St Mary the Virgin & All Souls Church
Highbury Road, Bulwell, Nottingham
NG6 9AD

"THE CHURCH ON THE HILL"

PARISH MAGAZINE

November 2026 Vol. 156 No 11

St Mary's is a down-to-earth Christian Community seeking, serving and worshipping God by sharing the love of Jesus

Inclusive Church

CHURCH SERVICES & GROUPS

WEDNESDAY

Little Acorns Toddler Group 9.30am – 11am
Email Zoe Elliott at: zoejackson000@gmail.com for more information

Bellringing (Practice Night)
(all ages from 11 years, under 18s must be accompanied by an adult). 7.30pm – 9.00pm
Tel: Tower Captain, Michael Varney 07858 653002

THURSDAY

Midweek Mass
9.30am – 10.00am (Said. First Thurs of the month follows the Book of Common Prayer. Last Thursday of the month Walsingham Mass)

Care Home Service
10.00am – 11.30am at one of the local Care Homes

Bible Study/Nurture Courses
2.00pm Please contact the Vicar for more information

Pub Social
7.30pm First Thursday of the Month at the William Peveril (Wetherspoons) in Bulwell

SATURDAY

10am – 12noon Church Open for Prayer 10am – 12pm **every 2nd Saturday**
Beginning with Tierce, Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, the Rosary and the Angelus

Muddy Church
11.30am Third Saturday of the month during term time
Email Zoe Elliott at: zoejackson000@gmail.com for more information

SUNDAY – SERVICES

10am – 11am First Sunday of the Month – Family Service (and Baptisms)
10am – 11am Second Sunday of the month – Parish Mass (sung) with Whiz Kids Sunday School during Mass
10am – 11am Third Sunday of the Month – Family Service (led by our Whiz Kids Sunday School)
10am – 11am Fourth Sunday of the month - Parish Mass (sung) with Whiz Kids Sunday School during Mass
10am – 11am Fifth Sunday of the Month – Healing Service (with Anointing) with Whiz Kids Sunday School during the service
Please see notice sheets for any additional and seasonal services.

BELLRINGING
Sunday Service Ringing 9.30am – 10am. Practice Evening (Weds) 7.30pm – 9.00pm
(all ages from 11 years, under 18s must be accompanied by an adult)
Tel: Tower Captain, Michael Varney 07858 653002

SERVERS & EUCHARISTIC MINISTERS
Please contact the Vicar for more information

CHURCH CHOIR
(Ages 11 and upwards)

Your Vicar Writes

November enters quietly, almost reverently. The clocks have gone back, the evenings draw in, and the world seems to exhale into stillness. There is a particular grace to this month: a grace found in remembering, in honouring, in waiting, and in allowing ourselves to be held by God in the gentle half light of autumn.

November begins with the great feasts of All Saints and All Souls – two feasts that stand side by side like open hands. As we celebrate All Saints we lift our eyes to the countless men and women who have shone with Christ's radiance in every generation.

Their courage, their faithfulness, and their perseverance remind us that holiness is not reserved for the extraordinary, but is woven through ordinary lives lived with great love. All Souls brings us into a quieter, more intimate space. Here we speak the names of those we love but, for a little while, see no longer; we acknowledge the ache of absence and we trust that God receives our grief with tenderness. As we remember All Saints and All Souls, heaven feels very close.

Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day follow soon after and, again, we find ourselves holding together sorrow and gratitude, lament and hope. We honour those who gave their lives in the cause of peace, and we pray for all who still carry the wounds of conflict. In a world that remains troubled and restless, our commitment to peace - rooted in Christ's own self giving love - matters deeply.

Later in November we celebrate Christ the King, the final Sunday of the Church's liturgical year. It is a day that reminds us that Christ's sovereignty is not one of domination or spectacle, but of mercy, justice, and compassion. Christ's kingdom is not built by force, but by the quiet, persistent work of love.

And then, almost without fanfare, Advent arrives. A season of watching, waiting, and preparing. A season that invites us to slow down, to listen, and to make more room for God. In the midst of busy lives and crowded diaries, Advent calls us to rediscover wonder.

Throughout November, St Mary's offers spaces of remembrance, healing, celebration and hope. Whether your heart is heavy or joyful, weary or expectant, you are welcome. My prayer is that in this month - with all its shadows and with all its promises - you may know the steady, patient light of Christ guiding your steps.

Every blessing,

Fr Andrew

Dates for Your Diary

Remembering Saints & Angels — A Service for the Bereaved (with Holy Communion)
10am, Sunday 1st November, followed by a buffet lunch

This gentle and beautiful service is one of the most important of our year. We gather to remember those we love but, for a little while, see no longer: to speak their names, to honour their lives, to light candles in quiet remembrance, and to hold one another in prayer.

Whether your bereavement is recent or long standing, you are warmly invited. Grief has no timetable, and God meets us tenderly whenever we come.

Sung Evensong — Patronal Festival
6pm, Sunday 1st November, followed by Cheeses & Wine

Later that same day we gather again for a festive Evensong to celebrate our patron saint, the Blessed Virgin Mary. This is a service rich in music, prayer, and thanksgiving — a moment to rejoice in the heritage and vocation of our parish.

The Cheeses & Wine afterwards offer a chance simply to enjoy one another's company.

Remembrance Sunday
9.30am, Sunday 8th November Requiem Mass for the Fallen – followed afterwards by the Act of Remembrance 10.55am by the Parish War Memorial.

Our Remembrance Services are some of the most significant of the year. We gather to honour those who gave their lives in the cause of peace, to pray for all who still bear the wounds of conflict, and to commit ourselves afresh to the work of reconciliation.

Acts of Remembrance are never about glorifying war; they are about recognising courage, lamenting loss, and seeking God's peace in our own time. "They shall grow not old…" — words that still carry weight and tenderness.

Members of St Mary's Ministry Team will also be leading Acts of Remembrance 10.55am on Armistice Day, Wednesday 11th November outside by the parish War Memorial, at Fairway View Care Home, and at the Council House on Market Square.

