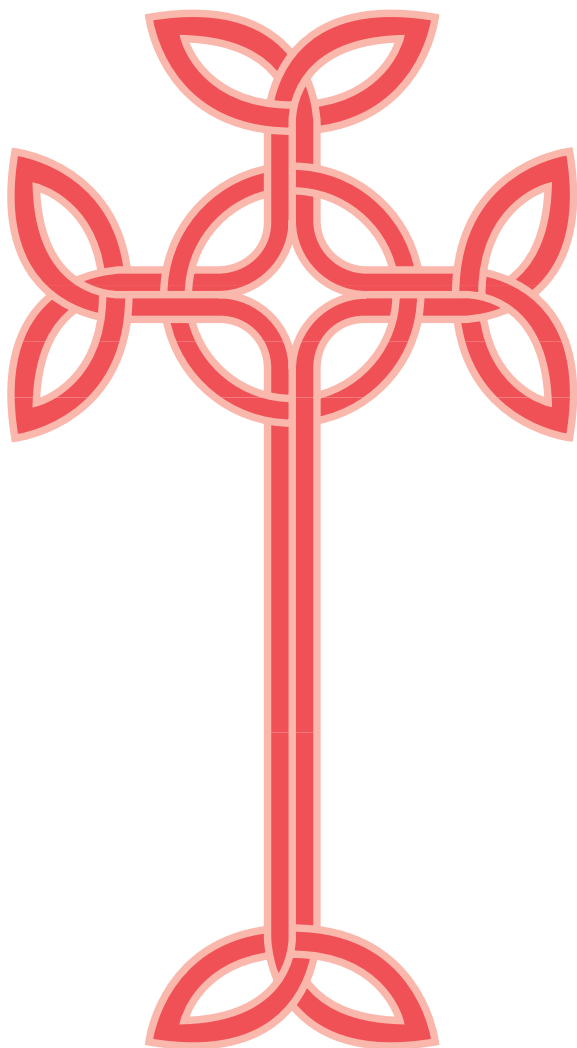


THE MONTHLY MAGAZINE
OF THE PARISH OF
HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING



St. Michael
AND ALL ANGELS

OCTOBER 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.

Assistant Curate

Rev'd Susan Elsey
Tel: 07557 125274
Email: revsuelsey@gmail.com

Readers

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

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

Church Wardens

Mrs. Rita Turnbull
Tel: (0191) 584 1954

Mr. Simon Hardy
Tel: 07854 411884

Assistant Church Warden

Mr. Brian Scott
Tel: 07778 577898

Officers of the Parochial Church Council

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

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

Organist & Director of Music

Mr. George Peebles
Tel: 07941 507724
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') (3rd Sunday is 'All-age Communion').
Sun	6pm	Evening Service: 1st Sun 'Service of light' – a relax sung service; 2nd Sun 'Choral Evensong' – a traditional service led by our Choir; 3rd Sun 'Celtic Eucharist' – 'Iona' style Communion; 4th Sun 'Reflective Service' – contemplative service of scripture and prayer.
Tues	7pm	Holy Communion (4th Sunday, during winter)
Thur	10am	Holy Communion with Hymns (& refreshments afterwards).

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

Contact Information

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

Find us online at:

website: www.stmichaels.hls.org.uk

facebook: www.facebook.com/stmichaels.hls

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

Email: stmichaels.hls@gmail.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/stmichaels.hls

Website: www.stmichaels-hls.org.uk

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

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

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

ABOUT SIGNPOST

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

Circulation: 300 copies per month.

Space4

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

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

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

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

Other events are advertised on Facebook and in the buildings.

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

Rector's Letter

As the leaves begin to fall and the nights draw in, we mark the festival of St Michael and All Angels and approach 'Feast time' in our church calendar. Traditionally, the celebration of Houghton Feast over a 10-day festival is a wonderful opportunity for our whole community to come together. We look out at a wider world that so often tells us to be divided, surrounded by voices that emphasize our differences and push us toward fragmentation. But here in Houghton, we are choosing a different path. This year's theme, "Together We Feast," echoes the legacy of my historic predecessor, Rector Bernard Gilpin. In the sixteenth century, Gilpin regularly declared his rectory an 'open house', offering free food and warm hospitality to all who visited, regardless of their wealth or status.



