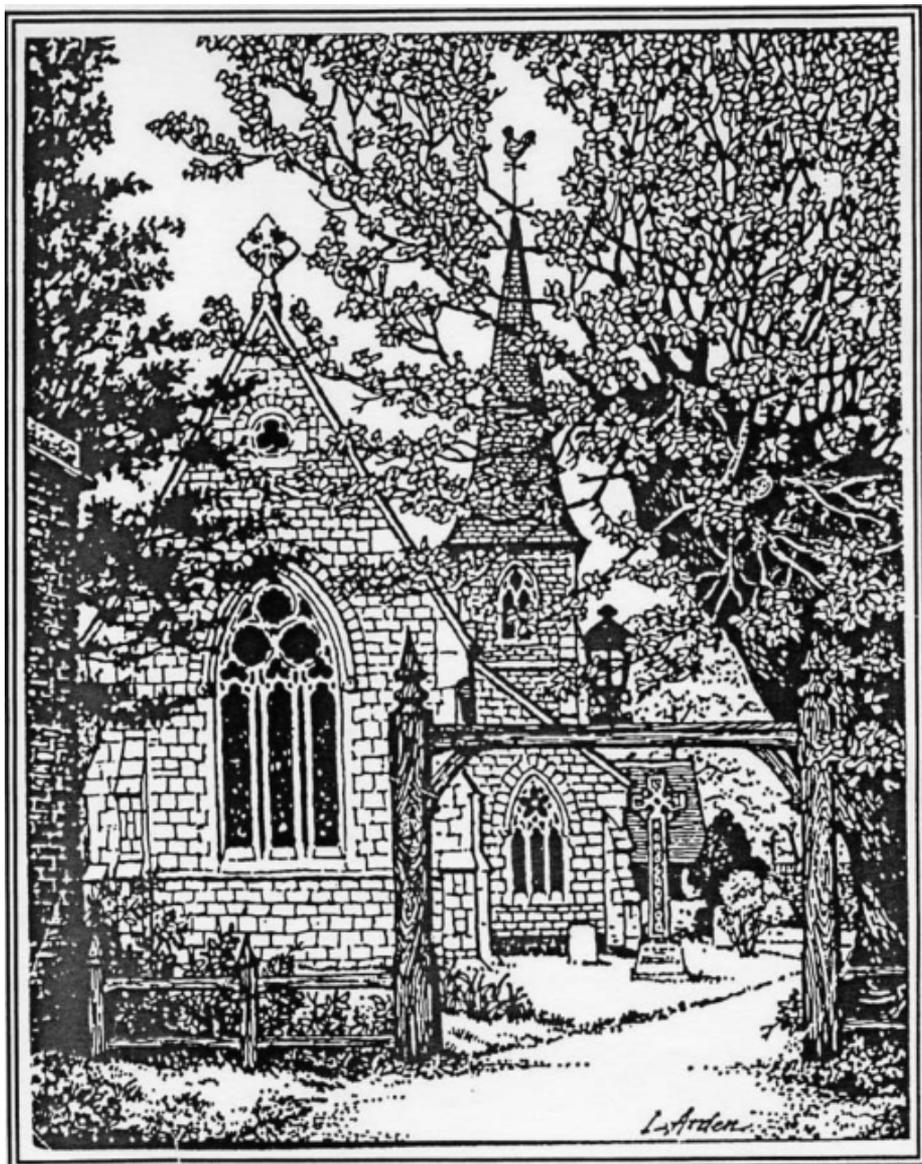


**The Parish Church of
*St. James, North Cray***

50p

January, 2022

(Part of the Bexley Team Ministry)



St JAMES, NORTH CRAY PARISH STAFF

Team Vicar: Reverend Ren Harding 01322 528923
The Vicarage, 6 Tile Kiln Lane,
Joydens Wood, DA5 2BB
renharding@hotmail.co.uk

Lay Reader: David Stevens 020 8300 0867

Church Wardens: Suzy Higgs 020 8302 5719
suzyjhiggs@gmail.com

Maxine Heath 020 8468 7895
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Treasurer: Position vacant

PCC Secretary: Rhonda Collins 020 8300 3797

Sacristan: Stephen Hills 020 8302 7236

Bothy Bookings: Lynne Meads 07966 315518

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 JANUARY 2022



My letter this month is adapted from a sermon that I preached a few days before Christmas, which seems to be relevant to us as we move into a new year.

THE DARK REALITY

As well as the usual problems of life, the pandemic has inflicted on many people, another layer of uncertainty, and, for many, another layer of FEAR! A sense of chaos and impending doom prevails. People's lives, already difficult, have been disrupted. Perhaps you have seen on the BBC news, reports of a Pastor in Burnley bringing comfort and food parcels to desperate, lonely people. A Christian group in Blackpool delivering hot meals to those who have very little and would otherwise go hungry, because even if they have food, they can't afford the gas or electricity to cook it.

How is this happening in our nation?

And it's not just happening in areas of extreme deprivation. I have been speaking to a local grandmother, herself suffering from the after-effects of covid who is caring for grandchildren who have special needs, as well as holding down a full-time job.

Someone else has been telling me that they feel exhausted with the pressure of keeping their business going, worrying if they will be able to pay their staff at the end of each month.

A family who has been re-housed out of furnished accommodation, into a flat with no furniture.

Tragic, heart-wrenching stories.

