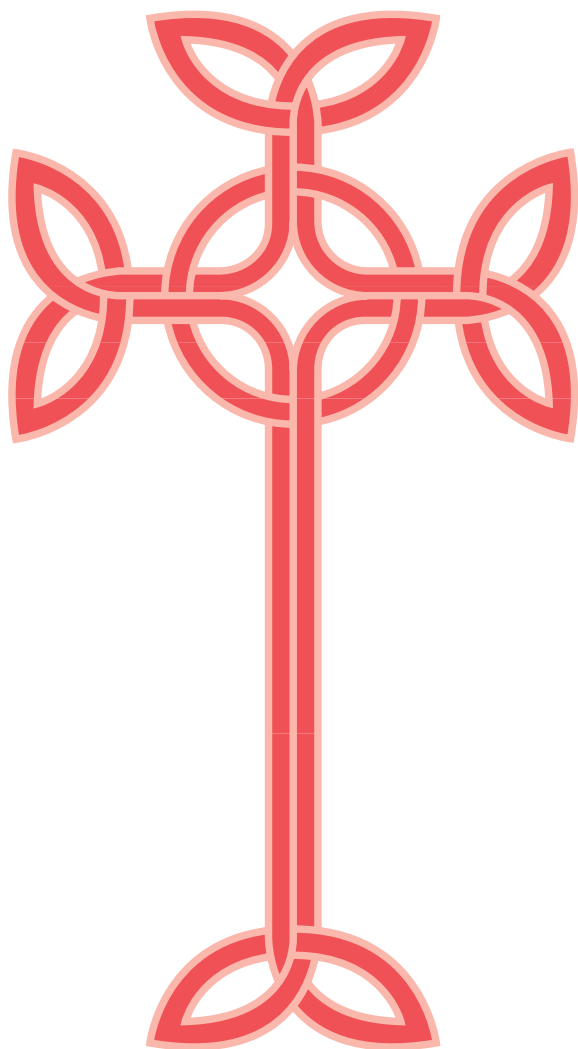


THE MONTHLY MAGAZINE
OF THE PARISH OF
HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING



St. Michael
AND ALL ANGELS

JANUARY 2026

£1

SIGNPOST

THE PARISH CHURCH OF HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING

MINISTRY TEAM

Rector

Rev'd John Barron,
The Rectory, 5 Lingfield, Houghton-le-Spring,
Tyne & Wear, DH5 5QA.
Tel: (0191) 584 7657

We enjoy and benefit from the ministry of a number of retired clergy at St Michael's.

Readers

Susan Elsey (Reader)
Email: Suelsey2@gmail.com

Mrs. Ros Pickersgill (Reader)
Tel: (0191) 584 5642

Mrs. Anne Clappison (Reader)
Tel: (0191) 584 7533

Church Wardens

Mrs. Rita Turnbull
Tel: (0191) 584 1954

Mr. Alastair Bradley
Tel: (0191) 584 1455

Assistant Church Wardens

Mr. Simon Hardy
Tel: 07854 411884

Mr. Brian Scott
Tel: 07778 577898

Officers of the Parochial Church Council

Angela Slater (Secretary)
Tel: (0191) 584 2036

Mrs. Susan Bradley (Treasurer)
Tel: (0191) 584 1455

Organist & Director of Music

Mr. George Peebles
Tel: (0191) 584 1628

Verger

Mr. David Turnbull
Tel: (0191) 584 1954

Safeguarding

Alison Young (Safeguarding Officer)
Tel: 07532 036026

Mrs. Kathleen Close (DBS Officer)
Tel: (0191) 584 0353

Space4

76 Newbottle Street
Next to Houghton Library
Twitter @space4
Facebook houghtonspace4
Tel: (0191) 512 0676

Church Website

Our website contains information on most aspects of church life.
www.stmichaels-hls.org.uk

The Friends of Houghton Parish Church Trust

Contact: Mr. George Peebles, Membership
Secretary on (0191) 584 1628 for information and application forms.

St Michaels and All Angels Mothers Union

The Mothers Union meets on the last Monday of every month at 2pm in the Kepier Hall.

We welcome new members with open arms and if you require any further information please contact:-

Joan Beattie Tel: (0191) 512 6032
Sheila Wynne Tel: 07916 629043
Anne Todd Tel: (0191) 584 1032

UNIFORMED ORGANISATIONS

Rainbows, Brownies, Guides and Rangers

Contact: Sheila Wynne, Tel: 07916629043

Beavers, Cubs and Scouts

Contact: Steve Gibson, Tel: 07507 161366
Website: www.1sthoughtonscouts.org.uk

REGULAR SERVICES

Our pattern of services at St Michael and All Angels over a 'normal' week:

Sun	8.30am	A shorter 'said' service of Communion.
Sun	10am	Parish Communion (a 'sung' service, with 'Young Church') (1st Sunday is 'All-age Communion').
Sun	6pm	Evening Service: 1st Sun 'Engage' – contemporary music & themed service; 2nd Sun 'Choral Evensong' – a traditional service led by our choir; 3rd Sun 'Service of Light' – a relaxed sung service; 4th Sun 'Celtic Eucharist' – 'Iona' style Communion.
Tues	7pm	Holy Communion (4th Sunday, during winter)
Thur	10am	Holy Communion with Hymns (& refreshments afterwards).

We hold a quieter service of Holy Communion on the 4th Tuesday of the month at 7pm. Our Young Church takes place during the 10am Sunday Holy Communion on the 2nd and 3rd Sunday of the month, with our All Age Service aim for the Young members of the congregation to be a part of on the 1st Sunday of the month.

Contact Information

Our website and Facebook page contain details of how to join others online for worship. We send regular updates via our church distribution list – please call us or email us if you know someone who would like to receive our email updates.

Find us online at:

website: www.stmichaels.hls.org.uk

facebook: www.facebook.com/stmichaels.hls

The Parish Office is open between 9am & 3pm on a Tuesday and 9am & 2pm Thursday. You can contact us on Tel: (0191) 512 1769. On occasions, when we need to close the 'physical' office, you can contact us between these times on Mob: 07707 043 395. You can also contact us on email or message us during the week and we will respond during opening hours:

Email: stmichaels.hls@gmail.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/stmichaels.hls

Website: www.stmichaels-hls.org.uk

For urgent issues contact Rev'd John Barron on (0191) 584 7657.

If you'd like your child to be a part of Young Church contact Clare our Young Church leader at stmichaels.youngchurch@btinternet.com

To make an appointment for 'Vestry hour' to book baptisms and weddings call the Church Office or email us. Vestry Hour usually takes place on a Monday between 6 – 7pm. You will be able to talk to the team about all your Wedding and Christening needs, whether that is booking dates, finding prices or finding out the process in more details.

