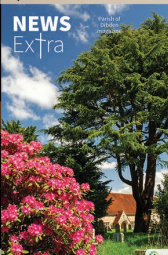
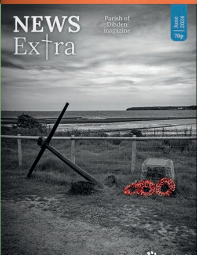
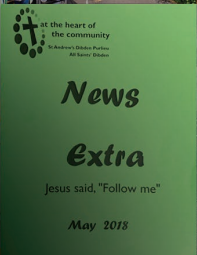
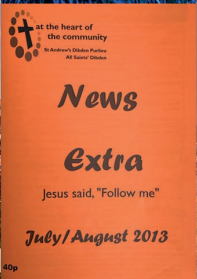
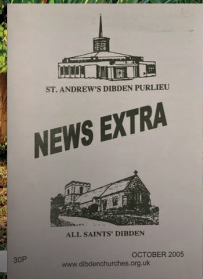
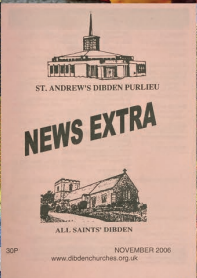
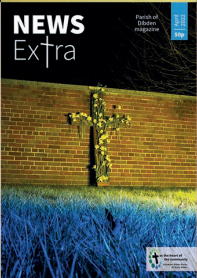
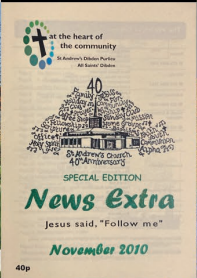
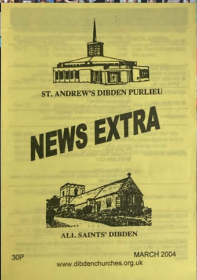
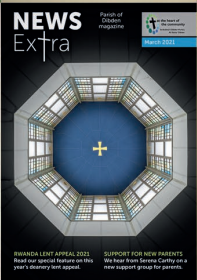
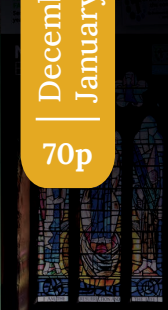
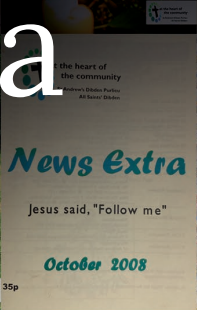


NEWS Extra

Parish of
Dibden
magazine

December 2025
January 2026
70p





Rev'd Peter Toller
Rector

Dear reader,

I write this welcome message to *News Extra* readers with a tinge of sadness, it being the final issue of a much loved communication in our parish for over 40 years.

Time moves on and methods of communication continue to change at an alarming rate. A few weeks ago, our Communications Team met and made the difficult decision for this to be the final edition of *News Extra*. All is not lost for those who value the physical form of communication though, as we have committed to staying in touch with the *News Extra* regulars, at least three times a year, with information about Christmas, Easter, Harvest and Remembrance/Memorial Services and more.

It was during Covid we began livestreaming our services online, which so many now benefit from (most of which are housebound and unable to get to church). Much to our delight, our online services are now also being shown in our local residential homes. It was also during Covid that we began communicating to our whole church family (and

more) through a weekly email. This was initially to send out the Zoom, YouTube and Facebook links for the online services. However, it very quickly became a good way of communicating to everyone (bar a handful for whom we do a print out) the latest news about church services and activities.

This September, our weekly email made a significant step forward as we moved to using Mailchimp. This has improved the look, the feel and the quality of the weekly communication with pictures and videos of events and services and much more. We're grateful to our Senior Administrator, Michael Ford, for overseeing this transition, which has been very well received. The Communications Team quickly realised that the weekly email was fulfilling the role *News Extra* has done in years gone by. It was for that reason, amongst others, that the decision was made for this to be the last *News Extra*.

As you will have seen from the cover of this edition, *News Extra* has taken many different guises over the years. We have benefitted from a variety of editors, each of whom have put their heart and soul into it to produce fantastic results. From my time, I remember Faith Joliffe as she



faithfully produced issues over the years. We're all immensely grateful to Ed Merritt, who took on the baton from Faith (initially alongside others from the church's Diben Connect, 20s and 30s, group), and introduced colour and brought his professional artistic qualities to the production, along with help from the new printers Solopress. You may remember previous editors and contributors - we're grateful to them all. We're also grateful to all those who have so faithfully delivered the magazines to our readers - in some cases it has been one of the only points of contact for them, not just with the church but also with the outside world. It's been a hugely significant part of parish life over so many years and we are sad to say goodbye.

Looking to the future, we're continuing to develop our communications as the world around us changes. The Friday email will continue to go to over 600 people each week and we have plans to develop this further. Our YouTube account recently reached the 500 subscribers milestone. We're now posting several stories a week on social media (Facebook and Instagram) all of which are reaching hundreds of people in our local community - well beyond the distribution capability of *News Extra*. We have over 900 followers on Facebook and our most popular posts achieve over 1000 views.

We're delighted that *News Extra's*

current editor, Ed Merritt, is not only in agreement with this development but is also willing to commit time that he previously dedicated to *News Extra* to enhancing these new forms of communication, along with our website:

<https://www.dibdenchurches.org/>

Please contact the office if you would like to begin receiving our weekly news email or would like to receive our paper/card communications about the festival services. Do also contact the office with any future articles, which we could include either in the weekly email, in social media posts, or, in due course, on our website: office@dibdenchurches.org.

