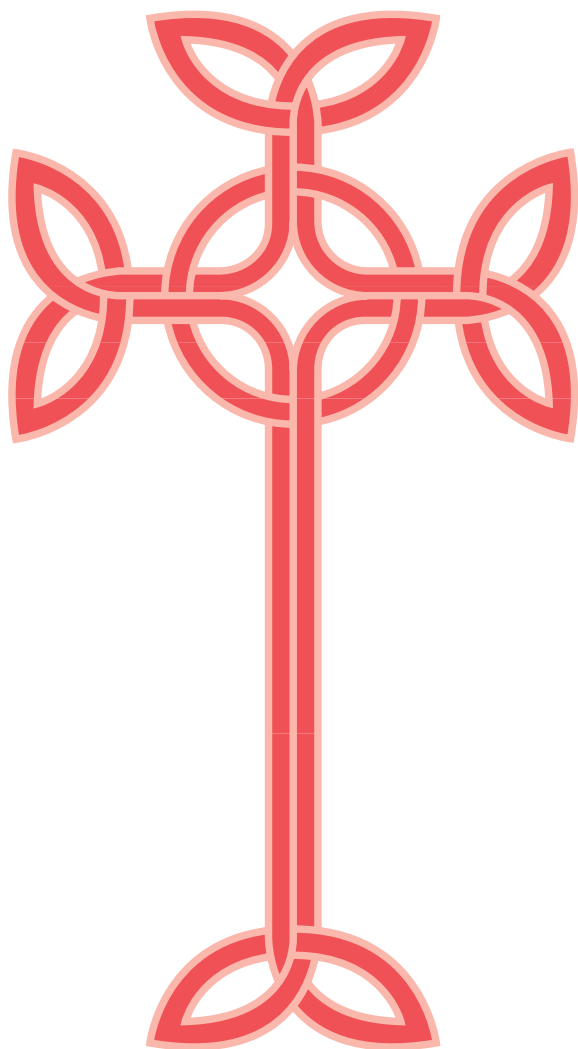


THE MONTHLY MAGAZINE
OF THE PARISH OF
HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING



St. Michael
AND ALL ANGELS

FEBRUARY 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.

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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.

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.

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.

Rector's Letter

As we approach the beginning of Lent, we find ourselves entering a season that, I think, is often misunderstood. While many see Lent primarily as a time of "giving up" or solemnity, the church calendar offers it to us as something much more vital: a period of spiritual renewal, a chance to develop habits that help us grow as disciples of Christ, ultimately a chance to help us grow in our relationship with God through Jesus Christ. This year, we want to develop and build on our Advent and Christmas focus on the meaning of 'Joy' in a world that often feels it could do with a bigger dose of joy! We also want to support people whether they are new to faith or have been members of



the church for many years to develop a "rhythm of life." Just as the seasons of nature follow a pattern, our spiritual lives flourish when we commit to habits and patterns that draw us closer to God's saving love. To help us on our journey of faith, we're offering a variety of opportunities for everyone in our parish to explore, reflect, and grow.

Building on our reflections during Advent and Christmas, our Lent course this year is **"The Joy of the Gospel."** Based on Paula Gooder's book and the acclaimed reflections of Pope Francis in his publication *'Evangelii Gaudium'*, we will explore how we might share our faith through both words and actions. In a world that often feels heavy, we want to offer a positive and realistic approach to Christian joy. The course is open to everyone—whether you are new to faith, just exploring, or have been a part of the church for many years. We will meet on **Wednesdays in Lent from 7:00–8:30 p.m. at the Space4 Hub on Newbottle Street** beginning of the 25th Feb for 5 weeks.

For daily reflection, we are recommending the book **"Draw Near: Life-Giving Habits for Lent."** This resource focuses on the "rhythm of life" that helps us grow day by day as we prepare for the mystery of Easter. If you would like a copy, please contact the Parish Office, and we can arrange to buy one for you (for the small cost of £3). I am delighted that our church children and families will be joining us in this journey with a parallel **40-day challenge**, exploring the life-giving habit of **generosity**. It is a wonderful way for our whole church family, young and old, to move together in faith.

Retreat Days at Brancepeth Castle: Sometimes, spiritual growth requires us to step away from the busyness of daily life. **Reverend Claire Cullingworth** is leading two retreat days at Brancepeth Castle as part of their 'Community of the Well' programme: **21st Feb:** "Finding God in Threads and Patches"; **21st March:** "Creative Prayer for Beginners". These retreat days are run by the Castle at a cost of £40 - you can find more information and book your place at <http://community-of-the-well.uk>. (Let us know in the office if we can help you in contacting them).