ABOUT SIGNPOST

Signpost is the magazine of the Parish Church of St. Michael & All Angels Houghton-le-Spring. In addition to providing information about the life of the church, it also aims to reflect the interests of the broader community and to provide a source of local news and a forum in which matters of common concern can be raised. The Editors welcome comments and suggestions, and invite contributions. Items to be included in Signpost should be submitted to the Editors by 10th of the month (end of 1st week of the month for memorials) to ensure inclusion in the next issue. It should be noted, however, that the Editors cannot guarantee to publish material and wish to point out that items included do not necessarily reflect their views nor those of the Parochial Church Council. Editor: Malcolm Foster, Tel: 07860 250 300. Distribution: Joan Bond, Tel: (0191) 584 1031.

Circulation: 300 copies per month.

Space4

At our community project, our aim is to provide 'Space4 everyone to flourish!'

We run out of our 'Hub' (next to the library) on Newbottle Street and the Kepier Hall (behind church). You can find us on our Space4 Facebook page: www.facebook.com/HoughtonSpace4/

There's lots going on throughout the week and all are welcome:

Mon	10am-1pm	Drop in (Space4 Hub, Newbottle Street)
Tues	10am-12noon	Community Food Store (Kepier Hall)
	10am-1pm	Drop in (Space4 Hub, Newbottle Street)
	3.30pm-5pm	Tuesday Treat
Wed	10am-1pm	Drop in & Craft Group (Space4 Hub, Newbottle Street)
Thur	10am-1pm	Drop in (Space4 Hub, Newbottle Street)
Fri	10am-12noon	Community Food Store (Kepier Hall)
	10am-1pm	Drop in (Space4 Hub, Newbottle Street)
	2pm-4pm	Cake & Chat (Space4 Hub, Newbottle Street)
Sat	2pm-4pm	Monthly Saturday Group (Space4 Hub, Newbottle Street)

Other events are advertised on Facebook and in the buildings.

Our Community Foodstore is open on a Tuesday and Friday: it is for anyone in the community who wants to use it, for a donation.

Rector's Letter

As we stand at the beginning of new year, with Christmas tree lights being packed away but the Epiphany star still shining brightly, I want to wish all a blessed and peaceful New Year. The season of Epiphany, which we now celebrate, is all about revealing—the manifestation of Christ to the wider world, symbolised by the journey of the 'Magi' – the

Wise Men. It is the moment we grasp the significance of what began quietly in a Bethlehem stable. This great revelation brings with it a powerful theme: Christian Joy. Over December, along with others in the Church of England, we explored the idea of 'The Joy of Christmas.' This reminded us that the birth of Jesus is not just a lovely historical event, but as the Christmas angels proclaimed "good news of great joy for all the people". This joy that runs far deeper than the superficial cheer of the season. This joy is rooted in the simple truth: God has come into the mess of the world in the Christ-child. He didn't wait for us to clean up our act or for the world

to become perfect. He came into the cold, the dirt, the uncertainty—the very reality of human life. This is the source of our deepest, most lasting joy—the knowledge that we are not abandoned, but that God is Emmanuel, (which means literally 'God With Us').

As we look ahead into the new year, this theme of joy becomes our spiritual signpost. We are not naive; we know that the year ahead will inevitably bring its challenges, its anxieties, and its heartaches. However, the Christian promise is not the absence of trouble, but the presence of Christ within it. This is the distinction that our Reader, Anne explored in her sermon at the beginning of Advent. She referred to the autobiography of C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, where Lewis describes joy not as mere pleasure or happiness, but as an "inconsolable longing" that pointed him towards God. For Lewis, Joy was a profound, transformative experience, not just a superficial feeling you can conjure up at will. This is the kind of joy that sustains us—it is the confident assurance that our lives, and the life of our church, are securely held in God's hands. It is the deep, underlying current of hope that persists even when the surface of life is choppy.

So, what might this Christian Joy mean for us in 2026? It is our strength: knowing Christ is with us gives us the strength to face whatever the world throws our way with courage, grace, and an unshakable hope. It is our witness: our joy is not meant to be hidden. It should overflow into our community, making us a welcoming, vibrant beacon of Christ's light, just like the Epiphany star. It is our foundation: it reminds us that our primary task is to focus on the Christ who was born, revealed, and who calls us into his service.

May you and your loved ones know this profound, surprising, and sustaining Christian Joy as you journey through the year ahead. I look forward to walking this path with you, trusting in the God who has come to us and will never leave us.

With my prayers and very best wishes for this coming year.




Journeying in 2026

It is January, and the adverts for summer holidays are hitting our TV screens again. But have you ever considered a walking holiday with a spiritual side to it, here in the UK? If so, Journeying might be a website well worth visiting (<https://www.journeying.co.uk>).

Travelling through beautiful landscapes to places where for centuries people have felt especially close to God – sacred places, places of pilgrimage - Journeying holiday groups are small, perhaps a maximum of 12 including two leaders who stay with the group throughout.

There is a family feel and a sense of community, with everyone is accepted just as they are. The days are not crowded with activity, allowing space and time for reflection.

The origins of Journeying lie in pilgrimage, and Celtic spirituality is a thread woven through all that they do. Their purpose is to enable guests to venture out, leave the every-day and connect with God in Creation, in each other and in themselves.

Each holiday has a rhythm of gentle prayer; morning and evening and occasionally when the group are out, perhaps by a mountain stream or on a hillside. All who feel the informality and ambience of the holiday will help nurture their own spiritual journey, are warmly welcomed.

The 2026 programme includes holidays with long walks, short walks and some with elements of retreat:

The Island of Anglesey. 24th-30th April

Llyn Peninsula, North Wales. 16th-23rd May

Caldey Island Pilgrimage retreat, West Wales. 4th-8th June

Grasmere and Lake District. 14th-19th June

Monasticism in the Wye Valley. 6th-11th July

Canterbury, England. 17th-24th August

Tenby and the Pembrokeshire Coastal Path. 12th-19th September

Late Summer in Oxfordshire. 22nd-25th September

More info at: www.journeying.co.uk

Bishop Martyn welcomes end of two-child limit

Following the recent announcement in the Budget, the Bishop of Leicester, Martyn Snow, the Church of England's lead bishop for child poverty issues, has said:

"I warmly welcome the Government's decision to remove the two-child limit from next April. This will make a profoundly positive difference to hundreds of thousands of children and their families.

"The Church of England has long called for this day as we believe in the equal and unsurpassable worth of every single child.

"As we celebrate the end of the two-child limit and commend the Government for taking action, we will continue to draw attention to the barriers – such as the household benefit cap – which still prevent many families from accessing vital support for their children."

