The Mustard Seed

The Parish magazine of the church of St James, Brownhills

A Family Following Jesus



www.stjameschurchbrownhills.co.uk

November 2026

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

Yew tree folklore

In St George's Churchyard in Clun, Shropshire, stands a marvellous sight to behold. Estimated to be around 2,000 years old, lives a majestic ancient Yew tree. As the oldest tree in Shropshire, this beautiful specimen has likely bore witness to rich history. It has stood tall, guarding the churchyard since medieval times. If it could speak, it would surely have some stories to tell.

There are many Yews across the UK standing strong in churchyards and burial grounds, each with their own unique stories and heritage. The English Yew, *Taxus baccata*, is an evergreen tree that is commonly found in and associated with churchyards. Some are hundreds and even thousands of years old. Many of these Ancient Yews likely predate the churchyards they are found in, and have strong ties to Pagan, Celtic and Druidic traditions.

Yews are steeped in rich and sometimes dark folklore. They are known as the "tree of the dead" for several reasons. It is thought that these trees were planted in sacred places to watch over the dead and guide their passage to the other side. The species is known for its longevity and habit of rooting from drooping branches that touch the ground, further cementing its lore of being a tree of death and rebirth. The all parts of the tree are toxic to humans, and even features in Shakespeare's Scottish play, where a poisonous concoction featuring Yew berries is made.

The Kingley Vale Yews are one UK example of Yews with a spooky history. Legends say there was a great battle between local people and invading Vikings and when the local soldiers fell, their bodies were buried in the forests where the Yew trees now stand. The forests are supposedly haunted by the soldiers, who possess the Yews and come alive at night. We can't forget to mention the Bleeding Yews of Nevern Church in Pembrokeshire. These Yews appear to be continuously bleeding red sap from their trunks. Many legends and myths have arisen to explain this phenomenon, but one endearing explanation is that they bleed in sympathy with Jesus and his crucifixion. Nevertheless, Yews all over the UK will likely live on for hundreds more years, passing down their stories, legends and history forevermore.

If you find yourself with one of these majestic trees in your churchyard, here are a few things you can do to help them out. Most Yews don't need much management and generally like to be left alone. However, clearing anything over their root plate and underneath the trees as well as any ivy growing up the trunk will give them the best conditions to thrive. Get thinking about how you can get your local communities involved with our Love Your Yew Week in Feb 2027. To find out more, follow the link to our website to see our Q&A on Ancient Yews and why they're so important to churchyards and how you can help them.

Lest we forget

'In Flanders' fields the poppies blow between the crosses, row on row, that mark our place: and in the sky the larks, still bravely singing, fly scarce heard amid the guns below.'

This is the first verse of John McCrae's poem, first published in Punch magazine in 1915. It soon came to symbolise the sacrifice of all who died in World War One. Today, the poppy remains an important symbol of all those who have sacrificed their lives in conflicts over the years. But why do we remember them?

'They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.' (Micah 4:3). Writing 700 years before Christ, Micah spoke at the time when Samaria was captured due to the invasion of Assyria. However, he prophesied a future of hope, a world where nations would come together in peace rather than war. His words are fulfilled in the kingdom of God established by Jesus.

Our understanding of *peace* is more than simply the absence of conflict. It is about building relationships between people, communities and nations, founded on love and justice for all. As we remember those who have died in war, we should look practically at how we can build such relationships, beginning with our own families, colleagues and neighbours. *'We will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.'* (Micah 4:5). Let us ask God's Spirit to make us people of peace, justice and compassion for today's world.

'They shall grow not old as we that are left grow old: Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. At the going down of the sun and in the morning we will remember them.'

As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them. - President John F. Kennedy

Stone of Scone – still safely home in Perth

Thirty years ago, on 30th November 1996, England officially returned the Stone of Scone to Scotland, after 700 years. It was the coronation stone of the Scottish and later English and British monarchs. It is now on permanent display in Perth Museum.

According to Scottish history the 336lb block of sandstone – also known as the Stone of Destiny – was first recorded in 1249 as being used for the Scottish coronation of Alexander III. It was then taken by Edward Longshanks (Edward I of England) in 1296, who transferred it to Westminster Abbey, where it was placed under the English Coronation Chair.

