

Stranton and Burbank Community

SIGNPOST



**Rooted in God's love
Growing together with Jesus
Branching out in the
Power of the Holy Spirit**

December 2023/January 2024

Advent – Preparing to Celebrate (The musings of a priest)

Advent is a strange time of year. It's a time when the world around us is already celebrating (and has been for many weeks) the festive season. But for the church, this is just the prelude to the party. We know it's coming, and we are gearing up for it – a little bit like the bridesmaids watching and waiting for the bridegroom to arrive in our Gospel reading from just a few weeks ago on Remembrance Sunday. All around us, the decorations are going up in celebration of Christmas – a festival that sadly fewer and fewer people around us truly understand the meaning of.

For us, Advent is a time of preparation, a time of waiting, and a time of expectation. We gather together and revisit the stories of the nativity that we know so well, the prophecies that foretell of the coming of Christ, and the people that paved the way, playing such a huge part in the story (Mary and Joseph, John the Baptist, Elizabeth, Zechariah, and of course the Angel Gabriel). During Advent, we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Saviour.

During Advent, we decorate the church quite simply – we have our Christmas Tree (a relatively modern addition to the Christmas traditions), we have our Advent Wreath, with the four candles (not fork handles!), and then we decorate our churches with greenery rather than with flowers in full bloom. Why do we do this? Because we wait in expectation of the celebration. The party hasn't started yet.

There are many different traditions around Advent and Christmas and we see this in the Advent Wreath. The candles representing the Patriarchs, the Prophets, John the Baptist, and the Virgin Mary, with the central fifth candle, the one we light on Christmas Day, representing Christ himself. At least that's how I know them. There are other meanings attributed to the candles – perhaps you know them as representing Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. We might see different colours being used. There might be four red candles with one white (or gold) one, or maybe we'll see three purple candles with one pink one and then a white or gold candle in the centre of the wreath. Incidentally, the pink one is used on the third Sunday of Advent (Gaudette Sunday) rather than the fourth Sunday which many people assume because of the fourth Sunday links with the Virgin Mary

But Christmas is when the party truly begins. Christmas is when we can finally celebrate the birth of Christ, the fulfilling of a promise, of prophecies foretold. Christmas is traditionally when the flowers, blooming in all their glory, come back into the church – when the time of preparation, waiting and expectation is over, and we can finally celebrate the birth of Christ, our Saviour, born on Christmas Day.

Grace, peace, and a very happy Christmas to you all.

John

From the Home Front



I recently made a trip to Surrey to visit friends. On the Saturday morning we set off around the M25 to visit Eltham Palace. It was a cold but bright autumn day. Eltham Palace was where Henry VIII and his siblings

grew up and he spent parts of his reign. The house and medieval hall fell into ruin over the years but in 1933 the wealthy American couple Stephen and Virginia Courtauld, leased the house and rebuilt it. They spared no expense to restore the Medieval Hall to its former splendour and remodelled the Palace into an art deco ultra-modern party house. I found the buildings amazing, but very thought provoking.

To walk across the entrance bridge where Henry VIII had walked made me feel a very small speck in history. This king was all powerful and ruthless as a ruler. Nonetheless his selfish actions led to the founding of the Church of England, which is the root of my Christian faith and beliefs. God brings good out of bad. Touring the house the opulence and luxury of the rooms was breathtaking. So much inherited wealth! My Christian socialist ideals were battling with my appreciation of beauty and history. However what was once the preserve of the rich was now accessible to everyone!



As we walked past the Medieval Hall we looked across the ancient walls and restored gardens to the most incredibly clear view of the City of London skyline! We easily spotted The Shard, The Gherkin, The Walkie-Talkie and Docklands financial area. Once again conspicuous wealth, often gained by greed and desire for riches, possessions and power, with no thought of others.

Thomas More, Lord High Chancellor for Henry VIII, visited Henry VII and Henry VIII at Eltham Palace. He was a man recognised for his intelligence, impartiality and wisdom. As a teenager I watched the film 'A Man for All Seasons', about More's life and death. It had a real impact on me. I loved the costumes and buildings and the political and religious intrigue, but I clearly recall the integrity and faith which Thomas More showed throughout the film and which led to his death. A quotation from the film which embedded itself in my mind still resonates "...it profit a man nothing to give his soul for the whole world..." . As a knowledge hungry youngster I discovered this was from the Bible – Mark 8 v36 'For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?'. It made me consider not only this life but eternal life and salvation. Wealth is worthless if it only benefits the few, possessions cannot go with us after death, power is transient and fraught with danger and challenges from others desiring the same. But love is free to give and receive; compassion costs nothing but is valued highly, hope is enduring and lifesaving – a lifebelt, sustenance for the desperate, often just a word or a small action is enough to ignite a flame of hope!

Remember nothing in this world is worth gaining if you lose your soul to acquire it.....

J.A.R.

Searching for Answers

Are you searching for answers? Do you want to know more? Would you like to explore Baptism, or Confirmation, or just want to know more about the Christian Faith?

We are looking to run a course in the new year looking at the Christian Faith, who Jesus is and what he did for us, what it means to be a part of the church, and what is significant about Baptism and Confirmation for those who are keen to know more.

