

The Mustard Seed

The Parish magazine of the church of St James, Brownhills

A Family Following Jesus



www.stjameschurchbrownhills.co.uk

*Called by name & empowered by the Holy Spirit to share
God's love with words and actions*

January 2026



Thinking about Carbon

It seems fitting, as we start a new year to focus on larger issues, trying to make positive changes to tackle the global crises of climate change and biodiversity loss. For those of you who care for our churchyards, chapel yards and cemeteries there is much you can do for wildlife and hopefully these monthly articles have already inspired you to take some steps already. But how climate change and carbon? Is there anything we can do about that on a local level?

Well, yes there is, for those of us who manage a piece of land, whether it's our own garden or the local burial ground there is a great deal that we can do.

Firstly, care for your trees. Trees and shrubs store carbon in wood, be it the trunk, branches or roots. Trees store more carbon than other plants owing to their size and long lifespan. Hedges too can store carbon for a long time. Many churchyards and cemeteries contain ancient trees as well as trees planted in Victorian times, often conifers with a shorter lifespan as well as the longer-lived native broadleaves. These conifers may be coming toward the end of their life so keep an eye on them, carry out an annual inspection using [The Caring for God's Acre sheet on inspecting trees](#) as well as having professional surveys by a skilled arborist. The life of a tree can be prolonged by care and prompt action as problems arise, (which can save money too). Perhaps you can think about planting young trees to replace those nearing the end of their lives. Is there room for a sapling now? Young trees grow quickly, laying down carbon-based wood as they do so.

Secondly, think about your grassland. Rather surprisingly grassland is actually great at storing carbon with most of it out of sight. Whilst carbon is stored in the visible, above ground plants it is within the soil that most if held in fact it is estimated that up to 30% of the earth's carbon is stored in grassland soil.

Soil carbon comes from decomposing plants, animals and fungi. When things die, they are broken down and used as food by insects, worms and other invertebrates, fungi, bacteria and other microbes. Whilst some carbon dioxide is released most carbon is incorporated into the soil. The more mature the soil, the better for carbon storage. A mature, complex, undisturbed soil has a wide range of life within its soil, all of which contain carbon. Churchyard, chapel yard and cemetery grassland are usually mature and full of different grasses, flowering plants, fungi and lichens. This richness above ground leads to a corresponding richness below the surface.

What about the length of the grass, does that have an effect? Yes it does, taller grassland rather than short lawn has a deeper zone of active soil due to deeper plant roots. This active soil is full of carbon-based life.

So look at your local churchyard with new eyes, seeing it as a carbon store and seeing if you can improve this. Care for your trees, plant replacements and when trees need to be felled try to leave some deadwood on site or maybe keep the carbon locked away by using the wood for timber or wood-turning. Is there scope to increase the grass length in some areas to increase the depth of active, carbon-rich soil? Finally, can you reduce the use of petrol machines such as lawn mowers and strimmers replacing with electric ones or maybe using them less often.

All of these actions will benefit wildlife too so it really is doubly worthwhile.

All the best, Harriet

Harriet Carty, [Diocesan Churchyard Environmental Advisor, harriet@cfga.org.uk,](#)

Doing hard things the right way



The start of a brand-new year is a great time for us to reflect on how we go about all things in life – and especially how we go about those things that are more difficult for us. Doing hard things requires us to be lion-like – bold, steely and courageous. Doing things the right way means being like a lamb – gentle, meek and submissive. As Christians, we're supposed to be a godly mixture of the qualities of both the lion and the lamb, as our Saviour Jesus is.

But how can one person be both 'the Lion' and 'the Lamb'? In C.S. Lewis's Narnia books, the lion, Aslan, represents Jesus. In the most famous of these books, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Aslan is slain: “Bind him, I say!” repeated the White Witch... “Let him first be shaved” ... the shorn face of Aslan looked... braver, and more beautiful, and more patient than ever. “Muzzle him!” said the Witch... the whole crowd of creatures kicking him, hitting him, spitting on him, jeering at him... They began to drag the bound and muzzled Lion to the Stone Table.’

Later, ‘they heard from behind them a loud noise – a great cracking, deafening noise... The Stone Table was broken into two pieces by a great crack that ran down it from end to end... There, shining in the sunrise, larger than they had seen him before, shaking his mane (for it had apparently grown again) stood Aslan himself.’ Aslan tells them that ‘when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backwards.’