Church of England weddings at historic low

The Church of England conducted fewer wedding than ever in 2023, as the number of people in England and Wales getting married in religious ceremonies has slumped to a new low.

In 2023, 23,004 marriages were recorded by the Church of England and Church in Wales, according to recent data from the Office of National Statistics (ONS). It is the lowest number since the 1830s, except for 2020, when churches were closed during the pandemic.

In total, 216,901 weddings of opposite-sex couples took place in 2023. The majority (184,428) were civil ceremonies. There were 32,473 religious weddings, of which 70 per cent were held in Anglican churches.

The Bishop of Manchester, Dr David Walker, told the Daily Telegraph: “We want to reassure couples that they don’t have to be churchgoers to have a church wedding, they don’t need to be christened, and we welcome couples who already have children.”

Archbishops’ Council response to Charity Commission case review

The Archbishops’ Council has welcomed the findings of the recently published Charity Commission case review on safeguarding improvements.

A spokesperson said: “It provides valuable clarity to support ongoing improvements in our work. We are reassured by the Commission’s finding of no evidence of mismanagement or misconduct, and that the Commission recognises the charity has made progress and delivered positive changes in safeguarding practice in recent years.

“Our priority in all our work remains to respond well to victims and survivors. This commitment continues to shape every aspect of our safeguarding work.

The Archbishops’ Council is “immediately focused on building on the work undertaken over the past decade,” including the introduction of independent safeguarding audits, comprehensive safeguarding training for all who work in the Church (paid or voluntary), and ensuring Church bodies have safe and healthy cultures.”

The Archbishops’ Council is also committed to the implementation of further safeguarding reforms, particularly in governance, with detailed proposals to be brought to the next General Synod to ensure sustainable and long-lasting best practice.

Bells Fish & Chips

11 Market Place, Durham, DH1 3NE **0191 384 8974**
 36 Sunderland Road, Gilesgate, Durham, DH1 2LG **0191 386 0302**
 Old Pit Lane, Framwellgate Moor, Durham, DH1 5HD **0191 370 9999**
 Unit 2, Craggs Road, Washington, NE38 8FB **0191 417 8687**
 North Terrace, Seaham, SR7 7HA **0191 500 1199**

www.bellsfishshop.co.uk



G. Whitfield Ltd

~Your Local Pharmacy~

A Family Business Serving The Local Community Since 1935

*We can collect your prescription from
 Houghton Surgeries and have it ready to
 collect from our Pharmacy*

1A Church Street, Houghton-le-Spring

Tel: 0191 584 2150

Visit

HOUGHTON HILLSIDE CEMETERY

HERITAGE FLORA FAUNA
 AMAZING VIEWS GENEALOGY
*Located at the top of Sunderland Street,
 near Houghton Cut*



www.theoldcem.co.uk

**This space is
 available
 to advertise,
 please contact
 the Editors**

Hetton Town Trust

At the Hetton Centre: We have a function room available for up to 120 guests with a licensed bar, suitable for all gatherings such as **Weddings, Birthday Parties, Christenings, or Funeral Teas**, also suitable for **meetings or conferences**.

In-house catering available from our Centre Spot Café,
 open Monday - Friday 9.30am - 2pm.

Contact Kim Downing on **0191 561 6629 / 07923 239674**
 Email: **kim@hettontowntrust.co.uk**



HOUGHTON RUGBY CLUB

Dairy Lane, DH4 5BW

Function room available for Christenings and other functions Catering available if required

Contact: The Clubhouse **0191 584 1460**
 Email: **houghtonrugbyclub@outlook.com**

Anglicans in Hong Kong offer prayers and support in aftermath of deadly fire

"Pray with us," the Archbishop of Hong Kong, the Most Revd Andrew Chan, has asked, following a horrific fire in seven residential tower blocks in Wang Fuk Court, in Tai Po. At least 146 people were killed. The complex was home to about 4600 people, and in addition to those killed, dozens have been critically injured, and others are still missing.

Community organisations - including the Hong Kong Anglican Church, known as the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui (HKSKH) - have rallied to support those displaced by the fire. The HKSKH's Welfare Council has launched a disaster support fund, and an HKSKH church centre in Tai Po has been opened to provide a shelter for people now made homeless by the fire.

Archbishop Chan said: "As fellow children of God, even though we are separated by geographical distances, I ask of you to pray with us in Hong Kong for the mercy and love of our Lord," he said.

Our long love affair with coffee

London's first coffee house opened in 1652, using beans imported from modern-day Yemen. Although many in Cromwell's Britain had doubts about this new drink, others welcomed its reviving effects - and asked for another cup.

Nearly 400 years on, coffee drinking in Britain is a vast industry. We drink 98 million cups of it every day. Even though a takeaway flat white can now cost you more than £5 in London, still coffee has become a daily necessity for millions of us.

And nearly 400 years on, we can better appreciate why this should be so.

Coffee keeps us awake. This is because when caffeine accesses the brain, it actively blocks our adenosine-producing receptors, which run our sleep-promoting system.

Coffee makes us alert. The caffeine drives our brain towards a more excited state which allows us to process information faster.

Coffee can also improve our mood, especially during the winter, when the loss of daylight acts as a depressant.

And although too much coffee can make us jittery and even prone to heart palpitations, there is even growing evidence among neuroscientists that coffee can even help to lower our risk of neurodegenerative diseases such as Parkinson's and Alzheimer's.

Complaints and refunds

– what about consumer protection?

'Use honest scales and honest weights' Leviticus 19:36

'The Lord detests dishonest scales, but accurate weights find favour with him.' Proverbs 11:1

These verses are not about the scales you use to weigh yourself, to see how much weight you have put on over Christmas! It is a biblical warning for businesspeople to act fairly and not cheat the buyer. As such it is one of the earliest pieces of consumer protection.

The law has been updated to reflect changes in buying. Many of us do our shopping online and much of what is bought are not goods in the old-fashioned sense, but electronic items such as downloaded music or games. Whether you do your Christmas shopping in the January sales or on Christmas Eve, what legal rights do you have? This is a complex area, and the following is a guide only.

The law gives us some basic rights about the quality and standard of things we buy from a business. They must be of 'satisfactory quality' which means what a reasonable person would consider satisfactory. They must be 'fit for purpose' and 'as described'. So, if you bought a Bible, it must be in good condition; and it must be the whole Bible if it says Bible; and it should not fall apart when you start to read it. If it is a leather-bound church Bible, you would expect it to last longer than a cheap paperback.

So, what if there is a problem?

Normally within the first 30 days, if it is faulty, you can get a refund.

Up to 6 months, if it cannot be repaired or replaced, you are entitled to a refund
- in most cases

Up to 6 years, if goods do not last a reasonable time, you may be entitled to some money back.

