

Church Magazine

FREE



DECEMBER 2023

Steyning and Ashurst

Steyning Parish Church

1 Vicarage Lane,
Steyning BN44 3YL

Vicar: The Revd Mark Heather LLB BA

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Church Services

Please see page 5 for full details of the Advent and Christmas services at both Steyning and Ashurst Parish Churches. You will be most welcome at each church, and we wish you a happy and blessed Christmas.

St Andrew's & St Cuthman's

Every Sunday

8 am 1662 Holy Communion Service

9.30 am Sung Eucharist

6 pm Evening Service

St James's

10.30 am Second Sunday Family Service

Fourth Sunday No Holy Communion on Christmas Eve

Wednesdays at St Andrew's & St Cuthman's

11.30 am Midweek Eucharist

Monday 1 January we invite you to join us for a Welcome the New Year service in Steyning Parish Church at **10:30 am** followed by sherry or soft drink.

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Parish Administrator: Pat McMullan.



Pastoral Letter

Dear Friends,

The other day the front page of the Daily Telegraph Saturday magazine advised its culinary readers how to '*Prepare for the Perfect Christmas – Your Guide to Flawless Hosting*'. This reminded me of how, some years' ago, Delia Smith's '*Christmas Easy*' suggested that for a stress-free Christmas work should start in earnest in mid-November. If you followed her recommendations, after six days of intensive hard work, you would have a menu plan to serve a house full of people with home-made food over eight days from Christmas to New Year's Eve. All I can say is: if that's an easy Christmas, I don't know what a difficult one would look like.

All this serves to emphasise how stressful and ambitious Christmas can become. My mother, born during the war, remembers how little things went a long way. A tangerine, in a sock, for the children, and a glass of sweet sherry for the adults was enough to make Christmas special.

Most of us, of course, will be content this year with something in between these two extremes, and I suspect it might not be the most expensive or luxurious things that make Christmas special. Some of us will be very busy just making it happen for others, and all us will, I hope remember the truism that it's the thought that counts.

What mattered for the young Mary came from deep within the heart (see page 9). Above all, I hope that it will be a time of generosity; not only in terms of presents and hospitality, but also in terms of love and forgiveness, of ourselves and of each other.

*What can I give him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd I would bring a lamb;
if I were a wise man I would do my part;
yet what I can I give him – give my heart.*

May the love of the Christ-child fill you with peace and goodwill this Christmas, and always.

Fr Mark

FROM THE EDITOR:

As we acknowledge the huge impact on everyone in Ukraine now that this war is in its second winter, our thoughts and prayers continue to be with them all. We hold before God those families who have found refuge within Steyning and Ashurst.

Page 11 acknowledges our love and deep concern for The Holy Land and all the Bible lands. At this special time of year we hold before the Lord all the Christians there as they celebrate the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

Linked to this is an article on page 23 with more Holy Land up-to-date details

Special Christmas Services are listed with all you need to know, on page 5.

Do please continue to send in your contributions in 2024 because what you do or think or see is of much interest to our readers.

As always, the address:

steyningchurchmag@gmail.com

Sunday Notices

The weekly Sunday notices sent from the Parish Office gives all the information about services, news and events. There is also the list of those needing our prayers. If you would like to receive the Sunday notices contact: office@steyningparishchurch.org or ring 01903 813276

To add any new prayer requests contact: prayers@steyningparishchurch.org or ring 01903 813276

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Advent and Christmas Services

AT STEYNING AND ASHURST

Sunday 3 December

6pm 'Darkness to Light'. Our popular ecumenical Advent Carol service at Steyning Parish Church, with a procession in a darkened and candle-lit church.

Sunday 10 December

10:30am at Ashurst. This is a gentle, friendly Advent Service at St James's Church lasting about an hour and aimed at all the family.

Sunday, 10 December

4pm Christingle Service at Steyning Parish Church, aimed at families with primary school aged children. Hot chocolate and cake will be served from 3:45pm.

Sunday, 17 December

4pm Village Carol Service at St James's Parish Church in Ashurst. A friendly service of traditional lessons and carols for all the family.

6pm Nine Lessons and Carols at Steyning Parish Church. A beautiful candle-lit service telling the story of creation through to the birth of Jesus in words and music.

Christmas Eve, Sunday, 24 December

3pm and **4:30pm** Our popular Crib Services for children and families.

11pm Midnight Mass at Steyning Parish Church. The traditional start to Christmas. Festal Choral Eucharist with carols led by our church choir. The service will end at midnight.

Christmas Day Monday 25 December

9:30am Sung Eucharist for Christmas morning at Steyning Parish Church.

10.30am Parish Christmas Communion and Carols at Ashurst St James.

