



Dear Friends,

We live in very uncertain times. As I write this on Saturday 17th November the political news is a constantly changing landscape. Whatever our political convictions and however we voted in the original referendum on EU membership we are all faced with a complex reality which is going to have long term implications whatever happens next.

In November we have marked the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War. As we remembered we recalled that this was the war that was meant to "End all wars". We look around the world and see so many ways in which great inhumanity is being shown by one group to another, so many ways in which civilian casualties are seen to mount, so many ways in which hope for peace is frustrated.

It is into the darkest and most difficult times in our world that the story of the birth of a baby brings the possibility of light.

It is into the times in our lives when we feel vulnerable and afraid that the birth of a baby brings the possibility of hope.

It is into the times where we feel most alone that the birth of a baby brings the possibility of love.

Advent offers us a chance to look for the signs of light in darkness.

It enables us to find hope when we are fearful.

It offers us love when all around us are expressions of hate.

May this Advent period be a time when we can experience the healing love of God.

Priscilla

Aspects of life at St Faith and St Laurence

Morning prayer – is normally said Monday to Thursday and Saturday at 8.15 am in the Lady Chapel. We use Common Worship Daily Prayer, all are welcome to come and join in.

Reflections A chance to meet together over a cuppa and reflect on the Gospel reading for the previous Sunday. A group meets on Mondays from 1.45-3pm Venues are listed in the Programme of the month.

Task Groups – The church has a number of task groups enabling areas of church life. These are listed in the magazine with the contact details of the chairs. If you would like to be a part of a groups please contact the relevant chair or Priscilla. All are welcome to join.

Stay and Play meets on Thursday between 9.30 and 11am in the Hall to give a chance for people with young children to meet and the children to play. All are welcome. Cost £1.50 per family.

Sunday Club meets on the first, third and fourth Sundays of each month except during the holidays. We hold an extra Sunday Club on days when there is a baptism. All are welcome to join in hearing and experiencing a Bible Story and learning together about what it means for our daily lives.

Messy Church takes place on the first Saturday of each month, most months. A chance for children and parents/ carers to have an informal time of worship, and discovering about a Bible story through song, craft, listening, cooking and so much more. Dates are published in advance and all are welcome to come along.

Planned Giving helps people make giving regular. You decide how much you can afford to give. You can join the envelope scheme weekly or monthly or pay by Standing Order or annually by cheque. Income tax payers are asked to Gift Aid their giving, so the Church can reclaim the tax on their donations at no extra cost to the donors. For details, contact Jackie Taylor.

The Parish Giving Scheme is another way that you can give at no extra cost to yourself. It reduces paperwork and increases cash flow for us. Details are available from Geoff Bennett or Priscilla.

We support **Recycling**. We have a special collection on the first Sunday of every month when we collect ALUMINIUM cans and foil which can be sold and the money raised is donated to our Mission Partners in Chile (through USPG) Local supermarkets have battery recycling facilities in this area. Pauline Sitford (427 7005).

Home Communion We have a team of lay people trained and able to bring Home Communion usually on a monthly basis. This is for those who are unable to come to church long term. If the situation is more temporary for example after an operation you can also receive communion, usually from Priscilla. In either case please contact Priscilla.

Traidcraft

Traidcraft sells a range of fairly traded food, cards, clothes and accessories. We use Traidcraft tea and coffee and everything we buy helps fight poverty and supports our church. You can order seasonal gifts through the church at Christmas time when catalogues will be available. Any questions, please ask Ruth Jeavons or Bronwen Jones.

'easyfundraising'

Next time you shop online, think of St Faith and St Laurence and raise free donations with 3,000+ retailers:

<https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/stfaithandstlaurence>

Women's Fellowship meets on the first Monday of the month from March to December. Meetings are held in the Committee Room at 7.45pm. We have talks on a variety of subjects. See Programme of the Month for details.

Prayer Ministry Team

Prayer ministry is offered during the 10am Communion on Sundays. People can receive prayer for themselves or for any situation that is important to them. It takes place in the Lady Chapel during the distribution of communion.

