

A photograph of a stained glass window with a candle in the foreground. The window is composed of several panes in shades of green, yellow, and blue, separated by dark leaded glass. In the foreground, a lit candle in a clear glass holder sits on a surface. The background is a soft-focus view of a church interior.

St James
Church
TAUNTON

St James' Church Magazine
March - May 2026

Letter from the Vicar

Rev Fabian Wuyts

Vicar of St James



Upcoming Sabbatical: A Journey of Renewal

You may have heard a whisper here and there that I shall be disappearing for a while later this year. Before rumours of secret careers or reality television appearances gather momentum, let me reassure you: I am not abandoning ship! I shall be taking a sabbatical.

In the Church of England, clergy are able to apply for a three-month sabbatical after ten years of continuous ministry. It is not an extended holiday (tempting though that sounds), but a deliberate season of rest, renewal, reflection and growth.

My sabbatical begins in May and will unfold in three distinct strands.

1. Pilgrimage and Reflection

The first strand involves walking the ancient Spanish pilgrimage route known as the Camino de Santiago or the Way of St James. Pilgrims from across the globe walk this route for all sorts of reasons: faith, gratitude, healing, adventure, or simply the need for space.



For me it will be an opportunity to reflect with deep gratitude on God's faithfulness over the years, to pray, to listen, and to be physically stretched (it is no gentle stroll!). I look forward to the simplicity of putting one foot in front of the other each day and to the unexpected conversations and stories that so often become holy encounters along the way.

2. Family, Friendship and Celebration



This year also marks a very special milestone: Vashti and I celebrate our 25th wedding anniversary. We will be spending ten days together marking this joyful occasion. This will be the first time we shall be away without children for such an extended period. That alone feels both strange and wonderfully life-giving.

The sabbatical will also offer the rare gift of being present for every weekend with the children. I am hoping for camping and hiking adventures across Devon, Cornwall and South Wales: time outdoors, around campfires, on cliff paths and hillsides, building memories that (I pray) will outlast even my questionable tent-pitching skills.

I also hope to visit family and friends in Belgium, reconnecting with people who have shaped and sustained me over many years. These relationships are part of the quiet scaffolding that holds life and ministry together, and tending them is no small gift.

3. Creativity, Study and New Possibilities

Traditionally, sabbaticals include a study element. I plan to invest in a long-standing passion - music. Music and composition have always been close to my heart and I hope to find a course that stretches and develops this creatively.



Alongside this, I would love to gather together the material I have accumulated over the years and see whether it might form the beginnings of a book. That may be slightly ambitious - but I would value your prayers for wisdom, clarity and courage as I explore the possibility.

There are also humbler aspirations: transforming the garage into a proper hobby and sport space for the family, improving our trailer tent for future adventures and perhaps even organising an extended family holiday later in the summer.

While I Am Away

I am deeply grateful to the Diocese and to you for granting me this opportunity. I am especially thankful for our wonderful churchwardens, who will so ably 'hold the fort', for our gifted and committed ministry team and for our supportive PCC. I am also very grateful to the visiting priests who will lead our communion services during my absence.

I have met with service leaders and preachers to offer guidance, but also encouragement to bring their own creativity and individuality. Things may feel a little different while I am away, and that is not a cause for concern but for celebration. This is a wonderful opportunity for gifts to flourish, confidence to grow and for the church to continue thriving.

A Final Word

I would greatly value your prayers, both for the preparations in the coming months and for the sabbatical itself. My hope is to return in the second half of August with fresh energy, deeper perspective and renewed joy for the calling we share together.

Thank you for your encouragement, your kindness, and your faithfulness.

With every blessing,
Your Vicar
Fabian

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Many thanks to all the contributors to the Magazine. If you have something to share for the June-August '26 edition, do contact the Editor - details on page 44.

Deadline for copy is Friday 15 May 2026



This Magazine grows bigger and bigger! Welcome to a bumper edition with some informative and thought provoking articles covering Mothering Sunday, Lent, Easter...and more!

Mike Gillingham writes part 2 of his view on the 'real' Christmas and David Smith pens some personal thoughts on Easter. Ruth P-G updates us on ACTS Uganda and also tells us of the new venture that will help fund her travel in support of that charity - she's also taken on the role of Church Librarian.

Re-live your trip to the theatre with a review and fab pics from 'Sleeping Beauty', St James' Payers' latest production. Find out about historical administrative areas in Andrew Wright's article (no, really, it's fascinating!). Richard Carpenter wraps up his review of the Eco Church Survey and Lilian offers some thoughts on our approach to others on Mothering Sunday. There are notices on dates for Easter Services and also for the Lent meditation series, 'Prodigal'.

Many other activities take place at St James' and we have a round up of those and also news of some forthcoming concerts. But that's not all! I thank all contributors for many more articles, regular and 'one-off'. Have a read and enjoy!

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**

Draw Near this Lent

The Church of England's theme for Lent 2026 is 'Draw Near: Life-giving habits for Lent'. It's a very different way of thinking about the season. Often, we identify Lent as a time for prayer and fasting when we 'give things up'. More recently many have decided to adopt an opposite approach – of 'taking something up for Lent'. 'Draw near' has a much wider remit. Each week, it invites us to explore a different aspect of Christian discipleship – worshipping together, praying, exploring the Bible, sharing communion, offering service and sharing the good news with others.

The 'Draw Near' approach fits well with how Lent began. During the Church's earliest days, those wishing to become Christians were known as 'catechumens', people who were learning to live as disciples of Jesus. Preparation was intensive. It took place particularly in the 40 days before new Christians were baptised on the Saturday night before Easter Sunday. Our season of Lent comes from this ancient practice.

When the Church began, it didn't have the trappings we're used to seeing around us such as buildings, hymn books, pews, or paid ministers. Church wasn't an institution. It was known as 'the Way'. Christians met in each other's homes and sought to work out how to follow Jesus in their everyday lives. This wasn't so much about head knowledge, believing a particular set of doctrines. It was about the habits and practices that Christians constantly cultivated to help them draw nearer to God who is with us, in us, around us and beside us every moment of every day. 'Draw Near' comes out of this heritage. It's an invitation to make Lent a journey that brings us closer to God.

I invite you to make use of 'Draw Near' this Lent. It includes materials for adults, for families and for children, resources for schools and encouragement for churches. More information can be found at www.churchofengland.org/faitH-life/what-we-believe/lent-holy-week-and-easter/draw-near-life-giving-habits-lent. As we approach Lent, let's draw near and join each other on the journey to God that is the Way.

Michael - Bishop of Bath and Wells

New Bishop of Taunton

We have a new Suffragan Bishop of Taunton, Fiona Gibson. Family, friends, as well as colleagues old and new travelled to Southwark Cathedral, London for Bishop Fiona's Consecration. On 6th February, during the service led by the Archbishop of York, Steven Cottrell, is when Fiona became a bishop.

Two days later, Wells Cathedral was filled with people from all corners of the diocese as we welcomed Bishop Fiona to Bath and Wells as the new Bishop of Taunton. Her installation ended with a rapturous round of applause led by Bishop Michael. We pray for our new Bishop and her family as she begins her ministry with us.

For those who missed the previous edition of Manna, here is Bishop Fiona's first letter to members of the diocese.



Generations growing in faith together

Our extended family recently got together for a celebration. We were nine adults from 24-68, one toddler, and one dog, and it was glorious! The joy was simply in being together, whatever our age.

I sometimes wonder what would happen in the life of our churches if we could adopt the same outlook there? Each generation glad that the other is there. Each generation contributing something to the whole. Each generation looking to the interests of the others, making sure there was something that spoke to the others even if not to them.

The writer of the Chronicles records something you could miss if you weren't looking for it. In 2 Chronicles 20, when Judah was facing attack from Ammon and Moab, King Jehoshaphat proclaimed a fast and summoned the people. This is what it says in verse 13:

“All Judah stood before the Lord, with their little ones, their wives, and their children.”

At a time of great peril, when the king was seeking the LORD, all generations came together to pray.

We often think of intergenerational meaning us older ones passing on wisdom to the younger ones, and that's certainly part of it. But a truly intergenerational family, which the church is, means all generations welcoming one another, valuing one another, learning from one another, and praying with and for one another. It's not a one-way thing.

Our younger generations are ambassadors from the future, with wisdom to give us about their culture, and how to share the timeless truths of the gospel with their peers. They are leaders and learners, just as we all are.

What might it look like across our diocese if we committed to making room for other generations? What might it look like if, like the people of God in ancient times, we came together in our year of especial focus on prayer - adults, young people, and little ones - and sought the power and wisdom of God together? I have a feeling we'd be surprised!

Fiona - Bishop of Taunton

The first beauty contest?

There is one book in the Bible which never mentions God and which contains possibly the first beauty contest in history. It does, however, centre on courage and answered prayer. It is the book of Esther. It is celebrated by Jews today, as in Jesus time, as the festival of Purim. This year it falls on 2nd March. It is the story of two Jewish slaves of the Persian empire, Mordecai and the orphan Esther, the niece he took under his wing and brought up.

I am always impressed by the way the Bible frequently mentions the important part women played in history. Esther is called upon to risk her life for the safety of the Jewish slaves and calls upon her uncle to mount a prayer meeting to pray for her success.

I would like you to read the book. I have never heard a sermon preached on it so I will not add more spoilers except, the villain's name is Haman and part of the celebration nowadays is to eat 'Haman's Ears' – see the recipe below...and enjoy!