Prayer Diary for December

Sunday 3 December

Advent

Sunday 10 December

The Second Sunday of Advent

Sunday 17 December

The Third Sunday of Advent

Sunday 24 December

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

Christmas Eve

Monday 25 December

Christmas Day

Almighty God, you have given us your only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin: grant that we, who have been born again and made your children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Tuesday 26 December

Stephen, Deacon, First Martyr

Gracious Father, who gave the first martyr Stephen grace to pray for those who took up stones against him: grant that in all our sufferings for the truth we may learn to love even our enemies and to seek forgiveness for those who desire our hurt, looking up to heaven to him who was crucified for us, Jesus Christ, our mediator and advocate, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Wednesday 27 December

John, Apostle and Evangelist

Merciful Lord, cast your bright beams of light upon the Church: that, being enlightened by the teaching of your blessed apostle and evangelist Saint John, we may so walk in the light of your truth that we may at last attain to the light of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ your incarnate Son, our Lord, who reigns with you, and in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Thursday 28 December

The Holy Innocents

Heavenly Father, whose children suffered at the hands of Herod, though they had done no wrong: by the suffering of your Son and by the innocence of our lives frustrate all evil designs and establish your reign of justice and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Sunday 31 December

The First Sunday of Christmas

Parish Registers

Funeral

20 October Stuart Mark Stevens (d. 16 September 2023)

Interment

4 November Millicent Sylvia Honeywood (d. 31 January 2020)



*The Vicar and Churchwardens wish you all
a very happy and blessed Christmas*

December for Children

THE CRIB SERVICE

The Crib Service tells the story of the birth of God's Son, Jesus in a very simple way.

The Carols are chosen especially with children in mind.

The service will last about 30 minutes.

Please join us at either **3pm** or **4:30pm** on Christmas Eve in Steyning Parish Church

This Christingle Service is all about Light, and centred around each child having a Christingle of their own with a candle in the middle to remind us all that Jesus is the Light of the World.

The Parish Church of St Andrew & St Cuthman, Steyning

Sunday 10th Dec 4pm

All welcome



Christingle

Hot chocolate and cake available from 3.45pm
www.steyningparishchurch.org/christingle



Advent waiting

Who is this young child? Boy or girl? Age? I can give you a background that comes from my imagination ... this is a young girl aged four, and her fifth birthday is approaching because it is on Christmas Day. Her birth Mummy was a drug and drink addict, and so she was taken into foster care on the day she was born in 2018, and now has lovely adoptive parents who love and care for her and ensure she has all the hospital treatments she needs, but at the moment, she is watching from the window and waiting because ...



What would your story be for this young child? Quite different, I hope, but then I hope we all can see that wistful look in the face, and know that indeed waiting for something or someone is what is actually happening, whatever the past story might be.

In the Bible we can find the word 'wait' in so many places, and most often it says wait upon the Lord. Waiting for and waiting upon are two different attitudes.

Psalm 33:20, 21

We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield.

In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name.

Advent is known as the season of waiting. We all wait at some points in our lives, though much of what happens around us seems to be immediate - next day deliveries, live screenings of sports, texting and emails - and so on. But we do have to wait for appointments at hospital, test or exam results, pain to ease - and you can add your own list. The difference with Advent is that it is the season of waiting for the coming of God. It is a time when I am trying to wait on God, not waiting for God, but also trying to find and create the right attitude and ask the right questions. Maybe to picture in my mind being a waiter in the restaurant serving God saying "May I take your order now please?" or "Would you like me to show you more kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, patience, or maybe you would like me to search a little further into what the Holy Spirit can do?"

Advent is also a time for traditions - candles, carols or wreaths, and getting ready for the birth of Jesus. I am reminded of the John Betjeman poem 'The Bells of Waiting Advent Ring' - it's too long to quote here, but do remind yourself of it too. The preparation time for waiting on God is the way we can then prepare ourselves for that amazing gift from God - that he sent his only Son to be with Mary and Joseph in a stable, and now lives with us in the bread and wine.

I hope I can remember during this December that waiting is what I must learn to do. Waiting involves listening, and the art of listening must be learned because it is not just hearing, it is about how our hearts hear and respond. We can remember the story of Mary and the sudden visit she had from the angel Gabriel to tell her she would bear a son and that she would call his name Jesus. Mary knew about waiting; Mary knew about listening; Mary knew about responding from her heart to the call from God; Mary knew to say "Yes" to God even though she knew it would make her life extremely hard, and also that of Joseph. No prevarication, just a simple Yes.

Am I able, is my heart able to say yes to God? Am I waiting on the Lord, or is the Lord waiting on me?

When I was teaching there was an excellent book for young children entitled "Don't just do something, sit there", and it enabled us to help children develop waiting and listening skills especially by the open questions it posed. So many questions in life have a right or wrong answer, but open questions allow all our thoughts to be equally valued and listened to. Listening and responding from the heart is a vital lesson to learn. Strangely enough, when we sit quietly and our hearts are attuned to listen quietly then we are working, doing something for the Lord, waiting upon the Lord.

