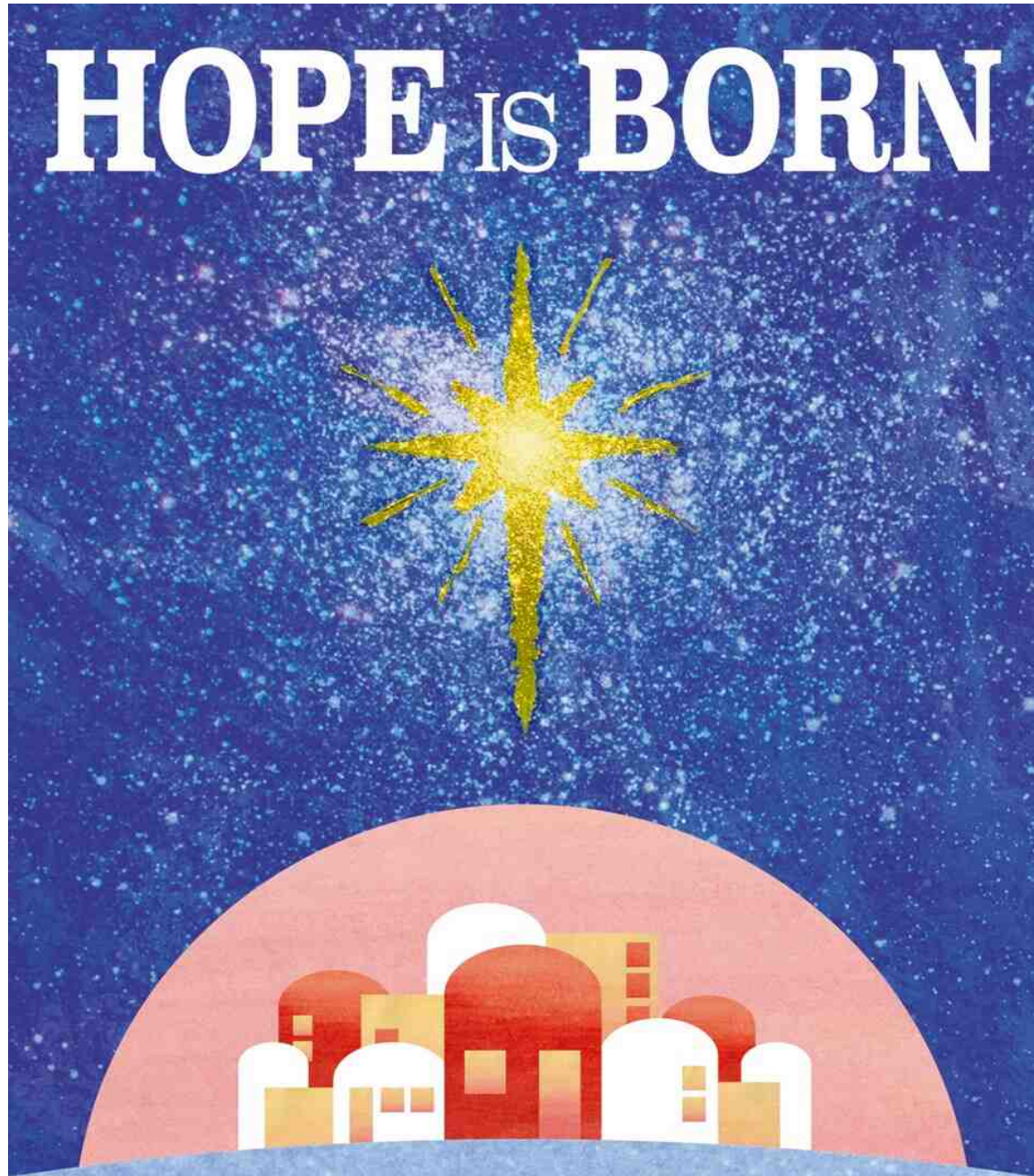




**St Andrew's Church  
Handsworth, Birmingham  
Church of England**



**THE MESSENGER  
Parish Magazine  
December 2024/January 2025**

**75p**

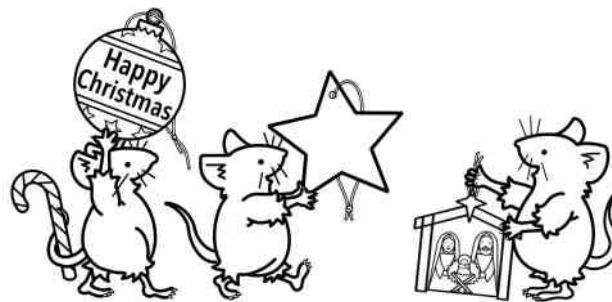
## From the Editor

Hi Everyone,

Welcome to the Christmas edition of the parish magazine. Our articles include a new section; Favourite Biblical Character, there is an article about The Garden Congregation reflecting on the development of the church garden, Christmas in prison, reflections on Mary and many other articles.

Thank you for your contributions, your articles are always welcome. The next magazine will be for Lent/Easter. Please send articles to [parishmagazine949@gmail.com](mailto:parishmagazine949@gmail.com) Thank you.

Eileen.



Please note that the magazine is also online on St Andrew's website and is accessible to the general public.

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**PCC Secretary:** Leonora Dore

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## FROM THE VICAR

### Christmas - Good News for all!

We are always trying to look forward in hope. The Advent Season teaches us to wait in hope and expectation. Expecting that something good is going to happen. We wait for Christmas. We expect Christmas to be a time of great rejoicing. And it is. But for many of us, for a variety of reasons, it brings sad memories during this particular time of the year.

The loss of a child, the loss of a family member, the loss of a spouse, separation or terminal illness. A sense of emptiness and loneliness can creep in.

Despite everything we see and experience around us. When the angel appeared to the shepherds and said,

*"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news  
that will be a great joy to all the people.  
Today, your Saviour was born in the town of David.  
He is Christ, the Lord"*

This good news will never grow old. This good news will never expire. This good news will never rust. This good news will never fade. This is ever lasting. This good news sustains us through the worst of the world events.

