



# Hallaton and Whatborough Newsletter

Edition Date: December 2023

## Services & Events – In Church & on Zoom:

### Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> December

9.30am **East Norton** Advent Holy Communion (Revd David Palmer)

11am Launde Parishes **Zoom Service**

4pm **Tilton** Advent Christingle (Revd Jayne Lewis)

5pm **Owston** Evening Prayer (Churchwarden Led)

5pm **Tugby** Advent Holy Communion (Revd Chris Webb)

### Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> December

9.30am **Knossington** Advent Holy Communion (Revd Canon Philip Norwood)

10am **Hallaton** Advent Holy Communion (Revd Jayne Lewis)

11am **Tugby** Christingle (Led by Sue Marsh, Revd David Palmer visiting)

11am Launde Parishes **Zoom Service**

5pm **East Norton** Carol Service (Community Led with Revd David Palmer)

6pm **Lovesby** Carol Service (Revd Jayne Lewis)

### Friday 15<sup>th</sup> December

6pm **Owston** Cottesmore Hunt Carol Service (Revd Canon Brian Davis)

### Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> December

11am Launde Parishes **Zoom Service**

4pm **Horninghold** Carols by Candlelight (Community led with Revd David Palmer)

5pm **Tugby** Carols by Candlelight (Congregation led)

6pm **Slawston** Carols by Candlelight Service (Community led with Revd David Palmer)

6pm **Knossington** Carol Service (Sue Sills)

6pm **East Norton** Carol Service

6pm **Hallaton** Community Carol Service (Community led)

6pm **Owston** Carol Service (Churchwarden Led, followed by mulled wine)

6.00pm **Tilton** Carol Service with seasonal refreshments (Community led with Revd JL)

### Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> December

6pm Launde Parishes Lessons & Carols **Zoom Service**

6.30pm **Allexton** Carols by Candlelight (Revd Jayne Lewis) *All are welcome*

### Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> December

6pm **Cold Overton** Carol Service (Community led with Revd Jayne Lewis)

### Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> December Christmas Eve

11am Launde Parishes **Zoom Service**

3pm **East Norton** Carol Service (Revd David Palmer)

4pm **Tilton** Crib Service with Scratch Nativity (Revd Jayne Lewis)

5pm **Slawston** Crib Service (Revd David Palmer)

11pm **Tugby** Christmas Communion (Revd David Palmer)

### Monday 25<sup>th</sup> December Christmas Day

10.30am **Owston** Christmas Communion (Revd Canon Michael Wilson)

10am **Hallaton** Family Christmas Communion (Revd Jonathan Dowman)

11am **Knossington** Christmas Communion (Revd Jayne Lewis)

11am Launde Parishes Christmas Day **Zoom Service**

### Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> December

11am **Gaulby** Launde Deanery Service (Revd Canon Jonathan Dowman)

## Contact Us:

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### 📧 **Sundays in December 11.00am Zoom** **Launde Parishes Zoom**

To Join our Zoom Services on **Sundays during December**, click on this link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87679803190?pwd=VzV5d1UwaTd4UnlybDdDbmdVUTZTZz09>

**Meeting ID:** 876 7980 3190

**Passcode:** 172162

**DIAL IN FROM A LANDLINE OR MOBILE:**

**T. 0203 481 5240**

Enter the **Meeting ID: 876 7980 3190** followed by #

Enter the **Passcode: 172162** followed by #

### 📧 **Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> December 6.00pm** **Lessons and Carols Zoom Service**

**Launde Parishes Zoom**

**Leader:** Hilary Painter

To Join our Zoom Service, click on this **SPECIAL** link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84975226104?pwd=UHBOYmpoTlk4ais5N2tTTUxqUjVpUT09>

**Meeting ID:** 849 7522 6104

**Passcode:** 613746

**DIAL IN FROM A LANDLINE OR MOBILE:**

**T. 0203 481 5240**

Enter the **Meeting ID: 849 7522 6104** followed by #

Enter the **Passcode: 613746** followed by #

**PLEASE NOTE:**

**THOSE JOINING US FOR THE ZOOM CONGREGATION CHRISTMAS PARTY CAN USE THIS LINK AT 5PM**

### 📧 **Christmas Day 11.00am Zoom**

**Launde Parishes Zoom**

To Join our Zoom Service on **Christmas Day**, click on this link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84811495147?pwd=QkQ5dERSEkI4VGw5cXdhcDJWTjZ6Zz09>

