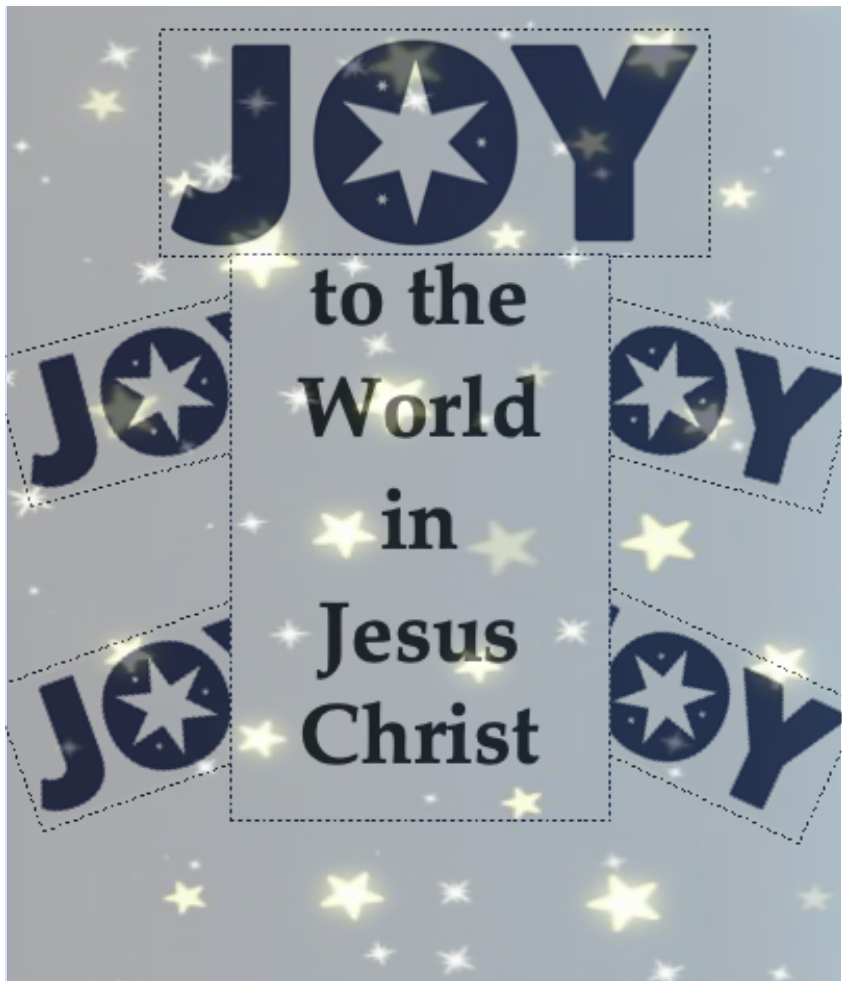
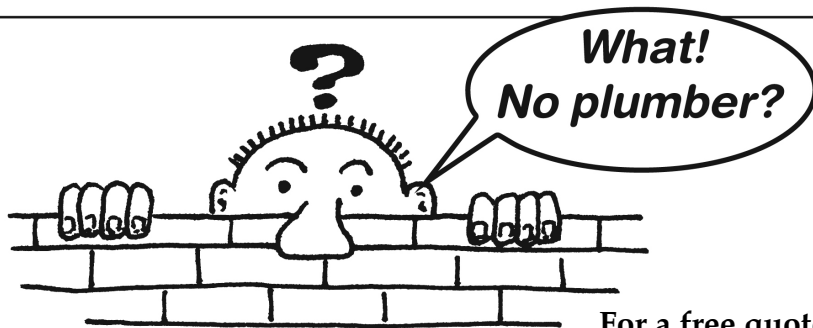


Church News
for the Parishes of
Bromham, Oakley and Stagsden



December 2025



*Need a plumber at any time?
Today that could be a crime,
But not with my competitive rates,
I'll soon get you out of a state.*

*Need an new bathroom, or washing machine fitted?
Just call on me – I'm very well kitted.
Need central heating or just a tap washer changed?
Give me a ring and get it arranged.*

**For a free quote
contact:
P J Bartram
25 Bedford Road
Clapham
MK41 6EJ**

**Tel:
07785 716716**

Bedford Carers

Maria O'Byrne

melita564@hotmail.com

Tel. 07817 191820



Domiciliary Care

Companionship

Housekeeping

Outings/Shopping

Providing simple meals

Overnight stay and/or Personal Care if or when required

DBS checked

Experienced

References

Full Drivers Licence

Liability Insurance

Member of NACAS & Registered with Bedford Borough Council

**Welcome to
Church News in
Bromham, Oakley and Stagsden**

Find us at: www.bromhambenefice.org



facebook Benefice of Bromham, Oakley & Stagsden

Clergy:

Vicar:	Revd Catherine Wilson	825665
		vicar@bromhambenefice.org
Assistant Priest:	Revd Di Harpham	07973 953744
Associate Minister:	Revd Petra Yates - revpetra@bromhambenefice.org	07504 118405