Psalm 130 5, 6

"I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I do hope. My soul waits for the Lord. More than those who watch for the morning - Yes, more than those who watch for the morning.

The word "wait" has the word "patience" attached to it, and patience comes because when I wait I am never alone and surrounding me are both the joy of the Lord and the peace of God.

When Jesus was born he was given wonderful names...the Prince of Peace, and also Emmanuel which means God-with-us. Jesus is with us, helps us and protects us.

God protected Mary during her pregnancy and waiting time, he protected Mary, her unborn child and Joseph as they arrived in Bethlehem, and continued that love and protection for the Holy Family while Jesus grew to take on his Father's work.

Advent is waiting, waiting on the Lord, but also waiting in hope. The Advent Carol Service begins in darkness, the darkness of waiting, of anticipation, and marks the new Christian year, and then moves slowly into light helping us enter more deeply into the life and light of Jesus.

Join me this Advent as we look at creation all around us showing plenty of signs that echo the Psalmists cry "How long, O Lord" and we will lament with God who longs to make all things right and see a world where there abides love, joy, peace, kindness, generosity gentleness and self-control. God is with us as we wait and pray actively for these things to come more fully in the world, and in us and through us.

Chris Fitton

Many people have been completely overwhelmed by the news from Gaza and Israel, and almost don't even want to put the news on.

I think we all share this deep grief for people's lives that have been so devastated, but part of our faith is to stand beside those in pain, even though we are at a distance crying out to God.

On page 23 there is a good article that helps us understand more about the situation, and can be used as a prayer help too. Some points are:

Pray for peace and an end to violence, and that the world leaders can have influence in that region.

Pray for the safety of all people who just want to go about their daily lives; for any who are working to bring relief and assistance; for access to food and water, electricity and medicines.

Pray for strength and hope for all churches and Christian communities, and for hope especially at the Christmastide.

With God all things are possible (Matt 19:26)

Prayers for Times of Crisis *in Jerusalem and all the Holy Land*

God of light and salvation, our refuge and our strength,
We pray for the people of Israel and Palestine amid the escalating violence.

We pray for those killed and injured in southern Israel. May your rod and staff comfort them. We pray for those who are grieving, may they know your ever present help.

We pray for the protection of those who have been taken hostage by Hamas. As they walk through this dark valley may they fear no evil.

We pray for all the civilians of Gaza. May they know that their help comes from the Maker of heaven and earth.

And we pray for those in leadership in Gaza and Israel. May you guide them along the right paths. We ask all this in union with Christ and trusting in the power of your Holy Spirit.



Heavenly Father, we pray for the many people whose lives have been torn apart by conflict in Gaza and Israel. We pray especially for those who have died, those who are grieving, the injured and those now without food, shelter or medical supplies. Strengthen and support the work of all relief organisations.

Ely Cathedral

Dear Father, we cry out for peace and stability – for everyone. We pray for Your protection over children and their families who are caught in conflict and face ever-increasing dangers.

Amen

*Jesus, light of the world,
you promised to be always with us.
Be with our sisters and brothers now,
dispelling the darkness of this crisis.
Compel us to be with them too*

*in thought, prayers and solidarity,
responding to their suffering with the same
compassion you have shown us.*

*We make this prayer in the firm faith that
your light shines in the darkness, and the
darkness cannot overcome it. Amen*

Pause and Pray for Peace



Lord we ask for peace for those who need peace, reconciliation for those who need reconciliation and comfort for all who don't know what tomorrow will bring. Lord may your Kingdom come, and your will be done.

We pray that people still in Ukraine will be protected from the violence; that there will be provision of essential food, power and clean water; for vulnerable people who cannot flee.

That refugees will find safe places to stay. For healing for people who are wounded or have experienced trauma; and comfort for those who are grieving. We pray that international leaders will know wisdom and understanding, strength, courage and compassion.

Ukrainian citizens ask that we pray:

- That God would intervene in the situation and stop the violence
- For God's wisdom for the presidents and authorities of both countries
- That God will care for those who are in danger, especially for Ukrainian people who have lost their loved ones, for His comfort and protection over them and the church

Please also pray for Russia:

- That God will comfort Russian families who have lost their beloved ones

We implore you, O Merciful God, look with grace upon those who courageously defend their land. Remember the mothers and fathers, the innocent children, widows and orphans, the disabled and helpless, those seeking shelter and refuge, who reach out to you and to their fellow human beings looking for mercy and compassion. *Christian Aid*

Heavenly Father, hear our prayers for our brothers and sisters in Ukraine.

Lord we ask for peace for those who need peace, reconciliation for those who need reconciliation and comfort for all who don't know what tomorrow will bring. Lord may your Kingdom come, and Your will be done.

