

Lark Valley and North Bury Team Ministry

VIRAL BULLETIN

11 January 2026

Baptism of Christ 1st Sunday of Epiphany

Please forward this to anyone you know who might not be in our Google group.

For information about us please visit: www.northburychurches.org.uk



At St Catherine, Flempton

St Francis of Assisi, St John the Evangelist and St Christopher

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Baptism of Christ

1st Sunday of Epiphany

Isaiah 42.1-9 Psalm 29 Acts 10.34-43 Matthew 3.13-end

Real recognises real

As some of you are aware, no thanks to the Rector cheekily revealing it, I had my 50th birthday in December, so there is no way that I can pretend to be down with the youth. However, spending the odd chaplaincy hour in Abbeygate Sixth Form, and having Lucy back at home from university, means I have some of the lingo in my back pocket, especially the odd phrase from drag or hip-hop culture. And a phrase straight out of hip-hop in the late noughties and TikTok nowadays is *Real recognises real*. It is about being genuine, capturing authenticity, and mutual respect between people as they recognise such in each other. No room for fakes (unless of course an authentic fake meets an authentic fake - discuss).

Anyway, amusingly so, though valid I'd argue, *Real recognises real* is the first thing which came to mind when I read the Gospel for today's celebration of the Baptism of Christ. Jesus, straight out of Galilee, facing John the Baptist straight out of the wilderness and who is now baptising hordes of people with water for repentance in the River Jordan.

Jesus recognises the Baptist's ministry and approaches him for baptism; John recognises Jesus for who he is and therefore doubts his own worthiness to baptise him - you may remember that John has previously said he was 'not worthy to carry his sandals.' But Jesus affirms his baptismal ministry, 'Let it be so now; for it is proper for us to fulfil all righteousness.'

So, John does it. And we'll come back to Jesus having a holy dunking in a moment. First, we might like to consider recognition. Besides ministry, potential even, and one of them being the long awaited one, do Jesus and John actually recognise each other?

We know they met many many years before, though for this earliest meeting they were in the womb on the occasion we recall in church as the Visitation. Mary, pregnant, goes to visit her cousin, Elizabeth, also pregnant: Jesus and John *in utero*. It is a joy filled and Spirit filled moment and we can say an early instance of *Real recognises real*.

As Mary greets Elizabeth, John leaps for joy. Elizabeth states this with great rejoicing, and in fact as both mothers rejoice in being together, there are happy and holy babies within. They recognise each other. Remember, the Holy Spirit surrounds these pregnancies. Mary was overshadowed by the Spirit and is carrying God's son, Jesus; while John's father, Zechariah, was told by the angel that even before John's birth, John would be filled with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's action is real and the sense of the Divine pervades their meeting.

Real recognises real – these women, these babies are blessed, and rejoice and revel in it, especially when Mary starts to sing a song of justice and the kingdom. We may wonder if these families, or more specifically if Jesus and John, ever met again before the watery encounter at the river. What we do know is that John had 'the hand of the Lord' with him and he 'grew and became strong in the Spirit', living in the wilderness till now when he picks up the ministry of baptism to prepare people for the coming of the Lord. John is the real deal: bold uncompromising but humble in the face of Jesus. Obedient too. 'Let it be so,' said Jesus - and John consents. Their ministries are woven together.

We're back at the River Jordan as Jesus places himself in John's arms, ready to submit to the shock of immersion, a little nervous perhaps, though comforted by the strength and surety of John's grip. This is what John does. And through God's grace he does it well. Jesus is plunged down into the depths - and I guess no-one was expecting what happened next.

Not the folk drying themselves on the banks or waiting for their turn. Not John, faithful and holy as he was. Possibly, not Jesus even. As John pulls him out of the river, water splashing and swirling, Jesus likely spluttering and gasping for breath, all hear and see an astonishing revelation, a theophany, as God responds to Jesus's baptism.

The heavens open and the Holy Spirit descends like a dove, alighting on - anointing - Jesus. Holy breath for the One gasping from the exciting turbulent waters of baptism. This is not all. A voice from heaven is heard, publicly declaring to all gathered there, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.' Here is real. Jesus, the Son of God. All see it. All hear it. Springing forth from the water, new things are happening.

