

St Thomas', Trowbridge and St John's, West Ashton Monthly News January 2025

St Thomas
Trowbridge

St John's
West Ashton

Kingfisher



Holy Trinity
Trowbridge



*"The object of a new year is not that we should have a new year, but rather that we should have a new soul."
- Gilbert K. Chesterton*

Churchwarden's Letter

My apologies that I wrote the churchwarden's message thinking it would go out at the very start of the year but for all kinds of good reasons it comes to you a week later. I haven't had a chance to rewrite everything, so I hope a reworked version is ok!

So, here we are, "Standing at the Portal of the opening Year", as the old hymn says. The start of a New Year seems a significant event, though sometimes hard as a Christian to find an appropriate way of marking it. Resolutions, plans for a healthier me, a lifestyle change, and dry January all have their place I suppose. However, they seem to miss the mark as they are almost entirely focused on bringing me more happiness, contentment and fulfilment, they also focus on the physical and mental but miss the spiritual dimension.

Many years ago, I recall attending a Methodist church for both a watchnight service and, on the first Sunday of January, a Covenant Service. I can't remember the details, but both offered significant moments in my walk of faith at the start of the year. Charles Wesley introduced Covenant Services into the calendar of the early Methodist movement in 1775. Although the service has evolved since then, it still plays a vital role in the lives of Methodist congregations and encourages them to rededicate their lives to Christ through repentance and commitment to a life of service.

I'm really pleased that Rev Helen Durant-Stevensen incorporated a parts of the Covenant Service into the Holy Communion on January 5th. I hope, for those present it was a helpful way to recommit ourselves to Jesus at the start of 2025.

Looking back on 2024, there have been many changes and challenges that we have faced individually and as a church. Our vicar of 25 years, Allan, retired, and he and his wife Janet left for a new life in Chesterfield. Alison B, the leader of Kingfisher Church on Paxcroft Mead decided during the year that it was the right time to step down, leading to the difficult decision to bring 15 years of worship at Paxcroft Mead School to a close. Also, in 2024 our Youth Worker, Hannah, felt the time was right for her to return to teaching.

We have also known for some time our treasurer, Pat, was likely to move back to Shrewsbury and although she is still in Trowbridge as I write, we expect that she and Geoff will be on their way in the coming week or two. Finally, 2024 was the year we lost a very dear member of our church, Reverend Reuben Dunnings. We are extremely grateful to God for Allan and Janet, Alison, Hannah, the Ks and of course Rueben. We have been blessed by them and their ministry among us.

One thing is certain for us, despite all the challenges ahead, we don't venture into the unknown of 2025 alone. God is with us and His Holy Spirit will guide and enable us to meet the changes and opportunities ahead. Our commitment in our relationship with God is to place him first, to serve him and be able to echo the words at the heart of the Covenant prayer, 'I am no longer my own, but yours. Put me to what you will, place me with whom you will...',

I'm sure you have, with me, been praying for the 4 Parish Reps, who as I rewrite this message, will be preparing for the interview day. I'm extremely grateful to the reps for taking on this responsibility. I know it's been rather frustrating for many in the church who don't know the details of what's happening. We have been following the guidance we've been given. However, whatever the outcome, I have faith that all involved will be able to discern God's will at the start of this significant year in the life of our churches.

This year, having no vicar to decide and design our motto card for 2025, Paul and I thought we might offer a challenge to our young people to come up with a theme for the church. I'm really pleased that one of them did and was inspired by a passage from John's Gospel. That dovetails perfectly with Paul's recent talk on December 3rd about recognising and valuing the younger people in our church. I'll leave you with the words from the motto card from John 15:5 that are a great reminder and encouragement to go through the year with Christ: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

John C

St John's Update

Where did Christmas go - we now have valentine cards, Easter eggs and chocolate bunnies plus hot cross buns all in the shops already !