As we think about communication, let's remember the greatest communicator of all. The very first chapter of the Bible is punctuated with the phrase, 'And God said...' as God communicated something of Himself in the beauty, wonder and variety of creation. Centuries later, God chose to communicate Himself fully to us in the Word made flesh - something we look forward to celebrating this month. Let's thank God that he has spoken to us through the written word of scripture and through the living word of His son. And may the Lord bless you and your families this Christmas as we celebrate the word made flesh.

Rev'd Peter Toller
Rector

PARISH NEWS

THURSDAY 11TH DECEMBER CHRISTMAS WREATH-MAKING 6:30PM, ST ANDREW'S MAIN HALL

Come and make your Christmas wreath under the guidance of award-winning florist Jo Hicks, and enjoy a drink and canapés with a short talk on 'The Hope of Christmas'. 40 places only! Tickets via the parish office: office@dibdenchurches.org.

MARIE CUNNINGHAM'S QUILT

Marie Cunningham has kindly donated a wonderful quilt to be sold off as part of the fundraising for the parish trip to Rwanda in

2026 (photograph below). The quilt measures 54 x 44 inches or 137 x 115 cm. It has a hollow fibre filling and is fully washable. We will be selling this by sealed bid auction.

There is no set figure we want to achieve, it is whatever people think the quilt is worth.

To place your bid, you can either put it into a sealed envelope and place it in the office pigeonhole, or submit your bid by email to office@dibdenchurches.org with 'Rwandan Sealed Bid' in the subject line, giving details of:

- Your name,
- Your contact details,
- The amount you are prepared to bid,
- And whether or not you wish for your name to be released.

All bids must be received by midday on **Saturday 6th December 2025**.

NEW PARISH COOKBOOK

Many thanks to everyone who made a contribution, our new Cookbook is now available, in time for Christmas. 400 copies have been printed and those that remain are available, via the parish office at St Andrew's, priced £5. First come, first served!

THE OFFICE HAS RETURNED!

Nicky and the team have moved back into the church office and everything looks bright, warm and organised. Many thanks to those who helped move everything back into place on Saturday 15th November.

CHRISTMAS CRAFT STALL

Our Christmas stall has arrived, with stocking fillers and all sorts of little gifts, many for £2 or £3 (photograph below). Grateful thanks to the amazing ladies who take bits and bobs and make beautiful things. The stall is in aid of the Rector's discretionary fund, for those unexpectedly in need, and can be found in the foyer at St Andrew's Centre.

KINTSUGI HOPE

Our next Kintsugi Hope course begins on **Wednesday 7th January**, 7:30pm at St Andrew's. Kintsugi Hope offers a safe space, support and practical tools to help with mental and emotional health. For further information, please talk to Fiona Needham, or contact the office: office@dibdenchurches.org.



NEWS FROM ELSEWHERE



‘AN URGENT CRISIS REQUIRING URGENT ACTION’ – BISHOPS JOIN MPS IN CALL TO SCRAP TWO-CHILD LIMIT

A group of bishops have joined with MPs and peers from a range of parties in a joint letter to the Prime Minister, calling for the “immediate complete removal” of the two-child limit on benefits.

The Bishop of Leicester, Martyn Snow, the Church of England’s lead bishop for child poverty issues, together with the Bishop of Gloucester, Rachel Treweek, and the Bishop of Manchester, David Walker, were among signatories to the letter to Sir Keir Starmer recently handed into Downing Street.

The letter, led by the Labour peer and expert on poverty, Baroness Lister, and promoted by the group Alliance 4 Children welcomes reports that the Government may be considering ending the limit but says any abolition must be total.

“Allowing child poverty to deepen is a self-defeating policy that undermines these very ambitions,” it continues. “According to the

Child Poverty Action Group, more than 100 children are pulled into poverty every single day the limit remains in place. “This is an urgent crisis requiring urgent action.”

ARCHBISHOP DESIGNATE, SARAH MULLALLY, SETS OUT HER HOPES FOR THE CHURCH

Shortly after the announcement of her nomination as the next Archbishop of Canterbury, Bishop Sarah Mullally delivered an address at Canterbury Cathedral, reflecting on her calling, the challenges facing the Church, and her hopes for its future.

Rooted in her early vocation as a nurse and shaped by her ministry in London, she spoke of “washing feet” as a guiding image of Christian service, and of finding hope in the quiet faithfulness of churches, chaplaincies, and communities across the Anglican Communion.

She addressed the Church’s responsibility in safeguarding, the need to confront power dynamics, and the importance of standing against hatred and antisemitism.

She said she would seek to be “a

shepherd who enables everyone’s ministry and vocation to flourish,” and expressed her desire to nurture confidence in the Gospel. “Held fast by the Lord’s hand,” she concluded, “please pray for me as I will pray for you.”

RENEWED CALL FOR NATIONAL CONVERSATION ON AI AND THE FUTURE OF WORK

Church of England academics and policy advisers have renewed their calls for a national conversation on the impact of artificial intelligence on the world of work, warning that rapid technological change raises profound questions.

In February 2024, General Synod passed a motion recognising the scale of the challenge posed by AI and the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

The motion affirmed the value of purposeful work and called for guidance on how emerging technologies can serve the common good rather than deepen inequality.

