



Brookfield News

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No Room? On the Contrary.

All over the world, doors are being slammed shut this Christmas. The closure of the Calais Jungle in the Autumn, which dispersed thousands of asylum seekers and would-be immigrants, brought into sharp focus the story of Joseph and the pregnant teenager Mary, for whom there was no room in the Bethlehem Inn. Vast numbers of Christians forced to flee from their ancient homelands in Syria and Iraq today mirror the Holy Family's escape into Egypt. Every time yet another infant dies violently, it will be a reminder of the first century massacre of babies in the Bethlehem region.

This year one carol will be sung with particular poignancy. It retells

the message of angels, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favour rests" and continues:

Yet with the woes of sin and strife,
The world has suffered long;
Beneath the angel strain have rolled,
Two thousand years of wrong;
And man, at war with man, hears not
The love song which they bring:
O hush the noise, you men of strife,
And hear the angels sing.

The angels' goodwill message will persist despite our clamour, for it proclaims God's all embracing and eternal welcome. Heaven's doors are ever-open: it is home for

everyone. The final biblical vision is of an all-encompassing city: "On no day will its gates ever be shut... the glory and honour of the nations will be brought into it."

Jesus, for whom there had been no room at the inn, taught that God's kingdom is home for every race: "I say to you that many will come from the East and the West, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." He reassured those anxious about the future: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms..."

No room? Don't you believe it!

This Month.....A season for song.....Page 9

Services

Sundays

11.00am Sung Eucharist

"Sunday Supplement" the children's activity takes place every Sunday in the sacristy during the service

Weekday Services

Said Eucharist

Tuesday 7.30pm

Wednesday 9.30am

Friday 7.30am

Saints' & Holy Days

Sunday 18th December Advent 4

6.30pm Nine Lessons and Carols by candlelight with Mulled Wine and Mince Pies to follow

Saturday 24th December Christmas Eve

11.30pm Blessing of the Crib and Midnight Mass

Sunday 25th December Christmas Day

11.00am Family Mass with Children's Nativity

Monday 26th December St Stephen

11.00am Sung Mass followed by drinks in the Vicarage

Clergy Day off: Fr. Guy is off duty on Monday but don't hesitate to call him in emergencies.

The Vicar is usually available in the Vicarage, 85 Dartmouth Park Road, from 8:00pm until 9:00pm on Tuesdays for the purpose of interviews, arranging Baptisms, reading of Banns and Weddings etc. he is also available to hear confessions then or by appointment.

Contents

In quires and places.....	Page 3
Turkey's expansion of Islam.....	Page 3
The way I see it.....	Page 4
Was Jesus born on 25th December.	Page 4
Arsenal has most prayers.....	Page 4
From the Vicar's Desk.....	Page 5
Iranian Christians face lashes.....	Page 6
Thomas Becket.....	Page 6
What sort of cards do you send?....	Page 6
He gave us eyes.....	Page 7
St Osmond.....	Page 7
No one name is big enough.....	Page 8
The challenge of Christmas.....	Page 9
A season for song.....	Page 9
Mary's Christmas.....	Page 10
Santa Claus.....	Page 10
Wenceslas.....	Page 10
Hymns and Readings.....	Page 11
Live church app.....	Page 11

Who done it??

There was an important job to be done and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it.

Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it.

Somebody got angry about that because it was Everybody's job.

Everybody thought that Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn't do it.

It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done.

MARK WILLIAMS

'In Quires and Places where they sing'

'There was scarce a score of persons in the Cathedral besides the Dean and some of the clergy, and the choristers, young and old, that performed the beautiful evening prayer.'

There may have been few attending evensong in the 1850s, in that description by the novelist, William Thackeray. But today such cathedral worship is an important part of the life of the Church of England, and as such, much valued, not just by those able to attend in person, but also by those who are able to listen in on the radio. That weekly broadcast on Radio 3 now attracts an audience of 250,000 people.

