

St. George's Montezbury

Magazine 50p



December 2023



LIFTING UP OUR EYES

With Richard Lonsdale

As I write this, I am looking out onto a hedge which is at the height of its autumnal glory - red, gold and green leaves make for an outstanding display, especially when the sunlight hits it. However as you read this, most of the leaves will have fallen and I'll be looking at dark bare branches. I don't mind, I love the changing of the seasons and the promises of the seasons to come.

Solomon writes that "He (that is God), has made everything beautiful in its time". We spend a lot of our time either rushing between jobs or scrolling on social media and of course at this time of year things get even busier. I'd encourage you to stop for a time - take a deep breath and look around you, at the trees, at the sky and be thankful. Time passes so very quickly - in Advent the traditional themes are Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell, things to think about with trepidation certainly but they need to be held in the context of the coming of Jesus Christ at Christmas, and that over and above death and judgement sit life and grace - as such it is important that we don't get too distracted by presents and parties and lights and credit card debt for there are deeper and older things to be aware of!

Come to church this Advent and Christmas-tide, it's a good place to get some re-ordering done, to knock back some nails into your shoogly spiritual floor-board and to do some business with God.

Rich

(A note from the Editor (courtesy of google):

The Scottish verb shoogly means to shake, sway, or rock back and forth).



CHRISTMAS at St. George's

Christmas Service Times

St George's, Pontesbury

Sunday Dec 17th 6:30pm Carol Service
St George's, Pontesbury

Saturday Dec 23rd 2:00pm Crib Service
St George's, Pontesbury

Sunday Dec 24th 6:00pm Carols on the Green
Pontesbury

Sunday Dec 24th 11:00pm Midnight Communion
St George's, Pontesbury

Monday Dec 25th 10:30pm Christmas Day Communion
St George's, Pontesbury





ST GEORGE'S CHURCH CRIB SERVICE

*Christmas:
what's it all about?*



*Saturday 23rd December
2pm at St George's Pontesbury*

come and join us - everyone is welcome

St. George's Church Annual Christmas Tree & Crib Festival

The Theme This Year is "Love"

Opening times

Friday 8th 10:00 - 6:00

Saturday 9th 10:00 - 8:00

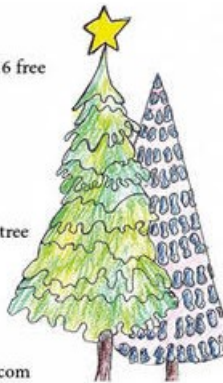
Sunday 10th 12:30 - 6:00

Stalls, Raffle, Refreshments,
Toilets, Disabled Facilities



Entrance £3, children under 16 free
Proceeds to
Severn Hospice
&
St. George's Church

If you would like to enter a tree
please contact
Marianne McCall
Phone:
07944 333830
Email:
mariannemccall.17@gmail.com



Come and Sing for Christmas

The benefice choir will be rehearsing at St George's:

Friday 24 th November	2pm
Friday 1 st December	2.30pm
Friday 8 th December	6pm
Friday 15 th December	2pm
Carol Service	Sunday 17 th December at 6.30pm



If anyone else is interested in joining the choir for this special occasion there may be time ... contact Barbara on 01743 683485



Christmas **CONCERT**

Special guests

Minsterley School Choir

***St George's Church
Pontesbury***

Shropshire SY5 0PS

FRIDAY 15TH DECEMBER 2023

7.00PM

Tickets - Adults £10 Children under 16 £5.00


Available on the door

Refreshments included

Contact no: 01743 790294

Readings and Services for this MONTH

In addition to the Christmas services detailed on page 4, this table gives the readings and the services for the other Sundays of this month.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Service</i>	<i>Readings</i>
3 rd December 1 st Sunday of Advent	Morning Worship 10.30am	Isaiah 64 v1-9 (1 Corinthians 1 v3-9) Mark 13, 24-end
5 th December	Tea Service	
10 th December 2 nd Sunday of Advent	Holy Communion 10.30am	Isaiah 40 v1-11 (2 Peter 3 v8-15a) Mark 1 v1-8
17 ^h December 3 rd Sunday of Advent	Holy Communion 10.30am Carols by Candlelight 6.30pm	Isaiah 61 v1-4, 8-end (1 Thessalonians 5 v16-24) John 1 v6-8, 19-28
23 rd December	Crib service 2pm	
24 th December Christmas Eve 4 th Sunday of Advent 	Holy Communion 10.30am a Group Service, Minsterley Midnight Communion 11pm, Pontesbury	Isaiah 52 v7-10 Hebrews 1 v1-4 John 1 v1-14
25 th December Christmas Day	Holy communion 10.30am a Group Service, Pontesbury	Isaiah 9 v2-7 Luke 2 v1-14
31 st December The First Sunday of Christmas	Holy Communion 10.30am a Group Service, Minsterley	Isaiah 61 v10-62.3 (Galatians 4 v4-7) Luke 2 v15-21

LIGHT UP ST.G's Each night from Advent Sunday until Twelfth Night in January the church will be floodlit to enable you to celebrate an event or to remember a loved one. Just choose a date, add your name to the list in the church West End Room, and contact Gerald Worrall (01743 791069) with your donation of £20.



Our Local and Church COMMUNITY



The Rea Valley Foodbank supports anyone unable to meet their food bills and will provide a weekly parcel of food and other essential household goods until financial circumstances improve. You need a referral to ensure that your parcel meets your needs, but it's really easy, just call

Greg 07902 794653 or Richard 07922 830488

Alternatively GP's and schools are able to make referrals

Our teams give you a warm welcome when you come to either of these two venues to collect your parcel:

Holy Trinity Church, Minsterley Tuesdays 10am-12.00

St George's Church, Pontesbury Thursdays 10am-12.00

THERE ARE A LIMITED NUMBER OF CHRISTMAS HAMPERS

Referrals for these need to be made before 6 December – referral contacts are as above.

