

# Rushall Parish News February 2024

Newsletter for the Churches of  
St. Michael the Archangel and Christ the King  
Rushall

Free online  
30p print copy



**Eco Gold!**

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## Some useful numbers

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updates.



"Next Sunday I think I'll do a new take  
on the Parable of the Virgins and the Oil."

It costs to follow Jesus Christ, but  
it costs more not to. – Anon

100 years ago, on 5<sup>th</sup> Feb 1924 that  
BBC Radio broadcast the 'six-pips'  
Greenwich Time Signal for the first  
time.

Please send any articles for the  
February magazine to Colin at  
[colinsuch01@gmail.com](mailto:colinsuch01@gmail.com) by Friday  
23<sup>rd</sup> February.



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### Genesis

This is the first of a new series aimed at providing an overview of the Bible. This month we consider the first book, Genesis.

As the title suggests, Genesis is primarily about beginnings. In chapters 1-11, it records the creation of the heavens and the earth and human beings; marriage and family; sin's effect on society and the world. The following chapters record God's dealings with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, and their families. In this story of the Patriarchs we see God establishing a people called to bless the world, as He blesses them.

The book of Genesis is key to understanding the whole Bible. It is supremely about relationships; the relationships between God and the created order, God and human beings, and between human beings themselves. Fundamentally man has been created in the image of God, so that he can relate to God in a personal way: *'God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them'* (1:27). However, Genesis plots how this relationship was broken by sin, when Adam and Eve disobeyed God, resulting in the fall of human beings and the created order. By creating people with free will, God risked the possibility that they might reject Him. This is inherent in His love for human beings.

In Genesis, God enters into covenants with the world (the rainbow following the flood) and with Abraham and his descendents (circumcision), pledging His love and faithfulness to them and calling them to respond to Him in faith. It reminds us that God is fundamental to living. Without a sense of the centrality of God's place in our lives, we can never get our lives right.

## **“Be faithful to Christ”**

Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> February (Valentine’s Day) is also Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent. During the service ashes (usually made by burning the palm crosses from the previous year’s Palm Sunday service which are brought back to the church in the few weeks before Lent) are either sprinkled on the people’s heads or (having been mixed with oils) are imposed on foreheads in the mark of the cross whilst the words “Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return. Turn away from sin, be faithful to Christ” are said.

I must admit that I always find it a very humbling moment as I say the words and make the sign of the cross. It could also be a very depressing moment bringing us, as it does, face to face with the reality of our own mortality. However, for me, the last part “Be faithful to Christ” lifts us from any sense of despondency to hope and faith. It makes me focus on the invitation Christ offers to us all, to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him with the promise that those who do just that will have the gift of eternal life.

We are now in the darkest, coldest part of the year. The Christmas and New Year celebrations are behind us and the self-discipline of Lent lies before us and there seems little to look forward to.



However, as I walk my dogs each day, I see signs of new life springing up from the cold earth among the dead leaves left from last year, the first snowdrops are already out (somewhat early) with the promise of spring. Ash Wednesday and snowdrops bring with them signs of hope of new life and better things to come. With the ashes on our heads comes the invitation to walk with Christ, to see beyond our mortality to eternal life with him. So let us turn to Christ and be faithful to him.

Colin

## **‘Lenten Valentines’**

*Canon Paul Hardingham considers the subject of ‘real love’.*

This month both Ash Wednesday and Valentine’s Day fall on the same day! The link between the two can be summed up in terms of the nature of real love! Lent, beginning on Ash Wednesday, focuses on learning to love God more, as we give Him space in our lives. This is what Jesus found when He was led into the desert by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan. (Luke 4:1-13).

Jesus was tempted to turn stones into bread. Yet loving God and His word comes before satisfying physical desires.

Satan tempted Jesus to worship him. However, worshipping God is an expression of loving God and serving Him.

Finally, He was tempted to put God to the test, by jumping off the Temple. Real love for God does not put Him to the test, but wants to obey Him.

Lent also teaches us how to live out the love of God in practical ways, as we follow Jesus in the way of the Cross. We see this clearly demonstrated in the life and death of Saint Valentine.

Valentine was a Christian who demonstrated the importance of sharing God’s love with others. We know little about him, except that he was a priest who lived in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century AD and that he was martyred on 14<sup>th</sup> February. Emperor Claudius felt that soldiers in the Roman Army were distracted from their duty by their wives, and so had attempted to outlaw marriage. It is believed that Valentine married couples in secret, which is why today we celebrate our love for one another on his day.

In trying to understand the meaning of her revelations from God, Julian of Norwich found:

*‘What, do you wish to know your Lord’s meaning in this thing? Know it well, love was His meaning.’*

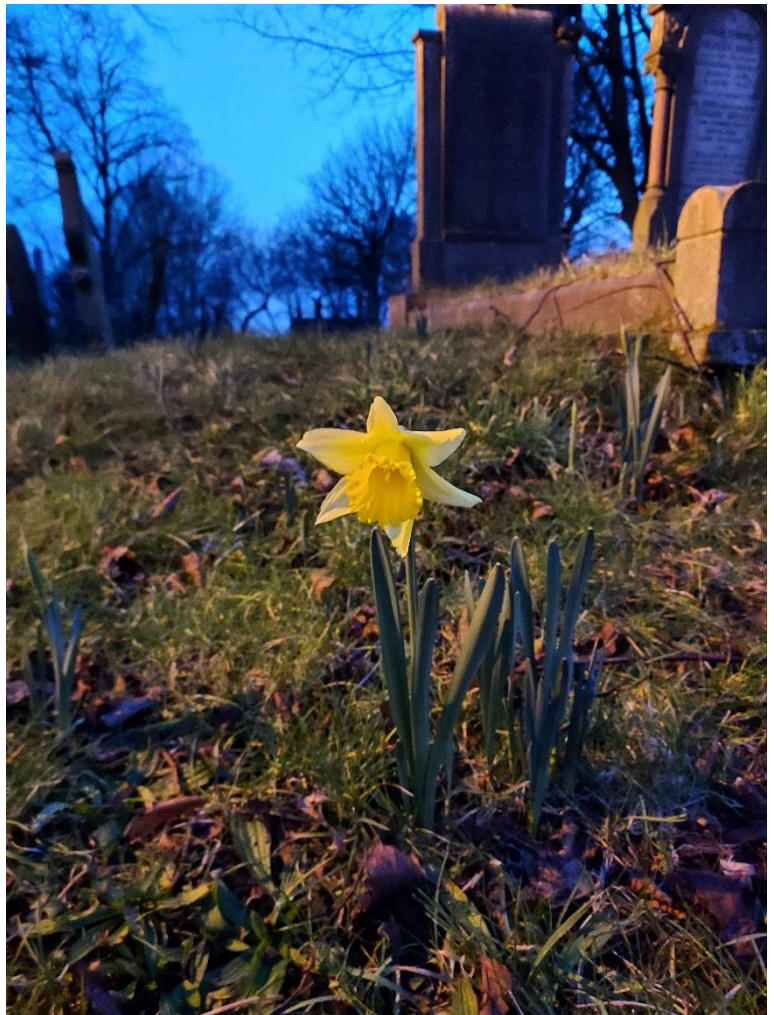


Some Christians are not only like salt that has lost its savour, but like pepper that has lost its pep. – *Albert George Butzer*

## M&M: Monty and Matty

What happened to the winter? We were all ready for snow and ice but it didn't come. Instead it's been warm, wet and muddy. The servant keeps telling us that it isn't too late for snow but we don't believe him – there's even a daffodil out in the churchyard as we walk by.