**Meeting ID:** 848 1149 5147

**Passcode:** 825307

**DIAL IN FROM A LANDLINE OR MOBILE:**

**T. 0203 481 5240**

Enter the **Meeting ID: 848 1149 5147** followed by #

Enter the **Passcode: 825307** followed by #



## Advent and Christmas on AChurchNearYou.com

In our mission to invite more families to church this Christmas, why not update your AChurchNearYou page? It's a great way to reach new people, plus there are lots of Christmas features this year.

AChurchNearYou.com has had a makeover in line with this year's 'Follow the Star' campaign.

You can now choose, through the Marketplace, to opt in or out of displaying the Christmas branding on your church or benefice site.

Other new features include:

- A tab specifically for Advent and Christmas events on your church's services and events page.
- At [AChurchNearYou.com/christmas](https://www.achurchnearyou.com/christmas) visitors will be able to refine their search using a drop-down list of seasonal tags and a date filter.
- Improved search results for Advent and Christmas services and events with 'Share' and 'Add to calendar' buttons.

## Global Carol Service



Everyone is warmly invited to our Global Carol Service – an intercultural celebration of Global Christmas – on **Saturday 16 December, 7pm, at All Saints with Holy Trinity Church in Loughborough. Read more about it here: <https://www.leicester.anglican.org/global-carol-service-.php>**

## Reflection for Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> December First Sunday of Advent:

There's a story of a Boys' School which had an ultra-religious Headmaster. At tea time, a large bowl of apples bore the notice, "Only one apple each! God is watching!" By the next bowl with biscuits, some wag had written, "Take as many as you like. God is busy with the apples". The Gospel for this Sunday is from Mark – it's the beginning of a new Church year, and we have moved on from Matthew as the main source of readings. And today's passage seems to show a God who is waiting to pounce and to catch us out. Isaiah longs for the Lord to come down like a ton of bricks and sort out the whole mess once and for all. Jesus warns us that we never know when the Master is going to turn up and surprise us.

Advent has this message for us to be ready for the unexpected and we know only too well in the light of recent acts of terrorism that we can be caught woefully unawares by tragedy or sickness or loss. But Isaiah has words of pleading that the Lord will be gentle in judgement; Paul reminds us that God is always faithful towards us; and Jesus assures us that his Word will never be defeated.

Perhaps we should think of the Prodigal Son who expected his father to be standing behind the front door with a stick in his hand, or the lost sheep waiting for a sound beating by the very tired Good Shepherd. We shall always be surprised when we meet our loving Creator, and we may very be shame-faced, but He is never waiting to pounce in vengeance.

Advent is a time for us to think of ways of being ready. And who could possibly be more surprised than the shepherds or the Wise Men to meet the Lord of all Creation in an animal's eating trough in a stable, not waiting to pounce but to show the full extent of the love of God?

Revd Philip Norwood

## Bible Readings: Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2023 First Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 64.1-9

**New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised**

1 O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,

so that the mountains would quake at your presence-

2 as when fire kindles brushwood

and the fire causes water to boil- to make your name known to your adversaries,  
so that the nations might tremble at your presence!  
3 When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,  
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.  
4 From ages past no one has heard,  
no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you,  
who works for those who wait for him.  
5 You meet those who gladly do right,  
those who remember you in your ways. But you were angry, and we sinned;  
because you hid yourself we transgressed.  
6 We have all become like one who is unclean,  
and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf,  
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.  
7 There is no one who calls on your name,  
or attempts to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us,  
and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.  
8 Yet, O Lord, you are our Father;  
we are the clay, and you are our potter;  
we are all the work of your hand.  
9 Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord,  
and do not remember iniquity for ever.  
Now consider, we are all your people.

### **1 Corinthians 1.3-9**

#### **New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised**

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 4 I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus,  
5 for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind-  
6 just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you-  
7 so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
8 He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
9 God is faithful; by him you were called into the

### **Mark 13.24-end**

#### **New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised**

24 'But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened,  
and the moon will not give its light,  
25 and the stars will be falling from heaven,  
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.  
26 Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in clouds"  
with great power and glory.