Mass for Christ the King
10am, Sunday 22nd November

The final Sunday of the Church's liturgical year invites us to lift our eyes to the sovereignty of Christ — not a rule of domination, but of mercy, justice, and love. It is a day to remember that all our striving

finds its meaning in him, and that his kingdom is already breaking into our world in small, surprising ways.

Looking Ahead: Advent Begins

10am Mass for Advent Sunday 29th November

Advent arrives quietly at the end of the November, with its invitation to watch, to wait, and to hope. In the midst of our busy lives, Advent calls us to make room — for silence, for prayer, for wonder. Look out for details of our Advent and Christmas services and events in the December 'Hill' and our 'Church Near You' website.

November Reflection with Rev Bob

It is that time of year, November is a busy time for the church, memories, remembering and for some a special time. We begin November on Sunday November 1st with services in church for those who have been bereaved this year, services taken by Father Andrew and Rev. Bob to remember and comfort each other in our grief, to give thanks for lives lived and now in eternal rest. Then we have our annual Remembrance services on Sunday 8th Remembrance Sunday and on Wednesday 11th November outside church at 11.am. At the end of the month on Sunday 29th Advent Sunday the beginning of the new Christian year. As we go through the month we remember, we look forward in days which get shorter and nature is shutting down for winter, the time when we look forward to the coming of Christ at Christmas a time to remember. For some of us November is a special time when we remember times past growing up and our families who set us on our life's journey when we were born and the times of birthdays. A mixture of joy, sorrow and remembrance. Jesus reminds us that throughout our life journey he is with us and this Psalm reminds us of God's presence and our refuge in times of uncertainty.

Psalm 46

[1] God is our refuge and strength,

an ever-present help in trouble.

[2] Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way

and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,

[3] though its waters roar and foam

and the mountains quake with their surging.

[4] There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,

the holy place where the Most High dwells.
5 God is within her, she will not fall;
God will help her at break of day.
6 Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;
he lifts his voice, the earth melts.
7 The LORD Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.
8 Come and see what the LORD has done,
the desolations he has brought on the earth.
9 He makes wars cease
to the ends of the earth.
He breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields with fire.
10 He says, “Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth.”
11 The LORD Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

"These people honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me." Matthew 15:8

God makes it clear throughout human history that when we do good to others and share what we have, this pleases him (Hebrews 13:16). When we are compassionate towards others it is a reflection of God's own character and it is an expression of what it means to know him, the one who loves God, loves and cares for other people.
Care for others is a central aspect of faithfulness to Christ and has always been part of the covenant relationship for the people of God. The Pharisees on the other hand were more concerned with rules and traditions (which aren't in themselves bad) but when they prioritised these above love, mercy and faithfulness, then it became a problem!

When asked by a Pharisee lawyer what was the greatest commandment, Jesus said "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength, the second is like it: you shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the Prophets."

Like the Pharisees, do we value abstract theological debates over kind actions in daily life?
Do we obsess over complex and rigid human traditions instead of communicating the beauty and joy of the gospel to those who desperately thirst for Christ?
We must remember that like Jesus we are here to love and to serve, and it is in this way that we will reach people, and how we will honor our Father in heaven.
Ultimately, Christ desires that we experience the fullness of life through companionship with him, and also fellowship with each-other, loving God and neighbour together. But these things have more to do with internal heart transformation than mere external compliance. Let us not just honor God with our lips but with our whole heart, by loving action which is the fruits of our faith.

God bless you, Daniel Newton.

From the Parish Registers

Baptisms

4th October
Ebony Walker
Sanaz Noroozi
Ezri Dissanayakamudiyanselage

Funerals

2nd October
Ian Smith RIP (Wilford Hill Crematorium)

8th November
Christine Camps RIP

Confirmation Services 2026

Confirmation is a special service in which folk confirm the promises that been made when they were baptized. During the service the bishop lay's his hands on the candidates' heads and ask God's Holy Spirit to give them the strength and commitment to live God's way for the rest of his life. See:

https://www.churchofengland.org/life-events/confirmation

If you would like to be Confirmed please speak with Fr Andrew, Rev Bob or Zoe.

The Aumbry Lamp

The Aumbry Lamp is the 7-day candle that burns before the aumbry in the Lady Chapel, announcing the Sacramental Presence of Our Lord in the aumbry. Sponsoring the aumbry lamp is a wonderful way to show gratitude for answered prayer, or as a tangible way to extend our petitions before God. Lamp sponsorship covers the cost of a candle for one month and can be sponsored for just £10 for a month. Please speak with Fr Andrew if you would like to sponsor St Mary's aumbry lamp.

Carol and Brian Butler have kindly sponsored the Aumbry Lamp from July 2026 to August 2026. Wendy Shah has kindly sponsored the Aumbry Lamp from August 2026 to December 2026 in prayerful memory of Norah who passed away in 2024. Mavis Polkey has kindly sponsored the Aumbry Lamp for September 2026 in prayerful memory of Alan Polkey who passed away in 2019. Carol Ezard has kindly sponsored the Aumbry Lamp from October 2026 to November 2026 in prayerful memory of Audrey Walker who passed away in October 2019. Ann Hotson has kindly sponsored the Aumbry Lamp for December 2026 in prayerful memory of Ray Hotson who passed away in 2025.

Holy water in church

Congregation members have asked Fr Andrew if St Mary's has a supply of holy water for folk to use or take away. There is a stoup by the south porch entrance with which folk can cross themselves with as they enter and leave the church building, and a holy water urn folk can fill any suitable small bottles with (please bring your own bottle).

A Window of Harvest Donations from Co-op Funerals Bulwell

Thanks very much, Eleanor, Cherie and Emily!

A Notice for the Walsingham pilgrimage 2027

The 2027 Walsingham pilgrimage will be one week later than usual, it will be on the 18,19 and 20th of June. Write it in your calendar or diary and I will be asking for deposits in the new year.

