

CORNERSTONE

The Magazine of
WITNEY CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH



Christ Jesus is the chief cornerstone.
In Him the whole fabric is bound together, as it grows into a temple,
dedicated to the Lord (Ephesians 2:21)

December 2025 & January 2026

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What a year it has been, with world events going from bad to worse. The war in Ukraine is still ongoing, and even though there is supposed to be a ceasefire, the chaos in the Middle East is also ongoing. Like other parts of the world, here in the UK we have had unprecedented storms and floods. Meanwhile, the cost-of-living crisis continues, and food banks in the UK look set to be overwhelmed. Many of us now are facing a hard winter, with seemingly little to be cheerful about. I know we are now into December, but we must also remember, and support, the Armed Forces community, and also of hope for a peaceful future, and Dave Wesson, one of our deacons, was at RAF Brize Norton on Remembrance Day



And yet, and yet – the message of Christmas is just as real for us today as it was 2000 years ago, and it can still bring us hope and joy for our long-term future. Emmanuel has come, the Prince of Peace, the Son of Righteousness. God IS with us. And HIS kingdom will have no end.

I now turn to some of this month's contents: Tony Houghton writes about the virgin birth; Elaine Kinchin writes about a weird & wonderful Christmas present; Lesley Barter

writes about for such a time as this and Judi Holloway gives us the Gospel of the Wild Messiah and along with the standard contributions, and some articles have been extracted from Parish Pump

Many thanks for those who have contributed for this edition, but would encourage anyone to consider submitting article(s) for the next edition by either:

E-mail: terrypowlesland@uwclub.net

jacquipowlesland@uwclub.net

or, just plainly written on paper, which can be typed up

The next 2-monthly edition, covering February & March 2026, is due on **Sunday 1st February** and wishing you a Merry



Your Editor

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December 2025 & January 2026

Services: 10.30am weekly & 6.00pm on first Sunday of the month

Dec				
6 th	11.00am	Saturday Praise		
7 th	am	Lesley Barter	Advent 2	
	pm	Rev Elaine Kinchin		Communion
14 th	am	Nanna Blackman	Advent 3	
21 st	am	Rev Judi Holloway	Advent 4	Carol service with Communion
25 th	am	Rev Judi Holloway	Christmas Day	
28 th		No Service		
Jan				
3 rd	11.00am	Saturday Praise		
4 th	am	Irum Anjum		
	pm	Rev Elaine Kinchin		Communion
11 th	am	Nanna Blackman		
18 th	am	Rev Judi Holloway		Communion
25 th	am	Tony Houghton		
Feb				
1 st	am	tbc		
	pm	tbc		
7 th	11.00am	Saturday Praise		
8 th	am	Nanna Blackman		

The following events are given for your particular attention:

Dec		
9 th	Chair-based Exercise Group & repeated on 16 th	10.45 – 11.45
	Drop-in Prayer Time & repeated on 16 th	12.30 – 1.30
18 th	Thursday Coffee with Carols & mince pies	10.00am
Jan		
5 th	Hi 5's Film Night	6.00pm
6 th	Chair-based Exercise Group & repeated on 20 th & 27 th	10.45 – 11.45
13 th	Drop-in Prayer Time & repeated on 20 th & 27 th	12.30 – 1.30
25 th	Church meeting	12.00 noon
31 st	Witney Book Circle	10.30 – 11.15
Feb		
3 rd	Chair-based Exercise Group	10.45 – 11.45
	Drop-in Prayer Time	12.30 – 1.30

Rotas

WELCOMING TEAM

Dec	07	Janet Hayes
	14	Lesley Barter
	21	Pat Smith
	25	Jacqui Powlesland
Jan	04	Jean Hodgson
	11	Janet Hayes
	18	Lesley Barter
	25	Pat Smith
Feb	01	Jacqui Powlesland
	08	Jean Hodgson



FLOWERS

Dec	07	Rita Hayes
	14	Christmas Tree
	21	Christmas Tree
	28	Christmas Tree
Jan	04	Christmas Tree
	11	Judi Holloway
	18	Janet Hayes
	25	Jacqui Powlesland
Feb	01	Rita Hayes
	08	Judi Holloway



SUNDAY COFFEE

Dec	07	Jacqui & Terry Powlesland
	14	Pat Smith & Janet Hayes
	21	Jacqui & Terry Powlesland
Jan	04	Jacqui Powlesland & Claire Woodward
	11	Jean Hodgson & Ann Clack
	18	Elaine
	25	Jacqui & Terry Powlesland
Feb	01	Pat Smith & Janet Hayes
	08	Jacqui Powlesland & Claire Woodward



THURSDAY COFFEE (10 – 12)

Dec	11	Jean Hodgson
	18	Jean Hodgson & Ann Clack
Jan	08	Elaine Kinchin
	15	Pat Smith
	22	Judi Holloway
	29	David Kinchin
Feb	05	Ann Clack
	12	Jean Hodgson

Coffee with Carols & mince pies



Nanna Blackman as standby - We would be extremely grateful for other people to join

