

St Helen's Magazine

December 2020



St Helen's Church

Ashby-de-la-Zouch



Loving God, loving others, loving the world

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Editor Writes ...

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine! Apologies if this lyric becomes your ear worm for the day. It's been mine today, and it's good to share. But fear not – this is the season of Christmas carols and traditional pop songs when other earworms a-plenty will be along to banish that one. St Helen's is determinedly bringing the message of a light shining in the darkness this Advent. On page 37 you can see one way we have been letting the town know what we're up to.



An earworm is an unwanted catchy tune that wriggles its way into the brain, sets up home, and plays on a loop in your head. Apparently it happens to the vast majority of us, and about two thirds of us feel fine about it, whilst the remaining third find it disturbing or annoying. One person's happily hummable is another person's relentless. I mentioned my other predominant current ear-worm last month – Do not be afraid by Philip Stopford, which our choir sang at the Advent carol service. Find out about how it came together from a musical point of view on page 25, and read Mary's inspirational meditation on page 18. On pages 20-22 are details of all the services and events still to come this December.

Certain songs are catchier than others, and so more likely to 'auto repeat' in your head. Music psychologists studying what makes a song catchy, discovered that, one of the catchiest of all catchy songs is (somewhat ironically) Can't Get You Out Of My Head by Kylie Minogue. Robert Nundi has had his two wives either side of his head for hundreds of years – turn to page 8 to find out how you can witness his purgatory.

Some psychologists claim that earworms can be good for you. They are a form of spontaneous mental activity, and such mind-wandering states can contribute to clear thinking and creativity. And you thought you were just daydreaming! The Ashby Youth For Christ Team are having to be Ashby-wandering and creative these days – read their latest news on page 34.

But what if you've had enough of 'This little light of mine' and need to stop it in its tracks? One suggested method is to seek out the tune in question, because it seems earworms might occur when you remember only part of a song, so that hearing the entire song may extinguish it. Another technique is to try to distract yourself with another tune. You might like to guess which are the two most helpful "cure" tunes, according to one study. The answers are on page 37, along with the answers to the Christmas Quiz you'll find on page 15.

... little light of mine ... tum, tum ... I'm gonna let it shine ... tum-ti-tum ...

Jill Chapman .



Revd Mary Writes ...

Dear Friends

'Christmas is cancelled!' yell the newspaper headlines. 'Boris is the Grinch who stole Christmas', pundits opine from plush sofas positioned two meters away from their chat show hosts, whilst worldly-wise children wonder if Father Christmas has been furloughed.



Behind these overstated views lies a truth that Christmas *will* be different this year: our pubs and restaurants will remain shut; mistletoe will be strangely redundant with any kissing beneath it strictly *air*-kissing at a 2 meter remove; whilst, even family, we're told, should be kept at arm's length. (Actually, that shouldn't be a problem as we'll be wearing so many layers in our well-ventilated rooms that we'll be at least that far apart!)

It's good to try and find a light side to all this but, even so, let's be honest: this is difficult for us, even painful - we *want* to be elbow-to-elbow around the table; we *want* to pull crackers and pass the potatoes without first showering in sanitiser; we want the rough and tumble of family teasing and tantrums. And so we need to be gentle with ourselves and with one another as we try to come to terms with the fact that, for this year, much of that will not be possible.

And yet, despite how different Christmas will be this year, it *isn't* cancelled; far from it. Let me explain why.

In my last parish we used to hold a special service in the week before Christmas called 'Blue Christmas.' It was created especially for those who might find Christmas particularly difficult either because they had been bereaved, or because a relationship had broken down or because they found themselves alone, or especially low. 'Blue Christmas' was a quieter, gentler carol service than the rip-roaring, pull-out-all-the-stops, 'Hark the herald' sort of carol service we're used to, and it reminded us of one vital thing: that Jesus came that first Christmas precisely *because* of the pain of the world; that he came to bind up the broken-hearted, to comfort those who mourn, to befriend the lonely, to free those held by things that harmed them. Jesus came, not because all was *right* with the world, but because

the world was broken and needed its Maker to fix it. Sound familiar?

And that's why I think that this Christmas, far from being cancelled, might just be the one that we celebrate most authentically, for what lies at its very heart. Stripped of all the trimmings, soundtrack muted, in rooms emptier than usual, we might just have the space and the focus we need to understand the invaluable Christmas gifts that money cannot buy and even Amazon can't deliver: the perfect love of God who was born to save us; the peace of knowing his companionship as Emmanuel, God with us; the hope that the baby who came to earth will return as King to make all things new.

Christmas isn't cancelled. You can't cancel God's bold endeavour to rescue the people he loves. You can't silence the song of the angels. You can't extinguish the Light of the World.

Maybe, just maybe, we can accept this stripped-back Christmas as a gift; a kind of clearing of the decks so that Jesus Christ takes centre stage again, and we bow down and worship him as he deserves.

May I wish you a very blessed Christmas - one that surprises you with joy and fills you with peace that passes understanding.

With love
Revd Mary

Four Candles

God.
Preparing the ground.
Digging in.
Turning it over.
Turning lives over.
Elizabeth. Zechariah.
Upside-down.
Nobody believing.

God.
Preparing the ground.
Digging in.
Turning himself over.
Turning his very nature over.
Father. Son. Holy Spirit.
Upside-down.
Nobody believing.

Incarnation?
Imagine the conversation
Even in the omnipotent mind:

We must prepare the ground.
We must dig it over.
We must be safe.
But nothing that grows in nature is safe.
We know that.
We made that.

So we dig.
We prepare the ground.
We choose faithful people.
Unexpected people.
Unexceptional people?

Take hold of the fork handle.
For the triune God
Preparing the ground is not static.
It is not safe.
It is not clean.
And it is not done alone.

Rev Kevin Lewis

Christian Aid's Christmas Appeal

Celebrate a love that builds hope this Advent

It's rare for us to live through a phenomenon which affects us in the UK at the same time as people right across the world. Not often in our lives have we experienced a threat that is shared by our global neighbours in countries as wide-ranging as Ethiopia, Lebanon and Nicaragua.

Covid-19 and measures to curb its spread have held much of the world in its thrall throughout 2020 destroying lives, instilling fear, devastating livelihoods and forcing vulnerable people into more desperate poverty.