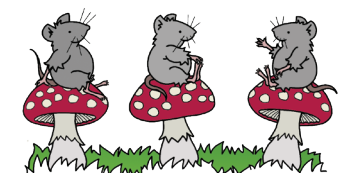
A new series of articles recently published in the quarterly journal *The Crucible* explores these issues in depth. They highlight the opportunities and risks of AI, drawing on biblical principles and Christian social teaching to ask

what fair, purposeful and dignified work should look like in an age of intelligent machines.

The reflections consider how automation and algorithmic management are reshaping employment, from the rise of the gig economy to the spread of remote working and workplace surveillance. They examine the ethical questions raised by AI-driven decision-making and the growing influence of technology companies on the conditions of work.

The urgency of this conversation is echoed beyond the Church. Within days of his election, Pope Leo XIV described artificial intelligence as “one of the defining issues of our time”, warning that its rapid advance poses new challenges for the defence of human dignity, justice and labour.

The collection calls on churches, policymakers and the wider public to engage with these questions now, ensuring that innovation serves people rather than the other way around.





‘THROUGH THE DARKEST VALLEY’



Rev'd Ian McGill
Associate Minister

Throughout my relatively short experience as a church minister, I have found myself being involved quite regularly with funeral and bereavement ministry. It has been, and is, an extraordinary privilege (and challenge) to journey

with those who have been bereaved. When we serve in this field of ministry, I have discovered that the complex dynamics of relationships, families and faith are intertwined in many mysterious ways ... and I have much still to learn!

Something that does appear to be consistent though, is the sense of emptiness and the heavy burden of loss that so often follows the death of a loved one or friend. We underestimate so much, the presence and value of those we journey with along life's highways, and when we encounter the loss of someone close, our world can indeed be darkened as never before. I can't recall where I read it, or possibly heard someone say, "we grieve because we first loved." Times of brokenness and times of tenderness, somehow occupy the same human heart, often at the same time.

Psalm 23 is probably one of the most read & spoken words of scripture in the Bible, and is frequently used at funerals. For all the times I have

heard it, read it myself or sung it, I have never got tired of it. I think it speaks so beautifully and helpfully into that space or wilderness that many can be experiencing at the death of a loved one, friend or colleague. The Psalm speaks of "The Lord" being a trusted shepherd, the one who can lead us to lay down amid the comfort of green pastures and beside still waters, and the one who can restore our weary souls. And yet it does not shy away from the everyday realities of life; acknowledging that we will all, one day, walk through the darkest valleys.

We do not hear too much about shepherds these days particularly should we be living in and around towns & cities; a profession very much linked with the rural community and yet a name we hear much of in scripture. For the shepherd is someone in whom the sheep in their care would come to instinctively trust, by their voice, in their presence, and for their protection. When the Psalmist speaks of the Lord



as 'my' shepherd it reassures me that even when those darker days come, as they will, I am not abandoned or to be left wondering. Jesus promised us all that He is the 'trusted shepherd' of our times, and though we may be prone to wander off, find ourselves in the wilderness, forget, or feel we have failed, He is not one who will ever give up on us.

For His goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives, that we may come to dwell in His house, forever.

With all blessings.

Rev'd Ian.

THE BOYS' BRIGADE



Written by
Allan Pollock

During a break at a first aid refresher earlier this year, the conversation topic turned to the Boys' Brigade. My co-attende, from the Liverpool area, had been a keen member. It was my Glasgow heritage that made the connection as 1883 the Boys' Brigade (BB) was born.

I was Scout and never a member of the Brigade, though my father was. On my bookshelf I happen to have William A Smith of the Boys' Brigade by F.P.Gibbon, published just after the 1933 jubilee celebrations.

So, prompted by the conversation I opened the cover and read. Inside is the signature of Mr Griffin, who lived next door to my childhood home. By then elderly, he had been a BB captain in his time.

William Alexander Smith was the founder of the Boys' Brigade. Born in 1854 near Thurso, he moved to Glasgow in 1869, following the death of his father in the far east when on business. The zenith of Empire approached, and it is today difficult to appreciate its reach at a time when travel was defined by



steamship alone.

Both Church and army were key influences. Smith became a keen reservist, ultimately holding a commission in the Lanarkshire Rifle Volunteers. He had also been much influenced by the American evangelists*, Dwight Moody (Congregationalist preacher) and Ira Sankey (Methodist gospel singer / composer), who toured Britain between 1873 and 1875.

(*Tom Lennie writes in Glory in the Glen that American evangelism to Scotland has a heritage extending from Moody and Sankey through to Billy Graham's All Scotland Crusade in 1955.)

A teacher in the Mission Sunday School, he was dissatisfied with the results, 'why should it be so easy to control 100 (army) men on a Saturday and so difficult to control a mere handful of boys on a Sunday'. And so by experiment a 'Let's pretend' Brigade was established.

His idea was to create a religious movement for boys, between the ages of 12 and 17, using military methods of elementary drill, physical education, obedience to command, punctuality and cleanliness'. In that era, recall that all but the youngest of the 'boys' were out working as apprentices or such like.

Gibbon records Smith as being a 'stickler' for 'smartness in uniform' ... 'discipline, emulation and esprit de corps carry men through'. His conviction was that the same instincts could be stimulated in dealing with boys. No boy could 'fall in' if a single minute late!

It proved a success and subsequently the BB (1st Glasgow) was launched in the Free College Church Mission, North Woodside Road, Glasgow (picture below left), on 4th October 1883 with 28 boys and three officers.

Pioneer brigades followed in London, Manchester, Newport, Wales and Belfast extending thereafter to the Empire and the USA.

The advancement of Christ's Kingdom sits at the core of the organisation and the weekly meetings were usually complemented with 'at home' bible study classes.

