

St. George's Montezbury

Magazine 50p



February 2026

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Contributions for **St. George's Magazine** should be sent to the Editor by the **15th** of the **previous month**. It may not be possible to include until the following month contributions which are received after this date.
Send e-mail & attachments to stgsmagazine@googlemail.com

Items for inclusion in the **Deanery News** should be sent by the **10th** of the **previous month** to Ann Jones
annmorganjones456@gmail.com

QUOTE: The person who never makes a mistake must get tired of doing nothing. - Anon



LIFTING UP OUR EYES

With Rev Fran Breazley

The year 2026 has been named a year of Celebration in the Diocese of Hereford. It is 1350 years since the Diocese was founded in 676AD, under the leadership of Bishop Putta. The Diocese was then part of the ancient Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia, whose king had converted to Christianity 20 years previously.

So how might we celebrate this year, and what exactly are we celebrating? You can find plenty of events listed on the Diocesan website, including Celebration services at Hereford Cathedral and at St Laurence's Church, Ludlow. There will also be the opportunity to take part in pilgrimages in and around Leominster, Much Wenlock and the Golden Valley in Herefordshire, as we remember local saints Eadfrith, Milburga and Dyfrig. And at Hereford Cathedral from March to September there will be an exhibition of the Hereford Gospels, the oldest book in the Cathedral library, which dates from 800AD.

But the hope is that we will also find ways to mark the year locally, celebrating the people, places and faith of our own area. If someone came into our church, for a service or just to have a look round, what would they learn about its past, and about the faith of the people who worship there today? How can we find ways to tell our story and the story of the people who have gone before us? Each church will have different answers to these questions, but each of our individual stories is worth telling, and forms part of the whole story of the Diocese, and of God's work in his world.

Celebrations – birthdays, anniversaries - are often a time both to look back and also to look forward. But we live in uncertain times, and it may be much easier to look back with thankfulness to the past, than to look forward with hope to the future.

The prophet Isaiah who lived in the most troubled of circumstances, wrote these words: *'Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.'*

I hesitate to disagree with the great prophet, yet I am fascinated by history and think that it is definitely something worth spending time studying (and often celebrating). Even so it is possible to become so nostalgic for what is past (perhaps especially the more recent past), that we fail to think about where God might be wanting us to go in the future. The prophet encouraged his people to notice what was going on around them, and to be attentive to God's actions in the here and now.

If we do the same in 2026, it will be different from what it was for Bishop Putta or Saint Milburga, but it will be no less exciting!

Rev Fran

With Lent in mind, this famous prayer attributed to Sir Francis Drake, 16th century, may well be an inspiration ...

Disturb us, Lord

Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves,
When our dreams have come true
Because we have dreamed too little,
When we arrived safely
Because we sailed too close to the shore.


Disturb us, Lord, when
With the abundance of things we possess
We have lost our thirst
For the waters of life;
Having fallen in love with life,
We have ceased to dream of eternity
And in our efforts to build a new earth,
We have allowed our vision
Of the new Heaven to dim.

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly,
To venture on wider seas
Where storms will show your mastery;
Where losing sight of land,
We shall find the stars.
We ask You to push back
The horizons of our hopes;
And to push into the future
In strength, courage, hope, and love.



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
1st February <i>The Presentation of Christ in the Temple (Candlemas)</i>	Holy Communion 10.30am	2 Samuel 15. 13-14, 30 and 16. 5-13 Psalm 3 Mark 5. 1-20
3rd February	Tea Service 2.30pm	
5th February	Messy Church 3.30pm	
8 th February <i>The 2nd Sunday before Lent</i>	Morning Worship without Communion 10.30am	Genesis 1.1-2.3 Romans 8. 18-25 Matthew 6. 25-end
15th February <i>The Sunday next before Lent</i>	Holy Communion and Children's Church 10.30am	Exodus 24.12-end 2 Peter 1. 16-end Matthew 17.1-9
18 th February <i>Ash Wednesday</i>	Holy Communion 7pm	Isaiah 58.1-12 Psalm 51. 1-18 Matthew 6. 1-6, 16-21
22 nd February <i>The 1st Sunday of Lent</i>	All Age Family Worship 10.30am	Genesis 2. 15-17; 3. 1-7 Romans 5. 12-19 Matthew 4.1-11

Our church COMMUNITY



WORLD DAY of PRAYER

Prepared by
Christian women from
NIGERIA

"I will give you rest" Matthew 11:28-30

Friday 6th March, 2.30pm
at
PONTESBURY CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

Followed by refreshments

Everyone is very welcome!



