



St James
Church
TAUNTON

St James' Church Magazine

December 2025 - February 2026



Letter from the Vicar

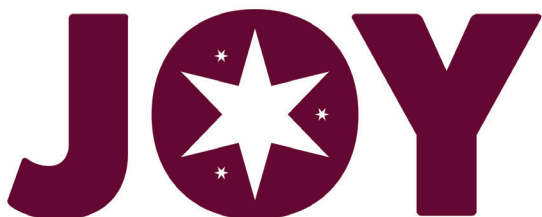
Rev Fabian Wuyts

Vicar of St James

JOY!

Amid the glow of Advent candles and the promise of Christmas, the Church of England has chosen one powerful word to guide us in 2025: *Joy!*

Yet perhaps that sounds surprising, maybe even a little out of place, when set against the gloom and doom that fills our newsfeeds: conflicts and wars, weather catastrophes, economic downturn, the rising cost of living, salary disputes, political instability. Just a few of the heavy concerns pressing on so many today. Joy may feel more like a luxury than a spiritual theme.



But we might pause and ask: Was the world of first-century Jews so very different?

The challenges were not identical, of course, but life was still marked by heaviness: living under Roman occupation, navigating oppressive taxation, lacking freedom, living with deep poverty, and bearing uncertainty about the future. Into that very real and burdensome world God chose to speak, announcing to the shepherds:



'Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people...'

Luke 2.10

Great joy in the midst of weakness, struggle, and fear. Why? Because God was visiting his people and choosing

to stay. Jesus, *Emmanuel* is ‘God with us.’ He came not as a distant idea but as living proof that God enters the mess of human life with compassion, authority and hope.

The joy Jesus brings is not escapism. It is not cheerfulness painted over cracks. So when the angels say, *“Do not be afraid... but see!”* they call us not to ignore the challenges of our time, but to face them with trust. Jesus is with us. His Spirit lives in us. And through his power we become instruments of good news, healing and hope in our communities. Joy, is the in-breaking of God’s restoring love here and now.

As we journey through Advent and celebrate Christmas this year, may we hold fast to this truth:

Joy is not fragile, because God is not far away. Christ has come. Christ is with us now. And Christ will come again to bring the restoration and healing of all creation to completion.

May that joy take root in us and flow through us. May it be good news for our homes, our church, our community and our world.

Every blessing this Advent and Christmas

Fabian

Christmas 2025 Services/Events

Sunday 14th December
2:30 pm: Carols and Tea

Sunday 21st December
10:30 am: Christingle
6:00 pm Carol Service

Wednesday 24th December (Christmas Eve)
3:00 pm: Crib Service
11:30 pm: Midnight Service

Thursday 25th December 10:00 am: Christmas Day Service

JOY

St James Church TAUNTON

Other events:
Friday, 19th December
5:00 pm and 7:30 pm:
A Gospel Christmas
(Gospel Choir and Live Band)
Queens Hall Theatre,
Queens College, Trull Road

For more information about events
at St James, go to our website:
www.stjamestaunton.org

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Many thanks to all the contributors to the Magazine. If you have something to share for the March-May '26 edition, do contact the Editor - details on page 40.

Deadline for copy is Tuesday 17 February 2026



Christmas is coming! As well as some of our regular items - School News, Focus on Mission, Eco Church, Wilder Churches - Sue Carpenter tells us about the Christmas banners to look out for and there's a thoughtful poem for Christmas from Philippa Johnson. But what do we really know about the Christmas story? Both Mike Gillingham and David Smith have outlined their views on that topic - they don't agree on everything, so what do you think...? See page 3 for information of the church services leading up to Christmas Day.

Jenny Wakefield tells us about the Heritage Open days and there are pix of some of the team in their costumes. And talking of costumes, it's time to start thinking about buying your tickets for Sleeping Beauty. (Oh, yes it is!) We also have some advance notifications of a concert, a new Alpha Course, and a Lent course (to be led by the Simply Pray team). Also you can read a little about the new Bishop of Taunton and the new Archbishop of Canterbury, both of whom will be installed in the new year.

So, as the old year draws to a close and we look forward into 2026, do have a go at the Quiz of the Year and see how much you remember about 2025.

I hope you enjoy this edition and I wish you all a very joyful Christmas.

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

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



DIOCESE OF
Bath & Wells

Living the story. Telling the story.

Letter from Michael Beasley
Bishop of Bath and Wells

Christmas joy for all people

We fear that we live in a world of increasing polarisation. Conflicts between and within nations play their part. The amplification of division and hostility by social media algorithms doesn't help. Culture wars exacerbate matters further. Sometimes it feels like common ground is disappearing from underneath our feet like a sandbar being overwhelmed by the tide.

In such a climate, it's good to return to the message that heralded the arrival of Jesus. 'I bring you tidings of great joy which shall be for all people,' says that angel who announces the saviour's birth (Luke 2:10). Jesus' story quickly includes all types and sorts of humanity. From local shepherds to exotic visitors from afar. I wonder what the conversation was like as they all crammed into the stable to see the newborn child?

Jesus' story quickly shows that not only is he for all people but that he needs all people. His family must have needed assistance when they fled as refugees to Egypt. Jesus must have needed help when his parents left him behind on a family outing to Jerusalem aged twelve. Jesus was constantly calling on and engaging with others as he went about his teaching and ministry.

What might counter the polarisation of our day? Amongst our greatest resource is to seek out the emotion that accompanied the news of the saviour's birth – joy. When we encounter joy – from that cup winning goal to the marriage of much loved friends – such moments are never the time for division and enmity. We're all far too busy shouting and hugging each other! The invitation of Christmas is to experience such joy afresh. Often, we see joy most obviously in children's experience of the season. Might we seek it for ourselves too? For joy breaks down divisions, overcomes barriers, reminds us that we are one.

'I bring you tidings of great joy which shall be for all people,' says the angel. A very merry and joyful Christmas to you all.

Michael - Bishop of Bath and Wells

New Bishop and Archbishop

On 22nd October, Downing Street announced that Fiona Gibson will be the next Bishop of Taunton.

After studying for a BEd (Hons) at Homerton College, Cambridge, Fiona became a primary school teacher. Thinking she would remain in education for her career, she realised, in her words, “God had other plans.” She undertook theological training at Oak Hill College, London, has a MTh in Theological and Pastoral Studies and holds a PhD in Divinity from the University of Aberdeen.



Fiona was ordained Deacon in 2011 and priest in 2012. Her first incumbency was in the Diocese of St Albans and since 2021 she has been Archdeacon of Ludlow in the Diocese of Hereford.

Fiona first needs to be consecrated as a bishop but then will be installed as Bishop of Taunton in the Diocese of Bath and Wells at a service at Wells Cathedral early in 2026.

