

The background of the cover is a deep blue gradient. In the upper half, several white doves are depicted in flight, with a bright starburst effect emanating from the center. The lower half features a silhouette of a hill with figures of the Three Kings, shepherds, and oxen, set against a warm orange and yellow glow. A church steeple is visible on the left side of the hill.

St James  
Church  
TAUNTON

# St James Church Magazine

*December 2023 - February 2024*



## Letter from the Vicar

Rev Fabian Wuyts

Vicar of St James

### Choosing to get close

We are approaching the time of year when we celebrate the choice God made to get close to us. In Jesus, God fully clothed

himself with humanity in sheer vulnerability. The one who is the source of the whole created order, chose to be born in humble conditions away from public eyes. The King chose to come and to reveal himself to the least and the last - poor shepherds with no influence and foreigners from the



east. The one who has all authority chose to become a refugee, fleeing the oppressive and bloody regime of King Herod. In Jesus, God chose to connect with the poor, the humble, the foreigner and the refugee.

God's choice to dwell among us challenges us to follow the unglamorous path of self-giving that Jesus shows us. How that works out in practice in our own lives and the life of our parish is for us to choose with the help, guidance and strength of God's Holy Spirit. I am grateful for those at St James' who are committing their time, skills, energy, money or prayer to local charities like Besom, Open Door and Foodbank. Others are choosing to be a presence in our community through street pastors and the chaplaincy team. Still others are supporting the most vulnerable at St James Church School through the reading and mentoring schemes. I am also grateful to those who have raised funds for Acts Uganda, Tearfund and Foodbank. Finally, I am grateful to all of you who, through giving financially to the life of St James' Church, are contributing to local and international



charities that work with the least, the last and the lost (at least 10 percent of our annual income goes to charities). There is much to celebrate in our common life!

With the year 2023 coming to an end and the year 2024 just around the corner, may we continue to respond willingly and gladly to the unglamorous path of self-giving. May our words, actions and our whole life reveal something of the character and intentions of the Creator towards the least, the last and the lost.

Wishing you all a Merry Christmas 2023 and a Blessed Year 2024.

Fabian

### *A unique step of faith*

It was a joyous day in Wells Cathedral on Saturday, 4 November when 86 people were confirmed by Bishop Michael, Bishop Ruth and Bishop Christopher - there were so many, fitting them all in the group photo was a bit of a challenge!

Bishop Michael said, "What an amazing afternoon. It has been such a privilege to be with so many different people, each with their own story, each taking their unique step of faith and looking forward to the future together. We are all on an amazing high as a result of it."



## What's in the Magazine...?

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*Many thanks to all the contributors to this edition of the Magazine. If you have something to share for the March - May '24 edition, do contact the Editor either directly or through the Church Office - details on page 36.*

***Deadline for copy is Tuesday 13th February 2024***



If you're reading this in December, then Christmas is on its way! See opposite for information about our Advent and Christmas services. But it will soon be 2024 and plans are in place for a new Alpha course - for details see page 27.

Bishop Ruth is leaving the Diocese. In her November letter (in Manna) she wrote about remembrance (being re-membered) and reconciliation. During this time when many wars rage around the world, it seems timely to think on these things. See also Marilyn's article about Israel and a prayer for the Middle East (pages 22-23). Perhaps James Haddell's practical applications for Christian Mindfulness may help as we try to make sense of events and our place in them (page 18)

Ruth has collected some views of our Harvest meal - done differently this year as hosts fed guests in informal gatherings at home or in the hall. Taunton Chaplains have been in court (page 8) and Richard Carpenter explains his role as Lay Dean (page 35).

There are more articles from which to take comfort and inspiration as well as some of our 'regular' updates in various areas. Thank you to all who have contributed.

If you have comments about any of the articles in the Magazine, do email the Editor - [dancingdoyle@sky.com](mailto:dancingdoyle@sky.com) - I'd love to hear your views.

Ed.

*Once you've read the magazine, do feel free to give it to someone who otherwise might not get to see it. The magazine is also published online. Please let friends and neighbours know how they can access this and previous editions through the*

*St James website: [www.stjamestaunton.org](http://www.stjamestaunton.org)*

*The views expressed in the magazine may not necessarily represent those of the Editor or those of St James Church*





# Christmas @

St James  
Church  
TAUNTON

**Sunday 3rd December**

*10:30am Messy Christingle*

*An all age experience to get into the spirit of Christmas*

**Tuesday 5th December**

*7pm Chaplaincy Carol Service @ St James*

**Sunday 10th December**

*10:30am Advent 2 @ St James - God is patient*

**Sunday 17th December**

*10:30am Advent 3 @ St James - God will do it*

*6pm Carol Service - a magical moment with candle light and mince pies!*

**Sunday 24th December**

*10:30am Advent 4 @ St James - Good News*

*3pm Crib Service @ St James - fun for all ages*

**Monday 25th December**

*10:30am Christmas Day @ St James -  
unwrapping the Christmas gift*



[www.stjamestaunton.org](http://www.stjamestaunton.org)

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Main image courtesy Kevin Tuck, rgbstock.com





DIOCESE OF  
**Bath & Wells**

Living the story. Telling the story.

**Letter from Bishop Michael, Bishop of Bath and Wells**

## **A unique story**

When I speak to my Mum on my birthday, she often recalls to me the events that surrounded my arrival in the world. These include nearly being born in the hospital lift, my older brother being smuggled in to see me under my dad's overcoat and of various aunts sneaking onto the maternity ward out of visiting hours by wearing their WRVS uniforms.

Each of us has a unique story about our birth. At Christmas we'll be recounting once again the story that we share about another birth - the birth of Jesus. Across the world we'll be re-telling and re-enacting what happened in Bethlehem more than 2000 years ago. We'll recall the journey of Mary and Joseph, the birth in the stable, the arrival of the shepherds, the song of the angels, the visit of the Magi.

Our own birth stories are unique to each of us. Jesus's is common to us all. And not just because we all know about it. For in our recollection of Jesus' birth, we'll also be remembering that in him, God came to be at one with us. In Jesus God arrived to share fully in our humanity, experiencing complete solidarity with every aspect of our human condition. Jesus is 'God with us' – in trenches in Ukraine, bomb shelters in Israel and Gaza, in hospital wards where loved ones die, in relationships where there is conflict and distress.

Just as much as he is with us in our greatest joys and our deepest woes, Jesus is also for us. One of the earliest teachers of the Church said this: 'He became what we are so that we might become what he is.' The baby born in Bethlehem stands with us not only in all that we experience. This child also comes to offer us the possibility of opening every part of our lives to the transforming power of God's life of love and joy and peace. He comes so that every day we can become a little more like him.

This is the good news of Christmas and may it be yours this year.

