

St. George's Montezbury

Magazine 50p



January 2026



LIFTING UP OUR EYES

With Rev Greg smith

Research suggests that we tend to get more anxious as we get older. I wonder why that might be? Those of us who lived through the threat of nuclear Armageddon during the Cold War might have learnt that things aren't always as bad as the newspaper headlines insist. And yet many find, as the years unfold, that the challenges they used to take in their stride are now a matter for deep breaths, and if possible, handing over to children and grandchildren to sort. Perhaps it's because our computerised, artificially intelligent world is so impenetrable. Do you remember when the only thing you needed in a car park were a few coins (and it was only a few in those days) to put in the meter? Now many machines don't take coins at all, and require you to download an app, and the app you downloaded last week isn't the right one for this carpark.

In the same way, phoning customer services for help entails a 20 minute wait to speak to someone (inputting the digits of your date of birth or your postcode which aren't then recognized) and a conversation with someone in Asia who is called Pete or Sharon but doesn't sound like a Pete or Sharon, who then tells you to go online to sort out your problem. And that's before you start worrying about what they're saying about you on Social Media. No doubt, none of this helps, but I don't believe it gets to the root of the problem.

I suspect it is a combination of two things. First, the world is designed for young people; and second, as we increase in years, both our bodies and minds let us down. We lose confidence because we can no longer do the things we used to. I don't say "I am 65 and can still run 5 miles" but instead lament how much more slowly I run 5 miles than I used to. By the same token, Joe Biden was considered too old to stand again for office as American President.

And yet, if you read the Bible, you find that age is no barrier to God being willing to use someone. Noah, Abraham and Moses were all of great age

when they were called into action. For example, the challenge of leading the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt, defying the might of Pharaoh was not entrusted to a strapping youth, still virile and able to win a duel with one of Pharaoh's champions. It was given to Moses, a man who had grown to know God through the wisdom of the years. Therefore, let us prize old age in ourselves and others that we may not miss out on that wisdom.

Greg Smith

Prayer for the New Year, 2026

Dear Father, Lord of all time,
Here we are! Another New Year!

So many mixed emotions for different people, for different reasons. For some, the reluctance to leave a year which brought joy and happiness; for some the relief of leaving behind a difficult year; for some, sadness at moving into a year where a loved one has never been; for some, apprehension and insecurity about what might lie ahead in this world of polarisation, conflict and confusion about what is true.

Lord, help us to take time at the start of 2026 to refocus our hearts, minds and spirits – to tune into you, our un-changing God.
Help us to be calmed and encouraged by the promise of Jesus that He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. The safe Way. The ultimate Truth. The Life, your gift, to be with you for all eternity.

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

Thank you, in Jesus' name. Amen.


Tree Festival 2025: Marianne and Holly McCall
thank everyone who came, helped or put up a tree in the
Tree Festival last month; time given to this annual festival
was much appreciated.

Looking ahead—the theme for December 2026 will be
'Celebrations'.



Readings and Services for this MONTH

Here are the Sunday Service details, and the readings which you may enjoy at home if you are unable to join a church service this month.

Date	Service	Readings
4th January <i>The Epiphany</i> 	Holy Communion 10.30am	1 John 3. 22-4.6 Psalm 2. 7-end Matthew 4. 12-17, 23-end
6th January	Tea Service 2.30pm	
8th January	Messy Church 3.30pm	
11 th January The Baptism of Christ (The First Sunday of Epiphany)	Morning Worship and Children's Church without Communion 10.30am	Isaiah 42, 1-9 Psalm 29. 34-43 Matthew 3. 13-end
18 th January 2nd Sunday of Epiphany The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity until 25 th January	Holy Communion and Children's Church 10.30am	Isaiah 49. 1-7 1 Corinthians 1.1-9 John 1. 29-42
25 th January The Conversion of Paul	All Age Family Service 10.30am	Jeremiah 1. 4-10 Galatians 1. 11-16a Matthew 19.27-end

Our church COMMUNITY



The Rea Valley Transport Scheme is now fully operational, enabling residents of the area to access medical appointments including Pontesbury & Worthen surgeries, and Shrewsbury, Telford and Oswestry hospitals. The scheme also undertakes whenever we can to get people to opticians, dental and other wellbeing appointments.

Please note that the scheme is not set up to help with emergency appointments or to assist with other transport requests such as shopping.

Our drivers are all volunteers, but are insured, DBS checked and safely recruited. However, they are not medical professionals. Your driver will collect you from your home address and take you in good time for your appointment.