As we approach Christmas though we are reminded of a person who turned the world upside down for good, whose life in a time of oppression and fear introduced a hope that transformed the globe as it spread across it.

Looking to Emmanuel, God with us, this Christmas, we are reminded that God walks with us through deeply difficult times and works through us in all circumstances to show love to this world. A love that never fails. A love that unites. A love that builds hope.

Inspired by Jesus, Christian Aid supporters walk alongside those for whom coronavirus is yet another threat on top of existing ones, including the climate crisis, conflict and in 2020 the impact of locust swarms.

Your gifts and actions help people like Mekonnen Sofar in Ethiopia's South Omo region, who digs a metre deep in dry river beds to try to find a water source to keep his livestock alive as the climate crisis pushes his family into hunger and threatens his whole way of life.

Friends, fellow herdsmen and children have died through digging so deep that the dry bed collapses above them.

Christian Aid is working with families like Mekonnen's to provide community water sources and explore alternative means of raising income such as through making soap from aloe vera and planting drought resistant crops.

The new restrictions placed on how we meet and interact have caused us to rethink what it is to be community, but our supporters know that we are bound together by much more than a virus and have shown a deep determination to continue to reach out to others.

This Christmas churches are being invited to join in a moment of solidarity and hope on Advent Sunday, 29 November by using the carol 'When out of poverty is born' in their worship and taking a collection for Christian Aid.

The hymn, which is freely available to use to use from caid.org.uk/christmasresources celebrates Mary's faith in the Magnificat and begins with

the words 'When out of poverty is born a dream that will not die'. This Christmas we can celebrate the incredible truth that we are bound together globally by a love that builds resilience in the face of disease, drought and darkness, that builds up hope for all our neighbours.

To find out more about Christian Aid's Christmas Appeal, including how to act for climate justice, visit caid.org.uk/hope. This Advent, £15 could train one woman to make aloe vera soap, £80 could provide two goats to help a family build a better future and £290 could pay for the materials and tools to build a pond, providing life-saving, reliable water for a whole community.

Jez Gowers-Cromie

Church Engagement and Fundraising Officer – East Midlands



Low rainfall leaves herdsman Mekonnen Sofar struggling to find water for his cattle in Ethiopia. Photo credit Christian Aid/Elizabeth Dalziel.

Stamps

Anne Heaton has offered to act as a collection centre for used stamps which she will send to RNIB. Drop them off (before Jan 1st) at 19 Rydal Gardens, LE65 1FJ. Foreign stamps need to be separated from UK stamps, and a cm left round each one.



The Two Wives of Robert Nundi - see them speak!

We were first treated to the spectacle of Robert Nundi standing forlornly between his two wives as they bickered in July 2019, when Helen Bralesford's play, *The Two Wives of Robert Nundi*, was performed live in St Helen's Church, as part of a 'Community Play weekend'. It was one of five playlets celebrating the history and heritage of St Helen's as the Heritage Project drew to a close.



The play was based on the story behind the intricate alabaster monument on the wall at the back of the church, which is a 16th-Century memorial plaque to the quarrelsome three, who are depicted in life-sized images.

Anne Heaton's article in last month's magazine was an interesting reminder of the story of Nundi's attempts to avoid purgatory. Anyone who was intrigued and would like to know more can watch the full story as told in the



2019 play, because an animation is newly available, thanks to Wendy Freer and her team at Pudding Bag Productions, who have cleverly brought to life the plaque figures.

The film can be found on YouTube, simply by searching for The Two Wives of Robert Nundi. Wendy and Nigel Freer reprise their roles as Elizabeth and Robert from the original playlet staged at St Helen's, and shown in the photograph. Listen out for the voice of our own Sharn Stinson as the other of the two wives ... also called Elizabeth.

Jill Chapman

Lockdown Give Away

During Lockdown 10% of fair2all's takings was given to WATSAN, an organisation which works in partnership with communities providing water and sanitation. For more details see <https://nkkdwatsan-uganda.com> In 2017 I was part of a team who went to south West Uganda and participated in one of their projects working with the local community to provide latrines in their school.

It's important work - educating girls is vital to reduce poverty in our world, yet due to poor latrines many girls drop out of school at puberty. The photograph shows the new latrine block being built by WATSAN, the completion of which resulted in 60 girls re-registering in the school.



During lockdown we added a 'collect from shop' option to the on-line shop www.fair2all.net. This means arranging a time to collect orders from the fair2all shop itself (at 17 Bath Street, on the corner of South Street and Bath Street.) Refills can be ordered in this way too.

Sadly there will be no Street Market this year but there will be a Virtual Market on 5th & 6th December. Come and check out the Christmas Windows then vote online for your favourite. For more information email info@fair2all.net

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On Eagles' Wings

President Elect Joe Biden quoted a verse from this hymn in what many commentators agreed was a grace-filled and conciliatory victory speech on 7th November, saying, 'It captures the faith that sustains me.'

On Eagles' Wings by Michael Joncas

You who dwell in the shelter of the Lord
Who abide in His shadow for life
Say to the Lord, "My refuge, my rock in whom I trust!"

And He will raise you up on eagles' wings



Bear you on the breath of dawn
Make you to shine like the sun
And hold you in the palm of His hand

The snare of the fowler will never capture you
And famine will bring you no fear
Under His wings your refuge, His faithfulness your shield

And He will raise you up on eagles' wings
Bear you on the breath of dawn
Make you to shine like the sun
And hold you in the palm of His hand

You need not fear the terror of the night
Nor the arrow that flies by day
Though thousands fall about you, near you it shall not come

And He will raise you up on eagles' wings
Bear you on the breath of dawn
Make you to shine like the sun
And hold you in the palm of His hand

For to His angels He's given a command
To guard you in all of your ways
Upon their hands they will bear you up
Lest you dash your foot against a stone

And He will raise you up on eagles' wings
Bear you on the breath of dawn
Make you to shine like the sun
And hold you in the palm of His hand

