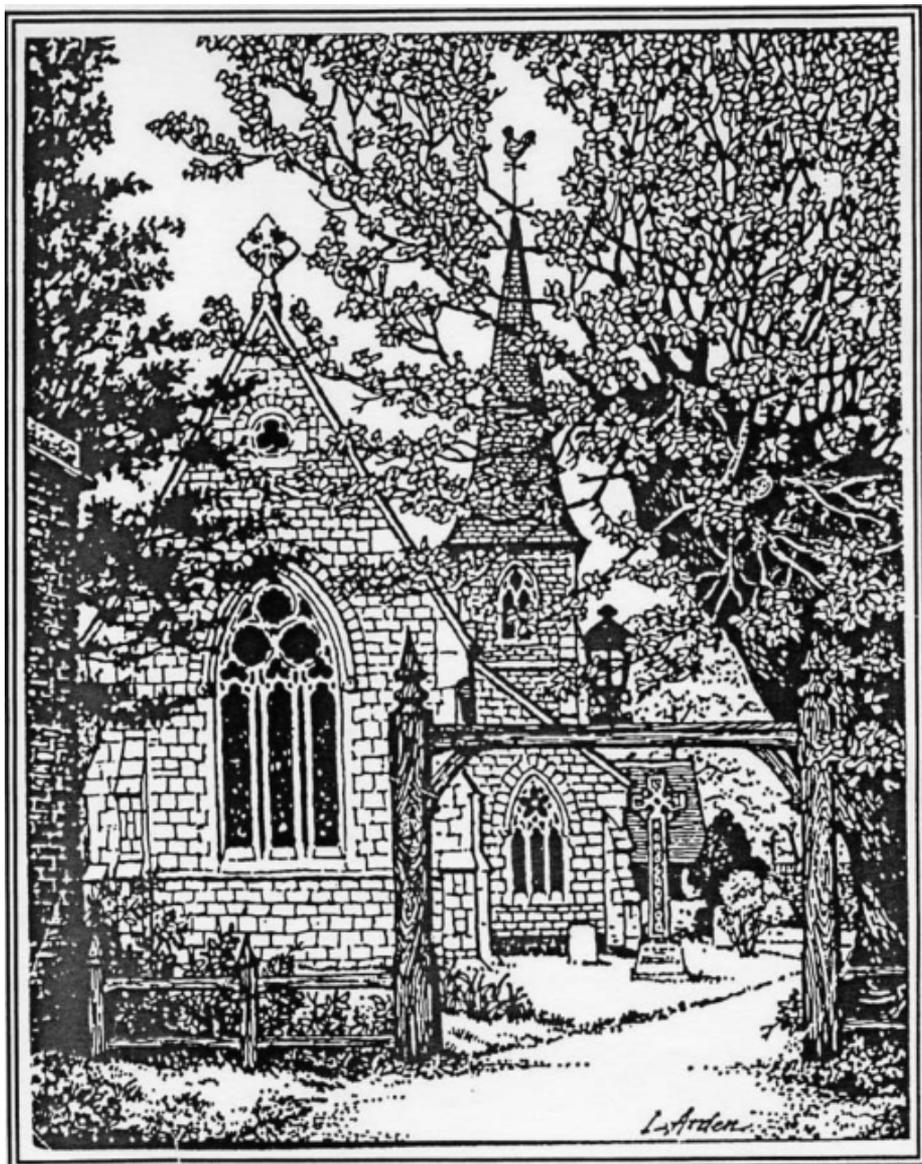


**The Parish Church of  
*St. James, North Cray***

**50p**

***December, 2019***

***(Part of the Bexley Team Ministry)***



## St JAMES, NORTH CRAY PARISH STAFF

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**Sacristan:** Stephen Hills 020 8302 7236

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**Parish Safeguarding:** Rhonda Collins 020 8300 3797

**Magazine Editor:** Steve Blake  
sblake stjames@virginmedia.com

### St James Sunday Service

9.30am Holy Communion

(All age service with Uniformed Organisations on second Sunday)

## TEAM RECTOR'S LETTER DECEMBER 2019



I start this month's Team Rector's letter with a small confession! I confess to you that inspiration for the December epistle did not strike me immediately. As you will know, articles for the parish magazines have to be submitted well in advance, so now, in early November, I don't feel ready to think about Christmas quite yet. Faced with a blank computer screen, with no inspiration forthcoming to my poor brain, in order to get myself thinking, I turned to the internet for ideas – trying to find out what other ministers had written last year for their December messages.

After some fruitless searching, I came across a minister's letter on a church website in the United States. And it told me that their church's Christmas theme for December 2018 was "AT LAST...NOEL". I liked that phrase very much, and it gave me the inspiration I needed!