For more information please email support@reavalleyfoodbank.co.uk

OASIS *FREE lunch & companionship for anyone living in Pontesbury, Minsterley and surrounding villages, who has been recently bereaved...
...on the 2nd & 4th Tuesdays every month, 12pm - 1.30pm
Minsterley Methodist Chapel, Horsebridge Rd, Minsterley.
Transport is Available—Friends & Family are Welcome too.*

Contact Heather Ryder for more information, at
ryder928@btinternet.com or 01743 790359

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?
*St. George's Church has a team of friendly people who would love to **phone** or **visit** 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.

Advent Course



Over 4 weeks, commencing
Thursday November 30th at 1.30pm,
The Prayer Course is being offered at
The Deanery, Main Road, Pontesbury, SY5 0PS.

In four sessions, we will be exploring The Lord's Prayer, using resources provided by 24-7 Prayer, and featuring Pete Greig videos. We will be looking at different types of prayer: adoration, meditation, petition and listening as well as why some prayers seem to be unanswered.

A warm welcome and refreshments will be provided.

For further information, please contact Greg on 07902 794653 or
rectorpontstip@gmail.com

25th December: Why begin at midnight with Holy Communion?

The hour was first chosen at Rome in the fifth century to symbolise the idea that Christ was born at midnight – a mystical idea in no way hindered by historical evidence! No one knows the real hour of His birth.

Certainly, in recent times, Holy Communion at midnight on Christmas morning has proved popular with modern families. One British writer pointed out its "domestic convenience" in 1947: "for where there are children and no servants, husband and wife may be unable to communicate at any other time." (So things don't change, then!).

25th December: Where did Christmas trees come from?

There are two early stories that mention fir trees. The first involves St Boniface, who went to Germany in the 8th century as a missionary and found people sacrificing a child to their god under an oak tree. Boniface was appalled, and he rescued the child. He then chopped down the oak tree and found a tiny fir tree growing nearby. He gave this to the people and said: "This is a symbol of life. Whenever you look at this tree, remember the Christ-child who is the One who will give you life, because He gave His life for you."

The second early fir tree story involves Martin Luther in the 16th century. It is said that one year he decided to drag a fir tree into his home and to decorate it with candles. He used it as a visual aid, telling people that the candles symbolised Jesus as the light of the world, and the evergreen tree symbolised the eternal life that Jesus gives to us. Many of the people who followed Luther were struck by the idea and took up the custom.



Thoughts from Richard, the Bishop of Hereford

Dear Friends,

In court, juries will be suspicious if all the witnesses come up with the same story. Their role is to weigh up accounts to discern where the truth lies. In most situations its remarkable how diverse people's perceptions of events can be. Such variation adds to the credibility of a story. This is especially true of the Christmas story in the Bible. The events are examined from a variety of angles. Diverse witnesses provided the source material for the Gospel writers to distil their accounts. We have an angle from Kings, Shepherds, and theologians keen to analyse things in the light of what God had already said through prophets hundreds of years previously. In the centre of the story is Mary, the young peasant girl in her teens, who finds herself inexplicably pregnant.

Her response is the exemplar of what it is to be a follower of Jesus. The angel tells her what is about to happen with only the sketchiest discussion of the personal implications. Her response is, "may it be unto me as you have said." Confronted with the reality of God, her answer is, "yes, now what is the question." She is in a long line of heroes of faith who exemplify unconditional obedience. Isaiah, confronted with a vision of God said, "here am I send me." The disciples required just a word from Jesus to leave everything and follow him. St. Paul was struck blind on the road to Damascus and meekly waited for what God was to tell him he must do.

We are coming to the end of our year of prayer in the diocese and moving to the year of faith. As we begin that journey together, Mary's, "yes, now what is the question?" is a good place to start. The Gospel was described by Rowan Williams as news not advice. The events of Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection stand at the turning point of history inviting us to respond with our own unconditional, "yes!"

+Richard

Looking at GOD

The Heart of Christmas

We're at that time of year again! But is Christmas just about the shopping, tree or presents? At its heart, Christmas is all about a God who has showed up on earth. The Creator of the universe, whose hands flung stars into space, cared enough to come to earth as a tiny baby. 'The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.' (John 1:14)

Every year we sing carols and retell the same story of the donkey, innkeeper, stable, angels, shepherds, star, wise men, gifts and Mary and Joseph with baby! Why do we do all this? It's to remind us that God deals with the mess of our world by sending His Son to die in our place. This makes it possible for us to have a relationship with Himself:

When the time came, He "did not consider equality with God something to be used to His own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:6-8)



Reflecting on Jesus in the manger is a great place to start understanding the heart of the Christmas message. However, it's so much more than simply a cute baby lying in the bed of straw:

*If our greatest need had been information,
God would have sent us an educator;
If our greatest need had been technology,
God would have sent us a scientist;
If our greatest need had been money,
God would have sent us an economist;
If our greatest need had been pleasure,
God would have sent us an entertainer;
But our greatest need was forgiveness,
so God sent us a Saviour.*

Canon Paul Hardingham considers spiritual disciplines that help us to grow and
deepen our faith.



Spiritual Disciplines: Celebration

'But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.' (Luke 2:10).

As we conclude our series on the spiritual disciplines, this month we look at *Celebration*, which is very appropriate for this Christmas season. We are called to rejoice in God's good gifts and celebrate His faithfulness.

Jesus modelled celebration in his first miracle at Cana, when He turned water into wine, enabling the party to continue (John 2:1-12). Celebration helps us with the other disciplines, as it enables us to keep going through times of joy and struggle: *'Without a joyful spirit of festivity the Disciplines become dull, death-breathing tools in the hands of modern Pharisees.'* (Richard Foster). We celebrate crucial moments in our lives with unreserved joy and thanksgiving and this shape our lives to be more like Jesus.

Richard Foster offers a few helpful pointers to celebration in his book *Celebration of Discipline*. They may come in handy as you celebrate Christmas this year!

