

Sydenham Life

February 2026

In and around the parish of St Bartholomew

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Why do I read the Bible?

As a boy I was taught to read the Bible, and I still do. I'm not alone. At least portions of it have been translated into almost half the world's 7,400 known languages. But why is it so popular? I have no training in theology, so I can only write about how the Bible strikes me as I read it.

My Bible, like most, is one book. But at a glance it's clear it's a whole library of books. Mine contains 66. I find history, law, poetry, hymns, prophecy, advice for living, and letters, all of varying lengths. This collection divides into two. The birth of Jesus Christ is the dividing line. The Old Testament, of 39 books, dates from before his birth. The other 27, the New Testament, were written after his death.

How Old is the Bible?

The Bible was not written originally in English. It's a mix of different languages including Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek. A 1611 translation into English, known as the King James Version (KJV) or Authorised Version (AV), still has a wide following.

It has had a huge impact on shaping the English language and British culture. There are now several more modern translations. I use the English Standard Version (ESV). This was recommended to me by a former curate at St Bartholomew's.

The writings are clearly ancient. The events described in the first ten chapters of Genesis, the first of the biblical books, are lost in the mists of time and depend on oral tradition. Historical material first appears from the time of Abraham (ca. 2000 BC) and stretches down to the first century AD. Several of the happenings are known from secular records and many of the places mentioned can be visited today. We are reading a theological history of God's dealings with humanity, written two to three thousand years ago over several centuries, and without the approach of a modern historian. As I read I detect a myriad of voices. Some books contain edited material from other sources. Some dates are quoted to a specific day. New Testament events, although two thousand years old, can usually be dated to a decade.

How was the Bible Written?

The Old Testament books were written originally on scrolls made from animal skins. Once a scroll had reached the end of its useful life, it was copied and the original destroyed. In 1953 a remarkable discovery in caves near the Dead Sea saw the finding of scrolls of the Old Testament penned in the first and second centuries BC.

The Dead Sea Scrolls show that often several identical copies of some writings existed. We gain the picture of the more popular and useful scrolls being brought together by Jewish scribes to form a collection of writings that were generally accepted to be divinely inspired. These eventually developed into the Jewish scriptures. This discovery showed that both ancient scrolls and modern texts have an amazing similarity. For this, both Jews and Christians owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the Jewish copyists over the centuries.

Christians then started writing about the life and sayings of Jesus. The gospel writer, Luke, tells that there were many such accounts in place. Here again, the most useful and generally approved were formed into the New Testament.

Gradually Christians developed the codex (book instead of scroll form) as being the most convenient way of disseminating both the Jewish Scriptures and the Christian New Testament. This resulted in the Bible we have today. So what do I make of this diverse collection of writings? Is there a common theme that unites them all? I find several, but there is one that is paramount.

The Impact of the Bible Today

My father was a jeweller. Sometimes he brought home diamonds carefully folded in squares of paper. To me they looked like rather dull pieces of glass. He explained that they could be analysed dispassionately by assessing their clarity, weight, cut and purity. But when a beam of sunlight struck their facets they came alive and shone with dazzling brilliance.

To me the Bible is similar. I can think about how it came about rather as I have above. But when, like a ray of sunshine, the Holy Spirit illumines its words it becomes

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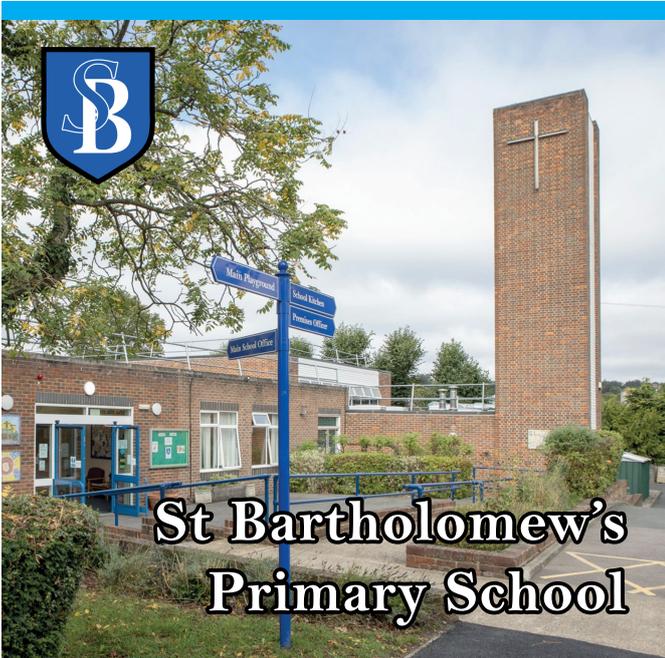
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From the Editor