As we enter this holy season, my prayer is that we don't just "endure" Lent, but that we embrace it. May these coming weeks be a time where we all find ways to open our hearts to God's transformative love, to experience the Joy of the Gospel and to discover a rhythm that sustains us long after Easter Sunday has passed.

With my prayers and very best wishes.

The droughts, heat and hunger threatening the Middle East and Afghanistan

World Vision has warned that millions of people in the Middle East and Afghanistan are suffering such severe drought, heat and hunger, that the aid agency fears we are reaching a 'tipping point'.

In its recent report, *Children on the Brink*, World Vision reviews the current situation:

- Iraq's catastrophic drought has displaced more than one million people in the region.
- Lebanon has its most severe drought on record, with more than 40 per cent of the people reliant on water trucking.
- Afghanistan has an estimated 17.5 million people in food crisis.
- In Syria, one million people are rated at 'food insecure'.
- Meanwhile, the West Bank is struggling with "severe restrictions on land and water access, damage to infrastructure, and hunger and malnutrition.

Considering all this, World Vision warns: "The Middle East and Afghanistan are approaching a critical tipping point as drought conditions intensify rapidly across the region. Rising temperatures, prolonged dry periods, and chronic water-management challenges are driving alarming levels of food and water insecurity.

"Close to 50 million people in the Middle East and Afghanistan are experiencing high levels of acute food insecurity that threaten their well-being and survival."

Alongside internal and cross-border displacement, the risk of "deepening tensions between communities" is rising, the report continues. "Children and already vulnerable families are being pushed to the brink, resorting to negative coping mechanisms to secure the food, water, and shelter needed."

World Vision's response in the region includes restoring watersheds, using earth and stone structures to increase water retention, recharge groundwater, and improve year-round availability. It is also promoting what it describes as 'climate-smart technologies', including drip irrigation, also called trickle irrigation; drought-tolerant seeds and livestock; and training in agroecological and conservation agriculture practices.

However, the reports warns: "The scale and pace of drought demand unified action from national authorities, international donors, and local communities."

Meanwhile, the recent World Meteorological Organisation's *State of the Climate in the Arab Region* report has found that a number of countries in the region had temperatures of above 50 C (122 F) in 2024. The agency's Secretary-General, Celeste Saulo, says these high temperatures are pushing society to the limits. "It is simply too hot to handle. Human health, ecosystems and economies can't cope with extended spells of more than 50 C."

Church's concern for Venezuela

The Episcopal Church in America is concerned about the people of Venezuela.

Following the Trump administration's recent night-time swoop on the capital Caracas, and the capture of the country's President, the Episcopal Church says it fears for the people because of the inevitable instability that will follow the dramatic raid.

President Nicolas Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, are in New York facing charges on weapons and drug-trafficking.

The Episcopal Church's General Convention has a long-standing policy that: 'condemns in any nation the first use of armed force in the form of a preventive or pre-emptive strike that is aimed at disrupting a non-imminent, uncertain military threat.'

The Church goes on: "Even as we recognise that intervention in sovereign states can sometimes be necessary to prevent atrocities, we discourage the abuse of this norm to rationalise military actions in sovereign states for political ends.

"We urge Congress to call for an investigation and accountability for this most recent unauthorised operation, as well as the related military actions carried out in recent months."

In the hours after the raid, President Trump announced that the US would run Venezuela, and that US oil firms would take over its oil industry.

Three in four car thefts unsolved

Keep a close eye on your car this year, because sadly, no one else seems to be able to do so. Recent figures have revealed that more than 121,000 car theft offences were not solved in 2024-25.

The British Transport Police, South Yorkshire, City of London, Sussex and Warwickshire police forces reported that more than 80 per cent of car thefts were unsolved. 35 of the 44 police forces in England and Wales had a total rate of 60 per cent of all cases going unsolved. Some critics even say that the dismal figures shows that car theft has been decriminalised in the UK.

Of course, theft has been around for a long time. For this very reason, Jesus warned us not to over-value the things that we own. He said: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where ... thieves break in and steal." (Matthew 6:19).

Sadly, no data exists from the 1st century, to tell us how many stolen camels and donkeys were ever recovered.

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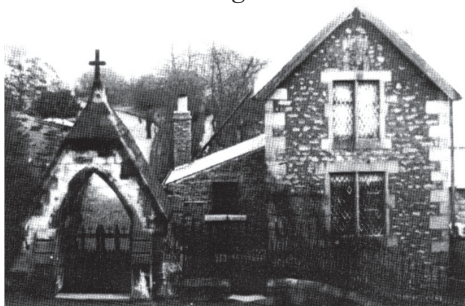
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 Email: **kim@hettontowntrust.co.uk**



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

4th anniversary of the Russia-Ukraine war

As 24th February approaches, the statistics are grim for the fourth anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Massive displacement: 6.9 million refugees have fled Ukraine, with a further 3.7 million internally displaced.

