



Cross Ways

Parish Magazine for the churches of St Andrew and The Wisdom of God
We are a church family that seeks to share the love of Christ
with the community here and world wide.



December 2024 & January 2025

Please send all correspondence to kingswood.Parishmag@gmail.com,
and submit copy for the February issue by Wednesday 22nd January 2024

A time of change and Waiting

December is with us already, and I wonder if you've started your preparations for Christmas yet? I find that it comes around more and more quickly each year, and it seems that there is never enough time to get ready.

It was very different when I was a child, waiting for Christmas in eager expectation. Waiting for the celebrations to start, waiting to see family, waiting to see what presents I'd been given. It couldn't come soon enough.

This year, December 1st marks the start of Advent season, the first of the four Sundays before Christmas. The word Advent means arrival. For Christians it has traditionally been a time of waiting and preparation, although nowadays it can get overlooked in the rush of Christmas preparations.

Advent is about waiting for two kinds of arrival. First, we remember the prophets and others waiting in hope for a Messiah, someone sent by God to save Israel from their sins. The one who we as Christians believe is the infant Jesus, born into our world, and who we celebrate at Christmas. And second, we remember that we are awaiting the future return of Jesus Christ to our world, not as a baby, but as a ruler.

This Advent, do take time out of all the busy-ness to think about that waiting time. Remember the prophets, waiting and praying during dark and difficult times, not knowing when the Messiah would come. And remember too that in Jesus Christ, we have a hope of a future that is much better than our present troubled world. That is a cause for real celebration.

I wish you all a joyful and blessed Christmas.

Francesca Perlman Mitchell



Francesca Perlman Mitchell

Letters to the Editor

It's always great to receive your letters (snail mail or email) of things that might be of interest to others in the parish.

If you have something that you would like to share, please get in touch via snail mail or email kingswood.Parishmag@gmail.com). The right of reply reserved :)

Ed

In This Issue

In this issue there is a Christmas and New Year theme. Paul Hardingham thinks about the challenges of Christmas, David Winter considers why an atheist might go to Midnight Communion and Ruth Bancewicz ponders the incarnation. Meanwhile Lester Amann discusses the which way we should look in January.

Nick Baines considers truth telling and prophets and Michael Burgess discusses Morten Lauridsen's musical take on the silence and wonder of Jesus' birth .

As well as the usual items in the sidebar there is an opportunity to sign up to the Calm and Bright Advent reflections, Christians Against Poverty's report on the impact of low incomes and information about Christians under persecution.

I wish you a Happy Christmas and hope that you find this issue interesting and enjoyable .

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"I'm sorry Michael – even if you HAVE changed your ring-tone to 'Away In-A-Manger', it's still ALL mobiles OFF!"

Ed

PS. Some images in this issue can be clicked to expand

From the Editor

Back in 1971 John Lenon and Yoko Ono asked us:

So this is Christmas And what have you done?

Another year over And a new one just begun

And so this is Christmas I hope you had fun

The near and the dear ones The old and the young

Well, the calendar year is not quite over but with Advent Sunday on the 1st December the new church year is already here. John Lenon's question is as relevant today as it was back then the tide of time has rolled on and what have we done with the year that has passed but does it actually matter?

We are all used to the idea of things being cyclic; the rhythm of weekly and monthly events as well as the seasons of the year. The Old Testament tells us about the weekly Sabbath, the sabbath year or Sabbath of the Land as well as all the annual festivals. These were instituted to remind the people of Israel about all that God had done for them and focus their lives on His ways in an attitude of Thanksgiving. Likewise, the church year is organised in such a way as to remind us on an annual basis of the major aspects of the Christian faith; Jesus' birth, death, resurrection, ascension, the giving of the promised Holy Spirit and Jesus' return.

Some of you may remember the musical 'Fiddler on the roof'. The story opens with a fiddler playing as he sits atop the roof and asks why does he stay there; how does he keep his balance? He answers his own question with, 'That I can tell you in one word... tradition!'. Tevye (the milkman) responds that he doesn't know why various traditions got started but '*because of our traditions, everyone knows who he is and what God expects him to do*'.

As the story continues it becomes apparent that the villagers try to continue their traditions to keep their society running but the world around them is changing. Tevye, as his children break with tradition, has to come up with ever more reasons to explain to his wife why things have to be done differently.

In chapter 7 of Mark's gospel Jesus points back to Isaiah 29 to warn his hearers that when we lose sight of why traditions exist, they can become ends in themselves and lose their value. Things that were intended to help us worship God may become blockages that impede our relationship with Him.

As we approach Christmas the tradition of giving presents can be a helpful way of remembering the greatest present of all. God gave us all the present of His only Son and through Him the promise of forgiveness and eternal life. However, the giving of presents as an expression of love to others is so easily corrupted by consumerism and the pressure to buy ever more expensive things and the spiritual meaning is lost.

So as we start the new cycle of the church and calendar year are we going to be like:

Round, like a circle in a spiral Like a wheel within a wheel

Never ending or beginning On an ever-spinning reel

Or, while remembering all that has happened in the past year are we going to allow the circle to become a spiral. We can let the meaning of our traditions help us move forward, adapting to changing circumstances and grow in the power of the Holy Spirit to follow Jesus more nearly and love God more dearly.

Wishing you all a merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

P.S. Enjoy all those Christmas traditions and especially the mince pies!



December can feel like chaos – lots of social events, services, Christmas presents to buy, never-ending to-do lists and the pressure to create the perfect Christmas. But in the midst of this chaos, Calm and Bright is an opportunity to find peace.

Follow the Star: Calm and Bright, draws on the world-famous carol, Silent Night:

*"Silent Night! Holy Night!
All is calm, all is bright..."*

this carol invites us into the still centre of the Christmas story, to contemplate Mary holding the newborn Jesus, the Light of the World.

The angelic messages we encounter in the biblical story of Jesus' birth typically hold together the need for calm in the present ("Do not be afraid" ... "Fear not") with the hope of a bright future ("for you have found favour with God" ... "for behold I bring you tidings of great joy").

Throughout Advent, the readings focus primarily on how to find **Calm** during this busy period, with reflections offering a chance to pause and tips on how to prepare for a calm Christmas.

Then through Christmas, they focus on **Bright**, with a series of daily reflections from Christmas Day to the Eve of Epiphany (5 January) by Sammi Tooze.

To sign up for the Reflections email visit

<https://www.churchofengland.org/node/37792> . These daily emails

offer Bible readings, short reflections and a practical challenge, as well as prayers linked to weekly themes

Ed

Christmas Geese

The story is told of a farmer who didn't believe in Jesus. One snowy Christmas Eve, his wife was taking their children to a service at their local church. He refused to come saying: *'Why would God lower Himself to come to Earth as a man? That's ridiculous!'* So, they left him at home.

