate all that Sue and Jason have brought to us in different ways both seen and unseen. As part of the Yurt community Liz and I have experienced first-hand their love, wisdom, faith and amazing hospitality (thank you Jason for lighting the Yurt log burner in the early morning all through the winter for our twice weekly 7.30 a.m. prayer gatherings!).

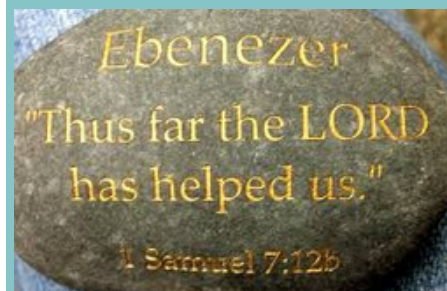
The thing about memorials is that they are not places to remain. The astronauts soon journeyed on. As a church we will continue along the path that God has set for us and we pray God's richest blessing on Sue and Jason as they too leave their mark and enter into the next season on their adventure of faith.

May you be blessed as you have been a blessing.

*Revd Chris Stoddard*

### *What's inside?*

*In conversation with  
Sue and Jason  
Hughes*



### *In Other News...*

*Dates for your Diary*

*Prayers for this  
month*



# *In conversation with Sue and Jason*

## ***Sue, why did you choose to follow the Pioneer track for your Curate's training?***

Back in 2018/19, I spent a year studying Theology, Mission and Ministry with Church Mission Society while also working alongside the St Albans Diocese. That year stirred something deep in me — it confirmed a growing call to imagine and nurture new worshipping communities, particularly for those who might never come near a conventional church.

Even before that, I'd carried a strong sense that a shift was coming — that the way we 'do church' would need to change significantly if we were to be faithful to Christ's call in our time. As I began my curacy, the pandemic hit, throwing everything into uncertainty. But within that disruption, I sensed an opening — a space to listen afresh to the Spirit and explore different ways of being Church, especially for those who feel far from it.

## ***Pioneering is about doing things new and doing things differently. What excites you most about developing fresh expressions of church?***

What excites me most is how discipleship and mission are woven together in fresh expressions — not separate tasks but a shared journey of relationship, discovery, and faith. In today's world, people often come to faith through belonging first. Walking alongside them — listening, sharing life, creating space — is often where discipleship quietly begins.

For many, stepping into a traditional church setting is a massive leap. Fresh expressions make room to meet people right where they are, to help them know they're seen, known and loved by God — often long before they'd use that language themselves.

The Yurt Community grew from an Alpha course and has become a place of deep spiritual belonging. Maker and Fixer began as a simple space around a shared passion for sustainability — and faith has emerged naturally in that soil. In every case, it's the same heartbeat: create spaces where community and faith can grow together. And what I love most is that the Holy Spirit's imagination is always bigger than mine — I never quite know what's coming next, but I trust it will be good.

## ***Pioneers start new things and love "firsts". Can you reflect on a few of the "firsts" you have experienced whilst serving at St Mary's?***

There have been so many meaningful firsts. One that stands out is celebrating Holy Communion in the Yurt — a packing box for an altar, gathered around a firepit, with people offering words of penitence and peace before breaking bread in the round. It was raw and real — and deeply sacred.



*Sue celebrating her Ordination with some of the 'Yurties'*



*The Yurt at Church Farm*



*Maker & Fixer at Culverton Barn*

## *Sue and Jason cont...*

Another unforgettable moment was writing and leading a service to commemorate the death of Queen Elizabeth II with the Fell Pony Society — a gentle and pastoral gathering outside St Mary's, giving thanks for her life and her love of the ponies, while praying for the riders who came to honour her.

And I'll never forget helping lead the Ukraine Memorial Service in 2025 — standing together with our town to pray, grieve, and show solidarity with our Ukrainian neighbours. Each of these "firsts" has stretched and surprised me — and they've all opened new doors for the Spirit to move.

### ***Can you tell us about some of the exciting things that are happening as part of your involvement in the Rural Greenhouse Learning Community?***

Launching the Rural Greenhouse Learning Community in January 2024 has been one of the great joys of my ministry so far. It's been such a privilege to journey with teams across our local rural parishes as they step out into new territory — listening to their communities and responding with creativity, faith, and love.

We've seen beautiful initiatives take root: Lego Church, Dementia Church, Men in Sheds, Café in the Park, Soul Space for young mums, Eco Church gatherings, Prayer Spaces in Schools — each one a unique response to local need.

What's inspired me most is how often these teams start small but dream big — creating spaces where faith, belonging, and care for creation gently intertwine. Greenhouse has been a place of encouragement, learning, and shared hope — and it's reminded me again and again that the Spirit is already at work in our communities, waiting for us to notice and join in.

### ***We read in Luke 2:19 that following the birth of Jesus, and the visit of the shepherds 'Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart'. Which moments of your time here will you and Jason treasure in your hearts?***

There's so much we will carry with us. Living in intentional community through the Yurt — praying together throughout the week, growing together in discipleship — has been transformative for both of us. For me, some of the most sacred moments have come through walking with families in grief. Funeral ministry, surprisingly, has brought deep connection and lasting friendships — often where I least expected it.

