The Mustard Seed

The Parish magazine of the church of St James, Brownhills

A Family Following Jesus

www.stjameschurchbrownhills.co.uk

February 2026

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

Spring Messenger

As winter starts to draw to a close and the days are getting noticeably longer we all start to search for signs of spring. One of the first spring flowers is the Lesser Celandine. This little plant, often viewed as a garden weed, lights up our churchyards with bright, shiny, yellow stars set off beautifully by the surrounding dark green heart-shaped leaves. An old name for Lesser Celandine was 'Spring Messenger' and, like the Snowdrop, it can lift the spirits with the message that spring is coming.

Another old name is Pilewort, suggesting that this plant was used to treat haemorrhoids. Richard Maybey in his Flora Britannica considers this prescription to have been due to the Doctrine of Signatures, a belief that similar shaped plants could cure specific ills. In the case of Lesser Celandine it is the knobbly tubers that were thought to resemble piles!

Lesser Celandine is a common plant which can spread fast and likes shady damp areas, but it is not fussy and can be found in grassland, at the base of walls or monuments, on banks, verges and along path edges and is always to be found within churchyards, chapel yards and cemeteries. The cheerful yellow flowers can carpet the ground offering an important early nectar supply to emerging insects such as queen bumblebees, beetles and other pollinators.

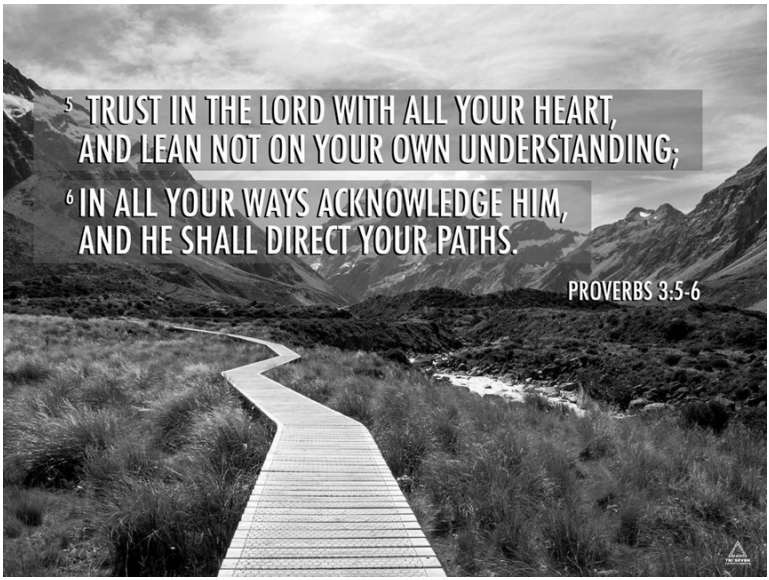
Although small, the Lesser Celandine has attracted the attention of the famous. Wordsworth wrote three poems about it and the naturalist Gilbert White of Selborne in Hampshire recorded when he saw his first Lesser Celandine each year, the average date being the 21st February. This date has been known as Celandine Day since 1795. Now, due to climate change, the flowers can be seen earlier in the year with some coming into bloom in late January.

Enjoy the Lesser Celandine in February, its flowers and leaves both die back in late spring so please make a record of it using iNaturalist, as anyone looking at plants later in the year may not find any remaining traces of it so it can easily go unrecorded. Although a common plant it is an important one and one on which our early pollinators rely.

All the best, Harriet

Harriet Carty, *Diocesan Churchyard Environmental Advisor,* harriet@cfga.org.uk,

You can trust God



During World War II, in the terrible days of the Blitz, a father, holding his small son by the hand, ran from a building that had been struck by a bomb. In the front yard was a shell hole. Seeking shelter as quickly as possible, the father jumped into the hole and held up his arms for his son to follow. Terrified, yet hearing his father's voice telling him to jump, the boy replied, 'I can't see you!' The father called to the silhouette of his son, 'But I can see you. Jump!' The boy jumped, because he trusted his father. In other words, he loved him, he believed in him, he trusted him and he had confidence in him.

'Faith', in the Bible, is primarily about putting our trust in a person. In that sense it is more akin to love. All loving relationships involve some element of trust. Faith is trust in God that transforms all your other relationships. Let's think a little more about trust and confidence…

Are you a confident person? If so, where does that confidence come from? Does it come from what you do or what you possess? Does it come from your education, looks, sporting ability or some other skill you have?

