

across **ROYSTON**

December 2025/ January 2026



The magazine of the Church of St. John the Baptist, Royston Parish
Church, part of the worldwide Anglican Communion



Christmas Services

30th November 5pm Advent Carol Service

A contemplative service anticipating the coming of Christ with bible readings, choir anthems and carols

7th December 3.30pm Christingle

Tea-Time Praise service for the family with Christingles

21st December 5pm Traditional Christmas Carol Service

The annual carol service, with bible readings, choir anthems & carols

22nd December 5pm Blue Christmas

A quiet and reflective service for those who find Christmas difficult for any reason

24th December 2.30pm & 4pm Crib Service

A service for all the family, held twice because of demand

24th December 11pm Midnight Mass

The traditional service of the first communion at Christmas

25th December 10am Family Communion Service

A family communion service with a chance for children to show & tell Christmas presents

Please note that the children's play area will be closed during these services with exception to the Family Communion Service.

In addition to these special services, we have the following services every Sunday morning: 9am Quiet and contemplative communion service (in traditional language on the 4th Sunday of the month)

10.30am Lively communion service with music, children's church, children's play area and refreshments

Further details at www.roystonparishchurch.org.uk

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THE CHRISTINGLE

On Sunday December 7th., at 3.30 p.m., our Tea Time Praise! service will include our annual Christingle.

The Christingle is a meaningful symbol used in Christian traditions, particularly within the Anglican Church, to celebrate Jesus Christ as the "Light of the World." The word "Christingle" comes from the German *Christkindl*, meaning "Christ Child," and has become associated with a special type of service that is especially popular during Advent and Christmas.



The Christingle tradition dates back to 1747, when Bishop Johannes de Watteville of the Moravian Church first presented it in Germany as a way to help children understand God's love. The practice gradually spread across Europe but became widely known in the United Kingdom in the late 20th century, primarily due to the work of The Children's Society, which adapted Christingle Services as part of their fundraising.

Each part of the Christingle has a deep symbolic meaning:

The Orange: Represents the world, reminding us of God's creation.

The Red Ribbon: Wrapped around the orange, it symbolises the blood of Christ and His sacrifice for humanity.

The Four Cocktail Sticks: These are inserted into the orange and usually adorned with dried fruits or sweets. They represent the four seasons and the fruits of the earth—God's bounty and provision.

The Candle: Placed at the top of the orange, the candle symbolises Jesus as the Light of the World, bringing hope and dispelling darkness.

In modern times, the Christingle remains a powerful symbol of hope, generosity, and faith. It is an invitation to reflect on the meaning of Christ's birth and to bring light into the world through love, compassion, and service to others.

Whether celebrated as part of a church community or at home, the Christingle is a vivid reminder of the Christmas message: that in the midst of darkness, there is light—and that light brings life.

Minister's Musings

Dear Friends

As I write this letter, I am looking out at a frosty patch of grass where the sun has not yet reached. Where the sun has done so, the grass is its familiar green colour.

The contrast between the two areas is marked, where the sun has reached looks cheerful, the rest is still rather gloomy.

The winter months often highlight that sort of contrast, not just between physical areas, but also in our minds and spirits.

On the one hand we see excitement all around us, particularly in the young, of forthcoming celebrations at Christmas; on the other hand, we see the sadness, the despair, and the loneliness of so many. The contrast is marked.

Even as I have been writing this, I see the sun has moved higher in the sky and the patch of frosty shade has become smaller, and I am reminded that a different kind of Son can change that gloom to light.

At Christmas we celebrate the Son of God coming in human form to, as the Gospel of Luke in the Bible puts it "bring good news to the poor, liberty to captives, new sight to the blind, freedom to the oppressed, and the year of God's favour," proclaiming the good news of forgiveness, and eternal life.

But if you are in the gloom, it is hard to wait for the sun to come around, so we will have our Blue Christmas service at almost the longest night of the year, Monday 22nd December at 5.00pm to commemorate the hope that Jesus brings into the world, and in a quiet reflective service we can try to find a way forward into the light

of God's eternal love. If you know anyone who is feeling "blue" or not thrilled with the prospect of the celebrations that others may experience, please invite them to come along with you. For the sun is worth waiting for.