During the evening the winds grew stronger, and the snow turned to a blizzard. He heard a series of loud thumps on the window. In the field near his house he saw a flock of wild geese. They had been migrating south when they got caught in the snowstorm. They were lost and stranded on his farm, with no food or shelter.

The man wanted to help the geese and so he opened the doors of the barn, hoping they would go inside for shelter. But the geese didn't do anything, despite the man's efforts to move them. He made a breadcrumb trail leading to the barn and tried to shoo them toward the barn, but they only got more scared and scattered.

Nothing he did could get them to go into the barn: *'Why don't they follow me?!'* Then he realised: *'If only I were a goose and become one of them, then I could save them.'* Finally, he understood the heart of the Christmas message. God has become one of us in Jesus. The eternal creator God has entered time and space as a baby, to show us who God is and how we can know Him.

This Christmas, let's celebrate again this amazing truth that we have a God who knows and can meet our needs in Jesus. *'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel, which means 'God with us''.* Matthew 1:23.

Paul Hardingham

The most beautiful story

A well-known atheist was being interviewed on Radio 4. When asked how he spent Christmas, he said that he went to Midnight Mass at church. "But you're an atheist", his interviewer protested. "Yes", he replied, "but what they celebrate at Christmas is the most beautiful story ever told."

That 'beautiful story' tells of a Creator who sent His Son to share the life of His creation, to be born as a helpless baby, to grow up as a man of extraordinary wisdom, gentleness and love, who was executed by the authorities for contradicting the traditions of the time. His followers – who today number about two billion people all over the world – believe that He rose from the dead, and that by His death and resurrection He has made possible forgiveness and eternal life for men and women everywhere.

That is certainly quite a story, perhaps the greatest story ever told, and yes, beautiful. And that is the story that will be rehearsed again this Christmas, in children's Nativities, in hymns and carols, in Bible readings and sermons all over the country. People who stay away from church all year turn up to hear it, and who can blame them? This is a story of hope, of love and of heaven touching earth.

Probably the best-known statue in the world is 'Christ the Redeemer', towering over the South American city of Rio de Janeiro, His arms outstretched in blessing. Christmas celebrates the birth of that great Redeemer – a tiny baby laid in a feeding trough.

His birth changed history, His life transformed our understanding of what it means to be human, His death was at one and the same time a tragedy and a triumph. Yes, it is 'the most beautiful story ever told'. Enjoy it again this Christmas.

David Winter

Christians facing persecution

This Christmas, there are about 360 million Christians worldwide who will not be celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. They dare not do so.

That's because 1 in every 7 believers globally live in countries where they suffer oppression and discrimination for their faith.

So, instead of going to church and singing carols, they face violence and abduction, while others risk losing their jobs and livelihood. According to the latest World Watch List from Open Doors, there are 13 countries where Christians face extreme persecution, and 37 more where they face general persecution.

Fortunately, there are charities working on the frontlines to help these persecuted believers. You may wish to support one this Christmas, as a way of showing solidarity with our Christian brothers and sisters worldwide.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide - specialises in freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). They work in 25 countries across Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. CSW is the only advocacy organisation with a sole focus on freedom of religion or belief that has United Nations accreditation.

<https://www.csw.org.uk/home.htm>

Help The Persecuted – works in 13 countries, including the Middle East, Turkey, Iran, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Yemen & North Africa. They currently provide a safe refuge in Lebanon to those fleeing the Middle East Conflict.

<https://htp.org>

Open Doors - has been helping persecuted Christians in over 60 countries for more than six decades. They supply Bibles, provide emergency relief and help persecuted believers stand strong for the long-term.

<https://www.opendoorsuk.org>



The Challenges of Christmas

Christmas is a great time of year, but it's not without its challenges! After one family had put up 250,000 Christmas lights outside, they didn't dare boil a kettle for fear of blowing the system!

The challenge of over-indulging

We all remember the episode of the Vicar of Dibley, where she had to consume four Christmas dinners! Christmas is a time when we usually eat and drink far too much, the average person gaining six pounds in weight. But Christmas is not simply about gaining weight, but losing what weighs us down. *'Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.'* (1 Peter 5:7). Whatever your concerns or worries this Christmas, bring them to God.

The challenge of overspending

In the rush to buy Christmas cards, a woman bought a pack of 50 identical cards. Without reading the verse, she hastily signed and sent them off, but for one. A few days later she read the message: *'This card is just to say a little gift is on the way.'* Christmas is not about getting into debt, but God getting us out of debt. He spent exactly what was needed on the first Christmas night: *'You are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.'* (Matthew 1:21).

The challenge is over too quickly

Christmas doesn't last very long, yet the effect of the first Christmas is long-lasting. *'For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.'* (John 3:16). Jesus has come to bring us life in all its fullness, both for now and all eternity. How do we face the challenges of Christmas? *'Yet what I can, I give Him - give my heart'*.

Paul Hardingham

Looking ahead

January is named after the Roman god Janus. He had two faces, so he could study the past and see into the future.

At the start of a new year, we dispose of old calendars and diaries. No doubt, it is only natural to look back at the former year. Perhaps we recall occasions of happy times that include special moments with dear friends. On the other hand, our old year may have had disappointments, such as loss of employment or deterioration of health.

We might also reminisce at the life of our church. We remember our building regularly filled for our services. There were many joyous occasions in which we were encouraged and supported. However, over time, things have changed. We may now have a dwindling congregation, with its regular members elderly and less active.

Cont...

Nolite Timere

(Do not be afraid)

Do not be afraid
Of angels in the sky
Nor of the Babe in manger laid
Or of the death He'd die.

Do not be afraid
Of magi bearing gold
Their clothes of velvet and rich
braid
As mysteries unfold.

Do not be afraid
Of Herod's fatal rage
Or soldiers on a killing raid
On those of tender age.

Fear not, instead rejoice!
For joy the angels bring!
Good news is in the angel's voice
Of Christ, our Saviour King!

Nigel Beeton

Banstead Arts Festival Society WINTER CONCERTS

8th February

ART DECO TRIO

The Art Deco Trio combine the materials and textures of the classical repertoire with the rhythms and harmonies of jazz. The trio is made up of three friends and colleagues, who have performed together with various groups of musicians at many leading UK venues.

15th March 2025

PADDINGTON TRIO

One of the most exciting chamber ensembles of their generation, the Paddington Trio is internationally recognised for their fresh interpretations and exuberant energy. Their programme comprises Haydn's delightful 'Gypsy' Trio, Brahms' dramatic Trio in C minor and Schubert's brilliant E flat major Trio

The events are all at Banstead Community Hall at 7.30 pm. Tickets are £20, school pupils free. Visit

<https://www.bansteadarts.org.uk>

However, these pondering are not meant to make us depressed! We can look back with thankfulness that God has been with us. Also, we can look to the future, praying that God will give us wisdom, strength and guidance for our journey ahead.

