



STOCKPORT PARISH CHURCH
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 Stockport Parish Church – St Mary's

Service times at St Mary's

Sunday: 10:30am Holy Communion or Morning Prayer

Normally the first and third Sunday is Holy Communion with Morning on the second and fourth.

**Tuesday: 10.00am Holy Communion
12.15pm Lunchtime Service**

Wedding, Baptism, Funeral and other services by arrangement.

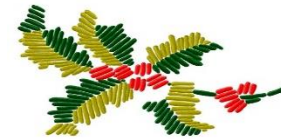
St Mary's and the Nave Café is open – Tuesday, Thursday, Friday & Saturday from 9.00am – 3.00pm

This magazine is written (and other submissions edited as deemed necessary) by S M Heap with additional material used by permission from www.parishpump.co.uk. Copy deposited as legally required with the British Library. Electronic copy available on pdf format via the church website.



Parish Magazine of STOCKPORT PARISH CHURCH

[St Mary's in the Marketplace] with St Andrew's, Hall Street.



December 2017



A contribution towards the cost of producing this magazine would be appreciated please – in the donations box.

Thank You

Diary

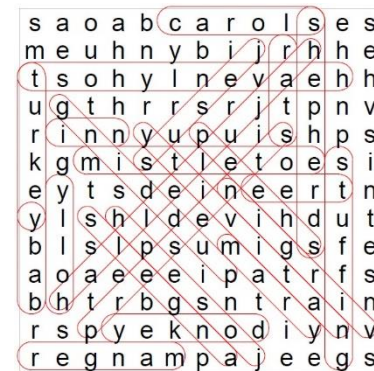
Sunday 3 rd December	Holy Communion Ex-Services Association Carol Service	10.30am 3.00pm
Tuesday, 5 th December	Holy Communion Lunch-time Service	10.00am 12.15pm
Saturday, 10 th December	St Mary's Toy Service Stockport Youth Orchestra Nine Lessons & Carols	10.30am 7.00pm
Monday, 11 th December	Beechwood Carol & Dedication Service	7.00pm
Tuesday, 12 th December	Holy Communion Lunch-time Service Banks Lane Junior School	10.30am 12.15pm 7.00pm
Wednesday, 13 th December	Mayor of Stockport Carol Service	12.30pm
Friday, 15 th December	Age UK Stockport with Warren Wood Primary School	1.00pm
Sunday, 17 th December	Holy Communion – Remembering a Loved One at Christmas	10.30am
Monday, 18 th December	Vernon Park Primary School	2.00pm
Tuesday, 19 th December	Holy Communion Lunch-time Service Wellspring Carol Service	10.30am 12.15pm 1.30pm
Friday, 22 nd December	Shopmobility Stockport With Offerton Methodist Choir	1.00pm
Sunday, 24 th December	Morning Prayer with Carols Midnight Holy Communion with Carols	10.30am 11.30pm
Monday, 25 th December	Christmas Celebration	10.30am

Crossword answers:

ACROSS: 1, Tabernacle. 7, Absalom. 8, Incas. 10, Roes. 11, Captured. 13, Fright. 15, Cavell. 17, Cyclonic. 18, Herb. 21, Sonar. 22, Amazing. 23, Settlement.

DOWN: 1, Taste. 2, Bold. 3, Ramiah. 4, Abiathar. 5, Lucerne. 6, Sacrifices. 9, Saddlebags. 12, Theocrat. 14, Incense. 16, Pilate. 19, Exist. 20, Save.

Wordsearch solution



Sudoku solution

9	3	4	6	2	1	8	5	7
2	7	1	5	8	9	3	4	6
5	8	6	7	4	3	1	9	2
8	9	7	2	1	6	5	3	4
1	4	5	3	9	7	2	6	8
6	2	3	4	5	8	9	7	1
7	5	9	1	6	2	4	8	3
3	1	8	9	7	4	6	2	5
4	6	2	8	3	5	7	1	9

We wish you a Merry Christmas and a
Happy New Year

Wordsearch

s	a	o	a	b	c	a	r	o	l	s	e	s
m	e	u	h	n	y	b	i	j	r	h	h	e
t	s	o	h	y	l	n	e	v	a	e	h	h
u	g	t	h	r	r	s	r	j	t	p	n	v
r	i	n	n	y	u	p	u	i	s	h	p	s
k	g	m	i	s	t	l	e	t	o	e	s	i
e	y	t	s	d	e	i	n	e	e	r	t	n
y	l	s	h	l	d	e	v	i	h	d	u	t
b	l	s	l	p	s	u	m	i	g	s	f	e
a	o	a	e	e	e	i	p	a	t	r	f	s
b	h	t	r	b	g	s	n	t	r	a	i	n
r	s	p	y	e	k	n	o	d	i	y	n	v
r	e	g	n	a	m	p	a	j	e	e	g	s

A New Church Year...