27 Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.  
28 'From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near.  
29 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates.  
30 Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.  
31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.  
32 'But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.  
33 Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.  
34 It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch.  
35 Therefore, keep awake-for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn,  
36 or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly.  
37 And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.'

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### **Collect for Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> December First Sunday of Advent**

Almighty God,  
give us grace to cast away the works of darkness  
and to put on the armour of light,  
now in the time of this mortal life,  
in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in great humility;  
that on the last day,  
when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge the living and the dead,  
we may rise to the life immortal;  
through him who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

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### **Additional Prayer for Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> December First Sunday of Advent**

Almighty God,  
as your kingdom dawns,  
turn us from the darkness of sin to the light of holiness,  
that we may be ready to meet you  
in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. **Amen**

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## Reflection for Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> December Second Sunday of Advent:

Advent is a time of preparation and is meant to be an opportunity for us to prepare for the celebration of Christ's birth, just as Lent is a time to prepare ourselves for Easter. The problem we have now is that Christmas has become so commercialised and so materialistic that our preparation time may become much more about these things than our spiritual need to remember the amazing fact that God himself came to be born and live as one of us in the person of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Advent is also a time of waiting and again our modern world today means that waiting, not knowing what may happen next, can shake our trust in God's promise that he is in control and one day when Jesus returns as he promised, all will be well.

Our reading at the beginning of Mark's Gospel tells of the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah, that someone would come to prepare the people to welcome the promised Messiah offering baptism and repentance. That time was now very near and John, known as the Baptist, was clear that he was only the one called to prepare the way. One, far greater than he, was coming and he will baptise not just with water, but with the Spirit. He is of course referring to his cousin, Jesus, the Son of God, the promised Messiah, the Saviour of all people and, of course, our own dear Saviour, Jesus Christ.

In Peter's letter he is trying to encourage the believers while they wait for Christ to return. His words to them are also encouraging for us. ".....we wait for new heavens and a new earth where righteousness is at home. While you are waiting for these things strive to be found by him at peace without spot or blemish." We can only achieve this with the help of God our Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit. Surely a good reason and great incentive to make Advent a real time of spiritual preparation. And who knows we may find this helps us with all those other preparations we will need to make! May our preparations both spiritual and practical lead us all to a joyful and blessed Christmas.

**Revd Christine Blodwell**

## Bible Readings:

**Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> December 2023**

**Second Sunday of Advent**

**Isaiah 40.1-11**

**New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised**

- 1 Comfort, O comfort my people,  
says your God.
- 2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and cry to her that she has served her term,  
that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the  
Lord's hand  
double for all her sins.
- 3 A voice cries out: 'In the wilderness prepare the way  
of the Lord,  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
- 4 Every valley shall be lifted up,  
and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven  
ground shall become level,  
and the rough places a plain.
- 5 Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,  
and all people shall see it together,  
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'
- 6 A voice says, 'Cry out!'  
And I said, 'What shall I cry?' All people are grass,  
their constancy is like the flower of the field.
- 7 The grass withers, the flower fades,  
when the breath of the Lord blows upon it;  
surely the people are grass.
- 8 The grass withers, the flower fades;  
but the word of our God will stand for ever.
- 9 Get you up to a high mountain,  
O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with  
strength,  
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,  
lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah,  
'Here is your God!'
- 10 See, the Lord God comes with might,  
and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him,  
and his recompense before him.
- 11 He will feed his flock like a shepherd;  
he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in  
his bosom,  
and gently lead the mother sheep.

**2 Peter 3.8-15a**

**New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised**

- 8 But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the  
Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand  
years are like one day.
- 9 The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think  
of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to  
perish, but all to come to repentance.
- 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and  
then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and  
the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth  
and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.

11 Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness,

12 waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire?