Foodbank

We collect food for the Quinton and Oldbury Foodbank. There is a box in church and food can be placed there at any time. The list of things that are needed is in church and in the hall. Food is distributed from St Boniface Church on Wednesdays and Paul and Barney's place on Fridays. Vouchers are required to receive food.

Choir and Music.

Choir Practice takes place weekly, normally on Thursdays 6-7pm. Anyone interested in singing in the choir should contact Simon Palmer, Organist & Choirmaster. (Contact details on page cover) We also like to encourage instrumentalists to perform in church, either in services or in concerts.

Call in for Coffee time together over a cuppa on a Wednesday morning from 10.30 -12.00. if needed we can arrange for someone to collect you and then take you home. Please ring Pauline Sitford (427 7005). If you are passing, do call in, or bring a friend, all are welcome.

Celebrating Advent

The key theme for Advent this year is going to be Anticipation. This will be worked out with different themes on each of the Sundays backed up by visual displays which will be at the front for the week and then transferred to the shelves by the pillars.

The four Advent themes are

Anticipating the signs of Christ's Coming

Anticipating the call of Christ

Anticipating the healing love of Christ

Anticipating the birth of Christ

As we worship together we will begin to experience the waiting and anticipation that advent offers us.

Advent Course – Exploring Ruth

The Book of Ruth is one of the shorter books in the Old Testament, but not all that well-known in general. It is often lost among the longer and more detailed books in the earlier part of the Hebrew Scriptures. At first glance it can seem as if it is simply a domestic love story, but it is full of important theological themes and the characters in the story stand out with real issues which are supremely relevant for today.

The twist in the tale of the book of Ruth is that Ruth the Moabitess is shown at the end to be the Great-Grandmother of King David. Her story is therefore pivotal in the Davidic story and in the idea of the Messiah being of David's line. It is therefore especially appropriate for Advent.

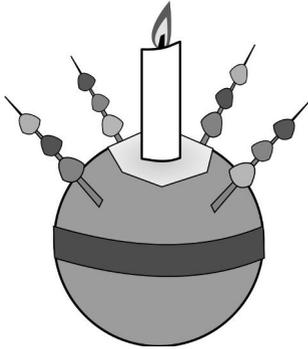
In a short (3 week) series we will look at the book of Ruth through various lenses. We will meet on Wednesdays at 7.30pm on the 5th, 12th and 19th December in the Lady Chapel

Some of the themes to be addressed will be friendship, love and duty, Naomi, the female Job, outsiders and insiders, the love and mercy of God. We will be able to look at texts together and discover God's love and mercy throughout.

If there is an appetite for an afternoon group in addition to the evening group I would be happy to put one on. Please have a word with Priscilla as soon as possible if you would like me to do this. I am most likely to be able to offer this on a Thursday afternoon.

Christingle

The Christingle this year is at 10am in our Morning Praise service on December 9th. Please do encourage friends and neighbours to come to what is a really lovely way to celebrate Advent and to think about the light of Christ in our troubled world.



Follow the Star

The Church of England is running a Christmas campaign #followthestar



You can sign up if you wish for daily reflections for the Christmas period and look out for the hashtag on social media if that is something you do.

If you can make a star and hang it in your window in the run-up to Christmas we can show people around us that we are following the star.



**# Follow
The Star**

Join us in church this Christmas!

Service and event times:

Sunday 23rd

6.30pm Carol Service

Monday 24th Christmas Eve

4pm Crib Service

11.30pm First Communion of Christmas

Tuesday 25th Christmas Day

8am Holy Communion

10am Celebration Communion for Christmas

 **THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND**

Archbishop Justin Welby says Christians must be reconcilers in face of Brexit division.

The Archbishop of Canterbury believes churches must "strive for reconciliation" in the face of Britain's withdrawal from the European Union, as some politicians try to "drive a wedge between people".

Most Rev Justin Welby also urged Europe's politicians to deliver "fair and sustainable solutions" for the UK-EU relationship after Brexit.

In a joint message released with German Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, he said: "European relationships are changing, not least as a result of Brexit. "We do not know what will happen and what the relationship between the UK and EU will look like after 29th March 2019."