Benefice Administration

Website &.....}	Administrator	07494 069540
Wedding.....}	(Mon & Thurs 9.30 -12.00: Tues, 9.30am -1.00pm organisation..}	
Fees Accounts...}	administrator@bromhambenefice.org	
Safeguarding Officer -	Judith Denyer	07981 928522

Parish News

Editor	Mr Edward Jones	stowensnews@btinternet.com	826551
Distribution	Mrs B Cryer		825463
			07767 272584

Pew Leaflet Sarah Smale, *as Administrator*

Who's Who in Bromham

Church Officers

Churchwarden	Ms T Woodcock	340089
PCC Secretary	Mrs Vivien Butler	407351
PCC Treasurer	Mrs Sarah Smale	07957 126145

Organist & Choirmaster Mr David P Williams

Messy Church for pre-school children (birth - 4yrs) & their carers

	Mrs R Farquhar	307996
Altar Guild	Mrs M Parrott	824402

Who's Who in Bromham cont....

Children & Young	}Emma Harrison	07752 186808
People's work	}Rene Farquhar	307996
Electoral Roll	Mrs Rene Farquhar	307996
Ringers	Mr Robert Jones	881741
Thursday Prayer Gp	Mrs C Wisson	306833
Friends of St Owen's	www.friendsof stowens.org	
Secretary:	Mr David Butler	407351



facebook Friends of St Owens

Who's Who in Oakley

Church Officers

Churchwardens	Mr G Palmer	07710 462535
	Mrs H Worley	262166
PCC Secretary	Katrina Hyden	07908 987959
	oakleypccsecretary@bromhambenefice.org	
PCC Treasurer	Mrs S Ball	ls.ball@btinternet.com
Organist & Choirmaster - contact Jenny Sudworth		822859
Messy Church for pre-school children (birth - 4yrs) & their carers		
	Revd Catherine Wilson	825665
St Mary's Ringers	Mr Bill Sellars	823473

Who's Who in Stagsden

Church Officers

Churchwarden	} Post holders names not published	
PCC Treasurer	} please contact through Revd Di Harpham	07973 953744
PCC Secretary	Caroline Heaton	
Ringers	Mr Richard Brown	823289
Flowers Team	please contact through Revd Di Harpha	07973 953744
918691		

If you know of further details for this page, or have information or articles to publish please send all material to the Editor by post or (preferably) by email - see details on page 3.

The Editor thanks Contributors and Advertisers for their material with acknowledgements to the "Parish Pump" website. Nevertheless, views expressed, and goods and services advertised are not endorsed by the PCC. **Please send material for publication to the Editor by the 22nd of the month.**



Principal Services in the Benefice

<u>7th December</u>	<u>2nd Sunday of Advent</u>
9.00am	Holy Communion (Oakley)
10.30am	Holy Communion (Bromham)

For all Christmas Services

(starting on Saturday 13th December) see page 13

<u>14th December</u>	<u>3rd Sunday of Advent</u>
9.00am	Holy Communion (Bromham)
10.30am	LEP Service with Communion (Oakley)

<u>21st December</u>	<u>4th Sunday of Advent</u>
9.00am	Holy Communion (Bromham)
10.30am	Holy Communion (Bromham)

<u>28th December</u>	<u>1st Sunday of Christmas</u>
10.30am	Holy Communion (Bromham)

Weekday Services

Mondays

11.30am Messy Church (Bromham)

Tuesdays (1st and 3rd of the month)

11.30am Holy Communion (Bromham FR)

Thursdays

10.00am Messy Church (Oakley)

NB 10.30 church services are streamed via Zoom for those who find it difficult to attend in person (details on website www.bromhambenefice.org)

From the Vicarage



It won't be long before the Christmas cards are appearing through the letter box, with their cheerful greetings wishing us joy for the festive season, and encouraging us to rejoice! What will make Christmas a joyful time for you this year?

Perhaps you are looking forward to hearing from distant friends, enjoying your favourite selection of seasonal food, holidays, watching the 'Christmas specials' on the television, singing the well-known carols, or being with people you love. All these things bring us joy in different ways; we know that sadly not everyone is able to have these things at Christmas, and we all appreciate how blessed we are to experience even some of them.

This year's Church of England Christmas campaign focuses on Joy – the booklet of daily readings from Christmas to Epiphany is called '12 Joys of Christmas' and helps us to think about the traditions of Christmas that we love, through them directing us to the heavenly joy that is at the centre of our celebrations. (You can get a copy of the booklet from our churches from Sunday Dec 14th, cost £1, or sign up for daily emails at cofe.io/TheJoyOfChristmas).

No doubt coming to church at some point to ponder on and celebrate Jesus' birth is on your list too as something that will bring you joy. We have plenty of opportunities to do this in

our Benefice, from carol services to crib services to the solemnity of the midnight communion – do come to celebrate the birth of the baby in the manger, God’s great gift to each one of us. And why not share the joy by inviting a neighbour or friend to come with you.

