

Editorial Notes

Back some time ago Diana Greenfield asked me if I would be available on the 20th November to take some photographs of people dressing up as Angels, Shepherds and other nativity people in the Crispin Hall where a nativity backdrop was set up to let people use their phones to take pictures of themselves or family for a personal festive Christmas card. On saying yes to Diana it gave me the opportunity to get a front cover picture for this month with Sandra (Walton's churchwarden) and myself. Even Father Christmas joined in the fun with other dignitaries at this 'Sparkle' event. This fun stall was one of many in the hall, and within the Crispin centre, selling crafts, food, and Christmas gifts to the multitude.

On the previous week I had another assignment at Elmhurst school at the annual Remembrance service, and this year the Chaplain of the Sea Cadets Suzie Williams played a big part. She is pictured on the back cover with three of her cadets, and another with Standard bearers and the bugler who played the last post and reveille. Above these photos are ones of SWCD remembrance church decorations. See page 9 for details of the picture on top left, and top right shows Jane Tompsett and Sandra Gristock loading the car up with the Samariton's Purse Christmas boxes for deprived children in poor countries.

It is again that time to thank all my team here at 'Life Magazine' for all their help throughout 2021 in distributing the magazines, to all the contributors, and of course all of you who buy it.

Wishing you all a very Happy Christmas.

Roger Harmsworth. Editor

Rector's Letter

“She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger” *Luke 2. 7*

Dear Friends,

It's that time of year again. Whilst as Christians we may be in the waiting season of Advent, most of those around us are going flat out for Christmas. After the restrictions and limitations of last year, I'm sure there is a huge sense of relief and excitement that this year we can do Christmas 'properly', whatever that means. We all have our Christmas traditions be that what we eat, who we meet or that wonky Christmas decoration that always has to go on the tree, otherwise it's not really Christmas.

This season is, even for those who only see Advent as a chance to eat chocolate, a time of expectation. We look forward to the celebrations that are to come but we also look back as we recreate traditions that maybe last year were not possible. For my family, the Christmas photo by the fireplace is something we have done each year it has been possible, since our children were tiny. We are looking forward to getting out the camera again!

Many also look forward to the Christian traditions at Christmas, carol services, crib services, or midnight communion, to name just a few. We look forward to welcoming many from our communities to celebrate with us on these occasions, but this year, we are also planning one or two unexpected and maybe even new Christmas traditions. Be they painted rocks, goodie bags, or Christmas services for those who might find Christmas

tough, let us find ways of bringing the Christmas story to friends and neighbours in both expected and unexpected ways.

The first Christmas was deeply shockingly unexpected. Christ was born in a dirty animal shelter to a teenage mother of lowly birth. The message of the Messiah's arrival was shared first with manual labourers and foreigners; this was not how the Jews awaiting their Messiah had expected it to be. Alongside the expectant anticipation, many will share for the Christmas season, let's also leave space for the unexpected as we pray for a fresh encounter with the living loving Lord Jesus this Christmas time.

With my love and prayers,

Ana

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This Christmas at SWCD Churches

You will see elsewhere in Life details of the various services and events across our parishes during Advent and in the run-up to Christmas.

This year, we will be using the Church of England 'strapline' and material which is based around 'at the heart of Christmas'. Amid all the celebrations, traditions and expectations, we want to be encouraging our communities to keep Jesus at the heart of the Christmas story. As well as sharing that story in song and word at our services and events, please get involved in the various other projects you will see advertised such as 'baby Jesus rocks' and the distribution of goodie bags in Street.

The Good News, which is truly at the heart of Christmas, is there to be shared. Let's share it with family, friends and neighbours in 2021.

Ana Lawrence

Walton Matters

But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.
Matthew ch 1. v 6. N.I.V. (Quoting from Micah)

Past events.