This will be open to anyone across the Central Group and we will look for opportunities for Baptism (across our churches) and Confirmation (at a service within the Deanery) in the coming months too. Bishop Sarah has already been in touch to see what dates the Deanery would like for confirmations next year.

If this is you, then please do get in touch with me, Revd John, revdjohnbell@stranton-church.org.uk / revdjohnbell@gmail.com or call 01429 756309 and leave me a message and I will let you know what we are doing and when. It may be a daytime group, it may be an evening group, or we may run both depending on who and how many want to join us.

I look forward to journeying with you in the new year.

John

Panning for gold!

I'm sure you have heard the quote 'Anyone can find the dirt in a person, be the one who finds the gold!' I started to think of this quote this morning and a picture came to mind of gold panning.

To pan for gold takes patience, you take your pan, you put it in the sandy water, not over filling it. Then you lift it out and you discard the big rocks that may have come into your bowl. You take any clumps of mud out and then you start to shake your pan, you sift through the sand until you see tiny speckles of gold.

We have a daily choice as we go through our lives to look for the speckles of gold in people we meet. In the places we work. In the places we worship! People can rub us up the wrong way, they can hurt us with their words or actions. We can choose to see the good or focus on the dirt!!

If we focus on the dirt in someone, that is all we will see. If we look for the gold, it will outshine the dirt. When we find the gold we then bring that gold out of them! How? By encouraging them, by building them up. When we do this that gold shines brighter.

"Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." 1 Thessalonians 5:11 NIV

A Prayer

Loving Jesus please help us to see people the way you see them.

May we always look for the gold and not the dirt.

Give us more grace so that we celebrate people instead of condemning them.

In your powerful name

Amen

Ang Hall

Calling all Carol Singers.

This year we're hoping to celebrate Christmas with a Group-wide joint "Carols by Candlelight", in Stranton on Sunday 17th



December. So, anyone and everyone who enjoys singing or playing an instrument would be very welcome to join the ensemble. **Rehearsals**

These will be on **Thursday 7th & Thursday 14th December at 7.00pm** in Stranton Church.

If you've any suggestions of new songs or carols to try, let's hear them.

Whether you've any previous experience or just fancy singing or playing with others and you'd like to participate in what will be a joyous event, then please let me know or just come along at these times if you feel you would like to join in.

Andrew Rogers

m. 07831 314375

energy.education@btconnect.com

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year Quiz

best done with a dram and a mince pie

- M** Which M was a gift?
- E** Which E means God with us?
- R** Which R describes David's city?
- R** Complete the lyric 'God _____ ye merry gentleman'
- Y** Which Y describes Christmas time?

- C** What C was ordered?
- H** Who was known as The Great?
- R** Which R ruled and appointed a puppet king of Judea?
- I** Which I were slaughtered at the first Christmas?
- S** Which S has feast on December 26th?
- T** What T was why the C was done?
- M** What M was a wise man?
- A** Who ordered the C?
- S** What S was the baby Jesus wrapped in?

- A** Which A came from the realms of glory?
- N** Where the Holy Family ended up living?
- D** What little animal carried Mary?

- A** What A succeeded King H

- H** Complete the carol '_____ the _____ angels sing'
- A** What is the name of a fountain in the carol 'Good King W.....'
- P** Complete the lyric 'Come they told me _____',
- P** Complete the lyric 'Where to certain P_____ shepherds'
- Y** Which carol begins 'Y_ Patriarchs and ancient sires'

- N** What N was silent?
- E** What E happens just after Christmas?
- W** Which W was King of Bohemia?

- Y** Which carol begins with 'Y_____ with exultation'?
- E** Complete the lyric 'Sing choirs of Angels sing in E_____'
- A** Complete the line 'A_____ in a manger'
- R** What carol begins 'R_____ R_____ , this happy morn'?

Junior and Anchor Remembrance Day Display in Church



The display is now complete



Remembrance Activities

Our Anchor and Junior Boys coloured in picture of The Great War and they were set on Remembrance Flags all of which were displayed in church.

The Juniors were visited by Captain Wells of the TA who spoke about the meaning of Remembrance Day.

The Company Lads worked together in a search about The Great War and then applied that knowledge in a tough crossword.

Christmas Carol Service

This year we are holding our Christmas Carol Service on Friday 15th December at 7.00pm in Stranton Church.

The Anchor Boys are singing the carol Little Donkey, The Juniors are playing carols on handbells and the Company Lads are going to play boom whackers.

Christmas Activities

As ever, December is a very busy month, on Friday 1st December the Company Lads are doing a charity wrap.

On the 2nd December it is THE Christmas Fayre (The Best) at St Matthew's CC and bargains galore are guaranteed from 09.30 - 12noon admission is £1.00 and children go free

Plus each section will have Christmas crafts and activities to enjoy.

The Future

In 2024 we hope to start a band and plan for Camp and I would like to sign off by wishing all our friends and supporters a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

George Bainbridge
07816445829

Tonight some of our company lads represented us in the first round of the BB Masterteam Quiz Competition. Despite a valiant effort, it wasn't meant to be for us this year. However we'd like to say a big well done to all the teams who took part in the first round, and especially the [17th Teesside Boys' Brigade](#) for placing second and hosting us perfectly and for the [TheEighth Hartlepool BoysBrigade](#) for coming first.