The Bible is full of instances where individuals and indeed the Jewish nation looked back. They had annual Feast Days, through which God showed them His grace and favour. These festivals were important because they had a dual purpose – to look back and face forward. The Passover looked back to the Israelites deliverance from slavery in Egypt. This meal was a reminder that just as God had cared for them in the past, He would be with them in the future.

Similarly, for us, the Communion Service is a reminder of the sacrifice of Jesus who secured our salvation. We look back to His life, death, and resurrection so that we can live with confidence that our sins are forgiven, and one day we will live in God's eternal Home.

January can be a month when remember God's blessings and faithfulness in the past, enabling us to look to the future with confidence. As we start a new year, may it be our prayer that God will enrich us wherever we are, and that we will know He is always with us.

Lester Amann

What's the Big Idea: John's Gospel

'John's Gospel is like a pool in which a child may wade and an elephant can swim. It is for the beginner in the faith and for the mature Christian.' (Leon Morris).

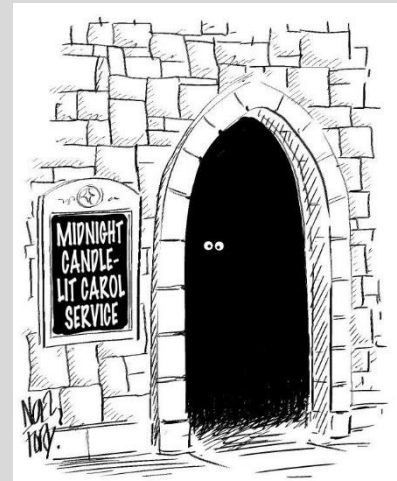
The Apostle John is usually credited with the authorship of this Gospel, writing in Ephesus at the end of the First Century. His purpose is *'that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.'* (20:31). Throughout he stresses the deity of Christ and presents Jesus as the Son of God.

In the prologue (1:1-14) Jesus is presented as the pre-existent and incarnate Word of God revealed by the Father. It also highlights how He has come as light into the world, so that those who believe in Him will not remain in darkness (cf [12:46](#)).

The heart of John's narrative contains 7 *signs* or miracles, which demonstrate who Jesus is and demonstrating His transforming power over creation and people: turning water into wine (2:1-11); healing the royal official's son (4:46-54); healing the paralytic (5:1-18); feeding the 5000 (6:1-14); walking on the water (6:16-21); healing of the man born blind (9:1-41) and raising Lazarus (11:1-44).

After these signs, the story moves into the upper room discourses followed by the story of His death and resurrection. The whole Gospel is a revelation of the glory of God's only Son, who comes to reveal the Father and then returns in glory to the Father. It can be well summed up in the famous verse: *'For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.'* (John 3:16).

Paul Hardingham



"Does anyone have a light, please?"

Tadworth & Walton Overseas Aid Trust

TWOAT held its Annual Meeting & Dinner in St John's Hall on Saturday 9th November with some 62 supporters in attendance. Treasurer, Antony Hawker, reported that in the previous 12 months TWOAT had provided record levels of support to over 20 projects. He described the very generous response from members to the appeal to increase the amount of donations via recurring payments and that, with the promised matched funding and Gift Aid, this would add in excess of £21k to TWOAT's income with most of that in 2024/25.



A papaya tree planted in Malawi by Fishermen's Rest

The guest speaker for the evening was Joe Robinson, from Fishermen's Rest, with a focus on ecological improvements in Malawi. Joe told us that the money TWOAT had already given had gone towards

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Dylan: Poets and Prophets

I went to see Bob Dylan in Liverpool last night. Oddly enough, it felt to me like he was sandwiched between the election of a party leader on Saturday and an American President this week. For decades Dylan has questioned power and the motivations of the people who wield it. Prophesying through his pen – in hundreds of songs – he applies the poet’s eyes and ears to what most of us either can’t see or can’t find the words to express.

This is the role of the prophet: to speak truth without fear or favour, in season and out of season. In this way the poet shines a light into reality, not seeking votes or power, but using the power of words and image to question and to illuminate real motivations – subverting the noise and claims to power that abound in times of confusion or conflict.

I wonder how this might apply to the new leader of the Conservative Party, Kemi Badenoch, as she seeks to renew a battered party for the future – and in the wake of significant loss. Or the next President of the United States as a deeply divided country handles truth in a discourse that almost has to be polarized to be heard. If leadership is to be prophetic – in the sense of enabling people to face reality and hear what might be uncomfortable – what price any attempt to unite under a single banner? If leadership has to be visionary – that is, shining a light on what the future might look like if a particular common path is to be walked down – how might a vision be proffered while the current conflicts are still raging?

Well, we shall see. But, common to both will be the place of truth telling and truth hearing. Prophetic leaders always have faced the same challenge. Moses led his people out of centuries of slavery only to have them complaining, looking for alternative leaders who would give them what they want NOW, and romanticizing the past’s agonies. Jesus stands in silence before his judge, Pontius Pilate, who then finds himself being judged by the one who will not provide easy answers.

Leadership, then, is never a means to becoming popular. Telling the truth rarely is. George Orwell’s lines, etched into the wall of the BBC itself might be true, but is often only welcome when applied to someone else: “If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear.”

Well, back to Dylan. The tempests of our modern times might be unique, but they still demand the rough and rowdy ways of the prophetic poets.

Nick Baines

BBC Radio 4’s Thought for the Day on November 4, 2024

both planting trees and creation of efficient wood burning stoves. He told of very worrying levels of deforestation in Malawi exacerbated by the use of tree wood as cooking and heating fuel.

The charity is encouraging the planting of new fruit trees, such as mangoes and papayas, which can provide both nutrition and sustainable fuel for the stoves. Some fruit trees can be productive in under 3 years. It was a useful coincidence that two visitors from Malawi had accompanied a TWOAT supporter to the event who were able to confirm the challenges faced by Malawi in maintaining its forests

You can read the TWOAT newsletter [here](#)

For more information on how you might support us visit our web site www.TWOAT.org, or contact Chair Mike Fox on 01737 350452.

Mike Fox

Shockingly low incomes leave millions hungry

Chronically low incomes are devastating the lives of millions of people who don’t have enough income to afford food, essential bills and a safe home to live in.

That’s according to the latest report by UK debt advice charity, Christians Against Poverty (CAP).

CAP’s YouGov polling, which accompanies the report, shows that 11.8 million (22%) of UK adults say they currently have a deficit budget, which is when a person’s income doesn’t cover the cost of the core essentials they need to live on.