How lovely to be able to say this after 21 months of not being able to gather for fundraising or social events. We got the ball rolling on Saturday 13th November with a musical extravaganza and what a wonderful evening it was. Our heartfelt thanks go to so many people and I know it's dangerous to name people in case someone is missed, we feel so grateful that some thanks must be said. Our evening was compared so well by Jim Williams who had many jokes and stories to regale us with while acts prepared. Our music was wonderfully provided by Rough Around The Edges with plenty to sing along to. Thank you Andy & Louise Savage, Suzie Williams and John Herbert. We had guest musical appearances by Ian Jones and Ana Lawrence and amusing interludes by Pauline Hatrey, Hilda, Brenda and Sandra and a very brave Kevin Lawrence who attempted to sell us a robotic rector (available 24\7). A delicious supper was provided by Gill Pople and Liz Selway and appreciated by us all and while we ate, Stephen Lynas and Margaret Dobbs played and sang for us. Also thank you to Jane and Patrick Doyle for organising the raffle and all who set out the hall and cleared away at the end. Amazing team work involved to provide us all with such a fun evening. Thank you all for attending and joining in. Somewhere around £350 was raised for the Church.

Samaritans Purse

A total of 51 shoe boxes were taken to Bagley Chapel from our churches, where they were picked up to be taken to the depot for customs checking and transportation. Thank you all so much for your incredible response to this appeal and for helping to give joy and fun to thousands of children who might otherwise never receive a gift. We will be notifying you of where the boxes are delivered by around February. Bless you all.

Forthcoming events.

We look forward to welcoming primary school age children to our Christmas Messy Church at 2.30pm on December 12th, lots of fun to be had.

Our Carol Service will be at 6.30 on December 18th and a Crib service will be held on December 24th at 4.30pm with our midnight communion at 11.30pm.

We will be hosting our next Benefice service on 2nd January at 10.00am.

We look forward to welcoming you at any of our services.

Sandra Gristock

Flower rota.

4th December. Sandra Gristock.

16th December. (Christmas decorations). Everyone.

1st January. Brenda Stradling.

Music and Song

'Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with timbrel and dancing, praise him with the strings and pipe, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals.' From Psalm 150

Music has been such an integral part of worship around the world since this well known Psalm was written, and pleased to say that we can still offer our praise to the Lord on these same instruments: a trumpet, strings, pipe and cymbals have all been spotted during services around our churches in the last few months as restrictions on playing instruments have been gradually lifted. How wonderful for the Benefice Band to make their first appearance for over eighteen months at our joint Benefice service in October. It was a joyful and special occasion, lifting our playing and voices in communal praise. There will be musical enjoyment too at the Benefice social event 'Walton entertains,' an opportunity to bring people together and enjoy both playing and listening.

'Music is one of the most magnificent and delightful presents God has given us,' claimed Martin Luther King. Recently we have all experienced church without singing and what a difference congregational music makes to our services. Long may it flourish.

Pat King



Poppies

2021 marks 100 years since the poppy fund was set up after World War One to help veterans and their families.

So on Remembrance Sunday in St Andrew's Church our prayers focused on the symbol of the poppy.

The poppy has two petals.

The first red petal is the blood shed by so many. We prayed for the service people who died for their country, each one known to God by name. The second red petal reminds us of red for danger, for the violence and unrest in our world.

The centre of the poppy is black and dark so we prayed for those facing dark times as a result of conflict.

The centre of the poppy is also the place where seeds are kept, ready for new life.

So we prayed Lord, take the seeds of peace and cast them over every nation.

Finally, the green leaves of the poppy remind us of the growing hope that comes from faith, faith in a God for whom everything is possible.

Pat King



FOCUS ON CHARITIES SUPPORTED ACROSS THE BENEFICE

SHELDON - SOCIETY OF MARY AND MARTHA

Sheldon is a Christian retreat centre, nestled in the Devon countryside, supported this year through the charitable giving of St. Andrew's Compton Dundon.

Run by a resident community supported by volunteers (including members of SWCD churches who go there to work), Sheldon offers a welcome to guests through a wide range of programmes, retreats and events.

It is perhaps best known for offering support to clergy in need of respite, but their web site, <https://www.sheldon.uk.com/>, lists opportunities to visit which are open to anyone.