In September of this year the BBC celebrated 90 years of outside broadcasting with Choral Evensong from Westminster Abbey. On 7 October 1926, all those years ago, the BBC began broadcasting this service from the same Abbey. It is a remarkable achievement – the longest running outside broadcast in its history!

Those years have seen many variations: Evensong once a week on Thursdays in the 1920s, twice weekly in the 1930s, moving to the Home Service in the years of World War II, and then to Radio 3 in 1967. In April 1970 with the BBC's reorganisation, there were 3 months without Choral Evensong. That gap resulted in 2500 letters asking for its return. Later in that year broadcasts began again on Wednesdays at 4pm.

It has been 90 years of variety and change. In 1993 the first girls' choir sang Evensong from Salisbury Cathedral. In 2002 Evensong was relayed from Trinity Church in New York on the first anniversary of September 11. Then in June 2006 there was even a Jazz Evensong. Amid all this variety, at the heart of the service is the Book of Common Prayer Evening Prayer, bringing to listeners a wealth of choral and organ music, settings of the psalms and canticles, special anthems and more popular hymns.

But it is not just Anglican cathedrals and important churches that have taken part. There have been broadcasts of Roman Catholic Vespers, and in 2005 the Holy Cross Liturgy from the Danilov Monastery in Moscow.

Izaak Walton, in his life of George Herbert of 1670, wrote that the poet said his time 'spent in prayer and cathedral music elevated his soul and was Heaven upon Earth.' We would echo those thoughts as we give thanks for this rich tradition of prayer and praise.

In a famous hymn, Herbert says that no door can keep out the worship of our God and King. Thanks to broadcasting no door can keep out the weekly offering of music and scripture as we tune our radios and become an extended congregation listening to Christian music from across the centuries. Thank you to the BBC for making this possible and for letting the glory of this music transport our lives and move our hearts to praise the Lord.

Turkey's expansion of Islam

Despite the fact that Turkey technically has a secular Constitution, which guarantees freedom of belief and worship, Turkey's authoritarian President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has initiated a programme of increasing Islamisation in the Muslim-majority country. The government has expanded the number of Islamic schools and laws that previously banned women in public roles from wearing headscarves have been overturned. Christians have also reported violent attacks

and threats against churches and pastors.

Historically, the region of Asia Minor was central to the spread of Christianity and in 1914 there were up to three million Christians in what is now Turkey. There are now estimated to be fewer than 150,000.

Today, there are two distinct Christian communities in the country: the historic, non-Turkish communities which existed prior to the creation of modern Turkey and

younger churches of converts from Islam, which have emerged in the last few decades.

Following the attempted coup in July 2016, Erdogan's government began a vicious crackdown on dissent, in which an estimated 40,000 people have been arrested. There were several recorded attacks on churches in the immediate aftermath of the failed coup and believers have expressed concern that there is increasing intolerance toward the Christian minority in Turkey.

THE WAY I SEE IT: The Most Beautiful Story

Earlier this year a well-known atheist was being interviewed on Radio 4. In the course of an enlightening chat he was asked how he spent Christmas, and he said that he went to Midnight Mass at church. 'But you're an atheist', his interviewer protested. 'Yes', he replied, 'but what they celebrate at Christmas is the most beautiful story ever told'.

That 'beautiful story' tells of a Creator who sent His Son to share the life of His creation, to be born as a helpless baby, to grow up as a man of extraordinary wisdom, gentleness and love, who was executed

by the authorities for contradicting the traditions of the time. His followers – who today number about two billion people all over the world – believe that He rose from the dead, and that by His death and resurrection He has made possible forgiveness and eternal life for men and women everywhere.

That is certainly quite a story, perhaps the greatest story ever told, and yes, beautiful. And that is the story that will be rehearsed again this Christmas, in children's Nativities, in hymns and carols, in Bible readings and sermons all over the country. People who stay away

from church all year turn up to hear it, and who can blame them? This is a story of hope, of love and of heaven touching earth.