CAP’s clients, on average, are £273 a month short of what they need to be able to cover their basics such as food, energy bills and rent

The report highlights that when CAP’s debt coaches go into clients’ homes, they find people living in cold properties and with empty fridges. Clients describe sitting in the dark with the lights off and curtains

Cont...



PARISH DIARY

We are pleased to welcome everyone into both St Andrew's and the Wisdom of God for Public Worship. We are offering Communion as both bread and wine from a common chalice in both churches. However, you may receive communion in one kind (bread only) if you prefer. Unfortunately receiving communion by dipping the bread in the chalice is not safe and therefore, not permitted.

The following service and event details are correct at time of publication however, please check the parish web site at <https://www.parishofkingswood.org.uk/> and the weekly emails for up to date information.

Services for December / January

St Andrews	The Wisdom of God
December	
Sun 1 Dec: Advent Sunday 11am Holy Communion	Sun 1 Dec: Advent Sunday 9.30am Holy Communion 6.30pm Advent
Sun 8 Dec: Advent 2 11am Holy Communion	Sun 8 Dec: Advent 2 9.30am Holy Communion
Sun 15 Dec: Advent 3 11am Holy Communion	Sun 15 Dec: Advent 3 9.30am Family Worship
Sun 22 Dec: Advent 4 11am Holy Communion	Sun 22 Dec: Advent 4 9.30am Holy Communion
Tue 24 Dec: Christmas Eve 5pm Christingle 9pm Holy Communion	Sat 21 Dec: 9.30pm Nine Lessons & Carols
Wed 25 Dec: Christmas day 10am Holy Communion	Tue 24 Dec: Christmas Eve 3pm Christingle Sun 29 Dec: Christmas 1 9.30am Holy Communion
January	
Sun 5 Jan: Epiphany 11am Holy Communion	Sun 5 Jan: Epiphany 9.30am Holy Communion
Sun 12 Jan: Baptism of Christ 11am Holy Communion	Sun 12 Jan: Baptism of Christ 9.30am Holy Communion
Sun 19 Jan: Epiphany 2 11am Holy Communion	Sun 19 Jan: Epiphany 2 9.30am Family Worship
Sun 26 Jan: Epiphany 3 11am Holy Communion	Sun 26 Jan: Epiphany 3 9.30am Holy Communion
February	
Sun 2 Feb: Candlemas 11am Holy Communion	Sun 2 Feb: Candlemas 9.30am Holy Communion

Parish events; details are correct at time of publication. However, please note that there may be changes at short notice.

Please check www.parishofkingswood.org.uk/ for more details.

closed, often hiding in terror because they're afraid of bailiffs knocking at their door demanding money that they don't have.

The report reveals that almost half (47%) of CAP's clients have deficit budgets, even after an expert debt advisor has supported them to review their finances, and has worked through suggestions to maximise their income and cut out non-essentials.

Christians Against Poverty's Chief Executive Officer, Stewart McCulloch, said, "Our expert debt advisors, alongside local churches we partner with, are continuing to help thousands of people across the UK to become debt free.

"But it's frustrating for our team when they have the tools to help someone out of debt, but the person's income is so shockingly low that even when the burden of debt is removed, they still can't afford life's essentials.

"11 million people living lives of hidden desperation is utterly unacceptable. We can't afford the welfare and health costs of this tragedy."

If you would like to help:

<https://capuk.org>

Parish Pump

Christmas Trees

Norway sent a Christmas tree
It marks the Saviour's birth,
The incarnation manifest
As God came down to earth

A babe born to a virgin
Would grow up as a man,
Yet still divine, such mystery,
To implement God's plan.

Another tree was put in place
A sacrifice was made,
As on that cross He gave His life
That all men could be saved.

So celebrate that wondrous day
When Jesus left His home,
To bring salvation down to man,
And claim us as His own.

Megan Carter



Monthly Coffee Circle

Wednesday 4th December
 Wednesday 8th January
 Wednesday 5th February
 10.30 am - Noon
 The Church Hall, Buckland Road,
 Lower Kingswood
 All Welcome - Free
 Coffee / tea and homemade cake

Wisdom Stories at Tea Time

Wednesday 4th December
 Wednesday 15,22,29 January
 Wednesday 5th February

3.30 pm at The Wisdom of God

Music for Christmas

Parish of Kingswood Choir

Sunday 8th December @ 6.30pm
 At the Wisdom of God, Buckland Road, Lower
 Kingswood KT20 7EF
 Tickets £10 on the door
 Refreshments will be served



Saturday 8 Feb

Banstead Arts Festival Society WINTER CONCERT

The Art Deco Trio performs classical and popular music with a jazz influence.

Banstead Community Hall at 7.30 pm. Tickets are £20, school pupils free.

See sidebar for more details

“Do you believe this?”

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity: 18-25 January

This year the prayers and reflections for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity were prepared by the brothers and sisters of the monastic community of Bose in northern Italy. This year marks the 1,700th anniversary of the first

Christian Ecumenical Council, held in Nicaea, near Constantinople in 325 AD. This commemoration provides a unique opportunity to reflect on and celebrate the common faith of Christians, as expressed in the Creed formulated during this Council; a faith that remains alive and fruitful in our days. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2025 offers an invitation to draw on this shared heritage and to enter more deeply into the faith that unites all Christians.

The guiding biblical text for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2025 comes from John 11:17-27. The theme for the week, “Do you believe this?” (v. 26), takes its cue from the dialogue between Jesus and Martha when Jesus visited the home of Martha and Mary in Bethany following the death of their brother Lazarus.



A night to remember

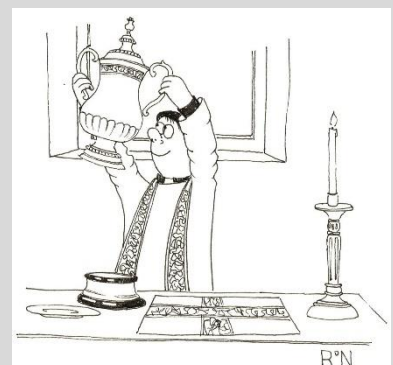
The night began as any other
 The world not aware of a special birth,
 Prophesied so long ago
 That God would come upon our earth.

Shepherds roused by a choir of angels,
 Wise men saw a special star,
 Gathered round the tiny infant,
 Bringing gifts from afar.

God had sent His Son to call us,
 Jew and Gentile, bond and free,
 All may come to know His presence
 Reaching out to you and me.