And every single one of us, in greater or lesser ways, and for many different reasons finding our lives dislocated. Out of kilter.

SO AGAINST THAT DARK REALITY, WHAT OF HOPE?

If we're feeling weighed down now, weary of the worry and pressure, if we're wondering what the New Year will hold, I believe God is saying something very clear to us:

Not everything that weighs you down is yours to carry.

God is saying:

In Jesus, who is Emmanuel, God with Us...

I will carry you. I will carry your burdens and your pain. I'm there, with you, in the middle of the shattered plans, the disappointments, and the sense of helplessness and hopelessness.

God is saying:

In Jesus, who is Emmanuel, God with Us...

I've lived in these dark streets, these shadowed places. I've been one of the last and the least, the forgotten ones. I know how it feels.

God is saying:

In Jesus, who is Emmanuel, God with Us...

My Holy Love transcends all things. The Everlasting Light of my love will overcome all these many darknesses.

God is saying:

In Jesus, who is Emmanuel, God with Us, I have been there at the beginning of time, and I will be there at the end of time. For I am Lord of all, Lord of all worlds.

And though you may feel yourself to be insignificant, lost, alone.

I love you with an everlasting love.

And, in Jesus, I came to prove it to you.

Reverend Ren Harding (Team Rector)

The Vicarage, 6 Tile Kiln Lane, Joydens Wood, Bexley, DA5 2BB
01322-528923 renharding@hotmail.co.uk

THE BOTHY

Are you looking for a small hall for a function?

**The Bothy (in St James Church Grounds) has all the facilities
you need and can seat 35 people.**

If you need further information please contact

Lynne Meads on 07966 315518

FROM THE TEAM CURATE

On a chilly and foggy Sunday afternoon we gathered once more in the grounds of the church for our monthly Forest Church service. Each month since April we've done this and it has become a popular and exciting service within the mix of St James's services, and across the wider Bexley Team. This year we made decorations and wreaths, attempted to construct dens for the baby Jesus (just in case the stable was being used as well as the inn!) and we finished as we usually do, with a few hilarious jokes as told by our young people.

This time was a little different though. We decided that we wanted to join the Christmas Forest Church service with the annual Carols by Candlelight hosted by St James later that afternoon. We did so with some festive carol singing on the steps of our beautiful church, our breath rising as we sung out to 'Ding Dong Merrily on High'. It was a really lovely opportunity to allow these two congregations to come together, and lovely to see so many unfamiliar faces becoming acquainted.

Church is a family. We are not a building or an organisation, but a family. Just like our own families, some members we might see every week, some we might not see regularly at all. But as with all families, we try to demonstrate our union through love and kindness. We look out for each other and encourage one another in our ventures. I look forward to more family adventures with Forest Church and the St James's Sunday morning congregation in 2022.

Happy New Year from Rev Matt

SERVICES AND EVENTS FOR JANUARY 2022

SUNDAY 2 January **EPIPHANY**
9.30am Holy Communion

SUNDAY 9 January
9.30am All Age Service with leaders and young people from our Uniformed Organisations. All are welcome

SUNDAY 16 January
9.30am Holy Communion
3.00pm Forest Church



SUNDAY 23 January
9.30am Holy Communion

SUNDAY 30 January **CANDLEMAS**
9.30am Christingle Service for all Ages

There will be music on this link:

www.stjamesnorthcray.org.uk/welcome/music/

We hope you find the music helpful and inspiring.

We continue to make worship available online, on Zoom, or via a phone-in link on Zoom. Details are emailed out each week.

Please contact the Team Rector or a member of the clergy team to be included on the emailing list or see our website for further information.

Also, do contact any of our clergy team if you are concerned, or if you would simply like a chat, or prayer.

BEXLEY TEAM MINISTRY

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. .”

2 Corinthians 1:10-11 (NIV)

PRACTICAL ADVICE

Wash hands frequently with soap & water or alcohol-based hand rub. It has been suggested that instead of singing Happy Birthday to ensure we wash our hands for long enough - that we say the Lord's Prayer!

Avoid touching eyes, nose & mouth as this can transfer the virus.

Stay informed (but not obsessively so!) on the latest developments about COVID-19. Follow advice given by your own healthcare provider, your national and local public health authority or your employer. National & local authorities have the most up to date information for your area.

A CALL TO PRAYER

Wherever you are, and whatever your personal circumstances, we invite you to pause at midday each day, to join with your brothers and sisters across the Bexley Team Ministry to pray for our churches, our community, our nation and the world. We pray the prayer that unites all Christians, the Lord's Prayer. This is the Traditional version:-

“Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory; for ever and ever. Amen.”

You may wish to use this prayer written by Malcolm Duncan of Spring Harvest: -

“May you be given the gift of simple faith. When the world around you is full of uncertainty, may God remind you that you are not alone and you do not need to be dominated by fear. May you find peace amidst chaos from God's promises. Hold onto the God who holds you.”

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Pray for those infected or in quarantine

Loving Jesus may they feel your power of healing through the care of medical staff. Take away fear, anxiety, and feelings of isolation from people receiving treatment or under quarantine. Protect their families and friends and bring peace to all who love them.

Pray for those at high risk

Dear Lord, we lift to you the elderly and people with chronic health conditions. Protect them from harm and be their comfort in this time of uncertainty.

