



Tacket Street, Ipswich, IP4 1AU



**COMMENT**  
**DECEMBER 2024 &**  
**JANUARY 2025**



## THE MINISTER WRITES ...



Dear All,

I'm sorry but I must confess that I am not a great fan of going Christmas shopping. Don't get me wrong, I really don't mind buying gifts for people! It's just the process of procurement that I find challenging! Thankfully, the retailers do their very best to encourage us in our noble endeavours! And the story and message of one Christmas advert this year has caught my attention.

The advert from John Lewis has a moving story. You may have seen it or you may wish to head to YouTube right now and watch it there before I tell you what happens here! Titled *The Gifting Hour*, this year's advert follows the journey of a woman named Sally who goes to John Lewis in Oxford Street on a mission to find the perfect Christmas gift for her sister, Lauren. As the clock ticks down to closing time, Sally embarks on a sentimental journey through their shared memories, beginning with their childhood, then moving through teenage years filled with laughter and disagreements, and finally to more mature moments, including the birth of Lauren's child. The story's emotional depth builds as Sally recalls key moments that defined their bond. At one point, Sally is transported into memories of a child version of Lauren, highlighting their deep connection. The end of the advert delivers a powerful punch, with Sally finally finding the ideal gift and reuniting with her sister outside the store, exchanging a hug and the simple but profound words: "What took you so long?" to which Sally replies, "You did." Here, the short story ends and up comes the message: *'The gifting hour is here'* with the subtitle, *'The secret to finding the perfect gift? Knowing where to look.'*

We'll no doubt be aware that John Lewis has developed a good reputation for its Christmas adverts and they usually leave us emotionally moved. This year's advert continues in this tradition and reminds the viewers that the true spirit of Christmas is found in the act of giving, and not just in a physical gift, but in the love and memories shared with those closest to us. As Advent begins and we start our journey towards Christmas, it looks like this retailer has not only advertised its goods with style but has also prompted us to reflect on key aspects of the true meaning of this season: love, relationships, and the joy of giving. The message of this story certainly resonates with me although I must confess that this advert will not lead me to love being in crowded shops! But what it does do is remind me of the joy found in giving to those we love and value. And isn't this to be our way of life that goes way beyond giving to just our closest relatives at Christmas?

Of course, in living this way, not just at Christmas but throughout the year, we live out not the message of a department store advert, but the message of the most moving and best ever story. John the Apostle tells us of this story: 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.' Thankfully, when it comes to perfect gifts, we know exactly where to look! We thank God for his gift of Jesus, given to us, given for us. This is why we celebrate Christmas. This is why we praise him as we do. This is why we live to joyfully give so that our lives will reflect God's heart, draw others to his love and bring him honour and glory.

Wishing you a joyful and peaceful Christmas.

With much love, *Neil*

## **DECORATING THE CHURCH FOR CHRISTMAS**

We will be decorating the church for Christmas on Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> December from 9.30am. We would appreciate any offers of greenery, which can be left in the church on the Saturday morning or I can arrange to collect it beforehand.

We also need some extra help to decorate and anyone who is able to will be very welcome.

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## **HARVEST OFFERINGS FOR 2024**

These are Christ Church's Harvest offerings:

Operation Agri - £899.00

Commitment for Life - £895.25

FIND - £880.25

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## **LEPROSY LUNCH 2025**

Matthew Henderson, the new Leprosy Mission representative, will take part in our service on 2<sup>nd</sup> February. This will be a cafe style, all-age service, with communion being received at the tables. Coffee will be served before the service. Lunch to support the Leprosy Mission will follow the service. The meal will be jacket potatoes with a selection of toppings and salad followed by fruit crumbles. Tickets, £6 for adults and £3 for children will be available in the new year.

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## **TWAM**

The boxes at the back of the Church are needing tools and items, also foreign coins, which we collect on behalf of TWAM. Our efforts over last year and previous years have been welcomed and we want to continue with this. Please bring items to Church and place in the boxes or I can collect if that would be helpful.

*Ron*

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## PRAYER CALENDAR FOR DECEMBER

*1<sup>st</sup> December:* We pray for hope in our world where, in too many places, beauty is ruined and masked by the ugliness of war, repression, greed and selfishness. We think of the special work carried out by Amnesty International and pray for all those involved in defending human rights and seeking to end injustice. This Advent, help us to find time to listen to your voice and to focus on the true meaning of Christmas. We place our hope in you, Lord, as we prepare to celebrate your birth at Christmas.