Singing and dancing: how can we rediscover what children do brilliantly, in our families or church? Is there room for singing Christmas carols together at home this year?

Laughter: just as Jesus brought humour into His teaching, how can we laugh more? What does it mean to take ourselves less seriously and encourage more fun with our friends?

Imagination and creativity: how can we invest in our own creativity, as well as other people's? -e.g. in painting, poetry, reading and other leisure activities? God gave us these things to enjoy! As we celebrate our own creativity, we are sharing in God's goodness and joy.

Family events: we can use family celebrations and with Christmas approaching, there is the opportunity of putting God at the centre of our celebration.

'So, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God' (1 Cor 10:31).

The Revd Dr Jo White continues her series on finding faith in the fabric of our church buildings.

Reflecting Faith— The Light of the World

During the month of December, people are ‘counting down’ to Christmas Day in an ever- increasing variety of ways.

In my childhood we had a simple card with a traditional picture of a manger scene with doors marked with the countdown numbers and a picture of the different characters behind each. If my parents had extra money to spend, they would buy one with shiny snow made of sparkles!

These days you can pay hundreds to have a gift for each day from toys to jewellery. And don’t fret, your pets can have their own also!

Churches don’t normally count the days, but they do note the four Sundays before Christmas Day. They give each of those four ‘advent’ Sundays a theme and light a candle each time. One for the first week, two for the second and so on. Unlike the secular world, the church counts up, and not down. It increases the light as we get nearer to Christmas Day and then adds an extra light on that day. So, a total of five candles.

Churches vary in their use of colour in the candles. Some will use all white, whilst many only use white for the Christ-light on Christmas Day and ‘colours’ on the four Sundays. There again they vary; some use all purple – originally the most expensive colour - as we prepare for The King. In a more modern style, some use blue – perhaps recalling the most associated colour for Jesus’ mother Mary. But perhaps reminding us of creation and that we are surrounded by God’s love as the earth is surrounded by the blue sky.

And again, others will change the colours for each Sunday, often giving the third Sunday to be pink as we are over half-way through Advent and it is known as *Gaudate* – Joyful – Sunday.



This month

Have a look at the advent candles in your church, or perhaps in your own home, and think about what the colours mean to you.

How do they reflect your faith?

Whatever the colour – Have a Good Christmas!

No one Name is big enough!

Sometimes people are given a name to match their beginnings. When a young woman in Kenya gave birth in the back of a missionary's car, on her way to hospital, she then decided to call her little boy *MOTAKA!* (Her attempt at 'motor car'.)

Centuries ago, a little boy was born in a Middle Eastern cattle manger. But his mother called her Son neither 'Stable,' nor 'Crib' - because the name *JE-SUS* had already been assigned from heaven, to match His unique coming world-role as 'Saviour' (Matthew 1:21) .

Here is 'the Name above every name' (Philippians 2: 9,10). And yet no single name is big enough to contain this pivotal Figure of all the ages! Take Christ's names of Revelation 19 – '*Faithful and True,*' '*Word of God,*' '*King of kings and Lord of Lords*'...

700 years before the Birth at Bethlehem, the prophet Isaiah declared, 'For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given.' There then emerged a four-fold Name: *Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace* (Isaiah 9:6). Thus, in one Man, lies an inexhaustible reservoir of 'counsel' over life's deepest questions. And – in knowing Jesus – we know the 'mighty God' in Person! Further - to have the 'Prince of Peace' occupying life's rocking little boat provides a supportive Presence in every storm.

Isaiah 7:14 gives us another name for Jesus: 'Immanuel', God with us. It is the best present we could possibly have this Christmas!

A QUOTE with Christmas in mind ...

For history the really strong argument in favour of the virgin birth is the difficulty of accounting for the story otherwise than on the assumption of its truth. – *H R Mackintosh*

Looking at the CHURCH Worldwide

The situation in Israel and Gaza is moving so quickly that any story printed here is bound to be 'out of date' by the time you receive your December magazine.

Many Christian UK agencies working in either Israel or Gaza have launched Appeals for help .

Bible Society:

Urgent appeal for the Bible Lands—our volunteers from Bible Society teams serving in *both* the Israeli and Palestinian communities can minister to people whose lives have been turned upside down. In the Holy Land they are now giving out everything from Bibles to food to blankets to hygiene items. They need your support; if you would like to help, please go to biblesociety.org.uk

Christian Aid

Urgent appeal for the people of Gaza, where our medical partner is providing mobile medical and psychological care, ranging from access to a doctor, nurse, or social worker, or to a physiotherapist.

In southern Gaza, our partner is responding to those most recently displaced as a result of the war, providing mattresses, medicines, and emergency food items. Your donations can make a huge difference to the current conditions of all those affected. Please go to: <https://give.christianaid.org.uk>

Embrace the Middle East

Israel's response to the terrible events of October has led to indiscriminate civilian suffering in Gaza, with residents forced to move from place to place in search of safety. Food, fuel, medical supplies and water have all but run out.

If you can help support Embrace's Christian partners as they work to help people caught up in this crisis, please go to: <https://embraceme.org/gazacrisis> .

World Vision

Middle East Emergency Appeal—We're already working in the West Bank, and with decades of experience in the area, we're acting right now to support the thousands of vulnerable children, families and communities impacted by this crisis. Your donation will be channelled into the areas of greatest need that World Vision and its partners can access. Please go to: <https://www.worldvision.org.uk/emergencies/middle-east-appeal/#donate>

*Thank
you!*

Israel and Gaza: how should we respond?

Written by Paul Woolley, CEO of London Institute for Contemporary Christianity
<https://licc.org.uk/resources/israel-and-gaza-how-should-we-respond-blog/>

Following the attacks on Israel by Hamas on Saturday 7th October, Israel's Defence Minister ordered a 'complete siege' of the Gaza strip and the cutting off of food, fuel, electricity and water supplies. Speaking to officials from Southern Israel soon afterwards, the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, said "what Hamas will experience will be difficult and terrible... this is only the beginning... we will defeat them with force, enormous force."

