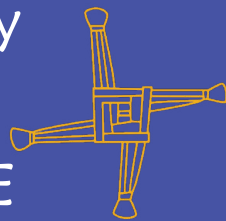


St Bridget's, West Kirby
with Caldy Church
PARISH MAGAZINE



Joy to the world
and
Peace on all the earth

www.stbridgetschurch.org.uk

www.caldychurch.org.uk

December 2025/January 2026 (Vol. 155: No 11)

£1.00



Do you enjoy singing?

Has someone ever commented on how lovely your singing is?

St Bridget's church has a junior choir called 'Sing Aloud'.

We practice each week during term time, and we sing together in church for special occasions.

Our next big sing is Christmas the traditional carol service
at St Bridget's church.

Would you like to join us for this occasion?

The rehearsals are Tuesday 4.45 until 6pm in St Bridget's church
and are led by Mrs Longmore and Reverend Alex.

Sometimes people have to arrive a little after the start or leave a
little before the end because of other things they are doing.

If you are aged over 7, can come to rehearsals between now and
Christmas and would be available on the evening of Sunday 21st
December for the Carol Service then we would love you to join us.

If you are interested please let Reverend Alex know
rectorwestkirby@gmail.com or 017718646863

On the cover, you may recognise 'The Ghost of Christmas Past' aka the Posada.
This set was travelling the Parish in Advent 10 years ago.



letter from alex

If only I had known ...

I wonder if you have ever thought 'If only I had known it was going to be like this I would have done it sooner?' or perhaps 'if I had known it was going to be like this, I would never have become involved'. Maybe there

have been times when you have taken up something new, joined a group or volunteered without fully knowing what you were embarking upon.

I remember three quarters of the way around the London Marathon thinking 'if I had known it was going to be this tough, I would never have signed up' and perhaps if I had known the pleasure of owning a dog that's something I would have done sooner.

Embarking on things which we haven't done before or have little idea what to expect usually involves us in an element of preparation. We might do some research, ask other people their experiences. Maybe there is equipment or materials or other resources we need before we can really get started. And then we have a go. It may be exhilarating or disappointing. It may change our lives for the better or make us re-evaluate.

I wonder what you can think of in your life?

We are just entering the season of Advent. A time of preparation, reflection and waiting. A time when we are encouraged to think about what it means to welcome Jesus into our lives afresh. Very often we are then thrown headlong into Christmas, the celebrating, gift giving, catching up with friends and family. And then, when the tinsel tumbles down, we move towards the season of Epiphany. A time of revelation and realisation, a making clear something which we hadn't previously understood.

I imagine that the first followers of Jesus had several moments when they thought 'if I had realised this is what it was going to be like I would never have joined in.'

Over the next few weeks as Christians we are encouraged to wait patiently, to try and build some space into our day for reflection, prayer or study. At Christmas we will joyously celebrate the incredible gift of love which God gives to us in the form

of Jesus and then in the season of Epiphany we will begin to explore once more what that really means in our individual lives, in our community and in our world.

There are lots of opportunities in the parish during the run up to Christmas to try something new or different, to explore faith and consider accepting God's gift of love to us. My hope and prayer would be that we find ourselves thinking 'if only I had known it would be like this I'd have done it sooner'

Alex



Waiting, preparing, praying

Each Friday during Advent at **12.30pm** there will be an opportunity for guided prayer and reflection in the Lady Chapel at St Bridget's. You are invited to simply come along for a time of quiet prayer led by the Rector.

Friday December 5th: *praying with a candle*

Christians of all traditions (and many others in our society) increasingly welcome the beauty and stillness that a candle's light can generate. Enjoy some guided prayer using candlelight as a prompt.

Friday December 12th: *praying with an icon*

Icons can help us focus our prayer time; they are an aid to counter distraction and a means of entering more deeply into God's presence. Enjoy a guided prayer and reflection.

Friday December 19th: *praying before the sacrament*

Often seen as 'not very Church of England,' many Christians are exploring this way of prayer. It has been described as a time of friendship with God, where we can simply "look at God as God looks at us". Whatever your understanding of the sacrament of Holy Communion come and share some time of quiet personal prayer.

Coffee Morning in aid of Charles Thompson's Mission

Once again this year, Pat Southworth is holding a coffee and mince pie morning for all members of the parish on Friday 5th December at 5 Pikes Hey Road, Caldby CH48 1PA from 10am till 12 noon.