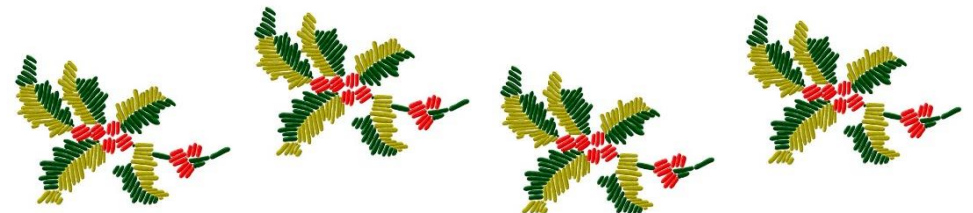
Advent Sunday brings with it a new “church year” as we start Lectionary Year B (Sunday worship) Year 2 (weekdays).

The season of Advent is one of expectation and preparation as the Church looks forward to celebrating the birth of Christ.

We start our “Advent Sunday” with a traditional service of Holy Communion and later in the day hold our first carol service of 2017 with the Ex-Services Association. Our Christmas Programme having started, there is plenty going on and we hope that you will join us for as many of our services and events as you can.

In January we will start a new calendar year, take a short break from weekday and Saturday opening, returning to a normal timetable on Tuesday, 9th January with high expectations that 2018 will be the start of an exciting future. The appointment of a new “vicar” and the continued planning (and the start of implementation of those plans) taking us into a new era, a new beginning.

Whatever you are doing over the festive season we wish you a blessed and joyous Christmas.



Look out for Wenceslas

Most of us probably know that on December 26th (the Feast of Stephen) 'Good king Wenceslas' looked out, writes David Winter. We probably also know that the snow lay round about, 'deep and crisp and even'. Beyond that, he's just someone in a carol that's not often sung nowadays.

However, Wenceslas was a real person, a duke, and effectively king of Bohemia in the 10th century. In modern terms, he was Czechoslovakian. He was known as a generous and kind monarch, deeply Christian and given to good works. So the story in the carol by the Victorian hymn-writer J.M. Neale, while possibly fictitious, is at least in line with his recognised character. 'Page and monarch' braved the 'bitter weather' and the 'cruel wind's wild lament' to take food and fuel to a poor man living rough.

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

Holy Innocents

The death of a very young child is perhaps the hardest grief of all to bear. So the 28th December is a very poignant day in the church calendar. It is when the worldwide Church joins with bereaved parents to grieve the loss of babies and young children. For Holy Innocents day recalls the massacre of the young male children of Bethlehem by Herod the Great.

Herod had been told by the magi, or wise men, that a great king had been born in Bethlehem, and he felt shaken. How could a child in unimportant little Bethlehem be so powerful that the stars in the night sky honoured His birth?! Herod took the magi so seriously that he decided to try and kill this new young rival. He decreed that every male baby of two years and under should be killed. (Matthew 2:1-18).

Bethlehem was not a large place, and Bible commentators estimate that between six and 25 infants were slaughtered by Roman soldiers. Their mothers were inconsolable at the death of their babies, as indeed mothers have always been.

The death of these innocent baby boys of Bethlehem became a feast-day in the western Church by the 4th century. This was because the Church considered them to be martyrs because they not only died for Christ, but instead of Christ.

Down the centuries, the tragic loss of the Holy Innocents has touched the imagination and hearts of poets, preachers and artists. Though heart-broken parents still grieve today, the Church can offer them one firm assurance: that young children who die to this world will undoubtedly "this day be with Me in Paradise." The One who eagerly said "Suffer the little children to come unto Me" will be the last person to turn them away.

What's in a (Christmas) Name?

What do your family call him, that funny old man in a red robe and floppy hat who pops up everywhere at Christmas? Sometimes he's Father Christmas, sometimes Santa Claus, and in parts of Europe he's Saint Nicholas. That's his real name, abbreviated to 'Santa Claus' by Brits and Americans who don't like to follow the Europeans, and then turned into a more homely, cuddly kind of name for the children. Whatever he's called, his function is the same – delivering presents to children at Christmas.