In the busy run-up to Christmas, many of us will comment "Oh no! Christmas already, where did the year go? I have so much to do to get ready, so little time to get everything done..."

Probably it's only small children who would actually say...

"AT LAST! Christmas is here!" We sing the carol 'The First Noel' (or Nowell!) and I discovered that it originated in Cornwall.

The words of the first verse that we use today are: -

*The first Nowell the angel did say  
Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;  
In fields where they lay, keeping their sheep,  
On a cold winter's night that was so deep:*

The carol tells us that very First Noel came to the poor, the marginalised, the down-trodden. It broke into their actual and metaphorical darkness. The message of the angels was the fulfilment of many years of longing for the coming of the promised Messiah. The world was troubled, the darkness seemed overwhelming. Where was the hope? But AT LAST the promise was fulfilled, the time had come, the Christ-Child was born.

The world now, like the world then, needs hope. The simple message of 'Noel' can bring us the inspiration we so desperately need, new energy, and a fresh new perspective. At last Noel – the end to our searching.

In the midst of the darkness, the confusion, Jesus is still the Light of the World. As you enter into this Christmas season, don't let these eternal truths get choked out by the busyness of the season. God still breaks into a world of need, the message of hope is still spoken, the warmth of God's love still comes into the cold places and melts the cold hearts.

Now, as then, we need Christmas, we need hope, we need Jesus  
At Last! Noel!

**Reverend Ren Harding (Team Rector)**

contact me at Joydens Wood Vicarage,  
6 Tile Kiln Lane, Joydens Wood, Bexley, DA5 2BB  
01322-528923                      [renharding@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:renharding@hotmail.co.uk)



**Christmas Message**

Away in a manger the baby lay,  
No blankets or pillows – just some hay.  
Shepherds watching their flocks by night  
Angels appear midst blinding light.

Wise men travelling from afar  
Following a guiding star,  
Herod filled with rage within  
Planning to kill this new born king.

What can this mean for us today?  
Just a story some would say,  
Perhaps we need to think it through,  
A Saviour born – for me, for you?

*By Megan Carter*

**For to Us a Child is Born**  
By The Rev Paul Hardingham



*'For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.'* (Isaiah 9:6)

Approaching Christmas, we are very aware of the political and economic uncertainties that face us. The prophet Isaiah also lived in such uncertain times, as the Assyrians had just conquered the northern kingdom of Israel (734-732 BC). This fulfilled Isaiah's warnings to the people, who had turned their back on God and His ways. However, Isaiah is able to bring a word of hope, promising a Messiah who would come like a great light: *'The people walking in darkness have seen a great light'* (Isaiah 9:2). These words are fulfilled in the birth of Jesus 700 years later and describe the person of Jesus:

*Wonderful Counsellor:* He will give us the wisdom we need, especially when we have difficult decisions to make at work or home, or in dealing with our finances or future direction.

*Mighty God:* He will provide the help and strength to face a difficult diagnosis, family crisis or relationships breakdown, as we trust His plan and purpose for our lives.

*Everlasting Father:* He cares for us as a father cares for His children, so that we can come to Him when we feel alone or we are really struggling, knowing that He hears and will answer our prayers.

*Prince of Peace:* He has secured peace by His cross and resurrection, and so we can find in Him true acceptance, forgiveness and peace for our lives, relationships and future.

Christmas is the time to celebrate a God who is faithful to all His promises, *'the zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this'* (7)

## NEWS FROM THE CHURCHWARDENS



### Churchwardens' reflections

This year seems to have flown by. Christmas is almost upon us and Reverend Ren and St James Church are busy organising the December services and events. I really look forward to this time of celebration, especially the carols which bring back fond memories of school nativity plays, concerts, and singing around the neighbourhoods of North Cray.

Our Memory Christmas tree will be lit on Friday 6th December at the North Cray Neighbourhood Centre. If you would like to remember someone who will not be with you this Christmas, please visit the centre and write a message on one of the tree tags. The names of those remembered will then be read out at one of our services in early January.

At St James we begin our church celebrations early with the Toy and Christingle Service on Sunday 8th December at 9.30am. This family service is always well attended, and it gives us the opportunity to donate a new toy for a child who may be less fortunate than ourselves. Once again, our gifts will go to Bexley Women's Aid, whose mission is to enable and empower women and children experiencing domestic abuse to obtain and sustain a safe living environment, as well as provide community education in the hope of teaching children and youth about healthy respectful relationships in order to prevent domestic abuse in the future. It is such a worthy local cause and it would be wonderful if you could help us support it by donating a toy that will bring a child some happiness on Christmas morning.