And hold you, hold you in the palm of His hand

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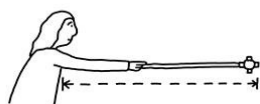
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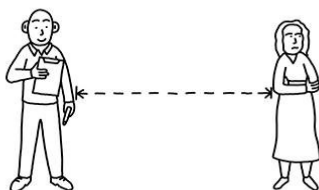
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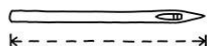
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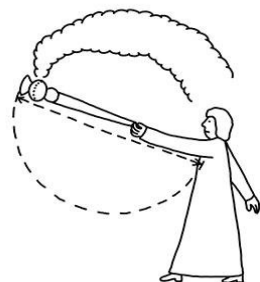
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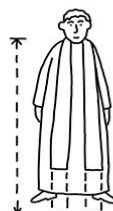
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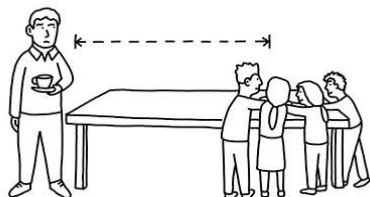
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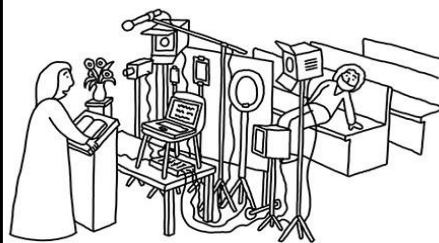
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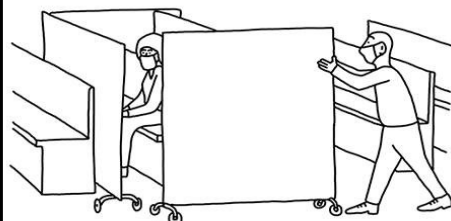
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WHEN THE CHILDREN'S
GROUP IS RELEASED

OBSCURED VIEWS

IN THE CHURCH BUILDING

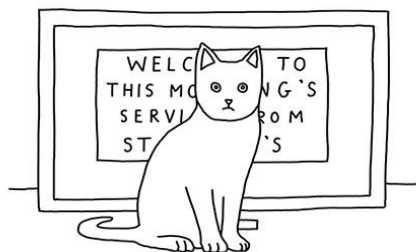


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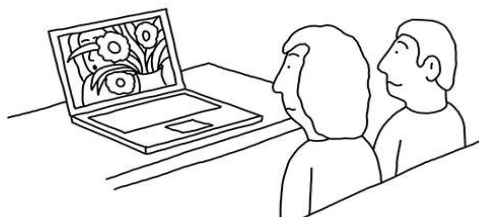


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Christmas Word Quiz

As with the popular board game Balderdash and the 1970s TV show Call My Bluff, each word has three possible definitions, but only one is correct.

1. BOUN

- a) According to the English Dialect Dictionary, to boun is to decorate with evergreens at Christmas
- b) Particularly prevalent in Northumbrian dialect, to boun is to give a hairdresser a tip
- c) From Old Norse búinn, to boun is to cheat at cards

2. HOGAMADOG

- a) A huge ball of snow built up by rolling a small ball of snow around a snowfield
- b) A Scottish name for the piece of coal carried across the threshold at New Year
- c) A popular festive rum punch in the 16th century



3. YULESTARN

- a) A fastener used to fasten 18th century ship's sails, which would be decorated at Christmas
- b) An old Yorkshire dialect name for the week before Christmas
- c) A noticeably bright star in the sky on Christmas night

4. YULE-SKREP

- a) A smack administered to a child's bottom on Christmas Day in the Shetland Islands
- b) A jacket kept for special occasions like weddings and Christmas
- c) An archaic word for someone who waits under the mistletoe to get a kiss

5. RAMRACKETTING

- a) Tidying everything away and cleaning the house on twelfth night.
- b) The Caribbean name for Christmas partying.
- c) Gambolling, running and jumping about playfully.

6. MERRY-NIGHT

- a) The food and drink ostensibly put out for Santa on Christmas Eve, but

eaten by the adults after the children have gone to bed.

- b) An 18th century word for a party held in a public house at Christmas.
- c) The name of Santa's naughtiest elf according to the brothers Grimm.

7. CRAWMASSING

- a) To whistle on the way to church on Christmas Day.
- b) The rush of sound coming from many people talking at once and making them indecipherable.
- c) Gathering up or going through the remnants of a Christmas meal.

8. BUMMOCK

- a) A Blue Cheese traditionally served on Christmas Day in Cornwall.
- b) In the 18th century a bummock, was the name for a party given by landlords to their tenants at Christmastime.
- c) The leather trimming tool used by a shoe maker, often given as a present to apprentices at Christmas.

9. RUMBALL

- a) A Rumball is an old Scots word for a large quantity of drink purposely brewed for a special occasion.
- b) Rumball Night is an old 17th century nickname for Christmas Eve.
- c) Lying awake before dawn. unable to sleep, is known as being a rumball.

10. YULESHARD

- a) Someone who doesn't receive any new clothes at Christmas
- b) Someone who rings the church bell on Christmas morning
- c) A blind hog specially trained to find truffles.

Answers on page 37

Our old friends in Kiteto

We heard from two old friends of St Helen's Church recently - Bishop John Hayden and Erasto Mollel.

Before retiring and returning to live in UK in 2008, Bishop John served in Tanzania as Assistant Bishop of Mount Kilimanjaro, tasked with preparing the southern portion of that diocese to become a separate entity - the new Diocese of Kiteto. (He now serves as an honorary assistant bishop of the Diocese of Chester.)

The Diocese of Leicester has been linked with the Anglican dioceses of Kiteto and Mount Kilimanjaro since 1982, and Bishop Stanley and Bishop Isaiah visited Leicester for Bishop Martin's installation in 2016. The diocese gives regular financial support for training, church planting and a fund for emergencies arising from natural causes such as lack of rain.

Many at St Helen's will remember our link with Erasto Mollel, and our support for him through his degree course at St Mark's Dodoma. Rev Brian Robertson travelled to Kiteko as part of a group from the Diocese, and met up with Erasto during the trip.

Bishop John writes:

When [Erasto] completed his degree Bishop Isaiah did not want him back in Kiteto, as he is fearful of any educated pastor. Now, after working as a secondary teacher in Arusha, Bishop Stanley has at last agreed to ordain him.