Mike Gillingham

Ingredients:

2 eggs
1/2 cup oil
2/3 cup sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla
2 teaspoons
baking powder
2 1/2 cups flour
Jam, chocolate
spread or desired
filling

Directions:

1. Cream together sugar, oil, eggs and vanilla.
2. Slowly add flour and baking powder. Mix together. The dough might be crumbly, use your hands to smooth it out and combine it.
3. Roll out dough on floured surface (about 1/4" to 1/8" thick - not too thick since then the circles are hard to shape and will open up, but not too thin since then it will rip when shaping or filling)
4. Cut out circles using a large circular biscuit cutter or the rim of a large glass cup.
5. Fill centre of circle with desired filling (about 1 teaspoon), then slowly fold over one side, then the next and finally bring the bottom on top. Gently pinch the corners. You can also simply bring up the sides, forming a triangle by pinching the corners together
6. Place on a lightly greased baking tray and bake 175° / 155° / gas mark 3½ for 12 to 15 minutes depending on how soft or crispy you want them.

In the previous edition of the Magazine, Mike Gilligham offered some of his thoughts on the 'real Christmas'. In this follow-up article he looks at some of the events that followed that miraculous birth...

The Real Christmas

So, in the first article I left Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus enjoying the hospitality, probably of a relative, in Bethlehem.

Let us continue. From Luke's account we then see Mary and Joseph taking Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem to offer the sacrifice for Mary, and since they gave doves, they were clearly poor, not surprising as Joseph was a labourer.

What happens next? Luke suggests Mary and Joseph went directly to Nazareth, but Matthew inserts another story. I think it would actually be unlikely for Mary and Joseph to return to Nazareth too soon after the birth, in case of rejection or worse from those who knew them and would realise the baby was older than he should have been. Neither gospel is intent on giving a complete biography, that was not their purpose.

So we come to the 'three kings' or better three Magi, but still not good enough – the number is not given, it may have been 23, or more or fewer! The number comes from the 3 gifts. The word used for the men is not Hebrew, they were from the East. Well there is not much land to the West and they were probably people who studied the stars to foretell the future, a cross between early astronomers and horoscope writers. They would have been regarded by most people of the time as magicians, hence the name. Whether they had camels or donkeys or horses, we have no idea.

One important detail is that the gifts were valuable and portable, just what a fleeing family would need to tide them over until they could settle somewhere else. When researching them a few years ago, I learnt that myrrh has some anaesthetic properties and may have been useful to Mary to help Jesus with teething. The gifts were the most valuable things they could offer.

The star is interesting, and has caused much discussion. The first thing to remember is that the Jews rejected all idea of astrology. Whatever it was the Magi saw, it was not so blindingly obvious that anybody would notice it, hence Herod had no idea when it appeared. The star rose in the east, like every star including our nearest one, the sun, because the earth rotates. Some of our carols talk about the Magi following the star, but the Bible does not suggest that at all.



What Matthew tells us is that the Magi saw a star and deduced that it meant there was going to be a new king of the Jews. They then went to the obvious place, the palace in the capital. When they next see the star, they are overwhelmed with joy, strongly

suggesting they had not seen it for a while. Matthew says the star went before them, not that they followed it. They were sent to Bethlehem, where they could see the star over the house where the young Jesus is living with his parents. Around the right time there is a series of double conjunctions, where two planets align, and it might have been that, the time between the two appearances being enough time for the journey, but we will never be sure. The star appeared over the house, because Bethlehem is on top of a ridge and so travellers looking up might well have seen such a view.

Jesus at this stage is called a child, paidion, not a baby, brephos, so some time has elapsed. It also seems that Mary and Joseph had moved to their own house. Even with the most hospitable hosts, you can outstay your welcome. Anyway, they would want to set up on their own. Remember, Joseph had a most portable skill so could work almost anywhere.



Some writers doubt the story of the massacre of the innocents, but a cursory glance at Herod's many murders, including his wife and some sons, would realise that a few, perhaps six, babies killed in a village, would hardly merit mention in histories. The couple's stay in Egypt would not have had to be long, Herod died in either 4 BC or 1 BC with most scholars seeming to favour the earlier date. A few years would be enough for Mary to return with her children without arousing any accusations of immorality.

Oh yes, her children. The Roman church has made the perpetual virginity of Mary part of their theology. Frankly this contradicts the clear teaching of the Bible, and I think it is an insult to anybody who is married. When the relationship between Mary and Joseph is mentioned in Matthew chapter one it says that the marriage was not consummated before Jesus was born. That clearly means they had a normal married life afterwards. This is further supported by the mentions of Jesus' brothers, James, Joses, Simon and Jude, and sisters, who are not named.

Matthew 13:55-56 says the crowd react to Jesus' teaching, "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" This is also reported in Mark 6:3. John 7:3-5 say, 'Jesus' brothers said to him, "Leave Galilee and go to Judea, so that your disciples there may see the works you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world." For even his own brothers did not believe in him'. Later, 1 Corinthians 15:7 says Jesus made a resurrection appearance to his brother James. Then, Matthew 28:10 records that the rest of Jesus' brothers would see him at a resurrection appearance in Galilee.

Those who believe Mary and Joseph did not behave as a married couple make excuses, for instance saying that these might have been Joseph's children from a previous marriage, (surprising the Bible never mentions this, or gives any hint that there were other children around at the nativity!) or cousins. Just to make clear that this is a desperate distortion, let me give you an altered version of Matthew 12:46-50:

While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and cousins stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, "Your mother and cousins are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my cousins?" Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my cousins. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my male cousin and female cousin and mother."

Interestingly Jesus uses separate words for brother and sister, definitively including the women hearing and following God's will. The sisters of Jesus were probably not with the brothers because they were too busy caring for their own children at their various homes, they would presumably be in their twenties.

We have only one other story of Jesus' early years, his going with his family to the temple for the Passover as did a large crowd. Jesus is 12, one year before his Bar Mitzvah when he becomes a son of the Law. Mary and Joseph come with a crowd and leave with the crowd. It may seem careless, but Jesus presumably had friends and probably his parents thought he was with them. I can understand this from our own parish rambles when our sons were certainly not always with us adults. Jesus is swatting for his coming of age next year when he will be 13.

So, we have a picture of Jesus being brought up in a fairly ordinary family, with brothers and sisters, friends also. One of us, yet, born to save us.

Mike Gillingham

Goodbye Betty

I would like to pay tribute to my friend, a kind, gentle, lovely, member of St James' who died in January this year aged 91 – Betty Partridge

My husband, Peter, knew Alan and Betty for many years through bell ringing and we used to sit with them in church. When Peter died in February 2021, Alan and Betty took me 'under their wing' and I have been visiting them regularly ever since – they helped me get through some dark times!

Betty was a true Christian – she loved the old hymns, bell ringing, music, flowers and wild life. She also had a 'sharp' mind enjoying making puzzles, crosswords, and was an avid knitter. We had so much in common, and I always felt at ease in her company, we always had something to discuss on my visits.

Most importantly she was a family person. Her two daughters and five grandchildren were her world and she adored them all, and they in turn are now doing a wonderful job of keeping Alan company and supported.



I feel truly honoured to have been her friend.
Sue Jeanes



A Lenten Conversation

**This stream wanders
meadow-wide or willow-bound;
birthed by clouds, combed through morning breezes,
its nature to meander, irrigate, nourish, spill, then turn & fall
from source back to source, via the wide sea.**

**A butterfly wanders
to buddleia & aster, jaggng in sunlight
or leaf-suspended from rain, having from its pin-head sac
peeled freedom, & again from self-spun case broken to the wild air;
from egg to velveteen marvel, its purpose is dance.**

**Sands wander
dune-slipping, wind & dew-tumbled,
sensible of their Maker's feet as He faced temptation's heat,
the chill of the knowledge of thorns; grains blow, lodge, drift
from ancient mantle to ocean-bed, mountain-memoried.**

**My thoughts wander
from child to parent, care to worry, stress,
prayers to lip-tripped hurt, a forgotten promise, love, loneliness,
back to the shopping, money, old aches, friends; yet my heart begs
from morning to eyes' rest that God be my centre, my mind's gravity.**

**My will wanders
& though I mean to, I fail, stumble to pray;
despite resolve, words spike out, longings rove, bitterness eats
the kernel from days' sweet moments. But Christ lost His life to save
me,
rescues me out of floods, from wild, unguarded wastes, from guilt
& its estrangements, because He loves me: so, I choose to follow Him,
from Eden's wilfulness through Grace to the New Jerusalem.**

Philippa Johnson

Sleeping Beauty

A Family/Community Pantomime

Fun, Fellowship and Fundraising

has been at the heart of St James' Players' productions since our formation in 2008. But our Faith is the underpinning factor and one which we hope is evident to those who came to our performances of 'Sleeping Beauty'. As hoped, this attracted a varied audience,

some church members but many not, some young, some not so young, but all willing to enter into the spirit of 'cheering' the heroes and 'booing' the villains.

With such a large production, it's a challenge to have enough people to direct, take on lead roles, learn lines and sing (more or less in tune); and to provide live music, choreography and vital logistical support. There were many answers to prayer - new connections were made and old ones renewed, which enabled us to have a full cast and crew who stayed the course and were not struck down by bugs and viruses at the crucial time. God was very good to us and the experience of many members of the church family working together was very special.