To request transport, please contact our scheme administrator, Emma, at reavalleytransportscheme.info@gmail.com or by calling **07468 115939**. If possible, please give us a minimum of a week's notice of when and where your appointment is.

TIME OUT

TIME OUT Postponed until SPRING

A new support group, sponsored by the local churches, for those struggling with the stresses and strains of life, has begun at St George's Church, Pontesbury, on the second and fourth Thursday afternoons of the month.

We are deliberately a small, friendly group aimed at people who find large gatherings too daunting. You will be made very welcome.

MEDITATION SERVICE

St George's Pontesbury and St Ruthen's Longden have been working in partnership over the last year to offer a service of meditation (in this busy world) on the second Sunday of the month.

This is just an hour to stop and reflect. We listen to Taize music, keep silent and meditate, with nothing asked of you.

The next service is at St George's on Jan 11th at 4 p.m.

Welcome to The Tea Break



Wednesdays 2pm - 4pm
St George's Church
Pontesbury

OASIS *FREE lunch & companionship* for anyone living in Pontesbury, Minsterley and surrounding villages, who has been recently bereaved ...

... on the 2nd & 4th Tuesdays every month, 12pm - 1.30pm
Minsterley Methodist Chapel, Horsebridge Rd, Minsterley.

Transport is Available—Friends & Family are Welcome too.

Contact Heather Ryder for more information, at
ryder928@btinternet.com or 01743 790359

St. George's Prayer Chain, a small group of people who believe that prayer can make a difference, is being revived under Mary Worrall's leadership. Each person within the group offers daily prayer for anyone who asks for prayer—**would you like to join this group?**

Please contact Mary Worrall
maryew15mp@gmail.com or on 01743 791069

All information given is given in confidence.



Monthly Tea Service

(not August)

1st Tuesday afternoon

2.30pm to 4pm

St George's Church,
Pontesbury.

A moment of prayer,
A short Holy Communion followed by tea and cake

Our local COMMUNITY



A Date for your Diary—
Open Gardens
Sunday 17th May 2026



Rea Valley
foodbank

Supporting those in food crisis within the Rea Valley Community

The foodbank is open from 10am—12noon on
Tuesdays at Holy Trinity, Minsterley, and Thursdays
at St George's Pontesbury.

To use the Foodbank, or find out more:

Call for a chat with Rev. Greg Smith 07902 794653 or Rev. Richard Lonsdale 07922 830488 email reavalleyfoodbank@gmail.com or your local clergy. You can also be referred by a GP, school, nursery, social/health worker, housing provider or other support agency. See our website: <https://reavalleyfoodbank.co.uk/> or Facebook

Do you have some spare time?

Mary Webb School in Pontesbury are looking for Exam Invigilators to help out during exam times. You can fit exams around your schedule and full training is provided.

More details and application form is available on the school's website <https://marywebbschool.com/vacancies/>



*QUOTE It takes a great person to give sound advice tactfully, but a greater to accept it graciously.
- J C MacAulay*

Looking at GOD

Epiphany for Today *thoughts from Canon Paul Hardingham*

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

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

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

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



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



Canon Paul Hardingham continues looking at the books of the Bible:

What's the Big Idea? - An Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament: *Song of Songs*

The title of this book, '*Solomon's Song of Song*' (1:1), claims to be written by Solomon, and while his name is mentioned seven times and several verses speak of the '*king*', the book may be more about Solomon rather than written by him. However, it is reasonable to assume that Song of Songs was written in the tenth century BC, during Solomon's reign (971-931 BC).

The focus of the Song is God's choicest gifts of love and the voice of this love belongs to a woman, the beloved. It is her experience of love, both as the one who loves and as the one who is loved, that is most clearly expressed. The Song begins with her wish for her lover's kiss and ends with an invitation for intimate love. It describes the intimacies of married love as God intends it to be. She speaks profoundly of love; of its beauty and delight; its exclusiveness (2:16); its spontaneity (2:7) and its overwhelming power: '*Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away.*' (8:6,7)

God created man and woman, and established marriage as His purpose for society (Genesis 1:27; 2:20-24). This Song is part of the wisdom literature and shows us how to receive and live the gift of God's love with thanksgiving and celebration. However, the Song also speaks symbolically of the experience of intimacy to be found in our relationship with Christ: '*My lover is mine and I am his...and his banner over me is love.*' (2:16,4).