A very Merry Christmas to you all.

Every blessing  
Bishop Michael



*I thought it was worth printing Bishop Ruth's letter from the November 'Manna'. Please also see Marilyn Gibson's reflections and also the prayer for the Middle East on pages 22-23 - Ed.*

### **Time to re-member**

I am shortly leaving Bath and Wells for a time to serve as interim Acting Diocesan Bishop in the Diocese of Coventry. You may know that the city of Coventry saw some very heavy shelling during World War 2, which resulted in the destruction of the Cathedral.

A new Cathedral has since been built and stands alongside the old ruin as a testament of hope. Though different in style, there's a harmony of old and new. It shows us where conflict can destroy, peace can be found as we seek to live together as the people of God.

This marrying of modern and traditional styles of architecture, helps us to consider how we fashion the life we are called to live as Christians in our communities. It is not that we put aside our differences nor require others to conform to our own shape or form. Rather we recognise the value of listening fully to others and learn to hear the voice of God. Determining to value the worth of each contribution and discerning together a faithful walk with God.

This season of Remembrance encourages us to look back and to value the contributions of those who have gone before us, giving their lives in the service of others. It is not about glorifying the concept of war and conflict but the desire to establish a peaceful world for all. As we look back, so we are invited to look forward and commit to establishing a world where all have a place and where the Prince of Peace, Jesus, is our example.

Coventry is the home to the Community of the Cross of Nails. A community of reconciliation based around the cross fashioned by iron nails found within the ruins of the Cathedral following the fire. Its mission is to live out the practice of peace-building, encouraging people across the world to learn to be reconciled with themselves and one another, as they find reconciliation with God, through Christ.

As I leave here, I do so with plenty of memories, many happy, occasionally sad. Often the latter are those where I have got things wrong and failed to live up to my calling to be the grace-filled child of God I long to be. So, if I have let you down, I am sorry and please pray for me, as I will for you, that God continues to reconcile us to Himself and to one another.

And as we hold our acts of remembrance this month, may we become re-membered (put back together), as the people of God.

**Bishop Ruth**



## Taunton Chaplains in Court...!



Nearly 40 local Christians drawn from 19 different churches in the Taunton area volunteer with Taunton Team Chaplaincy in order to share the love of Jesus with the residents, employees and visitors in the town. They engage with thousands of people who work in offices and shops or live and work in care homes, those who work and pass through Taunton railway station or walk at the nearby Obridge flyover.

They support the homeless and marginalised and greet people in the parks and open spaces. Some of our team have the privilege of coming alongside police officers and staff, uniformed young cadets and armed forces veterans. Most recently, we accepted an invitation to provide chaplaincy in Taunton's Magistrates court centre.

The request came from the Courts, and the Chief Usher was so excited when we made the first tentative visit to say we were willing to find out what they wanted by way of chaplaincy, that she greeted us saying, 'Fantastic! Can you start tomorrow?'



The courts recognised the distinctive and inclusive presence of chaplains; listening, caring and praying, meeting people where they are in times of great need and accompanying them on their journey.

You don't need any previous chaplaincy or legal experience. You don't need to be ordained or of any particular denomination or tradition. You do need to have a love for Jesus and spiritual and emotional maturity, to be willing to go beyond your comfort zone, to be able to listen without fixing, accompany without judging and live and share the presence of God's love within the courts.



*Rev Kate Sax and Rev Michael Hayes ready to start work at the Court.*

Some of the situations you might encounter include listening to peoples' worries and fears as they wait for their cases to be heard; helping people who have low level of literacy to read the legal documents, listening to the hard-pressed and over-busy court staff and offering them support; caring for families whose loved ones have been sent to prison, signposting people to agencies such as Foodbank when they need that help.



In 18 months of weekly visits we have prayed with many people, heard testimony of chaplaincy encounters making a real difference and had Scriptures kindly donated to us by the Good News for Everyone team, enthusiastically received by some very unlikely characters.

Three fully robed and wigged judges approached us at an event a year into the work, demanding to have chaplaincy extended into the Crown Court complex at Shire Hall. We'd love to respond, but, despite our best efforts to minimise costs, we are struggling to sustain what we already offer.



There are more openings for chaplaincy than we have volunteers to fill and, in the wake of Covid, our funds are diminishing. Yet we don't believe God is calling us to hold back.

We are one of many expressions of the Gospel of Jesus made by The Church in Taunton to our community. We offer training and support and underpin all that we do with prayer. Thank you for your support in whatever way you can give it.

Adrian  
Prebendary Adrian Prior-Sankey MBE  
Lead Chaplain



(To find out more about the Taunton Town Chaplains, talk to Adrian or go to the website: <https://www.tauntontc.co.uk> - Ed.)

# HOT NEWS

**Dave Wilkie and family will be moving in March 2024!**

**Dave has been appointed Team Vicar for Haldon Mission Community which includes Teignmouth and the surrounding area. Half the role is a pioneering one to grow work with young people and children across the area.**



**Dave said, "We're excited about the move. Thank you all for your continued support and prayers."**  
**(More info next edition - Ed.)**

# Harvest: Come Dine With Us... At Home!

13 hosts (10 at home/3 in the hall)  
94 people eating Harvest meals  
with a difference.

So what did people think...?  
Comments from guests and hosts

I really enjoyed our evening but feel it was a shame that the church as a whole didn't celebrate together at harvest time. There are not many opportunities for socialising as a fellowship.

This new twist on the traditional harvest lunch was a great inspiration! We were guests and it was wonderful to meet with people that we have worshipped alongside for many years, but had not yet spent time getting to know on a more intimate basis. The meal was exquisite, with everything thought of and prepared in advance. There were several home-grown components to the meal, which added even more to the feeling that there had been great attention to detail in ensuring our enjoyment of the event. It was a great privilege to be part of this lovely innovation. We all felt that the evening was a great success and shared the hope that there would be more such events in the future. We are tremendously grateful to our hosts, who put so much effort into ensuring the evening was a delight for us all.

The 'Come dine with me' event was a lovely idea. Especially for us being relatively new to St James Church, it was great to meet new people and get to know them a little better. It was very kind of Church family who volunteered to be hosts/hostesses and we enjoyed a lovely meal and conversation. It must have taken a lot of time and care in organising this event, so thank you,

"It was lovely to see so many pockets of close fellowship around the tables in the church hall... chatting, eating, sharing and caring. Serving each other (and Jean, a lady without a home), as our Lord commands"



We thoroughly enjoyed the company of our guests and I'm hoping they felt the same. The conversation flowed very easily and everyone seemed to enjoy the lunch I served.

I really enjoyed hosting my meal -we had a lovely evening sitting round the kitchen table, eating, drinking and chatting - what a great way to get to know people better.