The Constitution (to this day) states that 'Object of the Brigade shall be the advancement of Christ's Kingdom among Boys, and the promotion of habits of Obedience, Reverence, Discipline, Self-Respect, and all that tends towards a true Christian

Manliness.'

The 'accoutrements' (Smith's term) of the Pill Box hat, belt and haversack created a uniform without the impediment of significant cost. The first summer camp was held at Tighnabruaich, Kyles of Bute in 1886, a novelty at the time that met with some parental resistance.

Twenty years later, twelve thousand boys marched past King Edward VII in Horse Guards Parade. The Jubilee Review of 1933 saw over thirty-two thousand boys on parade before the Duke of Kent (Prince George).

In 1888, Smith became the full time Brigade Secretary and in due course the headquarters moved to London. His achievements were recognised with a knighthood in the year of the semi-jubilee. He died in 1914 barely in his 60th year. Twice married, both wives sadly predeceased him. There were two sons from his first marriage one of whom became Brigade Secretary.

Smith never sought the Presidency, but he had a skill for seeking men of influence in public life who could help the BB: city merchants, university professors, eminent churchmen and, of ▶



course, the military heroes of the day. Had William Smith lived, the tragedy of the Great War would assuredly have weighed heavily. Some 400,000 Old Boys and Officers served in World War I, and among them eleven were awarded the Victoria Cross for the highest gallantry.

'Robust Christianity' was a feature of Empire, leading to global expansion of the BB and today the movement exists in 60 countries. Nigeria has one of the largest contingents.

The BB seeded many other organisations, its best known progeny being the The Boy Scouts (1908). Baden-Powell's Scouting for Boys was in fact written for use in the Brigade but proved so popular that it catalysed the Scout movement.

The Boys Life Brigade was another organisation of particular significance, merging with the BB in 1926. This saw the demise of drill with dummy rifles, militarism having long attracted criticism. The badge was modified to incorporate the Geneva Cross of the BLB, and until 1966 the junior section of the BB was known as the Life Boys.

Smith's biographers suspect that

founder might have been resistant to a junior section in an organisation intentionally focussed on 12-17 year olds, intent in passing them on to Church membership. But times change as has the uniform and formation of Girls' Brigades.

Though always inter-denominational (the religious teaching set by the respective Church and not the BB) though units were more commonly linked to the reformed Churches (e.g. Methodists). Be that as it may, Boys and Leaders continue to honour their motto to be 'Sure and Stedfast' in personal Christian commitment and service.

St Andrew's has no allied uniformed youth groups, but there are some tentative links. Nigel Ladbury told me that he was briefly a Life Boy; briefly due to war time disruption necessitating a change in Church. Gibbon mentions the Church of Scotland mission to the Kikuyu, the tribe in the area of Kenya where the Besley's worked. And, coincidentally, I just read that my former school in Glasgow has just purchased the former Stevenson Memorial Church (pictured bottom right on page 11), once home to that 1st Glasgow Company of the Boy's Brigade.

THIS CHRISTMAS, DO YOU HAVE ENOUGH?

Written by the Rev'd Roy Shaw, a retired but active priest in the diocese of York, where he is a spiritual director.

Enough. Complete. These words probably rarely fall from our lips as an experienced truth, either in relation to what we have, what we want, and importantly, who we are. And yet we've assented to this concept of the all-sufficiency of God in countless hymns that we've sung Sunday by Sunday since, well ... forever. Christ 'my all in all'.

At best it remains an aspiration, for we live at a time when the whole weight of our culture is to divert our baptism promises, our reliance on God into reliance on stuff, gewgaws in infinite variety.

No more so than at Christmas, when we are urged to splurge, and then splurge some more. 'Is this present good enough for our Jo? Maybe I should buy him something else as well ... And do you think a turkey and beef will be enough? Maybe another two dozen pigs in blankets?'

I'm not trying to be a kill-joy here. Our best times are around food, with friends, and Christmas is the one time of the year that we make an effort to be with friends and family.

But the whole of so-called western civilisation is posited on the fact that we have to have more, and it reaches its anxious climax at Christmas.

Any advert you happen to catch will convince you of this truth; western capitalism depends on you buying stuff, needed or not. It tells us: "You will never feel complete, be complete, unless you have this product. And then let me draw your attention to this, a 'must have'"...

But the fantasy world which supports this compulsion to 'must have' is that the earth has infinite resources, and we can go on forever fulfilling the fantasy of all our wants being satisfied from Amazon or Temu or wherever. We're unwilling to face the fact of the earth's finite resources, either for ourselves or our grandchildren. It is only God who has infinite resources.

As Christians we're supposed to be alive to this lie, that the gewgaws of this world can fulfil us. But many of us still get sucked into the myth of stuff as being the be-all and end-all of life.

Thank God, then, for the irritant of our faith in this materially obsessed world. It reminds us that in Christ 'I have enough'. Let me just slow down and take that in again. In Christ I have enough. From Genesis to Revelation the message is 'God will provide, and I will have enough'.





HE GAVE US EYES TO SEE THEM: MADONNA AND CHILD FROM DONATELLO'S WORKSHOP

The Rev'd Michael Burgess surveys works of sacred art that can be found in various museums.

Each month during this year we have visited art galleries and museums in England that are often overlooked by the tourist trail, but which contain treasures that can inspire and deepen our Christian faith. Our final visit in this series is to a gracious, elegant Georgian villa rejoicing in the odd name of the Ranger's House. It is outside the western wall of Greenwich Park in London and is home to the Wernher collection of art.