SOUND SYSTEM

Dec	07	Terry Powlesland
	14	Tony Houghton
	21	Terry Powlesland
	25	Terry Powlesland
	28	Church Closed
Jan	04	Terry Powlesland
	11	Terry Powlesland
	18	Tony Houghton
	25	Nanna Blackman
Feb	01	Terry Powlesland
	08	Tony Houghton



For ALL the Rotas, every effort has been made to meet individual circumstances.
However, if the dates are not convenient for you, please change with someone else

Dec	09	Joan White
	16	Layla Holloway
	25	Preston Holloway
	29	Cecily Lau



Jan	02	Benjamina Esapa
		Joseph Esapa
		Margaret Esapa
	07	Storm Wallace Heppell
	13	Anthony Beechey
	14	Elaine De Fraine
	15	Ruth Doyle
	23	Heather Houghton
	24	David Kinchin

Wishing you all a Merry Christmas and a



The following article was written & submitted by Elaine Kinchin & is entitled:

A weird and wonderful Christmas present!

Many of us remember Kathy Shaw, who was a member at Witney Congregation Church from 2014-2020. While living in Witney, Kathy began the Congregational Federation training course and is now minister at Padfield in Derbyshire and, from January, also at Stalybridge in Cheshire. As part of her training she set up Witney Book Circle, which still meets monthly.

Kathy shares something with these people: Isaac Newton, Humphrey Bogart, Sissy Spacek, former Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Annie Lennox. She was born on December 25th.

So was Annie Ide. *Who?* I can hear you ask.

Henry Clay Ide was U.S. Commissioner to Samoa during the 1890s and his daughter Annie was not happy that the anniversary of her birthday took place on December 25th. Robert Louis Stevenson, author of *Kidnapped* and *Treasure Island* lived in Samoa towards the end of his life and was a friend of Henry Clay Ide. Stevenson knew that Annie felt cheated because everyone received presents on HER birthday!

In 1891, Stevenson drew up a legal looking document in which he gave all the rights and privileges of his own birthday (November 13th) to Annie. Annie was authorised to wear nice clothes, eat rich food and receive presents and compliments. Annie was delighted! For the rest of her life, she celebrated Christmas on December 25th and her birthday on November 13th.

In exchange, R. L. Stevenson requested Annie to add Louisa to her name, which she did.

This is not a fictional tale: the original deed of gift is on display in the Fairbanks Museum, St. Johnsbury, Vermont.



PRAYER LETTER

No 220

In the last issue of Cornerstone, I wrote about Thora Hird. This time I feature another figure from my childhood and young adult years: Roy Castle (1932-1994). I think I remember him mostly for *Record Breakers*, the long-running show he presented for over twenty years. My husband has additional memories: Roy appeared in a Dr. Who film and in *Carry on up the Khyber*. During his time on *Record Breakers*, Roy broke nine world records himself and he performed the closing theme which included these lines: *If you want to be the best, if you want to beat the rest, Dedication, dedication, dedication is what you need.*

James Whitborne interviewed Roy for *Thought for the Day* towards the end of his life and Roy chose this passage from Romans:

“God has given each of us the ability to do certain things well. So, if God has given you the ability to prophesy, then prophesy whenever you can—as often as your faith is strong enough to receive a message from God. If your gift is that of serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, do a good job of teaching. If you are a preacher, see to it that your sermons are strong and helpful. If God has given you money, be generous in helping others with it. If God has given you administrative ability and put you in charge of the work of others, take the responsibility seriously. Those who offer comfort to the sorrowing should do so with Christian cheer.

Don’t just pretend that you love others: really love them. Hate what is wrong. Stand on the side of the good. Love each other with brotherly affection and take delight in honouring each other. Never be lazy in your work but serve the Lord enthusiastically. Be glad for all God is planning for you. Be patient in trouble, and prayerful always.” (Romans 12:6-10 Living Bible):

We can certainly see where Roy got the inspiration for the song *Dedication* from!

Roy and his wife Fiona were committed Baptists and his faith sustained him especially during the last few years of his life. As a non-smoker, he was diagnosed with lung cancer, which he attributed to his early years entertaining in smoky venues. After his death Fiona continued to campaign for smoking to be banned in enclosed public spaces, which finally came into effect in England and Wales in 2007.

What is interesting is the mix of gifts named by the Apostle Paul: preaching and prophesying, administering and being a foreman. All done to the best of the person’s ability – which is God-given. It reminded me of Brother Lawrence, a monk from the 1600s, whose job was cook. Maddy Prior and Rick Kemp sum up his philosophy: *He hums to himself all the hymns he has known, while he pulls up the leeks... He does all his work in the presence of the Lord...He is peeling potatoes to the glory of God.*

Whatever God has given us we should use, cheerfully and thankfully. By offering all we are and do, we are prayerful always.