"However, what we do know is that the relationship between the Church of England and the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland goes back over many centuries - long before the European Union.



Bishop Heinrich, the council chair of the Evangelical Church in Germany, has been on a two-day visit to London hosted by Archbishop Justin.

Their statement continued: "As churches, we urgently appeal to all politicians to find fair and sustainable solutions for the future coexistence of the UK and the EU."

"As some politicians and political forces seek to drive a wedge between people so it is all the more important that the churches continue to strive for reconciliation and to speak out prophetically for a Europe where the values of human rights and human dignity are central, based in the great Christian traditions of our two countries when at their best."

In August 2017, Archbishop Justin drew criticism from several MPs when he said that the chances of negotiating a deal before the UK's planned EU exit date of March 2019 were "infinitesimally small"

Alex Williams (Premier Christian Radio)



FROM THE REGISTERS

Funeral in Church

23rd November

Ethlyn Marshall

Holy Baptism

October 28th

Gemma Salisbury

Laura Salisbury

Ellie Rebecca Westall

November 18th

Ivie Willow Robinson

FACTS AND FIGURES

Week Beginning	Communicants	Loose Plate £	Planned Giving £	Gift Aid £
Oct 21	84	94.05	170.00	10.00
Oct 28	85	133.97	307.00	25.00
Nov 4	67	135.02	150.00	12.00
Nov 11	28	214.71	61.00	22.00
Standing Orders			N/A	N/A
Parish Giving			N/A	N/A



Prayer of the month

Advent, from the Latin word *adventus* meaning "coming", is a season observed in many Western Christian churches as a time of expectant waiting and preparation for the celebration of the birth of Jesus at Christmas. It is the beginning of the Church year and commences on Advent Sunday (four Sundays before Christmas Day).

The Latin *adventus* is the translation of the Greek word *parousia*, commonly used in reference to the Second Coming of Christ. For Christians, the season of Advent serves as a reminder both of the original waiting that was done by the Hebrews for the birth of their Messiah, as well as the waiting of Christians for Christ's return to bring the Kingdom of God.

Advent Prayer

God of hope, who brought love into this world,
be the love that dwells between us.

God of hope, who brought peace into this world,
be the peace that dwells between us.

God of hope, who brought joy into this world,
be the joy that dwells between us.

God of hope, the rock we stand upon,
be the centre, the focus of our lives
always, and particularly this Advent time.

Amen.

Vicky Miller (Reader)

Pain and hope

You may remember hearing a few years ago, that the Church of England had got into a bit of trouble by trying to place an advert in cinemas across the country promoting prayer. The advert consisted of all kinds of people, starting with the Archbishop of Canterbury himself, taking turns to give us a line of the Lord's Prayer. Dangerous stuff. Quite wrong to mention the prayer in public apparently, potentially rather upsetting, especially so close to Christmas.

No, the adverts the public want to see at Christmas, it seems, are adverts which promote Christmas as some kind of retail therapy. The gift of giving has become the business of giving and big business it certainly is. It's too early for 2018 figures of course, but Christmas 2017 was, according to the Centre for Retail Research, kind to most retailers. Sales increased in the UK to over £74 bn. Most of that £74 bn will have been spent in Advent.

Advent is the period of the year when I am routinely most conscious of the clash between the world as it is, and the world as it might be. The pace is so frantic – it's almost as though we're too frightened to stop and reflect. What would happen if we just sat for a moment and took stock? Would we only see the pain? Or would we see the hope?

The pain might be seeing a world in which 800m are living in extreme poverty on less than 1.9 dollars a day. A world in which around 300k poor women will die this year as a result of pregnancy or childbirth. A world in which conflict and climate change are making larger and larger parts of the world uninhabitable and forcing desperate people to do desperate things, like take to flimsy boats on impossible seas. A world in which it takes a toddler to be found face down lifeless on a beach before people ask, 'Is this the best we can do?'