Does it come from what other people think about you?

There is nothing wrong with these things. Be confident, but ultimately your confidence should come from 'the Lord'. It is possible to have none of the other things and still be confident.

The writer of Proverbs and in chapter 3 says, 'The LORD shall be your confidence' (v.26a, AMP). The object of your faith is a person, 'the Lord'. God is the one person you can totally trust in everything. ***This 'confident trust' (v.23, AMP) transforms the way you live your life. It gives you: -***

- **Wisdom:** The fool is 'self-confident' (v.35, AMP). But those who are confident in the Lord are wise: 'Preserve sound judgment and discretion; they will be life for you' (v.21). Wisdom, good judgment and discernment come from walking closely with God.

- **Peace:** Success at work, wealth and fame are of little value if you do not have peace. Peace comes from a right relationship with God. There is no pillow as soft as a clear conscience: 'When you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. Have no fear of sudden disaster' (vv.24–25a). Whatever happens, you can trust that God is with you and in control.

- **Goodness:** 'Never walk away from someone who deserves help; your hand is God's hand for that person' (v.27, MSG). Take every opportunity to do good; if you have the ability to help someone, do not delay (v.28).

- **Love:** 'Do not contrive or dig up or cultivate evil against your neighbour, who dwells trustingly and confidently beside you' (v.29, AMP). Trust in God leads to a love for your neighbour.

- **Intimacy:** 'The LORD… takes the upright into his confidence' (v.32).

When the Lord is our confidence, he takes us into his confidence. This is a wonderful image of what intimacy with God looks like: 'His confidential communion and secret counsel' (v.32a, AMP).

Humility: God 'gives grace to the humble' (v.34b). If your confidence comes from trusting the Lord you will have no cause for pride. God promises to give you grace, blessing and honour (vv.33–35).

As part of St James' church family, as we work together, I pray that front and central we will have our confidence in the Lord Jesus. May we all pray prayers like this: 'Lord, help me to live the life of faith – walking closely with you and putting my trust and confidence in you, above all others and above all other things. Amen!'

With love and many prayers,

Rev'd Gayle

Did you know?

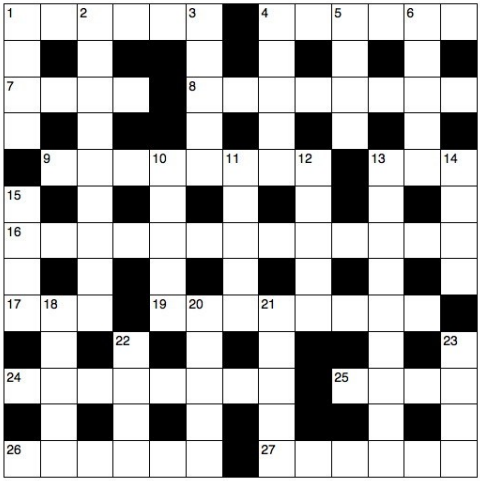
2026 is the only time that there are 4 Sundays, 4 Mondays, 4 Tuesdays, 4 Wednesdays, 4 Thursdays, 4 Fridays and 4 Saturdays in the month of February.

This will not happen again for 836 years!!

Nature forms us; sin deforms us; school informs us; Christ transforms us. - Anon

February

Crossword



Across

1 'If you love those who love you, what — is that to you?' (Luke 6:32) (6)

4 'They threw the ship's — overboard' (Acts 27:19) (6)

7 The first murderer (Genesis 4:8) (4)

8 He was the head Levite in charge of the singing when the ark of God was brought back to Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 15:22) (8)

9 Samson was noted for this (Judges 16:6) (8)

13 Solicit money or food from passers by (Acts 3:2) (3)

16 What William Booth's Christian Mission became in 1878 (9,4)

17 Alliance of Religions and Conservation (1,1,1)

19 'I will praise your name for ever and ever. — — I will praise you' (Psalm 145:1–2) (5,3)

24 Simon had (anag.) (8)

25 Desperate (Deuteronomy 28:48) (4)

26 Elisha witnessed the boy he was seeking to resuscitate do this seven times before opening his eyes (2 Kings 4:35) (6)

27 The belly and thighs of the statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream were made of this (Daniel 2:32) (6)

Down

1 'Before the — crows, you will disown me three times' (Matthew 26:75) (4)