During 2016 we have all become familiar with probably the best-known statue in the world, Christ the Redeemer, towering over the Olympic city of Rio, His arms outstretched in blessing. Christmas celebrates the birth of that great Redeemer – a tiny baby laid in a feeding trough. His birth changed history, His life transformed our understanding of what it means to be human, His death was at one and the same time a tragedy and a triumph. Yes, 'the most beautiful story ever told'. Enjoy it again this Christmas.

Christmas: Was Jesus really born on 25th December?

Almost certainly not. But the story of how that date came to be chosen as his 'birthday' is one that stretches back long before his birth.

it seems to have started on the Greek island of Rhodes in 283 BC. That year the solstice fell on 25th December, and it was also the year that the Ancient World's largest Sun God statue – the 34 metre, 200 tonne Colossus of Rhodes, was consecrated.

By 46 BC, Julius Caesar had made 25th December the official winter solstice.

In AD 274, the Roman Emperor Aurelian chose the winter solstice to be the birthday of the Sun God. He also decreed that Sol Invictus (the unconquered sun) was 'Lord of the Roman Empire'.

Fifty years after that, and Constantine had become the first pro-Christian Roman Emperor. He wanted the Church to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ on 25th December. Perhaps it was that to him, Jesus was more or less the same person as the mighty Sun God. Or perhaps he felt that the ancient sun god's association with goodness, light, warmth and life would help ease the people's transition from paganism to Christianity. Whatever the reason, the Church went along with it, and chose 25th December to be the date of Christmas. And in an ancient mosaic in the crypt of St Peter's Cathedral, Jesus is portrayed as adorned with sun rays and riding in a chariot – just like Sol Invictus.

As for the huge, bronze 200 tonne Sol Invictus? He fell over during an earthquake, and was sold off

for scrap metal in 654AD by an enterprising Arab scrap merchant. Meanwhile, Jesus lives on...

Arsenal has most prayers behind them as new season is underway

A recent survey of church leaders across the UK has found Arsenal to be the best supported football team in the Premier League.

Premier, the UK's largest Christian media organisation, asked 200 leaders from across the denominations which team they supported. After Arsenal, Liverpool came second.

As their nickname is 'Saints', Southampton may have hoped to have come higher in the list than joint ninth, especially with Manchester United's 'Red Devils' coming in third.

Meanwhile the survey found one in five church leaders has prayed for their team to win, and one in seven has even skipped church to watch their team play.

“Dear Friends...” From the Vicars Desk

Surely 2016 will go down in history as the year when the world went mad. Brexit which as we have seen only today has already led to a huge change in government policy on borrowing and a further tightening of the purse strings with all of us having to pay the cost of the crazy decision the nation took.

Then the election of Donald Trump as the president of the USA, despite not winning a majority of votes. Not only is he a bigot, but he is clearly no diplomat and a tax fraudster. To say that paying no tax for years was because he was clever was to belittle all the ordinary folk who pay their taxes without which the whole country would grind to a halt. Yes we all know that many wealthy people and organisations seek to reduce their tax commitment but to pay none is surely unacceptable for someone who claims to be a Christian! Then to appoint a whole string of his family members as his advisors and to run his business interests is nepotism gone mad.

Is he really going to tare up world trade agreements? It seems so as he has vowed to leave the Pacific agreement in his first hundred days. He believes that climate change is an invention of the Chinese. Has he not looked at any of the scientific evidence or even at the very clear evidence in his own country of a change in weather patterns?

Then to crown it all he tries to

dictate to our government who will be our ambassador in Washington. Had no one told him that unlike the USA ambassadorial posts are not political appointments handed out at the whim of an incoming government. If they did he didn't bother to listen! So what does this presage for the coming four years? It looks very much as if he will try to bully the rest of the world to accept his view of world politics and this will be doubly difficult for us to counteract as we will be outside the EU facing him alone.

All this presages a very uncertain future for our country and one where the church may well have to once again take a lead in social policy and activity as the government are likely to have to focus on other areas of life.