*Come thou long expected Jesus.*

*8<sup>th</sup> December:* We pray for peace this week. Lord, you entered our world as the Prince of Peace. This Advent, help us to strive to become the best possible version of ourselves that we can be. Fill us with a deep, inner peace so that we can be equipped to share peace with all those we meet, especially those who need it most. We pray for those living in worn torn countries; may our prayers be heard for the people in those places. May they be able to find some inner peace.

*“For unto us a child is born.....and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor,  
The Mighty God, The everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace”*

*15<sup>th</sup> December:* We pray for joy as the busy-ness of Christmas starts to intrude on other thoughts. Lord, help us to remember and be grateful for the joy you brought to the world – and into our lives. Please help us to find moments every day to be grateful for all you have given to us. We think of those who are less fortunate than ourselves, especially those who are unwell or lonely and for whom life is a struggle. May we do all we can to brighten someone’s day.

*“Joy to the world, the Lord is come.....let every heart prepare him room.”*

*22<sup>nd</sup> December:* We pray for love. Jesus, you are the light of the world and you encourage us to bring light and love in to the hearts of others. Christmas is drawing ever closer. Please help us to be grateful for the love which you give to each and every one of us. May our hearts be open to receive your love so that we can use it to transform every aspect of our lives and enable us to show kindness, generosity, thoughtfulness and love to others. We think especially of the homeless and those who may be hungry or lonely. We pray for all those who will be working this Christmas, in hospitals and many other places, caring for others.

*Love came down at Christmas, love all lovely, love divine,  
Love was born at Christmas, star and angels gave the sign*

*29<sup>th</sup> December:* God surprised us, coming here on Christmas Day. Who would think that a child would be given to us to lead the way and teach us how to live our lives? May we strive for greater sense and meaning in our lives and in so doing encourage many voices to sing loudly proclaiming Jesus as our Lord and King. As we move towards a new year, we give thanks for the various ways in which we have been able to celebrate the birth of Jesus, our Saviour. May we continue to find and share with others hope, peace, joy and love.

*Now let people sing, ‘Praise to God we bring. “Peace on earth” we hail the blessing  
sent from heaven for our possessing, Jesus, Saviour, King!’*



November's talks were very varied. We heard about the incineration and recycling plant at Great Blakenham, then revived our pride in Ipswich when we heard from Helen who is doing all she can to promote Ipswich and its positive features. The next talk was from Mick Lowe of the Fire Prevention Service. If anyone would like a 'Safe and Well' visit to check the safety of their home, or would like a smoke alarm installed, please get in touch with me and I can pass on details. To mark the beginning of Advent we heard from Rev Catherine Forsdike about her career and faith journey. All the speakers have been of a high standard and we've been given food for

thought as well as entertainment at each meeting.

December has a celebratory feel. We start on 5<sup>th</sup> with a talk by Deb Bunt and Peter Berry. Peter is living, successfully, with dementia and Deb is his mouthpiece and scribe. This is a must for anyone who has contact with someone with dementia.



Ipswich Town Football Club is not just a sporting source of pride for Suffolk; it does an enormous amount for the community too and Leanne Smith is coming to tell us about this.

We end the year, as always, with our celebrations and carols on 19<sup>th</sup> December. There will be festive food this day too as well as the usual lighter options.

January 2025 is also planned. Did you know Ipswich is a Heritage harbour? Ipswich became a Heritage Harbour this time last year, joining a national network that now includes 14 historic harbours and inland ports. Cathy Shelbourne of the Ipswich Maritime Trust explains what this means for Ipswich and what the future holds.



We are expecting extra guests on 16<sup>th</sup> January when we are privileged to have Nick Hulme the CEO of East Suffolk and North Essex Hospitals. He will tell us of his journey, and that of our hospital, in challenging times.

A much smaller, but important support is RABI. This organisation uplifts and supports farming people through practical, emotional and financial assistance, touching the lives of thousands of people each year.



Ipswich Central has new staff at the head of it and we hope to have one of these people on 30<sup>th</sup> January to tell us what Ipswich Central does.

I have to repeat thanks to all our cooks who prepare wonderful meals for however many turn up (about 30 at the moment), and also to Karl and John who come early to lay the tables and get the coffee going. A special thanks to Jayne who makes sure the place is heated (not always just a case of turning on a switch), and gets the tables and chairs out and numerous other things we only notice when they do not happen.