We are now in the Epiphany period - it is said it is a message of faith in divine light, which guided the Magi (the Three Wise Kings) to Bethlehem, celebrating Jesus coming to unite the world as the "king of kings" and that He came to be a saviour to all people. Amen, December at St John's kicked off with the Christingle Service on 1st December - Alison B and Jean C organised a super service and the children and adults that came enjoyed the service and made aware of the meaning of the Christingles. A thanks goes to Jean C for supplying the oranges. It was a magical moment when the lights went out and the children held the candle lit Christingles. This was followed on Friday, 6 December by the annual Christmas concert. The Songbirds Choir entertained us wonderfully and we all enjoyed the mulled wine and mince pies. It really felt that the festive season had started. (Joan Bond will be submitting a report). The Carol Service was held on the 15th - Revd. Ivor Hughes led the service and gave a talk on the painting of the Adoration of the Shepherds, painted by the Dutch artist, Rembrandt. An excellent service and all left the church uplifted. During the mid-December storms, another tree bough came down in the churchyard, fortunately causing no damage. The school visited for their end of term service, the church was packed with parents and grandparents. The school had compiled an admirable service and outlined the true meaning of the Christmas story. The Christmas Eve Service was held at 10.30am and was led by Revd. Ruth Gillings, her first visit to us and the congregation appreciated her time and ministry. A big vote of thanks must go to the ladies that decorated the church so beautifully; it really had a festive look. The internal damp walls are still being monitored and usual maintenance and upkeep of the building/grounds are in hand.

We now head into a New Year, new challenges, new territories to explore and tough cards to deal with - perhaps even a new vicar! Let

us pray for holding our faith, to have positivity and we may get through.

Perhaps we have more to be thankful for than we realise; that we can find joy and contentment even if living through difficult times. As we enter the year full of unknowns, let us pray that God has plans for us - these we are unaware of - plans of hope and joy for the future.

January services at St Johns are :

5 January - Service of The Word and 19 January - Holy Communion, both at 10.30am

Wishing you all a blessed 2025 filled with fun, happiness and good health.

Jean R





Fresh Starts (This Months Diocesan Letter)

At the end of 1992 we all remember the late Queen describing the year as an Annus Horribilis. Well, in a way 2024 has been an Annus Horribilis for the Church of England. The publication of the Makin Report into the horrific abuse of boys by a trusted lay leader which went unchecked for years and the subsequent resignation of the Archbishop of Canterbury has caused a mirror to be held up to the church. The use and abuse of power, the nature of deference, the lack of transparency of processes, the need for truth and the ability or inability of the church to govern itself have all been called into question.



There is an urgent need for us to look honestly at ourselves afresh, to right the wrongs where we can, and when I say 'we' I mean all of us affiliated to the Church of England. To listen and learn from the victims and survivors of abuse and to support them in whatever way possible; to create greater transparency within our structures local, diocesan and national, and to consider where our own behaviour falls short as we follow the way of Christ.

A New Year creates the opportunity to resolve to change things. To be a church that is honest about its failings and determined to bring to the light things which have been hidden. To talk about hard topics honestly and safely where every voice counts, including safeguarding, human sexuality, our financial obligations, racial justice, and how we include or exclude. Too often as we look back, we can see it is fear that entraps us, and causes us to act in certain ways, to remain silent. So in response as we look ahead let's declare 2025 as the year we begin to banish fear, and pay heed to the Psalmist 'The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I **fear**? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? Psalm 27:1.

+Karen



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6 January 2025,
Feast of the Epiphany

Dear Friends in Christ,

Mindful of the ongoing challenges facing the Church of England, I write to you, the clergy, lay ministers and people of the Church of England on this Feast of the Epiphany, trusting that with God's guidance, we can look to the future with great hopefulness in Christ. The Magi came to the Christ child and their lives were re-directed. Please join me in praying for the renewal of our church as we come again to Christ to seek God's way for God's church.