The first St Nicholas was a real person, about whom a few more facts were discovered this Autumn. He was bishop of Myra, in the country we now call Turkey, in the fourth century. He was known as the friend of the poor, and especially poor or abused children. At (or just before) Christmas he went around handing out presents to them, as well as rescuing some from dreadful circumstances. The red robe our modern Santa Claus wears is a vague representation of a bishop's garment, and the floppy hat is his mitre!

The original good bishop from 1600 years ago is remembered by the Church on December 6th, and the lucky children in Belgium and the Netherlands get their presents then!

by David Winter

Lazarus of Bethany – back from the tomb

Some people have near-death experiences.... Lazarus should be their patron saint. Except that he went all the way, and died for four days. He was quiet in his tomb and the mourners of Bethany were in full swing - before Jesus called him back to life. (See John 11: 1 – 44.)

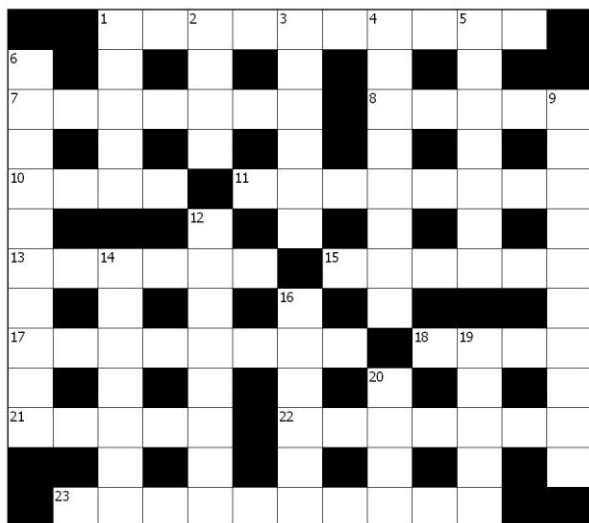
What happened next to Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary? The New Testament never tells us, but there are some clues from early church history and legends.

It seems that Lazarus became very popular with the early Christian Church because he was living evidence that Jesus could bring people back from the dead. It also seems that Lazarus was NOT popular with the local Jews, for the very same reason. They wanted to forget Jesus, and here Lazarus was still walking around, talking about resurrection...

So eventually some exasperated Jews decided to act. According to an early Eastern tradition, they placed Lazarus and his sisters into a leaky boat and set them adrift in the Mediterranean.... where the little boat carried them safely to Cyprus. Here Lazarus became bishop and lived for another 30 years.

Another, later, tradition has it that the boat had no rudder or oars, but still bore them safely to Gaul, where Lazarus founded a church and became the first bishop of Marseilles, so to speak... until he was martyred under Domitian (81-96AD).

Either way, second time round, Lazarus stayed dead. But it was thought he was still at work. By the late Middle Ages, anyone who had a vision of the after-life knew just whom to thank for this 'postcard from heaven' – St Lazarus!



Crossword Puzzle

Across

1 Provisional meeting place of God and the Jews (Exodus 25:9) (10)

7 David's third son, killed when his head got caught in a tree during a battle with his father (2 Samuel 18:14,15) (7)

8 They ruled much of the

west coast of South America in the 15th and early 16th centuries (5)

10 Small deer of European and Asian extraction (4)

11 Seized control of (Numbers 21:25) (8)

13 Terror (Luke 24:5) (6)

15 First World War heroine shot by the Germans in Brussels, Nurse Edith (6)

17 Stormy (8)

18 A bitter variety of this, together with lamb and unleavened bread, was the Passover menu for anyone unclean (Numbers 9:11) (4)

21 Arson (anag.) (5)

22 How John Newton described God's grace in his well-known hymn (7)

23 Habitation (Isaiah 27:10) (10)

Down

1 and see that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:8) (5)

2 The wicked man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are as ... as a lion (Proverbs 28:1) (4)

3 One of the exiles, a descendant of Parosh, who married a foreign woman (Ezra 10:25) (6)

4 He escaped from Nob when Saul killed the rest of his family and joined David (1 Samuel 22:19,20) (8)

5 City and lake in Central Switzerland (7)

6 Offer your bodies as living , holy and pleasing to God (Romans 12:1) (10)

9 Pouches carried by horses (Genesis 49:14) (10)

12 One who accepts government by God (8)

14 Aromatic substance commonly used in Jewish ritual (Exodus 30:1) (7)

16 He asked Jesus, 'What is truth?' (John 18:38) (6)

19 Are (Romans 13:1) (5)

20 You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will ... his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21) (4)

Sudoku

9			6					
2	7			8				6
	8	6		4	3	1	9	2
	9			1	6	5		
		5				2		
		3	4	5			7	
7	5	9	1	6		4	8	
3				7			2	5
					5			9

Christmas:

Why does it begin at midnight with Holy Communion?