So many people have supported the cast and crew in many ways, including preparing and designing publicity, making sure it got into the right hands, organising and serving refreshments, painting scenery, erecting staging, making costumes and props, applying make-up and doing the myriad essential technical things...the list seems endless. Also our families who put up with us dashing off to rehearsals, learning our lines, singing our songs in the shower and then coming to hear it all again live. Thank you all.

But a performance without a wider audience is pointless so we are very grateful to those who came, brought friends, joined in the fun and contributed to our fundraising. At the point of writing, we have raised just over £1700 to donate to **Taunton Foodbank** and **Tearfund's Ukraine Appeal**. Wow! Most importantly though we hope we have made connections with people who will be able to return and feel at home in our church family.

Take a look at the photo scrapbook opposite and see if you can spot your favourite characters from the panto. Our thanks to Chris Buckman for being our 'David Bailey'!

Jenny Wakefield



Tearfund's Ukraine Appeal

One of the charities supported by the recent performances of 'Sleeping Beauty' is Tearfund's Ukraine Appeal. The charity's 'Transforming Communities' training equips churches to lead transformation in their local communities by identifying needs and mobilising resources together. Tearfund's role is to kick-start this journey by helping churches to recognise that they can play an active part in bringing about the change they long to see.

Tearfund is working in Ukraine alongside local Christian partners to provide urgent support. This local, on-the-ground partnership is key to Tearfund's mission as they follow Jesus wherever the need is greatest, responding to crises and partnering with local churches and organisations to help people lift themselves out of poverty. One inspiring individual leading a partner organisation is Yana (name changed for protection).

Her non-profit organisation (which grew out of her former building contractor business in 2018) is dedicated to rebuilding people's lives and reaching the community in a variety of practical ways. Her team provides educational input to restore opportunities to children, offering them a sense of normality, friendship and fun. Yana's organisation has also provided essential services such as a water pump and purification system, enabling access to clean water in their community. The ongoing conflict has left most people with some form of trauma so, to help, they have a drama therapist running a drama club with mixed group of 25 adults and children taking part...and a waiting list of 240 women and 400 children! They also have a physio room providing rehabilitation for injured men returning from the front. In addition, they won a grant and now use a 3D printer to print models of landmines so people can learn what they look like and how to avoid them

More information on her work can be found here: <https://www.tearfund.org/stories/2025/01/introducing-yana-an-inspiring-tearfund-partner-in-ukraine>

Another example is of a Christian seminary that is one of Tearfund's supported partners in Ukraine. As the needs have become greater, the responsibilities of the graduating students have become heavier and the school's role has moved beyond the classroom and into the neighbourhood around them. Daniela is one of the students learning to be the hands and feet of Jesus as they meet the needs of people facing the fallout of the years of violent conflict.

Her story can be found here: <https://www.tearfund.org/stories/2025/02/ukraine-daniela-and-the-ministers-on-the-frontline>

Sue Doyle

(Sue is Tearfund's rep at St James'. If you would like any further information or details of how you can support the work, do talk to Sue – Ed.)

New Banners for St James'

In the recent edition of the magazine we wrote about a plan to produce new banners for St James'. Well, the first one is now on display!



The new series show the 'Fruits of the Spirit' as listed in the New Testament (Galations 5:22-23). Artist Pat Preater, who designed most of our banner collection at St James', was inspired to paint some bookmarks based on readings from the scriptures. The banner group then worked from Pat's sketches, transforming them into long banners to adorn the pillars of the church. The initial banner was completed last year, and comprises the first three 'fruits': Love, Joy and Peace.



We meet together to sew on a Thursday afternoon, enjoying the warm welcome and Pat's large and homely kitchen. As we work we share our lives and concerns, encouraging one another and praying.



We took homework away, embellishing letters with beads and sequins; a relaxing and satisfying task. All the letters are finished and we are working on the remaining six banners; they will be released when completed.



'...But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law.'

Galatians 5: 22-23

ACTS Uganda Update

Who would imagine that a bottle of epilepsy medicine could make such a difference to a child's life? Yet for Jordan, now his seizures are under control, he is able to sit in a supportive seat and watch his mum doing tasks around the house. He is starting to recognise familiar people, and he even started giggling! His mum is bringing him up on her own. Each week she spends the day at Kiwumolo House,



Jordan is supported to stand in the standing frame

where Jordan receives physiotherapy and occupational therapy. Even more than that, she and her boy are accepted as people of dignity and value, part of the Kiwumolo House community. She is growing in confidence and starting to pass on tips to new mothers coming to the Centre. Jordan will probably never be able to walk or talk, but he is seen for who he is, for his personality, and his tiny milestone achievements are recognised and celebrated.

Many of you already know ACTS Uganda, our small charity which supports this Centre for children with disabilities in central Uganda. It is the only place in that area offering Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, and social support to these children and their families. All children are welcome. They receive a full therapy assessment, and their parents or caregivers are helped to understand the nature of the disability. They are taught how to help their child at home through good positioning, exercises and activities and locally-made therapy equipment. The Centre nurse, Lynette, offers help with medical and nursing needs.

'Kiwumolo' means 'the place where I am at home, the place where I can relax, the place where I am accepted'. This is a game-changer in a culture where there are superstitions around disability and many families feel ostracised by their communities because their child has a disability. Not only are the staff treating the children who come to the Centre, they are also reaching out to the community with education about disability, helping to dispel those myths and superstitions. This takes time, it may take a generation to change attitudes, but the change has started. Two children have been accepted into the local primary school. It is a big step for the school to include these children and we pray that more children will have the opportunity of an education in the future.

The picture on the right shows Joseph trying out a supportive seat with a tray. One like this was then made by a local carpenter, for Joseph to use in school.





One of the boys who is cared for by his grandmother, and needs the services of the Centre

Emmanuel is the Centre Director. He sent us a recent update telling us about a day of outreach into a distant part of the area where they found two children with disabilities living in impoverished circumstances and no provision to help their disability. They live with their grandmother. Now the staff have found them, they will work to gain the grandmother's trust and find ways of working with her to help the children.

Emmanuel also told us about Angela, a child who has been with the Centre since she was two weeks old. Her disability means her development has been delayed but now, aged 4, she is standing and starting to walk. She's a feisty character! And a joy to work with. Here she is with Emmanuel.



The people of St James' Church have been faithful supporters for several years through prayer, financial giving and practical support. Our next event will be a coffee morning, plants and table top sale on 16th May. Please join us and bring your friends and family!

On a practical note, we can always make good use of children's shoes, small baby and toddler toys (no batteries please), any books with a bar code on them, spare foreign currency and any good-quality items to sell on 16th May. Please pass any of these to Ruth Preater-Gillard.

Last Christmas many of you purchased 'alternative gifts', buying medicines, bus fares, food parcels, physio sessions, outreach days and even wheelchairs. Thank you all, you are helping the Centre to make a huge difference to so many lives. This isn't just a social enterprise; this is living out the values of the Kingdom of God where each person is loved, valued and treated with dignity. The Centre is gradually turning the tide of a culture that has devalued people with disabilities, shunned them and neglected to care for them. Their motto is, 'We are the hands and feet of Christ'. Thank you for joining in with this.

Ruth Preater-Gillard and Margaret Mockford
(Therapists and ACTS trustees)

Using My Gifts in Service: Why I'm a Tropic Ambassador and How It Supports My Trip to Uganda

"Come and buy your pomegranates!"

That is my earliest memory of 'selling' in church. I was about eight years old, standing in St James' Church, playing the part of a woman in a bustling market during a primary school Christmas play. I can still remember the thrill of calling out my line, the pretend baskets of fruit, and the sense of being part of something joyful and communal. Mostly concentrating very hard to pronounce that word correctly! It makes me smile now, because in many ways that tiny moment planted a seed – though I never imagined it would grow into anything resembling a real-life venture. And yet, as an adult, I often feel a tension between that innocent childhood memory and the well-known passage where Jesus overturns the tables in the Temple. The Message translation puts it starkly:

'Jesus went straight to the Temple and threw out everyone who had set up shop, buying and selling... "My house was designated a house of prayer; you have made it a hangout for thieves." Then the blind and the crippled came to him and he healed them.' (Matthew 21:12–14)

There are moments when my instinct echoes that scene – a discomfort about mixing faith and anything that looks like commerce. It can feel at odds with my current venture, and I've honestly wrestled with the concept.

Growing Into New Roles

Over the last two years, I've stepped into two roles I never expected:

- Trustee of Action for Children's Trust (ACTS), a charity our St James' family supports prayerfully and financially
- Tropic Skincare Ambassador, running my own small, flexible business alongside my other job

Both roles have stretched me, taught me new skills, and opened doors I didn't anticipate. My faith has always shaped my work. As many of you know, I'm a qualified Occupational Therapist (OT), and for most of my OT career I've worked within the NHS. Service, compassion, and practical care have always felt like the heart of my vocation. Scripture reminds us that God equips us with gifts for a purpose:

'We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.' (Romans 12:6)
'Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others.' (1 Peter 4:10)

My first year of volunteering, when I was 18, was with 'Time for God', in Essex and I was again supported in prayer by the St James' community. My role was supporting people recovering from mental health difficulties; it taught me that service can take many forms. Since then, Scouting, church roles, and now ACTS have continued that thread.

Why Tropic?