It became fashionable to ask a few years ago, what would Jesus do? During Advent, we might ask, what would John the Baptist say? I think we can be pretty sure he would not have minced his words. Not a word-mincer, John the Baptist, on the whole. I think he might have been tempted to use the language we hear in Matthew's Gospel. He call us all 'a brood of vipers'. That's so hard to hear, isn't it, when we're just trying to do our best? But here's the thing. We have to face the pain, otherwise what would hope be for? Indeed, what would hope even be?

As I pondered this, I found myself thinking of a place which, 2000 years ago might have been just as busy as our shopping centres are during December, the town of Bethlehem. As you enter the little town of Bethlehem, as I have done on three occasions, you're greeted by a large banner across the road which reads, in Hebrew, 'Blessed is he who comes' and underneath it, in Arabic, 'My tent is yours.'

As a Christian, it's a great joy to be welcomed so gracefully, because going to Bethlehem, you have the feeling of going back to your roots.

The great Basilica of the Nativity, as it is called, stands in the centre of the town. It was built more than 1,600 years ago over the cave which the early Christians venerated as the place here Jesus was born. The Crusaders who rescued the church from the Saracens, walled up the doors to stop soldiers riding in on horseback, and for centuries the only entrance to the vast interior has been a tiny little postern gate, where you have to bend almost double to avoid banging your head. It's a sort of parable, I've always thought, each time I've visited Bethlehem, that no one can come and see the place where Jesus was born without making this act of humility. It's as if the very stones are saying to you: 'You've got to stoop here pilgrim, this place where God has stooped so low for you.'

2000 years ago, Bethlehem would have been bustling and bursting at the seams with people. The inns, traders and others, no doubt, making generous profits from overcharging people and exploiting their desperation for food and accommodation.

But, in a hidden corner, in a shelter, maybe an outbuilding, maybe part of a house, we don't know, but a place normally set aside to house the animals, a miracle takes place that will change history. It is a very ordinary miracle – the daily miracle of birth – a young woman bearing her first child in a strange place, far from her home, in conditions far from ideal, even in those times.

She must have been frightened and felt very alone. That disturbing day, nine months earlier, and the conversation with the angel, may have seemed along time ago. But in that place, aside from all the bustle and busyness, the miracle occurred, and God, creator of all we know and all we don't, emerged as a human being into the world, fragile, vulnerable and dependent.

In the midst of the busyness and consumer pressure of a 21st century Christmas, I would encourage us to take time, as part of our preparations, to, figuratively go and sit in that stable in Bethlehem, and in stillness, allow our hearts and minds to be touched by the wonder of the gift that was given to us there. It is unsurpassed.

Many years ago, a learned friend gave me this advice. If you want to make sure a message travels far and fast, say it's a secret. So, I'd like to share with you an extraordinary secret. Please don't tell a soul. We wouldn't want to upset anyone, especially so close to Christmas. But soon, billions of people across the world will join together to sing of a baby, born 2000 years ago in a stable, far from here. These people know that God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that we might have life in all its fullness. They know too a dangerous thing which retailers would prefer you didn't find out- that love cannot be bought or sold, it is always freely given.

Peter Stokes

PROGRAMME FOR DECEMBER

Sat	1	10.30 am	Messy Church	Church
		12.00 noon-3pm	'Christmas is Coming'	
SUN 2 ADVENT SUNDAY				
		8.00 am	Holy Communion <i>Jeremiah 33.14-16; 1 Thessalonians 3.9-13; Luke 21.25-36</i>	
		10.00 am	Family Communion <i>Readings as at 8am</i>	
		6.30 pm	Advent Carol Service	
Mon	3	1.45 pm	Reflections	143 Balden Road
Wed	5	10.30 am	Call in for Coffee	Committee Room
		11.00 am	Holy Communion <i>Isaiah 25.6-10a; Matthew 15.29-37</i>	Lady Chapel
		7.30 pm	Advent Course	
Thu	6	6.00 pm	Choir Practice	Church
Sat	8	12.00 pm	Midlands Hospital Choir Workshop	Church
SUN 9 SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT				
		8.00 am	Holy Communion <i>Malachi 3.1-4; Philippians 1.3-11; Luke 3.1-6</i>	
		10.00 am	Morning Praise Christingle	
		6.30 pm	Sung Eucharist with Healing Prayer <i>Readings as at 8am</i>	
Mon	10	1.45 pm	Reflections	143 Balden Road
Tue	11	2.00 pm	William Lench Court Service	
		7.15 pm	PCC Meeting	Committee Room
Wed	12	10.30 am	Call in for Coffee	Committee Room
		11.00 am	Holy Communion <i>Jeremiah 1.1-4; Luke 11.42-46</i>	Lady Chapel
		7.30 pm	Advent Course	
Thu	13	6.00 pm	Choir Practice and concert rehearsal	Church
Fri	14	7.00 pm	Harborne Orchestra Concert	Church
Sat	15	3.30 pm	Carols at St. Joseph's	

