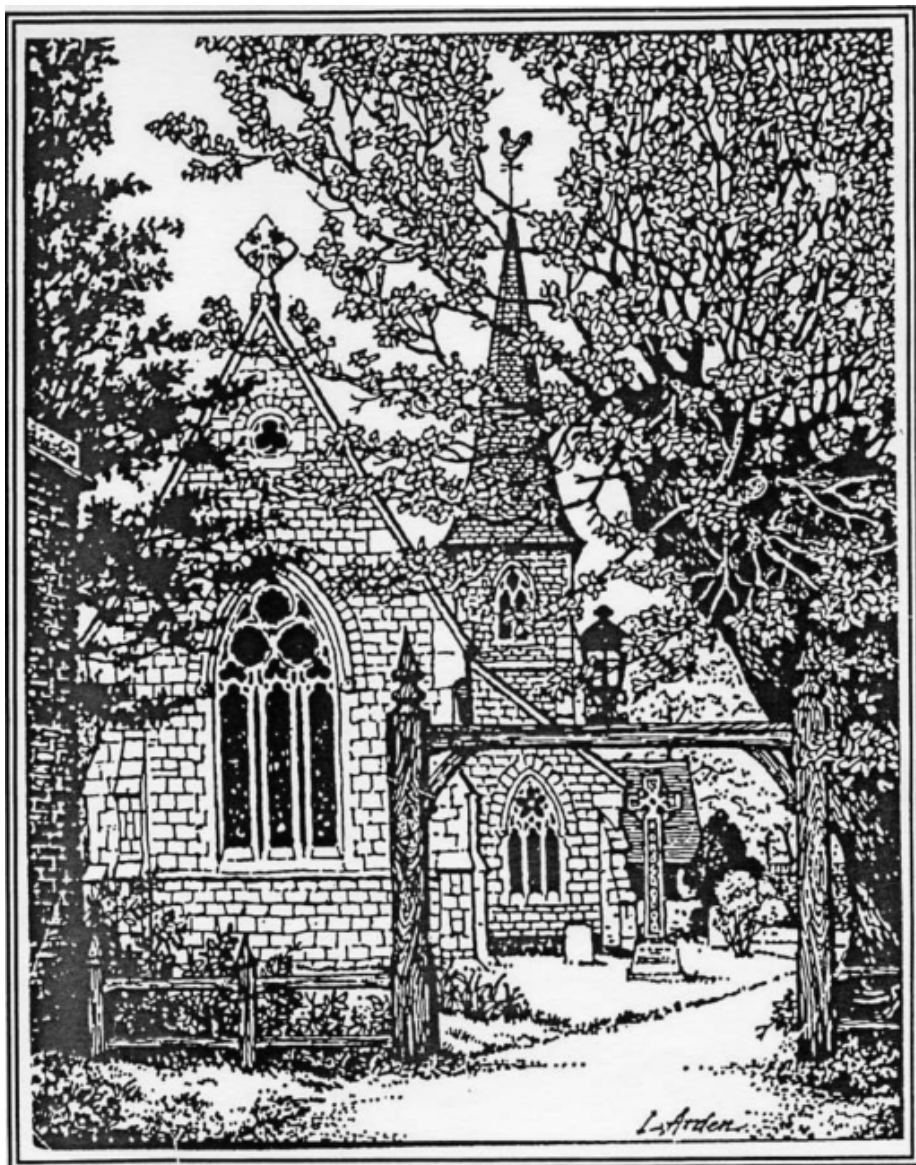


The Parish Church of **50p**
St. James, North Cray ***December, 2021***
(Part of the Bexley Team Ministry)



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
maxinejheath@gmail.com

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
sblakestjames@virginmedia.com

St James Sunday Service

9.30am

Holy Communion

(All age service with Uniformed Organisations on second Sunday)

TEAM RECTOR'S LETTER DECEMBER 2021



What is your favourite Christmas Carol?

Christmas Carols first became popular in the 15th century. Carols express the faith and ideas of ordinary people, with tunes that are easy to sing. Some originally had Pagan roots but were adapted to the Christian faith, such as *The Holly and the Ivy*. In the 17th century, when the Puritans disapproved of celebrating religious feasts, including Christmas, carol singing declined. Then in 1871 a song book called *Christmas Carols New and Old* was published and brought 13 carols into popular use. The traditional and much-loved Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols was first introduced in 1880, in Truro Cathedral and popularised by being broadcast from King's College Cambridge, first in 1954.