Earlier in October it was announced that Dame Sarah Mullally has been chosen to be the next Archbishop of Canterbury, the first women to be appointed to that office. Dame Sarah was ordained in 2002 and for the last seven years has been Bishop of London, the third most senior member of clergy in the Church of England.



Please pray for our new bishop and the Archbishop designate, and all our church leaders, and support them in the work God has planned for them.



The Face of God

*Glory in that fickle night, when folk
rolled over in their sleep, grunted, unaware of Heaven's torch
which, soft as velvet, swept the roofs in silent silver, a light
to the world to indicate the arrival of our Means of Grace.*

*Snort of cattle, the cloudy breaths of donkeys
dampen the hay packed into corners against the draughts,
blanketing a strange throne for One so small, so great as He
whose creative love had formed the pilgrim star itself,
these beads of corn by snuffling noses sought, the trees
from whom His bed – & His years-distant cross – were made.*

*His welcome, a carpenter's care-shaken palms, the musty-sweet
of straw, the tender wrapping in His mother Mary's arms;
to take that first gulp of air as human being, & first nourishment
while grateful prayers are offered for their safety,
joy at this Delivery.*

*Those first few, tiny cries
that every parent remembers, the scrunched face
that settles into life alone and smooths in sleep, while mother
& holy father look on: a wonder to all in Heaven
to see the Messiah tied to time, to know that He would satisfy forever
that debt of human straying, rebellion's self-led doom.*

*This tiny morsel,
Beloved of the Beloved, wields Love spanning time & space;
sweet implosion of mystery, Divine, the face of God.*

Philippa Johnson

Christmas Banners

We wrote about the very special Christmas crib figures and backdrop last Christmas. This year, we focus on another two Christmas banners made by Pat Preater and her team. Do step up and take a closer look at these when they appear in December.



The purple banner speaks of royalty and riches.

But see the fragility and vulnerability of the newborn baby.



The giving hands
The inexpressible gift of God
Fulfilling prophecies
Making the way back to God

Isaiah 9:6

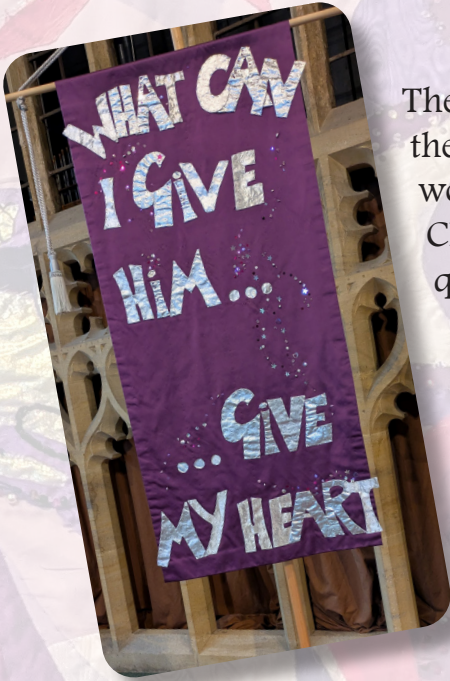
**For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor,
(Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**

John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

1 John 4:9-10

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.



There's another banner which used the same fabric, and echoes the words we know from a well-loved Christmas carol. It addresses that question of our response to God.



Sue Carpenter

Stop Press: New Year...New Banner(s) – Pat and her team have been creating a new series of banners over the last year or so. Look out for a new banner in the new year!

Christmas...what do we actually know - or think we know - about the Christmas story? So many different traditions have grown up around it that maybe it has become a little confused over the years.

School Nativity plays and that well know carol tell us about Mary riding on a 'little donkey' to Bethlehem. Once there, were she and Joseph refused entry to an inn, so ending up giving birth in a stable? Were there really three inn keepers wagging their fingers and refusing her entry before, at last, they found a kindly one? Which animals were in that stable - if there was one? (For those who remember them, both Nick Tall and Tim Jones had their own view on that one!) And if you've watched the film 'Love Actually', you might even think there was a lobster there...!

Some carols tell of snow in the bleak midwinter - really? In Bethlehem? Were all the angels blonde haired and blue eyed? Did those shepherds bring a little (toy?) lamb with them?

Later, how many wise men were there? Do we really know their names? And did they turn up just after the shepherds, or was there some tiime lag? See - it can be confusing, can't it?

In the following articles, both Mike Gillingham and David Smith have presented their view of the 'real' Christmas story. As you read them, you'll find even they can't agree about it all! After you've read of both Mike and David's thoughts, decide what you think.

The Real Christmas

A view from Mike Gillingham

The Nativity service at Christmas is so strong an influence that we often neglect what the Bible actually says.

So, let us start with the annunciation. Mary is told the shocking news that she is to have an important baby even though she is only engaged.

There is one other detail that is often overlooked. She is told that

Elizabeth is in her sixth month. The next time we come across the two of them is when Mary visits Elizabeth, whose baby leaps in the womb. Whether or not you accept the traditional site for Elizabeth's house, she clearly lived near Jerusalem because of Zechariah's job in the temple.

It is therefore certain that Mary leaves Nazareth very soon after the annunciation and journeys south. I have never heard anybody give a reason to suggest why she would then journey all the way back north, where she would be subject to shame and derision. So, let us do away with the long journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem on the back of a donkey with Mary nine months pregnant. The donkey is never mentioned in the Bible and is just one of the many 'nativity play' fictional additions

I have often wondered when and how Joseph learnt about Mary's condition. Not from Mary herself, she has probably already left to go south, and she would surely have told Joseph what had happened. I would like to suggest that Mary's 'besty' was entrusted with the task of telling Joseph, but we will never know. I think it highly likely though, that Joseph completed the marriage to Mary, and found a house somewhere near Jerusalem and Bethlehem. What we are told is that Joseph learnt about Mary's condition, considered divorcing her but was told in a dream to marry her. Then he did marry her, the process being simply to take her to his house. The 'engagement' was much stronger than ours would be, it could only be ended by divorce, hence Joseph's thought. It could be that Mary did make the double journey, but there is no evidence for a last-minute journey down to Bethlehem in any case. The bible tells us Joseph travelled from Nazareth, but is not clear about when, but it is before he actually married her.

The word translated 'carpenter', 'Tekton' in our bibles, is actually much more like 'craftsman' and any builder would be called that, so Joseph would easily have found work wherever he went.