Julius Wernher was a diamond magnate who died in 1912, and in his lifetime, he amassed an amazing array of 700 works that make up this collection. There are paintings by Joshua Reynolds and Romney, Renaissance jewellery, and a marble statue by Bergonzoli, 'The Love of Angels.'

But this month we focus on another love – the love of a mother and child by the workshop of Donatello. When I was a student I visited Florence for the first time, and I can always remember the impact of entering the Bargello and being greeted by the sculptures of Donatello. It was a special moment of revelation to be able to look around and wonder at the glorious works of this sculptor filling the second floor of the castle.

By contrast the Madonna and Child in the Ranger's House is a miniature, a bronze plaque just 4 inches square. Our Lady is depicted in classical profile with flowing robes and wavy hair, but the mood is one of tenderness as she cradles the Christ-Child. She holds His left hand in hers, while He looks down at something that has caught His attention. Perhaps it is a noise at the stable door or the sound of an animal in the Bethlehem night. Perhaps it is St Joseph getting everything ready for the Holy Family to leave. We don't know, but it is another special moment of revelation caught in this little plaque. It may not be by Donatello himself, but we sense the master overseeing the creation of this work.

At Christmas we ponder the mystery of infinity caught in a little space, the cradle at Bethlehem, just as the mystery

of love, maternal and divine, is caught in the little space of this plaque. Margaret Rizza's carol, 'Jesus is our joy' captures the mood of wonder, joy and hope as we open the stable door to see the love of a mother and her newborn baby expressed here and at the heart of the Christmas gospel:

'Lovely in your littleness, longing for our lowliness, searching for our meekness.....

Held in Mary's tenderness, tiny hands are raised to bless, touching us with God's caress.

Joy then in God's graciousness, peace comes with gentleness, filling hearts with gladness.'



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Thanks to gifts in wills
we are able to care for
1 in 4 of our patients

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hospice
making every moment matter

Carol's story

After Carol was diagnosed with a brain tumour at the age of 58, it was the care and support from Oakhaven that helped her and the whole family at such a difficult time.

Initially visiting the Coates Centre, then Day Hospice, Carol was able to benefit from the support on offer, whether complementary therapy or a cup of tea and chat with others. Later she was able to stay at home thanks to Oakhaven's specialist nurses who visit across the New Forest, Totton and Waterside.

Leaving a legacy to Oakhaven ensures we will be able to continue caring for those in our community when they need us most, helping us to make every moment matter.

A pledge of any size will ensure we are there to make a difference for families in the future.

Could you help us with a gift in your will?

Visit oakhavenhospice.co.uk/legacy for more information.



WHAT'S ON THIS WINTER ST. ANDREW'S, DIBDEN PURLIEU

Every Tuesday			
Dibden Minis Playtimes (term-time)	9:00am-10:30am	Main Hall	Toys, songs and snack time for babies and toddlers!
Every Wednesday			
Parish Prayers	9:00am	Garden Lounge and via Zoom	https://us04web.zoom.us/j/854948714 A Psalm, thought for the day and prayer.
Waterside House of Prayer	11:45am	Chapel	A weekly meeting for people across the Waterside to gather for worship and intercessory prayer.
Every Thursday			
Dibden Minis Playtimes (term-time)	10:00am-11:30am	Main Hall	Toys, songs and snack time for babies and toddlers!
Seekers youth group (term-time)	5:00pm-6:30pm & 6:30pm-7:30pm	Garden Lounge	Youth groups for those in Years 7-13. 5:00pm-6:30pm for Years 7-8, 6:30pm-7:30pm for Years 9-13.
Parish Prayers	6:30pm-7:00pm	Chapel	Prayers for our parish, community and world.
Wednesday 3rd December and Wednesday 7th January			
Living with Loss	3:00pm	Garden Lounge	An informal and supportive bereavement group.
Saturday 6th December			
Men's Breakfast	7:30am	Main Hall	We will be in the Main Hall, as usual, with prayers from 7:30am, breakfast from 8:00am.
Thursday 11th December			
Christmas Wreath-Making	6:30pm	Main Hall	Come and make your Christmas Wreath under the guidance of award-winning florist Jo Hicks, and enjoy a drink and canapés with a short talk on 'The Hope of Christmas'. Booking required, tickets via the parish office.
Tuesday 9th December and Tuesday 13th January			
Women's Fellowship	2:15pm	Garden Lounge	A friendly group that meets with a guest speaker. Enjoy tea and a chat afterwards.
Wednesday 17th December			
Carols in the Car Park	6:00pm	Car Park and Church	Join us for a festive evening! Community carol singing with the New Forest Brass Band and the groups Intersection and Cabin Crew. Mulled wine and mince pies will be served and we will also be joined by Prazin' Hands puppets. All welcome.
Thursday 18th December and Thursday 15th January			
CAMEO	12:15pm	Main Hall	Lunch time group for the elderly. Booking required.
Wednesday 7th January			
Kintsugi Hope	7:30pm	Garden Lounge	The first session of our latest Kintsugi Hope course. A safe space, support and practical tools to help with mental and emotional health.
Tuesday 13th January			
The Bible Course	7:30pm	The Coffee House	The first session of The Bible Course. Want to explore how you can apply the Bible to your daily life? Join the Bible Course 'New Edition' and grasp God's big story in 8 weeks.



ECO EXTRA



Written by
Ed Merritt

NEW YEAR'S DECORATIONS

Most people enjoy putting up decorations at Christmas time. Bright lights and colourful adornments bring a festive cheer to an otherwise often dark and dreary time of the year.