Beetle Drive with **Pancakes**



Tuesday 17th February

**West End Room
St. George's Church**

7pm

£5 per ticket - available from



**Mary 791069
Marianne -
07944 333830**



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

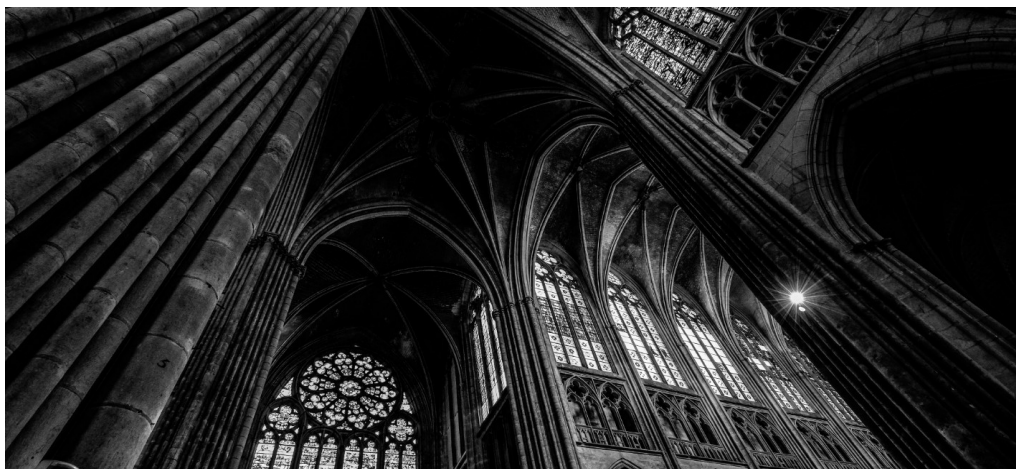
(not August)

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



Rev Fergus Butler-Gallie
talking on his new book
'12 Churches'

With his trademark reverence and revelry, The Revd. Fergus Butler-Gallie travels through time and place to get to the heart of the religion he is so passionate about.

Twelve Churches is a quest for a new people's history of Christianity, told through the stories of twelve churches scattered across the globe. Through a patchwork of interlinking and varied human stories, Butler-Gallie takes us on a physical and historical journey, exploring the role of hope, faith and beauty in Christianity, but also its fraught relationships with sex, violence and power.

The story of Christianity is, he shows, the story of our modern world: it's a story of who we should be, as well who we sometimes are.

FREE ENTRY - BOOK SIGNING - LIGHT REFRESHMENTS



5 February, 2026
7:00 PM



St George's Church
Pontesbury SY5 0PP

www.achurchnearyou.com/church/10689

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

Thank you for bringing some Christmas cheer—
because of your support the Foodbank has been
able to bring some Christmas cheer to local people
in need. We really appreciate all those who donated

items, Christmas Extras and local groups giving us their collections and raffle proceeds. It is very generous and does make such a difference. This year the Foodbank ran Christmas Extra sessions where people could choose what they needed, rather than a prepared parcel. 41 households benefitted, with 32 receiving vouchers for use at Smith's Butchers, The Flower Shop and Hignetts. We also had some new people referred, and we hope they will return during the year.

Word of mouth has proved one of the most successful ways of people knowing about our service. Please do tell others about us and encourage them to come. You can contact us on their behalf and come along with them to their Foodbank visit. Our volunteers are friendly and non-judgmental, and people are welcome to stay for a hot drink and a chat. Taking the first step is often the hardest so please do try us as we know there are more people out there who could benefit from some basics.

Please keep donating in date tinned and packaged food, toiletries, and cleaning products. All donations are very welcome, it is especially helpful if you can check our "Items in Need" on our website <https://reavalleyfoodbank.co.uk/donating/>
Drop them off at Pontesbury Co-op, Village Stores Longden or your local church.

To use the Foodbank, or find out more: Call for a chat with Rev. Greg Smith 07902 794653 or Rev. Richard Lonsdale 07922 830488, or ask your local clergy, GP, school, nursery, social/health worker, housing provider or other support agency. See our website: <https://reavalleyfoodbank.co.uk/> or Facebook.

Looking at GOD

How to Handle Temptation

Canon Paul Hardingham considers the temptations of Christ.

'I can resist everything but temptation' (Oscar Wilde). During Lent we remember Jesus' experience in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11), when *'Hewas led by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil.'* (1). Temptation is a test of whether we do things our way or God's way. After 40 days of fasting Jesus was tired, hungry and vulnerable. Like Him, the Devil will attack us at our most venerable moments, especially when we are stressed.

The first temptation was to turn stones into bread: Jesus' ministry was not about putting His own needs first, but being nourished by God's word. *'We do not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God'* (Deuteronomy 8:3). Like Jesus, we need to make God our priority and trust Him completely.

The second temptation was to put God to the test: Jumping off the Temple pinnacle would have been a dramatic way for Jesus to gain popularity, but this was not God's way! *'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'* (Deuteronomy 6:16). We too need to learn this lesson!

