

CENTREPIECE

December—January 2026

Free but donations are helpful



Christmas Special
Trees, Music, Advent thoughts, Services...



The Collegiate
Church of

Saint ⊕ Mary
in Stafford

Stafford Churches

Saint Chad : Collegiate Church of Saint Mary : Saint Leonard

RECTOR

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For Baptisms and Weddings:
Please contact the Parish Administrator

Monday 11am—3pm
Tuesday 11am—3pm
Wednesday 11am—3 pm
Thursday 11am—3pm
Friday 11am—4pm

SERVICES IN STAFFORD CHURCHES

Usual weekly services

The three Parishes Eucharist on Sundays

8.30am at Saint Chads

10.00am at Saint Mary's

Tuesdays at noon in St Mary's

Wednesdays at 11.00am in St Chad's

Fridays at noon in St Chad's

First Sunday of the month at 10.00: a service at Saint Leonard's, Marston

There is a weekly newsheet sent out by email. If you are not receiving this and would like to, please contact the Parish Office.



From the Editors

We are into Advent now, the church is full of Christmas trees and many services and concerts have been planned. You'll find details of many of these inside this edition, along with photos of the Christmas Tree Festival..

We hope you like the wonderful cover photo of the Supermoon rising over St Mary's. Thank you Paul Milgate-Scarrott for this photo.

And finally we would like to wish you all a peaceful and happy Christmas. Hope to see you at some of the services,

*If you have something interesting to share with us —please do.
It's always nice to hear from different people.*

Steve and Dee Turner

steveanddeeturner@yahoo.co.uk



From The Musing Ministers

So, Advent has begun, the Advent calendars have fought their way through the Halloween pumpkins and spooks in the shops and we can enjoy the glorious count down to the birth of Christ!

But still, Christmas Day is weeks away, by which time everyone will be tired of the jingles, the adverts and the decorations and the real Christmas trees will have begun to look sad and will have begun to lose their pine needles. As I was growing up, and (I suspect for many of you too), it was very different.

We all have our memories of Christmases past, and as I write this mine have come flooding back.

One is of my father bringing the Christmas tree in, on Christmas Eve on his way home from work.

My brothers and I were beyond excited, the box of decorations was brought out of the loft and we poured over them as we dressed the tree.

The smell in the house was of freshly baked mince pies and sausage rolls, and the chicken that my grandmother had plucked sat proudly in the pantry.(how it fed 3 adults and three children, I will never know!)

There was a rising excitement , that the great day was tomorrow!

And so it dawned and stockings were opened, each with one main present ,a chocolate selection box, chocolate coins, satsumas and nuts.

Then it was off to church, where we sang carols and marvelled at the nativity scene, which now miraculously had a baby in the manger.

All these years later I still feel that same excitement, as Advent begins and continues to Christmas Day and then on to Epiphany.

For all of us this is the true meaning of Christmas.

I believe that as Christians we are twice blessed.

We can enjoy all the retail and the glamour and glitz of a secular Christmas, but most of all we can be certain in the knowledge that Christ has been born in us again.

For us, He is not just for Christmas, but forever.

May I wish you all, dear readers, a very Blessed Advent, Christmas and New Year, filled with love, joy and peace.

Pam



**Dates for next
QUIET MONDAYS
at Shallowford House**

**December 8th, February 9th, March 9th
9:45 am to 3.30 pm**

a gentle day of devotion, quiet time and worship

£26 including lunch
To book call 01785 760233

Further information about these Quiet Days from Sheila Young

No Quiet Monday in January



ST. MARY'S
ADVENT & CHRISTMAS SERVICES 2025

 **24th December**
Childrens Christingle Service - 4pm

 **24th December**
Midnight Mass - 11:30pm

 **25th December**
Christmas Morning Mass - 10am



ADVENT SERVICES:
JOIN US THIS CHRISTMAS FOR
CHILDREN'S
CHRISTINGLE
SERVICE

WEDNESDAY 24 DECEMBER
4:00 PM

ST. MARY'S CHURCH, STAFFORD ST16 2AP

The Children's Society

Advent

The Rt Revd Jan McFarlane
Dean of Lichfield

Much as I'd prefer not to think about Christmas presents and cards until the week before Christmas, the reality is that as soon as Bonfire Night and Remembrance Sunday are over, I must procrastinate no longer! Poor Advent. It's lost in the mists of time, its season of spiritual preparation for Christmas overtaken by ever exotic Advent Calendars, their numbered windows promising expensive 'treats' to help us to get through the stress of Christmas preparations. I've even seen a cheese-a-day Advent calendar. Seriously, who thought of that one?