Our financial gift this year will help to support their work. Sheldon, like so many other organisations that rely on visitors for their income, has been hard hit by Covid closures and restrictions in the last 18 months.

Their work is clearly valued by many, as one guest said of the time they spent there *'that 'wow' on arrival, of thinking: people who don't even know me care enough to provide all this for me'*

Benefice Charitable giving group

We will shortly be asking you for nominations for charities each parish should be supporting in 2022. More details, including the criteria agreed by the PCC's for whom we support, will be published in next month's 'Life', but in the meantime, do be thinking and praying about which organisation you might nominate.

Kevin Lawrence

Congratulations!

I hope you enjoy the photo (on the back cover) of Andy Savage (Walton) at his recent Confirmation Service in Wells Cathedral. For those of you who do not know, Andy is in the second year of his training to be a licensed Lay Reader and we look forward to another occasion to celebrate when he is licensed next year.

Ana Lawrence

Sharing your hobby or passion

At our joint PCC's day away back in October, we shared some of our hopes and dreams about being church in our communities. One of the ideas that emerged quite strongly was that of groups of people meeting together with a shared interest, groups that could invite others, build relationships and communities.

We are still working through what this might mean but I'd love to hear from people who have a particular interest, hobby or passion that they would like to share with others both inside and outside our churches. That might be walking, photography, painting, bird watching, music or something much more unusual.

Let me know if this resonates with you and what you are interested in and let's keep the conversation going.

Ana Lawrence

SWCD Eco Churches

Advent and Christmas - a Time to Think about Gifts

Christmas is seen as a time for giving gifts to friends and family. Some people fill shoeboxes to give to children in need or make donations to charities. Advent is an appropriate time to think about other kinds of giving that can continue throughout the year. As I write the COP26 conference is in its concluding days. Many of those attending events in Glasgow are from Christian communities in the UK and around the world, including communities that are severely threatened by global temperature changes. Climate breakdown is having a devastating impact on people in poverty; those who are least responsible are often the most affected. Rises in sea levels are anticipated but communities already face climate driven emergencies. In 'Climate Crisis is a Present Reality' (Church Times) the stark reality of the new unpredictability of climate, especially for those in the global South, partners of Christian agencies such as Tearfund, Christian Aid and USPG, is laid bare. The frequency and intensity of storms is growing, with floods and hurricanes. Drought is another threat, crop pests have increased, affecting food production and putting millions at risk of hunger.

Tearfund maintains that the church cannot ignore this crisis which is causing so much suffering. God calls us to meet the needs of these people, helping to build his kingdom on earth. We are also called to care for the whole of creation. As God's image-bearers, we shouldn't stand by while our common home is being destroyed. Creation care is a gospel issue, and an issue of justice. The church needs to know that we are all neighbours, that what we do impacts each other. Churches across the world have the potential to hold those in power to account and demand change.

What we do, what gifts, apart from money, can we offer in the face of this situation? Whilst organisations and governments have a major role to play there are things we can do.

- We can pray, as well as the Benefice prayer sheet, resources are available on the websites of Tearfund, Christian Aid, USPG, Green Christian and others. Printed copies are available of some of these resources.
- We can care for our own environment, treating it with care and respect. The Eco Church group has been looking at how we can do this, particularly in our churchyards.
- We can speak up, write letters, support campaigns, holding organisations and governments to account.
- Last but not least we can make changes to the way we live, reduce our energy consumption and our waste, walk or cycle instead of drive. We can think more carefully about what we buy. The Eco Church group have been looking at the carbon footprint of each of our churches and in the coming months will be looking at ways to reduce it.

When we show by our actions that we want to live in a fairer, more sustainable world, we are caring for our global neighbours and valuing what God has given us.