Every Blessing, Elaine

Please note that for up-to-date prayer requests contact Elaine 07534 879449)

The following article, written by Jon Swales, has been submitted by Judi Holloway and is entitled:

The Gospel of the Wild Messiah

He did not come robed in safety.
He did not come crowned in gold.
He came with dust on his sandals,
blood in his future and fire in his bones.
Not to keep the peace—but to break it open.

The penniless preacher from Nazareth
walks towards the pain,
kneels where no king kneels, calls friends
what the world calls waste.

The mission of the wild messiah is
madness to the market and mercy to the
margins.

Here is a man. Exiled flesh. Olive skin
cracked like parched land.
No one hugs lepers. But he does. No
ritual. Just reach.

Let the church be like this— touching
what others avoid.
Body of Christ, move your hands.

Here is a man. Dropped through a broken
roof. They say his legs are cursed,
but Jesus says, "Friend." Forgiveness
before healing. Wholeness before
walking.

Let the church be like this— tearing open
ceilings so mercy can get in.

Here is a man. Sworn to Caesar. A soldier's
posture, a servant's pain.
Faith speaks from strange lips. Jesus
listens. Heals.

Let the church be like this— wide-lunged
enough to breathe in foreign hope.

Here is a woman. Tears on feet, perfume
in air, shame in the room.
They call her sinner. He calls her forgiven.

Let the church be like this— welcoming
the shamed. Less pointing. More tears.
Less tally.

Here is a man. Naked in tombs. Self-harm
scrawled across skin. Unclean, unkempt,
unloved. Jesus asks one thing: What's
your name? And the demons tremble.

Let the church be like this— naming the
silenced, holding the haunted.

Here is a woman. Twelve years of blood.
Invisible in a crowd. She dares a touch—
and it stops him. He says: "Daughter." A
word that heals more than wounds.

Let the church be like this— interruptible.
Alive to power in the unnoticed.

Here is a man. Short in stature, tall in
corruption. Collaboration money stacked
in a crooked house. Jesus invites himself
in. No lecture. Just presence. And
something changes.

Let the church be like this— hosting grace
before repentance, feasting with the
fallen.

Here is a man. Blind and begging. Shouting
louder than the crowd's comfort.
Jesus halts. Sees what others pass by. And
lets light in.

Let the church be like this— attentive to
inconvenient cries.

This is not a clean gospel. It smells of spit
and soil, rupture and resistance.
It weeps in alleyways and whispers beside
beds. It eats with the wrong people
and sings in the dark.

The kingdom is not far. It is falling like a
tear from the face of God.
And still he walks. Still he calls. Still he
touches the untouchable and invites the
forgotten home.

Let the church be like this. Let us be
wounded, wild, and faithful. Amen. And
amen again.

The following article, written by Dr Ruth M Bancewicz, who is Church Engagement Director at The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion in Cambridge, has been extracted from Parish Pump, and Ruth writes on the positive relationship between Science and Christian faith, and is entitled:

Science and Miracles

We live in a world where we can expect the sun to rise tomorrow and the milk to pour out of the bottle when we tilt it over our cereal. But for God, the properties of matter and the biological processes that we know and read about in text-books are simply the usual ways He works. If He chooses to do something unexpected to demonstrate something about His character, His relationship with us, and His purposes, then He will.

A group of 14 UK-based science Professors wrote to the Times in 1984, saying that “We gladly accept the Virgin Birth, the gospel miracles, and the Resurrection of Christ as historical events. We know that we are representative of many other scientists who are also Christians standing in the historical tradition of the churches.” For the non-believer, I would suggest a thought experiment: if God exists, why should He be bound by the same laws of physics as us?

Professor Christine Done is an Astrophysicist at the University of Durham. In the book *True Scientists, True Faith* (Monarch, 2014) she writes: “Even when I was an atheist I used to get cross at discussions...on how all Jesus’s miracles could be physically explained. To me, once you have believed in a God, a supernatural being, then it’s obvious that supernatural stuff could happen, since any God who can make the physical universe and its laws can presumably suspend

those laws in any time and way He chooses.”

There are also miracles which appear to be a case of wonderful timing. The wind blew all night and the Israelites crossed the Red Sea on dry land, for example. The biblical writers don’t seem especially interested in distinguishing between wonders that seem to break the usual rules of how things happen and those that don’t.

Many in Jesus’ audiences were not won over by His wonders. Most of the people in the crowds who ate the food He produced out of nowhere were quite happy to turn on Him when the religious authorities decided He was dangerous. We can only make sense of something unexpected, such as an answer to prayer for healing, in the context of a growing relationship with God. The exciting task for a Christian is to explain what this interaction looks like, and to demonstrate what ‘your kingdom come’ looks like in our communities. God works through us in words, works *and* wonders.