I travelled home on the London Overground on 16 January 2026 about 9:30, it could be earlier or later. The train on the Windrush Line from Canada Water was not particularly full. I sat next to an elegantly dressed lady. She got up just before Sydenham station, where she prepared for exit, adjusting her black, layered, well-cut overcoat from her time of sitting. In addition, she wore ankle length Wellington boots. Beside her on the carriage floor was a large, yellow, rectangular shiny bag with Selfridges emblazoned on the side in large, capitalised lettering. She also had a large, black tote bag with the Times and Sunday Times logo in white on the side. I got up as this was my stop as well and stood by the door as I did not want to step out in front of her, others had the same thought. A tall gentleman who appeared like an older Peter O'Toole with a lived-in, craggy face gave a rather theatrical bow and allowed the stylish lady off first.

I thought the gentleman's actions were well intentioned and charming, and received by the stylish lady with good grace as she responded with a smile. He could have been her father or possibly grandfather. He would have come from a generation of individuals who dressed well, no matter where in society they came from. Men and women thought to look good was to feel good. Whenever Windrush pictures are shown in the media, the gentlemen from the Caribbean always looked smart in their suits, ties and trilbies, and the ladies looked smart with their well-designed frocks in the best materials.

I witnessed this first hand when I was recently in Barbados and attended a cousin's wedding. I accompanied my mother (who is in her eighties and had a smart maroon dress) as she sought out silver shoes to go with the dress, plus a silver bag and silver costume jewellery to set it all off. I thought I would mention to two fellow church members about the idea that I was developing for this month's article. I was going to write a sanitised version but they said go bold. In fact, both members became conscious of what they were wearing and one opened the top button of their coat showing she was wearing a pink Jaeger jacket.

Geoffrey Cave, Sydenham Life Editor

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alive to the soul. I see one theme that is supreme, and that is the person of Jesus Christ. With the eye of faith he resonates through the Bible's pages, dimly at first in the Old Testament through metaphor and analogy, but with increasing clarity, until he appears in the New Testament as the very revelation of God. He is described there as the creator of the universe. He calls himself 'the light of the world' and 'the bread of life'. Evoking the 23rd Psalm he claims he is 'the good shepherd'. Others in his lifetime called him 'one who eats with sinners'. A good shepherd who eats with sinners? Now with that I can identify. He restores my soul. That is why I read the Bible.

Stuart Forbes

Send in your Sydenham Life contributions by the first day of each month

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Paella Valenciana

As with so many ancient Spanish dishes and customs, Paella Valenciana (the most authentic form of the dish) goes back to Moorish times; there's little agreement on its origin – nor on the derivation of the name. What is certain is that the inhabitants of Valencia, that vibrant Mediterranean city on the east coast of Spain, consider it their own, and all other versions of paella a poor imitation.

A *paella* is a pan, from the Valencian/Catalan word which comes from the French *paelle*, which in turn comes from the Latin *patella*, a small dish or plate, akin in turn to the Old Spanish *padilla*, a frying pan, a dish or an oven (it's also a Spanish surname). Years ago, I was told in Valencia that none of that is right: paella comes from the Arabic *bakaia* meaning 'leftovers'. Though purists dislike it, the word *paellera* for the shallow, two-handled steel pan, is approved by the Real Academia Española, the official guardian of the Spanish language.

Paella Valenciana is made with chicken, pork ribs, rabbit, *caracoles* (snails), artichokes, butter beans and French beans, and Valencia rice; it's often spiced with paprika, saffron and rosemary. Most home cooks will leave out the snails and rabbit. The rice, like wine, ham and many other foods, has its own appellation or *denominacion de origin*, DO Arroz de Valencia. It's a short-grain rice, first grown in the wetlands southwest of the city by the Moors in the seventh century. It's only this *bomba* rice that will caramelize in the bottom of the pan and form the fragrant, gooey crust, called *socarrat*, that is the most prized part of the dish.

Inclusion of other ingredients such *chorizo* or *mariscos* (seafood) is allowed but then it's no longer a Paella Valenciana. Spanish cooks will pick and choose ingredients; chicken is regarded as essential, pork ribs important and the other meats optional.

