

# *St. George's Hontezbury*

Magazine 50p



*December 2021*

# The Parish of Pontesbury

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*QUOTE: The Almighty appeared on earth as a helpless baby, unable to do more than lie and stare and wriggle and make noises, needing to be fed and changed and taught to talk like any other child.... The more you think about it, the more staggering it gets. - J I Packer*

Contributions for St. George's Magazine should be in by the **15<sup>th</sup>** of the **previous month**. It may not be possible to include contributions received after this date until the following month.

Send e-mail & attachments to [stgsmagazine@googlemail.com](mailto:stgsmagazine@googlemail.com)  
Please post handwritten articles to Ford Place, The Bank, Pontesbury Hill, SY5 0XX.

Website: [www.st-george.org.uk](http://www.st-george.org.uk)

Items for inclusion in the Deanery News to be submitted by 10<sup>th</sup> of previous month to  
Alison Bebb - Keepers Cottage, Cruckmeole, Shrewsbury, SY5 8JN  
Telephone: 01743 860158 email: [alisonbebb5@gmail.com](mailto:alisonbebb5@gmail.com)



# LIFTING UP OUR EYES

with Greg Smith

Dear Friends

In recent days my world has been rocked and I have found myself wondering whether there is any relationship between a man making a genuine effort to do the right thing and getting his just reward. Let me tell you about two instances.

First, Fran and I recently flew to Amsterdam with EasyJet. I researched long and hard to establish what we needed to do in order to comply with Covid rules. I discovered that we were required to undertake a PCR test no more than 48 hours before we were due to fly (a Tuesday); that it was not possible to undertake such a test at a regular testing station; and that the nearest approved site was in Chester. The net result was that we paid £160 to have a test each, drove to Chester early on Monday morning, having booked an appointment for 8.30, only to find that the station (which was a cubicle in a carpark) didn't open until 9 a.m. I just about got back for an assembly in Pontesbury at 10 a.m. (no speed limits were broken!) The next morning, we arrived in good time at Liverpool airport; and after queuing for some considerable time, were refused boarding by EasyJet because our test results had not arrived. The small print on the testing company's website said that the results were available 24 hours after arrival at the lab, not after being administered. Our only option was to buy new flight tickets and take new tests (at the airport) and fly to Amsterdam a day late. We had gone to inordinate lengths to get this right but had failed to successfully navigate an impenetrable system. And believe me, we weren't the only ones.



Secondly, I drove to Hereford for a Diocesan training event, parked in an NCP carpark, spent 15 minutes downloading the NCP app onto my phone (the only way one could pay, the coin slot having been taped over), paid the fee and went off to the Bishop's Palace. On my return to the car, I didn't notice that tucked under the wiper blade on the passenger side was a parking ticket, which I only saw upon my arrival back at the Deanery. After investigation, it transpired



that although parking on the same footprint of land, I had strayed onto a private carpark and ought to have paid another provider. Again, I was trying to do the right thing at considerable time and expense but have been punished (a £100 fine) for failing to understand an obstruse system. It all feels a bit like taking a maths exam, where scoring 96% is insufficient and anything less than perfection warrants punishment.

It is easy to mistake the process of Salvation working like this. Good people go around worrying that despite their kindness, generosity and avoidance of serious sin, the Heavenly Judge is looking down, ready to punish the slightest mistake. However, in contrast, nothing could be further from the truth. The knowledge that no human being can attain perfection in their own strength takes Jesus to the cross to complete the examination for us. He has already scored 100% for us and is ready to hand us the certificate proving this to anyone who asks. Salvation already earned.



Worth remembering when one is faced with what too often seems an uncaring world that demands unachievable perfection.

Every blessing  
*Greg*

### *Christmas Rush* By Megan Carter



That time again, my trolley's full  
Buying all the Christmas fare,  
A turkey crown, a rib of beef,  
Crisps and nibbles, lots to spare.

Christmas crackers and serviettes,  
Paper for wrapping and cards to send,  
Nuts and oranges, figs and dates  
The list goes on, there seems no end.

In all this rush it's good to pause  
And think about that special Day,  
When shepherds watched and angels sang  
As a Baby lay in a bed of hay.



# Readings and Services for this MONTH

Here are the Sunday Service details, and the readings which you may enjoy at home if you are unable to come into church this month.

| Date  | Service   | Readings   |
|---|---|--|
| <b>5<sup>th</sup> December</b><br>2 <sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent                                | <b>10:30 am</b><br><b>Morning Worship</b>   | (Malachi 3: 1 – 4)<br>Philippians 1: 3 – 11<br>Luke 3: 1 - 6 |
| <b>7<sup>th</sup> December</b><br><b>Tuesday</b>  | <b>2:30pm</b><br><b>Tea Service</b>   | TBA  |
| <b>12<sup>th</sup> December</b><br>3 <sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent<br><i>Festival of Trees</i>   | <b>10:30 am</b><br><b>Holy Communion</b>  | Isaiah 12:2-6<br>(Philippians 4: 4 – 7)<br>Luke 3: 7 – 18    |
| <b>19<sup>th</sup> December</b><br>4 <sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent                               | <b>10:30 am</b><br><b>Holy Communion</b>  | Micah 5: 2 – 5a<br>(Hebrews 10: 5 – 10)<br>Luke 1: 39 – 55   |
| <b>Carols by Candlelight</b>  | -----<br><b>6:30pm</b>  | -----<br>TBA   |
| <b>24<sup>th</sup> December</b><br>Christmas Eve  | <b>3:30 pm</b><br><b>Crib Service</b><br>-----<br><b>11:30 pm</b><br><b>Midnight Mass</b> | -----<br>Isaiah 52: 7 –10<br>John 1: 1- 14                   |
| <b>25<sup>th</sup> Dec</b><br>Christmas Day<br><br><b>Group Service at St.George's Pontesbury</b> | <b>10:30 am</b><br><b>Holy Communion</b>  | Isaiah 9: 2 – 7<br>Titus 2: 11 – 14<br>Luke 2:1-20           |
| Sunday 26 <sup>th</sup>   | No church service.  |  |



# Looking at Christmas

*The Revd Canon Paul Hardingham on waiting for Christmas.*

## Advent

Waiting is not popular in our culture, when so much can be obtained simply at the press of a button! Advent, when we wait for the coming of Christmas, is also an opportunity to learn what it means to be waiting for the promised return of Jesus. He says: *'It's like a man going away: he leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. Therefore, keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back'* (Mark 13:34-35).