God Rest You Merry Gentlemen, and *The First Nowell* are truly traditional carols. Others, like *Once in Royal David's City* and *Away in a Manger* were written to teach children in Sunday School. Some, like *Hark the Herald Angels Sing* were adaptations of earlier words, sometimes translations, *Silent Night* originally written in German. If you have decided which is your favourite Christmas Carol, you may also like to think about WHY it is. Maybe you remember it from school, or at a family gathering. Maybe you particularly like the tune. Or maybe there is something in the words that seems to speak to you about God's love.

For me, it is the words of *It Came Upon the Midnight Clear*. They seem very relevant today.

*Yet with the woes of sin and strife
The world has suffered long;
Beneath the angels' strain have rolled
Two thousand years of wrong;
And man, at war with man, hears not
The love-song which they bring;
O hush the noise, ye men of strife,
And hear the angels sing*

Reverend Ren Harding (Team Rector)

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



Quiet and Still

The snow came drifting gently down
When all was quiet and still,
The village clock chimed out the hour
This season of goodwill.
And in the distance music notes -
Many voices singing,
Sacred hymns and Christmas carols
Church bells started ringing

The presents tied and gaily wrapped
Are placed beneath the tree,
Which has been dressed in tinselled best
For this festivity.
Tomorrow will be Christmas Day
Excitement, noise and cheer,
And friends and family will come
To a happy atmosphere.

But for tonight I'm lost in thought
Just gazing at the snow,
Thinking of another Christmas
Of many years ago,
A young girl and her new born Son
A stable had to share,
With sheep and shepherds, ox and ass
And angels everywhere.



Kathleen Gillum

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



SERVICES AND EVENTS FOR DECEMBER 2021



SUNDAY 5 December

9.30am Holy Communion

SUNDAY 12 December

9.30am Advent Parade Service with leaders and young people from our Uniformed Organisations.
All are welcome

SUNDAY 19 December

9.30am Holy Communion
3.00pm Christmas Forest Church followed by hot chocolate!
4.00pm Carols by Candlelight

CHRISTMAS EVE

5.30pm Crib Service



CHRISTMAS DAY

10am Christmas Day Family Communion

SUNDAY 26 December

9.30am Informal Worship

Wednesday 29 December

10am Team Midweek Communion at St James

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

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



Our Pilgrim Places – a look at Whitby

The Rev Dr Herbert McGonigle



When King Oswy decided that the question of the date of Easter must be settled once and for all, he called a Synod of both Celtic and Roman Christians. The meeting place was Whitby Abbey where Hilda was the greatly esteemed Abbess.

The two parties arrived to take part in the Synod. Colman, bishop of Lindisfarne, led the Celtic monks, supported by Irish and Scottish monks and Hilda. The Roman deputation was led by Agilbert, bishop of Dorchester, Wilfrid, abbot of Ripon, and James the Deacon. King Oswy presided and none attending that gathering in Whitby could have foreseen the long-term outcome of the proceedings.

Colman argued that the Celtic tradition went back through Columba, who brought the gospel to Iona, Polycarp, bishop and martyr in the 2nd century, and the Apostle John. Wilfrid, the Roman spokesman, said their tradition was now accepted by Christians all over Europe and that it could be traced back to the teaching of both Peter and Paul.

Argument and counter argument followed. Colman and his supporters emphasised that John was the Lord's beloved disciple and that his teaching therefore carried great weight. Wilfrid, an ambitious young cleric, suggested that the Celtic Church was confused in its calculations and that it was time for the obstinate Irish and Scottish monks to forsake their out-of-date practices and join 'the universal Church.'

He then added very pointedly that Peter had the keys to heaven and it was unwise to ignore his tradition. This alarmed King Oswy who asked Colman if our Lord had indeed given the keys of heaven to Peter. Colman said yes because it was recorded in Matthew's gospel. That decided the matter for King Oswy. Without asking what

the 'keys of heaven' meant, Oswy declared that he and his people would follow St Peter and the Roman tradition. He would not offend the apostle who controlled the gates of heaven!