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Adapted from prayers of World Vision

<https://www.worldvision.org/disaster-relief-news-stories/prayer>

WORSHIPPING AT HOME

The following are resources which you may like to use as aids to your own personal prayer and worship. As the weeks progress we will make additions to the list via a weekly newsheet, and will endeavour to make these prayer resources available in paper form in the coming days.

If you have access to the internet this is a good site to visit.
<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-liturgy-and-prayer-resources>

Radio 4

Prayer for the Day @ 5.43 am – if this is too early for you it can be found at a time to suit you online at bbc.co.uk

Daily Service Monday to Friday @ 9.45 am – on Longwave and DAB
Sunday worship @ 8.10am

Ren, is available to talk to anyone who is feeling the need of a church minister at this time, to talk over a difficult circumstance or to ask for prayer. We also have a resource that can be used at home if you are unable to attend a funeral because of the current restrictions, and a weekly newsletter that is going out on email, with news, reflections and prayers. All you need to do is ring, or email me (see inside cover) and I will do what I can to help, and I can also put you on the circulation list so you receive weekly information. Your email will not be given to anyone else.

Suzy Higgs, Churchwarden

The reality of faith in God

By The Rev Dr Herbert McGonigle

As we enter this New Year of 2022 even the most devoted Christians can't ignore the uncertainties we face. The whole world was caught up in the persistent spread of Coronavirus. It is shaking national economies and causing untold stress and harm. Many people fear that their lives and families will never be the same again.

Almost daily the news has been gloomy and economic experts say the situation is the worst in living memory. How do we, as Christians, react to all this? What do we trust in? Has God something to say to us in these days?

An answer may be found in a well-loved passage from the Bible – Psalm 23: 'The Lord is my shepherd ...He restores my soul ...he leads me ...I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.'

But in the middle of this lovely psalm there are three reminders that Christians are NOT exempt from the realities of life. The psalmist speaks of 'the paths of righteousness', 'the valley of the shadow' and 'the presence of my enemies.'

The mention of 'the paths of righteousness' is a reminder that we are called to love the Lord and live our lives in *righteousness*. The wonderful promises in this psalm come with a condition; they are given to those who determine by God's grace to live righteously. And that must be our first resolution for 2022.

The 'valley of the shadow' may refer to death, but generally the reference here is wider. It means all those occasions when fear and sorrow and heartbreak and loss come to even the best Christians.

Then there are our 'enemies.' Originally that probably meant those wanting to kill the psalmist. For us it may be the seduction of old temptations, the fears that paralyse us and the memories of sins that still haunt us.

The psalmist is a realist! As Christians we live our lives in the real world! We are not floating on cloud nine; we are rooted in a fallen world and surrounded by temptations and sins and infirmities. Any day, pain, an incurable disease, even death itself, may come to us or to those we love. How do we face these realities?

Psalm 23 has the answer. If we, by God's grace, will walk in 'the paths of righteousness,' then all the promises are ours! The Lord will be our Shepherd. He will lead us by the still waters; He will restore our souls, prepare a table for us in the wilderness, protect and guide us with His rod and staff and, at the end, bring us into the house of the Lord forever. Let's make Psalm 23 our charter of faith for 2022!

Dr Herbert McGonigle is a former Senior Lecturer in Historical Theology, Church History and Wesley Studies in Nazarene Theological College, Manchester, England.

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News and Issues



What the Archbishops say about the C of E

The current state of the Church of England – and its future – was the subject of the joint presidential address to the recent General Synod, delivered by both the Archbishops of Canterbury and York.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, considered the historical context: “Numerically, the number of regular church goers has shrunk in absolute terms every year since around 1952, 70 years next year. As a percentage of the population of England, the Church of England was at its high point, when there were accurate records, in the 1851 census when we were about 20% of the population. We are today a little less than 2% of the population.”

But the picture is not entirely bleak. “The reality is that a huge amount of work is being done at every point of this extraordinary Church for England ... People talk too easily of decline but miss the energy that is spurring us on.

“Internally, we will be looking at reforms and changes aimed at focussing resources where they are most needed, at enabling support for anywhere and everywhere that shows signs of the blessing of the Holy Spirit...

“We have gone through the greatest peacetime challenge in 400 years and emerged forging ahead. Effectiveness is being transformed, training is being rethought to work well in the very different patterns of population that we see today, and even more different that we see in the future.

“The way in which dioceses work together and share resources is being challenged, and will change slowly and gently and consensually.

“Our failures in safeguarding, in racism, in the way we treat those with disabilities ... are being tackled... We are a church that can admit it is wrong, say sorry and try – at least try – to do better.”

SAVE OUR SPIRE

The ancient parish church of St James, North Cray has been there as a focal point for the community through many lifetimes. The building stands through the seasons, and the years, as a reminder of the Church's commitment to God and His love for all people, whether they attend church services or not!

We want to ensure that this precious church building remains open for many years to come. To achieve this, we now need the help of our community!

We are facing a number of significant challenges with the church building, the most pressing of these is our lovely church spire. This is covered with traditional wooden shingles, and we need to replace these urgently.

If you value your parish church, and the part it plays in your community, please do consider making a donation to this work.

Contact me for more information or look on our website

www.stjamesnorthcray.org.uk





MEETINGS and Events 2022

**Planning for The "Welcome to the Meadows"
Educational Day which was scheduled for
19th July 2020 is on hold.**

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ALL IN THE MONTH OF JANUARY

150 years ago, on 14th Jan 1872 Greyfriars Bobby, a Scottish Skye terrier dog died. He was famous for having guarded his master's grave in Edinburgh for 14 years.