There is no charge but donations of warm clothing (coats, hats, scarves and gloves) or monetary gifts for this excellent local charity in Birkenhead will be very welcome.

<https://charlesthompsonsmision.org/>



Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.

Proverbs 31:8-9



REAL ADVENT CALENDARS

The *Real Advent Calendar* is the only one with Fairtrade chocolate, a copy of the Christmas story and which helps projects providing care and support for mums and new babies in African villages.

The *Real Advent calendar* was created in 2013 following surveys which showed that 36% of 5–7-year-olds did not know whose birthday is celebrated at Christmas. In the same year 51% of adults said that the birth of Jesus was irrelevant to their Christmas.

Children love the Fairtrade chocolate and they love the book. Parents enjoy reading it with them and learning more about the Christmas story and traditions. Every year a new edition is produced using top children's illustrators.

The *Real Advent Calendar* is a great way to put Christ back into the hearts of those who no longer know the Christmas story.

The calendars are not on sale in supermarkets but are available from the Fair Trade stall in St Bridget's Centre on Sunday after the main morning service, and on Wednesday at the Link Coffee Morning. Margaret Smith

On Tuesday 11th November, 18 members and some husbands met at the *Gravesberie Inn* (once known as *The Twelfth Man*) in Greasby for lunch.

We had a table on the end of the dining area so it was less noisy and others were not disturbed by our hilarity. The atmosphere was very pleasant, the service was good and though the portions were on the small side for some of the voracious members, everyone enjoyed themselves. (To be fair, the meal was good value for the price.) [Please note: the MU officers take no responsibility for this paragraph!]

Our next meeting is on 9th December at 2 pm when Andrew Gibb will be coming to entertain us with some Christmas music followed by mince pies etc.

Next year is the 150 Anniversary of the Mothers' Union and there will be special services and occasions around the country. Visitors are always welcome at our meetings.



Message for Epiphany

From our curate, Ruth Abbott

In the Christian tradition, Epiphany celebrates a moment of revelation: the Christ child made known to the world as the Magi recognise something sacred in an ordinary setting. It's a story of unexpected understanding, of people from far away being drawn toward a light they can't quite explain but feel compelled to follow. So what might sacredness in the ordinary setting of our lives look like?

We can find sacredness in countless small, everyday moments, often in places that seem almost too simple to hold anything profound: for example, a quiet act of generosity, like someone holding a door, offering a smile, or giving their time when they didn't have to. The laughter of a child, bursting with joy and reminding us how much goodness exists in the simplest things.

A moment of forgiveness—offered or received—that opens a space for healing we didn't realise we needed.

A feeling of connection during prayer, reflection, or a quiet moment when we sense we are not carrying life alone.

When we allow ourselves to notice these small sparks, life can begin to feel brighter and more hopeful. We realise the sacred isn't far away or reserved for special occasions; it moves alongside us, ready to meet us in the most familiar places. Embracing this awareness can lift our hearts, reminding us that every day holds the potential for discovery, encouragement, and a deeper sense of connection with the divine.



A CHRISTIAN CHRISTMAS

[Fred Aspbury wrote this originally for the staff intranet when he worked at the Information Commissioner's Office in 2022]

In light of the re-branding of Christmas to 'the end of year celebration' I thought it would be nice, and important, to state the religious importance of the festival of Christmas to Christians around the world and re-emphasise that, for us, Christmas is a deeply spiritual time.



Though the world now seems to start celebrating Christmas after Halloween, Christmas actually starts at sunset on Christmas Eve (in Biblical times, a day ended at sunset and the evening was actually the next day). The period from the first Sunday in December to Christmas Eve is called Advent, and though we tend to fill this time with parties and singing, this is actually a penitential season, like Lent, in which Christians have traditionally fasted and abstained. We pray and reflect on the state of the world, and calmly and patiently await the dawning of a New Age in Christ.

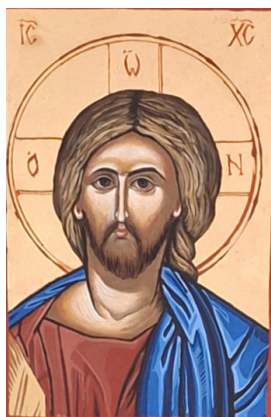
It is an obligation on all Christians to celebrate Communion (or at least attend Church) on Christmas. This can either be after nightfall on Christmas Eve (often called 'Midnight Mass') or on Christmas day itself. There then follows 12 days of feasting, though it should be remembered that not all feasts are joyous (on 28th December we commemorate the massacre of the children of Bethlehem). The word simply refers to observance of a religious obligation. Christmas officially ends on Candlemas 40 days later.