We live between Jesus' first and second comings and this parable reminds us of the need to watch and wait, as disciples living faithfully for Him. It reminds us of two kinds of waiting: *passive* and *active*. Imagine you're at the railway station, awaiting the arrival of a train. On the platform a man is asleep, as he thinks there is plenty of time before the train arrives. He is *passively waiting*. There is also a small boy on the platform who is excited about the train coming. He can't sit still and constantly looks down the track to see if the train is coming. He is *actively waiting*, for he expects the train to arrive at any moment.

Advent gives us a choice: *how will we wait for Jesus' coming?* Passive waiting doesn't require much attention on our part. We can live our Christian life pre-occupied with our own concerns, rather than looking to God. However, active waiting involves an eager expectation, as we await Jesus' return or simply look to him coming to us today. All we want is to be found faithful as His disciples. There is nothing more important than being ready to meet our Master!



Lester Amann considers the melody of Christmas:

## Music for the Messiah

Have you noticed that, in the Christmas story, singing is featured on three occasions?



Firstly, after Mary was given a message from the angel Gabriel, and was visiting her elderly and pregnant relative, Elizabeth. Mary was so overwhelmed with happiness at the forthcoming miraculous births, she started to sing.

Over the years, her words, known as *The Magnificat*, have been set to music by various composers. The hymn 'Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord' is one example of it. Of course, we don't know Mary's melody line, but her words express God's promise that He would rescue His people and through them save the world. Mary sings of God's mercy and benevolence on the helpless, the humble and the hungry.

Months later, in the fields of Bethlehem, shepherds were confronted with an angel and given an incredible message: the Saviour, the Messiah had been born. This was followed by a host of angels who could not help but sing glory to God. Later, the shepherds saw the baby Jesus. They then returned home: not in silence and awe, but in song. They were overwhelmed with an encounter with Almighty God! Heaven and earth had been brought together. They simply couldn't stop themselves from praising and glorifying God.



For Mary, the Shepherds and the Eastern Men too, that first Christmas brought in a time of hope: hope for the helpless, pardon for the guilty, and forgiveness for the conscious stricken. Good news for those who had had nothing but bad news!

From that time on, people have tried to express their gratitude, thanks and wonder at God's love and mercy. Over the centuries, countless poets and musicians have composed music for us to sing. At no other time in the year, is so much music used to describe and express one moment in history.

Traditionally, December is a time for concerts and services of Christmas music. We come together to sing carols and other songs that express the wonder of God's Gift to us. Unfortunately, last year, the coronavirus restricted or even cancelled our musical festivities. This month, we may be in a better position to worship together.

Jesus has given us hope; forgiven our sin; and continues to impart faith and heal our spiritual wounds. Isn't that something to always sing about?

*O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord!*



*Lester Amann finds the Christmas story full of surprises*

*Amazed!*

Some people like surprises. The pleasant ones, anyway!

When we look at the Christmas story, it is full of surprises. Mary didn't expect to be chosen by God to give birth to His Son. Joseph was surprised and shocked that his fiancée was pregnant. The couple thought they would start married life together in Nazareth, but political circumstances forced them to go to Bethlehem and then into Egypt.

The Bethlehem shepherds were surprised and frightened by the heavenly choir and an angel with a marvellous message. Later, they rejoiced at seeing the Saviour – a new born baby in a manger.

The Wise Men were surprised to see a unique star, and so they followed it all the way to Jerusalem. They thought a royal birth would be in a city and in Herod's Palace. They were surprised again, to be redirected to a remote village called Bethlehem. Herod too was surprised that a new king had come, and felt his position and authority were being threatened.

What is most surprising is that God had planned the coming of Jesus thousands of years before it happened. Prophets had told of His coming and their hearers were waiting for Him to appear. But still they were surprised when the Messiah came, for He did not come as a conquering hero but as a suffering Servant.

Jesus came to save people from their sins. He came to restore a broken relationship and bring His people to a glorious Home. The biggest surprise? It was also done for you and me!

## What a Christmas *By the Ven John Barton*

The Bethlehem manger, shepherds, wise men, Jesus, Mary and Joseph –it's all so familiar to older people, who are shocked to hear that younger generations may be hazy or ignorant of them. Aren't they part of everyone's education?

Yet the first Christmas was restricted to just a few. What 21st Century Christians proclaim as the most significant event in history began in a remote corner of the Roman Empire, without the pomp and publicity we associate with kingship and power. What modern media have called 'The Greatest Story Ever Told', escaped everyone's attention in first century Palestine.

This year, Christmas is going to be a busier celebration than last year, but probably not yet back to the normal fuss we usually make each December. The streets will be crowded, but shops may struggle with supplies. Parties will take place, but many people will feel reluctant join in. Family gatherings are allowed again, but the vulnerable may hesitate. Christmas services will be held, but as singing has the potential for droplet and aerosol transmission, music will be muted this year. A Christmas without many carols!

Many will struggle to hold their 'usual' Christmas. Yet God does not neglect us. This may be the very opportunity to rekindle or deepen our faith in what really matters about Christmas. Away from the hordes, perhaps completely alone this Christmas, we may sit quietly and allow our heavenly Father to draw near to us. We may picture Mary inviting us to gaze with her at her Son, born to save us from our sins. In the silence of our imagination, we may join the chorus of angels announcing His birth to the shepherds:

"Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace to those on whom His favour rests."