Christmas celebrations should not stop us from thinking about the millions of people worldwide who are facing a crisis. A bitter reality like conflicts in Sudan, the Middle East, and war between Russia and Ukraine and so on. These wars have uprooted millions of people – young and old, children and women from their homes, villages, towns, and even from their countries.

Like Mary and Joseph with their little baby Jesus, they are forced to leave their home town and look for a safe place. This holy family was a refugee.

At this time, think about the refugees, homeless people, and the poor and needy around you, and share your Christmas gifts with them so they can also become part of the Christmas story.

Christmas brings the message of new tidings. That things will change; things will be transformed with the arrival of the Prince of Peace.

Let us live in this hope and share this message of hope with others.

Merry Christmas!

Father Paskal  
(Vicar)



# **JOIN IN WITH OUR CHURCH SERVICES AT ST ANDREW'S**

**Our Sunday Services are as follows:-**

**Sunday - 9.30 am service with Holy Communion**

**In Good Shepherd Hall, behind the church.**

**These Services include**

**FAMILY MASS EVERY: SECOND SUNDAY 9.30 AM**



**HEALING SERVICE EVERY: THIRD SUNDAY 9.30 AM**



**Thursday Holy Communion Service**

**10.00 am in Good Shepherd Hall**

**DURING THE WINTER MONTHS, SERVICES TAKE PLACE  
IN THE GOOD SHEPHERD CHAPEL AT 9.30 A.M.**

## The Garden Congregation by Joan Wild

<https://www.youtube.com/c/GardenCongregation/featured>

It sometimes seems so long ago, but the Spring of 2020 will never be forgotten. St. Andrew's Church grieved the loss of Janice Bissell and June Banner who were two of the first victims of the Covid virus. Janice left us on the 14th April followed by June on the 19th April. Fr. John was critically ill in hospital at this time as was Shebina's mother who passed to glory on Easter Sunday, 12th April.

As Fr Douglas had resigned as our Vicar in February, St. Andrew's had no priest. On 23rd March, as with all places of worship, St. Andrew's was closed, but Carl, Alison, Carole, Val and Stuart, (our Church Warden and Readers) did the best job possible to give support to us all especially on the WhatsApp Group. But they were strange times and many across the country and the world felt frightened and alone.

