



*Let us not forget our fellow Christians behind the separation wall
in Bethlehem this Christmas*

Christmas Services

Sunday 17th December

10.45 a.m. Sung Eucharist

6 p.m. Festival of Lessons & Carols

Christmas Eve

8.30 a.m. Holy Communion

Please note there is no service at 10.45 a.m.

11.15 p.m. Sung Eucharist

Christmas Day

10.45 a.m. Family Communion

Wednesday 28th December

10.30 a.m. Holy Communion

New Year's Eve

8.30 a.m. Holy Communion

10.45 a.m. Sung Eucharist

The Vicar writes:

I came across 'My Christmas Tree' last week
and thought I would share it with you.



MY CHRISTMAS TREE

O Lord, I would wish during this Christmas season to have a tree inside my heart and to hang on its branches, instead of presents, the names of people who are my friends! Friends I have known a very long time and those I came to know recently. Friends I meet up with regularly and those whom I seldom see. Those friends who are always beside me and those who rarely come to see me. Those friends I can count on in my sad times and those I can count on during my happy times. Those friends whom I've offended and those who unwillingly may have offended me. Those friends who owe me little and those to whom I owe very much. My young friends, my older friends and the little children who are my friends. My humble friends and my wealthy friends. All friends who have died. Those friends I know without them knowing me and those who know me, not permitting me to be aware of it. Those friends who admire and esteem me and those whom I admire greatly.

I would wish my Christmas tree to have deep roots, so that their names may never be erased from my heart. I would wish my tree to have long boughs, so that other names may join the ones already there. I would wish the shadow of my tree to be very sheltering so that our friendship may be moments of peace during our lifetime.

I wish you all a very happy and peaceful Christmas.

Love Diane



Christingle Service
Sunday 10th
December 10.45 a.m.



This is a beautiful service for all the family, especially toddlers. By coming to this service you are supporting the needs of The Children's Society



The Blessings Of
Christmas
 PEACE★HOPE★JOY★LOVE

Our Church Choir will lead the
Festival of Lessons & Carols
Sunday 17th December at 6 p.m.

Do please come and begin celebrating Christmas by singing familiar carols and hearing the Christmas Message of love, joy and peace to all people.

This service is not suitable for toddlers.



And there were shepherds (David Winter)

Luke's story of the birth of Jesus is brilliantly told – the angel's visit to Mary to tell her she would be mother of the long-promised Messiah, the old priest in the Temple told by another angel that his wife would have a son to be called 'John', who would prepare the people of Israel for that event, and then Mary and Joseph making the 60 mile journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, as required by the Roman census. When they got there, no room at the inn, and they settled instead for a convenient stable, where Mary gave birth to a boy child.

Suddenly, Luke changes the tone. 'And there were shepherds ...' – that's what he actually wrote, just like that. 'And there were shepherds', doing exactly what shepherds do, looking after their flocks by night. But this night was different: yet another angelic message – a call to abandon their sheep and go into Bethlehem to see the baby Messiah. They were given directions and a 'sign' to identify Him. He would be lying in a feeding trough. Well, at least they would recognise that.

And why the shepherds, in this glorious story of our salvation? Because the event needed witnesses, and the chosen witnesses would be this bunch of scruffy, smelly shepherds straight from the sheep-pen. Nothing could speak more eloquently of God's purpose than that. This was not a Saviour for the strong, rich and powerful, but for everybody. The carpenter and his wife guarded the Saviour of the world, and the very first witnesses were not kings or priests but a handful of shepherds.



Christmas: The man who married Mary by Lester Amann

The traditional Nativity scene on our Christmas cards has Mary with the Holy Babe. Around her are the shepherds and Magi. We may also see stable animals, angels and a star! While Joseph is often included, his presence seems to be of minor importance. After all, we praise God for Jesus with our familiar Christmas carols, mentioning angels, shepherds, Wise men and Mary but the name of Joseph is absent! Why is Joseph given a low profile? He is a man to be remembered!

Joseph was a resident of Nazareth. He worked as a carpenter and his skills would have included making furniture, repairing buildings and crafting agricultural tools. Although Joseph had an honourable profession, he would not have been a man of great wealth.

The gospel writers Matthew and Luke give Joseph a few brief mentions. After the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary go to the temple in Jerusalem to dedicate the Baby to God. Afterwards, they flee into Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod and much later return to Nazareth. Twelve years later, Mary and Joseph go with Jesus to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. Here they lose Jesus, and find Him in the Temple talking with religious leaders!