It was that chorus which inspired an American Minister, Edmund Sears, to write the Christmas hymn, 'It Came Upon a Midnight Clear'. Sears, troubled by the world's turbulent history and failure to hear the Christmas message, was himself recovering from a breakdown. Written in 1849, his words have a timeless ring about them:

*Yet with the woes of sin and strife  
The world has suffered long;  
Beneath the angel-strain  
have rolled  
Two thousand years of wrong;*

*And man, at war with man, hears not  
The love-song which they bring;  
Oh, hush the noise, ye men of strife,  
And hear the angels sing.*

## The laws about Christmas *by David Pickup, a solicitor.*

*And she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. Luke 2:7*

Bethlehem was busy that first Christmas. This year Christmas Day is on a Saturday, and we get two Bank Holidays on the Monday and Tuesday. There are some peculiar legal rules about Christmas that are more significant when Christmas Day falls on a normal working day.

The courts are closed, so you could not go to court if you wanted to. No writ, warrant to enforce a judgment or order is allowed on a Christmas Day. So, while you may pretend you are not at home to unwelcome relatives, you do not have to hide from a court officer wanting to evict you or take your goods.

Curiously, there is no law to say you cannot work on the big day. The only law that protects shop workers is the Christmas Day (Trading) Act 2004, which imposes a ban on Christmas Day trading for large shops, over 280 square metres in size, in England and Wales.

If you get bored on Christmas, you can eat as much as you like, but you cannot go outside and shoot pheasants or any other game. The Game Act 1831 makes it illegal.

Christmas has other particular laws around it. It is against the law to sell Christmas crackers to anyone under 12, because of the Pyrotechnic Articles (Safety) Regulations 2015, s.31. Also, and this is frustrating for many, it is against the law to make or use a slide from snow or ice in the metropolitan area, under the Metropolitan Police Act 1839.

This, as always is a light-hearted comment and you should always take proper advice. Spare a thought and a prayer for those who are homeless or fear the knock on the door from a bailiff or debt collector. If you need advice or help, don't hang about, contact someone, one of the debt charities like Christians Against Poverty.



## ***Your Gift of Life – at Christmas***

Creaking on the staircase -  
Noise outside my door -  
A rustle in the chimney –  
It's 'Santa-time' once more.  
St Nicholas is on his way  
With all his Christ-life gifts  
To fire every child-light with  
The loving Christ-mass kiss.



In some he'll place the gift of gold -  
In others frankincense -  
While others will be given myrrh -  
All signs of God's presence.

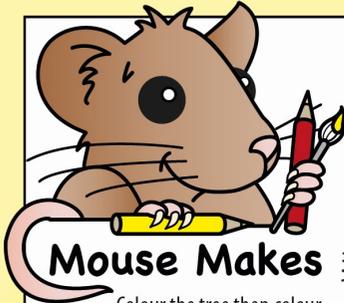
For in each earthly crib or bed  
In squalor, comfort, splendour -  
The Christ child has been placed again  
To call the world to wonder.

So come you kings, come one, come all,  
Come shepherds to the cradle stall  
And hear the angels sing a-new  
The heavenly song they sing for you.

Your God is in your gift of life -  
The life He gives with love –  
So take the gift and use it,  
Use it wisely, don't abuse it,  
Let the Christ-life fire your spirit  
That God in you may LIVE.

***By Sam Doubtfire***

*Sam is the newest 'resident poet' on the Parish Pump. After serving as a vicar in Knottingley, Ripponden, Keswick, Barrow-in-Furness, and Reddish, this retired priest says he is "re-learning the meaning of the baptismal promise and commission on which the priesthood of all believers has to be established".*



## Mouse Makes

Colour the tree then colour in one star each day until Christmas. Leave the large star at the top of the tree to colour in on Christmas day!

What's on the Christmas Tree?



### A STAR

shows the way to Jesus

Read

Matthew 2:1-12

### ANGELS

bring messages from God

Read about

Gabriel's message in

Luke 1:26-38

Read the

shepherd's story in

Luke 1:26-38

### LIGHTS AND CANDLES

remind us that Jesus lights our way to God

Read Luke 2:29-32

### PRESENTS

remind us of God's special gift to us ... **JESUS!**

**"For God loved the world so much that He gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life." John 3:16**

Presents at Christmas under the tree,  
A red Christmas stocking waiting for me,  
But what really is Christmas,  
What is it about?  
Just look and the Bible and you will find out!  
It's about **JESUS** - the best present of all,  
**JESUS** our **Saviour**,  
God's gift to us all!



## From the Bishop of Hereford

*In his letter to the Philippians, St Paul said that Jesus Christ was God in very nature.*

In the recent COP26 Conference run-up, some of us have been planting trees as part of the Queen's Green Canopy Project. It is a fitting way of marking Her Majesty's 70 years as sovereign, and the tree-planting project acquires an urgent relevance in the light of the climate crisis. Gardeners will have collected seeds to multiply their stocks. It is a longer-term view and cheaper way than buying established plants from our suppliers.

Seeds are remarkable things. There is little correlation between their size and the size of the plant that emerges. What is more extraordinary is that the complete blueprint for the established plant resides in such a small package. Every detail is written in the DNA, ready to emerge when the conditions are suitable for germination. The seed is as much the plant as the tree is, despite their very different appearance.

All metaphors have their limitations. But when we contemplate the events of Christmas and the reality of God's incarnation in Christ, the seed to plant metaphor can be helpful. In his letter to the Philippians, St Paul said that Jesus Christ was God in very nature. In Jesus, God reveals himself not just as the creative hand behind all that is, but also as personal. The human (albeit extraordinary) attributes of personality we see in Jesus are the characteristics of God himself. Paul is essentially saying that *because* Jesus was God, he took the lowest place, showed humility, and gave himself up for others.

Appearing in human form, born as the infant Jesus was not a disguise for God, but God in his very essence.

The humble familiarity of the Christmas story reminds us that we can know God. The good news is that knowledge can be transformative as we enter into a relationship with him.

I pray that we all enter afresh into this reality and prepare to celebrate his coming to us.

**+Richard**

# Our Church Community at Christmas

## St. George's PARISH VISITORS

Would you, or someone you know, appreciate some help or a phone call? Maybe you're feeling lonely, isolated, in need of support and friendship?