Canterbury Cathedral, a place where daily worship had been practiced continuously for hundreds of years was also closed to worshippers of course. This greatly distressed the late Dean of the Cathedral, the Very Reverend Dr Robert Willis. Thinking of all the local people who usually attended the Cathedral his partner and work colleague in Canterbury, Fletcher Banner, offered to film the Dean saying Morning and Evening Prayer in the Deanery Garden. They thought that if they posted the videos on-line some of their regular worshippers in the Cathedral might be able to join in with the prayers virtually, and feel less isolated.

Apparently after the first few broadcasts they were very surprised to receive a 'thank you' from a lady in Australia! They were then even more surprised to realize that hundreds and then thousands and then possibly millions of people were tuning in to daily prayer. A worldwide 'Garden Congregation' had come into existence.

I was one of the thousands who tuned in, and found that I immediately felt 'at home' in the same way that I had felt when I first entered St Andrew's Church. Fear and anxiety were lifted, as feelings of calm and peace took over. It became more and more obvious that Dean Robert Willis was a very exceptional man with a brilliant and beautiful mind. He was a fantastic 'wordsmith' and seemed to make every reading from the Bible easy to understand and relevant to us all.

But it was his kindness and gentleness that made joining in with his prayers feel such a privilege. He often quoted from the late Jo Austen's favourite poet, George Herbert. He seemed to put one verse from

**'The Elixir',**

**'Teach me, my God and King,  
In all things thee to see,  
And what I do in any thing,  
To do it as for thee'**

into practice in his Ministry from the garden, and was able to show us God in every plant, creature and feature and welcome us all into his garden as he would Royalty or even Jesus himself.

After joining in with the daily prayers from Canterbury for over a year, eventually in June 2021, I suddenly felt a 'vocation' to do some work in *our* Church garden - if that was OK with everyone? It certainly was a wonderful thing that so many of you 'OK'd' it and joined in with the gardening. We made a daffodil walk and other beds for flowers to the Glory of God and in memory of our loved ones.



Because of his part in the development of our garden by his 'encouragement', and because he had such a kind heart we hope to dedicate our 'Heart Garden' to Dean Robert's Memory by planting blue and white flowers, including Canterbury Bells, around the grass heart. Blue and white are the colours of Canterbury as well as St Andrew so we could reflect on St Andrew too in our 'Canterbury Heart Garden'.

Throughout 2020 and 2021, brilliant photography and music and poetry and book readings accompanied the prayers and were appreciated across the globe and there was a special sense of worldwide love and unity, and gratitude for such a Ministry, especially during Covid and then with the start of the War in Ukraine when it was really needed.

We thought this Ministry would never end as Dean Robert and Fletcher hadn't missed a single day in over two years, but when they both seemed to be reaching new peaks of artistic creativity, (and perhaps even deeper spirituality) the Church of England powers-that-be at Canterbury announced that Dean Robert Willis would have to follow rules to retire on the eve of his 75th Birthday which fell on 17th May 2022. As we can see in Fr. John and the Revd. Eve some (if not all) priests just cannot 'retire' from their lifelong Ministry. It seemed incomprehensible for the C of E to cut short such a phenomenal Ministry for bureaucratic reasons, but unfortunately it did.

It was therefore wonderful to see the Garden Congregation Ministry come to new life early this year with broadcasts from different parts of the UK and abroad. It was such a joy to see the Dean being so happy again, particularly during tours in America and Canada and to 'meet' some of the fine people he had prayed for with us during the Pandemic. It was also great to 'meet' Fletcher who we had never actually seen, as he was always behind the camera throughout the two years+ in the Deanery Garden. It was therefore unbearably sad to hear the news of Dean Robert's sudden death from a heart attack at Yale University on 22nd October just a day or two after his last broadcast from there.

