



# Parish People

Includes  
'Little Parish People'  
Magazine



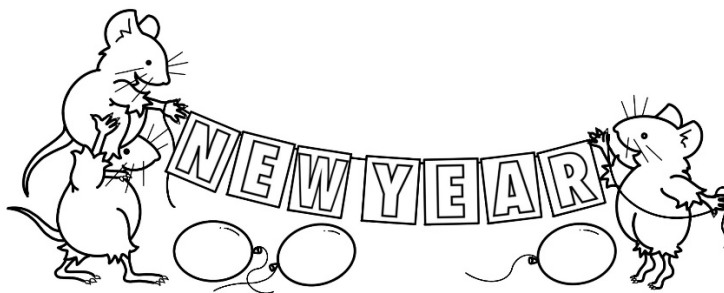
The Parish Magazine of St Alban and St Edmund

Have a Merry  
CHRISTMAS  
And A  
HAPPY  
new year



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# Hello everyone

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Dear Friends

Wow...hasn't December come around quickly this year? One day we're in a record-breaking July heatwave. The next, it seems, there are Christmas adverts everywhere and we're working out if we dare turn on the heating for ten minutes.

This Christmas, I think, with the cost-of-living crisis all around us, we all face hard but important questions about what matters and what doesn't. We've often heard that phrase about putting Christ back into Christmas. But what does it mean? Surely it doesn't mean spending huge amounts of money or putting ourselves and others under pressure trying to live up to impossible expectations or having tables groaning with food.

Christmas means reconnecting **how** we celebrate with **why** we celebrate. And we celebrate because God, in his goodness, sent us his Son, Love Incarnate, as a vulnerable, and poor baby boy to show us how to enter God's Kingdom of love; Christmas means living up to our calling to point always to that Kingdom; Christmas means caring for our planet and all the people on it; Christmas means

living simply that others might simply live; and, of course, Christmas means to celebrate, but to celebrate in a way that does not exploit others or our planet.

So maybe reuse old decorations, and if you buy new ones, try not to buy plastic; buy locally if you can; buy wrapping paper that is recyclable – less shiny but better for the planet – and, if you can, be generous to charities this year – they too are struggling. If you feel able to, please support our foodbank, especially our appeal for Christmas treats that will allow those less well-off to feel loved and cared for.

This Christmas and in the year beyond, be kind to this planet, and to yourself, reduce the pressure to spend too much, cherish your loved ones, cherish everyone, spend time with the lonely and those who are grieving. We don't need to put Christ back into Christmas – he never left. We just need to look beneath the glittery commercialism of it all, into the eyes of those who most need us, and we'll find God right there.

God bless and keep you this Christmas,

Mandy

# Why do they do that? – number 5

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## What is baptism all about?

Baptism is sometimes known as a Christening; it means washing. It is a key service in most but not all Christian traditions and is known as an initiation service – which means it is a point of entry into the Christian faith.

The church is like a huge extended family and much of the language of baptism is about joining the ‘family’ of God. That is why ideally it is best to have a baptism during the main Sunday service when other members of the church family are present to welcome the newly baptised.

Christians try always to follow the example of Jesus Christ as revealed in Scripture. In the Gospels we learn that Jesus was baptised. We also learn that before he ascended to heaven Jesus told his followers to go and baptise in the ‘name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit’. And, as well as being clearly an act of obedience to Jesus, baptism is a sacrament. That means, simply, it is sign and symbol of God’s love for us. It is an act of grace to be freely given to all who seek it though there must be proper preparation.

There are key bits in a baptism service to look out for:

Water – a person is always baptised in water whether that is by a sprinkling of water on the head or by full immersion. Either way, going ‘under’ the water is symbolic of death and rebirth and of being washed clean ready for a new beginning in Christ!

Candle – a baptised person is always given a candle lighted from the pascal candle. The pascal candle is the big candle at the front of the church near the altar, and it represents Jesus ‘the light of the world’. Being given a candle lit from that reminds us that, as a newly baptised Christians, we now have a job to do - to go out into the world and share the light and love of Jesus to all whom we meet.

Anointing – the soon to be baptised person is anointed with oil blessed at the cathedral by the Bishop. The sign of the cross is made on their forehead. The Cross of course is the fundamental sign and symbol of Christian love. It is the ‘badge’ of our faith.

Vows – vows, which is a theological word for promises, are made at a baptism. The candidate or, if he or she is too young, the godparents, make very serious promises to follow Christ.