Becoming a Tropic Ambassador felt strange at first. Selling, earning commission and running a business were completely outside my comfort zone. I questioned whether it was 'selfish' or somehow unspiritual.

But as I prayed and reflected, I was reminded that Scripture speaks not only about integrity in worship, but also about wise stewardship. In the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30 and Luke 19:11-27), Jesus tells of a master who entrusts resources to his servants. The ones who use, grow and increase what they have been given are commended; the one who hides his talent and does nothing with it is rebuked. The message is clear: if God gives us a gift – whether money, skills, opportunities or relationships – He calls us to steward it wisely, to put it to work and to allow it to bear fruit. Our wealth is really God's wealth and we are accountable for how we use it. This theme continues in Proverbs 31, where the wise woman is praised not only for her character but for her enterprise. She produces goods, sells them, invests her earnings, buys a field, plants a vineyard and provides for her household. Her work brings blessing, stability and abundance to those around her. Far from being discouraged, her diligence and profit are celebrated as part of her faithful living.

These passages helped me see that using my abilities to generate income – especially when done with integrity, purpose and generosity – can be part of honouring God, not contradicting Him. I chose Tropic because its values align with mine: sustainability, natural ingredients, reducing chemicals on our skin and a business model that fits around my other commitments. The ambassador community is supportive, empowering and full of women cheering one another on. And unexpectedly, Tropic has become a subtle outreach opportunity. Conversations about wellbeing, confidence or why I'm involved often lead naturally into discussions about faith, charity and purpose. It's not evangelism with a capital E, just gentle, relational sharing when people ask.

Why I'm Sharing This With You Now

The reason I'm writing about this in the church magazine is not to promote a business, but to share with you how I'm using my enterprise wisely. Over the next few months, every penny of commission I earn through Tropic is going directly towards funding the next charitable trip to Uganda. It's important to say clearly: This is entirely separate from ACTS' fundraising. Charity donations go directly to the projects in Uganda. My travel costs are my own responsibility and Tropic is one way I'm choosing to meet them.

Thank You

Thank you for being a church family that nurtures, supports and encourages service in all its forms. I also want to say that I'm not keen to do business at church. The image of Jesus turning over the tables in the Temple is a strong one and it sits firmly in my mind. That's why I'm reaching out through the magazine instead and sharing my contact details in this gentler way. Should you wish to support my venture – whether through interest in the products, curiosity about Tropic or simply wanting to encourage me – please feel free to get in touch. I usually keep a catalogue in my bag and there is something for everyone, whether you need everyday skincare, SPF, a luxurious treat or a thoughtful gift for someone else.

Ruth Praeter-Gillard

**You can contact Ruth on 07590 679888 or
<https://tropicskincare.com/pages/ruthpreatergillard>**

THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT DAYS OF YOUR LIFE

The American author Mark Twain wrote,

'The most important days of your life are the day you were born and the day you find out why'.

Whilst 'why' could refer to the birds and the bees, I take another meaning. Mark Twain himself was sceptical about religion and the Bible, but this statement may point to God's search for our souls...

There's not much argument that the day we were born was an important one, for better or worse! A new born baby has no inkling about the challenges it will face, but growing up they will learn what parents and society expect from them. At some stage, a person might start to ask themselves the 'why' question: "OK, I'm here, is there anything which could transform my life beyond mere existence into something more significant?"

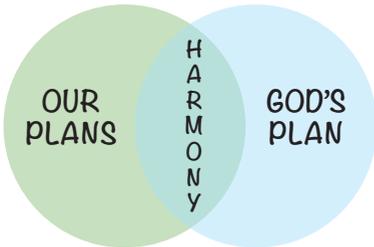
They may ask, "Am I here to make myself happy?" "To achieve something really special for myself?"

Would you say, for example, that you had found the answer because... I found my life-partner; got a qualification, played sport for my country, survived trauma, climbed the highest mountain, discovered a far-off land, etc., etc.? I'm sure God would delight if we did these things, but do you notice that this list is all about 'me-benefits'?

One of the most dramatic examples in the Bible of a person who totally changed from being focussed on himself was St Paul. He had a complete transformation which started as he was travelling to Damascus. His work involved hounding and punishing believers of the new group who followed Jesus' teaching, the Christians. On the road, God struck Paul down with a brilliant light and he was taken into the city. Later, God gave a vision to a Christian named Ananias in which he was told to go to an exact address in Straight Street and 'lay hands' on Paul. God knew Paul was praying to him right then. The result was that Paul regained his sight and became a Christian himself. He felt forgiven for his past and started out on a totally different life, encouraging people to believe in the Good News of Jesus whom God had sent to earth.

I have become aware that personal achievements, even happiness, don't make the sum total of all that we are put on this Earth for. Fundamentally, God has plans for us. That's not always an easy thing to accept because most of us

like to be in control and follow our own plans. It's my belief that our own plans and God's plans can work together for good. The Bible records the prophet Jeremiah being told by God, "I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." That should give us reassurance and the harmony we all seek.



In Genesis chapter 3, we hear about Adam and Eve, the first humans to inhabit the Earth. God had created a perfect world to live in, but warned them never to eat any fruit from the tree of good and evil which stood at the centre of the Garden of Eden. However, they were tempted by the serpent to disobey God and proceeded to eat a fruit (often depicted as an apple) from the tree. They realised they had gone against

God's specific instructions, became ashamed and tried to hide from God. God then walked through the Garden looking for them, calling out to Adam, "Where are you?" To me, this message seems to be saying, "You have lost your way, I'm still here if you want to join me in my project for humanity."

There is a song by Don Francisco on You Tube called 'Adam, where are you?' (look it up on Google). In one verse, he sings about Adam:

'...all down through the ages he can hear his Maker calling out his name... "Adam, Adam where are you?"

I think God has been asking this question of the human race from its beginning and continues to ask it today.

In conclusion, after we are born, the second most important day of our lives could be when we respond to God's call, "Where are you?" We need faith to respond, "Here I am". More information about what being a Christian means and your opportunity to ask questions about it can be found from the Alpha courses which St James' runs during the year.

I like to believe that when the penny drops and we understand the reason we were born, God will have helped each one of us to understand why.

Andy Hall

A promotional graphic for the Alpha course. It features a red circular background with white text. The text includes: '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', and 'Looking forward to seeing you there!'. A QR code is located at the bottom of the graphic.

The Stone, the watch, the seal: reflections on the Easter Story

by David Smith

Reading: Matthew 27:57 – 28:15

The parties that humiliated, condemned and crucified Jesus, fearful that the events surrounding his death may point towards the truth of his assertions, obstructed any further claims by putting a guard on the tomb. This is described in Matthew's Gospel and reiterated in the second verse of the Easter Hymn attributed to Charles Wesley, 'Christ the Lord is risen today, saints on earth and angels say'

Vain the stone, the watch, the seal,
Christ hath burst the gates of hell:
Death in vain forbids his rise,
Christ hath opened paradise

What lesson may be learnt from this portion of scripture about the miraculous events surrounding Jesus' burial and subsequent restoration and the wider context? What message may we deduce for the 21st century?

Joseph of Arimathea was a very brave man since he approached Pilate requesting that he be allowed to bury Jesus according to Jewish rite. Jesus' disciples did not feel sufficiently empowered to do this, fearing for their own safety should they acknowledge their association with Jesus. Indeed, Joseph was an influential man on the Jewish Council but may well have been kept in the dark about the Chief Priest's true intentions.

The Chief Priests and Pharisees approached Pilate on the Sabbath to request that the tomb where Jesus lay be made secure to prevent Jesus' disciples from stealing his body and then claiming that he had risen from the dead. It might appear that Jewish guards were not available due to the Sabbath.

In Matthew's account, evil men used three devices to try to restrain the will of God and His desire to bring about a true reconciliation with mankind.

The Stone, The Watch and The Seal

The 'stone' was a huge boulder that would have been used to close off the mouth of the tomb. This would have rolled in a specially constructed gully for ease of movement but would still have weighed several tons. It probably needed a team of several men using long poles as levers to manoeuvre it into position. It would certainly be beyond the capacity of the watching women to have moved it on their own.

This stone represents the physical constraints that face each and every one of us at some time in our lives. Our need to hear and understand the gospel message concerning Jesus Christ. Often, we delay addressing this significant news due to outside pressures, which feels particularly relevant during Easter. The stone was designed to prevent physical contact with the risen Christ. Neither Jesus nor those

waiting outside the tomb were humanly capable of passing its physical barrier. Who will move the stone of unbelief that blocks our way towards the saviour who is patiently waiting for our confession of faith? Just as the women asked Jesus to move the stone, mistaking him for the gardener, it is imperative that we ask Him to break down the barriers that would obstruct our union with him. These might include distractions such as demands on our time, hobbies and interests, relationships, our position in society. These obstructions do not end after a confession of faith and acceptance of the Lord Jesus as a risen saviour. The stone also represents setbacks, dissent and conflict, and possible periods of unbelief as we cope with the frailty of being human. Our God was once human and is able to empathise with us having faced the full gamut of human experience, including being unjustly accused and suffering horrendously for those he loved. If we feel the stone is too hard to shift we can rest assured that Jesus faced and overcame such tribulation. Indeed, he was instrumental in shifting the greatest stone in human experience; the heart of stone that blocked a proper relationship with God the Father.