Geologists say the stone was quarried near Scone, two miles north of Perth. There is little doubt that it was kept at Scone Abbey as a symbol of Scottish sovereignty, but there are also claims that it came originally from Ireland, and even that it had its origins in biblical times, being in fact the Stone of Jacob, taken from Bethel to Ireland by the prophet Jeremiah.

There are also suggestions that the stone taken by Edward 1 was a substitute, with the original hidden by local monks, perhaps in the nearby River Tay. Nevertheless, the stone taken by Edward remained at Westminster for another six centuries, being used in the coronation of Scottish Stuart kings – and others – on the English throne.

Scottish nationalist students stole the stone from Westminster Abbey on Christmas Day 1950, but accidentally broke it in two before its reappearance at Arbroath Abbey the following year. It was restored to Westminster in February 1952, but fragments of it appear to have gone missing during its repair.

Its official return to Scotland in 1996 was conditional on its returning to Westminster Abbey for coronations such as that of King Charles III in 2023.

The difference between perseverance and obstinacy is that one often comes from a strong will and the other from a strong won't. - Henry Ward Beecher

Growing number of churches moving away from oil and gas amid rising energy prices

An increasing number of Church of England parishes, some of them in the most rural areas of the country, are moving away from oil and gas and improving their energy efficiency as they brace for rising energy bills this winter.

A match funding pilot scheme from the Church of England's Net Zero Carbon Programme for churches to pay for work such as under pew heating, LED lighting, insulation, electrical upgrades and small solar panel and battery storage schemes has been expanded after it exceeded its targets.

Give to Go Green will be expanded to all 42 of the Church of England's dioceses after £938,000 – exceeding targets – was raised by 127 churches to help pay for work to cut their carbon emissions and increase energy efficiency. The total was boosted by an additional £830,000 of match funding from the Church of England's Net Zero Carbon programme.

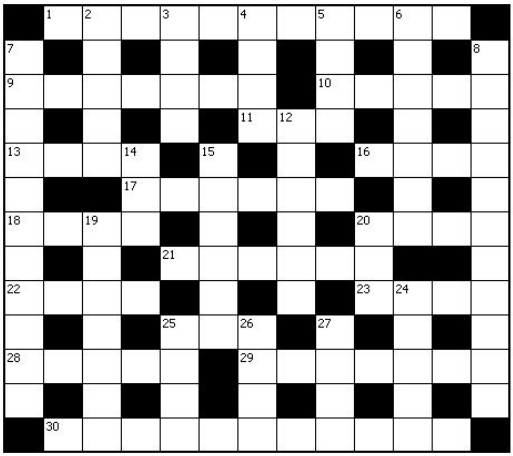
Julian Atkins, the Church of England's Net Zero Carbon Programme Director, said: "Across the country, parishes are taking action in ways that make sense for their own buildings and communities – raising money locally, making buildings more energy efficient and finding other practical solutions to reduce carbon emissions.

"We are deeply grateful to all our many committed volunteers who make this possible**.** Our role through the national Net Zero Carbon Programme is to create the conditions and provide the funding and expertise to help them do that.

"For many churches, this is about much more than reducing carbon. It is about creating warmer, more welcoming buildings that can serve their communities well, while using resources wisely and, where possible, reducing energy costs so that more can be invested in mission and ministry."

November

Crossword



Across

1 and 20 Down 'Lord of all _, Lord of all _, whose trust, ever child-like, no cares could destroy'(11,3)

9 Moses' question to a fighting Hebrew labourer: 'Why are you _ your fellow Hebrew?" (Exodus 2:13) (7)

10 Acclaimed cellist who contracted multiple sclerosis at the height of her fame, Jacqueline _ (2,3)

11 'At even _ the sun was set, the sick, O Lord, around thee lay'(3)

13 A descendant of Gad (Numbers 26:16) (4)

16 'Do not leave Jerusalem, but _ for the gift my Father promised' (Acts 1:4) (4)

17 Clambers (Jeremiah 48:44) (6)

18 Peter's response to questioning by the Sanhedrin: 'We must _God rather than men!' (Acts 5:29) (4)

20 Christian paraplegic author, artist and campaigner, _ Eareckson Tada (4)

21 Bird partial to the nests of other birds (6)

22 'Such large crowds gathered round him that he got into a boat and sat _ _ '(Matthew 13:2) (2,2)