Significant casualties: Russia has hit one million casualties in all, including 250,000 soldiers killed. Ukraine has had about 53,000 casualties, including about 15,000 deaths.

Immense destruction of Ukraine's infrastructure, medical facilities and educational facilities.

Impact: Russia now occupies about 20% of Ukraine, including Crimea. Worldwide, a weakened global economy, threatened food security, and documented war crimes, including chemical weapons used by Russia.

Expense: Billions of dollars have been given in aid to Ukraine. (About \$175bn from the US, and \$197bn from EU since 2022.)

The future is unclear, but here are some memorable quotes of two leading Ukrainians:

At the start of the war, when offered evacuation from Kyiv by the U.S. government, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy famously stated, **"I need ammunition, not a ride"**.

The following day, on 25th February he emphasised Ukraine's determination, stating: **"We will be defending our country, because our weapon is truth, and our truth is that this is our land, our country, our children, and we will defend all of this"**.

The head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC), **Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk** focuses on themes of resilience, freedom, and hope. **"Ukraine is wounded, but it is not defeated! Ukraine is exhausted, but it is standing and will remain standing! Believe me, no one thinks of giving up."**

A recurring theme in Zelenskyy's speeches is that **"Life will win over death, and the light will win over darkness"**.

The funeral of Queen Victoria

Exactly 125 years ago, on 2nd February 1901, the funeral of Queen Victoria took place.

She had died at the age of 81 on 22 January, having ruled for nearly 64 years, and her death took her family, courtiers and subjects by surprise in difficult times. The Boer war was still in progress, and the previous year the Prince of Wales had been shot at in Belgium, by a boy who was protesting against the war.

Her third adult child – Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh – had just died, another was near death, and she herself had been confined to a wheelchair, almost blind and often confused. She died at the remote Osborne House on the Isle of Wight, and when it happened there was no-one alive who could remember how to bury a monarch.

Victoria had asked for a full military state funeral, and there were secret instructions concerning mementoes of her personal servant, John Brown. The official service in St George's Chapel was chaotic because of timing errors, but it was followed by an emotional ceremony for the family on 4th February, in the mausoleum the queen had built for her husband at Frogmore, adjoining Windsor Castle, where the Queen was laid to rest beside her much-loved Prince Albert.

The total cost was £35,500 (£4.5 million). Victoria had outlived all the members of her Privy Council alive in 1837; all the members who had sat in the House of Commons at that time; and all nine of her bridesmaids.

What has been described as the godly domesticity of the Victorian era appealed to a mainly Protestant public, centring more on morals than on radical evangelicalism and effective prayer. One historian noted the transformation in the general British attitude from “aggressive, brutal, rowdy, outspoken, riotous, cruel and bloodthirsty” to “inhibited, polite, orderly, tender-minded, prudish and hypocritical”.



Prayer for February

Flame of a Candle

See the candle flame a-burning
See its flick'ring, dancing light;
See how it, the darkness spurning
Burns throughout the darkest night.

Light of faith, of God reminding

As His Spirit, long ago

Lit the first apostles, finding

Faith within the Spirit's glow.

Light of life – God's life eternal

Won through Christ's atoning death

Sparing us from Hell, infernal

Granting us His living breath!

Light of hope, in God victorious

For we know that He will win

When we'll see His flames of glorious

Vict'ry o'er the pow'r of sin!

Light your candle, kneel and praise Him

Kneel and praise the Lord of Hosts;

Let your prayers and praises raise Him

Father, Son, and Holy Ghost

FROM THE REGISTERS

Funerals

19 Jan	Elizabeth Gettings	Age 65
	Houghton-le-Spring	
19 Jan	Barry Gowland	Age 73
	Houghton-le-Spring	
21 Jan	Betty Fletcher	Age 92
	Houghton-le-Spring	
22 Jan	Stan Morson	Age 94
	Houghton-le-Spring	
23 Jan	Malcolm Berry	Age 69
	Hetton-le-Hole	

Baptisms

25 Jan	Logan Henry Walton
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CHURCH BONUS BALL SCHEME UPDATE FOR 2025

I am pleased to be able
to announce that over
the year 2025 the Church
Bonus Ball Scheme has
raised the grand amount of

£1472

Many thanks to everyone
for continuing to support
this scheme in raising
much needed funds for the
upkeep of our church.

Brian Scott

Saint for February

2nd Candlemas, The Presentation of Christ in the Temple

In bygone centuries, Christians said their last farewells to the Christmas season on Candlemas, 2nd February. This is exactly 40 days after Christmas Day itself.