100 years ago, on 5th Jan 1922 Sir Ernest Shackleton, the Irish-born British Antarctic explorer, died of a heart attack in South Georgia. He had led three British expeditions to the Antarctic.

Also 100 years ago, 16th Jan 1922, Ralph Vaughan Williams' *A Pastoral Symphony* was performed for the first time, in London.

Also 80 years ago, on 17th Jan 1942 Muhammad Ali (previously Cassius Clay), American heavyweight boxing champion, was born. One of the most significant sports figures of the 20th century.

Also 80 years ago, on 26th Jan 1942 the first US troops arrived in Europe. 4,508 soldiers from the 34th Infantry Regiment docked in Belfast.

Also 80 years ago, on 29th Jan 1942 the BBC Radio Show Desert Island Discs was first broadcast. It is Britain's longest running radio show, and the world's longest running weekly factual radio programme.

75 years ago, on 1st Jan 1947 the UK's coal industry was nationalised when the Coal Industry Nationalisation Act 1946 came into effect. The industry was run by the National Coal Board. It was renamed the British Coal Corporation in 1987 and was subsequently privatised.

70 years ago, on 1st Jan 1952 the nuclear reactors at Windscale (now Sellafield) in Cumbria began producing enriched plutonium for use in Britain's first atomic bomb.

50 years ago, from 9th Jan to 28th Feb 1972 British miners staged a major strike over pay. This led to power shortages, and a state of emergency was declared on 9th Feb. The miners returned to work when the National Union of Mineworkers accepted an improved pay offer.

40 years ago, on 14th Jan 1982 Mark Thatcher, son of the British Prime Minister, was found safe and well after going missing in the Sahara Desert for six days while competing in the Paris-Dakar rally.

25 years ago, on 15th Jan 1997 Princess Diana walked through a minefield in Angola, visited victims, and called for an international ban on landmines.

Also 20 years ago, on 31st Jan 2002, that the Larsen B Ice Shelf in Antarctica began to collapse. The whole 3,265 sq. km structure disintegrated over the next 35 days.

CHRISTIANS IN ACTION

Amy Carmichael, founder of the Dohnavur Fellowship



Amy Wilson Carmichael was born in Ireland on 16th December 1867, into a devoutly religious Presbyterian family in Belfast. When she was 16, Amy had become a Christian, and decided to start a mission for mill girls. When she came into contact with the Keswick movement, she sensed a call to serve abroad.

At first, Amy planned to go to China, but ill health prevented her from travelling. Later, for 15 months, she worked in Japan, but the climate was detrimental to her health. In 1895, she went to India to evangelise around Bangalore, and then, in order to escape rising political violence, she moved on to Dohnavur.

Here she met a girl called Preena, who had escaped being a slave in a Hindu temple. From that moment, Amy knew she had found her true calling. She dedicated the rest of her life to rescuing girls and boys who had been given by parents or relatives to serve in the temple as prostitutes.

Amy donned Indian dress and learnt about the Hindu culture and showed the love of Christ through her compassion. Overcoming much hardship and danger, Amy expanded her evangelistic work to establish a centre for homes, schools and a hospital. The Dohnavur Fellowship still continues today.

In 1931, Amy suffered a severe injury that virtually confined her to bed for the next 20 years. Despite this, she wrote 13 of her 35 books and many thousands of letters. Amy based her life on prayer and trusted God for all her needs. She died on 18th January 1951, aged 83.

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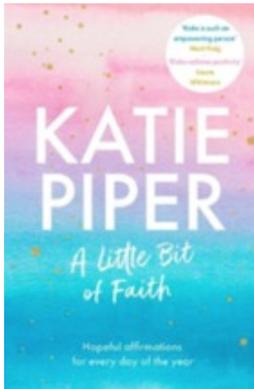
**BRANCHES IN SOUTH-EAST LONDON, PETTS WOOD AND
BIGGIN HILL**



Book Mark



A Little Bit of Faith – hopeful affirmations for every day of the year. By Katie Piper, SPCK, £11.99



Much loved TV presenter and charity campaigner Katie Piper offers hopeful and encouraging daily affirmations for the entire year, showing that *A Little Bit of Faith* can take you a long way.

Katie Piper encourages us to see that heartbreak and hardship can become fuel for your fight. Whatever life has thrown at you lately, you can fall countless times and still get back up again – all you need is a little bit of faith.

Full of hope and warmth, this lovely daily devotional draws on Katie's own faith to show how spirituality has brought greater confidence and meaning to her life.

The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness – the path to true Christian joy. By Timothy Keller, 10Publishing, £2.99



In an age where pleasing people, puffing up your ego and building your résumé are seen as the methods to 'make it', the Apostle Paul calls us to find true rest in blessed self-forgetfulness.

This short and punchy book shows that gospel-humility means we can stop connecting every experience, every conversation with ourselves and can thus be free from self-condemnation. A truly gospel-humble person is not a self-hating person or a self-loving person, but a self-forgetful person.

The Conversion of Saint Paul

By Canon David Winter

This month, the Church celebrates a famous conversion - the conversion of a man called Saul on the road to Damascus. Saul was a devout Jew, a Pharisee, a student of Gamaliel and a fierce critic of the followers of Jesus, then a very new sect on the religious scene.