Some shops give you more rights. They offer money back guarantees if you change your mind. Always keep the receipt. Check that what you buy works, and that it is ok when you get it. No point buying something in November and then find out on Christmas Eve that it is broken. Watch out for those scales!



Prayer for January

Lord, help us to take time
at the start of 2026 to refocus our
hearts, minds and spirits
– to tune into you, our
un-changing God.

Help us to be calmed and
encouraged by the promise of
Jesus that He is the Way, the
Truth and the Life. The safe
Way. The ultimate Truth.
The Life, your gift, to be with
you for all eternity.

You promised never to leave us
or forsake us. When we put our
trust in you, through what Jesus
did on the cross, we are secure,
we are accompanied, no matter
what the New Year brings.

We can go forward, safely.
Thank you, in Jesus' name,

Amen.

FROM THE REGISTERS

Funerals

23 Dec Terry Coxan Age 80
Houghton-le-Spring

Marriages

6 Dec Anne-Marie Stoker
& James Maddison

Dublin given a Roman Catholic Cathedral

Dublin is to have a Roman Catholic cathedral – for the first time in 500 years.

And it has the Pope to thank: Pope Leo XIV has designated St Mary's Pro-Cathedral as the cathedral of the archdiocese of Dublin.

Before the 16th century, the cathedral in Dublin was Christ Church, and St Patrick's served as a second cathedral of the medieval diocese. At the Reformation, both buildings became Church of Ireland cathedrals. Today, St Patrick's is the National Cathedral and Christ Church is that of the diocese. But this has left Roman Catholics in Dublin without a cathedral of their own.

It was not until St Mary's opened in 1825, as a temporary solution, that the Roman Catholics had at least some big church in Dublin. Although long regarded as the de facto Catholic cathedral, its status was never formally recognised – until now.

St Mary's Cathedral has even been welcomed by the Anglican Archbishop of Dublin, Dr Michael Jackson. He said it was "a happy day and noteworthy occasion" for Christians across the city, which now has three cathedrals.

Saint for January

6th January – Epiphany

On 6th January we celebrate Epiphany - the visit of the Wise Men to the baby Jesus. But who were these Wise Men? No one knows for sure. Matthew calls them 'Magi', and that was the name of an ancient caste of a priestly kind from Persia. It wasn't until the third century that they were called kings - by a church father, Tertullian.

Another church father, Origin, assumed there were three - to correspond with the gifts given. Later Christian interpretation came to understand gold as a symbol of wisdom and wealth, incense as a symbol of worship and sacrifice, and myrrh as a symbol of healing - and even embalming. Certainly Jesus challenged and set aright the way in which the world handled all three of these things. Since the 8th century, the Magi have had the names Balthasar, Caspar and Melchior.

“The suffering in Sudan is almost unbearable” – Bishop of Leeds

The situation in Sudan is “so dire that ‘urgent’ does not do justice to the need for action,” the Bishop of Leeds, Nick Baines, has warned in his final speech in the House of Lords.

Bishop Nick, who is retiring, used his last appearance in the House after more than a decade to secure a debate on the worsening humanitarian crisis in Sudan.

He highlighted mass killings, sexual violence, starvation, and the displacement of millions, with non-Arab Africans among the primary targets.

Bishop Nick also emphasised the lack of attention to Sudan in western media and called for stronger UK leadership in diplomatic, economic, and military efforts to end the conflict, protect civilians, and ensure accountability for atrocities.

Bishop Nick said: “The suffering in Sudan is almost unbearable, the worst humanitarian catastrophe on the planet, and it is neither new nor simply a phenomenon of only the last three years. Whatever the causes of and motivations behind the current conflict, it is civilians—women, children, young men and vulnerable ethnic groups—who are being targeted and abused in the most inhumane ways.”

Warning that inaction will exacerbate refugee migration, generational trauma, and cycles of violence, he stressed that Sudan's plight demands immediate, coordinated global intervention.

Eating alone 'bad for pensioners' health'

Pensioners who eat at home alone are more likely to suffer from poor nutrition and health.

So says new research. It has found strong links between dining solo and diets of poor quality, with fewer fruit, veg and meat. This can lead to weight loss and frailty.

Researchers at Flinders University in Australia are instead highlighting the importance of community-based initiatives – such as neighbourhood meal groups, intergenerational dining programmes, or local café partnerships to mitigate the harms of eating alone.

As one researcher explains, “Food is more than the nutritional benefit it provides. Sharing a meal is an important social activity that can influence appetite, dietary variety, and overall well-being for older adults.”

The Seven Deadly Sins: Pride

Our new series looks at the 7 Deadly Sins, a list compiled by Pope Gregory 1 in AD 590 to describe the nature of sin. This month we consider pride, *'the beginning of all sin'* (Augustine).

Pride is preoccupied with self and denies the need for others or God. We see it present in the first sin, when Adam and Eve wanted to become like God (Genesis 3:5).

What does pride look like? Jesus told the story of two men, a Pharisee and a tax collector, who went to pray in the Temple (Luke 18: 9-14). The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: *'God, I thank you that I am not like other people, robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'* (11,12). He illustrates how pride is essentially putting ourselves in God's place and believing we can run our own lives. It's subtle and self-deceptive and eats away our lives: *'Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.'* (Proverbs 16:18).

So how do we deal with pride? The answer is humility. The tax collector stood at a distance *'he would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'* (13). This man was right with God, because he acknowledged his sin and his need for forgiveness. Humility is being realistic about ourselves, and acknowledging our total dependence on God. We develop it by giving ourselves wholeheartedly to God and repenting of our desire to do things our way: *'Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up.'* (1 Peter 5:6).

'Humility is not in thinking less of yourself, but in thinking of yourself less' (Rick Warren).

How to keep those New Year Resolutions

We are full of good intentions at the start of each year. How come we usually fizzle out by February? Here are some tips to keep you going...

Be realistic. If you have several goals, don't attempt them all at once. Research has found that if you stagger your goals, you will have more success. So, for example, if this year you want to spend less money, do more exercise and spend more time with your family, start one change this month, another in February, and start the third in March.

Be specific. For example, don't tell yourself: Lose weight. Decide exactly how much you want to lose. When do you want to lose it by? How will you do it? If you want more time with your family, how and when will you do that? The more exact you can be, the more likely you are to succeed.

Write it down. There's something about committing thoughts to paper that helps to cement your resolve. Why not start some sort of journal this year, to track your thoughts, your hopes, your goals – and your successes!

Tell other people. If you intend to do something, tell someone, and therefore you will feel more obliged to get going with it... your pride may keep you going when all else fails!