The following article has been written & submitted by Tony Houghton, and is entitled:

The virgin birth: a holy mystery that changes everything

I love the words of the song we have sung at the Christmas WICS (Witney Inter-Church Singers) concert, 'Arrival' (by Hillsong):

Who is God that He would take our frame
The artisan inside the paint
Or breathe the very air His breath sustains
The architect inside the plan

Oh come now hail His arrival
The God of creation
Royalty robed in the flesh He created
Jesus the maker has made Himself known
All hail the infinite infant God

The One who had no start and knows no end
Became confined in time and tense
The Everlasting God
The Great I Am
In the mercy of a mother's hands

The virgin birth of Jesus is not just a doctrine we affirm—it is a wonder we are meant to worship. When the angel told Mary that she would conceive by the Holy Spirit, he wasn't simply announcing a miracle; he was revealing the heart of God. In the quiet obedience of a young woman and the supernatural work of God, heaven touched earth in a way that changed history forever.

At the centre of the virgin birth is a beautiful truth: salvation begins with God, not with us. Jesus was not born by human effort, human planning, or human strength. He came by divine initiative. This means our redemption is not something we achieved—it is something we received. When we gaze at the manger, we see a God who came near to rescue us, not because we earned it, but because He loved us.

The virgin birth also draws us into the mystery of the Incarnation—God choosing to put on human flesh. Jesus was formed in Mary's womb, born into weakness, and laid in a feeding trough so that He could fully enter our pain, our temptations, and our everyday lives. He is not a distant Saviour shouting instructions from heaven. He is Emmanuel, "God with us." Because He was born of a woman, He understands our suffering. Because He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, He has the power to save us completely.

This miracle also reminds us of the purity and holiness of Christ. Jesus was not stained by sin; He was sent as the spotless Lamb. The virgin birth stands as a quiet declaration that His life was sacred from the very beginning. Only a perfect Saviour could offer a perfect sacrifice, and only a holy life could redeem broken hearts like ours.

Lee Strobel beautifully captured this truth when he wrote, *"The virgin birth is not an optional belief for Christians. It is a declaration that Jesus was not just another man, but God stepping into human history in a supernatural way."* When we meditate on this, our faith moves from routine to reverence. We are reminded that Christianity is not just about good advice—it is about divine intervention.

Most of all, the virgin birth invites us to worship in humility. God didn't come with noise and spectacle; He came in vulnerability and grace. He entered the world through a womb and slept in a manger. This truth softens our hearts and lifts our eyes. If God can come so gently, so humbly, then He can step into our lives no matter how messy or fragile they may feel.

May the mystery of the virgin birth draw us again to wonder, to gratitude, and to worship—because in that humble beginning, God gave us everything.

The following article has been written & submitted by Lesley Barter, and is entitled:

For Such a Time as This.....

I know that I am not the only one who feels that a doomy cloud has been settling over the earth this year and there is a sense that we are hurtling towards a very sticky end which No One is Doing Anything to Avoid.

Now is the season of Pantomimes and we are all hoping and waiting for the Fairy Godmother (of course she is a woman) to appear and engineer a happy ending. Oh, yes, we are! What we may have conveniently forgotten is that in pantomime it is the worthy that are eventually rewarded and the villains that are punished. There is a happy ending because we are on the side of the wronged protagonist, who has always Done the Right Thing or Protected the Vulnerable. It requires kindness or a selfless act to qualify for redemption. That is the message in fairy tales but our Christian ethos teaches otherwise.

We do not need to be perfect to qualify for eternal life, because Jesus was, and he performed the selfless act that saves us. He just wants us to do our best to live up to His example, to Do the Right Thing and Protect the Vulnerable – just like our pantomime heroes and heroines.

The message of the pantomime is that the forces of Good are more powerful than the forces of Evil and that is exactly what, as Christians, we believe. Our Fairy Godmother is God, who will only let us go so far in ruining His beautiful world and wiping out His creation. The action required from us may seem like a drop in the ocean, but as I was reminded in the Reith Lecture this week, small individual acts can start a rollercoaster that changes the world. Doom may be averted by ordinary people like you and me.

The following article written by Canon Paul Hardingham, has been extracted from Parish Pump, and is entitled:

Epiphany for Today

This month we celebrate Epiphany, the occasion on which we remember the Magi from the East following a star to find the baby Jesus: 'Where is the One who has been born king of the Jews?' (Matthew 2:1). At the start of a New Year, in an uncertain world, we can be asking the same question. The gifts the Magi offered point us to how Jesus can answer our concerns and worries: 'they bowed down and worshipped Him...and presented Him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.' (2:11).

The gift of gold reflects that the Magi saw in the baby a king, destined to rule over us all. In this coming year we need to remember that Jesus is on the throne, the seat of power and authority in the whole universe. Will we crown Him king of our lives and dedicate all that we are and do to Him?

The gift of frankincense reflects that the visitors saw not just an earthly king, but God in human flesh. Incense symbolises the prayers of God's people and so this gift reminds us that God is worthy of our worship and prayer. Will we offer our praise and prayer, as we seek God to guide us through the uncertainties of this coming year?

The gift of myrrh reflects that these astrologers saw beyond the baby's birth and life, to His death which would secure life for all. Jesus was offered myrrh on the cross and was a spice used in His tomb. As we face challenges in the future, we can be confident that Jesus knows and understands our experience. Are we ready to trust Him in everything?