We have of course been here before. In Victorian times the church was the driver of social support and education. Then we were blessed with more financial backing, but I am sure that when pressed into a corner we can take a lead again. It was that social action that drew many to the Christian church then and hopefully will do again. What we must not do is to lose hope or faith in our ideals and standards.

What a way to be entering Advent! Yet this time of preparation is just what we need to be able to celebrate the birth of our Lord and Saviour who is the only one who can guide us to change our lives and the lives of all those around us and to thereby change the world. As we deepen

our commitment in our daily lives and come to acknowledge that all we have and all we do is dependent on him our understanding of the incarnation and its significance for all of us can only grow. Do make sure that you take a copy of our Advent booklet, *Crossing Thresholds*, to help you use this time positively.

We think of Christmas as a time of giving and receiving of presents, sharing of joy within families and peace and joy to the world. But most significantly it is the birth of the most significant person to ever walk this earth. He was both truly human and yet divine, “God in Man made manifest”. He came to show us the way to live and treat others. It is up to us to use what we have learned to change our world for good.

May you have a very happy and holy Christmas wherever you are and may God's blessing be upon you.

Your Parish priest

Over Christmas

I asked a friend of mine what he would be doing over Christmas. He told me he reckoned he would be doing a lot of work on “aqua-thermal treatment of ceramics, aluminium, and steel under a constrained environment.”

I was astonished – and baffled.

In further conversation, I learned that he would be “washing dishes with hot water under his wife's supervision.”

Thomas Becket ± the Archbishop who died at Christmas-time

Thomas Becket was the medieval equivalent of a public-school educated son of a wealthy banker, who eased his way into the ruling elite and quickly worked his way to the top. His assured manner and ready talents were noticed by the King, and Becket was brought into the royal circle. He and Henry II became close friends, hunting and par-tying together. Thomas was even appointed the King's Chancellor.

All was going fine until King Henry needed a new Archbishop of Canterbury, and decided that Becket was a sound and loyal choice. Thomas was therefore ordained priest one day, and consecrated archbishop the next. What the king had not expected was that his favourite courtier would take his vows so seriously.

For Becket was transformed. He adopted an austere lifestyle and began wearing simple clerical dress. But of more concern to the king was that when Church and State came into conflict, instead of siding with the king, Becket sided with the Church. The once strong friendship between the two men was sorely strained so much so that Becket had, in 1164, to flee into exile in France.

He returned to Canterbury in due course, but the rift had not healed. The story goes that Henry was so angered with him that he shouted: 'Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest?!' It might have been a rhetorical question born of anger, but four knights took him at his word.

On 29th December 1170, they

arrived in Canterbury and barged their way into the cathedral. Once inside they found and murdered the archbishop at a spot still remembered as The Martyrdom. Becket offered no resistance, and died with dignity. Within three years he had been acclaimed saint and martyr. Henry II did penance for his outburst, and a shrine to Becket was set up in the cathedral and became a major, and for the monks, lucrative focus of pilgrimage.

At the Reformation the ornately decorated shrine was dismantled and, according to the official story, Becket's bones were disposed of. But rumours persist to this day that the relics were saved, and are still hidden in the Cathedral crypt.

the Post Office wants to send them.

Iranian Christians face 80 lashes for taking communion wine

Three Iranian Christians are to appeal a sentence of 80 lashes for taking Communion wine. The Christians are converts from Muslim backgrounds. The sentence reflects the state's hard-line refusal to recognise the right of Muslims to change their religion.

Now Release International is calling for the Iranian authorities to allow its citizens to choose their own faith and to acquit the Christians. They also face charges of crimes 'against national security'.

Yaser Mosibzadeh, Saheb Fadayee and Mohammed Reza Omid (also known as Youhan) were arrested at

their house church in Rasht earlier this year.

90 prisoners are now in jail for their faith. Many have been beaten and abused. Some have been threatened with death. Iranian officials often target evangelical house groups. Yet the Church in Iran continues to grow, despite being under constant pressure.

