

St. George's Hontesbury

Magazine 50p



January 2022

The Parish of Pontesbury

Contact details:

Rector The Revd. Greg Smith 07902 794653 <u>Greg's DAY OFF is FRIDAY</u>	Friday Club Mrs Mary Worrall 791069
Reader Emeritus Mrs Dorothy Headland 790565	Little Dragons Mrs Valerie Butterworth 790587
Churchwardens Mr Allen Marsden 791822 Mrs Mary Worrall 791069	Mothers' Union Mrs Marion Elliott 792256
Assistant Churchwardens Mrs Helen McCall 790296 mobile 07985 312192 Mrs Heather Ryder 790359	Prayer Chain Coordinator Revd. Shirley Small 791885
Treasurer Mr Gerald Worrall 791069	Parish Visitors Team Mrs Marion Elliott 792256
PCC Secretary Mrs Valerie Butterworth 790587	Bell Tower Officers Captain: Mrs Sheila Bower 790294
West End Room Booking Contact Mrs Mary Worrall 791069	Website Mr Richard Elliott 792256 webmaster@st-george.org.uk
Organist & Choirmaster Dr Paul Bracken 0795-167-4428	Magazine Editor Mrs Sheila Bower 790294
	Advertisements Mrs Marion Elliott 792256
	Printing team Mrs Carolyn Lewis 860714 stgsprinting@gmail.com

QUOTE:

Although our New Year's resolutions may quickly crumble,
God's plans never fail. - Charles Stanley

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

Send e-mail & attachments to stgsmagazine@googlemail.com

Please post handwritten articles to Ford Place, The Bank, Pontesbury Hill, SY5 0XX.

Website: www.st-george.org.uk

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



LIFTING UP OUR EYES

with Carolyn Chadwick

Musings from The Hermitage

At Epiphany we celebrate the arrival of the Three Wise Men at Bethlehem. We know next to nothing about them; indeed, even their title is open to conjecture. We only know they were wealthy enough to afford very valuable gifts, and that they were sages or possibly astrologers from a pagan, non-Jewish culture. We may wonder why these men are even included in the story, but I believe that they have some wonderful truths to impart.

When they see the star rising in the east, they have an inkling of its portent: the birth of a new King of the Jews, worthy of their worship. Their response is whole-hearted. They are not content merely to think "Oh, that's nice for them," and continue with their lives as they know them. The hunch is powerful enough to shake them out of their comfort zone, and to set them on a journey, they know not where, or for how long, in order to find this newborn king and worship him. It is a response almost on a par with Abraham, who heard the still small voice of God calling him, left his country and his father's people, and set off, aged 75, on a journey which would change his life forever. True faith is not a matter of cold reason, giving merely mental assent to a set of ideas. True faith leads to action; it radically affects the way we live, the choices we make.

The Wise Men are also willing to have their own assumptions challenged. Setting out on their journey, they head straight for the royal palace in Jerusalem. Well, where else would the King of the Jews be born but in the royal palace, with all its trappings of riches, status, pride and power? On arrival, they must have been puzzled that the present King Herod knew nothing about the birth, but they do not give up and go home; they continue to follow the star and find themselves at the other extreme of existence – amongst the goats, chickens and cows, and with a poor, young couple who will shortly become refugees due to the Wise Men's indiscrete conversation with Herod. They have an epiphany. They see the infant – the Word made Flesh, unable to speak a word; the Creator of all

has become a creature among His creatures. Not for Him the sham trappings of worldly power and might, but life in all its raw splendour and beauty and risk and vulnerability. The response of the Wise Men is one of utter humility. They bow down and worship this divine Nobody, they give Him their priceless gifts. They return home by another route, avoiding all that Herod represents. They have sought and found, and they are radically changed. Wise Men and Women still seek Him!

*May God bless you all richly in 2022.
Carolyn*



New Year Prayer 2022 by Daphne Kitching

Lord of all creation,
Lord of all the years,
Thank you for steering us through the fragmented landscape of two pandemic-riddled years. Here we stand at the beginning of a new year, not knowing what lies ahead. Our only security lies in you, Lord.

Please take our hands and guide us, day by day, into January and beyond. We will not be afraid, Lord because you have promised never to leave us, never to forsake us. And you keep your promises. We are safe.

2022, here we come... expectantly,
In Jesus' name,
Amen

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 join a church service this month.

Date	Service	Readings
2nd January Epiphany of the Lord	10:30 am Morning Worship	Isaiah 60:1-6 Ephesians 3:1-12 Matthew 2:1-12
9th January Baptism of the Lord Covenant Service	10:30 am Holy Communion	Isaiah 43:1-7 (Acts 8:14-17) Luke 3:15-17, 21-22
16th January Second Sunday after the Epiphany	10.30 am Holy Communion	(Isaiah 62:1-5) 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 John 2:1-11
23rd January Third Sunday after the Epiphany	10:30 am Holy Communion	(Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10) 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a Luke 4:14-21
30th January Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany	10:30 am Morning Worship	Jeremiah 1:4-10 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 Luke 4:21-30



Looking at GOD

The Revd Canon Paul Hardingham considers the gifts of the Magi:

A Christmas Gift

It's not easy getting the right Christmas present for others, especially in these uncertain times. However, the Magi's gifts were entirely appropriate and help us to understand God's gift of Jesus to us.



'On coming to the house, they saw the child with His mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.' (Matt 2:11).

These were the expensive kind of gifts that visitors from the east would bring: gold, frankincense (a plant gum resin used in incense) and myrrh (another resin used in perfumes).

Who is He?

Gold is a gift for a king. In Jesus, we see a king in baby clothes. The worship of the wise men was costly, not only in terms of their gifts but for their lives.