The following article written by Tom Bonnar, has, with permission, been extracted from the Congregational Federation Light-Life series, and is entitled:

Mary, Did You Know?

We have moved through the year quite well and have now entered into the season of Advent with Christmas heading in our direction. The word that crops up at this time of year is Hope. A feeling of expectation and a desire for a particular thing to happen is really the meaning of the word.

Warren W. Wiersbe, the writer, comments, "No matter what is going on in our life we have a God that loves us and that should give us all hope. Hope is not the absence of pain, but the presence of God in the midst of it. Hope is the anchor of our souls; the steadfast trust that God will fulfil His promises. Hope gives us the encouragement to hang in there and rest on these promises

I am reminded of the words of hymnwriter Edward Mote:

My hope is built on nothing less
than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
but wholly lean on Jesus' name.

Music helps to lift our spirits especially at this time of year, and carols and Christmas music in our neck of the woods has been playing in the shops for a wee while now and we find ourselves shopping and humming along with the music coming through the Tannoy system. One of my favourite carols is a newer one, Mary, Did You Know?. This is a modern Christmas classic that digs into the profound emotions and reflections surrounding the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was written by Mark Lowry in 1984 with music by Buddy Greene. This song offers a contemplative look at the events of the

nativity through a series of poignant questions posed to Mary, the mother of Jesus. The lyrics explore the miracles and significant events in Jesus' life, from walking on water to giving sight to the blind. Each question serves as a reminder of the divine nature of Jesus and the monumental impact he would have on the world.

The recurring line, "Mary, did you know?" invites us as listeners to ponder the depth of Mary's understanding and the weight of the role she had as the mother of the Saviour of the world. Over the years the song has been covered by numerous artists across various genres, each bringing their unique interpretation to its deeply spiritual message. Its universal appeal lies in its ability to bridge the gap between the divine and the human, offering a fresh perspective on a story that has been told for centuries.

In essence, Mary, Did You Know? is a heartfelt exploration of faith, prophecy, and a mother's boundless love for her child.

Whilst gathering material together for this Light-Life series, the following scripture came to mind from Romans 15:13

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

Keep trusting, keep praising for there is hope.



The following article, written by Tim Lenton, has been extracted from Parish Pump, and is entitled:

The many journeys of the Stone of Scone

Some 75 years ago, on 25th December 1950, the Stone of Scone, the coronation stone of British monarchs, was taken from Westminster Abbey in London by four Scottish students as a home rule gesture. They transported it to Scotland but broke it accidentally. It was later left by them in the ruined Arbroath Abbey, repaired and returned to London to be used in the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

From 1996 it was kept in Edinburgh Castle, but last year it was moved to a new museum at Perth – two or three miles down the River Tay from Scone Abbey, where it had been used in the crowning of Scottish kings.

The Stone, also known as the Stone of Destiny, is a block of red sandstone that was taken by Edward I “Longshanks” of England in 1296 and used in the crowning of English monarchs since then. It is still used to crown UK kings and queens – most recently King Charles III in May 2023 – but it has returned to Perthshire for the first time in 700 years, and is now freely available to view there.

An old symbol of Scottish monarchy, the Stone was first recorded as being used in 1249 for the inauguration of the boy-king, Alexander III. It was taken by the English as war loot – a symbol of Edward’s perceived right to rule.

There are various stories about the origins and history of the Stone. One goes back to biblical times, naming it as the Stone of Jacob, taken by Jacob from Bethel as described in Genesis 28 and then removed to ancient Ireland by the prophet Jeremiah. There are also claims that the

Stone at Perth is not the original, and many stories of the intricate measures taken to ensure its safety during the war years. Editor: by Tim Lenton

The following article has been extracted from Parish Pump, and is entitled:

Michael Bond, creator of Paddington Bear

It was 100 years ago, on 13th January 1926, that Michael Bond, the children’s writer, was born. He has an assured place in any literary Hall of Fame, for he created the characters Paddington Bear and Monsieur Pamplemousse.

Paddington Bear padded into Michael Bond’s life quite by accident. It was back in 1956 that Michael was on his way home from work at the BBC when he spied a lonely looking teddy bear on the shelf in a shop window in London. On the spur of the moment, Michael decided to take it home as a stocking filler for his wife.

Michael called the bear Paddington, because they lived near Paddington Station at the time. Two years later, in 1958, while daydreaming over a typewriter and a blank sheet of paper, Michael wondered what might happen if an unaccompanied bear turned up at a railway station looking for a home.

The rest is literary history.

His first book, *A Bear Called Paddington*, was written in ten days and published by Collins in October of 1958. 28 more books followed, and in all more than 35 million Paddington books have been sold worldwide, in more than 40 languages. More than 27 million Paddington Bear soft toys have been sold, just since 2021. The films alone have grossed more than \$778 million.

Paddington made his most famous appearance at Buckingham Palace in 2022, where he had tea with Queen Elizabeth II on her Platinum Jubilee, and exchanged tips with her about the best place to store marmalade sandwiches.