QUOTE Life is too short for us to do everything we want to do; but it is long enough for us to do everything God wants us to do. - Anon



The Seven Deadly Sins: Pride

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

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

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



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

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



There is a lot of talk about 'mindfulness' these days, and how to find calm moments in our daily lives. Both the BBC and Classic FM have even got radio stations devoted to 'mindful' and 'calm' music. But as Christians, we have an extra, divine resource, to call on.

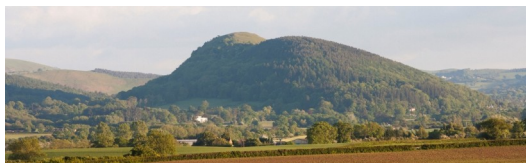
Peaceful mind

The Bible tells the story of Jesus and His disciples in a boat. The wind blows, the waves rise, and the disciples are stressed. Like them, we also get hit by storms in life. Like them, we can't control what comes our way. But like them, we can know that Jesus is also with us. Why not take a moment to ponder these promises:

In peace I will lie down and sleep, for You alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety. (*Psalm 4:8*)

The Lord gives strength to His people, the Lord blesses His people with peace. (*Psalm 29:11*)

For God is not a God of disorder but of peace - as in all the congregations of the Lord's people. (*1 Corinthians 14:33*)



As a New Year begins *A prayer by Karl Barth (1886 – 1968). This most prominent Protestant theologian of his time spent much of his life resisting the Nazi movement, and so knew a thing or two about entering a New Year undaunted by troubles all around him.*

O Lord, our Father!...at the turn of the year... our hearts are filled with sombre thoughts... our ears are deafened by the voices of the radio and the newspapers, with their numerous predictions for the coming year. Instead we want to hear your word, your voice, your assurance, your guidance. We know that you are in our midst, and are eager to give us all that we need, whether we ask or not.

...We ask for one thing only: that you collect our scattered thoughts, getting rid of confused and defiant thoughts that may distract us, and thus enable us to concentrate on your limitless generosity to us. You were abundantly generous to us last year, and will be no less generous to us next year, and in every year to come. Fill us with gratitude to you.

David Pickup, a solicitor, considers January.

Going from Strength to Strength – even in January!

Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion. (Psalm 84: 5-7)

January can be a grim month! Back to work after Christmas, dark days and early nights. Colds, sniffles and bugs, then the bills, renewals and invoices come in. There is not much going on in church, as Candlemas is not until February.

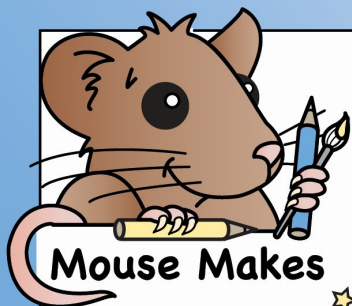
I like the psalms, as they are written from personal experience. This one is a belter and has been called one of the sweetest psalms. I suppose January could be a type of 'valley of Baca' or veil of tears, meaning a difficult time to get through. The psalmist encourages us to look for wells and pools of water even in the driest desert.

Many people have debt or other problems. Perhaps the church could set up a group to support members or look for local sources of advice, food-banks or help. *(Or some in our community could be encouraged to support or to use our Rea Valley Foodbank).*

January may be cold, costly and dark but there are things to look forward to: snowdrops, bulbs and days beginning to lengthen and at least the stress of Christmas is past!



"The vicar's hoping providing a really strong mobile signal will attract more young folk to the church"



Mouse Makes

DID YOU KNOW ?

Stars shine different colours, the colour we see depends on the temperature of the star. The hottest stars shine blueish-white, then yellowish-white, yellow, orange and the coolest stars shine red.

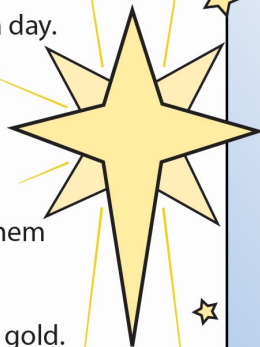
WISE MEN FROM THE EAST

The Wise Men came from a land far away, they had seen a star that shone brighter than day.

The star was a sign of the birth of a king, so they followed that star to pay homage to him.

They found him in Bethlehem as the prophets foretold, they gave him three gifts: myrrh, frankincense and gold.

The star led to Jesus our saviour and king, let us join with the Wise Men and go worship Him!



Read the story of the Wise Men in **Matthew 2:1-12**

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

Can you find these words in the word search?