In the Easter story, God moved the stone through the combined effects of an earthquake and the intervention of angels. These heavenly beings demonstrated their opinion of man's efforts to thwart the will of God by sitting on the stone! God still moves the greatest of boulders that obstructs the lives of people today – the huge burden of sin that everyone is destined to bear through faith in Jesus Christ.

The 'watch' was a detachment of Roman soldiers who would have been responsible for public order in and around the environs of Jerusalem. It is possible that they had already had a busy weekend. On Thursday, they may have been involved in the arrest of a well-known dissenter with a very large following that had the potential to turn nasty. Friday, same dissenter was interrogated, tried and crucified. All these events had the potential to cause a riot and may have done so had the soldiers not conducted themselves with detached professionalism. And now they had been detailed to guard the dissenter's tomb to prevent any untoward activity; no-one should go in or, more importantly, come out of the tomb.

The watch comprises those who stand detached from us who still in some way exert influence or control over our access to Jesus Christ. Our erstwhile friends and relatives who put down or criticise our relationship with the Lord Jesus; colleagues and supervisors who regard our faith as a source of ridicule or criticism, society that condones petty restrictions on the wearing of badges of faith or praying for people as part of working practice yet allows the most dreadful, unnatural practices to occur, threatening punishment to any who object on behalf of a grieving Father in heaven. We must beware of God deniers who gain profit and acclaim from actively diverting people away from the truth about Jesus Christ. Those who use science to bamboozle people into accepting that unbelief is logical, without answering the fundamental questions of what existed before science.

The watch exhibited their true colours when, confronted with a more powerful and just cause than they were used to, they found themselves rendered speechless and

ineffectual. However, true to their nature and instead of accepting the truth of what they had witnessed, they allowed themselves to be persuaded to recite a lie in exchange for money. They had witnessed the greatest event in human experience and thought to keep quiet about it so as momentarily to enjoy the pleasures of this life.

Finally, we come to the 'seal' mentioned in Matthew's account. The seal was a device to authenticate powerful forces' control over events. A nobleman's seal on a document was a declamation of his will contained within its contents. It denoted possession and constituted a right to behave in a manner befitting his station. The seal on the tomb was affixed to challenge the right of any unauthorised person to pass in or out of the tomb in direct contravention of the wishes of the chief priests and other religious leaders of the day.

Mankind continues to challenge the right of Jesus Christ to his Kingship as the saviour of the world by virtue of his role as the only Son of God. Other faiths and none would have you believe otherwise. Many persecute the followers of Jesus and make criminals of believers. They place 'seals' on everyday life making it difficult for Christians to meet, gain employment or play a full part in the life of their society. Such seals are designed to insulate us from aspects of our faith that assist us in our daily walk with the Lord, degrading the quality of our relationship with Him. Ultimately, they seek to seal all from the life-changing gospel concerning Jesus Christ, replacing it with beliefs and practices that suit powerful authorities in opposition to the wishes of God the Father.

The seal of hopelessness that separated God from mankind was forever broken at Jesus' resurrection. Throughout history empires, authorities, philosophies, institutions and false religions have sought to restore the power of Satan's seal on human kind. Each has fallen, or is destined to fall, by the wayside in the face of the remarkable truths of Eastertide.

The events we celebrate at this season remind us of the huge stone that has been removed from our path towards God the Father through the sacrifice of Jesus, His son, who was punished for our disgraceful conduct. The watch of the evil one has been frustrated as he can only stand by and witness the amazing spectacle of a person born again through acceptance of Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection on their behalf. The seal of dead religion loosens as Jesus fulfils all the promises of the past concerning himself and is available to each and every one who accepts him as Master, Lord and Saviour.



When is a hundred not a century...?



As you progress through school some words fascinate you. From chemistry, *deliquescent*; from primary school history, *wapentake*, from secondary school history, the *Bashi-Bazouks*. (I have on my bookshelf an 1884 book 'Adventures in Servia among the Bashi-Bazouks' by Dr A Wright.)

Another word that I learnt at primary school was *isthmus* because we lived on one. The Wirral peninsular was only readily accessible from the east end near Chester. It was a pre-Norman administrative unit in Cheshire, the Wirral Hundred. Cheshire was divided into 13 hundreds (3 later became Flint and Denbighshire). The hundred as a unit of government was widespread. Sussex was divided into 6 hundreds neatly organised, each with a section of Channel coast and lying parallel to each other. Somerset was once divided into hundreds of which Taunton Deane was one.

Each hundred had its local parliament assembly site (*Ping* – assembly and *vollr* – field), and in the Wirral that is the village of Thingwall. The same meaning attaches to places like Dingwall and in the name of the Manx parliament, Tynwald.



When I moved to Yorkshire we lived in the Don valley in an area informally known as Hallamshire. Originally it was a hundred covering the north side of Sheffield. Historically there were only 3 divisions of Yorkshire, the East Riding, the North Riding and the West Riding. The West Riding took in Hallamshire and the area to the north including Barnsley, Wakefield and the Leeds area valleys. Those of a certain age will remember Wilfred Pickles' 'Have a Go' programme on the BBC Radio Light Programme. Those who took part were given the chance to win a money prize for answering correctly a topical question. A teenage boy won the prize for knowing that there were only 3 Ridings because riding meant a third part. ("Give 'im the money, Mabel.")

To the east of Hallamshire, beyond Doncaster, was Lincolnshire. This, too, is a county administered for centuries as 3 separate districts. Instead of the term 'Riding', residents used the word 'Parts'. To the north the Parts of Lindsey, to the south east Parts of Holland and the south west Parts of Kesteven. The flag for each of the 'Parts' of Lincolnshire shows a red semicircle at the hoist to signify the whole county of Lincolnshire. The remaining three-quarters of the flags show devices appropriate to Lindsey, Holland and Kesteven.

When school history classes mentioned the *Soke of Peterborough*, we heard 'Soak of' and assumed he was the local drunk. In fact the term *Soke* describes another division of local administration and gives us the adjective *socage*. Being a Norman term it denotes more the area of authority of the Norman Lord rather than the assembly of the people's representatives.

But back to hundreds as areas of administration from Saxon times, and the term *wapentake*. This has the same meaning as hundred but seems to have been preferred to 'hundred' in Yorkshire.

Andrew Wright

Mothing Sunday 15th March - Kindness

When Mothering Sunday comes around, it is very easy simply to think about physical mothers and, for some, this can be upsetting. Not every person has a good experience of a mother, others have parents that are at a distance and there are also people, some in their thirties or older, that do not have a mother alive. This time can be especially hard for parents of young children who want to get things right and do not have a living example near.

When I think of the Christian women that have impacted my life most, as 'big sisters' or a 'mother', marital status is not part of it. A single lady, a former nurse and health visitor was the first person to befriend me, listen, and most importantly pray. She was delighted when I came to faith and supported me a great deal. The next person in those early years was a widow with children and grandchildren. She 'mothered' me when I was single and had a wealth of experience of being married, a single parent and yet most importantly showed me how faith was practised day to day. She made me a book of Bible verses, beginning with her favourite, 'As your days so shall your strength be.' (Deuteronomy 33:25 – New King James Version) She listened to Christian radio, lent me books and she taught me to laugh. Only later did I realise how much she had influenced me as I repeated one of her phrases, "If you receive a little kindness, pass it on."

Please don't read the letters to Timothy and Titus (1 Timothy 5:9-10; Titus 2:3-5) and then dismiss the teaching as irrelevant to our century. It is not about working full time. Thankfully those of an older generation do not have to work to put food on the table. Maybe we do not like the phrase 'good deeds' but we do know that we all need kindness.

'No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the Lord's people, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds.' 1 Tim. 5:9-10

'Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.' Titus 2:3-5

To build a friendship is as it always has been; about time, effort to listen, praying for that person. By learning more about someone, we can come to understand needs, the practical help such as letting a family new to the area know where the play parks are, or family-friendly walks out of town.

The single person working in this area can be glad of someone who cares as much as the mother of two small children. Clearly it is important not to judge when a different generation does something like a bedtime routine differently.

I see how those in the church of what I would loosely call a 'grandparent generation', look out for each other. What I would like is that we as a church family consider how to build friendships across generations. Some do have responsibilities for grandchildren. It is a little like being a godparent for a child. When a child is welcomed, we as a community declare that we will support the family. It is easy to say we welcome the children but will men chat to men and ladies to ladies so that adults are equally welcomed?



'And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.' Matthew 19:29 NIVUK

Are we prepared to care for, be kind to and become the sister, mother, etc. for someone in our church family?

Image by Margaret Young, rgbstock.com

Lilian

A Note from Your New Church Librarian

I've recently taken on the role of Church Librarian. Over the coming months I'll be working through the collection, refreshing the layout and making the space easier to browse and enjoy. I'm also exploring ways to make the library more accessible and better used by the whole church family.



Image by sanja gjenero, rgbstock.com



We've become increasingly aware that the current location of the library isn't ideal as direct sunlight is beginning to damage some of the books. Work is happening quietly in the background to explore a more suitable place and it may be that by the time this magazine is printed a decision has been reached. As you can imagine, these conversations involve a range of practical considerations, so we're taking the time to prepare a thoughtful and appropriate way forward.

If you have suggestions, favourite authors or ideas for themed displays, I'd love to hear from you as we shape the library together.