What sort of a Christmas card person are you?

The time to send and receive Christmas cards has come round again – time for our annual shock at the cost of coloured card and disbelief at what

It seems there are three kinds of people when it comes to Christmas cards: the total abstainers, the total givers and the selective givers.

Abstainers write 'Happy Christmas everyone' on Facebook, and consider the job well done. Total givers spend a fortune on cards and stamps and send them to everyone they know. Selective givers try to cut corners, but then cannot remember who sent who what, and as the cards pour through their door, spend time worrying...

However you do it, it is good to stay in yearly touch with your widest circle of friends and family. Proverbs points out that: 'Like cold water to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.' Prov 25:25. They will enjoy hearing from you!

'He gave us eyes to see them' ± the church building

The Rev Michael Burgess continues his procession through a church building, this month pausing to consider the significance of the church building itself.

Each month we have been following in the footsteps of George Herbert and making our way through the church building from the entrance door to the altar - pausing at the font, by kneelers, candlesticks, windows, monuments, pulpit, ceiling, bells and choir stalls. They all form part of the church building: a witness to its history and tradition. They speak to us of beauty and craftsmanship, of art and skill, of dedication and faith. We look around. We find our hearts raised to heaven in praise for all we see, and remember Jesus talking about the stones speaking out on that first Palm Sunday.

And when people enter the church building, they become the living stones - filling the air with hymn and psalm, pulling the ropes for the bells to ring out, lighting candles to shine in the dark, kneeling in prayer, and going to the altar to feed on the Bread of life. A church building is an offering, and we, as

Osmond ± an immigrant before Brexit

Feast day 4th December

Osmond is the saint for you if you regret Brexit, and believe that immigrants can actually bring good to Britain. Osmond came to England from France back in the days before EU regulations. It was shortly after 1066, and he was a Norman, following William the Conqueror.

Osmond himself was no soldier,



we worship, make our offering. We set aside time and attention, and bring to God our lives in His service.

All Saints Church in Brockhampton, just south of Hereford, is a wonderful example of the Arts and Crafts movement. Outside and within there is much to admire - including a frontal, hymn book covers and embroidered seat covers that were left on the altar in 1960 by an anonymous donor. They were a thank offering for that church being there and open. It is

but a gifted and godly man, with a great gift of administration. He became royal chaplain, and then chancellor in 1072, producing numerous royal letters and charters for the king. In 1078 he was made bishop of Salisbury. As such, he completed and consecrated the cathedral, and formed such an outstanding chapter and constitution that it later became a model for other English cathedrals.

a reminder of the journey called of us as we become living stones, offering our love and faith and

service for the Kingdom.

Churches up and down the land invite us all to enter and make that journey, both physically and in faith. As Herbert's poem 'The Invitation' expresses it:

'Come ye hither all, whose love
Is your dove,
And exalts you to the sky:
Here is love, which having breath
Ev'n in death,
After death can never die.'

Osmond took part in the preparation of the Domesday Book, and was present when it was presented to William in April 1086. He died in 1099, well respected for his purity and learning, and his lack of avarice and ambition.

Sums up Christmas

Three phrases that sum up Christmas are: Peace on Earth; Goodwill to Men; and Batteries not included.

No one Name is big enough!

Names! Sometimes people are given a name to match their beginnings. As a child of Kenya missionaries, I'm still in touch with an African who was born in the back of our car before my dad could get the mum to hospital. She decided to call her little boy MOTAKA! (Her attempt at 'motor car'.)

Centuries ago, a little boy was born in a Middle-East cattle manger, when a man called Augustus had been ruling the world for around 25 years. But the mother called her Son neither 'Stable,' nor 'Crib' - because the name JESUS had already been assigned from heaven, to match His unique coming world-role as 'Saviour' (Matthew 1:21).