Why did He come?

Frankincense was used by the priests in the temple in offering sacrifices. Jesus, as the ultimate priest, is the one who came to bring God and man together. He could do this because He is both divine and human.

What did it cost Him?

Myrrh was used to embalm the dead. This gift reminds us that the baby of Bethlehem would die on the cross to give His life for us. The wood of the crib and the cross are the same wood!

What are we going to offer Him this Christmas? Jesus is *Christ*, the king who comes to rule our lives; He's *Lord*, the One who knows

what it's like to be human as well as divine; and He's *Saviour*, who enables us to be friends of God.

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

Looking to the New Year

The month of January is named after the Roman god Janus, who is depicted as having two faces. As we look back on a difficult year dominated by the pandemic, how should we look forward to 2022 with fresh hope? The apostle Paul writes: *'But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.'* (Philippians 3:13,14).

Firstly, to make a new start, you need to **forget the things which are behind**. Paul saw himself as an athlete running for Christ and purposely not looking back. He refused to allow his past sins and difficulties to define who he was. By God's grace, he no longer saw himself that way. The same can be true of ourselves, as we confess our sins and failures to receive God's forgiveness and new life.



Secondly, we need to **focus on the things that lie ahead**. The athlete is entirely focused on winning the race and gaining the prize. Like Paul, we have to be single-minded in making Jesus the focus of everything we do. How can we go deeper in our prayer life and Bible reading this year? What will it mean to better serve Christ in our workplace and neighbourhood, or family and children?

Paul looked forward to the day when he would stand before God, who would say *'well done, good and faithful servant'*. In light of all that Jesus had done for him, Paul wanted to give his very best to Jesus. As we stand at the beginning of this New Year, let's ask ourselves, *'What can I do this year that will help me bring glory and honour to God?'*

Written by Canon Paul Hardingham.

Bible verses of hope as a New Year begins

You are a new creation: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.' (2 Corinthians 5:17)

You can have a new heart: I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. (Ezekiel 36:26)

Good new things can happen: Behold, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth; shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. (Isaiah 43:19)

God is looking out for you: For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. (Jeremiah 29:11)

You need not worry: Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?(Matthew 6:25)

Do not be afraid: For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.(2 Timothy 1:7)

Feel free to always ask for help: Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. (Philippians 4:6)

Look forwards: But one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead. (Philippians 3:13)



Paul Hardingham begins a year-long series on the very foundations of our Christian faith.



God the Creator

For many today the universe began with a big bang, in which a lump of matter, smaller than a pinhead, exploded 15 billion years ago. It's a story that defines who we are and where we come from. However, the Bible gives us another perspective on this event, revealing God as Creator: *'By faith we understand that the universe*

was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible' (Hebrews 11:3). What does Genesis 1 say about God as Creator?

'In the beginning, God'

Whereas science can offer answers about the **how** of creation, the Bible tells us about the **why** i.e. the purpose of the Creator! Creation reflects the character and glory of God, inviting a response of dependence and praise!

'God created the heavens and the earth'

God shaped the universe, as expressed in the '6 days' of creation. They speak of an ordered and purposeful universe that expresses God's will: He spoke and it was done! An alternative translation is *'God began creating'*, reminding us that creation is also an ongoing process, where the Holy Spirit is still at work in our lives and world.

'God created man in His own image'

In the account, human beings are presented as the climax and crown of creation. We share the sixth day of creation with other creatures, as well as 95% of the same DNA. However, we are distinctively made in the **image of God**, created for relationship with God, with a responsibility to care for the created order.

'And God saw that it was good'

Like an artist, God described His work as *good*. We should always approach this story with wonder, enjoying God's world and affirming creativity in ourselves and others.

QUOTE: Do not pray for easy lives. Pray to be stronger men. - John F Kennedy

The Rev Dr Jo White continues her walk through the church year.

Reflected Faith Series - Taking Down Christmas

Happy New Year!

January is, of course, the time to take down the decorations and put them away for next year. In many churches however, the Crib scene is left up until the beginning of February - the Feast of Candlemas. That celebrates the Presentation of Christ in the Temple.

It's yet another moment of 'illumination,' and has a number of meanings.

The date 'set' for Candlemas is the 2nd February each year and it marks the midpoint of winter, halfway between the shortest day and the spring equinox. So, from that date onwards the days begin to get longer and the nights shorter.

It's the day when we celebrate Mary and Joseph taking their baby, Jesus, to the Temple. The custom was set down in Leviticus chapter 12, where the parents presented the child to the Lord, and received a blessing from the priests. It was a picture of the sacrifice of the first-born son, giving him to the Lord.

Any ideas on a third meaning? (*Answer next month.*)

As you take down your decorations, think about where you will store them ready for use next Christmas - and also, how carefully you will put them away.

Will the string of lights be a tangled mess of knots when you take them out of their wrappings or will you be able to hang them straight on the tree? One of the biggest concerns is where to put the figure of baby Jesus. It's usually so small in a Crib Set that it is easily lost and then the Crib Set rather loses its meaning!

This month

Have a think about where you put Jesus after Christmas. Not the figure but the 'real' person. He's easily left in a virtual crib as a baby in our minds, just like the wooden or plastic figure in our attics or under the stairs. If we keep Him as that lovely sweet-smelling-cute baby we miss out on His teaching and miracles, we will fail to understand and engage with His massive love and compassion for each of us on the cross - and most importantly His resurrection. Death is not the end.

Not for Him.

Not for us.

And not for our loved ones.

