

17th – 23rd May 2026 ASCENSION – NEWSLETTER

(Jesus said) *“I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do.”* (John 17:1-11)

Dear friends,



On a gloriously bright **Ascension morning**, we gathered on Gainford's riverside millennium clock platform to be blessed by outdoor worship, joining joyful birdsong and the river alive and glistening. We felt at one with the disciples looking up and witnessing Jesus' ascension to his home in glory.



Led by **Ordinand in Discernment Sarah Fells**, this was Brian and my last Ascension Service here. We were joined by Hilary and Sarah with their dogs, and Symon supporting with his pennywhistle.

Every Ascension to Pentecost period, I join in the **Thy Kingdom Come global ecumenical prayer** movement, praying for 5 people to respond to the Holy Spirit's presence in their lives, prompting, healing, lifting them to the Lord. I invite you also to join me. Might you have 5, or perhaps even 1 person, on your heart, that you could pray for by faith, to be blessed by the Spirit in this tremendous way?

Here is the first prayer of Thy Kingdom Come from Pope Leio XIV (the full script is appended on the last page: <https://www.thykingdomcome.global/stories/message-pope-leo-xiv>)



This week was also **Christian Aid week**. Sadly, with many matters dominating our national news and the wars still unresolved in The Ukraine and with Iran, attention is lowered for the continuing deep needs of the world. Last week, I reminded 2 of our congregations (Staindrop and Gainford) that our 5 Marks of Mission include tending to the needs of the poor and needy, and transforming unjust structures. These are served under the most challenging conditions by Christian Aid, both in emergency crises and where there are chronic circumstances. Online donations are encouraged: <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/our-work/what-we-do>

SUNDAY AFTER THE ASCENSION SERVICES

9.15am **Staindrop St Mary Communion**

9.30am **Winston St Andrew Communion followed by APCM**

10.45am **Gainford St Mary Communion**

Lay-Led by Worship Group

Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop

with Rev'd Canon Alec Harding preaching

Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop

with Rev'd Canon Alec Harding co-presiding and preaching

Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop

NOTICES:

APCM in our parish churches

Gainford and Staindrop St Mary's have now held their APCMs. Our next APCMs are:

1. **17th May 2026 10.30am in Winston St Andrew Church** immediately following the 9.30am morning Communion service
2. **24th May 2026 12 noon in Ingleton St John the Evangelist Church** immediately following the 11am morning Communion service

Baptisms in May: Please pray for these children and candidates, their parents, Godparents and friends:

† **Daisy Todd**, at Winston St Andrew's Church on Sunday 17th May, 1pm

† **Dottie Beatrice Brown** and **Kit Michael Brown** on Sunday 24th May, 1pm together with Dottie's Godparents – **Catherine Wilson, Ellie Tinkler, and Nidhi Devgan**

Weddings in May: We look forward to the weddings of:

† **Marc Nicholas Guffick** to **Samantha Jayne Jewson** on Saturday 23rd May 2026 11.30am Winston St Andrew

† **Andy Joseph Greener** to **Jillian Keast Johnston** nee Greenwood on Saturday 23rd May 2026 2pm Gainford St Mary's Church

Bereavement: We thank God for the late **JOAN MARRIOTT**, who lived her **100-year-old faithful life**. Her funeral service will take place in **St Mary's Church, Gainford on Friday 29th May 2026 at 11.30am** followed by Cremation at Darlington Crematorium at 1pm. We hold in prayer her daughters Roberta and Lesley, Granddaughter Laura, and all her family.

GAINFORD'S LITTLE PRAYER BEARS



Parishioner Louise Ransom came up with a wonderful fundraising idea for St Mary's Church, Gainford – a generous ongoing gift from Louise. Noticing that many members of our community come into church for prayer and children are frequently coming in after school, she is **knitting Gainford's Little Prayer Bears for a modest minimum donation of £1 per bear** so it is available to anyone who would appreciate one.

Unbeknownst to Louise, I am a lover of bears.

Encouraged by interest in Louise's bears, which have run out each week, **donations are welcome** for some of **Eileen's own bears memorabilia** will be available from this weekend!