It would be good if St Helens could pray for him and send him a message of encouragement.

+ John

Erasto Mollel writes:

Dear friends,

It's my hope that you and your families are doing well. I'm doing well too.

It's been a long time without communication and many of us went and are still going through corona virus pandemic challenges.

Sorry for those like myself who have lost members of families, friends or relatives. Let the challenges draw us nearer to God for He still loves and cares for us!

I'm writing to you to share with you some good news of which are the results of our prayers which we have been praying for times.

I'm invited with the Bishop of DMK for ordination on Dec 26th, 2020. I just wanted to invite you to share with me this news on the day, you are so welcome! I also invite you to join me to continue praying for the will of God to be fulfilled.

Looking forward to meeting and sharing with you!

Erasto Mollel



Revd Mary has written to Erasto to express our congratulations. I have his email address if anyone else would like to make contact.



Jesus, you are the light of the world

Like a searchlight
you seek me out and hold me in the beam of your desire.
Light the spark in friends' eyes
you are fired by love of me.

Like a police flashlight
you expose evil, give hypocrisy no place to hide.
Like the floodlights of the football pitch
you chase away my shadows.

Like the morning creeping round the curtains, pulling at the duvet,
you open my eyes.
Like the viewpoint on a mountaintop
you show me *more*.

Like the sun through a stained glass window,
you bring all my colours to life.
Like the sun on a tender shoot
you make me unfurl and grow and turn to you.

Like a miner's headlamp
you make absolute darkness glisten gold.
Like a torch held in trembling hands
you light up just one step, another, and lead me home.

Like birthday cake candles
you bring me joy.
Like a bonfire night sparkler
you make me fizz with child-like wonder.

Like blue lights nearing,
you seek me and you save me.
Like a lighthouse's persistent beam
you point me from danger and into the harbour's embrace.

Like lightning ripping the sky
you command my attention.
Like a candle flame
you soothe me into peace.

Like the light at the end of the tunnel,
you give me hope, draw me on.
Like the dawn pinking the sky
you whisper 'Again. Begin again.'

Like no other light,
you blaze into life from nothing, and illumine everything.

Like no other light,
you never go out.

Like no other light,
nothing can put you out.

And although, when you die, darkness falls
it is just the space between the morse-code night-time message,
'Light overshadows darkness. The Son rises again.'

Jesus, you are the light of the world.

As on stars, I gaze at the wonder of you.
As towards fire, I reach for the warmth of you.
As in torchlight, I trust in the wisdom of you.

And like a candle, I put my wick to your flame
and dare to believe that though the darkness is great
I can be light for the world, too,
can pierce the night with a pinprick of brightness.

The Revd Mary Gregory
Advent Sunday 2020

Advent Course

The Revd Rob Marsh is leading an Advent course for the Flagstaff Family called Journeying through Advent with New Daylight. It will run on Tuesday evenings 8th, 15th and 22nd December, via Zoom. It includes themed reflections by contributors to the New Daylight, including David Winter, Steve Aisthorpe, Amy Boucher Pye, Andy John and Margaret Cundiff.

The price of the book is £2.99, which can be ordered from BRF.

Please email Rob at ministry@family-marsh.uk if you would like to join.



Service Pattern

Wednesdays


- Wednesday 9th December
10.00am Holy Communion at St Helen's  
- Wednesday 16th December
10.00am Holy Communion at St Helen's  
- Wednesday 23rd December
10.00am Holy Communion at St Helen's  


Sundays


- Sunday 6th December
4pm, Holy Communion at Isley Walton 
- Sunday 13th December
10.30am Holy Communion at St Helens  
4.00pm at Holy Communion Worthington 
- Sunday 20th December
10.30am Holy Communion at St Helens  
6.30pm Flagstaff Family carol service - online only 
- Sunday 27th December
10.30am Flagstaff Family service - online only 

 Can be watched on the Flagstaff Family of Churches Facebook page

 Can be watched **live** on the Flagstaff Family of Churches Facebook page

 To book seats at Isley Walton, Breedon or St Helen's please email Jill Chapman - sthelensashby@gmail.com.

 To book seats at Worthington please email churchwarden Christina Walmsley - christina@stmatthewsworthington.net

 To book seats at Holy Trinity please email parish administrator Emma Harris - office@trinityashby.net

Advent and Christmas

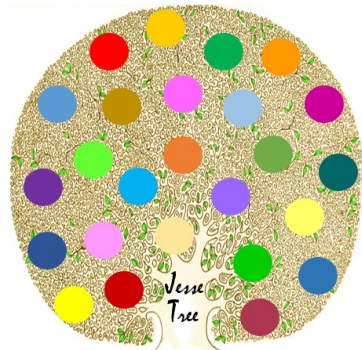
Prayer for the Day Advent special: The Jesse Tree Advent Calendar

30th November to 24th December at 8.00am

Tracing Jesus' family tree, hearing about his ancestors and how they might inspire us, and rediscovering why he was born as a baby that first Christmas morning.

Follow Jill's online Jesse Tree, a low tech version to create your own at home, or a high tech version where you simply click a button!

<https://calendar.myadvent.net?id=d84e80cd7b5fd7ad3e46065f87d063e9>



Compline

Wednesday 2nd December

Wednesday 9th December

Wednesday 16th - Wednesday 23rd December

Picking up our practice of praying the quiet, reflective service of Compline together to end the day in the kindness of God's company.

DIY Christingle:

13th December at 4.00pm on-line

We'll each be making our own Christingle!

Christingle kits are being delivered to Breedon, Newbold and Coleorton primary schools. If your child (or you!) doesn't go to one of those schools, pick up your DIY Christingle kit from St Helen's on Saturday 12th December, 10.00am - midday

Christmas Windows

18th-23rd December at 4pm - 7pm

Christmas carol window displays throughout the town. Follow the map (from sthelensashby@gmail.com or here on the website) and see if you can identify the carol.

Bedtime Stories

18th-23rd December at 7pm on-line

Wrap the children in a rosy glow at the end of each day as they snuggle down in their PJs and listen to a bedtime story

Christmas Carol Service



20th December at 6.30 pm (on-line only)

The traditional Nine Lessons & Carols telling the Christmas story through readings, poems and beautiful music.