In the meantime, books are quite literally appearing from everywhere — some were even found in the attic! For now, we're pausing new donations while I catalogue what we already have and organise the collection in a sensible way. Progress will be steady rather than speedy as I'm working through around twenty books a week. Once the current collection is in order, I'll introduce a simple system for screening future donations. We may also be able to request a small budget from the PCC to purchase new titles that support our teaching and ministry here at church.

I thank you for your support...and patience



Ruth Praeter-Gillard

What's On at St James'?

A surprising number of activities take place in St James' Church and halls and in homes at different times during the week. This page shows just some with contacts if you'd like to know more. Apologies to any I've left out but do take a look also at the St James' website - www.stjamestaunton.org - for more information.



St James Church TAUNTON

Hymns & Tea

Twice monthly, 2nd & 4th Sundays
Hymns & afternoon tea 2:30 – 4:00 pm
Doors open at 2pm

All welcome

Lots of hymns you love, accompanied by the church organ and other musicians, Bible readings, and prayer.
A time to praise the Lord Jesus in an informal relaxed manner... followed by light refreshments.



Hymns & Tea

Jan	11 th & 25 th	Jul	12 th & 26 th
Feb	8 th & 22 nd	Aug	9 th & 23 rd
Mar	8 th & 22 nd	Sep	13 th & 27 th
Apr	12 th & 26 th	Oct	11 th & 25 th
May	10 th & 24 th	Nov	8 th & 22 nd
Jun	14 th & 28 th	Dec	13 th Carols

2026

at St James Church, St James Street, Taunton TA1 1J
(next to the county cricket ground)

St James Players

Members and friends of St James' Church, Taunton who enjoy using drama to bring a smile to the faces of our audiences, to enjoy friendship together and to raise funds for organisations in our community. If you'd like to get involved onstage or backstage, contact Jenny Wakefield on 01823 277318



WHY NOT TRY?

LIFE GROUPS

BETTER TOGETHER

St James Church TAUNTON

WEEK DAY

A Life Group is a place for you to be yourself. In a Life Group you will enjoy the company of others, find a place to connect and belong, give and receive encouragements through the highs and lows of life.

In a Life Group you will meet ordinary people, with ordinary lives gathering in homes, on the church premises and other places.



WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT

- ✓ A place to be yourself
- ✓ Making new friends
- ✓ Growing a purposeful life
- ✓ Finding support
- ✓ Enjoying hospitality

WANT TO KNOW MORE

Contact us
01823 272831

Email Roger
rogerfenton@gmail.com



Art Group



The Art Group meets most Wednesdays from 10am-12noon. A self-help group in any medium - bring your own equipment. £2 includes tea/coffee/biscuits. More info from the Church Office: 01823 272931

THURSDAY FELLOWSHIP
2pm for 2.30pm

PROGRAMME
January - August 2026

January 6th
Holy Communion in Church
taken by Rev Fabian Wajda

February 5th
Ed Hoarson
Beyond the Firmament

March 5th
Anthony Plotable
A Life in Landscape

April 2nd
Jan & John Guido Dege
John and Ploceus's Journey

May 7th
Dr Terence Ascott
The Surprising Middle East

June 4th
Dawn & Somerset
Air Ambulance

July 2nd
Cressy Tea

August 6th
Dr Harry Rowall
Recent Advances in Medicine

COMMITTEE
Carole Whitaker 430426
Rita Butler 275117 Sue Colford 271858 Vicki Dykes
282507 Ellen Price 289160

St James Church
TAUNTON




Sunday ringing :
1st and 4th Sundays
Practice night :
1st and 3rd Tuesdays
For more info contact the
Tower Captain:
Marian Gentile
Tel: 07968 331793



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

English Country Dancing
St James Church Hall
Taunton TA1 1JS



Every Tuesday Evening
8pm to 10pm
Come and Try!

No experience or partner needed

For more information call
Margaret or Alan
07990972203



An informal mix of fellowship, Bible study and support. A number of groups meet each week, during the day and evenings.

For more info contact:
Roger Fenton 07960 672321

English Country Dance is one of the many activities not connected with St James' but using the Hall as a venue. St James' is pleased to have this facility available. For more info about hiring the church or halls, contact the Church Office on 01823 272931



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. This article is the final one of the series as we conclude by looking at our approach to lifestyle.

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

“Our church has a strategy or plan to promote ethical and environmentally aware consumption patterns by individuals and households.”

The important thing to note is that this isn't about our own individual decisions. Rather it seeks to map how, as a church, we encourage each other to improve those decisions. Indeed, I'm not even sure whether articles such as this – encouragement by an individual – actually hit the target.

Looking back through the records, I'm saddened by the paucity of references in our PCC minutes to terms such as 'climate' or 'creation'. Those that I can find seem mostly to be just noting what someone has done rather than being concerned with the church's policy or practice.

The first group of questions asks us to think how a church's eco-team can influence the wider congregation and leadership in their responses to the climate emergency.

There are reasonably regular pieces in this magazine about how we as individuals can respond to the current climate and related crises. However, as noted above it doesn't seem to be an issue that gets much collective consideration. I'm not sure we can say that much is happening on a congregation-wide basis. Perhaps it's time for a formal eco-team.

The second theme looks very specifically at our individual and household carbon footprint. Does the church encourage members to audit their footprint and to look at ways to both reduce consumption and to seek to be more efficient in what we do use.

The need to consider and then seek to reduce our individual carbon footprint has featured several times in the magazine across recent years. As part of recent work to reduce our impact on creation, we have as a church systematically sought to improve the energy efficiency of our heating and lighting. There is an expressed desire to install both solar panels and a ground-source heat pump – what's mainly lacking is someone who can champion this idea and move the project on.

The third theme examines our personal choices. In short, do we recognise the need for and therefore encourage:

- Better food choices
- More use of earth-friendly forms of transport
- Greater awareness as to how our money and investments can influence or affect climate decisions
- Reduction of consumption and promotion of ethical choices
- Reduction in the amount of waste (including waste water) that we produce.

I don't think we have much recognition of these by the church per se. There is therefore little direct encouragement. Our sermons and other teaching seem to not quite get round to the fifth mark of mission. It would be good to see articles on these themes in future editions. Could you write one?

The fourth theme considers our approach to nature, asking how we can better enjoy, nurture and protect creation. Specifically, it asks us to think how our outdoor spaces (and indeed our own gardens) can be better used to this end.

Here at least, we can see green shoots. Much of our eco-focus lies in the churchyard and work being done there, especially the conservation area. Could you help lead the drive to open up our grounds both for church events but also as a space for the wider community? A place where people can find quiet – to reflect, to think, to hope: a thin space where God's Spirit can truly be felt. Alternatively, could you be our 'Wild Christian'¹ champion and help people think through their impact on God's creation?

It's clear that if we are to seek an award under the current Eco church audit then change is required. Initiatives will have to be owned by the church rather than resting on the actions of individuals.

We have to remember that this is not just a good in itself; it is an inherent part of the church's role. As the fifth mark of missions says, we are to:

“strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.”

Richard Carpenter

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

¹ <https://arocha.org.uk/wild-christian/>



...MISSION

Practical Faith

In the letter of James, the writer is at pains to demonstrate that faith is integrally linked to action, putting our faith into practice. Of course, action needs to be spirit-led and praying the 'how' of what we should do is very important. This is at the heart of the three organisations we are focusing on through the months of March, April and May – Street Pastors, Besom and TLG. All started as a result of earnest and patient prayer, asking God to show a vision for the way ahead; and that prayerful approach is a key factor for both the national parent organisations and the local teams. They all aim to be real expressions of Christian love to the people they meet. They are not 'preachy' but the hope is that the love of Jesus in each person involved will shine as a beacon.

They give Christians an opportunity to serve in areas for which they have a heart – we're all different and we all find some areas of service fit our personality best, although I suspect many volunteers would say, "I never thought I could do that." If you are interested in exploring the opportunities these partner organisations can offer, do have a chat with the link people mentioned at the end of this piece.

Taunton Street Pastors started in 2008, and they are part of a growing national and international team of volunteers first pioneered in 2003. Street Pastors are trained Christian volunteers from local churches who care about our community; they operate in Taunton, Bridgwater and Wellington.



They are usually on patrol from 10pm until 2am every Saturday night, walking around the town centres and staffing 'Safe Space', a free street cafe offering hot drinks, biscuits, a listening ear and practical help, very often working with the emergency services. They are also on patrol on other occasions including Carnival nights and other townwide events.

The Besom In Taunton is also part of a wide national network and is a Christian organisation that provides a bridge between those who want to give and those who are in need in the Taunton and Wellington area.



Giving is at the heart of all they do. Everything they provide is free of charge to the clients referred to Besom, usually by statutory agencies. They rely entirely on individuals and a wide range of organisations donating furniture, kitchen equipment, bed linen, money and more.

One of the volunteers said, "What goes out is quickly replaced by more donations, as prayers are answered - very often just what is needed for that moment."

TLG (Transforming Lives for Good) is another national initiative which relies on local volunteers. Its vision is to work with schools, children and their families to provide mentoring support for young people who need time spent with them in their school context, to support and help them, provide a listening ear and encouragement.



All three organisations have people from St James' congregation actively involved. Each person finds it an enormous privilege to be able to share their faith in a practical way. Practical Faith is very much a feature of 40 ACTS - our Lent challenge encouraging us to find ways to share God's love in practical ways. You'll hear more up to date news in the monthly Mission interviews in our services, but for more general information about each organisation and perhaps how you can become involved, talk to:

Sue Doyle: Taunton Street Pastors
Elaine or Roger Fenton: Taunton Besom
David Jordan: TLG and Schools work

Jenny Wakefield

SAVE THE DATE...!