In the book of Revelation, we see Jesus is standing at the centre of the throne of heaven. He is the Lion and the Lamb. He is both triumphant ('has triumphed', 5:5) and slain ('you were slain', v.9). In an imaginative and powerful way, C.S. Lewis shows how Jesus can be both 'the Lion of the tribe of Judah' (Revelation 5:5) and 'a Lamb [that] had been slain' (v.6).

We need to be cleansed from our sin – our 'filth', as the writer of Proverbs chapter 30 describes it (v.12). This 'filth' of sin comes in many guises and disguises:

- Failure to give sufficient blessing and obedience to our parents (vv.11–12,17)
- Pride, which can come in the form of 'haughty' eyes and 'disdainful' looks (v.13). 'Don't be stuck-up and think you're better than everyone else' (v.13, MSG)
- Failure to look after 'the poor' and 'the needy' (v.14)
- Sexual sin, which justifies itself by saying, 'I've done nothing wrong' (v.20)

The worst state to be in is not to recognise the need to be cleansed (v.12). It is a wonderful thing to be cleansed of our sins, and in Revelation 5 we see the whole of creation worshipping the Lamb that had been slain, because 'with your blood you "purchased for God" members of every tribe and language and people and nation' (Revelation 5:9). It is the blood of Jesus that 'purifies us from all sin' (1 John 1:7).

Sometimes every one of us as Jesus' followers will find ourselves, acting like lambs when we need really to be lions. Jesus took on powerful opponents with lion-like courage: for example, throwing out the money-changers from the temple. On the other hand, with the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1–11), he could have been steely, but instead he was gracious and gentle as a lamb. The challenge for us is to follow the example of the One we worship.

What is going on in heaven right now? John tells us that when he glimpses into heaven, he sees millions worshipping Jesus: 'the Lion' who is also 'a Lamb'. Jesus is the key to understanding history and salvation. On earth, we find it so hard to understand what is going on. What are God's plans and purposes for history and salvation? What are his plans and purposes for your life and my life? The scroll 'sealed with seven seals' (Revelation 5:1) probably represents God's plans and purposes.

No one in heaven or on earth, or under the earth, is found worthy to open the scroll or even to look inside it, except for Jesus: 'The Lion of the tribe of Judah' who 'has triumphed' (vv.2–5). Here stands Jesus in all his majesty and kingship. Only Jesus can open the secrets of history, God's plan of salvation and his purpose for each of our lives.

The Lion is also a Lamb: 'A Lamb, slaughtered but standing tall... He came to the One Seated on the Throne and took the scroll from his right hand. The moment he took the scroll, the Four Animals and Twenty-four Elders fell down and worshiped the Lamb (vv.6–7, MSG). The Lamb is worshipped by the whole created order and the entire church falls down before him.

Here is an amazing fact: your prayers on earth affect the worship of heaven: 'Each had a harp and each had a bowl, a gold bowl filled with incense, the prayers of God's holy people' (v.8, MSG version). Your prayers fill the golden bowls of heaven. Your prayers really do make a difference.

'They sang a new song... "with your blood you purchased for God members of every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth"' (vv.9–10). 'Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand' (v.11a).

This is one of the reasons why I love New Wine so much, because there at Bath & West Showground, people from all over the country come to worship Jesus. This is a foretaste of heaven. Here we see that the activity of heaven is the worship of Jesus. You will sing songs of redemption. The whole of heaven bursts with praise (v.13). There is a great orchestra and a magnificent choir and all types of music in harmony. You were created for the worship of God's glory, which was revealed in Jesus Christ – the Lion who is also the Lamb.

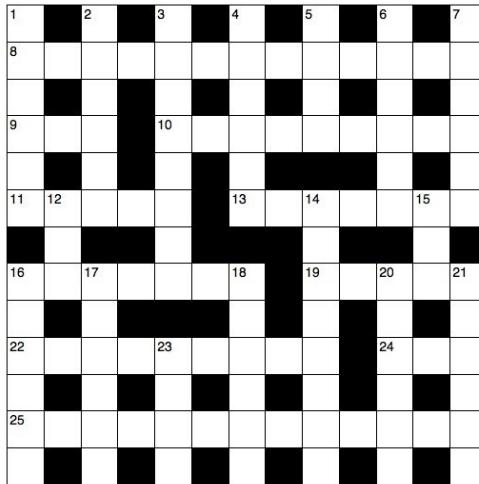
So, as we progress further into January and this whole new year, I pray that we'll do so with the resolve to do the hardest things right, through having a godly mix of gentleness and courage in our lives, and being empowered by God's Holy Spirit.