His hosts were shocked and devastated as were all members of the Garden Congregation. Prayers are needed for his heartbroken partner and wonderful cameraman Fletcher Banner. His funeral service was held at Christ Church, New Haven, Connecticut, U.S.A.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=50Ssw6K60z8&t=3073s>



and there will be a Memorial Service at Salisbury Cathedral on Candlemas Day. This is very appropriate as one the most well loved hymns that Dean Robert composed is:

**Let us Light a Candle.** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QzSBoilaR7o>)

**In a world where people walk in darkness**

**Let us turn our faces to the light,**

**to the light of God revealed in Jesus,**

**to the Daystar scattering our night.**

**For the light is stronger than the darkness**

**And the day will overcome the night.**

**Though the shadows linger all around us,**

**Let us turn our faces to the light.**

**In a world where suffering of the helpless**

**Casts a shadow all along the way,**

**Let us bear the Cross of Christ with gladness**

**And proclaim the dawning of the day.**

**For the light is stronger than the darkness**

**And the day will overcome the night.**

**Though the shadows linger all around us,**

**Let us turn our faces to the light.**

**Let us light a candle in the darkness,**

**In the face of death, a sign of life.**

**As a sign of hope where all seems hopeless,**

**As a sign of peace in place of strife.**

**For the light is stronger than the darkness**

**And the day will over come the night.**

**Though the shadows linger all around us,**

**Let us turn our faces to the light.**

**R.I.P. Dean Robert Willis**

**c/o JOAN WILD**

(There are many photos reflecting the growth of our church garden which will be printed at a later date.)





*“Welcoming all,  
sharing our gifts to proclaim the gospel  
and grow in faith  
and God’s love.”*



*St Andrew’s Church*

*“We aspire to be a church  
reaching out  
to all people  
through love  
and growing together  
as a community.”*

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## **My favourite Bible character: the unnamed daughter of Jephthah (Judges 11-12)**

It's hard to name just one person from the Bible as a favourite. It seems I've been drawn to different people at different points of my life, yet one person is often on my mind – the unnamed daughter of Jephthah. I've been doing the *Bible in a Year* plan by Nicky and Pippa Gumble, and when I first read about this young, nameless girl, she pulled on my heart strings, and I find myself thinking about her in some of my weaker moments.

To summarise the bare bones of her short story: Jephthah was the son of a prostitute, driven from his home by his half-brothers. He was also a mighty warrior. When his family were facing war with the Ammonites, self-preservation trumped disdain and they called Jephthah to lead their army, offering promises of reconciliation and recognition, not only as a member of the family, but as its head! Jephthah agreed, and when coming face-to-face with their formidable enemy he made a vow to the Lord: *"If you give the Ammonites into my hands, whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the Lord's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering."* (Judges 11:30-31). God granted Jephthah victory, and he returned home, only to be greeted by his joyful daughter who had rushed out to meet him, dancing to the sound of timbrels (which resemble tambourines).

I wonder what on earth Jephthah was thinking when he made that vow to God! Was it fear that motivated this moment of rash impulsivity? Had he been overly influenced by the pagan cultures that surrounded him in exile? Was it a rush of self-righteous pride that made him think he could bargain with God in this way? Had he forgotten the command not to put the Lord your God to the test (Deuteronomy 6:16)? The softer part of my heart thinks his humble origins played a part. We're told that just prior to his vow, the Spirit of God came upon him. It's so sad to think that he already had *everything* he needed to win the day and be welcomed home, no longer a reject and an outcast. Did he feel unworthy of this? Did he think more was needed to secure his place? I know I feel like that sometimes and I ask myself how I can better earn my place among our Christian family. I make rash decisions motivated by a contradictory combination of pride and insecurity, foolishly forgetting everything I've been told and shown, about God and my Saviour Jesus. Did Jephthah also forget what he'd been taught, for the Law of Moses called human sacrifice something "the Lord hates" (Deuteronomy 12:31)?

I don't know; I can't weigh a person's heart, besides I'm in danger of losing my focus and casting my heroine into her father's shadow. I don't want her to get lost in his narrative and viewed as the personification of a lesson or consequence. She was a living, breathing, dancing young woman; and she was brave, and faithful; dutiful, and obedient, *"my father,"* she said, *"you have given your word to the Lord. Do to me just as you promised...but grant me this one request...give me two months to roam the hills and weep with my friends, because I will never marry"* (Judges 11:36-37). Had I been in her shoes I think my response would have been rather different!