Communities of Hope Hamper Appeal

Communities of Hope are again planning to make up and distribute Christmas hampers to families in need in our parishes. Cheques payable to "Stranton PCC" - mark on back "Communities of Hope", or send online to Stranton PCC Account 20 - 82 -18 10146501 with reference "CoH"). Cash donations in a sealed envelope marked "Hampers". All donations will be very much appreciated.

Any questions or offers to help pack the hampers please speak to Hayley Liversidge or Emma Cain or email: Emma@hartlepoolcoh.co.uk
Hayley@hartlepoolcoh.co.uk

Communities of Hope

(Help needed – speak to one of the team to find out how you can support us)

- Sid's Kitchen - Monday 10.00am -12.00pm at St Matthew's
- Stranton Toddlers - Tuesday 9.00am -11.00am at St Matthew's
- A Bit of God Time - Tuesday 1.00pm -2:30 pm at St Aidan's
- Friday Drop In - Friday 10.00am - 12.00pm at St Aidan's

Autumn Gardening News



This is going to be an attempt to fill some of the gap left by the loss of Ann's monthly article about her garden and assorted wildlife, especially the birds. This particular effort will, however, be seasonal rather than monthly and will be limited by my vastly inferior knowledge in the wildlife department. I will do what I can!

So, to Autumn, "season of mists and mellow fruitfulness", when the main event is, of course, the Autumnal hues of the trees and bushes, with their multi-coloured leaves and the ethereal quality of the ensuing bare branches. In my own garden, the silver birch tree that we planted some 25 years ago, is as beautiful when it drops its leaves as it is in Summer. When the leaves have gone, the stark, white trunk and branches become the star of the show.

I was lucky enough in October to spend a few days in Perthshire, where against a backdrop of mountains, lochs, rivers and waterfalls, the trees were putting on their finest performance. One of the sights I love to see is the reflections of trees mirrored in rivers and lakes and I was not disappointed. This happened twice during our visit, once at a famous beauty spot near Pitlochry called 'Queen's View' (named after Queen Isabella who married Robert the Bruce in the 14th century), where there are panoramic views over Loch Tummel and again whilst walking along the River Garry near Killiecrankie.

Of course, the wonderful thing about Autumn in terms of plants and trees is that we know that, when they die back, most of them will return, looking like new, a few months later. It may not be a good idea to question God's creation in a church magazine (please don't cancel me!), but I sometimes wish He had designed us to send out new shoots and look lovelier than ever when spring arrives too.

Moving swiftly on, I have noticed that there have been species of birds in my garden recently that I have not seen for some time – our occasional visiting robin has returned and a pair of resident blackbirds that have become so familiar that I have named them (Janet and John) have been much in evidence. We have also played host to a pair of thrushes, which I know are much rarer nowadays and we have not had the pleasure of their company for several years. Thankfully the sparrow hawk which was hovering over our garden in the Summer seems to have gone elsewhere. I had a rare opportunity one day to study it for several minutes while it sat completely still on our bird bath, no doubt waiting for its dinner to appear, and I felt very conflicted at the magnificence of this beautiful creature that inflicts such suffering on its more vulnerable victims. But that sounds depressingly familiar in relation to our own species, so who am I to talk? To finish (yes, we're nearly there), our God deserves so many thanks for the beauty of the natural world and it is a great pleasure and a privilege to have my own little plot where I can plant and look after and enjoy what He has provided. Thank you, God, for the grass, the trees, the plants and flowers and for all the creatures that share our gardens with us. Amen.

Pam Stockton

Living in Love and Faith

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this:

'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.

*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, with all your mind,
and with all your strength.'*

The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'

There is no other commandment greater than these.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

This is a summary of the ten commandments, words we often use in our Communion services. Words that tell us the most important things we can do are love God with all that we are and love our neighbours as ourselves. When Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan, he was teaching his disciples (including us) that our neighbour isn't just the person who shares the same views as us, lives in the same street as us, goes to the same church as us, or anything else for that matter. He was teaching that we are all loved by God, no matter who we are, where we're from, or what we have and haven't done with our lives. He was teaching that we should treat everyone in the way we ourselves want to be treated. He teaches us to welcome everyone with open arms, no questions, no judgements.

Over the last few years, the Church of England has been in a period of consultation across the breadth and depth of its member churches – with discussions involving both clergy and lay members alike. This process has been known as Living in Love and Faith, which set out “to inspire people to think more deeply about what it means to be human and to live in love and faith with one another. It tackles the tough questions and the divisions among Christians about what it means to be holy in a society in which understandings and practices of gender, sexuality, and marriage continue to change.”

Last week (as I write this on 20th November), General Synod voted to allow the blessing of same sex marriages on a trial basis. This vote has been received with joy by some members of the church, and with anger and frustration by others. Some are glad to see progress being made, others think that this has not gone far enough, and others still think this 'progress' is a departure from the teachings of the church.