Through baptism and the divine affirmation, Jesus is ready for what comes next: facing temptation in the wilderness. He is the Son of God. And when he returns from the wilderness and embarks on his ministry, then many will know it. And, you know, in John's Gospel, Jesus and John the Baptist baptise alongside one another. Indeed, John rejoices to hear Jesus's voice – and with humility he says that Jesus 'must increase, I must decrease.'

There is authenticity to both their ministries as *Real recognises real*.

Like John, Jesus will encourage repentance and he will proclaim the good news of the kingdom. Jesus's work is liberating and light for all the nations; this is the stuff of Isaiah. Likewise, the incredible stuff mentioned in Acts by Peter when he is in Cornelius's house.

Interestingly, Peter is the only one, besides the Evangelists, to mention Jesus's Baptism and his anointing with the Holy Spirit. Peter demonstrates that Jesus's ministry flows from this moment: the preaching of peace, the doing good, the healing and freeing of those oppressed by evil.

Transformation is afoot wherever he walks. Peter and the apostles were witnesses to his work and finally his Passion, death and resurrection. Now the apostles carry on his work. And these chaps are flawed and faithful, yet beloved by God, exuding *realness* nonetheless. From the outset, their work includes baptising. Remember after Peter received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and spoke to the crowd, those who welcomed the message were baptised, about 3,000 that day!

We celebrate this gift of baptism today. We realise that Jesus, the holy One, when he encountered the waters, also hallowed the water, blessing it with his presence, his being. The font is a place of grace where we too, when we are baptised, find forgiveness, cleansing and newness. We also receive a commissioning to live lives after the example of Christ, for

everything we do is in God, through God, for God – and we do so secure in the knowledge of our salvation for we are also beloved children of God. Now, I have baptised many people. I often hear a wail, a cry, or a gasp (especially if in my exuberance I have sent water down the back of someone's shirt).

If you've attended a baptism, likely you have heard such vocalising too. But what of God's voice? Trust me, it is there. 'This is my son.' 'This is my daughter.' 'This is my child.' At baptism, we are all God's Beloved and we're pleasing to him. We find our identity in Christ and we find family. We also find authenticity, the sense of realness.

Don't mistake this for being perfect. That is not possible for us, even though we may try and be true to our baptismal faith. Yet understanding this may help us to spot the charlatans and fakes in our midst, especially in public life and those exploiting faith for political or financial gain. Maybe this realness is what enables us to put one foot in front of the other when life is tricky and the going tough.

This is also why keeping this feast is important, particularly if we find ourselves thirsting in the drought of our own misdoings. Today is a long refreshing drink, a holy reminder of baptismal grace, of what it is all about – forgiveness, new life and opportunities, a pouring out of gifts and that yes, we are temples of the Holy Spirit, no less!

Look at each other in the pews. *Real recognises real.* I'm part of God's family, and *beloveds*, so are you - and we are equally trying to live a good and holy life after Jesus, even in our struggles (I mess up; so do you) and we recognise this and in Jesus's name we encourage one another, worship together and go about his precious work in obedience and faithfulness. This is how God does new things, which is very exciting.

So, be of good heart and good cheer in thanksgiving for Holy Baptism, prepare to be doused with holy water, then rejoice like John and Jesus, as *real recognises real.*

Mother Ali

Lark Valley and North Bury Churches

SERVICES WEEK BEGINNING 11 JANUARY

SUNDAY 11 January Baptism of Christ First Sunday of Epiphany

8.00am	Holy Communion (BCP)	All Saints', Bury St Edmunds
8.00am	Holy Communion (BCP)	Culford
9.30am	Holy Communion (CW)	St George's, Bury St Edmunds
9.30am	Holy Communion (CW)	All Saints', Bury St Edmunds
10.00am	Eucharist (CW)	Lackford
10.00am	Eucharist (CW)	Fornham St Martin
11.00am	Sung Eucharist (CW)	St John's, Bury St Edmunds
5.00pm	Team Epiphany Carol Service	St John's, Bury St Edmunds

Monday 12 January Aelred, abbot, 1167; Benedict Biscop, scholar, 689

Tuesday 13 January Hilary, bishop, teacher of the faith, 367; Kentigern (Mungo), missionary bishop, 603; George Fox, founder of the Society of Friends (Quakers), 1691

6.00pm	A Quiet Space	St John's, Bury St Edmunds
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Wednesday 14 January