As we celebrate this Christmas,
 Let Jesus come not as a stranger,
 But as a friend and loving Saviour –
 Not just a baby in a man

Megan Carter



The special silverware only came out once a year

In this anniversary year of the Council of Nicaea, the Ecumenical Celebration of the Word of God during the Week of Prayer is centred on the meaning of believing and on the affirmation of faith, both personal and communal, both “I believe” and “We believe”. The biblical text from which the theme for the week is drawn challenges us with the question, “Do you believe this?”.

Ed



Pause for prayer

There has never been a spiritual awakening in any country or locality that did not begin in united prayer.

D.A.T. Pierson

The photograph was taken recently in Chelsea Green. The red berries form a star floating in a water fountain in the midst of dead fallen leaves.

Here are some topics for prayer during the months of December and January:

- Thanks for the Christmas Star that guided the Wise Men, the water that springs up within us to eternal life, our life in Christ in the midst of death.
- As we see the red berries in the star that we may give thanks for the forgiveness freely available through the blood of Jesus.
- Thanks for all those things and ‘coincidences’ that point to and lead us to Jesus.
- That in the midst of the plenty around us, we would be on the side of the poor, vulnerable and oppressed.
- Protection for those working for relief agencies taking aid to the civilian populations caught up in war zones.
- Safety and provision for all those who will be sleeping rough through these coldest months of the year.
- Those who live and work in Tudor House, Uplands, Vicarage Close, Walnut Drive, Warren Drive, Warrenegate Care Home, Warren Lodge, Warren Lodge Drive and Waterhouse Lane.

Ed

Prayer for December

Father, the days are short; darkness deepens in December and this year it seems to reflect the darkness in so many parts of the world. We think especially of the land You came to, all those years ago, and other nearby lands where so many are suffering.

Father, thank you that Jesus came into the world as Your Light; that He shines today as brightly and powerfully as He did then, and will do forever.

Help us to open our hearts and minds to allow His light to fill us with the assurance that, no matter what is going on, we are safe in Him.

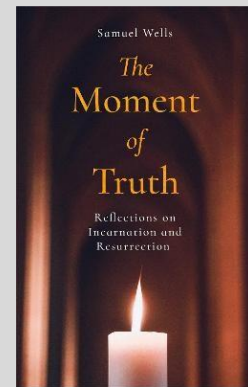
Thank you that, in Jesus, You have conquered death and darkness; that one day, everyone will bow before Jesus as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, whose Kingdom shall never end.

Help us, in thankfulness and love, to share Your Christmas Light and Hope and Joy. Hallelujah!

In Jesus’ name. Amen

Daphne Kitching

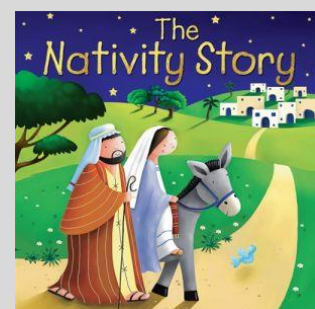
Book Reviews



The Moment of Truth
Sam Wells, Canterbury Press,
£11.69

Christmas and Easter, Advent and Lent, each focus on the central beliefs of Christian faith - that in the Incarnation, God comes among us, and that in the Resurrection, death is defeated and creation is renewed.

In this collection of seasonal reflections, Samuel Wells unpacks the substance of these key Christian doctrines, and explores their practical implications for living as Christians in the world: - Laid in a Manger: Reflections on the Nativity - The Word was Made Flesh: Reflections on Christmas - The Image of the Invisible God: Reflections on the Incarnation - Early on the First Day of the Week: Reflections on Easter Morning - I have Seen the Lord: Reflections on the Risen Christ



The Nativity Story
Juliet David, SPCK, £4.99

This sturdy and colourful little board book is just right for little ones starting to learn about Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem, the shepherds and the wise men who came to meet Baby Jesus. It would make a good stocking filler.

Meditation on the Incarnation

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

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

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

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

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

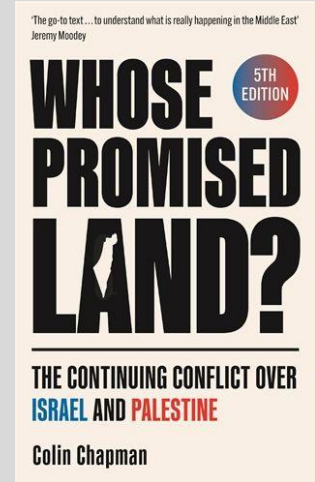
All three of these processes are driven forward by the movement of cells, the connections between them, and the signals they pass to each other. Jeff studies a sort of cellular glue which is involved in joining cells together. Making and breaking these adhesions can affect how cells move and signal to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

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

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

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

Ruth M Bancewicz



Whose Promised Land?
Colin Chapman, SPCK, £16.99

The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians has profoundly affected the Middle East for almost 80 years, and shows no sign of ending.

With two peoples claiming the same piece of land for different reasons, it remains a huge political and humanitarian problem. Can it ever be resolved? If so, how? These are the basic questions addressed in this revised and expanded sixth edition of Colin Chapman's highly acclaimed book.

Having lived and worked in the Middle East at various times since 1968, Chapman explains the roots of the problem and outlines the arguments of the main parties involved. He also explores the theme of land in the Old and New Testaments, discussing legitimate and illegitimate ways of using the Bible in relation to the conflict.

This new and fully updated edition covers developments over the past ten years, including the war that broke out between Israel and Hamas in October 2023.

Morten Lauridsen, American composer

In the Middle Ages, at the end of the Christmas Midnight Mass, the clergy would often tell the animals' version of the Nativity story and imitate the sound of each animal. The cock would crow 'Christus natus est.' (Christ is born). The cows would moo 'Ubi?' (Where?). The sheep would bleat 'In Bethlehem.' And the donkey would cry 'Eamus' (Let us go there). It was a way of expressing something of the joy and fun of the Christmas celebration.

Commercialism with all its trappings has sadly made that fun and festivity the be all and end all of Christmas. We need to capture again the heart of the Incarnation, which is a mystery rooted in silence and wonder. The book of Wisdom reads 'For while gentle silence enveloped all things, and night in its swift course was now half gone, the all powerful Word leapt from heaven, from the royal throne.'

Those words remind us that at Bethlehem there is that silence and wonder. The animals may rejoice to tell the Good News of the Incarnation at the Midnight Mass, but at the crib they gather with the Holy Family and the shepherds. We are given no words of Mary and Joseph and the shepherds around the crib. The mystery of what was happening seems to have intensified their silence. They did not know what the future held for this new-born child, but they did know that God was acting in a special way. They were like people standing in the faint light of the dawn, and their response was an expectant and wondering worship.