In New Testament times 40 days old was an important age for a baby boy: it was when they made their first 'public appearance'. Mary, like all good Jewish mothers, went to the Temple with Jesus, her first male child - to 'present Him to the Lord'. At the same time, she, as a new mother, was 'purified'. Thus, we have the Festival of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple.

So, where does the Candlemas bit come in? Jesus is described in the New Testament as the Light of the World, and early Christians developed the tradition of lighting many candles in celebration of this day. The Church also fell into the custom of blessing the year's supply of candles for the church on this day - hence the name, Candlemas.

The story of how Candlemas began can be found in Luke 2:22-40. Simeon's great declaration of faith and recognition of who Jesus was is of course found in the Nunc Dimittis, which is embedded in the Office of Evening Prayer in the West. But in medieval times, the Nunc Dimittis was mostly used just on this day, during the distribution of candles before the Eucharist. Only gradually did it win a place in the daily prayer life of the Church.

Leaders of the Ukrainian church appeal for peace

As the fourth anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine approaches, Ukrainian church leaders have appealed for just measures to be put in place so that the invasion will end.

The country's Greek Catholic Primate, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, said: "Let the modern creators of history protect human life from modern-day Herods - and let us pray that those who make fateful decisions will be inspired by the Holy Spirit not to start wars, but to stop them."

The Primate of the Ukrainian independent Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Epiphany (Dumenko), also compared Russia's rulers to King Herod, who had used "ostentatious, external religiosity" to conceal a "rejection of God's truth".

He went on to say that divine retribution was "inevitable" for those who continued to abduct Ukrainian children and rape Ukrainian women, and for Patriarch Kirill, who had "blessed war, crimes, and murders" from the pulpit.

He Wrote The Date

Jon Swales

He slept beneath the stars –
Not the poetic kind,
But the cold blink of CCTV,
The flicker of a dying lamp
In a car park that forgot his name.

A heroin addict,
A hungry ghost,
Bones hollow,
Eyes flightless.
The dragons had done their work.
He was all aftermath.

Across the road,
Minds awakened,
As his body and mind
Folded in on itself.

Leeds Uni lectured on progress,
He revised survival.
Lesson one:
How to disappear
without dying.

Then one day –
Just a Tuesday,
No trumpet,
No script –
He crossed the road
& walked towards hope.

Not to detox.
Not to court.
But to St George's Church.

He hadn't heard the rumours –
That dragons are slain there.
He just knew
He was tired of hurting.

They called it Lighthouse
a place where the light of Christ
doesn't flinch at brokenness.
Where wounded saints
pour tea like benediction,
and mercy arrives,
often cloaked in grace.

And the Wild Goose
did her work.

Someone prayed.
Someone stayed.
Someone handed him a Bible.

And he-
with trembling hands,
called out to Jesus &
wrote the date.

Not prophecy.
Not poetry.
Just biro and breath:
This is the day.

He never touched heroin again.

“If you see a brother in need
and do nothing,
how can the love of Christ be in you?”

So we did something.
No council forms.
No funding stream.
Just this:
Not one night without a roof.
Not one night without dignity.

Ten years on –
he still wears a baseball cap
like a crown.
Still carries scars.
But now he laughs.
Smiles.
Sleeps safe.

The Wild Goose
has done her work –
through care and compassion,
through mercy and grace,
through love that bleeds and stays.

And he prays –
Sometimes in Hebrew –
reading from a creased scrap of paper
tucked in his wallet.
Not to impress,
but because the blessing
burns like
divine fire
and tastes like
holy truth:

Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu
Melekh ha'olam,
She'asani b'tzalmo.....
Blessed are You,
Lord our God,
King of the Universe,
who has made me in His image.

Now he speaks it over others –
tattoos visible,
cap low,
an image-bearer
blessed
to be a blessing.

And he is.
Blessed.
And a blessing.

*Printed with permission from
Rev'd Jon Swales
and based on a true story.*

His poetry is available on
Facebook or from
www.lighthousewestyorkshire.org.uk
or
www.cruciform/justice.com