Santa Claus (Nicholas of Myra) traditionally came to visit children with gifts on his Feast Day, December 6. Henry the VIII and his followers reformed the Church and expunged any Feast Days not related directly to events in the Bible. Going by how intense my kids are about Christmas

presents, I can only imagine that the children of England caused such a ruckus that someone came up with the bright idea of introducing gift-giving on Christmas Eve. St Nick became irretrievably confused with the traditional English sprite 'Father Christmas' (who in Dickens is merely the *spirit of merriment at Christmas*) and a legend was born. Most of us know the rest of the development of Santa through the influence of mass American culture.

In Medieval times, this and Easter were the only consecutive days anyone would have off from work. Added to that, Lords were expected to host and feed their tenants and servants, meaning that it was one of the few times of year that you could expect to eat and drink anything beyond vegetable stews, old bread and small beer. Hints of the metaphysical significance are reflected in traditions such as wassailing (basically Trick or Treating) on Christmas Eve, and role/gender swapping on the Twelfth Night. At Christmas, 'normality' is rent asunder in the face of the New Age. These *may* be older traditions but we only have evidence of them from the Medieval period and to a medieval mind were Christmas through and through.

The significance of Christmas lies in the Incarnation. We believe, as John says, that "God so loved the world" that he sent his very essence to share in our experience of it. Christmas is about the bountiful sharing of God's love by his sharing our joys, trials and tribulations with us. Henry Scott Holland once said something along the lines of "*the more I reflect on the Incarnation, the more I become interested in drains.*" He meant that life, in all its visceral and boring



details, matters. It matters so much that God came to share in it. Our God is not a distant God, but lives as we do: in pain, hunger, sadness, need, loneliness, as well as joy. When we see someone suffering we know that our God could easily have been in the same situation, and if we would do all we can to alleviate the suffering of Christ, we must do likewise for our fellows.

Most of what happens in the Nativity (literally 'birth') narratives as found in the Gospels according to Matthew and Luke, are references to prophecies found in the Old Testament: the Virgin Birth (possibly a mistranslation from the Hebrew to the Greek 'Parthena'), the descent from David, the Messiah's birth in Bethlehem, the stable (though Matthew just has it

in an ordinary house!). Interestingly enough, the shepherds appear in Luke but not Matthew, and the Magi in Matthew but not Luke. The arrival and veneration by both these groups signifies for us the submission, first of the Judeans (the shepherds) and then the Gentiles (the Magi), to Christ as 'Pantokrator' (ruler of all).

As to when this happened, well it could be at anytime within a decade of what we now call the year 0. Herod the Great, who tries to hunt the Babe Jesus down according to Matthew, died in 4BC; but Quirinius, governor of Syria as mentioned by Luke, wasn't appointed until 6AD. As to December 25? Well shepherds are unlikely to have been grazing flocks at that time of year. Critics of Christianity will say that it was intended to take over Pagan festivals, but there is no evidence for this other than the fact that all cultures have a winter festival and the most commonly cited *never* took place on the 25, nor does the Winter Solstice. Most likely, it was calculated by early Christians to be exactly 9 months after the traditional date of the Annunciation (25 March), when an angel visited Mary (and begot Jesus). Later on, we do have examples of the Church attempting (successfully) to reassign Pagan festivals, traditions and places of worship, but none which date back as early as the records for the celebration of Christmas. But the minute details are unimportant for Christians. They are stories written by people, long after the event, in order to describe, comprehend and celebrate something which cannot be wholly put into words or described as history: the God with us ('Emmanuel').

At Christmas, Christians are called to remember that, despite all our faults and flaws, we are loved; and thus are called to love each other, despite our flaws and weaknesses. It is a time of joy, prayer and compassion in which we remember that the One True King was born, not in a palace but in a stable; not among the powerful, but a conquered and provincial people; and not to condemn, but to love and save. No matter what your position or status in the world, all are humbled before the King of Heaven.

Have a calm Advent and a very Merry Christmas.



Dale PCs



**For PC Sales Service & Repair Call Dave At Dale PCs
0151 652 6262 or email help@dalepcs.co.uk**

Dave Wilson is a mature qualified professional.