Gilpin understood a radical truth: the Creator of the universe didn't arrive in a pristine palace but was born into a messy stable for our sake. God loves us so much that he was prepared to walk to the cross—and beyond—for us. His answer to a fractured world isn't a fortified wall; it is an open, radically inclusive table. To embrace this during the Feast, we are launching an unbroken, 24-7 canopy of prayer inside the church. We have set up seven interactive prayer stations to take prayer out of our heads and put it into our hands. You are invited to move around the building and physically engage with these stories that matter:

- At the 'Dragons Door Arch', you can tie a ribbon across a wooden frame to build a bridge where there is division in our world or your life.
- In the South Transept, you can leave a heavy stone of hopelessness in the sand at the feet of the 'Risen Christ', trusting that the stone is always rolled away and the story doesn't end in the dark.
- By 'Bernard Gilpin's Tomb', you can reserve a seat at an empty table for the outsider, honouring Gilpin's legacy of radical inclusion.
- At the 'Font', you can dissolve a written lament for our groaning, warming planet into the water, a place that continually reminds us of God's deep, relentless love and protection.
- In the 'North Transept', you can map your 'magic moments' of our local community by adding a heart to our fabric map and share your own story before God.
- At the 'Nave Altar', you can add a brick to a communal Lego cross. Just as we did at a recent All-In service, this acts as a powerful, visual reminder that we are not on our own, but are part of something significantly bigger.
- Finally, at the 'High Altar', you can tear off a piece of crusty bread from our chaotic, vibrant banquet table as a reminder that we all feast together.

During this Houghton Feast time, we're reminded that we are called to reach out to those around us. I warmly invite you, your friends, and your neighbours to step through our doors. Participate in the 'stations' or simply come in to sit in the quiet. By 'Feasting' together as a diverse community, we build bridges and celebrate the beautiful tapestry of our town and our region.

With my prayers and very best wishes.

The UN and EU warn against rising religious persecution

The UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, has spoken out against the rise in religious persecution worldwide

“Across the world, bloodshed based on religious affiliation runs rampant,” Mr Guterres said. “Festivals have been attacked, places of worship desecrated. And many believers, especially among religious minorities, face hostility online and off. Such acts are an assault on human rights and human dignity. They must end now.”

Instead, Mr Guterres stressed that the UN is committed to “building societies where all faiths can live and worship in peace.”

And so, he urged governments to “bring perpetrators to justice” and to counter “all forms of discrimination and hate speech.”

He appealed to religious leaders “to speak out against violence.” And he challenged digital technology companies to ensure their platforms were designed and moderated “to protect users from stigma and scapegoating”.

Meanwhile, the European Union Council has said that two-thirds of the world’s population is living under the threat of “serious abuses and violations” of religious rights. This is despite the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights promising religious freedom.

The EU is promoting “specific initiatives” to curb anti-religious discrimination in Europe, and is also funding projects to promote peaceful religious co-existence in Asia and Africa’s Sahel region.

The EU Council said: “Millions of people suffer daily from intolerance, discrimination, hatred, hostility and violence because of their actual or perceived religion or belief, or lack thereof.”

“We have a responsibility to keep working actively towards a world where freedom, respect, tolerance and peace for persons of all religions and beliefs are no longer an exception but the norm.”

In 2025, in France alone, there were a reported 843 anti-Christian acts and 1,646 anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim acts, including a fourfold increase in attacks on Christian clergy and Church representatives.

May God grant you courage - message of solidarity with the people of Ukraine

The Bishop of Worcester, Hugh Nelson, who is the C of E's Bishop to the Armed Forces, recently went to Kyiv to join Ukrainian church leaders, other religious leaders and government officials at the National Prayer Breakfast in Kyiv. Bishop Hugh also met with the leader of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, His Beatitude Metropolitan Epiphany.

Bishop Hugh brought a message from the Archbishop of Canterbury, Sarah Mullally. She promised that the Anglican Church would continue to "stand in prayerful solidarity" with Ukraine, and she acknowledged the "immense sacrifices" which the Ukrainians are making "in defence of your country, its people and the values of freedom and human dignity".

Archbishop Sarah also commended Ukraine's constitutional commitments to freedom of religion and conscience. She rejected the language of "holy war" used to justify the attempts to occupy and subjugate Ukraine by the current regime in Moscow.

"We pray for those who have lost their lives, for those who mourn, for the wounded, the displaced, and all who live under the daily shadow of violence and fear. May the peace of Christ, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in the days ahead."

Light Parties – a happier alternative to Halloween

While many of us may buy Halloween themed confectionary, pumpkins, decorations and even costumes this month, thousands of us have no intention of celebrating Halloween.

Instead, we will be attending Light Parties hosted by our local churches, and our children will enjoy a positive and upbeat alternative to traditional Halloween celebrations.

Scripture Union, the Christian charity that first pioneered Light Parties, reports that around 8,000 churches and youth organisations now request their Light Party Pack each year.

And churches of all the major denominations are in full and active support. The C of E often sets up localised search engines on its website, specifically to help families track down local 'light and bright parties' in their dioceses.

Meanwhile, Methodist, Baptist, and Elim Pentecostal churches also offer Light Parties, to which all are welcome.

Just for the record, a Light Party is a family-friendly Christian event held on 31st October. Instead of featuring ghosts, ghouls and darkness, it celebrates the themes of light and hope in Jesus Christ. Children dress up in bright, colourful outfits, enjoy games such as glow-in-the-dark, eat party snacks and enjoy themselves without any element of fear or oppression. The organisers usually close with a simple, positive message of faith and light.