THEOLOGY BOOKS RAISED FUNDS FOR INGLETON ST JOHN

Thanks to Sarah, who was at Lindisfarne College of Theology in Ushaw Hall last weekend, Eileen's theology books were sold for £40 towards Ingleton St John's church funds. More books, unsold that weekend, were donated towards the college.

COLLECT for ASCENSION

Risen, ascended Lord,
as we rejoice at your triumph,
fill your Church on earth with power and
compassion,
that all who are estranged by sin
may find forgiveness and know your peace,
to the glory of God the Father. Amen

POST-COMMUNION PRAYER

Eternal God, giver of love and power,
your Son Jesus Christ has sent us into all the
world
to preach the gospel of his kingdom:
confirm us in this mission,
and help us to live the good news we proclaim;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

First Reading – Acts 1:6-14

⁶So when they had come together, they asked him, ‘Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?’ He replied, ‘It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’ When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.’

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

The Gospel for Easter 6: John 17:1-11

¹After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

‘I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

ASCENSION DAY MESSAGE FROM POPE LEO XIV for THY KINGDOM COME

'Dear brothers and sisters,

I am pleased to greet all of you taking part in this year's "Thy Kingdom Come" ecumenical prayer event, and to assure you of my spiritual closeness.



Each year, during the Advent season, Christians address God with the words, "Come, Emmanuel." With great urgency we cry out for the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy: the birth of Emmanuel, whose name means God is with us. Throughout that season, in our songs and our carols, we repeat this call with ever greater urgency, "Come, God-with-us," as we long for his presence. We long for him to save us from our sins, our foolishness and all that might harm us. We long for him to heal what is broken in us and what is broken in our world. Even though we know that God is almighty and transcendent, we are still bold enough to ask him to be truly with us – not distant, but close. We are bold enough to cry out with the prophet, "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down" (Is 64:1).

While it is true that sometimes we stumble and forget about God and our need for him, at the core of our being we know that only he can satisfy our deepest longings and our inner restlessness. Perhaps the most beautiful expression of this can be found in the writings of Saint Augustine: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you" (*Confessions*, I, i, 1). In Jesus, God has indeed come close. He revealed himself in flesh to us, and through his Holy Spirit he is with us now.

Now, in these weeks of Eastertide, "Alleluia" is our song in a particular way, as we offer praise and thanksgiving for the resurrection of the Lord from the dead. He is still God-with-us! At the same time, we learn from the Gospels that even those closest to Jesus did not always recognize him in the days following his resurrection. Even Mary Magdalene at first thought that the risen Lord was a gardener. Yet, even though he was not immediately recognized, he was truly present. And Jesus is still present, for when he returned to the Father's side, he did not leave us orphans (cf. Jn 14:18). He remains with us through the gift of the Holy Spirit, and we encounter him in a variety of ways, for he is always truly present in the Church.

Dear friends, Christ is everything for us! In him, we find the fullness of life and its meaning. This is not something about which we can keep silent. It is something to proclaim boldly (cf. Mt 10:27), for it is indeed Good News and needs to be shared. God is with us, and we who have encountered him are called to tell others about him. These days of the "Thy Kingdom Come Novena" are an especially fitting time to do so, and to pray that others will also come to encounter the saving and liberating love of God revealed in Jesus.

Dear brothers and sisters, I would like to conclude by sharing with you some words from my homily in Saint Peter's Basilica on Easter night: "The encounter to which we want to bear witness – through the words of faith and the works of charity – we do so by "singing" with our lives the "Alleluia" that we proclaim with our lips (cf. Saint Augustine, *Sermon* 256, 1). Just as the women rushed to tell the disciples, we too should be desiring to set out... to bring to all the good news that Jesus has risen and that having risen with him, through his power, we too can give life to a new world of peace and unity as 'a multitude of people and yet [...] a single person, for although there are many Christians, Christ is one'" (Saint Augustine, *Commentaries on the Psalms*, 127:3).

With these thoughts, I willingly invoke upon you all God's abundant blessings. And may the blessing of Almighty God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit come upon you and be with you always. Amen.'