Of course, it's not just Christmas time that people put up decorations of one form or another. Halloween decorations seem to be burgeoning year on year (I will leave any analysis of that for another time). At Easter, there's a presence of fluffy bunnies and eggs that have started to emerge outside people's homes. In the summer, it's not hard to find flags and other memorabilia celebrating sporting events and achievements outside people's houses too (again, the recent

emergence of flags on our streets is a topic for another article). These features can often, but not always, help to bring people and communities together, and, in many cases, I can see the benefits.

The last few years in particular, however, I've begun to associate another visible feature with a specific point of the year: New Year. Unlike most of the other adornments that people place outside their houses, at other times of the year, the decorations for New Year are, far more would agree, of a less appealing nature. For a start, they're often accompanied by a less than pleasant smell, they get in the way of pedestrians walking on pavements, they can be hazardous to local wildlife and, unlike the other forms of decoration, people who place them outside their homes often take no ownership of them whatsoever, once they've been put in position in communal areas.

In a rather facetious way, I'm referring to the piles of rubbish and recycling bags that appear outside peoples homes in the week after Christmas. The sound of drifting rubbish, blowing in the wind, having escaped from such bags (or having never been put in a bag in the first place) is more common than it probably



should be.

Holding my hands up first, I looked at the number of bags that I put out for the collection on 2nd January, at the start of this year, and I winced a bit as I was doing so. Yes, obviously, the refuse collections had been suspended over Christmas, so naturally there would be more waste than usual but, even so, more than two of the five bags we put out (more than double the number of bags we'd normally put out) were filled with wrapping paper and cardboard from Christmas gifts alone. I looked at the bags and didn't feel very comfortable (so much so that I started, back then, to write this article).

One of the downsides to buying a lot of our Christmas gifts online (which in other ways can be beneficial from an environmental perspective) is the amount of cardboard delivery boxes that we gained in the lead up to Christmas. I'm sure many of you will have noticed a similar trend in your own households in recent years, especially this side of the pandemic?

At the risk of sounding a lot like Ebenezer Scrooge, at first glance, it would seem that the only way for this issue to be reduced significantly would be for everyone

to buy fewer gifts, eat less food and generally have a much more frugal Christmas. There are, of course, some merits in that (not only from an environmental perspective) but I'm not going to have much take up if that's the only suggestion to this issue that I make here! So, instead, I did some research and found some suggestions (some better than others, you'll probably agree).

1. Cloth gift bags. Carry out some research on this subject online and this suggestion comes up time and again. Of course, these are reusable and can be stored year on year. Plenty of links online and so, at the risk of promoting one form over another, I'll leave you to search.

2. Buying second hand or refurbished items. It goes without saying that this obviously requires some degree of thought or consideration, in terms of what and who you are buying for, but second hand items are unlikely to be accompanied by so much packaging, plus it's a way of extending the life of existing goods, of course, too.

3. Plan what food and drink you are buying before you shop for the festivities. According to the website 'CommercialWaste' (<https://commercialwaste.trade/>), an online commercial



waste and recycling publication, apparently 5 million Christmas puddings, 2 million turkeys, and 74 million mince pies, bought at Christmas time, are wasted. Bad any way you look at it but that's more packaging out on the street at New Year than needs to be.

4. Find an alternative format to shop bought Christmas crackers (or don't have any at all). Very dangerous ground here, I realise, but it's an obvious thing to point out as unnecessary waste. Lots of reusable, 'eco-friendly' (plastic free), and 'make your own' (from recycled waste) alternatives

to the standard shop bought crackers instead: <https://www.forgerecycling.co.uk/blog/eco-friendly-christmas-cracker-alternatives/>.

I know that I can do a lot better at Christmas time than I'm doing currently with this issue. Do you feel the same way about this? Have you got any better ideas as to how it's possible to have an enjoyable Christmas but not create a large quantity of rubbish in the process?

CHRISTMAS UNWRAPPED!

Canon Paul Hardingham considers the Christmas story.

All of us have received unwanted gifts at Christmas. For Joseph the gift of a child, as recorded in Matthew chapter 1, was not something he really wanted.

Although he was engaged to Mary, her pregnancy would be grounds for divorce. Not surprisingly, with the associated social disgrace, Joseph wanted to divorce Mary quietly (**Matthew 1:19**). However, God intervened in a dream: 'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel, which means, God with us.' (**1:23**). In a scary and uncertain world, what does the message of Immanuel say to us today?

and space as a baby. This baby is both uniquely divine but also fully human. This means that we can know God personally, not just know about Him. The Holy Spirit is committed to making Jesus' life and character real in us, and bringing meaning to our circumstances, just as He worked in Mary's life.

GOD IS ON OUR SIDE

Christmas touches some raw nerves in our lives, including stress, family rows, loneliness and financial pressures. However, God does not remain aloof from our experiences. In Jesus He enters our world of hopes and fears, joys and disappointments. He understands what we are going through, as He is alongside us. By the cross and resurrection, He gave His life that we might know His love, joy, peace and forgiveness.

GOD IS PRESENT WITH US

God assured Joseph that He was working in all that Joseph was going through. The eternal and creator God entered time

For Joseph, as well as us, the Christmas message is one of hope in an uncertain world. It is a time to re-consider the claims of Immanuel ('God with us') as we entrust ourselves to Him for the coming year.



Is This You?

