

The Mustard Seed

The Parish magazine of the church of St James, Brownhills

A Family Following Jesus



www.stjameschurchbrownhills.co.uk

December 2025

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



The December Moth and the Winter Moth

It seems a strange time of year to look for moths but there are a couple of tough cookies who brave the winter weather! The December Moth and the Winter Moth have different ways to cope. The December moth wraps up warm, it has a coat of hairlike scales, giving a fluffy appearance, which helps it hold heat well enough to be active and to fly. The Winter moth by contrast can fly when at a lower body temperature. It has large delicate wings and a small body, its big wings able to beat less frequently to stay airborne.

Neither moth will feed when on the wing, they rely on food reserves built up as a caterpillar. The moth 'stage' is devoted solely to searching for a mate and, in the case of the females, laying eggs. December moth males and females both fly, with the female larger in size than the male, whilst Winter Moth females are flightless, they emerge from a chrysalis in the soil and crawl up a nearby tree. Once there they emit pheromones to attract males then wait for them to arrive. Both moth species lay their eggs on the winter twigs of broadleaved trees including oaks, birches, hawthorns and willows. The eggs hatch when the trees are coming into leaf, giving the caterpillars lots of young, soft leaves to eat.

Most people are more familiar with the caterpillars of both December and Winter moths than with the adult. December moth caterpillars are mottled brown, well camouflaged when on twigs and bark whilst Winter moth caterpillars are bright green, the colour of new leaves. You may have seen the holes in leaves caused by their voracious appetites or spotted a caterpillar dangling from the mouth of a parent bird, being taken to feed chicks in the nest. Whilst the adult moths may emerge at a time of year when there are few predators about, with bats in winter roosts, the caterpillars are an important early source of protein in the spring, particularly for breeding birds.

Moths are drawn to lights which may kill them or distract them from seeking mates and laying eggs. Please think about outdoor lighting, keeping it to the minimum need to give safe access and have a look for moths when out and about during the long winter nights.

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

Why Christmas?



Entering into December, what is most important for us as followers of Jesus is that we keep central why we celebrate Christmas, so that we can be ready to share with others who are yet to embrace Jesus in their lives.

There is something almost magical about Christmas: children dream of Father Christmas and his fantasy sleigh, we picture Christmas trees, snowy scenes, filled-up stockings, piles of presents and smiling families around the fire. The reality is often not as perfect as we imagine. Some people go over the top at Christmas. The overcrowding on the streets and in the shops can lead to over-spending and over-consumption.

Over-indulging takes its toll on family life. One nine-year-old boy wrote, 'I know Christmas should be a religious time, but to me Christmas is a time for the necessities of life such as food, presents and booze.' Also, one little girl wrote to her granny, 'Thank you very much for the nice gloves you sent me for Christmas. They were something I wanted – but not very much!'

Others can become over-demanding. One doting father asked his small daughter well in advance what she would like for Christmas. Shyly she announced she would like a baby brother. To everyone's surprise and delight her mother returned from hospital on Christmas Eve with a baby boy in her arms. When the father repeated the question next year, there was less hesitation. 'If it wouldn't be too uncomfortable for Mummy, I would like a pony!'

But while some go over the top, others struggle. For many, Christmas is one of the worst times of the year. Suicide rates go up, more people die from 'natural causes', marriages fall apart, psychiatrists' patients suffer regressions and family feuds begin. One poll suggested that there are three million family rows each Christmas.

A newspaper article, headed, 'Enough to drive you crackers', spoke of people breaking down at Christmas as a result of the pressure to be perfect. It reported that two psychologists, a psychotherapist and a counsellor were running a workshop entitled 'Stress in the family: coping with Christmas'. They said that part of its success seemed to be the chance it offered to get away from it all. The psychiatrist, Anthony Storr, in an article on depression at Christmas entitled, 'Cheer up, it's soon over' had this final piece of advice: 'Remember that Christmas, although recurrent, doesn't last for ever.'

With all the magic, the stress and the hype of Christmas, are we missing the point? What is at the heart of Christmas? In the words of C. S. Lewis, at Christmas we remember the 'central event in the history of the earth – the very thing the whole story has been about'.

So, seeking to keep this question as to why we celebrate Christmas central, let's ask what HAS TO BE alongside this question, which is WHY BOTHER WITH JESUS?