Some of the most delicious paellas I've had have been cooked over an open fire – woodsmoke adds a wonderful flavour to the rice. If you can't do that, make sure you use your biggest gas ring to ensure even heat. I don't think you can make paella on an electric stove, though I haven't tried.

Paella is an everyday and also a celebratory dish and is often served over Christmas. Then again, *Valencianos* expect to eat one several times a week in any season; they become irritable if they go more than a few days without.

Ingredients

- Four or five chicken pieces in big chunks, skin on
- Four or five pork ribs
- Rabbit pieces (optional)
- Olive oil
- Artichoke hearts
- Tin of butter beans
- French beans, fresh or frozen
- Garlic
- Tin of tomatoes
- Paprika
- 10 strands of saffron
- Fresh rosemary
- 500g Valencia rice (it may be called "paella rice" in the supermarket)



Pablo Neustadt _ @ICEX

Equipment

Heavy-bottomed two-handled steel paella pan – mine is a 12" one which is good for four to six people.

Method

Heat the oil in the pan and brown the meat for about 15 minutes. Let it stick to the bottom to caramelize it.

Push the meat to the sides and add the green beans to the middle. Sauté for five minutes and add the garlic, cook for five minutes, then add the butter beans and the artichoke hearts.

Add the paprika and rosemary, sauté.

Add the tomatoes and mix all together. The tomato will deglaze the caramelized meat from the bottom of the pan.

Infuse the saffron in a few tablespoons of boiling water for 5 minutes.

Add enough water to *just* cover everything in the pan. Bring to the boil and simmer for 20 minutes, adding more water as necessary.

Making sure the water level is the same as before – just covering the ingredients – add the rice evenly over the whole pan.

Without stirring the rice (this is essential) cook on medium heat for about 10 minutes then low heat for another 10, until all the water is absorbed.

As the *socarrat* forms you'll hear a crackling sound – turn the heat up high for 30 seconds to seal in the flavours.

Rest the paella for 5 minutes covered in a tea towel.

Serve in the middle of the table, everyone scraping the bottom of the pan to reach the *socarrat*.

Wine

There are so many flavours in paella that any bright, fruity red or a flavourful white will go well. Of course it should be Spanish, but Italian reds, or Beaujolais will be fine. If you're sticking to Spanish, go for Rioja, or for white, an Albariño from Galicia. I want to put in word for the excellent Kenrick's Wine just outside Sydenham station – he's pricier than the supermarkets but he has a superb selection off slightly off-the-radar wines from all over the world – and some great beers too.

Waitrose Blueprint Old Vine Garnacha, Cariñena, Spain

Garnacha (Grenache in France) is sometimes known as "poor man's Pinot" because its perfumed aromas are reminiscent of Pinot Noir. This fresh, cherry-bright, nicely-textured example is from Cariñena in the north. I've recommended it before so worth checking it out.
Waitrose £7.25

M&S Organic Monastrell, Yecla, Spain

From Yecla in Murcia, south of Valencia and inland from Alicante, this is a classic delicate, intense red with lifted

cherry fruit and fine acidity. Monastrell is the ancient grape of this desert-like region, where days are roasting and nights chilly. Delicious with paella
M&S £7.00

Laurent Miquel Albariño, Languedoc-Roussillon France

I really shouldn't be recommending a French Albariño as this gorgeous aromatic, mineraly grape's homeland is Galicia in north-west Spain. But this is a delicious example and powerful enough to go with all the robust flavours a paella throws at you.
Sainsbury's £12.75

Vent del Mar Organic Garnacha Blanca, Catalonia, Spain

Another from the north, this a ripe and zesty white with enough texture and body weight to cope with the strong flavours of the meat and the crunchy savouriness of the rice and *socarrat*
Majestic £11.99/£7.75 mix six