We've had a couple of weeks without a walk as Matty had a bad leg. The vet told the servant that Matty wasn't allowed any exercise at all – that didn't go down too well with Matty. When the vet saw him again, she decided that he has stiff knees. The servant said that sounded like half of the congregation! Matty now has to take tablets for his joints every day (the servant said that still sounded like half of the congregation!)



Still, we're back out walking now and catching up on the smells that we haven't sniffed. It's nice to see lots of green shoots everywhere but we're still hoping for some snow to play in!

Lots of woofs,  
Monty and Matty



## **The war in Gaza-Israel – Bishops urge people to pray and act**

“The first thing Christians can do in response to war is to pray for peace and for those affected.” That is the message of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York.

The Archbishops are praying for “those mourning, those injured, and all those fearing for their safety,” and for “restraint on all sides, and renewed efforts towards a just peace for all.”

The Archbishops and Bishops are also encouraging Christians throughout the UK to join them in prayer, and to consider practical action, by supporting organisations “working to promote peace and human flourishing in the Middle East.”

The following is posted on the Church of England website:

[Christian Aid](#) is the official ecumenical arm of Churches in Britain and Ireland and has been working with the poorest and most vulnerable people in the Middle East since the early 1950s, when it provided humanitarian relief to Palestinian refugees.

[The Church Mission Society](#) is a historic Anglican mission society which supports mission partners across the region.

[The Council of Christians and Jews](#) is a leading interfaith charity which works to help Jews and Christians to meet, to understand each other better and to create meaningful engagement between the communities.

[Embrace the Middle East](#) is an ecumenical Christian charity working to help marginalised and vulnerable communities in the Middle East.

[Friends of the Holy Land](#) is a non-political Christian Charity whose mission it is to secure a resilient and enduring Christian community in the West Bank, Gaza, Israel and Jordan - the part of the world that Christians call the Holy Land.

[The Jerusalem Middle East Church Association](#) has supported the life and work of the Anglican Church across Jerusalem, the Middle East and North Africa for more than 120 years and other many ways for individuals to get involved in supporting the Church in the Holy Land.

[USPG](#) is a historic Anglican mission agency that has a long-standing partnership with the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem and the Middle East.

## Gardening Notes for February

'If February comes can Spring be far behind ' as the saying goes but this can be difficult to imagine on some late winter days. Hopefully after the wet winter days there will be a chance to catch up outside.

Signs of spring are there of course with the snowdrops well up if not already in flower. After flowering large clumps can be lifted carefully, split and replanted as soon as possible. Daffodils which showed their heads over a month ago are making good progress and will bring surprises if we have forgotten what we planted at the end of summer.

Not having written in January there has been no opportunity to mention winter flowering shrubs. Any time a visit is planned to the Cambridge area in winter time a stop off at N.T. Anglesey Abbey (a good way from North Wales! ) is very rewarding as they have an extensive separate garden devoted to winter colour . From cherry trees with amazing coloured and peeling bark to the fragrant shrubs such as mahonia, viburnum bodnantense, daphne ( a tricky one to keep and after two attempts abandoned as it was expensive to buy ) .To digress slightly Daphne apparently needs to be planted in well-drained soil in a sheltered spot with morning sun and afternoon shade ( who knew it was so fussy ,now we are wise after the event ! ) . It will tolerate temperatures down to -10degrees C. Along with many other winter flowers there is a sweet perfume which can attract early bumble bees and on a mild day even a Red Admiral butterfly. The garden also contains winter box and witch hazels and many other exotic species names of which are way beyond my knowledge. The witch hazels (hamamelis) come in shades of yellow, burnt orange and red. Having two yellow ones both with abundant spidery flowers at present, I now wish we had bought a red as this colour is so striking . These shrubs seem to be quite reliable providing they do not dry out or become water - logged

As always and particularly this year there is still a lot of tidying of plants and pruning to do. Later flowering clematis can be cut right down as they flower on new growth. The books say prune to 4in from the ground and to just above a fat bud. I have never plucked up the courage to take this drastic action and usually just take off the dead growth to show the new buds. We are assured that vigorous growth will ensue given the recommended measures and a good mulch applied at the base.

Those with ponds may soon see frogs and toads emerging, in our previous garden where we had a pond, frog spawn seemed to arrive without fail on the 1st March.

Many of us who attended the funeral of Traud Jones were given a delightful gift of a small packet of flower seeds. Those of us who received sweet pea seeds can definitely plant them now in pots on a warm windowsill if not already done so they will be ready to plant from early May .

Hoping that those of us who are really keen or just over enthusiastic can get outside as often the weather allows,



## Supporting those in need on Church Action on Poverty Sunday

This year Church Action on Poverty Sunday is on 11<sup>th</sup> February, when Christians around the country are urged to remember those in real need.

Perhaps one of the most serious impacts of poverty is the dire state of homelessness. The numbers are staggering. More than 300,000 people are homeless in the UK; 119 families in England are made homeless every single day; and 140,000 children are currently without a home. The figures are the highest on record.

When you picture a homeless person, he or she will probably be a rough sleeper; but rough sleeping is only one manifestation of homelessness, and not the most frequent one.

Homelessness ranges from living on the streets, to living in emergency accommodation, in women's shelters, and in other temporary accommodation.

Homelessness is not always a visible problem. But the cost-of-living crisis, record rents hikes, stretched local services and withdrawal of emergency Covid measures have led to more people falling into desperate positions than ever before this past year.

Green Pastures is one organisation who is working to enable Christians to make a difference. It has been housing the homeless for 25 years, and it exists to help Christians do their bit to tackle the growing homelessness crisis.



Green Pastures has grown to now house more than 1500 formerly homeless people across the UK, in more than 100 towns and cities. To fund property purchases, Green Pastures has raised more than £47 million in funding, through everyday people who lend them some of their savings and receive interest in return. This model enables the organisation to buy property and work in partnership with local ministries to directly impact the lives of people in need.

*Kev (pictured left, with Green Pastures partner, John) lives in a Green Pastures home in Cumbria. At a visit, without prompting, Kev said, "This home saved my life, in fact this man saved my life."*

For those facing homelessness, it starts with the life change of a safe and secure home. Tenants like Kev are also offered compassionate wraparound support, pathways towards recovery and independence, and the opportunity to know Christ for themselves.

With many more people in need waiting for help, this month is a great time to consider how the Church can make a significant impact. You can find out more about Green Pastures' work, and how you might get involved, at <https://www.greenpastures.co.uk>.

## God in the Arts

### **‘Glorious the song when God’s the theme’: the *Nunc Dimittis***

*During this year The Revd Michael Burgess looks at great works of music.*

St Luke tells us in his Gospel that the angels sang praises to God at the birth of Jesus, and he has given us three poems that have become part of Christian song: the *Magnificat*, the *Benedictus* and the *Nunc Dimittis*.