In the meantime, throughout the whole of December, we do encourage people to drop into church to see the magnificent Christmas Tree and, if they wish, to write a message tag showing that they are thinking of someone special to them no longer around and put the note together with one of the many baubles we have onto the tree. We deliberately leave the lower branches clear of baubles so that there is plenty of space to put on your own, even if you are small in height!

Last year the number of visitors and baubles was astonishing, and generally there will be people around in church if you want to speak to you if you wish or leave you to simply be peaceful if you don't.

I have also had the privilege of seeing some of our children from our local schools rehearsing for their Christmas Services, some of which will be in church. The wonderful optimism of the children is infectious and definitely is enough to spread that sunshine more. So many of our own services in church do reflect the optimism of our children, but also of the optimism that we should have knowing that God so loved us that he sent Jesus into the world for our sakes. In the midst of the excitement and commercial razzmatazz that we see this time of year, let us truly celebrate that we have a God who loves us so much.

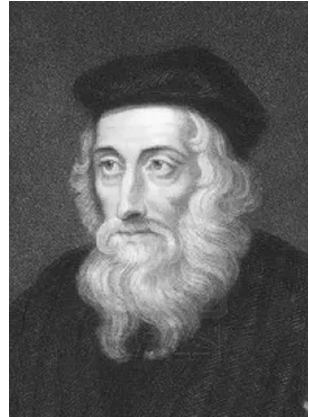
May I wish you the blessings of Christmas, not just at this time of year, but throughout this coming year.

Reg

CHRISTIAN OF THE MONTH: JOHN WYCLIFFE (WYCLIF)

Commemorated by the Church of England on December 31st.

John Wycliffe (c. 1330–1384) was an English theologian, philosopher, and early church reformer who played a foundational role in the movement toward religious reform that would culminate in the Protestant Reformation. Born in the village of Hipswell in Yorkshire, Wycliffe studied at Oxford University, where he earned a reputation for his exceptional intellect and deep understanding of scholastic theology. By the 1360s, he had become a leading scholar and preacher at Oxford, eventually serving as master of Balliol College.



Wycliffe's career coincided with a time of political and social upheaval in England, including the Black Death, the Peasants' Revolt, and increasing tensions with the Papacy. Wycliffe began to speak out against ecclesiastical abuses, particularly the accumulation of wealth by the Church and the moral failings of the clergy. He argued that the Church had strayed from the teachings of Jesus, and advocated a return to a simpler, more Scripture-centred faith.

A key aspect of Wycliffe's reformist agenda was his belief that the Bible should be available to all believers in their own language. Although his exact role in the production of the English Bible is debated, Wycliffe inspired and possibly oversaw the translation of the Latin Vulgate into Middle English. This translation, completed by his followers and known as the Wycliffe Bible, became the first complete Bible in the English language.

Wycliffe's ideas gained traction among a group of followers known as the Lollards, who continued to spread his teachings after his death. Despite being declared a heretic by the Church and having his works burned, Wycliffe's legacy endured. His critiques of church corruption and his emphasis on Scripture influenced later reformers such as Jan Hus and Martin Luther, earning him the title "Morning Star of the Reformation."

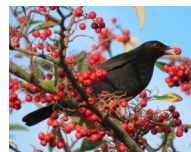


JOIN IN THE 2026 GREAT BRITISH BIRDWATCH 23–25th January 2026!

Royston Parish Church Sustainable Living Committee

A great way to get rid of the January blues and boost your mood is to get out into the nature - and a good motivation to do this is to participate in the RSPB's "Great British Birdwatch". This winter it takes place over the weekend of Friday 23-Sunday 25th January and all it takes is one hour of observation plus a few minutes sending off a list of what you saw to the RSPB (either on paper or on-line).

To join in, you need to register with the RSPB in mid-December*, and they will send you instructions. Essentially all it involves is spending an hour noting the type and number of birds that land in your garden (or the park or the churchyard or the Additional Burial Ground, any outdoor place of your choosing). Spending time outside at this darkest time of the year is great for boosting your vitamin D levels – and maybe encourage friends, children or grandchildren to come out with you and do it together. The RSPB supply detailed information to help you identify the birds you see and explains the rules for how to count them (to avoid double-counting). If you like a technical solution, there are many great free Apps available for your mobile phone to help you identify birds such as **Merlin Bird ID**, **Seek by iNaturalist** or **BirdNET** (which identifies birdsong and gives a good clue to what might be coming to land in your garden).