Bond was born in Newbury in 1926 and served with the RAF and army during WW2. He started writing in 1945 while stationed in Cairo, and began his career at the BBC, where he later worked on Blue Peter as a cameraman. He died in 2017, aged 91.

The following article written by Canon Paul Hardingham, has been extracted from Parish Pump, and is entitled:

An Introduction to the Books of the New Testament: Philippians

This letter was written to Christians in the Macedonian city of Philippi when Paul was in prison, probably in Rome (60-62 AD). His primary purpose in writing was to thank them for the gift they had sent him upon learning of his imprisonment. However, he also uses the letter as an opportunity to report on his situation; to encourage the Philippians to stand firm in the face of persecution and rejoice regardless of circumstances; to exhort the church to live in humility, fellowship, and unity; to commend Epaphroditus and Timothy to them; and to warn them about false teaching. This included Judaizers who were persuading the Philippians to submit to circumcision.

The central message of Philippians focuses on joy (the word occurs some 16 times!). For Paul, joy isn't simply an emotional

response to favourable circumstances. True joy is to be found through a relationship with the resurrected and glorified Christ. Death ceases to be an enemy, because through it we can more fully enjoy the presence of Jesus. This joy is also rooted in an expectation of the return of Jesus, which gives urgency to the task of sharing the gospel. So, Paul begins his letter by thanking the Philippians for their partnership together in the work of the gospel through the offerings they have sent.

Paul also powerfully appeals to the Philippians to be of '*one mind*' in pursuing humility and unity. He gives the example of Jesus himself '*who made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant*' (2:7) to the point of dying the death of a common criminal. '*Therefore*', say Paul, '*God exalted him to the highest place*' (2:9). This 'Jesus attitude' is the one that all believers should share.



Christmas tree wordsearch

Read the Christmas story below and then find the bold words in our Christmas tree wordsearch

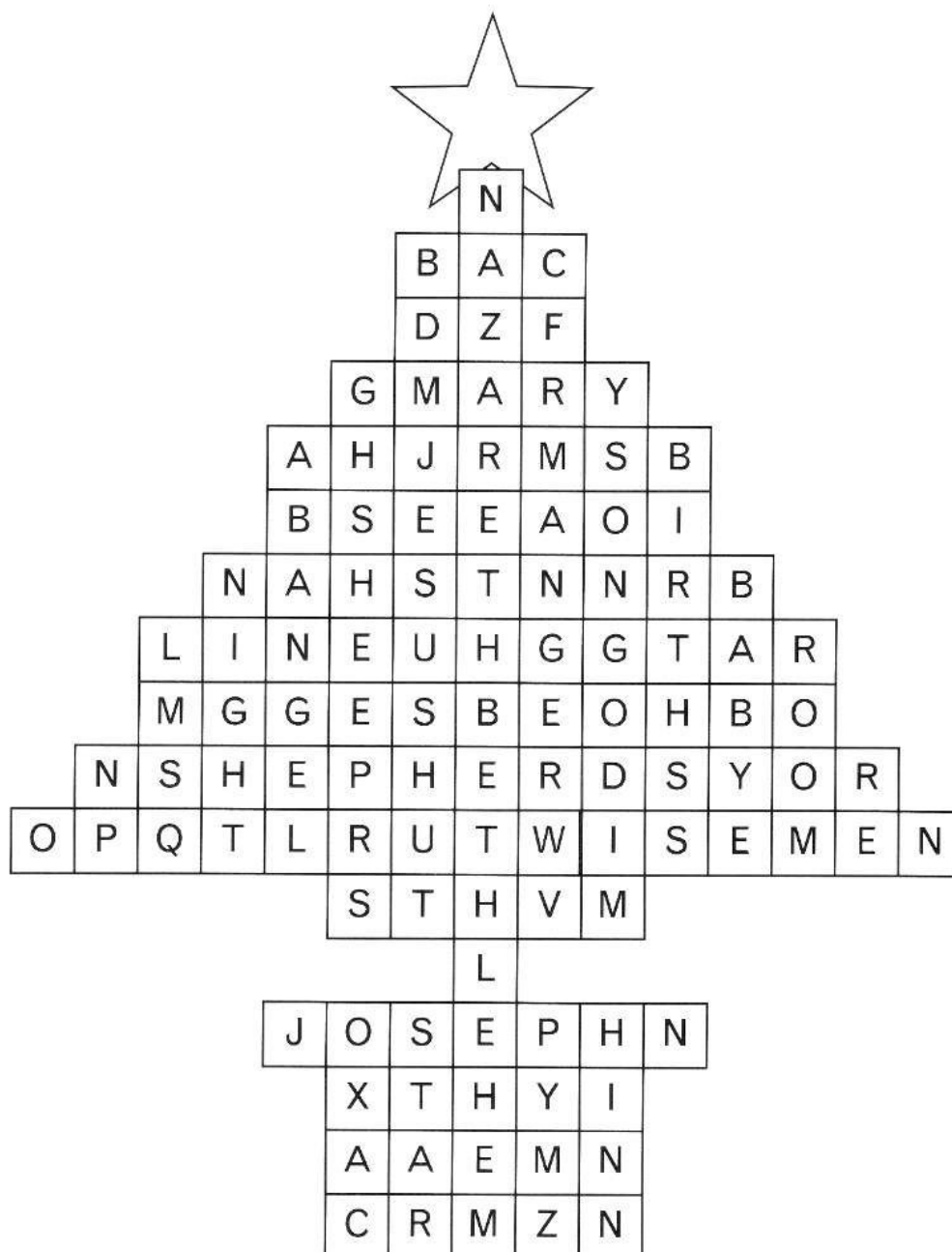
Mary and Joseph travelled all the way from their home in **Nazareth** to **Bethlehem** to be registered for the King's head count. Mary was expecting a very important **baby**. An **angel** had told her that this baby would be the **Son of God**.