23 Infectious tropical disease (4)

25 Tree (3)

28 'No fear of me should _ you, nor should my hand be heavy upon you' (Job 33:7) (5)

29 For example, to Titus, Timothy or Philemon (7)

30 Week beginning with Pentecost Sunday, according to the Church's calendar (11)

Down

2 'O Jerusalem _ how _I have longed to gather your children together' Matthew 23:37) (5)

3 Way out (4)

4 Exhort (Romans 12:1) (4)

5 Done (anag.) (4)

6 Highest of the four voice-parts in a choir (7)

7 Concerning the study of God (11)

8 Uniquely, it has Abbey, Cathedral and Chapel (11)

12 Admonish (Matthew 16:22) (6)

14 Frozen (3)

15 Established form of religious ceremony (6)

19 Inscription often found on gravestones (7)

20 See 1 Across

24 Behaved (Joshua 7:1) (5)

25 Time (anag.) (4)

26 Lists choice of meals (4)

27 'For the wages of sin is death, but the _ of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord'(Romans 6:23) (4)

What are you built on?

"Lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes. For you will spread out to the right and to the left…" Isaiah 54: 2, 3

How strong and flexible are you, as a person? Did you know that the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco can move up to 20 feet in either direction as its centre? It's built to sway – to absorb and accommodate vast daily stresses and heat. But it always comes back to its true centre, because it is built on a vast system of steel and concrete that sinks down, down into a solid rock foundation far below in the Pacific.

Each of us needs to be anchored like that - onto a sure foundation. Without it, we will be at the mercy of the storms and strong tides of life. Burdens and flying debris from other people's lives will knock us off balance.

That foundation for us is Jesus. How is your relationship with Him? Is it solid? Is it deep enough to hold you steady on your course as 2026 draws to a close? Jesus urges us to 'abide' in Him. It takes time to get to know Him. The Bible is His message to us; prayer is our message back to Him, and more: for if we draw close to Him, He promises to draw close to us, too.

Piety means letting God bend your will, not just your knees. - Anon

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

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So Doku

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

Enjoy.

Solution elsewhere!

On working with young people

The Rectory
St James the Least

My dear Nephew Darren

It is quite natural for you curates to enjoy working with young people in your parishes; church youth clubs were created in order to keep the newly ordained off the streets in the evenings. But be assured you will grow out of it. I consent to baptise babies and prepare teenagers for confirmation, but beyond that my contact with this alien life form is kept to an absolute minimum.

Dear Miss Thrush runs our weekly Pram Service - whose sole purpose seems to be to give young mothers an opportunity to discuss the ever-changing liaisons within the village, while their offspring shred hymn books and destroy the flower arrangements. I drop in from time to time in order to check that the more mobile haven't found where we hide the matches. An infant equipped with that knowledge can so easily become a teenage pyromaniac.

I can give you little advice on your youth group. When I was a curate, the major activity seemed to be to teach them how to wear gas masks, although today I imagine there is more concern about protecting them from other sorts of exotic chemicals. Also, I suspect you are kept busy keeping the young out of the

darker corners of the churchyard as they develop their anatomical knowledge – a past-time still enthusiastically pursued by each new generation.

You clearly find your monthly Youth Service a deeply enriching experience. As far as I am concerned, if such a liturgy had been necessary, then Cranmer would have provided us with one. Endlessly repeated choruses accompanied by a guitar would make me warm to the Quakers. I am sure St Paul's services would have been much enriched with Hymns Ancient and Modern. The disciples in hiding in Jerusalem were not even able to sing accompanied by an organ, which must have greatly dispirited them. I also feel that our Verger would be unable to cope with organising the strobe lighting and dry ice effects. It takes him all his time to remember to light the candles on the altar.

On this matter we must differ. You must worship God in your way, and I in His.

Your loving uncle,

Eustace

So Doku solution

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

Why you should NOT squeeze your teabag

More than eight million of us drink at least two cups of tea a day. Many of us drink five cups or more. As a nation, we love tea.

George Orwell loved tea. Back in 1946 he even wrote an essay, 'A Nice Cup of Tea' to set out his 11 rules for making the perfect brew. But nowadays, we turn to chemistry professors on the Tea Advisory Panel for their tea-making tips.