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## PARKING ON THURSDAYS

Thursday Forum is having problems with accommodating all our guests on the car park on a Thursday lunchtime (12pm – 2.15pm). If you have a church permit to park, please do not park at this time unless absolutely necessary, or unless you are also attending Forum - it's on your conditions of use. Thank you very much.

Ann

## CHRISTIAN AID CHRISTMAS APPEAL FOR SOUTH SUDAN

'I did not come with anything. No table, no teapot, no chair, no bed.'

On 15<sup>th</sup> April 2023, everything changed for Shede, a mother and grandmother from El-Daein in Darfur, Sudan. She had been living a peaceful life, working at a restaurant and tending her organic farm, which sustained her family. But when conflict erupted across Sudan, her life was torn apart in an instant.

As war consumed her homeland, Shede faced unimaginable loss. Two of her brothers were killed, her nephew was severely injured, and her family's safety was threatened. With no food and worsening conditions, she was forced to make the heart-wrenching decision to flee Sudan with her three daughters and six-year-old granddaughter, Mariem.

Sadly, her husband had to stay behind, and with no way to contact him, they have been separated ever since. After a perilous journey, Shede and her family arrived at Wedweil Refugee Settlement in South Sudan.

Upon reaching the camp, the realities of their new life set in. Food and rations were scarce, and finding employment seemed impossible. In desperation, Shede's elder daughters left the settlement to find work, leaving their young daughters, Saida and Mariem, in Shede's care.

Her daughters now work in a restaurant by the river, taking on physically exhausting tasks, but they are determined to send money home. Life for Shede is now focused on survival. Living in a temporary shelter provided by the UNHCR, she must manage scarce food rations and financial assistance while caring for the two little girls. They receive some support from the UN's World Food Programme, but it is not enough to meet their needs.

At Wedweil Refugee Settlement, Christian Aid is working alongside its partner, Smile Again Africa Development Organisation (SAADO), to provide vital financial assistance to families like Shede's. To date, they have supported 4,550 people in the settlement, offering small cash grants. Without this financial support, families would face unimaginable hardships. Children would go hungry, illnesses would go untreated, and families would struggle to maintain basic hygiene. These funds allow families to buy essential items such as nutritious food, medicine, blankets, and clothing. For Shede, the money helps her buy meat to supplement their corn rations and Plumpy'nut, a peanut-based paste used to combat malnutrition.

As Christmas approaches, Shede's story serves as a powerful reminder of the many families around the world who have been forced to flee their homes in search of safety. The war in Sudan continues to push more families across the border into South Sudan, where they arrive with little more than the clothes on their backs.

For Shede, the future remains uncertain, but she dreams of rebuilding her life. One of her goals is to save up enough money to buy cooking pots and utensils. She knows that with the right tools, she could start preparing food again—perhaps even earn a small income, just as she did in Sudan.

## A PRAYER FOR PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

O God of all justice and peace we cry out to you in the midst of the pain and trauma of violence and fear which prevails in the Holy Land.

Be with those who need you in these days of suffering; we pray for people of all faiths - Jews, Muslims and Christians and for all people of the land.

While we pray to you, O Lord, for an end to violence and the establishment of peace, we also call for you to bring justice and equity to the peoples.

Guide us into your kingdom where all people are treated with dignity and honour as your children for to all of us you are our Heavenly Father.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen

This prayer was written by The Very Revd Canon Richard Swell, Dean of St George's College Jerusalem.

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## ECO CHURCH – CREATION CARE

It is difficult to know where to begin this month, with climate events and news coming thick and fast.

COP 29, held in Baku, Azerbaijan, while over-running by a couple of days, has just concluded. One of the main aims was to produce an agreement on finance to be committed by the richer countries of the world to the poorest to help them develop their own green economies and adapt to the climate change caused by our emissions. Some agreement was finally achieved, but the sums involved are far from what is considered adequate by developing countries, who have branded the deal a “betrayal”. The conference has been difficult, with controversies over, for instance, the significant participation by oil and gas producing companies and attempts by Saudi Arabia and other fossil fuel producing countries to even pull back from last year’s modest resolution to “transition away from fossil fuels.”

Just to explain, COP stands for “Conference of the Parties” and “Parties” refers to the countries that have ratified a treaty called the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change). That document was signed back in 1992 by almost 200 countries and is generally known as the Paris agreement. Representatives of these countries meet every year to negotiate the best approaches to tackling the root causes of climate change. But, even when modest commitments are agreed, they have not always been achieved.