The hour was first chosen at Rome in the fifth century to symbolise the idea that Christ was born at midnight – a mystical idea in no way hindered by historical evidence! No one knows the hour of his birth.

Certainly in recent times, Holy Communion at midnight on Christmas morning has proved popular with modern families. One British writer pointed out its “domestic convenience” in 1947: “for where there are children and no servants, husband and wife may be unable to communicate at any other time.” (So things don’t change, then!)

Prayer at Christmas

Father of all good gifts,

Thank you for the greatest gift of all – your precious Son, Jesus. Thank you that He chose to live with us so that all who trust Him will one day live with you in peace and wholeness.

Help us Father, this Christmas, to keep you at the centre of our celebrations and, in the midst of all the busy-ness and rush, to know your presence and the peace that only you can give. And Lord, may we reflect your love to those who don’t yet know that you are real and alive and able to help, whatever their situation. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

By Daphne Kitching

Tuesday – Lunchtime Service

December 5th

Advent: The Private Announcement (Matt 1: 18-25)

December 12th

Advent: The Public Announcement (Luke 3: 7-18)

January 9th

New Beginnings (Acts 13: 1-13)

January 16th

Upwards and onwards (Acts 13: 13-25)

January 23rd

The message of life (Acts 13: 26-43)

January 30th

Decision time (Acts 13:44-52)

Christmas: The man who married Mary (2)

Joseph would have taught Jesus many things – not just the skills of a labourer, but the lore of the countryside which was evident in our Lord's teaching. Jesus grew up within a loving family and described

God as 'Father', knowing also the good fatherly qualities of Joseph.

In the Christmas story, Joseph is placed into a situation that brought him misunderstanding and suspicion. But Joseph remained faithful in the knowledge that as long as God had spoken, the opinion of others mattered little. Before Jesus began His ministry it is believed that Joseph died. It is likely Jesus took on many of his father's responsibilities before He left home. In the eyes of the world, Joseph was a nobody. He was not a man of valour, fame and fortune. But he was the one who had parental responsibility for the greatest person who has ever lived!

It is sad that we often equate ordinariness with ineffectiveness. Down the ages, God has used many ordinary people to accomplish great things. God continues to use ordinary people. Like Joseph, we need to know that doing God's will is the most important thing in life. May we, this Christmas, respond to God's call to us and please Him in all that we do.

By Lester Amann

Christmas: World's oldest fake tree

Did you know that it is a family in Wiltshire, the Parkers, who claim to own the world's oldest artificial Christmas tree? It was bought in 1886, and is still put up every year.

Christmas: And there were shepherds

Luke's story of the birth of Jesus is brilliantly told – the angel's visit to Mary to tell her she would be mother of the long-promised Messiah, the old priest in the Temple told by another angel that his wife would have a son to be called 'John', who would prepare the people of Israel for that event, and then Mary and Joseph making the 60 mile journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, as required by the Roman census. When they got there, no room at the inn, and they settled instead for a convenient stable, where Mary gave birth to a boy child.

Suddenly, Luke changes the tone. 'And there were shepherds ...' – that's what he actually wrote, just like that. 'And there were shepherds', doing exactly what shepherds do, looking after their flocks by night. But this night was different: yet another angelic message – a call to abandon their sheep and go into Bethlehem to see the baby Messiah. They were given directions and a 'sign' to identify Him. He would be lying in a feeding trough. Well, at least they would recognise that.

And why the shepherds, in this glorious story of our salvation? Because the event needed witnesses, and the chosen witnesses would be this bunch of scruffy, smelly shepherds straight from the sheep-pen. Nothing could speak more eloquently of God's purpose than that. This was not a Saviour for the strong, rich and powerful, but for everybody. The carpenter and his wife guarded the Saviour of the world, and the very first witnesses were not kings or priests but a handful of shepherds.

By David Winter

Christmas: Where did Christmas trees come from?

There are two early stories that mention fir trees. The first involves St Boniface, who went to Germany in the 8th century as a missionary and found people sacrificing a child to their god under an oak tree. Boniface was appalled, and rescued the child. He then chopped down the oak tree and found a tiny fir tree growing nearby. He gave this to the people and said: "This is a symbol of life. Whenever you look at this tree, remember the Christ-child who is the one who will give you life, because he gave his life for you."