Lord God, we ask for you to be with all – especially children who are suffering as the crisis in Ukraine deteriorates. Lord for those who are anxious and fearful. For those who are bereaved, injured or who have lost their lives. And for those who have lost loved ones. Lord hear our prayers. *World Vision*

The Tree

What tree? There are millions of trees. Yes, but this was a very special tree - one tiny seed dropped several hundred years ago, a common variety, but slowly becoming a wonder of God's creation. Perfect in its symmetry and placing between two hills on Hadrian's Wall. Loved by many for its beauty and simplicity in all seasons. Why, oh why, would another of God's Creation,



a Human Being, feel compelled in a moment of madness to come in the night and destroy such a harmless and lovely thing? For ever. What is this destructive element lurking in us that is able to do such a thing? Well, I confess that I can happily squash a snail or a cabbage white caterpillar - some might throw up their hands in horror and maybe understandably so, after all they are also a part of God's creation.

But, just for a moment, can we stop and consider this - there are truly wonderful people in this world whose lives embody selfless love, kindness, understanding and care for others. They are there among the horrors of Gaza, Israel, Ukraine, and many other places of suffering. Sadly, they don't make headlines or sell newspapers, but they are there, all over the place, risking their lives and too often losing them. Each is a tiny cog in the wheel of HOPE in the world.

Remember, Christianity was founded on our trust and Faith in just ONE person - God's only Son Jesus. He came into the world 2,000 years ago as a tiny baby, and now there are 'forests' of Christians throughout the world, believers in the certain knowledge that He died to redeem us.

So this Christmastide, maybe we need to stop, think, and consider the wonder of the power of Jesus born in simplicity and to think where we are in the 'Forest of Pilgrims' and, above all, to cling to that comforting word 'HOPE' which brings Holy Light to a sad but beautiful world - and to feel a deep gratitude.

Maureen Jones

Advent

I haven't checked the facts, but I think there aren't many years when the season of Advent is all contained in December, but I think this is one of them; so I ought to write something about Advent. It sounds simple, and we would all expect to hear good sermons about this season of the Coming of Christ; his birth in the stable and his second Coming at the end of time. But the more I think about it, the more it seems to me that the season has become a treasure house (dumping ground? You choose!) for all sorts of ideas and thoughts.

For a start, it is the beginning of the church's year and the preparation for the Birth - combining that with the idea of an extended preparation of Nine Sundays before Christmas, never seems to have caught on properly - too much goes on in November already. So somewhat perversely, as well as the set readings, church custom marks the new beginning with a tradition of meditating on the Four Last Things - Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell. I have often thought that they should be called the Four Next Things as they fit well with the idea of a new start in our being. They are well worth four sermons or articles for any time.

Not content with that, which you would think would be enough to keep any preacher/prayer going for a life time, Advent seems to have collected an evergreen wreath or crown (which connects with death to my mind, not birth) adorned with five candles in three colours, variously linked with Patriarchs, Prophets, John the Baptist and the Blessed Virgin Mary - or some similar selection of holy representatives of God's work of salvation.

The colours of the candles, purple, rose-pink and white, reflect the liturgical colours of the Sundays of the season; purple for the serious penitential mood of preparation; pink for the brief "breather" Sunday in the middle ("Gaudete" Sunday from the first word of the old introit Psalm in Latin) and white for the joyous birth of The Child. A curious elision of rational thought has led some to equate pink with the Virgin Mary, which is quite mistaken and entirely unimportant.

In the end after all this, we are invited to make a new start.

My father in law was a great madrigal singer and in his more light-hearted moods he would start his choir on a little round which ended each verse with the words "begin again"; some of you may know it and will know why I think of Michael Finnegan as the theme patron of Advent. If you don't know what I'm on about, ignore this last paragraph and just let's all ... Begin again.

Senex



Eco Church Silver Award

Back in 2016, you may remember that we started to think about how we could integrate environmental issues into our parish life. Seven years later, and after a lot of work by various members of the congregation, we are proud to announce that we have gained our Eco Church Silver Award.

Eco Church is an award scheme for churches who want to demonstrate that the gospel is good news for God's earth. Taking part helped us to identify existing, and initiate new, ways of caring for our environment in our worship and teaching, around our buildings and grounds, in our community engagement at local and global level, and in the personal lifestyles of our members.



We made a brilliant start to improving things by installing LED lighting, following our Let There Be Light fundraising campaign. This not only saves us money and reduces our carbon footprint but enhances the beauty of the church for services and for the many community events that are held here. We

reduced our use of single use plastics and increased our use of ethically sourced goods while improving our recycling. We ensured that the climate and environmental issues are considered in all decisions about the management of our



buildings and the way the church is organised. We developed a Churchyard Management Plan which has helped us to increase the biodiversity of our churchyard. A bonus of this was that it enabled us to work with other community groups and pupils from Steyning Grammar School. We were involved in the Steyning Festival Green Day and some of us

have taken part in Climate Change marches in London. We regularly include prayers for God's creation in our intercessions.