The world today looks very different from the way it appeared thirty years ago. It was in September 1993 that the then Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, and the PLO leader, Yasser Arafat, shook hands before cheering crowds on the White House lawn. The handshake – the first ever in public between the two former enemies – marked the signing of a Declaration of Principles for peace between the Israelis and Palestinians. Since then, peace moves have stalled and more moderate voices who seemed open to compromise have been replaced by more extreme ones.

How should we respond to the recent events?

First and foremost, we must unequivocally condemn the Hamas attacks for what they are – evil acts of terror, including the rape, kidnapping, and murder of women, men, and children. Any attempt to justify these actions is morally indefensible, and we must firmly oppose the arguments of those who seek to rationalise them. Contrary to what one academic at a British University has said, the attack on Israel was not the "consequence" for "partying on stolen land."

Secondly, we should grieve. The land flowing with milk and honey is instead a land of blood and tears. We should grieve with those who are suffering in the Bible lands, as elsewhere around the world. In the face of injustice, we should weep.

Thirdly, we should pray for those who are suffering, for a de-escalation of violence, and for peace. We should pray that Israel acts justly and proportionately, even as it fulfils its duty to protect its citizens. In waging war on terror, governments should always act to promote good and prevent evil (Romans 13:4). The line between punishing evil and revenge can be a fine one, but it's an important one.

And finally, we should examine ourselves and work for peace and justice in our everyday lives. Every day we have opportunities, in our workplaces and communities, and even with our contributions to social media. In the words of Isaiah 1v17, we must 'learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.'

We continue our series looking at the stories BEHIND some of our favourite hymns.

The story behind the hymn: O Come, All ye Faithful

Nobody knows who wrote this well-loved Christmas carol. It was originally a Latin Christmas hymn, 'Adeste Fidelis'. It seems to have first 'surfaced' in English due to a John Francis Wade, who lived in the 18th century, and who made his living copying manuscripts and, sometimes, music by hand. Wade was a Roman Catholic, and all services in the church at that time were conducted in Latin, and so he knew the language well.

The story goes that in about 1750 he slipped this hymn into a manuscript he was copying for the English Roman Catholic College in Lisbon, Portugal. 35 years later, in 1785, it turned up in the Portuguese Chapel in London, where it became known as the 'Portuguese Hymn'.

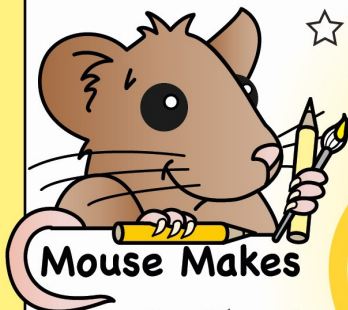
From there, the hymn appears to have 'travelled' across to the Margaret Chapel in London's West End. Young William Ewart Gladstone, who later became British Prime Minister, greatly appreciated the services at this church. He said that the congregation were "the most devout and happy that I have ever seen."

The minister at that time was Frederick Oakley, one of the leaders of the 19th century Oxford Movement, who was later to convert to Roman Catholicism. Oakley believed strongly in the power of religious symbols and fine music, and before he bade farewell to the Margaret Chapel, he introduced this hymn to the congregation. Having started as 'Adeste Fidelis', and been for a while 'The Portuguese Hymn', this hymn soon became known – and loved worldwide – as 'O Come, All Ye Faithful'.

*O Come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
Come and behold Him, born the King of angels;
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ, the Lord!*

*Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,
O sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!
Glory to God, all glory in the highest;*





Mouse Makes



GOD'S PROMISE

Isaiah 9:6-7

CHILD • BORN • SON
GIVEN • WONDERFUL
COUNCELLOR
MIGHTY • GOD
EVERLASTING
FATHER • PRINCE
PEACE • LORD



AN ANGEL MESSENGER

Luke 1:26-38

ANGEL • GABRIEL
JOSEPH • MARY
FAVOUR • SON
JESUS • GREAT
THRONE • REIGN
FOREVER • HOLY
SERVANT • WORD

ADVENT
comes from
the Latin
'AD VENTO'
which means
ARRIVAL

In Advent we
celebrate Jesus' birth
and look forward to
the time when Jesus
will come again.



A LONG JOURNEY

Luke 2:1-20

BETHLEHEM
REGISTER • BIRTH
MANGER • INN
SHEPHERDS • FLOCK
ANGELS • JOY
GOOD NEWS • PRAISE
SAVIOUR • CHRIST



THE BEST GIFT OF ALL

John 3:16

GOD • SO • LOVED
WORLD • HE • GAVE
ONLY • SON
WHOMEVER • BELIEVES
ETERNAL • LIFE

V	R	P	R	I	N	C	E	L	R	O	D
W	O	R	D	C	F	A	T	H	E	R	E
J	A	G	M	A	N	G	E	R	G	E	B
O	W	H	O	E	V	E	R	W	I	I	J
S	J	O	Y	B	O	R	N	O	S	G	E
E	S	L	S	E	R	V	A	N	T	N	S
P	P	Y	J	C	H	I	L	D	E	P	U
H	R	O	S	H	E	P	H	E	R	D	S
F	A	V	O	U	R	E	F	R	W	S	O
B	I	R	T	H	S	W	O	F	O	D	L
I	S	A	V	I	O	U	R	U	R	L	O
F	E	C	O	U	N	C	E	L	L	O	R
A	N	G	E	L	B	J	V	K	D	V	D
B	E	T	H	L	E	H	E	M	G	E	S
L	A	N	G	E	L	S	R	G	O	D	V
I	G	A	B	R	I	E	L	T	D	S	M
F	P	G	I	V	E	N	A	H	U	O	A
E	E	H	G	A	V	E	S	R	W	N	R
S	A	E	G	R	E	A	T	O	N	L	Y
O	C	H	R	I	S	T	I	N	N	J	O
N	E	O	G	O	O	D	N	E	W	S	N
F	L	O	C	K	M	I	G	H	T	Y	B

Colour in one star each day until Christmas

Dec23 © deborah noble • parishpump.co.uk



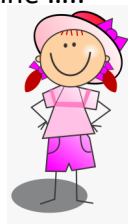
From the Dragon's Den

When we began our Little Dragon sessions, 17 years ago, we were given a toy cooker - a white plastic cooker - along with a few pots, pans, 2 trays of plastic eggs and numerous interesting food-orientated items. I can't remember who gifted us with the kitchen-based equipment, but it has provided many delightful hours of play over the years.