The first two are full of praise and rejoicing. The last comes as Mary and Joseph fulfil the Law of Moses and bring the child Jesus to Jerusalem. In the temple they meet Simeon and Anna. Simeon represents each of us who can look back over life with gratitude in the face of death as he says, ‘Lord, now lettest Thou thy servant depart in peace.’ It is a story that has inspired preachers and artists, and also composers.

In the Christian Church these words of the *Nunc Dimittis* have become part of worship at the end of each day, not just the end of life. Cathedral and parish church choirs have sung settings of these words in that great tradition of Anglican choral music at Evensong – settings that have captured the sense of quiet resignation, but also conveyed the glory of the light that is Jesus shining for all people. Rachmaninov’s setting is part of his Vespers, the night-long vigil sung in the Russian Orthodox Church on the eve of great feasts.

Rachmaninov composed the work (and it comprises 15 pieces) at great speed, but even so, the Vespers are now seen as one of the great masterpieces of religious music.

This was no more so than in his beautiful setting of the 5<sup>th</sup> canticle, the *Nunc Dimittis*. Just 36 bars long, it begins with a rocking, undulating figure in the upper voices. A solo tenor enters as the voice of Simeon, and it ends with the basses moving down to a low B flat: ‘a sigh of wonder and resignation on the threshold of eternal rest and peace,’ one critic has called it.

Rachmaninov later recalled, “After I played the passage at the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> canticle where the basses slowly descend to that low note, the conductor shook his head, saying, ‘Now where on earth will we find such basses? They are as rare as asparagus at Christmas!’ Nevertheless, he did find them.” It was one of the composer’s favourite pieces, and he asked for it to be sung at his funeral in the hope that it would send his ‘ship of death gently towards the unknown region.’”

On 2<sup>nd</sup> February we shall hear these words as part of the Gospel on the feast of Candlemas. Simeon prays them because his cup is now overflowing. He has looked on the salvation of God. Music allows us to look on that glory and salvation also, and Rachmaninov, in his moving setting, has captured the calm trust of that moment, which shines out like the brightness of the light of Jesus.

## **"Thank you, but we should have done more" - Bishop responds to COP 28**

*The Bishop of Norwich, Graham Usher, lead bishop for Environmental Affairs, has been reflecting on the recent COP28. Here are some extracts of what he says:*

"My hopes for COP28 were that we needed a commitment to phase out fossil fuels, make significant progress with the Loss and Damage Fund, prioritise resilience building for climate vulnerable communities, and create a transition to green development pathways that is just and ambitious.

"COP28 saw some progress on these items. Like a cracked record, I say again: 'Thank you, but we should have done more.'

"\$700m has been pledged for the Loss and Damage Fund, with further funding pledges for adaptation and resilience building. Both are a start, but the amounts are not nearly enough to support even the existing schemes in the pipeline to support the poorest and least resilient communities in the world who have pumped the least carbon into the atmosphere.

"While it is very significant that the words 'fossil fuels' have made it into the final agreement, it remains disappointing that the parties have failed to agree the most important pledge – the need to completely phase out fossil fuels.

"The UK Government's clear position of a phase-out of fossil fuels means it can have global moral leadership in this area. Without a phase-out of fossil fuels, there is no pathway to net zero carbon.

"The Church of England has a clear role in continuing to be a place of thanksgiving for our life in Jesus, hope for the poor, and prophetic action to care for our planet.

"I urge us all, and particularly world leaders, to remember that the pledges made at COP28 do not have to be the upper limits of our climate action. We can and must reach further. That goal must be a fossil fuel phase out and a re-centring of our priorities towards the care of creation and the poorest people."



We make a living by what we get; we make a life by what we give. – Anon



## DEMENTIA

### CO-ORDINATOR

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And

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Walsall, WS4 1HB

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Hello, I'm Carol, the Dementia Co-ordinator for our churches.

- **SOMEONE TO SPEAK TO:** I'm here for a conversation if you have concerns about memory loss or dementia, or if you are living with dementia or caring for someone who has dementia.
- **SHARING INFORMATION:** I'm happy to share information about local groups and resources available to people living with dementia and their families/carers. Have a word if you'd like to know more: I may be able to signpost you on to something locally that you may find helpful.
- **PRAYERS:** I will pray for people affected by dementia and will ensure that they are prayed for regularly in our church services.

## The Memory Café

Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> February 2pm – 4pm in St. Michael's Community Hall



Dementia friendly but open to anyone who'd love to come for a chat and refreshments,  
Come along and join us

## 1<sup>st</sup> February – Seiriol, saint of Puffin Island

You can find traces of old saints in most corners of the British Isles, but Seiriol is one of the only two saints connected to Anglesey, and certainly the ONLY saint connected to Puffin Island.

It was back in the 6<sup>th</sup> century that this gentle abbot first settled in Penmon, and built a little church. His ruined beehive cell still survives there today, as does the well from which he drew water, both for his own use, and also for baptising local people.

Like many other Celtic saints, Seiriol would have travelled by sea. So he felt comfortable near the coast on Anglesey, on low-lying land. Although he lived as a simple hermit, Seiriol soon attracted followers, and eventually he decided to establish a small monastery. He chose to build it on nearby Ynys Seiriol, now called Puffin Island.

That little monastery on Puffin Island saw some scary action in 632, when Edwin of Northumbria was chasing the Welsh king, Cadwallon, and ended up besieging him on the island. Cadwallon was finally conquered, and history moved on, but the monastic ruins of Seiriol's little monastery are still there today.

Seiriol seems to have been a purely local saint who never attracted a very great number of followers. The only known dedications to him are at Penmon and Puffin Island. But Seiriol's life and work are still a testimony today. He is a gentle and encouraging reminder of what an impact even a simple local Christian can achieve, by simply being faithful to Jesus Christ in the place where he is.



## 11<sup>th</sup> Feb: Caedmon, the poetic shepherd

Caedmon (d 680) should be the patron saint of all farmers who enjoy humming to themselves as they do the lambing this Spring. For Caedmon of Whitby was a bit like David in the Bible; he grew up as a simple herdsman out on the hills who enjoyed composing songs and poetry for himself while watching his flocks.

Like David, Caedmon also had a keen awareness of God, and used his creative gift to express his devotion and love for his Creator. When his poems and songs became known to others, they liked them so much that soon Caedmon left his sheep in order to become a monk. This gave him time to compose many poems based on the stories in the Bible: from Creation and Genesis, to the Exodus and entry of the Jews into the promised land, to the birth, passion and resurrection of Christ, and finally to the future Last Judgement, Heaven, and Hell.

Then one day Caedmon suddenly announced that he knew he was going to die soon. And so he did, in a state of charity and peace with everyone. There was great mourning.

Sadly, only nine lines of his poetry have survived, and we have the great historian, Bede, to thank for even that much. But in his time, Caedmon's gift of telling Christian stories in the vernacular must have been of great value in evangelising the common folk.