WISE MEN • MAGI
STAR • SIGN
JOURNEY • BETHLEHEM
VISIT • JESUS • MESSIAH
CHRIST • KING
GIFTS • GOLD • MYRRH
FRANKINCENSE
WORSHIP • JOY
EPIPHANY



Looking at CHURCH, at home and worldwide

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity - 18th to 25th January



This year the prayers and reflections are from the Armenian Apostolic Church, along with the Armenian Catholic and Evangelical Churches.

These resources draw upon centuries-old traditions of prayer and petitions used by the Armenian people, along with hymns that originated in the ancient monasteries and churches of Armenia, some of which date as far back as the fourth century.

They extend an invitation to draw upon this shared Christian heritage and to delve more deeply into our fellowship in Christ, which unites Christians worldwide.

Why we have Plough Sunday

In bygone years, the supply chain of food across Britain was fairly short: if it didn't grow in your local fields, you were apt to go hungry. Hence the widespread traditional custom of Plough Sunday – bringing a plough (and sometimes a lamb as well) into church and praying for God's blessing on the land in the year ahead.

Traditionally, Plough Sunday was held on the Sunday after Epiphany, which makes 11th January this year's special day. Parishioners would often walk through their village collecting alms for the poor, before gathering down at the church. Farmers would sometimes roll up on their tractors at the church door (though there are no stories of any farmer trying to bring his tractor into the church!) Work on the fields would then begin on Plough Monday, the day after the prayers for blessing.



These days, with supermarkets delivering food all year round, the nature of Plough Sunday has changed into a general celebration of farming and the work of farmers.

Embedding Religious Education is key to building understanding

In response to the Government's recent Curriculum and Assessment Review, the Church of England has welcomed the scrapping of the EBacc (English Baccalaureate).

The CofE believes this will have positive implications for Religious Education, making it easier for pupils to study Religious Education at GCSE as part of a broad and balanced curriculum.

The Church's Chief Education Officer, Nigel Genders, said: "At a time where the need for understanding and dialogue across different faith groups and worldviews is increasingly evident, the importance of children studying RE could not be clearer.

"We look forward to continuing to engage with proposals to develop RE, and to enabling church schools to continue to provide RE in a way that is consistent with their designation as schools with a religious character."

Note: Our local Pontesbury Primary is a church foundation school.

<https://www.pontesburyprimary.org.uk>

Fuelling children's potential

The international children's charity World Vision has recently published a new research report, *School meals in our words: Choosing our future*, to demonstrate the positive ripple effect that meals at school are having on children's lives across the globe.

The report comes at a time when the World Food Programme has warned that, despite a significant increase in government-led school meals programmes, it is estimated that half the world's primary school-aged children go to school hungry.

Yet World Vision found that children worldwide consider school meals very important to their daily lives. The regular food gives them the energy to learn, and a reason to come to school on a regular basis.

World Vision prioritises school meals through its Child Sponsorship programmes and through partnership with the School Meals Coalition. In 2024, nearly one million children were provided with school meals through World Vision projects.



Journeying in 2026

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Island of Anglesey. 24th - 30th April

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

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

Grasmere and Lake District. 14th - 19th June

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

Canterbury, England. 17th - 24th August

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

Late Summer in Oxfordshire. 22nd - 25th September

More info at: www.journeying.co.uk

Looking at YOU

How to keep those New Year Resolutions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Break your resolution into steps. Some goals will take months to achieve. So,

break each one down into tiny steps, and simply head for each step. Build in some time frames, to prevent you procrastinating.

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

David Pickup, a solicitor, gives some guidance on...

Complaints and refunds – what about consumer protection?

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

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

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

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

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

So, what if there is a problem?

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

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

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



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



What, oh what, is that person's name?!

Do your New Year Resolutions include the forlorn hope that you will be better at remembering people's names in 2026?

Many of us – and not only those of the older generation – have difficulty remembering names. It's not just TV personalities and so on, but people we meet in the street. We know exactly who they are, we see them every week in church or the supermarket, we know what job they do and which school their children go to. But as for their name – it's a blank.

Help is at hand, however. Not to solve the problem, but at least to name it. 'Anomic aphasia' is the clinical name for the inability to remember a name, even when we can remember everything else about someone.

There is also the strange truth that the cure for anomic aphasia comes spontaneously, often in the middle of the night, when that elusive identity pops unbidden into our memory. We must be sure, of course, to put the light on and write it down, because for sure it will be gone again with the morning light!