This is why I love this girl! First and foremost, she honoured God above all things even her own life; she was mindful of his command to *“honour your father and your mother...”* which, in this instance, feels bitterly ironic, as the rest of the Commandment states *“...that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you”* (Exodus 20:12:). The fact that she asked her father’s permission to go to the hills is remarkable to me. I’d probably have stormed off and I might not have returned, yet *“after the two months, she returned to her father, and he did to her as he had vowed. And she was a virgin.”* (Judges 11:39). She kept her word. She didn’t let fear or anger determine her course of action. She kept her eye on God and finished her race with dignity, integrity and courage.

Biblical scholars say her story highlights the cost of leadership, offering warnings against making rash vows, but I’m not a biblical scholar so I say those things are the lessons of Jephthah’s story! In the context of Judges, her story speaks to the brutality and chaos of a leaderless time before the Kings, a time lacking order and divine authority. As a modern reader with the benefit of the New Testament, I see Jesus everywhere and I get the symbolism: the sacrifice of an innocent only-child dying for sins that are not their own. But of course, the differences are striking; she was sacrificed because of a needless vow made by a father who lacked wisdom and understanding. Jesus’ sacrifice fulfils the ultimate vow of *the* Father, the New Covenant, which lies at the heart of all wisdom and understanding. Without the Cross as a starting point, I can’t understand anything about God, my faith, the Bible, or myself. Jephthah seemed not to know God’s heart; without knowing Jesus neither can I.

Jewish women today still ritually mourn Jephthah’s daughter during the winter solstice - the traditional date ascribed to the young girl’s death. As a Christian in the season of Advent, I’ll spare a moment to think of this unnamed daughter, and I’ll give thanks that because of Jesus I’m adopted as a child of the Heavenly Father. And I’ll remember that she is too! Jesus is ultimate, intimate, eternal, singular, boundless, timeless, limitless. He’s for the foolish, the rash, the fearful, the proud, the dutiful, the joyful, the mourners, the dancers, the sinners and the saints! I’ll give thanks to *our* Father, and I’ll rejoice that maybe one day the unnamed daughter of Jephthah and I can dance to the sound of those timbrels together at His feet.



**Becky G.**



## **Why is Christmas Special to me?**

Christmas is special to me because I was born on Christmas Day 25th December with my twin sister.

This Day is a Special Day for me as I will remember the day when Christmas is. The whole world celebrates Christmas on this Special Day and I celebrate my birthday together with my twin sister and all my family together.

I love Christmas because we get together with all our families and celebrate Christmas and my birthday together, and we all enjoy every moment .

Today I feel so Blessed and thankful for this Special day.

**Tina Kaur**



## **St. Andrew's Coffee Morning**



**All are welcome!**

Coffee Morning is 10am till 12pm every Thursday in The Good Shepherd Hall. We offer tea and coffee for 60p a mug and toast 20p a slice. We have biscuits each week and sometimes cakes if people bring them in for their birthday. Carole Sami has a table selling her cards and Val Ryder has her table selling various items. It is a friendly occasion where people enjoy having a chat over a cup of tea / coffee.

All are welcome. You don't have to be a regular church member. St Andrew's Coffee Morning is open to the whole community.

**Please note Coffee Morning will be closed on 26 December and 2 January.**

**Chris Baker**

## CHRISTMAS IN CUSTODY

Working in an adult male prison is a challenge most of the time especially the festive season. Being employed in the education department of the establishment is sad at Christmas. Unlike schools and colleges, we do not shut down until Christmas Eve. Staff can opt to take annual leave, this year I have not.

Some of the men look forward to visits from family including children. The Visits Team including volunteers ensure that the decorations transform the area into a Santa's grotto, with carefully wrapped presents for little hands.

For men sentenced far from home and those who have little or no contact with friends or family, they can feel even more isolated at this time.

Food provides a focus and cause for celebration. The menu is a talking point; half a chicken and sweets are the highlights. This change from poorly presented mass produced food unites all the men. This is pertinent as over one third of the prison population are practicing Muslims who attend weekly prayers in the prison. All the guys welcome a seasonal change of meals.