13 But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

14 Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish;

15 and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given to him,

### **Mark 1.1-8**

#### **New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised**

1 The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

2 As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way;

3 the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:  
"Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight"',

4 John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

5 And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.

7 He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals.

8 I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

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### **Collect for Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> December Second Sunday of Advent**

O Lord, raise up, we pray, your power  
and come among us,  
and with great might succour us;  
that whereas, through our sins and wickedness  
we are grievously hindered  
in running the race that is set before us,  
your bountiful grace and mercy  
may speedily help and deliver us;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
to whom with you and the Holy Spirit,  
be honour and glory, now and for ever.

**Amen**

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### **Additional Prayer for Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> December Second Sunday of Advent**

Almighty God,  
purify our hearts and minds,  
that when your Son Jesus Christ comes again as judge  
and saviour  
we may be ready to receive him,  
who is our Lord and our God. **Amen**

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## Reflection for Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> December Third Sunday of Advent:

### 1 Thessalonians 5. 16-24

This week's New Testament reading is last part of Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians and probably one of the first letters written to Christians; well chosen for the time of year. They remind me of the final instructions given to my children when they went to a party - be polite, say thank you, don't push, lose gracefully... Most of the time those words weren't even heard, because my children knew them by heart having heard them repeatedly. I suspect that many of us read Paul's list of final appeals in a similar way - barely listening, knowing them by heart. However, for both groups, obeying them is another matter!

As a church today we too read or hear these final exhortations as we celebrate Christ's birth and await his return. In our world we are surrounded by death, pain, suffering, and turmoil but these do not get the last word. We have a Saviour who has conquered Death.

This period of waiting is not a time to twiddle our thumbs. We are called to be active. At Christmastime in particular, rejoice that God has not abandoned us to evil but has sent his son, whose birth we are celebrating. Model what is good and peaceful and pray for peace. Give thanks for all you have, materially but also spiritually. Remember, in all the extra tasks there seem to be at this time, the real reason we have Christmas, so take time to allow the joy of the celebration to wash over you. Allow God's Spirit to shine in you for the God of peace is really at work among us.

May you all have a blessed and peaceful Christmas and a happy New Year.

Hilary Painter

### Bible Readings:

## Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> December 2023

### Third Sunday of Advent

#### Isaiah 61.1-4, 8-end

#### New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised

1 The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,  
because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to  
bring good news to the oppressed,

to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to  
the captives,

and release to the prisoners;

2 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour,  
and the day of vengeance of our God;  
to comfort all who mourn;

3 to provide for those who mourn in Zion-  
to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of  
gladness instead of mourning,  
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will  
be called oaks of righteousness,

the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.

4 They shall build up the ancient ruins,  
they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall  
repair the ruined cities,

the devastations of many generations.

8 For I the Lord love justice,

I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give  
them their recompense,

and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

9 Their descendants shall be known among the  
nations,

and their offspring among the peoples; all who see  
them shall acknowledge

that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed.

10 I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,

my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has

clothed me with the garments of salvation,  
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as  
a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,  
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

11 For as the earth brings forth its shoots,

and as a garden cause what is sown in it to spring up,  
so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise  
to spring up before all the nations.

### 1 Thessalonians 5.16-24

#### New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised

16 Rejoice always,

17 pray without ceasing,

18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of  
God in Christ Jesus for you.

19 Do not quench the Spirit.

20 Do not despise the words of prophets,

21 but test everything; hold fast to what is good;

22 abstain from every form of evil.

23 May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely;  
and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound  
and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

24 The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

### John 1.6-8, 19-28

#### New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was  
John.

7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all  
might believe through him.

8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

19 This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?'

20 He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, 'I am not the Messiah.'

21 And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the prophet?' He answered, 'No.'

22 Then they said to him, 'Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?'

23 He said, 'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord"', as the prophet Isaiah said.

24 Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.

25 They asked him, 'Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?'

26 John answered them, 'I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know,

27 the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.'