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



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Dairy Lane, DH4 5BW

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

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

Ushaw Flower Festival



Wonderful experience at the Ushaw Flower Festival celebrating the music of the North East re-imagined in flowers. (Thursday 10th - Sunday 13th September).

The festival includes a beautiful display by our own Gilly Beck 'Domini Nostri Vita' based on the Oratorio of that name composed by William Shenton organist and choirmaster of St Michael and All Angels'. Gilly's stunning display uses William's music as the inspiration

to tell the story of Christ linking to the church's liturgical calendar. The photos (taken at night!) Don't do the displays justice - they need to be seen to be fully appreciated.

Lots of other wonderful displays around the historical setting including lighthouses, dinosaurs, the Lambton Worm and the Angel of the North along with a range of music inspired displays from ACDC to Colliery Bands, Church oratorios to the Pet Shop Boys.

Find out more about the event on this link Ushaw Flower Festival - Ushaw: Historic House, Chapels & Gardens <https://share.google/U2GLQABhkSL4UQEAp>.



Which milk do you buy?

Once upon a time there was just milk. Now our supermarket shelves are packed with dairy (whole, semi-skimmed, fat-free) and also plant-based alternatives: oat, almond, soya, coconut, and pea.

Which is the best? The amount of protein, sugars, fat and vitamins in each vary a great deal. No wonder that, according to Mintel's UK recent market report, nearly half of us struggle to decide. Here are some facts to consider:

According to nutritionists, the best all-rounder is semi-skimmed cow's milk. This is because dairy milk contains all nine

essential amino acids and has the most protein.

Or, if you are dairy-free, try fortified soya milk or pea drinks for reasonable levels of protein.

As for the others, they vary in nutrients, but:

Oat milk is popular but contains very little protein.

Almond milk is popular and low in calories, but again, has very little protein.

Coconut milk has hardly any protein at all.

Rice milk has almost zero protein.

Walking alongside one another

Many of us can look back and recognise people who have helped us in our faith: a parent, a friend, a church leader, or perhaps someone who was simply willing to listen, pray and encourage us at the right moment.

The Christian life has never been a path we are expected to travel alone. Throughout the gospels, we see how Jesus spent time with a small group of people, His disciples, and helped them grow. The early Church continued this pattern, learning together what it meant to follow Christ in everyday life.

Yet many of us wonder whether we have anything to offer others. Life is busy, and we may feel we don't know enough or have enough time to make a difference.

What if discipleship is simpler than we imagine? Often, it begins with a conversation over coffee, offering to pray for someone, opening the Bible together, or taking the time to listen well.

The *Alongsider Course* has recently been launched by the Navigators: a free seven-session video course that explores what it means to walk alongside others and together take steps towards Jesus. Drawing on many years of experience helping people grow in faith, the course encourages ordinary Christians to be intentional about the relationships God has already given them, in their families, friendships, workplaces and churches.

In a world where many people feel isolated, there is something quietly powerful about walking alongside someone and seeing what God can do. Who might God be inviting you to walk alongside?

Further info: www.alongsidercourse.com

Remembering St Francis of Assisi

Eight hundred years ago, on 3rd October 1226, St Francis of Assisi, the Italian friar, deacon and mystic, died. One of the most venerated religious figures in Christianity, he founded the Franciscan Order.

He died at the age of about 44 of severe illness, including eye disease, malaria and exhaustion, possibly following a 40-day fast. He was declared a saint by Pope Gregory IX two years later.

Francis' father was a wealthy silk merchant, Pietro di Bernardone dei Moriconi, and his mother a noblewoman from Provence. He was one of seven children – called Francesco by his father, who was an enthusiast for France. At first, he behaved as a typical son of a wealthy merchant, but several things changed his attitude – one of which was his capture and imprisonment for nearly a year after fighting in a war against Perugia.

He also had visions and underwent a change in character leading him to a strong commitment to help the poor – an attitude which led to estrangement from his father, whom he eventually renounced.

He aligned himself strongly with the poor, on one occasion begging with them at St Peter's Basilica in Rome. He also spent times in lonely places, seeking divine illumination, and was said to have received the stigmata during an angelic vision.

Often pictured wearing a plain brown habit tied with a rope of three knots, symbolising poverty, chastity and obedience, St Francis is one of the most honoured people in Christianity. He is a joint patron saint of Italy with Catherine of Siena, and in 2013 Archbishop Bergoglio of Argentina chose the papal name of Francis in his honour, becoming Pope Francis.

Many pilgrimage routes lead to the tomb of St Francis in Assisi, and he is honoured by many churches, including Lutherans and Anglicans.



Prayer for October

Dear Lord,

As we give thanks for the harvest and pray for the farmers who have struggled through the summer's drought and heatwaves, we also give thanks and pray for those who work to share the good news of Your kingdom, to bring in Your harvest of people who are searching for You.