On his way to Damascus to start a purge of Christians in that city, he was blinded by a bright light and heard a voice saying, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' He asked the identity of the voice, and was told: 'Jesus, whom you are persecuting'. Stunned by the experience, he followed further instructions which led him to a Christian man in Damascus, who prayed with him. As he did, Saul's sight was restored.

The experience convinced Paul that Jesus - crucified in Jerusalem four or five years earlier - was in fact the Messiah and had risen from the dead. After a period of instruction, Saul was baptised and took the name Paul. At first, some Christians were wary about the reality of his conversion, but over a period of time he was accepted and indeed eventually recognised as an 'apostle', a 'special messenger' of Jesus Christ.

His intellectual stature and leadership gifts quickly marked him out, and within a few years he became a leading figure in the emerging Christian Church, preaching and founding churches all over the Middle East, largely of Gentile converts. He was eventually martyred in Rome, probably in 65AD.

Paul was the first intellectual of the Christian Church, the man who was able to set the events of the life and teaching of Jesus, and especially His death and resurrection, into a coherent theology, with its roots very clearly in the Jewish faith of his own upbringing.

Reflected Faith Series - Taking Down Christmas

By The Rev Dr Jo White

Happy New Year!



January is, of course, the time to take down the decorations and put them away for next year. In many churches however, the Crib scene is left up until the beginning of February - the Feast of Candlemas. That celebrates the Presentation of Christ in the Temple.

It's yet another moment of 'illumination,' and has a number of meanings.

The date 'set' for Candlemas is the 2nd February each year and it marks the midpoint of winter, halfway between the shortest day and the spring equinox. So, from that date onwards the days begin to get longer and the nights shorter.

It's the day when we celebrate Mary and Joseph taking their baby, Jesus, to the Temple. The custom was set down in Leviticus chapter 12, where the parents presented the child to the Lord, and received a blessing from the priests. It was a picture of the sacrifice of the first-born son, giving him to the Lord.

Any ideas on a third meaning? (*Answer next month.*)

As you take down your decorations, think about where you will store them ready for use next Christmas – and also, how carefully you will put them away.

Will the string of lights be a tangled mess of knots when you take them out of their wrappings or will you be able to hang them straight on the tree? One of the biggest concerns is where to put the figure of baby Jesus. It's usually so small in a Crib Set that it is easily lost and then the Crib Set rather loses its meaning!

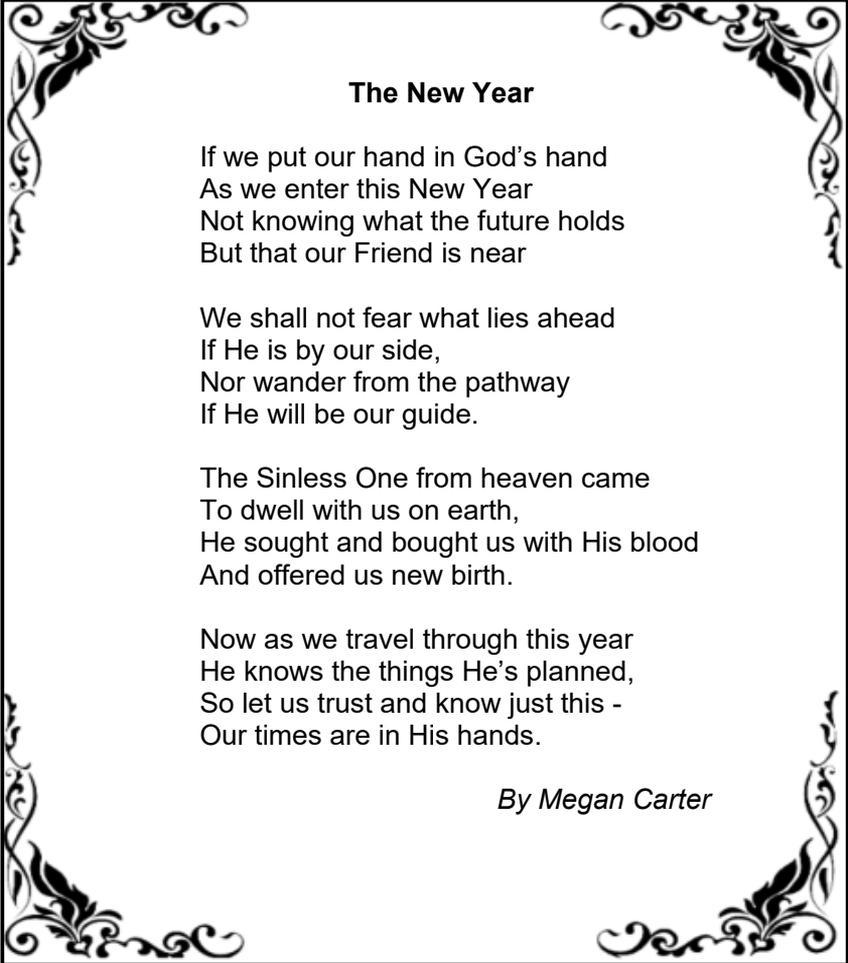
This month: Have a think about where you put Jesus after Christmas. Not the figure but the 'real' person. He's easily left in a virtual crib as a baby in our minds, just like the wooden or plastic figure

in our attics or under the stairs. If we keep Him as that lovely sweet-smelling-cute baby we miss out on His teaching and miracles, we will fail to understand and engage with His massive love and compassion for each of us on the cross – and most importantly His resurrection. Death is not the end.