Adam Lechmere

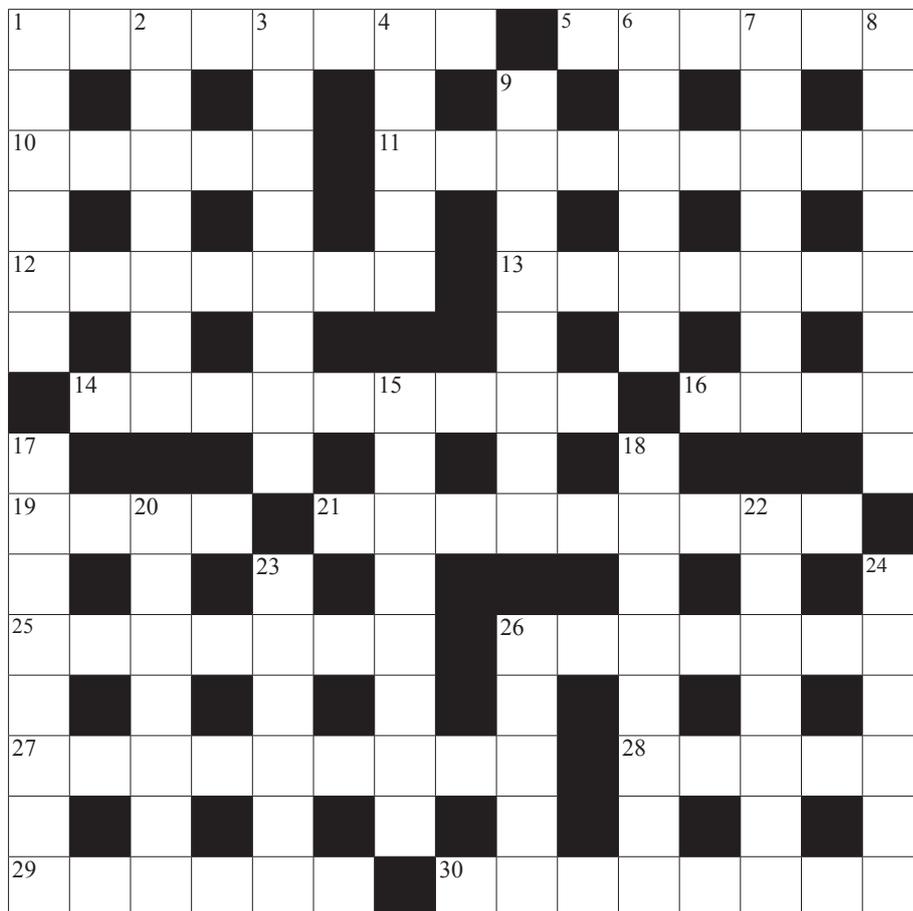
February – Mthr Bea

Across

1. Bond spotted a tool (8)
5. Some biblical literature for Norman, say (6)
10. Alternative title for Bea when not saying mass (5)
11. A slithery rogue in Barnet (9)
12. Green, Beryl: Disorganised dreamer, mistaking left for right (7)
13. Crap! Age is a prison (7)
14. Practice! Try again, Salvador! (9)
16. American vessel boarded by eastern operations (4)
19. Cover and return milk (4)
21. We hear the full total is good (9)
25. Ignore odd parts, or be aghast at a race rally (7)
26. Unusual scenic point provides chemistry, perhaps? (7)
27. Listener upset by second fights again (9)
28. Relative would be pleasant without drug (5)
29. Puerile mistake takes over youth at first (6)
30. Feel heat? Swap caps and it converts energy (4,4)

Down

1. A long drink is trendier (6)
2. A replay accepted by the sportsman (7)
3. Irrelevant bishop ate dessert first, it's told (8)
4. A greek character, dead, found eating leaves (5)



6. Crazy Parisian swimmer on the radio (6)
7. Aridity might make a monster homeless? (7)
8. Humility shown by Ken seems out of place (8)
9. Orchard jackpot? (8)
15. Practise on a dead man's ride (8)
17. Adam had one bit of pork (5,3)
18. Appointed as token journalist (8)
20. Very sudden attack of shivering left swiftly at last, pretty much (7)
22. Nelson's ship with dodgy lead underneath (7)
23. Old at heart american supports pen for ancient writer (6)
24. Vindicate concerning judge (6)
26. Jesus himself ate fish (5)

Once a Mom, always a Mom

My husband had an arrangement with his mother. When he was in his thirties they agreed that as she was the mom, she got to tell him what she thought he should do. He being the adult male son, listened then he got to do what he wanted to do. That arrangement worked very well for them.

I on the other hand subscribed to the philosophy that once a mom, always a mom. I found this adage particularly useful as a preface when I wished to impart my point of view on my adult children. Through the years I have found myself interjecting my take on many things to my children. I know they are adults but they are still my babies.

Combining that notion with the adage 'Be careful what you wish for'. Let me share with you some things it hath brought upon me as being a mom means not only does that entitle one to voicing an opinion but also requires a degree of action.

With that perspective, it means coming to the rescue. In fact, that is what one of my daughters calls me – she says, mom you are a rescuer by nature. And I have done that many times over the years, sometimes small rescues, sometimes larger ones.

Let me share with you some of the antics where this philosophy has lead me.