Some people in our communities won’t feel joyful at this time of year – memories of the past or worries for the future overshadow the celebrations perhaps, or the thought of Christmas without a loved one who has died recently means that it’s a sad time this year. Our ‘Quiet Christmas Space’ in St Owen’s on Saturday Dec 13th at 3pm is an opportunity to remember and celebrate in a gentler, more muted way for those who don’t want all the Christmas hype. Maybe you know someone who would appreciate this opportunity?

One of the happiest pieces of news to receive at any time of year is the birth of a new baby – our third grandson was born in Australia at the end of September, and we await the arrival of a granddaughter early in the New Year! The angel brought the shepherds ‘good tidings of great joy’ – not just another new baby born in Bethlehem, but the Saviour of the world come to earth for us. Jesus’ birth showed God’s love for the world and all its people, and we celebrate that 2000 years later he is alive and present in the world, and we can all know the deep comfort and joy of his presence and love. ‘Joy to the world, the Lord is come!’

Wishing you a very joyful Christmas.

Catherine Wilson

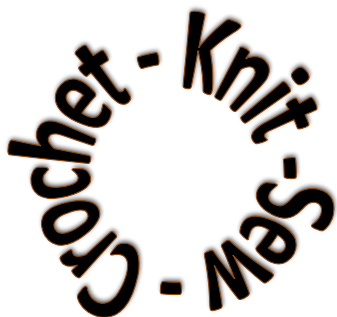


Next meeting - **Thursday 11th December**

Christmas Meal

For further info contact Tessa Woodcock

01234 340089



Sewing Group

1st and 3rd Wednesday
afternoons 2pm - 4pm in
St Owen's Church
Fellowship Room.

I would be happy to undertake alterations or mending. My fee, I will donate to St Mary's Oakley. For more information please call Maureen on 01234 356354.



First Friday Coffee Mornings

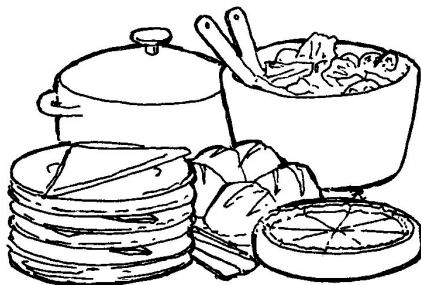
Next coffee morning on Fri 5th December

11am- 1pm

in St Owen's Fellowship Room, Bromham.

NB: Next month, coffee on 9th January not 2nd





Fellowship Lunch
at St Owen's
Next event in
January 2026!

Don't eat

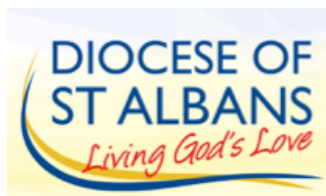
What do you get if you eat Christmas decorations?
Tinselitus.



Christmas Teas
in Church
at St Mary's. Oakley
Saturday 14th December
3.30 - 5.00pm
Many Raffle prizes too!



'Messy Church for All'
at Oakley Methodist Church
on 3rd Tuesday in the month
3.30 till 5.30pm
Contact 824504 or
mcarr49@hotmail.com



Encountering God on a Greek mountain

Interfaith Week (9–16 November) was an

opportunity to share stories and experiences that bring people together. One recent journey did just that: a pilgrimage to Mount Athos in Greece, organised by Bishop Richard and co-led by Father Ioan Nazarcu, Priest of Romanian Orthodox Congregations in Luton and Bedford. The Revd Martin Watson, curate at St Paul's, St Albans, was among the group and described it as "a once in a lifetime pilgrimage to the Holy Island of Mount Athos."



For three days in mid-October, Martin joined seven others, along with Fr Ioan and Bishop Richard, on a journey to Mount Athos, a self-governing monastic community two hours from Thessaloniki as part of our Year of Spiritual Renewal and Wellbeing. Known as the Holy Mountain, it is home to 20 large Orthodox monasteries, countless smaller communities, and hermits who live in solitude. Pilgrims are strictly limited, and access is by ferry only.

"Mount Athos... is dedicated to Mary, the Mother of Jesus. It

Continued on next page

was a real privilege to be able to visit the Mountain, a limited number of pilgrims are allowed each day and access is by ferry only."

The adventure began in Thessaloniki, where the group visited two cathedrals before heading to the port of Ouranoupoli. Martin recalls the drive:

"For me, most of the journey was spent in prayer as Father Ioan drove us to the port living out his rally driver dream as he did so!"

After a seafood feast and a good night's sleep, the pilgrims boarded the ferry and stepped into a world steeped in centuries of devotion. Over two days, they visited six monasteries and stayed overnight in two: one Greek-speaking and one Romanian-speaking.

"We saw some incredible things, beautiful churches decorated with the most vivid images, thousands of icons, the most ornate decorations and some incredible relics all pointing back to God."



The services were long – sometimes three hours – and conducted in Greek or Romanian. Martin admits they were hard to follow, but the experience was profound:

"Yes the style of worship was very different to what we were used to, yes the services were difficult to follow but above it all it was clear that God was there, the same God that we worship in our services at home was there on the Mountain."

Continued on next page

Hospitality was another highlight:

“We were welcomed in like old friends and made to feel at home.”