Mary and Joseph couldn't find a **room** anywhere in Bethlehem, but an innkeeper let them stay in the stable at the back of his **inn** and this is where Mary gave birth to baby **Jesus**.

That **night**, in the fields near Bethlehem, some **shepherds** were watching their **sheep**. Suddenly an angel appeared to them and told them about the **birth** of this special baby. The shepherds rushed into town to see Jesus. They found him in a stable, lying in a **manger**, just as the angel had told them.

Later some **wise men** followed a new **star** and travelled a long way to come and worship Jesus.

At Christmas we celebrate Jesus' birthday.



The following article has been extracted from Parish Pump, and is entitled:

All in the month of December & January

December:

250 years ago, on 16th Dec 1775 that Jane Austen, novelist (*Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, *Northanger Abbey*, *Persuasion*) was born. Over 30 million copies of her books have been sold, 7,000 of them in her lifetime.

175 years ago, on 4th Dec 1850 that William Sturgeon, physicist, electrical engineer and inventor died. He created the first electromagnets and invented the first British electric motor.

150 years ago, on 6th Dec 1875 that Evelyn Underhill, writer and pacifist was born. Best known for her books on religion and Christian mysticism.

80 years ago, on 27th Dec 1945 that The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development were founded. They had been created at the Bretton Woods Conference in July 1944.

75 years ago, on 25th Dec 1950 that the Stone of Scone, the coronation stone of British monarchs, was taken from Westminster Abbey in London by four Scottish students. They transported it to Scotland but broke it. It was later returned to London and used in the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. Since 1996 it has been kept in Edinburgh Castle, with the agreement that it will be transported to Westminster Abbey when needed for coronations.

70 years ago, on 1st Dec 1955 that African American civil rights activist Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat to a white man in Montgomery Alabama. This violated the city's racial segregation laws, and led to the Montgomery Bus Boycott (5th to 20th Dec 1956) and the birth of the modern American civil rights movement.

Also 70 years ago, on 20th Dec 1955 that Cardiff was proclaimed the capital city of Wales.

65 years ago, on 9th Dec 1960 that the first episode of the TV soap Coronation Street was broadcast on ITV.

60 years ago, on 22nd Dec 1965 that Richard Dimbleby, journalist and radio-television broadcaster, died. The BBC's first war correspondent, he was one of the greatest figures in British broadcasting history. Father of the TV presenters David Dimbleby and Jonathan Dimbleby.

40 years ago, on 7th Dec 1985 that Robert Graves, poet novelist, critic, translator and classical scholar died. Best known for *I, Claudius*, and *Goodbye to All That*.

30 years ago, on 22nd Dec 1995 that the British 'rogue trader' Nick Leeson was jailed for six and a half years in Singapore for fraudulent financial dealings which had led to the fall of Barings Bank.

30 years ago, on 15th Dec that the European Council announced that the new European currency would be called the Euro.

30 years ago, on 21st Dec 1995 that the city of Bethlehem passed from Israeli to Palestinian control. On 26th Dec Israel also passed dozens of West Bank villages over to the Palestinian authority.

25 years ago, 13th Dec 2000, that George Bush finally claimed the US presidency, 36 days after the election was held. The results were delayed by disputed votes in Florida.

20 years ago, on 27th Dec 2000 that British pharmaceutical companies Glaxo Wellcome and SmithKline Beecham merged, to create the world's largest pharmaceutical company, GlaxoSmithKline.

15 years ago, on 16th Dec 2010 that Ireland was granted a 67.5 billion Euro bailout from the European Union to rescue its banks and other financial institutions from collapsing.

10 years ago, on 19th Dec 2015 that Jimmy Hill, football player, manager and host of the BBC football TV series *Match of the Day* (1973-88) died.

January:

250 years ago, on 1st Jan 1776 that, according to tradition, George Washington raised the first American flag, the Grand Union Flag, at Prospect Hill in Charleston, Somerville, Massachusetts.

250 years ago, on 24th Jan 1776 that E T A Hoffmann, German fantasy/Gothic horror writer, composer, artist and judge was born. Offenbach's opera *The Tales of Hoffman* is based on his stories. Tchaikovsky's ballet *The Nutcracker* is also based on one of his stories.