28 This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

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### Collect for Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> December Third Sunday of Advent

O Lord Jesus Christ,  
who at your first coming sent your messenger  
to prepare your way before you:  
grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries  
may likewise so prepare and make ready your way  
by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom  
of the just,  
that at your second coming to judge the world  
we may be found an acceptable people in your sight;  
for you are alive and reign with the Father  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

**Amen**

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### Additional Prayer for Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> December Third Sunday of Advent

God for whom we watch and wait,  
you sent John the Baptist to prepare the way of your Son:

give us courage to speak the truth,  
to hunger for justice,  
and to suffer for the cause of right,  
with Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen**

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### Reflection for Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> December Fourth Sunday of Advent Christmas Eve:

All of us make plans but they don't always work out. Three years ago, we were going to stay with relatives for Christmas. Only a few days beforehand it was announced that, due to the pandemic, Christmas was cancelled. We had to rush to the supermarket to stock up on provisions and they were left eating turkey for weeks!

In our Old Testament reading, we learn that David had plans. He has been crowned King, he has conquered Jerusalem and made it his capital. He has unified his country and made his borders safe. He has built himself a grand palace. He has definitely arrived – with the help of God. Only now does he think about doing something in return. A powerful God needs a magnificent temple to impress his worshippers and overawe the pagans. David had plans for himself – and plans for God. But God doesn't want to be part of David's plan. He doesn't want David to build him a house. He wants David to be the founder of a house, a dynasty, through which salvation will come to all people.

David backs down. The future will not be the one that he has mapped out, but the one God maps out for him. Even though David does not realise it, it will indeed be through a young woman who marries into his family that God's future for his people is revealed.

No doubt, Mary had plans for her married life. But whatever they may have been, they are blown out of the water by the arrival of Gabriel. There will be scandal, there will be long and dangerous journeys – a heavily pregnant Mary jolting uncomfortably on the way to Bethlehem and a hasty departure when Herod's anger and jealousy is revealed. There will be joy and there will be pain. God's plan for Mary will change the world. But she says 'yes', abandons whatever plans she may have made and walks trustingly into the future that God has outlined for her.

You probably have plans for Christmas – and let's hope they work out. Then, a week later, there will be New Year's resolutions to make – hopefully, that we will be more regular in private prayer and public worship. Surely, God has a place in our plans. Yet we have a place in God's plans. We may not know exactly what it is, but we know it involves us – every part of us, not just an hour or thereabouts on a Sunday morning, but our

whole being. But Advent in particular reminds us to be prepared – not only for Christ when he comes again, but also to be prepared to adjust, alter or completely jettison our plans when God makes plain to us what he wants us to do and where he wants us to be. What will God’s plans mean for us? Who can tell? But what we do know is that Christ, Emmanuel, ‘God with us’ will indeed live up to his name and that whatever God requires of us he will enable us to carry through, secure in the knowledge of his all-embracing love.

**Revd Jeff Hopewell**

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## **Bible Readings:**

**Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> December 2023**

**Fourth Sunday of Advent Christmas Eve**

**2 Samuel 7.1-11,16**

**New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised**

Now when the king was settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him,

2 the king said to the prophet Nathan, ‘See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.’

3 Nathan said to the king, ‘Go, do all that you have in mind; for the Lord is with you.’

4 But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan:

5 Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord: Are you the one to build me a house to live in?

6 I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle.

7 Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, ‘Why have you not built me a house of cedar?’

8 Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the Lord of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel;

9 and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth.

10 And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly,

11 from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house.

16 Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.

**Romans 16.25-end**

**New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised**

25 Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages

26 but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith-

27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory for ever! Amen.

**Luke 1.26-38**

**New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised**

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth,

27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary.

28 And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.’

29 But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

30 The angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God.

31 And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.

32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David.

33 He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.’

34 Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I am a virgin?’

35 The angel said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.

36 And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren.

37 For nothing will be impossible with God.’

38 Then Mary said, ‘Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.’ Then the angel departed from her.

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## Collect for Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> December Fourth Sunday of Advent

God our redeemer,  
who prepared the Blessed Virgin Mary  
to be the mother of your Son:  
grant that, as she looked for his coming as our saviour,  
so we may be ready to greet him  
when he comes again as our judge;  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

**Amen**

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## Additional Prayer for Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> December Fourth Sunday of Advent

Or Eternal God,  
as Mary waited for the birth of your Son,  
so we wait for his coming in glory;  
bring us through the birth pangs of this present age  
to see, with her, our great salvation  
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen**

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## Collect for Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> December Christmas Eve

Almighty God,  
you make us glad with the yearly remembrance  
of the birth of your Son Jesus Christ:  
grant that, as we joyfully receive him as our redeemer,  
so we may with sure confidence behold him  
when he shall come to be our judge;  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

**Amen**

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## Additional Prayer for Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> December Christmas Eve

Almighty God,  
as we prepare with joy  
to celebrate the gift of the Christ-child,  
embrace the earth with your glory  
and be for us a living hope  
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen**



## Reflection for Monday 25<sup>th</sup> December Fourth Sunday of Advent Christmas Day

It's arrived! Christmas is here! Hopefully none of us is too old to have forgotten the excitement which Christmas Day brought to us as children.