Last year, over 590,000 people participated in the "Great British Birdwatch", and between them counted more than 9 million birds. Whilst overall in Britain the house sparrow was the most commonly-sighted bird, in Hertfordshire blue tits topped the ranking, followed by wood pigeons, house sparrows, starlings, magpies and robins.



It is also a very useful "citizen science" project as it is crucial for tracking bird population changes and informing conservation efforts. It is extra important to monitor bird numbers this year, as the number of blackbirds has plummeted recently due to a mosquito borne virus, the Usutu virus (also known as USUV) which is spreading due to climate change. If you carry out the survey, you will be helping to gather scientific data to help understand the magnitude of the crisis.

*For more information and how to register, see: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/whats-happening/big-garden-birdwatch>

Clare Davies

Heath Watch with Holly (the little dog)

Welcome to the Forty forth article in a series of dog walking diaries, documenting the flora and fauna on the beautiful heath as the seasons change.



October and November 2025

It was so windy and rainy at the start of October that Holly was reluctant to go for walks, preferring to curl up by the radiator, but once she was out she enjoyed nosing about the fallen leaves and barking at other dogs, our walks continued.



The sun was low and shadows longer, soon the wind became stronger and we saw the effects of Storm Amy. I listened to the sound of the wind in the trees, a type of natural music, harmonising with bird song and the distant sound of barking foxes. I watched some long tailed tits, these little acrobatic birds are fascinating and if you are lucky to see them close to you will notice their beautiful plumage. The October full moon, known as the Harvest Moon was a super-moon, I'm not sure of the science but a super-moon is larger and appears closer to Earth, I think for me its beauty would be lessened by an understanding of why it occurs. The well known radio 4 drama "The Archers" mentioned the Redwing at this time but I still haven't seen one yet this year, perhaps they have only got as far as Ambridge!

I stood and watched dogs and their owners walking up Lankester Hill and remembered with sadness how Holly used to run up and down the hill with ease and now at 16 is unable to manage it. The bad weather was followed by misty rain, "wet days with no rain" as the locals say, it was like walking in a cloud. The mistletoe was now clearly visible on the trees and as far as I could see, because it was so high up, was full of berries. The trees displayed beautiful colours still, all shades of yellow, orange, red and brown and I saw some interesting fungi which grows well at this time of year and forms a valuable part of the ecology. There are always a lot of stinging nettles on the heath and I watched a bee diving deep in to one of the bell shaped flowers and coming out with its back loaded with pollen, it reminded me of the once common sight of the coal man carrying sacks of coal on his back.



November started with bright clear and cold days, I like this kind of weather and enjoy watching birds of prey hovering high in the sky. The November full moon, called the beaver moon was on 5th. November and was also a

super-moon. I watched some squirrels chasing each other up and down the trees, I'm sure it was play, I couldn't see a purpose.



There was a lot of rain in the middle of the month and the leaves became damp and started to rot. About this time, I spent some time watching a tiny wren, a wonderful bird with a vertical tail, one of the most widespread birds in the UK. It also has a most beautiful song and although not a rare bird was probably the most enchanting sight of these two months.

Finally at the end of the month we saw the first frosts and the grass sparkled in the morning light, I am writing this on 22nd November, tomorrow is the Sunday next before advent and Christmas is on the horizon....

Anthony Pigg

FOCUS ON MISSION: THE BIBLE SOCIETY



The Bible Society: Spreading the Word Around the World

The Bible Society is a group of interdenominational Christian organisations dedicated to translating, publishing, and distributing the Bible. Founded in the early 19th century, the movement began with the establishment of the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804, inspired by the need to make the Bible accessible to people in their own languages and at affordable prices.

Today, Bible Societies operate in over 200 countries and territories through a global fellowship known as the United Bible Societies (UBS). Their mission is grounded in the belief that everyone should have the opportunity to read or hear the Scriptures in a language they understand and in a format they can use. This includes printed Bibles, digital texts, Braille editions, and audio versions. In addition to translation and distribution, many Bible Societies engage in literacy programs, humanitarian efforts, and cultural preservation. They play a vital role in peace-building and spiritual nurture, particularly in regions affected by conflict or poverty.