First, I want to express my deep gratitude for your faithfulness. The unstinting witness and service of parish churches, chaplaincies and other Christian communities brings hope and light, embodying the message of the Gospel, a message of peace and of new beginnings that is needed so urgently in our world as well as our church.

The events of recent weeks, particularly the publication of the Makin Review, have sometimes felt as though we have been separated from the light and hope of Christ. Reading reports of abuse, cover-ups, and institutional failure, we are confronted with a darkness that has harmed so many. To those who have been hurt, I offer my deepest apologies.

These painful reports serve as a stark reminder that victims and survivors are asking for – and deserve – more than words of lament. They call us to action.

Significant progress has been made. Every week, thousands of parish safeguarding officers faithfully attend to their duties in churches across England. They are supported by over 100 professionally qualified safeguarding staff working at both regional and national levels. More than 20,000 clergy, lay ministers, and church officers now undergo safeguarding training as part of their roles. Alongside them, thousands of volunteers who work with children and vulnerable adults complete rigorous vetting through the Disclosure and Barring Service. This essential safeguarding work is so important, and I am profoundly grateful for the dedication and commitment of all involved.

However, there is still more to do in order for us to become a safer and more accountable church, and for our processes to be trusted. Whether it is my decisions that are called into question or anyone's within the church, our safeguarding practices must be subject to independent oversight and scrutiny.

Consequently, the House of Bishops, the Archbishops' Council and the other relevant National Church Institutions are committed to leading this change and are working with the lead bishop for safeguarding and others on several key initiatives, including:

- Bringing forward new proposals on independent safeguarding to the General Synod in February. This would include models for independent oversight, scrutiny, audit, and complaints, as well as for day-to-day operational safeguarding.
- Seeking final approval in February for new clergy conduct measures that will strengthen the Church's disciplinary provisions.
- Ensuring the Church's National Safeguarding Team continues its work alongside Safe Spaces to provide support for anyone wishing to raise safeguarding concerns, while also managing the process for addressing issues raised in recent reports.
- Reviewing the recommendations of recent reviews through the National Safeguarding Steering Group and implementing them with guidance from the independently chaired National Safeguarding Panel.
- Finalising the provisions of the forthcoming Redress Scheme so as to express in tangible ways the Church's heartfelt sorrow and shame for the abuse survivors have suffered.

I want to reach out to all people of goodwill, and especially those who have been consistently and courageously advocating for change in the Church of England and invite support for these proposals.

There are other things to consider this year. We must attend to issues around clergy wellbeing and do all that we can to increase the stipend level. It may also be the time to look again at clergy terms of service to increase accountability (including that of bishops) and possibly ask the question as to whether clergy should become employees.

Moreover, as we remember Archbishop Justin's ministry and his decision to step down as an acknowledgement of the institutional and collective failings of the Church he served so steadfastly, we need to reflect deeply on what we expect from an Archbishop of Canterbury. It is at least four jobs wrapped into one. Spiritual leader of the worldwide Anglican Communion. Spiritual Head of the Church of England. Primate of the Province of Canterbury. Diocesan Bishop.

6 January 2025

We also face decisions about Living in Love and Faith (LLF). I believe we should focus again on the things we have in common, whatever our theological conviction on these issues. In this respect, I am convinced we are united in our desire to ensure that all our churches are places of welcome for everyone regardless of difference, but we also live with profound disagreement about how that welcome should be expressed towards same sex-couples.

Prayers of Love and Faith have become one option. They are now commended for use in existing services. Many same-sex couples in faithful, stable relationships have benefited from this, something I welcome.

Later this year, we will consider introducing bespoke services. With this must go provision for those who cannot support these developments. We must, therefore, properly honour the conscience and theological conviction of clergy, lay ministers and churches who can't use the services and then develop our practice of delegated episcopal ministry for these ministers and communities. In this way we will have that symmetry of provision I have always believed necessary. But since the Makin Review itself warns how tribalism can endanger accountability and make oversight more difficult, we must not do this in a way that further breaks the Body of Christ.