2 Relating to the books of the Bible between Acts and Revelation (9)

3 'They have — the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!' (John 20:2) (5)

4 Belief (5)

5 'Take the following fine spices: ... 250 shekels of fragrant — ' (Exodus 30:23) (4)

6 'Do not — Jerusalem, but wait for the gift' (Acts 1:4) (5)

10 A seer (anag.) (5)

11 'Even there your hand will — me' (Psalm 139:10) (5)

12 The wild variety was part of John the Baptist's diet (Mark 1:6) (5)

13 A non-Greek speaker who was looked down on by civilized people (Colossians 3:11) (9)

14 Famous 1950s musical whose characters included members of

16 Across, — and Dolls (4)

15 The province from which Paul wrote to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 16:19) (4)

18 'He was standing in the gateway with a linen cord and a measuring — — his hand' (Ezekiel 40:3) (3,2)

20 'Today, if you hear his — , do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion' (Hebrews 3:15) (5)

21 The Jericho prostitute who hid two Israelite spies on the roof of her house (Hebrews 11:31) (5)

22 'And now these three remain: faith, — and love. But the greatest of these is love' (1 Corinthians 13:13) (4)

23 'God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end' (Daniel 5:26) (4)

Peaceful mind

The Bible tells the story of Jesus and His stressed disciples in a boat in a storm. Like them, we also get hit by storms in life. And like them, we can know that Jesus is also with us. Why not take a moment to ponder these promises:

Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never let the righteous be shaken. (Psalm 55:22)

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14:27)

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4: 6-8)

When you were born, you cried and the world rejoiced. Live your life so when you die, the world cries and you rejoice. - Native American saying

---

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

So Doku

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

Enjoy.

Solution elsewhere!

On the art of drinking well

The Rectory
St James the Least

My dear Nephew Darren

You closed your last letter with the remark that it was time to retire to bed with a cup of cocoa. That may be all very well for the pious intensity of a theological college - although a stiff whisky was always acceptable in my day - but it is not a style to continue once in the parish. I do feel obliged to give you a few hints about what should and should not be drunk in public as a parish priest.

Morning visits are to be discouraged, but if one is unavoidable, and you are invited to have a drink, then it has to be coffee. It is the only time of day when a mug is acceptable - provided, of course, that it is bone china or porcelain. In the afternoons one changes to tea, but only from cups. Blended varieties may be all very well for Curates in their first year, but it should be Darjeeling for an incumbent. And fruit teas are for Quakers only.

If an inappropriate vessel is offered, then the drink should be accepted, but left untouched. Since the visit will be discussed in the finest detail throughout the parish the moment you have left, your host will soon learn why and not make the same error a second time. It is for the same reason that if you ever want to circulate a piece of news round the parish as quickly as possible, never put it in the parish magazine, just mention it casually during one of your visits. Everyone will know by teatime.

Alcoholic drinks must be carefully judged. A sherry - dry, naturally - is probably best if you are invited to lunch. In the early evening, a gin and tonic would be the drink of choice. To ask for whisky would indicate that you are about to go over to Rome, and a mineral water that you have your roots in non-conformity. Beer is never, ever drunk in someone's house unless you suffer from some personal tragedy, such as being the diocesan youth chaplain.

However, an occasional beer in the pub with the bell-ringers (who will be real ale fanatics to a man) or after choir practice - which seems to be the real purpose of holding practices anyway - or as a treat for the sacristan, will show you are a man of the people. It is some years since I visited the pub.

Understanding wine should be taught at every theological college as an essential part of the ministry. Develop a taste for claret, dear boy, and you will be starting your journey towards high office.

And perhaps you should give that tin of cocoa to the verger.

Your loving uncle,

Eustace

So Doku solution

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

How to handle temptation

'I can resist everything but temptation' (Oscar Wilde). During Lent we remember Jesus' experience in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11), when *'He was led by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil.'* (1). Temptation is a test of whether we do things our way or God's way. After 40 days of fasting Jesus was tired, hungry and vulnerable. Like Him, the Devil will attack us at our most venerable moments, especially when we are stressed.

The first temptation was to turn stones into bread: Jesus' ministry was not about putting His own needs first, but being nourished by God's word. *'We do not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God'* (Deuteronomy 8:3). Like Jesus, we need to make God our priority and trust Him completely.

