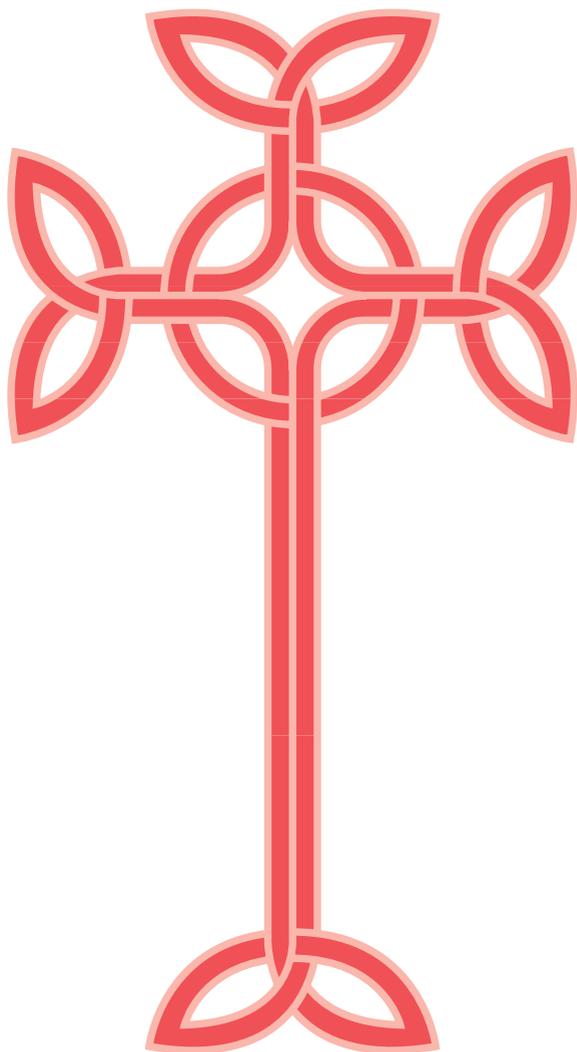


THE MONTHLY MAGAZINE
OF THE PARISH OF
HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING



St. Michael
AND ALL ANGELS

MARCH 2026

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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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Mr. Alastair Bradley
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Assistant Church Wardens

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Mr. Brian Scott
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Officers of the Parochial Church Council

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Tel: (0191) 584 2036

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

Organist & Director of Music

Mr. George Peebles
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Email: georgepeebles@talktalk.com

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 07941 507724
Email: georgepeebles@talktalk.com 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

I wonder if you've given anything up for Lent this year? It's the question that defines this season in the popular imagination. Perhaps you've opted for the traditional fasts—chocolate, alcohol, or social media. Or perhaps you're fasting in a more modern way, such as reducing your carbon footprint or committing to a "plastic-free" forty days. At our Ash Wednesday service, back in February, I encouraged us not to think of Lenten promises as a spiritual "self-improvement programme."



There's a story of a woman who decided to be the "Perfect Christian" one Lent. She gave up everything fun, avoided every carb, and went to the gym first thing every morning. By week two of Lent, she was exhausted, irritable, and—ironically—spending all her time judging everyone else who wasn't as disciplined as she was. One afternoon, she found herself staring at a forgotten leftover Shrove Tuesday pancake in the back of the fridge. In a moment of "hangry" desperation, she ate it. Cold. Rubbery. Defeat. That cold pancake was her wake-up call. In her quest to be "perfect," she'd become entirely self-absorbed. She'd been so busy "improving" herself that she'd forgotten to actually spend any time with God. I want to

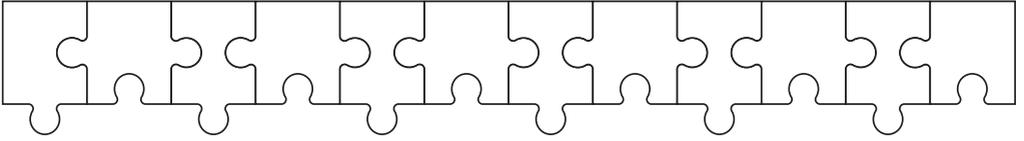
strongly suggest this isn't the way Lent should be – it isn't meant to be a spiritual Olympic Games; it's much more an invitation to relationship.

Our readings in church at the beginning of each Lent take us to the wilderness. I remember as a child seeing pictures of the Tempter as a big, red, scary figure with horns. Red means danger; when we see red, we stop. But as I've grown older, I realise temptation rarely wears a red suit. In the Book of Genesis, the serpent is described as "crafty" or "subtle." Temptation doesn't usually shout; it whispers. It nudges us to put ourselves at the centre of things instead of God. We see this with Jesus in the desert. He wasn't just tempted by bread or power; he was tempted to do things on his own terms. We often do the same. When we pray, is it a list of demands? "Lord, let it stay dry today," or "Take this problem away on my to-do list." Praying "Thy will be done" is a tough prayer because it requires us to trust God's terms over our own.