It is at the heart of this month's beautiful and moving setting of some words from the matins of Christmas morning, 'O magnum mysterium.' 'O great mystery and wondrous sacrament, that animals should see the new-born Lord, lying in the manger. Blessed Virgin, whose womb was found worthy to bear Christ the Lord. Alleluia.' The words were set by the American composer, Morten Lauridsen in 1994 and first performed a few days before Christmas in Los Angeles. Since then, the setting has been sung by choirs, both professional and amateur, around the world.

Morten Lauridsen has composed many works for the human voice, and all of them are sensitive and heartfelt responses to the words chosen. No more so than in 'O magnum mysterium.' After the opening chord, the altos introduce us to a motif that pervades the work: D to a rising 4th, and a falling 3rd that lights on A. It is like the movement of the heart, rising in praise and resting in hope at the mystery of the Incarnation. The joy is inner and deep and suffuses the music as it reaches a climax with Alleluia. The final words are that all this glory lies in a manger, where the animals gather.

The world will call us in this month to a frenzy of doing and buying amid a clamour of noise and muzak. 'O magnum mysterium' by Morten Lauridsen invites us to step into the stable again and join the animals, the Holy Family and the shepherds to find a joy and a wonder there that can nourish the soul. At the crib we can know 'the silence of eternity interpreted by Love' and with the choir we can respond Alleluia.

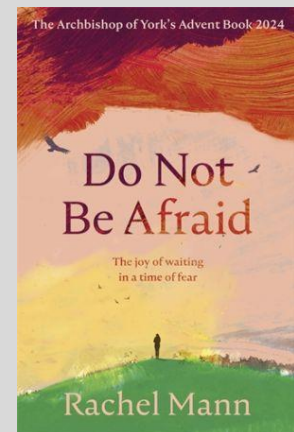
Michael Burgess



The Big Big Big Christmas - (*That Was Also Very Small*)

Emma Randall and Mei Shan Dibble, 10Publishing, £4.99

The wonder of the Incarnation is told here in a fresh, funny and child-friendly way. The book offers a hilarious series of zany comparisons that get bigger and bigger until they help children discover just how big God is and how completely mind-blowingly amazing it is that He became a tiny baby at Christmas.



Do Not Be Afraid - the Joy of Waiting in a Time of Fear
The Archbishop of York's Advent Book 2024

Rachel Mann, SPCK, £10.99

These meditations tell stories of God waiting with us when we're in fear or distress; of coming - bidden or unbidden - to relieve our loneliness; of disconcerting us, desiring us and surprising us with joy... Most of all they remind us that Jesus Christ comes into the world as one long waited for; as the Servant who waits on others; as the One on whom we are, adoringly, called to wait



The Rev Freddie

Bible Bite

A short story from the Bible

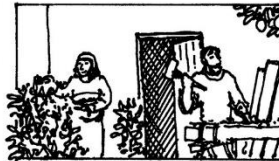
It can be read in the Bible in Luke chapter 2 verses 1-7

The Roman Empire charged the countries it had invaded taxes, based on the number of people and what they earned.

Emperor Augustus gave orders that all people in the Empire were to be registered so they could be taxed.



This census was before Quirinius became Governor of Syria* (*whose own census started riots - Acts 5:37)



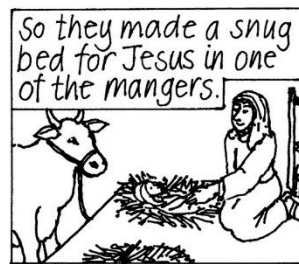
When the order came, Mary and Joseph were living in Nazareth.

But Joseph was descended from King David, who had been born in Bethlehem...



so Joseph took Mary to Bethlehem to stay with his family.

Come and meet everyone!



Let nothing disturb thee

Let nothing disturb thee, nothing affright thee;
All things are passing; God never changeth';
Patient endurance
Attaineth to all things;
Who God possesseth
In nothing is wanting
Alone God sufficeth.

St Teresa of Avila



We don't sing carols no more... you 'ave to listen to 'em off me iPod!

The month of December

1750 years ago, on 25 Dec 274 that the Roman Emperor Aurelian founded the cult of Sol Invictus as an official religion. He erected a temple and declared 25th December a national holiday, to be known as the Feast of the Unconquered Sun. In 336, after the conversion of the Emperor Constantine, 25th December began to be celebrated by the church in Rome as the birthday of God's Son.

200 years ago, on 21st Dec 1824 that James Parkinson, British surgeon and politician, died. He was the first person to describe Parkinson's disease, in 1817.

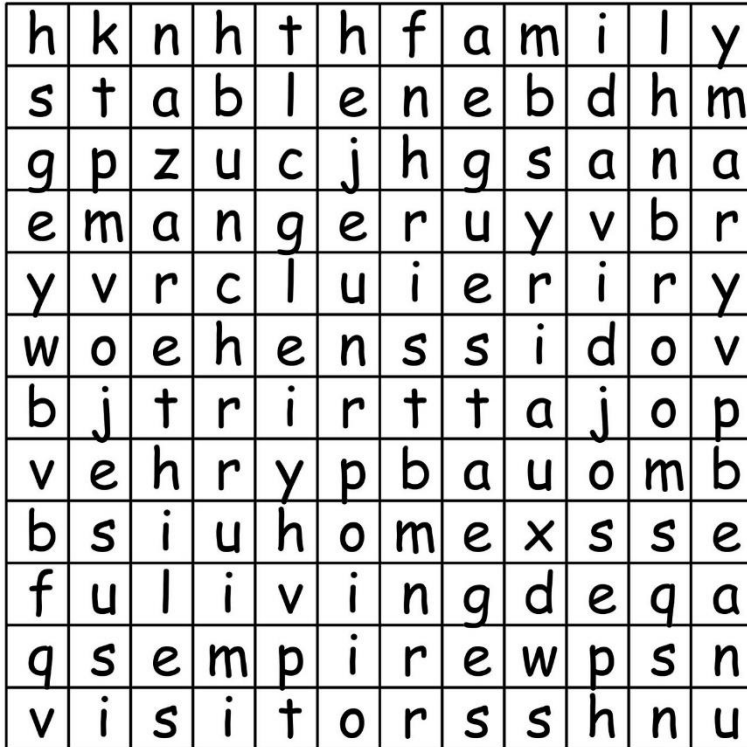
125 years ago, on 5th Dec 1899 that Henry Tate, British sugar merchant and philanthropist, died. He established the Tate Gallery in London.

Cont...