Not for Him.

Not for us.

And not for our loved ones.



The New Year

If we put our hand in God's hand
As we enter this New Year
Not knowing what the future holds
But that our Friend is near

We shall not fear what lies ahead
If He is by our side,
Nor wander from the pathway
If He will be our guide.

The Sinless One from heaven came
To dwell with us on earth,
He sought and bought us with His blood
And offered us new birth.

Now as we travel through this year
He knows the things He's planned,
So let us trust and know just this -
Our times are in His hands.

By Megan Carter

Remembering Sir Ernest Shackleton

By Tim Lenton



One hundred years ago, on 5th January 1922, Sir Ernest Shackleton, the Irish-born British Antarctic explorer, died of a heart attack in his bunk in South Georgia. He had led three British expeditions to the Antarctic. He was 47. It is now believed he may have had a weak heart. His feats of bravery and endurance were mixed with sudden illness, but he was never willing to have his heart properly examined.

He set a Furthest South record when he commanded the Nimrod expedition in 1907-09. On that occasion he showed acclaimed leadership by refusing to try for the Pole because of the likelihood that he and his men would die on the return journey.

But his greatest achievement was to enable the rescue of his crew after the *Endurance* became trapped and then crushed by ice in the Weddell Sea in 1915. A long trek, hauling lifeboats over ice, was followed by Shackleton and two companions reaching South Georgia in a small boat – followed by a trek over mountains and glaciers to a whaling station, from where a rescue ship was launched to bring home the remainder.

This has been described as “an utterly unbelievable story of bravery, heroism and endurance”. Shackleton was not known to be a Christian, but he and his men said they felt Providence was guiding them, especially during the 36-hour march across South Georgia, when all three said they felt sure there were four of them, and not three, making the journey.

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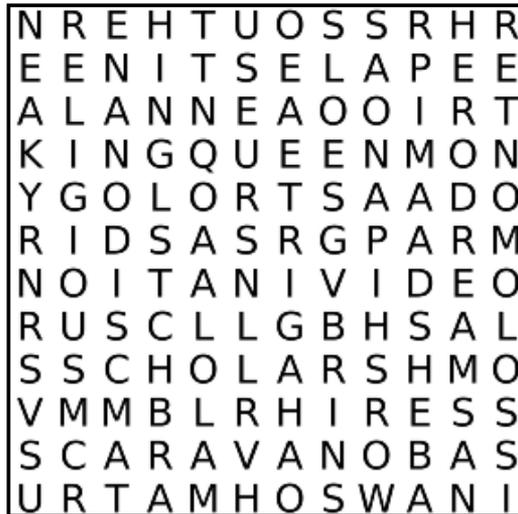
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Astrology	Arabia	Herod	Caravan

(Solutions on page 32)

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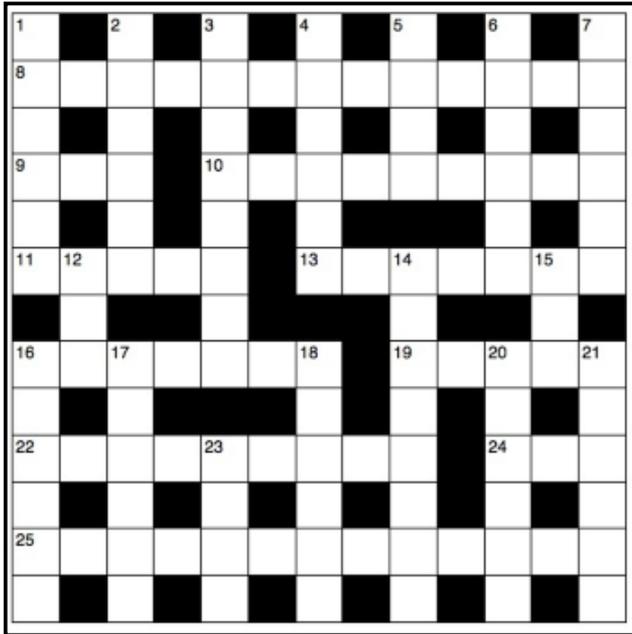
JANUARY CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Across

- 8 How the Abyss (NIV) is described in the Authorized Version (Revelation 9:1) (10,3)
- 9 Frozen water (Ezekiel 1:22) (3)
- 10 The Ten Commandments (9)
- 11 In Roman Catholic theology, neither heaven nor hell (5)
- 13 Des cons (anag.) (7)
- 16 'Though [your sins] are red as — , they shall be like wool' (Isaiah 1:18) (7)
- 19 Keen (Romans 1:15) (5)
- 22 Repugnant, loathsome (Jeremiah 24:9) (9)
- 24 Drink like an animal (Judges 7:5) (3)
- 25 First and last (Revelation 22:13) (5,3,5)

Down

- 1 Father of Ahi, a Gadite (1 Chronicles 5:15) (6)
- 2 Where David found the stone with which he killed Goliath (1 Samuel 17:40) (6)
- 3 'Hour by hour fresh lips are making thy — doings heard on high' (8)
- 4 'And there were shepherds living out in the fields near by keeping watch over their — at night' (Luke 2:8) (6)
- 5 United Society for Christian Literature (1,1,1,1)
- 6 'If he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would — — or a tax collector' (Matthew 18:17) (1,5)
- 7 Where Paul was taken when things became difficult for him in Berea (Acts 17:15) (6)
- 12 Istituto per le Opere di Religione (Vatican Bank) (1,1,1)