Susan Ripley (Street Parish)
For SWCD Eco Church Group

Climate Crisis is a Present Reality' (Church Times 22/10/21)

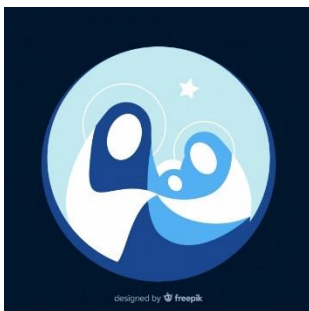
<https://www.tearfund.org/stories/2021/09/why-cop26-matters>

For further information see USPG, Christian Aid and Green Christian websites



Blue Christmas Service

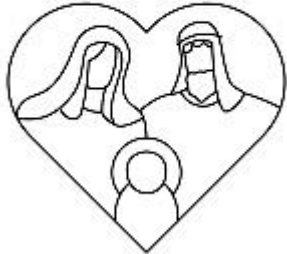
Parish Church, Street on Saturday 11th December at 4 pm



As the shops already begin to heave with the hustle and bustle of what can be a very commercial Christmas, the noisy, clanging background noise reflects a society that often has an expectation that all people will enter into the jolly atmosphere of the period, we appreciate this will not be the case for all for

a variety of reasons, whether through memories evoked, bereavement, illness, anxiety and many others. This service will offer a quiet, thoughtful atmosphere to reflect on the hope of the Christmas message, there will be an opportunity to join with some appropriate carols and prayers if you would like to, or just the space to be with your own thoughts. Alison Tolson.

At the heart of Christmas



Christmas

Coffee Morning

Saturday 4th December

10-00am till 12noon

Mission Church Street

Pop in for tea/coffee

and a chat

We will be collecting the £2 coins that you have collected during the year and any other donations.

Cheques should be made payable to

STREET PCC

All proceeds will be going to Holy Trinity Parish and Mission Church Street Funds, 10% of which is given to the

Missions and Charities that we support.

Advent Reflections

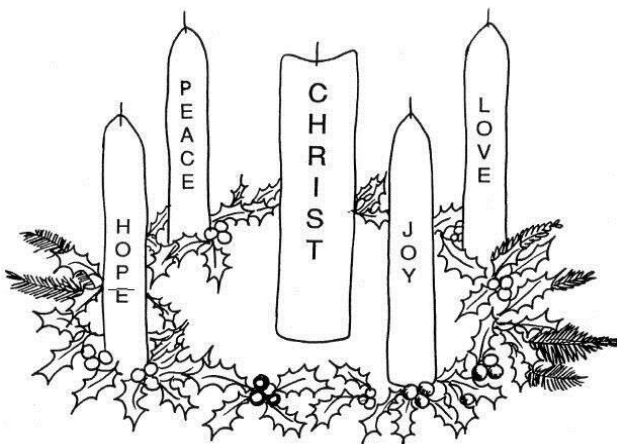
On Wednesday evenings during Advent, we will be sharing an online reflection as we look forward in expectation during this season of watching and waiting.

Do join us for half an hour each week from 7pm, if you are able to access Zoom at home (if you are not, why not pop round to a friend's or neighbour's and share the experience together.

Ana Lawrence

Advent Candles

You will notice this year that the Advent Candles in our churches are different colours. The three purple



ones represent hope, love and peace, the pink one represents joy and the centre white candle represents Christ. The candles are usually lit with the pink candle being lit on the third Sunday of Advent. The centre white candle will be lit on Christmas Day. I think all of us who put together the Advent wreaths had to do some reading up on the subject this year. Pam Harmsworth

Musings on Potato Peelings and other things...



We make stewardship decisions all day long.

Shall I.....

Peel the potatoes or leave the skin on?

Put the peelings in the compost, in the food waste bin, or in the rubbish?

Cook my potato in the microwave or the oven?

Find a jumper to wear or turn up the heating?

Open the curtains, or switch the light on?

Walk to the shop or take the car?

Order that book from Amazon or E-bay?

Watch TV or do the hoovering?

Wash the dishes or put them in the dishwasher?

Phone a friend or watch a DVD?

Go out to eat or get a take-away?

Climb the stairs or take the lift?

Buy an extra packet of pasta for the foodbank or not?

We are stewarding all the time:

- Stewarding our time
- Stewarding our planet's resources
- Stewarding our money
- Stewarding our energy
- Stewarding our compassion (ever heard of compassion fatigue?)