The die was cast! A momentous decision had been made at the Synod of Whitby. King Oswy committed himself and his country to the Roman tradition. Hilda accepted the decision but Colman resigned as Bishop of Lindisfarne and with many of his monks returned to Iona.

Of course the Celtic Church did not disappear immediately but after Whitby, the Roman Church in Britain was in the ascendancy. Celtic Christianity remained in these islands for another three centuries but was eventually incorporated with the more powerful and prestigious Roman administration. The Synod of Whitby committed the British Church to the jurisdiction of Rome and the Pope. That jurisdiction lasted for eight hundred years until it was challenged and dismantled by the Reformation.





News and Issues



First meeting of the new General Synod

The 11th General Synod of the Church of England was formally inaugurated on Tuesday 16th November, at the start of a two-day meeting in London – the first full group of sessions held in person since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The recent elections attracted a record number of candidates (with 956 standing for the Houses of Clergy and Laity combined) and returned a majority of new members - 60 per cent of those elected.

Churches awarded £6m in latest Cultural Recovery Fund grants for major works

The Government has announced awards totalling just over six million pounds from the Heritage Stimulus Fund, part of the Government's Culture Recovery Fund, to Church of England churches and cathedrals.

A total of 21 grants have been made directly to the Church of England, with a further 12 Church of England churches being funded through a grant to the National Churches Trust. The Churches Conservation Trust, Friends of Friendless Churches, and Catholic Church were also successful in bids for funding.

All of the funds awarded to places of worship will be channelled into work by specialist builders and craftspeople allowing these places to deal with urgent repair needs.

Places of worship make up the largest category of listed public buildings in England, totalling 14,600 across every community in England.

The Church of England's lead Bishop for Buildings, Viv Faull, who is Bishop of Bristol, said: "The enthusiasm for this scheme shows

the scale of need across our churches and cathedrals...it will help them to continue to serve their wider communities as centres of heritage, community and faith.”

Christians in Scotland join in prayer over Covid

Christian churches and organisations across Scotland have recently co-signed a letter calling for people to pray. The Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Lord Wallace, said:

“In this pandemic, our responsibility is to come together and offer our prayers for all the many diverse expressions of our Christian faith that enrich life, as we have done for many months now.

“Behind each death there will be grieving family and friends; behind each hospitalisation there will be a suffering patient, an anxious family and a caring and skilled medical team.”

Daily Hope phone line receives more than 550,000 calls

Daily Hope, a free phone line which offers prayers and support for callers, receives nearly 20,000 calls every month. The service, which was launched during the Covid-19 lockdown, has spent more than 7.15 million minutes on more than 550,000 calls.

The phone line originally launched in April 2020, only to continue in response to ongoing demand once restrictions were eased.

Daily Hope set up by the Church of England nationally, has also been supported by Connections, a Missional Programme to older people based at Holy Trinity Claygate in Surrey and the Christian charity Faith in Later Life.

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MEETINGS and Events 2021



**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 DECEMBER



1500 years ago, on 7th December 521 St Columba, Irish missionary who spread Christianity in Scotland, was born. He was one of the Twelve Apostles of Ireland.

250 years ago, on 25th December 1771 Dorothy Wordsworth, writer, poet, and diarist, was born. She was sister to the poet William Wordsworth.

175 years ago, on 21 December 1846 the first surgical operation in Europe using anaesthesia took place. Robert Liston amputated a servant's leg at University College Hospital in London.

150 years ago, on 24th December 1871 the world premiere of Giuseppe Verdi's opera *Aida*, was held in Cairo, Egypt.

100 years ago, on 6th Dec 1921 the Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed in London. It ended the Irish War of Independence and established the Irish Free State (with effect from December 1922.)

80 years ago, on 7th December 1941 the Japanese made their surprise bomb attack on Pearl Harbour, Hawaii. The USA, UK, Netherlands, New Zealand, and other countries declared war on Japan the following day. The War in Europe had now become a World War.

50 years ago, from 3rd to 16th December 1971, the Indo-Pakistani War took place. It was one of the shortest wars in history, but still between one and three million Bangladeshis were killed. Indian victory leading to the founding of Bangladesh.