The views across the Church of England differ widely, and I'm sure we will all hold different views to some of the other members of our own churches and across our group, deanery and diocese.

In the new year, I would like to provide the opportunity for us to look at this, perhaps by running the Living in Love and Faith Course, across the Group, so that we can explore this in a safe space. You can find many more resources at www.churchofengland.org/LLF but in the meantime, whatever your thoughts and views on this, I just simply want to encourage us all to hold each other in grace and peace, seeking to love each other as ourselves.

John

Update on Church giving

Firstly many thanks to all who support Stranton Church through regular giving, whether through the (recommended) Parish Giving Scheme, bank standing orders, or weekly Loyalty Scheme envelopes. The sad loss this year of some of our most generous regular members has however had an impact on our day to day finances and we would encourage all to pray regularly about our giving and review our own response to God's great generosity to us in committing our time, talents and finances to His service.

We have now installed a bank card reader at the back of Church, in recognition that fewer people carry cash these days. While we believe this will provide a particularly appropriate means to seek support from occasional visitors and congregations such as at Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals it is also available for general use. The machine prompts for particular amounts but the donation amounts can be adjusted to be as great or small as needed: For those who like paying for things using Smartphone "Apps" - we even have a "QR" code which you can scan to then enable you to make direct payments. See below!



If you have any questions on giving, or wish to commence a regular giving plan do please ask the Treasurer David Craig or one of the churchwardens.

David Craig

Four Week Advent Course for the Central Group

Looking at our Advent Journey through Frank Capra's film
'It's a Wonderful Life'.

It is being held in

**St Columba's Church, on Thursday 30th November and 7th, 14th, 21st
December, starting 7:00 pm.**

You do not have to come to the first session to be able to follow the course. PLUS: If you would like to see the film without any breaks to help you remember it before you come to the course.

We will be showing it in full on **Thursday November 23rd**
in St Columba's Church starting at 7:00 pm.



Ward Jackson CE Primary School Update

Last week for enrichment time, our Ward Jackson Park group learned how to read maps. We followed our maps to find different parts of the park. Our final task was to find the playground. As you can see, it was worth the effort! 🌍



KS2 have had a simply amazing day of STEM with [Hyett Education](#). Pupils and even staff too were really engaged in Physical Computing and programming robots to achieve an end goal! We've collected nuclear waste and shifted plastic from the oceans. Huge thank you for your time today, you've helped to raise the profile of STEM for every child involved.



Our Year 3 children had a great afternoon developing their sports skills. A highlight was definitely balloon tennis! We cannot wait for our next sports event.



**Are you planning a special celebration or party
and looking for a venue?**

**Have you thought about
St Matthew's Community Centre?**

**We have 2 large halls which can accommodate up to 140 persons
as well as 1 large and 2 small kitchens for your catering needs.**

**One hall is even big enough to house a bouncy castle –
ideal for children's parties.**

**We also have our own private car park and some outdoor space if you fancy
al fresco fun for your guests.**

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Trish Playfor (01429 894006) during office hours,
or Carol Laud (01429 290290)
and we will be happy to help.**

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Communities of Hope Children & Families Work

The children and families work is flourishing and busy. Here is just a flavour of what has been happening.

Recently Stranton Primary School Y1 and Y2 came to visit All Saints to look at what they could find in a church and find out a little bit more about Christianity. Y2 and Y3 from Kingsley Primary came for the same reason and while they were visiting produced the most lovely Remembrance Day banner that was in church for the Remembrance Day Service.



Shortly Ward Jackson Primary School Y2 and Y3 children will be visiting All Saints to look at the Trinity. It will be wonderful to discuss this with them.

In addition another school RE lunch club has started, this time at Stranton Primary School, by their request. We have had 2 sessions so far and it's been lovely to share Bible stories and thoughts with the children.

Plenty is going on for Christmas. For example Stranton Primary School's Christmas Celebration, Jesmond Garden's Primary School Christmas Celebration, St Aidan's Primary Schools Christingle Service as well as Toddlers Christmas Party to name a few.

For the first time there will be a Christmas Tree Festival for families at St Columba's Dryden Road on Thursday 14th December - Christmas trees, carols and of course mince pies.

All in all a busy and fruitful time. Many thanks for your continued prayer support and especially to the volunteers without whom the ministry wouldn't happen.

Blessings

Hayley Liversidge

Boys Brigade Christmas Carol Service

Our Christmas Carol service is at Stranton Church on Friday 15th December at 7.00pm, where each section will play their part to remember the Christmas story.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year Quiz Answers