Working closely with Sarah, the Bishop of London, in her role as Dean of the Province of Canterbury, for most of the next year it falls to me to help guide the Church of England through these challenging times. I am hugely grateful for the affirmation and support I have received, though I know and accept that some people have concerns. But aware of my own needs and shortcomings I pledge myself to learn, and I pledge myself to do what I can to steer through the change we need on these important issues and to hold myself accountable, both to the processes we have at the moment and to the new ones we will introduce. I invite the clergy and people of the Church of England to do the same and in your parish and worshipping community to pray for the stability, good governance, and renewal of our Church. I will then look forward to working closely with whomever the Spirit calls to be the next Archbishop of Canterbury.

Alongside this, I will continue the work I have been called to in the North of England, particularly getting on the road to teach about the way of discipleship Jesus offers us in the prayer he taught us. The Lord's Prayer, the prayer of Jesus, is the prayer that takes us right to the heart of God. It teaches us how to live, as well as how to pray. At the moment, we need this more than ever.

Such a renewal of prayer, a new dependence upon God and a new focus on discipleship, living out our Christian vocation each day, will, I believe, help us to become a simpler, humbler and bolder church – and by 'church' I mean here both the universal Church, the bride of Christ and the community of the redeemed, and the thousands of local parishes, chaplaincies and other expressions of Christian community that are the bedrock and lifeblood of the Church of England.

6 January 2025

Finally, in this Epiphany-tide, I am reminded that in Christ God comes to us in the most vulnerable thing we can imagine: a tiny, newborn child. Let us learn from this and ensure that we are putting the needs of the vulnerable first. Let us commit ourselves to becoming a Church that looks and sounds like Jesus: penitent, kind, and in tune with the will and purposes of God, the safer and more accountable Church I believe we are called to be.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen", with a plus sign to its left.

Request from Ukraine

This is an email from a lady in Ukraine. It has been circulated via CATA. If you have any ideas about how we might be able to help or know of anyone else who may be able to, please speak to Mandi A.

Hello. My name is Nataliia. I am from Ukraine (Kharkov - eastern Ukraine). I have a family - my husband, eldest daughter 20 years old and youngest daughter 5 years old. We are now in Ukraine. We believe in our Lord Jesus Christ. We are looking for an opportunity to come to England and are looking for people who could help with the sponsorship program. I have already sent over 300 letters to churches in England this month. We want to be safe. We pray. We are neat and do not have bad habits.

Thank you.

Mead Schools' Living Nativity 2024

On 6th December, a team from Kingfisher, St Thomas' and St John's enjoyed delivering three performances of a Living Nativity to local schools. In the morning, we gave performances to Year 4 and Year 1 at The Mead School; we followed this in the afternoon by a performance to Year 4 at Castle Mead School. The performances are designed to bring to life this familiar account. The audience first met the Angel Gabriel (who had exciting news about her mission) and then a tired and weary Joseph and Mary who were trying to get their newborn son to sleep. Next, we met a group of shepherds (and sheep) who had just been surprised by Gabriel's latest announcement and were about to set off to the stable. Finally, we witnessed the meeting of the Wise Men with a very grumpy Herod. Thankfully, he didn't scare the children (too much). At each stage, the characters were encouraged to recount the Nativity Story by skilful questions from the narrator, who also prompted the children to pose their own questions to each of the sets of characters.

The children had some really good questions, which gave us an opportunity to explore the story further: these included:

- (to Gabriel) "How big is heaven?" and "What does God look like?"
- (to Mary and Joseph) "How did you feel when you couldn't choose the baby's name?"
- (to Herod) "If you've been king for a long time, why don't you let Jesus have a turn?"