When my oldest took a job in Washington state, my husband and I packed up a van with her two cats and all her belongings, and drove it a 1,000 plus miles (that is equivalent to driving round trip twice between York to Southampton) over the course of three days. We helped her unpack, buy more furniture, assemble it, and generally get her settled in. Then, exhausted from the venture we flew back to Arizona with the thought we had accomplished the goal.

Less than a year later the job did not work out and she wanted to return to Arizona. The mom in me sprang into action again. We dutifully flew backup, packed up her newly acquired along with the original belongings and her now one cat, and drove a Uhaul truck with her belongings back to Arizona over the same thousand plus miles.

This year my youngest daughter had knee replacement surgery (been there, done that). Once again the mom in me flew into action and I offered to help her through the post op course while simultaneously prepping for Christmas.

After waiting for sixty (60) weeks she finally received a surgery date. As the fates would have it, the surgery date turned out to be the same day we were due to fly in from America to enjoy a UK Christmas season. Our flight actually arrived as she was being wheeled out of the operating theatre. We transited through border security, and reclaimed our baggage like a tornado blowing through the American heartland. Hopped on the Elizabeth line, transferred to the Windrush line and arrived in Sydenham in time to make our way to her house where we picked up my granddaughter and drove to the hospital in time to arrive as she was being transferred onto a ward. Thus began the next six weeks of caregiving and rescuing.

The first week was a daily sojourn to the hospital to see her. Gathering two parents and a teenager to go visit her was like herding cats. Everyone had a different agenda.

On the day she was released is when my mothering and nursing skills coalesced. Every day my husband and I made dinner and cleaned up afterwards as I helped her maneuver around her home. After dinner I would drive my husband back to our flat, gather my belongings and return to her house where I stayed the night lest she need something. Come morning upon arising I fed and let the dog out, drove my granddaughter to the train for school, returned to the house to help my daughter, then returned to my flat to shower and prep for the day. After which I returned to my daughter's place to help her with her care in her home. Picked up my granddaughter from the train and made dinner. Thus starting the routine all over again.

After a week my granddaughter's Christmas holiday began. This changed the equation as there was now another set of hands to share some of the caregiving. Good thing too, or we would not have been able to prep properly for Christmas.

After a couple of weeks much of the caregiving activities, evolved into 'Uber' activities. Now I was doing her grocery shopping and pharmacy pickups, post office run etc. As time progressed, I would take her to go shopping. Like the Saturday we were going to stop at the Range then go to Sainsbury. Well, we started at the Range, then had to make a pitstop at the train station, then another pitstop at the bank, and a stop at the pet store to pick up medication for the dog, before finally heading to Sainsbury. Upon leaving the store before we could head home a final, final stop to put petrol in the car. Alas home several hours later – in time for dinner.

Before we arrived my daughter and granddaughter asked if during the week between Christmas and New Year's would I drive so we could all go into central London to see the Christmas lights. I agreed to be the driver. We did so on a Sunday evening – London was heaving with traffic and pedestrians. We spent four hours in the car driving the major streets viewing holiday lights. The lights I saw were beautiful when I wasn't doing the shifting dance between first and second gear.

During her recovery she also had to make arrangements to pick up a display board from a project my granddaughter had participated in at Kensington Palace. Another three hour Uber experience in the city, and another adventure in endless shifting in central London.

Of course, there was the trip to Costco and Ikea; another opportunity for 'Uber' driving. I really enjoyed this outing – it was like a girls' day out. Good bonding time.

Then there was the first train ride into central London for my daughter to attend parent's night at her daughter's school. Our mission was to help her manoeuvre through the station, the train and the stairs. After we got her to her destination my husband and I spent the parent conference time shopping on Oxford Street. Since it was the first time this holiday season I had been in a department store, needless to say I spent money!!!

The best part of the post op caregiving and mothering, I got to spend all that time with my daughter.

by Geri Falconer-Ferneau

Sixty years in Sydenham

'Prologue' - How come Sydenham?

My grandparents bought a house in Dulwich in 1928, large enough to accommodate their already large family - Trevor, Frances, Reg, Faith (my Mother) and Geoffrey - Geoffrey's twin brother, Rye, died early in infancy. By the time War broke out in 1939, many of the family had already left home to start work. My Mother became a nurse, met my father, who was a patient in a hospital in North Wales, and in 1943, they were married, I was their only offspring and, a couple of months before I was born, my Mother and I took up residence with my grandparents in Dulwich. My father joined the family when he was eventually demobbed.