8.30am	Morning Prayer (CW)	St John's, Bury St Edmunds
9.30am	Eucharist (CW)	St John's, Bury St Edmunds

Thursday 15 January

9.30am	Eucharist (BCP)	All Saints', Bury St Edmunds
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Friday 16 January

5.15pm	Evening Prayer (CW)	
6.00pm	Eucharist (CW)	St John's, Bury St Edmunds

Saturday 17 January Antony of Egypt, hermit, abbot, 356;
Charles Gore, founder of the Community of the Resurrection, 1932

SUNDAY 18 January 2nd Sunday of Epiphany

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity begins

8.00am	Holy Communion (BCP) followed by breakfast	All Saints', Bury St Edmunds
9.30am	Holy Communion (CW)	St George's, Bury St Edmunds
9.30am	Holy Communion (CW) preceded by breakfast	All Saints', Bury St Edmunds
9.30am	Matins (BCP)	Timworth
10.00am	Said Eucharist (CW) preceded by breakfast at 9.15am	West Stow
10.00am	Eucharist (CW)	Fornham All Saints
11.00am	Sung Eucharist (CW)	St John's, Bury St Edmunds
6.00pm	Launch: Week of Prayer for Christian Unity	All Saints', Bury St Edmunds

Lark Valley and North Bury Churches

St John the Evangelist

St John's Street Bury St Edmunds IP33 1SN



Epiphany Carol Service

Candlelit people's procession

Epiphany carols

Readings and reflections

Seasonal refreshments

Sunday 11 January 2026 at 5pm

THE ANCIENT TRADITION OF HOLY GRAFFITI

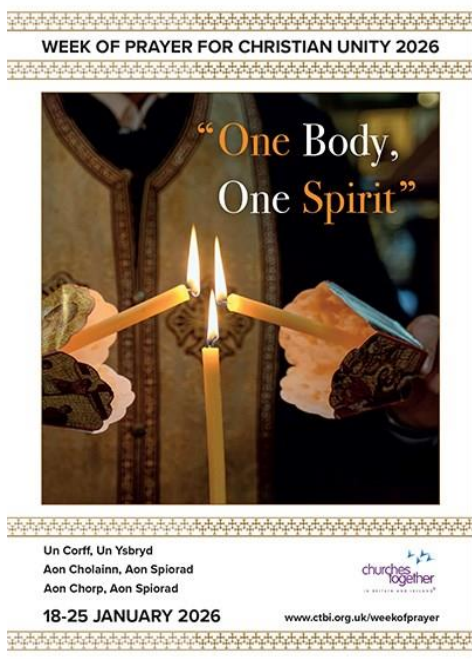


Photos taken on the feast of Epiphany at St Andrew's, Timworth by Marcus King and at St John's, Bury St Edmunds by Ali Miller.



Please contact Andy and Ali if you would like some blessed chalk, then use it to write by your main door **20 + C + M + B + 26**. **C M B** reminds us of the traditional names for the wise men (Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar) and means **Christus Mansionem Benedicat** (May Christ bless this house), and 20 26 is for the new year. And you may pray:

The three Wise Men, Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar, followed the star of God's Son, who became human two thousand and twenty six years ago. May Christ bless our home and remain with us throughout the new year. Amen.



Churches Together
in Bury St Edmunds
and District

WEEK OF PRAYER
FOR CHRISTIAN
UNITY

18 -25 January 2026

Launch Service:

All Saints', Bury St Edmunds,
at 6pm on Sunday 18th January

Lunchtime Meetings

*Lunch, Bible Study and Reflection on weekdays,
material provided by churches in Armenia,
starting at 12.30pm ~ venues will provide drinks,
please bring your own lunch.*

Monday 19 at the Cathedral

Tuesday 20 at Garland Street Baptist Church

Wednesday 21 at Trinity Methodist Church

Thursday 22 at St Edmund's Roman Catholic Church

Friday 23 at Whiting Street United Reformed Church

Saturday 24 at St John's, Bury St Edmunds

WONDER CLUB

Wonder Club is our monthly
All Age afternoon benefice service,
using Godly Play.

We meet at St Lawrence, Lackford, 3pm
Expect stories, wondering, craft, cake



2026 dates
1st February
1st March
12th April
3rd May
7th June
5th July

What does Godly Play offer?