Reflecting on the pilgrimage, Martin concludes:

“The dedication to worship and the service of God from the monks was inspiring. It was a joy to be able to spend time in God’s presence in this most beautiful of places.”

Bishop Richard shared about the experience:

“Pilgrimage is always about more than the journey itself. It is about opening ourselves to encounter God in unexpected places, whether in a Greek monastery or in the quiet of our daily lives. I rejoice that those who travelled this particular journey have returned with renewed faith and fresh vision.”

Sharing stories like Martin’s helps us appreciate the many ways faith is lived and expressed. Whether through dialogue, hospitality, or the simple act of learning from one another, these encounters deepen understanding and strengthen the bonds that hold communities together.

If you have a story of learning from and working with those from other traditions and faiths, please do get in touch, we would love to hear from you

ST OWEN’S ALTAR GUILD

Decorating St Owens Church for Christmas will take place on Tuesday 23 December from 10 am. Anyone who would like to help will be most welcome.

Donations for the purchase of flowers will be gratefully received.

Margaret Parrott



Christmas Celebrations 2025

You are warmly invited to celebrate Christmas with us

Saturday 13th December

3.00pm Quiet Christmas (Bromham) a gentle service
 of light, reflections and carols

Sunday 14th December

6.00pm Christmas Carol Service (Stagsden Village Hall)

Wednesday 17th December

6.30pm Christmas Carol Service (Bromham)

Sunday 21st December

6.00pm Christmas Carol Service (Oakley)

Donations at Carol Services to your Parish Church

Wednesday 24th December - Christmas Eve

3.00pm Crib Service for younger children (Bromham)

4.30pm Crib Service (Bromham)

4.30pm Crib Service (Stagsden Village Hall)

4.30pm Crib Service (Oakley)

5.30pm Short Holy Communion (Stagsden Village Hall)

11.00pm Midnight Communion (Oakley)

11.00pm Midnight Communion (Bromham)

Thursday 25th December - Christmas Day

10.00am Family Communion with carols (Oakley)

Bedford Women's Refuge (Butterfly House)

*At any of the services on Christmas Eve or on Christmas Day
you may donate cash/gift cards Argos for Toys, Primark for
clothes or Sainsbury for food (but no wrapped gifts, please).*



Coffee Morning Extravaganza

St Owen's Church
Bromham

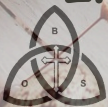
Friday 5th December 2025

10.30am to 2pm

Tea, coffee, cake &
light lunches

Raffle, Stalls

In aid of St Owen's Church



www.bromhambenefice.org



UNISONG
Community Choir

Christmas Concert

**Saturday 20th December
2pm**

St Owen Church, Bromham

**Tickets £10 (£5 children) on the door.
Includes refreshments!**

**Christmas Raffle & proceeds in aid of
East Anglian Air Ambulance.**

Reservations recommended!

01234 826551

Tales from a Sabbatical II – Places

Last month I wrote about some of the projects I saw during my month in London volunteering with LCM. This month I'm going to write about the various places I visited across the whole 3 months of my Sabbatical.

I began by driving down to north Devon, to a beautiful Retreat centre called Lee Abbey, on the coast near Lynton and Lynmouth. It was built in c1850 but was never actually an Abbey; it became a retreat centre in 1946 and since then has been home to a Christian community, and host to many guests – among them me! I was booked onto a silent retreat – from 8pm on Monday to 5pm on Thursday we smiled at each other but didn't speak, companions at meals and at our daily meeting at 10am when we listened to our retreat leader and were led in reflection. The rest of the time there was the countryside and the sea, time to think and pray and rest; it was only when I got there that I realised just how tired I was, and I left feeling refreshed and cared for.

It was quite a contrast to arrive in London a week or so later, with the noise, the traffic, the bustle and the people. I was based in East London: street after street of terraced houses, leading off busy High Streets with many shops selling unfamiliar (to me) food, and beautiful Asian clothing. I quickly became adept at using the 'Citymapper' app on my phone to find my way by bus and/or tube to wherever I was due each day, remembering to 'tap on' and 'tap off' every time. I went to the LCM headquarters a few times, which involved a tube journey and then a walk past the Tower of London and across Tower Bridge, with views of the city and the river that I loved. Sometimes my travels took me on the Docklands Light Railway, which passes London City Airport, and it was fascinating to watch the occasional plane land or take off so close by.

Continued on next page

At the end of July and beginning of August I spent 2 weeks in Cambridge –a very different city. I was attending a Summer School doing some theology and biblical languages study, and staying at Westminster College which is in the north west of the city. The College was only a short walk from the city centre, where I saw beautiful historic buildings and colleges, many tourists! (but no students as it was not term-time), and of course the river Cam where some new friends from the summer school and I enjoyed a punting trip. The studying itself was hard work! Each week we had 5 lectures each on various aspects of the Old and New Testaments – I found the teaching on Psalms and on the disciples in the Gospels and Acts very interesting, but was less engaged by lectures on the decolonisation of New Testament studies (once I had begun to understand what that meant). I also dipped into Biblical Hebrew and New Testament Greek, both of which I experienced a little of when Tim was doing his ordination training, and was pleased to find that I hadn't completely forgotten it all.