Later that day, we will be holding our annual Carolaire in The Bothy from 3pm-6pm, where you can enjoy a wonderful afternoon tea, join

in with Christmas carols and a quiz, and be entertained with Christmas songs. Tickets cost £8 and are available from Ann Milcoy in church on a Sunday or by phone on 020 8300 3930.

On the following Sunday, the 15th, our candlelit Carol Service will be held at 4pm and everyone is most welcome. It's a beautiful service with readings and carols followed by mince pies and mulled wine.

As Christmas Day draws nigh, please join us on Christmas Eve for the Crib Service at 5pm. It's a lovely family service and we invite the children to take part in our Nativity play – it's narrated so there are no speaking parts to worry about! Later that night, the Midnight Communion will be a joint service at our sister church, St Barnabas, Joydens Wood, at 11.15pm.

Finally, Christmas Day dawns and we celebrate the birth of our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, at St James with a Communion Service at 10am.

It would be wonderful if you could join us for some, if not all, of our Christmas services and we look forward to welcoming you to St James.

We wish you all a very Happy Christmas and thank you for supporting St James Church. Without you, we would not be. Peace be with you all.

Maxine & Suzy, Churchwardens

### **JANUARY 2020 MAGAZINE**



To avoid the last minute Christmas rush, could all copy please reach me by Sunday, 8<sup>th</sup> December.

Many thanks and a Happy Christmas!

Steve Blake



# News and Issues



## **Homeless people at risk of modern slavery**

Staff and volunteers at night shelters are being urged to be on the lookout for signs of exploitation among guests in a campaign recently launched by the Church of England's anti-slavery initiative.

More than 1,000 posters and other materials aimed at raising awareness of the dangers of modern slavery amongst homeless people have been distributed to night shelters across the country by The Clewer Initiative, the Church of England's response to modern slavery.

The signs of modern slavery amongst homeless people could include:

- Unusual anxiety about people in positions of authority and extreme fear of being watched
- Working for no or little pay
- Working in the most common sectors for modern slavery such as construction and hand car washes
- Not being allowed to leave their place of work
- Having no control of their ID
- Being approached on the street, outside a shelter or at drop-in by someone offering work
- Signs of physical abuse or untreated injuries

The *Let's Talk* initiative includes a poster illustrating the typical journey of a homeless person trafficked into exploitation.

There are also guidance notes for project managers and volunteers in night shelters on the steps they can take to safeguard their guests from this danger. These include warning guests of the dangers of modern slavery.

The Rt Revd Dr Alastair Redfern, Chair of The Clewer Initiative, said: "With rising numbers of homeless people on our streets, it is even more important that we are able to recognise the signs."

## **PAST CASES REVIEW**

We are committed to making our church a safe space for all. Churches across the Diocese of Rochester are currently undertaking a comprehensive safeguarding review to establish that all known past cases of concern relating to church abuse have been considered and dealt with appropriately. If you are concerned about something you have experienced in a church, now or in the past, or you are worried about another person - perhaps a vulnerable adult or a child – there are people you can talk to and you will be taken seriously. Anyone who needs to come forward with information or make any disclosures regarding church related abuse are encouraged to make direct contact with the Diocese of Rochester's Safeguarding team on: 01634 560000 or visit: [www.rochester.anglican.org/safeguarding/](http://www.rochester.anglican.org/safeguarding/) Recognising that this may not feel safe for those with a lived experience of abuse from within the church, a dedicated telephone helpline, operated independently from the church, by the NSPCC, is available. Calls can be made free on 0800 80 20 20

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## Trusting God in all things

By Lester Amann



For many, Christmas is a time of happiness and holiday. An opportunity for parties, concerts, pantomimes and watching children perform nativity plays. We exchange colourful cards, and presents, and prepare special meals for family and friends. We sing carols. We adorn our homes and churches with all kinds of decorations.

All our celebrations are a far cry from that first Christmas. In our festivities it is easy to forget that when Jesus came life was hard. The Romans were an occupying force in Israel. There was poverty. The Jews were a captive and oppressed people. They had numerous worries and fears and awaited their Messiah to give them freedom.

Mary was looking forward to marrying Joseph and living with him in Nazareth. Suddenly she meets an angel; told she will be pregnant with God's Son and then her fiancé wants to divorce her! Her world is changed. Joseph too is distressed. In the turmoil, God speaks to Joseph in a dream and while this explains the miraculous pregnancy, he can't stop the hurtful gossip or the doubters.

Even if he wanted to face his critics, Joseph can't stay in Nazareth. He is compelled to take Mary with him to Bethlehem to complete a census. The long journey, possibly all on foot, must have been horrendous. Then in Bethlehem there is unsuitable accommodation for a birth.