We continue to encourage everyone to register for Creation Care. As with the Eco

Church scheme, the online audit helps your household to assess your current situation to see how well you are doing but also gives access to lots of ideas of ways in which you can improve. If you haven't done so already, please have a go.

The link is: <https://creationcare.org.uk/>

We know we don't stop here. This is an ongoing project and although our 12th century Grade 1 listed building won't make it easy to get our Gold Award, we will continue to do what we can to reduce our carbon footprint and become a more sustainable part of the community of Steyning.

Christine Aubrey

Unfortunately the church has not yet obtained permission to place the award plaque under the lychgate as hoped, and as stated in last month's magazine. It is instead on the notice board in the church porch.

Community coffee



**Do come and join us
on a Wednesday morning any time between
10am and 11.30am.**

Several of our visitors go across to the Church in time for the Wednesday morning service, but there are always plenty of people wishing to chat until the coffee mugs are empty and we don't finish until 11.30.

Elizabeth Brown and the Coffee Team

**COME IN ... PLEASE
JOIN THE TEAM FOR A COFFEE OR TEA AND A CHAT ON
WEDNESDAY MORNING
10-11:30 IN THE PENFOLD HALL**

The Agnes Collective are thrilled to be back and able to share some beautiful and magical Christmas Music with you all again this coming December.

The Voice of Christmas

The Agnes Collective
with John Tolputt



Wednesday 20th of December 2023

@ 6.30pm

St Andrew's & St Cuthman's Church,
Steypning

Adult £15 - Child £8 (4's and under free)

Steypning's History Society's December meeting is a show of films by South Downs Filmmakers.

The meeting is on Wednesday 13 December, 7:30 for 7:45 start, at the Steypning Centre. Visitors are welcome (£5)

Christmas Greetings

From the Bybyk Family

In October, three of us were lucky enough to visit our friends Olga and her mum Tanya in their new home on the outskirts of Crawley. Gregory and Peter were with us too; Ilya was at work in Storrington, and Ivan and Artium were at school, where they are settling well.

Tanya had prepared delicious home-baked pastries, and we were so warmly welcomed. They were eager to show us round their lovely house, which has a small garden and is situated in a close with lots of other families with children of all ages. They spoke very positively about their next-door neighbours, and how the boys were able to play out safely with the other kids after school and at weekends. In addition they have a great park and a football pitch close to the house, and their school is only a few minute's walk away. Olga, who, as we know, likes a bit of shopping, is happy that they are only a twenty-five minute walk from the town centre and there are also frequent buses. It is also much easier for them to visit Olga's sister Luda.

They were of course keen to have news of their friends at Steyning whom they think of with affection. However it is clear from all who know the family, and especially Olga, that they will very soon have a close circle of friends in their new community. They have joined Crawley Community Church, which offers lots of activities for children as well as adults and seems to have quite a diverse congregation.

Olga would like to send love and Christmas greetings to everyone in Steyning who knows the family and all those who supported them on their arrival and during their time here.



Prayer Points for December

- For Fr Mark, Canon Nigel, Fr Peter and Canon Paul who will be taking services during Advent and Christmas.
- For the PCCs of both Ashurst and Steyning.
- For the Church Wardens, the church welcomers, the coffee makers, the flower arrangers and the church cleaners.
- For the church choir and the music group and those who will be involved with the Crib and Christingle services.
- For the Eucharistic ministers, intercession leaders and lesson readers.
- For our church primary and secondary schools in Steyning and Ashurst, and all their end of term activities.
- For all who reside at Primrose Court and Penns Court and all who love and care about them, and especially the newly formed Ecumenical Group at Penns Court.



For unto us a Son is given

Match the prophecy with the verse.

- | | |
|--|---------------|
| 1. The messiah would be born to a virgin. | Psalm 34 20 |
| 2. He'd be a direct descendant of David. | Hosea 11 1 |
| 3. Christ would be born in Bethlehem. | Zechariah 9 9 |
| 4. He would spend time in Egypt | 2 Samuel 7 12 |
| 5. He would ride on a donkey | Isaiah 53 5-7 |
| 6. He would sacrifice himself for our sins. | Isaiah 7 14 |
| 7. None of his bones would be broken. | Isaiah 9 7 |
| 8. Christ would rule over the house of David | Micah 5 2 |

Answers next month

Choir Report

I would like to begin this report by welcoming a new young member of the choir. Isla Humphreys joined the choir as a probationer in September and has impressed everyone with her enthusiasm and outgoing personality. She is a very promising chorister and has quickly learned the format of the services and much of the regular music. Isla is also an excellent swimmer and says that her favourite things to do are 'swimming and singing'.