Les Ward

Award ceremonies for Guides and Rangers

7th Nottingham Guides and Rangers enjoyed a Celebration Evening on Thursday 24th September.

The County Commissioner presented Evie with the Celtic Cross, which was awarded for Evie's bravery during her illness,

Erin and Fran were presented with their Guide Gold Awards. Katherine from 88th Nottingham Brownies was presented with her 5 years long service award.

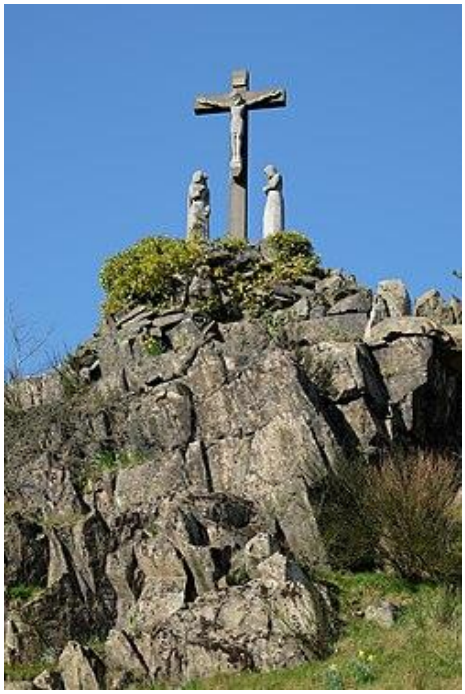
10 year long service awards were also presented to Sarah 88th Nottingham Brownies and Keia 87th Nottingham Guides.

On Sunday 11th October Eleanor attended Girlguiding Nottinghamshire County awards. This is a celebration event that members of Girlguiding celebrate long service and achievement.

At the event Eleanor was presented with her 40 years long service award.

A massive congratulations and well done to all the award winners!

Mount St. Bernard Abbey – Les Ward



The nearest working monastery to us in and around Bulwell is Mount St. Bernard. This is located near Coalville, North West Leicestershire, about a forty minute drive away.

It belongs to the Trappist order and is the only one in England. It was founded in 1835, the first after the Reformation. Land was purchased by a local landowner to establish an abbey. Part of this land was called Tynt Meadow, which now is the name of the ale brewed on site by the monks, which helps meet running costs.

A temporary monastery was built and opened in 1837. The architect was William Railton, better known for designing Nelson's Column. That had a short life because in 1844 a new permanent building

opened. The architect was Augustus Pugin, who also designed Nottingham Cathedral and the Houses of Parliament. There was much opposition from the local vicar of Whitwick, who preached and wrote prolifically against the revival of the Roman Church. The abbey was consecrated on 20th of August 1844, the feast day of St. Bernard. It was to remain unfinished for ninety years and only Pugin's nave was built due to lack of funds. However the abbey was soon attracting famous people from home and abroad. Thousands of Irish immigrants arrived from the Great Famine and were given food and lodgings. Large numbers of local people suffering from poverty came for soup, this was faith in action.

The church building was extended and was consecrated in 1945 by the R.C. Bishop of Nottingham.

Visitors can walk Calvary way up to the summit of the rock nearby, there stands Jesus on the cross, overlooking miles of beautiful countryside. Close by is a chapel that was rebuilt in this location in 1955. The chapel contains two exquisite wooden figures representing the Blessed Virgin weeping over her Divine Son who has just been taken down from the cross.

If you are able, do try and visit Mount St. Bernard, we may even have a church organised visit in 2027.

Before leaving for home, don't forget to pop into the gift shop, buy a book, rosary beads or even a bottle of their wonderful beer!

Prominent WWI Chaplains – Rev Bob

In Remembrance of those clergy who served as chaplains to the armed forces in WW1. Over 5,000 Clergy served as Chaplin’s in WW1 many were killed or wounded here are some who were more well known to the soldiers on the front. They joined up to serve God but the men they came across, to comfort those who were dying, the last rites to those who died, comfort for soldiers on leave,

- Rev. Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy ("Woodbine Willie"): An Anglican priest and poet who became legendary for handing out Woodbine cigarettes, rum, and spiritual comfort to troops on the Western Front. He wrote moving poetry about the realities of war (Rough Rhymes of a Padre) and advocated for the poor. Today cigarettes are considered health hazard in WW! They were smoked to relief the boredom and to cover the stench in the trenches, Woodbine Wille as he was known gave out woodbines and other items to help the soldiers his courage and morale booster helped many in those awful conditions and in the hospitals and comfort to those whose lives were cut short.

- Rev. Theodore Bayley Hardy VC, DSO, MC: An elderly schoolteacher and clergyman who volunteered as an army chaplain at age 52. He became the most decorated non-combatant of the First World War, winning the Victoria Cross, Distinguished Service Order, and Military Cross for repeatedly going into No Man's Land under heavy shellfire to rescue wounded soldiers. He died of his wounds in October 1918.

- Rev. Edward Noel Mellish VC, MC: A curate from London who served with the 4th Royal Fusiliers. He was awarded the Victoria Cross in 1916 for voluntarily going out into intense fire at St Eloi over three successive days to rescue wounded men.

- Father Francis P. Duffy: The famous American Catholic chaplain of the "Fighting 69th" (165th Infantry Regiment, 42nd Division). He was a towering, beloved figure who constantly worked near forward dressing stations and received the Distinguished Service Cross and the Distinguished Service Medal.

- Father William Doyle: A heroic Irish Jesuit military chaplain serving with the British 16th (Irish) Division. He was renowned for his fearless devotion to the men in the trenches before he was killed at the Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele) in 1917.

- Rev. Philip "Tubby" Clayton: An Anglican chaplain who, alongside Neville Talbot, founded Talbot House (Toc H) in Poperinghe, Belgium—a famous rest house open to all soldiers regardless of rank, which later grew into an international movement.

THE HAUNTING OF EPWORTH RECTORY

Come and experience the curious tale of one of the UK's most documented poltergeist cases involving the famous Wesley family.