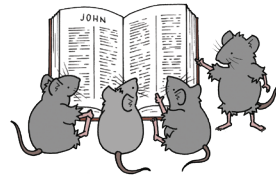
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SERMON REFLECTIONS



‘CHRIST DIVIDED?’

Mark 9:33-37 and 1 Corinthians 3:1-7
Rev'd Peter Toller / 12th October

...“What we need to be thinking, as a church, is how do we actively work against that kind of worldly tendency. I say worldly because that's the language Paul used when he described it in chapter 3. He said, "You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere human beings?" You see Paul's point, this is how the world behaves. If we're part of Christ's church, we've been called out of the world to declare the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His wonderful light. So, as a church, we're called to be different to the world around us. Society appears to be becoming more and more fractured, more and more divided, more and more polarized, you might say. And what an opportunity then we have, as a church, to create a community of people who are different to that, who love one another and who work together with one another.”...

‘CHRIST CRUCIFIED’

Mark 8:31-35 and 1 Corinthians 1:18-31
Sue de Jong / 19th October

...“And I'm sure that in this church there are many of us who would say there was a moment (there certainly was in my life) where I was just aware that Jesus died on that cross for me. So in our hearts and our minds, let's sometimes linger at the cross. Jesus took on the weakness of a human life, didn't He? He wanted to save the poor, the weak, the marginalized. And He also wanted to save those with worldly riches and influence. Because, deep down in our hearts, we all need a saviour. And we are all equal at the foot of the cross. There can be no boasting, can there, in this Christian life? Because it's not about who we are. It's not about what we do. It's all about what Jesus has done for us.

Have you noticed, in life, how often God uses what appears to be rather weak and poor, perhaps even insignificant or foolish, to achieve His purposes. That's because, isn't it, when we are weak, when we're not full of ourselves, it's God's power and strength, God's spirit in us, that can have full reign in our lives.”...

‘CHRIST UNITED’

John 17:20-23 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-27
Rev'd David Lewis / 26th October

...“If the body is to function as a whole, then the body must include every part. Some parts, says Paul, may be more prominent. They may have more visible functions, but that doesn't mean, he says, that any of the other parts are less important.

We're all different. We all have different gifts from God. We all have different roles to play in the life of the church. And the part that God wants you to play is no less important or more important than the part He calls someone else to play. And that has some real practical implications for us. It has implications for the way that we look at ourselves and at other people in the life of the church. We can't be puffed up by our own self-importance or we can't look down on ourselves and think we're worthless. And we certainly can't look down on other people because God's word tells us that each one of us is important in the life of the body as a whole.

Think of a piece of music being played on a piano. Imagine just one of the notes missing or being greatly out of tune. Imagine half of the notes missing or being out of tune. And that would be even worse. We all have a part to play in the life of the church.”...

‘CHOSEN TO PRAISE’

John 15:15-17 & Ephesians 1:1-14
Rev'd Ian McGill / 2nd November

...“What is God's will? Paul touched on it in Ephesians, in verse four. To be holy and blameless in His sight. To be holy and blameless, that's a challenge, isn't it, a challenge that I stumble with continually. To be holy and blameless in His sight, and then to give honour through our praise and worship. Why? Well, that all will come to hear and receive. All generations will come to follow and come to know Him as a loving father.

What does this tell us about His nature? You see, all through the scriptures, Old Testament and New Testament, we discover a father God who seeks to be in relationship with His people. The creator of all things, heaven and earth, desires those who whom He created to know Him and to journey with Him. This is His good will.

Now, of course, we have to be realistic, don't we? We live in a world where many don't believe. ... Some may believe that there may be a God who created something ... The world spins and eventually ceases. It will die and people come and go but ultimately there is no purpose. God, if there is one at all, is on the outside just letting it all go on and doesn't want to take part. I don't believe that's true at all.”...

THE INCARNATION: FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE

Written by Ruth Bancewicz, who is based at The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion in Cambridge, and writes on the positive relationship between Science and Christian faith.

My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. Psalm 139:15-16

You began life as a single cell. For a few hours you were a miniscule but highly complex blob of jelly, until it began to divide: two cells, four, eight, sixteen, a ball, a hollow ball, and then something more recognisably like a living organism. You were still tiny, but developing a nervous system, a head, a body, arms and legs.

Until recently I hadn't thought much about Jesus being an embryo. Somehow, I find that thought even more shocking than His birth. How could God, who made the universe, have become something so completely and utterly vulnerable? Maybe in the

past, when the development of a child happened in 'secret', it was possible just to let that part of the Christmas story go untold.

Today, when we see images of a developing child, or even embryos outside the womb, it is harder to ignore the process of Jesus developing into a baby. The incarnation meant that God's Son went through all the stages in the diagram in my developmental biology textbook: 'zygote', 'morula', 'blastocyst', implantation, and so on.

Jesus was there in the beginning, and all life owes its existence to Him. But instead of remaining aloof, He chose to become one of us. The Son of God shared the same kind of DNA as every other organism on the planet. He knows what it feels like to have a body, to feel hungry and thirsty, pain and pleasure, dark and light.

In Psalm 139, the writer is meditating on God's intimate knowledge of him, which began when he was an embryo. There is nothing God doesn't know about him, and even darkness cannot obscure him from God's sight. The incarnation means that God's intimacy with us now extends even further. He became one of us, lived alongside us, and shared our very fragile material nature.

The transcendent God is also

immanent, longing for us to relate to Him as Father. He became as fragile as we are so He could rescue us from the messes we so often find ourselves in. With His help, we can remember what it means to be fearfully and wonderfully made.