All very well, I hear you say, but why then baptise babies and young children at all – they can’t understand what’s going on, can they? The short answer is none of us can claim to ‘understand’ God – it is not about age, or mental capacity, or anything like that, it is about grace. But there is a long answer to the question – why does the Church of England baptise babies? – and we’ll cover that next time! Meanwhile, if you’re one or a hundred and one, you are welcome to be baptised and become part of the family of God. Get in touch anytime.

God bless, Mandy

# 'Twisty' the tree



I called my new tree 'Twisty'  
I just could not resist –  
The crown on which the angel sat  
Had got a little twist!

We gave it lots of water  
As we are meant to do  
And kept it cool till it was time  
To bring dear Twisty through.

Residing in our living room  
Despite his twisted end  
Bedecked with globes and tinsel  
He was our Christmas friend!

We watered Twisty daily  
And talked to him a lot  
The fact he never answered back –  
It mattered not a jot!

Then, soon enough, came Christmas Day  
And all around our tree  
Were wrapped and ribboned Christmas gifts  
With love to you and me.

For twelve days after Christmas  
We kept him while we could  
With twinkling lights and verdant leaves  
Our tree just looked so good!

But Twelfth Night came upon us,  
And, though it broke my heart,  
The Christmas season ended –  
T'was time for us to part.

We took off all his pretty lights  
We stripped our Twisty bare  
We took him to the garden  
And left him lying there.

Until came bin collection day  
And, though it seemed a sin  
We cut him into pieces, small  
And put him in the bin.

The moral of my story, sad it  
Is (it seems to me),  
So that you don't shed bitter tears as well,  
*Don't* name your Christmas tree!

# The history of Christmas

The Bible does not give a date for the birth of Jesus. In the third century it was suggested that Jesus was conceived at the Spring equinox, 25<sup>th</sup> March, popularising the belief that He was born nine months later on 25<sup>th</sup> December. John Chrysostom, the Archbishop of Constantinople, encouraged Christians worldwide to make Christmas a holy day in about 400.

In the early Middle Ages, Christians celebrated a series of midwinter holy days. Epiphany (which recalls the visit to the infant Jesus of the wise men bearing gifts) was the climax of 12 days of Christmas, beginning on 25<sup>th</sup> December. The Emperor Charlemagne chose 25<sup>th</sup> December for his coronation in 800, and the prominence of Christmas Day rose. In England, William the Conqueror also chose 25<sup>th</sup> December for his coronation in 1066, and the date became a fixture both for religious observance and feasting.

Cooking a boar was a common feature of mediaeval Christmas feasts, and singing carols accompanied it. Writers of the time lament the fact that the true significance of Christmas was being lost because of partying. They condemn the rise of 'misrule' – drunken dancing and promiscuity. The day was a public holiday, and traditions of bringing evergreen foliage into the house and the exchange of gifts (usually on Epiphany) date from this time.

In the 17th century the rise of new Protestant denominations led to a rejection of many celebrations that were associated with Catholic Christianity. Christmas was one of them. After the execution of Charles I, England's Puritan rulers made the celebration of Christmas illegal for 14 years. The restoration of Charles II ended the ban, but religious leaders continued to discourage excess,

especially in Scotland. In Western Europe (but not worldwide) the day for exchanging gifts changed from Epiphany (6<sup>th</sup> January) to Christmas Day.

By the 1820s, the significance of Christmas was declining. Charles Dickens was one of several writers who sought to restore it. His novel *A Christmas Carol* was significant in reviving merriment during the festival. He emphasised charity and family reunions, alongside religious observance. Christmas trees, paper chains, cards and many well-known carols date from this time. So did the tradition of Boxing Day, on 26<sup>th</sup> December, when tradesmen who had given reliable service during the year would collect 'boxes' of money or gifts from their customers.

In Europe Santa Claus is the figure associated with the bringing of gifts. Santa Claus is a shortening of the name of Saint Nicholas, who was a Christian bishop in the fourth century in present-day Turkey. He was particularly noted for his care for children and for his generosity to the poor. By the Middle Ages his appearance, in red bishop's robes and a mitre, was adored in the Netherlands and familiar across Europe.