For it *is* exciting. We are celebrating the birth long ago of a person who has done more to change the world than any other person. And the stories of shepherds and angels and Wise Men and animals in a stable and Mary and Joseph – these are timeless stories depicted in many and varied ways all over the world, in company of course with Santa and his reindeer.

The weeks of preparation during Advent have hopefully been for us a time to build up a sense of expectation and enable us to join in the festivities and make all the many preparations. But we should not lose sight in all the busy activity of what all the preparations are really for. True, we are celebrating family ties and friendships, we are enjoying the community we live in, and we are reaching out to those who need support.

But there is more. When we sing about the 'little town of Bethlehem', we come to the words, "Cast out our sin and enter in; be born in us today." Those words say it all. For people of faith, Christmas is essentially about celebrating Jesus being born in our hearts and minds and lives every day of the year, not just one.

And that is something really to celebrate. How thankful we are to have been offered the gift of the knowledge of God's love for us: the gift of a purpose in life in loving God and serving our neighbour and caring for creation: the gift of being guided by God's Spirit: the gift of forgiveness and the hope of an eternity of love. When we open our presents, remember the greatest gift of all for which the whole purpose of our celebrations should be to enable us to say 'Thank You'.

**Revd Philip Norwood**

**Bible Readings:**  
**Monday 25<sup>th</sup> December 2023**  
**Fourth Sunday of Advent**  
**Christmas Day**

**Isaiah 9.2-7**

**New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised**

2 The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of  
deep darkness-  
on them light has shined.  
3 You have multiplied the nation,  
you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you  
as with joy at the harvest,  
as people exult when dividing plunder.  
4 For the yoke of their burden,  
and the bar across their shoulders,  
the rod of their oppressor,  
you have broken as on the day of Midian.  
5 For all the boots of the tramping warriors  
and all the garments rolled in blood  
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.  
6 For a child has been born for us,  
a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders;  
and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
7 His authority shall grow continually,  
and there shall be endless peace for the throne of  
David and his kingdom.  
He will establish and uphold it with justice and with  
righteousness  
from this time onwards and for evermore. The zeal of  
the Lord of hosts will do this.

**Titus 2.11-14**

**New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised**

11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation  
to all,  
12 training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions,  
and in the present age to live lives that are self-  
controlled, upright, and godly,  
13 while we wait for the blessed hope and the  
manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour,  
Jesus Christ.  
14 He it is who gave himself for us that he might  
redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a  
people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

**Luke 2.1-14 (15-20)**

**New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised**

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus  
that all the world should be registered.  
2 This was the first registration and was taken while  
Quirinius was governor of Syria.  
3 All went to their own towns to be registered.

4 Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee  
to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because  
he was descended from the house and family of David.

5 He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was  
engaged and who was expecting a child.

6 While they were there, the time came for her to  
deliver her child.

7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped  
him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because  
there was no place for them in the inn.

8 In that region there were shepherds living in the fields,  
keeping watch over their flock by night.

9 Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the  
glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were  
terrified.

10 But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see-I  
am bringing you good news of great joy for all the  
people:

11 to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour,  
who is the Messiah, the Lord.

12 This will be a sign for you: you will find a child  
wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.'

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of  
the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

14 'Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!'

[15 When the angels had left them and gone into  
heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go  
now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken  
place, which the Lord has made known to us.'

16 So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph,  
and the child lying in the manger.

17 When they saw this, they made known what had  
been told them about this child;

18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the  
shepherds told them.

19 But Mary treasured all these words and pondered  
them in her heart.

20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God  
for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told  
them.]