The second early fir tree story involves Martin Luther in the 16th century. It is said that one year he decided to drag a fir tree into his home and to decorate it with candles. He used it as a visual aid, telling people that the candles symbolised Jesus as the light of the world, and the evergreen tree symbolised the eternal life that Jesus gives to us. Many of the people who followed Luther were struck by the idea, and took up the custom.

THANK YOU to those who supported our Bonfire Eve Dinner Party at St Andrews. Having only a small party to cater for was an advantage for this first "social event" of this type to be held at our Hall Street premises – it was a lovely evening complete with fireworks on the lawn. The sum of £80.00 raised towards church funds.

Christmas: Mistletoe's smelly history

Did you know that the word 'mistletoe' means dung on a tree? The Anglo-Saxons thought that mistletoe grew in trees where birds had left their droppings. Mistel means dung, and tan means twig.

Christmas:

The man who married Mary

The traditional Nativity scene on our Christmas cards has Mary with the Holy Babe. Around her are the shepherds and Magi. We may also see stable animals, angels and a star! While Joseph is often included, his presence seems to be of minor importance. After all, we praise God for Jesus with our familiar Christmas carols, mentioning angels, shepherds, Wise men and Mary but the name of Joseph is absent!

Why is Joseph given a low profile? For he is a man to be remembered. Joseph was a resident of Nazareth. He worked as a carpenter and his skills would have included making furniture, repairing buildings and crafting agricultural tools. Although Joseph had an honourable profession, he would not have been a man of great wealth.

The gospel writers Matthew and Luke give Joseph a few brief mentions. After the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary go to the temple in Jerusalem to dedicate the Baby to God. Afterwards, they flee into Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod and much later return to Nazareth. Twelve years later, Mary and Joseph go with Jesus to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. Here they lose Jesus, and find Him in the Temple talking with religious leaders!

Apart from these verses, the New Testament is silent about the rest of Joseph's life. However, we do know that Joseph was father to other children by Mary. His four sons are named and they had at least two daughters. (See Matthew 13:55)

And we also know that Joseph was someone who quietly and humbly took on the awesome role in caring for the early life of the Son of God.

Continued...

Christmas: Why was Jesus born in a barn?

Our pretty Christmas cards do not do it justice – the stable that Jesus was born in would have been smelly, dirty, and full of mess. So why did God not provide something better for His beloved Son? Why let Joseph and Mary scrounge around until they ended up in a smelly stable?

Perhaps because the King of Kings being born in a foul stable is a perfect picture of redemption. Jesus came from glory into a world filled with the dirt, filth and darkness of sin. And Jesus was not put off by darkness in the least – instead, He came to be the Light of the World. Thank God for His unspeakable gift. No wonder the angels sang “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” (Luke 2:14)

Introducing Limitless Skies & Feathers Tale Charity No 1156852

We are pleased to be working with “Limitless Skies” over the next few weeks – a Manchester charity making grants to organisations, children/young people, providing human resources, education and training. The prevention or relief of poverty, accommodation/housing, provision of buildings/facilities/open space...

In particular we are looking to support through “Limitless Skies” another charity “Feathers Tale Children’s Village” through “Share Tanzania”. Share Tanzania operates in rural Tanzania, in the foot hills of mount Kilimanjaro. The goal is simple, to alleviate poverty, and improve the lives of vulnerable children living in the area. Feathers Tale Children’s Village is concerned with children with special needs and disabilities – due to the demands of poverty, work and no support, parents have no choice but to leave their children alone whilst they work, and for all neglect can occur intentionally, it also occurs unintentionally with it. Some parents are sadly even made homeless by the demands of raising a special needs child alone.

Christmas: We three kings of Orient are... what?

“A cold coming they had of it at this time of the year, just the worst time of the year to take a journey, and specially a long journey, in. The way’s deep, the weather sharp, the days short, the sun farthest off, in solstitio brumali, the very dead of winter.”

It was 1622, and the Bishop of Winchester, Launcelot Andrews, was preaching a magnificent sermon to King James I. Reckoned one of the best preachers ever, Launcelot Andrews’ words were later taken up by T S Eliot and transformed into his wonderful poem ‘The Journey of the Magi’. What a vivid picture – we can see it all! The camels’ breath steaming in the night air as the kings, in their gorgeous robes of silk and cloth-of-gold, and clutching their precious gifts, kneel to adore the baby in the manger.