Each week, there is a queue to use the cooker, fry the eggs and bake the various pieces of fruit and veg that are available. Numerous 'cups of tea' are poured into the great variety of cups and saucers and it is a source of enjoyment for all of us to observe our little people developing their skills at handling the many items to hand.

I doubt that many of our little people will recall these activities in years to come, although our very first Little Dragon, who happened to be granddaughter to Frank & myself, remembers vividly using the range of items available. Incidentally, she is an excellent cook, perhaps having developed her skills long ago in the West End Room. Who knows!

Joy to everyone ... from Val, Frank, Marion E, Marion W, Pat, Caroline and from we three



George, Uncle Sam & Idris

Christmas gifts

Grandfather was talking to his granddaughter, "When I was a child all we got for Christmas was an apple and an orange."

The little girl clapped her hands in joy. "Brilliant! I'd love a new computer and a mobile!"



Deanery of Pontesbury

DEANERY NEWS

Rural Dean: **The Revd Bill Rowell**

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

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH from Greg Roberts, vicar at Ford

What would be an adventure for you?

What is it that makes it an adventure? Words that could describe an adventure include: possibly risky, unusual, unpredictable, exciting. The Christian life is also an adventure. It has its ups and downs, its sorrows and heartbreaks, as well as its joys and delights. The Christian life may take us to both meeting new people, new friends but also leaving people and places you love.

Advent reminds us that we are a people on the move. We look back but we also look forwards. Adventure shares its root meaning with Advent. Advent is a time of waiting, a time of keeping ready, for the coming of God. Being in December it means we wait at a time of dark mornings, and dark evenings, but the darkness is overcome by the light of Christmas. There is darkness all around, but we have the knowledge that as we approach the light it approaches us: a powerful picture of Christian life in this world.

At Advent we look and move from the world's darkness to the ultimate light of Christ's return, from sin's darkness to redemption's light. The Advent readings are powerful: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light", "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you". Advent reminds us that our God brings light into the darkness.

I do like to ensure we sing then Advent hymns before the season of carols: O come, O come, Emmanuel and Lo, he comes with clouds descending and Let all mortal flesh keep silence. These hymns combine biblical theology with Christian experience and focus totally on Christ himself.

*Let all mortal flesh keep silence
and with fear and trembling stand;
ponder nothing earthly-minded,
for with blessing in his hand
Christ our God on earth descendeth,
our full homage to demand.*

God comes with blessing. And he demands our homage: our commitment, our love, our time, our ambitions, our gifts. Christ the King is coming. May God be with us in the silence of our hearts, in the depths of our imaginations, at the centre of our lives, and fill us with his love for the adventure ahead.

Greg Roberts

*Our Stiperstones Benefice COMMUNITY
Bits & Pieces' from Greg Smith..*

Scams A reminder not to be taken in by requests from the Vicar to part with money. Email scams get ever more sophisticated. Always double check before giving away sensitive information like dates of birth or bank details.

Confirmation There will be a Confirmation Service at St George's on Sunday January 7th. If anyone would like to join the four candidates in being confirmed, please speak to Greg, FranB or Richard as soon as possible.

Facebook Page – Hope and Shelve Parish In addition to St. George's, Hope and Shelve parish now has its own facebook page at facebook.com/HopeandShelve. If you use facebook, please like or follow us to raise our profile locally.

Christmas Prayer 2023 by Daphne Kitching

Almighty Father,

*Thank you for your indescribable gift of Jesus – the Light of the world.
Thank you that He brought light and life to all who received Him during
His life on earth and that He still brings light and life to all who receive
Him.*

*Lord, how this broken world needs your light today. As we rejoice and
give thanks for Christmas, we pray that the light of Jesus will pierce the
darkness of self-interest and hatred - and change the hearts of those
who do not love you or their neighbours.*

*We pray that by the power of your Holy Spirit you will deliver your people
from evil, and that Your kingdom will come on earth as in heaven.
Thank you, Father, that because of Jesus, light will always shine in the
darkness and the darkness will never be able to extinguish it.*

*Glory and thanks and praise to You Father God, this Christmas and always.
In Jesus' saving and powerful name.*

Amen.

The Big Bash!



JESUS OFTEN TOLD STORIES WITH HIDDEN MEANINGS



ONE STORY WAS ABOUT A RICH MAN WHO DECIDED TO HAVE A PARTY



HE SENT OUT LOTS OF INVITATIONS

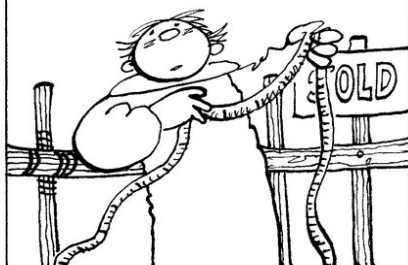


OH!
NO!!



BUT PEOPLE STARTED MAKING EXCUSES

ONE MAN SAID HE HAD BOUGHT A FIELD, BUT NEEDED TO MEASURE IT



ANOTHER MAN SAID HE NEEDED TO TEST DRIVE THE OXEN HE HAS JUST PAID FOR



ANOTHER MAN SAID HE HAD JUST GOT MARRIED - AND HIS WIFE WOULDN'T LET HIM OUT!