M Which M was a gift?	Myrrh
E Which E means God with us?	Emmanuel
R Which R describes David's city?	Royal
R Complete the lyric God _____ ye merry gentleman	Rest
Y Which Y describes Christmas time?	Yuletide
C What C was ordered?	Census
H Who was known as The Great?	Herod
R Which R ruled and appointed a puppet king of Judea?	Rome
I Which I were slaughtered at the first Christmas	The innocents
S Which S has feast on December 26th?	Stephen
T What T was why the C was done?	Taxation
M What M was a wise man?	Melchior
A Who ordered the C?	Augustus
S What S was the baby Jesus wrapped in?	Swaddling clothes
A Which A came from the realms of glory?	Angels
N Where the Holy Family ended up living?	Nazareth
D What 'little' animal carried Mary?	Donkey
A What A succeeded King H?	Antipas
H Complete the carol '_____ the _____ angels sing'	Hark the Herald
A What is the name of a fountain in the carol Good King W?	St Agnes
P Complete the lyric 'Come they told me _____'	Pa rum pa pum pum
P Complete the lyric 'Where to certain P_____ shepherds'	Poor
Y Which carol begins 'Y_ Patriarchs and ancient sires'?	Ye
N What N was silent?	Night
E What E happens just after Christmas?	Epiphany
W Which W was king of Bohemia?	Wenceslas
Y Which carol begins with 'Y_____ with exultation'?	Yesterday
E Complete the lyric 'Sing choirs of Angels, sing in ___?'	Exultation
A Complete the line '_____ in a manger'	Away
R What carol begins 'R_____ R_____, this happy morn'?	Rejoice, Rejoice

4th Hartlepool Boys Brigade Christmas Fayre

Saturday 2nd December from 9.30am-12noon at St Matthew's Community Centre, Elwick Rd. Admission £1.00 (children go free) Boys Brigade is collecting bric-a-brac and prizes for the tombola stall (contact George Bainbridge 07816 445829). The Social team will be running a 'Lucky Dip / Bottle' Stall in order to raise funds for parish social events.



Stranton Brownies and Guides

One of our members has been selected to represent Girlguiding in Norway in July 2024.

To help her raise the money for this trip.

We are having a fun night where throwing a dice will help you create your Christmas tree

On
Monday 4th December

at
6.30 – 8.00 pm

St Matthew's Community Centre

Please come to support Iona, raise the money required for this trip, where she will represent our units, Hartlepool and North East England Girlguiding

Steph Boyd's Pilgrimage Walk

I want to say a big thank you to everyone who sponsored me for the pilgrimage walk to Santiago de Compostela in September 23. We raised £1,514 for Headlight, a bereavement charity.



God's presence

Exodus chapter 33, verse 14 reads 'My presence will go with you and I will give you rest.'

Moses needed to know from God, who was going to go with him to lead the people. He knew he couldn't do it alone. Moses then went on to say "I will only go if you come with me". He knew that there was absolutely no point to go ahead in this great mission of leading the children of Israel out of Egypt, if God wasn't with him. Moses could not have done all that he did without the presence of God.

This week I was reminded of the wedding in Cana. Jesus was attending the wedding and all was well until the wine ran out. Jesus didn't get flustered. He didn't panic. He just asked the servants to go fill jars of water. He chose to use the people in front of Him, but it was His presence that changed the water into wine. Mary, Jesus' mother, knew that Jesus' presence at that wedding was enough.

Jesus wants and desires for us to come to Him, to be intimate with Him. He wants us to invite Him to walk with us through our daily lives.

When we belong to Jesus, we have the Holy Spirit within us so wherever we go, we change the atmosphere. We change those around us, because the presence of God is in us and with us.

The same God, who led the children of Israel out of Egypt. The same God who parted the Red Sea. The same God who provided manna and quail in the wilderness is the same God, today!

He wants you to know that He is more than enough for you right now. He wants you to know today that His presence will go with you wherever you go. Today, ask Him to show you His presence. Be aware of His closeness.

Take time to experience Jesus' closeness today. Read this passage of the wedding in Cana in John Ch 2 slowly and picture yourself at the wedding, picture yourself standing next to Jesus. What does His physical presence feel like? Notice how it feels to be so close to Him? What do you notice about the atmosphere around you?

'On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." "Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."

You can ask Jesus to show you His presence as you walk through your day today. Invite Him into every situation or circumstance. I hope you will see things differently and will look at your situation differently.

A blessing

I bless your eyes to see Jesus so close to you.

I bless your mind with His peace.

I bless your heart to know Jesus' abundant love.

I bless your body that you will know His healing touch.

I bless your homes that every room will be flooded with His light.

Ang Hall

Open Doors report and prayer request, October 2023.

China has recently sent 600 North Korean refugees back to North Korea, where they face extreme danger. This 'repatriation' goes against the appeals of multiple international rights bodies, and is likely to lead to the refugees facing torture and imprisonment in appalling conditions. Timothy Cho* – an escapee from North Korea and an Open Doors spokesperson – believes that China has 'cynically' used the world's focus on Israel and Gaza as an opportunity to make the move without attracting attention. Hundreds more North Koreans are in danger.

"I have personally experienced repatriation once, and I am familiar with the process of imprisonment, torture and punishment that follows," Timothy Cho writes in a letter to MPs, in his role as Co-Secretariat of the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group on North Korea, exhorting them to raise the matter in Parliament. "I urge you to encourage the British Government to initiate a dialogue with Chinese authorities to facilitate the deportation of the remaining North Korean refugees to third countries, rather than sending them back to North Korea.