Children's Carol Service



24th December at 5pm

This annual highlight of the season for many Ashby families, with Revd Mary's own unique brand of hilarity and fun, and a mass nativity play (dress up and post your photos in the 'comments') Or how about the adults Try for the Best Christmas Jumper competition? Guaranteed to put a smile on your face, this crowd-pleaser will happen on-line

Christmas Eve

11.15pm Holy Communion at Holy Trinity



11.30pm Holy Communion at St Helen's

Christmas Day

8.30am Holy Communion at St Helen's



9.00am Holy Communion at Breedon

10.30am Holy Communion at St Helen's

Welcome Revd Rob Marsh

Revd Rob Marsh, Associate Minister in the Benefice of Desford and Kirkby Muxloe, joined us in the Flagstaff Family of Churches for three months on 12th November. The intention is for Rob to support us in our existing ministry, but also to work with us to develop and enhance our offer, not least to children and young people.

Rob introduces himself:

Hi All,

I am looking forward to joining the Flagstaff team to assist Mary and the rest of the team. I will be with you until mid-February and hope to meet as many of you as possible, in these difficult times.

A little about me though, so you know what you are getting.

I did a period of time at St. Helen's with Brian before my ordination to experience different styles of worship, then whilst a curate at Whitwick, I spent time with John at Breedon and Worthington as I learnt about and took

weddings.

More recently, I have been at Kirby Muxloe and Desford as associate minister. I am actively involved in the children's work, pastoral work and funerals, along with regular mid-week and Sunday services.

I have been working with Dr. Sandra Miller and the national Life Events team on funerals and also on the on-line system for recording all occasional offices called "Life Events Diary".

Things to avoid: (especially if you are short of time)

Never ask me about my work in TV and who I have met through it

Don't ask me for my opinion on food – I love to cook everything from sausages to Chinese banquet.

I have a love of nature and this comes through in my preferred style of spirituality, have been with a youth trip to the Taize community in France and also to our link diocese in India.

I have a widely varied choice of music and reading books and also love to get out for a walk with my cameras photographing landscapes and wildlife. I have been lucky enough to photograph wolves, otters, woodpeckers, kingfishers and more.

Revd Rob





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Just in time!

Making sure we had music for our Advent Carol Service this year proved an interesting challenge. When Lockdown 2 began, we knew we couldn't have our choir singing live in church on November 29th as we'd hoped.

Well, of course it went ahead, entirely on-line. And we did have beautiful music from the St Helen's choir (and from Madeleine McCormick too.)

As we'd expect, they went above and beyond the call of duty for us - They agreed to gather for a hastily arranged recording session in church on the evening before Lockdown. They were socially distanced which really doesn't help a choir to hear each other. They were still only part way through their practices for this service, so sang carols they were still learning; and instead of leading the congregation in worship as is their role, they found themselves singing to an empty church. But they rose to the occasion, naturally. A big thank you to them for blessing us by being as adaptable and dependable as ever.

Andrew Chapman



Thank you to Anne Heaton for sending in this 'behind the scenes' photo

I have no idea where I am going

This beautiful and, for many of us, relatable prayer by Thomas Merton was included by Martin Vaughan in his Prayer for the Day on 6th November:

My Lord God,
I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think I am following your will
does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please you
does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,
though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore will I trust you always though
I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

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Mothers' UNION

Christian care for families

We have heard a lot this year about 'holiday hunger' among UK schoolchildren, so I would like to highlight the involvement of Mothers' Union members in a 'Grub Club' project organised by Mount Merrion Church and Rev Adrian in the Diocese of Down and Dromore, Northern Ireland. Since 2019, it had been planned that a team would prepare and serve a hot meal twice a week during the Easter and summer school holidays. But plans had to be altered due to the pandemic, and MU members were quick to adapt and offer help in different ways.

Every week, during July and August, MU members prepared 45 packed lunches for a mini-bootcamp and packed lunch giveaway which took place in the parish of Mount Merrion Church. This was free and attended by up to 30 people each time to abide by social distancing laws at the time. Additional outside funding enabled 3 sports coaches to help run the bootcamp, so the children and families had exercise and fun as well as a healthy packed lunch. One additional benefit was that vulnerable and isolated families benefitted from getting to know other people locally.

Rev Adrian commented that, through this and other projects, 'we hope to share something of the love of Jesus in a practical way'.

Events:

The **16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence 2020** runs until 10 December. A daily bible reading and prayer diary is available on the MU website (some members will have received this by email).

Saturday 5 December - Global Day of Action - Programme:

9am Online Protest launches – on MU social media channels including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

11.30am Online 'Cup of Tea for No More 1 in 3'. Join in with a cup of tea as we reflect and pray for the MU 'No More 1 in 3' campaign, followed by Midday Prayers.

8pm No More 1 in 3 Global Day Service

All events to take place on 5 December on Facebook and YouTube.

Beryl Stephens

The Standard Soap Works

Christmas 2011 saw the closure of the Standard Soap factory in Ashby, bringing to an end well over 100 years of soap-making in the town. Some of you may have worked there, or have friends or family who did. At the time of closure, I made a film about the company and, assisted by two of its longest standing engines, Derick Stokes and Alvyn Owen, wrote a book, but many of you may not know anything about its history so here is a brief summary.

The company began in Leicester and London when it was known as the Hydroleine Co Ltd. It moved to Ashby around 1892 as The New Hydroleine Company and was first established in Tamworth Road, premises which were later used for warehousing.

In the later 1890s, the company erected a larger factory in The Callis, close to the old leather works and water works. The new factory was said to be fitted with every modern labour-saving device, including electric lights and a private telephone linking the two factories. In 1902 or 04, it took over the old leather works, and later the water works, as the factory expanded.

For many years the entire soap manufacturing process took place on the site, but by the 1950s the first stage was done elsewhere and the company was buying in the raw soap base. From the earliest days, they were producing a range of products, some with the most extraordinary names! Black Chief was a stove polish, said to be “black as midnight, bright as diamonds” and also “the cheapest and the best”! White Chief, they claimed, was also the cheapest and the best and also “never gets lost in the bath” because it floated! Most amusing of all to modern ears is the brand Witch Soap, invented by C. S. Parsons who owned the factory from 1911. Despite passing through many different owners throughout the 20th century, the company retained an affection for this curiously named product and one of its old advertising signs remained in the foyer of the office block right up to closure in 2011.