Apart from these verses, the New Testament is silent about the rest of Joseph's life. However, we do know that Joseph was father to other children by Mary. His four sons are named in St. Matthew's Gospel. And we also know that Joseph was someone who quietly and humbly took on the awesome role in caring for the early life of the Son of God. Joseph would have taught Jesus many things – not just the skills of a labourer, but the lore of the countryside which was evident in our Lord's teaching. Jesus grew up within a loving family and described God as 'Father', knowing also the good fatherly qualities of Joseph.

In the Christmas story, Joseph is placed into a situation that brought him misunderstanding and suspicion. But Joseph remained faithful in the knowledge that as long as God had spoken, the opinion of others mattered little. Before Jesus began His ministry it is believed that Joseph died. It is likely Jesus took on many of his father's responsibilities before He left home. In the eyes of the world, Joseph was a nobody. He was not a man of valour, fame and fortune. But he was the one who had parental responsibility for the greatest person who has ever lived!

It is sad that we often equate ordinariness with ineffectiveness. Down the ages, God has used many ordinary people to accomplish great things. God continues to use ordinary people. Like Joseph, we need to know that doing God's will is the most important thing in life. May we, this Christmas, respond to God's call to us and please Him in all that we do.

£2,760 ~ best result ever!

The Christmas Fair raised a staggering £2,760 for Church Funds.

A huge 'thank you' to all stall-holders, the ladies in the kitchen, the men who put up the marquee, to Madeleine who did the organising and to all who came and supported the Fair or gave to the various stalls.

Your time, effort and giving is very much appreciated.
Thank you one and all.

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We have received an email from the local Foodbank saying it is in great need of any of the following please:

- | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------|-------------|
| Longlife milk | Tinned potatoes | Cereals |
| Sugar | Instant Coffee | Tea bags |
| Tinned Soup | Tinned tuna or salmon | Jam |
| Rice | Biscuits / snack bars | Pasta sauce |
| Pasta | Tinned puddings | Shower Gel |
| Tinned tomatoes | Tinned vegetables | Shampoo |

And as we draw closer to Christmas, any Christmas goodies (except Christmas puddings) for the family would be greatly appreciated.
Thank you.

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The Ven John Barton provides a meditation on the sheer wonder of Christmas....

The miracle of Christmas Day

Way back in Bible times, everyone believed the world was flat and the universe was in layers, above and below. Though limited in their understanding, people in those days could marvel at the immensity of the universe and their relative insignificance: one of the OT Psalms considers all this and asks God a question:

'When I look up at your heavens, the work of your fingers,

At the moon and the stars you have set in place,

What is a frail mortal, that you should be mindful of him,

A human being, that you should take notice of him?' [Psalm 8:3,4]

How much more meaningful that question is today. Think *of our* appreciation of the cosmos: its staggering size and complexity. What *are* frail mortals, that God should be mindful of them, human beings, that God should take notice of them?

If questions about our origin and our place in the order of things are larger than ever, so too is our enquiry about human destiny. Where's it all heading?

Suppose then, for one moment we could glimpse through a crack in the impenetrable veil of the unknown, to see whatever/whoever it is that controls our origin and our destiny. What would that vision do to us?

There's a healthy reticence in the Bible about seeing God. Moses was warned that 'no mortal may see me and live'. (Exodus 33) And in the New Testament St. Paul makes clear that no one had ever seen or could ever see Him.

And yet. That is precisely what *Christmas* enables us to do. In Jesus, we are offered God on the only terms we could understand. God in our own language. Incarnation.

It began with a baby in the arms of His mother. Sensationally surprising. The origin of the universe and its destiny – now in human form... *for our sake*. It's the last thing we would have expected, so it's easily missed. But here and now you and I are invited to kneel in wonder and worship, with Mary and Joseph and shepherds.

The story continued, of course. As the baby grew up, the Creator of the Cosmos placed Himself at the service of humanity, as Jesus the teacher and healer. Then it all went grim. He suffered persecution, prosecution, crucifixion. But it was still all part of God's plan to redeem His wayward human creation.

Finally, as the Christian creed puts it, 'On the third day He rose again...

He will come again in glory, to judge the living and the dead, and His kingdom will have no end.'

This child is our glimpse of the beginning and the end. He is God stooping to meet us, in the lowliest of guises.

This extraordinary contrast of majesty and humility in the birth at Bethlehem was captured beautifully by a 17th century parish priest, Giles Fletcher (1586 - 1623) Here is just an extract:

'A child He was, and had not learnt to speak,

That with His *word* ... the world before did *make*;

His mother's arms Him bore, He was so weak,

That with one hand the vaults of heaven could shake.

See how small a room my infant Lord doth take,

Whom all the world is not enough to hold.