The third temptation was to worship Satan: The devil took Jesus up a mountain to offer Him worldly power. In contrast, His calling as Messiah was to be marked by suffering and honouring God. *'Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only'* (Deuteronomy 6:13). This is to be our experience of living for God.

Jesus stands with us in our temptations. As we claim the promises of Scripture, like Him, we will find strength in the Spirit's power and the victory of the Cross.

Consider these verses:

'Watch and pray, so that you enter not into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.' (Matthew 26:41)

'Since Jesus Himself has endured being tempted, He is able to help those who are tempted.' (Hebrews 2:18)

'Blessed is the man that endures temptation, for when he is tested, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. (James 1:12)

'If you look at the world, you'll be distressed. If you look within, you'll be depressed. But if you look at Christ, you'll be at rest!' (Corrie Ten Boom).

Candlemas comes this month. 'Many churches use candles either as part of worship, or burning in places of prayer within them, and many Christians use them at home to provide a focus for contemplation, meditation, or intercession. What does the flame of a candle remind us of?'

Flame of a Candle by Nigel Beeton

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

Light of faith, of God reminding
As His Spirit, long ago
Lit the first apostles, finding
Faith within the Spirit's glow.

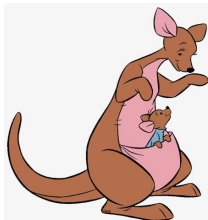
Light of life - God's life eternal
Won through Christ's atoning death
Sparing us from Hell, infernal
Granting us His living breath!

Light of hope, in God victorious
For we know that He will win
When we'll see His flames of glorious
Vict'ry o'er the pow'r of sin!

Light your candle, kneel and praise Him
Kneel and praise the Lord of Hosts;
Let your prayers and praises raise Him
Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.



Winnie the Pooh and Lent 2026



Remember the Winnie the Pooh stories? And Kanga's insistence on Baby Roo's taking his Strengthening Medicine? It's 'really quite a nice taste when you get used to it', she explained, although I'm not convinced Baby Roo always agreed.

It can be helpful to think of Lent as a sort of medicine; an opportunity to strengthen us in the things that are good, rein in other facets of our personality, and reset the compass to the true North of following Jesus. A Spring-clean of the soul, if you like.

Baby Roo (and Piglet on the one occasion he was subject to it) found Strengthening Medicine not to their liking, and we may groan inwardly at the thought of 'giving up something for Lent'. Think of what lies behind this 'giving up'. It's so that we may be strengthened, our character refined, our prejudices examined, our junk thrown overboard, and we may come to Passiontide and Easter more fit to walk the way of the Cross, and rise in new life with Jesus at His Resurrection.

Nor is Lent just a case of giving up chocolate. One year I gave up Facebook for Lent, having spent far too much time scrolling through it each day. It freed me to do other, more constructive things. And instead of giving up, why not take up something you've been meaning to do but never got round to; something life-affirming, something good for God.

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, which this year falls on 18th February. Many Christians go public with their intention to keep a good Lent by being 'ashed' - the sign of the Cross made on the forehead in a mixture of ash and holy oil at a special service that day. The ash is usually the burnt remains of the palm crosses from last year. Having been ashed, the intention of the 40 days of Lent is to maintain a steady course closer to God, symbolised by the giving up of something -like chocolate- which has a hold on us. We walk with Jesus on the way to the Cross, mindful of the 'riches of God's kindness, forbearance and patience' as St Paul has it, and mindful too of Jesus' choice of the Cross as a way for us to enter those riches more fully.

And to face the immensity of that sacrifice, and the immensity of God's riches made available to us in Jesus, we need all the Strengthening Medicine we can get!





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: Isaiah

Isaiah is often regarded as the greatest of the prophets. His name means *'The Lord saves'* and he began his 50-year ministry in 740 BC when King Uzziah died (6:1). Many scholars challenge the claim that Isaiah wrote the entire book, however there are striking verbal parallels between chapters 1–39 and 40–66.

Isaiah spoke during the stormy period marking the expansion of the Assyrian empire and the decline of Israel. The Assyrians destroyed the northern kingdom in 721. Judah was left to decide whether they would make alliances with other kingdoms or rely on God to protect them. Isaiah warns Judah that her sin would bring captivity in Babylon, which eventually took place in 586.

Isaiah sees the Messiah coming from the line of David. He speaks of a new temple being established (ch2); a child born with a new kingdom (ch9) and judging differently to other kings (ch11) as well as the nature of His suffering (ch53). The *'suffering servant'* (chapters 42–53) also applies to Israel as a nation, who are called to be a *'light for the Gentiles'* (42:6). Not surprisingly Jesus applies Isaiah's words to His own life and ministry. eg Is 61:1 is quoted in Luke 4:18. Throughout his book Isaiah presents the full dimensions of God's judgment and salvation as *'the Holy One of Israel'* (6:1), as well as the *'Sovereign Lord'* far above all nations (40:15–24).