Poems & Prayers

The New Year By Megan Carter

*If we put our hand in God's hand
As we enter this New Year
Not knowing what the future holds
But that our Friend is near*

*We shall not fear what lies ahead
If He is by our side,
Nor wander from the pathway
If He will be our guide.*

*The Sinless One from heaven came
To dwell with us on earth,
He sought and bought us with His
blood
And offered us new birth.*

*Now as we travel through this year
He knows the things He's planned,
So let us trust and know just this -
Our times are in His hands.*



As for the future....

*O my Father, my God, I am in Your
hand;
and may I rejoice above all things
in being so.
Do with me what seems good in
Your sight;
only let me love you with all mind,
soul and strength.*

By John Wesley

God's Aid

*God to enfold,
God to surround,
God in speech-told,
God my thought-bound.*

*God when I sleep,
God when I wake,
God my watch-keep,
God my hope-sake.*

*God my life-whole,
God lips apart,
God in my soul,
God in my heart.*

*God Wine and Bread,
God is my death,
God my soul-thread,
God ever breath.*

Ancient Celtic Prayer

This is the first in a series about encouragement, written by Dr Herbert McGonigle, who will take a Bible event and a historical anecdote to bring us a word of help and support in these difficult days.

There's more with us than with them!!

We begin the New Year with a Bible event from 2 Kings and an anecdote from Birmingham.

For a number of years, the king of Syria had tried to capture the prophet Elisha. (The story is found in 2 Kings 6:11-19). Elisha always knew what the Syrians were planning, and revealed their plans before they could be carried out. Finally, the Syrian armies surrounded Elisha in Dothan.

When Gehazi, Elisha's servant, woke up and saw the encircling Syrian armies, he was terrified. But Elisha prayed, 'Lord, open his eyes.' When Gehazi looked again, he could hardly believe what he saw. All round them were horses and chariots of fire. The armies of heaven were protecting them! And Elisha encouraged him. "Don't fear, there's more with us than with them!" Immediately the Syrians were struck with blindness and Elisha and Gehazi escaped.

Often, we need to ask the Lord to *open our eyes*. When our strength has failed and faith is weak, we're apt to think that God has forgotten us. But He hasn't! He is near and only our dimness of vision prevents us from seeing His great presence and power and provision. Fear not! Trust God! Believe His Word! There's more with us than with our enemy!

In the early 1950s a well-known department store in Birmingham, England, wanted to extend its premises. Close at hand was an ideal site but it belonged to the Quakers whose Meeting House had been there for well over 200 years. The department store wrote to the Quakers, offering to buy the site. They said, "We will give you a very good price for the land. In fact, we'll send you a blank cheque. Please fill in whatever sum of money you think appropriate, and we will honour it." Four weeks passed and there was no reply, then five weeks, then six weeks.

Finally, a letter arrived from the Quakers. It thanked the department store for their generous offer but declined to accept it. "Our Meeting House has been here for almost 250 years," they explained, "much longer than your store. We have no wish to sell our property. However, if you would agree to sell your site to us, we are very interested in buying it. We will give you a very good price for it. Just state your selling price and we will honour it."

The letter was signed 'Cadburys.' The department store thought they

were dealing with a small congregation of Quakers. Instead, they were dealing with the Cadburys' empire. Cadburys could have bought the department store twenty times over!

When our enemy the devil attacks us, by ourselves we are weak and feeble. But when Christ dwells in us by His Spirit, we are mighty! The devil is no longer attacking us; he is attacking the Captai of our salvation – and the devil cannot win! There's more with us than with him! As we go through 2022, be *encouraged*. With Christ we are more than conquerors!

The Revd Dr Herbert McGonigle is a former Senior Lecturer in Historical Theology and Church History, Nazarene Theological College, Manchester.

Looking at CHURCH

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity – 18th to 25th January

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is traditionally observed from the 18th to 25th January – the octave of St Peter and St Paul.

This year, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity has been prepared by the churches of the Middle East. The Christians of the Middle East say that they offer these resources “conscious that the world shares many of the travails and much of the difficulties that it experiences”, and that it also “yearns for a light to lead the way to the Saviour who is the light that overcomes darkness.”

More at: <https://ctbi.org.uk/week-of-prayer-for-christian-unity-2022/>

Sitting down in church



Did you ever wonder how our churches first acquired pews? Dr Nicholas Orme, Emeritus Professor of History at Exeter University, has written a book, *Going to Church in Medieval England* (Yale University Press), in which he points out that “no medieval church pronouncement ordered the provision of seating in churches other than for the clergy. General seating was a lay invention.”

It is easy to understand those laity of long ago: the services could go on for hours. And so, as Dr Orme explains, general seating “seems to have begun with the nobility and gentry who wished for comfort The desire spread downwards to the congregation during the 14th and 15th centuries.”

19th January Wulfstan, Bishop of Worcester 1095



Wulfstan, Bishop of Worcester from 1062 to 1095, occupies a unique place in British church history.

He was the last surviving pre-Conquest bishop, the first bishop to pay homage to William the Conqueror after the battle of Hastings, and one of the few Saxons to keep high office to the end of William's reign. On top of that, he seems to have been a truly good and holy man.

Wulfstan was born about 1008 at Long Itchington, Warwickshire. His uncle was Archbishop of York, and through his help, Wulfstan studied at monasteries in Evesham and in Peterborough. Because of his Christian dedication, his superiors recommended him for the priesthood. Wulfstan was ordained in 1038 and joined a Benedictine monastery at Worcester.

Wulfstan was appointed prior of the monastery and from 1034 also served as the parish priest of Hawkesbury, Gloucestershire. He was made bishop of Worcester in 1062.