Under Parsons, the company became known as Castle Works and this name could still be seen in the wrought iron gates at the entrance in later years. From its earliest days at the end of the 19th century, the company had its own branch of the

railway that ran through Ashby and a faint reminder of even this still remains in the form of a fragment of the old Callis railway bridge preserved in the grass bank at the side of the road.

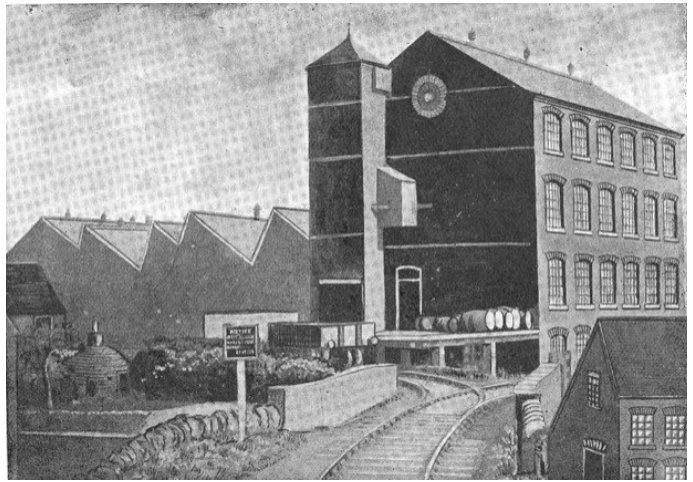
As the factory expanded and passed through the hands of different owners, it diversified into products such as talcum powder,

deodorants, after shaves and more. A major change came in the 1960s with the move to manufacturing private label soaps for established names in the industry. Although few people outside Ashby will have heard of the Standard Soap works, many will have used its products. Over the years they have made soap for Nivea, Avon, Coty, Jo Malone and many, many more. They have even made special soaps for the first-class state rooms on board Cunard ships and for prestigious hotels including Claridge's.

The factory had two major fires in the last century. The first destroyed the original building in 1979 and this brought to an end the manufacture of Talcum powder. The circular iron window frames on either gable end survived the fire and were displayed in the modern office block until closure. They are now in Ashby museum. The second fire broke out on 31st May 1990 during the annual shutdown. There was, therefore, no-one in the building at the time and it did not destroy the main production areas but the laboratories and some ancillary buildings were lost. Water to fight the fire was taken from the Hood Park outdoor swimming pool!

Returning to thoughts of Christmas, many people will remember the Christmas parties which the company held, not only for staff but for their children as well. Some of the staff I spoke to when I made the film remembered attending the parties as children, long before they came to work there!

There is much more to the story of Standard Soap, but space does not permit it to be told here. The book *All of a Lather* is still available at Ashby Museum if you would like to find out more. It is full of old photographs of the factory and its staff, and the museum itself has a large collection of staff and other photographs which can be seen on request when the museum is open.



Wendy Freer

Mary Christmas

It's that time of year again, shops full of Christmas goodies and families beginning to think about the annual trek up into the loft to retrieve the tree and decorations, and to remove from the cupboard the nativity scene that has been on display every year since you can remember. They're all there, the shepherds, wise men, angels, animals, Joseph, baby Jesus and of course Mary. We couldn't have a nativity without her, but what do we really know about her? Very little, sadly. Yet she is one of the most well-known women. Many people, male and female, are named after her, as are towns, villages and churches. Images of her can be seen, especially in Europe, on walls and houses, cathedrals and churches, roadside crosses and icons. For the Catholic Church, she is ever present. Her name would originally have been Mariam in Aramaic or Miriam in Hebrew. The name means 'pious' – and I wonder if the name was attributed to the mother of Jesus as a description of her, rather than being her real name.

Mary is only mentioned by name 12 times in the New Testament, 19 times in all. By comparison, she is mentioned 34 times in the Quran, with a whole chapter (Sura 19) dedicated to her, in which she is portrayed as a woman of considerable integrity, sanctity and autonomy in her own right. She is not celebrated as the mother of Jesus, but as an archetype of prayerfulness and patience in adversity.

Other differences in the Quran are that Mary is not married, Joseph is not mentioned at all. She gives birth alone under a palm tree and has a painful labour, is hungry and thirsty during childbirth and is comforted by a voice (from below) which is taken to be Jesus' voice, and is provided with food and water by god. She returns to her home community alone with the baby and is questioned about her morality. In the Quran, baby Jesus speaks of his prophetic mission and defends his mothers' chastity.



Mary was not revered much at all until the Council of Nicea in 325CE when the virgin birth of Jesus was acknowledged as an essential Christian belief, and it was at the council of Ephesus in 431CE where she was declared to be the Mother of God (Theotokos) and approval was given to

her devotion by the members of the Church. Not long after this, she was adopted as the patron Saint of the Byzantine Empire and her standard was carried before the troops. It was said that she could be seen running along the battlements shouting support to her army. After this time, there was an explosion of Marian piety and many feast days, churches named for her, shrines, hymns, relics and icons began to appear. Mary as Queen of Heaven was seen robed in blue, the most expensive fabric colour due to the dye being created from lapis lazuli and worn only by the ruling elite, with crown and jewels.

The doctrine of the virgin birth is a separate issue to Mary being a virgin. Her virginity may or may not be true – it is believed by some that the Bible, when translated from Greek, had many words mistranslated, virgin being one of them. The original word is said to mean young woman.

The virgin birth relates to the fact that Mary, whilst delivering her son in the normal manner, allegedly remained physically intact. In this way, Mary has been held up by the Catholic Church as the perfect woman that all women should aspire to. However, some feminists argue that this is a totally unrealistic expectation demanded by a patriarchal church hierarchy.