SUN 16 THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

- 8.00 am Holy Communion *Zephaniah 3.14-20; Philippians 4.4-7; Luke 3.7-18*
- 10.00 am Family Communion with Baptism
Philippians 4.4-7; Luke 3.7-18
- 6.30 pm Evensong *Psalms 50.1-6*
Isaiah 35; Luke 1.57-66

- Mon 17 1.30 pm Court Oak Kindergarten Nativity Church
- Tue 18 8.00 pm Team Meeting
- Wed 19 10.30 am Call in for Coffee Committee Room
- 11.00 am Holy Communion Lady Chapel
Judges 13.2-7, 24-end; Luke 1.5-25
- 3.30 pm Bible Story Club Woodhouse Primary Academy
- 7.30pm Advent Course
- Thu 20 10.00 am Woodhouse Carols Church
- 6.00 pm Choir Practice Church
- 7.15 pm Carol singing at the Court Oak

SUN 23 FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

- 8.00 am Holy Communion *Micah 5.2-5a; Hebrews 10.5-10; Luke 1.39-45*
- 10.00 am Family Communion
Readings as at 8am
- 6.30 pm Carol Service

MON 24 CHRISTMAS EVE

- 4.00 pm Crib Service Church
- 11.30 pm Midnight Communion Church
Isaiah 52.7-10; Hebrews 1.1-4; John 1.1-14

TUE 25 CHRISTMAS DAY

- 10.00 am Celebration Communion for Christmas
Isaiah 52.7-10; Hebrews 1.1-4; John 1.1-14

SUN 30 FIRST SUNDAY OF CHRISTMAS

- 8.00 am Holy Communion *1 Samuel 2.18-20,26; Colossians 3.12-17; Luke 2.41-53*
- 10.00 am Family Communion
Readings as at 8am
- 6.30 pm Evensong *Psalms 132*
Isaiah 61; Galatians 3.27-4.7

Advent Appeal 2018

This year we are supporting **Birmingham City Mission Christmas Toy Link**. This charity has been giving toys to families in need for over 50 years. The charity supports all ages by giving them essential goods, food, clothing and furniture. The families are referred by various agencies.

We are looking for gifts for children aged 0-16, Preferably new toys but toys that are in good condition are more than welcome.

The following are a few ideas to help you:

Babies 0-18 months - handheld toys, feeding dishes Si spoons, building cups, small soft toys (from birth), stacking & teething rings. Toys to shake, touch & feel. No hand-knitted toys.

Toddlers (under 3s) - stacking rings, wooden jigsaws, small pull along toys, shape sorters, character plates, dishes, mugs.

Boys/Girls (4-7s) - games, books, cars, trucks, dolls, jewellery.

Boys/Girls (8-10s) - games, hats, gloves, suitable toiletries, books, annuals (dated for the coming year).

Teenagers (10-15yrs)

Boys: footballs, football pumps, football books (not for a specific team), ruck-sacks, socks, gloves, hats, games, dartboards (not metal darts), toiletries.

No jigsaws please.

Girls: toiletry sets, scarves, gloves, hats, socks, bags (suitable for teenagers), make up, nail polish, jewellery (no earrings for pierced ears), jewellery boxes, games, annuals (dated for the coming year). No jigsaws please.



We will be collecting the gifts on December 2nd, December 9th and December 16th.

Please note December the 9th will be our Christingle Service.