With extreme and damaging weather events becoming increasingly common, the flash floods in Spain and severe hurricanes in the Southern United States being just two of the latest examples, it becomes ever more urgent that the world tackles the issue with speed and determination. 2024 is set to become the warmest on record while planet-heating emissions are not going down but actually increasing to their highest level ever this year. In stark contrast, emissions have to fall by 43% by 2030 for the world to have any chance of keeping the temperature increase down to the 1.5 degrees target. Some experts think we are already too late for this. The election of a climate change denier as the next president of the US - who calls the climate crisis “a big hoax” and has announced his intention to leave the Paris agreement - is scarcely encouraging.

A piece of news I have found sad is discovering the words that have been removed from the Oxford Junior Dictionary and those that have replaced them. Of course, the job of a dictionary is not to dictate but to reflect the reality of language used today, but I wonder what it says about the experience of today’s children that words that have gone include acorn, ash, beech, bluebell, buttercup, catkin, conker, cowslip, cygnet, dandelion, heron, ivy, kingfisher, lark, mistletoe, nectar and newt. The words taking their places include blog, broadband, bullet-point, celebrity, chatroom, committee, cut-and-paste, MP3 player and voice-mail.

We do pray that God will lead the leaders of nations and industries at this critical time, and all of us to do whatever we can, in our small ways, to care for the natural world of which we are a part.

*Kate Helleur*

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## BMS WORLD MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN

There are six BMS World Mission workers in Afghanistan. Their names and details of their work have to be kept secret for their safety, but in this article from BMS they ask for prayer for the women of the country.

*"The world has forgotten us"*

The de facto leaders of Afghanistan have introduced new laws banning women from speaking in public and requiring them to wear a full veil when leaving home...

BMS workers Ruby\* and Reeta\* report that the laws have created fear and uncertainty among women. There are concerns about harsh enforcement, including potential beatings or detentions for non-compliance. The impact varies across the country, with rural women already facing severe restrictions, while more-educated urban women see their dreams and freedoms vanishing.

Ruby and Reeta have spoken with some of the younger women about the new laws: "Some think it would be better if they were born a boy or even not to have been born at all. Some still study online when they have the money for the internet. They try for all the possible scholarships to be able to get out and have freedom but so few countries will accept them due to where they are from. [Every week] they say that the rest of the world has forgotten about them, they no longer care, that they are invisible."

The team is concerned about what new laws might mean for BMS' work in the country. They are continually assessing how both the staff and women they work with be kept safe. Women are among the most vulnerable in their communities. Widows in particular have little choice but to live off charity. There is a great need to allow continued engagement with vulnerable women in a way that does not put them at further risk.

When the future is so frightening and uncertain, your prayers are urgently needed for the women of Afghanistan. But even in the face of such cruelty, you can remain confident of this: "that you will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord (Psalm 27: 13-14)."

\*Names changed for security reasons.

### BMS Engage

BMS World Mission produces two regular publications, *Engage*, with news and articles about what BMS workers are doing around the world, and a Prayer Guide, with daily topics for prayer, again covering the full span of what BMS does. There are some copies of these publications in church for people to take, along with forms to request your own copy of *Engage* as it's published. Although the September to November prayer topics are past, it's well worth reading through them to get a fuller picture of BMS.

### Disaster Relief

The BMS Disaster Recovery Fund provides financial help to people living through disasters and crises across the world. Recent grants have been:

**Nepal:** support in the wake of flooding and landslides: £7,000

Families had access to emergency supplies and shelter following severe flooding and landslides in September.

**India:** relief following heavy cyclone storms: £10,000

Over 250 families were safely evacuated from danger and provided with shelter and food until it was safe for them to return home.

**Lebanon:** supporting those displaced by conflict: £65,000

This grant provide food and bedding for those forced to leave their homes because of the war.

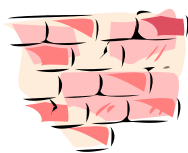
**D R Congo:** supporting those displaced because of violence: £15,000

Because of the increased violence in North Kivu, thousands have had to flee their homes. This grant provided displaced people with food and financial support.



## OVER THE GARDEN WALL

... from our neighbours at St Pancras



Dear Friends,

I'm writing this as I prepare for a short stay in Dorset to see my sister and exchange Christmas presents. They have snow, causing perilous conditions, so I hope it clears before she has to drive to meet me! By the time you read this we shall be seriously thinking about Christmas and you will have just had your Christmas Fayre. I see that proceeds go to TWAM. Probably I've said before that I've much to thank them for. In the years that I worked in Uganda, they sent numerous books and lab equipment for me and even on one occasion an organ. Bill was so helpful in agreeing to send all sorts of things for me and he and his wife Beryl even visited our main science Centre. We owe them a lot.