Even 2000 years after the birth of Jesus, Mary still appears to the faithful. Everyone knows about the vision at Lourdes. But have you heard about “Our Lady of the Underpass”? In 2005 a mark appeared on the wall of an underpass in Chicago that had a (vague) shape like the typical image of Mary in a cloak with praying hands. The discolouration of the wall was explained away by the Department of Transportation as a salt run-off, but nevertheless, the underpass became a shrine to Mary and a site for pilgrimage. People left candles, flowers, photos and pictures and visited the scene to pray. It was seen by many Catholics as Mary’s approval of the newly elected Pope, Benedict XVI. Prior to this, in Clearwater in Florida in 1969, an image appeared in the two-storey high window of a financial company. The image again was of Mary in a blue cloak and seemed to be holding a baby in her arms. The image was again explained away scientifically by the window manufacturers as a chemical reaction in the metal coating on the window. Even so, it became a place of pilgrimage, with hundreds of thousands of people visiting the shrine, leaving votive offerings and some going so far as to be married in front of it.

As bizarre as these illusions are, it shows that many people need to feel the presence of Mary in their lives, to act as intercessor for them with Jesus.

So, when you place Mary at the head of the crib in your nativity, give some thought to who this young woman was, and what she has become over the last 2000 years.

Jill Bishop

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Quotes for the Month

'Will Lassie go to heaven?'

premier@premierchristianmedia, November 1st

'Am reading through the Bible in a year, just hit Leviticus. Leviticus didn't seem too relevant, until I got to the bit advising against snacking on bats....'

Jeff Lucas, Facebook, November 2nd

'If people insult God, God's big enough to deal with that'

Most Revd Justin Welby on Good Morning Britain, November 6th

'Kamala Harris is set to bring Baptist faith and Hindu roots to historic role.'

Sojourners website, <https://sojo.net>, November 7th

'I can't believe the Church of England released Living in Love and Faith on the same day as a new series of Nigella. I predict her bold use of packet-bought fish fingers will gain more media attention on the morrow.'

Reverend Canon Dr Daniel Inman, Chancellor of Chichester Cathedral, Twitter, Nov 10th

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

Revd Steve Chalke, Pause for Thought, BBC Radio 2, November 10th

'Like every village in the country, there's been a lot happening in Dibley this year.'

Richard Curtis, writer, interview re the Vicar of Dibley Christmas special, BBC news, Nov 17th

Church online NOT CANCELLED, Quiet time with God NOT CANCELLED, Praying for the sick NOT CANCELLED, Checking on a friend NOT CANCELLED, Helping others NOT CANCELLED, Being the church NOW MORE THAN EVER

ProgressiveChristianity.org Facebook page, November 18th

'Grace comes from an ancient Greek word directly translated as 'Dolly Parton.'

Unvirtuous Abbey Facebook re news Dolly Parton donated \$1 million to coronavirus vaccine research, Nov 18th

'Religion is at its best when it makes us ask hard questions of ourselves. It is at its worst when it deludes us into thinking we have all the answers for everybody else.'

Archibald MacLeish quoted by ProgressiveChristianity.org, November 18th

'We could choose to love God and trust others to love God in their own way.'

Revd Dr Megan Rohrer, Facebook, November 18th

'Oh man, if you're upset about brown people in UK Christmas ads then I have some news about Jesus that you may want to sit down for.'

Author RJ Barker, UK Against Racism Facebook page, November 19th

'Dialogue begins when people meet people. It doesn't begin when we take out our scriptures'

Revd Canon Andrew Wingate on Dr Ataulloh Siddiqui, BBC Radio 4's Last Word, Nov 20th

'Thou shalt wear a mask. Hygenesis 20:20'

Liberal Christians Facebook page, November 20th

'Back in the dog collar, back in Dibley and back on your telly at Xmas. I couldn't be happier.'

Dawn French, The Vicar of Dibley Christmas specials, Daily Mail online, November 20th

'I don't particularly want to spend the rest of my ministry talking about sex.'

Very Revd Andrew Nunn, Dean of Southwark's blog, Beautiful Story, November 22nd

'You can feel free to move getting together with Granny, but Christmas is still going to be 9 months after the Annunciation.'

Archdruid Eileen, The Beaker Folk of Husborne Crawley, November 24th



Ashby
**YOUTH
FOR CHRIST**

November News

Football

Our Wednesday evening football session is not running. This does not mean we have no contact with the lads who used to attend. Most of them are still local and bored or anxious due to redundancy, furlough or educational limbo. So please keep praying for them. I occasionally come across them in small groups having a kick around. Conversations tend to be brief but I enjoy them. I'm also in irregular but fairly frequent touch (via digital means) with one of the more senior young men. Please pray that these infrequent meets would be blessed and that I would be able to encourage and support these young men by being a reminder or a signpost to them. Pray that they would cry out to the one who is not required to socially distance himself and that he would draw near to them in a way they recognise.

Thanks,
Vernon

Sk8ers - Let the detached work begin....

"He shall cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you shall find refuge"

Psalms 91:4

At the beginning of November, we had another of our Sk8ers by candlelight, and 5 young people came to share Greggs and the cold with us! However, with sadness we had to tell our young people that due to the second lockdown, we could not continue to meet in this way.

Please keep praying for our young people. I met one of the young men on the street the other day, and he told me how, after moving into Ashby School, he wanted to start to concentrate on his exams - he doesn't want to be a 'waster'. He has hopes for his future. I also met our local PCSO last week, and he was complimenting a couple of the young men coming out of Sk8ers and how they have grown - from weekly interventions and conversations about behaviour, to well balanced young men - entering the workforce.

Our buildings may be closed, our Sk8ers may not be able to meet at this time, but WE ARE NOT CLOSED. We hope to go to where the young people are. So the AYFC Sk8ers leaders will be taking a trip, hopefully every week

in December, up to the Westfield's estate where we can offer up our cheery selves and some hot chocolate, to the young people who hang out on the parks and by the shops there.

Please keep praying for the Sk8ers young people that they will find refuge under his wings, and recognise that they are being cared for by God and prayed for by us all. It will be easy to feel isolated again at this time. Please pray they come out to meet us, and for dry weather, so we can stand and chat. Pray too for the team, as we find new ways of meeting with these young people through allowed detached work and specific organised events, to try to stay in touch whilst we cannot be indoors, safe and warm. Pray for us to have ideas on how to engage these wonderful young people in conversations that show them more of God and less of us.