Instead of moaning about the commercialism of Christmas, here at Lichfield Cathedral we do all we can to keep the Sundays of Advent special, beginning with the hauntingly beautiful Advent Carol Service. But then we go 'full bling' with the Christmas Light Show and the Christmas Tree Festival. They're ever popular, a seasonal 'must' in many people's diaries. And at the heart of both, is a search for the light in the midst of the darkness. Physical light in the long nights of winter. And spiritual light in a world which feels chaotic and dark.

One of my favourite worship songs is 'Christ be our Light' by the Roman Catholic songwriter Bernadette Farrell. It's beautiful. If you don't know it and have access to the internet, do search for it. You'll soon be singing along to its gentle tune and meaningful lyrics.

Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.

This is why, I think, so many people turn to the Church at Christmas, on the shortest days of the year. Our ancestors prayed that the sun would return. We search for the Son – the one who is the Light of the World. Even those who don't yet know him for themselves. But light and truth are in short supply at the moment – and in the Church we know both.

Many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
making your kingdom come.

So many people are lonely at Christmas. So many are searching for somewhere to belong. As Christians we belong to one big family, made brothers and sisters through our baptism. Who might we 'serve' this Christmas by simply inviting them to 'come and see'? Invite them to a carol service, or a social event at church, or bring them to their cathedral to see the Christmas Trees or Christmas Light Show. You might make someone's Christmas, and it might be for them

the first step to joining the church and finding faith. The worst that can happen is that they say no, so what's to lose?

A blessed Advent from us all at Lichfield Cathedral.
Your Cathedral.

The Advent season begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas Day, November 30 2025.

Lichfield Cathedral's programme of worship and events for Advent and Christmas can be found on the cathedral website:

www.lichfield-cathedral.org



One World Group

The One World Group at St Mary's Church, Stafford, would like to extend our warmest thanks to the congregations of the three parishes for their continued generosity and compassion. Your ongoing support for Stafford's local food bank has made a meaningful difference to individuals and families experiencing hardship in our community.

We also invite you to support our Christmas Food Drive.

On Sunday, 14th December, we will be holding a food drive to support the local food bank, collecting non-perishable items including:

Tinned meals - Tinned vegetables - Tea - Coffee -Packaged festive treats.

Every donation helps bring comfort, nourishment, and hope to those most in need during the Christmas season.

Thank you for continually showing such heartfelt commitment to supporting others locally and globally.

Your kindness truly changes lives.

Stafford Poppy Appeal Launch

Stafford Branch of the Royal British Legion launched their 2025 Branch Poppy Appeal on Monday 13th October 2025 with a spectacular show in the Gatehouse Theatre. The Poppy Appeal is the RBL's biggest fund-raising event held every year in November and this year the theme and message of the RBL appeal was 'a combination of commemorating significant anniversaries and celebrating community spirit'.

This is the 10th time that Paul Milgate-Scarrott, Churchwarden at St Mary's, has delivered the Stafford Poppy Appeal Launch and it was by far his most ambitious. He wrote, produced and directed a show that took place in the Gatehouse Theatre and involved over 70 school children, a specially written song by Jim Milgate-Scarrott and Carol Lake with other music performed by the very talented Maria Kelly and flutist Ailish Steele. Along with many parents, families and friends of the performers also in attendance were his Majesty's Deputy Lieutenant, Mrs. Philippa Jane Gee, the Worshipful the Mayor of Stafford Borough, Councillor Jenny Barron and the RBL Stafford Branch Chairman, Lt Col (R) EC Dale OBE, soldiers from 22nd Signal Regiment, aviators from the Tactical Supply Wing, veterans and interested spectators.

As Chaplain to the Stafford Branch of the Royal British Legion Rev. John Davis began the Poppy Launch with prayers, and a reflection on George



Wright BEM, who is one of the remaining veterans who served in the Second World War. George was a boat boy, serving with the Royal Navy from 1943, too young to fight, so his job was carrying the ammunition up from the ship's hold for the firing of the guns. Probably far more dangerous than being on deck. He served in the Sicily and Italian campaigns, and on Operation Dragoon, attacking the Germans in Southern France, to relieve the D Day landings.



Time Marches On was re-edited and recorded by Paul Boocock.film, in St Mary's Church.



We are delighted to announce that this year's poppy appeal broke all previous records and the RBL have expressed their thanks to the generosity of the people of Stafford and the hard work of all the many volunteers.



St Mary's Christmas Tree Festival

St Mary's Christmas Tree Festival has become a well established tradition in Stafford. About 90 trees decorated by local businesses and organisations bringing together the whole community.



The Christmas Tree Festival was officially opened by the Mayor of Stafford, Cllr Jenny Baron.

The Mayor attended a reception to open the event, met with those who were taking part, and gave out certificates to the various business and community groups who had decorated trees.

Photos by Paul Milgate-Scarrott



But we mustn't forget the preparation that went into it!

A big shout out to the guys from Streetscene, Stafford Borough Council, for all the help they gave us to set up the festival, installing the trees. We really appreciate their help.



