

So, here we are in the *spiritual* month of May. Perhaps the year will now have a warmer spring in its step. In the Church calendar there are two great, though rather less accessible festivals than Easter or Christmas. First comes the Ascension, then Pentecost (Whitsun). Colour also returns into our landscape after the pale months of winter. We have already enjoyed some blossoms, but there is little to compare with the hawthorn blossoms along the field-side hedges, usually in May – hence the alternative name, May-tree. *May* is the only British plant which is named after the month in which it blooms. As *Thorn* it is also the most common tree found in English place names, for instance, *Thornhill* in Southampton – which also has a *Maybush*! Though it now usually flowers around the middle of the month, may flowered much nearer the beginning of the month before the introduction of the Gregorian calendar in 1752. It also has many associations with May Day festivities.



St Mary Bourne School
Maypole 1928

As everything gradually warms up, the growing year takes off. Once again, it seems that the Church year is in harmony with the natural year. It is said that the 1662 Prayer Book reflects the rural rhythms which shaped people's lives in those days. As our sensitivity to times and seasons becomes attenuated, perhaps it is no wonder that our spiritual grasp also weakens. But we are left with a lingering sense that material comforts do not answer all the deep questions we have.

First comes the Ascension, then Pentecost (Whitsun, 11th). The Ascension of Christ is the great festival of lift-off and this year it falls on the first of the month (once also *Labour Day*) because of the uniquely early Easter, after which it is the fortieth day. Visitors to fervently Catholic countries at Ascension will have experienced the colourful and energetic processions. Pentecostal fire and rushing wind remind us of the unpredictable nature of Jesus' gift of the Holy Spirit, the inner comforter in our turmoil but also God's challenger of all false comforts.

So perhaps May offers some really good stimulation for the spiritual search, and for celebration in the worship of the churches, lifting hearts, minds and voices in thankfulness for this time of budding, blossoming and growth – and, we hope, increasing warmth. *May the Spirit's Blessing be yours – wind and fire, joy and wisdom comforting you, disturbing you.*

Martin Coppin

Arrangements ...

Most will know that Nona Harrison retired at the end of April from her post as House-for-duty Assistant Priest in Longparish. This means that until her replacement is in residence, we shall be running with less ordained presence in the parishes.

We are very grateful for the Revd Dodie Marsden, whose part-time ministry is extremely generously shared, and the Revd John Scott who will be occasionally covering services. Some Family Services will be lay-led, which is exciting (if daunting for the leaders).

For most purposes, and for discussing personal services, the first call should be to myself (details below) or Dodie (01264 738211). I hope to offer a regular presence in Longparish and Hurstbourne Priors, and details will be posted on the church noticeboards.

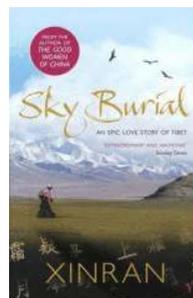
Aiming to appoint a successor, we are working on a Benefice profile and a person specification to give to prospective candidates. If anyone has a view on the latter, the abilities, experience and qualities desirable, you are very welcome to mention it to Dodie or myself or a local churchwarden. It would help if you wrote it down. A group will be meeting with Bishop Trevor Basingstoke on 24th June to finalise the Benefice Profile.

In every way, we particularly value your understanding, support and prayers during this time of exploration of God's will for our common future. I know that Nona is very grateful for your continuing prayers in these early days of her retirement, which she has entered with our resounding thanks.

The final session of our **Beta Course**, *Self and God*, is on Thursday 1st May at 8.00pm at St Mary Bourne Vicarage. As with every session, even if you have not been before, it is still possible to get a lot from what is a very thoughtful and pastoral course with many insights into our modern lives in the light of psychology and the Bible. You will be very welcome. In essence, the course is about compassion.



Benefice Reading Group



Our next book is Xinran, *Sky Burial* (Vintage, £6.99, 176 pages) – for Tuesday 13th May, 8.00pm with Laura Würzer at Beech Hill, Springhill Lane, St Mary Bourne. *Sky Burial* is a story of persisting love and seeking, set against the background of Tibet. You will be made most welcome to the discussion. Further details are on fliers in the churches.

As floated last year, I am planning to lead a group tour to the **Holy Land** 2-12



March next year. Details have now been finalised and soon brochures will be available for anyone interested. Let me know if you would like a copy. The exciting itinerary is based on Jerusalem and Nazareth.