May we, who know You, join those workers and share the good news that Jesus brings. So many people are lost and without hope or direction. Help us to reach out to them, maybe with an invitation, or simply a smile, or an act of kindness. May they see Your love reflected in us and turn to You.

May they put their trust in Jesus, who alone is the answer to all life's great questions.

Lord, may we be workers in the harvest field where You have placed us, for Your glory. In Jesus' name.

Amen.

FROM THE REGISTERS

Funerals

2 Sept	Maurice Whittaker	Age 89
	Houghton-le-Spring	
28 Sept	Anne Goodman	Age 89
	Houghton-le-Spring	

Baptisms

27 Sept	Isla Rose Wilkinson
27 Sept	Lilia June Russell-Murray

Aid workers in need of more protection

One thousand aid workers have been killed in the past three years, caught up in various global conflicts.

So reports the Christian relief charity, World Vision. It is calling for stronger protection of humanitarian workers, independent investigations, accountability, and consequences for attacks on humanitarian workers, healthcare facilities, and other civilian infrastructure.

World Vision also wants the humanitarian consequences of drones and other emerging military technologies to be addressed.

World Vision says: "When aid workers are attacked or blocked from reaching people in need, children are left waiting for food, medicine, and protection that may never come. Too often those risking their lives to help are local people and members of the very communities caught in the conflict."

Saint for October

St. Francis – and the Life of Simplicity

Just about the only thing most people know about Francis of Assisi is that he talked to the birds. Church-goers also know the popular hymn based on his famous prayer, 'Make me a channel of your Peace', which was sung at the funeral of Princess Diana.

However, Italy's patron saint, whose feast day is this month (the 4th) was a more complex, and some would say controversial character. His life spanned the end of the twelfth and beginning of the thirteenth centuries. He was born into a very wealthy family, but after what he called his 'conversion' standing before a crucifix. He renounced all his possessions. In fact, he stripped himself of his of his wealthy garments in a public square in his home-town, Assisi.

For the rest of his life, he and his followers, including his feminine counterpart. St Claire longed, prayed and worked for a life of simplicity – a lifestyle without luxury or privileges. For the Franciscan brothers and the Poor Claires. This meant no private possessions at all. Francis saw that many poor people without these things, actually seemed to live happier and more fulfilling lives than the ambitious rich. He spoke of a simple life not shaped by money or power but by love and mutual concern. As his hymn says, 'it is in giving of ourselves that we receive'.

Of course, poverty; in our modern western world is seldom a matter of blissful simplicity, as present-day Franciscans recognise. For too many it is a matter of poor diet, over-crowded rooms, rough sleeping and unemployment. The call of today's followers of Francis and Claire is that those who are better-off should 'live more simply, so that others can simply live'. Christians follow a Master who said that he came with 'good news for the poor'. They believe that many of us today can be that good news.

The Rector of Houghton-le-Spring's Message for 'The Feast' 2026

On behalf of St Michael and All Angels Church, I am delighted to add my welcome to this year's Houghton Feast. This ancient festival finds its origins in the 1100s as the dedication festival for our Parish Church. Yet, all these centuries later, its purpose feels more relevant than ever.

We look out at a wider world that so often tells us to be divided, surrounded by voices that emphasize our differences and push us toward fragmentation. But here in Houghton, the Feast offers us a different path—a vital opportunity to genuinely come together.

This year's theme, "Together We Feast," echoes the legacy of my historic predecessor, Rector Bernard Gilpin. In the sixteenth century, Gilpin regularly declared his rectory an 'open house', offering free food and warm hospitality to all who visited, regardless of their wealth or status. His radical inclusion was so moving his Rectory Garden was famously described as a "little slice of 'God's Kingdom'".

Gilpin's spirit of unity challenges us today. We are a vibrant, evolving town where people from all walks of life have found a home here. When we gather for the Feast, we share in a joyful celebration that challenges voices that seek to divide us. By 'Feasting' together as a diverse community, we build bridges and celebrate the beautiful tapestry of our region.

May all find a warm welcome at this year's Houghton Feast.

***This message will be published in this year's
Houghton Feast Brochure.***

Burning Coals

Romans 12:20 and Proverbs 25:21,22

In Romans chapter 12, Paul appeals to us to dedicate the whole of ourselves as living sacrifices to God. He talks about loving one another and living in harmony, and commands us 'not to repay evil with evil...but if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; *for by so doing, you will heap burning coals upon his head.*'

At first reading this can seem like a bizarre and contradictory statement because it sounds like we would be aiming to harm our enemy in some way, which is not in tune with the previous injunctions.

There are a few ways that scholars have dealt with this verse over the years.

First, we can look at the burning coals as representing our love, which is designed to encourage our enemies to repent and therefore bring about peace between us, which is obviously a good thing. It is not a guaranteed outcome, but it is certainly a better route than revenge.