Whatever we are doing to keep Lent, the invitation of Lent remains the same for everyone: focus on the relationship. Perhaps that might mean reading a chapter of the Gospels every day or simply carving out five minutes of quiet for daily prayer. It doesn't matter how "grand" the gesture is. What matters is the intent. Are we clearing a little space in our busy lives to let God in? Lent is a time to practice being loved. It's a time to realise that we don't have to be "perfect" to be in the right relationship with our Heavenly Father. Jesus went into the wilderness not to prove how tough he was, but because he knew he was the "Beloved Son."

So, whatever you are doing this season—whether you are giving something up or taking something on—may you find that God is right there in the wilderness, ready to walk with you.

With my prayers and very best wishes.



The final Celebration Jigsaw progress report!

We are delighted to be able to report that the St Michael and All Angels Celebration Jigsaw raised **£2,750!**

A huge thank you to everyone who so kindly supported the project. Your generosity enabled the jigsaw to grow steadily piece by piece, as successive photographs in Signpost showed so clearly. It was wonderful to see our beautiful Church building gradually take shape!

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to Dian and Denise, the other two members of the Jigsaw Team. Their energy, enthusiasm and endless good ideas not only ensured success, but also made it great fun. Thank you!

Angela Slater



We hold ‘national treasures for the common good’ - new repairs fund announced

The Church of England’s Director for Cathedral and Church buildings, Emily Gee, has welcomed the Government’s Places of Worship Renewal Fund, and its willingness to invest in repairs and improvements for eligible parish and cathedral church buildings.

She said: “We also welcome the Government’s recognition of the special role of historic churches in national life - church buildings are national treasures for the common good.

“They have huge spiritual, cultural and historical significance, and are major centres of practical assistance through food banks, lunch clubs and parent and toddler groups. They serve as a place of sanctuary,

refreshment and cultural heritage throughout the UK.

“The vast majority of fundraising for the maintenance and repair of these buildings is done locally by heroic volunteers and Government support is crucial in helping them reach their targets - and we are really grateful for this ongoing support.

“However, we are very concerned that the end of the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme - after more than 20 years - will mean added pressure on local fundraisers and inevitably a drain on other sources of funding. We will work with the wider sector and the Government to see how that burden can be alleviated.

Education Secretary praises Church of England schools at Festival of Flourishing

The impact of Church of England schools on children’s lives and communities has been celebrated at the first ever recent Festival of Flourishing.

Hosted by the National Society for Education, the event formed part of the Society’s annual national conference and brought together school and trust leaders, teachers, clergy, policymakers and young people to explore how placing children and young people at the heart of leadership, governance and culture can enable schools and communities to flourish.

Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson spoke warmly about the Church of England’s longstanding contribution to national education, praising the commitment, community role and leadership of its schools and trusts.

She highlighted the strength of the partnership between Church and state, recognising the impact of Church of England schools in serving more than a million children and acting as “calm and hopeful anchors” within their communities. “There are so many Church of England schools that understand this already,” she said.

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Email: houghtonrugbyclub@outlook.com

High Places

'High places' have been used for millennia in many religions and faiths as places of worship and were seen as representing a closer step to heaven, or the divine. These places can be small hills which are higher than the surrounding flat landscape, or mountains, or man-made structures.

They often have an altar and other sacred objects associated with them. Many high places in the days of the Patriarchs Abraham, Issac and Jacob (c2166BC – 1859BC) were dedicated to idol worship, but the people of God also used high places for this when they first entered the promised land.

For a long time in European history, because of antisemitism, it was forbidden for a Synagogue to be built higher than a nearby Church, so the idea of 'high places' having a physical importance and dominance seems to have come through into Christian ideas. This was reinforced by the use of churches as fortresses against attacks by their enemies during many war-like periods in history.

Genesis records the Bible's earliest mention of worship sites, where Abram built altars at Hebron and Moriah. Both of these are geographically high and the pattern was followed by Joshua when he sited his pillars on higher ground than the nearby Jordan river.

The prophet Samuel often visited high places, but once the first temple was built (960BC) it was the only high place named where sacrifice was authorised, and God then commanded that all other high places should be destroyed.

The high places which were used for worship by pagans and Israelites alike ended up becoming a snare for both Kingdoms of Israel. The only Kings who obeyed God's command to destroy them were Hezekiah (born 716BC) and his great grandson Josiah (born 641BC), both of the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

The term 'high place' is not used in the New Testament but the high places of the distant past can still teach us about keeping our lives open to the spirit of God and not the influence of the world, and the idolatry it can bring.

This can be in the shape of greed, immorality, lust or other desires which tempt and seduce us away from the will of God.

Mothering Sunday

Mothering Sunday - the fourth Sunday of Lent- offers families an opportunity to honour the women who have nurtured them. Lots of different streams and traditions have come together to make today's Mothering Sunday the special day that it is.

In the Middle Ages it was an occasion for everyone to visit their 'mother' church - the place where they had been baptised. Later, an opportunity for those who worked away from home to visit their mothers became added to the mix of reasons to make it a special day.