Now we come to the birth itself. We are not told how long Mary and Joseph had been accommodated in the house they were staying at. Yes, 'house'. There is no mention of an inn, the word used is 'Katalumati', the extra room. Most houses were one roomed dwellings. If you were there for a while and had some extra money you could add an extra room,

a katalumati. The only other use in the Bible is the room where Jesus and the apostles celebrated the last supper, and that certainly was not a stable! If you were in a city the extra room had to be above the rest, hence the upper room. Joseph and Mary were almost certainly staying with family members, perhaps distant cousins. The people of that time were very hospitable, and a poor family with family members in the town would not have had to look for an inn. The idea that Mary and Joseph turned up at an inn is pure fiction.

The baby, we are told, was laid in a manger. Most houses would have a sleeping platform for the family to keep them above the main floor, because they would share the room with their animals, perhaps a cow or two, perhaps the odd goat or sheep. We had similar houses in Britain back along, the animals acting as central heating. So, the real place of birth was a crowded house of distant family members who had a load of people staying for a few days. Not a lowly stable, but the house of a lowly and kind family. Forget Joseph the midwife, there would be a number of women there, who could help because they had been through that.

To be continued...

A personal review of the Christmas Story

A view from David Smith

At first reading the Christmas story as related in Matthew and Luke's Gospels is clearly defined into a series of events that tell a consistent story but have scant shared material. Luke provides extensive detail about Jesus' birth whilst Matthew provides a resume of events culminating in the visit of the Magi and the subsequent warning of Herod's maleficence and the escape to Egypt.

Each evangelist commences with a genealogy of Jesus. One criticism is that each of these provides a line of ascent or descent based on Joseph's parenthood which is instantly problematical. However, it is almost certainly based on Jewish tradition that Mary and Joseph were part of the same extended family thus sharing a common ancestry. The primacy of Joseph may be seen as a typical patriarchal trope of the time.

The narrative skilfully interlaces various accounts to construct a coherent storyline, yet it invites the reader to thoughtfully interpret and determine both the sequence of events and their significance. Among the story's many themes the prevalence of travel is central to the narrative. This characteristic of the story is a useful means by which this paper can be structured.

The first journey is that of Mary, betrothed to Joseph who discovers she is pregnant in unusual circumstances. She requires time to come to terms with this news, so she chooses to stay with a close relative who understands her circumstances; Elizabeth has also conceived in miraculous circumstances. After all, proclamations from the Archangel Gabriel are uncommon and best shared initially with people who have had a similar experience. On her return Mary finds that her betrothed, through divine intervention, has come to terms with her situation and is content with taking responsibility for her and the unborn child.

The next journey is a little more puzzling. Why would an otherwise sensible man undertake a lengthy journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem on poor roads in company with a heavily pregnant wife? One authority has calculated that such a journey would have taken at least a week to complete with no donkey mentioned in the narrative. On the surface, an Imperial decree by the Emperor Augustus necessitated the journey. Although Joseph descended from King David, he now lived in a region once occupied by Israel's rebellious tribes who were exiled by the Assyrians. An ambitious Judean ruler in 1st century before The Christian Era had noted the desirability of the relatively sparsely populated region of Galilee and encouraged Jewish migration to the territory. This might provide an explanation for Joseph's displacement from his family home.

This then raises a further question regarding the census. Were all Galilean migrants required to move back to Judea to be registered – a chaotic situation – or only those who had recently settled? Or was it that having a choice in the matter of registration he opted for Bethlehem in the light of the Angel's proclamation? Perhaps his status as a descendent of David afforded superior status that he did not wish to have challenged? One source has suggested that Joseph was a member of a powerful

guild of craftsmen located in Bethlehem and he wished to preserve his membership through local registration.

As to Mary's presence, while probably not required for registration purposes – women were regarded as chattels – Joseph almost certainly would have misgivings about her welfare in his absence. People in Nazareth may have been angered by his gracious response to her unexplained pregnancy and would see his absence as an opportunity to see the matter properly resolved.

The lack of accommodation in Bethlehem was common to the entire land. Inns were modest establishments that offered little beyond protection from the weather, essential provisions, and limited space for their guests. The birth of a child requires space and a degree of privacy. In a population used to living cheek by jowl with domesticated animals, a stable would have provided a warm and comparatively comfortable environment in which to stay. The suddenness of the birth may also have upset carefully laid plans regarding more comfortable accommodation with relatives.

A stable would also provide space for the multitude of people – shepherds for instance – who witnessed the heavenly host of angels proclaiming the birth of the Messiah and the desire of people to go and find the baby.

The birth of Jesus may well have delayed Mary and Joseph's return to their home. It is reasonable to think that they remained in the Bethlehem area until the purification rites, required for all firstborn Jewish males that took place up to 40 days after the birth, as Jerusalem was close by. (It was this temple visit that prompted Simeon and Anna to endorse Jesus' Messiahship.) The journey home by the young family is indicated in Luke's Gospel after 'all that the Law of the Lord required' was fulfilled.

This brings us to the Journey of the Magi. Matthew's account makes no mention of the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem but does not contradict Luke's narrative stating blandly that 'Jesus was born in Judea during the time of King Herod'. It is safe, however, to suppose that Matthew provides a succinct summary of Luke before exploring unique

material concerning the adventures of the wise men. I use this moniker advisedly questioning the wisdom of three well-heeled strangers turning up at the palace of an insecure character like Herod announcing the birth of a rival. Insecure because he was a foreign appointment put in place by the Roman authorities. 'When Herod was troubled,' says Matthew, 'so was the rest of Jerusalem!' It could be argued the naivety of the wise men led to the tragedy that later befell Bethlehem; the slaying of baby boys under the age of two years old.

If the Magi came from Persia, they likely travelled north along the Euphrates River, then south through the Jordan Valley along the Fertile Crescent, avoiding the direct route through the drought affected Jordanian desert. A geographical feature well known to travellers. If the Natal star appeared at Jesus' birth, a significant amount of time likely passed before the Magi met Herod. Herod's courtiers correctly interpret the scriptures and send them to Bethlehem. However, the star takes them, if Luke's account is to be relied upon and Matthew does not contradict, to Nazareth where they lay out their gifts and worship the child Jesus - who is probably several years old by this time. Because the wise men in Galilee were already on their way home, there was no practical reason to return to Jerusalem. After being warned in a dream, they simply continued their journey, avoiding the city altogether. The fact they did not revisit Herod may well have provoked his mass infanticide and triggered the flight by Mary, Joseph and the child Jesus to Egypt, not returning until after the death of Herod. Matthew's account of the return suggests some indecision as to whether Judea or Galilee would be safer, with Joseph finally opting for Nazareth.

These journeys represent more than a travelogue: they reflect the characters' emotional and spiritual experiences and ours as we share them through an appreciation of the Christmas story. Travel highlights themes of faith, obedience, displacement and danger inherent in the evangelists' accounts, emphasizing the momentous significance for all creation inherent in the Christmas story. It might also explain the tradition of present giving at Christmas and the modern propensity to travel as TS Elliot would have it: 'at the worst possible time of the year'.