Yet the Bible does not give us as much detail as some people think. Tradition down the centuries has added a great deal more. For instance, we know from St Matthew that the magi were ‘wise’, or learned men of some sort, but we do not know if they were kings or not. The Bible tells us there were several; tradition has decided upon three, and even named them: Balthassar, Melchior, and Caspar (or Gaspar). But the Bible does tell us that the magi gave baby Jesus three highly symbolic gifts: gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. Gold stands for kingship, frankincense for worship, and myrrh for anointing – anticipating his death.

There is a lovely ancient mosaic in Ravenna, Italy, that is 1,500 years old. It depicts the wise men in oriental garb of trousers and Phrygian caps, carrying their gifts past palm trees towards the star that they followed... straight to Jesus.

Christmas: Thank Dickens for Christmas as you know it!

Ever wonder where many of our Christmas traditions come from? A surprising amount of our modern Christmas celebrations can be traced back to the well-loved story of 'A Christmas Carol', by Charles Dickens.

When you read 'A Christmas Carol', you discover almost a template of the 'ideal Christmas' which we still hold dear today. Dickens seems to have selected the best of the Christmas celebrations of his day (he ignored some of the odd excesses) and packaged them in such a way as to give us traditions that we could accommodate and treasure – more than a century later.

So, for instance, in A Christmas Carol, Christmas is a family day, with a family-centred feast. In a home decorated with holly and candles the characters enjoy a roast turkey, followed by Christmas pudding. They give their loved ones presents. Scrooge even gives donations to charity (!).

And all the while outside, there is snow and frost, while church bells ring, and carol singers sing, and hope for mulled wine. In 'A Christmas Carol' there is even a Father Christmas – in the shape of Christmas Present. Only the Christmas tree itself came later, when Prince Albert imported 'a pretty German toy' that won the heart of the English court, and hence the rest of Victorian society.

Christmas: The story of mince pies

Did you know that mince pies have been traditional English Christmas fare since the Middle Ages, when meat was a key ingredient? The addition of spices, suet and alcohol to meat came about because it was an alternative to salting and smoking in order to preserve the food. Mince pies used to be a different shape - cradle-shaped with a pastry baby Jesus on top

Christmas: Christmas and St Luke's Gospel

It is to St Luke's wonderful gospel that many Christians turn as the year draws to a close and Christmas approaches, for it is to St Luke that we owe the fullest account of the nativity.

Luke alone tells us the story of Mary and the angel's visit to her, and has thus given the Church the wonderful Magnificat of Mary.

Luke alone tells us the story of Simeon's hymn of praise, thus giving us the wonderful Nunc Dimmittis. Imagine an Anglican evensong without the Nunc Dimmittis.

Luke alone tells us the story of how the angels appeared to the shepherds and how the shepherds then visited the infant Jesus. So – imagine Christmas cards and nativity scenes every year without the shepherds arriving to visit baby Jesus. Imagine school nativity plays without our children dressed as shepherds or sheep. So – thank you, Luke!

What makes it so amazing is that Luke was not a Jew! The man who wrote the fullest nativity story, and indeed more of the New Testament than any other single person, was a Gentile!

www.stmarysinthemarketplace

Our web-site celebrates its SIXTH birthday – how the time goes – considering it was only intended to be a temporary site hosted through Vistaprint to give us an online presence until we had time to start from scratch with a dedicated webmaster designing our pages for us! Well, we did get as far as a pilot site being prepared, presumably this is still sat on our intended "webmasters" file server, but it will be for another day to pick up on this and take it forward! Still, be impressed, we do have quite a lot of "hits" on our present site and it is updated regularly and available for all to see.

Christmas: Was Jesus really born on 25th December?

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

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

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

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

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

As for the huge, bronze 200 tonne Sol Invictus? He fell over during an earthquake, and was sold off for scrap metal in 654AD by an enterprising Arab scrap merchant. Meanwhile, Jesus lives on...

Christmas: Who is 'Santa Claus'?

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

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

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

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

Thank you to Stockport Heritage Trust for auctioning Daisy the "cow" and giving the proceeds to St Mary's (£15.00). We hope that she will be very happy in her new home, but not too upset that our bovine friend has left the tower. Very worrying when you forgot she was there and walked through in the dark to switch on the lights to be greeted by her lifelike face - thankfully she never went Moooooo.

Let Jesus Show! *The Rev Paul Hardingham*

The nativity scene with all its characters was in place, as the children (representing angels), gathered around the manger. They sang: 'Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will among men'. Suddenly a small girl on the edge of the crowd, who couldn't see what was going on, shouted out, 'Let Jesus show!'