CROSSWORD ANSWERS

ACROSS: 1, Tabernacle. 7, Absalom. 8, Incas. 10, Roes. 11, Captured. 13, Fright. 15, Cavell. 17, Cyclonic. 18, Herb. 21, Sonar. 22, Amazing. 23, Settlement.

DOWN: 1, Taste. 2, Bold. 3, Ramiah. 4, Abiathar. 5, Lucerne. 6, Sacrifices. 9, Saddlebags. 12, Theocrat. 14, Incense. 16, Pilate. 19, Exist. 20, Save.

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BOOK REVIEWS



THE FOUR EMOTIONS OF CHRISTMAS

10Publishing - £3.99
Bob Lepine



We expect Christmas to be a season filled with happiness and love. And yet so often, what we want to be a nice, relaxing family day turns into 24 hours of stress and disappointment. Our loneliness and sadness are amplified because of how out of sync they are with what the season has promised. Shouldn't there be something better than this? This book is designed to be given out widely, and contains a clear gospel message.

guided generations in expressing profound truths in an accessible way, providing a framework for gratitude even in the hardest times.

Giving Thanks seeks to reintroduce this prayer to the contemporary church. It explores the spiritual truths embedded in the prayer and reveals how thanksgiving is not about ignoring reality, but responding to God's goodness – past, present, and future.

Far from being a burdensome duty, a life of gratitude is a whole-life response to who God is and what God has done. This is an invitation to rediscover The General Thanksgiving and integrate its wisdom into daily Christian living.

GIVING THANKS REDISCOVERING THE HEART OF GRATITUDE

Canterbury Press - £11.99
Philip Plymng



For more than 350 years, a powerful resource has helped believers frame their thanksgiving: The General Thanksgiving from the 1662 Book of Common Prayer.

This theological masterpiece has

O COME EMMANUEL

Reflections on the Advent Antiphons
CHP - £8.99
David Hoyle, Esther Prior, and Philip North



This beautifully illustrated, full-colour daily Advent companion explores the ancient biblical

names and images for the coming Messiah familiar to most people from the hymn, 'O come, O come Emmanuel'.

Well-known writers offer 24 reflections, one for each weekday of the four weeks of Advent. There are reflections on the seven antiphons: O Wisdom, O Adonai, O Root of Jesse, O Key of David, O Morning Star, O King of the Nations, O Emmanuel. Lastly, there are three reflections on the Magnificat – Mary's Song – which the antiphons have been heard alongside since at least the eighth century.

Each day includes the text of the antiphon from Common Worship, a Scripture reading exploring its biblical roots, paintings of the antiphon as a focus for meditation, a reflection, a challenge to ponder and an Advent prayer.

The volume also includes an introduction explaining the rich history of the antiphons, recommendations for further resources including musical settings as well as suggestions for how to use the antiphons in local worship and study groups.

Contributors include Jane Williams, Chris Russell, Esther Prior, Philip North, Muthuraj Swamy, Tanya Marlow, David Hoyle and Lucy Winket.

ARE YOU READY FOR CHRISTMAS?

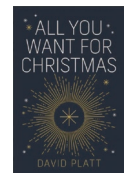
10Publishing - £3.99
Roger Carswell



Christmas is a hectic time of year: cooking big meals, buying and wrapping the presents, sending the cards, and wondering if we've forgotten something. All these preparations help to make Christmas such a special time of year, but before the very first Christmas it was God who was getting the world ready to meet His Son. This book tells the story of God's Christmas plan, and explains how He can help us to be ready for Him today. You'll discover how the baby whom God sent that first Christmas is still His message of hope, joy, and peace to us today.

ALL YOU WANT FOR CHRISTMAS

10Publishing - £9.99
David Platt



At our deepest level, we all have needs we long to be met and desires we want to be fulfilled. Jesus came and meets our deepest need. This new giftable Christmas book, All You Want for Christmas (hardback) explains four simple reasons why He came: to be with you; to die instead of you; to show you how to live; to be your servant; to be your God.



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11:00am Midweek Communion
Blue Christmas

Sunday 7th December • Toy Sunday

10:30am Morning Worship * 9:00am Holy Communion BCP
Alpha and Omega
6:30pm Refuelled Contemporary Carols

Sunday 14th December

9:00am Holy Communion BCP 4:00pm Advent Carols
No more crying
10:30am Family Communion *
No more crying

Wednesday 17th December

6:00pm Carols in the Car Park *

Sunday 21st December

10:30am Children's Christmas Praise * 9:00am Holy Communion BCP
Pondering and Praising *The Tree of Life*
6:30pm Carols by Candlelight *

Wednesday 24th December • Christmas Eve

3:00pm Christingle *
5:00pm Christingle *
11:00pm Midnight Communion *
Light Shines

Thursday 25th December • Christmas Day

10:30am Morning Worship * 9:00am Holy Communion BCP
Unspeakable Joy *Unspeakable Joy*
11:15am Holy Communion

Sunday 28th December

10:30am Holy Communion BCP
Come, Lord Jesus

Sunday 4th January

10:30am Morning Worship * 9:00am Holy Communion BCP

Sunday 11th January

9:00am Holy Communion BCP
10:30am Morning Worship *

Sunday 18th January

9:00am Holy Communion BCP
10:30am Family Communion *

Sunday 25th January

9:00am Holy Communion BCP
10:30am Morning Worship *

* Services also available online

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Funerals We sympathise with the loss of loved ones, following the funerals of:
18th November Margaret McFarlane



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