On a different note, we have a Centre built in memory of Dr Maire Heley for pregnant girls and young mothers. Secondary schools are mainly boarding and at the start of every term they do pregnancy tests. Any girls that test positive are thrown out and often when they get home, they are also thrown out, so our Centre is a lifeline. They learn skills there to help them to be able to earn a living. This includes sewing and knitting, using machines from TWAM. They have a lot to thank Ipswich for! They have a garden where they grow vegetables and bananas to minimise food costs but early this year drought caused the crops to fail. Thanks to kind donors they now have two pregnant cows, soon to give birth. This will give plenty of milk for the girls; any left, each morning will have folk eager to buy it, providing funds for other food. Missionary work is very variable!

Our diocese is tackling the problem of elderly priests retiring and insufficient young ones to replace them. I think many churches have similar problems. A plan was devised some years ago but never carried out so our fairly newly appointed bishop has a real problem to tackle. Since St Pancras has only one priest, I don't think it will be affected, but St Mary's has lost its very good assistant priest from Ghana. Some services, especially at Kesgrave, have been cancelled, and people there are very upset. We shall have to wait and see how it turns out!

My best wishes and early Christmas greetings to you all.

Your Catholic friend,

**Jean**

## PRAYER CALENDAR FOR JANUARY

5<sup>th</sup> January - World Braille Day

A day to raise awareness of the importance of Braille as a means of communication in the full realization of the human rights for blind and partially sighted people. We give thanks for Your gift of sight and our ability to look in awe at the wonderful world You gave us.

12<sup>th</sup> January: As we settle into a new year, we look forward to new challenges. Show us the way, Lord, that we go forward confident that we are doing you will. We may meet barriers, be at our side as we work to overcome them.

19<sup>th</sup> January - Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

Lord Jesus, who prayed that we might all be one, we pray for the unity of Christians, according to your will. May your spirit help us see the suffering caused by division, and to hope beyond all hope that we see the day when we can all pray together.

26<sup>th</sup> January - Holocaust Memorial Day

We remember the millions who died during the Holocaust. We pray today for the many millions of people who are still persecuted or imprisoned because of their faith or race. We pray for a world where all are able to live together in harmony.

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## DIARY DATES

Friday 20 <sup>th</sup> December	Carols at Tooley's
Thursday 9 <sup>th</sup> January	Deacons' meeting (7.30pm)
Tuesday 28 <sup>th</sup> January	Prayer lunch (midday)

### Emmaus Groups

Mondays at 10.30am in the Lounge (Finishes 9<sup>th</sup> December, restarts 13<sup>th</sup> January)  
2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesdays at 7.30pm (Finishes 11<sup>th</sup> December, restarts 8<sup>th</sup> January)  
1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursdays at 10.30am in the Lounge (Finishes 19<sup>th</sup> December, restarts 16<sup>th</sup> January)

### Dates for February's Comment

Copy Due Date    Friday 17<sup>th</sup> January  
Publication Date    Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> January

## SERVICES FOR DECEMBER 2024

*All Services will be led by our Minister, Revd Neil Coulson unless otherwise stated.*

### **Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> December**

10.45 am Advent Sunday Family Worship with Holy Communion  
*Jenny and Mike from Ipswich Amnesty will be with us and there will be a card signing opportunity after the service*

### **Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> December**

10.45 am Church Parade and Gift Service

### **Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> December**

10.45am Family Worship on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent  
*Junior Church will be making Christingles*

### **Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> December**

10.45 am Family Worship on the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent

6.30pm Readings and Carols by Candlelight Service followed by mince pies

### **Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> December**

10.45 am Christmas Day Family Worship  
*A short all-age service*

### **Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> December**

10.45 am Family Worship led by Mr Peter Dawson  
*Peter is a preacher and Elder at St. John's URC.*

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## SERVICES FOR JANUARY 2025

### **Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> January**

10.45 am Family Worship with Holy Communion and Commissioning of Deacons

### **Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> January**

10.45 am Family Worship

### **Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> January**

10.45 am Family Worship

### **Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> January**

10.45 am Family Worship

### **Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> February**

10.45 am Leprosy Sunday Family Worship with Holy Communion  
*Matthew Henderson, from The Leprosy Mission will be speaking. The service will be followed by a Church Family meal to raise money for The Leprosy Mission.*