## **Eco Church:**

### **A message from Rocha UK on granting Rushall Church Eco Gold Status:**

**Huge congratulations to you and everyone involved with the Eco Church team at St Michael's Church, Rushall on reaching this significant milestone.**

**There are so many highlights - too many to mention - but here are a few that stood out to us:**

- You are constantly looking for ways to celebrate creation throughout the year and have a team that incorporates creation themes into the church services and sermons. Along with weekly intercessions for the environment.
- Your sustainable flowers initiative; not using oasis but locally sourced flowers.
- Your recognition that your churchyard is one part of a wider green corridor and the nearby lime pits are all important habitats for wildlife.
- Your upcoming plans to plant 1000's of spring bulbs with members of the community shows that your church yard is a place of activity and connecting with others who enjoy gardening.
- Your positive links with the local council in maintaining the church yard.
- Your community links with the local allotments, beekeepers and local farmers to raise awareness of the importance of pollinators as well as how farmland can be precious wildlife habitats too.
- Your awareness of church maintenance and energy saving measures are to be noted; and the consideration of what is a sustainable way forward given your current energy usage and cost.
- Your financial and prayerful support of vulnerable households, women and small holding farmers affected by climate change in Malawi.
- Your keenness to share the importance of individual actions and how tools like the WWF carbon footprint and the Eco Church Survey are helpful ways to assess the impact of lifestyle changes on our planet.

All of the above and more demonstrate how embedded the ethos of Eco Church is in your church community and how the principles of Eco Church are integral and woven into the fellowship.



## **Next steps**

We wholeheartedly endorse all that you are already doing around championing and influencing others around creation care.

**Some suggestions** - here are a couple of areas for you to consider as you move beyond your Gold Award:

- Keep on thinking about ways to share the richness of your churchyard with others and why this matters, as well as to increase biodiversity in your church yard, as you are already doing in your plans to plant bulbs and through engaging with the lichen expert.
- To have further discussion with the local council to explore more ways to protect and restore nature.
- Consider ways to champion and promote the local green corridor through guided wildlife walks or simple nature walks.
- Hold community events and invite others to take part in various annual churchyard wildlife counts such as Churches Count on Nature, or the Big Butterfly Count.
- Explore ways to share your Eco Church journey wider, not only with your cluster, and to support other churches of all denominations to respond to the nature and climate crisis.
- To get involved with future lobbying and take part in national campaigns - signing up to A Rocha UK monthly e-news and Wild Christian emails will share upcoming campaigns you can take part in: like holding a Green Quiz during Great Big Green Week etc. And will help you develop a closer relationship with your local councillors and MPs to show that green issues are important to you.
- Review how you can engage with your wider community to be involved with events you hold at your church like pre-loved / jumble sales/ repair cafes, and consider the broader appeal of all the amazing eco initiative you are involved with.
- Look into ways of linking more with wider community groups that focus on nature and climate and consider how involvement with the Great Big Green Week can be an opportunity to connect and encourage such groups.
- Take a look at Hope for the Future which helps churches have effective and impactful conversations with their local politicians on climate change, as well as They Work for You as it can be a helpful tool in building up a relationship with MPs.

## 27<sup>th</sup> Feb:     **Gabriel Possenti, the enjoyment of romance**

If you have been hurt in your search for romantic love, Gabriel Possenti (1838-62) may be a good saint for you. Because Possenti, born to the governor of Assisi, began by having it all. He grew up doing the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century equivalent of eBay, nightclubs, cinema and online dating, only in those days it was done by having a tailor who made you an exquisite wardrobe, and then going often to the dances and the theatre with as many young ladies as he could possibly find. Gabriel loved romance; he loved women: his friends called him Il Damerino (the ladies' man).

But the beautiful young ladies were not there for him when Gabriel fell gravely ill. Lying alone in bed Gabriel turned to the only One who could still be found. He prayed that if God would heal him, he would devote his life to him. Sure enough, Gabriel got well. But - he forgot God, and returned to his insatiable search for romantic love.

Gabriel fell ill again, and again the doctors despaired of his life. Again, he prayed, again he was healed, again he returned to his women.

But then one night, when he had joined a sacred procession of the miraculous ikon of Spoleto, something suddenly happened to Gabriel Possenti. He was suddenly overcome by a sense of the presence of God, and the love of God. It was a love he had never dreamed of, and far better than anything he had found with his many women. That night Gabriel decided to forsake the search for the perfect romance, and return to the Lover of his soul.

He joined the Passionist monastery at Morrovalle in 1856, and although his new life was very austere, Possenti was now full of joy that depended on no one but God, and so could never be taken away from him. Sadly, he died young of tuberculosis – at only 24, but his sunny personality and love for God were so outstanding that he became patron of youth. Immense numbers of pilgrims have visited his shrine down the years.



Marriage is like twirling a baton, turning handsprings, or eating with chopsticks; it looks so easy till you try it. – *Helen Rowland*

## **Out and About Walking, Driving and Visiting**

We have had so much rain despite a temporary respite, will we have ' February Fill Dyke '? In view of the mud underfoot restricting suitable places to walk I thought to mention tearooms which would at least allow us. A nice ride out into the countryside.

These for us are mostly in Staffordshire and may have been mentioned before.

There are always refreshments available at National Trust properties, Moseley Old Hall, Shugborough., Attingham Park and in the Solihull area Packwood and Baddesley Clinton to mention the nearer places, however food available is much the same at each place

Probably our favourite would be The Old Bakehouse at Newborough (sat nav DE13 8SH). This a small place with a small garden and is very welcoming with the sisters who run it in vintage dresses. It's amazing how much of this clothing is still available. They are open Tues-Fri from 10am, Saturday until 1pm and Closed Sunday and Monday.

In Alrewas is the Bank Coffee House (DE13 7AE) on the main street, very friendly and popular, open Tuesday to Sunday from 9am closed on Monday. If the weather is unsuitable for anything else Alrewas is an interesting village to walk around. In the Church there were leaflets with the recently named ' Pilgrims Way Walk 'these are walks are between the churches of Tattenhall, Dunstable, Alrewas, Fradley and Lichfield Cathedral. All walks are fairly short except the last leg from Fradley to the Cathedral.

Near to Shugborough at Great Haywood is the Canal side Tearooms and Farm shop (ST18 0RQ). This place is very popular especially at weekends, the additional outside marquee seating which only seemed acceptable in lockdown is now usually the reserve of muddy cyclists! Free cards with local walks are available here.

A recommended place we have not tried yet is the Vintage Tearoom near to Armitage (WS15 1PU). We did a reconnoitre and eventually located it. On the A513 from Rugeley towards Armitage is the Ash tree pub. Opposite is a lane with a track off into the Hawksyard estate and along the track the tearoom is eventually reached. It appears the opening times are 12pm Wednesdays to Sundays and closed Monday and Tuesday.

In a different direction entirely and especially if you are using the A3400 towards Woodstock and Oxford, the Stalls Lifestyle shop and tearoom is just off the main road at Preston- on-Stour. The setting is beautiful especially in summer overlooking horses in paddocks and the extensive estate. The prices are surprisingly very reasonable and the shop is worth a look.

Hope these suggestions are helpful when a break from home is needed,

Ann



## Recipe

### Braised red cabbage with apple

To serve 6 this recipe needs a large casserole with a tight-fitting lid. The finished dish will keep for a long time without spoiling or can be made up to 2 days before and reheated.

To serve smaller portions the remainder can be put into small containers and frozen until required.

