

Well, as I said, I have now been the vicar of Wye for a full year having been installed by the archdeacon on the 14th January 2010. And then my first service here was Sunday 17th. A year ago tomorrow. Which is weird because on the one hand being in London seems like a life-time ago (even if having Daisy and Libby here brings back happy memories) but equally, I still feel like the new vicar – although I'm sure that's entirely normal; I think officially you remain the new vicar for at least 3 years. 5 in the country. And on the subject of time, I was talking to someone else from my St Luke's the other day, Katherine Smith, the other curate there who told me about a conversation she'd recently had with our former vicar, John – that's John Shepherd from Battersea not John Richardson. They'd heard about my performance at 'Wye's got talent' – cos obviously elvis was a regular guest at St Luke's too (in fact it was Libby who bought me

my Elvis costume) – anyway Katherine told John that she was surprised that I had come out of my gold lame closet so early. You know, the conventional wisdom is that in a new parish, you 'play it safe' for at least the first year and I guess some people might object to an Elvis-impersonating vicar...

Anyway, *John* said that the only thing *he* was surprised about was that I'd managed to *wait* a whole nine months before 'donning the suit' – and of course I've donned it a few times since then: at the poinsettia festival, at Mike's Monday club's, the Christmas party and indeed at the end of term assemblies at both Spring Grove school where Bill Jones was my pianist and Wye primary where Mr Grout was my backing singer cum go-go dancer, doing the peter kay dance as we sang show me the way to Amarillo much to the amusement of all concerned...

Anyway, I'm thinking of giving elvis a rest for a while: you *can* have too much of a good thing – although having said that at least one person has suggested that we should offer 'credit crunch Vegas style weddings' as part of our ongoing fund-raising campaign: you know, why fly all the way to Las Vegas, when you could be married by an ordained Elvis here in the UK? I wonder what Bishop Trevor would think of that?! You see, the first year's over so the gloves are off... I'm only joking but the fact is I do want to... reveal something to you today that I've – not exactly *hidden* from you before but not completely spelt out either... and that is the *real* story of how and why I changed my name [from Ravi Maharishi or to Ravi Holy].

You see, when I first arrived here I said that Ravi Holy was a stage name that stuck and that's true but what I haven't told you before is *why* that was my stage name in

the first place. So, in 1991, God told me, through a series of what some Christians call words of knowledge or prophecies, delivered by three different people, that he wanted me to change my name. He made that very clear. I then spent several weeks *praying* about what I should change it *to* and he subsequently made it *equally* clear that my new name was to be Ravi Holy.

Now I'm aware that that might sound a bit barmy and you can probably see why I didn't broadcast the full unexpurgated version [of this story] when I first arrived. You know, there was already the whole 'former Satanist thing' and I wasn't convinced that turning up saying 'God told me to change my name to ravioli' was the best way to reassure people that I was now a well-balanced individual. The kind of person they'd want to be their pastor – although you *could* say that raviholi is a very *good* name

for a pasta... I know: it's corny isn't it? But don't blame me, blame God; it was his idea. And as today's gospel reading makes clear, I'm far from being the first person that God has asked to change their name...

As we heard, Jesus said to Simon who went on to become Saint Peter, 'You *are* Simon (son of John); you *will* be called Cephas or Peter'. And this is a formula that appears several times in scripture: in Genesis 17 God says to *Abram*, 'no longer shall your name be Abram but your name shall be *Abraham* for I have made you the father of many nations (which is what abraham means); and then a few chapters later he says to Abraham's *grandson* (because of course Abraham has gone on to have a son as per the prophecy) 'you shall no longer be called *Jacob* but Israel because you have wrestled with God and with men and have prevailed. Israel means 'one who fights or

wrestles with god' and this was after the famous wrestling-match with the angel which actually Jacob *lost* but you get the impression that God admired his cheek. Sort of, well done for having a go.

And then there's Saint Paul who was born Saul and who changed his name to Paul after his famous conversion. We don't know whether God *specifically* told him to do that but certainly *he* felt that the change he'd experienced *internally* needed to be acknowledged externally as well. And for *all* those people, Abraham and Jacob, Peter and Paul, the change of name was also part of a call to or commissioning *for* a specific ministry. And that's very much how I understand my own name change: God called me *out* of the darkness of my previous way of life and *into* his service – for which I am eternally grateful. And obviously a key focus of my ministry now is helping

others who are stuck in darkness to find the same freedom and recovery. And to that end, in a few weeks time, I'm going to visit the Heal For Life Foundation also known as Mayamurri in Australia which, as many of you will know, is a ministry set up by Lucy Huntington's sister Liz and which both Lucy and Francis are involved with as leaders and counsellors. In fact they're on their way there as we speak.

Now the Mayamurri programme is designed to help survivors of childhood abuse and other forms of trauma *heal for life* hence the 'heal for life foundation' and I am hugely excited about seeing it in action.

You see, because my own story is one of recovery from the effects of abuse suffered in childhood (I mean, I didn't just wake up one morning when I was a teenager and think

'I know, I'm going to dive headfirst into the most negative lifestyle you can imagine') I have, for many years, had a dream and a vision to help other people as I was helped. I mean, obviously I've ministered to lots of people with similar problems *one on one* but something more *formal*. I didn't have any clear idea of exactly what or when this would be but I did believe it would happen at some point...

So, just over a year ago, I accepted this post here in Wye having had a very strong sense that this was where God was calling me. And Lucy and Francis were two of the first people that I met here because Francis was effectively the coordinator of 'project vicarage'. And they were just about to go to Mayamurri *then* (they always go in January) and Francis happened to tell me about it. He also said that eventually Lucy and him would like to open a UK version

of Mayamurri and he hoped that that was something I could support... well, you can imagine his reaction when I told him that this was a subject I had a *strong* personal interest in and that I'd spent the last 15 years believing that one day I would be directly involved in helping other survivors of abuse. For both of us it was like the sudden appearance of the sun on the horizon after a long dark night, the glory of god rising upon us and while from that point on we pretty much knew I'd go to Mayamurri *eventually*, I don't think either of us imagined it would happen so *quickly*. But God moves in mysterious ways and Liz, Lucy's sister is as excited about all this as we are and she has very kindly paid for me to go over there which I obviously wouldn't have been able to do otherwise so I'm very grateful to *her* and to God for his incredible goodness and faithfulness and I would ask all of you to pray, in the next few weeks, for me, for Lucy and Francis and for the

work of the heal for life foundation – in Australia and by the grace of god in this country as well.

Of course my *primary* calling is to *this benefice* and there's *lots* of other exciting things happening this year – the new youth group which Matthew and Christina King are setting up, part 2 of the God question which will run in Lent and two new services; but the fact is, one of *those* is the benefice healing service which will take place in Waltham church each month and which Lucy and Francis will be key players in with Madi and others so it's happening already! God is at work! And a year in, I'm even more thrilled to be part of what he's doing than I was when I got here.

So, thank you for calling me here, for your welcome, your support and your prayers and may God bless all of *you* as richly as he has blessed me.