Why chemistry professors? Because there are almost 2,000 chemicals in tea, which is a "wildly rich molecular mix". And everything you do to your tea changes its chemical makeup.

So – some tips:

First of all, use *boiling* water on the tea leaves.

Secondly, warm your mug or teapot. That ensures the water is HOT when it hits your tea leaves.

Thirdly, swirl the bag or pot – swirling releases more of those subtle flavours.

Fourthly, let it mash, steep or brew for three to five minutes, to get the best flavour.

Fifthly, *never* squeeze your teabag! That releases bitter tannic acids.

Sixth – add the milk last, or the water won't be hot enough to brew your tea. Apparently, adding milk first is a historical relic from when boiling tea could break fragile china cups.

Seventh – take a moment to enjoy your tea. Chemists stress that medium to strong tea is really good for you. It increases your hydration, your cognitive function, and your bone health. It even helps cut the risk of type-2 diabetes and heart disease.

Finally, beware tea in America. They do odd things with it there. They use lukewarm water over indifferent tea bags. Even worse, they sometimes put a teabag in a mug of cold water and then boil it in a microwave. This is sacrilege!

Are vicars slowly disappearing?

There are certainly some worrying statistics out there. Such as:

There are 8,368 retired priests holding permission to officiate.

But there are only 6,682 clergy in paid (stipendiary) positions, and 2,440 in self-supporting, unpaid roles.

Nearly half of the current 6,682 paid priests are aged over 55. They all retire at 70.

But numbers of new entrants in training dropped from 591 in 2020 to 442 by 2025.

Where is this all headed? Worse case, by 2033, there could be only 5,400 full-time priests. That is 40 per cent of what the number was in 2000.

These sobering predictions come in a recent report by the campaign group Save the Parish. It argues that the decline has left the C of E at real risk of no longer being "a Christian presence in every community."

So, Save the Parish is calling on the C of E to "commit to a model that will support a young person in stipendiary ministry for their lifetime." It does not want a reduction in full-time paid clerical positions to save money, and it wants to lift the retirement age of 70.

Also, the report says that the Church should measure ministers' success on the "numbers of lives touched, funeral by funeral, cup of tea by cup of tea".

If a man's religion does not affect his use of money, that man's religion is vain. – H Martin

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Crossword Answers
ACROSS: 1, Hopefulness. 9, Hitting. 10, du Pre. 11, Ere. 13, Ozni. 16. Wait. 17, Climbs. 18, Obey. 20, Joni. 21, Cuckoo. 22, In it. 23, Yaws. 25, Elm. 28, Alarm. 29, Epistle. 30, Whitsuntide.

DOWN: 2, Often. 3, Exit. 4, Urge. 5, Node. 6, Soprano. 7, Theological. 8, Westminster. 12, Rebuke. 14, Icy. 15, Ritual. 19, Epitaph. 20, Joy. 24, Acted. 25, Emit. 26, Menu. 27, Gift.

Could a cemetery—or churchyard—surprise you?

A while back, I found a strange connection between the cemetery, opposite the church where I minister, and my hometown.

I discovered that a former head curator of the world-renowned Kew Gardens in west London was buried in the cemetery – and that one of his lasting achievements was to plant a line of trees along the gardens' Thames embankment.

Why? To hide unsightly views of industrial Brentford – where I was brought up – from visitors to the gardens.

Back then, Brentford was the site of one of London's largest gas production plants and its pungent smell drifted across the area. I was christened in a church that nestled among the gasworks.

Today, Brentford is a thriving west London suburb that even boasts a Premier League football team.

Cemeteries and churchyards can be places of encounter and surprise. Places too that speak of history, of community, of nature and of the spiritual.

My local municipal cemetery has graves dating from the 1880s, including more than 200 war graves and a memorial, built after the First World War. Walking among the numerous graves, you can see reminders of people who lived lives very different to our own.

Well-known people buried there include Samuel Ryder, who founded golf's Ryder Cup, and was a prominent local churchman.

The cemetery, like all cemeteries, also speaks of the breadth of the local community, with people of different nationalities and faiths buried within its grounds.

Humour sometimes features on the inscriptions. One of my favourite gravestones reads, "I can only please one person a day – today is not your day. Tomorrow doesn't look good either!"