The second temptation was to put God to the test: Jumping off the Temple pinnacle would have been a dramatic way for Jesus to gain popularity, but this was not God's way! *'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'* (Deuteronomy 6:16). We too need to learn this lesson!

The third temptation was to worship Satan: The devil took Jesus up a mountain to offer Him worldly power. In contrast, His calling as Messiah was to be marked by suffering and honouring God. *'Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only'* (Deuteronomy 6:13). This is to be our experience of living for God.

Jesus stands with us in our temptations. As we claim the promises of Scripture, like Him, we will find strength in the Spirit's power and the victory of the Cross.

Consider these verses:

'Watch and pray, so that you enter not into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.' (Matthew 26:41)

'Since Jesus Himself has endured being tempted, He is able to help those who are tempted.' (Hebrews 2:18)

'Blessed is the man that endures temptation, for when he is tested, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. (James 1:12)

'If you look at the world, you'll be distressed. If you look within, you'll be depressed. But if you look at Christ, you'll be at rest!' (Corrie Ten Boom).

Greed

'How much money is enough? Just a little bit more.' (John D Rockefeller).

Greed is the overwhelming desire for *more and more* in our lives. In our consumer culture it can be hard to tell the difference between needs and wants - e.g. buying a new laptop or shoes for different occasions? We need to ask the question: *How much is enough*?

Jesus was approached by a man who wanted Him to settle a dispute about family inheritance. He said, *'Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.'* (Luke 12:15). Jesus goes on to tell the story of a rich farmer who builds bigger and bigger barns, but whose life is unexpectedly cut short by death. He concludes: *'This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich towards God.'* (21).

How do we overcome greed and become *'rich towards God'*? Paul writes: *'I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.'* (Philippians 4:13).

Overcoming greed involves learning to be content in whatever situation we find ourselves, in need or plenty. Paul is not saying that there is anything wrong with having food, money or possessions, but these cannot be the primary source of our contentment.

The secret of contentment is found in a transforming relationship with Jesus: *'I can do all this through Him who gives me strength.'* (13). He is the one who enables us to overcome greed and know riches.

'Contentment makes poor men rich; discontent makes rich men poor.' (Benjamin Franklin).

Crossword Answers

ACROSS: 1, Credit. 4, Tackle. 7, Cain. 8, Kenaniah. 9, Strength. 13, Beg. 16, Salvation Army. 17, ARC. 19, Every day. 24, Admonish. 25, Dire. 26, Sneeze. 27, Bronze.

DOWN: 1, Cock. 2, Epistolic. 3, Taken. 4, Tenet. 5, Cane. 6, Leave. 10, Erase. 11, Guide. 12, Honey. 13, Barbarian. 14, Guys. 15, Asia. 18, Rod in. 20, Voice. 21, Rahab. 22, Hope. 23, Mene.

Winnie the Pooh and Lent 2026

Remember the Winnie the Pooh stories? And Kanga's insistence on Baby Roo's taking his Strengthening Medicine? It's 'really quite a nice taste when you get used to it', she explained, although I'm not convinced Baby Roo always agreed.

It can be helpful to think of Lent as a sort of medicine; an opportunity to strengthen us in the things that are good, rein in other facets of our personality, and reset the compass to the true North of following Jesus. A Spring-clean of the soul, if you like.

Baby Roo (and Piglet on the one occasion he was subject to it) found Strengthening Medicine not to their liking, and we may groan inwardly at the thought of 'giving up something for Lent'. Think of what lies behind this 'giving up'. It's so that we may be strengthened, our character refined, our prejudices examined, our junk thrown overboard, and we may come to Passiontide and Easter more fit to walk the way of the Cross, and rise in new life with Jesus at His Resurrection.

Nor is Lent just a case of giving up chocolate. One year I gave up Facebook for Lent, having spent far too much time scrolling through it each day. It freed me to do other, more constructive things. And instead of giving up, why not take up something you've been meaning to do but never got round to; something life-affirming, something good for God.

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, which this year falls on 18th February. Many Christians go public with their intention to keep a good Lent by being 'ashed'- the sign of the Cross made on the forehead in a mixture of ash and holy oil at a special service that day. The ash is usually the burnt remains of the palm crosses from last year. Having been ashed, the intention of the 40 days of Lent is to maintain a steady course closer to God, symbolised by the giving up of something - like chocolate - which has a hold on us. We walk with Jesus on the way to the Cross, mindful of the 'riches of God's kindness, forbearance and patience' as St Paul has it, and mindful too of Jesus' choice of the Cross as a way for us to enter those riches more fully.