We may not be able to visit you at the moment, but St. George's Church has a team of friendly people who would love to **phone** you -

**if we can help, we will !**

Call in confidence:

Phone **Marion Elliott 01743 792256**



**ST. GEORGE'S PRAYER CHAIN** is a small group of people who believe that prayer can make a difference. Each person within the group offers daily prayer for anyone who asks for prayer.

If you yourself or someone you know needs special prayer for any reason, please contact

**Rev. Shirley Small 01743 791885.**

All information given is given in confidence.  
A name is enough if that is all you wish to give.



## This month's Tea Service ...

A service of Holy Communion followed by tea, cakes and a time to catch up and chat on the first Tuesday of each month at St George's Church.

**Join us on December 7<sup>th</sup> at 2.30pm.**

*Everyone is welcome!*

## **Are you are a driver? Can you help?**

Could you spare a little time in the afternoon of the first Tuesday of each month to help with transport to and from the Tea Service at St George's Church.

If you think you could do this to help our community then please contact Marion Elliott on 01743 792256 or email

to: [mepontesbury@gmail.com](mailto:mepontesbury@gmail.com)

for more information.

# Light up for Christmas

Every night from Advent Sunday until Candlemas the church floodlights will be switched on to enable you to celebrate an event or to remember a loved one.

Just choose a date and add your name to the list in the WER. Contact Gerald Worrall (01743 791069) with your donation of £20.



## Holy Trinity Church, Minsterley CRIB FESTIVAL



Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 10.00 - 5pm  
Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> December 10.00- 5pm  
Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> December 12.00 - 5pm  
Monday 6<sup>th</sup> December 10.00 - 3.30pm

*Refreshments will be served, cakes and preserves on sale.*

*Entry is FREE, donations are welcome.*

*It would be good if all our benefice churches could be represented by cribs. If you have a nativity scene which you would be willing to have on display during this time please would you notify Barbara Norsworthy (01743 600476 or [barbnors65@aol.com](mailto:barbnors65@aol.com)).*

*N.B. The church will not be left open and unattended during this event.*

**A Christmas Concert with the *GoCompare Man*  
7:30 Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> December  
Shrewsbury Abbey**

Wynne Evans (better known as the *GoCompare Man*) is singing at Shrewsbury Abbey at next month's "*Spirit of Christmas*" concert. There's full support from Shrewsbury Choral, the Meole Brace Chamber Orchestra and the choirs of Meole Brace and Prestfelde schools.

The programme includes lots of Christmas songs, carols and music – and the audience can join in! There's also a good chance that you'll recognise one or two familiar faces from St. George's among the performers....

Tickets are £20 for adults, £5 for children and are on sale at Pengwern Books on Fish Street, Shrewsbury; on-line at [www.shrewsburychoral.org.uk](http://www.shrewsburychoral.org.uk) and from Allen Marsden.

This promises to be a fabulous evening of family entertainment – not to be missed!



**Holy Trinity Church, Minsterley invites you to:**



**Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> December at 5pm**

**A MEDITATION FOR ADVENT**

**Led by the Rev. Carolyn Chadwick**



ST GEORGE'S PONTESBURY

TREES AND CRIBS  
FESTIVAL



December 9<sup>th</sup>—11<sup>th</sup> 10am—6pm

Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> 12noon—5pm

Wander among the trees, Cribs and lights and enjoy this beautiful church

Stalls & Refreshments

Facilities for disabled persons and space to keep safe distance

Monies raised will be shared with The Severn Hospice.



## You're invited!

Join in with others across the country to celebrate Christmas.

Sing or play an instrument

— Wednesday 15th December at 6pm —  
join in with the Shrewsbury Brass Band  
on Radio Shropshire.

**DOWNLOAD:** Visit the website [doorstepcarols.co.uk](http://doorstepcarols.co.uk) and download the words.

**TUNE IN:** The carols will be broadcast on BBC Radio Shropshire to help us all stay in time and in tune, or via BBC Sounds.

**SING:** Simply sing or play along on the night. Help us spread the word with your neighbours!

[www.doorstepcarols.co.uk](http://www.doorstepcarols.co.uk)



Presents

## A Brass Band Christmas

St. George's Church, Pontesbury

Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> December at 7.30pm.

Tickets: £10 Adult, £5 under 16,  
available from church or from Hignett's shop.

Light refreshments included.

Holy Trinity Church, Minsterley invites you to  
an evening of Christmas carols with ...

# STIPERSTONES BRASS BAND

Monday 20<sup>th</sup> December at 7.30pm  
Come and sing-a-long!

*Refreshments - mulled wine and mince pies.*



## CAROLS ON THE GREEN CHRISTMAS EVE at 6 PM

Wrap up warmly, bring a torch or lantern, come  
and join our traditional carol singing  
on School Green.

*(If really wet we'll sing in St. George's Church)*

### ***The Nativity in your window***

Pause for thought: Perhaps Christians should think about putting  
a Nativity scene in their front window at Christmas, to show pass-  
ers-by the real reason for Christmas. At Easter, we could put up  
a Christian poster or a Christian cross in our front window, while  
we have the freedom to do this.

## *Deanery of Pontesbury*

### DEANERY NEWS

Rural Dean: **The Revd Bill Rowell**

telephone: 01938 552064 • email: [wkrowell@btinternet.com](mailto:wkrowell@btinternet.com)

*Thought for the month* from **Revd. Carolyn Chadwick,**  
*Pontesbury & Stiperstones Benefice*

Here is a story about Babushka. Babushka is the Russian name for grandmother or for any woman of grandmotherly age.

During the Cold War years, when the Soviet Union was expanding, the Church was severely persecuted. Church goers were intimidated, forced to inform on the activities of their fellow Christians. Many were sent to re-education camps, or were accused of anti-state activity and incarcerated in prisons for decades. Many lost their lives.