#### Ingredients

1lb red cabbage

Half pound onions

Half a cooking apple

Small glove of garlic (or small teaspoon of 'Easy Garlic')

One eighth of a nutmeg freshly ground

One eighth tp. cinnamon

One eighth tp. ground cloves

1 & half tb brown sugar

1 & half tb wine vinegar

Freshly ground black pepper

Butter

#### Method

Shred the cabbage.

Arrange a layer of cabbage in the casserole, then a layer of chopped onion and apple and a small amount of garlic. Continue to layer sprinkling the spices and dotting with butter and vinegar until all the ingredients are used.

Cook for 2 to 2 and a half hours at Gas 2 or 150 degrees with occasional stirring.

The advantage of the effort of making this amount is that it can be portioned up for future use as a side dish for winter roasts and if you buy a 2 lb cabbage double all the ingredients.

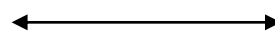
Ann

## Don't forget those nestboxes!

On 14<sup>th</sup> February our annual National Nestbox Week begins.

Now an established part of the ornithological calendar, it aims to encourage people to help out the birds in their gardens each Spring. Everyone is invited to put up more nestboxes in their local area, and a very helpful website gives full instructions on how to do this. More details at:

<https://www.nestboxweek.com>



### Abandoned and helpless

If February is the month of love, shouldn't that include some compassion for animals?

The RSPCA reports that animal abandonment incidents have reached a three-year high.

Latest figures for 2023 reveal more than 20,000 reports of animals being simply dumped by their owners.

Dermot Murphy, RSPCA inspectorate commissioner, says: "Behind these shocking statistics are thousands of vulnerable animals. Each one is a valuable life in urgent need of our help."

He goes on: "The combined effects of the pandemic and the ongoing cost-of-living crisis has created a perfect storm, and means we expect more animals than ever will need our help this year."

Yet many rescue centres are already full to bursting, "so we are facing an unprecedented winter crisis. Our rescue teams are busier than ever. We need animal lovers to donate to help us be there for animals in desperate need."

## **Food shortages are ‘likely’ this year**

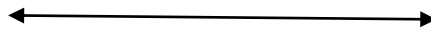
You might find some supermarket shelves empty in the coming months.

A combination of global conflicts, climate change and transportation issues are making it harder for food producers to get their products out of the field and onto your plate. And as at the end of last month (January), it got even more complicated, with the introduction of new checks on the goods coming from the EU into the UK.

Professor Chris Elliott of Queen’s University Belfast is a food security expert. He explains: “It’ll be about affordability but also availability, and the likelihood of empty shelves, particularly fresh produce shelves, in 2024 is alarmingly high.”

Professor Elliott said: “We are virtually totally dependent on other countries for most of our fresh produce, our fruit and our vegetables. We were reasonably self-sufficient in dairy, we were reasonably self-sufficient in poultry and eggs. But that’s also on the decline now, as a result of the collapse of some sectors of the food industry in the UK.”

According to the gov.uk website, just under half of the actual food on our plates is produced within the UK.



## **Who is hiding in your car?**

You may not be the only one enjoying the comfort of your car this winter.

According to recent figures from the RAC, if you have left your car standing alone for even a week, then anything from rats, squirrels, mice, foxes and even snakes may have moved in.

A squirrel stockpiling nuts in a car air filter, ten mice nesting under a windscreen, rats living in engine bays, and foxes chewing brake hoses, are only some of many culprits listed this year as having caused a breakdown. There was also the baby python found behind a wheel trim.

In all, last year the RAC responded to over 300 incidents of vehicle damage caused by animals. That’s a 55 per cent increase from the 196 recorded in 2018. Alice Simpson, spokesman for the RAC, said: “Finding a rat or mouse in your car is not only a nasty shock, but often the cause of very expensive damage.

“Our best advice is to make sure no food is left inside. Also, check for unusual smells in the vehicle, and be mindful of any dashboard warning lights that don’t disappear after a minute or two.”

## What's the Big Idea? *An Introduction to the Books of the Bible: Exodus*

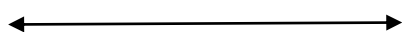
In addition to Genesis (page 3) this month we are also looking at Exodus, the second book of the Old Testament. Its name means departure, reminding us that Israel's flight out of slavery in Egypt is the major focus of the book.

Exodus is a book of two halves! The first part (chapters 1-19 & 32-34) is the story of an oppressed people who are delivered from slavery into a life of freedom. The second half (chapters 20-31 & 35-40) consists of detailed instructions about the life and worship of God's people. The book introduces us to their *salvation* or deliverance, as *story*. God's promises to Abraham are fulfilled as the people journey to the Promised Land. He also renews His covenant with them at Sinai, expressed in the Ten Commandments (20: 1-17).

At the heart of Exodus is the person of God Himself. In chapter 3 God reveals His name as YHWH or '*I am who I am*' (3:14) to Moses. This is the name by which God is known throughout the Old Testament, expressed in the title '*the LORD*'. To know God's name is to know Him, as well as His character ie His justice, truthfulness, mercy, faithfulness and holiness. He is the God who controls history, delivering the people out of Egypt, while the death of the Passover lamb points us to Jesus' death on the cross (1 Corinthians 5:7).

God's promises of help remain true for us today: '*Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today*' Exodus 14:13.

*'This Exodus story continues to be a major means that God uses to draw men and women in trouble out of the mess of history into the kingdom of salvation.'*  
(Eugene Peterson).



### **When bigger is not better**

Women have added almost three inches to their waistlines over the last three decades.

A recent mass survey across England has found that the average woman now has a waist span of 35 inches. That is up from an average of just over 32 inches in the 1990s. A 'very high waist circumference' is defined as being 34.6in or above.

Male waistlines have also continued to grow, but at a slower rate. 36 per cent of men are now classed as having a 'very high waist circumference' – which is 40in (102cm) or above. In the Nineties, just 20 per cent of men were this big.

The data comes from the Health Survey of England carried out in 2019, when waistlines were last measured. Tam Fry, from the National Obesity Forum, said: "The figures are alarming – too many of us are eating as though it is Christmas every day."

Draft guidance from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) urges everyone to regularly measure their waistline. It should be less than half their height. A recent study by the University of Oxford has found that every extra inch on the waistline increases the risk of heart failure by 11 per cent.

*The Ven John Barton looks back on two years of the Russian-Ukrainian war.*

## **Ukraine - Two Years Later**

Although Russian troops were massing near the borders of Ukraine in February 2022, we naively believed their denial that an attack was imminent.

Since then, an all-out war has resulted in tens of thousands of civilian deaths, and hundreds of thousands of military casualties. A quarter of the Ukrainian population has been displaced. Eight million are now refugees, spread across Europe.

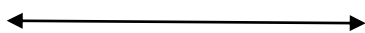
Few of us realised that a war between the two countries really started in 2014, when pro-Russian regions of Ukraine rebelled and Crimea was annexed.

Hostilities between the two countries had begun even earlier. Ukraine had joined the Soviet Union in 1922 and ten years later lost more than a million of its population in the 'Holodomor' famine, now widely regarded as genocide inflicted by Joseph Stalin, the Soviet leader.