We first presented the Living Nativity to the schools in 2018 and have done so every year since ... even in 2020, when the performance was done outside, with the help of a large wooden camel. This was a great opportunity to continue our relationships with both these schools – sharing the gospel with them in an engaging way, as well as helping them to deliver their R.E. curriculum. They have been consistently enthusiastic and grateful about the Living Nativity, and our return this

year was at their request.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the volunteers who gave up their day to play their parts - without them we could not make this happen.

We hope to continue other outreach activities around Easter, and we will be asking for volunteers nearer the time. Keep your eyes open for our calls for help in the Spring!

Stephen and Alice B



The Morning Break Christmas Special



On Friday 13 December 45 of us (guests and volunteers) gathered in the Church Rooms for chat, coffee and delicious homemade Christmas biscuits.

Feeling thoroughly relaxed we adjourned to the Hall for a lunch of homemade soup, and a cold buffet rounded off with coffee and petit fours. We were entertained with a Christmas Quiz (I really must learn the names of Father Christmas' Reindeer as I've been caught out twice this year!). We also had humorous readings about notes left for the milkman (can you remember the days when we did this?) and thank you letters written by a thirteen year old boy. This was all rounded off by a Scripture reading reminding us of "the reason for the season".

Our happy guests left with a goodie bag containing a chocolate Father Christmas, a personalised Christmas card and a copy of the Hope 2024 Christmas book – "Gift of Christmas"

The Morning Break resumes on 10 January at 11 am with our usual coffee, cake and chat and a light lunch of soup and a roll. Sometimes some entertainment thrown in for good measure! If you are free on a Friday morning and would enjoy some company, please come along and give us a try – you will be made very welcome.

We currently run with five teams each with five volunteers but if you could give some time once every five weeks or so and would like to join us, please get in touch with Geoff T or Linda P. Many hands make light work.

We look back in gratitude for all that's happened in 2024, especially new friendships formed and old friendships developed, and look forward to exciting and happy times in 2025.

Geoff T and Linda P



**A GOOD
TIME
WAS
HAD BY
ALL!**



St John's Christmas Concert

On 6th December St John's Church celebrated the coming of Christmas with a superb concert. Luckily, the severe storm that was forecast did not materialise until the early hours of the following morning. We arrived to find the whole church floodlit with alternating coloured iridescent lights, which continued in through the East Window throughout the evening. One lady commented it seemed to make the Angels come to life! We were greeted with welcome notices, mince pies (including an array of gluten free/vegetarian ones). Plus, delectable hot mulled wine which was festooned with fruit. The inside of the Church was a winter wonderland. The tree was covered in twinkling baubles; there were garlands of red and green everywhere; stars; flickering tea lights in every window; plus, Santa's reindeer and enchanting details of tiny creatures in the snow - all showing the magic of the festivities. The wonderful Songbirds Choir sang an amazing selection of harmonies - some quiet and meaningful; others riotous and fun - interspersed with well-chosen festive readings and amusing poems. The music was a blend of the familiar and the new, all beautifully orchestrated. Sometimes the audience joined in with favourite carols from times gone by. In the middle of the concert, we were entertained by the O'Mahoney Ensemble - talented performers - their choices both from home and the tropics were varied and special, uplifting and exhilarating. Altogether, a lovely festive concert, with glimpses of Bible stories; plus laugh-out-loud tales of how things can go wrong with gifts and preparations!

Generous, clever and hardworking, contributors made for a Merry Evening. We left smiling, with delightful melodies to remember, all illustrating the importance and joy of the season.

Joan B

Footnote :

The annual Christmas Concert starts the festive season off well. A massive "thank you" must go to Peter and Beverly W who provided

the illuminations and to Noel for operating the controls. There was a little scary moment as the “jennie” that powered the lighting failed at 4.30 and it was a rush to secure a replacement from Chippenham. However all was well and a replacement sourced. Thanks also goes to the Village Hall for providing the wine for the mulled wine which Jo and Geoff W made so beautifully. The mulled wine and mince pies were very welcome on such a wintery night. In fact, thanks go to everyone who helped in any way to make this evening such a joyful occasion. After expenses were paid, a sum of £100.14 went into the church funds. Thank you.