Secondly, we can look at the burning coals as being associated with the worship of YHWH. Paul tells us in Romans to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice. Our love in words and actions is being burned on the coals at the altar of sacrifice, sending up a fragrance to God. This is one way we worship God with our lives, by putting our own desire for pay-back to one side, and following his commands.

On the Day of Atonement, the high priest would take his censer, filled with burning coals off of the altar of burnt offerings, and then put incense on the coals to create a pleasing fragrance to God, which was acceptable to God for atonement. Commentary in the Amplified Bible for Proverbs 25:22

Debbie Anderson

~ HERITAGE OPEN DAYS 2026 ~

Heritage Open Days this year took place 17th, 18th and 19th September. The visitors we welcomed were very interested in our church, its history and were very appreciative of the information they were given. We also welcomed members of our church family who joined us for a cuppa and a chat.

On Saturday 19th September the Events Group also held a coffee morning. As usual there was a good selection of savouries, scones and cakes, all of which were much appreciated.

The Heritage Open Days bunting and signs are put away for another year with thoughts now turning to Houghton Feast.

Dian Scott

The Month Ahead.....October

1	Thur	10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
		10.00 am	Holy Communion (in Church)
		6.00 pm	Choir Practice (Choir Vestry)
2	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)
		6.00 pm	Receptions for Opening Ceremony
3	Sat	10.00 am	Feast Coffee Morning (in Church)
		11.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle St, until 1.00 pm)
4	Sun	Feast Sunday	
		8.30 am	Holy Communion (in Church)
		10.30 am	Civic Service (in Church & Facebook)
		12.00 noon	Lunch (Kepier)
		6.00 pm	Community Hymn Singing (in Church)
5	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)
6	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)
7	Wed	10.00 am	Space4 Mums (Hub, Newbottle Street)
8	Thur	10.00 am	Holy Communion (in Church)
		10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
		6.00 pm	Choir Practice (Choir Vestry)
9	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)
		7.30 pm	Ceilidh (in Church, tickets from Church Office)
10	Sat	7.00 pm	Houghton Brass Band Concert (in Church, tickets from Church Office)
11	Sun	St Francis Sunday	
		8.30 am	Holy Communion (in Church)
		10.00 am	Pet Service (Service of the Word - in Church & Facebook)
		6.00 pm	Celtic Eucharist (in Church)
12	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)
13	Tues	10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
		3.30 pm	Family Fun (Kepier Hall)
14	Wed	10.00 am	Space4 Mums (Hub, Newbottle Street)
15	Thur	10.00 am	Holy Communion (in Church)

	10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
	6.00 pm	Choir Practice (Choir Vestry)
16 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)
18 Sun	Harvest Festival	
	8.30 am	Holy Communion (in Church)
	10.00 am	All In Communion (in Church & Facebook)
	6.00 pm	Choral Harvest Service (in Church)
19 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)
20 Tues	10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
	3.30 pm	Family Fun (Kepier Hall)
21 Wed	10.00 am	Space4 Mums (Hub, Newbottle Street)
22 Thur	10.00 am	Holy Communion (in Church)
	10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
	6.00 pm	Choir Practice (Choir Vestry)
23 Fri	9.30 am	Stay & Play (Kepier Hall, until 11.15 am)
	9.30 am	Community Food Store (Kepier Hall, until 12 noon)
	2.00 pm	Cake & Chat (Hub, Newbottle Street)
25 Sun	Sunday	
	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)
26 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)
27 Tues	10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
	3.30 pm	Family Fun (Kepier Hall)
	7.00 pm	Holy Communion (Hub, Newbottle Street)
	7.30 pm	PCC (Hub, Newbottle Street)
28 Wed	10.00 am	Space4 Mums (Hub, Newbottle Street)
29 Thur	10.00 am	Holy Communion (in Church)
	10.00 am	Drop-in (Hub, Newbottle Street)
	6.00 pm	Choir Practice (Choir Vestry)
30 Fri	9.30 am	Stay & Play (Kepier Hall, until 11.15 am)
	9.30 am	Community Food Store (Kepier Hall, until 12 noon)
	2.00 pm	Cake & Chat (Hub, Newbottle Street)
31 Sun	Bible Sunday	
	8.30 am	Holy Communion (in Church)
	10.00 am	Holy Communion (in Church & Facebook)
	6.00 pm	Service of Light (in Church)

Why AI is far from divine...

I wrote an email to my local councillor – and within three minutes received back a detailed reply summarising my concerns and promising action. A stunningly quick response.

I was impressed, and grateful for the speedy reaction.

But then a thought came to me. Had this helpful, swift, reply perhaps been written, not by my councillor, but by Artificial Intelligence (AI)?

And, if so, did it really matter?

It's hard to say, but it flagged up to me how AI is becoming such a key part of our lives, and often in ways that we take for granted. Like the algorithms that choose what we might like to watch next on TV or read on holiday.

Churches aren't immune to AI's increasing popularity. Pope Leo has advised his priests not to use it to write their sermons.