Today we honour all women who have in one way or another been special to us, and in church this is usually signalled by small bunches of flowers for every woman present.

Treating mums and grans to Sunday lunch, chocolates and flowers is also part of the present mix. And will there be a simnel cake to be seen - a tradition from ages past - with its rich layers of marzipan, and eleven balls of marzipan on top, reminders of the 11 disciples who remained faithful to Jesus?

Not everyone has enjoyed a wonderful or enduring relationship with their mum, so lest we get carried away on a wave of love and sentimentality, there is usually space in the Mothering Sunday church service to reflect on and pray for those whose relationships with their mother were not all they might have been.

Also, there are the families blighted by the lack of, or death of a child; families remembering a mum who died tragically young; women who never had a child but would have dearly loved the opportunity; all these and more are a recognition of the imperfections of human love, human life.

These imperfections can be brought in prayer to the God who mothers us. In the Old Testament, Isaiah speaks of God comforting His people like a mother hen. In the New Testament, both Matthew and Luke bear witness to Jesus expressing His desire to gather His people as a mother hen gathers her chicks under her wings. Yes, God has strong maternal qualities which He invites us to discover and enjoy!

Have you discovered the mothering, nurturing, maternal qualities which God offers to all people? It's lovelier than flowers, more long-lasting than simnel cake, better than a visit from family, and it's free to everyone who wants it - it could be yours!



Prayer for March

(Based on Jn 3:21, Jn 14:6, Jn 8:12,
Jn 16:33, Heb 13:5)

Lord, In these weeks leading up to Easter, many of us spend time reflecting on what Jesus has done for us and how he can help us live our lives. But we live in a harsh, confusing world, where traditional values are upended and we can hardly believe some of the things we hear from powerful world leaders. Truth seems to be lost in the darkness.

Lord, your word tells us that, *whoever lives by the truth comes into the light*. Jesus says He is *the Truth*.

He also says He is the *Light of the world*. Help us to hold fast to these facts. Help us to remember that Jesus said that in this world we will have trouble – so we shouldn't be surprised – but that He has overcome the world – so we should be encouraged.

Whatever is going on in the troubled world around us – we can live by the real Truth – and in the real Light – Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, who will never leave us or forsake us.

Thank you so much.

In Jesus name.

Amen.

FROM THE REGISTERS

Funerals

17 Feb	Neil Scott Belmont, Durham	Age 76
18 Feb	Edward Blake Formerly Houghton-le-Spring	Age 86
27 Feb	Sarah Turnbull Formerly Houghton-le-Spring	Age 98
27 Feb	Marion Sleeman Houghton-le-Spring	Age 95

Baptisms

22 Feb	Noah Daniel Lewis
22 Feb	Rosie Kate Lewis

Peaceful mind in Lent

Lent is a time of prayer and inward reflection, when we take stock of where we are with God... with this in mind, the following may be helpful.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Matthew 11: 28-30.

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” John 16:33

“Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” James 1:12

Saint for March

Palm Sunday & Holy Week

The events of Easter took place over a week, traditionally called Passion Week. It began on Palm Sunday. After all His teaching and healing, Jesus had built a following.

On the Sunday before He was to die, Jesus and His followers arrived at Jerusalem. The city was crowded. Jewish people were arriving from to celebrate Passover. This commemorates how they had escaped from slavery in Egypt nearly 1,500 year earlier.

Jesus rode into the city on a young donkey. He was greeted like a conquering hero. Cheering crowds waved palm branches in tribute. He was hailed as the Messiah who had come to re-establish a Jewish kingdom.

The next day they returned to Jerusalem. Jesus went to the temple, the epicentre of the Jewish faith, and confronted the money-changers and merchants who were ripping off the people. He overturned their tables and accused them of being thieves. The religious authorities were alarmed and feared how He was stirring up the crowds.

On the Tuesday, they challenged Jesus, questioning His authority. He answered by challenging and condemning their hypocrisy. Later that day Jesus spoke to His disciples about future times. He warned them about fake religious leaders; the coming destruction of Jerusalem; wars, earthquakes and famines; and how His followers would face persecution.

By midweek the Jewish religious leaders and elders were so angry with Jesus that they began plotting to arrest and kill Him. One of Jesus' disciples, Judas, went to the chief priests and agreed to betray Him to them.

Jesus and the 12 disciples gathered on the Thursday evening to celebrate the Passover meal. This is known as the Last Supper. During the evening, Jesus initiated a ritual still marked by Christians – Holy Communion – which commemorates His death. Jesus broke bread and shared it and a cup of wine with His disciples.

Judas then left to meet the other plotters. Jesus continued to teach the others and then went outside into an olive grove to pray. He even prayed for all future believers. He agonised over what was to come but chose the way of obedience. The Bible book, Luke, records Him praying, *'Father if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will but yours be done'*. Minutes later Judas arrived with soldiers and the chief priests and Jesus was arrested.