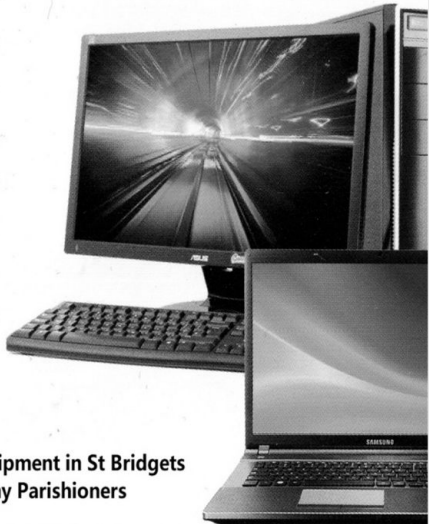
He says: "I have been working with computers for over 30 years and I have a relentless passion and enthusiasm for all things IT."

If you're having problems with your PC, or are looking to improve or replace it please give me a call and we'll have a chat about it.

My advice is free and I operate a no nonsense no fix no fee policy, customer satisfaction is at the heart of everything I do."

Dave has been supplying & maintaining the computer equipment in St Bridgets Parish Office for over 10 years and has helped out many Parishioners

www.dalepcs.co.uk



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Julie Dala

Proprietor

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West Kirby

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6 days a week**

Golden Oldies Rates
Mon, Tues & Wednesdays

Dedicated to our job

Children up to 100+ years old
Gentlemen too

December 2025 & January 2026 Diary

Our churches are open for visitors and as places of prayer & stillness
St Bridget's daily until 5pm, Caldy Church every day

**The Parish Office in St Bridget's Centre is open
Monday to Friday mornings, 9.30am–12.30pm**

The Rector's day off is a Monday
*For additional information about our activities, including occasional services
and events, please consult our website*
(www.stbridgetschurch.org.uk),

A Church Near You

www.achurchnearyou.com/St-Bridget-West-Kirby

www.achurchnearyou.com/All-Saints-Caldy

or the weekly newsletter, or phone the office (0151 625 2739)

Sunday 30th November ADVENT SUNDAY

- | | |
|---------|-------------------------------|
| 8am | Holy Communion – St Bridget's |
| 10am | Holy Communion – St Bridget's |
| 10am | Holy Communion – Caldy |
| 6.30 pm | Evening prayer – St Bridget's |

Sunday 7th December SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

- | | |
|--------|-------------------------------------|
| 8am | Holy Communion – St Bridget's |
| 10am | Holy Communion – St Bridget's |
| 10am | Holy Communion – Caldy |
| 6.30pm | Stories of Encounter – St Bridget's |

Sunday 14th December THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

- | | |
|--------|-------------------------------|
| 8am | Holy Communion – St Bridget's |
| 10am | Holy Communion – St Bridget's |
| 10am | Holy Communion – Caldy |
| 6.30pm | Evening Prayer – St Bridget's |

Friday 19th December

- | | |
|--------|-------------------------|
| 6.30pm | Outdoor Carols at Caldy |
|--------|-------------------------|

Sunday 21st December FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

8am	Holy Communion – St Bridget’s
10am	Holy Communion – St Bridget’s
10am	Holy Communion – Caldý
3.30pm	Christingle and Nativity – Caldý
6.30pm	Carol Service – St Bridget’s

Christmas Eve

3.30pm	Outdoor-Indoor Nativity at St Bridget’s
11.30pm	Midnight Mass at St Bridget’s

Christmas Day

8am	Quiet Communion – St Bridget’s
10am	Celebration Christmas Communion – St Bridget’s
10am	Celebration Christmas Communion – Caldý

Sunday 28th December FIRST SUNDAY OF CHRISTMAS

8am	Holy Communion – St Bridget’s
10am	Holy Communion – St Bridget’s
10am	Holy Communion – Caldý
	No evening service

Early morning communion during Advent

For those larks among you, there will be a said communion service at 7.30am at St Bridget’s on Thursday 4th, 11th and 18th December.

This lasts 25–30 minutes.