Isaiah looks forward to the promise of a new city of Zion (chs 60–66), in which the people offer praise to the Holy One of Israel. *'Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.'* (65:17).

THOUGHT: A word of encouragement can sometimes make the difference between giving up and going on. – Anon



The Seven Deadly Sins: Greed

*'How much money is enough?
Just a little bit more.'* (John D Rockefeller).

In the second of our series on the Seven Deadly Sins, we look at greed. It is the overwhelming desire for *more and more* in our lives. In our consumer culture it can be hard to tell the difference between needs and wants - e.g. buying a new laptop or shoes for different occasions? We need to ask the question: *How much is enough?*

Jesus was approached by a man who wanted Him to settle a dispute about family inheritance. He said, *'Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.'* (Luke 12:15). Jesus goes on to tell the story of a rich farmer who builds bigger and bigger barns, but whose life is unexpectedly cut short by death. He concludes: *'This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich towards God.'* (21).

How do we overcome greed and become *'rich towards God'*? Paul writes: *'I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.'* (Philippians 4:13). Overcoming greed involves learning to be content in whatever situation we find ourselves, in need or plenty. Paul is not saying that there is anything wrong with having food, money or possessions, but these cannot be the primary source of our contentment. The secret of contentment is found in a transforming relationship with Jesus: *'I can do all this through Him who gives me strength.'* (13). He is the one who enables us to overcome greed and know riches.



*'Contentment makes poor men rich;
discontent makes rich men poor.'*
(Benjamin Franklin).



The Big Bash!



JESUS OFTEN TOLD STORIES WITH HIDDEN MEANINGS



ONE STORY WAS ABOUT A RICH MAN WHO DECIDED TO HAVE A PARTY

HE SENT OUT LOTS OF INVITATIONS

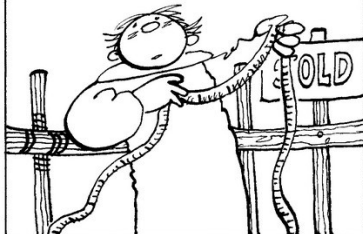


OH!
NO!!



BUT PEOPLE STARTED MAKING EXCUSES

ONE MAN SAID HE HAD BOUGHT A FIELD, BUT NEEDED TO MEASURE IT



ANOTHER MAN SAID HE NEEDED TO TEST DRIVE THE OXEN HE HAS JUST PAID FOR



ANOTHER MAN SAID HE HAD JUST GOT MARRIED - AND HIS WIFE WOULDN'T LET HIM OUT!

SO THE RICH MAN INVITED ALL THE POOR AND NEEDY INSTEAD.



YES - I CAN COME TO YOUR PARTY

THE PARABLE MEANS WE SHOULDN'T MAKE EXCUSES FOR NOT FOLLOWING JESUS.

QUOTE: It costs to follow Jesus Christ.
but it costs more not to. - Anon

Looking at CHURCH, at home and worldwide

Deanery of Pontesbury

DEANERY NEWS

Rural Dean: **The Revd Greg Smith**

telephone: 07902 794653 • email: rectorpontstip@gmail.com

Thought for the month from Rev David Moss:

So it's Lent; what's that all about then?

Stillness? Abstinence? Temptation? Exploring doubt?

Well, yes, all of these – possibly. Certainly the last one, doubt, we should never think this is backsliding or sinful, doubt is healthy. It broadens one's mind, it enables us to explore different perspectives which ultimately strengthens our faith. In doubt, we try to understand what we say we believe. Whereas fundamentalism comes from unhealthily closed mind sets, where there is no room for learning.

But what is Lent for? The Bible doesn't really tell us clearly, we all rely on the account of the 'forty day' period of Jesus in the wilderness where he was tempted by the devil. And this is useful for us, because we are introduced to a 'clever' devil who knows his scripture:

Shakespeare's Shylock in the Merchant of Venice famously quotes:

Mark you this, Bassanio, The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose. An evil soul producing holy witness is like a villain with a smiling cheek, a goodly apple rotten at the heart. Oh, what a goodly outside falsehood hath!

We all know that both Lent and Advent are periods, provided for us, in which we can take spiritual refreshment, rather than earthly refreshment; take time out, reflect, anticipate and explore. Jesus reminded the devil that man needs more than just physical food to survive, quoting back to the devil:

Deuteronomy, 8:3; He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

I'm struck however, by the gospel of Mark and his account of the first 'Lent', here Mark records that the journey into the wilderness for Jesus may not have been an elective one: *'The Spirit immediately **drove** him out into the wilderness. He was in*

the wilderness for forty days, to be tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts and the angels ministered to him.'