In between these three sections of my sabbatical time, Tim and I had a short break on the south coast, and a longer holiday near Durham including a rather chilly visit to Scarborough where we paddled in the sea briefly! I also was able to spend a couple of weekends in south London with my mother, which we both enjoyed very much.

The third and final part of my sabbatical reflections will appear next month. *Catherine*

You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you. - *Dale Carnegie*
American author of "How to Win Friends and Influence People"



Bromham Benefice

St Owen's Bromham, St Mary's Oakley, St Leonard's Stagsden

Events for families and children coming soon...

CHRISTMAS CRAFT AFTERNOON

14.00- 16.00

SUNDAY 7th DECEMBER

ST OWEN'S - BROMHAM

All Welcome

Children must come with an adult



Wednesday 24th December Crib Services for Christmas Eve

3pm St Owen's Bromham (for younger children)

4.30pm Stagsden Village Hall

4.30pm St Mary's Oakley

4.30pm St Owen's Bromham



Join us for more family fun,
craft, activities and food
next time...

Monday February 16th 2026

11.30am—1.30pm

St Owen's Church, Bromham

Children must come with an adult. Free event.

www.bromhambenefice.org

Being a pastor in the Ukraine

Pastors in the Ukraine are continuing to minister to their beleaguered congregations, bringing comfort and hope into the most frightening and desperate war-torn situations.

So says Transform Europe Network, a Christian ministry which serves alongside indigenous Christians in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. In a recent report, it gives an update from one of its partners on the ground:

“Pastor Evgeniy serves in the war-torn Kherson region of southeastern Ukraine. Since 2022, he and a small group of volunteers have brought food, comfort, and hope to people living amid the destruction.

“Evgeniy and his team recently came to a village that had been shelled. One family’s home was reduced to rubble, and their vital documents were buried. The team arrived in bright, civilian clothing, deliberately chosen to identify them as volunteers, not military. As they began to pull back the rubble, they remained calm, focussing on their priority to help the family escape.

“40 minutes later, the volunteers heard and saw a reconnaissance drone circling above them. They couldn’t tell who it belonged to, but its presence was ominous. Then came a different sound — sharper, lower, and closer. A small military drone was heading straight for them. In a moment that could only be described as divine intervention, the drone clipped a tree branch and crashed to the ground next to the team’s car.

“The team cautiously approached the drone, still twitching and sparking. Minutes later, a second drone appeared. It aimed for the fallen drone, possibly to trigger an explosion by

Continued on next page

striking the first. But it too missed its target—crashing about six meters from the car, hitting a nearby concrete wall rather than the group. No one was injured:-

“But the volunteers knew then that they were under attack. They gathered their tools, helped the family into the vehicle, and drove away. Just seconds after they left, a third drone struck — right where their car had been parked moments before. The resulting explosion could have easily taken their lives. But once again, by what they all believe was God’s hand, they were spared.

“Reflecting on the events, Pastor Evgeniy was asked if he ever felt hatred or the desire for revenge. His answer was quiet, but unshakable

‘No. I just understand. I understand the pain. I understand the fear. But if we don’t bring light into this darkness, who will?’

“For Evgeniy, war is not a reason to harden the heart—it’s a call to deeper compassion. Even as drones fly overhead and homes crumble, he continues his ministry, bringing food, prayer, and humanity into places others flee from.

“This is what faith looks like in the ruins. It looks like a small group in bright vests, carrying hope into danger. It looks like a pastor who chooses grace over vengeance. And it looks like a God who protects, even when the bombs fall close.”

Since the talks involving the US and a possible ceasefire, the local leaders testify that instead of de-escalation, they've experienced a significant rise in attacks and shelling.

Transform Europe Network (TEN) asks Christians in the UK:

Please pray for pastors and church teams, exhausted by serving many people on the frontline.

Continued on next page

Pray for those who are confused, discouraged and angry, even with each other. Pray for healing and comfort from the Holy Spirit. Churches in Ukraine do all they can to reconcile local people, but it is getting harder and harder.

Mothers are afraid that their teenage sons will be taken away for conscription, which has become increasingly aggressive. This also causes men to run away from home and so many families are fractured and deeply stressed as the war grinds on.

More details at: <https://ten-uk.org>

Parish Pump website

Christmas Cards - Why Not.....?

.....greet fellow members of the church family with ONE card on the noticeboard at the back of church and donate the amount you save (or more, of course) to:

SMART at the Prebend Street Centre for the Homeless

(Collection boxes in church)

From the Registers

Funeral / Memorial Service:

17 th November	Pelham Pitts (Oakley)
26 th November	Revd Derek Draper (Bromham)

Burial of Ashes:

12 th November	Rodney & Kay Turnbull (Bromham)
---------------------------	------------------------------------

FRIENDS OF ST OWEN'S 100 CLUB PRIZE WINNERS

NOVEMBER 2025

1st prize	Elizabeth Craigen
2nd prize	Janice Street
3rd prize	Binny Cryer
4th prize	Lorna Holland



Remember, Remember in December!!