Relationships between the two countries have always been turbulent, and Russia's possessive attitude towards its neighbour is deeply resented.

Ukrainian refugees in the UK are mainly women and children, for their men are needed for war service. So, they have organised themselves into self-help groups, painstakingly learning to read and write in English, as well as working full or part-time and keeping up their morale by organising groups for young and old. Choirs have sprung up, often assisted by British musicians. One member wrote movingly of how singing helped her cope with the mental trauma of her homeland fighting for survival.

Ukrainians are unceasingly grateful for our hospitality, but they fear our compassion may wear thin, as our attention has been diverted by news of the barbarity between Israelis and Palestinians. That conflict also has a long history of smouldering hatred on both sides. Wars rarely solve disputes. When wearied people recognise their futility, settlements may be negotiated. Forgiveness takes longer.



Hatred and bitterness can never cure the disease of fear; only love can do that. Hatred paralyses life; love releases it. Hatred confuses life; love harmonises it. Hatred darkens life; love illumines it. – *Martin Luther King*

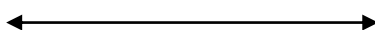
## 29 February - Oswald of Worcester: the saint for Leap Year

There is a saint for Leap Year: He is St Oswald of Worcester, who died on 29<sup>th</sup> February 992. His family story was extraordinary, and full of some surprising 'leaps', all by itself. It provides a tantalising glimpse of what happened to at least one of those pagan Viking warriors who settled in Anglo-Saxon Britain.

For Oswald's great-uncle had come to England c 865, as part of the 'Great Heathen Army' of Viking invaders. But his son, Oswald's uncle, Oda, forsook paganism, and not only converted to Christianity, but actually ended up as Archbishop of Canterbury. From there, Oda was in a position to help his nephew, Oswald, which he did.

Oda sent young Oswald to be educated at the abbey of Fleury, then a great centre of learning. There Oswald absorbed the Benedictine ideals which would guide his later life and work. Back in England, he became bishop of Worcester in 961, and with the support of King Edgar, eagerly joined in major reforms of the Anglo-Saxon church. In 972 Oswald was made Archbishop of York, and seems to have taken a great interest in renewing the church in the Danelaw. He founded Ramsey Abbey, which became one of the great Fenland monasteries.

Oswald was popular as an archbishop, and always washed the feet of the poor every Lent. On 29<sup>th</sup> February 992 he had just completed this service at Worcester when he collapsed and died. In later years, Worcester adopted both him and Wulfstan to be its two chief saints: they flank the tomb of King John, which is before the high altar in the cathedral.



Rocha UK's February tip:

Go green for Lent. The weeks leading up to Easter are a time for self-reflection, repentance and emulating Jesus' obedience to the Father. Is there something you'd like to give up or take up during Lent that will enable you to reflect on God, contribute to our planet's well-being and enhance others' lives through sustainable, eco-friendly living? Explore some of these changes at [arochoa.org.uk/go-greenfor-lent/](http://arochoa.org.uk/go-greenfor-lent/)



## **Celebrating the now and future Creation**

I find that watching buds swelling on trees and plants during the winter months gives me a tremendous sense of hope. After creation's winter shutdown, the sight of tiny flowers poking out of brown earth may be more important than ever.

Getting outdoors during daylight hours, enjoying green spaces and getting some fresh air and exercise are great ways to keep ourselves healthy at any time of year. A psychologist colleague wrote, "Attending to the details of nature can also inspire awe, which has been linked to positive mood and increased life satisfaction." I expect it is this sense of awe that makes it easier for many of us to connect with God outdoors.

Helping ourselves and others to thrive is a good start to 2024, but it is also vital to have hope for the future. In the face of climate change, we urgently need to care for all of Creation, both human and everything else, with God's help.

Our ultimate hope is in God's promise that He will bring about a new heaven and a new earth. We can look forward to the day when Creation will be fully redeemed and liberated from evil. The Greek word used to describe the new creation is the same as that used to describe someone who becomes a Christian, whose humanity is restored and renewed. There will be continuity between the old and new earth as it is cleansed and purified, surpassing and perfecting what has gone before. There will also be some discontinuity, as there will be no more suffering or death.

So, one source of hope for 2024 is that we can enjoy both caring for and meeting God in Creation. But the parts of Creation that we find most beautiful, giving us a sense of awe and helping us to worship, are also a reminder that there is something much better to come.

*Written by Dr Ruth M. Bancewicz, who is Church Engagement Director at The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion in Cambridge. Ruth writes on the positive relationship between Science and Christian faith*



Some Christians are not only like salt that has lost its savour, but like pepper that has lost its pep. – *Albert George Butzer*

## On why rural church-goers like to freeze in church

The Rectory  
St James the Least



My dear Nephew Darren

Winter certainly exposes the difference between those of you who live in cities and us rural folk. While you bask in your centrally heated flat, and complain about the half an inch of slush outside, we country folk wear overcoats in our houses, open all doors and windows to let the heat in and battle through snow drifts, measured in feet, to get the morning paper.

Colonel Wainwright has acquired a new toy: a snow blower, of sufficient power that I believe it could clear the Antarctic. He kindly volunteered to clear the paths around the church. Working outwards from the church door, the path to the church soon became snow-free. Unfortunately, he only realised when his job was complete that the blown snow then formed a ten-foot drift under the lych gate.

Miss Margison, ever helpful in the worst sense of the word, decided to unfreeze the pipes in the church hall. A blow torch was not the ideal solution, although the resulting burst did make some rather attractive ice sculptures round the kitchen equipment. The village badminton team that uses the hall has now temporarily changed sport to ice hockey.

Inevitably, congregations have soared. There is nothing like adversity for making people want to prove they have the moral fibre to overcome it. Much satisfaction seems to be obtained on discovering who has not dared venture out, which is taken as judgement on their strength of character. The Prentices upstaged most people by arriving on a sleigh. Mr Prentice was warmly wrapped in a travelling rug, while his wife pulled it. As they both explained, they couldn't possibly let the pony work in such conditions.

What I momentarily thought was applause during my sermon was merely people keeping their hands warm and the hymns were drowned out by the stamping of feet. Our organist complained that the cold made his fingers so numb that he couldn't play properly – although I didn't notice that things were much different from normal.

No, my dear nephew, a few flakes of wet snow may close *your* car park for health and safety reasons, but we shall continue to triumph heroically over adversity. We return home after Mattins, knowing we have proved our Christian commitment in being utterly uncomfortable.