SATURDAY 16th

MAY

Plants

Coffee

Table top sale
Children's crafts

For ACTS Uganda



Please will you grow/propagate some plants for this event?

Let Sue Carpenter know - Thank you!



School News

St James' Church School

Christmas may seem a long time ago, but at the end of last term I received a 'Thank you to the church' on behalf of the year 1 and 2 children following their Nativity performances. It arrived with this lovely framed photograph of the children, which you may have seen in church.



The Inn signs read:

'Premier Inn'

'Welcome Inn'

'Better out than Inn'

'I'm Inn a good mood'

and

'King's Inn'

There were some real stars in the performances. Over a two-day period, staff worked really hard to help the children tell parents and classmates the timeless story of Jesus's birth with simplicity.

The Christingle and Carol services also retain that profound simplicity and 'specialness', putting something of the reality in Christmas which all too often is subsumed by 'Commercialmas'.

We are indeed blessed with a school that seeks to navigate the difficult road of ensuring that faith and values are kept central, and with so much diversity in the school – over 50% of the children have non-English ethnic background. Please continue to pray for Fabian, Mike, the TLG mentors and reading volunteers who are all warmly welcomed into the School community – it's a real privilege.

Jenny Wakefield

Prodigal
- finding hope in a story of redemption
A Lent series of gatherings

St James Church
TAUNTON

Join us for a series of Christian contemplative prayer

Prodigal

- finding hope in a story of redemption

We invite you to join us in a series of gatherings through the season of Lent. The meetings will be held in the side chapel **Thursdays and Friday from 10.30am - 12.00 noon** over the six weeks of Lent following Ash Wednesday Evening Service (7:30pm 18th February)

Each week we shall be offering a taster of meditation prayer with the celebration of a simple communion service in two of the sessions.

In this reflection on a powerful Gospel story we look afresh at our own lives. For at times we may have been each of the characters in the story. We ask "Where have my struggles lead me?" and look through the memory of brokenness to the hope of healing.

We hope this story will help us to focus our thoughts and prayers as we journey together through Lent.

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 or none are most welcome to join us for any of these gatherings.

For more information contact either Lyn - 07772 881463 or Felicity - 075082 87808 or go to:
www.stjamestaunton.org

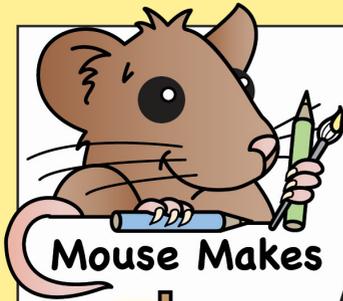
Easter @

St James Church
TAUNTON

15th March 10.30 am	<i>Mothering Sunday</i> A Time to Be Grateful	3rd April 10.00 am	<i>Good Friday</i> With Hot Cross Buns & Coffee
29th March 10.30 am	<i>Palm Sunday</i> What an Entrance!	3rd April 2.00 pm	<i>The Last Hour</i> A Quiet Hour
2nd April 7.00 pm	<i>Maundy Meal</i> Around the Table	5th April 10.30 am	<i>Easter Day</i> All-Age Celebration!

www.stjamestaunton.org

Young People's Pages



Mouse Makes

On the cross Jesus opened wide his arms for us.
Jesus put an end to death by dying for us,
and showed us the resurrection to
come by His raising to new life!



Jesus is risen!

The angel said:
"Jesus ...is not here, for He
has risen, just as He said."
Matthew 28:6

Jesus is here

Jesus said:
"Where two or three
come together
in my name I am
there with them."
Matthew 18:20



READ the story of
the resurrection in:
Matthew 28:1-10
Mark 16:1-19
Luke 24:1-49
John 20:1-29
and **21:1-14**

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



Jesus will come again!

Jesus said:
"I will come back
and take you to
myself so that you
will be where I am."
John 14:3



JESUS • ALIVE • RISEN
LORD • SAVIOUR • KING



RESURRECTION
PEACE • NEW LIFE • JOY • GOOD NEWS

MESSIAH • REDEEMER
CHRIST • SON OF GOD

HOSANNA • PRAISE
GO TELL • EASTER



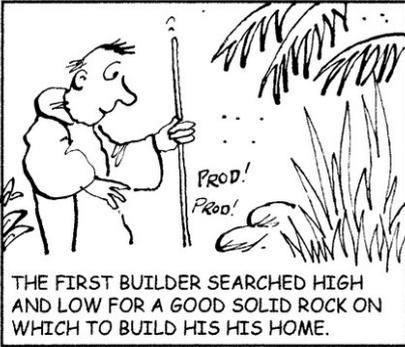
The
Tale of the
**TWO
BUILDERS**



**JESUS OFTEN TOLD
STORIES WITH
HIDDEN MEANINGS**



**ONE WAS ABOUT TWO MEN WHO
BUILT THEIR OWN HOUSES**



**THE FIRST BUILDER SEARCHED HIGH
AND LOW FOR A GOOD SOLID ROCK ON
WHICH TO BUILD HIS HIS HOME.**

**AT LONG, LONG LAST HE
FOUND THE IDEAL SPOT.**



SO HE BEGAN TO BUILD.