Mark says nothing of bread, temples or jumping off towers.... So maybe Matthew and Luke are just refining Peter and Mark's Greek language; or maybe it is a theologically significant point, missed by others. In Genesis 3 the same word is used when God 'drove' Adam out of the Garden of Eden. God divides the world into two: Inside the garden of paradise and outside in the wilderness.

Humanity is cast out to live in the wilderness with the wild beasts. I wonder if what Mark is saying is not clumsy Greek at all but a clever reminder of Genesis and saying that Jesus had to be driven out into the wilderness – where man dwelt – into the confusion and danger; in order to bring him back to the Garden of Eden.

So what if the temptation recorded in the gospels is the Spirit of God leading and challenging Jesus the fully human Jesus, to face the reality of his calling? In other words go out into the chaos and bring man back to the garden.

What is clear from the account however, is that Jesus' temptations and struggles in the wilderness were about clarifying and deepening his life; the subsequent temptations and trials were for a beneficial purpose – not simply giving up wine or food for the challenge of a dry month or a detox.

This life discipline becomes a pattern for Jesus, before or after every significant event throughout the gospel narrative he 'withdraws' often to a lonely place, often described as a mountain. He even takes leave of his trusted friends and goes alone, simply to 'be'; not to 'do' anything.

God loves it when we withdraw and spend time in his presence; he loves the times when we don't fill the silence with words of prayer; in his poem 'Emerging', the Welsh poet R. S. Thomas wrestles with this thought:

I would have knelt long, wrestling with you, wearing you down.

Hear my prayer Lord, hear my prayer.

It begins to appear this is not what prayer is about.

It is the annihilation of difference, the consciousness of myself in you, of you in me...

So Lent... what is it about? Well for everyone maybe it is something different. But why not try to 'withdraw', even for a short moment in our long journey through Golgotha and towards Easter Sunday. Do you know, for me, in my younger Christian walk I never really understood the 'Stations of the Cross' that one sees in Roman churches; but how I would love them around one of our churches, simply to help us focus and reflect on this incredible journey, to sit and ponder; not to try and explain or understand but simply just 'be'.

Blessed are You, LORD of all. Through Your Goodness You bless us in so many ways and your Word reminds us of your marvellous deeds. It is in our spending time in prayerful reflection that we begin to know you and the calling you have given us. As we make our journey into the wilderness of Lent over the course of the next weeks, help us to dedicate ourselves to deepening this relationship which you have offered through Jesus' death and resurrection.



THE DIOCESE OF HEREFORD

February 2026



Letting the Light in: thoughts from
The Reverend Jane Plackett-Ferguson
Chaplain to the Bishop of Hereford

Spring does not arrive cleanly or all at once. It comes slowly and unevenly. The sounds of returning birds herald warmer weather, green shoots appear before the cold has fully released its hold. Even as the days lengthen, winter often still lingers. Spring understands something that faith has always known: that renewal is rarely quick, and almost never comfortable.

For me, spring is forever bound to the weeks I spent sitting beside my mother as she was dying, a season of watching and waiting. In her final days, nights seemed to stretch without end. At around four in the morning, birds would begin to sing outside her hospital window. Their sound floated into the room as we kept watch, fragile and persistent. Slowly the sky would lighten. Family would arrive. Nurses would come in with their laughter, their friendship, their quiet competence. Little by little, the weight of the night would begin to lift, and the light broke in.

The morning my mother died, a dove cooed outside the window. It was an ordinary sound, easily overlooked, but it felt like a sign: God, by his Holy Spirit, had seen us, and God was present within it all. The following day, the weather broke into full spring sunshine. Within days, the trees burst into leaf, bright and astonishingly green. Amidst grief and deep tiredness, life was continuing to unfold, and beauty was to be found everywhere, and yet still, for many months, it was hard to worship, hard to pray and hard to hear God's voice.

The Biblical story never pretends that light appears without darkness first. As we read the Christmas story in the depths of the British winter, Luke is careful not to place God's arrival in ideal conditions, but in a world shaped by political pressure,

anxiety, grief, and ordinary hardship. God's work of revealing himself does not begin with triumph or glory, but with quiet presence in tumultuous circumstances. Many of us recognise that pattern in our own lives. We wait for things to feel resolved before we allow ourselves to hope. We tell ourselves that joy can come later, once the worry has passed or the loss has softened. That we'll return to church when the kids are older, or pray again when God isn't so mad about our bad choices. But Luke offers a different picture. Light appears while things are imperfect and unfinished, and bringing all that mess into the light is what makes it easier to bear. Spring often teaches the same lesson. It does not begin when the ground is warm, but when it is just beginning to thaw. The first signs of life are fragile and (like the camelia in my garden) sometimes thwarted on a first attempt at breakthrough. We might spot a single bud on a bare branch or daffodils appearing in Tesco. These are not signs that winter is finished, but reminders that its days are numbered. Spring has broken into the harshness of winter despite the most unfavourable conditions. This is not a dramatic kind of hope. It does not erase grief or hurry us toward resolution. Instead, it sits alongside what is unfinished. Luke shows us a God who enters the ordinary: long journeys, crowded spaces, tired bodies, uncertain futures. Light does not come to deny reality, but to dwell within it.