However, neither the Staasi nor the KGB bothered with the Babushka. They were just little old ladies, of no consequence to anyone, long past their usefulness to society, and so they were ignored. They continued to attend Church without harassment; they continued to worship God and to pray; they continued to care for their families, and especially their grandchildren, whom they quietly taught the ways of God, praying with them and for them, trusting that, in due season, their faithfulness would bear fruit.

These grandmothers, these Babushka, did not live to see the fruit of their quiet, faithful leadership. Two generations on and these children had grown up with a profound sense of what it really means to be a Christian, thanks to their Babushka, who had the time and the freedom to nurture their tender young spirits. They in their turn became committed praying communities. They began to pray for the liberty for their people; they became politically active; they began peaceful prayer vigils in their various churches, notably in Leipzig and in Berlin. And the Berlin Wall came down. And not a drop of blood was shed.

We live within a society which prizes achievement, activity, position, busyness, success, and which denigrates those who don't seem to be doing much. As the average age of our congregations

creeps up, it is easy to imagine that we are no longer of any consequence, no longer any use in this frenetically busy world. Not so! We are all called on (by God) to be leaders within our own sphere of influence, be it the family, the community, at work among colleagues, or in play among team-mates. 'What distinguishes a leader from a non-leader is not position or office or role but rather, a basic attitude to life. Others wait for something to happen; leaders help *make* something happen. While others curse the darkness, a leader lights a light... and leaves the world a little better for their presence.' (Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Lessons in Leadership*, p.xxi).

May we be a people who, like the Babushka, refuse to curse the darkness but instead light a light, in our praying, in our choosing, in our loving. May the Light of Christ shine in the darkness!

## Bits & Pieces from Revd Greg ...

### Crib Service

We will be offering interactive crib services on Christmas Eve with a dramatic presentation at both Minsterley and Pontesbury. Anyone willing to help with this by performing or helping with costumes should speak to Greg.

### Bereavement Group

We are looking at starting up a bereavement group for the whole area in the new year, working in conjunction with other denominations. If you would be interested in being part of a team to help with this, please speak to Greg.

You may like to refer to the article on page 22, '*When someone you loved is dead*', the first part of which appeared in November's church magazine.

#### QUOTE:

***"At Christmas time, when we receive presents that we don't really need, God offers us a gift we cannot do without."*** – J John

*John Ioannou John, best known as J.John, is an international evangelist and author based in the United Kingdom.*

This poem was found at St Laurence's Church in Ludlow and read out at the Remembrance Service at Pontesbury last month.

## **Who are these Men?** by Jodie Johnson (aged 11)

Who are these men  
Who march so proud  
Who quietly weep  
Eyes closed, heads bowed?  
These are the men  
Who once were boys  
Who missed out on youth  
And all its joys.

Who are these men  
With aged faces  
Who silently count  
The empty spaces  
These are the men  
Who gave their all  
Who fought for their country  
For freedom for all

Who are these men  
With sorrowful look  
Who still can remember  
The lives that were took?  
These are the men  
Who saw young men die  
The price of peace  
Is always high

Who are these men  
Who in the midst of pain  
Whispered comfort to those  
They would not see again  
These are the men  
Whose hands held tomorrow  
Who brought back our future  
With blood, tears and sorrow.

Who are these men  
Who promise to keep  
Alive in their hearts  
The ones God holds asleep?  
These are the men  
To whom I promise again  
Veterans, my friends



*Tony Horsfall lost his wife last year to cancer. He is a former missionary in East Malaysia and former retreat leader based in West Yorkshire. This is part two of a two-part series, part 1 was in our November magazine.*

## *When someone you loved is dead*

*Following on from last month, the other lessons that I learned following my wife's death were:*

11. That it helps to talk about your loss and the person you have lost. Sharing helps you to put things together in your mind, and is healing in itself.
12. Don't be afraid of pain, and don't anaesthetise it or avoid it – acknowledge it, face it, and you will heal more quickly.
13. That crying is normal, even for men, and it is a healing part of the grief process. Don't be afraid of this, even in public.
14. It may surprise you, to discover which people draw near to you in your grief, and who steps away. Appreciate those who come closer, without judging those who hold back.
15. Not everything people say to you about grief and your response will be helpful. Decide for yourself what is important for you, and let the rest go.
16. That grief may expose some of your inner fault-lines, but don't be afraid of this – learning more about yourself is a gift that comes with grieving.
17. No-one grieves perfectly. Following the death of your loved one, you will make mistakes, bad choices, and errors of judgment. This is normal, so forgive yourself.
18. That hope will rise again within you. The human spirit, in combination with God's grace, has its own remarkable resilience.
19. Don't be afraid to live again. God has a good purpose for you, and a plan for your life.
20. That your faith is an asset, not a liability. When you are tempted to be angry with God, remember that He is an ever-present help in time of need. Lean on Him.
21. That you have a part to play in your grief journey, so don't be passive and allow it to overwhelm you – begin to do what you can to rebuild your life.



# From the Dragon's Den

An exciting few weeks have passed at Little Dragons since we recommenced sessions following the long lockdown. Our first week back in September saw 9 little faces appearing through the door into the West End Room; this being the exact number that attended our first ever Dragon session in September 2006.

A lot of tiny feet have travelled through the WER, the Children's Corner and the nave aisle in the years since then and, it has to be said, that there has never been a time throughout those years, when we have regretted our journey.

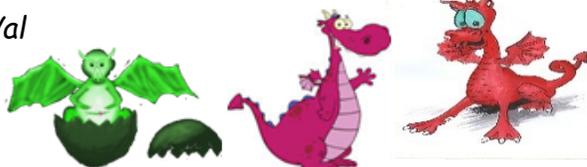
I read through my Little Dragon Journal entries the other day and re-read the 2006 report on the initial fund-raising effort to raise funds to start the venture. This took the form of a sponsored cycle event in and around the lanes, which resulted in £350 being raised through the valiant efforts of :-

*Our brave cycling party consisting of a wide age range – 68, 65, 62, 59, 47, 39 and almost 3, totalling 281 years, with an additional 133 years joining us for the walk; the only essential entry qualification being a foolhardy disposition and a big smile.'*

It is good to know that those involved, whose ages now total 386 years (cyclists) + 163 years (walkers) are still willing, although not necessarily as able, to take part in such energetic activity; although the minds are still active. (I think!).