100 Club send out invitations to join / renew your membership as a fun way to support St Owen's and a chance to win a cash prize.

To join contact Frances 01234 602718

* * * * *

Also Friends of St Owen's are looking for someone to help keep the membership register and run the monthly 100 Club draw. Neither task is onerous!!

Offers please to Edward at 01234 826551

Plough Sunday- Sunday 11th January 2026

Join us at 3.30pm in Stagsden Village Hall for songs and worship as we mark the traditional start to the agricultural year, and return to work after The Twelve Days of Christmas.



Next meeting
Saturday 13th December
 5 - 7.00pm
Christmas Special
 The Fellowship Centre
 Clapham
 MK41 6ER

Santa's sleigh

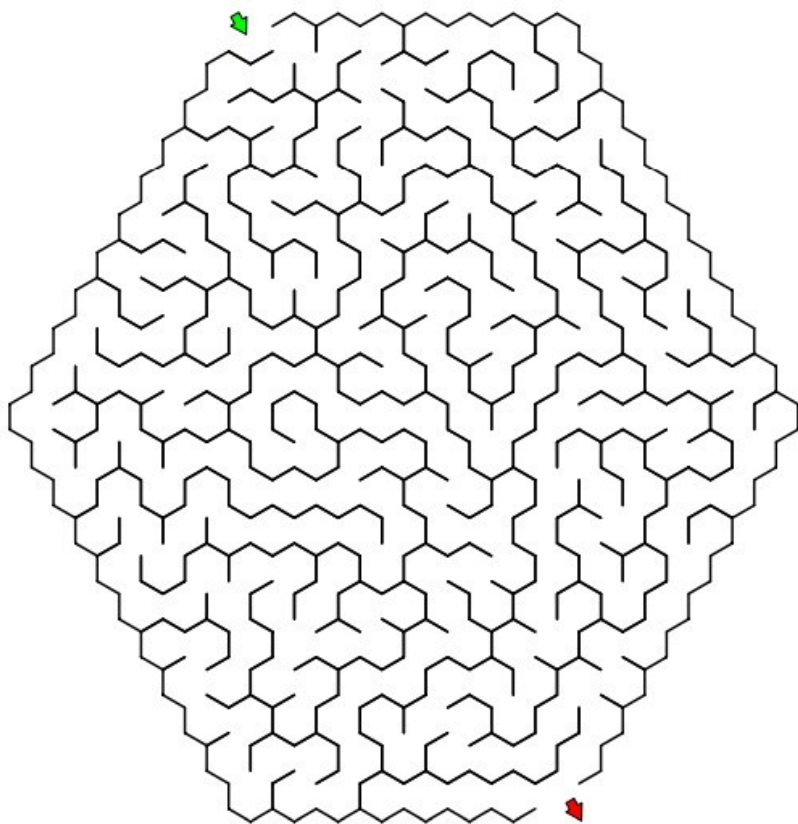
Father Christmas nervously went for his sleigh-driving test. He came rushing back in a thunder of reindeer and pulled up in front of the toy factory. "At last!" he shouted, "No-el plates!"

Sudoku - Medium

Solution on
page 33

	5					3	7	
			2	7	6			
7					1			
2		3		1				
		7				6		
				3		4		5
			1					9
			5	9	4			
	6	2					1	

Can you find your way from top to bottom?



At 3pm on Christmas Day

Many people will stop everything at 3pm on Christmas Day to listen to His Majesty's annual address to the nation. But did you ever wonder what the King calls his Christmas Broadcast? Could it possibly be 'The One Show'?!

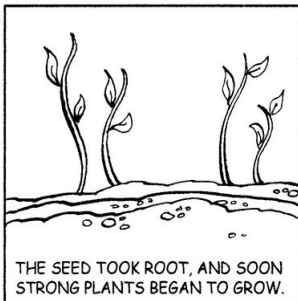
For younger readers.....

The tale of the Wheat and the Weeds

JESUS OFTEN TOLD
STORIES WITH
HIDDEN MEANINGS

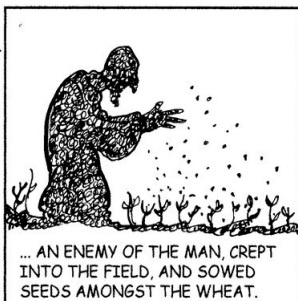


ONE WAS ABOUT A MAN WHO
SOWED SEED IN HIS FIELD.



THE SEED TOOK ROOT, AND SOON
STRONG PLANTS BEGAN TO GROW.

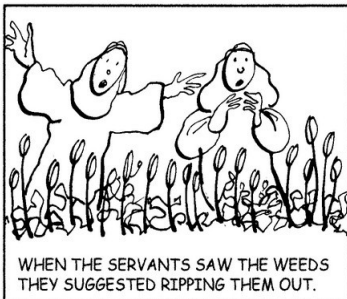
BUT ONE NIGHT, WHEN
EVERYONE WAS ASLEEP...



... AN ENEMY OF THE MAN, CREPT
INTO THE FIELD, AND SOWED
SEEDS AMONGST THE WHEAT.