SO THE RICH MAN INVITED ALL THE POOR AND NEEDY INSTEAD.



YES - I CAN
COME TO YOUR
PARTY

THE PARABLE MEANS WE SHOULDN'T MAKE EXCUSES FOR NOT FOLLOWING JESUS.

Looking at the wider COMMUNITY

Where did Christmas cards come from?

Christmas cards have a history which may surprise you: their origins are not of the Church, but of the Post Office and railways.

Of course, very early 'Christmas cards' had been around for hundreds of years, in the form of a simple exchange of Christmas greetings in private letters. The earliest such letter on record was written in England in 1534.

In 1611 a HUGE Christmas card made a one-off appearance. It measured a whopping 33" by 24", and was given to King James I of England (who was also King James VI of Scotland). It featured an illustration of a rose, four poems, a song, and a Christmas message for the king and his son.

Then in 1843 came the creation of Christmas cards as we know them today. One enterprising man was responsible for this: Sir Henry Cole, a senior civil servant who had helped launch the 'Public Record Office', now called the Post Office.

Sir Henry Cole helped to introduce the Penny Post, as it was called. Until then, only rich people could afford the Post, but with the building of the railways, which carried far more packages than a horse and cart (and went much faster), suddenly the Penny Post became possible. Sir Henry wanted to encourage 'ordinary' people to use the new service. So he came up with the bright idea of creating a simple card that people could send each other for Christmas. His friend, John Horsley, was an artist, who designed a three-panel card. Two panels depicted people caring for the poor, and the middle panel showed a family enjoying a large Christmas dinner.

They printed about 1000 cards that first year, and advertised under the slogan: 'Just published, a Christmas Congratulations Card; or picture emblematical of old English festivity to perpetuate kind recollections between dear friends! The cards sold for one shilling each and could be posted to friends and family for a Penny. There was an immediate, warm response from the public.



Printing methods improved, and by 1860 Christmas cards were produced in large quantities. By 1870 the cost of posting one had dropped to half a penny, and the custom was rapidly gaining popularity. By the early 1900s, the custom had spread across Europe. The first cards usually included a Nativity scene, and in late Victorian times, robins and snow-scenes. Robins were chosen because the postmen in those days were nick-named 'Robin Postmen', because of their red uniforms.

Christmas cards appeared in the USA in the late 1840s. They were mass produced from 1875, and in 1915 John C Hall and two of his brothers created Hallmark Cards, which today offers 2,000 different designs of Christmas card. Charity Christmas cards began in Denmark in the early 1900s. They spread to Sweden and Norway, and then on throughout Europe and America.

Last year the Royal Mail estimated that it had delivered 150 million cards during the Christmas period.

Think twice before buying that goat in Ghana

What are you buying your friends for Christmas this year? If you are tempted by 'socially responsible' gifts that involve you NOT giving your friends anything at all, but instead giving your money to a charity 'in their name', you may wish to think again. Such gifts as goats in Ghana or chickens in Chad can make you feel virtuous, but may also damage your relationships.

A recent study has found that people who buy others 'socially responsible' gifts can be considered self-serving and inconsiderate by the people to whom they give them. It seems that such givers often over-estimate how appreciative their friends will be to receive nothing!



A study at the University of Southern California found that to be successful, a gift must make the recipient feel 'special'. So if you suspect that giving your various loved ones news about some goat in Ghana won't achieve that, there is only one solution: instead of *giving* only socially responsible gifts, insist on *receiving only them*. Then your mantelpiece will be full of photos of happy goats and chickens, and your family and friends will enjoy your more usual gifts - and still be speaking to you.

Christmas all wrapped up!

"And this will be a sign to you, you will find the babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." Luke 2:2

Do you ever dread wrapping all those Christmas presents? The large roll of fragile paper that slides around on the table, the lumpy gifts that defy wrapping, the tape that sticks to your fingers... what is so important about wrapping presents, anyway? Why not just hand them over?

Well did you ever consider that the very first Christmas present EVER was wrapped up – in swaddling clothes? In biblical times, after a birth, the umbilical cord would be cut, the baby would be washed, rubbed with salt and oil, and then carefully wrapped in swaddling clothes. The swaddling is described as a cloth or blanket, tied together like bandages. This process was carried out with great love and care and was thought to have health-giving benefits.

On the other hand, to ignore the swaddling process was seen as abandonment and rejection. "And as for thy nativity, on the day thou wast born, thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed in water to soothe thee. Thou wast not salted at all, nor swaddled at all. (Ezekiel 16:4 KJ21)

So why wrap your presents? Because just as the baby Jesus was swaddled as a sign of great love and care, wrapping our gifts is a sign of our own effort, love, and care towards those whom we love. So be patient with the wrapping paper, and Happy Christmas!

Stronger



*Statistics prove we're all getting stronger.
Fifty years ago, you needed an estate car
to hold £50 worth of Christmas presents.
Twenty-five years ago, it took two people to carry
£30 worth of Christmas groceries -
now a five- year-old can do it.*

Your PUZZLE for November

answers on p33

Crossword clues Across

- 1** Rely (Psalm 62:7) (6)
4 'He stretches out the heavens like a — , and spreads them out like a tent to live in' (Isaiah 40:22) (6)
7 What the dove carried the olive leaf in, when it returned to Noah's ark (Genesis 8:11) (4)
8 Annoy (1 Samuel 1:6) (8)
9 Judah's last king, who ended his days as a blind prisoner in Babylon (Jeremiah 52:11) (8)
13 'They all — and were satisfied' (Luke 9:17) (3)
16 Eliphaz the Temanite was one; so was

Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite (Job 2:11; 16:2) (4,9)