With many prayers and much love in Jesus,

Rev'd Gayle



Life is too short for us to do everything we want to do; but it is long enough for us to do everything God wants us to do. - Anon

**Across**

8 How the Abyss (NIV) is described in the Authorized Version (Revelation 9:1) (10,3)

9 Frozen water (Ezekiel 1:22) (3)

10 The Ten Commandments (9)

11 In Roman Catholic theology, neither heaven nor hell (5)

13 Des cons (anag.) (7)

16 'Though [your sins] are red as — , they shall be like wool' (Isaiah 1:18) (7)

19 Keen (Romans 1:15) (5)

22 Repugnant, loathsome (Jeremiah 24:9) (9)

24 Drink like an animal (Judges 7:5) (3)

25 First and last (Revelation 22:13) (5,3,5)

Down

1 Father of Ahi, a Gadite (1 Chronicles 5:15) (6)

2 Where David found the stone with which he killed Goliath (1 Samuel 17:40) (6)

3 'Hour by hour fresh lips are making thy — doings heard on high' (8)

4 'And there were shepherds living out in the fields near by, keeping watch over their — at

night' (Luke 2:8) (6)

5 United Society for Christian Literature (1,1,1,1)

6 'If he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would — — or a tax collector' (Matthew 18:17) (1,5)

7 Where Paul was taken when things became difficult for him in Berea (Acts 17:15) (6)

12 Istituto per le Opere di Religione (Vatican Bank) (1,1,1)

14 'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new — ; the old has gone, the new has come!' (2 Corinthians 5:17) (8)

15 Used to colour ram skins red for use in the tabernacle (Exodus 25:5) (3)

16 Vat car (anag.) (6)

17 'Be joyful — — , patient in affliction, faithful in prayer' (Romans 12:12) (6)

18 'The parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts — — special treatment' (1 Corinthians 12:23) (4,2)

20 Ancient rowing boat (Isaiah 33:21) (6)

21 Say again (2 Corinthians 11:16) (6)

23 What Jesus did in the synagogue in Nazareth after he stood up (Luke 4:16) (4)

Going from Strength to Strength—even in January!

Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baka, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion. (Psalm 84: 5-7)

January can be a grim month! Back to work after Christmas, dark days and early nights. Colds, sniffles and bugs, then the bills, renewals and invoices come in. There is not much going on in church, as Candlemas is not until February.

I like the psalms, as they are written from personal experience. This one is a belter and has been called one of the sweetest psalms. I suppose January could be a type of 'valley of Baca' or veil of tears, meaning a difficult time to get through. The psalmist encourages us to look for wells and pools of water even in the dryest desert.

Many people have debt or other problems. Perhaps the church could set up a group to support members or look for local sources of advice, foodbanks or help.

January may be cold, costly and dark but there are things to look forward to: snowdrops, bulbs and days beginning to lengthen and at least the stress of Christmas is past!

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So Doku

Nobody's said they don't like it, so here's another.

Enjoy.

Solution elsewhere!

On the perils of leading prayer in church

The Rectory
St James the Least

My dear Darren

I do hope you have now settled down in your first parish - although it is such a pity that you did not choose a more distinguished one. I know you feel your vocation lies in inner city work – whereas mine, fortunately, has always been to the better sort of rural village. I have always felt that the Almighty understands me well in that regard.

We had a little flurry of activity in church on Sunday. At the signal “let us pray”, as the congregation dutifully flopped to their knees, sounding like a flock of geese settling in for the night, Major Hastings lost his glass eye. Yes, again! That man is so careless at times. Anyway, released from captivity, the eye rolled under the pews like a fugitive marble, ricocheting from hassock to handbag over the stone flags.

My sonorous entreaties to the Almighty were completely lost as the entire congregation scuttled under pews, trying to retrieve it. It finally appeared on the collection plate - along with £4.17, 100 pesetas and Miss Simpson’s front door key. I was unsure whether the last item represented a fit of absent-mindedness or an improper suggestion. I returned it

to her very firmly at the end of the Service.

The eye stared at me mournfully as I blessed it, along with the money. But it left a small social dilemma. What is the etiquette of returning a lost glass eye to its owner?