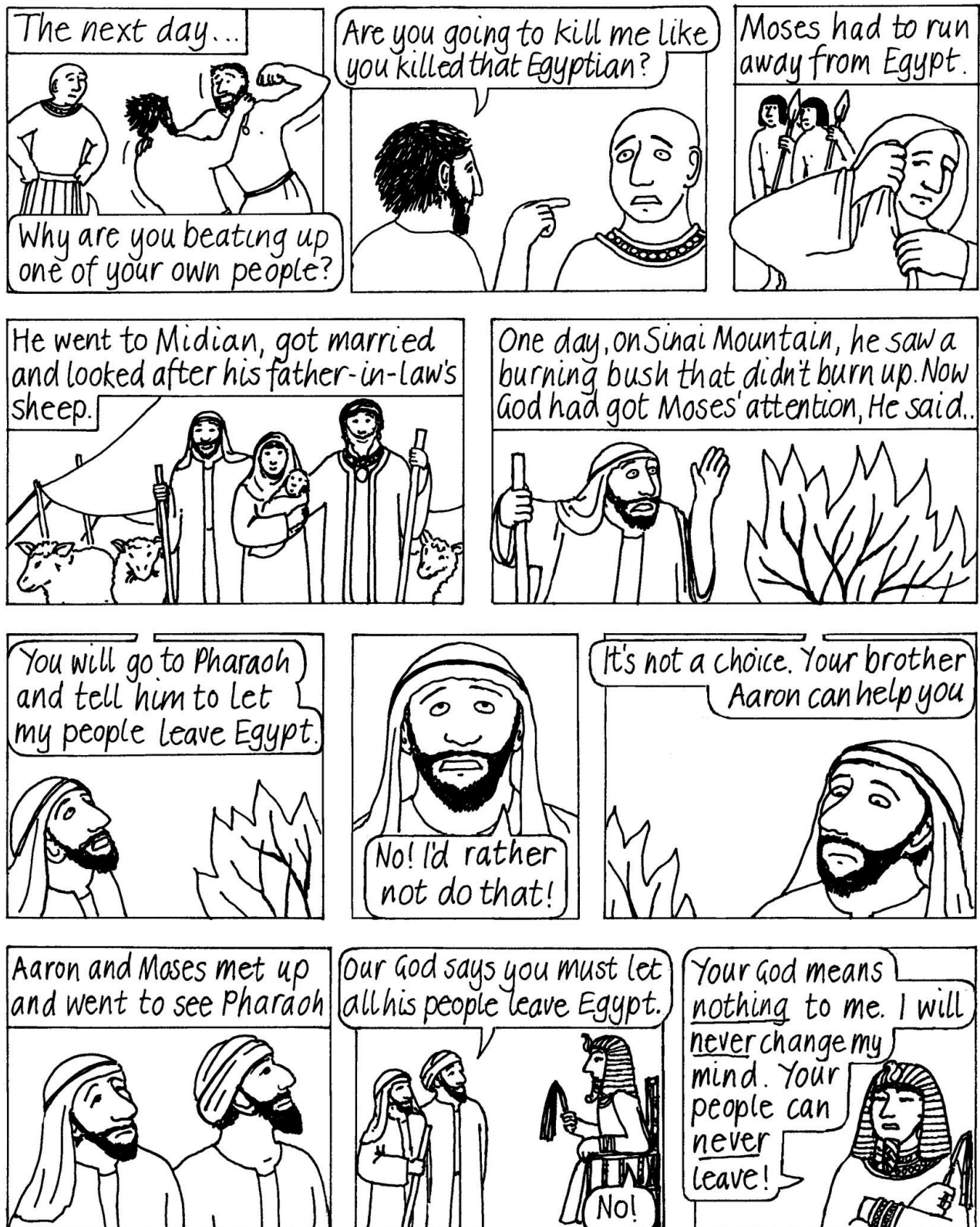
Your loving uncle,  
Eustace

# Bible Bite

A short story from the Bible

It can be read in the Bible in  
Exodus 2:13-4:23, 4:27-5:2

Moses: a Hebrew adopted by an Egyptian princess. He killed an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew slave, and hid the body.



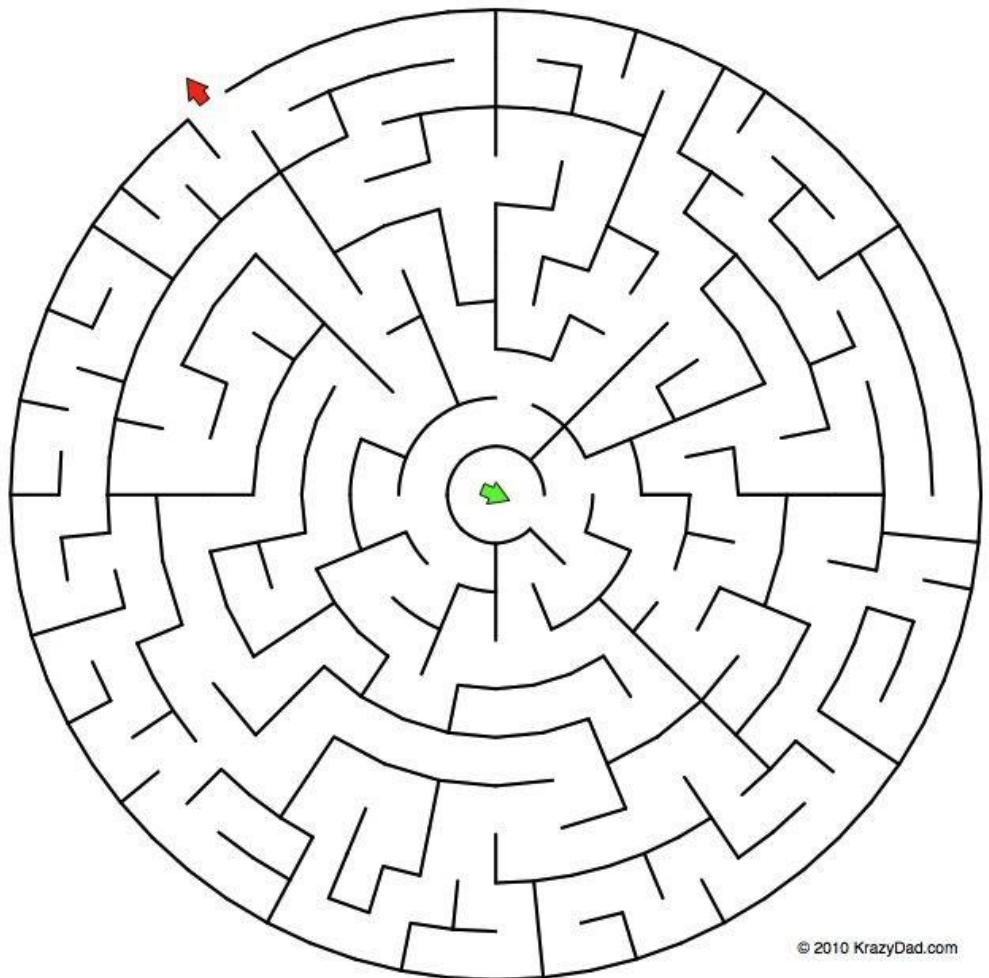
December/January Solution

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|   |   | 5 |   |   | 7 | 3 |   |   |
|   | 1 |   |   |   |   | 2 |   |   |
| 7 |   |   |   | 1 | 5 |   |   | 6 |
|   | 5 | 9 |   |   | 6 |   |   |   |
|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|   |   |   | 3 |   |   | 4 | 2 |   |
| 6 |   |   | 5 | 4 |   |   |   | 7 |
|   |   | 1 |   |   |   |   | 8 |   |
|   |   | 8 | 2 |   |   | 6 |   |   |