Photo credit Dee Turner



Eddi the Priest

Rudyard Kipling

Eddi, priest of St. Wilfrid In his chapel at Manhood End,
Ordered a midnight service For such as cared to attend.

But the Saxons were keeping Christmas,
And the night was stormy as well. Nobody came to service,
Though Eddi rang the bell.

"Wicked weather for walking," Said Eddi of Manhood End.
"But I must go on with the service For such as care to attend."

The altar-lamps were lighted, -- An old marsh-donkey came,
Bold as a guest invited, And stared at the guttering flame.

The storm beat on at the windows, The water splashed on the floor,
And a wet, yoke-weary bullock Pushed in through the open door.

"How do I know what is greatest, How do I know what is least?
That is My Father's business," Said Eddi, Wilfrid's priest.

"But -- three are gathered together -- Listen to me and attend.
I bring good news, my brethren!" Said Eddi of Manhood End.

And he told the Ox of a Manger And a Stall in Bethlehem,
And he spoke to the Ass of a Rider, That rode to Jerusalem.

They steamed and dripped in the chancel, They listened and never stirred,
While, just as though they were Bishops, Eddi preached them The Word,

Till the gale blew off on the marshes And the windows showed the day,
And the Ox and the Ass together Wheeled and clattered away.

And when the Saxons mocked him, Said Eddi of Manhood End,
"I dare not shut His chapel On such as care to attend."



Holy Interruption

Craig Newton, new director of Shallowford House, our diocesan retreat centre, mulls the season of mistletoe and wine.

There's a certain stillness in the air as the year begins to draw to a close. It's a quiet that sits beneath the busyness of December, beneath the shopping lists and Christmas parties, beneath the deadlines and the expectations. It's the solemn quiet of winter. Of early nights and frosted mornings. Of candles lit against the dark.

If we allow ourselves to listen, Advent has a different rhythm to the world around it. Where the world demands we speed up, Advent invites us to slow down. Where the world grows loud, Advent gently whispers. Where the world requires more, Advent offers rest. Advent, in its truest sense, is a season of holy waiting. A time not to strive, but to receive.

In the Gospel stories, before the multitudes of the heavenly host praised God, there was silence. Before the light of a star broke into the night sky, there was anticipation. Before God came close in the vulnerability of a child, there were ordinary people going about their ordinary lives. It was in that stillness, unnoticed by most, that Heaven touched earth.

This is the fulfilment of Advent: God interrupting the ordinary. The Incarnation is the great holy interruption; the Creator entering creation, the Eternal One stepping into time, Heaven colliding with earth. It didn't arrive with prestige or power, but in the stillness of the night, in a place where most weren't looking.

This is how God so often moves. Not through the sensational and spectacular, but through quiet, unassuming moments. A whispered prayer. A small act of kindness. A pause in the rush of the day.

As Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote, "We must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God." Perhaps this Advent, we might learn again how to make room for those interruptions. To pause, long enough to notice where the light breaks in. To listen, for the whisper beneath the noise. To create for ourselves and for others, spaces of stillness in which the God who came at Bethlehem might meet us again.

Craig Newton joined the diocese in August as director of Shallowford House, our diocesan retreat and conference centre and is looking forward to welcoming people through his first winter of retreat days, workshops and hosting church weeks/ weekends and other groups stays. The ever-evolving calendar of up-coming retreats etc can be found at <https://shallowfordhouse.org/events1/>

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Saturday Morning Coffee Concerts at St Mary's



Jan 10	Jun-Jou Lin (piano)
Jan 24	Manchester Reed Trio
Feb 14	Tbc
Feb 28	Simon Fitzgerald (organ)

All concerts begin at 11:00am

Doors open 10:30am when tea and coffee will be available
All are welcome Admission free but donations very welcome!



Tuesday 20 January 2026

The Royal Academy - Guardians of British artistic taste? **Lecturer Ian Swankie**

Famous for its annual open Summer Exhibition the Royal Academy has been a pillar of British art over 250 years. This lecture deals with its history from its modest beginnings to its current home in Burlington House and explores the world of the Royal Academicians.

Venue is Stafford Gatehouse Theatre at 1.45pm.

Membership for the year starting on April 1st costs just £60 for 10 lectures.
Guest attendance fee is £10

For more information please see our website: www.theartsocietystafford.org.uk

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Stafford Calendars and Christmas Cards

The Friends of St Mary's Stafford Calendar is selling well. Get yours from our stall during the Christmas Tree Festival or from the following local shops.

**Magic by Candlelight
Mews Music
Snapdragon cards and gifts**

They very kindly give all the proceeds to St Mary's.



Here's our newest card, a wonderfully Christmassy church picture including Christmas trees, candles and crib.