The Month Ahead.... February

1	Sun	Candlemas
	8.30 am	Holy Communion (in Church)
	10.00 am	Holy Communion (in Church & Facebook)
	6.00 pm	Service of Light (in Church)
2	Mon	10.00 am Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
	2.30 pm	Community Food Store (Kepier Hall, until 4.30 pm)
	6.00 pm	Vestry hour (call Parish Office for appointment)
	7.00 pm	Rehearsal for Baptism Families
3	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)
4	Wed	10.00 am Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
5	Thur	10.00 am Holy Communion (in Church)
	10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
	6.00 pm	Choir Practice (Choir Vestry)
6	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)
7	Sat	11.00 am Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle St, until 1.00 pm)
8	Sun	Second Sunday before Lent
	8.30 am	Holy Communion (in Church)
	10.00 am	Holy Communion (in Church & Facebook)
	6.00 pm	Choral Evensong (in Church)
9	Mon	10.00 am Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
	2.30 pm	Community Food Store (Kepier Hall, until 4.30 pm)
	6.00 pm	Vestry hour (call Parish Office for appointment)
10	Tues	10.00 am Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
	3.30 pm	Family Fun (Kepier Hall)
11	Wed	10.00 am Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
12	Thur	10.00 am Holy Communion (in Church)
	10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
	6.00 pm	Choir Practice (Choir Vestry)
13	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)

15 Sun Sunday Next before Lent

- 8.30 am Holy Communion (in Church)
- 10.00 am 'All-In' Holy Communion (in Church & Facebook)
- 11.15 am Pancake Party (Kepier Hall)
- 6.00 pm Celtic Eucharist

- 16 Mon 10.00 am Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
- 2.30 pm Community Food Store (Kepier Hall, until 4.30 pm)
- 6.00 pm Vestry hour (call Parish Office for appointment)

- 17 Tues 10.00 am Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
- 3.30 pm Family Fun (Kepier Hall)

18 Wed Ash Wednesday

- 10.00 am Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
- 10.00 am Holy Communion with the Imposition of Ashes (in Church)

- 19 Thur 10.00 am Holy Communion (in Church)
- 10.00 am Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
- 6.00 pm Choir Practice (Choir Vestry)

- 20 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)

22 Sun First Sunday of Lent

- 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)

- 23 Mon 10.00 am Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
- 2.30 pm Community Food Store (Kepier Hall, until 4.30 pm)
- 6.00 pm Vestry hour (call Parish Office for appointment)

- 24 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)

- 25 Wed 10.00 am Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)

- 26 Thur 10.00 am Holy Communion (in Church)
- 10.00 am Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
- 6.00 pm Choir Practice (Choir Vestry)

- 27 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)

The Winter Olympics returns to Europe

If you like snow-sports, you are in for a great month. From 6th to 22nd February, Italy will be hosting the 2026 Winter Olympics, officially known as Milano Cortina 2026. The opening ceremony is at football's famous San Siro stadium. The Paralympic Winter Games follows, from 6th to 15th March.

For the first time the Winter Games will have two host cities, Milan and Cortina d'Ampezzo, with events spread across 15 venues in northern Italy, using existing infrastructure to reduce costs. (Thus, Milan will host indoor events like hockey and figure skating, while Cortina hosts alpine skiing and snowboarding.)

Around 3,500 athletes from more than 90 countries are expected to compete for 195 medals across 16 Olympic disciplines. New this year is ski-mountaineering.

Snow gets an occasional mention in the Bible. Job tells how God "Says to the snow, 'Fall on the earth' ... He stops all people from their labour. The tempest comes out from its chamber, the cold from the driving winds. At His direction they swirl around over the face of the whole earth to do whatever He commands them."

Let's hope that the snow does a good deep swirl around Italy this month.

Shrove Tuesday – Pancake Day – 9th February

It's odd, really, to think that that confessing one's sins to God should be linked to making pancakes. And yet the beginning of Lent brings us both – Shrove Tuesday is Pancake Day, and is followed by Ash Wednesday, and so Lent begins.

In centuries gone by, the pancakes were made to use up the milk and eggs before the fasting of Lent. More recently, many readers will have childhood memories of the wonder of watching our mothers break an egg, mix it with milk and flour – and out of that gooey mess, to produce a light and delicious pancake.

These days, more of us buy pancake mix, or even ready-made pancakes. It seems we prefer the certainty of ending up with pancakes - to the risk of having made nothing BUT a mess of the kitchen.

In many parishes they used to hold pancake races on the day. Why anyone would want to run around a field while holding a pancake is not clear, but in Olney, Bucks, they have held a pancake race almost every year since 1445.

Eating Disorders Awareness Week:

23rd Feb to 1st March

Do you suffer from an eating disorder? Or are you close to someone who struggles with one? If so, then you will know the long battle that sufferers can wage with anorexia, bulimia, binge eating and EDNOS (or 'eating disorder not otherwise specified').

Eating disorders ruin lives. They ruin relationships. They also ruin careers. They are estimated to cost the UK economy about £9.5 billion a year.

This year the annual Eating Disorders Awareness Week website says: "An eating disorder can be isolating, making people feel alone, whether someone has an eating disorder themselves or whether they are supporting someone.