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Book Mark



Be Still – a simple guide to Quiet Times by Brian Heasley, SPCK, £9.99

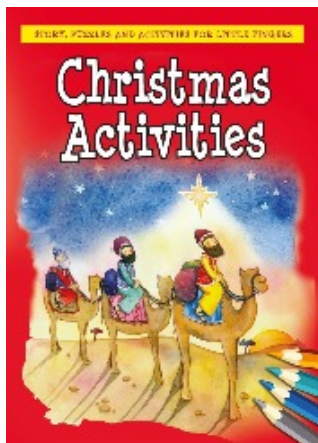


In this easy-to-read guide, Brian Heasley explores the multitude of rhythms of Christian prayer and devotion available to every believer. From memorising scripture and prayer, running to noticing beauty everywhere, he demonstrates how we don't need to be static for our hearts to be still, and how even in the midst of a full, busy life, we can spend quiet times with God.

Packed full of ideas for different ways to pray and tips and advice for how to build prayer practices into everyday life, Brian's book may change the way you

think about prayer and devotion and help equip you with all the tools you need to deepen your relationship with God.

Christmas Activities by Bethan James, Authentic, £2.50



All the events of the first Christmas are retold and illustrated in this small format paperback book with on-the-page puzzles and activities to complete. Kids will enjoy reading the story and immersing themselves in the related activities.

With attractive colour illustrations, age-appropriate text and a variety of puzzles, the book could be useful in church outreach activities with children aged four to seven. A little book for little fingers!

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Remembering Dorothy Wordsworth

By Tim Lenton



Two hundred and fifty years ago, on 25th December 1771, Dorothy Wordsworth – writer, poet and diarist – was born. She was sister to the poet William Wordsworth.

She had no ambitions to be a published author herself, but her diaries – particularly the Grasmere Journal, eventually published in 1897 – reveal her to be a talented, poetic writer, from whom her famous brother borrowed freely, and without attribution.

She was born in Cockermouth, one of a family of five, and her early childhood was happy until her mother died, followed by her father when she was 12. She was sent to live with an aunt in Halifax while her four brothers remained together, but she was reunited with William 12 years later, and they became extremely close.

In the intervening years she had lived for about six years in the isolated village of Fornsett, in Norfolk, where her uncle, the Rev William Cookson, was vicar – and where she set up a small school. She was deeply attached to her brother, William, and she continued to live with him after his marriage to Mary Hutchinson in 1803, when Dorothy was 31 and regarded herself as too old to marry herself. She never did marry, though she may have had a brief liaison with poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, a friend of William's.

In later life she was chronically ill – possibly from the after-effects of opium – and she remained an invalid in what her biographer described as “a deepening haze of senility” for at least the last 25 years of her life, dying near Ambleside at the age of 84.

Her journals describing walks with William and others in the Lake District reveal her importance to her brother's work and her own extraordinary talent.



Christmas Rush

That time again, my trolley's full
Buying all the Christmas fare,
A turkey crown, a rib of beef,
Crisps and nibbles, lots to spare.

Christmas crackers and serviettes,
Paper for wrapping and cards to send,
Nuts and oranges, figs and dates
The list goes on, there seems no end.

In all this rush it's good to pause
And think about that special Day,
When shepherds watched and angels
sang
As a Baby lay in a bed of hay.

By Megan Carter



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Signs & Symbols : Christmas Tree Decorations

The Rev Dr Jo White



What does your church have by way of Christmas decorations?

At this time of the year churches, shops and homes abound with signs and symbols related to Christmas. Actually, 'this time of the year' is an understatement, because the shops have been selling Christmas items for quite a while now. Since late September a visit to your favourite garden centre to buy winter pansies has also been an opportunity to top up your own Christmas Tree decoration stock. There are stars and angels which are easily understood from the Gospel stories but what about some of the other things?

First there's Father Christmas. He's based on St Nicholas, a bishop from the fourth century who lived in Myra in today's Turkey. He was said to have given good things to people in such a way that they did not know they had come from him. In Holland he was called Sinterklaas and when many Dutch people emigrated to the States they took that custom with them. It then got translated by the English-speaking Americans into Santa Claus – Father Christmas – and was exported back to Europe! Obviously FC can't make all the gifts himself so he needs helpers. Now that's like St Teresa of Avilla's wonderful quote that goes along the lines, God has no hands on earth but ours. We are God's helpers. But why elves? – any ideas?