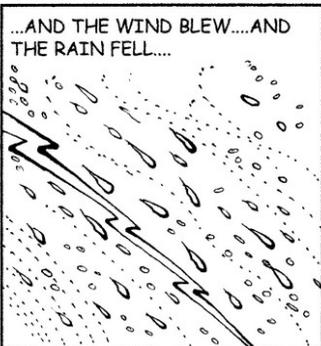


**THE OTHER BUILDER
DIDN'T CARE WHERE HE
BUILT HIS HOUSE**

**HE THOUGHT SOME NICE FLAT SAND
WOULD BE AN EASY PLACE TO BUILD.**



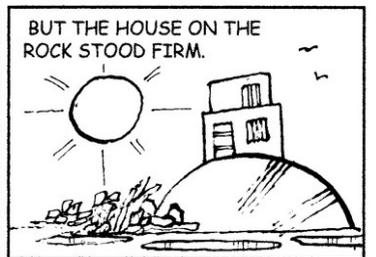
**BUT ONE DAY THE
STORM CAME...**



**...AND THE WIND BLEW...AND
THE RAIN FELL...**



**...AND THE HOUSE ON
THE SAND COLLAPSED!**



**BUT THE HOUSE ON THE
ROCK STOOD FIRM.**

**JESUS EXPLAINED -
IT'S IMPORTANT OUR LIVES HAVE
A FIRM FOUNDATION!**

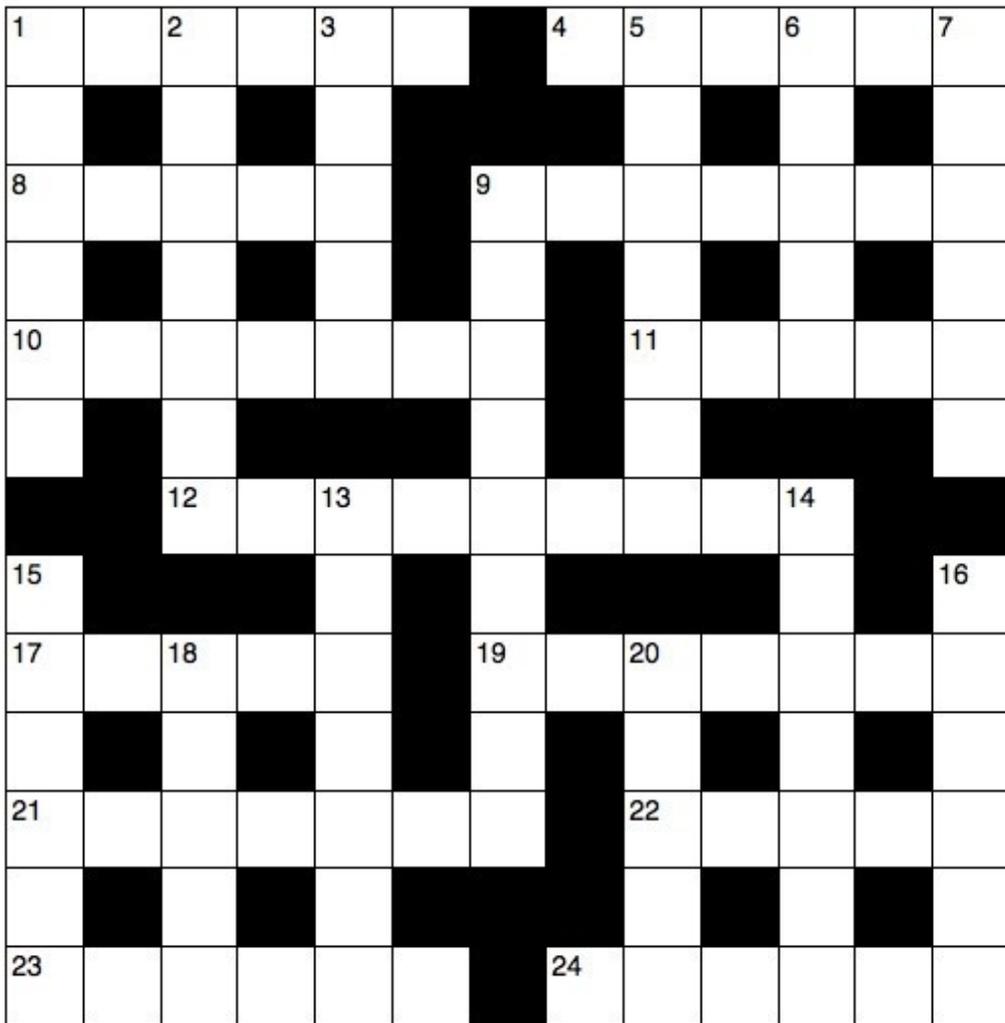
Crossword

Across

- 1 Arouse (Song of Songs 2:7) (6)
- 4 Extinguish (Isaiah 1:31) (6)
- 8 “They — — ,” you will say, “but I’m not hurt!” (Proverbs 23:35) (3,2)
- 9 Unhappiness (Nehemiah 2:2) (7)
- 10 Jewish (7)
- 11 Dirge (anag.) (5)
- 12 ‘A truthful witness gives honest — , but a false witness tells lies’ (Proverbs 12:17) (9)
- 17 Paul quoted from the second one in his address in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:33) (5)
- 19 ‘Do not use your freedom to — the sinful nature’ (Galatians 5:13) (7)
- 21 ‘As you can see, he has done nothing to — death’ (Luke 23:15) (7)
- 22 Name applied by Isaiah to Jerusalem (Isaiah 29:1) (5)
- 23 ‘All the people — — one man, saying, “None of us will go home”’ (Judges 20:8) (4,2)
- 24 Lazarus, who was carried by angels to Abraham’s side when he died, was one (Luke 16:20) (6)

Down

- 1 Appalled (Job 26:11) (6)
- 2 ‘In an — to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down into the sea’ (Acts 27:30) (7)
- 3 Expel (Acts 18:16) (5)
- 5 ‘But I have a baptism to — , and how distressed I am until it is completed!’ (Luke 12:50) (7)
- 6 ‘Of the increase of his government and peace there will be — — ’ (Isaiah 9:7) (2,3)
- 7 Hurry (Psalm 119:60) (6)
- 9 ‘For I desire mercy, not — , and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings’ (Hosea 6:6) (9)
- 13 One of its towns was Sychar, where Jesus met a woman at Jacob’s well (John 4:5) (7)
- 14 Shouting (Acts 7:57) (7)
- 15 Arachnid (Isaiah 59:5) (6)
- 16 One of Paul’s first converts in Philippi was Lydia, a — in purple cloth (Acts 16:14) (6)
- 18 Donkeys (5)
- 20 Raked (anag.) (5)



“Just cleared out some space in the freezer”

sounds so much more productive than

“I just polished off another tub of ice cream.”



Image by Justyna Furmanczyk, rgsstock.com

ACROSS: 1, Awaken, 4, Quench, 8, Hit me, 9, Sadness, 10, Semitic, 11, Ridge, 12, Testimony, 17, Psalm, 19, Indulge, 21, Deserve, 22, Ariel, 23, Rose as, 24, Beggar.
DOWN: 1, Aghast, 2, Attempt, 3, Eject, 5, Undergo, 6, No end, 7, Hasten, 9, Sacrifice, 13, Samaria, 14, Yelling, 15, Spider, 16, Dealer, 18, Asses, 20, Drake.



The PCC has been discussing...

Here's a summary of the main things the Parochial Church Council looked at in December, January and February.

Annual Meeting / PCC Vacancies

Our Annual Meeting will be held after the service on Sunday 19th April, so please put this in your diary and stay after the service. Fabian will give his annual review during the service, so the meeting will be short.

We'd really like some younger folk to bring their voice to the PCC! We talk about all aspects of church life, and have a 'Big Picture' item at every meeting to focus on aspects of our mission – it's not all boring business! Look out for the PCC Nomination Form, coming soon!

December's Big Picture: Church School Links

Nigel Johnson, headteacher at St James Church School, and Cerys Randell, Chair of the Trust Local Committee, spoke to the PCC. Nigel thanked the church members working in the school in various capacities, acknowledging the positive impact they make.

The school's vision statement, 'Aspire, Achieve, Flourish', encourages aspiration in underperforming children, while flourishing provides a spiritual dimension, encouraging children to support each other. The school's core values are explicitly Christian: kindness, aspiration, forgiveness, trust, respect and perseverance.

Other subjects covered were Ofsted and SIAMS inspections, how the school is showing pupils that they can make a difference in their wider world, and the wide range of background of school families.

January's Big Picture: Youthwork

The PCC picked up the matter of recruiting a part-time youth leader. There is a growing number of children in year 6 and above attending church on a Sunday morning. The leaders of Children's Church need to focus on the 5-11 age group. It was agreed to form a steering group to take the recruitment forward. It is envisaged that this will be a part time post of around 15 hours per week, similar to the Children's Church Pastor.

February's Big Picture: Living out Lent as a church community

This was a different discussion from usual: the PCC broke into small groups which contributed ideas for Lent. These were then drawn into a programme that Fabian undertook to take forward.

Safeguarding

The matters brought to the PCC indicate the detailed nature of most of the work of Jenny and Jacqui on the Safeguarding Team:

- Safer recruitment procedures for new volunteers
- Reminders for renewing training (usually every three years)
- Annual reviews of support given by team leaders to volunteers
- Job descriptions for roles that do not yet have them
- Maintenance of risk assessments for all activities

This is a lot of work and the support of team leaders is vital.

Financial Matters

The financial situation at the end of the year is that a deficit of around £20,000 is expected. This is largely due to one-off premises repairs, such as the work on the tower. The financial forecast for 2026 indicates a deficit of over £32,000. While some of this is due to inflation, the church's main income from stewardship giving by church members is falling. This comes at a time where we have a need to increase expenditure to cover a much needed Youth Worker.

Facilities

The annual facilities report recorded that 61 premises and technical jobs were completed during the year.

Looking ahead, two priority matters are: maintaining the deteriorating tower stonework, with an annual two-day inspect-and-fix regime starting in 2026; and replanning the heating systems, beginning with the Large Hall and moving on in due course to a carbon-free system for the church as well. The refurbishment of the outer vestry is also on the agenda.

Miscellaneous Matters

- The arrangements for admitting children who are baptised to communion are about to be put to the bishop for approval.
- The PCC continues to keep its policy documents under review. In this period, we looked at the Safe Working Reminders, the Lone Working Guidance and carried out the annual review of opening times and security arrangements.

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



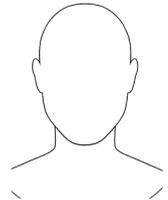
Richard Carpenter



Roger Fenton



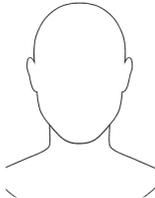
Mike Gillingham



Vacancy



Lyn Jones



Vacancy



David Jordan



Jane Osborne Price



Chris Rickard



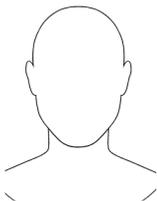
Richard Sainsbury



Johan Smit



Vashti Smit



Vacancy



Jenny Wakefield



Martin Wakefield

photos: Richard Sainsbury

Concerts at St James

Many choirs and orchestras use St James' Church to stage their performances. The church 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. And some members of the church sing with Taunton Choral Society and Voce, so you would know some of the faces in the choirs

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 and about what we, as Christians, stand for. Here are some of the concerts coming up soon. Why not get your tickets and show the face of St James' to a wider audience!

Somerset County Orchestra

Conductor - David Hedges

Leader - Alex Chivers

Sibelius

Symphony

No.5

Dvorak

Cello Concerto
soloist Christopher
Hedges

Dvorak
Silent Woods

Saturday

14th March 2026

at 7:30 p.m.

St James Church, Taunton

Tickets £15 Students and Under 18 Free
available from the Taunton Visitor Centre,
our website and on the door



Saturday 21st March 2026
St. James' Church, Taunton
7:30pm



Longing and Belonging

Works by Gardiner, Stanford, Wagner and Mendelssohn



Tickets: £18 (Students/under 18's free)

Available from Taunton Visitor Centre or

tauntonchoralsociety.org.uk

Registered Charity No. 900713



Voce

ALLEGRI
BEE GEES
ELGAR
BRUCKNER
SNOW PATROL
PALESTRINA

MEALOR
SPICE GIRLS
TAVENER
THE WELLERMAN
RACHMANINOV
DAISY THE GREAT

AWAKENING

A NEW SPRING PROGRAMME FROM
TAUNTON'S ECCLECTIC CHAMBER CHOIR

19:00 SATURDAY 28TH MARCH 2026

ST JAMES CHURCH, TAUNTON

TICKETS: £10 ADULTS - £5 UNDER 18

WWW.TICKETSOURCE.CO.UK/VOCE-CHAMBER-CHOIR

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email: vicar@stjamestaunton.co.uk



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Church Office: 01823 272931
email: info@stjamestaunton.co.uk

Church Wardens:
Nigel Bright 07817 627326
Fiona Hope 07743 917478

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

Discipleship & Home Groups Co-ordinator:
Roger Fenton 07960 672321
email: rogerifenton@gmail.com

Facilities (buildings & technical) Co-ordinator:
Martin Wakefield 01823 277318
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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