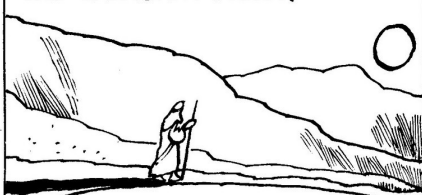
The Good Samaritan

JERICO

ONCE, A LAWYER TRIED TO TRICK JESUS WITH A CLEVER QUESTION.



JESUS REPLIED BY TELLING THE LAWYER A STORY.

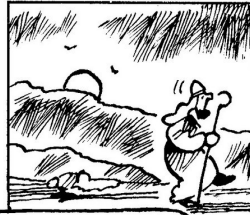


A MAN WENT FROM JERUSALEM TO JERICO. ON THE WAY...

HE WAS ATTACKED BY ROBBERS!!



THEY TOOK EVERYTHING HE HAD AND LEFT HIM FOR DEAD!



LATER A PRIEST PASSED BY, BUT DID NOTHING TO HELP - NOR DID THE RELIGIOUS MAN FROM A TEMPLE!

BUT A MAN FROM A FOREIGN COUNTRY STOPPED TO HELP THE INJURED MAN. HE DRESSED THE MAN'S WOUNDS AND EVEN PAID FOR HIM TO STAY AT AN INN.



JESUS THEN ASKED "WHO WAS THE NEIGHBOUR?"

- ☐ PRIEST
- ☐ TEMPLE MAN
- ☐ FOREIGN MAN

WHICH DO YOU THINK WAS THE ONE THE LAWYER CHOSE?

From Richard, Bishop of Hereford

January 12th is designated as Blue Monday, the most miserable of the year. The festivities of Christmas are a distant memory, and winter still holds us in its grip. A few valiant daffodils and snowdrops poking through the mud do little to elevate the mood. At least that is the contemporary narrative.

However, we Christians, especially in the Diocese of Hereford are entering into a year of celebration. We have had three years to explore our central values of Christlikeness, prayerfulness and engagement and now we want to celebrate, not least because the diocese is 1350 years old this year.

As Bishop of Hereford, it is an extraordinary thing to walk into the cathedral for a service passing a board that shows you have 105 predecessors in an unbroken line back to 676! Our diocese predates England and was carved out of a corner of the ancient kingdom of Mercia and the Romano-British kingdom of Archenfield.

It is hard to see any connection between the wild, rural subsistence society of that time and the modern world. And yet our year will celebrate an unbroken thread of Christian faith, about the only thing that does link the ancient past to today. From the first Celtic saints like St. Dubricious who brought Christianity to this part of the world in the sixth century, to Putta our first Bishop, expelled from Rochester and finding a home here, to people like St. Aedfrith and St. Milburgha who linked this then obscure part of the world to wider Christendom.

But not just our founders. Christians are described by the Apostle Paul as Saints. The witness of some remains through the centuries. For some there might be a stone memorial, but I doubt anyone will remember much about me as a Bishop in 50 years time when they walk past my name on the board. Over the last 1350 years the Gospel has advanced as much by ordinary people living it out in their homes, workplaces and communities as it has by the few preserved by history. That remains the case today. We would not have the healthcare system, education, good working conditions in factories, the abolition of slavery and countless other benefits but for

such Christian witness and activity.

We may feel we are struggling as a church today, but whether acknowledged or not, much that is good in the modern world owes its origin to the Gospel. That is well worth celebrating.

+Richard

In the News

Dublin given a Roman Catholic cathedral

Dublin is to have a Roman Catholic cathedral – for the first time in 500 years. Pope Leo XIV has designated St Mary’s Pro-Cathedral as the cathedral of the archdiocese of Dublin.

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

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

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



The wider COMMUNITY

Menai Suspension Bridge celebrates 200 years

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



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

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

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

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

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

Michael Bond, creator of Paddington Bear

It was 100 years ago, on 13th January 1926, that Michael Bond, the children's writer, was born. He has an assured place in any literary Hall of Fame, for he created the characters Paddington Bear and Monsieur Pamplemousse.

Paddington Bear padded into Michael Bond's life quite by accident. It was back in 1956 that Michael was on his way home from work at the BBC when he spied a lonely looking teddy bear on the shelf in a shop window in London. On the spur of the moment, Michael decided to take it home as a stocking filler for his wife.