AS THE WHEAT BEGAN
TO GROW, SO DID THE
WEEDS.



WHEN THE SERVANTS SAW THE WEEDS
THEY SUGGESTED RIPPING THEM OUT.



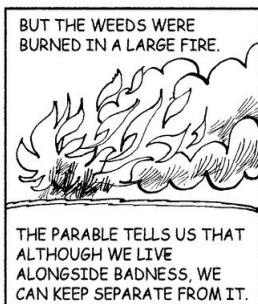
NO! LET'S LEAVE THEM
UNTIL HARVEST TIME!



IF YOU PULL THEM UP NOW,
YOU MIGHT KILL THE WHEAT
TOO. WE'LL SORT THEM OUT AT
HARVEST.

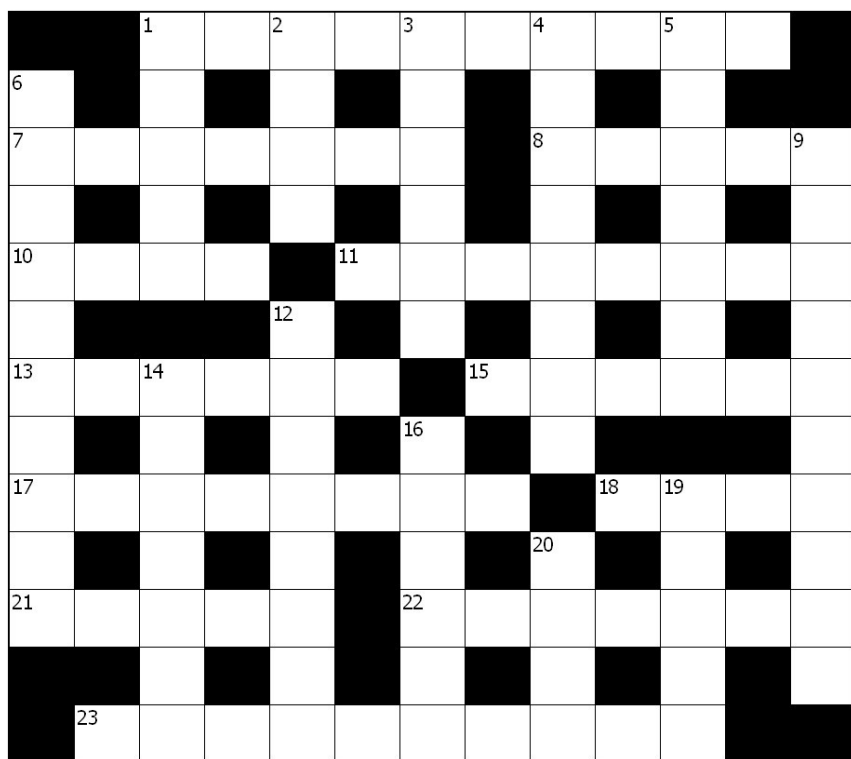


WHEN THE WHEAT WAS
READY, IT WAS HARVESTED
INTO HUGE BUNDLES.



BUT THE WEEDS WERE
BURNED IN A LARGE FIRE.

THE PARABLE TELLS US THAT
ALTHOUGH WE LIVE
ALONGSIDE BADNESS, WE
CAN KEEP SEPARATE FROM IT.



Across

1 Provisional meeting place of God and the Jews (Exodus 25:9) (10)

7 David's third son, killed when his head got caught in a tree during a battle with his father (2 Samuel 18:14,15) (7)

8 They ruled much of the west coast of South America in the 15th and early 16th centuries (5)

10 Small deer of European and Asian extraction (4)

11 Seized control of (Numbers 21:25) (8)

13 Terror (Luke 24:5) (6)

15 First World War heroine shot by the Germans in Brussels, Nurse Edith (6)

- 17 Stormy (8)
- 18 A bitter variety of this, together with lamb and unleavened bread, was the Passover menu for anyone unclean (Numbers 9:11) (4)
- 21 Arson (anag.) (5)
- 22 How John Newton described God's grace in his well-known hymn (7)
- 23 Habitation (Isaiah 27:10) (10)

Down

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

Solution on page 33

Canon Paul Hardingham continues his series on the books of the Bible.

What's the Big Idea? An Introduction to Books of the New Testament: Philippians

This letter was written to Christians in the Macedonian city of Philippi when Paul was in prison, probably in Rome (60-62 AD). His primary purpose in writing was to thank them for the gift they had sent him upon learning of his imprisonment. However, he also uses the letter as an opportunity to report on his situation; to encourage the Philippians to stand firm in the face of persecution and rejoice regardless of circumstances; to exhort the church to live in humility, fellowship, and unity; to commend Epaphroditus and Timothy to them; and to warn them about false teaching. This included Judaizers who were persuading the Philippians to submit to circumcision.