The churchwarden would like to take this opportunity at the start of the New Year to thank all those who help in any way with the functioning of our small rural church; it is part of our parish and serves our community.

Jean R



Early Primroses at St John's on
20th December

Church Giving 2024

At the PCC meeting (in November) we agreed on our £20k tithe. As ever half of this money is given to international groups, and half to UK and local based charities.

We gave to Flame International and the Kadugli Diocese working in Sudan; Al Kalima (Arab World); Azaria (nee Spencer) and David Pocasangre working in South America; Ugandaid including sponsorship of Omar Pius at the Nile Vocational Institute. Mercy Ships, Tear Fund and the Bible Society were also agreed.

Our 'home' support went to UCB, CPAS, New Wine and Fusion, we supported West Runton Holidays. Many of our young people go to the Broads Cruise led by Jamie where they learn more about teamwork and more about Jesus. They run other ventures for young people and also give grants to those unable to meet the full cost.

More locally we help the Trowbridge Debt Advice Service, Wiltshire Youth for Christ and the Impax group which also subsidises some of the cost of the young people going to Spree. Money is given to A Rocha for Eco Church (we are working towards the bronze award).

Home for Good/Safe Families support families and Storehouse supports homeless and others through the food bank and other initiatives are two local groups that we are able to offer support to

Finally, we support Ruksak 45218 which helps those in our local towns who need it - with clothes, bedding and many other items. Recently I took some things in for the charity shop part of the group's work in Castle Place. As well as seeing the shop Jenny G took me 'behind the scenes' and I was amazed at the stock they have ready to give to those who are referred to them by social services, schools etc. Why not chat to Jenny or Martin who will tell you more about the group and would be delighted to give you a similar guided tour.

Guide Dog Puppy Update

Over the Christmas period, we had reports on all three dogs that we have puppy raised, but no photos this month.

Gucci – is now 3 months in to her training and it is likely that already the people who place the Guide dogs will be looking towards suitable matches for her. The report just before Christmas was that she is doing really well – although still a couple of things to work on.

We were surprised to hear that she is a bit of an escape artist- she manages to get out of her pen to go in to the German Shepherd dog's adjacent pen – Gucci and this German Shepherd dog who I think is named Trinity are best friends. Zoe, their trainer, says they haven't known any other dog to do this – they thought initially that someone had left the pen open but they have since seen her do it!

At the end of this month or early February we will be invited to visit the Exeter centre to see her working

Esselle is still a well loved pet, now loved by the owners' 6 month old daughter – we did actually receive a photo of the dog and the baby but I don't have permission to include it.

Winter – our first Guide Dog puppy is still working with Rowena in North Wales enjoying life and giving Rowena the independence that only comes to the blind and the visually impaired with these beautifully trained dogs.

We have now been without a puppy since beginning of October and look forward to having a new little bundle of fluff, fun and naughtiness in the next month or so.

Ordination Progress Update January 2025

Firstly, blessings and prayers for the New Year and 2025. Thank you so much for the many emails and messages of encouragement I have received, and your prayers.



A bit of a recap: After the 2-day Stage 2 Interview (used to be called a BAP for those of you who remember!) at St Columba's in mid-July, I met with Bishop Stephen on 23rd to hear I was accepted for Ordination training. It was a tight timeline, so I left the South Canonry and walked over Sarum College to confirm my place. I then spent the next 3 weeks doing the Induction Modules on Moodle 🤖 (software online), before a full-on residential week starting on the 18th August at Summer School at Sarum.

At Sarum, every day starts at 7:30am with a Service of Morning Prayer in the chapel or a walk over to the Cathedral for Morning Prayer and Eucharist, then lectures, groups, meals and the day wraps up about 9pm. That was a shock to my system! It's one thing having your quiet time in your PJ's, but quite something else to be up and showered, ready for action with 40 other students.