As a bishop, Wulfstan made some significant contributions to the English church. He had a passion for pastoral care and was the first English bishop to be known to have made a complete visitation of his diocese. He was a gifted administrator, increasing the effectiveness of his archdeacons.

He was highly influential in monastic reform, overseeing laws and canons to reform the role of the clergy.

He was a powerful preacher – with a great gift for explaining the teaching of Christianity. He encouraged a wider understanding of public penitence and taught against the many pagan customs throughout the land.

He had a strong social conscience, and soon became a bitter opponent of the slave trade. Together with Lanfranc, Wulfstan was mainly responsible for ending the slave trade in Bristol, and for abolishing the slave trade between Worcester diocese and Ireland.

He had a passion for buildings, and founded Great Malvern Priory, as well as overseeing the large-scale rebuilding of Worcester Cathedral, Hereford Cathedral, and Tewkesbury Abbey.

Wulfstan died in January 1095, apparently during his daily ritual of washing the feet of 12 of his parishioners.

Our Church Community at New Year

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 ...

There will be **NO TEA SERVICE** in January.

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

for more information.

There's still time to Light up St. G's ... !

Every night throughout January 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.



Tree Festival

The total takings for the weekend were

£2018

shared between St. George's church
and the Severn Hospice.

A BIG THANK YOU to all who took part
from Mary and Gerald Worrall.



... is very sorry that due to concerns about the spread of the omicron variant coronavirus, the planned concert was **POSTPONED**. We hope to rearrange this event later in the year.

Reindeer
keep
watch
outside
St. G's



God's fragrance – do people catch a whiff of it on you?

*'...and the house was filled with the
fragrance of the perfume.' John 12:3*

A story runs of how a lady was having tea outside a tea shop late one afternoon, when she became aware of a pleasant scent filling the air. She asked the waiter the source of the scent and was told that it came from the people passing by. He explained that they worked in a perfume factory down the street and were on their way home. When they left the factory, they always carried with them the fragrance that had permeated their clothes during their day's work.

As the perfume workers leave the factory full of the fragrance of where they have been, so we, as we leave our churches and chapels and wherever we spend time with God, are meant to carry the perfume of His presence with us. We are called to spread everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Him (2 Corinthians 2:4). If we allow ourselves in worship to be permeated with Christ's love and the sweetness of His presence, then we will be able to take the Jesus in us out into the world.

Deanery of Pontesbury

DEANERY NEWS

Rural Dean: **The Revd Bill Rowell**

telephone: 01938 552064 • email: wkrowell@btinternet.com

Thought for the month from Bill Rowell

I was reflecting on what resolutions I might make for 2022, when something a friend said to me - rather dismissively I thought, at about the same point a couple of years ago, popped into my head: "I don't need to make resolutions. What you see is what you get!"

I'm sure I do need to make resolutions: I'm aware of areas of my life where improvement is not only possible, but desirable. But often the my resolutions have applied just to one section of me or my life in a way that's separated that bit of me from the rest. I might, for example, have the praiseworthy objective of joining a gym (though I don't, as it happens) - but it'll go the way of very many New Year gym memberships unless it's connected up to changes in my life, such as how and what I eat and drink, and what other exercise I take. On its own it won't be enough, it won't be sustainable.

So my friend's "What you see is what you get" motto might be a useful tool if it reminds me to be connected in my thinking. Something somebody else helpfully said to me is also important: "Resolutions need resolution." In other words, to keep the resolutions we make requires stickability. Don't give up at the first hurdle! Our New Year resolutions are too often dropped the first time we fail or falter. So this year I'll do like the song says - "Pick yourself up, dust yourself down, and start all over again."

My starting point for resolutions with coherence and stickability in mind, will be a text that's turned up a lot in my Advent sermons, the Summary of the Law - Jesus quoting the Old Testament instruction to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength; and love your neighbour as yourself."

The resolutions I'll make and hope to stick at will connect into three words in that text, the first of which is "all". What the areas of my life that I'm not fully offering to God? Where am I not using all my

strength in his service? I need to address my prayer life, so that it becomes the basis on which all else is built, and not an after-thought to be fitted in where there's time.

The second word is "neighbour". Loving God is something meaningless and abstract unless it's expressed in practical and effective love of my neighbour. The two commandments in the Summary of the Law cannot be separated. So how can I act with more kindness myself, and give my support to the kindness of others? And my neighbour, of course, is anyone I have the power to help.

And then lastly but no less importantly, the word "yourself". God loves me, and if loving God means aligning my love with his, as far as I can manage, that includes valuing and caring for (loving) myself. And if I can make progress, through small, coherent and sensible changes, in all three of these areas, I hope I can be more connected and useful as a disciple, so that what you see will be what you get - and in a good way.

How to hug somebody

The perfect hug should last between five to ten seconds, and it should be done with your arms criss-crossed behind the other person's back.

That is the finding of psychologists who experimented using more than 100 pairs of friends. They found that when it comes to hugging someone, "more is definitely more."

It seems that a ten second hug gives great pleasure, a five second hug is adequate, but a brief hug of just one second leaves nobody comforted.

Even worse, since Covid, elbow bumping has become popular. But a bump on the elbow doesn't do much for anyone.

The research was done at the University of London and the University of Bristol.





From the Dragon's Den

Wonders never cease - we managed to enjoy our Little Dragon Christmas Party, draped in masks and well-sanitised, without mishap. George, Uncle Sam and Idris were not to be found in their basket as they had decided to escape from their usual confines during the Christmas Tree Festival and were found to be hiding: - George behind the candles, Uncle Sam under the church tree and Idris, under the Little Dragon Tree.