It was likely that when the shepherds came and shared their experience of an angel messenger and the singing heavenly host, that their difficult circumstances began to make sense. Then, perhaps, sometime later when the Eastern men came with gifts that they were reassured and encouraged that God was with them in their difficulties. Also, when God told Joseph in a dream to go with Mary and the infant to Egypt to escape Herod's cruelty, they knew that in a foreign land they could trust God with their lives.

Our Christmas comes amidst life's traumas and troubles. We may have on-going difficulties. In our struggles we need to know that God can be working out His purposes. Mary and Joseph came to know that in their hardships they were in God's will. Like them, we too must trust God in life-changing events.

*"I know the plans I have for you" declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11)*



**Erith Operatic Society**

**Present**

# **Festive Family Carol Concert**

**St. Barnabas' Church**

Tile Kiln Lane, Joydens Wood, Bexley DA5 2BB

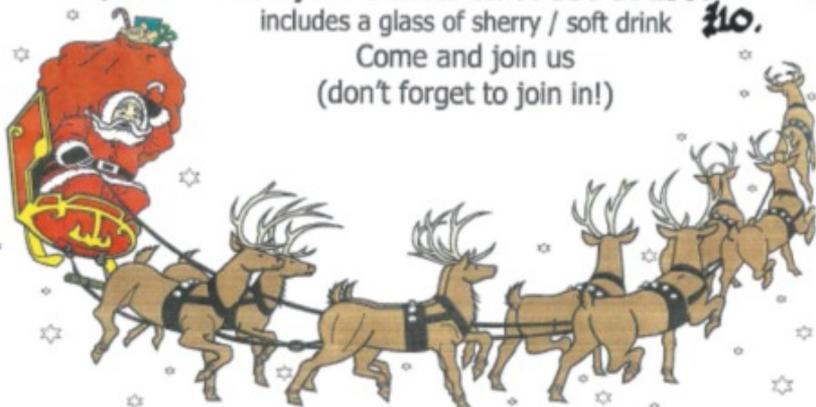
**Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> December at 7.00pm**

**Book your tickets on 07850 972997**

includes a glass of sherry / soft drink **£10.**

Come and join us

(don't forget to join in!)



## MIDWEEK COMMUNIONS for the TEAM



Starting from 4 December 2019  
the churches of the Bexley Team  
will be having a JOINT Midweek Communion  
at 10am every Wednesday.

Please note our new pattern!

at St John's Bexley  
on the *first* and *third* Wednesday of each month  
at St Mary's Bexley  
on the *second* and *fourth* Wednesday of each month.

In the months when there is a *fifth* Wednesday  
we will be having our midweek communion  
at St James North Cray (North Cray Road)

Please let a member of the Clergy Team  
know if you need a lift.

There is also an informal 'House Communion'  
at 53 Woodlands Park, Joydens Wood  
at 10am on the third Thursday of the month.

TEAM RECTOR  
Reverend Ren Harding  
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# **MEETINGS and Events 2019**

**Sunday, 8th December - 3pm to 6pm - The Bothy**

*Carolaire & Afternoon Tea Tickets £8.00*

*for tickets and enquires: Ann Milcoy 020 8302 3930.*

**Sunday, 8th December - 7pm - St Barnabas Church**

*Festive Family Carol Concert (see page 11)*

\*\*\*\*\*

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## FROM THE MEADOWS



By the time you read this we will be into the winter season, the temperature dropping encouraging us all to don hats and wrap up warmly.

Even in this bleak season there is great beauty across our meadows: Early morning and late evening mists creeping up from the river like a chill blanket gently covering the grasses. Trees suddenly linear as the leaves fall to the ground, their branches revealed in intricate patterns against the skyline.

The Footscray Meadows Action Group meets once a month. At these meetings we discuss matters concerning the meadows and with the strong support of our local councillor, Alex Sawyer we strive to work with all local groups for the good of this treasured environment.

So far we have concentrated on the protection of wildlife and have recently had a meeting with Mr James Brokenshire MP. He was very receptive to our concerns and was keen to resolve some of the issues (more to come on that in the new year).

Recently the group has become aware of the increase in dog walkers and owners failing to clear up their dogs mess. I am a dog owner myself. I know that sometimes it can be hard to find the 'deposits' particularly at this time of the year but please at least TRY!

I see too many people 'pretend' not to notice as their dog squats, just glance round and walk off or even blatantly stare, waiting for the dog to finish, almost wanting to be challenged.