The Bible Society movement continues to innovate by using the latest technology to reach younger generations and remote communities, ensuring that the message of hope and faith remains accessible to all.

The Bible Society is one of the charities and missions that the Parish Church regularly supports



GIFT IDEAS for a more sustainable Christmas!



Royston Parish Church Sustainable Living Committee

Do you find that shopping for gifts for friends and family gets increasingly difficult? Often, they have already got most of the things they need, and I don't want to inflict more "stuff" on them, especially if there is a risk that they won't want it. An article by Oxfam says that 40% of us receive between one and five Christmas presents that we would prefer to do without. Whilst these can end up in Charity Shops with a positive outcome, very often they are simply thrown away and end up in landfill. So, if you are struggling for ideas of gifts that do not constitute more "stuff" to add to the carbon footprint, here are some more sustainable ideas you might like to consider:

- **Gifts of Food.** When my cousins visited last Christmas, they gave me a jar of home-made granola. It was so delicious, hence when we finished it, I decided to re-use the jar and make my own granola to restock it. I have not gone back to shop-bought granola since!
Of course, at church we are very lucky to have the opportunity to buy Chris Wallis's gift packs of jam/marmalade and chutney – a delicious gift in aid of a good cause as well!
- **Something to attract wildlife to your garden.** A Bird Box (or artisan bird nester), Window feeders, Bug hotel, Bee Hotel, Hedgehog hotel. Some come as kits to help you make your own, which could make a fun project to do with children and teach them a bit about DIY at the same time. You can also buy kits of things to plant in the garden such as log kits for growing mushrooms, or seed sets designed to attract birds, bees and butterflies.
- **Reusable and Low-waste gifts:** Reusable water bottles, coffee cups, food containers or beeswax wraps all help to reduce single-use waste. (Of course, it is always a good idea to check that the recipient does not already have enough of these items already).
- **A donation to a charity.** Some friends recently gave us a Gift Voucher from a charity called "LendWithCare", which is a microfinancing scheme. This gave us a sum to credit our account and we could then select projects around the world to contribute to for micro loans – for example, a farmer in Ecuador might want a loan to start a new quinoa planting cycle (soil

preparation, seeds, fertilisers, wages) or a smallholder in Cambodia needs a loan to buy a walking tractor to plough her fields. You are then informed of the progress the recipient makes to pay back their loan, and once repaid, you have credit in your account to start lending all over again.

For animal lovers, you could support a charity like WWF and give an animal adoption.

- **Membership of an organisation.** Why not buy someone an annual subscription to an organisation such as the National Trust, English Heritage or membership of a conservation organisation like the RSPB or the Hertfordshire Wildlife Trust (having, of course, discreetly checked that they aren't already members!). This gives them something to look forward to all year.

Other general sustainable giving thoughts:

Check that any wood, card, bamboo or paper gifts are made from 100% recycled or Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified materials – especially for wrapping paper.

Avoid plastic ribbons and tape or foil backed and glittery wrapping paper (or re-use any you may have saved from gifts that you have received in the past).

Gifts of Food. When my cousins visited last Christmas, they gave me a jar of home-made granola. It was so delicious, hence when we finished it, I decided to re-use the jar and make my own granola to restock it. I have not gone back to shop-bought granola since! If you'd like the recipe, it is published on page 16 of this magazine.

Clare Davies

oxfam.org.uk/media/press-releases/a-third-of-people-shove-unwanted-christmas-gifts-away-in-a-cupboard-oxfam-research-reveals/

RSPB shop: shopping.rspb.org.uk/wildlife-friendly-garden/wildlife-by-species/bees-butterflies-bugs

Protecttheplanet.co.uk/collections/eco-friendly-gifts

Lendwithcare: lendwithcare.org

World Wildlife-Fund: www.wwf.org.uk/top-tips-sustainable-christmas

Nutty Granola

Once you taste this crispy and toasty tasting granola, you will not want to go back to shop-bought stuff! What is especially good is that it is so fresh and crunchy. This recipe is enough for one medium sized clip glass storage jar (17cm high x 11cm wide).