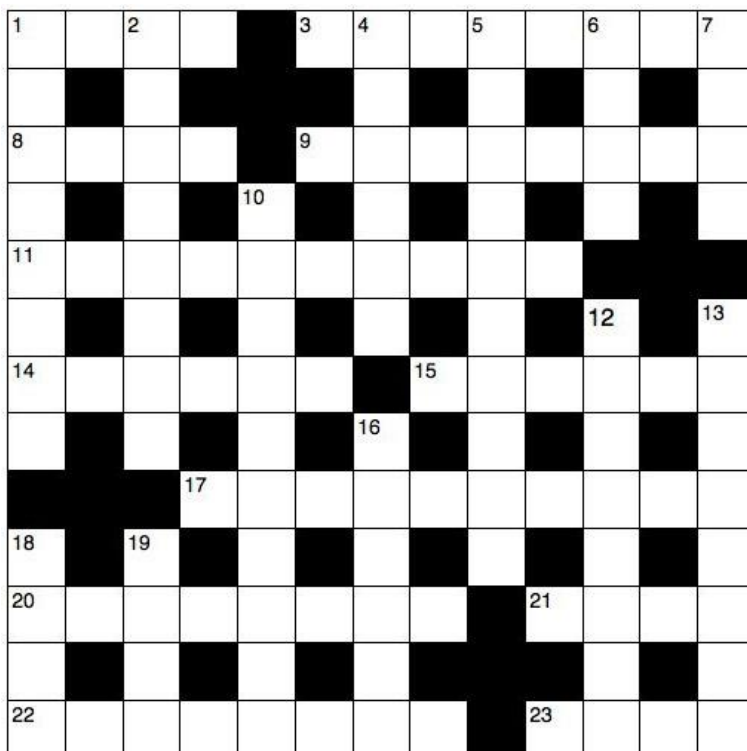
Wordsearch:

This month's wordsearch is based on the time when Mary and Joseph had some trouble getting a bed for the night! You can read all about it in Luke 2:1-7.

baby, everyone, born, living, home, David, Nazareth, visitors, room, Quirinius, Augustus, Jesus, family, space, manager, bed, Joseph, Syria, Mary, Empire, taxes, Bethlehem, guest, stable.



Crossword



75 years ago, on 13th Dec 1949 that Jerusalem became the capital of Israel, replacing Tel Aviv.

60 years ago, on 19th Dec 1964 that the first coordinated nationwide protests against the war in Vietnam were held in the USA.

50 years ago, on 5th Dec 1974 that the last episode of the TV comedy series *Monty Python's Flying Circus* was broadcast in the UK. It had begun in October 1969.

40 years ago, on 3rd Dec that the Bhopal disaster took place in India. A poisonous gas leak at a Union Carbide pesticide plant killed thousands of people and left at least 120,000 with long-term health problems.

40 years ago, on 19th Dec 1984 that the Sino-British Joint Declaration was signed by Britain and China. Britain agreed to return Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty on 1st July 1997.

30 years ago, on 9th Dec 1994 that Sinn Fein held its first formal talks with the British government. This eventually led to the IRA ceasefire, the Good Friday Agreement, and the establishment of the Northern Ireland Assembly in 1998.

25 years ago, on 1st Dec 1999 that an international team of scientists working for the Human Genome Project announced that they had mapped an entire human chromosome (number 22). In April 2003 they announced that they had mapped all human chromosomes

20 years ago, on 26th Dec 2004 that the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami (also called the Boxing Day Tsunami) took place. A massive undersea earthquake near Sumatra caused a devastating tsunami that swamped coastal areas in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Thailand and East Africa. It was one of the deadliest natural disasters in recorded history, killing more than 230,000 people in 14 countries.

Quotes of the month

The Son came out from the Father to help us to come out from the world; He descended to us to enable us to ascend to Him. - *Anthony of Padua*

Christ became what we are that He might make us what He is. - *Athanasius*

I hope your Christmas has had a little touch of Eternity in among the rush and pitter and all. It always seems such a mixture of this world and the next – but that after all is the idea! - *Evelyn Underhill*

God became man to turn creatures into sons; not simply to produce better men of the old kind but to produce a new kind of man. - *CS Lewis*

Our children await Christmas presents like a politician getting election returns. - *Marceline Cox*

My brother heard a woman on the bus say, as the bus passed a church with a Crib outside it, Oh Lor'! They bring religion into everything. Look – they're dragging it even into Christmas now!' - *CS Lewis*

It is easier to renounce worldly possessions than it is to renounce the love of them. - *Walter Hilton*

Nothing influences a man so much as that which he calls his own. - *CH Spurgeon*

Advertising: The science of arresting the human intelligence long enough to get money from it. - *Stephen Leacock*

Across

- 1 'The blind receive sight, the — walk' (Luke 7:22) (4)
- 3 Got (Philippians 3:12) (8)
- 8 Leave out (Jeremiah 26:2) (4)
- 9 Castigated for using dishonest scales (Hosea 12:7) (8)
- 11 Weighty (1 John 5:3) (10)
- 14 'Now the serpent was more — than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made' (Genesis 3:1) (6)
- 15 'Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot — God' (Romans 8:8) (6)
- 17 Because Israel lacked one of these, tools had to be sharpened by the Philistines (1 Samuel 13:19) (10)
- 20 In his vision of the two eagles and the vine, this is how Ezekiel described the latter (Ezekiel 17:8) (8)
- 21 Rite (anag.) (4)
- 22 Nine gigs (anag.) (8)
- 23 'The eye cannot say to the — , "I don't need you"' (1 Corinthians 12:21) (4)

Down

- 1 'Flee for your lives! Don't — — , and don't stop anywhere in the plain!' (Genesis 19:17) (4,4)
- 2 Principal thoroughfare (Numbers 20:19) (4,4)
- 4 'The tax collector... beat his — and said, "God have mercy on me, a sinner"' (Luke 18:13) (6)
- 5 'The zeal of the Lord Almighty will — this' (2 Kings 19:31) (10)
- 6 'The day of the Lord is — for all nations' (Obadiah 15) (4)
- 7 Specified day (Acts 21:26) (4)
- 10 Deadly epidemic (Deuteronomy 32:24) (10)
- 12 Roman Catholic church which has special ceremonial rights (8)
- 13 Tied up (2 Kings 7:10) (8)
- 16 In his speech to the Sanhedrin, Stephen described Moses as 'powerful in speech and — ' (Acts 7:22) (6)
- 18 'Although he did not remove the high places, — heart was fully committed to the Lord all his life' (1 Kings 15:14) (4)
- 19 Tribe (Deuteronomy 29:18) (4)