Who of His years or of His age hath told?

Never such *age* so young, never a child so old.' so *old*.'

Church of England reaches more than a million on social media every month

More than a million people are being reached every month with the Christian message on social media, a year after the Church of England adopted a new digital approach, new figures show.

Videos, podcasts, blogs and images including prayers are reaching an online audience of 1.2 million a month through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn, according to the statistics from the Church of England digital project.

During Christmas 2016, 1.5 million were reached through the Church's award-winning #JoyToTheWorld campaign featuring short films. A further 2.5 million were reached during Lent, through the #LiveLent 2017 project.

Meanwhile, new statistics show that average Sunday attendance over October 2016 at Church of England services stood at 780,000 people, a lower figure than in 2015, in line with a long-term trend.

The 'worshipping community' of the Church of England, a measure of the number of people who come to church once a month or more, stood at 1.1 million, of whom 20% were under 18 years old.

On average, 930,000 people (86% adults, 14% children under 16) attended church services each week in October 2016. A further 180,000 children and adults attended services for schools in churches each week, a rise of 6.2% on last year.

Christmas attendance on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day rose by 1.4% in 2016 to 2.6 million. During Advent, 2.5 million people attended special services for the congregation and local community, and 2.8 million people attended special services for civic organisations and schools.

There were 120,000 baptisms and services of thanksgiving for the gift of a child, 45,000 marriages and services of prayer and dedication after civil marriage and 139,000 Church of England-led funerals.

A one-off question for 2016 showed the majority of churches are open to visitors outside of service times, with more than 50% of churches reporting being open to visitors five or more days each week.

Prime Minister backs C of E drive to eradicate modern slavery:

The Prime Minister and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, have given their backing to the recent launch of a project aimed at mobilising the Church of England's 12,000 parishes in the battle to eradicate modern slavery.

Theresa May welcomed the Clewer Initiative, a three-year programme to help the Church of England's 42 dioceses work to support victims of modern slavery and identify the signs of exploitation in their local communities.

Mrs May said: "Modern slavery is a barbaric crime which destroys the lives of some of the most vulnerable in our society. I value the work that the Clewer Initiative will be doing. In particular, I welcome the focus on engaging with local communities to help them to spot the signs of modern slavery. We need to shine a light on this hidden crime and to encourage more victims to come forward so that we can provide them with the support they need.

'The Government cannot tackle this problem alone, and this is why the efforts of organisations and groups such as the Clewer Initiative are so important.'

Work is already under way in dioceses, with training sessions on how to provide support and identify victims of labour exploitation in areas from the construction and property sector to hand car washes in British cities and shipping.

In a video message, The Archbishop of Canterbury encouraged churches to act as 'eyes and ears' in local communities to identify victims. 'Jesus came saying that He proclaimed freedom for captives. Those who purposefully constrain, confine and traffick and enslave people will face the judgement of God for their terrible sins.'

Kevin Hyland, the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, said: 'Faith groups have influence, insight and rare avenues into the community; they are therefore a powerful tool in the fight against modern slavery.'

The Bishop of Derby, Dr Alastair Redfern, who chairs the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner's Advisory Panel, said: 'Modern slavery is present in nearly every community in England and will continue to flourish if we remain indifferent to it.

'Churches can act as 'eyes and ears' in our communities to help identify victims. Our work in the Clewer Initiative will build on the passion of churches to be with people, to contribute to more effective structures, and to go the extra mile for the sake of those who are suffering.'

All in the month

of December

It was:

250 years ago: on 22nd December 1767 that John Newbery, the British publisher, died. He was one of the first to publish children's books, and the first to do so profitably and sustainably. Known as the 'Father of Children's Literature', the Newbery Medal for children's literature is awarded annually in his honour. Think how much poorer your childhood would have been, without your favourite stories!

200 years ago: on 7th Dec. 1817 that William Bligh, British Royal Navy officer and colonial administrator, died. Best known as the captain of HMS Bounty when a historic mutiny (the Mutiny on the Bounty) took place in 1789. He was set adrift in a small boat with some of his loyal crew, but managed to travel over 4,000 miles without any navigational aids to Timor, from where he returned to England. It makes our modern need of a Satnav to go even 20 miles seem a bit pathetic.

150 years ago: on 6th Dec. 1867 that (Marie) Jean Pierre Flourens, French physiologist and educator died. He was the first person to prove that the mind is located in the brain and not the heart. Does this mean we should be guided more by reason than feeling? He was also a pioneer of anaesthesia.

125 years ago: on 18th Dec. 1892 that Tchaikovsky's ballet The Nutcracker was performed for the first time, at the Mariinsky Theatre, in St Petersburg, Russia.