(So - are you any wiser...? Ed.)

*Right:
Good Wife
Giddings*



800 years...

This year saw some anniversaries when we discovered our church dates back at least to 1175 alongside our tower having been rebuilt 150 years ago. So, when the theme of Heritage Open Days was 'architecture', we grabbed the chance to tell the story from the church's origins in the 12th Century to the present day.

*Left:
Not that rat again!*



It's a history that involves of a lot of knocking down and building up from the origins of an unpretentious, towerless little building alongside the priory, to the beautiful building we know today with underfloor heating, movable pews and a tower that proclaims its existence as place of worship.

It was a joy to share the story of our Christian struggles and heritage with visitors from our local community and beyond. It is difficult to estimate how many there were, but the tower team estimate that at least 170 people took the tower challenge. In addition, there was a large number of people who were content to enjoy the armchair virtual tower tour created by Richard Sainsbury and Bob Boulton, and the bell camera gave an opportunity to see the bells in motion close up. Thank you, Bob and Norman.



*Above:
St James' Bazaar*



*Above:
Just some of the team members*

and counting!

Over thirty people from Church took part in the preparation and presentation of the two days, and that doesn't include those who made pots of jam to be sold as an illustration of the 1900s Blackberry services.

So huge thanks to:

- The Welcomers
- The Tower Tour Guides
- The Bellringers
- The team of historical characters who told the story of the various phases of the building
- Mike for bringing us up to date with 21st century developments
- The catering team
- Rachel and the children's team setting out activities
- The flower team who produced some magnificent displays
- Dave Bysouth for demonstrating the organ
- And Fabian and the PCC for letting us do it

*Right:
The Misses Cottle
and Hugo*



*Below:
Refreshments*



*Right:
Tower Flowers*



Jenny Wakefield

what to expect

The course runs for an initial 6 weeks

Connect

You'll meet other people with questions just like yours.

Watch

We watch a 25 minute film together that's designed to inspire questions.

Discuss

There's an open discussion where you can share your thoughts in small groups.

Alpha

Scan the QR code to register your interest or send an email to info@stjamestaunton.co.uk



Looking forward to seeing you there!

St James
Church
TAUNTON

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

Alpha

**Wednesday evenings
7.30pm-9pm**

**14th January for six weeks
@ St James Church**

www.stjamestaunton.org



We invite you to drop in and Simply Pray

*Offering of a time of reflection, contemplation and ending with a short time
of silent meditation in the peace of the Side Chapel*

***1st Thursday each month
alternating 10:30am to midday and 7pm - 8:30pm***

*Come along and leave when it's right for you. We dip into material from the Northumbrian and Iona Communities,
Wild Goose, Lectio Divina, Lectio 365 and others. Something different each month*

All welcome - come along and leave when it's right for you

For more information speak to or ring:
Felicity on 07508 287808 or Lyn on 07772 881463

Sleeping Beauty

St James Players
present

A pantomime by Ben Crocker

A Family Community Pantomime with proceeds in aid of:
Taunton Food Bank and TEAR Fund Ukraine Appeal

St James Church, Taunton, TA1 1JS
(next to the County Cricket Ground)

Friday 30th January 7pm
Saturday 31st January 4.30 pm
Sunday 1st February 4.30 pm

Tickets: Adults £7/Children £3 (must be accompanied)

(includes interval drink, biscuit and programme)

Tickets available from Church Office 01823 272931 or
07796248369 or bookable online through Ticket Source QR code



BOOK YOUR TICKETS NOW!

St James Players would like to invite you to bring your friends, neighbours, children, grandchildren, grandparents and anyone you think would enjoy a bit of light hearted fun in the gloomy winter months of January/February.

We are working hard learning our lines, painting our scenery and planning to make this a show to remember.

Plus, we are hoping to raise some serious money for two very serious charities.

THE TAUNTON FOOD BANK – which provides much needed food support for families and individuals who are struggling to manage.

The Tear Fund UKRAINE appeal to support work with local partners in Ukraine who are helping to provide relief and support for those living in the midst of a war that has devastated their country.

We would really value your support so go on, book your tickets now!

QUIZ of the YEAR!

How much of the past year do you remember? Test yourself out with this multiple choice quiz. Answers on page 37

1. Ashley, Bert and Conall were names of:
A. storms B. Eurovision entrant C. footballers
2. There was a re-wilding lynx project this year. Was it:
A. A new golf course B. Releasing cats in the wild C. Releasing aftershave
3. Palmerston, the former resident cat at the Foreign Office, was brought out of retirement for a “purr-fect” diplomatic posting to where?
A. Belfast B. Bermuda C. Birmingham
4. What is President Trump’s favourite word?
A. Tariffs B. Musk C. Sorry
5. This year was the 200th anniversary of the start of modern railways. The East-West Rail Link is due to be opened next between Oxford, Milton Keynes and eventually Cambridge. What was the nick name of the original line?
A. The Varsity Line B. The Farcical Line C. The Gravy Train
6. Donald Trump called King Charles “aman”
A. Young B. Regal C. Beautiful
7. Restaurants in Pozzuoli Italy cooked up a plan to attract customers who are being put off by 1800 land tremors a month. How long did they have to stay?
A. Until paid bill B. Until dessert served C. Until coffee served
8. Birmingham experienced ‘Binmageddon’. Was it
A. Shortage of bin bags B. Too many bin bags C. Bin collector strike
9. A singer, Lauren Sánchez, Gayle King, Aisha Bowe, Amanda Nguyen, and Kerianne Flynn took an 11 minute flight into space giving them a few moments of weightlessness. What music accompanied them?
A. Louis Armstrong’s What a Wonderful World B. Fly me to the Moon C. Up, up and Away

10. The film *Conclave* was a hit at the box office. What colour is the smoke used to signify the election of a new Pope?

A. White B. Black C. Grey

11. What was Doge that Elon Musk was associated with and then left? The Department of Government...

A. Elasticity B. Efficiency C. Energy

12. Loretta Swit passed away this year. What long running sitcom is she best known for?

A. Friends B. Mash C. Frasier

13. UK proposed a wider ban on destructive bottom trawling. Is it:

A. Anti-social behaviour B. Long trousers C. A type of fishing

14. Which composer whose centenary was marked this year invented 'furniture music'? (He always kept a hammer in his pocket for fear of muggers and founded his own church)

A. Frank Sinatra B. Jean Sibelius C. Erik Satie

15. What were the "mushroom murders" in Australia?

A. Killing by adding fungi to dinner guests' meals B. Illegally picking mushrooms from fields C. Killing someone in vegetable aisle at supermarket

16. Which of the following were not Proms this year?

A. The Shipping forecast prom B. The Traitors prom C. The Grand Prix prom

17. 'Skibidi' "Delulu" and 'tradwife' among words added to Cambridge Dictionary. What does delulu mean?