All gifts will be collected weekly, and after the last Sunday they will be collected and taken to the City Mission Headquarters.

The gifts are sent all over the city and are so welcome. **Please be generous.**

FOOD BANK NEWS



TESCO ANNUAL COLLECTION

Thursday 29, Friday 30 November and Saturday 1 December

If you are shopping at Tesco on any of these days, you are likely to be accosted by our volunteers and asked to give an item of food for the Foodbank.

We are indebted to Tesco for generously increasing donations collected by 20 percent.

We are lucky to have a Tesco store on our patch, and also to have the support of all the parishes in Harborne and Quinton together with the Primary Schools, a group of Muslim friends and some businesses and generous individuals.

At times we find our shelves are over-stocked with some items. If this happens or if we have goods that are nearing their best before dates, we pass them on to less well-provided Foodbanks or to charities and shelters that feed the homeless. None of the food we collect is wasted.

Thank you for your continued support.

Brenda Stott and Hilary Shaylor

**A time to
Delve deeper into
The love of God -
Emmanuel
Not spending
Too much money**

After the thunder storm!

Each year, the Gospel reading for the third Sunday of Advent directs our thoughts towards the character of John the Baptist. In fact the readings in Advent follow a specific pattern in that the four Sundays remind us of those who prepared for the coming of Christ; the Patriarchs, the Prophets, John the Baptist and finally the Virgin Mary.

John appears in all four of the Gospels. He is mentioned by the writer Josephus and indeed the miracle story of John being born to older parents appears in the Quran. He was born in the village of Ein Karem which is now in the western suburbs of modern Jerusalem. At the entrance to the church, there is a lovely inscription which reads, *Let me prepare the way for thee, remove each stone that may hinder thee to make thy coming sure and soon.* John was the one who prepared the way in Jesus' own generation.

There is no doubt Jesus had a tremendous regard for John; he said of him *Never has there appeared on earth a mother's son greater than John the Baptist.* (Matt 11:11) But it is also clear that there was a real difference in their approach and teaching. John's message was robust and uncompromising - every tree that fails to produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Jesus on the other hand wanted to embrace and include all people in his Kingdom.

This difference in approach left John confused to the extent that, when he was in prison and awaiting death, he sent a message to Jesus asking *Are you the one who is to come or are we to expect another.* (Matt 11:3) Jesus sent a message of reassurance back to John.

Behind the altar in the cathedral in Copenhagen, there is a life size statue of Christ by an artist called Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770 -1844) and there is a beautiful story associated with it. When Thorvaldsen made his original draft in clay, he created a figure with head held high and thrown back; with strong arms, outstretched and lifted up. It was a powerful, majestic Christ.

After he finished it he went away for a few days - on his return he opened the door to his studio only to stare in disbelief. There had been a weekend of thunder storms and humidity and the clay figure had 'sagged'. The proud head, once thrown back was now bowed slightly towards the ground; the powerful outstretched arms had dropped. Thorvaldsen was distraught and left. Later he returned with a friend to discuss what might be done. But the friend, far from being appalled, was overwhelmed. He saw a gentle, compassionate Jesus with arms reaching out to welcome and embrace, and a head lowered in compassion. John's vision of what Jesus should be was governed by his own thinking - he even said that Jesus would burn the chaff on a fire that would never go out.

John's image was the figure that Thorvaldsen first made. The real Jesus was the figure after the thunder storm.

Geoffrey Lowson

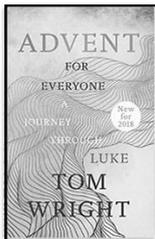
In This Light - Thoughts for Christmas- Justin Welby



A collection of thoughts and inspiration from around the world. Days around Christmas are busy and noisy; somewhere in that hustle and bustle the message of Christmas is faintly heard, but Advent gives us a natural time to pause and reflect. *In This Light* is a gathering of the writings of 50 leaders - some traditional, and some not so - each sharing a view on Christmas and community. This book congregates voices from all walks of life from; film and TV personalities to sportsmen and business influencers, and those whose lives are not in the limelight but are as inspirational as the season. Contributors include Bear Grylls, Sadiq Khan, Alan Titchmarsh, Miranda Hart, Bishop Michael Curry, Sally Lloyd-Jones, Malala, and President of Google Matt Brittin, amongst many others!