Focus on GAIN, not loss. Ever notice how many resolutions are about giving something up? Why not put it the other way round - instead of saying you will eat less, tell yourself you are headed for those skinny jeans....

Give yourself rewards. If you are quitting smoking or sweets, for example, put the money that you would have spent in a jam jar, and treat yourself to something nice (and healthy) with it.

Break your resolution into steps. Some goals will take months to achieve. So, break each one down into tiny steps, and simply head for each step. Build in some time frames, to prevent you procrastinating.

Finally, don't let failure defeat you. You will make mistakes. But the secret is to simply get up again and to keep going. Only if you stop are you *really* defeated. None of us are perfect, and the Bible encourages us to always start again.

The Month Ahead.....January

1	Wed	-	<i>Drop-In recommences on Mon 6th January</i>
2	Thur	10.00 am	Holy Communion (in Church)
		6.00 pm	Choir Practice (Choir Vestry)
3	Fri	-	<i>Stay & Play recommences Friday 10th January</i>
		-	<i>Community Food Store is closed until Mon 6th January</i>
5	Sun	Epiphany	
		8.30 am	Holy Communion (in Church)
		10.00 am	Holy Communion (in Church & Facebook)
		6.00 pm	Service of Light (in Church)
6	Mon	10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
		2.30 pm	Community Food Store (Kepier Hall, until 4.00 pm)
		6.00 pm	Vestry hour (call Parish Office for appointment)
		7.00 pm	Rehearsal for Baptism Families
7	Tues	10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
		1.15 pm	'Light' – Drop In Bereavement Group (The Hub, Newbottle Street)
		3.30 pm	Family Fun (Kepier Hall)
8	Wed	10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
9	Thur	10.00 am	Holy Communion (in Church)
		10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
		6.00 pm	Choir Practice (Choir Vestry)
10	Fri	9.30 am	Stay & Play (Kepier Hall, until 11.15 am)
		9.30 am	Community Food Store (Kepier Hall, until 12 noon)
		2.00 pm	Cake & Chat (Hub, Newbottle Street)
12	Sun	Baptism of Christ	
		8.30 am	Holy Communion (in Church)
		10.00 am	Holy Communion (in Church & Facebook)
		6.00 pm	Choral Evensong (in Church)
13	Mon	10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
		2.30 pm	Community Food Store (Kepier Hall, until 4.00 pm)
		6.00 pm	Vestry hour (call Parish Office for appointment)
14	Tues	10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
		3.30 pm	Family Fun (Kepier Hall)
15	Wed	10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
16	Thur	10.00 am	Holy Communion (in Church)
		10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
		6.00 pm	Choir Practice (Choir Vestry)

17 Fri	9.30 am	Stay & Play (Kepier Hall, until 11.15 am)
	9.30 am	Community Food Store (Kepier Hall, until 12 noon)
	2.00 pm	Cake & Chat (Hub, Newbottle Street)
19 Sun	Second Sunday of Sunday	
	8.30 am	Holy Communion (in Church)
	10.00 am	'All-In' Holy Communion (in Church & Facebook)
20 Mon	6.00 pm	Celtic Eucharist
	10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
	2.30 pm	Community Food Store (Kepier Hall, until 4.00 pm)
21 Tues	6.00 pm	Vestry hour (call Parish Office for appointment)
	10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
	3.30 pm	Family Fun (Kepier Hall)
22 Wed	10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
23 Thur	10.00 am	Holy Communion (in Church)
	10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
	6.00 pm	Choir Practice (Choir Vestry)
24 Fri	9.30 am	Stay & Play (Kepier Hall, until 11.15 am)
	9.30 am	Community Food Store (Kepier Hall, until 12 noon)
	2.00 pm	Cake & Chat (Hub, Newbottle Street)
25 Sun	Conversion of Paul/ Week of Prayer for Christian Unity	
	8.30 am	Holy Communion (in Church)
	10.00 am	Holy Communion (in Church & Facebook)
	12.00 noon	Baptism
	6.00 pm	Reflective Service (in Church)
26 Mon	10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
	2.00 pm	Mothers' Union (Kepier)
	2.30 pm	Community Food Store (Kepier Hall, until 4.00 pm)
	6.00 pm	Vestry hour (call Parish Office for appointment)
27 Tues	10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
	3.30 pm	Family Fun (Kepier Hall)
	7.00 pm	Holy Communion (Hub, Newbottle Street)
	7.30 pm	PCC (Hub, Newbottle Street)
28 Wed	10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
29 Thur	10.00 am	Holy Communion (in Church)
	10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
	6.00 pm	Choir Practice (Choir Vestry)
30 Fri	9.30 am	Stay & Play (Kepier Hall, until 11.15 am)
	9.30 am	Community Food Store (Kepier Hall, until 12 noon)
	2.00 pm	Cake & Chat (Hub, Newbottle Street)

Epiphany for Today

This month we celebrate Epiphany, the occasion on which we remember the Magi from the East following a star to find the baby Jesus: *'Where is the One who has been born king of the Jews?'* (Matthew 2:1). At the start of a New Year, in an uncertain world, we can be asking the same question. The gifts the Magi offered point us to how Jesus can answer our concerns and worries: *'they bowed down and worshipped Him...and presented Him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.'* (2:11).

The *gift of gold* reflects that the Magi saw in the baby a king, destined to rule over us all. In this coming year we need to remember that Jesus is on the throne, the seat of power and authority in the whole universe. Will we crown Him king of our lives and dedicate all that we are and do to Him?

The *gift of frankincense* reflects that the visitors saw not just an earthly king, but God in human flesh. Incense symbolises the prayers of God's people and so this gift reminds us that God is worthy of our worship and prayer. Will we offer our praise and prayer, as we seek God to guide us through the uncertainties of this coming year?

The *gift of myrrh* reflects that these astrologers saw beyond the baby's birth and life, to His death which would secure life for all. Jesus was offered myrrh on the cross and was a spice used in His tomb. As we face challenges in the future, we can be confident that Jesus knows and understands our experience. Are we ready to trust Him in everything?

'Glorious now behold Him arise, King and God and Sacrifice! Heav'n sings Hallelujah: Hallelujah the earth replies.' ('We Three Kings').

Menai Suspension Bridge celebrates 200 years

If you have ever gone to Anglesey, chances are that you used the Menai Suspension Bridge (*Pont y Borth*, in Welsh). A lot of people do – an average of 13,300 vehicles a day, or about 4.8 million vehicles a year.

The bridge celebrates a big anniversary this month: it is 200 years old. It was formally opened on 30th January 1826, to link Anglesey (*Ynys Mon*) to mainland Wales (*Gogledd Cymru*).