A. French B. Delusional C. Incontinent

18. Heartthrob Terence Stamp passed away this year, which part did he play in the 1960s film of *Far from the Madding Crowd*?

A. Sgt Troy B. Farmer Boldwood C. Gabriel Oak

19. What month does October Beerfest in Germany start?

A. October B. September C. November

20. In October a lady in Kew was given a fine of £150.00 for pouring what down a drain on a road?

A. Beer B. Oil C. Coffee



In this series, we are looking at the new set of questions for the Eco Church survey, in particular, their impact on us as church and as individuals. We continue with the section looking at our approach to community and global engagement.

As usual, they begin with a commitment to the basic principles, asking if:

*“Our church recognises the impact of the climate and nature crises and has a plan or strategy to take action **locally** and/or **nationally** and/or **globally**.”*

The first section builds very closely on this overall principle and looks at how we approach making people aware of the issues we all will face (and will continue to face). It focusses on how we might get them (and ourselves) to a position where the changes that will need to happen are seen as the best way ahead. It does so by asking us to reflect how our church responds to ‘the impact of the climate and nature crises and engages with environmental and social justice issues’ in those three different contexts: our own local area, nationally and globally.

By and large, there is an implicit recognition of these crises through our engagement (however tentative) with Eco Church and related initiatives. However, we are far from being able to say that we have a plan or strategy to properly engage and act. That said, we are of course active in specific areas – think Wilder Church – but need to build on these. How else can we say that our mission as a church encompasses the fifth mark of mission - to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth?

The second theme is about what we’re actually doing. This includes how we engage with local issues and who we join with as we do so. We are asked how we ‘encourage a more equitable and inclusive experience of nature for all through getting outside to enjoy, nurture and protect nature.’ This could be something as simple as our Easter Ramble. We are asked to think how and where we invest the money we hold. Do we avoid funds whose interests may be harmful to nature or do we actively seek out those with nature-positive policies? Similarly, do we actively choose providers whose provision is accredited by organisations such as Fairtrade, B Corp or Rainforest Alliance?

Two questions then look at our more direct impact. Firstly, how do we encourage sustainable transport; secondly, what impact does the food we provide at church events have on climate and nature? It is well known that most meat products have a high impact on our planet and the simple idea of 'food miles' needs to be borne in mind.

One hopeful seed in this area may be an initiative through Taunton Transition Town to join up those working in this area across various churches in the town. There are six of us involved so far.

Our response to this section reminds us that 'a church's response' can often be that of an individual rather than the organisation itself. I'm sure many of you are already in contact with others, lobbying our MP perhaps and we know that, when relevant, our church members follow diocesan and national webinars.

We will all have seen our well used cycle racks and it's probably worth noting that car-sharing may become more important for us when the council introduces charges for their car parks in the near future.

The final theme of the Community and Global Engagement section focusses on communication. Do we have a recognised person who can speak for us on these issues? Do all our communication channels speak about our beliefs and views on the climate and nature emergencies and their impact on the planet and its communities? The final question is simple – do we 'put our money where our mouth is'? In short, do we financially support an environmental charity?

Our Communications Team will soon be taking shape and developing its style and practice. This can give us a great opportunity to embed these core elements into all we portray to those around us.

It's clear that as we step further into this category, we move beyond what the actions of an individual – or even a small group – can mean for the church. Here we meet issues that have to be tackled and owned by the community – as a whole – if they are to truly carry weight.

It is not without meaning that each question in the survey begins with the same formula: 'Our church responds, Our church uses, Our church promotes' and so on. Might you be the person to help make that a reality?

Next time we'll look at the revised questions covering Lifestyle.

Richard Carpenter

(Apologies to anyone whose work and initiatives I may have missed or misstated in putting these thoughts together - Richard)

Wilder Churches

Some happenings this year...



Here are Children's Church harvesting Yellow Rattle seed in June. The collected seed was added to those of other native plants from the meadow and locally.



We had to be extra careful around the hedge as we had a hedgehog on site!



This was found in a local garden in the parish and the lady was advised that St James had a suitable wild area. I was very pleased that I happened to be on site when the hedgehog was delivered. I made sure that water was available in the dry period which followed. I wonder if the hedgehog has stayed?



Hester came to do her annual scythe of the meadow in late July. Johnny and Lilian helped to rake up the hay which we removed from the area. This is important as the wild flowers and plants thrive in poor soil, and leaving the mowings would raise the nutrient level.



The area which we seeded in autumn 2024 was partially successful. Somerset Council mowing team mowed this new part in August and again in September.

Johnny, Lilian, Sue (with Maura the greyhound!) and I raked and seeded in the autumn. We look forward to the spring and more diversity to come.



Sue Carpenter

(If you would like to help in the churchyard, or if you'd just like to find out more of what goes on to maintain and develop the work, I'm sure Sue would love to talk to you. It can be a bit labour intensive at certain times of year so she may be glad of more hands to assist! - Ed.)

all photos: Sue Carpenter



X Marks the Spot...!

At the October Family service, Rachel asked the children to give her words beginning with A...B...C... that described God. Immediately my mind went to X and to Z. Problem letters!! Most people playing spelling games opt for **X-rays** – they would have been stuck if x-rays were still known by their original name, Roentgen rays, named after the person who discovered their usefulness.

Science, particularly biochemistry, has a number of words beginning with X.

Xylem is a specialised tissue in plants that conducts water and dissolved nutrients from the roots through the stems to the leaves and flowers. Its origin is the Greek word meaning 'woody'.

Xenon is a part of the atmosphere, making up 1 part in 20million (oxygen is about 20 parts per 100). It is used in Xenon headlamps to give a clear white light. Being an 'inert' gas, it doesn't react with many other elements but Xenon difluoride (HF₂) is used to etch silicon microprocessors for the computer industry.

Away from science we get two words that mean the opposite to each other.

Xenophobic describes a dislike of strangers or foreigners that is strongly held. Some dictionaries describe as a morbid dislike of foreigners. The opposite word is **xenophilic**. Less commonly used it describes a person who is attracted to foreign people and

cultures. In all these words the Greek parent word is the word for stranger.

If you worked in an office in the last 60 years, you will be aware of the **Xerox** company. Indeed, like biro, the name became the general term for the process of photocopying and the printed copies that it produced. The root Greek word for this is a word meaning dry. So, in botany, plants that prefer dry conditions can be termed **Xerophytes**.