The choir is now in its busiest period of the year, preparing and singing a number of major services including Remembrance Sunday Service in November and the Advent and Christmas Carol Services. The Advent Carol Service, Darkness to Light, is the most atmospheric choral service of the Church Year. It begins with the church in complete darkness and the choir singing the Matin Responsary from the West End from where they process gradually to the choir stalls singing antiphons and anthems. During this time the church is gradually candlelit and the service concludes with the recessional carol 'Lo He Comes with Clouds Descending'.

The Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols is very different from Darkness to Light and includes the most familiar congregational Christmas carols and choir carols interspersed with Christmas readings.

Darkness to Light is on Sunday, 3 December at 6pm and the Nine Lessons and Carols is on 17 December also at 6pm. Please support these great services.

I started this report with a welcome to a new chorister who joined the choir recently, and I would like to extend that welcome to anyone who may be interested in joining. I am looking for all voices SATB, so if you are interested and would like more information about the choir, please come and see me for a chat at the end of any morning service, after choral evensong, or call me on 01903 816008. You will receive a warm welcome and enjoy singing the most glorious choral music.



Brian Sawyer

Saint of the month

FRANCES CABRINI, FOUNDRESS OF NUNS (1850-1917)



Frances Cabrini was born in Lombardy, Italy two months prematurely and was small and weak as a child; she remained in delicate health for the rest of her life. Her parents died in 1870 and she applied to become a nun at the convent where she had been educated. Because of her health she was refused admission to the Order.

She became the headmistress of an orphanage at Codogno, northern Italy and she was joined by a small community of women living a religious way of life. Cabrini took religious vows in 1877 and planned to be a missionary in the Far East. She went to Rome to seek the Pope's approval to go to China with her companions to do missionary work. However, instead he urged her to go to the United States to work with the large Italian immigrant population in New York.

When she and her companions arrived there they encountered many setbacks and disappointments, in particular finding the local Archbishop not supportive. Eventually she was given permission to found an orphanage where she organised catechism and education classes for the immigrants and provided for the needs of the orphans.

With perseverance and determination she established schools and orphanages and a hospital. The work flourished which led to the building of institutions for the sick and poor in many parts of the United States. Cabrini became a citizen of the United States in 1909 and died of Malaria in 1917 at the age of 67.

By the time of her death the Order numbered over 1,500 nuns serving in many countries (including China, her original aim). She was canonised in 1946, the first citizen of the United States to become a saint. Her feast day is 22 December, the date of her death.

December Garden

My garden is waiting to be put to bed for the winter, it will be green for a little longer, but the flowers are fading fast. The vegetables are all brought in and those beds manured ready for next spring's plantings. The summer vibrancy has gone, but the shapes of the trees and the odd sign of a daffodil poking through give a different delight and a smile to my heart.

That, though, is the truth about a garden - there are the winter months when we cannot sit outside with a drink soaking in the warmth of the sunshine and taking in those colours and shapes that surround us.

The summer, however, cannot happen without the winter. It is the time for renewal, restoration, rest and enrichment. That is the work that goes on in December to give the high summer the joy we all find in nature. December is the time when the garden is working its hardest to give change and sustenance to the soil.

This is what we are called to do for ourselves during the winter. To allow ourselves to change is to restore our souls, to rest our bodies and minds and so find enrichment coming into our lives. We need it to be a rainy day - though we all would probably say we have had rather too many during November - but we do need rainy and bleak days sometimes because it is at those times that we can be renewed and the soil of our souls and our lives will be developed and enriched.

Chris Fitton

DECK THE HALLS

Deck the halls with boughs of holly,

Fa la la la la la la!

'Tis the season to be jolly,

Fa la la la la la la!

Don we now our gay apparel,

Fa la la la la la la!

Troll the ancient Yuletide carol,

Fa la la la la la la!

See the blazing yule before us,

Fa la la la la la la!

Strike the harp and join the chorus,

Fa la la la la la la!

Follow me in merry measure,

Fa la la la la la la!

While I tell of Yuletide treasure,

Fa la la la la la la!

The Meaning is in the Waiting

Moments of great calm
Kneeling before an altar
Of wood in a stone church
In summer, waiting for the God
To speak...
...Prompt me, God;
But not yet. When I speak,
Though it be you who speak
Through me, something is lost...
The meaning is in the waiting

R.S. Thomas

I have been reading some of R.S. Thomas' poetry and have been drawn to this one. This poem takes us through phases of waiting for God to waiting upon God. It gives us the light of future hope alongside sensing that we are with God now. Sensing God's constant presence in the world, in our own lives too, alongside us in our ordinariness, our pain and joys, as well as the huge mess the world finds itself in at this present time.