200 years ago, on 30th Jan 1826 that the Menai Suspension Bridge was first opened. It links the island of Anglesey to mainland Wales, and was the world's first major suspension bridge.

175 years ago, on 7th Jan 1851 that French physicist Leon Foucault set up the first Foucault pendulum in the cellar of his home, to demonstrate the rotation of the earth. On 31st March he created his most famous pendulum, hanging a 28-kilogram (62-pound) lead weight from a 67-metre (220 foot) wire from the dome of the Pantheon in Paris.

125 years ago, on 1st Jan 1901 that the Commonwealth of Australia was established when the six British colonies of New South Wales, Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia were federated

125 years ago, on 22nd Jan 1901 that Queen Victoria died, and was succeeded by her son, Edward VII.

125 years ago, on 27th Jan 1901 that Giuseppe Verdi, Italian composer died. Best known for his operas *Aida*, *Requiem*, *Otello* and *Falstaff*

100 years ago, on 13th Jan 1926 that Michael Bond, children's writer, was born. He created the characters Paddington Bear and Monsieur Pamplemousse.

100 years ago, on 14th Jan 1926 that Warren Mitchell, radio TV stage and film actor was born. Best known for his role as Alf Garnett in the TV sitcoms *Till Death Us Do Part* and *In Sickness and in Health*.

100 years ago, on 26th Jan 1926 that Scottish engineer and inventor John Logie Baird gave the first demonstration of his TV system to members of the Royal Institution.

90 years ago, on 18th Jan 1936 that Rudyard Kipling, writer and poet, died. Best known for *The Jungle Book*, *Kim*, *If*, and many more. Winner of the 1907 Nobel Prize for Literature.

90 years ago, on 20th Jan 1936 that King George V died and was succeeded by his son Edward VIII, who abdicated that December.

80 years ago, on 3rd Jan 1946 that William Joyce, Lord Haw-Haw, British fascist politician died. He had broadcasted Nazi propaganda from Germany during WW2. (Hanged for treason)

80 years ago, on 8th Jan 1946 that Elvis Presley received his first guitar on his 11th birthday. (Apparently, he would have preferred a bicycle.)

80 years ago, on 10th Jan 1946 that the United Nations General Assembly convened for the first time, in Westminster Central Hall, London.

75 years ago, on 9th Jan 1951 that the UN headquarters in New York City was officially opened.

75 years ago, on 30th Jan 1951 that Ferdinand Porsche, Austrian automotive engineer died. He designed the Volkswagen Beetle, the Tiger tank and founded the Porsche sport car company.

70 years ago, on 8th Jan 1956 that five American evangelical Christian missionaries were killed by members of the savage and isolated Huaorani tribe in Ecuador. The missionaries were attempting to bring Christianity to the Huaorani people, and had spent several months dropping gifts from an airplane. They had established a camp a few miles from the Huaorani settlements on 6th Jan, but were all killed within two days.

70 years ago, on 31st Jan 1956 that AA Milne, writer, poet, humourist and playwright died. Best known for his stories about Winnie the Pooh.

65 years ago, on 20th Jan 1961 that John F Kennedy was inaugurated as the 35th President of the USA.

60 years ago, on 17th Jan 1966 that the album *Sounds of Silence* by Simon and Garfunkel, was released.

50 years ago, on 12th Jan 1976 that Dame Agatha Christie, crime novelist, short story writer and playwright died. Best known for creating the character Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple, and for the world's longest running play, *The Mousetrap*.

40 years ago, on 28th Jan 1986 that the US space shuttle Challenger exploded shortly after lift-off from Cape Canaveral, Florida. All seven astronauts were killed, including the first teacher in space, Christa McAuliffe.

30 years ago, on 20th Jan 1996 that the first Palestinian general election chose Yasser Arafat to be President of the Palestinian National Council in a landslide victory.

30 years ago, on 22nd Jan 1996 that a mass grave was discovered near Brcko Bosnia that contained the bodies of nearly 3,000 victims of Serb ethnic cleansing. They had been killed in May-June 1992.

30 years ago, on 27th Jan 1996 that the first Holocaust Remembrance Day was observed in Germany. It became International Holocaust Remembrance Day in 2005 when it was adopted by the United Nations. It marks the day (27th Jan 1945) that the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration/death camp was liberated during WW2.

25 years ago, on 12th Jan 2001 that Swedish football manager Sven Goran Eriksson became the first non-Briton to coach the England national football team.

20 years ago, on 12th Jan 2006 that at least 346 people were killed in a stampede during the annual Hajj pilgrimage in Mina, Saudi Arabia.

10 years ago, on 31st Jan 2016 that Terry Wogan, Irish radio and TV broadcaster, died. Known for his long-running BBC Radio 2 show, and for presenting TV's Wogan, Blankety Blank, Come Dancing, the Children in Need, and for his commentaries on the Eurovision Song Contest.