Remembering the Dunblane Massacre

Thirty years ago, on 13th March 1996, the Dunblane Massacre took place in Scotland. Thomas Hamilton, a former Scout leader, entered Dunblane Primary School, shot dead 16 children and a teacher, wounded 15 more, and then committed suicide. As a result, the private ownership of handguns was banned in the UK.

There was no obvious reason for the massacre, though Hamilton's behaviour had previously made the police raise questions about his fitness to own firearms. He was said to have had a grudge against some prominent members of the community for being labelled a "pervert" – and this "persecution" was said to have affected his business, which was fitting kitchens.

The allegations arose after he was ejected as a Boy Scout assistant leader and had to give up as organiser of several boys' clubs after he had behaved strangely towards young boys – though nothing illegal was ever proved against him. Future tennis star Andy Murray had been a member of some of the clubs.

The teacher who died, 43-year-old mother Gwen Mayor, was killed while trying to protect her pupils, who were in the youngest class. Another teacher and an assistant teacher were wounded while similarly attempting to keep the children safe.

After the massacre, residents of Dunblane, which is a few miles north of Stirling in central Scotland, started the Snowdrop Campaign and gathered about 750,000 signatures for a petition against the private ownership of handguns. This resulted in a law being passed the following year and a subsequent fall in the number of gun killings in the UK.

A service in Dunblane Cathedral the following Sunday – Mothering Sunday – saw locals united in a determination to find "peace, hope, calm and joy". Tears naturally flowed – except for a minute when the crying unaccountably stopped and everyone was silent.

Our love affair with our phones

It was 150 years ago this month, on 10th March 1876, that the world's first telephone call was made.

Alexander Graham Bell called his assistant and said: "Mr Watson, come here. I want you."

That phone call was the beginning of a worldwide addiction to phones. Phones spread quickly, constantly improved, and after more than 100 years of landlines, mobile phones arrived.

The first was introduced by Motorola in 1983 in the USA. The Motorola DynaTAC 8000X weighed nearly two pounds and cost around \$3,995.

The first smartphone, the IBM Simon Personal Communicator, was released in 1994, combining phone calls with PDA features like email, fax, and a calendar on a touchscreen. It was so expensive it sold only about 50,000.

But by the late 90s, the BlackBerry had become a top favourite, with its popular email and messaging services beloved by Barak Obama, among many others.

Then in 2007, Apple released the first iPhone, informally known as the iPhone 2G, with an advanced multi-touch interface and app ecosystem.

Fast forward nearly 20 years, and there are now about 7.5 billion active smartphones in the world.

The total number of all connections (SIMs/devices) now even exceeds the human population of about 8.3 billion.

Two donkeys

Two donkeys were walking the streets of Jerusalem.

One said: "Just a few days ago I came down that hill carrying Jesus, and the people were all singing and

shouting and throwing down their cloaks and palms for me to walk on. But today they don't even recognise me."

The other donkey replied: "That is how it is, my friend. Without Jesus, none of us amounts to much."

The Month Ahead.....March

1	Sun	Second Sunday in Lent/Bernard Gilpin
		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 Space4 Mums (Hub, Newbottle Street)
		7.00 pm Lent Course: The Joy of the Gospels (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 Street, until 1.00 pm)
8	Sun	Third Sunday in 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)
		4.00 pm Wedding Rehearsal
		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 Space4 Mums (Hub, Newbottle Street)
		2.30 pm Wedding
		7.00 pm Lent Course: The Joy of the Gospels (Hub, Newbottle Street)
		7.30 pm Gilpin Singers (Church)
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	Mothering Sunday
		8.30 am Holy Communion (in Church)
		10.00 am 'All-In' Holy Communion (in Church & Facebook)
		6.00 pm Reflective Service
16	Mon	10.00 am Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
		2.30 pm Community Food Store (Kepier Hall, until 4.30 pm)

16	Mon	6.00 pm	Vestry hour (call Parish Office for appointment)
17	Tues	10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
		2.00 pm	Baptism
		3.30 pm	Family Fun (Kepier Hall)
		7.30 pm	Project Board (zoom)
18	Wed	10.00 am	Space4 Mums (Hub, Newbottle Street)
		7.00 pm	Lent Course: The Joy of the Gospels (Hub, Newbottle Street)
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		Fifth Sunday in Lent - <i>Passiontide</i> begins
		8.30 am	Holy Communion (in Church)
		10.00 am	Holy Communion (in Church & Facebook)
		12.00 noon	Baptism
		6.00 pm	Celtic Eucharist (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)
		2.00 pm	Baptism
		3.30 pm	Family Fun (Kepier Hall)
		7.00 pm	Holy Communion (Hub, Newbottle Street)
		7.30 pm	PCC (Hub, Newbottle Street)
		7.30 pm	Gilpin Singers (Church)
25	Wed	10.00 am	Space4 Mums (Hub, Newbottle Street)
		7.00 pm	Lent Course: The Joy of the Gospels (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)
29	Sun		Palm Sunday
		8.30 am	Holy Communion (in Church)
		10.00 am	Holy Communion (in Church & Facebook)
		6.00 pm	Passiontide Devotion (in Church)
30	Mon	10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
		2.00 pm	Mothers' Union Easter Readings (in Church)
		2.30 pm	Community Food Store (Kepier Hall, until 4.30 pm)
		6.00 pm	No Vestry hour (call Parish Office for appointment)
		7.00 pm	Holy Communion in Holy Week (in Church)
31	Tues	10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
		3.30 pm	Family Fun (Kepier Hall)
		7.00 pm	Holy Communion in Holy Week (in Church)

House of Bishops shares letter as Living in Love and Faith approaches conclusion

The House of Bishops has shared a letter to the wider Church of England setting out an agreed position as it prepares to bring the Living in Love and Faith (LLF) process – which explores the Church’s approach to identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage – to a conclusion.