Our resources are finite. How will we steward our God-given resources...as individuals and as a church family?

love for Jesus - or their neighbours. They are more concerned about being respectable and not offending anyone. Jesus says to them in effect “You make me sick” and he will walk away from them if IF WHAT? Jesus challenges individuals in the church: “I am standing outside the door of your heart, knocking, waiting to see if you will ask me in.” Note, Jesus is not talking here to people outside the church who do not yet believe. He is talking to people in the church. They are in the church, but Jesus is not in them: he is outside them, waiting to be asked to come in. Then comes this most amazing promise - made all the more amazing by what Jesus has said just before condemning their church, that he will come in and sit down and eat with that person , making them to be at home with him. I believe that is the challenge to us today. To fix our eyes on Jesus and our relationship and love and service with and for him, and away from the distractions and indifference of the world system which surrounds us.

Bernard Sinclair

Thursday House-Group – now called **‘Discover**



Stop



Look



Listen

If you are looking for a safe place to take time out to explore the bible together, to look at the words written and listen to what God is saying to us today through it as well as discovering the richness and impact different passages have, this could be the opportunity you are looking for. We meet on a Thursday at the **Mission Church** from 2pm to 3.30pm All are welcomed and indeed encouraged to be a part of this opportunity to discover, pray and share your experiences. For further details please contact me on Alisontolson@sky.com
Thank you, Alison Tolson

INTERMEDII

A Concert of Christmas Music



*St Andrew's Church, Peak Lane,
Compton Dundon TA11 6PE*

*Sunday 12th December 2021 at 6pm
Tickets £12.50 to include a glass of wine*

Manna

The heart of Christmas

What is at the heart of Christmas for you? Is it the feasting and festivities? The carols and the candles? The stockings and the gifts? Or the presence of those you love?

This Christmas we may find ourselves investing more in our preparations, as last year Christmas plans were curtailed and for some even cancelled. A year ago we were to have had all our family gather for Christmas at our house and then just before, my husband Howard had a positive Covid test. Everything changed and in fact neither of us felt well enough to enjoy a special meal together let alone welcome others. So, this year I want to pull out all the stops!

The children and grandchildren will be with us and Howard tells me that Father Christmas will be paying a special visit! However, we are also wanting to make sure that we don't get carried away with all the tinsel and trappings and forget the heart of the story. So, we shall limit our spending on pressies but make sure that we really value the presence of one another and particularly of the Christ child at the heart of it all.

This year as you anticipate Christmas, through the stories told through Advent windows, or carol services in your church, or Nativities on the move, how might you prepare your heart for the coming Christ child? The wonder of Christmas is that God has never given up on us and in fact loves us so much that he wants to spend time with us. The birth of Jesus, God's Son, into a humble human family, brought God into our very midst, into the heart of our homes. This Christmas let's make space for Him once more and listen to the words of love, hope and joy He wants to share with us. And may that inspire our faith in the future, for ourselves and our world.

Wishing you much joy and peace this Christmas!

+Ruth

News

New pupil chaplains for Wellington

St John's CofE Primary School is celebrating having seven new pupil chaplains.

The pupil chaplains, who volunteered for the role and had special training, will be supported by their school chaplain. They hope to plan and prepare Collective Worship and community events, help on the playground and take part in assemblies.

Churches and schools mark COP26

At St Thomas', Wells, recent climate change service, COP26 was marked with an all age service on climate change. Artwork by children from Horrington and Stoberry primary schools was on display, inspiring the congregation to write individual pledges that focused on what they could do to help look after our world. After the service the pledges and artwork remained on display for visitors to view.

A special carol service

St Mary's, Timsbury is holding a carol service for special needs children and their families on 12 December. Revd Julian Davies, himself a father of a son with autism and severe learning difficulties, says, "Families with special needs children can feel very isolated. As a family we wouldn't have gone to the pantomime were it not for their special performances. I know it can be difficult taking a child with special needs to such a service as other families often don't understand the behaviour of the child with special needs. I am hoping to give them a space where they feel welcome and comfortable among people in a similar situation."