This is a mix of testimonies, inspiration, and classic Christmas readings in a beautiful gift book format.

Advent for Everyone: A Journey Through Luke-Tom Wright



Explore Gospel themes of encouragement, celebration, renewal and justice, with readings and meditations for a week, beginning with the Sunday reading in the Revised Common Lectionary, and ending with questions for reflection or group discussion. Distilled from passages in his popular *For Everyone* commentaries, these sparkling reflections take you on a journey of spiritual enlightenment, guiding you towards the wonder and joy of Christmas.

Announcement: Interim Archdeacon of Birmingham

The Bishop of Birmingham is delighted to announce the appointment of an Interim Archdeacon of Birmingham. Revd Canon Julian Francis, currently Vicar of St George's Edgbaston, will take up the role from 1 December 2018.



Bishop David says, "I am looking forward to working with Julian to support the mission and ministry of the Birmingham Archdeaconry and know that his considerable experience and wisdom of being a parish priest will be invaluable for his colleagues and churches alike."
Please join the Bishop in praying for Julian and the parish during these changes.

In Mary – Darkness



I live my Advent in the womb of Mary
And on one night when a great star swings free
From its high mooring and walks down the sky
To be the dot above the Christus i,
I shall be born of her by blessed grace.
I wait in Mary-darkness, faith's walled place,
With hope's expectance of nativity.
I knew for long she carried me and fed me,
Guarded and loved me, though I could not see,
But only now, with inward jubilee,
I come upon earth's most amazing knowledge:
Someone is hidden in this dark with me.

Jessica Powers

Christmas prayers for peace to go to Bethlehem

As many Christians around the world prepare to celebrate Advent and Christmas in the security of their homes and communities, they are being invited to pray for justice, peace and security for Palestine and Israel - and to send a prayer or a peace message to Bethlehem.

Once again this year, Christmas celebrations will take place in a difficult climate for people in the Holy Land. However, in Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus Christ, many individuals and groups refuse to give up hope. They continue to search for non-violent ways to voice their rights and work for a peaceful and just future for both Palestinians and Israelis.

Since December 2000, a new Christmas tradition has been taking shape: sending peace messages to people in Bethlehem. Once again, individuals, communities, churches and congregations, organisations and partners from across the world are invited to e-mail Advent and Christmas wishes and prayers for justice and peace to Bethlehem.

The project is being carried out in collaboration with the World Council of Churches and its Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF).

Wishes and prayers will be printed and handed out as personal messages, educational materials (e.g. at schools), and in the context of interfaith prayers (in places of worship) and in the newly established peace house of the Arab Educational Institute opposite the Israeli "separation wall" at Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem. The wishes and prayers could also include ideas for non-violent actions.

Sending a wish or a prayer by e-mail is an important way of communicating with many people who long to hear a word of hope. People in Bethlehem greatly appreciate receiving wishes and prayers from people outside the region, both as personal and spiritual gestures of comfort and hope on the occasion of Christmas. These messages are one way of breaking through the isolation they live in.

Please e-mail your Christmas messages and prayers for peace before the 25th of December (Western Christmas) and/or the 7th of January 2019 (Eastern Christmas).

Messages can be e-mailed to the Arab Educational Institute at the following address: aei@p-ol.com

December – Eco Christmas ideas

Be creative in the gifts you give this Christmas; make sure your desire to be loving is not damaging the environment.

Getting ready for the festivities of Christmas. Buy as much locally produced, in season food and particularly veg as you can. Try not to over cater and waste food.

Wrap and rewrap. Why not reuse your wrapping paper. Take a bit of care unwrapping your presents (it adds to the gift experience), save the paper and reuse next year.

Enjoy the feast of Christmas! Don't forget to recycle your rubbish. Don't waste unwanted presents find new homes for them through the charity shop or on ebay.

Get ready with your environmental New Year's Resolution. How will your care for creation in the coming year?

(Diocese of Leeds)

Rachel Braves The Shave!