And so it is that "We're celebrating the power of community and the vital role family, friends, and other support networks play in helping someone feel supported, understood, and never alone on their journey from seeking help, undergoing treatment and beyond. How can people with eating disorders be best supported by their employer and colleagues? Visit <https://edaw.beateatingdisorders.org.uk> for details.

As for our church, if there is anyone who would like prayer about their eating disorder, or about the problem of someone they love, please contact us at...

Can you get across the pedestrian crossing in time?

Have you ever had to hurry to make it to safely across the street because the pedestrian crossing light is about to turn red again?

If so, you are not alone. A recent study has found that pedestrian crossing timings are simply too brief for many elderly people and especially those with mobility problems.

The length of time given at crossing points usually assumes a walking speed of 1.2m per second. But the study found that the average speed of adults aged over 65 is only 0.77m per second.

So more than half of older people need to increase their normal walking speed by about 50 per cent, just to reach the other curb safely.

One of the researchers said: "This isn't just a safety issue – it's potentially a barrier to independence, physical activity, and social connection, all of which often decline in later life."

Another said: "Allowing enough time to cross the road can boost confidence, support independence, and help them remain engaged in their communities, all key to a better quality of life."

The study was published in the journal *Age and Ageing*.

Evening **Chronicle** The Northern Echo

4th

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.*

Lidl evacuated after car crashes into North East store sparking huge emergency response

The Lidl store has been closed after a car ploughed into the supermarket while shoppers were inside buying their groceries.

A supermarket has been forced to close after a car crashed into the building. The Lidl store in Houghton-le-Spring has sustained major damage following the incident involving a Mazda CX-5 car at around 10.20am on Friday 16th January.

Multiple windows have been smashed from the impact of the collision with smashed glass scattered over the pavement and car parking spaces in front of the Mautland Square supermarket. Multiple police vehicles responded to the incident with officers erecting a cordon around the area.

It has been confirmed that neither the driver or anyone in the Lidl store were injured as a result of the crash. The store has been closed until further notice with signs put up outside the supermarket.

A Northumbria Police spokesperson said: "Just before 10.20am this morning (Friday), we received a report of a single-vehicle collision at a retail premises on Mautland Square in Houghton-Le-Spring.

"It was reported a car has collided with a supermarket window – causing damage. Emergency services attended, however have since left the scene. No-one is reported to have been injured in the incident".

A Lidl spokesperson said: "We can confirm that emergency services were alerted to an incident involving a car at our Houghton-le-Spring store this morning. Thankfully, no one in the store, nor the driver, was injured.

"The store is currently closed with a view to reopening as soon as possible, once measures have been implemented to secure the store and ensure customer and colleague safety".

New boost for plan to bring back axed railway line

An ambition to reopen a railway line axed in cuts 60 years ago has received a significant boost after being backed by the government.

Development work on the Leamside Line, which runs from Pelaw in Gateshead to Tursdale in County Durham, is set to progress as part of the Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) initiative.

It would bring new train services through Ferryhill, Shincliffe, Belmont, West Rainton and Penshaw, and provide an alternative path for freight trains, freeing up the congested East Coast Main Line between York and Newcastle.

Regional politicians say the line, which is also set to support an extension on the Tyne and Wear Metro, could provide links for 100,000 people in the North East.

Andrew Husband, Reform UK leader of Durham County Council, said: “It would help to connect thousands of residents without access to rail, to major employers, towns and cities across the region.”

Funding was agreed in 2025 for a restoration of the northern section of the disused route as part of a new Washington loop of the Tyne and Wear Metro.

Plans to improve rail services in the north also include improved services from Durham, Darlington and Newcastle.

North East Mayor Kim McGuinness, Labour, called it a “once-in-a-generation project”. My region deserves major investment in transport and that’s what we’re delivering, ensuring Northern Powerhouse Rail services reach Newcastle, via Darlington and Durham.”

NPR is the focus of the government’s wider Northern Growth Strategy, which aims to also provide better jobs, more homes and increased investment in the north of England.

Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer said he wanted to end the cycle of broken promises for the region.

“This cycle has to end. No more paying lip service to the potential of the north, but backing it to the hilt,” he said.

Candlemas – Luke 2.22-40

Hello, Today I wanted to bring you a reflection on this gospel reading we will hear in February at Candlemas time.

Firstly, let me unpack what Candlemas means. Candlemas happens forty days after Christmas day, signifying the Jewish ritual of presenting the first-born to the synagogue to consecrate the first born male in the purification rites. We also celebrate Jesus becoming the light of the world, Simeon recognized the infant Jesus as a “light to the Nations” concluding our Christmas and Epiphany. To mark this, we light and bless Candles in church to use in the year signifying Jesus’s presence on earth- Emanuel – God with us.