To have processed down the aisle with it, accompanied by crucifer and verger seemed a little too public. To sneak it to him as we shook hands at the door seemed a little too furtive. I finally decided to send a server to deliver it during the last hymn. I still wonder if it was the right decision. Perhaps you could look through that new Common Worship book and see if they have included an appropriate rite for returning lost glass eyes. We here at St James-the-Least-of-All haven't yet got round to Common Worship. The days are evil enough as it is.

Your loving uncle

Eustace

3	8	6	2	7	1	5	9	4
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4	7	9	6	5	3	1	2	8
6	4	3	1	2	8	9	7	5
8	1	5	3	9	7	6	4	2
2	9	7	4	6	5	8	3	1
5	6	8	7	3	2	4	1	9
7	3	1	8	4	9	2	5	6
9	2	4	5	1	6	3	8	7

So Doku solution

How to keep those New Year Resolutions

We are full of good intentions at the start of each year. How come we fizzle out by February? Here are some tips to keep you going...

Be realistic. If you have a number of goals, don't attempt them all at once. Research has found that if you stagger your goals, you will have more success. So, for example, if this year you want to spend less money, do more exercise and spend more time with your family, start one change this month, another in February, and start the third in March.

Be specific. For example, don't tell yourself: Lose weight. Decide exactly how much you want to lose. When do you want to lose it by? How will you do it? If you want more time with your family, how and when will you do that? The more exact you can be, the more likely you are to succeed.

Write it down. There's something about committing thoughts to paper that helps to cement your resolve. Why not start some sort of journal this year, to track your thoughts, your hopes, your goals – and your successes!

Tell other people. If you intend to do something, tell someone, and therefore you will feel more obliged to get going with it... your pride may keep you going when all else fails!

Focus on GAIN, not loss. Ever notice how many resolutions are about giving something up? Why not put it the other way round - instead of saying you will eat less, tell yourself you are headed for those skinny jeans....

Give yourself rewards. If you are quitting smoking or sweets, for example, put the money that you would have spent in a jam jar, and treat yourself to something nice (and healthy) with it.

Break your resolution into steps. Some goals will take months to achieve. So, break each one down into tiny steps, and simply head for each step. Build in some time frames, to prevent you procrastinating.

Finally, don't let failure defeat you. You will make mistakes. But the secret is to simply get up again and to keep going. Only if you stop are you *really* defeated. None of us are perfect, and the Bible encourages us to always start again.

Politics is the career of plundering and blundering. - Disraeli

Epiphany for Today

This month we celebrate Epiphany, the occasion on which we remember the Magi from the East following a star to find the baby Jesus: *'Where is the One who has been born king of the Jews?' (Matthew 2:1)*. At the start of a New Year, in an uncertain world, we can be asking the same question. The gifts the Magi offered point us to how Jesus can answer our concerns and worries: *'they bowed down and worshipped Him...and presented Him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.'* (2:11).

The *gift of gold* reflects that the Magi saw in the baby a king, destined to rule over us all. In this coming year we need to remember that Jesus is on the throne, the seat of power and authority in the whole universe. Will we crown Him king of our lives and dedicate all that we are and do to Him?

The *gift of frankincense* reflects that the visitors saw not just an earthly king, but God in human flesh. Incense symbolises the prayers of God's people and so this gift reminds us that God is worthy of our worship and prayer. Will we offer our praise and prayer, as we seek God to guide us through the uncertainties of this coming year?

The *gift of myrrh* reflects that these astrologers saw beyond the baby's birth and life, to His death which would secure life for all. Jesus was offered myrrh on the cross and was a spice used in His tomb. As we face challenges in the future, we can be confident that Jesus knows and understands our experience. Are we ready to trust Him in everything?

'Glorious now behold Him arise, King and God and Sacrifice! Heav'n sings Hallelujah: Hallelujah the earth replies.' ('We Three Kings').

What makes snow stick?

Depending on whether you are a child with a sleigh or an adult trying to drive home, snow is either your friend or your foe. And sometimes snow can be hard to understand....

Matt Taylor of the BBC Weather, recently named a couple of reasons as to why snow behaves in the way that it does. For instance:

Ground temperature plays a massive part when it comes to whether snow sticks or not. When the weather has been relatively warm, the ground will store some of that warmth and melt the snow more quickly. This happens faster on roads and pavements than on grass, which transfers the heat from the ground more slowly.

Sunshine helps melt snow, and any snow covered in dirt and debris will melt even quicker, as the darker surface absorbs the warmth from the sun more readily.

What, oh what, is that person's name?!