It is good to note that this week our attendance total was 18 Little Dragons plus their Carers. Never did we think, way back in 2006 that our enthusiasm and good luck would enable us to continue so happily for so long and I must say that it has been a privilege to have had the good fortune plus the support of so many at St. George's Church. This continued support has enabled us to continue far longer than we could possibly have envisaged. Thank you!

*Best wishes to all of you from Val  
and from we three,  
George, Uncle Sam & Idris*



*Nigel Beeton writes: "At St Mary's in Bury St Edmunds, many years ago they found, sadly, that the tower could no longer support the bells swinging as most bells do, so they were fixed in the downward position, and they are rung with hammers as a carillon.*

*At Christmas, they ring out Christmas carols – O Little Town of Bethlehem, Silent Night – all the favourites.*

*As I listened to them, I was reminded of an old German carol, Susse die Glockennieklingen (Bells never sound any sweeter).*

*This year, I felt it was high time that I attempted an English version!"*

## **Bells Never Sound Any Sweeter**

Bells never sound any sweeter  
Than when at Christmas they ring;  
Angels on wings never fleeter –  
Message of gladness they bring!

*As they once sang on that first Christmas night  
Bells sing of God's Holy birth  
Ringing throughout the whole earth!*

O, when those sweet bells are ringing  
Even in Heaven they're heard;  
Angels soon join with their singing  
Bringing us God's Holy Word.

*Sing of the father, the mother, the child  
Bells sing of God's Holy birth  
Ringing throughout the whole earth!*

Ring with those beautiful tones  
Across the far ocean wide  
Joy to all folk in their homes  
This blessed Christmastide!

*All sing with joy the wonderful song –  
Bells sing of God's Holy birth  
Ringing throughout the whole earth!*

*By Nigel Beeton*

**SMILE: Easy come, easy go**

Father Christmas enters through a hole in the chimney  
and leaves through a hole in your pocket.



# Looking at CHURCH overseas

## **CRISIS GROWS IN LEBANON**

“Now that Christmas is approaching, families are worrying that by then, they won’t even be able to provide a home or food for their children.” – The words of a Lebanese Christian leader.

Lebanon’s crippled economy has reached such a low point that state-supplied electricity has dwindled to almost zero, so that extended blackouts engulf all without private generators. Fuel, whether for generators or cars, is becoming increasingly scarce, and so expensive that many cannot buy it even when available. Shelter and warmth are not the only problem. Food is a challenge too. Already many families are going without meals in a time of hunger unlike anything in living memory in Lebanon.

If you would like to send some food and medical support to Lebanese Christians this Christmas, please go to Barnabas Fund at <https://barnabasfund.org>.

## **HAITI STILL STRUGGLING AFTER EARTHQUAKE**

The 7.2 magnitude earthquake and Tropical Depression Grace that hit Haiti in August left 2,189 people dead, with a further 12,200 injured, and at least 129,000 homes either damaged or completely destroyed.

Following the disaster, All We Can and the Methodist Church in Britain launched an appeal to support those affected.

They have sent emergency food supplies (including rice, oil and beans), water purification tablets, sanitary equipment and temporary shelter materials. Additionally, they have sent seeds and tools for the winter agriculture season.

Now that the immediate humanitarian needs have been met, families need support for recovery and rehabilitation. This Christmas, if you would like to support the Haiti Emergency Earthquake Appeal, please visit [allwecan.org.uk/Haiti](http://allwecan.org.uk/Haiti).

## TEARFUND CAMPAIGNS FOR COVID VACCINES

The coronavirus pandemic has pushed an estimated 120 million people into poverty. Most of these will have to wait until at least 2022 to receive their vaccine.

Tearfund says: "The only way out of this pandemic is to recover together – no country is safe until all countries are safe. People who are going hungry now can't wait; they need urgent practical assistance. As well as providing this, Tearfund is campaigning for everyone in every country to have access to an approved Covid-19 vaccine.

"Our local partners are advocating for governments around the world to include vulnerable groups, such as refugees, in their vaccination programmes. And we are asking the UK government to do even more to support lower-income countries."

Tearfund is also helping to prepare communities for the rollout of a vaccine, including equipping church leaders to share accurate information about Covid-19 vaccines. If you would like to support this, please go to: <https://www.tearfund.org/campaigns/recover-together>

## Looking at the wider COMMUNITY

*Tim Lenton recalls a much-loved Irish saint.*

### *The great work of St Columba*

It was 1500 years ago, on 7<sup>th</sup> December 521, that St Columba, an Irish missionary who spread Christianity in Scotland and the North of England, was born in what is now County Donegal.

Columba – also known as Columcille – was one of the Twelve Apostles of Ireland, who studied under St Finnian in his monastic school, Clonard Abbey. He was also a great-grandson of the Irish King Niall, and he was said to have left Ireland primarily because he had caused considerable bloodshed at a battle stemming from his illegal copying of the Gospels.

But he became a missionary after he landed on Iona – a tiny island

off the west coast of Scotland – and, with his 12 followers, built a Celtic church and established a monastic community.

Iona quickly became known throughout Europe as a missionary centre and school: it turned into a place of pilgrimage for centuries to come – and still is, though none of Columba’s original buildings have survived. His cell and outlines of the original monastery were uncovered by excavations in 1958 and 1959.

He spent much time in Scotland, but Columba’s final years seem to have been spent mainly on Iona, where he was already revered as a saint. He is now the patron saint of Derry. He and those associated with him spread the gospel more than any other religious pioneers in Britain.

In the Irish language his name means “dove”, which is the same as Jonah in Hebrew. The word ‘columba’ is also Latin for dove.

## Prison FELLOWSHIP

**Angel Tree** gives parents in prison the opportunity to send a Christmas present to their children. In 2020, it sent out over 4,400 gifts.