But to help with Scrabble and Lexicon this Christmas, what about **Xebec** – a Mediterranean three-masted sailing boat. Or **Xyster** a device for sampling bone – arghh!

Back to Biochemistry, there are many uses of **Xanthos**. This is from a Greek word meaning yellow. So we have a group of compounds that are products of **Xanthic acid** – the **Xanthates**.

Xantham gum too is used in food to change the viscosity of the product, but for those who are allergic to gluten in cereals, Xantham gum is used as a replacement to improve the elasticity of dough made without barley, rye, oats and wheat. The name is from the bacteria from which it was first isolated **Xanthomonas campestris**.

Back to Rachel, can we help her with an adjective beginning with 'X' that describes God? One of the gifts of the Spirit is hospitality that is an aspect of God's character so maybe we could use **Xenial**, meaning friendly and hospitable to guests and strangers.

Andrew Wright



School News

St James' Church School

It hardly seems possible that the autumn school term is drawing to a close, with preparations for the school Nativity, Christingles and carol services being finalised. Very soon the sounds of children in the church will be heard again as we welcome them, their teachers and parents to hear the Christmas story.



Of course, there has already been one school service recently with the celebration of Harvest. The church was already decorated for our own celebrations, so the autumn golds and browns of the flower team formed a perfect backdrop as the children sang and recited their harvest songs and poems, much to their parents' delight.

Image courtesy of Steve Woods @ rgbstock.com

The TLG mentoring team are mostly well underway with meeting their new children, and Fabian and Mike have been busy preparing assemblies and arranging for new reception children to visit the church.



Please pray for all the children as they settle back into the routine of learning, especially those for whom it is their first term or their last school year at St James. Pray too for the teachers, leadership team, support staff and governors as they seek to make the school a safe, enjoyable and happy place.

Jenny Wakefield



Image courtesy of Sanja Gjenero @ rgbstock.com



...MISSION

During the Autumn, our focus has been on organisations that provide practical relief to those in need, both at home and abroad. With Operation Christmas Child Shoe Boxes and Harvest gifts to Open Door, we have been able to be more 'hands on' in our giving. This includes the Youth Church who were busy packing shoeboxes at the beginning of November. That month also saw the TEAR Fund Quiz and the PCC agreed an Emergency Donation to Samaritans Purse who responded speedily to the Storm Michelle damage in Jamaica.



Our focus turns to the work of TLG in December and Taunton Youth for Christ in January. Both of these organisations involve working with children in school, who are struggling with their learning or challenging home situations.

Our own TLG (Transforming Lives for Good) team continues to work in St James School, with five mentors (soon to be six) working with individual children on a one-to-one basis. TLG works nationally with programmes all over the country and also runs a Make Lunch provision for families which includes school holiday events, one of which operates out of Oakwood Church.

You may remember Kelly Jones from TYFC's visit in the Summer where she spoke passionately about the work she and Chloe Dietz are doing in Pyrland and Courtfield



Schools and the ongoing outreach bus project in Halcon and Priorswood. A homework club based at Oakwood is also having a marked effect and Kelly and the TYFC trustees are praying and working hard to develop their activities with local youngsters, showing them the difference the love of Jesus can make in their lives.



In February we will be focusing on yet another aspect of the church in action in Taunton when we hear more about the work of the Taunton Town Chaplaincy which supports the work of local chaplains in offices, shops, the law courts, at the railway station and other parts of our local community. Chaplaincy has a vital role in meeting people where they are and being able to share the good news of Jesus's love, hope and salvation.

If you want to know more about these organisations check out their websites or if you would like to find out how you can get involved then have a word with:

David Jordan – TLG <https://www.tlg.org.uk/>

Kelly Jones – TYFC kelly@taunton.yfc.co.uk <https://www.tauntonyfc.co.uk/>

Andy Hall – Taunton Town Chaplaincy <https://www.tauntontc.co.uk/>

A full list of the Church representatives for the organisations with which we partner can be found on the mission board.

Jenny Wakefield



The Big Quiz Night

Thank you, quizzers!

Our Big Quiz Night was a huge success.
Thanks to you, we managed to raise an amazing...

£283.00

We're so grateful for your support. Every pound you raised will help equip communities around the world to lift themselves out of poverty.

tearfund.org/quiz
Tearfund, 100 Church Road, Teddington, TW11 8UE, United Kingdom
T: +44 (0)20 3955 3955 | info@tearfund.org | @tearfund

Registered office: Tearfund, 100 Church Road, Teddington, TW11 8UE. Registered in England 3193233. A company limited by guarantee. Registered Charity No. 325546. (England & Wales) Registered Charity No. 10333224 (Scotland)

tearfund

THANKS!

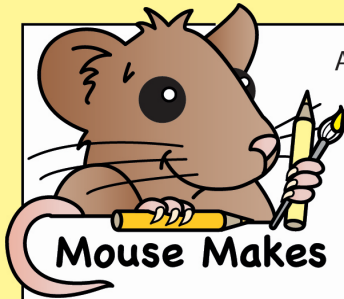
Many thanks to all who took part in Tearfund's Big Quiz Night on November 15th, we raised a total of £283. There were 164 other churches also taking part in the Quiz on the same night, 6409 other people quizzed and helped to raise £36,244 so far (donations are still coming in).

We had a fun evening, singing some of the answers, and querying some of the others. The local round prompted lots of discussion of true or false, and the raffle prizes were evenly spread throughout the room. Well done all!

Keep your eyes peeled – the big church Christmas card will be appearing soon, please sign to send Christmas good wishes to all our family at St James, and donate to Tearfund what you have saved in buying individual cards.

Many thanks, Sue Doyle

Young People's Pages



Mouse Makes

A baby needs clothes
to keep warm like
a snugly sleep suit
or a vest and nappy.

What were you dressed in?

Jesus was wrapped in
.....

read Luke 2:7

A baby needs
somewhere
to sleep like
a crib or a cot.

*What did you
sleep in?*

Jesus slept in a
.....

read Luke 2:7

At Christmas we celebrate the birth of Jesus,
God's Son and our Saviour
coming into the world as a baby,
and we look forward to the time
when Jesus will come again,
not as a baby but as the
King of kings and Lord of lords!

read

John 14:3

A baby needs somewhere
to be born like at home
or in a hospital.

Where were you born?

Jesus was born
in a stable in
.....

read Luke 2:1-6



A baby needs
a name.

*What name were
you called?*

Jesus was given
a special name
that had a
special meaning.

read

Matthew 1:21-23

HAPPY CHRISTMAS!