At Christmas time, we want to let Jesus show, in our churches, communities and lives. We have an amazing message to share: 'in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; He is the Messiah, the Lord' (Luke 2:10). It was to the shepherds, apart from his parents, that Jesus was first showed.

The filthy, hardworking shepherds, living in the fields with their flock of dirty animals, were unlikely candidates for this honour. By the nature of their work, they had the status of migrant workers. Yet this underlines for us that the good news of Christmas is for everyone, irrespective of social standing, background, race or gender.

No doubt these simple shepherds would have had no idea of what the names given to Jesus fully meant (ie Saviour, Messiah and Lord). All they needed to know, and all we need to know, is that God has done something unique in coming to earth as a human being. This is good news of great joy for everybody!

After worshipping the child, the shepherds returned to their normal routine. However, they would never be the same again! Even though their work and social standing were unchanged, they had a message to share and let Jesus show. Although we don't normally see angels, we have the same good news to share! When Christmas is over and we're back to our normal routines, how will we let Jesus show in our lives?

No room at the inn! David Pickup (Solicitor) considers the problem of booking hotel rooms

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth..., to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. (Luke 2 4-7). You can just imagine the conversation. Mary's trepidation: "The baby is due any day, and it is a long journey!" And Joseph's reply: "Don't worry, there will be plenty of places to stay. I feel Bethlehem is my second home."

In the end, they had to register for taxation, and so they went. A journey of about 80 miles would have taken days, but surely that would be the worst of the trip? What could go wrong once they reached Bethlehem?

If you book a room at a hotel, and when you arrive they say they made a mistake, and are full, what do you do? A contract is still a contract, and if the hotel has double-booked, they have to find you an alternative room at a similar standard. Putting you in their garage is not an option! On the other hand, if you, the guest, cancels or leaves early, you may have to pay for the full booking. Before you book anywhere, it is well worth reading the small print, because hotels usually have cancellation policies and conditions which may greatly restrict you. If ever in dispute, always get professional advice. And so, Jesus came down from heaven, and landed in the middle of a humdrum problem about an inn being too full. He came straight into our real world of problems, disappointments and unexpected expense. Our Lord appears among us, not in a palace but in a stable, adored by shepherds, and accessible to anyone of us. Have a safe, legal and Happy Christmas.

The Love that in a Family Dwells

By David Winter

Christmas is, beyond doubt, the family event of the year. For holidays and weekends we go away, but at this one time of the year most of us get in our cars to join some or all of the family somewhere.

Being human, there may be the odd squabble or falling out (and if we believe the television drama, not much else), but in fact they are usually treasured get-togethers.

This family element of Christmas probably originates from the story of the birth of Jesus. There must be hundreds of famous paintings of the Holy Family gathered around the manger – Joseph, Mary and the baby Jesus. It was a little family from which, in the Christian story, vast blessings flowed to the whole human race. The Son of God had an earthly father and mother, and grew up in an ordinary home in an ordinary town. His later life was extra-ordinary, but his home life was utterly normal.

Family lies at the heart of our whole culture. It is created by two things, choice and inheritance. Around the family table are some who are there because by choice they married someone, and others are there because they were born into the family. It's usually a happy mix. We are glad we chose our partner, and we are glad to be members of this family, and probably another one as well. In his poem, 'Christmas', John Betjeman spoke of 'the love that in a family dwells'. It's not a bad idea once a year to celebrate it.

THANK YOU – for retuning your collection boxes to Frank recently.

Cheques have been forwarded to the Children's Society for £206.00 and the Leprosy Mission for £80.00

The Christmas Message

The date was set in heaven above
When love come down upon this earth,
A stable bare, a bed of straw,
The setting for the Saviour's birth.

Shepherds out upon the hillside
'Watching o'er their flocks by night',
When angels telling of a baby
In splendour, burst upon their sight

Signs were seen in distant lands
With wise men travelling from afar
Having searched the skies at night
Came following His natal star.

As we hear the Christmas message,
If we think these things are true,
We could come to seek this baby
We could be like wise men too.

By Megan Carter

Clive Calton: As we approach the end of another year – a THANK YOU to our mostly "unseen" but not forgotten 'Steeple Keeper' who so kindly comes into church at all hours of the day and night to maintain our wonderful bells, keeping everything in good working order. It is quite a job for which we are most grateful, as we are to the many visiting bell ringers Clive invites, to climb the steps to the ringing chamber, as and when he can and for those very special occasions.