Our time supporting Ukrainian refugees — through the Yurt, the wider church, and the Ukraine to Chilterns Charity — has also left a deep imprint on us both. It's something I'll continue beyond St Mary's.



***Sue celebrating her Ordination with Jason***



***Sue and David at her Priesting***



## *Sue and Jason cont...*

And then there are the quiet treasures — co-leading the Practicing the Way courses with Andrew, seeing how people's faith has deepened, and how relationships have grown through honest, vulnerable discipleship. These are the moments Jason and I will hold close — signs of God's presence and the gift of being part of a community that has loved us so well.

### ***What are your hopes for the future of the missional communities that you and Jason have nurtured during your time here?***

My deepest hope is that these communities — especially the Yurt and Maker & Fixer — will keep growing as places of prayer, courage, and creative mission. From the beginning, they've had a sense of being both gathered and sent — not inward-looking, but called to go out with the love of Christ.

I hope they'll keep walking that road: passing on what they've received, welcoming others in, and continuing to live out faith in ways that feel natural, earthy, and real. Jason and I have been so shaped by these communities — they've taught us so much about grace, resilience, and what it means to be a sent people.

Even though we're moving on, they remain very close to our hearts. And we trust that the Spirit who began this good work will carry it on into even greater fruitfulness.

### ***Can you tell us a little about your new role at Haddenham?***

I'll be joining the team at St Mary's Haddenham as Associate Minister, with a focus on starting new worshipping communities — particularly among those moving into the new housing estates.

There's a great sense of openness and potential — people settling into new rhythms and often hungry for connection, meaning, or simply someone who will listen. I'm hoping to create fresh expressions of church that grow out of real relationship — rooted in daily life and shaped by the questions people are actually asking.

I'll also be working closely with the three local schools — a part of ministry I love — building relationships with children, staff, and families. And more broadly, I'm looking forward to discovering how we can serve the wider community well — offering spaces where people can encounter God's love in ways that feel welcoming, grounded, and true.

It feels like a season of sowing — and I'm excited to see what will grow.

***Sue Hughes, Pioneer Curate***



*Sue with the Maker & Fixer Community*



## *In other news...*

Sue's last Sunday with us is **June 1<sup>st</sup>**. We will have a **'bring & share' lunch** in church following the 11.15am service. If you are able to help organise contributions, please speak to the Church wardens or Kathryn in the Parish Office.

Princes Risborough Town Council is proud to host a **Beacon Lighting Ceremony** in commemoration of the 80th anniversary of **VE Day on Thursday, 8th May**, at the Stratton Memorial Garden.

Attendees are welcome to enter the Stratton Memorial Garden from 8:25 PM, with the event beginning at 8:45 PM. The Beacon will be lit at 9:30 PM.

As part of the event, there will be a 10-minute segment for public participation. If you'd like to join us on stage to share a memory or reflection, please contact Stephanie at [stephanie@princesrisboroughtowncouncil.gov.uk](mailto:stephanie@princesrisboroughtowncouncil.gov.uk)

**The Chiltern Arts Festival** runs from 9-20 May with concerts and music-related events in local venues including St Mary's. **On Monday 12<sup>th</sup> May**, there is a **morning concert at 11am: Robert Burns in Music** with the JKL Duo playing guitar and flute. We are promised: 'A melting pot of creativity. Robert Burns as you've never heard him before.' Later that **evening at 7.30pm** we welcome Anton Lessor, actor, (you may remember him as Chief Superintendent Bright in Endeavour) and Echor Music with **'Le voyage imaginé: Ravel: the Man and his Music**. Inspired by Jean Echenoz's novella imagining Ravel's transatlantic voyage, expect to meet some colourful characters along the way...

Tickets range in price from £15 for the morning concert to £20-£35 for the evening concert and are available from [chilternarts.com](http://chilternarts.com) or phone 01442 920303.

**Open Garden in aid of Project Possible on Bank Holiday Monday May 26<sup>th</sup> 2-5pm.** Kaye Lillycrop invites you to visit her beautiful garden at Stockwell Lane Farm, Little Meadle, HP17 9UG where you will find much of interest including a walled garden, a large rose collection and pondside planting. There will be a plant identification quiz and plants for sale. £5 entry, cash only please, with all proceeds going to the Christian charity, Project Possible, supporting small community initiatives in poor areas of our world to help people out of poverty and towards a sustainable future without aid.

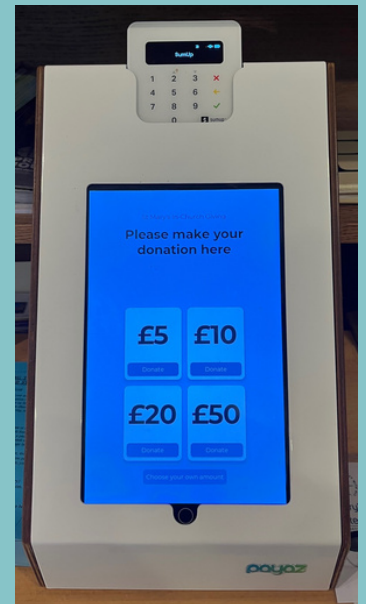
### ***Looking Ahead***

**Princes Risborough Lighthouse is running from Monday 28<sup>th</sup> July to Friday 1<sup>st</sup> August.** Volunteer registration is now open and children's registration opens on Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> May. We welcome young people from 12 years upwards to sign up as Lighthouse Keepers and Lamplighters who help run the smaller groups of children.