"Even if we can rescue just one person through these diplomatic efforts in collaboration with the South Korean government, it would be a significant achievement." "Many of these refugees are Christians, women, and children, including recently born babies," writes Timothy Cho. "The punishment for anyone that has been associated with Christian churches or missionaries while they were in China are likely to be dealt with particularly severely, indeed many are likely to be executed."

Open Doors ranks North Korea as the place where Christians face the worst persecution for their faith. If discovered by the authorities, believers are either sent to labour camps as political prisoners where the conditions are atrocious, or killed on the spot – and their families will share their fate as well. Christians have absolutely no freedom. Even having spoken with missionaries is a grave danger to those being sent back to North Korea.

Timothy Cho escaped from North Korea in his teens, after being repatriated once – facing imprisonment and brutal interrogation on his return. After a second escape, where he was again arrested in China, he was granted deportation to the Philippines after missionaries advocated for his safe release.

"I was so lucky. If I had been returned to North Korea again, I would not be alive today. That's a fate I want to spare my brothers and sisters, currently in prison in China."

This is not the first time that China has repatriated North Koreans who have fled across their northern border, however numbers have been far lower in previous years.

"It's too late for those six hundreds who've already been repatriated," adds Timothy Cho. "What we can do is to urge the Chinese authorities to deport any more escapees to a third country, such as the Philippines. This will ultimately allow them to reach South Korea safely."

Timothy hopes that a Backbench Business Debate can be heard in the Commons. Please pray that this happens and is effective – and pray for all North Korean refugees who've been repatriated, and those under threat of it.

Please pray for:

North Koreans to be kept from harm, and for Christians who've been repatriated to know God's loving comfort and sovereign protection.

That the UK Parliament will act wisely and compassionately in response to these actions.

Join with North Korea's Christians in praying for religious freedom to come to the nation, and light to overcome the darkness.

*Name changed for security reason

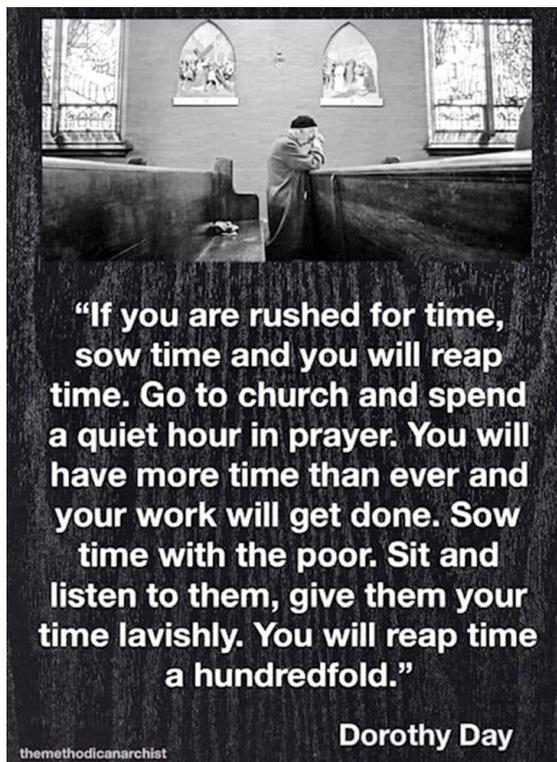
Mary Tones

Living with Loss Group – Company, Understanding and a Cuppa



Come and join us on Saturday 16th December in St Matthew's Community Centre 10:30 to 11.30am. Bring a friend.

Someone you know is preparing for their first Christmas without their husband, wife, mother, father, brother, sister, daughter or son. Others are preparing for their last. Regardless of the specifics, remember that this season of joy is often times a season of sorrow for many. Be kind, be generous, give love, give help; if nothing else, just don't give people a hard time.



“If you are rushed for time, sow time and you will reap time. Go to church and spend a quiet hour in prayer. You will have more time than ever and your work will get done. Sow time with the poor. Sit and listen to them, give them your time lavishly. You will reap time a hundredfold.”

Dorothy Day

themethodicanarchist

Help Needed with Children's Ministry

On Sundays, we are looking to expand our Children's Ministry to two separate groups as our numbers grow, so we are keen to grow the team, and need both leaders and helpers. We are also seeking people to support Stranton Toddlers (Tuesday Morning), Youth Fellowship, and Messy Church. If you would like to be involved in any of these activities (as leaders or helpers) then please contact Revd John. All volunteers will be subject to the usual Safer Recruitment process, but please don't let this put you off.

October Kilimatinde update from Jill Barrett

Stranton church has been supporting the Kilimatinde Trust since 1993 when Bishop Alpha Mohamed from the Rift Valley visited, and Reverend Stephen Taylor who was Vicar of Stranton Church welcomed him, took a team to visit the village and founded the Kilimatinde Trust in 1999. It's with thanks to Stranton Church for the sustained commitment that I'm sending this report

I spent three weeks re-engaging with Kilimatinde village and its organisations, particularly its hospital services, and community health facilities.