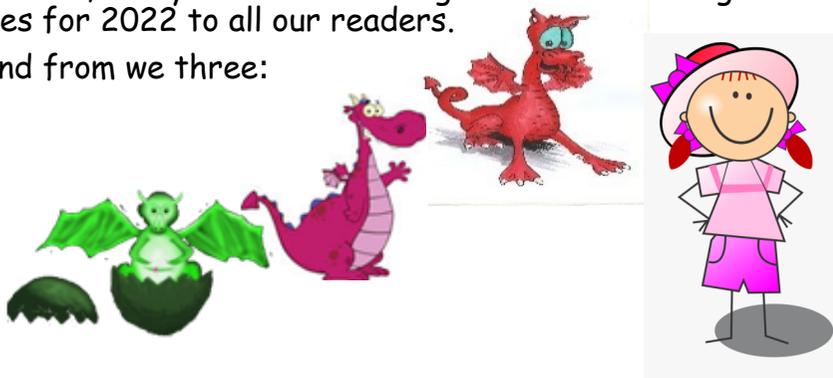
After we had lit our Christmas candle, to remind us of the birth of Jesus, and sang about the twinkling of the stars on our tree, Father Christmas appeared with a bulging sack and each Little Dragon received a gift from him. It was lovely to hear their 'thank you' responses as they received them.

Father Christmas had left his reindeer snacking at Lower Camp and, after chatting with each child, he went to continue planning his Christmas journeying.

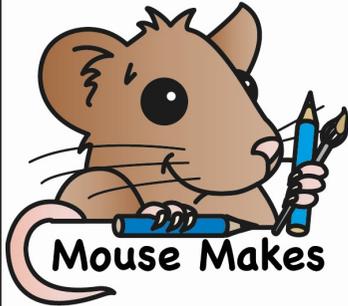
This all seemed to be a far cry from the worries of Covid-19 and we are living in hope that we will be able to open as usual to enjoy our Spring Term.

In the meantime, everyone at Little Dragons sends Greetings and Good Wishes for 2022 to all our readers.

From Val and from we three:



QUOTE: *We're most happy when we're enjoying God and fulfilling His purpose for our life. - Nancy Wolgemuth*



When I am afraid
I will **trust** you,
I praise God for
His word,
I **trust** God, so
I am *not* afraid.

Psalm 56:3-4



But I **trust**
in you,
O Lord;
I say,
"You are
my God!"

Psalm 31:14



*The Lord is good,
a refuge in times
of trouble.
He cares for those
who **trust** in Him.*

Nahum 1:7



Jesus said:
"Do not be troubled.
Trust in God and
trust in me."

John 14:1

Cut out and colour these cards to help you to **thank** and **praise** God.

"May the God of hope fill you with joy and *peace* as you **trust** in Him!" *Romans 3:13*



Trust in the Lord with
all your heart and
lean not on your own
understanding.
In all your ways **submit**
to Him and He will make
your paths straight.

Proverbs 3:5-6



Looking at the wider COMMUNITY

Call for action to free Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe

The Bishop of Chelmsford, Dr Guli Francis-Dehqani, is calling upon the British Government to repay its £400-million debt to Iran, and take immediate action to secure the release of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe.

Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe was first jailed in Iran five years ago, accused of crimes that involved plotting against the Iranian government. Last year she lost her appeal against a second prison sentence and was then ordered to return to prison for another year, with a further year of a travel ban. Late last year her husband engaged in a 21-day hunger strike outside the Foreign Office, to try and persuade the British Government to take action.

Britain owes Iran £400 million over the purchase of Challenger tanks. It is an acknowledged historical debt. It is widely assumed that the debt is linked to the continued imprisonment of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe.

And here Tim Lenton, Community reporter for the Parish Pump, offers us some memories ...

Remembering Sir Ernest Shackleton

One hundred years ago, on 5th January 1922, Sir Ernest Shackleton, the Irish-born British Antarctic explorer, died of a heart attack in his bunk in South Georgia. He had led three British expeditions to the Antarctic. He was 47.

It is now believed he may have had a hole in his heart. His feats of bravery and endurance were mixed with sudden illness, but he was never willing to have his heart properly examined.

He set a Furthest South record when he commanded the Nimrod expedition in 1907-09. On that occasion he showed acclaimed leadership by refusing to try for the Pole because of the likelihood that he and his men would die on the return journey.

But his greatest achievement was to enable the rescue of his crew after the *Endurance* became trapped and then crushed by ice in the Weddell Sea in 1915. A long trek, hauling lifeboats over ice, was followed by Shackleton and two companions reaching South Georgia in a small boat – followed by a trek over mountains and glaciers to a whaling station, from where a rescue ship was launched to bring home the remainder.

This has been described as “an utterly unbelievable story of bravery, heroism and endurance”. Shackleton was not known to be a Christian, but he and his men said they felt Providence was guiding them, especially during the 36-hour march across South Georgia, when all three said they felt sure there were four of them, and not three, making the journey.

Remembering Ralph Vaughan Williams

One hundred years ago, on 16th January 1922, Ralph Vaughan Williams’ *A Pastoral Symphony* was performed for the first time, in London.

Later designated Symphony No. 3, it was said to be inspired by the composer hearing a bugler practising and is frequently thought of as a memorial for the fallen of the First World War, many of whom Vaughan Williams knew. He later said he saw music as an antidote to a war-torn world.

He had been born in 1872: his father was vicar at Down Ampney in Gloucestershire, but he died two years later. His mother, an evangelical Christian, was also the niece of Charles Darwin. This combination of events may have led to his uncertainty in questions of faith: his second wife Ursula said he “drifted into a cheerful agnosticism, but he was never a professing Christian”.