Here is 'the Name above every

name' (Philippians 2: 9,10). And yet no single name is big enough to contain this pivotal Figure of all the ages! Take Christ's four names of Revelation 19 - 'Faithful and True,' 'Word of God,' 'King of kings and Lord of Lords'... and even 'a name that no one knows but He Himself.' (This teaches us never to assume we have the total identity of the Christmas Child neatly bottled.)

700 years before the Birth at Bethlehem, the prophet Isaiah declared, 'For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given.' There then emerged a four-fold Name: Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). Thus, in one Man, lies an inexhaustible reservoir of 'counsel' over life's deepest questions. And - in knowing Jesus - we know

the 'mighty God' in Person! Further - to have the 'Prince of Peace' occupying life's rocking little boat provides a supportive Presence in every storm.

When you read the name 'Everlasting Father,' do not be confused over the Persons of the Trinity. For when Isaiah 7:14 foretells the 'sign' of the virgin with child, Immanuel (a yet further name!), 'Immanuel' then speaks in person: "Here am I, and the children the Lord has given me" (Isaiah 8: 18). The New Testament (Hebrews 2:13) confirms that the words are indeed those of Jesus!

Christ, then, is 'Father' in the sense used by those in Christian ministry, who speak of their protégés as their 'spiritual children.' Thus, the Christ who came to bring us to spiritual new birth is 'Father' to millions of us this Christmas!

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The Challenges of Christmas

Christmas is a great time of year, but it's not without its challenges! One household had 250,000 Christmas lights, but could not boil a kettle for fear of blowing the system!

The challenge of over-indulging

We all remember the episode of the Vicar of Dibley, where she had to consume four Christmas dinners! Christmas is a time when we usually eat and drink far too much, the average person gaining 6 pounds in weight. But Christmas is not simply about gaining weight, but losing what weighs us down. 'Cast

all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.' (1 Peter 5:7). Whatever your concerns or worries this Christmas, bring them to God.

The challenge of overspending

In the rush to buy Christmas cards, a woman bought a pack of 50 identical cards. Without reading the verse, she hastily signed and sent them off, but for one. A few days later she read the message: 'This card is just to say a little gift is on the way.' Christmas is not about getting into debt, but God getting us out of debt. He spent exactly what was needed on the

first Christmas night: 'You are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.' (Matthew 1:21).

The challenge of over too quickly

Christmas doesn't last very long, yet the effect of the first Christmas is long-lasting. 'For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.' (John 3:16). Jesus has come to bring us life in all its fullness, both for now and all eternity.

How do we face the challenges of Christmas? 'Yet what I can, I give Him - give my heart.'

A Season for joyful song

Many people like to sing. No matter what we sound like, there can be a stirring within us on special occasions that prompts us to sing.

In the Christmas story, singing is featured on three occasions. When Mary visited her elderly relative, Elizabeth, she was so overwhelmed with happiness at the forthcoming miraculous birth of her Son, that she burst into a flow of praise.

Her words are known as The Magnificat, and they have been set to music by numerous composers down the years. Mary recalled God's promise that He would rescue His people and, through the Messiah, save the world. So Mary sang of God's mercy and benevolence on the helpless, the humble and the hungry.

The next 'song' came from the angels, on the night of Jesus' birth. They appeared to the shepherds in the fields of Bethlehem, and were full of the glory of God. 'Peace on

earth,' goodwill toward man.'

The final 'song' in the Nativity story came from the shepherds, who hurried to see the new-born baby. They were so overwhelmed by the implications for Israel, that they sang praises to God as they returned to their sheep.

Mary, the angels and the shepherds could not help but sing for joy at the coming of the Messiah. They were the first, but not the last! Since the day of Pentecost, hundreds of millions of people have raised their voices in gratitude, thanks and wonder at God's love and mercy in sending Jesus. Down the centuries, countless poets and musicians have composed music to describe a wondrous moment in history. At Christmas, around the world, people come together to sing carols and other songs that express the wonder of God's Gift to us.

So as we sing carols this month, let's remember that they are well worth

singing! Jesus has given us hope; forgiven our sin; and continues to impart faith and heal our spiritual wounds. Now isn't that something to sing about?