I went to the local Dulwich Hamlet School, passed my 11 plus, and applied to, and was, accepted as a new entrant by Sydenham High School where I stayed until I passed a reasonable number of GCE 'O' Levels, then applied, and was accepted into the Civil Service (my interview was on the day that Yuri Gagarin was the first astronaut to go into Space!)

I spent 9 years in the Civil Service - an incredible Apprenticeship for Life, and never any regrets!

However, during these years, I had met and married the love of my life, Bob Trembath - we married on his 25th birthday in 1966 - World Cup year! Our first daughter, Carolyn, was born in February 1969. By November, the following year we had moved to Sydenham, bought a fairly rundown house in Longton Avenue overlooking Sydenham Wells Park, and Alison, our second daughter arrived, completing our family.

At the time that we moved to Longton Avenue, Lewisham Council was already planning the demolition of much of the pre-first World War housing in the area of Wells Park Road and Taylors Lane on the other side of

the park. Local residents living in these properties were rehomed elsewhere in the borough. And as the new-build 3- and 4-bed properties were completed, these were occupied by mainly young families with several children from elsewhere in the borough.

A pause here to remember that a lot of the plumbing in the new-build had to be re-done as soon as they were occupied - cold water came out of the bathroom and kitchen taps, whilst hot water flushed the loos!!!

One big problem arose fairly quickly, the strong rivalry between the teenagers from the long-established local Estates - Sydenham Hill and High Level Drive - and the Newcomers on Wells Park Road. Few people enjoyed walking up and down Wells Park Road, particularly after dark, as young gangs roamed the area.

Local residents walking in Wells Park met daily, concerned with the problems that we could see were causing unrest throughout the area. Gradually, over the first summer, a group of long-time local residents decided that 'something must be done!', and a meeting of these local residents took place in the redundant old school building on the corner of Bradford Road. A Committee was formed - I became a member - and discussions began about how to involve the 'old community within the area' and the newly arrived residents, the adults of whom were also similarly concerned. Sydenham Wells Park was a neutral area, used by everybody, and a logical place to hold an afternoon of events, which everyone could enjoy.

A bid for some Council funding was successful, and an afternoon of fun for everyone was planned in Sydenham Wells Park for mid-June. So successful was it, that as it came to a close, and as local children queued up to collect black plastic bags to 'Womble' up the rubbish, the Committee was already talking about how to build on the general 'bonhomie' for the following year!

To be continued...?

Pat Trembath



A

St Valentine's

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Sunday 15th February

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18:30
Eucharist
A gently interactive service with prayer, hymns and self-examination

ASH WEDNESDAY

18th February

Both services will include opportunity for Imposition of Ashes

All are welcome - faithful, doubtful or just curious

St Bartholomew's Church
Westwood Hill, Sydenham



Services at St Bartholomew's Church

Sunday – 8am Holy Communion, 10am Parish Eucharist
Wednesday – 6pm Holy Communion.

Open church for prayer, quiet and reflection Monday 10:00-12:00,
Tuesday & Wednesday 17:00-18:00, Thursday 11:30-13:30,
Saturday 10:00-12:00. Rev Jim is usually available during open
church to discuss Christenings, Weddings, to pray or simply to chat.

Vicar – The Reverend Jim Perry

Email: revjimperry@mailfence.com
Tel: 020 3422 5343

Assistant Curate – Mother Bethany Austin

Email: contact@motherbea.com
Tel: 07549 003895

*The church is open every Saturday morning
between 10 am and 11am for anyone to drop in.
A member of staff is always available.*



**Join St Bart's Choir
OR join St Bartholomew's
Singers!**

**Contact: Rev'd Jim Perry
Tel: 020 3422 5343**

Floodlighting

Anniversary, Birthday or Special Event?
You can sponsor the floodlighting of
St. Bartholomew's church for
one whole week for **£10**.

Contact Claire Adams 07813 989668

We need **more volunteer distributors** for
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**Please pass Sydenham Life Magazine on
to other people and recycle magazine.**

St. Bart's Church Hall is available to hire for regular
classes, children's birthday parties, Baptism parties
and other family celebrations and events. There is a
well-equipped kitchen and rates are reasonable. The
church, which has a lovely acoustic, can also be hired
for concerts. We currently have availability on several
evenings in the week for regular bookings and on weekend
afternoons for one-off bookings.

**To discuss your requirements, please call Lesley on
07785 905355, or email her at l.khatibi@outlook.com**

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