In this lesson we read about Jesus being put into the arms of Simeon a servant of the temple who we are informed had the holy spirit upon him. Simeon recognized Jesus as the Messiah and the words he gave us became our Nunc Demits – sung in our evensong and other service over centuries alongside Marys Magnificat.

Then a mysterious figure enters the scene who had lived at the temple, devoutly worshipping there, never leaving. The prophetess Anna, who sees Jesus and begins to spread the word about Jesus to all who would listen.

Imagine this – every first-born son in Jerusalem would be presented to the synagogue to be consecrated to God. How busy was this place!

Amongst all the hustle and bustle, Simeon and Anna were drawn to Jesus and his parents amidst the throngs of people, doves and pigeons and lambs. The noise, the echoing chatter bouncing off the stone walls, birds chirping and babies crying. Amongst all this we have two humble quiet people recognizing Jesus as Emanuel, Gods promise fulfilled to free his people, to reconcile man to God.

Heaven come down to earth in Jesus.

Then Simeon has hard words for Mary to hear – of the sorrow and pain in the future – “and a sword will pierce your soul too”.

What words to hear about their little forty-day old baby.

Jesus, born in a stable to humble parentage. Visited by one of the lowest sections of society-the shepherds. Then by the wise men bearing prophetic gifts. Now in the synagogue being heralded as the saviour of mankind by Simeon then by the prophet Anna, someone of no formal standing in the temple but guided by the Holy Spirit

in accepting Jesus as Emanuel and so happy that she broadcasts it to all who would listen.

Can you imagine the response of the Scribes and Pharisees to Anna shouting about the saviour come to set them free from their oppressors. The other synagogue users, visitors and officials all wondering what she is saying and wondering if she is unwell!

Hear them say - it's just Anna – she probably needs a drink of water and a cool down – she will be fine after a rest; she is old you know..... Dismissing her joy and delight in recognizing the light of the world is here at last.

Two humble servants of God prophesising about Jesus, his parents astounded to hear these things.

This story is only found in Luke who concentrates on teaching us about Jesus fulfilling the prophecies in the Old Testament to establish Jesus' legitimacy as the Messiah.

Why am I pondering about this story in Luke? For me – I see that Jesus is greeted to earth in humility and poverty. Only recognized by the humble or those directed by God to welcome him directly but quietly. Yet here we see the prophecy being fulfilled in the public temple by two devout servants of God leaving us words we have used over two thousand years in our worship.

We recognize Jesus as the son of God, as did Simeon and Anna. We follow his teachings and are motivated by the Holy Spirit through prayer and worship, We are Christians. Growing in faith just as Jesus was to grow up and become a man ready to do Gods will and fulfil the scriptures. So we need to grow in faith and be nurtured in conversation with God in Prayer, pondering on the Bible as it speaks to us in our reading.

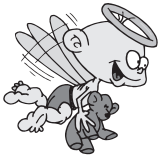
One last thought -

And she kept all these things and pondered them in her heart (Luke 2.19)

So may we constantly ponder on Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Let us pray – Dear Father, I pray that this day we may talk together in prayer so I may listen to your words, see your world and be part of your church through Jesus Christ, a light to the nations. Amen.

Simon Hardy



Michael's Angels

Matthew 2

Star Search

Draw a line from the first part of each word on the top line to the last part of the word in the second line. Start and end your lines on the dots. The words are names of people and places in Matthew 2:1, 2, 11-23. After you have connected all the names, write the letters crossed by the lines in order from left to right in the blanks at the bottom of the page. You will find out what the Magi did when they saw Jesus.

JES	HE	JOS	MA	BETH	JERU
W			X		T
A	O	T	R	S	L
F		M		B	I
EPH	RY	US	SALEM	ROD	LEHEM
JU	EG	NAZA	RAC	JE	RA
J	E	Y	H	F	
P	N	D	A	I	K
				R	M
YPT	HEL	DEA	WS	RETH	MAH

Ideas for Valentine's Day

Valentine's Day was begun by Pope Gelasius the 1st in 496, in honour of St Valentine, the saint who had shown such kindness and love to all who crossed his path. It has become the day when we celebrate the joys of human love.

If you have a romance in your life, Valentine's Day is easy: you can celebrate your shared love with everything from a candlelit meal to red roses to love letters, to revisiting the place where you first met each other.

But even if you do not have a romance in your life, that need not stop you enjoying Valentine's Day (after all, the saint had no romance in *his* life). Instead, why not seek out and show love and kindness to several people? How about hosting a Valentine's meal to enjoy each other's company and to share God's love for us all? At the very least, why not be on the 'look-out' to do people a random act of kindness this month? Ask God to help you be sensitive to even a stranger who needs a helping hand.