Christmas is especially difficult for prisoners and their children. Angel Tree, organised by the Prison Fellowship, lessens the devastation experienced as a result of parental absence by not only helping families connect and build relationships, but by providing children with much-needed joy.



Prison Fellowship volunteers work with prison chaplains and local churches to buy, wrap and deliver the presents. As long as prisoners are allowed access to their children, they are given the opportunity to apply for a gift to be sent to them.

Each gift is dispatched as though it is from the parent in prison and is accompanied by a personal message written by the parent for their child to make the gift extra special. The parent is also given the option of including an age-appropriate Christian story book in their child’s gift.

*"I can't tell you in words how much my kids are happy. I can only say from my heart, you didn't send gifts, you sent happiness and smiles."  
– A Dad in prison.*

Visit <https://prisonfellowship.org.uk/our-work/angel-tree/>

## Christians speak out about truth and the media

Christians working in the media have been speaking about integrity and truth, and the challenges they face in their jobs. Several leading journalists took part in a special online service organised by the network Christians in Media.

**Lucy Denyer**, associate editor of the Telegraph magazine, explained: "It can be a tough working environment. Journalists are trained to ask hard questions, often they're cynical. But they are also taught to hold everything up to the light and question it for rigour or for truth – which is not so different to being a Christian after all."

**Warren Nettleford**, ITV News and Channel 5 presenter spoke about covering stories where teenagers had been killed. He said: "I've had to interview parents who have suffered a terrible loss, and you are there, knowing that your editor wants a story that will engage with viewers. At the same time, you are there to ensure that the parents can say what they want to say. You don't want to verge on being sensationalist. "So it's really important that you make sure that the parents can be heard – but you're not going over the edge to make it into entertainment."

**Tim Pemberton**, Head of Religion and Ethics for the BBC's audio output, was the keynote speaker at the service, available on YouTube. He spoke on Peter's denial of Jesus from Luke 22, and pointed out "Speaking the truth can be threatening and costly. Jesus ended up on a cross for it."

Looking across society, he said: "Truth is now a cudgel, a weapon with which to beat and shame your opponents into submission. We are no longer open, honest enquirers. We are all warriors keen to prove our point."

He contrasted this with St Paul, writing to the Ephesians, and encouraging them to seek unity by "speaking the truth in love."

The BBC executive encouraged people "to seek one-ness by caring how my telling of the truth impacts my family, my friends, my opponents and my enemies. We all have a choice in this – to follow the status quo and add to the cycle of abuse and anger or to fulfil the promise of our good intentions, listen to others and make sure our contribution is insightful, courteous and positive. This is a radical, counter-cultural idea."

# God in the Arts

*This month the Revd Michael Burgess continues his series on God in the Arts with Arts with 'The Annunciation to the Shepherds' by Sano di Pietro. It now hangs in the Vatican.*



'In that region there were shepherds keeping watch over their flock'

In the Old Testament shepherds were greatly valued and treated with respect. Patriarchs, prophets and kings had all tended sheep. Job, a rich man, owned 14,000 sheep. David was tending sheep when he was called by God and anointed by Samuel.

But as the Israelites settled in towns and cities and turned to farming, attitudes towards the shepherds changed. As the New Testament opens, shepherding had become a dirty, lonely life, away from civilisation. Shepherds could not observe the daily rituals of their faith, and so they had a low status in society, looked down upon by orthodox Jews.

But out in the countryside with just the hills and the plains and the open air, St Luke tells us that it was there that God's message was proclaimed and heard. Cities and towns had walls and barriers, as Bethlehem has today. But in the fields at night, there were shep-

herds, watching and alert, ready for any eventuality. And so, they were the first to hear of the birth of a Saviour.

'The Annunciation to the Shepherds' is this month's painting by Sano di Pietro. We know little about this Italian artist apart from some dates. He was born in Siena in 1406 and died there in 1481. But he has left us a legacy of beautiful and sensitive paintings. As we look at this scene, we see the human details: two shepherds huddled by the fireside with their dog, all three looking up to see the angel, and a spear by the side to ward off thieves and predators. The sheep are safely in their pen, black and white fleeces huddled together for warmth. In the sky the angel appears, bearing an olive branch in one hand and with the other pointing to Bethlehem in the distance.

Luke has already told us of another annunciation, with Gabriel visiting Mary. Artists loved to portray this scene and often showed a lily, the symbol of purity, in their paintings. Here there is the olive sprig, a symbol of peace to reinforce the angelic message of peace in the birth of the Saviour. Luke goes on to tell us how Jesus brought new meaning and peace to all those like the shepherds who were nobody in the eyes of people, but everything to the eyes and heart of God.

Jesus in His teaching often turned to the theme of sheep and shepherds, with parables about lost sheep, gates to the fold, and hireling shepherds. Just as the faithful shepherds were prepared to give their lives to protect the flock, so Jesus the Good Shepherd gave His life for the world – a death that would bring the peace and reconciliation shown in that olive branch held by the angel. At this Christmas time we rejoice with the heavenly host to proclaim the birth of this Prince of Peace and we commit ourselves to that work of peace and shepherding. Howard Thurman wrote these words:

'When the song of the angels is stilled...  
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,  
the work of Christmas begins:  
to find the lost, to heal the broken,  
to feed the hungry, to release the prisoner,  
to rebuild the nations, to bring peace among the people,  
to make music in the heart.'



# God in the Sciences

*Dr Ruth M Bancewicz, who is Church Engagement Director at The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion in Cambridge, writes on the positive relationship between Science and Christian faith.*

## **Meditation on the Incarnation**

*After the bright beam of annunciation  
fused heaven with dark earth  
His searing sharply-focused light  
went out for a while  
eclipsed in amniotic gloom:  
His cool immensity of splendour  
His universal grace  
small-folded in a warm dim  
female space*

This extract from Luci Shaw's poem *Made Flesh* captures something of the wonder of the moment when the second person of the Trinity became an embryo.

How does a single cell turn into an infant, and what does that process say about us – and God? These are the questions that Professor Jeff Hardin, a developmental biologist, asks himself. Having studied theology as well as science, he has a unique perspective on embryonic development.