How joining a choir can actually keep cancer at bay

This sounds unlikely, but it seems that singing in a choir can help many cancer patients stay in remission.

The collaborative research carried out by Tenovus Cancer Care and the Royal College of Music has discovered that choral singing can help to increase levels of your immune proteins, reduce your stress and improve your mood - all factors which help prevent cancer from returning.

Dr Ian Lewis, director of Tenovus, explains: "We've long heard anecdotal evidence that singing in a choir makes people feel good, but this is the first time it's been demonstrated that the immune system can be affected by singing. It's really exciting and could enhance the way we support people with cancer in the future." The study was published in *ecancermedical-science*.

Mary's Christmas

As the baby's mother, Mary plays a crucial part in the Christmas story. It all begins with the visit of Gabriel to Mary: 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.' (Luke 1:30,31).

This conversation between Gabriel and Mary takes us straight to the heart of what Christmas is all about. God was doing something unique, that had never been done before! 'God was beginning, at this divine and human point, the New Creation of all things. The whole soiled and weary universe quivered at this direct injection of essential life.' (CS Lewis).

This Child joins heaven and earth in a new way: the eternal enters time and space and pure spirit takes on flesh and blood. God becomes a human being in the baby

26 December Look out for Wenceslas

Most of us probably know that on December 26th (the Feast of Stephen) 'Good king Wenceslas' looked out, writes David Winter. We probably also know that the snow lay round about, 'deep and crisp and even'. Beyond that, he's just someone in a carol that's not often sung nowadays. (Unless you come to St Mary's where we always sing it on Boxing Day)

However, Wenceslas was a real person, a duke, and effectively king of Bohemia in the 10th century. In modern terms, he was Czechoslovakian. He was known as a generous and kind monarch, deeply Christian and given to good

Jesus. It reminds one of the sci-fi film in which a team of surgeons are shrunk to the size of blood cells and injected into the veins of a patient to perform lifesaving surgery. The Christmas message affirms that God has entered the bloodstream of humanity to put things right with Him.

God chose an unknown, frightened teenage girl to bring about this new beginning for all of us. Her response is the pattern for us, as we welcome God's special gift into our lives this Christmas: "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." (Luke 1:38).

Mary gave an unqualified Yes to all that God wanted to do in her life. It was a costly decision, which risked both shame and scandal. Yet she was ready to obey God and trust His plans for her life, despite her many questions. Is the same true for us this Christmas?

works. So the story in the carol by the Victorian hymn-writer J.M. Neale, while possibly fictitious, is at least in line with his recognized character. 'Page and monarch' braved the 'bitter weather' and the 'cruel wind's wild lament' to take food and fuel to a poor man living rough.

Neale's carol was enormously popular in the 19th century, because it perfectly expressed Victorian Christian ideals of benevolence and alms-giving. Christian men of 'wealth and rank' are urged to help the poor, and so 'find blessing'. Ignoring the 'wealth and rank and men' bit, it's still good advice, at Christmas or any other time.

Who is 'Santa Claus'?

On the whole British people are happy with the title 'Father Christmas', a suitably neutral name for the central character in children's Christmas-
es, writes David Winter.

In America, however, and by a process of cultural indoctrination increasingly in other English-speaking countries, the same red-coated and bearded fellow with his sack of presents is known as 'Santa Claus'. They are, of course, one and the same person, distantly related to a bishop in Turkey in the fourth century (hence the red coat and hat – a cope and mitre originally). His name was Nicholas, and he was known as a patron of children, who would from time to time distribute gifts to them.

From that, believe it or not, comes the practice of giving presents at Christmas. We can't give them to Jesus on his birthday, so we give them to someone else, in love and gratitude. That, at least, is the theory. Quite how the massive commercialization of such giving developed probably owes more to smart marketing than Christian generosity.