**Collect for Monday 25<sup>th</sup> December**  
**Fourth Sunday of Advent**  
**Christmas Day**

Almighty God,  
you have given us your only-begotten Son  
to take our nature upon him  
and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin:  
grant that we, who have been born again  
and made your children by adoption and grace,  
may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

**Amen**

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**Additional Prayer for Monday 25<sup>th</sup>**  
**December**  
**Fourth Sunday of Advent**  
**Christmas Day**

Lord Jesus Christ,  
your birth at Bethlehem  
draws us to kneel in wonder at heaven touching earth:  
accept our heartfelt praise  
as we worship you,  
our Saviour and our eternal God.

**Amen**

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**Reflection for Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> December**  
**First Sunday of Christmas Epiphany**

'Tis the season of Christmas carols. I'm sure that each of you will have a favourite. One familiar carol (maybe not a favourite!) is *'The twelve days of Christmas'*. Have you ever wondered about those twelve strange gifts? What is it all about?

The carol, it seems, was written in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and is a cumulative song, where each verse is built on the previous one (like *'I know an old lady who swallowed a fly.'*) So, is it just a fun song for the festive season, or might there be a different interpretation?

It has been suggested that it is a teaching song where each gift represents an element of the Christian faith but where the meanings have been obscured and lost. We might consider that possibility.

The twelve days of Christmas begin on Christmas Day and continue until 5<sup>th</sup> January. On the first day, the gift is a *partridge*, representing the one, true God. Then as the carol progresses, we find *two turtle doves*, standing for the Old and New Testaments and *three French hens* for faith, hope and charity.

*Four calling birds* point to the four gospels, *five golden rings* to the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses, and *six geese a-laying* to the six days of Creation.

*Seven swans a-swimming* evoke the seven gifts of the Spirit, *eight maids a-milking* the eight beatitudes, and *nine ladies dancing* suggest the fruits of the Spirit.

Then we sing *ten lords a-leaping*, echoing the ten commandments, *eleven pipers piping* for the eleven faithful disciples, and finally *twelve drummers drumming* mirroring the Creed, the teaching of the twelve apostles. How intriguing. Is this simply fanciful? Or perhaps a spur to reflect on our faith at this time, our personal faith in God's promises realised in the gift of Christmas.

**Revd John Taylor**

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**Bible Readings:**

**Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023**

**First Sunday of Christmas Epiphany:**

**Isaiah 61.10-62.3**

**New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised**

10 I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,

my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,

he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

11 For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

62 For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,

and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch.

2 The nations shall see your vindication,  
and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by  
a new name  
that the mouth of the Lord will give.

3 You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord,  
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

### **Galatians 4.4-7**

#### **New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised**

4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his  
Son, born of a woman, born under the law,

5 in order to redeem those who were under the law, so  
that we might receive adoption as children.

6 And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit  
of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'

7 So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child  
then also an heir, through God.

### **Luke 2.15-21**

#### **New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised**

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven,  
the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to  
Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which  
the Lord has made known to us.'

16 So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph,  
and the child lying in the manger.

17 When they saw this, they made known what had  
been told them about this child;

18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the  
shepherds told them.

19 But Mary treasured all these words and pondered  
them in her heart.

20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God  
for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told  
them.

21 After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise  
the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the  
angel before he was conceived in the womb.

### **Collect for Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> December**

#### **First Sunday of Christmas Epiphany:**

Almighty God,  
who wonderfully created us in your own image  
and yet more wonderfully restored us  
through your Son Jesus Christ:  
grant that, as he came to share in our humanity,  
so we may share the life of his divinity;  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

**Amen**

### **Additional Prayer for Sunday 31<sup>st</sup>**

#### **December**

#### **First Sunday of Christmas Epiphany:**

God in Trinity,  
eternal unity of perfect love:  
gather the nations to be one family,  
and draw us into your holy life  
through the birth of Emmanuel,  
our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Amen**

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Information about the Zoom services (including  
the Link), and **other information**, can be found on

**The Launde Deanery and Minster Community**

**Website at:** [http://launde-minster-  
community.webador.co.uk/](http://launde-minster-community.webador.co.uk/)

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