- 14 'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new — ; the old has gone, the new has come!' (2 Corinthians 5:17) (8)
- 15 Used to colour ram skins red for use in the tabernacle (Exodus 25:5) (3)
- 16 Vat car (anag.) (6)
- 17 'Be joyful — — , patient in affliction, faithful in prayer' (Romans 12:12) (6)
- 18 'The parts that are unrepresentable are treated with special modesty, while our representable parts — — special treatment' (1 Corinthians 12:23) (4,2)
- 20 Ancient rowing boat (Isaiah 33:21) (6)
- 21 Say again (2 Corinthians 11:16) (6)
- 23 What Jesus did in the synagogue in Nazareth after he stood up (Luke 4:16) (4)

(Solutions on page 32)

ST JAMES THE LEAST OF ALL



On how to mix town and country – or not

The Rectory
St. James the Least

My dear Nephew Darren

Your idea for our two churches to hold a combined New Year's Day walk was an admirable one, although I could sense a certain clash of cultures when your party arrived at the starting point with boots, waterproofs and GPS equipment. Our own group, rather anticipating tottering between tea shops, with a little light shopping in between, sported tweed suits, shopping bags and furled umbrellas.

Even the two sets of dogs seemed bemused with one another, with your Westies and King Charles spaniels making enough noise to scare all the wildlife in the county, and our Retrievers puzzled why the pheasants were not dropping from the sky. Dear Miss Mill's miniature poodle, with the painted toenails, will probably need life-long counselling; the furthest she had walked previously was from her bed to beside the dining room table.

The electronic navigation equipment brought by members of your group made me think that if only the wise men had had these blessings, they wouldn't have had to follow anything as unreliable as a star. Although I suppose that instead of gold, frankincense and myrrh, they would then have arrived with an MP3 player, a mobile phone which would have been obsolete before Jesus' first birthday and a CD of greatest hits.

I do concede that our two congregations learned much from one another. Our ladies were most interested to hear about the latest in personal trainers, while yours discovered how to bring a pan of jam to a rolling boil. Your men seemed impressed to hear of squirrel

shooting while ours gathered useful tips for caravanning abroad. And poor Miss Mill's poodle learned that the great outdoors was a parallel and hostile universe.

By mid-afternoon, however, the balance of power shifted. When the leader of the walk from your group lost his SatNav, our members felt the need to assert themselves. The gentlemen navigated using wind direction, moss on trees and angles of the sun, while our ladies, with tweed skirts furred somewhat higher than one would have wished, showed yours how to wade through peat bog without complaining.

Perhaps town and country really can learn from one another. But if Major Bullock's wife arrives for Mattins next Sunday sporting the latest gym gear, you will have much to answer for.

Your loving uncle,
Eustace



"We're looking for something to help us survive our church's early morning Winter services"

GOD AND THE ARTS

By The Rev Michael Burgess

What hope, at the turning of the year?



A few years ago, one of the Sunday magazines printed a Doom Directory. It surveyed the possible ways in which the world might come to an end - nuclear disaster, famine, global warming and so on. The cover showed a man bearing a placard, 'The end of the world is at hand': he was at a bus stop peering down to see the times of the last buses!

The speed at which we are using the earth's resources has put humanity's very survival at risk. It is a bleak thought to consider as one year ends and another begins. Where can we

place our hope and find any assurance? we ask ourselves. Do we need to think of the last buses on our earthly journey?

This month's painting was painted in Italy at a time when there was similar speculation about the end of the world. A mesmerising priest called Savonarola had preached in Florence about portents of this end time, and the final battle that would take place. His own end was gruesome and horrific as the church authorities silenced his voice, but his influence lingered on among people. Nowhere more so than in Botticelli, who painted this 'Mystic Nativity' in 1500, two years after Savonarola's death.

At first glance, it looks a typical Epiphany scene, for the wise men are shown to the stable by an angel. But everything is basic and

rudimentary. The wise men do not wear luxurious clothing, they have no servants, they bear no gifts. The stable is just a thatched roof propped against the mouth of the cave, with Joseph oddly hunched at one side. The babe kicks a leg into the air as Mary and the animals watch on, looking from the inside of the cave.

But then look above the scene. There is a long inscription from Botticelli: it announces that he painted this Nativity at the end of 1500, to provide a key to the violent and confused times in which he lived. At the bottom little demons scramble back to the underworld, and those who have been through the battle of life are comforted by angels, and there are more angels engaged in an ecstatic dance above the stable with olive branches and scrolls in their hands.

At the heart of it all is the simple nativity scene.

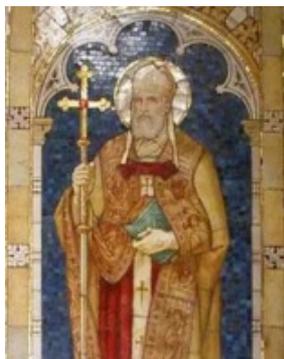
Botticelli seems to be making a heartfelt statement about his faith in the light of all that he had experienced and seen around him: his distress at the suffering war had brought, and his sense of doom that war was a portent of worse things to come. But the painting also shows his calm resignation that as one century turned into another, and one year into another, there is a birth which can be the pivot of that turning. A birth which is a sign of a future, a sign of new life, a sign of love. We can come through, he says, if we realise where our hope and trust should be placed - not in the pursuit of power which leads to death and destruction, but in a birth that leads ultimately to a heaven of victory and dancing and celebration.