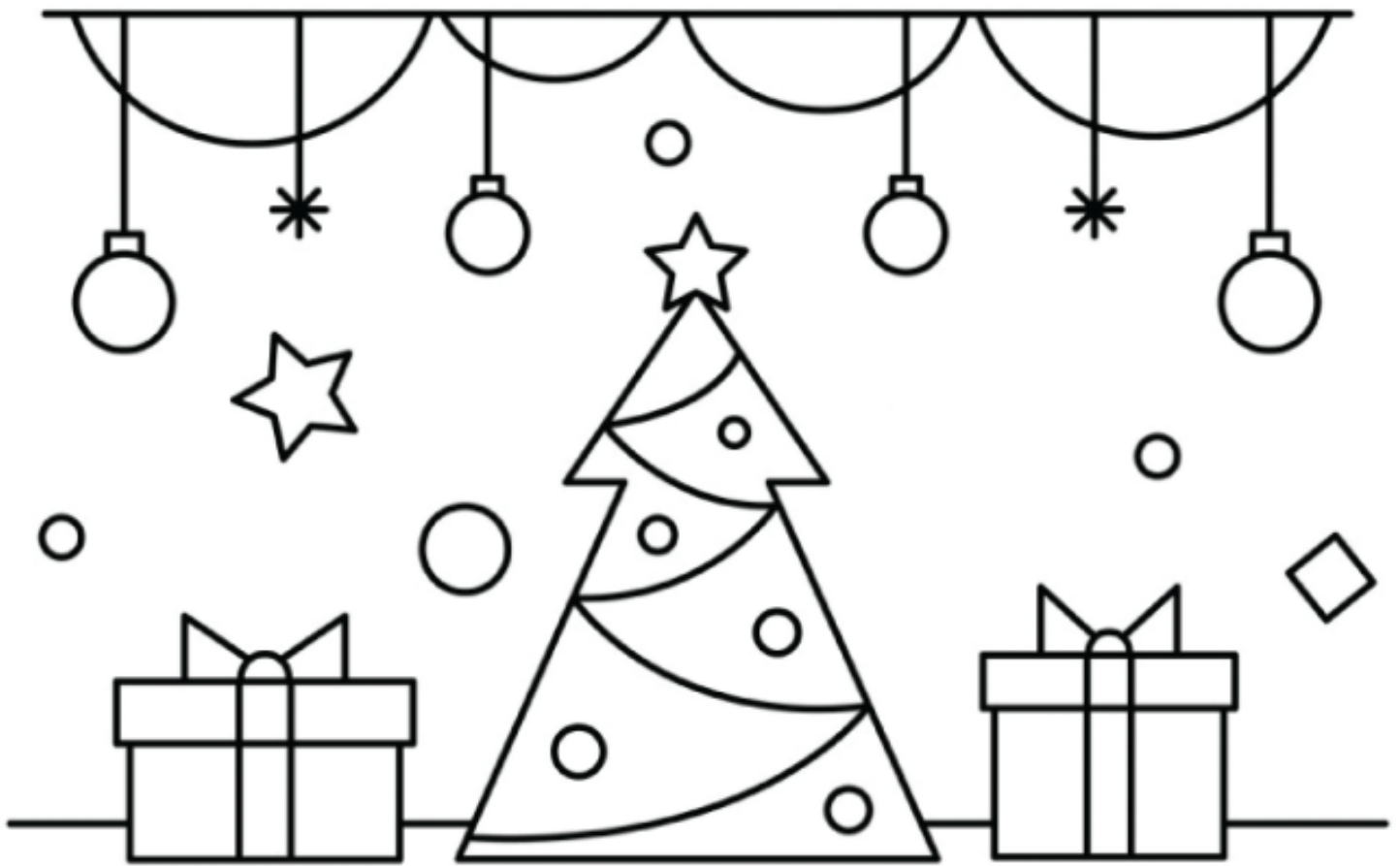
Father Christmas dates from 17th century England, where he was a secular figure of good cheer (more associated with drunkenness than gifts). The transformation of Santa Claus into today's Father Christmas started in New York in the 1880s, where his red robes and white beard became potent advertising symbols. In some countries (such as Latin America and Eastern Europe) the tradition attempts to combine the secular and religious elements by holding that Santa Claus makes children's presents and then gives them to the baby Jesus to distribute.