It gave me the challenge of finding food to suit the various dietary requirements and thanks to The Cook Shop in town it got sorted!

St James Harvest  
"Come Dine with me"  
was very different from the Channel 4 programme of the same name, we had lovely guests who were a delight to host. My very special memory was seeing baby Grace perched on her Dad's shoulder while he expertly tackled his dinner, two Toms chatting away together and Martin and Lily trying to set up our grandchildren's airport playset much to everyone's amusement.

As new members at St James Church we were eager to offer hospitality on harvest thanksgiving. Imagine our pleasant surprise when Fabien, Vashti and family, Stan and Celia chose to come to our house in Bradford on Tone. To begin with we basked in a sense of being specially chosen, replaced over time with a frisson of concern about the event going awry. What if the meal was inappropriate or badly prepared; would I be subject to a theological examination and expected to know obscure passages of scripture to prove my ecclesiastical credentials? I girded my loins through an appraisal of my bookcase noting those tomes with concordance or commentary embossed on their spine. I needn't have worried! The meal was a tour de force and witnessing such an array of hearty appetites was itself a blessing. Our conversation was relaxed and focused on families, interests, and activities. A lovely opportunity to socialise and forge new friendships with like-minded people who were as interested as much in us as we were with them. This was a wonderful opportunity for Sue and me to offer hospitality to new friends and is an event we would love to repeat in future occasions.



The idea of targets in our political landscape has been well aired in recent weeks; in particular, those relating to our country achieving carbon net-zero. All that we seem to have left is a legal commitment to have got there by 2050. Everything that might have moved us along the road to that aim has been, shall we say, relaxed.

I fear that these changes, at least in part, reflect a failure of understanding on the part of politicians. As a country our *purpose* is not to achieve net zero by 2050 but rather to pass on a clean and healthy environment to our children and grandchildren. The target is simply a way in which we can measure how well we're doing or have done.

We know that the current situation is damaging to the overall health of our planet. To slow down the rate at which we hope to improve will cause further damage to the environment. Are we putting private profit before the common good? Our planet needs change as soon as possible; doing stuff later makes things get worse. It will cost people more. The Office for Budget Responsibility has estimated the cost of not hitting net zero to be double the costs of reaching it.

Independent monitoring has recently indicated that our progress towards the 2050 deadline is already too slow. It is hard then to see how relaxing our route can do anything but make things worse. We know that it will be the poor, both in our own society and across the world, who will suffer most as a result of a failure to tackle the climate crisis.

As well as this direct harm, these changes send a simple message to polluters – you don't have to do anything just yet; you can leave it all to someone else. It also steps back from any moral leadership we may have had on such issues on the world stage.

One reassuring thought, both the Church of England and our diocese still have a commitment to reach net zero by 2030.

Richard Carpenter

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*See earlier articles in this series about what net-zero actually means and why reducing our (negative) impact on the planet as soon as possible does actually matter.*





## Useful sayings... or jargon?

Clearly in this series of noteworthy sayings, family sayings would get a look in.

Cynthia's father once misspoke a sentence and informed the family he was, *'the most happily unmarried man in Sheffield.'*

My own father used to recite the lines:

*'When I was single my pockets did jingle, now that I'm double they're always in trouble.'*

So there was some common ground!

Dad gave up trying to learn foreign languages when having learnt 'parrot-fashion' how to ask the way to a church in Algiers -

*'Ou-est-la-salle-evan-gel-ique?'*

The gendarme used his truncheon to push his kepi to the back of his head and said casually, *'How you say in the English — 1st right, 3rd left.'*

This family difficulty with learning languages is in the genes as I managed to fail O level French three years running, but each year I got 35%; so I claim I achieved CONSISTENT failure.

The gospel halls on Merseyside of my youth had their own vocabulary of phrases that were often repeated without thinking.

*'Father, we pray for our Brother who has been laid on one side in a bed of sickness these last 4 weeks.'*

Did no-one go round to his house and clean up the bed?

Another phrase, used almost as a certificate of acceptability, was, *'He was brought up on Assembly lines'*, implying he was sound in his doctrinal beliefs: in my early teens this always brought to mind a picture of Ford's Dagenham car plant.

But we all use stock phrases and never think of how people hear them. English today has a very different vocabulary from the mid 20th century. In the 80's I did a six month church leaders' training course (Masterlife). One of the exercises was to give a three minute account of how you came to faith and to do so without using Christian jargon. One member of the group had real difficulty doing this. It became a running joke in the class that Allan could not get even 30 seconds into the account before jargon made its appearance.

Part of giving our testimony (ah-jargon!) is to try to pack a full account of the Gospel into it. Sometimes less is more. To quote another phrase from my youth,

*'Always give them the sincere milk of the word.'*

To which my father would add, *'But make it condensed.'*

Andrew Wright

# Wilder Churches

Winter: a time to appreciate, dream, plan...or maybe you'd rather hibernate?

Looking back over the years since we began eco-friendly changes to the church grounds, we have tried to balance the needs of the Church and the local community as well as the wildlife.



The grounds have been used for a variety of events and activities:

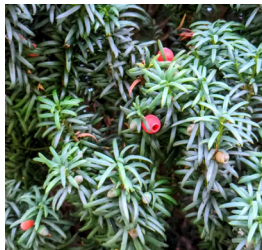
- worship
- trails
- celebrations
- children's activities
- school visits and,
- in September, the Prayer Day including the special prayer cairn with flowing water.



We have managed the site to encourage wildlife too, with new mowing regimes and an expanding number of habitats to increase and support biodiversity. A small group is looking at new ways to make our churchyard more welcoming.

**I wonder if you have ideas?**

Please give us your thoughts: see Lyn Jones, Dave Wilkie, Martin Wakefield, Norman Bambridge or me (Sue). Meanwhile let's appreciate what we have!



Our churchyard isn't quite a woodland but we do have a lot of trees! They are mainly evergreen including yew, cyprus and holly. Younger trees feature too, for example rowan, birch, hazel and ash.