Chris Fitton

Helping victims of Armed Conflict

In the Holy Land and beyond.

As we approach Christmas, our thoughts turn naturally to the Holy Land. The land is holy to three great monotheistic faiths – Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It is a tragedy that there have often been, and still are, competing visions for the territory fuelled by religious commitment. It is a tragedy that the Christmas message of “peace on earth” is undermined by armed conflict once more in the birthplace of Jesus. We think also at this time of our Christian sisters and brothers of the Holy Land – “the living stones” of Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth and beyond. These are lively, worshipping congregations, not just place names in the Bible.

The terrible terrorist attack of October 7 in which 1,400 Israelis were killed – the most deadly single day in the history of the State of Israel - triggered the latest spiral of violence between Israel and Hamas.

At present both the Israeli and Palestinian populations are traumatized by the deaths and armed violence. In the longer-term there is a need for a peace process which leads to peace and security for both sides. At present there is no realistic immediate prospect of that happening.

What then can we do? Obviously we can continue to inform ourselves

from reliable news sources ranging from the BBC to Channel 4 News. The latest outbreak of mass violence has seen many thousands killed (altogether on both sides nearly 10,000 in less than the first month – three times as many as in 30 years of “The Troubles” in Northern Ireland.) Both sides need peace, security and a safe home – this round of armed attacks is another cycle of war. Israeli accounts stress the right of Israel to exist in peace and need for self-defence. Palestinian accounts relate decades of dispossession and being uprooted from their homes. But as I say, a peace process seems far from the agenda of the protagonists or the international community.

At present we can appeal to our MPs to support the need for immediate release of the hostages, an end to attacks on civilians on both sides, full implementation of international humanitarian law, and access for vital humanitarian aid in volume.

As a Christian congregation and as individuals we are called to be peacemakers. Two things we can do are to provide aid to the most vulnerable on both sides, Palestinian and Israeli. Thank you for the response to the Red Bucket appeal in Church. And we can also pray together in church and in our own prayer time.

At the time of writing (30 October), humanitarian needs are most acute in Gaza because of the blockade and bombardment of this densely populated area – now with so many displaced people. The needs are for food and water, but also medicines and fuel so that health facilities can be restored to full working capacity.

In November's magazine, I wrote about the Christian Aid - World Food Programme (WFP) partnership, which multiplied up by 20 times any money donated. The impact of armed conflict is long-term – lasting far beyond its coverage in our news cycle. This partnership works with the many Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, and the people in parts of Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo who never were in our news. But the danger, dislocation and hunger they suffer is just as real.

The following update from Christian Aid came at the end of October 2023.

“ Christian Aid is devastated by the latest violence being faced by people in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. Your prayers for a peaceful resolution are needed now more than ever.

Christian Aid has always been committed to supporting all those in need, of all faiths and none. We and our partners have been working in the Middle East since the early

1950s...

We ask our supporters to keep all those facing this crisis in your prayers. We are monitoring the situation, with our Palestinian and Israeli partners, and we pray for a swift end to this conflict."

I conclude with one of the Christian Aid prayers:

Roger Williamson

A prayer for the Middle East

God, hear our prayers for peace in the Middle East.

May all people in the region be protected, safe from harm.

We pray that this crisis will end now, with no further loss of life.

God, may the injured and distressed know your healing presence.

May the powerful and the decision-makers follow the paths of
justice, mercy and peace.

We pray for recognition of the dignity and value of every life.

May the clamour of violence cease,

Replaced by the beating of swords into ploughshares.

God, in your name,

Amen

Saint Lucia's Day

This Scandinavian holiday, also known as Saint Lucy's Day, commemorates Lucia, a fourth century martyr and the patron saint of light. Legend has it that she brought supplies to Christians hiding in catacombs from the Romans, wearing a wreath of candles to light her way and free up her hands for carrying food.

On December 13, the ancient winter solstice, girls dress up as Lucia in white dresses with a blood-red sash and candle-bedecked crowns. Golden saffron buns or lussebullar are traditionally enjoyed too.



Chris Fitton

The Shepherds and the Angels

ADAPTED FROM THE BIBLE FOR FAMILIES

And there were shepherds in the same country abiding in the field, and keeping watch by night over their flock. And an angel of the Lord stood by them and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them,

"Be not afraid; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people: for there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this is the sign unto you; ye shall find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger."

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:



*"Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace,
Good will toward men."*

And it came to pass, when the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another,

"Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing that is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us."

And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in the manger. And when they saw it, they made known concerning the saying which was spoken to them about this child. And all that heard it wondered at the things which were spoken unto them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these sayings, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, even as it was spoken unto them.

And when eight days were fulfilled his name was called

JESUS

Anagram for December

The anagram for December is:

Christmas

REMEMBER: All words to have three or more letters, but only use each letter once. NO capitalised words and NO plurals.