So this is a plea from me as one dog owner to all the others out there who benefit from glorious walks with their dogs on our meadows... we are not the only users of this beautiful place PLEASE pick up after your dog. To those who do pick up, thank you it is appreciated.

I will finish by thanking everyone who cares for and protects the meadows which we all treasure so dearly.

Happy Christmas and a healthy New Year to all.

## SERVICES AND EVENTS FOR DECEMBER 2019



### **SUNDAY 1st December**

- 9.30am Holy Communion  
6pm Team Advent Carol Service at St John's, Bexley

### **Wednesday 4th December**

- 10.00am Team Communion at St John's, Bexley  
12noon Gentlemen's Lunch at The Anchor Bexley

### **Thursday 5th December**

- 10am Daytime Housegroup at Joydens Wood Vicarage

### **Saturday 7th December**

- 9.30am Monthly Prayer Meeting at St Barnabas  
11am to 2pm St Mary's Christmas Bazaar

### **SUNDAY 8th December**

- 9.30am All Age Worship – Christingle Service  
3-6pm St James Carolaire (booking required)  
7pm St Barnabas Christmas Concert with  
Erith Operatic Society

### **Wednesday 11th December**

- 10am Team Communion at St Mary's

### **SUNDAY 15th December**

- 9.30am Holy Communion  
12 for 12.30pm Team Lunch at the King's Head Bexley.  
(book with Ren)  
4pm St James Carol Service

### **Wednesday 18th December**

- 10.00am Team Communion at St John's, Bexley

### **Thursday 19th December**

- 10.00am St Barnabas House Communion  
at 53 Woodlands Park, Joydens Wood

**SUNDAY 22nd December**

9.30am Holy Communion

**Tuesday 24th December CHRISTMAS EVE**

5.30pm Crib Service

11.15pm Midnight Communion at St Barnabas

**Wednesday 25th December CHRISTMAS DAY**

10am Christmas Day Communion at St James  
North Cray

**SUNDAY 29th December**

9.30am Holy Communion

Bexley Team Gentleman's Lunch on the first Wednesday of the month at 12.30pm at The Anchor, Bridgen Road, Bexley

*Further details, Julia Wickham, St John's Bexley, 01322 556686*

## Hyde Home Help

Do you need help around the home or garden?

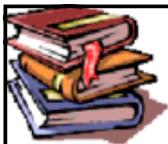
Mowing lawns, weeding  
General garden maintenance  
Cleaning  
Dog walking  
Shopping, running errands

**Louise Hyde 07703 191325**

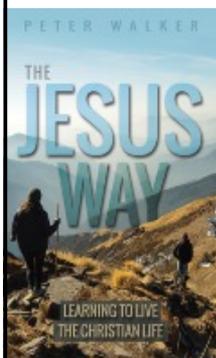
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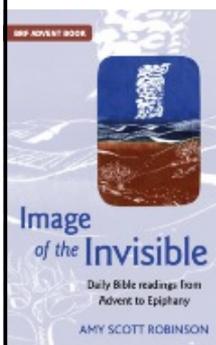


# Book Mark



**The Jesus Way – Learning to Live the Christian Life. By Peter Walker, Lion Hudson, £15.99**

This book teaches the basics of the Christian faith, looking first at what Jesus Himself taught, and then at what His apostles had to say. It is for anyone who wants to follow Jesus, but who would like to be reminded of the way. In short clear steps, Dr Peter Walker takes us through the basics of enjoying Jesus' forgiveness, welcoming His Spirit and feeding on His scriptures; then explores the principles of worshipping with His people, following His teaching and trusting Him with our future.



**Image of the Invisible: Daily Bible Readings from Advent to Epiphany. By Amy Scott Robinson, BRF, £8.99**

As we look towards celebrating the incarnation at Christmas, we consider how God chose to express Himself, in a moment in history, as a tiny baby. But what other images describe God in the Bible, and what can we learn about His character through them? How does an invisible God reveal Himself to us in Scripture and in Jesus? Amy Scott Robinson, a poet and storyteller, answers this question with imagination and a close reading of the text.

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## ALL IN THE MONTH OF DECEMBER



125 years ago, on 3rd Dec 1894 Robert Louis Stevenson died. This Scottish novelist, short story writer, poet, essayist and travel writer was best known for his novels *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped* and the *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

100 years ago, on 1st Dec 1919 Lady Nancy Astor became the first female Member of Parliament (MP) to take her seat in the House of Commons.

60 years ago, on 1st Dec 1959 12 countries including the UK and USA, signed the Antarctic Treaty, setting aside Antarctica as a scientific preserve free from military activity.

50 years ago, on 18th Dec 1969 the British Government abolished the death penalty for murder.