Photo by Paul Milgate-Scarrott



Stella and Dee ran the first stall of the season at a very successful St Chad's Christmas Craft Fair.

Festival Night Concert

A big Thank You to St Mary's Singers for the fabulous performance at our Festival Night Concert on a rather cold, wet night. A varied mixture of Christmas songs, carols and readings, some fun, some more serious—guaranteed to put us in the Christmas mood.

There are plenty more concerts and carol services to come—try to catch one of them if you can.

R N Clarke

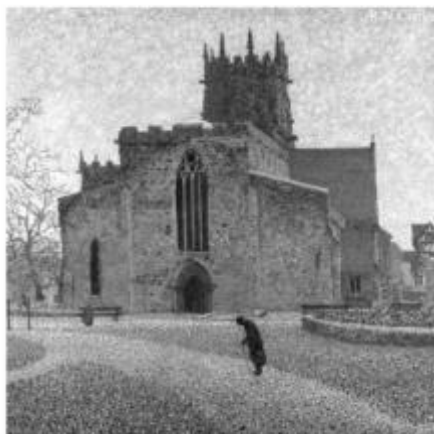
Paintings, drawings and
watercolours of
R N Clarke

Gallery address

R N Clarke Fine Art
Suite No1, St Mary's Mews,
St Mary's Place,
Stafford ST16 2AP

The Gallery is **Open by Appointment**
please telephone 07874 708372
or email
richard.n.clarke@outlook.com

The Gallery also holds occasional
Open Days



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Christmas Events

Sunday 7th December 10am –
Christingle Service, everyone will have
the opportunity to make a Christingle
to take home 

Sunday 21st December 10am –
Communion with Christmas Carols

Wednesday 24th December Christmas Eve
4pm – **Christmas Carol Service** with
mulled wine and mince pies 

Everyone welcome, come and join us
Enquiries to: stleonardmarston@outlook.com

 **JOY**

Carols for Epiphany

Sunday 18th January 2026
6.30pm
at Saint Mary's Stafford
The choir and musicians
of the Collegiate Church




St. Chad's Crib Service

Saturday 20th December – 2pm
St. Chad's Church, Stafford

 All children must be
accompanied by an adult

 Children are encouraged to
dress up as their favourite
nativity character!




ADVENT SERVICES:
JOIN US THIS CHRISTMAS FOR

THE FIRST MASS OF CHRISTMAS

WEDNESDAY 24 DECEMBER
8:00 PM
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Cross Laying Ceremony

Have you ever wondered, like me, how the Cross Laying Ceremony came about? Well finally I have an explanation.

In the early 1920s, after the first world war, widows, widowers and family members were not allowed to join the Armistice or Remembrance Services held at the Cenotaph in London to pay tribute to their lost loved ones. This led to them running across the road to lay crosses at the foot of the Cenotaph.



This very dangerous practice was noted by the RBL and branches soon started to hold their own cross laying services so that families could be included in the national act of remembrance.

Stafford is one of the few branches in the UK that continues to observe this



***We join together every week day morning
at 9 am online to say Morning Prayer and
we would love you to join us!***

***Just one day or five, and join just to listen
or to take part.***

It is a wonderful way to start the day!

Interested?

Contact Rev. Pam Merriott (pamamerriott@gmail.com)

or Ruth Duffy. (r.m.duffy@me.com)

The Soup Kitchen



This beautiful 16th Century eating house offers the ideal place to meet your friends and is described in The Times as "Stafford's hidden gem". Visitors from all over the world regularly return and comment 'there is nowhere else that compares in atmosphere, traditional old-fashioned service and genuine warm welcome which is unique to Stafford's Soup Kitchen.

Church Lane Antiques



A wide selection of antiques for sale, including furniture, pictures, pottery, glass, silver and jewellery.

We are always interested in buying; from single items to house clearance.

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St. Chad's

Churchwardens.....Ian Carr07714913079
Gary Webster

St. Leonard's

ChurchwardenGail Wray01889 271176

WEBSITES:



Website for StaffordChurches: www.staffordchurches.uk
St Mary's Website: www.stmarysstafford.org.uk
St. Chad's Website: www.stchadsstafford.co.uk
Why not follow us on Twitter? @staffordchurch
Facebook: staffordchurches.uk

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FRIENDS OF ST MARY'S

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A Christmas Cracker!

Join us for crafts and storytelling as we share the Christmas Story for children of all ages!

Saturday 13th December
10:30am – 12:00 Noon
St Mary's Church, Stafford ST16 2AP

Refreshments will be available.

Everyone is welcome!

*Children must be accompanied by an adult



Contributions to Centrepiece:

If you would like to advertise an event, comment on one you have attended or just share something interesting with us– then please do so.

Email us at: steveanddeeturner@yahoo.co.uk

Deadline is about 10 days before the first Sunday of the month.