The painting is not about winter, it is about spring: a season of hope and new life. We can draw the curtains across this nativity scene and shut out the light and springtime. But then, says Botticelli, chaos and war and greed will flourish. Go to the stable with the wise men, open the curtains, invite the Christ-Child in, and all will be transformed.

Savonarola had preached the same message a few years earlier, 'If you wish to be at rest, seek Christ. Come to this crib, seek none but Him, and you will find rest. Be well assured that you will never have peace until you come to this crib and to this light of faith in Christ

19th

Wulfstan, Bishop of Worcester 1095



Wulfstan, Bishop of Worcester from 1062 to 1095, occupies a unique place in British church history.

He was the last surviving pre-Conquest bishop, the first bishop to pay homage to William the Conqueror after the battle of Hastings, and one of the few Saxons to keep high office to the end of William's reign. On top of that, he seems to have been a truly good and holy man.

Wulfstan was born about 1008 at Long Itchington, Warwickshire. His uncle was Archbishop of York, and through his help, Wulfstan studied at the monasteries of Evesham and in Peterborough. Because of his Christian dedication, his superiors recommended him for the priesthood. Wulfstan was ordained in 1038 and joined a Benedictine monastery at Worcester.

Wulfstan was appointed prior of the monastery and from 1034 also served as the parish priest of Hawkesbury, Gloucestershire. He was made bishop of Worcester in 1062.

As a bishop, Wulfstan made some significant contributions to the English church. He had a passion for pastoral care and was the first English bishop to be known to have made a complete visitation of his diocese. He was a gifted administrator, increasing the effectiveness of his archdeacons.

He was highly influential in monastic reform, overseeing laws and canons to reform the role of the clergy.

He was a powerful preacher – with a great gift for explaining the teaching of Christianity. He encouraged a wider understanding of public penitence and taught against the many pagan customs throughout the land.

He had a strong social conscience, and soon became a bitter opponent of the slave trade. Together with Lanfranc, Wulfstan was mainly responsible for ending the slave trade in Bristol, and also for abolishing the slave trade between Worcester diocese and Ireland.

He had a passion for buildings, and founded Great Malvern Priory, as well as overseeing the large-scale rebuilding of Worcester Cathedral, Hereford Cathedral, and Tewkesbury Abbey.

Wulfstan died in January 1095, apparently during his daily ritual of washing the feet of 12 of his parishioners.



JANUARY COLD

Is it cold or snowing while you are reading this? January is the coldest month of the year and traditionally 14th January is supposed to be the coldest day on the year.

On at least 2 occasions on 14th January the River Thames froze in London. In 1716 and again in 1814, Londoners held Frost Fairs on the frozen river. There were ox-roasts, stalls, tents and sports on the ice – even a printing press was set up on the ice! When the thaw came some people were drowned and lots of

equipment floated out to sea.



One of the ways of warming up is to light a bonfire. In some country areas bonfires were lit on the bare fields, one to represent Our

Lords and one each for the 11 apostles. If a thirteenth bonfire was lit, representing Judas Iscariot, it was stamped out just after being lit.

JANUARY SAINT

The answer to each question is the name of a person in the Bible. When you have all the answers, rearrange the first letter of each name to make the name of a saint whose festival is celebrated in January. Answers at the bottom of the page.

1. He built the Ark (Genesis 6)
2. Paul's assistant (Acts 19)
3. Father of Jacob and Esau (Genesis 21)
4. King Saul's father (1 Samuel 9)
5. Eunice's son (2 Timothy 1)
6. Ruth's mother in law (Ruth)
7. Laban's daughter, mother of Joseph (Genesis 29)
8. Giant killed by David (1 Samuel 17)
9. The first woman (Genesis 3)

Who invented the first fire place?

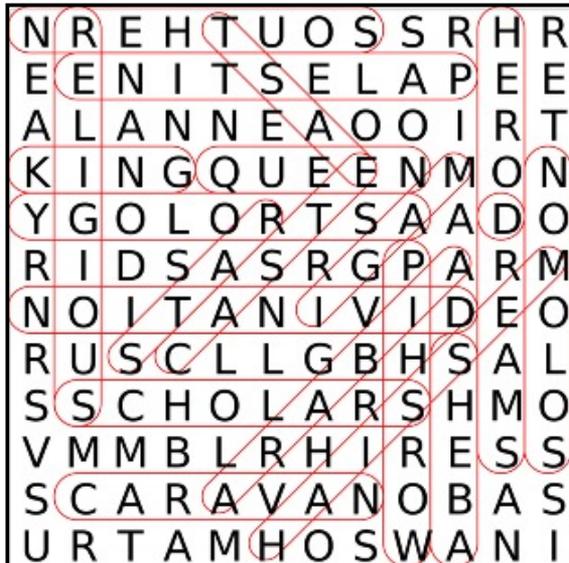
Alfred the Grate.

Answers: 1 Noah 2 Erastus 3 Isaac 4 Kish 5 Timothy 6 Naomi 7 Rachel 8 Goliath 9 Eve. The letters spell out KENTIGERN (also known as Mungo) founder of the church at Glasgow, whose day is celebrated on 14th January.

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