Forestry England have a useful website with ideas for enjoying trees and forests. Here are some extracts from their well-being section:



*'Look for repeating patterns called fractals. Fractals are found in leaves, ferns, the branches of trees, snowflakes and on teasel heads and pinecones. Our brains respond positively to fractal patterns in nature which lowers stress and mental fatigue. Trees lower our blood pressure, reduce inflammation and enhance our mental wellbeing. Phytoncides, essential oils emitted into the air by trees, increase the number of natural killer cells in our bodies which strengthens our immune system!'*



*'Connecting with trees and nature lowers levels of the stress hormone, cortisol, helping us feel more relaxed. Trees are like a community, helping each other grow. They are able to exchange water and nutrients through the fungal root systems that link them underground. This is often called the 'Wood Wide Web'.'*

Free family activity sheets are available on the Forestry England website (I'll be recommending for grandchildren!) and there are lots more ideas for everyone. Go to:

<https://www.forestryengland.uk/article/forest-activity-sheets>  
or use this qr code



Sue Carpenter

## Why King Charles never throws cake away

King Charles is on a mission to tackle food poverty and rising food waste. It is said that he and the Queen eat daily slices from the same cake until it is finished, as part of a drive to curb their personal food waste. As for the nation, the king has been increasingly concerned that in the UK, 12 million tons of food is thrown away each year - even though almost three quarters of it could still be eaten, according to experts. In contrast, an estimated 4.7million people are living in food poverty.

To combat this problem, King Charles has launched The Coronation Food Project, to coincide with this, his 75th year. Up to eight new food hubs around the country will store food, prepare it, and package it, before redistributing it to organisations like food banks and community kitchens. The long-term goal is to circulate 200 million meals a year.

In the meantime, King Charles is careful not to throw his cake away. Is there one simple thing you could do in your own kitchen this Christmas, to curb your personal food waste?



# GIFTS

Some verse beats plain,  
Sometimes a rhyme.  
How beats God's heart  
which is both

in and out

of our time?

Human hearts seek God to varying degree,  
but who's to judge? On a complete scale  
we're all equidistant from God, more or less.  
For whom the breath of the Holy Spirit falls,  
not one of us can foretell.


It's a short gap from street to church door.  
Fans walk past, head down to the match.  
Here we know one player who never fails,  
someone who will always bat for you.  
When you need strength on your team  
Jesus stands at your front door and knocks.

You see the gap twixt land and sky?  
That's the universe folks, but beware,  
a juggernaut comes with climate change.  
So, when science seeks workarounds  
and their clever solutions fail,  
can a climate of faith help mankind's travail?

When God seems distant and we feel  
lost and weary, the greedy world  
hisses, 'Back off, you're safe with us.'  
Thereby love is pushed to the shadows.  
Yet no one is lost for Jesus, who says,  
"I'll share your burden and give you rest."

In words of today,  
Jesus might say,  
"It's a partnership thing:  
If I hear your voice, please hear mine,  
my still, small voice in the ether divine."





I searched for words to finish this piece,  
then by chance meet a man at the coast.  
We share delight over a meadow of wildflowers.  
Like people, the flowers seem to stand  
frail but stubborn against global winds.  
When the stranger leaves,  
he turns and says, "God Bless."

He says he often walks this way  
then takes the path ahead.  
Twice he stops to look down.  
Is he praying? Is he an angel  
in disguise? Then my mind recalls  
a parable about heaven

Jesus told: treasure buried in a field,  
a pearl of great price for those who find it.  
Perhaps when our prayers and God's grace meet,  
in some extra-ordinary way  
His light shall enter our soul,  
sweet descant to creation's song,  
gifts undeserved, so right for **our** time.

Andy Hall

## Practical Applications for Christian Mindfulness

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Recognize that not everything is within your control. Embrace the fact that God is in charge, and surrender your anxieties to Him.

Focus on the present moment. Instead of worrying about tomorrow, embrace today and trust that God's grace is sufficient for each day.

Start or end your day by listing things you are thankful for. It could be the love of your family, the beauty of nature, or the gift of a new day. Gratitude shifts your focus from worries to blessings.

Take a moment to watch the birds outside your window or take a leisurely walk in nature. As you observe the beauty around you, remember the lilies mentioned in this passage<sup>1</sup>. Reflect on the Creator's care for all His creation, including you.

**Gratitude for Simplicity:** Cultivate gratitude for the simple and beautiful things in life. Perhaps it's a single flower on your windowsill or the laughter of a child. Learn to see God's beauty in simplicity.

Surrender and Trust: When worries arise, make a conscious choice to surrender them to God. Trust that just as He cares for the lilies, He cares for you. This trust is a cornerstone of Christian mindfulness.

Shift your focus from acquiring and competing to being content with what you have. This aligns with the lilies' approach—they grow, they bloom, they flourish without striving for worldly acclaim.

Challenge yourself to live in the present moment. Instead of worrying about the future, strive to be fully present in the here and now. Engage in each moment with gratitude.

Allocate a specific time each day for addressing your worries. During this designated 'worry time', address your concerns, pray about them, and then release them. Refrain from dwelling on them throughout the day.

And lastly, share your struggles and pray for one another. In times of worry, we can find strength and comfort through our brothers and sisters in Christ.

*Some people asked for a reminder of the 'takeaway' thoughts James Haddell left with us at the end of a recent Sunday morning talk. Here they are for you to think about and perhaps use in your daily life - Ed.*

*James says, "Some of them seem like things to do, others seem like ways to think. But all of them are really both because we are holistic creatures whose actions affect our minds and whose thoughts affect the things we do."*

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<sup>1</sup> The passage referred to is Matthew 6:25-34







# Hard words #1 – Postmodernism

What is the answer to the ultimate question of life? We can be sure that (Douglas Adams notwithstanding) it isn't 42. We know that it's relationship with God through Jesus.

But what if someone said that not only did we have the wrong answer but we were dishonest to claim that such an answer could even exist. Doing so would define us as exploitative, even evil. That's postmodernism...

So, *postmodernism*, a word that's used in all sorts of contexts from history to religion to architecture. It typically carries different meanings depending on the context. Here I'm trying to unpack some of what its more general impact on society might mean for us in the church.

Before we think about where we're going, we need to reflect on where we're coming from – modernism.

## Modernism

The successor of medievalism, modernism sprang from the era of renaissance and reformation. Through a focus on the capability of and the need for logic and rational thought, it laid the foundation for the progress of science through succeeding centuries. Indeed, progress itself is very much a concept of modernism. Many came to believe that man could perceive and know absolute truth simply through the rational mind.

Also among its key traits were the thoughts of:

- A consistent and orderly universe
- The power of reason to make sense of a reasonable world
- The possibility and availability of objective, even absolute, truth.

One side-effect though was that there ceased to be a place for God within the world as we know it. He may have created us but by now he's just an absent and disinterested watchmaker. So, as we critique postmodernism, we have to remember that much of modernism carried a profoundly anti-Christian perspective. It was the origin of ideas – if incorrect and indeed illogical – that science and Christianity are necessarily in conflict.

## Postmodernism

As a term, postmodern first occurs towards the end of the nineteenth century, mainly in the art world. Only in the years leading up to the first world war does it become associated with changes in attitudes and beliefs. It grew from a feeling



that technology causes as many problems as it solves and that human progress bears within it the prospect of self-destruction. Optimism gave way to pessimism and scepticism and it also gave birth to much of our customised consumerism: the *'it must fit me'* world.