First sterilise your storage jar

Remove the rubber gasket and wash both the glass jar and the seal in hot soapy water, rinse and drain them. Heat the oven to 160°C, gas mark 3, and then put the jar on a baking tray and heat in the oven for 15 minutes to sterilise.

The rubber seal can be sterilised by simmering briefly in a pan of boiling water.

The Recipe

Ingredients

200g old-fashioned rolled oats (use certified gluten-free oats for gluten-free granola)

100g approx. raw nuts (e.g. a mix of almonds, pecans, walnuts, cashews)

50g seeds (e.g. some flaxseeds, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds... whatever you fancy)

¼ teaspoon fine-grain sea salt

¹/₈ teaspoon ground cinnamon

20g coconut oil, (1 tablespoon) – or 1 tbsp of olive oil if trying to use less saturated fats

60ml maple syrup or honey

½ teaspoon vanilla extract (or a mix of vanilla extract and orange blossom water)

Optional variation: *You could use slightly less nuts and seeds, and substitute them after the baking stage with one or two of the following: dried fruit of your choice such as chopped up dried apple rings, or dried cranberries, flame raisins or even some chocolate chips or coconut flakes.*

Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 175°C
2. Line a large, rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper.
3. In a large mixing bowl, combine the oats, nuts and/or seeds, salt and cinnamon. Stir to blend.
4. Whilst the oven is heating, melt the coconut oil in a heatproof cup or jug in the oven until just melted (about 5 minutes). Using oven gloves, take it out of the oven very carefully and leave to cool slightly . Then add the maple syrup or honey plus the vanilla extract (and orange blossom water if using).
5. Poor the liquid mix gradually over the oats and nuts, mixing thoroughly until every oat and nut is lightly coated. Pour the granola onto the lined pan and use a large spoon to spread it in an even layer.
6. Bake until lightly golden, about 21 to 24 minutes, stirring halfway (for extra-clumpy granola, press the stirred granola down with your spatula to create a more even layer). The granola will further crisp up as it cools.
7. Let the granola cool completely, undisturbed (at least 45 minutes).
8. Store the granola in an airtight container at room temperature for 1 to 2 weeks, or in a sealed freezer bag in the freezer for up to 3 months. The dried fruit can freeze solid, so let it warm to room temperature for 5 to 10 minutes before serving.

Clare Davies



Sunday Services for Dec. 2025/ Jan. 2026

Services to be held in Royston Parish Church

Sunday 7th December

09:00 - 09:45	Communion Service that is quiet and reflective
10:30 - 11:40	Communion Service with music/choir, children's groups/toy area, followed by refreshments
15:30 - 17:00	Christingle / TTP

Sunday 14th December

09:00 - 09:45	Communion Service that is quiet and reflective
10:30 - 11:40	Communion Service with music/choir, children's groups/toy area, followed by refreshments

Sunday 21st December

09:00 - 09:45	Communion Service that is quiet and reflective
10:30 - 11:40	Communion Service with music/choir, children's groups/toy area, followed by refreshments
14:30 - 16:30	Choir Practice
17:00 - 18:15	Traditional Christmas Carol Service

Sunday 28th December

09:00 - 09:45	Communion Service in traditional language (BCP) that is quiet and reflective
10:30 - 11:40	Communion Service with music/choir, children's groups/toy area, followed by refreshments

Sunday 4th January

09:00 - 09:45	Communion Service that is quiet and reflective
10:30 - 11:40	Communion Service with music/choir, children's groups/toy area, followed by refreshments

Sunday 11th January

09:00 - 09:45	Communion Service that is quiet and reflective
10:30 - 11:40	Communion Service with music/choir, children's groups/toy area, followed by refreshments
10:30 - 11:30	Baptism service

Sunday 18th January

09:00 - 09:45	Communion Service that is quiet and reflective
10:30 - 11:40	Communion Service with music/choir, children's groups/toy area, followed by refreshments
12:30 - 13:30	Baptism service

Sunday 25th January

09:00 - 09:45	Communion Service in traditional language (BCP) that is quiet and reflective
09:00 - 09:45	Communion Service that is quiet and reflective