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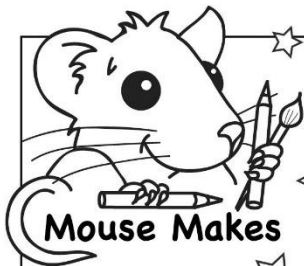
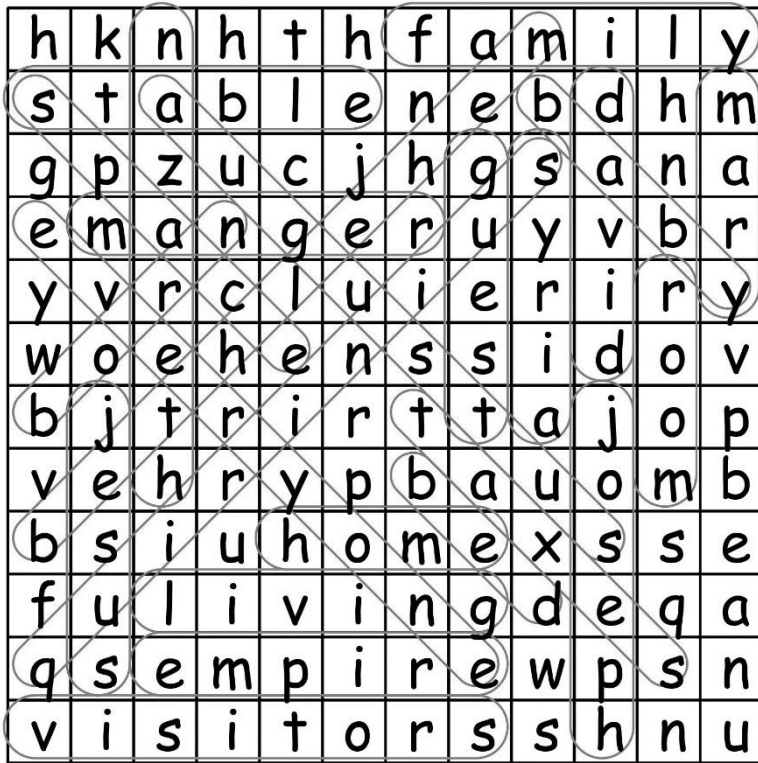
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Wordsearch Answers



"Jesus said,
I am the ___ Y
and the ___ U
and the ___ I ___ .
No one comes to the Father
except through me."
John 14:6

"The child to be born
will be called
H ___ , the
___ of ___"
Luke 1:35

"For unto you is born
this day a
S ___
who is
R ___
the ___ R ___"
Luke 2:11

THE GREATEST GIFT

"She will bear a son,
and shall call his name

for he will save his
people from their sins."
Matthew 1:21

"Jesus said,
I am the

and the life."
John 11:25



EMMANUEL • MESSIAH • REDEEMER • KING OF KINGS • WORD
SON OF MAN • EVERLASTING • SHEPHERD • PRIEST • PROPHET • TEACHER
LIGHT • BREAD • VINE • DOOR • LAMB • COUNSELLOR • CHRISTMAS • GIFT

Find the words from the Bible verses too!

Dec24 © deborah noble @ parishpump.co.uk

Smile Lines

What would you like for Christmas?

A little girl visited Father Christmas in the local garden centre grotto. He welcomed her with a smile and asked what she would like for Christmas. She gasped, and stared at him in horror. "Didn't you get my email?!"

Christmas gifts

Grandfather was talking to his grand-daughter, "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!"

Christmas shopping

It was Christmas and the judge was in a benign mood as he asked the prisoner what he was charged with. "Doing my Christmas shopping early," replied the man.

"Why, that's no offence," said the judge. "How early were you doing it?"

"Before the store opened," replied the defendant.

Snow

One snowman said sadly to the other, "All our friends are flakes."

Holly

Knock, knock! Who's there? Holly. Holly who? Holly-days are here again!

Ho, Ho, Ho!

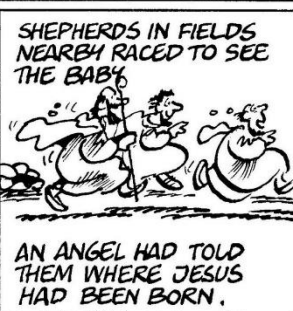
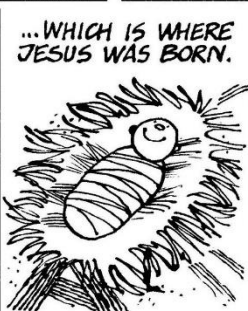
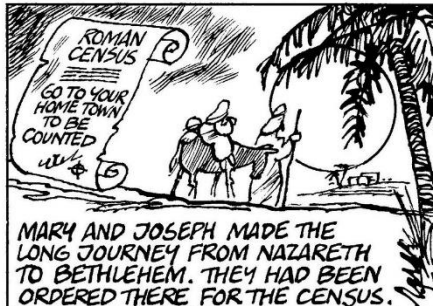
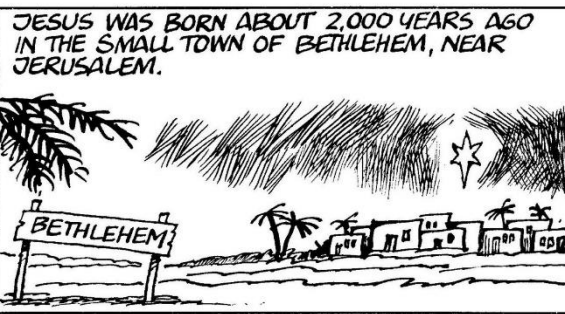
How much did Santa pay for his sleigh? Nothing. It was on the house.

You can tell

You can tell a lot about a person by the way they handle three things: a rainy day, lost luggage, and tangled Christmas tree lights

Cont...

A Very Special Baby



Christmas play

The Sunday School Christmas play was in full swing when the teacher prompted: "And what was it that guided the Wise Men from the East?" Right on cue, the pre-schoolers turned their large white letters to face the audience. However, the last four children in the lineup had somehow reversed their sequence, and so the answer was: CHRISTMAS RATS.

Fragile Nativity

A couple visited their son and his family for Christmas, and admired their beautiful nativity set in the hallway. The grandfather asked his young granddaughter if she knew what it was. "Oh yes," she said immediately. "Of course I do. It's breakable."

REMEMBERING LOVED ONES

If you would like someone remembered in our Sunday prayers annually on the anniversary of their death, you can have their name put in the Book of Remembrance either at St Andrew's or at The Wisdom of God for about £5. Please contact the parish administrator (administrator@parishofkingswood.org.uk or 01737 210785).

Crossword Answers

ACROSS: 1, Lame. 3, Obtained. 8, Omit. 9, Merchant. 11, Burdensome. 14, Crafty. 15, Please. 17, Blacksmith. 20, Splendid. 21, Tier. 22, Singeing. 23, Hand

DOWN: 1, Look back. 2, Main road. 4, Breast. 5, Accomplish. 6, Near. 7, Date. 10, Pestilence. 12, Basilica. 13, Tethered. 16, Action. 18, Asa's. 19, Clan.



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