Nevertheless, Vaughan Williams frequently attended church, where he found musical inspiration. His first job after graduation was as a church organist, and he wrote many compositions for the Anglican Church, including well known hymn tunes. He edited *The English Hymnal* in 1904 and wrote an opera of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. But he said there was “no reason why an atheist could not write a good Mass”.

A Pastoral Symphony received some criticism at first but was later regarded as stunningly beautiful, combining the grace of the wildly popular *The Lark Ascending* with the deep sadness of war.

80 years of Desert Island Discs

Some 80 years ago, on 29th January 1942, the BBC radio show *Desert Island Discs* was first broadcast. It is Britain's longest running radio show, and the world's longest running weekly factual radio programme.

Devised and originally presented by Roy Plomley, it was first broadcast on the BBC Forces Programme, but later switched to Radio 4. Each week a guest 'castaway' has to choose eight recordings, a book and a luxury item they would take with them if they were stranded on a desert island. In discussing this, they also reveal hopefully offbeat elements of their life. Past presenters have included Michael Parkinson, Sue Lawley and Kirsty Young, but the show is now fronted by Lauren Laverne.

More than 3000 episodes have been broadcast, with some guests appearing more than once. In the early 1970s, Roy Plomley interviewed Alistair MacLean, who turned out not to be the famous author but someone else with the same name, and the programme was never broadcast.

Very few episodes from the first 20 years of the show have survived; the earliest known to exist was broadcast in 1951 and features actress Margaret Lockwood.

All participants are allowed to take a Bible and copy of Shakespeare: needless to say, the National Secular Society has called for the Bible to be dropped, but known atheists such as Philip Pullman have wanted to keep it. A recent poll suggested that 56% of people questioned would not choose to take a Bible, and another 13% were unsure.

David Bowie and God

It was 75 years ago, on 8th January 1947, that David Bowie, pop/glam rock singer, songwriter and actor, was born in London. He became one of the most influential musicians of the 20th century, dying in 2016.

Born David Robert Jones, he studied art and design before transforming himself into an enigmatic and exploratory singer, specialising in songs about being a misfit and an outsider - sometimes literally, as when, early on, he became Ziggy Stardust - a gender-

bending role some Christians found threatening.

But he was always interested in spirituality, though he questioned organised religion. Towards the end, when he had liver cancer, he found comfort in God: the day after he died his wife Iman posted an Instagram message: "The struggle is real, but so is God."

One of Bowie's definitive acting roles was as *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, during which he experienced an occult incident that led him to wear a Cross afterwards. He also collaborated in a kind of sequel, *Lazarus*. He once said: "Searching for music is like searching for God."

Bowie became a musician in 1963, his first major hit being *Space Oddity*, in 1969. He moved into glam rock in the early 70s. His record sales were estimated at over 100 million during his lifetime: he was one of the best-selling artists of all time and was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1996. After his death the magazine *Rolling Stone* called him "the greatest rock star ever".

News

SYNOD CALLS ON POLITICIANS TO REDUCE WEALTH GAP BETWEEN THE RICH AND THE POOR

The General Synod has recently called for the Government to reduce the gap between rich and poor after members heard of the 'scandal' of inequality.

The Church of England's national assembly approved a Leeds Diocesan Motion calling on all political parties to adopt an

'explicit policy' of reducing the gap between rich and poor.

Synod members further voted to redouble efforts by the Church of England both at national and local level to respond to need through social action and to tackle 'unjust structures' that contribute to the wealth gap.

Speaking to the General Synod, Father Paul Cartwright, from the Diocese of Leeds, said living costs were rising and real terms

disposable income decreasing for the poorest families.

“We cannot expect to be able to write social or fiscal policy on behalf of Her Majesty’s Government, or even eradicate the wealth gap,” he said. “But what we can be is that genuine voice which speaks about the injustice of such a gap, a gap that leads to reduced opportunity for so many in our country.”

The Leeds Diocesan Motion was approved by 342 members with three recorded abstentions and two objections.

Currently, dioceses can only use the funds for certain specified purposes within their dioceses.

The Bishop of Sheffield, Pete Wilcox, Chair of the Church of England’s Mutuality in Finances Group, described the move as the ‘first step’ towards a conversation about the full extent of the inequalities in financial resources between dioceses.

He said: “The legislation we are proposing today would remove an existing restriction on how particular historical endowments in dioceses can be used, giving dioceses more ability, but no obligation, to be generous.”

GENERAL SYNOD BACKS MOVES TO ALLOW DIOCESES MORE FREEDOM TO SHARE HISTORIC WEALTH WITH POORER DIOCESES

The General Synod has voted to back moves to lift a restriction on allowing wealthier dioceses to share their historic wealth with poorer dioceses after hearing about inequalities in finances within the Church of England.

Members approved a request to begin the process of drawing up legislation that would give dioceses more freedom to be generous with historic wealth held in Diocesan Stipend Funds (DSF) to help other less well-off dioceses.

NEW JOB FOR FOUNDER OF MESSY CHURCH

The founder of Messy Church, Lucy Moore, has been appointed the first head of the C of E’s Growing Faith Foundation. The Foundation will seek to promote partnerships between schools, churches and households, “to encourage and nurture Christian faith in those of all ages within those communities.”

Lucy Moore first launched Messy Church in 2004, originally as a Fresh Expression in a church near Portsmouth. Messy Church is now found in more than 3,500 settings, in more than 30 countries.