Then there are the baubles in all colours in matt and shiny, all shapes and sizes. They could be like us; people come in all shapes and sizes, colours and tones. They're very fragile, like we are sometimes – quick to take offence – and have to be handled with care. They remind us to look after other people and not treat them roughly.

Of course, they also make 'unbreakable' baubles. Some folk put these on the lower branches of their trees in case their cats decide to pull

them off and bat them around the room. They remind us that we all have different uses and tolerances. But even they can get broken.

Then there's spiders and their webs. They come from a lovely modern story about how a spider entertained baby Jesus and kept him quiet while Herod's soldiers were searching and killing all boy babies; so he was kept safe.

This month: Have a look at your decorations and see if they need a bit of refreshing, some TLC, (tender loving care), just as we all do. Enjoy choosing a new one each year which has real meaning for you at that time.



Bells Never Sound Any Sweeter

Bells never sound any sweeter
Than when at Christmas they ring;
Angels on wings never fleeter –
Message of gladness they bring!
*As they once sang on that first
Christmas night
Bells sing of God's Holy birth
Ringing throughout the whole earth!*

O, when those sweet bells are ringing
Even in Heaven they're heard;
Angels soon join with their singing
Bringing us God's Holy Word.
*Sing of the father, the mother, the child
Bells sing of God's Holy birth
Ringing throughout the whole earth!*

Ring with those beautiful tones
Across the far ocean wide
Joy to all folk in their homes
This blessed Christmastide!
*I sing with joy the wonderful song –
Bells sing of God's Holy birth
Ringing throughout the whole earth!*

By Nigel Beeton

St Nicholas – a much-loved saint

By Canon David Winter



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.

WORDSEARCH



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

(Solutions on page 32)

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DECEMBER CROSSWORD PUZZLE

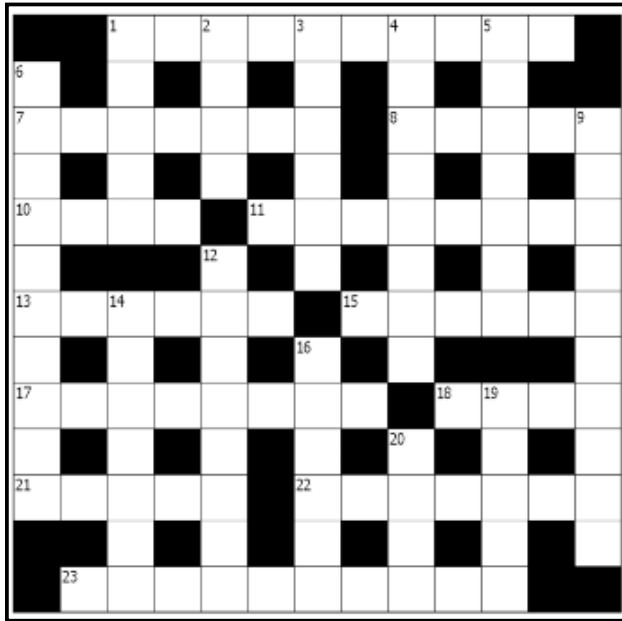


Across

- 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)

(Solutions on page 32)



ST JAMES THE LEAST OF ALL



On how to survive Christmas in the parish

The Rectory
St. James the Least

My dear Nephew Darren

I am sorry you will have to take your Christmas Services sporting a black eye, but I have no sympathy. It doesn't matter what competition you are asked to judge - biggest marrow, best decorated shower cap, most beautiful goldfish – the winner should always be the muscular entrant with the steely glint in their eye. The meek may well be destined to inherit the earth, but they will never win the best decorated Christmas cake competition. You should have known that a lady who works at the “Rose and Crown” pulling pints and throwing clients out at closing time is not one to be awarded second prize.

Lady Bartle has won ours every year for the last 50 years – even though we all know that her French pastry chef will have spent the previous month laboriously decorating the thing. Someone once rashly asked her how she came up with such novel ideas every year. Lady B. promptly started to talk about grouse shooting with a look that made it quite clear how she would have dealt with her interrogator had she herself been feathered.

As you are now well on your way to learning, the Christmas Fair presents a minefield of potential disasters. I treasure the look on our Health and Safety officer's face each year, as he sits in a corner, surrounded by fire extinguishers for every possible contingency, concentrating on the one plug in our church hall providing power for two tea urns, Christmas tree lights, amplifying equipment and mince pie warmer.