100 years ago: on 9th Dec. 1917 that during the Battle of Jerusalem, the Ottoman Empire surrendered the city to the British. On 11th Dec., the British General Edmund Allenby entered the city on foot (rather than horseback or vehicle) as a mark of respect, becoming the first Christian to control the city in 500 years.

75 years ago: on 1st Dec. 1942 that the British Government published the Beveridge Report, which formed the basis of the welfare state.

65 years ago: on 5th Dec. 1952 that the Great Smog of London took place. Dense, cold, smoke-filled fog descended upon London, bringing the city to a standstill for four days. More than 4,000 people died.

60 years ago: on 25th Dec. 1957 that Queen Elizabeth II's Christmas Message was televised for the first time.

50 years ago: on 3rd Dec. 1967 that the world's first successful human heart transplant was performed by a team led by Dr Christian Barnard in Cape Town. The patient, Louis Washkansky, survived for 18 days before dying from pneumonia due to a weakened immune system.

40 years ago: on 16th Dec. 1977 that Heathrow Central (now Heathrow Terminals 1,2, 3) opened at Heathrow Airport as a station on the London Underground. It was the first airport in the world to be directly served by its city's underground railway system.

30 years ago: on 25th Dec. 1987 that in the British TV soap opera Coronation Street, Hilda Ogden left the street to become her doctor's housekeeper in the country. It was one of the most-watched episodes in the show's history.

20 years ago: on 11th Dec. 1997 that the Kyoto Protocol, aimed at reducing greenhouse gas and combating global warming, was adopted at a conference in Japan. (Over 190 countries have signed the agreement, which came into effect in Feb. 2005. Canada withdrew in Dec. 2012.)

Also 20 years ago: on 11th Dec. 1997 that Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams met British Prime Minister Tony Blair at 10 Downing Street – the first Irish Republican leader to do so since Michael Collins in 1921.

15 years ago: on 7th Dec. 2002 that Iraq submitted a weapons declaration to the United Nations in which it stated it had no weapons of mass destruction.

10 years ago: on 23rd Dec. 2007 that the British royal family launched The Royal Channel on the video sharing website YouTube.

Desert Island Discs by Spencer Rogers



The Vicar asked the following questions:

1. How would you cope as a solitary castaway on a desert island?
2. Choose four pieces of music or hymns you would want to take with you, and one CD and please give a sentence of explanation for each.
3. What luxury item would you choose?

Coping

Alone on a desert island? Help! Even the thought gives me feelings of isolation, loneliness, desolation, pain, and need of others.

Being a very practical person the questions of living and sleeping would present few problems. Food, though, would be a different kettle of fish. I cannot think of killing animals and would therefore have to become vegetarian - but possibly including fish.

Having always been a hobbies person - cycling, poetry, writing letters, music, reading, - the deprivation of access to such activities would create serious problems.

The inevitable result of all this is that I would “go in on myself” and be in absolute and total need of God’s presence at all times.

Music

The magical world of music: charm, excitement, romance, spirituality - God’s greatest gift - after life itself.

Music is and always has been important to me but to choose a few isolated pieces I find impossible. Loving the work of several composers it is hard enough to even choose a composer from the abundance we have. However:

Chopin’s Nocturnes

Schumann said of Chopin “Hats off gentlemen to a new genius”
Like many composers of the time he died young. Being short of money, in 1848 he gave piano concerts in London, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Manchester (there is a memorial statue of him on Deansgate). He died the year after, aged 39.

Debussy

He wrote music which has been described as “a sonorous halo of sound”. Nuff said. Lived to the age of 50 and died in 1918.

Greig

A Norwegian composer but his grandfather was a Scot. His music is called “emotional and poetic”, transcending national boundaries. He was asked by Ibsen to write incidental music to “Peer Gynt” and this made him a national figure. He lived to the age of 64 but ruined his health by overworking. Died in 1907.

Mendelssohn

A child prodigy. First performed on the piano publicly at the age of 9 and was a prolific composer at the age of 12. Wrote many “Songs without Words” and was inspired to write “Hebridean Overture” after visiting Scotland. He was phenomenally gifted:

A good painter, a brilliant writer, a superb pianist, a good violinist, an exceptional organist, an inspiring conductor and a genius composer. He was disregarded for many years because of his privileged background but not now. He died of overwork aged 38.

CD:

My favourite CD is “Ocean Surf” by Dan & Gordon Gibson. I listen to this a lot at bedtime but it has been put to me that I wouldn’t need a recording of such sounds on a desert island.

Luxury item: Piano



Chopin Memorial in Manchester