Simply speaking, postmodernism is the view that says absolute truth cannot be discovered at all, neither through reason nor tradition. A claim to have the whole truth is likely to be distrusted, often seen as simply a way to exert power over others.

A major issue though comes along when situations arise where all that relativism seems wholly inappropriate. As one writer on the topic put it:

*"Can postmodernism hold the perpetrators of genocide accountable?"*  
(Catharine MacKinnon)

## Our response

It has been said that the western church had only just discovered how to answer the question, *'Is Christianity true?'* when people stopped asking that and started to ask, *'Does it work?'* As we meet those of a postmodern disposition, who we are will probably matter more than what we say. Do we show what it means to be *'followers of the way'* (Acts 22:14)? In our lives we stand as a symbol for Christ and through our lives must tell his story.

As we speak out in a world conditioned by postmodernist thinking, we need to reflect as to whether people today are rejecting our message or just the language we use to describe it. We must live and communicate our message effectively. We can't blame our audience if our message fails to get through.

Rather than simply 'broadcasting' its message, the church will surely need to rely more (than it does today) on:

- Story and testimony
- Creative worship attending to all our senses
- Supportive communities at both the church and group level.

Some would say that the primary form of Jesus' ministry as portrayed in the gospels is one of telling stories and giving people the space to think about their impact on them. Is that where we should go?

Richard Carpenter

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*"We live in the postmodern world, where everything is possible and almost nothing is certain."* (Vaclav Havel)

## God's Promises to Israel

As many of you know I have been blessed by visiting Israel many times and have friends there. The Lord has given me a love for Israel and all who live in the land. This has always been based on what God has said about His chosen people and His everlasting Covenant He made with them in scripture - it does not mean that everything Israel does is right. However, God has disciplined them over hundreds of years but never rejected them - Rom 11 v 2 'No, God has not rejected His own people whom He chose from the very beginning.'

Israelis are deeply traumatised and shocked, in mourning and fearful for the hostages and their sons and daughters in the IDF. How they need their God and Messiah, Jesus. There are many Messianic Jewish believers and Arab Christians in Israel and Palestinian Christians in Gaza. All need our prayers that they will be comforted and know God's protection, that their love and witness will bring many to know God's love.

As we are so distressed with all that is happening, may we be encouraged by some of the many promises that God has given to Israel.

*Ps 122 v 4 'Indeed He who watches over Israel never slumbers or sleeps.'*

*Jere 32 v 38 'They will be my people and I will be their God.'*

*Jere 32 v 41 'Yes I will rejoice over them to do them good and I will assuredly plant them in this land with all My heart and with all My soul.'*

*Jere 31 v 37 'This is what the Lord says: "Just as the heavens cannot be measured and the foundations of the earth cannot be explored, I will not consider casting them away for the evil they have done. I, the Lord have spoken."'*

*Eze 36 v 24 'For I will gather you from all the nations and bring you home again to your land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean. I will give you a new heart and I will put a new spirit in you.'*

*Zech 12 v 10 'Then I will pour out a spirit of grace and prayer on the family of David and the people of Jerusalem. They will look on me whom they have pierced and mourn for him as for an only son.'*

*Rom 11 v11 'Did God's people stumble and fall beyond recovery? Of course not! they were disobedient so God made salvation available to the Gentiles. But He wanted His own people to become jealous and claim it for themselves.'*



*Rom 11 v 25 'I want you to understand this mystery dear brothers and sisters. Some of the people of Israel have hard hearts, but this will only last until the full number of the Gentiles come to Christ. And so all Israel will be saved.'*

These verses encouraged me again as I was writing this that, even today, God has not forgotten His people. He is faithful to completing what He has said in His word.

Marilyn Gibson



## **Prayer for the Middle East**

God, rich in mercy and love, we pray for the people of Israel and Gaza.  
For the Innocents, broken, scared, frightened, confused.  
God who weeps with the weeping, have mercy.

We think of those who have lost their lives and those who grieve.  
God who meets us in the darkness of the valley and in the stillness of the night.  
Oh God, meet with the bereaved.

For families shattered and children torn. Oh God have mercy.  
To the injured, bring healing. To the bereaved bring comfort.  
To the frightened bring love. To the weary bring hope.

God of grace, we pray for an end to bloodshed. May peace come quickly.  
We pray that peacemakers may find a voice and offer a way forward.  
Father, have mercy. Lord Christ, have mercy. Holy Spirit, bring hope.

**Amen**

Prayer by Fred Drummond



# ...MISSION



As we approach the festive season, children tend to be on our minds. The story of Christmas is about a baby, a gift from God to the World. The more secular aspects of Christmas also play on our minds as the shops fill with tinsel and glitter, and Father Christmas images beckon and encourage us to become little children again enjoying the sparkle of magic of the season.

And yet for many, Christmas is a difficult time of year, filled with hardship and not hope. So perhaps it is very fitting that over the months of November to February we focus on organisations that bring a glimmer of hope and happiness to children and families that are struggling in different ways.



**In November, *Samaritan's Purse*** will have collected the shoe boxes people packed for distribution in a range of different countries, bringing a little ray of joy and love to children who are struggling in the face of war or poverty, disaster or hunger.

This has been a devastating year for children in a host of countries and while this may seem a drop in the ocean, sometimes small things can have a disproportionate effect.



We also remembered the work of ***Home for Good***, supporting families who adopt or foster and encouraging churches to be part of the vital support networks that can make a difference.

Adoption is at the heart of the Christian message because we are all adopted children of our heavenly Father.



**In December** we think and pray for the work of ***Transforming Lives for Good (TLG)*** as they support teams of coaches and volunteers around the country working with children who are struggling in education. Church communities can provide genuine and consistent support.

Please pray for our own team of TLG volunteers (recently expanded from three to five) working in our church school and the very positive welcome they have received from school staff.

The impact of Covid and lockdown has had negative effects for some children and re-establishing positive routines will take time. Please pray for all schools in our town, for your children and grandchildren and their future.



**January** - Last year we heard how the Bus project, initiated by **Taunton Youth for Christ**, was starting to get off the ground.

It is now established as a feature in Hamilton Park and Priorswood and young people are finding genuine care and acceptance in what is becoming for them a safe space.

Young lives are being changed and there is deepening understanding of the needs of young people living in areas where dysfunction and disorder are a reality. It is a privilege to be able to support this dynamic project.

In addition, chaplaincy in schools both by TYFC and the School Pastors is a really positive way of sharing Jesus' love in the community to young people who would find it very difficult to enter a church building.

So as we contemplate the holy child of Bethlehem, God's own Son let us celebrate the many opportunities we have to reach our younger generation.