17 National Association of Evangelicals (of the USA) (1,1,1)

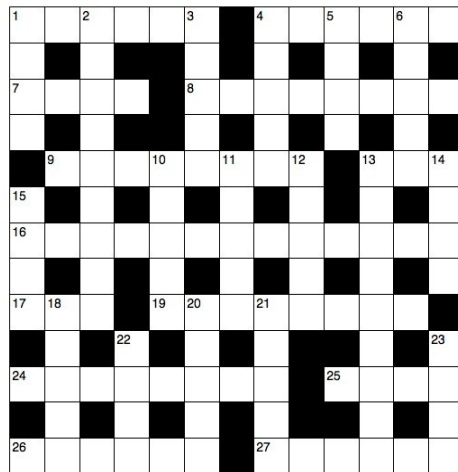
19 Popular song for New Year's Eve, Auld — — (4,4)

25 The number of stones David chose for his confrontation with Goliath (1 Samuel 17:40)

26 Elgar's best-known 'Variations' (6)

24 Able dock (anag.) (8)

27 Soak (Isaiah 16:9) (6)



Crossword clues Down

- 1** Money owing (Deuteronomy 15:3) (4)
2 Conciliatory (Titus 3:2) (9)
3 'Do this, whenever you — it, in remembrance of me' (1 Corinthians 11:25) (5)
4 A group assisting in the governance of the Roman Catholic Church (5)
5 One of the gifts Joseph's brothers took with them on their second journey to Egypt (Genesis 43:11) (4)
6 'Reach out your hand and — — into my side. Stop doubting and believe' (John 20:27) (3,2)
10 Be outstandingly good (2 Corinthians 8:7) (5)
11 'What — — that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?' (Psalm 8:4) (2,3)
12 Horse's feet (Judges 5:22) (5)
13 Notice (Deuteronomy 17:4) (9)
14 Comes between 2 Chronicles and Nehemiah (4)
15 One of Israel's northern towns conquered by Ben-Hadad (1 Kings 15:20) (4)
20 One of the two rivers in which Naaman would have preferred to wash (2 Kings 5:12) (5)
21 Avarice—one of the evils that come from inside people (Mark 7:22) (5)
22 Knight Grand Cross of St Michael and St George (1,1,1,1)
23 Jacob's first wife (Genesis 29:23) (4)

Bible Bite

A short story from the Bible

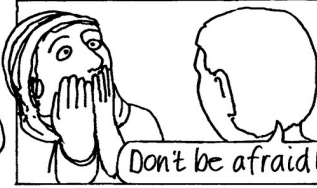
It can be read in the Bible in
Luke 1:26-56 & Matthew 1:18-25

In Israel, about 2000 years ago, a young woman, Mary, was going to marry Joseph. The weddings were in two stages.

In one year we will
complete our wedding



Then God's messenger
angel came to see Mary.



You will have God's baby,
and call him Jesus, 'God saves',
because he will save people



How can this happen?



Your cousin Elizabeth, who
couldn't have children, is
now 6 months pregnant.



Mary visited
Elizabeth.



When Joseph heard that
Mary was pregnant, he
was very upset



This will bring
shame on me and
my family.



He always did what was right
so he decided to end their
marriage, but quietly.



But the angel came
to him in a dream.



Don't be afraid to marry Mary.
The baby is God's, and you will
call him Jesus.



So Joseph and Mary
completed their marriage.



Your Wordsearch for the Bible Bite Story

e	f	a	m	i	l	y	o	u	n	g	i	p
l	f	r	z	s	z	d	e	v	b	q	g	n
i	y	j	y	r	i	s	z	y	l	u	f	w
z	e	b	m	a	r	r	i	a	g	e	x	i
a	a	p	r	e	g	n	a	n	t	c	u	m
b	r	f	b	l	s	a	v	e	s	h	k	p
e	a	t	y	j	o	s	e	p	h	i	e	o
t	n	c	o	m	p	l	e	t	e	l	m	s
h	g	s	w	e	d	d	i	n	g	d	a	s
c	e	q	n	o	t	h	i	n	g	r	r	i
e	l	m	g	h	p	e	o	p	l	e	y	b
m	f	h	l	j	d	r	e	a	m	n	r	l
c	m	z	k	b	w	i	e	s	h	a	m	e

impossible
Elizabeth
people
baby
messenger
complete
wrong
saves

young
Israel
pregnant
wedding
angel
nothing
marriage
shame

Joseph
afraid
dream
children
Mary
family
God
year



The story of 'Silent Night'

This much-loved carol comes from Austria, where it was first sung as *Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht* on Christmas Eve, 1818. It was written by Father Joseph Mohr, a young priest at St Nicholas parish church, in the village of Oberndorf bei Salzburg. As Christmas 1818 approached, he asked the local schoolmaster, Franz Xaver Gruber, to compose a melody for his carol. Gruber was organist in the nearby village of Arnsdorf, and so was happy to oblige. On Christmas Eve they presented the carol to the church during the midnight mass. The carol went on to become loved world-wide; and the version sung by Bing Crosby is the third best-selling single of all time.

These words from the story are hidden in the grid below —

can you find them all?

M	O	H	R	L	A	A	M	A	S	S	T
R	T	N	E	L	I	S	T	I	L	L	E
Y	E	M	G	L	I	A	N	R	D	N	E
J	L	B	I	N	G	M	M	T	T	O	M
I	O	A	L	D	U	T	L	S	G	I	E
T	V	S	I	T	N	S	E	U	E	S	L
O	E	I	E	T	S	I	N	A	G	R	O
Y	D	N	H	P	R	R	G	A	E	E	D
O	A	G	I	P	H	H	I	H	C	V	Y
U	I	L	O	R	A	C	T	F	T	H	E
N	D	E	D	O	T	A	D	R	I	H	T
G	C	A	G	A	F	R	A	E	H	A	U

Silent

Night

Loved

Carol

Austria

Christmas

Eve

Father

Joseph

Mohr

First

Sung

Stille

Nacht

Heilige

Young

Priest

Organist

Midnight

Mass

Melody

Single

Bing

Version

Third

God in the SCIENCES

Written by Dr Ruth M. Bancewicz, Church Engagement Director at The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion in Cambridge.