SATURDAY 7TH NOVEMBER

6:30 FOR 7:00PM - 9:30PM

ST MARY THE VIRGIN AND ALL SOULS

HIGHBURY ROAD, BULWELL, NG6 9AD

£4.00 (ON THE DOOR)

REFRESHMENTS AVAILABLE

Fr Andrew's talk from the Churches Fellowship for Psychical & Fr Andrew's talk from the Churches Fellowship for Spiritual Studies Conference, 12th September

From One Place to Another – Our Journey after Death, Part 2

One of the most striking accounts from our early Christian tradition comes from St Drythelm, a Northumbrian layman of the seventh century, whose story is recorded by the Venerable Bede. Drythelm, we are told, falls gravely ill and appears to die. His family mourn him, and his wife sits beside his body in tears. But at dawn, Drythelm suddenly returns to life, sits up, and speaks with extraordinary calmness.

Drythelm describes himself as having been led by a radiant figure through realities that were neither heaven nor hell, but places of profound transition - places of purification, longing, and movement. Drythelm saw souls who were not yet in glory, but who were being drawn towards glory. He saw souls who suffered, not in despair, but in the healing fire of divine mercy. Drythelm saw souls who waited, prayed, and hoped. And Drythelm said that the realities he experienced were so vivid, so compelling, that from that moment on he lived entirely for God. He gave away all his possessions, entered a monastery, and devoted himself to a lifetime of prayer.

Bede records that Drythelm's testimony was given "for the correction of the living" - not to frighten us, but to awaken us. And Drythelm's experience affirms what the Church has always taught: that our soul's journey after death is dynamic, purposeful, and suffused with God's mercy.

Drythelm's vision is not a medieval curiosity; it is a reminder that the boundary between this world and the next is thinner than we imagine, and that any souls who linger do so within the embrace of God's love.

I spoke with a widow once, who told me that for several nights following her husband's death, she felt her husband's presence - not in a frightening way, but in a way that brought her comfort. "It was as though he was still praying for me," she said. "And then one night, it stopped. I think that he had moved on." The widow's words carried no fear, no superstition, no sense of haunting. They carried love. They carried longing. They carried the quiet intuition that her husband's soul was still in motion, still journeying, still responding to God's call.

This widow's experience aligns with the ancient Christian understanding that, after death, our souls continue to love, continue to pray, and continue to move on. The Early Church prayed for the departed not because they were lost, but because love continues to bind us. Our soul's journey is dynamic, relational, and responsive to the prayers of the living. The bonds of affection do not dissolve at death; they are transfigured. They become part of our soul's movement toward God.

This intermediate state, then, is not purgatory in the medieval sense, nor is it a shadowy underworld. It is a realm of divine mercy, where our souls are held, healed, and guided. Our souls here are not yet what they will be - but they are on their way to becoming that. The intermediate state is a place of transition, of awakening, of purification and of deepening love. It is a place where God's mercy is experienced not as judgement but as healing fire, gentle illumination, as all that burdens us is gradually released.

Mystical theology often speaks of 'liminality'- the threshold between one reality and another. Death is our ultimate liminal moment. At death, our souls stand between two worlds, perceiving both the earthly and the heavenly. The Celtic Christian tradition speaks of "thin places," where the veil between the physical and the spiritual is particularly permeable. And death is the thinnest place of all. It is the moment when our souls begin to see with clarity, when earthly distractions fall away, and when divine realities draw nearer.

Our souls, newly freed from our bodies, begin to perceive divine realities with greater clarity. Our souls are drawn towards God, yet they are still connected to the world we have left behind. This tension between longing and release shapes the early stages of our soul's journey. And within this intermediate state, Church tradition and pastoral experience recognise that some souls linger. Some souls, it seems, do not immediately enter the fullness of God's near presence. This, again, is not a punishment; it is simply a reality of our human complexity.

Some souls linger because of unfinished love. A mother who died suddenly may linger near her children out of longing or concern. A lost child may similarly linger near his or her mother. A spouse may remain close to the one they left behind. Love, even in death, can be a tether. It is not a chain, or a trap, but a gentle pull - a desire to reassure, to comfort, to remain present until the living are ready to let go.

I was asked some time ago to visit a family who insisted that they could hear their father's footsteps in the house for several days after his death. Not in a frightening way, but in a familiar, comforting rhythm. They said to me, "It's Dad checking in on us, like he always did." Eventually, the footsteps ceased. The family's grief began to settle, prayers were offered, and their father's soul, it seemed, released its hold. The footsteps were not a haunting; they were a farewell.

Other souls linger because of unresolved wounds. Trauma, sudden death, or fear can disorientate our souls. A person may not yet recognise that they have died, or they may struggle to release earthly pain.

A colleague once told me of a young man who had died in a violent accident. For weeks afterwards, the man's family felt a restless presence in the house - doors opening, lights flickering on and off. When my colleague and the young man's family finally gathered to

pray for the young man, they acknowledged the trauma of his death and commended him to God, and the disturbances stopped. It was as though the young man's soul needed help recognising the way to his heavenly home.

Some souls may be held back by their attachment to earthly life. These attachments might be possessions, or status, unresolved conflicts, or deep emotional entanglements. A parishioner once told me that, following the death of her father, she felt compelled to visit his office - a place that he had poured his life into. She said that she felt her father's presence there; not in a frightening way, but in a way that suggested he was reluctant to leave the work that had defined him. And after the family and I gathered to bless the office and pray for him, the sense of presence faded. It was as though the man needed permission to let go.

There may also be souls who experience spiritual confusion. These souls may never have been taught to hope. They may fear judgement or feel unworthy of God's love. A soul that has lived without faith might not know how to turn towards God. We might recall the two criminals crucified beside Jesus. One criminal derides Jesus. The other turns toward Jesus in hope, and Jesus says, "Today you will be with me in Paradise." That single moment of turning - that single moment of trust - is enough to draw a soul into divine mercy.