Jenny Wakefield

### CHAIRS...?

I was asked this question - why do I volunteer in the warehouse at Besom a few mornings a month? Part of the answer is a concern for needy people and God calling. While you have heard about Besom at church, it is worth noting that they do not ask directly for items, money or time givers. It is a charity that relies on prayer.

Yet members from the church community give items, etc. and some of you have either hosted a Ukrainian family or know someone who has. So those families and others that have been homeless or are fleeing domestic violence, are referred by key workers for help. The time givers include a van team and warehouse team to clean and sort the donated goods.

There is also the fellowship of working with other Christians, praying together in the middle of each morning and seeing the joy of answered prayer. At one point the warehouse looked quite empty and there never seemed to be enough chairs, two rather than four went out with a table. Now there are plenty of chairs with tables going in and out again, plus beds, bedside units, etc. In fact, some racking has had to be purchased to help stack the smaller items safely.

I love being part of God's work, sharing his love with those in need. If God is nudging you to be a part of it too, please speak to Elaine or Roger Fenton.



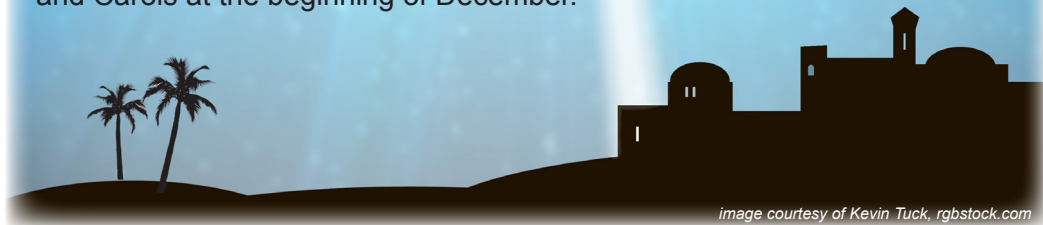
## What's been and what's to come!

You may recall that at our own Harvest Service everyone brought up their harvest gift to a catchy little song called 'The Harvest Samba'. This was borrowed from St James' school's harvest service which took place earlier in the week. As you can see from the photo below, the church was packed to capacity with children and parents as they celebrated with thankfulness the gifts that we have been given. The school had collected an amazing amount of food which was donated to the Taunton Foodbank, an essential organisation for those in need which is always in need of increasing their stocks as winter looms. Well done St James' School!



As ever it's been busy at school since the beginning of term as the children settle into their new classes. Please pray for staff, pupils and parents, governors and volunteers. The school was anticipating Ofsted last year, but it didn't happen so preparation continues in anticipation. Do pray that all the very good aspects of the school will be appreciated and celebrated.

Looking forward to Christmas, there is a buzz in KS1 as preparations are in hand for their Nativity. The church team looks forward to a week of Christmas celebrations when the school will be coming into church for Nativity, Christingle and Carols at the beginning of December.



*image courtesy of Kevin Tuck, rgbstock.com*

Our TLG coaches and reading volunteers from St James' are back in school and the good news is that we have two new volunteer coaches (welcome Sue and Maureen) poised to start soon, and our existing three mentors are already enjoying their sessions with their mentees. Glue, paints, clay, games and all sorts feature in the 'getting to know and working together' processes. We also have a new volunteer reader, Martin D, bringing our readers group up to four. This is such a fantastic opportunity to work with children who are really delightful. If you are interested in becoming involved then please have a word with David Jordan who would love to tell you all about it.

The Revs, Fabian and Dave, continue to visit school to take collective worship on a regular basis, sharing stories from the Bible with the children. Do pray for them on Wednesday afternoons when they seek to engage children with the timeless truths of the gospel. Last, but by no means least, do pray for Vashti in her role as a school governor, which is a demanding one and full of challenges.

If you are an early riser and would like to join those of us involved in prayer for the school, we aim to meet twice a term at 8 am in the Hive – please keep an eye on the bulletin for dates next school term.

Jenny Wakefield

Alpha is a chance to explore  
the big questions of life in a  
non-pressurised environment.

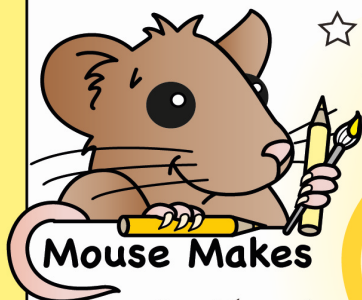
Wednesday evenings  
7.30pm-9pm  
10th January for six weeks  
@ St James Church

Interested about trying Alpha? Get in touch by visiting our  
website <http://stjamestaunton.org/alpha>,  
emailing [info@stjamestaunton.co.uk](mailto:info@stjamestaunton.co.uk)  
or contacting the office on 01823 272931





# Young People's Pages



## GOD'S PROMISE

*Isaiah 9:6-7*

CHILD • BORN • SON  
GIVEN • WONDERFUL  
COUNSELLOR  
MIGHTY • GOD  
EVERLASTING  
FATHER • PRINCE  
PEACE • LORD



## AN ANGEL MESSENGER

*Luke 1:26-38*

ANGEL • GABRIEL  
JOSEPH • MARY  
FAVOUR • SON  
JESUS • GREAT  
THRONE • REIGN  
FOREVER • HOLY  
SERVANT • WORD

**ADVENT**  
comes from  
the Latin  
'AD VENTO'  
which means  
**ARRIVAL**

In Advent we  
celebrate Jesus' birth  
and look forward to  
the time when Jesus  
will come again.



## A LONG JOURNEY

*Luke 2:1-20*

BETHLEHEM  
REGISTER • BIRTH  
MANGER • INN  
SHEPHERDS • FLOCK  
ANGELS • JOY  
GOOD NEWS • PRAISE  
SAVIOUR • CHRIST



## THE BEST GIFT OF ALL

*John 3:16*

GOD • SO • LOVED  
WORLD • HE • GAVE  
ONLY • SON  
WHOEVER • BELIEVES  
ETERNAL • LIFE

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

Colour in one star each day until Christmas

Dec23 © deborah noble • parishpump.co.uk

# Bible Bite

## A short story from the Bible

It can be read in the Bible in  
Luke 1:26-56 & Matthew 1:18-25

In Israel, about 2000 years ago, a young woman, Mary, was going to marry Joseph. The weddings were in two stages.