It's not Nicholas's fault, of course, nor of the Dutch Christians who took the practice to America as migrants 300 years ago. It might be a positive step at least to tell children who St Nicholas is, and perhaps even to mark his feast day, December 6th, when 'Christmas' presents are handed over in Holland

How odd

Christmas is weird - what other time of the year do you sit in front of a dead tree and eat sweets out of your socks?

Hymns and Readings

December 4th Advent 2

Readings Isaiah 11: 1-10

Psalm 72

Romans 15: 4-13

Matthew 3: 1-12

Hymns 5 Hark a herald voice
12 On Jordans bank
7 Hills of the north rejoice
8 Lift up your heads

Sidesperson: Rob Nesbitt

Readers: Carol Kenning, Nick Bethune

Intercessions: Ian MacGregor

December 11th Advent 3

Readings Isaiah 35: 1-10

Psalm 146

James 5: 7-10

Luke 20: 27-38

Hymns 18 Ye servants of the Lord
3 Come thou long expected Jesus
16 Wake O wake
15 The Lord will come and not be slow

Sidesperson: Elizabeth Oyedemi

Readers: Lucy Boyd, Denise Sealy

Intercessions: Bill Saunders

ChurchLive brings worship to the smart-phone generation

A year-long project allowing people to access live streamed Church of England services on mobile phones has attracted more than 40,000 viewers.

ChurchLive was a scheme launched by the Church of England in partnership with Twitter UK. The project broadcast a range of church services via Twitter's Periscope app – from traditional carols to a blessing of the surf at Hove Beach in Sussex and a service in a tent at Glastonbury Festival.

A total of 53 churches took part, broadcasting around 60 hours of worship. On average, each service has been viewed on around 750 screens, including mobile phones, laptops and tablets, or at least 40,000 screens over the year.

The project provided a first taste of worship, prayer and preaching for people unfamiliar with Church of England services.

December 18th Advent 4

Readings Isaiah 7: 10-16

Psalm Magnificat

Romans 1: 1-7

Matthew 1: 18-end

Hymns 6 Hark the glad sound the saviour comes
17 When came in flesh
9 Lo he comes
10 Long ago prophets knew

Sidesperson: Nick Bethune

Readers: Nicky Pittam, Rob Nesbitt

Intercessions: Lucy Boyd

December 24th Midnight Mass

Readings Isaiah 9: 2-7

Psalm 96

Titus 2: 11-14

Luke 2: 1-14

Hymns 32 O little town of Bethlehem
42 While shepherds watched
29 It came upon a midnight clear
30 O come all ye faithful
26 Hark the herald angels sing

Sidesperson: Mark Williams

Readers: Rosie Price Timmins, Joe McKenzie

Intercessions: Carol Kenning

Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus

The teacher asked her Sunday School class to draw pictures of their favourite Bible story. She was puzzled by Kate's picture, which showed four people on an airplane. She asked her which story it was meant to represent. "The Flight to Egypt," was her reply.

Pointing at each figure, the teacher ventured: "That must be Mary, Joseph, and Baby Jesus. But who's the fourth person?"

"Oh," explained Kate happily, "that's Pontius - the pilot!"

Thanks

"Thanks very much for the beautiful jumper," said Charles, kissing his grandmother dutifully on the cheek.

"Oh, there's nothing to thank me for," she murmured. "That's what I thought, but Mum said I had to."

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For your prayers

PRAYER CALENDAR FOR MONTH OF DECEMBER 2016

4th Bellgate mews
11th Boscastle Road
18th Chetwynd Road
25th Churchill Road

SAINTS & HOLY DAYS

3rd Francis Xavier
4th Second Sunday of Advent
6th St Nicholas

7th St Ambrose
**8th The Conception of the Blessed
virgin Mary**
11th Third Sunday of Advent
13th St Lucy
14th St John of the Cross
18th Forth Sunday of Advent
24th Christmas Eve
25th Christmas Day
26th St Stephen
27th St John the Evangelist
28th Holy Innocents
29th St Thomas Becket