30 years ago, on 3rd Dec 1989 US President George H W Bush and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev announced the end of the Cold War at a meeting in Malta.

Also 30 years ago, on 22nd December 1989 the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin was reopened, effectively reuniting East and West Germany.

10 years ago, on 1st Dec 2009 the Treaty of Lisbon came into effect. It amended the Maastricht Treaty and the Treaty of Rome, which form the constitutional basis of the European Union.

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## Christmas - the most beautiful story ever told

By Canon David Winter



On the BBC's 'Today' programme last Christmas a distinguished atheist revealed that his Christmas routine included attending Midnight Mass. Asked why, he replied that it was the most beautiful story ever told and he didn't want it to be forgotten. Up and down the country this month, thousands and thousands of parents will be attending school and church nativity plays. They're good fun, the children like them, and they remind us of the most lovely and memorable story of all time.

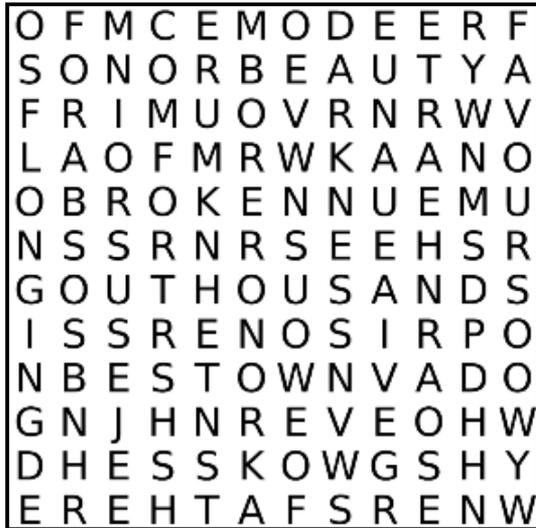
First, there was the actual birth. Excluded from the shelter of the 'inn', Mary and Joseph found themselves in a stable. Soon after, Mary gave birth to a boy, wrapped Him in His birth-robe, and laid Him in the only secure place she could find – the feeding trough.

Next came the shepherds, bursting in from the fields, eager to see the baby that the angels had told them to look for, 'lying in a manger'. They worshipped him, in wonder of all that had happened that night. Finally, at some point came the so called 'Wise Men'. The gospel calls them 'Magi', and says they were from the East. The word 'magi' comes from the Greek 'magos' (magic) and further back, from the old Persian word 'Magupati'. The Magi could have been priests from an ancient Persian religion that watched the night sky. Today they would be called astrologers.

Whoever they were, their influence at that point in history was immense. All over the ancient world their predictions were regarded with awe, but they knelt before Jesus and offered Him gifts. They were the first Gentiles to recognise a divine and kingly power and purpose in the baby in Bethlehem.

150 years later the great bishop Clement of Rome described this as the moment when the old order of fear and fate gave way before this new era of love and grace. What a story!

## WORDSEARCH



Crown	Messiah	Favour	Seen
Beauty	Broken	Prisoners	Father
Ashes	Heart	Comfort	Whoever
Son	Freedom	Mourn	
God	Darkness	Longing	
Jesus	Bestow	Thousand	

(Solutions on page 27)

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## DECEMBER CROSSWORD PUZZLE



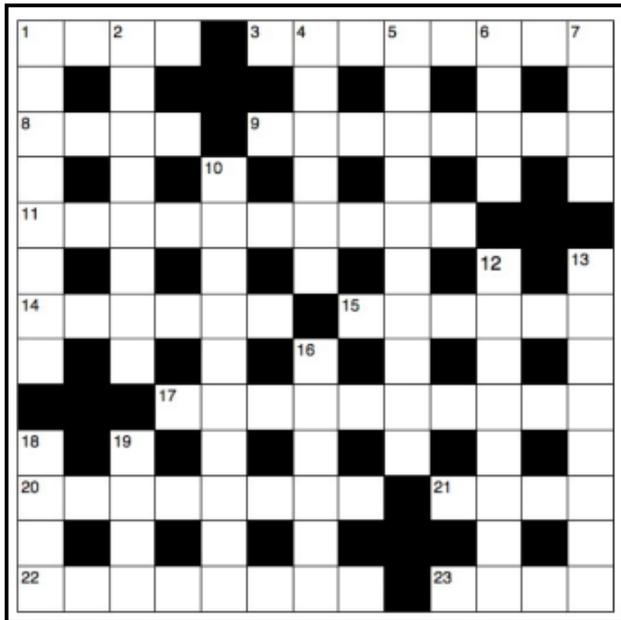
### Across

- 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)

(Solutions on page 28)



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## ST JAMES THE LEAST OF ALL



Letter from St James the Least of All –

On keeping warm in church

The Rectory

St. James the Least

My dear Nephew Darren

It was delightful to have a family from your church visiting ours last week, but perhaps if it happens again, you may suggest a certain dress code to them. That the man arrived without wearing a tie was forgivable, I know they will do things like that in your congregation, although someone from our own parish arriving like that would have been greeted with a silently deafening rebuke. But I do think you should have warned them about the temperature.