The letter, in the form of a statement from the House, speaks about proposed new bodies to be set up once LLF comes to a conclusion; confirms an agreed approach to any further changes and rules out so-called Delegated Episcopal Ministry at this stage.

Following a General Synod vote in February 2023, same-sex couples can now receive public prayers of dedication, thanksgiving and asking for God’s blessing – known as the Prayers of Love and Faith (or PLF) – as part of a regular church service.

At a recent meeting, the House confirmed the decision taken at its meeting in October that, based on legal advice, new special or ‘bespoke’ services using Prayers of Love and Faith would need full formal authorisation under canon law.

They also acknowledged that general permission for clergy to be in a same-sex civil marriage would require a formal legislative process and agreed to explore what legislation would be needed.

And they made clear they could not agree to placing some parishes under the care of bishops with “separate and independent jurisdiction” as a result of the Prayers of Love and Faith at this stage.

The bishops’ letter details how a new working group would carry out the theological and legislative preparatory work needed and report back to the new General Synod – which will be elected later this year – with recommendations within the first two years after the election.

The House recognised and regretted the deep hurt, particularly to LGBTQI+ people, caused by the decisions.

It agreed a letter to the Church, bringing LLF and the process initiated by the February 2023 Synod vote to a formal conclusion and setting out steps to be taken next. A vote of bishops to issue the letter achieved overwhelming consensus across traditions and the range of theological views on questions of sexuality and marriage.

Those steps include establishing a Relationships, Sexuality and Gender Working Group to support the House of Bishops and enable it to:

Engage in preparatory work and explore the approval process under Canon B2 that would be necessary for bespoke services of Prayers of Love and Faith;

Explore what legislative changes would be required to enable clergy to enter same-sex marriage;

Continue to explore what pastoral episcopal provision and reassurance would be required, proportionate to any further proposed changes;

Report back to General Synod with recommendations within the first two years following the upcoming elections.

A new Pastoral Consultative Group will also be set up to advise bishops and archdeacons on specific cases in the interim and facilitate consistent practice across the Church.

“We dare to hope that the LLF process will leave a legacy of greater inclusion of LGBTQI+ people in the life of the Church of England, together with deeper understanding of the theological issues and greater honesty about, and tolerance of, individual differences,” the letter explains.

Speaking of the need for careful consideration of next steps, it adds: “Lessons need to be learned from the process of the last three years.

“It is important to avoid a further cycle of hopes or anxieties being raised only to be disappointed.”

Detailing the process the Church has undergone since the 2023 Synod motion, including the introduction of Prayers of Love and Faith, the bishops write: “We believe we have fulfilled, albeit imperfectly, the February 2023 General Synod motion as best we can, given the range of views across the Church of England, including replacing Issues in Human Sexuality after the July 2025 Synod motion, without departing from or indicating any departure from the Church’s doctrine of marriage.

“We believe, as a House, that the time has now come formally to conclude this Synodical process in February 2026 and to identify the next stages of work which will need to be considered by the House of Bishops and the General Synod in the coming years, including the ongoing structures for development, dialogue and discernment.”

Evening **Chronicle** The Northern Echo

4th

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THE GREAT DAILY OF THE NORTH

87p

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

Meet the football-mad siblings supporting rival teams ahead of Tyne-Wear derby, Amber Borthwick is a Sunderland fan while her brother Finley supports Newcastle United

Amber and Finley Borthwick - the siblings supporting rival teams ahead of their first Tyne-Wear derby.

Amber, 11, is a big Sunderland fan while her brother Finley, nine, supports Newcastle United. It will be the first time the pair have witnessed the two teams playing each other in the Premier League when they go head-to-head on Sunday afternoon. The last time the sides faced each other in the league, on March 20, 2016, Amber was a toddler and Finley wasn't even born. Amber will be attending the match with her gran while Finley will be watching at their home in Houghton-le-Spring.

Amber and Finley's mother Vicky Wardle, 32, told ChronicleLive: "This was their first experience of derby day. They can't wait. It's like Christmas for them! Amber has a season ticket, she's football obsessed and Finley is Newcastle crazy. They are at each other's throats over football."

Amber and Finley are part of a divided family when it comes to North East football. They both supported the Toon but Amber changed her allegiances to Sunderland after going to games at the Stadium of Light with her gran Linda Borthwick, 66.