Michael called the bear Paddington, because they lived near Paddington Station at the time. Two years later, in 1958, while daydreaming over a typewriter and a blank sheet of paper, Michael wondered what might happen if an unaccompanied bear turned up at a railway station looking for a home.

The rest is literary history.....

His first book, *A Bear Called Paddington*, was written in ten days and published by Collins in October of 1958. 28 more books followed, and in all more than 35 million Paddington books have been sold worldwide, in more than 40 languages. More than 27 million Paddington Bear soft toys have been sold, just since 2021. The films alone have grossed more than \$778 million.



Paddington made his most famous appearance at Buckingham Palace in 2022, where he had tea with Queen Elizabeth II on her Platinum Jubilee, and exchanged tips with her about the best place to store marmalade sandwiches.

Bond was born in Newbury in 1926 and served with the RAF and army during WW2. He started writing in 1945 while stationed in Cairo, and began his career at the BBC, where he later worked on Blue Peter as a cameraman. He died in 2017, aged 91.

From slaughter on a beach through gates of splendour

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

The missionaries had been attempting to bring Christianity to the small tribe

of about 500 Auca people, and so had spent several months trying to befriend them by dropping gifts from an airplane.

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

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

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

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

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



Bible Bite

A short story from the Bible

It can be read in the Bible in
1 Samuel chapter 1

In the time before there were kings in Israel, there lived a rich man, Elkanah, and his two wives, Hannah and Peninnah.

Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none.



Each year they travelled to Shiloh to worship God.



After the worship, they feasted.



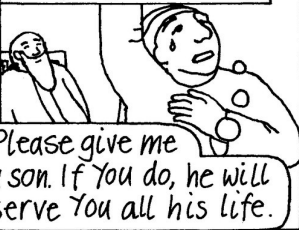
Elkanah always gave Hannah a special portion of food to show he loved her.



But Hannah was too sad to eat. She left the meal and went to pray.



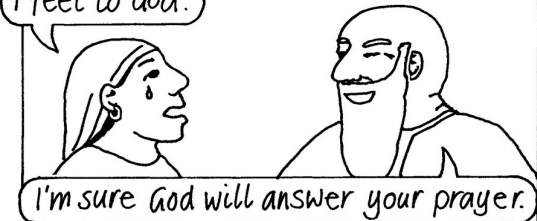
She prayed silently.



Eli the priest saw Hannah's silent weeping and praying and thought she was drunk.



I'm not drunk! I was just pouring out how I feel to God.



Back home, Hannah had a son, and she named him Samuel.



She stayed at home with him when the rest of the family went to Shiloh.

When Samuel was old enough, Hannah and Elkanah took him to Shiloh to live there and serve God.



*The words in the list below can be found in the grid.
You will notice that they are words from the BibleBite story
on page 27.*

d	r	u	n	k	o	k	o	e	f	j	w
n	g	i	y	o	s	d	a	w	u	c	s
h	t	u	p	e	n	i	n	n	a	h	a
a	s	p	v	l	a	e	n	s	s	i	m
n	j	i	r	k	u	r	q	i	p	l	u
n	w	t	r	a	v	e	l	l	e	d	e
a	f	r	t	n	y	e	n	e	c	r	l
h	g	s	t	a	y	e	d	n	i	e	o
w	o	r	s	h	i	p	r	t	a	n	v
e	d	i	a	n	s	w	e	r	l	h	e
e	y	c	w	f	e	a	s	t	f	m	d
p	s	h	w	s	h	i	l	o	h	x	h

Israel	none	worship
prayer	weep	loved
children	God	silent
Elkanah	travelled	answer
wives	Peninnah	Samuel
year	Shiloh	feast
Eli	stayed	special
rich	Hannah	drunk

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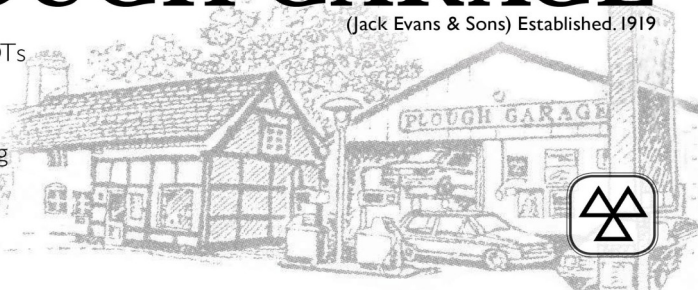


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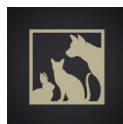
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