It's a challenging but joyful 40+ hours a week, one-year fast-track at Sarum. There was time for a 5 mile circular walk to Old Sarum on morning. So far, we've covered Theological Reflection, Pastoral Care and Funeral Ministry, Liturgy and Sacraments and a deep reading of the Bible threads through, including the 1.5 days a month Placement at St Katherine's Holt finishing until 31st May. Each tutor group has to take turns in leading the early morning Services at Sarum, as well as running the bar! The Ordination date is 29 June at Salisbury Cathedral.



Mum, Richard and me
Cley Nature Reserve

Mum learning to needlefelt
Bwylch y Groes

Somehow, we've also managed to visit Mum and Richard in Norfolk and I've taught Mum (89) how to needlefelt. We went bird-watching at Cley and Blakeney and caught up with other family in Norfolk; we also escaped in the caravan to Brecon and Poole (combined with visiting a Garden Church for an assignment); spent days out at Slimbridge with cameras and binoculars; New Wine; spent a week at Christmas with Lisa and Edd in their new home (needs major renovations) in Dolgellau, where we had an air-fryer Christmas dinner and visited some spectacular scenery nearby. We've seen less of Kerry & Ian this year as they juggle work and teenage boys; Wilf now 20 and at Uni, Frank 17 doing A Levels and Ned now 14. Not sure where the time has gone, but you might remember Wilf in his pre-school years, playing the drums with Kevin in church!



And here is the Wright, Milbourn, Greenhalgh clan and the latest edition to our family, Kimberley (on the far right), my lovely God Daughter, baptised at Holy Trinity on 29th August.

It's been a busy 2024, not without its challenges, as I've lost 2 family members, and two dear friends – Celia and Wendy, as well as Rueben, who has been a constant source of inspiration and kindness. I also had a health blip which has just about resolved. The story of Elijah in 1

Kings 19 has really resonated with me this year. Elijah became afraid and exhausted and ran into the wilderness. He was fed there by an angel. When he was strengthened he walked 40 days and nights to Mount Horeb and spent the night in a cave.

God's word came to Elijah and asked what he was doing there. Given that Jesus is the Word (John 1) it seems to me that Jesus himself went to Elijah. Elijah was told to go and stand on the mountain and that the Lord (the Father?) was about to pass by. Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. God said to Elijah, leave the cave, go back and carry on.

I have learned afresh that it's in the silence of the thin places that we experience the profound peace of God and hear their gentle whisper. It's the place where we are transported out of ourselves and where we begin to truly understand who we are and who God is. It would be very easy during this full-on process of Ordination to be swept along by the winds of study, assignments and placements and lose sight of God's calling. Church life can become like that. But at the start of this new year, it's good to remember that in the busyness of travelling around, teaching the disciples and healing people, that Jesus himself constantly sought out the quiet places where he could sit with his Father, and be refreshed and encouraged.

When I can't see the wood for the trees, I know that on the other side, there's a peaceful lake where Jesus is preparing breakfast on the other side, waiting for me (and you) to cross over and share a meal with him, for the next part of the journey.



So bless you, and I look forward to seeing you all soon, Judy

Dear Friends,

You are warmly invited to join us in March next year to explore together the depth of Father God's love for us. Our first 'Encountering the Father's Love' school of 2025



will be hosted again by St Philip and St James' Church in Bath.

The school runs from 17th to 21st March 2025

St Philip and St James
35 Frome Road
Odd Down
Bath
BA2 2QF

The cost will be £120 per person or £210 for a couple (Help may be available for those in financial difficulties).

Tea and coffee will be provided but please bring your own packed lunch.

Please do forward this invitation to friends and family you think may be interested. We have had many testimonies of life-changing encounters as a result of attending these schools!

For more information and to register please visit:

encounteringthefatherslove.org

We hope to see many of you there.

Blessings

David & Faith and the Bath EFL team