He told them, "Like all the muscles in the body, if we do not use them, if we do not move them, they die. The brain needs to be used, so our intelligence must also be exercised a little so as not to lose capacity."

To give a true sermon, the Pope explained, "is to share faith," something AI would never be able to do.

He advised preachers, "people want to see your faith, your experience of having known and loved Jesus Christ."

That is so true. A sermon should be preached for that congregation, in that place, at that specific point in time, and be delivered by a preacher who has opened themselves to hear from God as they prepared their message

AI is not human. It's been designed to trick users into thinking it has a personality and maybe opinions of its own. It will never know pain, hunger, disappointment or grief, or a whole range of other human emotions.

And these are the emotions God experienced, living on earth as Jesus Christ. God with us, living and dying as we do. The Almighty came to live among us as human flesh, and not as computer code. Fully God, fully man.

Christ lived, and died, in frail human flesh, and rose from death, underlining the sacred value of every human being.

AI falls far short of that value, no matter how closely it can mimic human personality.

Premier League footballer says: **'faith helped me through injury'**

A Premier League footballer has revealed how finding faith helped him cope with a series of injuries that kept him off the pitch for periods totalling more than three years.

Josh Dasilva, who plays for west London-based Brentford FC, suffered a hip injury in February 2021 that kept him out of the team for a year, and then a hamstring injury followed between August 2023 and January 2024.

Then, in February 2024, Dasilva suffered a serious knee injury while in training, and did not return to the team until the dying minutes of Brentford's 3-0 victory over West Ham in May 2026. The crowd gave Dasilva a standing ovation and cheered his every touch of the ball.

Dasilva's way back to fitness has been long and painful. He now says, "When you seek God honestly and diligently, you'll find true peace. When I was in dark places, that's what pulled me out."

It was four months into rehabilitation, following his knee injury, that Dasilva made a choice that transformed his outlook and his life.

He recalls, "One of my closest friends invited me to church. I'd grown up in church but lost my way. My parents are strong believers. Whenever I went home and visited my parents, my mum would say, 'Let's pray quickly' and sometimes it wasn't so quickly!"

Returning to church made a major impact on Dasilva. He explains, "Since taking it seriously, my whole life has changed. Faith has become a big part of my life and how I want to live my life. If it wasn't for Christ, if it wasn't for Jesus, I wouldn't be here right now.

"What were the biggest things that helped me? Obviously, my family and friends and the club, but my faith has been number one."

Dasilva was baptised in May 2025, and prayer and worship became part of his daily routine. He explains, "I always dedicate the first hour of the day to God. I pray and I read. It directs my day.

"God is faithful. Regardless of my situation, whether I was able to play another game of football or not. I knew that God loved me regardless. I knew I would be fine."

Should our church accept bitcoin?

A church on England's south coast made headlines, when it recently announced that it was going to accept bitcoin as donations.

Claygate Church, based in Bournemouth, Southbourne and Poole, is among the first UK churches to accept the digital currency. In the US, increasing numbers of churches and non-profit organisations have already joined the trend.

British churches are approaching cryptocurrencies with caution. Charity and tax regulations between the two countries are different, so no direct comparison can be made.

Fundraisers and church treasurers I have spoken to have expressed scepticism about giving by cryptocurrencies taking off in the UK – certainly in the short-term. But a major UK online giving platform offered me the opportunity of donating in cryptocurrency, when I wanted to support a local schools charity.

So, what's happening?

A spokesperson for the Church of England told me: "Although our national systems do not currently support bitcoin donations, our priority remains providing secure, compliant, and trusted giving solutions.

"Any future consideration of cryptocurrency would need to align with regulatory requirements and available resources to implement well, but we remain interested in monitoring developments in this area."

The Charity Commission, that oversees UK charities including churches, has published guidance to address the rise in cryptocurrencies.

It sets out the 'many risks' of cryptocurrencies including: the volatility of their value as this can change very quickly; potential fraud or theft by hackers; the lack of protection compared to traditional currencies or financial products; and difficulty in tracing donors because donations can be made anonymously.

The Commission has also pointed out that many of these cryptocurrencies use a lot of energy, and this may not comply with a charity's environmental, social and governance policies.

For UK churches, the current risks appear to far outweigh benefits, especially as most British churches have treasurers who are hard-pressed volunteers, combining the role with full-time jobs, or are in their retirement years.

The risks set out by the Charity Commission would make most churches think twice – or many times more than that – before taking a chance with new digital currencies. But it could be that new technology – or changes in regulation – will make bitcoin more acceptable within a few years.

But I'm not sure that will be the case for most churches.

Black History Month marks 100 years – and brings Barak Obama to the UK

This year Black History Month celebrates its first centenary, and Barak Obama is coming to speak at events in Belfast, Glasgow and Manchester.

It was back in 1926 that 'Negro History Week' was first founded by the American Black historian Carter G Woodson.