Ways to be community - Building trust and exploring together

Ways to create sacred space - Making a place to wonder, and taking time to reflect

Ways to get inside stories - Discovering the languages of word, gesture, symbol and silence

Ways to search for meaning - Supported by community, story and space, deepening spiritual meaning in our lives

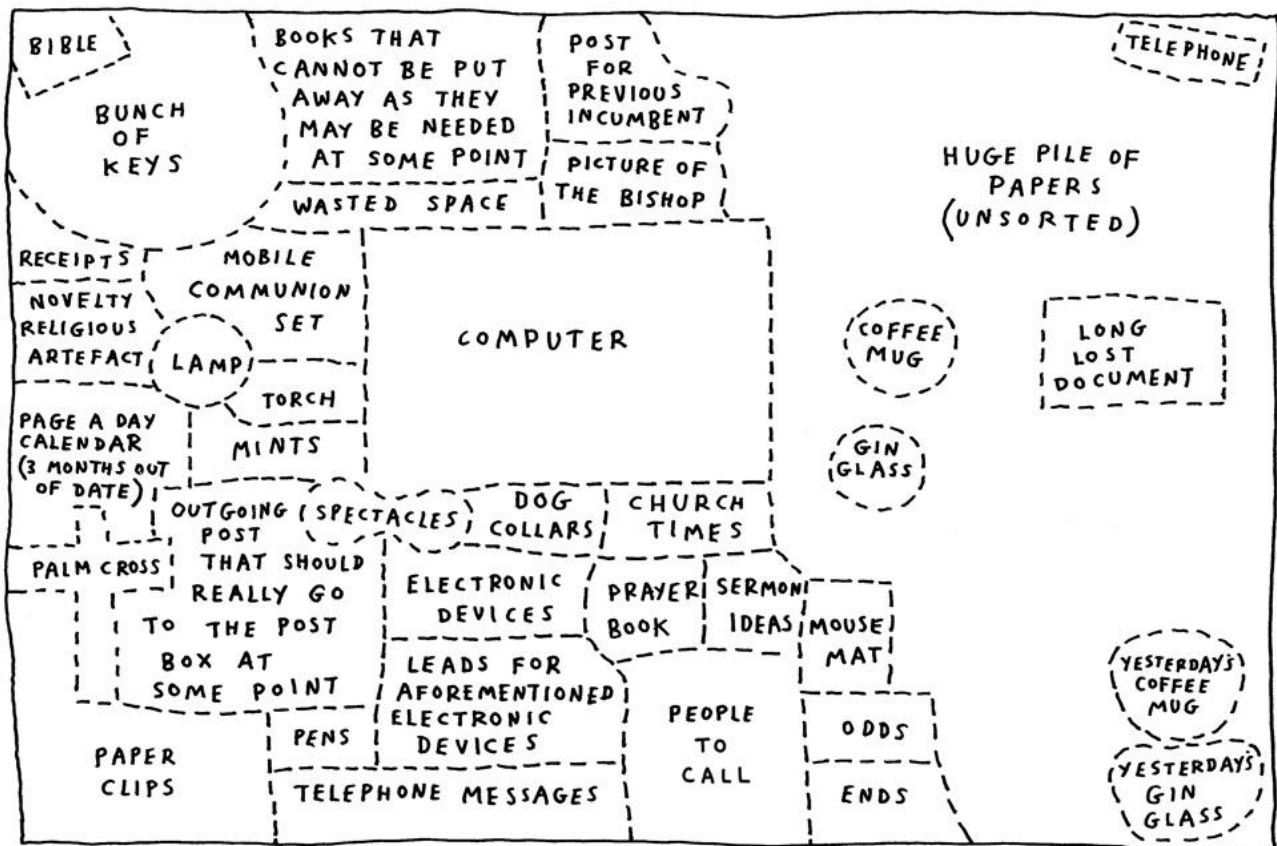


Footsteps to the manger

Gina Robertson

THE CLERGY DESK

THE TRIED AND TESTED WAY TO ARRANGE IT



CartoonChurch.com

Contacts

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We also have assistance from priests within the benefice who have permission to officiate.

Please don't forget ...

to let Julie Hooton NBTLVB@outlook.com

and the 'Viral Bulletin' adrian.mann@btinternet.com

have news and details of events which have happened
as well as events which are coming up at your church.

And your photographs are always welcome, especially those suitable for the Caption Competition, which can have a high value on the art market.