Do your New Year Resolutions include the forlorn hope that you will be better at remembering people's names in 2026?

Many of us – and not only those of the older generation – have difficulty remembering names. It's not just TV personalities and so on, but people we meet in the street. We know exactly who they are, we see them every week in church or the supermarket, we know what job they do and which school their children go to. But as for their name – it's a blank.

Help is at hand, however. Not to solve the problem, but at least to name it. 'Anomic aphasia' is the clinical name for the inability to remember a name, even when we can remember everything else about someone.

There is also the strange truth that the cure for anomic aphasia comes spontaneously, often in the middle of the night, when that elusive identity pops unbidden into our memory. We must be sure, of course, to put the light on and write it down, because for sure it will be gone again with the morning light!

What do you know about the Foodbank?

The Lamp Foodbank continues to be a vital resource in the community, and is generally used by between 12 and 15 voucher holders each week (this can be more or less, depending on the need).

During September and October we had over 1600kg of food, and nearly 300kg of non-food purchased or donated.

We have a team of around 12 regular volunteers and four others who fill in during school holidays, who all work together to ensure the smooth running of the Foodbank.

Aldi is our main source of donations, and regularly give large amounts of fresh food which is in addition to their donations. This is taken into the Community Centre for users to help themselves. The Green Dragons nursery also benefits from this fresh food. This ensures that ALL food donated to the Foodbank gets used and there is little or no waste.

During term time, Ryders Hayes School donate their surplus milk, which means we are able to provide fresh milk and well as the long-life variety.

Local schools have been very generous after their harvest festivals. St Bernadette's School were particularly generous, and asked if they could bring some of their children into the Foodbank. They helped with the sorting, labelling and organization of the food.

We have now been voted by the children from this school to be their nominated charity with visits planned well into 2026.

In addition, we regularly have young probationers coming in to help, accompanied by their key worker, as part of their community service.

The Foodbank continues to be a very important part of St James Church, not only for the help and donations they give, but also in giving to those who are struggling to feed themselves and their families, and also for the positive links they are continually forging with all areas of the community—modelling kind, empathetic and Christian behaviour, often accompanied by a cup of tea and a chat!!

Readings for January

Sunday 4th January

10am	Follow the Star!	Matthew 2 v 1-12
6.15pm	Epiphany!	Psalm 72 v 1-14 Ephesians 3 v 1-12

Sunday 11th January

10am	The Deep Life of Overflow	Philippians 1 v 1-11
6.15pm	He who gives living water	John 15 v 1-15 Psalm 96 John 4 v7-26

Sunday 18th January

10am	Loving God with our mind	Romans 12 v 1-8	Luke 2 v 39-52
6.15pm	To fulfil righteousness	Isaiah 42 v 1-9	Matthew 3 v 13-17

Sunday 25th January

10am	The example of John's disciples	Isaiah 49 v 1-7	John 1 v 29-42
6.15pm	Philip found Nathaniel	John 1 v 43-51	Galatians 1 v 11-24

Be smart—don't keep up appearances

If you are struggling with money as the New Year begins, you are not alone. Too many of us are using our credit cards as almost permanent extensions of our bank account, instead of as highly expensive loans.

So, this year, think about how just small changes could help you. For example, simply deciding to take your own sandwiches, and skipping lunch and coffee 'out' could save you £25 a week – that is £100 a month, or £1,200 a year – enough to pay off a big chunk of your heating bills.

If we are taken up with our own personal needs, or if we are looking for position and status in the church, we shall be of little use to God. - David Watson

Prayer for the New Year 2026

Dear Father, Lord of all time,

Here we are! Another New Year!

So many mixed emotions for different people, for different reasons. For some, the reluctance to leave a year which brought joy and happiness; for some the relief of leaving behind a difficult year; for some, sadness at moving into a year where a loved one has never been; for some, apprehension and insecurity about what might lie ahead in this world of polarisation, conflict and confusion about what is true.

Lord, help us to take time at the start of 2026 to refocus our hearts, minds and spirits – to tune into you, our un-changing God.

Help us to be calmed and encouraged by the promise of Jesus that He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. The safe Way. The ultimate Truth. The Life, your gift, to be with you for all eternity.

You promised never to leave us or forsake us. When we put our trust in you, through what Jesus did on the cross, we are secure, we are accompanied, no matter what the New Year brings.

We can go forward, safely.

Thank you, in Jesus' name, Amen.

By Daphne Kitching



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