NADOLIG LLAWEN ✨ NOLLAIG CHRÏDHEIL ✨ NOLLAG SHONA

JOYEUX NOËL • FELIZ NAVIDAD • BUON NATALE • GOD JUL • FROHE WEIHNACHTEN

Bible Bite

A short story from the Bible

It can be read in the Bible in
Luke chapter 2 verses 8 to 20

Shepherds were paid to look after the flocks
out on the hillside. Uneducated and rough,
they were usually avoided, or overlooked.



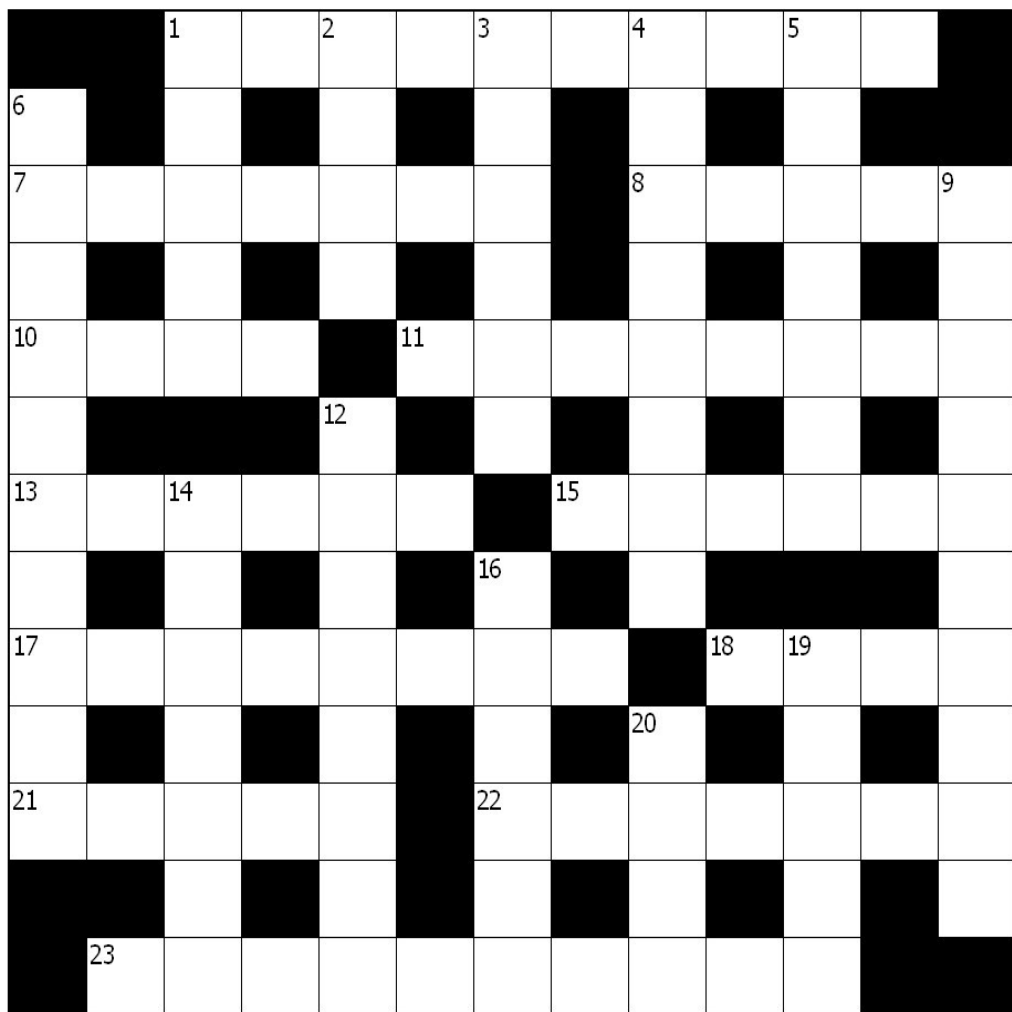
Crossword

Across

- 1 Provisional meeting place of God and the Jews (Exodus 25:9) (10)
- 7 David's third son, killed when his head got caught in a tree during a battle with his father (2 Samuel 18:14,15) (7)
- 8 They ruled much of the west coast of South America in the 15th and early 16th centuries (5)
- 10 Small deer of European and Asian extraction (4)
- 11 Seized control of (Numbers 21:25) (8)
- 13 Terror (Luke 24:5) (6)
- 15 First World War heroine shot by the Germans in Brussels, Nurse Edith (6)
- 17 Stormy (8)
- 18 A bitter variety of this, together with lamb and unleavened bread, was the Passover menu for anyone unclean (Numbers 9:11) (4)
- 21 Arson (anag.) (5)
- 22 How John Newton described God's grace in his well-known hymn (7)
- 23 Habitation (Isaiah 27:10) (10)

Down

- 1 and see that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:8) (5)
- 2 The wicked man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are as ... as a lion (Proverbs 28:1) (4)
- 3 One of the exiles, a descendant of Parosh, who married a foreign woman (Ezra 10:25) (6)
- 4 He escaped from Nob when Saul killed the rest of his family and joined David (1 Samuel 22:19,20) (8)
- 5 City and lake in Central Switzerland (7)
- 6 Offer your bodies as living , holy and pleasing to God (Romans 12:1) (10)
- 9 Pouches carried by horses (Genesis 49:14) (10)
- 12 One who accepts government by God (8)
- 14 Aromatic substance commonly used in Jewish ritual (Exodus 30:1) (7)
- 16 He asked Jesus, 'What is truth?' (John 18:38) (6)
- 19 Are (Romans 13:1) (5)
- 20 You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will ... his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21) (4)



Father Christmas nervously went for his sleigh-driving test. He came rushing back in a thunder of reindeer and pulled up in front of the toy factory. "At last!" he shouted, "No-el plates!"

ACROSS: 1, Tabernacle. 7, Absalom. 8, Incas. 10, Roes. 11, Captured. 13, Fright. 15, Cavell. 17, Cyclonic. 18, Herb. 21, Sonar. 22, Amazing. 23, Settlement
DOWN: 1, Taste. 2, Bold. 3, Ramiah. 4, Abiathar. 5, Lucerne. 6, Sacrifices. 9, Saddlebags. 12, Theocrat. 14, Incense. 16, Pilate. 19, Exist. 20, Save



The PCC has been discussing...

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

PCC Vacancies

Just a reminder to begin with – we still have vacancies in the PCC. We'd really like some younger folk to bring their voice to the table. How about it?

Youth Work

We're sad to say that the youth worker initiative fell at the last hurdle due to a change of circumstances for the prospective internee.

We now need to find a leader for our Youth Church. The numbers continue to increase as friends are invited. But we're restarting from scratch, and are prepared to pay for a part-time youth worker. Please pray for guidance as we move forward.