Vicky said: "I'm football-mad and the kids are football-mad. My family all support Newcastle but their dad's side are Sunderland. Amber started playing football herself and she started with Sunderland Pathway. When she was nine her gran asked her if she wanted to go to the match. She went and loved it. She started going to the match with her gran and then she was a Mackem. She has a season ticket with her gran, her uncle and her cousin. She sings all the chants, she just goes nuts. She's never had the experience of derby day. She's going to love it but I think she's going to get a little bit of a shock as well! Finley just wouldn't go, he would have absolutely none of it. He's stuck with Newcastle and he's desperate to go to a game."

Amber, who also goes to watch Sunderland Women, plays for Newcastle City Juniors FC. She initially played for New Durham AFC before transferring to the club, which is based in Newcastle's West End. Vicky, who is a kitchen assistant at a care home, said: "At first she would put her Sunderland top under the Newcastle City Juniors top so she felt like she wasn't cheating on her team!"

"They make jokes like 'the last one in is a Mackem'. They will all run and Amber will literally just walk because she wants to be the last one in. She loves the club but she doesn't support Newcastle."

Amber's favourite Sunderland player is Trai Hume and her favourite player for the Women's side is Katie Kitching. She thought the score on Sunday would be 2-1 to Sunderland.

She said: “My gran started taking me to the Sunderland matches and, as I got taken to more and more, I started to like them more and more. Then my mam took me to watch the Sunderland Women’s match and we started going every

Amber, who also goes to watch Sunderland Women, plays for Newcastle City Juniors FC. She initially played for New Durham AFC before transferring to the club, which is based in Newcastle’s West End.

Finley thought the score would be 2-1 to Newcastle. When asked why he supports the Toon, he said: “They are the best side, my favourite player is Bruno and I just like watching them play.”

Demolition works planned at farm near Sunderland to make way for new self-build home

Sunderland City Council’s planning department has received an application for Holmeland Farm, off Stoneygate, in the city’s Copt Hill ward.

New plans are seeking permission to demolish three agricultural buildings on the site, described as “redundant” buildings in supporting planning documents, and to build a “single-storey, three-bedroom self-build dwelling” together with “associated parking and ancillary works. Details of the development are set out in a planning statement submitted to council officials, which notes the buildings earmarked for demolition have “no architectural or heritage merit”.

It was also noted that the site lies within the designated Green Belt and that the application had been “directly informed” by feedback from Sunderland City Council through a pre-application enquiry, which included advice around the proposed home remaining “single storey and respecting [the] existing massing and openness of the Green Belt”.

Submitted planning documents said the proposed self-build dwelling “would be a single-storey, sensitively designed building with a simple rural form and restrained material palette, including brick external walls and profiled metal roofing”.

The new home is planned in the “south eastern extent” of the site and would benefit from a garden and “garage and car port”, providing a “defined edge of development on Holmeland Farm’s southern boundary”, supporting planning documents state.

It was noted that “the siting of the dwelling has been carefully considered to respect the openness of the site” and that “its layout and scale have been developed to respond appropriately to the surrounding rural context while delivering a high-quality and sustainable self-build home” By “maintaining the established height and massing”, applicants said the proposal “minimises any impact on the character of the area and preserves the openness of the Green Belt”.

It was also noted that proposed plans show “four dedicated vehicle parking spaces provided within the garage and car port located to the north-west of the dwelling” and that an electric vehicle charging point would be provided for the proposed dwelling. The planning statement adds: “The proposal would not result in unrestricted sprawl, encroachment into the countryside, or harm to the openness or permanence of the Green Belt.

“Accordingly, it is considered that the development represents a sustainable and acceptable form of development, and planning permission should be granted.

Community Organising to bring positive change in Houghton-le-Spring

Community organising is the process of bringing people together to build collective power, act on shared concerns, and achieve social change. It focuses on listening to the community and finding out what issues are causing pressure on their day-to-day lives. St Michael and All Angel's church in Houghton-le-Spring uses this approach on their Space4 Community Project to help bring about positive change for their community. In recent months, members of the project team have been engaged in listening within the community and one issue that kept coming up from local families was the state of the local Kirklea Park.



Gillas Lane children with Councillor Dodds

Jade, one of our project team, invited people to come along to the park in the summer to speak to her about their concerns. St Michael's Rector Rev'd John Barron said, "We were hoping for a turnout of 10-15 but, in the end, 50 people turned up, demonstrating just how important the park is to the local community. From that initial meeting, a small group of committed parents went out and spoke to more families. We heard that people felt unsafe in the park, that it was dirty and not maintained, and that broken equipment had been removed and not replaced."

At the end of January, mams and children from Gillas Lane Primary School met with Councillor Tracy Dodds to discuss their thoughts about Kirklea Park. The meeting was originally meant to take place in the park itself, but was rained off... So Gillas Lane Primary provided a lovely warm space for the meeting to take place! The mams led the meeting, sharing their stories and clearly and confidently setting out what needs to change in their local park.