You must also make sure you spend absolutely the same sum at every stall. Five pence more on Admiral Thornton's coconut shy than on Mrs Eccles' roll-a-penny will never be forgotten – or forgiven. I sometimes think that Lord Cleethorpe's practice of arriving, dashing

round every stall, showering a £5 note at each, with not the slightest interest in what he's buying or entering, then bolting back to his castle for a restorative scotch is the best policy.

Our poor verger has played Father Christmas for as long as anyone can remember – until last year, when he executed his escape. He promised every child that they would receive all the gifts they wanted and encouraged them to let their imaginations rip. We had a village of tearful children on Christmas morning when they discovered they had not received private jet planes, main line railway station or a major football team. The look of joy on the dear man's face when he was told he'd been sacked was quite touching.

So, as you carol your way through the Services, may I suggest you hold them all by candlelight, so your shiner may be a little less obtrusive.

Your loving uncle,
Eustace



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

GOD AND THE ARTS

By The Rev Michael Burgess



‘In that region there were shepherds keeping watch over their flock’

In the Old Testament shepherds were greatly valued and treated with respect. Patriarchs, prophets and kings had all tended sheep. Job, a rich man, owned 14,000 sheep. David was tending sheep when he was called by God and anointed by Samuel.

But as the Israelites settled in towns and cities and turned to farming, attitudes towards the shepherds changed. As the New Testament opens, shepherding had become a dirty, lonely life, away from civilisation. Shepherds could not observe the daily rituals of their faith, and so they had a low status in society, looked down upon by orthodox Jews.

But out in the countryside with just the hills and the plains and the open air, St Luke tells us that it was there that God’s message was proclaimed and heard. Cities and towns had walls and barriers, as Bethlehem has today. But in the fields at night, there were shepherds, watching and alert, ready for any eventuality. And so, they were the first to hear of the birth of a Saviour.

‘The Annunciation to the Shepherds’ is this month’s painting by Sano di Pietro. We know little about this Italian artist apart from some dates. He was born in Siena in 1406 and died there in 1481. But he has left us a legacy of beautiful and sensitive paintings. As we look at this scene, we see the human details: two shepherds huddled by the fireside with their dog, all three looking up to see the angel, and a spear by the side to ward off thieves and predators. The sheep are safely in their pen, black and white fleeces huddled together for warmth. In the sky the angel appears, bearing an olive branch in one hand and with the other pointing to Bethlehem in the distance.

Luke has already told us of another annunciation, with Gabriel visiting Mary. Artists loved to portray this scene and often showed a lily, the symbol of purity, in their paintings. Here there is the olive sprig, a symbol of peace to reinforce the angelic message of peace in the birth of the Saviour. Luke goes on to tell us how Jesus brought new meaning and peace to all those like the shepherds who were nobody in the eyes of people, but everything to the eyes and heart of God.

Jesus in His teaching often turned to the theme of sheep and shepherds, with parables about lost sheep, gates to the fold, and hireling shepherds. Just as the faithful shepherds were prepared to give their lives to protect the flock, so Jesus the Good Shepherd gave His life for the world – a death that would bring the peace and reconciliation shown in that olive branch held by the angel. At this Christmas time we rejoice with the heavenly host to proclaim the birth of this Prince of Peace and we commit ourselves to that work of peace and shepherding. Howard Thurman wrote these words:

‘When the song of the angels is stilled...
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,
the work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost, to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry, to release the prisoner,
to rebuild the nations, to bring peace among the people,
to make music in the heart.’



13th

Lucy, Martyr at Syracuse



Lucy was a Christian girl who got caught up in the fierce and widespread Diocletian persecutions of 303-4. She refused to give up her Christian faith, and so was put to death. Her tomb can still be found in a Catacomb in Syracuse (Sicily), and there are early fourth-century inscriptions bearing her name (Euskia).

Lucy's full story has been lost in the mists of time, but a romantic legend of her martyrdom grew up after her death.

According to the legend, Lucy was arrested while giving to the poor at the height of the persecution. Her own fiancé had betrayed her, telling the authorities about her faith. The judge ordered that she be raped in a brothel and then burned, but all attempts to inflict such punishment on her went amiss, because God protected her. At last, Lucy was killed by the sword.