A new-born baby is made of around five trillion cells. These cells come in hundreds of different types, each of which must be in the correct place for the child's body to function properly. Every new life is the result of intricate and highly ordered processes. Three things must happen as an embryo develops.

The first important process is for cells to take on their identity as types of muscle, bone, nerves, and so on. The second is when each cell learns which part of the body it belongs to. Third, those cells are moved around to form the different tissues and organs. These three are not discrete stages, but they all happen at around the same time, building up gradually like the different aspects of a picture coming into focus.

All three of these processes are driven forward by the movement of cells, the connections between them, and the signals they pass to

each other. Jeff studies a sort of cellular glue which is involved in joining cells together. Making and breaking these adhesions can affect how cells move and signal to each other, their identity in the body, how they are organised as groups, and ultimately their survival. This glue is found on the surface of cells throughout the animal kingdom, including the small worms Jeff's lab studies.

For Jeff, peering down a microscope at tiny worm embryos can be an act of worship. It is also an exercise in art appreciation, as he learns to appreciate the created order. Understanding the complexities of development, while also being aware that God knows that process intimately both as Creator and created, fills Jeff with a profound sense of awe, wonder and worship.

Does the minute scale of our early development, compared to the incomprehensibly vast and ancient universe, give us a sense of insignificance? Psalm 8 says, "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?"

For Jeff and the Psalmist, such feelings can be a positive experience if they serve as a reminder to be humble in the face of a universe that is vastly complicated but also deeply meaningful, made by a God who loves each one of us.

### Grandfathers

I was talking to my young Sunday School Class, and a four-year-old boy suddenly asked me: "Miss, do you have a grandfather?"

I replied, "I used to have two, but they both went to Heaven to be with Jesus."

He thought, shook his head sadly, and said, "One of my grandfathers hasn't gone to Heaven."

(Long pause while I tried to decide how to proceed.)

"He's gone to Bexhill-on-Sea."

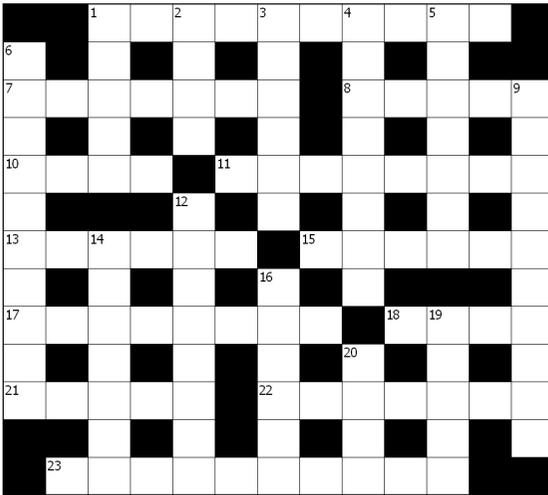


### Crossword solution.

**ACROSS:** 1, Tabernacle. 7, Absalom. 8, Incas. 10, Roes. 11, Captured. 13, Fright. 15, Cavell. 17, Cyclonic. 18, Herb. 21, Sonar. 22, Amazing. 23, Settlement.

**DOWN:** 1, Taste. 2, Bold. 3, Ramiah. 4, Abiathar. 5, Lucerne. 6, Sacrifices. 9, Saddlebags. 12, Theocrat. 14, Incense. 16, Pilate. 19, Exist. 20, Save.

# Your puzzle for December



## Across

- 1** Provisional meeting place of God and the Jews (Exodus 25:9) (10)  
**7** David's third son, killed when his head got caught in a tree during a battle with his father (2 Samuel 18:14-15) (7)  
**8** They ruled much of the west coast of South America in the 15th and early 16th centuries (5)  
**10** Small deer of European and Asian extraction (4)  
**11** Seized control of (Numbers 21:25) (8)  
**13** Terror (Luke 24:5) (6)

- 15** First World War heroine shot by the Germans in Brussels, Nurse Edith \_\_\_\_ (6)  
**17** Stormy (8)  
**18** A bitter variety of this, together with lamb and unleavened bread, was the Passover menu for anyone 'unclean' (Numbers 9:11) (4)  
**21** Arson (anag.) (5)  
**22** How John Newton described God's grace in his well-known hymn (7)  
**23** Habitation (Isaiah 27:10) (10)

## Down

- 1** '\_\_\_\_ and see that the Lord is good' (Psalm 34:8) (5)  
**2** 'The wicked man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are as \_\_\_\_ as a lion' (Proverbs 28:1) (4)  
**3** One of the exiles, a descendant of Parosh, who married a foreign woman (Ezra 10:25) (6)  
**4** He escaped from Nob when Saul killed the rest of his family and joined David (1 Samuel 22:19-20) (8)  
**5** City and lake in Central Switzerland (7)  
**6** 'Offer your bodies as living \_\_\_\_\_, holy and pleasing to God' (Romans 12:1) (10)  
**9** Pouches carried by horses (Genesis 49:14) (10)  
**12** One who accepts government by God (8)  
**14** Aromatic substance commonly used in Jewish ritual (Exodus 30:1) (7)  
**16** He asked Jesus, 'What is truth?' (John 18:38) (6)  
**19** Are (Romans 13:1) (5)  
**20** 'You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will \_\_\_\_ his people from their sins' (Matthew 1:21) (4)

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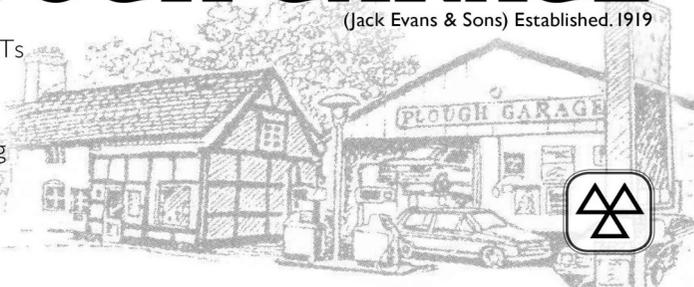
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