<https://app.signmeup.org.uk/lighthouse-princes-risborough/27>

St Mary's will again be hosting the **Lighthouse Quiz on Saturday June 14<sup>th</sup>**, 7.30pm. Teams of up to 8 people, raffle and heads and tails game. Bring your own drinks and nibbles. Prizes for the winning team. Raffle donations welcome. To book a table, please contact Jamie carter on 01844 273286 (booking essential)

**Thy Kingdom Come** is a global ecumenical prayer movement that invites Christians around the world to pray from Ascension (29 May) to Pentecost (8 June) for more people to come to know Jesus. We are invited to pray that God's Spirit might work in the lives of 5 people who have not responded with their 'Yes' to God's call. Prayer resources will be available in church. A **Prayer Week** at St Mary's will run from **9-13<sup>th</sup> June** with prayer times and activities throughout the day and also provides the opportunity to pray and reflect quietly in church during the week. Further details from Andrew Walmsley.



***Don't forget  
You can make regular  
or one-off donations  
to St Mary's at the  
Payaz Terminal***

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## **GIVING ...**

... keeps St Mary's going.  
From services and AV  
to lighting and courses,  
we rely on

### **Regular Planned Giving.**

Please support the Church.  
To get started, please contact  
the Giving Secretary:  
Michael Hoey  
01844 275192  
[mhoey@btinternet.com](mailto:mhoey@btinternet.com)

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***Sign up for our weekly  
e-news by going to the  
homepage on our  
website. Receive all the  
news from St Mary's  
direct to your phone!***

## *Dates for your Diary*

**Ladies Breakfast:** Saturday 3 May, 9 -10.30am in the Parish Hall. Sign-up list in church.

**Lunch Club:** Wednesday, 7 May, 10am-3pm in St Mary's Church

**80th Anniversary of VE Day:** Thursday 8 May, Beacon Lighting at Stratton Memorial Ground, 8.45pm

**Men's Breakfast:** Saturday 10 May, 9 -10.30am in the Parish Hall.

**Bereavement Drop-in Group:** in the Chapter House, 3pm on Mon 12 May

**Prayers at the Yurt:** Mon & Fri mornings, 7.30am to 8am

**Tea for All** in the Chapter House, 2.30pm on 25 May

**Farewell Lunch** for Sue & Jason Hughes: Sun 1 June in church after the 11.15am service.

**Play Cafe:** Tuesdays during term time from 9.30am to 11am in church

**Youth Group:** Sundays during term time from 6.30pm to 7.45pm in the Chapter House

## *Services at St Mary's and St Peter's*

**Holy Communion at 8am** (*said*)

**Parish Communion** at 9.30 on Sundays in church and live streamed to your home.

See the St Mary's website for the link to our YouTube channel.

**Live@St Mary's** all age service at 11.15 in church. Kid's Church welcomes children to join them for activities during this service - contact the Parish Office for further info on sessions.

**Mid week Holy Communion** is on Wednesdays at 10.30 followed by coffee.

**St Peter's Church, Ilmer - Evensong & shortened HC** 18 May at 6pm.

## *For your Prayers this month*

May the sunlight and the rain  
be reminders that You are at work renewing the earth.  
As a God of renewal, You are ever at work in our lives, too.  
Open our eyes and lives to the needed changes  
in our lives this Spring.  
Awaken us to new life and perspective,  
for we pray in Jesus' name.

**Amen**

**We remember the family in our prayers following the death of:**

Geoffrey John

**We uphold in prayer:** Jimmy Finlay, Sarah Drewett, Joyce Wooster, Lily Matthews, Dennis Scourfield, Pete Wynn, Elaine Needham and granddaughter Emma, Paula Knall, Jenny Deverill, David Coleman, the Rolfe family, Carl State-Claridge, Kelly May, and all those bereaved, suffering ill health or facing operations.

**Please pray for:**

- Sue and Jason Hughes as they leave St Mary's for Sue's new role at Haddenham.
- Nikki Maxwell who has had to leave South Sudan due to the unrest and is staying in South Africa, waiting to hear if she will be able to return to Juba
- The Churchwardens and new PCC members elected at the APCM
- Children's & families Ministry, giving thanks for our volunteers

*Copies of this newsletter are available in Church for you to collect and pass on to friends and neighbours. They are also on the website.*



*Join our weekly prayer meeting on Zoom every Wednesday at 9am – Zoom invite available from the Parish Office .*

*We encourage everyone to pray for one another. Ask the Parish Office if you would like to receive details of prayer requests.*

**Contact the Parish Office**  
[parishoffice@stmarysrisborough.org.uk](mailto:parishoffice@stmarysrisborough.org.uk)

**Tel: 01844 273300**