Happy Christmas, Anagrammers



Flowers in Church

Church Flowers for December

There are no flowers in church during Advent, but on **16 December** the church will have the greenery brought in, in preparation for Christmas. **Please could we have volunteers willing to help on that morning at 10am.**

On Saturday **23 December** the church will have all the flowers and decorations added to the tree and the greenery. **Please could we have volunteers for that morning at 10am.**

Carol McKechnie



The Steyning Society

Friday 15 December at 7:00 for 7:45 at the Steyning Centre,

Joint Christmas Supper with Steyning Museum

There is a short reception at 7pm before a sit down supper at 7.45pm.

Catering by Superdoux, Brighton.

After dinner entertainment by magician David Croucher.

Tickets: £27 to include refreshments.

Available from Steyning Bookshop and The Steyning Centre

Recipe for December

CHRISTMAS PUDDING TRUFFLES

Ingredients

750g Christmas Pudding or fruit cake

100g dark chocolate. Chopped

30g unsalted butter

2 tbsp brandy (optional)

200g white chocolate, chopped

12 red glaze cherries, quartered and thinly sliced

12 green glaze cherries, quartered and thinly sliced



Method

1. Break up the Christmas pudding or fruitcake in the bowl of a food processor and blitz until it forms coarse crumbs.
2. Place the dark chocolate and butter in a heatproof bowl over a saucepan half-filled with simmering water. Stir until the ingredients melt together and the mixture becomes smooth. Add the melted chocolate and brandy to the Christmas pudding or fruitcake, and stir to combine.
3. Line a tray with baking paper. Roll large tablespoonfuls of the mixture into balls, and place on the lined tray. Transfer into the fridge to chill for 45 minutes.
4. Meanwhile, place the white chocolate in the heatproof bowl over a saucepan half-filled with simmering water. (Or heat in 10 second blasts in the microwave.) Stir until the chocolate has melted and becomes smooth. Use a teaspoon or piping bag to drizzle the melted white chocolate over the truffles, and decorate with slices of cherries.

I'm sure you'll agree that these are crazy times, folks. Back in Ancient Rome they had a festival – Saturnalia – which saw their society turn upside down for a week each December. It seems Saturnalia's traditions of chaos and mayhem are now the daily norm for us Brits but, as we career towards Christmas, we have another thing in common with Saturnalia. We will soon be paying our respects to the Holly tree.



Holly has been celebrated in many traditions over the centuries because, as a native evergreen, its vibrancy in the dead of winter could easily be mistaken for immortality. Holly was the sacred tree of Saturn, the Roman god of agriculture. In pagan tradition, the Holly King ruled over the Oak King from Midsummer to Midwinter. Holly was easily adopted by Christians, who saw many links between the tree and the life of Christ. Today, Holly remains a centrepiece of our Christmas decorations, cards and cakes.

Each Holly tree is either male or female. While both produce delicate white flowers in May, it's only the female Holly that bears a berry as red as any blood. When these berries are produced in profusion, it's taken to be a sign of an oncoming hard winter -although in reality it's the outcome of a successful spring. Holly's prickles provide protection for nesting birds, their flower buds are food for the Holly Blue butterfly's caterpillar and their ripe berries are essential for thrushes.

If you're after a tree filled with folklore then Holly must take a bow. So if you're planning to deck your halls with boughs of the stuff this Christmas, here's a quick user guide. First off, *never* cut down a Holly tree – that's guaranteed bad luck, a superstition which has spared many Holly trees from the woodsman's axe. And make sure you leave Holly trees in your hedgerows to prevent witches from running along the top. If you bring Holly into your home at Christmas, it'll help protect you from those pesky festive faeries. Only female Holly leaves under your pillow will allow you to predict your future in your dreams. Oh, and don't forget to get rid of your Holly decorations before Twelfth Night (but don't burn them, that's bad luck too). Holly trees will protect you against lightning strikes (I'm not sure if this has been scientifically proven so don't blame me if you still get zapped). And don't eat the berries, they're poisonous, but if you have smallpox you can drink an infusion made from the leaves.

Stick to those rules folks and you'll have a peaceful Christmas. Me? I've had enough of the state of the world today. I'm going to pour some wine, put on my toga and pretend I'm in ancient Rome. Somebody pass me my fiddle.

Michael Blencowe

Psalm 33



Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him.

Praise the LORD with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre.

Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy.

For the word of the LORD is right and true; he is faithful in all he does.

The LORD loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love.

By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth.

He gathers the waters of the sea into jars; he puts the deep into storehouses.

From heaven the LORD looks down and sees all mankind; from his dwelling place he watches all who live on earth - he who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do.

We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield.

In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name.

May your unfailing love be with us, LORD, even as we put our hope in you.