School Christmas services in St Bridget’s

Friday 12 December	10am	Avalon School
	3.45pm	St Bridget’s School Christingle
Monday 15 December	9.30am	St Bridget’s School FS2 (reception)
Tuesday 16 December	9.30am	St Bridget’s School Year 1
Wednesday 17 December	2.15pm	St Bridget’s School Year 2
Thursday 18 December	2.15pm	St Bridget’s School Year 4

JANUARY 2026

Sunday 4th January EPIPHANY

- 8am Holy Communion – St Bridget's
- 10am Holy Communion – St Bridget's
- 10am Holy Communion – Caldý
- 6.30 pm Prayers for Healing and Wholeness – St Bridget's

Sunday 11th January BAPTISM OF CHRIST

- 8am Holy Communion – St Bridget's
- 10am Holy Communion – St Bridget's
- 10am Holy Communion – Caldý
- 6.30pm Evening Prayer – St Bridget's

Sunday 18th January SECOND SUNDAY OF EPIPHANY

- 8am Holy Communion – St Bridget's
- 10am All Together Worship – St Bridget's
- 10am Holy Communion – Caldý
- 6.30pm Compline – St Bridget's

Sunday 25th January CONVERSION OF PAUL

- 8am Holy Communion – St Bridget's
- 10am All Together Worship – St Bridget's
- 10am Holy Communion – Caldý
- 6.30pm Evening Prayer – St Bridget's
-

Regular weekday services

Tuesday	10am	Holy Communion at Caldy Church
Wednesday	8.30am	Morning prayer at St Bridget's
Wednesday	11.30pm	Holy Communion at St Bridget's
Thursday	9am	Morning Prayer on Zoom
Friday	9am	Morning Prayer livestreamed on Facebook

Regular weekday activities

Tuesday	3.30pm	Toasty Tuesday in St Bridget's (term time)
	4.45pm	Sing Aloud junior choir practice (term time)
	6.00pm	Choir practice
	7.30pm	Bell ringing practice
Wednesday	8.30–11.30am	The Link Café – Centre
	10am	Knit & Natter, craft and chat group – Centre
Thursday	10am	Caldy Baby & Toddler Group (term time)
Friday	10am	St Bridget's Baby Group – Centre (term time)

Other regular activities

Second Tuesday of month	2pm	Mothers' Union in the Centre
Third Wednesday of month	12 noon	Men's Shed Lunch in the Centre
First Tuesday of month	7pm	Theology Discussion group at the Ring O' Bells
One Saturday each month	9.30–12 noon	Churchyard Working Party St Bridget's

SPONSOR A BENCH

As part of the development of the lower churchyard as an area for quiet reflection we are hoping to install some simple, natural benches. Each bench will cost approximately £200 to install. If you would be willing to sponsor a bench please let the Rector know.

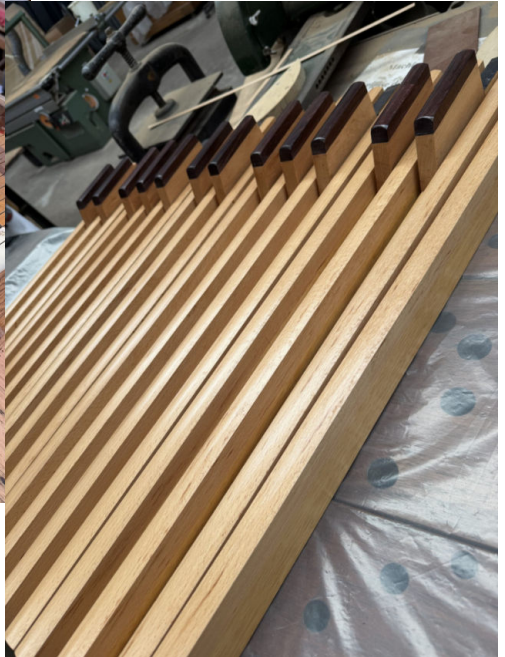
ORGAN UPDATE

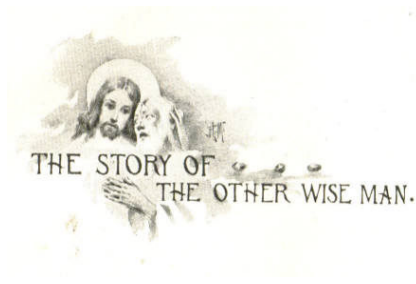
The work on the St Bridget's organ has begun! As you'll remember, the console is now in the Henry Willis & Son workshop in Liverpool. This is part of the latest report:

The console components have all been thoroughly cleaned and overhauled. The console case has been repaired. The key bench has been repaired where the veneer had been broken off. All of the black console woodwork has been stripped, repaired, filled and then sprayed before rubbing back and re-spraying. We are still awaiting many electrical components which are being made to our specifications for this particular console. The new key contacts have now arrived and these will be fitted to the keys and the pedalboard and then wired, starting next week.