# Little Parish People

@ Alban & Edmund



MERRY  
CHRISTMAS



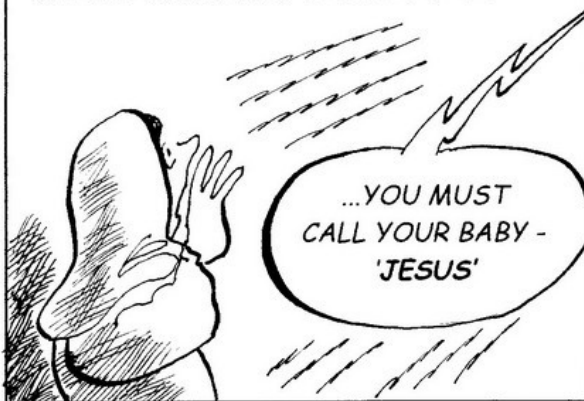
# The First Christmas



JESUS WAS BORN ABOUT 2,000 YEARS AGO IN THE SMALL TOWN OF BETHLEHEM, NEAR JERUSALEM.



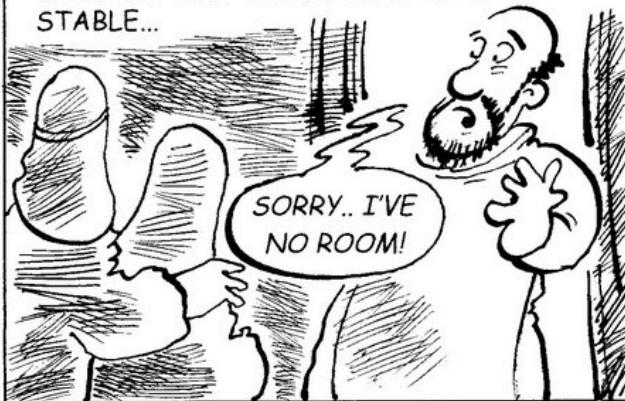
AN ANGEL HAD TOLD MARY SHE WOULD HAVE VERY SPECIAL BABY



MARY AND JOSEPH MADE THE LONG JOURNEY FROM NAZARETH TO BETHLEHEM. THEY HAD BEEN ORDERED THERE BY THE CENSUS.



BUT THE TOWN WAS FULL... THE ONLY SHELTER THEY COULD FIND WAS A STABLE...



...WHICH IS WHERE THE BABY JESUS WAS BORN.



SHEPHERDS IN FIELDS NEARBY RACED TO SEE THE BABY. AN ANGEL HAD TOLD THEM WHERE JESUS HAS BEEN BORN.







# Mouse Makes

HAPPY  
CHRISTMAS!

Read the Christmas story  
in **Luke 2:1-21**.

Answer the questions, colour  
the picture and colour one  
star each day until Christmas.

Where was  
Mary's baby born?  
Why were Joseph  
and Mary there?

What did  
Mary dress  
her baby in?

Where did  
Mary lay  
her baby  
and why?

Why were the  
shepherds  
afraid?

What good  
news did  
the angel tell?



What  
did the  
shepherds  
do after they  
had seen the  
baby?

Who  
appeared  
praising God,  
what did they  
say?

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



ALL • DECREE • JOSEPH • DAVID • BETHLEHEM • MARY • BIRTH • SON • LAID • MANGER  
 INN • SHEPHERDS • FLOCK • NIGHT • LORD • GLORY • GOOD NEWS • JOY • DAY  
 SAVIOUR • CHRIST • SIGN • BABY • GOD • PEACE • ANGELS • GO • SEE • TOLD • PRAISE

# Bible Bite

A short story from the Bible

It can be read in the Bible in  
Genesis 12:1-9, 17:1-22, 18:1-15, 21:1-7

About 6000 years ago, God told Abram  
and his wife Sarai to leave their home and  
go to a new land that He would give them

This land will belong to  
your family, but not yet



But Sarai and I  
cannot have children

and I am changing your  
names to Abraham and Sarah



'Abraham' means 'Father of many'  
'Sarah' means 'Princess'

You and Sarah will  
have a son, Isaac



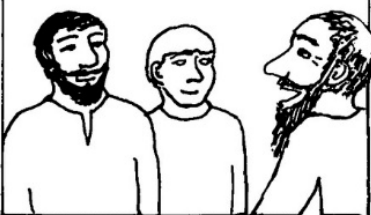
We are too old to have  
children. Ha ha ha!

It was noon, and everyone  
was resting from the heat...



When Abraham saw three  
men coming to his tents.

He recognised the Lord



Please stay and have  
something to eat.