And there may be souls who, in their freedom, choose to resist God's grace. These souls cling to anger, bitterness or self-condemnation. God, who is love, never forces our will. Our soul's journey to God always requires our consent. Even in death, the human soul retains its freedom; a freedom that God honours with infinite patience.

In all of these cases, our souls are not lost. They are simply not yet ready. They are held in God's mercy. They are gently invited to release what binds them, and they are gently encouraged to turn towards the God who waits with love.

It’s important to say that souls who linger are not ghosts in a sensational or cinematic sense. Christian tradition describes lingering souls as conscious but incomplete, present but not embodied, longing but not yet fulfilled. These souls remain within the sphere of God’s mercy; they are not outside of the divine reach. They are simply in a state of delay, held between earthly and heavenly realities.

A parishioner once told me, “I don’t think that Mum was haunting us. I think she was waiting for us to be ready.” And that distinction matters. Such experiences are not about fear; they are about love, grief, and the slow but sure work of letting go. They are about the tenderness of human relationships and the patience of God.

St Mary the Virgin & All Souls

Church Open for Morning Prayer
Every second Saturday of the month
10am until 12pm

10:00 Divine Office
10:30-11:00 Adoration in our Lady Chapel
11:00 Holy Rosary
12:00 The Angelus

All are welcome

Highbury Road, Bulwell NG6 9AD

Is Baptism by Immersion Anglican?

October 15, 2026 by the Revd. Ian Paul

Why was a faculty application for a portable baptismal pool in a church in Southwell and Nottingham rejected? What does that tell us about processes in the Church of England—and are they fit for purpose?

It is not often that a consistory court judgment makes the national press, and when it does it is usually because of a disputed churchyard memorial or a row about a nightclub partnership. So it was something of a surprise to see headlines last month announcing that a judge had thrown out a church's plans for a 'baptism pool' because it would be a 'needless waste of water'. It was doubling surprising for me, since this was in my own diocese (Southwell and Nottingham).

The headlines were, as usual, misleading. The water point was explicitly not the basis of the decision, as Law & Religion UK quickly pointed out. But the actual reasons for the decision are in some ways more striking than the press reports, and they deserve closer attention than they have so far received. (I suspect that the press picked up on the 'water' comment since they found the rest of the argument too obscure to make sense of...)

The case is Re St Mary, Radcliffe-on-Trent [2026] ECC S&N 1, decided by Mark Ockelton (also known as Christopher), Chancellor of the Diocese of Southwell and Nottingham, and dated 24 August. In refusing a faculty for a portable immersion baptistery, the chancellor concluded that the claimed need for baptism by immersion 'has no theological basis' (para 16), and that in the Church of England there is 'never any need' for immersion where another lawful mode is available.

It is worth considering this judgment seriously, because it is, in some respects, learned, carefully argued and clearly written. The

chancellor has done real work here, including in the Greek and the Latin. But I think it is mistaken at several key points—historically, liturgically, theologically and (I suspect) legally. And since it is the only recent reasoned judgment on the question, it is likely to be cited well beyond the borders of our diocese. That matters for every parish that is seeing adults come to faith and asking to be baptised in a way that expresses what is happening to them.

What the parish asked for

The request itself was modest. St Mary's is a Grade II listed parish church with a traditional font. The vicar and churchwardens asked for permission to buy and store a portable baptistery—six timber sections that bolt together into an oval pool, with a waterproof liner, holding up to 940 litres. It would be set up in the chancel for 'single baptism services', drained afterwards, and stored out of sight in an unused vestry. The Diocesan Advisory Committee recommended approval.

The reason was simple and, I suspect, familiar to many readers of this blog. A small but growing number of adults have been coming to faith, many through Alpha, and others who were never baptised as infants. When they ask for baptism, they ask to be immersed. The parish described these requests as 'universal', and had been borrowing pools from other churches to meet them. Buying their own seemed the sensible next step.

The chancellor accepted at the outset that the pool would cause no harm to the building's significance. That is usually what faculty cases turn on. But he held that this was not the real question. The fittings and usages of a church must promote, and not counteract, the doctrine of the Church, so the question was whether using the pool would be appropriate. And that, he said, was 'a question sounding principally in the theological and liturgical understanding of the rite of baptism'.

He returned the petition to the parish once, drawing their attention to the House of Bishops' Guidance on Fonts from 1992. The vicar and curate replied with what he graciously called a full and thoughtful response. But the faculty was refused.

The chancellor's reasoning

The argument runs in four steps.

First, history. The chancellor notes that βαπτίζω in the New Testament implies submersion, but that the Latin Fathers used tingo, which can mean anything from wetting to dipping. He cites Didache 7 as permitting baptism in running water, still water, or by pouring three times on the head. He points to the palindrome attributed to Gregory of Nazianzus, νίψον ἀνομήματα μὴ μόναν ὄψιν ('wash the sins, not just the face'), found on a number of fonts. He observes that most medieval fonts could not immerse an adult. And he offers a careful reading of the 1134 Council of Ravenna, which prescribed baptism by triple aspersion or immersion, as a restatement of existing practice rather than an innovation. The Book of Common Prayer's rite for those 'of riper years' then confirms the position: the priest shall 'dip him in the water, or pour water upon him'.

From this he concludes that the parish's claimed necessity has no theological basis. If there is a pastoral need, it is for teaching that the mode makes no difference. And, in what is probably the most quoted line, the doctrine and practice of the Church 'is not determined by those about to join it'.

Secondly, he accepts without hesitation that immersion is lawful. It is part of the tradition and allowed by the formularies. So the question becomes whether a parish should offer candidates a choice.

Thirdly, he answers that question from the 1992 Guidance, which he treats as authoritative even though it is not formally law. The Guidance holds that there should be one font in a church, that a

second is ‘an anomaly’, and that multiple fonts risk suggesting different kinds of baptism. He concludes that the sacramental reception of grace should not become ‘akin to the consumer choices available in worldly life’.