Councillor Dodds agreed to a series of changes, including immediate action to deep clean the park, repair and replace benches, fix the zipwire, work closely with children to co-create new play equipment, and continue meeting with local parents to listen to their concerns about the area.

John said, "We are so proud of the mams and children for showing what can happen when local people organise and act together. This is just the beginning of work to improve Kirklea park and a small part of the ways the church in Houghton-le-Spring is seeking to serve our community, in Jesus name, and bring about transformation for our local community and our local church." St Michael's have used Community Organising methods for a number of years to tackle social justice issues and last year joined a pilot project led by the Centre for Theology and Mission exploring how Organising can lead to Congregational growth in the local church, particularly in relation to children and young people attending church.

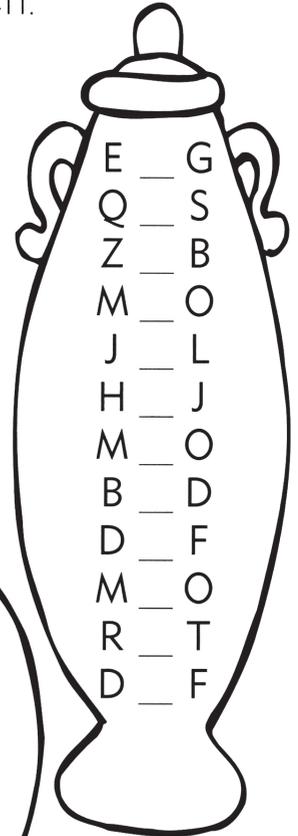
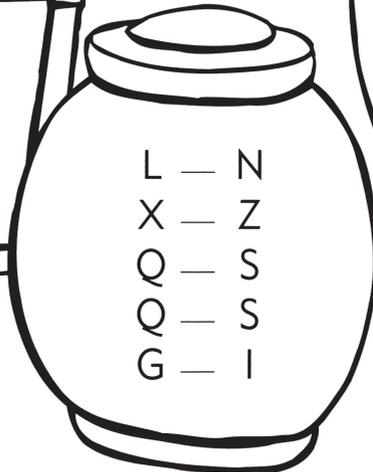
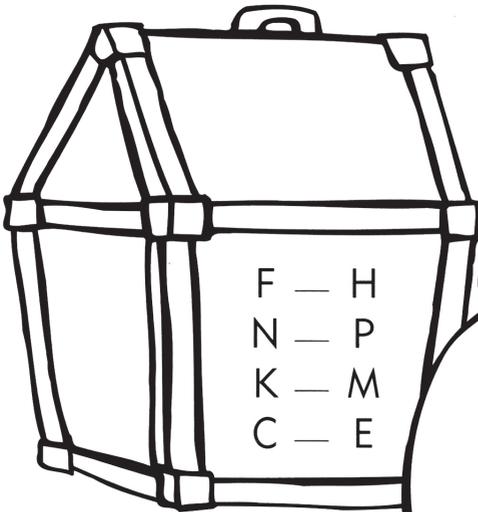


Michael's Angels

Matthew 2

Gifts for a King

The wise men knew the star was leading them to a very special child. They brought gifts suitable for a king. To find the names of these gifts, look at each pair of letters and write the alphabet letter that comes between these letters. For example, the letter between A and C is B. Hint: the letter between Z and B is A. Check your answers in Matthew 2:9-11.




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The Venerable Rick Simpson to be the next Bishop of Durham

A message from the Diocese of Durham

Downing Street has announced that His Majesty the King has approved the appointment of the Venerable Rick Simpson, currently Archdeacon of Auckland, as the next Bishop of Durham.

Rick will succeed the Right Reverend Paul Butler who retired from the role in February 2024. We give thanks to the Right Reverend Sarah Clark, Bishop of Jarrow, for her service as Acting Bishop of Durham in the interim; last month Bishop Sarah was announced as the next Bishop of Ely.

Reacting to his appointment, Archdeacon Rick said: "I am humbled and delighted to have been called to be the Bishop of this diocese, which I love. My deepest hope is to be able to walk alongside and encourage our local Christian communities as they seek to both show God's love in action and help people to come to life-changing faith in Christ – and through this see our churches grow. It is also an honour to be tasked with representing the needs and voices of people in this region in the national church and the House of Lords."

Bishop Sarah Clark said: "I rejoice in the Venerable Rick Simpson's nomination as the next Bishop of Durham. God's clear call of Rick, confirmed by the Durham Crown Nomination Commission, places a person who already loves the people, parishes and communities of Durham Diocese and the North East at the heart of this hopeful new season. The voice he will bring to the wider church and national roles will be shaped by his long experience of the challenges and joys of life and faith in this land of Cuthbert, Bede and Hild."

The Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell said: "Archdeacon Rick has served the Diocese of Durham with dedication over many years. He has a wealth of experience in supporting and enabling parish ministry. His deep local knowledge of the Diocese will be an asset in his new role as Bishop of Durham. Please join me in praying for Rick and for the Diocese as he begins a new chapter of ministry, inspiring all to grow in mission, leadership, church life, and in engaging younger generations."