My overall impression was of a happy thriving village where people want to live. The community seems to be made up of people who have worked in the schools, government primary and secondary, plus St John's school, and Kilimatinde Hospital. There are students from St John's Seminary either studying or working. Some people have businesses, some work in shambas, or farms and of those who have retired who remain in the village

St John's is an English-speaking primary and secondary boarding school. The school fees are high and for those who struggle with books, uniforms or fees, school sponsorship helps, especially for children around Kilimatinde

Rev Cannon Ngassa received the Teddy Bear pattern from the Bear Ladies and is encouraging the sewing department in the school to make Kilimatinde Bears to raise funds to help support education in St John's.

My main reason for visiting Kilimatinde this time was to re-engage with the hospital. Kilimatinde Hospital is under the Diocese of the Rift Valley, which is responsible for the Hospital buildings and infrastructure, maintenance and ancillary staff, along with some medical and nursing staff, who are not covered by government provision. The government supply and pay for medical and nursing staff for those services which should be free. Running the hospital is very expensive, and the Kilimatinde Trust and other supporters assist. As a Trust we are in regular contact; Stephen Taylor, who founded the Trust, has regular contact with the Diocese and the Bishop. I am a nurse attached to the Trust and have been visiting for 10 years now with a particular focus on the hospital and its health systems, including the Burns Unit which offers the first 10 days of treatment free. This life saving initiative, was opened in 2018. The Trust allocates £3000 per year for this which has been enough to ensure that everyone is able to be treated in the first stages which saves life and prevents complications.

Kilimatinde Hospital has set its own 4 year health plan which aligns itself to the health care improvement plans of the government, for the benefit of the population it serves. Long term health conditions which were once

rare in third world countries are now becoming common in Tanzania. The hospital seeks to open a diabetic clinic, heart failure clinic and a community pharmacy, plus dentistry.

There are bungalows owned by the hospital which are occupied by hospital staff while they are working in Kilimatinde. The Kilimatinde Trust uses one to provide accommodation to medical students who spend elective placements at the hospital. This bungalow has running water in the bathroom and a flushing toilet.

Please pray for the staff and patients of Kilimatinde Hospital, many of the patients are unable to pay for hospital treatment and require support. Because of its faith based service it never turns anyone away, it's a remarkable hospital based on Christian foundations.

Recent additions to service are the appointment of a radiographer. The X Ray has been used during my visit. Also the appointment of a dentist (government funded). Maternity services now have an ultrasound machine which provides a safer environment for women and babies. Further plans for improvement include an improvement to anaesthetic services as the current anaesthetic machine is not fit for purpose and requires replacing.

Kilimatinde Hospital 1st year plan in response to government's health strategic plan Jan 23-24:-

The overall aim is to increase the number of people using the hospital by developing services people need.

Re-establish the nutrition project hospital garden.

Open a community pharmacy, which will enable people to get what they need on site and reduce lost revenue .

To improve safety of patients by increasing it oxygen availability

Supporters of the Kilimatinde Trust are embarking on some fundraising initiatives. If you would like to find out more about the Kilimatinde Trust please visit www.kilimatindetrust.org.uk . More detailed reports about her visit can be obtained by contacting Jill Barrett.



Christmas General Knowledge Quiz

1. Where is it always winter and never Christmas?
2. What was Scrooge's Christian name?
3. Who was Scrooge's partner?
4. How many years had Scrooge's partner been dead?
5. Which pantomime features a Lord Mayor of London?
6. Which pantomime features Dandini?
7. Which pantomime features Robin Hood?
8. What was first recorded being sent in 1611?
9. What do the people of Oslo provide London with every year?
10. Who sang White Christmas in the movie Holiday Inn?
11. Who sang Blue Christmas?
12. Who is Slade's main singer?
13. Guess the song - M_____ and W_____
14. The song 'Pipes of Peace', recalls what historic act?
15. Merry Xmas War is Over is about which war?

Congratulations to Peter and Jeni Hart

On being awarded Hartlepool Retailer of the Year 2023
for Gamers-At-Hart Shop.



An Augustus Plan

To him it was just another task
Seeing what he could spend
By collecting everyone's tax.
The great Augustus needed to know
So his riches would continue to grow.

An ordinary decision made a long time ago
The result of which, Augustus wouldn't
know.
Yet from this great emperor's request
A couple's life plan was put to the test.

They travelled a rough journey
To their ancestral home town,
Like so many other of their brethren
They all ended up in a packed Bethlehem.

No room at the inn for his wife
despite expecting his first born.
Just a manger and stable would do
Followed by a visitor or two.

Shepherds were there, first on the scene,
Amazed and startled at what they saw
Just as the angel correctly had predicted
There joy was so natural and unrestricted.

Then wise men from afar
Arrived after following a star,
Offering gifts to the new born king,
Quickly leaving after a warning.

The Holy Family took flight
Leaving for Egypt quick as they could
To get out of evil Herod's sight,
Returning to Nazareth when it was alright.

Who would have thought an Emperor's
task
Would become a story like him. Augustus
Although a greater plan had been made
So that all who follow may be saved.

St Luke's Cheese & Wine and Carols by Candlelight
Is on **Friday 8th December at 6:30 pm** in St Luke's Parish Centre.
Tickets cost £5 and are available in church.