To raise money for our Hall Roof Fund, on 1st December, Ruth will be shaving my head. You are welcome to come and gawp, point or laugh. We will be pestering you for sponsorship, or there is a JustGiving page:

<https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/rachel-luckman2> .

Additionally, you can donate by PayPal to luckmara@internet-mail.org.

Rachel Luckman

Over Christmas

I asked a friend of mine what he would be doing over Christmas. He told me he reckoned he would be doing a lot of work on "aqua-thermal treatment of ceramics, aluminium, and steel under a constrained environment." I was astonished – and baffled. In further conversation, I learned that he would be "washing dishes with hot water under his wife's supervision."

Sums up Christmas

Three phrases that sum up Christmas : Peace on Earth; Goodwill to all men; and batteries not included!

A saint sometimes overlooked at this time of the year

With our focus during December, quite rightly, on the birth of Jesus, it is easy to pass over some saints whose feast days occur this month, so we should not forget St Stephen.

'The feast of Stephen', that we sing about in the carol *Good King Wenceslas* falls on 26 December—Boxing Day - when in the past people put a contribution in tradesmen's boxes as a Christmas present for their services during the year.

Neither of these acts are mentioned in the Bible accounts of Christmas in the gospels. However, Stephen does appear in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. He was a member of the church in Jerusalem and found himself involved with six others in administering the allocation of food to those in need.

The apostles, who were the leaders of the church, felt that it wasn't appropriate for them to abandon preaching and 'serve tables', so they selected seven deacons to do the job for them. Stephen, however, quickly revealed hidden gifts as an eloquent spokesman for the Christian cause. This led the Jewish leaders to make an example of him, so they arrested Stephen accusing him of speaking against the two central elements of their religion - the Temple of God and the Law given by God through Moses.

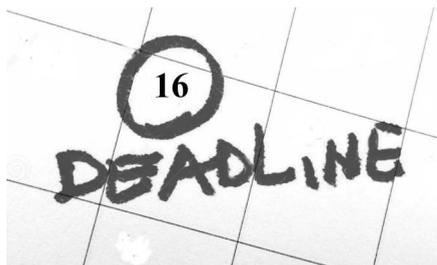
Instead of defending himself Stephen gave an eloquent account of Jewish history in which he accused the leaders of killing the Messiah. In their anger they dragged Stephen out of the city and stoned him to death.

In this act of violence Stephen became the first Christian martyr and his feast day is therefore the first to be celebrated in the Christian year- a day after the birth of Christ. Because Stephen was one of the first deacons of the Church, he is the patron saint of deacons, and among other patronages are those who suffer from headaches (which may or may not be appropriate!) because he was killed by stones being thrown at his head. Images of St Stephen will sometimes include a rock on his head.



The deadline for material for the next
PARISH MAGAZINE is

SUNDAY DECEMBER 16th



Cathedral launches gin to fund revamp

A cathedral has become the first in Britain to launch its own brand of gin, in a bid to finance the renovation of its crypt.

Blackburn Cathedral hopes bottles of Cathedra - on sale for £45 each - will eventually be sold at other cathedrals nationwide. The Dean of Blackburn, Very Rev Peter Howell-Jones said: "This is not a novelty, this is a cathedral doing business. "It's about engaging with people, that's our core business."

"Blackburn is not a tourism centre, it is not a rich part of the world, and we need to reach out to markets beyond our town and region to be sustainable long-term."

Cathedra is one of several fundraising ventures aimed at helping Blackburn Cathedral raise £1 million to transform its crypt into a community, heritage and exhibition space.

Very Rev Howell-Jones added: "Gin is on trend, it is a developing market, and there is a long history of monastic communities brewing mead, wines and beers. " I wanted to create a brand that would work across the country, that could create an income stream from which all English cathedrals can benefit." If enough bottles are bought, there are hopes sales could also help fund education, music and social cohesion projects - currently benefiting 6,000 youngsters in 160 schools.

(Peter Howell-Jones was Vicar of St Michael's Church, Boldmere from 1998-2005, and Acting Dean of Birmingham Cathedral from 2008-2010)