A group of us should be visiting our organ in the workshops on 27th November.





by HENRY VAN DYKE (1852–1933)

Paula Cobby ('Paula in the Office') suggested this would be appropriate for this issue. Some of you will be familiar with the story but it may be new to others.

Available at <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/19608/19608-h/19608-h.htm>

This version has been abridged by the Editor from <https://resource-ni.com> (Adapted by Joy Swartley Sawatzky)

In the days when Augustus Caesar was master of many kings and Herod reigned in Jerusalem, high on the hill overlooking the region of Persia, sat the estate of Artaban the Median, a priest of the Magi, a king in his own right.

On this particular night, as Artaban stood on the terrace of his roof, the quiet dawn was nearing. Artaban was trying to free his mind from all that had happened just hours before, trying to make sense of it. His friends could not comprehend his realisation, that the answers were no longer in the stars. They refused to go with him on his journey to find the King who was to be born this night. They had known him as a scientist, not a believer in a child born to become the King, the hope of the world.

Artaban held on to the knowledge that at least three of his colleagues among the Magi also believed. They understood why he would sell his home and his possessions, to buy gifts for this King yet to be born. Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar would join him on the journey to find this one born to be King of Israel. He reached into the pocket of his robe and drew out three great gems – one blue as a fragment of the night sky, one redder than a ray of sunrise, and one as pure as the peak of a snow mountain at sunrise. His tribute to honour the King .



“Religion without a great hope, would be like an altar without a living fire. It would be pointless,” Artaban said to himself.

As Artaban looked back to the sky, an explosion of colour came out of the darkness. and a star of great radiance shone in the distance.

“This is the sign!” he said. “The King is coming, and I will go to meet him!”

And before the sun rose, the Other Wise Man was in the saddle of his swiftest, most trusted horse, riding to meet his friends. Without pushing his horse too hard, Artaban calculated that he would reach the Temple of the Seven Spheres, the appointed place and time of meeting, just before midnight on the tenth day. At nightfall of the tenth day, Artaban and his exhausted horse arrived beneath the shattered walls of Babylon, but he pressed on to the Temple to meet his friends.

A grove of date-palms made an island of gloom ahead. As Artaban's mare passed into the shadow of the palms, she slowed her pace and began to pick her way more carefully. The grove was silent as a tomb. At last, she stood still, quivering in fear. Artaban dismounted. The dim starlight revealed the form of a man lying across the road. His dress and appearance showed that he was probably one of the poor Hebrew exiles who dwelt in great numbers in the vicinity. Artaban felt the chill of death in the man's lean hand, and he turned away with pity, resigning the body to that strange funeral of the desert where vultures and varmints would pick the bones clean. But as he turned, a faint sigh came from the man, and bony fingers closed on the hem of the Magi's robe.

How could Artaban stay here in the darkness to minister to a dying stranger? What was his duty? If he was delayed for even an hour, he would not reach the meeting place at the appointed time, and his companions would go without him. He would fail in his quest. But if he left now, the man would surely die.



"God of truth and purity," he prayed, "direct me in the holy path, the way of wisdom which only you know."

Then Artaban turned to the sick man and made sure he was comfortable. He brought water and moistened the sufferer's brow and mouth. He mixed a drink of a simple but potent remedy which he carried always in his girdle—for the Magi were physicians as well as astrologers—and poured it slowly between the colourless lips. After several hours, the man's strength returned; he sat up and looked about him.

"Who are you?" he said, in the dialect of the country.

"I am Artaban, of the Magi, and I am going to Jerusalem in search of one who is to be born King of the Jews, a great Prince and Deliverer of all. I cannot delay my journey any longer. Here is all that I have left of bread and wine and here is a potion of healing herbs. When your strength is restored, you can find your way home. The Jew raised his trembling hand to heaven and looked at Artaban,

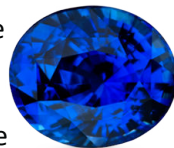
"I have nothing to give you in return for what you have done for me but I can tell you where the Messiah must be sought. Our prophets said that he should be born not in Jerusalem, but in Bethlehem of Judah. May the Lord bring you safely to that place, because you have had pity upon the sick."

Artaban rode through the night as quickly as possible: even so, it was after dawn before he arrived at the Temple of the Spheres. There was no trace of his friends. Even from the highest terrace, there was no sign of the caravan of the three wise men, far or near. At the edge of the terrace, he found a note saying:

“We have waited past the midnight hour and can delay no longer. We go to find the King. Follow us across the desert.”