As spring reaches its fullness, it reminds us that light works patiently. Each day grows brighter and longer almost without us noticing. Growth happens slowly and quietly. Faith, too, is less about sudden certainty and more about learning to trust the small signs of presence along the way.

Luke's Gospel invites us to pay attention to where light has already begun to show itself, and to embrace it wholeheartedly, no matter how unfavourable the conditions of life. Because, like the signs of spring in the dark of winter, God is here in the world and breaking into even the bleakest of circumstances. This hope is not sentimental optimism, but learning to recognise the presence of God with us, and gently making space again for him to meet us.

QUOTE: We make a living by what we get; we make a life by what we give.
- *Winston Churchill*

QUOTE: Live as if you die tomorrow. Learn as if you live forever.
- *Gandhi*

QUOTE: Great eagles fly alone; great lions hunt alone; great souls walk alone – alone with God.
- *Leonard Ravenhill*

: How much do your readers know about the new Archbishop?

Introducing Dame Sarah Mullally - the 106th Archbishop of Canterbury

The Rt Revd and Rt Hon Dame Sarah Mullally DBE officially became Archbishop of Canterbury on 28th January 2026, when she was legally confirmed at St Paul's Cathedral.



Most people know that she had been Bishop of London for several years, and that she is the first woman to ever become Archbishop of Canterbury. But what else do you know about her?

She was born in Woking in 1962, and is one of four children, with two sisters and one brother.

She attended Winston Churchill Comprehensive School and Woking Sixth Form College. She went on to South Bank Polytechnic and Heythrop College, University of London

She worked as a nurse in the National Health Service, which she has described as "an opportunity to reflect the love of God". She specialised as a cancer nurse and became a ward sister at Westminster Hospital, before being made Director of Nursing at Chelsea and Westminster Hospital.

In 1999, at the age of 37, she was appointed the Government's Chief Nursing Officer for England in the Department of Health. She was the youngest person ever to be appointed to the post. Bishop Sarah was made a Dame Commander of the British Empire in 2005 in recognition of her outstanding contribution to nursing.

She had become a Christian at the age of 16. While working as the Chief Nursing Officer for England, she discerned a call to ordination and entered training ministry at the South East Institute for Theological Education.

She was ordained in 2001 and served her curacy in St Saviour's Battersea Fields, initially as a self-supporting minister, before leaving her government post in 2004, which she has described at the time as "the biggest decision I have ever made".

In 2012 she was installed as Canon Treasurer at Salisbury Cathedral and

three years later took the role as Suffragan Bishop of Crediton in the Diocese of Exeter, the fourth woman to become a Bishop in the Church of England.

On 12th May 2018, Bishop Sarah was installed as the 133rd Bishop of London at St Paul's Cathedral, the first woman to hold the role.

Bishop Sarah sits in the House of Lords as one of the Lords Spirituals, having been introduced on 24th May 2018. Her maiden speech paid tribute to the NHS on its 70th anniversary, telling the Lords: "I am the Bishop I am today because of that first vocation to nursing, and compassion and healing are constants at the heart of who I am."

She was sworn in as a member of the Privy Council in March 2018 and became Dean of Her Majesty's Chapels Royal in July 2019.

As Bishop of London, she led the Church of England's Living in Love and Faith process from 2020 to 2023. This included the formative stages of discernment and decision making which saw the introduction of the Prayers of Love and Faith for same-sex couples.

She has served on the Church's National Safeguarding Steering Group and is also Lead Bishop for Health and Social Care issues.

As a Lord Spiritual, she has drawn from both her pastoral experience and her background in nursing and healthcare and has played a key role in the ongoing debates on assisted dying.

This year, she chaired the Triennium Funding Working Group that developed the Church of England's three-year spending plan that led to significant investments in local churches and parish clergy.

Archbishop Sarah is married to Eamonn, an Irish-born IT and Enterprise Architect who enjoys beekeeping and volunteering as a London tourist guide. The couple have two grown-up children.

Archbishop Sarah has continued her interest in the health service having been a non-executive director at the Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust then at Salisbury NHS Foundation Hospital. And she is Chair of Christian Aid.