December represents the end of a year off their sentence which most men find uplifting, and a reason to look forward as opposed to the usual reflection that occupies their mind. The Chaplaincy in the prison welcomes all Services and external choirs.

There is a definite festive buzz around the prison estate at Christmas, and it has been known for some homeless men to offend just to secure a bed, bedding, a hot meal and company at this time of year.

Elaine



## Quiet Day: "In her heart: A Journey with Mary"

A reflection on the quiet day

Attending a quiet day themed around Mary, the mother of Jesus, proved to be a deeply reflective and spiritually enriching experience. The day was designed to invite participants to journey alongside Mary, exploring her role in the life of Christ and her example of surrender and grace.



From the outset the atmosphere was serene, fostering a sense of sacred stillness. The quiet day was a much-needed respite from the noise and busyness of daily life. It provided ample space for contemplation, prayer and a deeper connection with God through Mary's story.

The structure of the day was beautifully balanced, in particular scriptural meditations on Mary's key moments. Each meditation was followed by periods of silence which allowed these reflections to take root personally which offered profound insights into her spiritual journey.

One of the highlights was the use of creative prayer practices. Whether through journaling, guided imagery or meditating on artwork. We were encouraged to reflect on how Mary's journey parallels our own spiritual faith. Her example of trust in God amid uncertainty and her quiet strength were particularly poignant for those navigating personal challenges.

The day also offered a communal sense of connection without breaking the contemplative focus.

During brief, optional discussions we shared insights about how Mary's life resonates our own faith journeys. These moments of sharing reminded us that Mary is not just a distant figure of reverence but a relatable model of discipleship.

Perhaps the most moving aspect of the day was the invitation to encounter Mary as a spiritual companion. In quiet prayer one could sense her maternal presence and draw encouragement from her unwavering faith in God's promises. This theme lingered well beyond the event, offering a renewed sense of peace and trust.

In conclusion, this quiet day was a gentle yet profound pilgrimage with Mary. It reminded us of the beauty of saying 'yes' to God and inspired a deeper commitment to walk with faith, just as she did. For anyone seeking spiritual renewal or a deeper relationship with Mary, this experience is highly recommended. Thanks to Father Paskal who led us through this journey.

Leonore Dore



# 2025



Epiphany (which comes from the Greek word to reveal) - also known as Three Kings' Day - is a Christian feast day which is celebrated on **6 JANUARY**. It is the date when Christians celebrate how a star led the Magi - also known as the Three Kings or the Wise Men - to visit the baby Jesus after he had been born. **Epiphany is celebrated all over the world.**

- **In the Czech Republic** some men celebrate it by swimming in the freezing cold Vitava river in Prague.
- **In Mexico** it is celebrated by eating a special sweet bread called Rosca de Reyes which is ring shaped and topped with candied fruit. A figurine representing baby Jesus is hidden in the bread and whoever finds it is responsible for hosting a celebration on Candlemas, 2nd February.
- **In Spain and Latin America**, Epiphany is seen as important as Christmas Day and many families take the day off and exchange presents. On the night before Epiphany children will leave out drinks for the Three Kings.
- **In Poland**, Epiphany is celebrated in grand style with huge parades welcoming the Wise Men, often riding on camels or other animals from the zoo.
- In **Louisiana**, the Epiphany marks the beginning of the Carnival season, during which it is customary to bake King Cakes containing a miniature doll. The person who finds the doll (or bean) in the cake must provide the next King Cake. Along the Catholic coasts of Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. King cakes are first sold then, Carnival parties and parades start.



**Monday evenings from January: "Becoming like Christ" is a six week course on Zoom.** This "Way of Discipleship" module looks at who Jesus is and what He came to do through His life, death, resurrection and ascension. It shapes our character to become more like Him by looking at how we change and the kind of practices that grow Christlike self-giving love in us. It also looks at how God sees and uses the difficult times in our lives.

You can browse the content at <https://wayofdiscipleship.org/> Contact [guydc@cofebirmingham.com](mailto:guydc@cofebirmingham.com) to book.