He ran to tell everyone



Quick, we need a feast  
cooked for special guests

Sarah was in the tent, listening

By this time next year, you will  
have a son



At our age?  
Ha ha ha!

Why did Sarah laugh?



I didn't laugh



Yes, you did.

Soon afterwards...



I'm pregnant!

Sarah and Abraham's baby  
boy was born



I'm so  
happy, I can't stop laughing

They called him 'Isaac'  
which means 'laughter'



Ha ha ha!

Ha ha ha!

**We all need help sometime**



## **Foodbank – Important Notice**

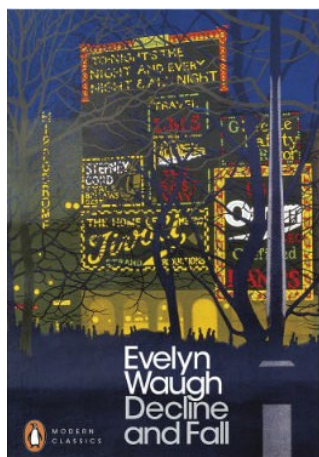
In the New Year the foodbank at St Edmund's church is changing days. We will be moving to MONDAY.

Our first date in 2023 is Monday 9<sup>th</sup> January, from 10am – 12noon.



# Book Reviews by Andrew Carr, Reader

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## **DECLINE AND FALL by EVELYN WAUGH**

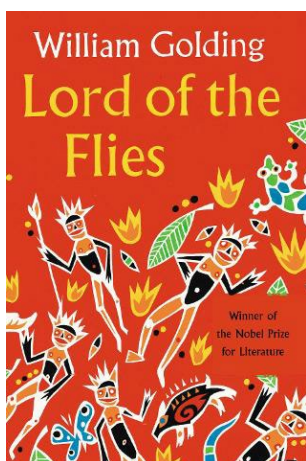
Penguin Modern Classics | 1928

If there were a book version of the long-running BBC Radio series *Desert Island Discs*, this would be one of my eight choices of fiction – my other review would be another.

Evelyn Waugh (1903-66), the author of 'Brideshead Revisited' was a soldier, historian, explorer and father of six. In later life he became a Catholic.

I first read this joy of a novel long ago at school studying for O Level English Literature. It was the first book that made me laugh out loud in public. It tells the story of Paul Pennyfeather, a worthy but dull student at an Oxford University college, who is dismissed from it after an 'incident' which was not his fault. He ends up at a declining school in Wales teaching subjects he has no training in and falls in love with a woman who would today regularly trend on Twitter for yet another scandal... and that's only the first half.

The humour (think *Fawlty Towers*) comes from a range of eccentric characters who come alive throughout – Captain Grimes, who trouble always finds, sad Mr Prendergast, the elusive Phillbrick, and the stylish but shallow Margot, with who our hero falls in love. The Sports Day, which covers two chapters, pokes much fun at the brittle snobbery and fake entitlement of the upper classes (no change there) and is quite rude about Welsh Brass Bands... Recommended.



## **LORD OF THE FLIES by WILLIAM GOLDING**

Faber & Faber | 1954

Another of my Desert Island novels. Few win the Nobel Prize for Literature with their first novel, but Golding did with this, IMHO, one of the finest novels of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Sir William Golding (1911-93) was a schoolmaster, lecturer and musician, served with the Royal Navy in World War II, and son of a suffragette. He later won the Booker Prize for 'Rites of Passage'.

A plane carrying schoolboy passengers crashes on a desert island, and only the passengers (its inferred that they're evacuees from an unnamed war) survive. The story focuses on Ralph and Piggy, their new-found friendship and their experiences of the island and with the other survivors. Initially, with rules stated and roles assigned, this pack works well together. But the survival instinct kicks in, the pack begins to disintegrate and descends into violent rivalry. One of the closing lines: "*I should have thought that a pack of British boys--you're all British aren't you?--would have been able to put up a better show...*" although speaking to a generation of stiff upper lips from the Forties into the Fifties, speaks more to the fragile veneer of civilisation and manners we all usually experience, and which survives when not under pressure, but fractures when it is. Such is the quality of the writing that you forget, bar one, that every character in the book is a schoolboy yet to reach their teens... Recommended.

# St James the Least of All

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The Rectory  
St James the Least



My dear Nephew Darren

I have been slightly surprised that in your ministry so far, you have never been asked to give an after-dinner speech. Now you have delivered your first one, I can understand why. Speeches after any dinner come at the point where stomachs are dealing with a little too much food and brains with about the same quantity of wine. They should be short and witty; yours was neither.