Pastoral Support

The PCC has been looking at our overall provision of pastoral support, with the aim of making sure that nobody falls through gaps when they are in need. The new Pastoral Support Team is ready to begin work, and the PCC asked a small group to review the wider picture.

The first report from the group focussed on making sure that everyone is aware of what is currently available. A leaflet is proposed to draw the many strands together, the contacts display on the board in the tower will be reinstated, a central email address for pastoral enquiries will be set up and Life Groups will be encouraged to keep in touch in between meetings via email or WhatsApp.

Safeguarding

The six-monthly review of safeguarding matters produced numerous action items on matters of detail. Job descriptions for several roles that were not tackled in the first programme have now been drafted or are in hand. The best way for team leaders to keep aware of each volunteer's situation is being considered. The way leaders are appointed in some areas is being reviewed. The oversight of several groups that do not have a formal place in the overall leadership structure is being considered.

A worksheet 'Promoting a healthy and safe culture' was looked at by the PCC. These worksheets prompt churches to explore what it means to incorporate good practice into our church life.

Evangelism

The PCC revisited the strengths and weaknesses survey carried out at its Away Day in July. Every member was asked to speak and all focussed on the topic of evangelism. To quote directly from the minutes: *We clearly do not 'do' evangelism...our communications are focused on transmitting, without a mechanism to listen to those we wish to reach... we need to meet others where they are and speak to where they are starting from.*

Nevertheless, our membership is growing and diversifying, which can form a starting point for our outward refocussing and there are signs that we are connecting with parts of our community. Our church school is an opportunity provided to us by God.

In November, we looked at the 'Quiet Revival' report by the Bible Society into church attendance growth across the country. Key findings included an increase in attendance by 18-24 year olds; and that a third of non-churchgoers would attend if invited by friends. We need especially to look seriously at our approach to reaching out to young adults.

Miscellaneous Matters

- The PCC was pleased to appoint Roger Hunt and Sharon Giddings as joint caretakers. Meanwhile, Ruth Preater-Gillard has offered to look after the church library.
- Since we returned after Covid, we have been using recyclable paper cups, and have checked that they are actually being recycled. We could go back to china cups if there were volunteers for washing up!
- We have been talking to the diocese about the admission of baptised children to Holy Communion with the aim of introducing this in January.
- We are planning to buy some chairs with arms for both the church (where we only have two) and the Lounge (where the oldest chairs need replacing with ones that are easier to get out of).
- The PCC continues to keep its policy documents under review. In this period we looked at: the Wages, Fees and Charges Policy for 2026 and the associated Event Booking Form; the Data Protection Policy; the Capital Projects List; the Financial Policies document; the Health and Safety Policy; the Risk Assessment Policy; the Fire Risk Assessment; and the Disability Access Statement.

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 Fiona Hope
Church Wardens*



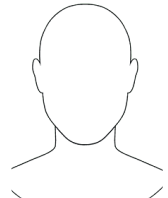
Richard Carpenter



Roger Fenton



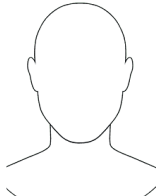
Mike Gillingham



Vacancy



Lyn Jones



Vacancy



David Jordan



Jane Osborne Price



Chris Rickard



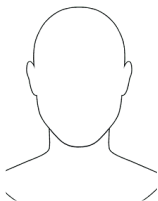
Richard Sainsbury



Johan Smit



Vashti Smit



Vacancy



Jenny Wakefield



Martin Wakefield

photos: Richard Sainsbury

The Lord Is My Strength And My Song

The Lord is my strength and my song
The Lord is my strength and my song
And he has become my salvation
Sing to the Lord for he has done marvellous things
Sing to the Lord for he has done marvellous things
Sing to the Lord, sing to the Lord, sing to the Lord for he has done marvellous things
The Lord is my strength and my song
The Lord is my strength and my song
And he has become my salvation

Copyright Roland Fudge Mission Praise 658

See, God has come to save me! I will trust and not be afraid, for the Lord is my strength and song; he is my salvation. *Isaiah 12:2 TLB*

I now appreciate that, like a young child, I soaked up both my Bible and songs that contained the Bible in my early years of faith. I loved to sing that 'the Lord is my strength and my song' because He helped me through so much. Yes the other bit is from the psalms but it resonated with me. It put things that had been difficult into perspective. It gave me peace as I sang. I moved my place of worship and learned new songs. Yet even though it must be 25-30 years since I sang Mission Praise, when I read Isaiah 12 'the Lord is my strength and my song'

- I sing it in my head!

Lilian

Quiz of the Year

Answers:

1. a
2. b
3. b
4. a
5. a
6. c
7. b

8. c
9. a
10. a
11. b
12. b
13. c
14. c
15. a

16. c
17. b
18. a
19. b
20. c

Happy
Christmas!



Handel's **MESSIAH**

with orchestra and trumpets!

Saturday 13th December 2025

St James' Church

Taunton

(next to the County Ground)

7:30pm



Registered Charity Number 900173

For tickets and more details search:
Taunton Choral Society

Taunton Choral Society is one of the many choirs and orchestras that use St James Church to stage their concerts. St James is a wonderful concert venue with flexible seating, a good acoustic and facilities. Each concert has a steward from the church and quite often a member of the 'tech' team to provide p/a.

It has been suggested that meeting the audience at some of these concerts would be a really good way of connecting with people who may not ordinarily attend church - a chance to talk to them about the building but also about what we, as Christians, stand for. So why not come along to the performance of Messiah or one of the other concerts in the new year and show the face of St James to a wider audience!



Prodigal

- finding hope in
a story of redemption

St James
Church
TAUNTON

A Lent series of gatherings

Join us for a series of Christian contemplative prayer
Thursdays and Friday 10.30-12 noon @ St James Church

Thursday 26th Feb
The Story

Friday 6th March
*The Younger Son**

Thursday 12th March
The Elder Son

Thursday 19th March
*Knowing the Father**

Thursday 26th March
Becoming the Father

** these sessions include a simple communion service*

Those of any faith and none are most welcome
to join us for any of these gatherings

For more information contact either:
Lyn 07772881463 or **Felicity 07508287808**
or go to **stjamestaunton.org**

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email: vicar@stjamestaunton.co.uk



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Church Office: 01823 272931
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Church Wardens:
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Fiona Hope 07743 917478

Children's Church Pastor: Rachel Haddell
email: rachel@stjamestaunton.org

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email: rogerifenton@gmail.com

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email: martin@scoopscoop.co.uk

Pastoral Care Co-ordinator:
currently vacant

Worship Co-ordinator: Richard Lucas 01823 412942
email: richardlucas.net@gmail.com

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