By 1976 it had grown and expanded into Black History Month, and it arrived in the UK in October 1987.

The theme for this year is 'Honouring Black Britain 2026.' It features a major new exhibition celebrating 54 British Blacks who have each made an outstanding contribution to British Life.

President Obama, the 44th President of the USA, will visit Belfast, Glasgow and Manchester to make three arena appearances. His live conversations will explore the subject of leadership, democracy, resilience and challenges currently facing America and the wider world.

An Evening with President Barack Obama will begin at The O2 Belfast on Tuesday 13th October, before moving to Glasgow's OVO Hydro on Wednesday 14th October, and finally Manchester's Co-op Live on Thursday 15th October. Tickets for all three appearances are now on sale.

When Obama won the US presidential election in November 2008, he became the first African American elected President of the United States. He served two terms as America's 44th president, from 2009 until 2017.

His live conversations will take place as the United States marks 250 years since the Declaration of Independence.

More details: <https://www.blackhistorymonth.org>

World Animal Day

– *helping animals in dire need*

World Animal Day, held on 4th October, the feast day of St Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals, aims to raise awareness about animal protection and welfare.

Here in the UK we have a good network of animal charities devoted to the rescue, medical care, and wildlife conservation. The leading one is the RSPCA, but there are also:

Dogs & Cats

Dogs Trust: Operates 22 rehoming centres to care for and rehome stray or abandoned dogs.

Cats Protection: UK's largest feline charity, offering rehoming, neutering, and advice.

Battersea Dogs & Cats Home: Rescues, heals, and rehomes thousands of pets each year.

Blue Cross: Provides veterinary treatment, rehoming and behavioural support for vulnerable pets.

National Animal Welfare Trust: Operates multiple rehoming centres.

Veterinary & Working Animal Support

PDSA: Offers free and low-cost medical pet care to low-income owners.

Donkey Sanctuary: Gives veterinary care, and a retirement home to donkeys and mules.

British Horse Society: Improves equine welfare by education, rescue, and campaigns.

Horse Trust: Provides retirement and respite care for working horses, ponies, and donkeys.

Wildlife & Marine Conservation

Wildlife Trusts: Network of 47 local charities protecting and restoring natural habitats.

British Divers Marine Life Rescue: Volunteer-led frontline responder organisation saving stranded marine mammals.

Badger Trust: Campaigns to protect local badger populations and their habitats across the UK.

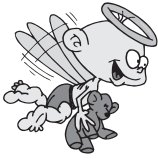
Froglife: Focuses on the conservation of native amphibians, reptiles, and the habitats they depend on.

Assistance & Working Dogs

Guide Dogs: Trains and pairs canine companions with people experiencing sight loss.

Hearing Dogs for Deaf People: Trains assistance dogs to alert deaf adults and children to critical sounds.

More details at: <https://www.worldanimalday.org/get-involved/>

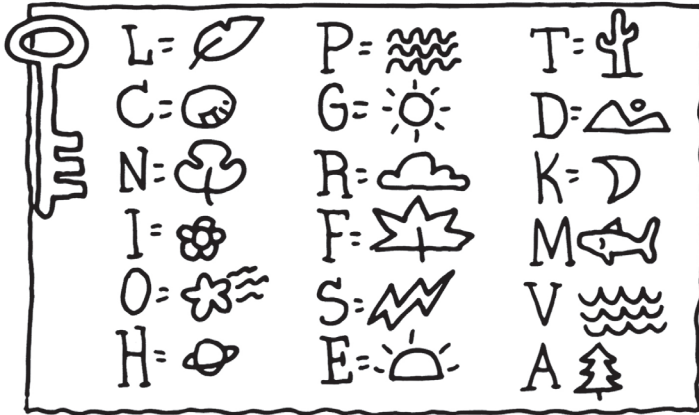


Michael's Angels

Matthew 3

Jesus Is Baptised

Matthew 3:13-17 tells us of the baptism of Jesus. But what happened when Jesus was baptized? Use the code to find the answer.



Government consultation on weddings proposes greater flexibility and cheaper options

Couples will soon be able to marry almost anywhere, including forests, beaches, cruise ships at sea, canal boats, and at home, under Government proposals that “shift the focus from bricks and mortar to people and promises”.

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) is to consult on plans to allow “authorised officiants” of any religion or belief to conduct weddings, in what are being described as the most radical changes to marriage law in England and Wales since the 19th century.

The Government says, however, that the “permanence” of marriage will be strengthened by enabling more questioning of candidates before their weddings.

“To protect against forced, predatory and sham marriages, couples must complete a two-stage process, including in-person interview, to verify their identity and demonstrate eligibility to marry.”

Anglican banns of marriage would continue “as an important part of the established Church”, the document says.

It continues: “The Government agrees with the Law Commission’s recommendation that Anglican weddings should continue to be conducted as they are now. It recognises the unique role of the Church of England and the Church [in] Wales in relation to marriage and has no plans to alter... these roles.”