<p>In one year we will complete our wedding</p> 	<p>Then God's messenger angel came to see Mary.</p>  <p>Don't be afraid!</p>	<p>You will have God's baby, and call him Jesus, 'god saves,' because he will save people from what they do wrong.</p> 
<p>How can this happen?</p>  <p>With God, nothing is impossible.</p>	<p>Your cousin Elizabeth, who couldn't have children, is now 6 months pregnant.</p> 	<p>Mary visited Elizabeth.</p> 
<p>When Joseph heard that Mary was pregnant, he was very upset</p> 	<p>This will bring shame on me and my family.</p> 	<p>He always did what was right so he decided to end their marriage, but quietly.</p> 
<p>But the angel came to him in a dream.</p> 	<p>Don't be afraid to marry Mary. The baby is God's, and you will call him Jesus.</p> 	<p>So Joseph and Mary completed their marriage.</p> 

# Crossword

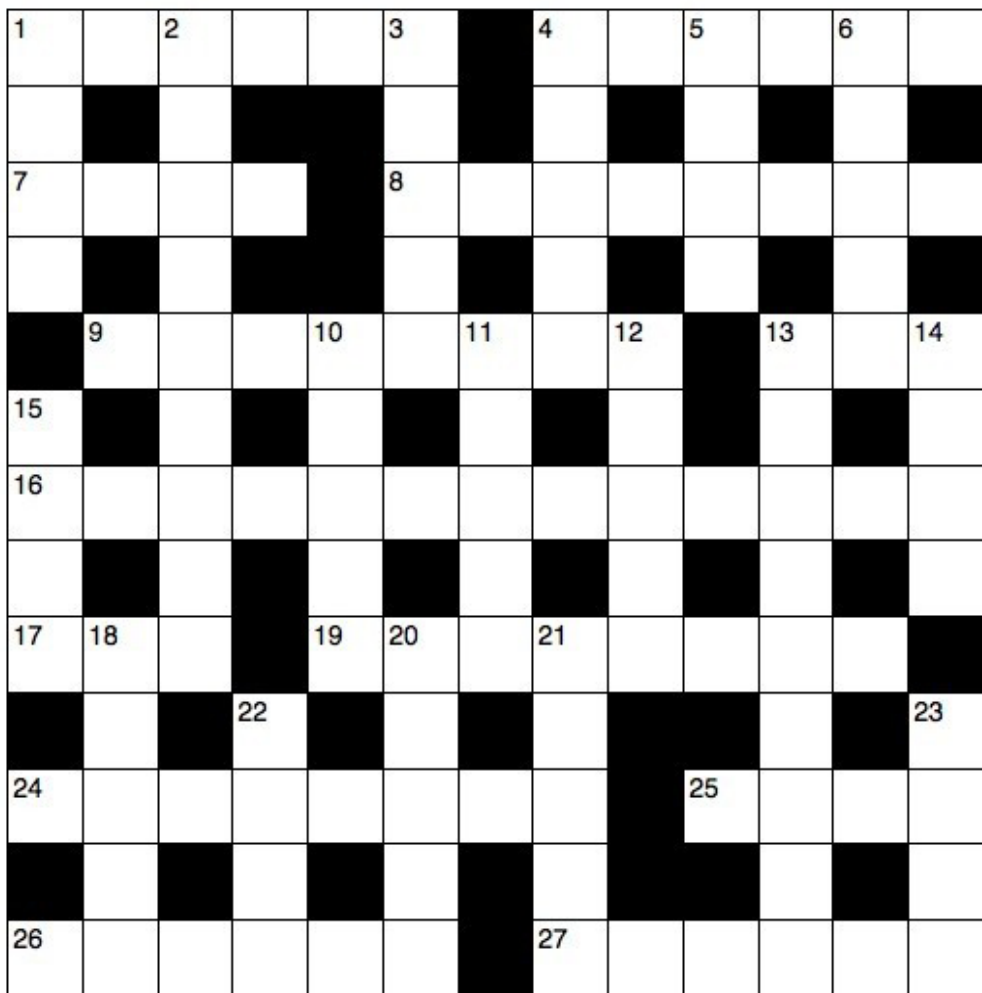
## Across

- 1 Rely (Psalm 62:7) (6)
- 4 'He stretches out the heavens like a — , and spreads them out like a tent to live in' (Isaiah 40:22) (6)
- 7 What the dove carried the olive leaf in, when it returned to Noah's ark (Genesis 8:11) (4)
- 8 Annoy (1 Samuel 1:6) (8)
- 9 Judah's last king, who ended his days as a blind prisoner in Babylon (Jeremiah 52:11) (8)
- 13 'They all — and were satisfied' (Luke 9:17) (3)
- 16 Eliphaz the Temanite was one; so was Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite (Job 2:11; 16:2) (4,9)
- 17 National Association of Evangelicals (of the USA) (1,1,1)
- 19 Popular song for New Year's Eve, Auld — — (4,4)
- 24 Able dock (anag.) (8)
- 25 The number of stones David chose for his confrontation with Goliath (1 Samuel 17:40) (4)
- 26 Elgar's best-known 'Variations' (6)
- 27 Soak (Isaiah 16:9) (6)

## Down

- 1 Money owing (Deuteronomy 15:3) (4)
- 2 Conciliatory (Titus 3:2) (9)
- 3 'Do this, whenever you — it, in remembrance of me' (1 Corinthians 11:25) (5)
- 4 A group assisting in the governance of the Roman Catholic Church (5)
- 5 One of the gifts Joseph's brothers took with them on their second journey to Egypt (Genesis 43:11) (4)
- 6 'Reach out your hand and — — into my side. Stop doubting and believe' (John 20:27) (3,2)
- 10 Be outstandingly good (2 Corinthians 8:7) (5)
- 11 'What — — that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?' (Psalm 8:4) (2,3)
- 12 Horse's feet (Judges 5:22) (5)
- 13 Notice (Deuteronomy 17:4) (9)
- 14 Comes between 2 Chronicles and Nehemiah (4)
- 15 One of Israel's northern towns conquered by Ben-Hadad (1 Kings 15:20) (4)
- 18 Narnia's Lion (5)
- 20 One of the two rivers in which Naaman would have preferred to wash (2 Kings 5:12) (5)
- 21 Avarice—one of the evils that come from inside people (Mark 7:22) (5)
- 22 Knight Grand Cross of St Michael and St George (1,1,1,1)
- 23 Jacob's first wife (Genesis 29:23) (4)





Q. Which side of the turkey has the most feathers? A. The outside.  
 Q. What's red and white, red and white, and red and white? A. Father Christmas rolling down a hill.  
 Q. What do you call Santa's helpers? A. Subordinate Clauses

**Across**  
 1, Depend. 4, Canopy. 7, Beak. 8, Irritate. 9, Zedekiah. 13, Ate. 16, Job's comforter. 17, NAE. 19, Lang Syne. 24, Blockade. 25, Five. 26, Enigma. 27, Drench.  
**Down**  
 1, Debt. 2, Peaceable. 3, Drink. 4, Curia. 5, Nuts. 6, Put it. 10, Excel. 11, Is man. 12, Hoofs. 13, Attention. 14, Ezra. 15, Ijon. 18, Aslan. 20, Abana. 21, Greed. 22, GCMG. 23, Leah..