Way of Discipleship

**January 2025:  
Way of  
Discipleship  
online.  
"Becoming like Christ"**



**Becoming like Christ is a six  
week course on Zoom covering:**

who Jesus is and what He came to do through His life, death, resurrection and ascension. How we change and the kind of practices that grow Christlike self-giving love in us. How God sees and uses the difficult times in our lives.

**Dates:**

Monday evenings, 7-9.15pm  
13th, 10th, 27th January, 3rd, 10th and  
17th February.

**Booking**

Contact [guydc@cofebirmingham.com](mailto:guydc@cofebirmingham.com)

**"This is undoubtedly one of  
the highlights of my week at  
the moment.  
I find the format very helpful  
as it includes listening,  
talking to others and  
personal reflection."**

## **St Andrew's Sports & Community Centre**



St Andrew's Sports & Community Centre is located on the corner of College Road. It is owned and managed by St Andrew's Church and is used for public activities and other church groups. The Centre is probably best known for the outdoor service that takes place on Good Friday every year.

If you wish to hire a room in the Centre for a private function, please contact John Emmins, Church Halls Administration.

Tel number - 07486 377719 or

Email - [enquiriesstandrewsacc@gmail.com](mailto:enquiriesstandrewsacc@gmail.com)

These are the public activities that currently take place at the Centre.

**Tuesday 10:00 - 13:00 Saheli Hub Crafts – keep fit / indoor tennis / knitting & health and wellbeing**

**Tuesday 10:00 - 12:00 Home Start Family Support Group**

**Wednesday Wellbeing group – Tai Chi 10.00 -11.00**

**Wednesday 17:30 - 20:30 & Saturday 13:30 - 14:30 - Temple Martial Arts**

**Thursday - Move for life 11:30 - 12:30 Exercise Class**

**Thursday PJ body work 18:30 – 19:30 Exercise Class**

**Saturday 09:00 - 13:00 - Little Kickers**

Please note that none of these groups/activities are run by the church.

## WORDSEARCH

### **Word Search - Gifts of the Wise Men**

What about their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh? One Victorian scholar has offered a possible explanation. He was the Rev John Henry Hopkins, an American Episcopalian minister, who in 1857 wrote the much-loved Christmas carol, 'We Three Kings of Orient Are'. Gold, said John Henry Hopkins, was a gift that would have been given to a king. Frankincense had traditionally been brought by priests as they worshipped God in the Temple. Myrrh was a spice that the ancients used in preparing bodies for burial.

If that is true, then you could say that the Wise Men, in choosing their gifts for this infant, honoured Jesus with gold because He was King of the Jews, with frankincense because He was to be worshipped as divine, and with myrrh, because He would also become a sacrifice and die for His people. The Wise Men were the very first Gentiles ever to worship Jesus. What faith they had!

**c/o Parish Pump**

**Gifts Gold Frankincense Myrrh Henry Hopkins Carol Three Kings Orient  
Worship Temple Spice Ancients Bodies Burial Honoured Divine  
Sacrifice Die Gentile faith**





**Christmas & New Year Services**  
**St Andrew's Church Handsworth**  
**Oxhill Road, B21 9RE**

**Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> December at 4.30pm**  
Carol Service

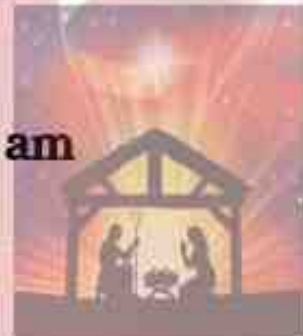
**Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> December at 11.30pm**  
Midnight Service

**Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> December at 10.00 am**  
Family Holy Communion Service

**Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> December at 9.30 am**  
Regular Holy Communion Service

**Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> December at 11.30 pm**  
Midnight Service  
*(Saying goodbye to 2024)*

**Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> January 2025 at 11.00 am**  
Thanks giving Service for New Year  
*(with bring & share lunch)*



**Happy Christmas &  
New Year  
to you all**



**For more details**

Fr Paskal Clement  
Mobile: 07727286905, Email: revpaskal@yahoo.com