In her spare time, Sarah loves cooking, walking and pottery.



The Revd Dr Jo White considers the Christian symbols in our churches.

Reflecting Faith: Breaking' the Word

For the last few months in this series of thoughts, we've been looking at the way that church services are put together. Last time we looked at the reading of the gospel, and how we honour that in our own body language (by standing up).

This month we will move on to 'The Sermon' which is often known as 'Breaking the Word'. This parallels if you like, the 'Breaking of the Bread' which follows later in the service.



The Sermon is intended to be an expansion and perhaps an explanation of the Bible readings that have been used in the service. Often it sets the scene and context for the verses which are set at what often seems quite random and disconnected.

This is particularly true of the Old Testament reading, where not only the verses may be unconnected to readings from previous services, but often they are taken from totally different books; Isaiah one week and Jeremiah another.

So what is the preacher's task here? It was once described to me as: to comfort the disturbed and to disturb the comfortable! That sounds a bit harsh, but when you think about it, isn't that what we really need from our God? When we are in difficulties, whatever the cause, we need to know He's there, and that He has our back, so to speak.

When things are going well for us, then that's a good time to be working on recognising another weakness in ourselves and working towards lessening it. There's no sitting back on our laurels when we work for the Lord.

This month

As we start Lent this month, have a good listen to a few sermons. You can catch them in a church service or even on your computer or phone. Most cathedrals have a website where they record their Sunday service in whole or in part, which you can listen to and take part wherever you are.

How were you before the sermon started and how did you feel at the end – was there something in it that you will think about over the coming week, or was it lovely comfort food? Whichever it was, may it bless you as you prepare for Lent.

God in the Arts

'He gave us eyes to see them' - The Church Font

Open the door of any church and the first thing to greet our eyes is the font. It marks the beginning of Christian life in the church. Many fonts have fine carvings of the seven sacraments that nourish the Christian. Others are octagonal in shape: a reminder of Noah and his seven family members saved in the ark from the Flood.

This font is a symbol of the ship sailing the seas of life. It is in St George's Church, Anstey, in Hertfordshire. Around the font are carved mermen - mythical, pagan creatures that belong to a pre-Christian age which the newly baptised is called on to renounce. When it was carved in the 11th-12th centuries, baptism occurred within eight days of birth. Babies would be immersed three times into the waters of the font: dying to the old life symbolised by the mermen, and rising to new life, to be clothed in a white robe and given a lighted candle as a guide through life. They would then grow up in the church, moving from that west end through the upturned boat of the nave to the altar at the east end.



A photo of the famous mermen font at St George's Church, Anstey in Hertfordshire, by Michael Garlick

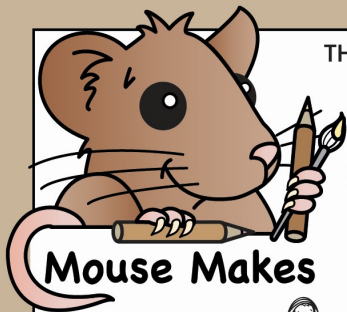
That movement is a sign of the pilgrimage we are all called to make. Like a journey on the seas of this world, we may sail through tranquil waters and peaceful days. There may be times when the skies are cloudy and the waters stormy. Martin Luther, when he was faced by struggles like that in his life, would say the words 'I am baptised' to strengthen and reassure himself. 'I am baptised' we can say as we travel in faith, knowing that there is always a light to guide and a goal that is sure and eternal.

MEDITATION SERVICE

St George's Pontesbury and St Ruthen's Longden are working in partnership 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 silence, and meditate, with **nothing asked of you.**

The next service is at Longden on February 8th at 7pm.



Mouse Makes

Read the story in
Luke 4:1-13



THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS

After Jesus was baptised in the River Jordan where did the Holy Spirit lead him to? v1

How many days was Jesus being tempted by the devil? v2

What did Jesus eat? v2

What did the devil tempt Jesus to turn a stone into? What did Jesus say? v3-4

What did the devil offer Jesus if He worshipped him? What did Jesus say? v7-8

What did the devil ask Jesus to do?

What did Jesus say? v9

FIRST TEMPTATION

THE
DEVIL SAID:

"If you are God's Son order this stone to turn into bread."

JESUS REPLIED:

"Man shall not live on bread alone."

Read Deuteronomy 8:3

WE LEARN:

Read the Bible

Learn God's word.



SECOND TEMPTATION

THE
DEVIL SAID:

"I will give you power and wealth if you worship me."

JESUS REPLIED:

"Worship the Lord your God and serve only Him."

Read Deuteronomy 6:13

WE LEARN:

Put God first

Worship only Him.