## ***The PCC has been discussing...***

*Here's a summary of the main things the Parochial Church Council looked at in September, October and November..*

### **Finances**

Richard Sainsbury reported that finances continue to recover, with hall hire income more or less back to its pre-Covid levels. We should be able to increase the amount of Parish Share paid to the diocese, but are not yet in a position to meet the full amount requested.

The contactless payment machine should be arriving shortly.

### **Children and Families Worker**

We have decided not to resume trying to recruit a Children and Families Worker from outside the church. In the short term, we will look for someone within the church to take over Dave Wilkie's role in coordinating Children's Church before he leaves us next year. So we need to pray and see if God has someone in mind! The next step is to meet with the Children's Church leaders in early December to take this thinking further.

The review team will meet again in January to look at supporting and developing outreach and working with schools.

### **Safeguarding and Pastoral**

The diocese has changed how it manages safeguarding. There are some new requirements, so please smile nicely at Jenny and Jacqui if they ask you to do some training or if your role needs a DBS check.

We are hoping that everyone with a pastoral responsibility (including home group leaders) will take the Domestic Violence Awareness Training course. This is so you are aware of the signs that people might give that a friend or family member needs help.

The PCC looked at the coordination of pastoral care, following Annie's retirement some while back. Further thought will be given to forming a small team of pastoral visitors who can also keep an eye out for folk who might otherwise 'fall through the gaps'.

### **Using our Facilities better**

- We mentioned this in our last report, and now you can see some early results as Vashti and her team refurnish the Side Chapel as a prayer space. Meanwhile, the team looking at the churchyard have met and have identified the area either side of the path to the Small Hall as their starting point – with a prayer cairn/water feature, more accessible path and an area for picnic tables.

### **Miscellaneous Matters**

- We have had new volunteers for listening to children read and for mentoring/ TLG coaching at St James Church School. Please support in prayer those who are engaged in this growing and effective ministry.
- We have started a review of our noticeboards and publicity, and are thinking about a team approach to handling what, in these days, is a multi-faceted activity. Fabian is taking the lead in the first instance.
- Our membership database is being overhauled. Please see Nigel Bright if you are missing out on the Bulletin being emailed each week, as we may need to check if you are on the database.
- We discovered the Taunton “Old Contemptibles” banner in the vestry! Taunton Museum now has it for safe keeping.
- The PCC continues to keep its policies (etc.) under review. In this period, we looked at Wages, Fees and Charges, the Hall Booking Form, the Capital Projects List, the Financial Policies document, the Health and Safety Policy, the Fire Risk Assessment and the Disability Policy.
- If you work alone in the church, or visit people on your own, please have a look at the new Lone Working Guidance on the website (Information/ Guidance and reports).
- We will be replacing our electrical distribution boards in early 2024, and carrying out other electrical work at the same time. One task is to enable us to turn on the sound system at a single point, which will enable more people to use the system without the Tech Team present. We are also planning to install emergency lights in the church.
- Planning continues to move ToneFM’s radio transmitter aerials to our tower to improve their coverage. Meanwhile, they will be live broadcasting the Chaplaincy Carol Service again this year.

Martin Wakefield



# Current PCC Members

A reminder of the current members of the Parochial Church Council  
If you'd like to raise any issues with the PCC or find out more about what  
the Council does, do talk to any of these people



*Rev Fabian Wuyts*  
*Vicar*



*Nigel Bright and Joyce Kirk*  
*Church Wardens*



*Rev David Wilkie*  
*Curate*



*Martin Bluemel*



*Richard Carpenter*



*Roger Fenton*



*Marilyn Gibson*



*Fiona Hope*



*Lyn Jones*



*David Jordan*



*Sue Lucas*



*Chris Rickard*



*Richard Sainsbury*



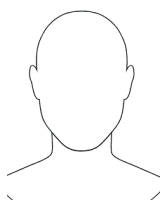
*Johan Smit*



*Vashti Smit*



*Nic Tall*



*Vacancy*



*Jenny Wakefield*



*Martin Wakefield*

## Just what is a Lay Dean?

You may have picked up – from the PCC minutes perhaps – that the Deanery Synod<sup>1</sup> recently elected me as the Lay Dean for Taunton. So just what is a Lay Dean? Hopefully, this will give you some flavour. If you want to know more do come and ask me.

Put simply, the Lay Dean is the leader, alongside the Area Dean<sup>2</sup>, of the deanery in our mission and ministry for Taunton. Beyond this generality, there are four areas I see as key for me during the next few years:

- Providing support and encouragement in the development of ministry and mission across the deanery, especially in the creation of (often lay led) new worshipping communities
- Forming a vital channel between the local church and the bishops and their staff
- Influence on the local church – the Lay Dean is involved in all aspects of clergy recruitment from the initial stages to being a member of the final interview panel
- Defining – through leadership of the DMPG (see below) – the pattern of ministry locally through any ‘pastoral reorganisations’, that is changes which might be needed in the way that stipendiary clergy are deployed and the number of them in the area.

And what of the deanery? Essentially, it’s the collective of CofE parishes across and around the town. Its focus is very much on those things that individual parishes cannot tackle but which can be done by the church working together.

The Deanery Mission and Pastoral Group (DMPG) is a sub-group of Synod. Its purpose is to have an overview of the deanery and how God’s mission can flourish there: to both have ‘an eye for detail’ and yet to ‘dream dreams’. It needs to consider what being the best church for the people of Taunton might look like. In particular, it plays the key role in any reorganisation of ministry necessary as the town expands into its ‘urban extensions’ and the current parochial pattern is put under ever increasing strain. My role as co-chair of both synod and the DMPG will give me a particularly focussed role in such deliberations.

Richard Carpenter

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<sup>1</sup>More details of the working of a deanery and its leadership are on the Bath and Wells website – the *Deaneries Hub* is under the *Parish Support* tab.

<sup>2</sup>Revd Jim Cox, Rector of the South Quantock Benefice

## PARISH CONTACTS



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**Church Office: 01823 272931**  
**Administration Co-ordinator: Rachel Knowlman**  
email: info@stjamestaunton.co.uk

**Church Wardens:**  
**Nigel Bright 07817 627326**  
**Joyce Kirk 01823 971431**

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currently vacant

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**Roger Fenton 01823 412113** email: rogerifenton@gmail.com

**Fabric (buildings & technical) Co-ordinator: Martin Wakefield**  
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**Pastoral Care Co-ordinator:**  
currently vacant

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**Church Treasurer: Richard Sainsbury 01823 284688**  
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