With no food and a spent horse, Artaban realised he would have to return to Babylon, sell one of the jewels to buy food and a camel train. He was in despair and said, “Only God the merciful knows whether I shall lose the sight of the King because I stopped to show mercy.”

Artaban did indeed return to Babylon, and with his sapphire he purchased what he needed for the journey. After a long and arduous journey across the desert, he arrived at last in Bethlehem. “Now at last,” he said, “I shall surely find him and be able to give him the ruby and pearl I still possess.” As he searched for the place where the baby lay, he became aware of the desolation of the streets. From the open door of a low stone cottage, he heard a woman’s voice singing softly to her baby. Artaban entered and the young woman told him of three wise men who had appeared in the village three days before, guided by a star to the place where Joseph of Nazareth was lodging with his wife, Mary, and her newborn child. She said they had given expensive gifts to the child.



“But the travellers disappeared again, as suddenly as they had come. And Joseph and his wife and baby fled that same night secretly to Egypt. They say that the Roman soldiers are coming from Jerusalem to force a new tax on us.”

The young mother graciously offered Artaban what food she had. Suddenly, there was a wild uproar in the village streets, a wailing of women’s voices, clashing swords, and desperate cries: “The soldiers of Herod! They are killing our children!”

The young mother was terrified: she held her child close, and crouched with him in the darkest corner of the room. Artaban went quickly to the doorway of the house. His royal bearing blocked any sight of the home within. The soldiers came hurrying down the street, blood dripping from their swords. They hesitated at the sight of the stranger: Artaban did not move, but said, in a low voice, holding out the ruby; “I am all alone in this place, waiting to give this jewel to the prudent captain who will leave me in peace.”

The captain barely hesitated and took the ruby greedily.

“March on!” he cried to his men. “There is no child here.”

Artaban re-entered the cottage. He turned his face to the east and prayed:

“God of truth, forgive my sin! I have lied, to save the life of a child. And two of my gifts are gone. Shall I ever be worthy to see the face of the King?”



But the voice of the woman, weeping for joy behind him, said, gently:

“Because you have saved the life of my little one, may the Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.”

So the Other Wise Man travelled from place to place. Beginning in Egypt, he searched among the people of the diaspora: he saw hunger and famine, plague-stricken cities, the imprisoned and enslaved. In all the morass of humanity, he found none to worship but many to help. He fed the hungry, clothed the naked, healed the sick, and comforted the captive; and his years went swiftly by. It seemed as if he had forgotten his quest.



“THE OLD MAN FOLLOWED THE MULTITUDE”

After 33 years seeking, Artaban was weary and ready to die as he came for the last time to Jerusalem. Although he had often visited the holy city without finding any trace of the family who had fled from Bethlehem, it seemed he must make one more effort. It was the season of the Passover. The city was teeming with strangers. But on this day, there was a noticeable agitation in the multitude and the sky was dark and gloomy. Artaban joined a group of people from his own country, Parthian Jews who had come to keep the Passover, and asked them the cause of the agitation, and where they were going.

“We are going to the place called Golgotha, outside the city walls, where there is to be an execution. Haven’t you heard? Two famous robbers are to be crucified, and with them another, called Jesus of Nazareth, a man who has done many wonderful works among the people. But the priests and elders have said that he must die, because he named himself the Son of God. And Pilate has sent him to the cross because he said that he was the ‘King of the Jews’.”

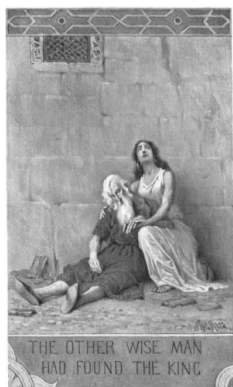
Artaban became agitated: could this be the same one who had been born in Bethlehem all those years ago, when the star had appeared in heaven? He said to himself, “Could it be that my last pearl is just in time to pay His ransom and save his life?” The old man followed the crowd and along the street, they met a troop of soldiers dragging a ragged young girl. As the aged but still stately Magi looked

at her with compassion, she broke away from her tormentors and threw herself at Artaban's feet.

"Have pity on me!" she cried, "I also am a daughter of the true religion which is taught by the Magi. My father is dead and I'm to be sold as a slave. Save me from this fate worse than death." Artaban trembled, troubled by the old conflict in his soul between the remaining gift he hoped to offer the King and the human need before him.