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

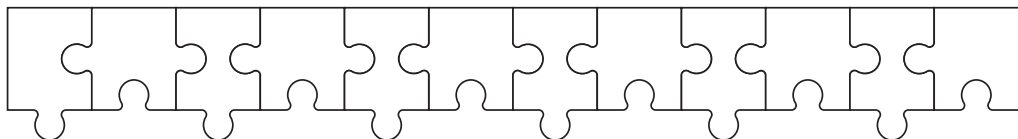
on the first Tuesday of the month from

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

Our 504 piece jigsaw is now complete!

Take a good look at this month's photograph... Our jigsaw is complete, including the four 'bonus' pieces!



As everyone had already been so generous, instead of **selling** raffle tickets for the bonus pieces, we decide to **allocate** a 'virtual' raffle ticket to each sponsor of one or more jigsaw pieces. Each ticket number corresponded to the number of the jigsaw piece sponsored, with a maximum of one virtual ticket per sponsor. No more money was involved!

The raffle was drawn on 22nd January and the four winning tickets were 54, 315, 80 and 67. The sponsors of those pieces have been informed, and they have now received their duplicate pieces.

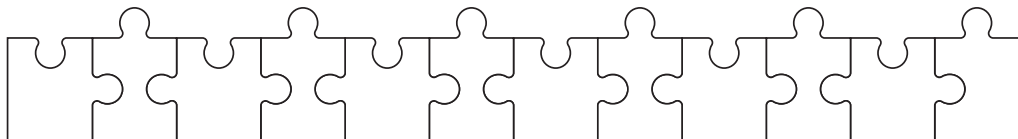
The next step is to have the completed jigsaw mounted and framed, ready for display in Church. Work will also begin on compiling the book of celebration and dedication, which will be going on display next to the jigsaw. If you have not yet finalised the wording of your own contribution, please get in touch over the next few weeks so that we can be sure that the book is accurate. Thank you.

The final Celebration Jigsaw Progress Report will appear in next month's Signpost, when we will confirm how much money the project has raised for the work of St Michael and All Angels, Houghton-le-Spring!

With all best wishes,

The Jigsaw Team (Angela, Dian and Denise)

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



ANNUAL PARISH PARTY

The Annual Parish Party was held in the Kepier Hall on 24th January.

The arrangement was for everyone to bring their own food and drink, which resulted in some delicious food being placed on the tables! After time for a catch up chat the evening started with a game of corners, always a favourite, followed by pass the parcel. David introduced us to a game which was a combination of quiz and bingo and Alastair called out the numbers for a game of bingo. There was also a generous raffle. The children had lots of fun playing with balloons.

The evening flew by with everyone enjoying the great atmosphere. The members of the Events Team were delighted so many people came along to support the event and it was very gratifying to receive many positive comments and how good it was to spend the time together.

Thanks go to everyone who came along to the party, and to the Events Team for all their hard work.

Dian Scott



How people fast during Lent

Many of us fast during Lent. It seems that the kind of fast you undertake may be connected to your denomination. A recent survey found the following:

- 94% Black Majority Churchgoers give up all food for a set time.
- 85% of Orthodox churchgoers cut out specific foods and/or drinks.
- 83% of Pentecostal churches give up all food for a set time.
- 79% of Roman Catholics cut out specific foods and/or drinks.
- 76% of New Churches give up all food for a set time.
- 57% of C of E cut out specific foods and/or drinks
- 30% or less of Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists cut out specific foods and/or drinks.

The survey was done by the charity Green Christian

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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,

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The Joy of the Gospel

Wednesdays in Lent

7:00-8:30 p.m.

Space4 Hub,
Newbottle Street

Paula Gooder's book forms the basis of our Lent course this year at St Michael & All Angels'. The course is based on Pope Francis' much acclaimed reflections 'Evangelii Gaudium' (meaning 'The Joy of the Gospel'). We hope this time together will allow us to draw on our Advent and Christmas reflections on Christian 'Joy' and how we share that with others through our words and actions. Our aim is to offer a positive and realistic approach to sharing our faith in world that often feels like it needs a bigger dose of joy!

All are welcome to join us, wherever we are on our faith journey. We may be exploring, be new to faith or we may have been part of church for many years – we think the course will work for all.

To find out more, give us a call in the parish office (0191 512 1769) on Tuesdays or Thursdays between 10 and 2 or email us on stmichaelshls@gmail.com. It's helpful for us to know numbers but also, just turn up if you want to, on Wednesday from 25th February to 25th March.

We mean it when we say:

All are welcome