Fourthly, and explicitly as an aside, there is the water. A 940-litre pool uses perhaps ten times a domestic bath, and thousands of times more than a font. Even if doctrine and law had favoured the parish, he says, the court might have declined to endorse such waste.

Where the reasoning goes wrong

‘Need’ is not ‘necessity’

The first problem is a straw man. No one at Radcliffe claimed that baptism by pouring is invalid. The parish’s ‘need’ was pastoral and missional; adult converts were asking for something the Church’s own liturgy allows. The chancellor tested that need against a standard of sacramental validity it never claimed to meet, and found it wanting. But once you concede, as he rightly does, that immersion is lawful and part of the tradition, ‘nobody needs it’ is simply not a reason to refuse it.

The Didache says the opposite

The historical argument is weaker than it looks. Didache 7 does not set out three equal options. It sets out an order of preference: baptise in living (running) water; if you have none, in other water; if not cold, then warm; and only if you have neither, pour water three times on the head. Here is the Greek text:

1. Περὶ δὲ τοῦ βαπτίσματος, οὕτω βαπτίσατε· ταῦτα πάντα προειπόντες, βαπτίσατε εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος ἐν ὕδατι ζῶντι. 2. ἐὰν δὲ μὴ ἔχῃς ὕδωρ ζῶν, εἰς ἄλλο ὕδωρ βάπτισον· εἰ δ’ οὐ δύνασαι ἐν ψυχρῷ, ἐν θερμῷ. 3. ἐὰν δὲ ἀμφότερα μὴ ἔχῃς, ἔκχεον εἰς τὴν κεφαλὴν τρὶς ὕδωρ εἰς ὄνομα πατρὸς καὶ υἱοῦ καὶ ἁγίου πνεύματος. 4. πρὸ δὲ τοῦ βαπτίσμος

προνηστευσάτω ὁ βαπτίζων καὶ ὁ βαπτιζόμενος καὶ εἴ τινες ἄλλοι δύναται· κελεύεις δὲ νηστεῦσαι τὸν βαπτιζόμενον πρὸ μιᾶς ἢ δύο.

Note the pun in Greek (also present in the New Testament) expressed in the metaphor for what we call ‘running water.’ It is ‘living water’, meaning that it moves rather than still. There are two metaphors that are at work here: the first, that water which moves is in some sense alive; and that such water brings life. New Testament theology of water baptism bringing the life of the Spirit to those who are born again leans heavily on this.

So this is evidence that immersion was the norm and pouring a concession, which is close to the opposite of what the judgment draws from it. We have not long returned from leading a study trip to Turkey, and on multiple occasions we can across examples of cruciform baptismal fonts demonstrating the widespread and normative practice of immersion. Many had their own baptistry in order to allow for the large numbers coming forwards for immersion.

The other evidence is either late or beside the point. Latin tingo tells us about translation, not apostolic practice. Depictions of Christ standing in the Jordan come from the third and fourth centuries. Medieval fonts date from long after infant baptism had become the norm—and what the judge completely misses is that such fonts are the size of baby baths, since immersion remained the norm even for infants!

The Gregory palindrome is a moral contrast between sins and face, not a liturgical rubric—in fact, the use of the word ‘face’ (rather than any other part of the body) arises from the need to make the palindrome work. Meanwhile the large early baptisteries, including those at Ravenna itself, go unmentioned, as does the broad scholarly consensus (Everett Ferguson’s monumental study is a good place to start) that immersion was normative in the early Church.

The moral of the story is this: it is great to do your homework, and consider the history. But if you are going to do so, then you need to get it right.

Sprinkling is not in the Prayer Book

Here is the curious thing. The chancellor's conclusion is that aspersion or affusion is the Church's settled practice. But the Book of Common Prayer never mentions sprinkling. For infants, the default is that the priest 'shall dip it in the water discreetly and warily', with pouring permitted only if the child is weak. For adults, dipping comes first. Even the 1992 Guidance describes aspersion as a post-Reformation fashion of northern climes! The judgment imports sprinkling from a twelfth-century Western canon into the Church of England, against the plain wording of our own formularies.

Validity is not the whole story

Most significantly, the judgment collapses the question of what baptism does into the question of what is valid. Of course baptism is 'of equal effect however administered'. But sacraments are signs, as Articles 25 and 27 insist, and the sign matters. Paul's language in Romans 6.3–4 of being 'buried with him by baptism into death' is not easily illustrated by a few drops on the forehead. The ecumenical consensus of Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (1982) recognised this, as has Roman Catholic practice for adults since Vatican II. And so did the 1992 Guidance itself, which conceded that immersion reflects Romans 6 'most completely', called for 'lavish symbolism', and (irony alert!) looked forward to large fonts suitable for immersion as 'the coming norm'.

2.6.5 The thrust of this paper is to point to a large, single font in which baptism can be administered in the three ways indicated previously. This we impenitently regard as the coming norm. However, churches have their own momentum, both in terms of developing liturgical practice, and in ways in which their liturgical furniture is adapted to changing pastoral needs. In the immediate future, we hope that

sufficient fonts of this style can be encouraged in key parishes (and all cathedrals?) throughout the dioceses.

In other words, the Guidance was pushing towards more water, not less. It is odd to see it used to defend the minimal sign it was hoping to move beyond.

The liturgy leaves it to the minister

Finally, there is a legal question. The Prayer Book leaves dipping or pouring to the minister's discretion, and Common Worship Christian Initiation, the Church's current authorised rite, does the same while encouraging a generous use of water. As far as I can see the judgment never mentions Common Worship at all. Refusing the only practical means of immersion in effect removes a lawful liturgical option through the back door of a furnishings decision. That is not what the faculty jurisdiction is for.

Consumers or converts?