An hour-long speech on the Herodians and Second Temple Judaism at the time of the birth of Christ was not quite what we had expected. I applauded your enthusiasm, but I was the only one; the rest of them were asleep. Long after you had left, the catering staff gently vacuumed the carpets around the audience, and it was only when the night security guard arrived that the last diners were woken and politely sent home. I suspect you will have put many marriages under strain as husbands, returning home in the early hours of the morning, had to explain to wives why they were so late. Their truthful answers would have been unbelievable.

When the head waiter appeared in a dressing gown and started placing chairs on tables, even you must have suspected that hints were being dropped and I have never heard of a hotel manager interrupting a speech to place his keys on the top table and asking if the last person to leave would kindly lock the main door.

I know that your clerical attire is more usually T-shirt and jeans but borrowing the curate's dinner suit from your next-door parish was also not a good idea. He is a foot taller and several stones heavier than you. The result was quite worrying – several people wondered if you had just recovered from some dreadful disease that had made you shrink.

In the light of your qualified success, thank you for offering to come to repeat your speech after our annual Christmas dinner, but no thank you. The verger's son wants to share with us how many potholes he has counted in and around the town, and that should be most interesting.

Your loving uncle, Eustace



# Everyday Faith | Rev Esther Bevan

I started writing this blog on 25th March 2020: 2.5 years ago. Doesn't seem that long when I look at the date- but also feels like ages ago. Time is a strange thing sometimes. So much can happen in a short space: life, death, transformation. There was a band in the 80's, The Bangles, who sung: "Time, time, time, see what's become of me" lots of things



change over time, especially us. I have changed over time, and I'm grateful for that.

**Grateful** - In March 2020 when I started writing this

blog, I chose to write about being grateful because we were in Coronavirus Lockdown, and I was feeling anxious. Often when we feel anxious or even angry or sad, it can help to remember the positive things in life. There is always something to be grateful for. Today I am grateful for my friend Danny who visited me today. Made my day - and Pixies!

**Taking photos** - at the time, because we were in lockdown, I knew that I would wear the same comfy clothes every day. So, I decided to mix it up and wear a different outfit, taking a photo. In the end I wore every single piece of clothing – even the dressy-up ones!

**Prayer** - I then wanted to pray about something, and quite often people would send me a message and ask me to pray for something in particular- which I really loved. I love praying with and for people, it's like we are standing together in the storm. Today I pray for Anna and Cyril. One who left hospital alive and getting better, and the other who probably won't.

**Psalms A Day** - and finally I reflected on a Psalm each day, (except for psalm 119, which is super long, so I split it up) and wrote this blog almost every day. My short reflection was on something about that Psalm that stuck out at me. I don't write my blog as often as I used to. Life got busier when lockdown stopped, but I try to do something monthly.

So, today's Psalm is 129. (There are only 150 Psalms, so we're ending in some way). This Psalm is written by someone who has been abused for a long time, they write: "they have greatly oppressed me from my youth" (v1,2). On one hand they can see that God has freed them, saying: "he has cut me free from the cords of the wicked" (v5); and on the other hand, the writer wishes that God will prevent the oppressors from harming others: "may they be like grass on the roof which withers before it can grow" (v6). The writer even asks God to withhold blessing those oppressors. "Not say to them 'the blessing of the Lord be on you'" (v8). To stop the abusers from thriving, so that their abuse will stop. It is also a desire for punishment- to see justice, and to appease their pain or bitterness.

Today as I think of things happening in the world, and in our lives and in my life- I often pray for God to stop those who oppress: to stop corporate greed, to stop decisions that lead to further climate damage, to stop selfish governments driving people into poverty, to stop gaslighting and lies. But this Psalm was written a long time ago: about 4000 years. So, I guess this painful stuff is part of the human condition.



And I guess this painful stuff will always pop up in one way or another.

As a Christian I believe that having Jesus in my life is the ointment for this pain. His death on the tree dealt with all the 'sin' (all the 'bad' in this world and in me) that causes death and misery. He doesn't stop oppression, necessarily, but he is the God I talk to and pray to when I need peace within. I trust him in the times when the peace within is thin. And I do believe that he will transform situations- and me, no matter how bad it is. As the Bangles said: 'Time time time' it moves on- and I see God's hand in my life, as I 'see what becomes of me'.