Christmas General Knowledge Quiz Answers

- | | |
|---|----------------------|
| 1. Where is it always winter and never Christmas? | Narnia |
| 2. What was Scrooge's Christian name? | Ebenezer |
| 3. Who was Scrooge's partner? | Marley |
| 4. How many years had Scrooge's partner been dead? | 7 years |
| 5. Which pantomime features a Lord Mayor of London? | Dick Whittington |
| 6. Which pantomime features Dandini? | Cinderella |
| 7. Which pantomime features Robin Hood? | Babes in the Wood |
| 8. What was first recorded being sent in 1611? | Christmas card |
| 9. What do the people of Oslo provide London with every year? | Christmas tree |
| 10. Who sang White Christmas in the movie Holiday Inn? | Bing Crosby |
| 11. Who sang Blue Christmas? | Elvis |
| 12. Who is Slade's main singer? (or should that be shouter) | Noddy Holder |
| 13. Guess the song - M_____ and W_____. | Mistletoe & Wine |
| 14. The song 'Pipes of Peace', recalls what historic act? WW1 | 1914 Christmas Truce |
| 15. Merry Xmas War is Over is about which war? | Vietnam |

CELEBRATE!

HAPPY BIRTHDAY! to

December

Diane Greenwood
Pam Hutchinson
Catherine Padgett
Robbie Spoors
Ella Spoors
Lilly Spoors
Chloe Thornhill
Mary Tones
Mark Tones
Josie Watson

January

Tyler Anderson
Sophie Bell
Frances Boyd
Michelle Butler
David Craig
Tony Grosvenor
Daniel Hart
Doreen Lathan
Trish Playfor
Bartholomew Sanders
Jessica Sanders
Isabel Spoors
Luke Tones



Wedding Anniversary December

Rob & Michelle Butler



Congratulations to

Vicky Harkness
On the birth of James Malcolm
On 16th October

If you have something to celebrate we would love to share it - email
admin@stranton-church.org.uk
or phone 894006.

All entries to be in by the 16th of the month.

Dates for the Diary Dates for December / January

2 nd	Dec	Boys Brigade Christmas Fayre	9.30am-12noon	St Matthew's CC
30 th	Nov & Dec	7 th , 14 th , 21 st Advent Course	7:00 pm	St Columba's
7 th	Dec	Joint choir rehearsal	7.00pm	Stranton Church
8 th	Dec	Cheese & Wine and Carols	6.30pm	St Luke's Centre
10 th	Dec	Christingle	4.00pm	Stranton Church
14 th	Dec	Joint choir rehearsal	7.00pm	Stranton Church
15 th	Dec	Boys Brigade Carol Service	7.00pm	Stranton Church
16 th	Dec	Living with Loss Group	10.30-11.30am	St Matthew's CC
17 th	Dec	Nativity	11.00am	Stranton Church
17 th	Dec	Carols by Candlelight Joint Service	6.00pm	Stranton Church
19 th	Dec	Ward Jackson Christmas Service	2.00pm	Stranton Church
24 th	Dec	Sunday Services	9.00am & 11.00am	Stranton Church
24 th	Dec	Family Service	4.00pm	Stranton Church
24 th	Dec	Midnight Communion	11.00pm	Stranton Church
25 th	Dec	Joint Service	10.00am	St Luke's Church
31 st	Dec	Sunday Services	9.00am & 11.00am	Stranton Church

January 2024

Sun 13 th	Jan	Messy Church	4.00pm – 5.30pm	St Matthew's CC
Fri 19 th	Jan	Group Christmas Meal	7.00pm	Golden Lion

Mothers Union—Starting January 2024

3rd Wednesday of the Month 2.00pm –3.15pm at St Luke's Rooms.

*St Matthew's
Community Centre
Elwick Road*



Please come and join us

Saturday 2nd December 2023

2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Coffee or Tea, Cake and Company

*A time to spend together,
meet new people, make new friends*

Who's Who

Church Office	St Matthew's Community Centre Arncliffe Gardens TS26 9JF
Administrator	Trish Playfor "Tues- Fri, 9.00 to 11.00am" 01429 894006 or 07305 550009 E-Mail: admin@stranton-church.org.uk Web Site: www.stranton-church.org.uk
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Priest in Charge 34A Westbourne Road 07512 481115
 Revd. John Bell
Email: revdjohnbell@stranton-church.org.uk

Reader
 Mary Tones 40a Blakelock Road 07972 342890

Churches Together in Hartlepool

Secretary Susan Atkinson,
 St Mary's RC

Church Wardens Angela Craig 57 Claremont Drive 234279
 Rohan Wanduragala 62 Clifton Avenue 223751

PCC Secretary Maureen Anderson 22 Thetford Road 871266
Treasurer David Craig 57 Claremont Drive 234279
Asst. Treasurer Maureen Anderson 22 Thetford Road 871266
Loyalty Treasurer Ken Shepherd 251 Park Road 268007

Notice Sheet The Office (Notices by the preceding Wednesday)
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Signpost Advertising Maureen Anderson 22 Thetford Road 871266
Signpost Subscription Maureen Anderson 22 Thetford Road 871266

St Matthew's Booking Trish Playfor Church Office 894006

Magazine articles to the parish office by 16th of every month.