The rhetoric of 'consumer choice' is, I think, the least persuasive part of the judgment. Adults who have just come to faith, been taught Romans 6 on an Alpha course, and want their baptism to look like dying and rising with Christ are not shopping. Many will have friends or family in Baptist or Pentecostal churches, where immersion is simply what baptism looks like. Their request is a sign of catechesis working, not failing. Ironically, the judge sees the need here for teaching about different forms of administration of the water within Anglican discussion—whilst ignoring both the need and the actuality of teaching about the meaning of baptism itself.

The judgment also passes over the rationale of Canon B21, which it quotes at the outset: baptism takes place in public worship so that the congregation may witness it and be reminded of their own baptism. It is hard to think of anything that does that more powerfully than an adult going down into the water in front of the whole church.

There is a wider problem too. The judgment raises the question of whether it is even lawful to use borrowed pools, and dismisses a photograph of a former Archbishop of York with one. Yet bishops and parishes across the Church of England regularly baptise in portable pools, rivers and the sea. To cast doubt on all of that, on the papers, without a hearing, without submissions on the chancellor's own historical research, and without input from the bishop, is a great deal of weight for a single parish petition to bear. The 1992 Guidance itself suggested that such questions might need episcopal direction.

And what about the water? It would drain onto the churchyard, not into the sewer; one fill can serve several candidates; and the parish was already borrowing pools. If we are going to start auditing the environmental cost of our worship, I suspect the heating bill will come some way ahead of the occasional baptistery.

Conclusion

The chancellor is right that there is one baptism, and right that pouring is fully valid. But the Church of England has never been indifferent to the fullness of the sign, and our own Prayer Book puts dipping (immersion) first. More than that, Church of England doctrine is always self-effacing, in that it claims merely to be an expression of biblical teaching. It therefore encourages us to return ad fontes (pun intended!) and look to the biblical practice and teaching on the meaning of baptism, which unequivocally requires immersion.

As Tim Wyatt notes in his discussion of the case:

Our tradition of a gentle sprinkle clearly doesn't meet the cultural moment. There may not be a measurable Quiet Revival, but what is clear is that adults are anecdotally coming forward in growing numbers to be received into the church. Men and women who have felt the urge to grab a Bible or visit a church and have unexpectedly met the risen Jesus. And if the national church cannot rise to this occasion and offer the full-bodied whole-hearted form of baptism today's converts are earnestly seeking, it will get left behind.

The question facing parishes is not whether immersion is necessary, but whether, when new believers ask to be buried and raised with Christ in the most vivid way our liturgy allows, we should say yes. I think we should—and I hope this judgment is not the last word on the matter.

That in turn raises two further question. Given the poor basis of this judgment, how might it easily be reversed? And then the wider question: why are we encumbered by legal processes which do not support the mission and ministry of the Church?

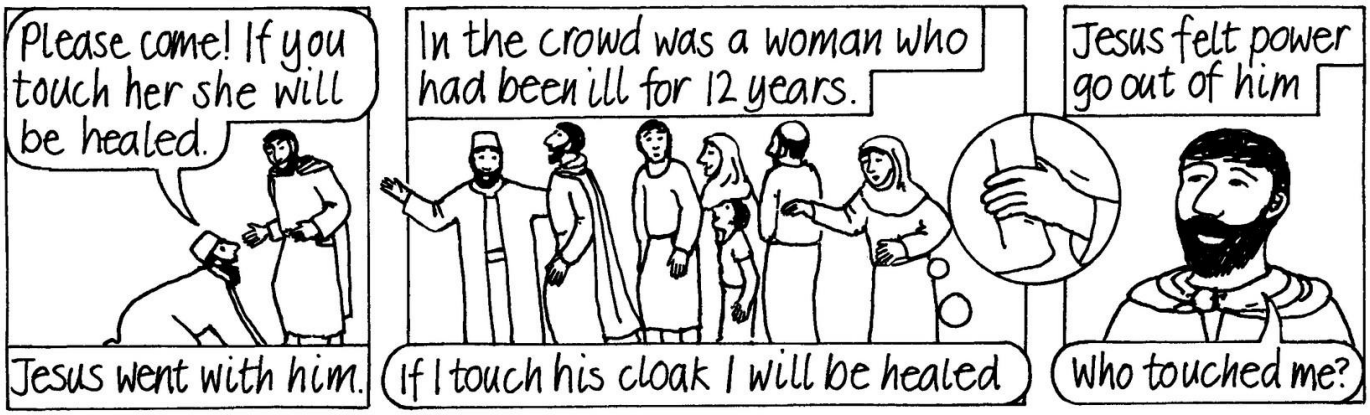
Article originally published on https://www.psephizo.com/life-ministry/is-baptism-by-immersion-anglican/