I know your building will be heated by the finest machinery money can buy and that temperatures within your walls probably exceed those to be found in nursing homes. Shirtsleeves for the men and light summer dresses for the ladies under those conditions become almost obligatory. The only time hot air is blown over the heads of our congregation is when the archdeacon preaches. But dressed like that in our church at the start of December rather marked them out from the rest of the congregation, equipped with overcoats, scarves, gloves and thermal socks. During the coldest months, our Verger's regular disappearance into the side chapel during Services isn't on urgent ecclesiastical business, but to warm himself up with copious swigs from his hip flask.

I noticed slight signs of discomfort in our visitors during the first hymn, but by the time of the sermon, were they to have been laid horizontally, they would have been indistinguishable from the marble effigies of the Earls of Stowe lying in state in the north aisle. As they limped out at the end of the Service, totally numb with cold, my offer of a sherry at the Rectory was more medicinal than social.

December is always the month when I gracefully concede my defeat regarding the church boiler. Hints begin to be dropped at Harvest at the start of October. Little asides about the autumnal nip in the air, or of the flowers keeping well in church because it is cool there, or even the

slightly more pointed remark that it will soon be time for the heating to be turned on, are all studiously ignored. Living in an arctic seventeenth century Rectory rather hardens one.

But when members of the congregation start arriving bearing travelling rugs and flasks of hot tea, I begin to realise that the time approaches to fire the boilers up. Then on the Sunday when Colonel Richards lights up his primus stove next to him on the pew, I know it is appropriate to announce that next Sunday the church will be heated – although ‘heated’ is rather more an aspiration than a reality.

Should any of our congregation be tempted to pay a visit to your own church, I will tell them to dress for a Mediterranean August – although the men will certainly wear a tie. One does have standards to maintain.

Your loving uncle,  
Eustace



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

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## GOD AND THE ARTS

By the Rev Michael Burgess



### He gave us eyes to see them: Gauguin's Portrait of a Breton Girl at Prayer

During this year we have been exploring the wealth of paintings in the National Gallery in London. Each year the Gallery has exhibitions highlighting the work of one particular artist, and until 26 January there is a major exhibition, 'Gauguin Portraits.' It celebrates in paintings and sculptures the life and work of Paul Gauguin (1848-1903). He is best known for the art he painted when he fled Europe to live in Tahiti in the South Seas. But from 1886 to 1891 he lived in rural Brittany at Pont-Even.



This month's painting is from those years when Gauguin was influenced by folk art and impressed by the simple faith of the Breton peasants. He has captured that faith in this painting of a Breton girl at prayer. His own catchphrase was 'I shut my eyes in order to see.' The girl has her eyes closed as she offers her prayers, but we sense that the inner eye of her heart is open in trust to God's will for her.

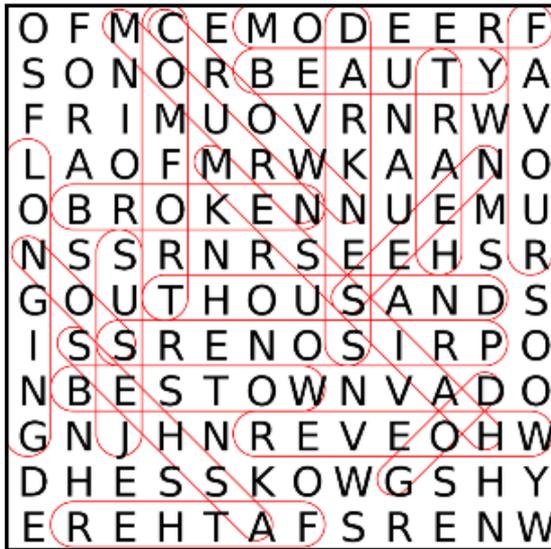
At this time of the year children step into the limelight of church and school life with nativity plays. They invite us to journey with them in that same simplicity and trust to Bethlehem, just as St Francis of Assisi invited the people of Greccio to a cave outside the town in 1223. As they looked into the cave, they saw the animals and the hay, and in the centre, a new-born babe. St Francis talked to them of the simple message of God's love revealed in all humility and openness in this birth of the Christ-Child. He invited the people to respond with those same gifts.