The bridge is special – it is the world's *first ever* major suspension bridge, with a 176-metre span. Designed by Thomas Telford, it took seven years to build and has been a huge success. It made the crossing safer (until then farmers had had to swim their livestock across the strait), and it also made the crossing more dependable and quicker for everyone, cutting hours off the trip from London to Holyhead.

The bridge has changed a bit over 200 years – the original wrought-iron chains were replaced with high-tensile steel chains in 1940, the bridge was reconstructed after a fire in 1970, and in 1998 it was brought under the management of UK Highways A55 Ltd.

But the Menai Suspension Bridge is still a much loved and critical road bridge for Anglesey, and there will be warm celebrations for it this month.

To put the history of the bridge into perspective: it was built nearly 25 years before Big Ben (in 1859) and more than 60 years before the Eiffel Tower (in 1889).

From slaughter on a beach through gates of splendour

It was 70 years ago, on 8th January 1956, that five young American evangelical Christian missionaries were killed by members of the savage and isolated Auca tribe in the rainforest of Ecuador.

The missionaries had been attempting to bring Christianity to the small tribe of about 500 Auca people, and so had spent several months trying to befriend them by dropping gifts from an airplane.

By the 6th of January they had established a small camp a few miles from the Auca settlements, but despite initial friendliness from some of the tribe, it suddenly all went wrong. Two days later, while meeting with the Auca, all five missionaries were suddenly attacked and speared to death on the beach, their bodies left floating in the water.

The news of the five missionaries killed in Ecuador hit world headlines. Their savage murder and how they had left five young widows and eight young children, ran in Life magazine, the Reader's Digest, as well as in dozens of national newspapers. Part of the reason for this was the behaviour of the five widows, who responded with dignity and forgiveness instead of anger and hatred.

One widow, Elizabeth Elliot, decided she would stay on in Ecuador. Rachel Saint, the sister of one of the murdered missionaries, Nate Saint, decided to join her.

In time, the two women made good contacts with the Auca people, and went to live among them for two years. They shared with them the gospel of Jesus Christ and showed by their personal example how to forgive fearlessly and to love unconditionally.

In response, many Auca people became Christians, including Mincaye, the man who had murdered Nate Saint. The Auca Christians built a small church and learned to read from the Bible. Mincaye became a leader of this church, and on one momentous day he was invited to baptise Nate's grandson, Steve. The tribe even changed its name from Auca ('savage'), to Huaorani ('humans').

Evening Chronicle The Northern Echo

47p

chroniclelive.co.uk

#ThereWithYou

THE GREAT DAILY OF THE NORTH

87p

*Snippets from the Evening Chronicle and The Northern Echo
which you may have missed.*

North East artist marks 100th birthday with exhibition to thank hospital that saved him twice

David Hughes is thanking the teams at Sunderland Royal Hospital with a very special exhibition.

A Wearside artist who is about to turn 100 has celebrated the milestone by holding an exhibition to thank the NHS hospital that saved his life twice. Great-grandfather David Hughes, who was made an MBE in 2016 for decades-worth of charity work, is hoping to raise money to give back to the teams at Sunderland Royal Hospital.

David, has donated a collection of his artwork to the STS Charity and launched an exhibition - called, appropriately, Celebration - at the Arts Centre Washington. All of this is to mark his upcoming birthday.

David, from Houghton-le-Spring, is hoping to raise cash for the charity, which is the official charity of the South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Trust, and to support two of its causes, the Stroke Unit Fund and the Vision Appeal. The latter is supporting “enhanced equipment and resources” at the soon-to-open new Sunderland Eye Hospital in the city centre.

David said that care - following a stroke in 2024 and to fit a pacemaker in 2010 - at Sunderland Royal had saved him twice. He said: “Thanks to the incredible care I received at Sunderland Royal Hospital, I’m still here and enjoying life. I’ve been committed to supporting charities since my retirement and now I’m using my art and my 100th birthday to give back in my own way.”

David also shared his wisdom on the topic of his own long life. He added: “If I can persuade people who are on their own to get out, to do even a little and live a happier and longer life, that’s all I’m trying to do. I get up every morning and say, ‘David, enjoy today. It’s no good thinking of tomorrow as it may not come. Accept the things you can change, change the things you can and live every day to your best.’”

A grandfather of six and great-grandfather of 14, David only took up art at 60, following the death of beloved wife May. After teaching himself to paint, his artistic career has now spanned four decades - and in that time he has supported charities from Marie Curie to Mencap.

Nichola Taylor, head of the STS Charity, shared: “We are so grateful to David for his incredible support of STS Charity. His generosity in donating his artwork will make a real difference and his commitment to giving back is truly inspiring.

“He shows us the importance of creativity and staying active in older age for health and

wellbeing, he's just brilliant. It was wonderful to see the preview and to celebrate his upcoming 100th birthday and I'd encourage everyone to come along and experience this very special exhibition."

Matthew Blyth, culture and heritage officer at Arts Centre Washington, added: "David's exhibition is a celebration of resilience and creativity. Despite recent challenges, David has continued to create extraordinary work that is inspiring our visitors.

"His message of staying active and pursuing your passions, no matter your age or the obstacles put in your way, is something we can all take inspiration from. It's an honour to host this exhibition at Arts Centre Washington, especially as David approaches his remarkable 100th birthday!"

Prints and cards featuring David's work can be bought at Arts Centre Washington or ordered directly by emailing the charity on stsft.charity@nhs.net.

Much loved North East Christmas tradition won't be happening in 2025 after 10 years of magic

A Christmas event that has been a yearly tradition for many families in the North East won't be happening this year.

For many people, it was one of the events that really made their Christmas year after year, but sadly a much loved event in the North East won't be happening in 2025. And its organisers have posted on social media this week to remind everyone it won't be taking place.

For a decade, the Puffing Billy vintage train brought so much joy to people young and old all over the region, calling in at towns and villages all over County Durham and Wearside and raising loads of money for charity in the process, as people lined the streets and stood at the bottom of their drives to see the illuminated vehicle and its characters, including Santa, go by. However, before last year's dates began, the team behind the magical event had some bad news for the many who always look forward to it, when they revealed that 2024 would be its last.

The post read: 'The time has come for Puffing Billy, Santa, Mrs Claus and the Elves to put their feet up for a while. This year will be Puffing Billy's last year (never say never).' As people quickly reacted in their droves, the posy added: 'We are so proud of our team and the sacrifice they have made year after year, but now it's their time to relax, enjoy mince pies and copious amounts of snowballs!'

The huge amount of comments on the post last year spoke volumes about just how much Puffin Billy was held dear by many people in the North East and there was a similar reaction when the team behind it returned to Facebook this week to remind everyone that, at a time, when they'd be expecting to see the Puffin Billy dates and locations, it wouldn't be going ahead.