The Dean of Durham, Dr Philip Plymington, said: "I am delighted that Rick has been called to be the next Bishop of Durham. He is well known and widely respected across the Diocese and his blend of missional energy and wise leadership, both rooted in a deep sense of trust in God, are what we have been praying for in our next Bishop. At the Cathedral we look forward very much to working with him and seeing God continuing to be at work in this generation."

The Vice-Chair of Durham's Diocesan Board of Finance, Canon Margaret Vaughan, and the Diocesan Secretary, Canon James Morgan said: "As Archdeacon, Rick has encouraged our

churches, chaplaincies and schools in their mission to bring people to faith in Jesus Christ. We are excited that he will now lead the Diocese as Bishop, shaping and taking forward our programme of Diocesan Transformation. We pray for him as he prepares to take up this new role."

Rick has served in the Diocese of Durham since 2006 when he came to be Priest in Charge of St Brandon's, Brancepeth, helping the church to thrive and develop its mission and the Initial Ministerial Education (IME, Phase 2) Officer for both Newcastle and Durham, supporting curates and training incumbents. He became Archdeacon of Auckland in February 2018. He was a member of the Wilkinson-Jay Response Group, advising on the development of Church of England safeguarding. He served previously in the Diocese of Newcastle where, as Vicar of Holy Trinity Jesmond, he saw the church grow strongly in number and discipleship over ten years.

Rick enjoys the outdoors, especially wildlife photography, playing guitar, sport, films and novels. He is married to Rachel, and they have ten godchildren and one cat.

The installation of Rick as Bishop of Durham will take place at Durham Cathedral in the summer. Episcopal arrangements for the short interim period between Bishop Sarah's confirmation of election to Ely and Archdeacon Rick's confirmation of election to Durham and consecration are in hand and details will follow shortly.



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will find us to the right of the library escalator.*



Earth Hour 2026 – a time to turn off your lights

The Earth Hour 2026 takes place on Saturday 28th March, when at 8.30pm in their local time millions of people worldwide will turn off their non-essential lights for one hour.

Organised by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the 20th anniversary of this global initiative will aim to raise awareness of the earth's climate crisis, and to encourage environmental action through sustainable, actionable lifestyle changes.

The first Earth Hour was held in Sydney, Australia, on 31st March 2007, and has since become a global movement. The 2025/26 theme is 'Giving an Hour for Earth' is encouraging people to adapt sustainable habits in their daily lives.

And while our lights are off for an hour, Earth Hour will encourage us to spend the time in nature, or stargazing, or engaging in environmental, educational, or sustainable activities.

More info at: <https://www.earthhour.org>

Granny retired? *You've got to be kidding....*

The idea that grandmothers retire into an unburdened world of gardening and tea-drinking, golf and knitting is no more than a pleasant fantasy these days.

Instead, nearly 63% of grandparents provide some sort of childcare to their under-16-year-old grandchildren. That amounts to around seven million older people, aged mostly between 55 - 74.

As many as one in three is doing the school run. Nearly one in five is spending more than 10 hours a week giving other childcare.

America has a nickname name for them: the 'granny nannies.'

Granny nannies do it for good reason: to enable their own children to be able to work longer hours. But granny nannies not only care for their grandchildren, they may also be providing comfort for elderly relatives of their own – and hold down a part-time job at the same time.

Perhaps Super-Granny-Nannies is the correct name for them!

Remembering the Hindenburg

Ninety years ago, on 4th March 1936, the German airship *Hindenburg* made its first flight. It was the largest airship ever constructed, and when it was destroyed in a fire in May 1937, it ended the era of airship travel.

Airships had been developed from balloons – the first attempt at lighter-than-air travel pioneered in 1783 by the Montgolfier brothers – because they could be steered using rudders and engines. Representing advances in science, engineering and exploration, they fascinated creative minds.

Foremost among them was Ferdinand von Zeppelin, who founded the Zeppelin Company that designed and built the *Hindenburg*.

The causes of the crash were primarily the fragile nature of airships, their use of highly flammable hydrogen gas and combustible construction material, and in the case of the *Hindenburg*, the fact that it was attempting to land during a thunderstorm at Lakehurst, New Jersey. Thirteen passengers, 22 crew members and one ground worker died. The horrific fire was caught live on camera. Not surprisingly, it heralded the end of the airship era as far as commercial aviation was concerned.

However, that was also hastened by the destruction of the British-made R101 nearly seven years earlier, when it crash-landed safely in France during its maiden flight – again during bad weather – but immediately burst into flames and incinerated 48 of the 54 people on board.

The Church of The Holy Family and St Michael at Kesgrave in Suffolk was constructed in memory of Squadron Leader Michael Rope and those who died with him in the blaze. He was an early and successful designer of airships who worked on the R101 at Cardington in Bedfordshire.

Airships exist today in advanced and safer form. Their ability to land almost anywhere and carry large payloads makes them useful for observation and providing humanitarian aid in disaster-hit areas.

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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