Follow the Star



Jesus' welcoming committee included Eastern scholars who learned about His birth through their study of astrology. I can't help thinking that the arrival of these people at Bethlehem is a link between a very early form of science (albeit mixed in with their own form of religion) and Christian faith. What better way to discover God than to explore the world and follow the evidence wherever it leads? But what exactly was the star of Bethlehem? Scientists have investigated this question over the centuries, coming up with a variety of answers.

First, there is the idea of a supernova: the massively bright explosion caused by a dying star. On rare occasions a supernova can be seen from Earth with the naked eye, remaining visible for several months. We now know that Herod the Great died around 4BC, so the actual date of Jesus' birth must be a little earlier. The supernovae that might match this timing were one in the Andromeda galaxy between March 8BC and September 7BC, and another in the constellation of Capricorn in the Spring of 5BC.

Next, comes a planetary conjunction. The alignment most commonly associated with the star of Bethlehem was between Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation of Pisces in 7BC, but not everyone is sure whether this would be extraordinary enough to be the 'star' mentioned in the Bible.

Finally, the bright astronomical object that drew the Magi could have been a comet. This idea came from Sir Colin Humphreys, Professor of Materials Science at Cambridge University, and Oxford astronomer WG Waddington, who found that a comet was recorded by Chinese astronomers between March and May, 5BC. Humphreys then speculated that the 'no room at the inn' scenario came about because Jesus was born during Passover, and the Magi visited Jesus in May or June.

People interpret the biblical account of Jesus' birth in all sorts of ways, but there's very little argument from serious historians that Jesus of Nazareth actually existed. Whatever the true explanation for the 'star of Bethlehem' may be, there's plenty of evidence that an astronomical event could have happened at the time of His birth.

I think it makes perfect sense that if God was going to enter His own creation and take on the form of one of His own creatures, it should be marked by a very significant physical event!

God in the ARTS

Michael Burgess continues his look at great works of Christian art. You can see the image described at https://www.wikigallery.org/wiki/painting_143485/Carlos-Schwabe/The-Virgin-of-the-Lilies

'The Virgin of the Lilies' by Carlos Schwabe

During this year we have been exploring how art can celebrate the wonder of this world. This month with our Lady and Jesus we stand above the world: high on the clouds with a glorious path of tall, elegant lilies that lead like a stairway to the earth beneath. This is 'The Virgin of the Lilies' by Carlos Schwabe. He was born in Germany and then lived in Switzerland and France, painting this canvas in 1899 when he was 33 years old.

It is like a scene caught when we look out of the window in an aeroplane. We can see the earth beneath and spot hills and valleys, roads and settlements, and a river weaving its way through the countryside. Mary and Jesus are haloed in a lunar-like radiance. The lilies are symbols of purity and obedience, the qualities that will take them to that scene at Bethlehem which we give thanks for at Christmas. The heavenly light shining out in the painting brings hope and joy to the world below, transforming lives with the wonder of the Saviour's birth.

Jesus holds three nails in his hand as a sign that His life will be tempered by rejection, suffering and death. But the lilies growing tall and straight in the skies are signs of new life and resurrection. The light come down to earth at Christmas can never be extinguished. That light and love are expressed in this vivid, moving painting of Carlos Schwabe as they are caught up in the carol of Christina Rossetti we sing at this time:

*Love shall be our token, Love be yours and love be mine,
Love to God and all men, Love for plea and gift and sign.*



Nigel Beeton writes: It's surprising just how many Christmas Cards have pictures of robins on them. When you consider that robins are resident all year long, you have to wonder why they have such an association with Christmas!

The Robin on my Christmas Card

The Robin on my Christmas Card

Upon a postbox, red –

He fixed me with a gaze quite hard

And this is what he said:

“O, viewer of this Christmas card

“I bet that you don't know

“Why I upon this card am here

“To bring a yuletide glow?”

I said to him, “O birdie, do

“Reveal your secret deep

“I see you all the yearlong through

“And hear your joyful cheep!”

“So why, O Robin, tell me why

“When you're around all year

“On lawn, or branch, or in the sky

“Why now this Christmas cheer?”

He said to me that long ago

The postmen you would see

Their jackets vivid red would glow –

“In fact, they looked like me!”

“From then till now my bright red breast

“And cheery trilling tweet

“Has come upon the Christmas fest

“To bring a Christmas treat!”



By Nigel Beeton

CROSSWORD ANSWERS

ACROSS: 1, Depend. 4, Canopy. 7, Beak. 8, Irritate. 9, Zedekiah. 13, Ate. 16, Job's comforter. 17, NAE. 19, Lang Syne. 24, Blockade. 25, Five. 26, Enigma. 27, Drench.

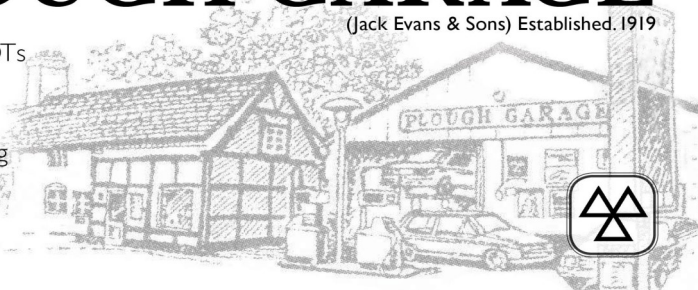
DOWN: 1, Debt. 2, Peaceable. 3, Drink. 4, Curia. 5, Nuts. 6, Put it. 10, Excel. 11, Is man. 12, Hoofs. 13, Attention. 14, Ezra. 15, Ijon. 18, Aslan. 20, Abana. 21, Greed. 22, GCMG. 23, Leah.

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