The cemetery is a green oasis in a busy urban suburb. Take just a few steps away from the busy road, and you are in a nature reserve, with many birds, trees and plants, plus squirrels and other animals.

And, of course, the cemetery is a spiritual place, where many people go to remember their loved ones, perhaps to pray and reflect. Early morning in the cemetery is always a special time for me, where I can feel close to God.

If you are looking for somewhere to experience history, community, nature and the spiritual, then consider paying a visit to a cemetery or churchyard near you. It may just surprise you.

National Tree Week – 21st to 29th November

It really is time to appreciate our trees. Did you know:

That the UK has 123,000 ancient and veteran trees, and more ancient oak trees than the rest of Europe combined?

Or that trees help us feel better? Studies have found that exposure to forests generally reduces our mental and physical stress, anxiety, and depression.

Or that 95% of land carbon in the UK is stored in soil, and trees help put it there? When wood and leaves fall, their carbon gets stored in the soil.

Or that hedgerows alongside our roads can reduce air pollution exposure by up to 63%?

No wonder that each year the Tree Council and its partners bring together the conservation sector, volunteers and tree-lovers to mark the start of the annual tree planting season. Together, they plant thousands of trees and hedgerows, to celebrate these "magnificent mainstays" of our landscape.

And we need more trees. Sadly, only 13% of the UK's total land area is covered in trees. That's compared to an average of 46% in Europe. In England, the figure is just 10%.

On the plus side, there are more than 80 community tree nurseries in the UK, growing an estimated 250,000 trees a year, often from locally collected seed, and which are given away

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Remembrance Sunday 2026

This year the national service for Remembrance will be held on 8th November, and include the annual march past involving up to 10,000 veterans and eligible participants. It will be followed by formal two-minute silence on Wednesday, 11th November.

This year Remembrance marks several significant milestones:

The 110th anniversary of the 1916 Battles of the Somme and Jutland, as well as the introduction of wartime conscription.

The 70th anniversary since the Suez Crisis of 1956.

The 25th anniversary since UK armed forces first entered Afghanistan, following the 2001 deployments.

All Saints

At the beginning of this month, we celebrate 'All Saints' (1st November), when we remember all those heroes of the faith who have in one way or another been a witness to Christ in what they said and what they did. But sometimes the saints of old- those portrayed in Renaissance pictures or in craggy, oversized sculptures- can matter less to us than the saints we have personally known.

For instance, one minister tells of a good friend of his, Stan, a farmer on the Yorkshire Wolds, who died earlier this year. Stan was the sort of man you'd meet at the mart, or stop to have a chat with in the village. He always had time for you. You'd go away thinking 'salt of the earth', and you would be right.

But Stan was much deeper than that. He was a devout Christian, with a simple but profound faith, used by God in many situations that never made the public eye. His farm had a Site of Special Scientific Interest in that it captured many of the unique features of the Wolds. He was a knowledgeable plantsman, although you would have to drag it out of him. In his day he had taken Bibles to Soviet-era Ukraine and Romania, and received the thanks of Christians there who were so encouraged that they were not alone, that someone cared, made the effort to bring them the Word of God.

So Stan, although a quiet family man living on a fairly remote farm, had had a profound influence for God and for good in many people's lives, both in the area – and in Ukraine and Romania.

And there have been multitudes like him. This month, are there folk in your life who have been an influence on you for God and for good? What difference did they make to you?

All Saints-tide is the ideal opportunity to give thanks for them. They are life's unsung heroes, who help others steer a path closer to God by their wise words, or their support, their prayers. The impact of a good life on others can be enormous. For all of them, let's thank God.

If you fall, don't give up, get up! - Anon

Prayer for November 2026

Dear Lord, At this dark and dismal time, when the year is closing down and our lives get busier and the world more confusing, we can sometimes become discouraged and low in spirits.

Help us to adjust our perspective, to turn and look up, to focus afresh on You, to remember that Your name is above all names, above discouragement, above despair, above confusion.

Help us to be thankful for each day that You have made, recognising each one as a gift from You, to be treasured and lived fruitfully.

May we welcome Your powerful, healing light into our hearts and lives – Your light, which no darkness can dim. Help us to remember your words,

I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

Help us to follow you and walk in the light, this November and always. In your name, Amen.

By Daphne Kitching

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THE PARISH OF BROWNHILLS WITH OGLEY HAY

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