WHAT THE ARCHBISHOPS SAY ABOUT THE C OF E

The current state of the Church of England – and its future – was the subject of the joint presidential address to the recent General Synod, delivered by both the Archbishops of Canterbury and York.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, considered the historical context:

“Numerically, the number of regular churchgoers has shrunk in absolute terms every year since around 1952, 70 years next year. As a percentage of the population of England, the Church of England was at its high point, when there were accurate records, in the 1851 census when we were about 20% of the population. We are today a little less than 2% of the population.”

But the picture is not entirely bleak. “The reality is that a huge amount of work is being done at every point of this extraordinary Church for England ... People talk too easily of decline but miss the energy that is spurring us on.

“Internally, we will be looking at reforms and changes aimed at focussing resources where they are most needed, at enabling support for anywhere and everywhere that shows signs of the blessing of the Holy Spirit...”

“We have gone through the

greatest peacetime challenge in 400 years and emerged forging ahead. Effectiveness is being transformed, training is being rethought to work well in the very different patterns of population that we see today, and even more different that we see in the future.

“The way in which dioceses work together and share resources is being challenged, and will change slowly and gently and consensually.

“Our failures in safeguarding, in racism, in the way we treat those with disabilities ... are being tackled... We are a church that can admit it is wrong, say sorry and try – at least try – to do better.”

As for externally the church is not only still educating a million young people across the UK, it is also planting churches in new places, and putting fresh resources into traditional parishes.

The Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell, continued the theme.

“Our vision and strategy is for growth. It is not about managing decline gracefully. We want the Church of England to grow. Let us declare the good news of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ and do everything we can to align all of our resources, to make that happen in our local churches, whatever that local church is.

God in the Arts



*The Nativity by Botticelli,
in the National Gallery, London.'*

What hope, at the turning of the year?

*Written
by
The Revd Michael Burgess*

A few years ago, one of the Sunday magazines printed a Doom Directory. It surveyed the possible ways in which the world might come to an end - nuclear disaster, famine, global warming and so on. The cover showed a man bearing a placard, 'The end of the world is at hand': he was at a bus stop peering down to see the times of the last buses!

The speed at which we are using the earth's resources has put humanity's very survival at risk. It is a bleak thought to consider as one year ends and another begins. Where can we place our hope and find any assurance? we ask ourselves. Do we need to think of the

last buses on our earthly journey?

This month's painting was painted in Italy at a time when there was similar speculation about the end of the world. A mesmerising priest called Savonarola had preached in Florence about portents of this end time, and the final battle that would take place. His own end was gruesome and horrific as the church authorities silenced his voice, but his influence lingered on among people. Nowhere more so than in Botticelli, who painted this 'Mystic Nativity' in 1500, two years after Savonarola's death.

At first glance, it looks a typical Epiphany scene, for the wise men are shown to the stable by an angel. But everything is basic and rudimentary. The wise men do not wear luxurious clothing, they have no servants, they bear no gifts. The stable is just a thatched roof

propped against the mouth of the cave, with Joseph oddly hunched at one side. The babe kicks a leg into the air as Mary and the animals watch on, looking from the inside of the cave.

But then look above the scene. There is a long inscription from Botticelli: it announces that he painted this Nativity at the end of 1500, to provide a key to the violent and confused times in which he lived. At the bottom little demons scramble back to the underworld, and those who have been through the battle of life are comforted by angels, and there are more angels engaged in an ecstatic dance above the stable with olive branches and scrolls in their hands.

At the heart of it all is the simple nativity scene.

Botticelli seems to be making a heartfelt statement about his faith in the light of all that he had experienced and seen around him: his distress at the suffering war had brought, and his sense of doom that war was a portent of worse things to come. But the painting also shows his calm resignation that as one century turned into another, and one year into another, there is a birth which can be the pivot of that turning. A birth which is a sign of a future, a sign of new life, a sign of love. We can come through, he says, if we realise where our hope and trust should be placed - not in the pursuit of power which leads to death and destruction, but in a birth that leads ultimately to a heaven of victory and dancing and celebration.

The painting is not about winter, it is about spring: a season of hope and new life. We can draw the curtains across this nativity scene and shut out the light and springtime. But then, says Botticelli, chaos and war and greed will flourish. Go to the stable with the wise men, open the curtains, invite the Christ-Child in, and all will be transformed.

Savonarola had preached the same message a few years earlier, 'If you wish to be at rest, seek Christ. Come to this crib, seek none but Him, and you will find rest. Be well assured that you will never have peace until you come to this crib and to this light of faith in Christ.'

Crossword Answers:

ACROSS: 8, Bottomless pit. 9, Ice. 10, Decalogue. 11, Limbo. 13, Seconds. 16, Crimson. 19, Eager. 22, Abhorrent. 24, Lap. 25, Alpha and Omega.

DOWN: 1, Abdiel. 2, Stream. 3, Wondrous. 4, Flocks. 5, USCL. 6, A pagan. 7, Athens. 12, IOR. 14, Creation. 15, Dye. 16, Cravat. 17, In hope. 18, Need no. 20, Galley. 21, Repeat. 23, Read.

God in the Sciences

Breathe *written by Dr Ruth M Bancewicz*

*You show your majesty
In every star that shines,
And every time we breathe.
Your glory, God revealed
From distant galaxies
To here beneath our skin.*

These words from the song *Magnificent* by Matt Redman and Jonas Myrin speak volumes to me as a scientist. Redman is an astronomy geek who has 'an appreciation for the universe that surrounds us, particularly its unique ability to lift our hearts to see how massive and mysterious God truly is'.*

The microscopic level on the other hand – what goes on 'beneath our skin' – is less available to ordinary people. I have had the privilege of exploring this world to my heart's content, and what I've seen has given me such a sense of awe that I want to share with others.