The MoJ says that the proposals will reduce costs. The average wedding in England costs more than £20,000 and venue hire alone typically costs around £6,000 - before any food.

About 470,000 people marry in England and Wales each year. Anglican weddings are generally required to take place in a church or chapel, although they can take place in a private home by special licence.

Hard Times

There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number, living things both large and small. Psalm 104:25

Do you remember rock? I do not mean the music, but the confectionary sticks sold at seaside resorts. They were pink cylinders about a foot long and an inch wide with a white centre and had the name of the place in letters. They were covered in film and had a small label with a picture of the place on. It is sometimes referred to now as Rock Candy which does not seem right. They were hard as, well, hard as rock and very difficult to break up to eat. Real teeth breakers.

One source says it started at fairgrounds in the 19th Century, when sugar was plentiful and inexpensive. It was not brightly coloured or lettered in those days, but it was of similar shape and size as it is today.

Ben Bullock was an ex-miner from Burnley, who conceived the idea whilst holidaying in Blackpool. He began producing sticks of brightly coloured lettered candy at his Yorkshire-based sweet factory in 1887. He sent his first batch of lettered rock to retailers in Blackpool, where it was well received. Other sources say a Victorian character by the name of Dynamite Dick, who came from either Morecombe or Blackpool.

It takes a lot of skill to make it. I think it is still available on sale to eat or keep as a souvenir.



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



The beginning of the M25

Forty years ago, on 29th October 1986, the M25 motorway around Greater London was opened.

An orbital motorway for London had been proposed in 1944, but by 1966 this idea had evolved into two ringways, to the north and south. By the time the first sections opened in 1975, however, it had been rethought again, and so joining them together to make a full orbital motorway was again the plan.

Just over ten years later, in 1986, the final section was opened by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, and the new M25 was the longest ring road in Europe. The Dartford Crossing is technically not a motorway, but few would know the difference.

Environmental considerations became a factor, and almost 40 public inquiries took place, the most controversial area being in Kent over the North Downs. However, none of the public inquiries came out in favour of objectors.

At first the M25 was popular with the public. In the 1987 General Election, the Conservatives won everywhere the motorway passed through. But problems quickly surfaced, the obvious one being chronic congestion.

Part of this was due to apparently unanticipated office and retail development along its route, generating in-and-out slower-moving traffic.

Also, it was soon clear that more lanes were needed in many places: in some areas three had become five or six. Some churches even objected because it created a kind of stone wall between those congregations within and those without.

A report in *The Economist* said it “had taken 70 years to plan, 12 to build it and just one to find it was inadequate”.

The M25 is now well established and used in practice as an alternative boundary for Greater London, especially by haulage companies. If you ever get stuck in a traffic jam on the M25, it might help to remember that it was designed for a maximum of 88,000 vehicles a day, but instead carries at times up to 300,000 a day.

Looking back on the Jarrow March

Ninety years ago, from 5th to 31st October, the Jarrow March took place. Some 200 men walked from Jarrow in north-east England to Westminster to draw attention to the severe unemployment and poverty in their area.

Because of the huge number of unemployed in the town, on the banks of the Tyne, the marchers felt compelled to do something dramatic to stir the government out of its apparent complacency. Their loss of Palmer's shipyard two years previously had meant that a staggering 70 per cent of the town were jobless.

They called their walk of nearly 300 miles a Crusade, and they received widespread support from local political parties of all kinds on their way to London, and from the population generally.

Before they left, the mayor, Alderman J W Thompson, the town clerk, members of the town council, and their extremely supportive MP, Ellen Wilkinson, attended a service at Christ Church, in which all the clergymen and ministers of the town took part. The Bishop of Jarrow, Dr Geoffrey Gordon, gave a blessing.

But there was little official support from the Church at top level, who seemed to regard the Crusade as political and disruptive. Dr Gordon was in fact rebuked for this reason by his superior, the Bishop of Durham, the Rt Revd Hensley Henson.

However, the men walked for 25 days in a peaceful line, causing no trouble at all. Miss Wilkinson joined them for much of the journey. On reaching London, the 12,000-signature petition calling for the government to build more industries was presented to Parliament, but it was not debated.

Although the men from Jarrow, who returned home by train, undoubtedly regarded their Crusade as a failure, it did in fact effect change, leading up to the creation of the Welfare State after the war.

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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.

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Name of person to be remembered:

.....

Request made by:

.....

.....

.....

Date for memorial:

Sunday, ...

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at

St Michael and All Angels

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2nd October**

7.00 pm

Opening Ceremony

**Saturday
3rd October**

10.00 am

Coffee Morning

**Sunday
4th October**

10.30 am

Civic Service

6.00 pm

Community Hymn Singing

**Friday
9th October**

7.30 pm

Ceilidh

**Saturday
10th October**

7.00 pm

**Houghton Brass Band
Concert**