

From the Vicar - February 2025

I'd like to begin by wishing you a happy and healthy New Year.

(As I am writing this on 9th January, a New Year greeting feels appropriate – though by the time you read this, in early February, it might seem less so!) I hope that you had an enjoyable Christmas and New Year. I really enjoyed the run up to Christmas, with its Carol Services, singing around the Christmas tree (in Cuddesdon), school Nativity (in Horspath), Crib Services, Christingle Services, etc. Advent and Christmas are one of my favourite times of year, and this year was no exception – although I was particularly pleased to enjoy a break in Northumberland immediately after Christmas.

We arrived in Northumberland on Boxing Day, after a long drive through heavy fog, just as the sky cleared and the Milky Way lit a path across the night sky over our cottage. It reminded me of the carol, 'It was on a starry night,' which I sung many times in school services during Advent, and then, again, on Christmas Eve. Another favourite moment of Christmas was presiding at the Midnight Mass, with the baby Jesus, from the church nativity set, laying on the altar before me, then placing him in the stable, after distributing communion, shortly after midnight. I wonder what your abiding memories of Christmas 2024 are?

Many of you are already aware that I am now called Tom Wallis (or Thomas), having changed my name by deed poll in November 2024, as part of a process of social transitioning from the gender I was assigned at birth, to the gender which I feel to be correct. However, newsletter deadlines – and the desire to inform church officers before informing the wider parishes – meant that I couldn't announce and explain my change of name and pronouns / gender in my December 'From the Vicar,' as I would have liked.

I'd therefore like to take this opportunity to say a huge thank you to everyone across the village, and wider Benefice, who has welcomed, encouraged and supported me as Tom / the Revd Tom. Your kindness, love and support have meant a great deal to me and to Martin. Thank you to all who have sent Christmas cards, or messages

of support and encouragement. And thank you to all who have prayed for Martin, for me, and for the churches of our Benefice.

For those who were not aware of this news, or who have found my transitioning difficult, I would like to reassure you that I am still a Christian – a disciple, deacon, priest and your Vicar. I still believe in Jesus, and in the Good News contained within the Holy Scriptures. I remain committed to serving God.

I am still here for the people of Garsington, Cuddesdon and Horspath. I remain available for pastoral visits, conversations, prayer, worship, baptisms, weddings and funerals ... or just for a cup of coffee, or a pint in the pub, and a friendly chat. All that is changing, for the time being, are my name, pronouns and gender identity. I will also be discussing and working through the medical implications with my GP and others.

I would also like to assure those in the Benefice who – I have been informed – believe that I have known for many years that I am a transgender man, and have deliberately kept this information from you, and deceived you, that that is not the case. I only began to discern, in May 2024, that ‘she/her’ no longer seemed to fit. I shared this information with Martin, and with my bishop, as soon as I felt able to do so. Martin and I then both needed some time to explore and digest this very private, personal and surprising discovery, and to inform family and friends, before my bishop and I discerned that the time was right for me to tell my congregations.

For me, it was a matter of integrity to tell you as soon as possible, and to begin social transitioning at the same time, so that I was not deceiving you, or living a lie. I assure you that I have shared the news with you within six months or so of my discovering that I was uncomfortable trying to live as a woman, and am happier as Tom.

Thank you, again, for your ongoing support, love and kindness. And, if you would like to chat – about my change of name, or about what is happening in your own life – do please get in touch. I am also discussing with senior colleagues the possibility of holding an open meeting, or a Question and Answer session, so that those with

questions and concerns may raise these in a gentle and constructive way. If senior colleagues agree that this might help to build bridges, and prevent further incorrect assumptions and gossip, I hope to advertise an event shortly.

My new email address is: therevdtomwallis@gmail.com

God bless,

The Revd. Tom