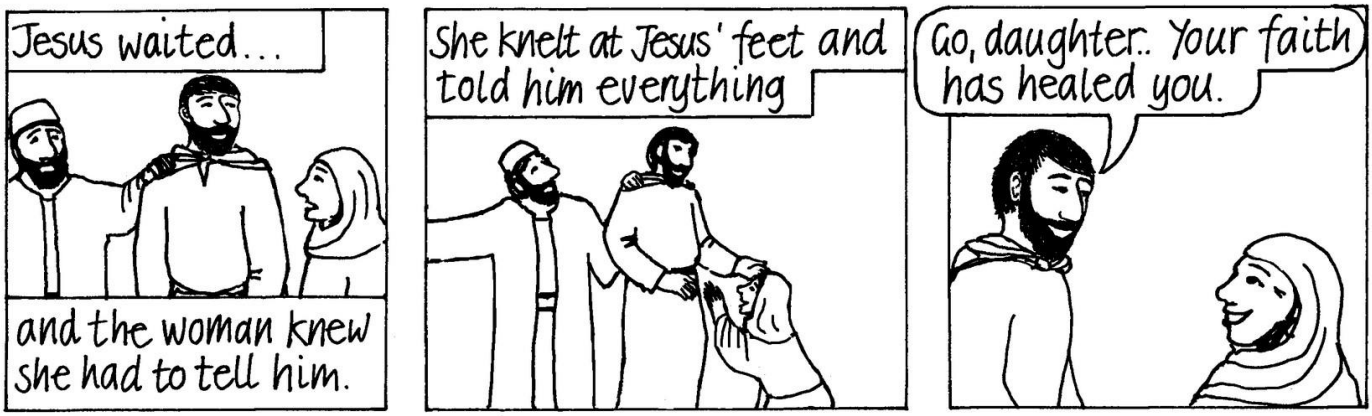
Bible Bite

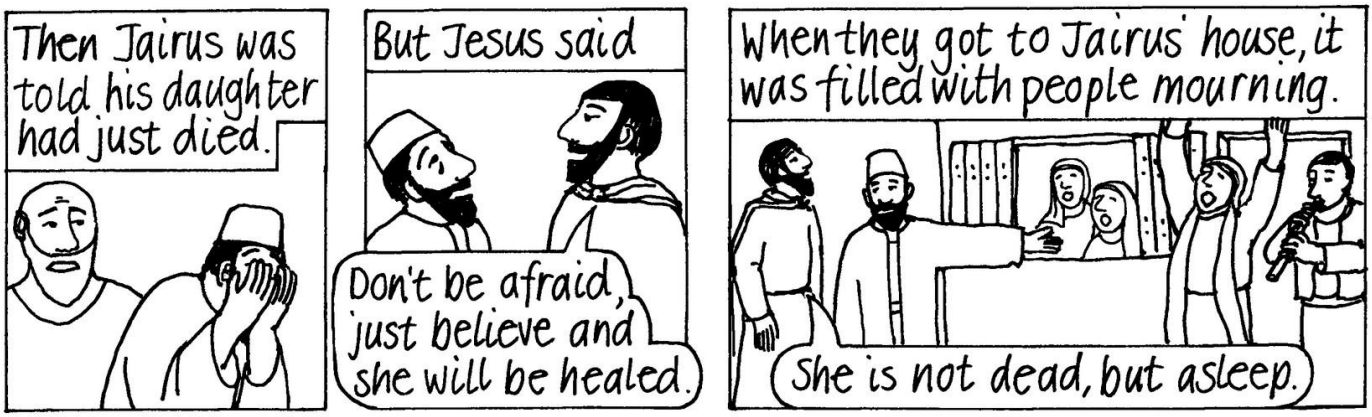
A short story from the Bible

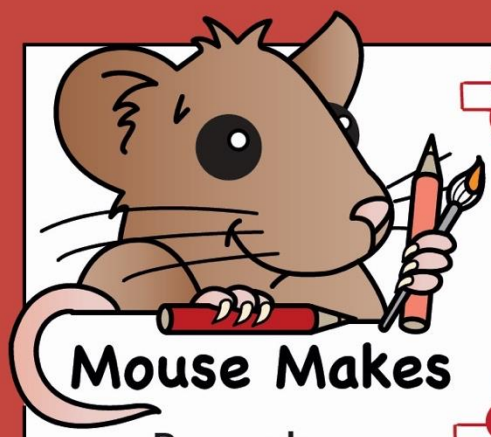
It can be read in the Bible in Lk 8:40-56, Mt 9:18-26, Mk 5:21-43

Jairus, a town leader, had a 12 year old daughter who was ill and about to die. He came to Jesus and knelt at his feet...









Mouse Makes

Remembrance Sunday is the day we remember the sacrifice of those who gave their lives so that we could live in peace, it mirrors what Christ did for us when he gave his life so that we could live in peace with God.

Remember
the words Jesus said:
"It is more blessed to give than to receive."
Colossians 3:25

Jesus said:
"No one can have greater love than to give his life for his friends."
John 15:13

O P R O T E C T
S R E S P E C T U N
B R A V E R Y H E F
E S E C O L O Y A L H T C
I R E M E M B R A N C E R O
M E L E B K O R I M
K G F M Y F U O B M
V A L O U R I U R I U E
R R E R K N F O V L A S T N
I D S I H O N O U R G M E D
G S A C R I F I C E L V
L U S E R V I C E
D A R M I S T I C E
E D E F E N D N

REMEMBRANCE • PROTECT • DEFEND • SACRIFICE • SELFLESS • SERVICE
BRAVERY • VALOUR • HONOUR • COURAGE • HEROISM • LOYAL • REGARD
RESPECT • THANKFUL • MEMORIAL • TRIBUTE • COMMEND • ARMISTICE • PEACE

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ORGANISATIONS & ACTIVITIES

Some meetings are term-time only – please check with organisers. Meetings are held at St Mary's church unless otherwise stated.

SUNDAY

Choir Practice — Warm up 9.00am Rehearsal after service 11.30 – noon Please contact the Organist: 07799 331271

Farnaby & Co (First & Third in month) — 7.15pm to 9.25pm

MONDAY

48th Nottingham Beavers — (boys & girls, 6-8 years) 6.15pm – 7.15pm
Tel: 0115 877 6569 or 07976 300013

TUESDAY

87th Nottingham Brownies — (7-10 years) 6.15pm – 7.30pm
Tel: 07596 758440

WEDNESDAY

Bestwood & Bulwell Foodbank — 1.00 – 3.00pm Tel: 07527048226
Email: info@bestwoodbulwell.foodbank.org.uk

Polish Speaking Al- Group - Spokoj — 6.15pm – 8.15pm

Bellringing (Practice Night) — 7.30pm – 9pm. All ages from 11 years.
Under 18s must be accompanied by an adult.
Tel: 07858653002

THURSDAY

88th Nottingham Brownies — (7-10 years) 6.00pm – 7.30pm Tel: 07817 3786543

87th Nottingham Guides — (10-15 years) 7.00pm – 9.00pm Tel: 07793 823440

Rangers — (age 14+) 7.00pm – 9.00pm Tel: 07786 226663

Pub Social — First Thursday of the Month at the William Peveril (Wetherspoons) in Bulwell.

FRIDAY

Rainbows — 5.15pm – 6.15pm Tel: 07812 160455

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