The new statement read: 'The festive season is nearly here...exciting!! We just wanted to send out a reminder that Santa, Mrs Claus, the Elves and of course Puffing Billy are taking a break this year. We are very sorry we won't get to see you this year, but we hope you all have an amazing time with your family and friends!'

World Leprosy Sunday - 25th January 2026

We read about leprosy in the Bible and assume it is a disease of the past. But leprosy is very much a disease of today, with more than 200,000 newly diagnosed cases every year. That means that every two minutes of every day, someone hears the words 'you have leprosy'. Three short words, but they carry thousands of years' worth of fear, stigma and shame.

Leprosy thrives in areas where poor nutrition, overcrowding, shared wash facilities and low standards of living naturally lower people's immune systems. Lepers will suffer growing numbness and worsening nerve damage, ulcers and finally even amputations. They will also suffer the hurt and shame of being an outcast, often abandoned by their own families.

And this is where The Leprosy Mission steps in, and with the support of churches in the UK, works to help the sufferers of leprosy around the world. The Leprosy Mission is a medical Christian mission which helps people with leprosy both medically, spiritually, and practically. With your help, their Leprosy Mission Vocational Training Centres can give sufferers a chance to learn a skill and get a qualification.

In Mark 1, the leper said to Jesus, 'If you are willing, you can heal me.' That plea still stands today – if we are willing, we can help The Leprosy Mission to still do Christ's work of healing and rehabilitation today.

More details at: <https://www.leprosymission.org.uk>

Burns Night – 25th January

Each year, Burns Night takes place on 25th January to celebrate the life and legacy of Scotland's National Bard, Robert Burns. (1759 to 1796).

Burns Night is usually a combination of haggis, neeps, tatties, and warming 'drams', accompanied by recitals of some of Robert Burns' famous work.

Robert Burns was born in 1759 and died only 37 years later, in 1796. But his life and writing certainly left a rich inheritance behind. Here are some interesting facts:

After Queen Victoria and Christopher Columbus, Robert Burns has more statues dedicated to him around the world than any other non-religious figure.

American music legend Bob Dylan said that his greatest-ever source of inspiration was Burns' A Red, Red Rose.

J.D. Salinger's 1951 novel 'The Catcher in the Rye' based its title on the Robert Burns poem, 'Comin' Thro' the Rye'.

Auld Lang Syne is a song of friendship in China. Known as You Yi Di Jiu Tian Chang

– or Friendship Forever and Ever – the song is played at graduations and other formal gatherings.

'Is There For Honest Poverty' (also known as 'A Man's a Man for a' That') was chosen to open the new Scottish Parliament in 1999 due to its themes of equality and universal brotherhood.

'Auld Lang Syne' is recognised by the Guinness Book of World Records as one of the top three most popular songs in the entire English language.

American fashion designer Tommy Hilfiger claims to be a direct descendant of Robert Burns.

In 2009, Robert Burns became the first-ever person to appear on a commemorative bottle of Coca-Cola.

A book of Burns' poetry was carried into space by astronaut Nick Patrick during a two-week space mission in 2010. The book completed a 5.7-million-mile trip, managing 217 orbits of the Earth.

Burns fathered at least 12 children during his short lifetime. His youngest son, Maxwell, was born on the day of Burns' funeral.

Australia celebrates a milestone

This is an important month for Australia.

As of 1st January, it has been 125 years (1901) since the Commonwealth of Australia was established, when the six British colonies of New South Wales, Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia were federated.

But a British presence in Australia began long before 1901. It was way back in 1788 that the First Fleet first landed in Australia, and the Union Flag of Great Britain was raised by Captain Arthur Phillip.

The 11 ships had left England seven months before. Their passengers were mostly convicts, and Captain Phillips had been charged with the job of establishing penal colonies to house them.

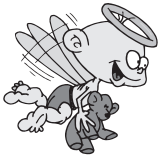
The First Fleet arrived in Botany Bay, but decided to explore further. A few days later, on 26th January 1788 the fleet finally landed at Sydney Cove, a small bay on the southern shore of Sydney harbour.

That was the day that British settlers arrived on Australian shores for the first time. They formally established the Colony of New South Wales on 7th February, and 20 years later, in 1808, the convicts who had been pardoned were now emancipated convicts, and heartily celebrating the anniversary of their arrival with dinners, drinking and toasts.

The first official celebration took place in 1818 on the 30th anniversary of their arrival, with Governor Lachlan Macquarie naming the day a national holiday, called Foundation Day.

While Australians have celebrated the 26th of January as Australia Day ever since, the story is not all a happy one. For indigenous Australians, who have been there for thousands of years, faced persecution and even dozens of massacres during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

As one website puts it, nowadays Australia Day is a day when: “We reflect on our nation’s past, which began more than 65,000 years ago, and the impact of European settlement on the First Nations Australians. Our national day is a time, above all, for inclusion and respect, as we work towards reconciliation. (<https://www.australiaday.com.au/about/>)

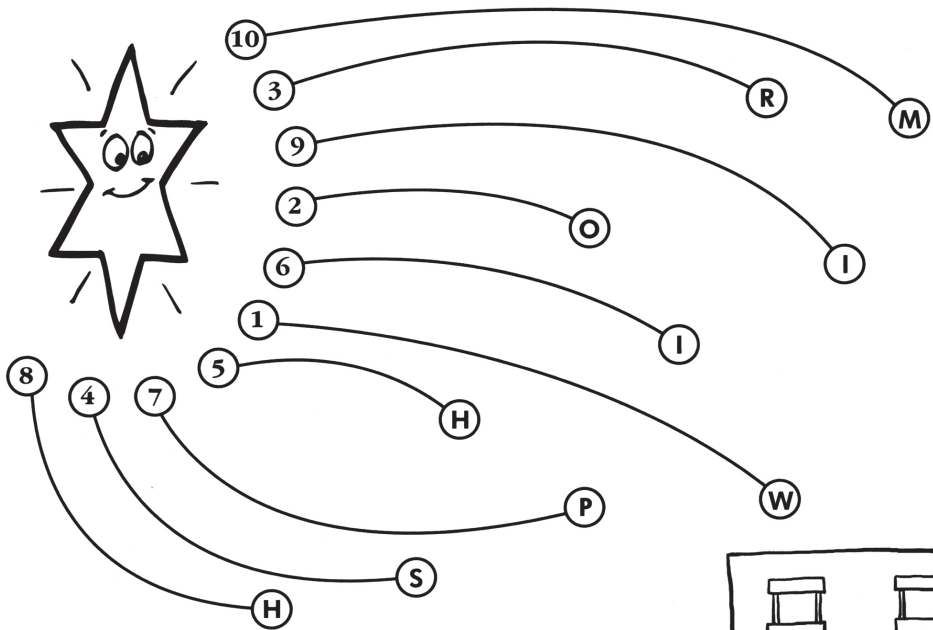


Michael's Angels

Matthew 2

Follow the Star

Follow each numbered ray of light from the star to find the letters you need to put in each numbered box. Then you will know what the wise men planned to do when they found Jesus. Read their story in Matthew 2:1, 2.