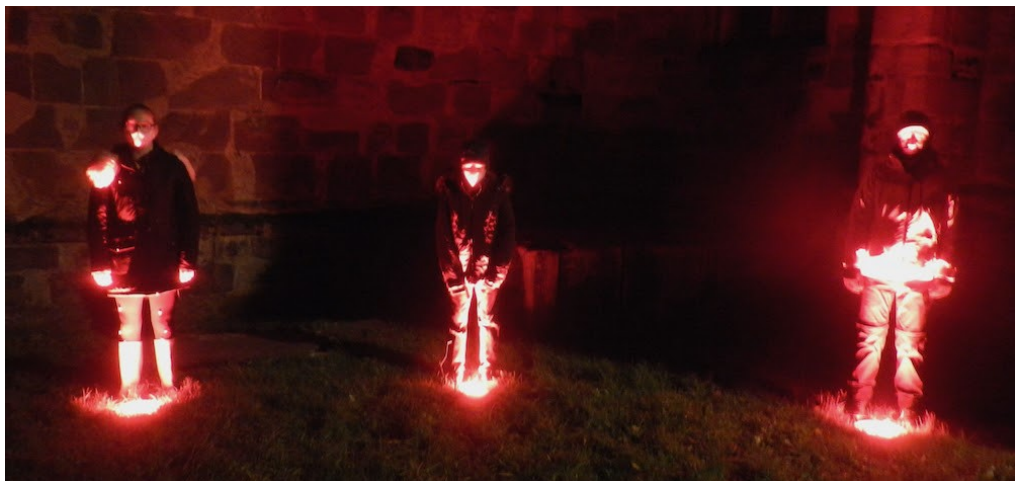
God bless,
Katie, Vernon & Kate.

Rock Solid

(Rock Solid is a club for school years 7-9 and supported by a team of young leaders (Aged 14 - 18) who are committed to the spiritual development of their younger peers.)

Having studied the National Youth Agency's latest Covid-19 guidelines we decided to continue Rock Solid during November. We met outside, as is now traditional, where it is cold and dark.

Our first meeting saw us imitating (badly) the murmurations of nature. Some species socially distance during their whole lives and so are masters of the genre. We watched starlings on film. We were in awe of their skill. We also reflected on how the actions and beliefs of those around us have unavoidable effects on us.



The following week's weather was dry and mild. We were grateful for this as we performed slightly spectacular fireworks displays using torches, phones and sparklers.

We also had a think together about Bartimaeus and how the question, 'What do you want me to do for you?' is a gift for us too. We can continually allow it to lead us into deeper connection with and blessing from the one who desires to recreate us.

The following week we explored Ashby stopping to ask some searching questions and searching for things that I'd launched space-wards. The things I'd launched space-wards were supposed to have illuminated themselves but true to form I'd failed to check the batteries and in the cool weather they glowed not at all.

It was an opportunity to think about failure and why we tend to struggle with our failure more than God does. Please pray we will be reminded of God's grace which is always sufficient for us.

We had another chance to listen to one another and believe that God wants to listen to us. Please pray that we will have revealed to us just how much God wants to walk with us in fellowship. Pray that we will dare to bare our hearts to him so that he can renew us with his love.

We are in darkest part of the year. The nights are long and cold. A little virus has caused a lot of darkness. Those who have escaped illness have lost many of the things that brought them happiness. And the darkness seems to be showing no signs of moving on.

Rock Solid has enjoyed the darkness. We have spent many dark evenings outside. Looking down at our feet we often see very little. We have stepped in things unpleasant and have sustained mild injuries walking into things unseen. We have at times felt disorientated and isolated, even a bit scared. But on clear nights we look up and see the skies are beautiful with stars and planets. And every time when we look to Jesus we see exquisite light.

The darkness serves to make us more aware of our need of light and more appreciative of the light we can see. Please pray that as we share Jesus through Scripture, testimony and his presence with us that these young people would become more aware of the darkness of sin and more aware of the Light of the World who offers us to light up our darkness and be our hope of the dawn.

Meanwhile please pray for us as a team that as we live, work and study in the darkness we would frequently look to God and enjoy face time with him and become ever shinier radiators of his glory - like Moses (Exodus 34:29) and Stephen (Acts 6:15).

Thanks
Vernon

A Star Team

From those who created the stars, to those who made the labels, to those who assembled them, to those who yarn bombed the town, this was a team effort which turned out to be a star turn, as our 'A Light Shines in the Darkness' Advent and Christmas season was well and truly launched.



Answers to Christmas Words Quiz (page 15):

1. a, 2. a, 3. c, 4. a, 5. c, 6. b, 7. c, 8. b, 9. b, 10. a

Best two 'ear-worm banishers' (page 3):

God Save The Queen by Thomas Arne and Karma Chameleon by Culture Club!

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Children's Advent & Christmas

Christingle

13th December at 4pm ...
includes 'Build your own Christingle!'
Collect DIY pack from St Helen's
12th December 10am to 12 noon



Christmas Windows

18th-23rd December at 4pm-7pm

Spot the carol! Displays all over town -
map available from sthelensashby@gmail.com
or www.sthelensashby.net

Bedtime Stories

18th-23rd December at 7pm



Children's Carol Service

24th December at 5pm
including Nativity Play &
Christmas Jumper competition



Storytelling and services live-streamed to the
Flagstaff Family of Churches Facebook Page



Services for Advent & Christmas

**The Light shines in the darkness ...
... & the darkness has not overcome it**

★ = Livestreamed to the Flagstaff Family of Churches Facebook Page

★ = Booking required to attend in person via sthelensashby@gmail.com

Advent 29th Nov 6.30 pm

Carol Service

Prayer for the Day 30th Nov 8am

The Jesse Tree –24th Dec

Advent calendar

Night Prayer/ 2nd 9th 16th & 9 pm

Compline 17th–23rd Dec

Christmas 20th Dec 6.30 pm

Carol Service

Christmas Eve

Holy Communion St Helen's 11.30pm

Christmas Day St Helen's 8.30am &

Holy Communion 10.30am

Breedon Priory 9.00am



Tune in to the Flagstaff Family of Churches Facebook Page 