And to face the immensity of that sacrifice, and the immensity of God's riches made available to us in Jesus, we need all the Strengthening Medicine we can get!

The 'Ash' service at St James is at 7.30pm on 18th February

Can you tell truth from fake news?

Guard your heart and mind

Philippians 4 v 8 says “whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” Don’t let media consume your peace or distort your perspective. Stay grounded in what I good and true. Be mindful of what and how much content your consume online.

Model discernment and demonstrate wisdom

Pray before consuming news. Christians are not immune to misinformation. Ask for wisdom to distinguish truth from manipulation, fearmongering or deceit—James 1 v 5 “If any of your lacks wisdom, let him ask God”. Try to resist reactive outrage and echo chambers. This can be done by being sensitive to the emotions the content you are consuming is stirring up in you and not relying on just one outlet or platform. Compare coverage of the same vent from different perspectives. Look for facts over opinions. And always remember to check and verify sources before publishing, forwarding or resharing content. Proverbs 18 v 13 reminds us “If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.

Embrace digital spaces

Instead of retreating from social media, step into the conversation with care and good judgement. Just as the Gutenburg press opened up scripture to the masses, today’s digital tools can open up gospel storis to new audiences. Technology is not the enemy—it’s an opportunity.

Share authentic stories

Polished branding is less powerful than honesty. Real testimonies of life, loss, forgiveness and faith can cut through scepticism. Focus on human experience, while pointing gently to deeper truths.

Final thought

Silence is not neutrality. I the church withdraws from media, other voices will fill the space. By stepping forward with authenticity, discernment and courage, Christians can help shape a more honest and hopeful public conversation.

Edited extract from an article by Duncan Williams on discerning truth from fake news, and both personally and collectively modelling a Christ-like approach to the content we put out there.

Readings for February

Sunday 1st February

10am	Communion for Candlemas	Luke 2 v 22-40	
6.15pm	Our Living Hope	Ecclesiastes 3 v 1-1	1 Peter 1 v 3-12

Sunday 8th February

10am	Loving God with our Spirit	Colossians 3 v 1-17	Matthew 6 v 5-15
6.15pm	Water to Wine!	Psalm 36 v 5-10	John 2 v1-11

Sunday 15th February

10am	Loving God with our body	1 Corinthians 6 v 12-20	Matthew 7 v 24-29
6.15pm	To fulfil righteousness	Isaiah 42 v 1-9	Matthew 3 v 13-17

Wednesday 18th February (Ash Wednesday)

7.30pm	With ashing	Joel 2 v 12-17	Matthew 6 v 16-21

Sunday 22nd February

10am	Loving our comfortable neighbours	Acts 2 v 42-47	Matthew 12 v 43 -50
6.15pm	Prosperity in the Lord?	Deuteronomy 30 v 15-20	1 Corinthians 3 v 1-9

Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. - Martin Luther King Jnr

Prayer of Thanks for Candlemas

Dear Lord,

The shortest month, the snowdrop month! February brings those beautiful, hopeful little flowers, also called Candlemas Bells. Thank You, Lord, for the beauty and the hope.

Thank You for the reminder of when Jesus was presented at the Temple as a baby. Thank You, for Simeon recognising in that vulnerable baby the promised Saviour of all the world.

Oh Lord, how this world needs to hear afresh that message of salvation.

Open eyes to see You and to know You. Open ears to hear Your message of hope and reconciliation. Open hearts to receive Your love and to share it, for the sake of all the suffering people of the world.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

By Daphne Kitching

THE PARISH OF BROWNHILLS WITH OGLEY HAY

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

Vicar:	
Revd Gayle Greenway	07545 657636
Lay Ministers:	
Pete Biggs	
Liz Corbett	01543 370162
Graham Sutherington (Reader with Permission to Officiate	01543 671020

OFFICERS

Wardens:	
Margaret Powell	01543 371396
Roger Corbett	01543 370162
Lay Chair:	
Liz Corbett	01543 370162
Secretary:	
Brenda Stanford	07736 769659
Treasurer:	
Alan Wiley	07823 884061
Deanery Synod Representative:	
Roger Corbett	01543 370162
Organist and Worship Leader:	
Pete Biggs, BEd(Hons), AMusCAM	
Safeguarding Co-ordinator:	
Roger Corbett	01543 370162