Esther has her own blog at [www.notquitethereyetbevan.wordpress.com/](http://www.notquitethereyetbevan.wordpress.com/)



<sup>1</sup> *“They have greatly oppressed me from my youth,”  
let Israel say;*

<sup>2</sup> “they have greatly oppressed me from my youth,  
but they have not gained the victory over me.

<sup>3</sup> Plowmen have plowed my back  
and made their furrows long.

<sup>4</sup> But the LORD is righteous;  
he has cut me free from the cords of the wicked.”

<sup>5</sup> May all who hate Zion  
be turned back in shame.

<sup>6</sup> May they be like grass on the roof,  
which withers before it can grow;

<sup>7</sup> a reaper cannot fill his hands with it,  
nor one who gathers fill his arms.

<sup>8</sup> May those who pass by not say to them,  
“The blessing of the LORD be on you;  
we bless you in the name of the LORD.”

# Gold, frankincense and myrrh

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Epiphany is also known as 'Twelfth Night', or the last night of the Christmas festival. According to the song, it is also the day when that over-enthusiastic 'true love' of yours dumps no less than 78 presents on your doorstep, among them a dozen leaping lords of the realm and a final partridge – to go with the 11 you have already been given.

In many parts of the world, 6<sup>th</sup> January is celebrated as Christmas Day. As we Western Christians are packing away our tree, the Greek Orthodox world and Catholic Spain are giving presents and celebrating the wise men, or magi. For what better time to give presents to each other, than on the day the wise men presented gold, frankincense and myrrh to the infant Jesus?

What do we make of these presents? Gold is for kingship, proclaiming a royal child. Frankincense carries a feeling of worship about it: it was used in the temple worship and indicated access to the presence of God.

Frankincense is thus for worship and incarnation.

The third gift, myrrh, finds its place at Calvary. After the crucifixion, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea prepared Jesus' body for burial, using myrrh as an embalming fluid. Thus, when the wise men visit the baby Jesus, the shadow of the cross already falls across the crib. But myrrh is also symbolic of love, so you could say that the third gift is about adoration as well as death. And Christ's death on the cross is for love of the Church, His bride.

As for the magi, they were not Jewish grandees, but foreign Gentiles. And so it was clear, from as early as the manger in Bethlehem, that Jesus was not just the Messiah for the Jews, but the Saviour of the whole world.





# Community matters

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**Donations for our foodbanks are always welcome at both St Alban and St Edmund Churches**

Sometimes we all need help.  
Please contact us if you need assistance.

St Edmund's: Thursdays | 10am – 12noon

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## Kindness Community



Kindness and Wellbeing Coffee Mornings.  
Tuesdays from 9:30am – 11am. Join us for tea, coffee, friendly chat and support, crafting for mindfulness and wellbeing, kindness and wellbeing library, mental health resources, healthy living support including weight and diet management resources with no judgement, recipe swap and healthy cooking demos, book swap, home-business networking and support, signposting to other support services and volunteering opportunities. Just £3 per week.

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**Spirit's Rest Animal Sanctuary, The Bridge, DA1 5RE**

**THANK YOU  
FROM SPIRIT'S REST**

**TO EVERYONE  
WHO SUPPORTED  
US WITH HELP  
AND DONATIONS  
DURING AND  
AFTER THE RECENT  
WILDFIRES**



# Service times

## All Sunday Services are at 10:30am at both churches

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1st Sunday - Holy Communion

2nd Sunday - Family Service

3rd and 4th Sundays - Holy Communion

5th Sunday – Joint Holy Communion

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1st Sunday – Family Service

2nd Sunday – Holy Communion

3rd and 4th Sundays – Holy Communion

5th Sunday – Joint Holy Communion



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### Family Service

This service with songs/hymns does not offer Communion and seeks to offer a more flexible service.

### Holy Communion

This service with songs/hymns offering Communion and prayer.

### Joint Holy Communion

We join together at either St Alban's or St Edmunds to celebrate Holy Communion.









...if you have been affected by any of the  
issues raised in this magazine...

## Getting in touch....

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[stedmundsdartford@gmail.com](mailto:stedmundsdartford@gmail.com)

**St Alban's Churchwardens:** Segun Abraham & Debbie

[www.stalbansdartford.com](http://www.stalbansdartford.com)

**St Edmund's Churchwardens:** Janet Gunner & Lorraine Bathgate

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