1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

8	9	10
---	---	----



Anglicans in Hong Kong offer prayers and support in aftermath of deadly fire

“Pray with us,” the Archbishop of Hong Kong, the Most Revd Andrew Chan, has asked, following a horrific fire in seven residential tower blocks in Wang Fuk Court, in Tai Po. At least 146 people were killed. The complex was home to about 4600 people, and in addition to those killed, dozens have been critically injured, and others are still missing.

Community organisations - including the Hong Kong Anglican Church, known as the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui (HKS KH) - have rallied to support those displaced by the fire. The HKS KH's Welfare Council has launched a disaster support fund, and an HKS KH church centre in Tai Po has been opened to provide a shelter for people now made homeless by the fire.

Archbishop Chan said: “As fellow children of God, even though we are separated by geographical distances, I ask of you to pray with us in Hong Kong for the mercy and love of our Lord,” he said.



BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT

LIGHT

LIGHT is a mutual support group for anyone who is finding bereavement hard to bear.

Come and chat with us over a cup of tea at

Space4

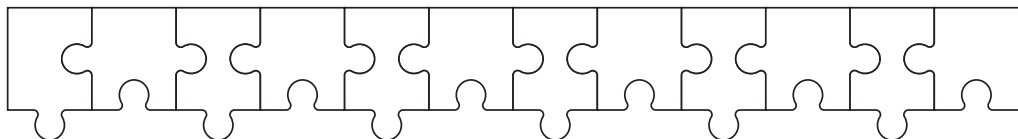
on the first Tuesday of the month from

1.15pm to 2.30pm

*We are located below the library on
Newbottle Street.*

*Enter through the automatic doors and you
will find us to the right of the library escalator.*





The Celebration Jigsaw Progress Report

500 pieces sold!

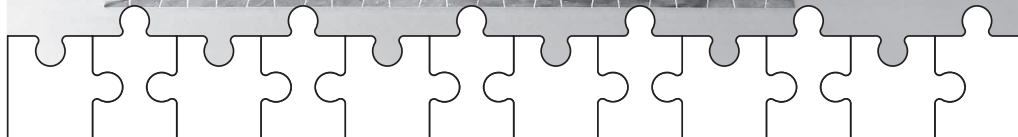
As we hoped, we were able to reach our target of 500 sponsored jigsaw pieces by the end of the Church Christmas Fair in November.

THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO HELPED MAKE THIS HAPPEN!

This month's photograph shows that only the four bonus pieces remain to be sponsored: numbers 501, 502, 503 and 504.

As previously announced in Signpost, these four pieces will be raffled, with tickets costing £1 each. If you would like a raffle ticket, please get in touch with me, Angela Slater (07931 064 891 - or catch me in Church!) Tickets will be on sale until 20th January 2026. The raffle will be drawn on 22nd January 2026, and the winners will be notified as soon as possible after the draw.

Thank you for being a piece of St Michael's!



Christmas Fair

Saturday 29th November



SERVING FAMILIES FOR GENERATIONS

DEREK MOSS FUNERAL DIRECTORS

Proudly serving families with the greatest of care...



Derek Moss Funeral Directors,
Houghton
104 Newbottle Street,
Houghton Le Spring, DH4 4AJ
0191 512 0927

Derek Moss Funeral Directors,
Shiney Row
1 Mill Place, Shiney Row,
Houghton Le Spring, DH4 4JT
0191 385 5959

Derek Moss Funeral Directors,
Chester Le Street
190 Front Street,
Chester Le Street, DH3 3AZ
0191 338 8894

**DIGNITY FUNERAL PLANS HAVE BEEN
RATED TOP FUNERAL PLAN PROVIDER BY
MONEY SAVING EXPERT, MARTIN LEWIS.**

Charles Embleton Funeral Directors, Washington
Blue House Lane, Concord, Washington, NE37 2TA
0191 416 4363

*** 24 HOUR SERVICE TO ALL AREAS * PRIVATE CHAPEL OF REST * CATERING/FLORAL TRIBUTES *
* MEMORIALS & INSCRIPTIONS * PRE-PAID FUNERAL PLANS * PERSONAL SERVICE ***

**We're here for you anytime. Whatever your wishes or budget,
we can provide a funeral to suit you.**



dignityfunerals.co.uk/local Attended Funerals from: £2695
The Moss Funeral from: £2095 Unattended from: £1595
*Pricing is correct at time of going to print and is subject to change

MEMORIALS

We hope this system will help us to meet requests for memorials more efficiently.

Should you wish for a loved one to be remembered on their anniversary in the weekly prayers read during the Sunday services, please complete the slip opposite.

Cut out the slip and place it in the intercessions box at least one week prior to the Sunday for remembrance.

If you are unable to get to church, please post the slip to the Church Administrator: Mrs Philippa Elsey, Parish Church of St Michael and All Angels, The Broadway, Houghton-le-Spring.

MEMORIAL REQUEST

Name of person to be remembered:

.....

Request made by:

.....

.....

.....

Date for memorial:

Sunday,

Andrew Grey Funeral Directors

Serving all communities with care and compassion

Losing someone you care about can be one of life's most difficult experiences, at Andrew Grey Funeral Directors we believe we have an important responsibility to care for our families, not just by offering support during the funeral but especially during the difficult days that may follow.

- 24 Hour Service
- Bereavement Advice
- Transparent Pricing
- Private Chapel of Rest
- Floral Tributes
- Memorial Masonry
- Home Visits
- Prepaid funeral plans

Hetton-le-Hole

0191 526 5800

Houghton-le-Spring

0191 385 7213

Easington Lane

0191 526 3499

South Hetton

0191 526 1265



greysfunerals.co.uk

 **Funeral Partners**



Nicholson, Martin, Legge & Miller

Solicitors

*We have looked after your legal requirements for
150 years and are still here to help*

65 Newbottle Street, Houghton-le-Spring. Tel: 584 2841

The Kepier Hall

for all your events in Houghton-le-Spring

Birthday Parties | Weddings | Christenings | Meetings

Contact:

07748 830445

thekepierhall@gmail.com



St Michael and All Angels

PARISH PARTY 2026

**Saturday 24th January
4pm till 8pm**

KEPIER HALL

Free entry

GAMES • RAFFLE • DANCING

Bring your own food and drinks

***This is an annual church event
which the whole family will enjoy***

All are welcome