1

What did the devil ask Jesus to do? What did Jesus say? v9

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JERUSALEM • TEMPLE • SON • JUMP • DOWN • LIFT • FOOT • LORD • TEST • LENT

THIRD TEMPTATION

THE
DEVIL SAID:

"If you are God's Son throw yourself down, the scriptures say God will take care of you."

JESUS REPLIED:

"Do not put the Lord your God to the test."

Read Deuteronomy 6:16

WE LEARN:

God cares, trust

Him do not test Him.



The world-wide COMMUNITY

4th anniversary of the Russia-Ukraine war

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

At the start of the war, when offered evacuation from Kyiv by the U.S. government, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy famously stated, **"I need ammunition, not a ride"**. The following day, on 25th February he emphasised Ukraine's determination, stating: **"We will be defending our country, because our weapon is truth, and our truth is that this is our land, our country, our children, and we will defend all of this"**.

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

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

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

World Vision has warned that millions of people in the Middle East and Afghanistan are suffering such severe drought, heat and hunger, that the aid agency fears we are reaching a ‘tipping point’. In its recent report, *Children on the Brink*, World Vision reviews the current situation:

- * Iraq’s catastrophic drought has displaced more than one million people in the region.
- * Lebanon has its most severe drought on record, with more than 40 per cent of the people reliant on water trucking.
- * Afghanistan has an estimated 17.5 million people in food crisis, of which two million are in food emergency.
- * In Syria, one million people are rated at ‘food insecure’.

Meanwhile, the West Bank is struggling with “severe restrictions on land and water access, damage to infrastructure, and hunger and malnutrition.

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

“Close to 50 million people in the Middle East and Afghanistan are experiencing high levels of acute food insecurity that threaten their wellbeing and survival.”

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

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

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

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

People are coming to faith amidst the 'darkness' of crises around the world ...

So say several Church of England bishops. They believe that increasing numbers of people have been turning to the Christian faith.

The Bishop of Rochester, Jonathan Gibbs said: “Something is going on. Or rather, God Himself seems to be up to something – way beyond what we as Christians have been doing to share the message of the gospel with the people around us.

“Humanly speaking, I believe this is happening because people have begun to realise that the things in which they had placed their hopes – things like ever-increasing prosperity or the ability of science and technology to solve all our problems – have started to crumble in the face of economic crises, global pandemics and climate change.”

The Bishop of Gloucester, Rachel Treweek said: “As I have listened to the voices of children, young people and adults across this diocese; the voices in Westminster, and indeed in prisons; I believe there is a yearning for certainty amid the turbulence, anxiety and uncertainty, and the endless messaging of crises.”

The Bishop of Chichester, Martin Warner, speaks of joyful celebrations of baptisms and confirmations in his Diocese and new congregation members at Chichester Cathedral.

“A new generation attending Chichester Cathedral have shifted the atmosphere,” he said. “Buggies now take their place alongside the Zimmer frames, to the delight of everyone.”



Looking at YOU

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 stressed disciples in a boat in a storm. Like them, we also get hit by storms in life. And like them, we can know that Jesus is also with us. Why not take a moment to ponder these promises:

- * Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never let the righteous be shaken. (Psalm 55:22)
- * Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14:27)
- * Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4: 6-8)

A religious upbringing helps your health in later life

Elderly people who had a religious upbringing have been found to be physically healthier, according to a recent study.

Scientists believe that one reason may be that they did not use drugs, cigarettes or alcohol when they were young. The data found that such people are reporting fewer difficulties with daily activities such as dressing or washing.

The study looked at older people across Europe, and the results were published in the journal *Social Science and Medicine*.

Many children in Europe who grew up after the Second World War had families who attended church on a regular basis, and who had Christian moral beliefs and values. For many children, this provided a sense of meaning in life, and a sense of belonging. They felt more 'connected', more mentally and physically stable.

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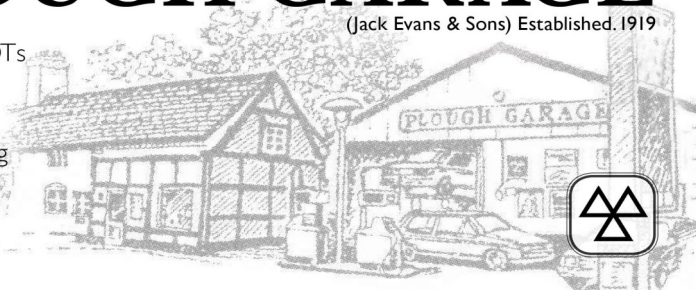


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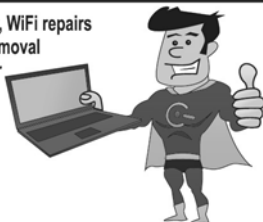
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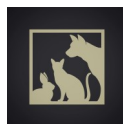
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