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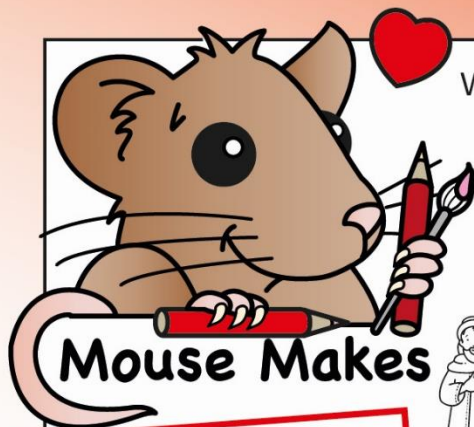
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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 7 | 3 | 8 | 4 | 9 |
| 3 | 8 | 9 | 1 | 6 | 4 | 5 | 7 | 2 |
| 7 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 8 | 9 | 1 | 6 | 3 |
| 5 | 7 | 1 | 8 | 3 | 6 | 9 | 2 | 4 |
| 8 | 4 | 2 | 7 | 9 | 5 | 6 | 3 | 1 |
| 9 | 6 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 7 | 8 | 5 |
| 4 | 3 | 7 | 9 | 5 | 8 | 2 | 1 | 6 |
| 1 | 9 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 7 | 4 | 5 | 8 |
| 2 | 5 | 8 | 6 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 9 | 7 |

Can you solve  
the maze?



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## Mouse Makes

### CONNECT THE BIBLE COUPLES

|           |           |
|-----------|-----------|
| ADAM      | ELIZABETH |
| ABRAHAM   | MARY      |
| ISAAC     | HANNAH    |
| JACOB     | PRISCILLA |
| BOAZ      | EVE       |
| ZECHARIAH | RUTH      |
| ELKANAH   | REBEKAH   |
| AQUILA    | RACHEL    |
| JOSEPH    | SARAH     |

Which couple helped the Apostle Paul in his ministry?

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ Romans 16:3

Who were the first couple?

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

Genesis 2:22-25

Who's wife became a pillar of salt because she disobeyed the angel's warning?

\_\_\_\_\_ Genesis 19:26



Which of Laban's daughters did Jacob love?

\_\_\_\_\_ Genesis 29:18

Who was Moses' wife?

\_\_\_\_\_ Exodus 2:21

Who married Boaz to become King David's great-grandmother and a distant relative of Jesus?

\_\_\_\_\_ Matthew 1:5



### FIND THE BIBLE VERSE

Change each letter in this bible verse to the letter **before** it in the alphabet.

XIBU HPE IBT  
KPJOFE UPHFUIFS,  
MFU OPU NBO  
TFQBSBUF.

NBSL  
UFO WFSTF  
OJOF

### DID YOU KNOW?

King Solomon had **700** wives! They were princesses of royal birth and he loved them all, but his wives caused him to turn away from God See 1 Kings 11:1-3

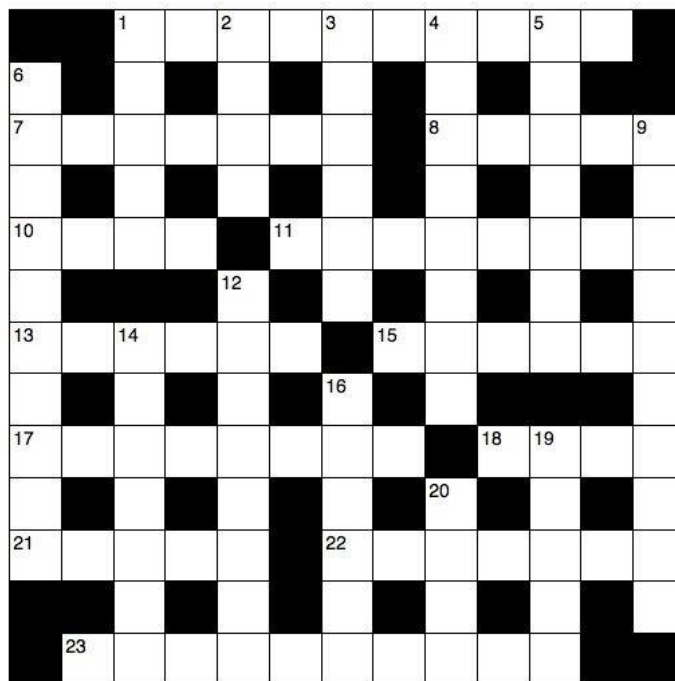
E E Z R E E L I Z A B E T H R  
S V Q S L R Z J I B O A D A M  
R E B E K A H O J R A O Q N O  
U I S A A C A S A A Z P R N S  
T H A Q N H Z E C H A R I A H  
H R U T A E V P O A I E B H I  
S A R A H L T H B M A R Y S D  
P R I S C I L L A Q U I L A

ABRAHAM  
ADAM • AQUILA  
BOAZ • ELKANAH  
ELIZABETH  
EVE • HANNAH  
ISAAC • JACOB  
JOSEPH • MARY  
PRISCILLA  
RACHEL  
REBEKAH • RUTH  
SARAH  
ZECHARIAH



## Across

- 1 Success or wealth (Deuteronomy 28:11) (10)  
 7 Forbidden fruit for Nazirites (Numbers 6:3) (7)  
 8 Concede (Job 27:5) (5)  
 10 Look at (Psalm 48:13) (4)  
 11 Much in evidence after weddings (8)  
 13 Condense (Job 36:27) (6)  
 15 Breakwater (6)  
 17 Give a tan (anag.) (8)  
 18 More usually now called Pentecost, — Sunday (4)  
 21 After living for 365 years, it was said of him that 'he walked with God' (Genesis 5:23–24) (5)  
 22 Trampled (Judges 9:27) (7)  
 23 For example, Miriam, Deborah (Exodus 15:20; Judges 4:4) (10)



## Down

- 1 Arrogance (Proverbs 8:13) (5)  
 2 Roman poet from first century BC (4)  
 3 So rapt (anag.) (6)  
 4 Declare again (2 Corinthians 2:8) (8)  
 5 Paul's 'fellow worker', to whom he sent two epistles (Romans 16:21) (7)  
 6 God's foreseeing care and protection (Job 10:12) (10)  
 9 Traditional form of Roman Catholic Mass (10)  
 12 'The Lord... has given the — of Israel to David and his descendants for ever' (2 Chronicles 13:5) (8)  
 14 'My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my — ' (Luke 1:46–47) (7)  
 16 The central element in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, identified and interpreted by Daniel (Daniel 2:31) (6)  
 19 'On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of — will not overcome it' (Matthew 16:18) (5)  
 20 City where Paul was under house arrest for two years (Acts 28:16) (4)

## December/January's answers:

**ACROSS:** 1, Depend. 4, Canopy. 7, Beak. 8, Irritate. 9, Zedekiah. 13, Ate. 16, Job's comforter. 17, NAE. 19, Lang Syne. 24, Blockade. 25, Five. 26, Enigma. 27, Drench.

**DOWN:** 1, Debt. 2, Peaceable. 3, Drink. 4, Curia. 5, Nuts. 6, Put it. 10, Excel. 11, Is man. 12, Hoofs. 13, Attention. 14, Ezra. 15, Ijon. 18, Aslan. 20, Abana. 21, Greed. 22, GCMG. 23, Leah.