Every time you breathe, a series of air pockets with a combined surface area the size of a tennis court is bathed with oxygen. These minute air pockets are covered with blood vessels. The boundary between air and blood is so thin that oxygen and carbon dioxide can diffuse freely from one to the other.

When your heart beats at a normal rate, a single red blood cell takes about three quarters of a second to travel through the small blood vessels in your lungs. But in just one third of that time, a quarter of a second, that cell has already received all the oxygen it needs from the air. So, when you exercise, causing your heart rate to increase and the blood to flow faster, you're still getting plenty of oxygen – as long as you keep breathing!

Redman and Myrin wrote in their song, "*You are higher than we ever could imagine, And closer than our eyes could ever see.*" The universe demonstrates God's awesome power. This is a place made by a being whose imagination is not limited by time and space. Biology, on the other hand, helps to remind me of God's creativity and closeness. I am a product of a long and painstaking process of

continued development over aeons of time. Beneath my skin are incredibly detailed, beautifully regulated processes that give me life. Jesus said that 'even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.' The knowledge that God intentionally made me and knows every detail of my physiology is both amazing and humbling.

**Indescribable: Encountering the Glory of God in the Beauty of the Universe, Matt Redman & Louis Giglio (David C. Cook, 2011)*

QUOTE: Be at war with your vices, at peace with your neighbours, and let every new year find you a better man. - *Benjamin Franklin*

Get fit for 2022!

More people join health and fitness centres each January than at any other time of the year. And well over half the newcomers will be gone again – within a month.

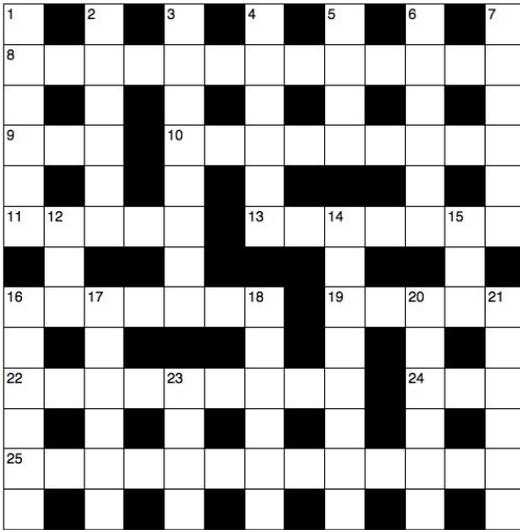
Perhaps there's not much commitment to begin with. Or maybe, they lack motivation because they haven't made themselves accountable to a personal trainer. (One incentive many clubs are now bringing in.)

But Christians have been called by God to become spiritually fit, and we DO have a personal trainer! We have only been able to join our 'club' through the precious, priceless blood of Jesus, and our 'spiritual fitness' goal is to be holy and to be loving, caring people.

The heavenly Father will be pleased and glorified as we simply keep on coming to the 'gym' of personal and corporate worship, and keep faithful to the spiritual disciplines, and our service together in the Body of Christ.



Your puzzle for January answers P29



Crossword Clues

Across

- 8 How the Abyss (NIV) is described in the Authorized Version (Revelation 9:1) (10,3)
 9 Frozen water (Ezekiel 1:22) (3)
 10 The Ten Commandments (9)
 11 In Roman Catholic theology, neither heaven nor hell (5)
 13 Des cons (anag.) (7)
 16 'Though [your sins] are red as — , they shall be like wool' (Isaiah 1:18) (7)
 19 Keen (Romans 1:15) (5)
 22 Repugnant, loathsome (Jeremiah 24:9) (9)
 24 Drink like an animal (Judges 7:5) (3)
 25 First and last (Revelation 22:13) (5,3,5)

Down

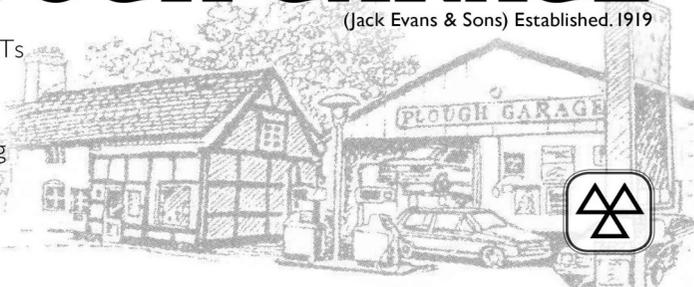
- 1 Father of Ahi, a Gadite (1 Chronicles 5:15) (6)
 2 Where David found the stone with which he killed Goliath (1 Samuel 17:40) (6)
 3 'Hour by hour fresh lips are making thy — doings heard on high' (8)
 4 'And there were shepherds living out in the fields near by, keeping watch over their — at night' (Luke 2:8) (6)
 5 United Society for Christian Literature (1,1,1,1)
 6 'If he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would — — or a tax collector' (Matthew 18:17) (1,5)
 7 Where Paul was taken when things became difficult for him in Berea (Acts 17:15) (6)
 12 Istituto per le Opere di Religione (Vatican Bank) (1,1,1)
 14 'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new — ; the old has gone, the new has come!' (2 Corinthians 5:17) (8)
 15 Used to colour ram skins red for use in the tabernacle (Exodus 25:5) (3)
 16 Vat car (anag.) (6)
 17 'Be joyful — — , patient in affliction, faithful in prayer' (Romans 12:12) (6)
 18 'The parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts — — special treatment' (1 Corinthians 12:23) (4,2)
 20 Ancient rowing boat (Isaiah 33:21) (6)
 21 Say again (2 Corinthians 11:16) (6) 23 What Jesus did in the synagogue in Nazareth after he stood up (Luke 4:16) (4)

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