Join us this Christmas

We hope and pray that many of the familiar experiences that help Christmas come alive return to our homes, our churches and communities, but whatever December brings there are number of ways you can embrace the spirit of Christmas. Services and nativities are being planned in churches, online and the Christmas story is being brought to life in a host of creative ways: St George's, Wembdon is taking its mobile nativity around the community again, a number of places are holding Advent window displays while St Mary's, Timsbury is holding a service designed to accommodate children with special needs and their carers.

You can join us online in Advent as we take a global perspective to journey through the account of Jesus' birth. Developed with children and young people in mind by our youth advisers, along with the Send a Cow charity and Movement, the youth and young adult ministry, our Advent activities have something to offer all ages. There are five short videos (one for each week of Advent plus one for Christmas Day featuring Bishop Ruth) and daily challenges on social media; all based around the themes of hope, joy, peace and love.

You can also join the Church of England online with their 'At the heart of Christmas' campaign, which is an invitation to everyone to discover – or rediscover – the good news of God's saving love as revealed in the birth of Jesus. Starting on Christmas Eve and continuing daily (Monday to Saturday) until Epiphany on 6 January, you will be able to hear 12 stories and meditations from the archbishops and guests as they explore themes close to the heart of Christmas.

A Time to Celebrate

Emily Hatton, who features in our Advent campaign, prepares for her first Christmas as a Youth Minister

How did you get involved in the campaign?

Having worked with Movement, the Go Team and Send a Cow over the years so it was great to get involved with the joint Advent Around the World project. Those who read the scriptures do so with such joy, that it's almost like hearing them for the first time. It really gets you thinking about what Christmas is all about.

What does Christmas mean to you?

For me, Christmas is (obviously) all about Jesus. But it's so hard not to get caught up in the commercialisation of Christmas that's happened in our developed countries, isn't it? But for me, Christmas is about remembering that God so loved the world that He gave his one and only son – God incarnate. So for me, Christmas is really exciting!

How will you celebrate with young people in your church?

I'm looking forward to getting stuck in with all that will be happening: Christingle, carol services, a community Christmas tree festival, and school events. We hope to have a number of the youth group getting baptised in the weeks leading up to Christmas. What an amazing time to see teenagers commit their lives to living wholeheartedly for Jesus!

How are they feeling about this year's Christmas celebrations?

After last year, I think the young people are just looking forward to taking up their Christmas traditions again, seeing their family and friends - and not just on one day! Christmas carols were really missed last year, so being able to sing again is really exiting.

Giving to God

'WHAT DO YOU HAVE THAT YOU DID NOT RECEIVE?'
1 CORINTHIANS 4:7 NAS

The story is told of a wealthy man who enjoyed buying his father unusual gifts for Christmas. One Christmas he found a unique gift: a talking bird that spoke five languages and sang the National Anthem standing on one foot. It cost £10,000, but the man didn't mind. So he purchased the bird and sent it to his dad for Christmas. A few days after Christmas he went over to his father's house to see how he was enjoying his gift. He said, 'Dad, did you get my present?' 'I sure did,' his father said. 'How did you like it?' His dad replied, 'It was delicious, we had it for Christmas dinner!' His dad obviously missed the point. He treated as ordinary, a gift that was very special.

Too often that's how we treat the blessings God gives us. Paul asks, 'What do you have that you did not receive?' Everything we have, including the breath in our lungs, is a gift from God! And James adds: 'Every good thing bestowed ... is from above, coming down from the Father ...' (James 1:17 NAS).

We can't even begin to talk about stewardship without first being reminded that we have been given everything, including the money entrusted to us. So anything we give back to God, is just returning to Him a small part of what He's given to us. Try to remember that next time the offering plate goes by in church.

From the daily readings in 'The Word for Today'. This booklet of devotional readings is published every three months and is available free of charge through the generosity of supporters, from: UCB Operations Centre, Westport Road, Stoke-on-Trent, ST6 4JF. Tel: 0845 60 40 401. Email: ucb@ucb.co.uk