Nigel Beeton writes: Children, nowadays, count down the number of sleeps till Christmas. There's even a website (www.yourchristmascountdown.com) which counts down the number of sleeps – and indeed seconds - remaining. We didn't do that when I was small, but I do remember the excitement of that last sleep before Christmas Day!

One Last Sleep

Time for bed! Time for sleep!
Go on your sleepy way;
Snuggled down and sleeping deep –
Tomorrow's Christmas Day!

He will come! While you rest!
Santa with his sleigh!
Climbing down the chimney breast
With gifts for Christmas Day!

You've been good! Just sleep well!
Hear what your parents say!
Underneath that sleepy spell
Along comes Christmas Day!

The best time of the year!
When we can laugh and play!
One day full of festive cheer
We all love Christmas Day!

By Nigel Beeton

Fizz Fashion Show



Many thanks to those of you who attended the Fizz Fashion Show at St Mary's, your support was most appreciated and we hope that you found something for your winter wardrobe as well as having a most enjoyable evening. To our organisers and "ticket sellers" (especially Catriona and Ann) well done indeed for making this such a successful event. Having to guarantee "bums on seats" is far from easy, but it all looked very convincing on the night as can be seen above.

'Fizz' is an independent fashion retailer located in the North West - the shop in Hyde was first shop to open in 1985, followed later by outlets in Shaw, Ashton-under-Lyne and Wilmslow. Founded in 1983, it all started on a market stall with the will and ambition to provide quality clothing at an affordable price – it would definitely appear that they achieved their goal!

Book-keeping wise – we made on the evening £555.00 (tickets and 10% commission received on sales). Monies for this event being for St Mary's. A welcome boost to our funds – thank you.

Angus Butterworth

I have known Angus for quite a number of years as many of you have. Of course my relationship with him has been through the church, St. Mary's, in the Marketplace. Like so many over the years, he just appeared in church, and gradually became one of the family, so to speak. He was not a mainstream churchgoer or Christian believer by any means, by his own admission. However, Angus went from sitting out on the side, to sitting in the main body of the church on Tuesdays, at the lunchtime service, which I always considered a sign of greater interest than some! He was on our side, I'm sure! And had I had the privilege of speaking at his funeral, I would have been able to speak very warmly and positively about this fine, gentle man.

I warmly recall the time that Angus once joined me at the Rectory for Christmas Day, a day I will always remember! One of the other guests was a certain Christine McConkey, who was also a great character, though like Angus, not a churchgoer, but a very good friend of mine, and a generous friend towards St. Mary's. When these two, who were of an age, found out that they shared a love of Scotland, for Christine was Scottish, they began singing Scottish songs together, at the table. It was such fun to see and hear them, and it made that Christmas Day unique for us all. Angus loved to recall his time in Scotland. Indeed, his experience of life was deep and wide, and he was always worth listening to.

Angus was a much loved member of the wider family at St. Mary's for many years, and I would simply like to record my thanks for having known him, and for having benefitted from his insight and experience of life, and for the gift of friendship that we shared together. I was always pleased to see him at church. And I'm sure God was too!

With very best wishes to you all
Roger Scoones - formerly Rector, St. Mary's.

Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal Coffee Morning

For a November morning (the 11th day of the 11th month) we were fortunate enough to have a slow but steady stream of visitors enjoying freshly ground coffee and a speciality cake. At the 11th hour a two minute silence was observed in line with the maroons sounding from Stopford House and the chimes of our own clock. Making around £76 on the day we have rounded up the cheque (to £80) which has been popped into the Poppy Collection box. We will be informed later from the RBL the total amount raised by St Mary's. Thanks to Una McNally, Jean Howells and Tony Trinci from the Rotary Club of Stockport for coming along to manage the kitchen/cafe and host this event.

January closure:

St Mary's will be closed (with the exception of Sunday worship) to the public after our Christmas Day service until Tuesday, 9th January. We will of course be keeping a close "eye" on the church (both inside and out) throughout this period, making regular checks as well as dismantling the Christmas decorations, cleaning and generally preparing for the New Year.

Operation Christmas Child

Thank you to everyone who made-up a shoe-box this year, manufactured scarves and hats etc. to be incorporated into boxes, or just bought items to be included. Another brilliant effort. Our bumper crop of boxes helped along with assistance from Rotarian Doug Cartwright bringing along 15 completed boxes made up by children from Bolshaw Primary School (Heald Green) for the Rotary Club of Stockport to contribute to this well worth project.