The central message of Philippians focuses on joy (the word occurs some 16 times!). For Paul, joy isn't simply an emotional response to favourable circumstances. True joy is to be found through a relationship with the resurrected and glorified Christ. Death ceases to be an enemy, because through it we can more fully enjoy the presence of Jesus. This joy is also rooted in an expectation of the return of Jesus, which gives urgency to the task of sharing the gospel. So, Paul begins his letter by thanking the Philippians for their partnership together in the work of the gospel through the offerings they have sent.

Paul also powerfully appeals to the Philippians to be of 'one mind' in pursuing humility and unity. He gives the example

Continued on next page

of Jesus himself *'who made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant'* (2:7) to the point of dying the death of a common criminal. *'Therefore'*, say Paul, *'God exalted him to the highest place'* (2:9). This 'Jesus attitude' is the one that all believers should share.

Editor: and now Paul Hardingham considers the Christmas story.

Christmas Unwrapped!

All of us have received unwanted gifts at Christmas. For Joseph the gift of a child, as recorded in Matthew chapter 1, was not something he really wanted. Although he was engaged to Mary, her pregnancy would be grounds for divorce. Not surprisingly, with the associated social disgrace, Joseph wanted to divorce Mary quietly (Matthew 1:19). However, God intervened in a dream: *'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel, which means, God with us.'* (1:23). In a scary and uncertain world, what does the message of *Immanuel* say to us today?

God is present with us

God assured Joseph that He was working in all that Joseph was going through. The eternal and creator God entered time and space as a baby. This baby is both uniquely divine but also fully human. This means that we can know God personally, not just know about Him. The Holy Spirit is committed to making Jesus' life and character real in us, and bringing meaning to our circumstances, just as He worked in Mary's life.

God is on our side

Christmas touches some raw nerves in our lives, including

Continued on next page

stress, family rows, loneliness and financial pressures. However, God does not remain aloof from our experiences. In Jesus He enters our world of hopes and fears, joys and disappointments. He understands what we are going through, as He is alongside us. By the cross and resurrection, He gave His life that we might know His love, joy, peace and forgiveness.

For Joseph, as well as us, the Christmas message is one of hope in an uncertain world. It is a time to re-consider the claims of *Immanuel* ('God with us') as we entrust ourselves to Him for the coming year.

Editor: Revd Roy Shaw is a retired but active priest in the diocese of York, where he is a spiritual director.

This Christmas, will you have enough?

At the opening of Bach's Cantata No, 82 a solo bass voice begins to sing the aria 'Ich habe genug' - (I have enough) - a paraphrase of Simeon's Song 'Now Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace... for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.'

Simeon - the bass voice - realises that he is complete, he has enough, now he has beheld the infant Jesus, even though our salvation has yet to be completed in the adult Christ. Bach's paraphrase, slow and meditative, takes, as it were, the words out of Simeon's mouth into the witness of the singer, reminding all who listen that this is a timeless truth: in Christ I have enough.

The rest of the cantata - another four movements covering a

Continued on next page

total of about 25 minutes - takes up the theme of longing to being united fully with Christ. That is enough, that is completion.

Enough. Complete. These words probably rarely fall from our lips as an experienced truth, either in relation to what we have, what we want, and importantly, who we are. And yet we've assented to this concept of the all-sufficiency of God in countless hymns that we've sung Sunday by Sunday since, well.... forever. Christ 'my all in all'.

At best it remains an aspiration, for we live at a time when the whole weight of our culture is to divert our baptism promises, our reliance on God into reliance on *stuff*, gewgaws in infinite variety.

No more so than at Christmas, when we are urged to splurge, and then splurge some more. 'Is this present good enough for our Joe? Maybe I should buy him something else as well.... And do you think a turkey *and* beef will be enough? Maybe another two dozen pigs in blankets?'

I'm not trying to be a kill-joy here. Our best times are around food, with friends, and Christmas is the one time of the year that we make an effort to be with friends and family. But the whole of so-called western civilisation is posited on the fact that *we have to have more*, and it reaches its anxious climax at Christmas.

Any advert you happen to catch will convince you of this truth; western capitalism depends on **you** buying stuff, needed or not.

Ed: this article will be completed on or about the Seventh Day of Christmas!



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Getting Stronger?

Statistics show we're getting stronger. 50 years ago, you needed an estate car to hold £50 worth of Christmas presents. 20 years ago, it took two people to do so. And now a five-year-old can do it.

Solution to puzzle on
page 23

1	5	6	9	4	8	3	7	2
3	9	4	2	7	6	1	5	8
7	2	8	3	5	1	9	4	6
2	4	3	6	1	5	8	9	7
5	8	7	4	2	9	6	3	1
6	1	9	8	3	7	4	2	5
4	3	5	1	6	2	7	8	9
8	7	1	5	9	4	2	6	3
9	6	2	7	8	3	5	1	4

Solution to puzzle
on page 26

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



Sara preferred to let people work out the hymn numbers for themselves.

Actual children's versions of Christmas Carols:

"...sleep in heavenly peas"

"While shepherds washed their socks by night..."

"We three kings of porridge and tar..."

"On the first day of Christmas my tulip gave to me..."

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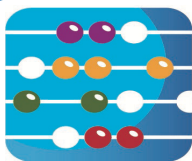
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