As we look at this painting, we see something of the simplicity and trust called of us, whether young or old. Too often as we get older, we find our lives weighed down by responsibilities and pressures. We find time is swallowed up in the busyness of this season, and somehow we lose that innocence and simplicity of life.

But, pondering the Christmas story and pondering this painting, we can put our hands together and pray for that openness and childlike trust. Fr Faber wrote a hymn with the lines:

*'If our love were but more simple,  
we should take him at his word;  
and our hearts would find assurance  
in the promise of the Lord.'*

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**6th December:**

**St Nicholas**



One account of how Father Christmas began tells of a man named Nicholas who was born in the third century in the Greek village of Patara, on what is today the southern coast of Turkey. His family were both devout and wealthy, and when his parents died in an epidemic, Nicholas decided to use his inheritance to help people. He gave to the needy, the sick, the suffering. He dedicated his whole life to God's service and was made Bishop of Myra while still a young man. As a bishop in later life, he joined other bishops and priests in prison under the emperor Diocletian's fierce persecution of Christians across the Roman Empire.

Finally released, Nicholas was all the more determined to shed abroad the news of God's love. He did so by giving. One story of his generosity explains why we hang Christmas stockings over our mantelpieces today. There was a poor family with three daughters who needed dowries if they were to marry, and not be sold into slavery. Nicholas heard of their plight and tossed three bags of gold into their home through an open window – thus saving the girls from a life of misery.

The bags of gold landed in stockings or shoes left before the fire to dry. Hence the custom of children hanging out stockings – in the hope of attracting presents of their own from St Nicholas - on Christmas Eve. That is why three gold balls, sometimes represented as oranges, are one of the symbols of St Nicholas.

The example of St Nicholas has never been forgotten - in bygone years boys in Germany and Poland would dress up as bishops on 6th December, and beg alms for the poor. In the Netherlands and Belgium 'St Nicholas' would arrive on a steamship from Spain to ride a white horse on his gift-giving rounds. To this day, 6th December is still the main day for gift-giving and merry-making in much of Europe. Many people feel that simple gift-giving in early Advent helps preserve a Christmas Day focus on the Christ Child.

**SOLUTIONS TO CROSSWORD PUZZLE**

**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



### NATIVITY PLAY

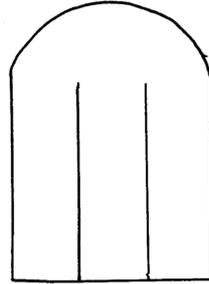
To see the story of the first Christmas through the eyes of little children makes it fresh and new. I like the story of the little boy who so wanted to be Joseph but was picked as the inn keeper instead. All went well until the nativity play started and Mary and Joseph arrived at the inn. The boy playing the inn-keeper greeted them with 'Come in Mary love, there's plenty of room for you, but Joseph can get lost!'

Mary may insist that her teddy is the Baby Jesus, the angels may trip over their robes made from sheets, but every nativity play shows the wonder of the story of the first Christmas when the son of God was born a baby, like us. Tea towels used as shepherd's headdresses and angels' haloes made from wire coat hangers only serve to underline the humanity of it all. A baby born in a stable – a simple story that changes the world.



### LOTS OF LOVE

Time to make some Christmas decorations? Cut out two shapes like the pattern below, one in red card, one in green card. Don't forget to cut the slits.



Interlock the 2 shapes by weaving the strips under and over their opposite colour. This will give you a



heart shape. Use a little glue to hold them together if needed. Punch a hole in the top at the centre and thread with cord to hang your decoration. You can make lots in different colours and decorate them with sequins or stickers too. Nice symbols of love for your Christmas tree.



### The Cat's Christmas Hymns:

- Oh, Come All Ye Fishful
- Silent Mice
- Joy to the Curled
- The First Meow



FROM THE REGISTERS

*Baptisms*

-

*Weddings*

-

*Burials*

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*Year's mind for December 2018*

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**Lynne Meads on 07966 315518**

**ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS**

If you are going to attend our church and you have accessibility needs please let us know and we will be happy to make arrangements for you. There is level access to the church and the Bothy and we have a sound loop system and large print orders of service. Please feel free to telephone the Team Vicar Rev Ren Harding who will be happy to discuss the matter with you.

## THE BEXLEY TEAM CLERGY - POINTS OF CONTACT

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07982 392809

For enquiries concerning St Barnabas, Joydens Wood website

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CONTACT the Team Rector

For enquiries concerning St James, North Cray

website [www.stjamesnorthcray.org.uk/](http://www.stjamesnorthcray.org.uk/)

CONTACT the Team Rector

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St James Church, North Cray

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