To rescue this helpless girl would be a true deed of love. And is not love the light of the soul? He took the pearl from his robes: its iridescent radiance had never seemed so beautiful. He took one last look and laid it in the hand of the slave. "This is your ransom, daughter! It is the last of my treasures which I kept for the King." As he spoke, the sky darkened, and tremors ran through the earth. The walls of the house near where they stood rocked, stones were loosened and crashed into the street. The soldiers fled in terror. But Artaban and the girl crouched helpless in the maelstrom. What did he have to fear? What did he have to live for? He had given away his last gift meant for the King and the hope of ever finding Him. The quest was over; he had failed.

But, even in that thought, there was profound peace. He knew that all was well, because day by day he had done the best that he could. He had been true to the light that had been given to him. A heavy tile, shaken from the roof by a tremor, fell and struck the old man on the temple. He lay breathless and pale, his head resting on the young girl's shoulder, blood trickling from his wound. As she bent over him, a gentle sound came through the twilight, like music from a distance,



The girl turned her head to see if someone had spoken, but she saw no one. The old man's lips began to move, as if in answer. Clearly, he had heard the words, and the girl heard him say in the Parthian tongue: "Not so, my Lord. For when did I see you?" The sweet sound came again and again the girl heard it, very faint and far away, but she now seemed to understand the words: "Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as you have done it to the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me." A radiance of wonder and joy lit Artaban's pale face, like the first ray of dawn on a snowy mountain peak, and he sighed one long, last breath. His journey was ended. His treasures were accepted. The Other Wise Man had found the King.

In the midst of this Advent season—this holiest of times—may you find hope, light and life in the smallest of acts of love and compassion. And remember, the journey is the answer, the answer is the journey.

And as Winter draws near, it's a delight to include this prose poem written by Lynne Saunders (who, when she's not writing, plays the organ in St Bridget's, amongst other things)



A Winter's Day



Dawn breaks, daylight slowly rises. The frozen earth, hidden beneath a layer of white, lies dormant.



The wind, cold and raw, blows across the open countryside, finding every dip and hollow, every turn in the river, every hill and rocky outcrop, bending the sparse, barren trees, stripped of their summer finery, their trunks and boughs stark against the landscape, and rustles in the hedgerows.

Leaves, swirling, find their resting place alongside others. The wind spares nothing, sheep huddling together for warmth against stone walls, shift uncomfortably. A bird of prey circles, once, twice before disappearing over a ridge.

A spider in the hawthorn bush ventures onto its web to see what disturbs it but quickly retreats. Frost hangs on the finely spun threads, sparkling magically in the winter light.



The sky, silver grey with clouds heavy and foreboding, blurs its edges with those of the hills as softly, softly, gentle snowflakes fall.

A break in the clouds, a shimmer of light descends on the fields, as the weak, December rays of the sun, low in the sky, shine through. A lone robin atop of the gate post, hops down onto the ice-covered tracks of the path, searching for food before the end of the day.

The wintry light of the afternoon begins to fade.

Dusk turns to night fall once more, ending another winter's day.



Snowflake image by Omelapics on Freepik

Theology Discussion Group @ the Ring O'Bells

The next meeting is on Tuesday 2nd December at 7 pm at the 'Ring O'Bells'

Dave says, "Themes to be explored in the coming year include: St. Paul; Liturgy; Mary and her place in the Gospel narrative and Evangelism. In the end, we decided that the discussion theme for next month [December] would be *the Incarnation*. This was felt to be highly appropriate as we prepare for the Christmas season.

All are welcome – please do come along and please invite others.

Dave can be contacted on jg54@liverpool.ac.uk

end



piece

"There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it."

Edith Wharton

"This is quite the season indeed for friendly meetings. At Christmas, everybody invites their friends about them, and people think little of even the worst weather. I was snowed up at a friend's house once for a week. Nothing could be pleasanter."

Jane Austen, 'Emma'

*"I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet
The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"*
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow



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If you are concerned about someone's safety or well-being contact:

- The Rector, Reverend Alex Williams, 0151 625 1052 rectorwestkirby@gmail.com
- The Parish Safeguarding Officer Rosemary Morgan 0782 1672232
safeguardingwestkirby@gmail.com
- The Diocesan Safeguarding Team 01928 718834 (option 4)
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IF SOMEONE IS IN IMMEDIATE DANGER OR HARM, **CALL 999** AND ASK FOR THE POLICE.