Lucy's legend was written in the 5th century, and she was honoured in Rome from the 6th century. The name Lucy means 'light', and so in time she became the patron saint for those with eye diseases. Her feast day is close to the shortest day of the year, so it is celebrated in Sweden as a festival of light.

As the full details of Lucy's martyrdom will never be known, she can represent all the young women who have been willing to die for Christ, and whose full stories will also never be known to us.



A LIGHT TO WELCOME

Fifty years ago all people had were decorated trees and a few paper-chains at Christmas, but now we have wreaths on the front door, outdoor lights in gardens; and the most recent addition, those arched candle-sticks with 7 or more electric candles to stand on windowsills.

This custom came to us from Scandinavia. The story is that in weeks before Christmas, like that first Christmas nearly 2,000 years ago, Mary and Joseph wander the



world looking for a place where they will be safe. They look for a welcome light in the window. And that is why we put the lights in our window: to

invite the Holy Family into our homes at the darkest and coldest part of the year. The candles say that Christ is welcome in our homes, to be born in our hearts and that we invite him to stay with us - not just for Christmas but for all time.

SKY LIGHTS

Stars are another source of light and the wise men and shepherds followed a star to the baby Jesus.

The answers to this quiz all start with the letters STAR so can you say which Star...



1. is the right-hand side of a ship?
2. is a bird?
3. is used to stiffen things?
4. is to look with wide open eyes?
5. is the US flag?
6. is someone who sets a race off?
7. is suddenly surprised?



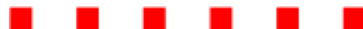
What carol is heard in the dessert?

Camel ye faithful.



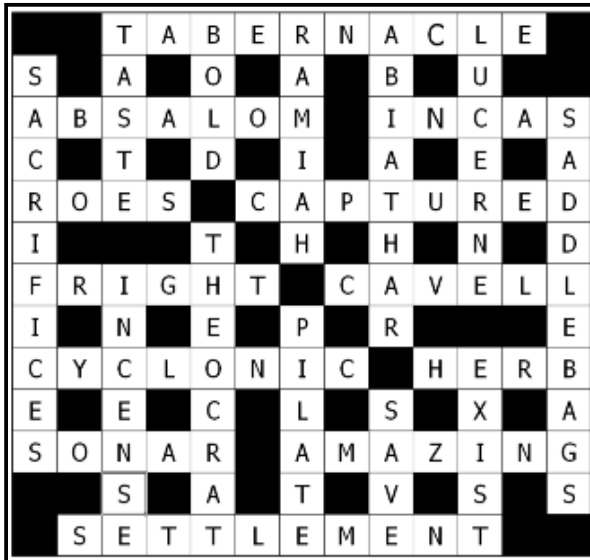
What's impossible to overtake at Christmas?

The three wide men.



Answers: 1 starboard 2 stalling 3 starch 4 stare 5 Stars & Stripes 6 starter 7 started

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Year's mind for December 2020



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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

Team Rector: Reverend Ren Harding

renharding@hotmail.co.uk 01322 528923 07836644782

Associate Priest: Revd Sue Twynam

susantwynam@btconnect.com 01322 559501 07952 468127

Team Vicar: Reverend Clive Wood

revclivewood@gmail.com 01322 270942 07982 392809

Team Vicar: Reverend Edward Barlow

fr.edwardbarlow@gmail.com 01322 521786

Team Curate: Matt Hodder

matthodder10@gmail.com 07889 873125

For enquiries concerning St Barnabas, Joydens Wood

website www.joydenswoodchurch.co.uk

email - joydenswoodchurch@virginmedia.com

CONTACT the Team Rector

For enquiries concerning St James, North Cray

website www.stjamesnorthcray.org.uk/

CONTACT the Team Rector

For enquiries concerning St John the Evangelist, Bexley

website www.stjohnsbexley.org

CONTACT the Team Vicar: Reverend Edward Barlow

fr.edwardbarlow@gmail.com 01322 521786

For enquiries concerning St Mary the Virgin, Bexley

website www.stmarysbexley.co.uk

CONTACT the Team Vicar: Reverend Clive Wood

revclivewood@gmail.com 07982 392809

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