Well for starters, when Jesus was born a group of highly intelligent

philosophers thought he was worth bothering with. They stopped everything to take him three symbolic presents. The first was gold – a present fit for a king. The child in the manger was the King of kings and Lord of lords. God himself had come to live as part of our world. Too often Jesus has been obscured by Christmas. One man wrote to ‘The Times’ newspaper: ‘Sir: Failing to find any religious books in the bookshop, I asked an assistant for help. She showed me an inconspicuous handful of Bibles and prayer books, saying: “We have had to move them down to the bottom shelf because of Christmas.”’

YET: the point of Christmas is Jesus Christ. At Christmas we celebrate the birthday of the most important One who has ever lived. He is the centrepiece of our civilisation. After all, we call what happened before his birth ‘bc’ and what happened after ‘ad’. What I believe this means is that the best gift we can give to our family members, friends, neighbours, and work colleagues is Jesus. For each of those in our lives who is yet to encounter Jesus, why not prayerfully take the bold step of offering to pray with them, there and then when they’re with you, that they’d experience Him for themselves? And wait, to see what happens.

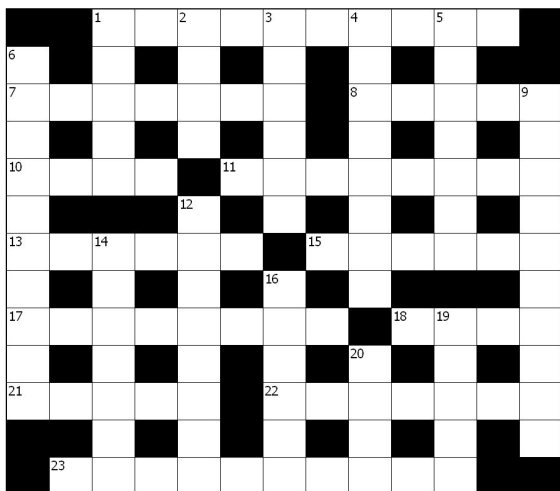
With love and many prayers for a peaceful, joyful and holy Christmas,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gayle', with a stylized, flowing script.

Revd Gayle

Some people use religion like a bus – they ride on it only while it is going their way. - Anon

December



Crossword

Across

- 1 Provisional meeting place of God and the Jews (Exodus 25:9) (10)
- 7 David's third son, killed when his head got caught in a tree during a battle with his father (2 Samuel 18:14,15) (7)
- 8 They ruled much of the west coast of South America in the 15th and early 16th centuries (5)
- 10 Small deer of European and Asian extraction (4)
- 11 Seized control of (Numbers 21:25) (8)
- 13 Terror (Luke 24:5) (6)
- 15 First World War heroine shot by the Germans in Brussels, Nurse Edith (6)
- 17 Stormy (8)
- 18 A bitter variety of this, together with lamb and unleavened bread, was the Passover menu for anyone unclean (Numbers 9:11) (4)
- 21 Arson (anag.) (5)
- 22 How John Newton described God's grace in his well-known hymn (7)
- 23 Habitation (Isaiah 27:10) (10)

Down

- 1 and see that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:8) (5)
- 2 The wicked man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are as ... as a lion (Proverbs 28:1) (4)
- 3 One of the exiles, a descendant of Parosh, who married a foreign woman (Ezra 10:25) (6)
- 4 He escaped from Nob when Saul killed the rest of his family and joined David (1 Samuel 22:19,20) (8)
- 5 City and lake in Central Switzerland (7)
- 6 Offer your bodies as living, holy and pleasing to God (Romans 12:1) (10)
- 9 Pouches carried by horses (Genesis 49:14) (10)
- 12 One who accepts government by God (8)
- 14 Aromatic substance commonly used in Jewish ritual (Exodus 30:1) (7)
- 16 He asked Jesus, 'What is truth?' (John 18:38) (6)
- 19 Are (Romans 13:1) (5)
- 20 You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will ... his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21) (4)

And there were Shepherds . . .

In his gospel, Luke tells how the shepherds in the fields were keeping watch over their flocks when they were terrified by the sudden arrival of heavenly angels, surrounded by the glory of the Lord. And the message of the angel that night has rung down the centuries:

“I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” (Luke 2:10,11)

And so, the first people to greet the Saviour were not rich VIPS, but humble shepherds. And in turn, it was the shepherds who became the first evangelists: for they would have gone home to their families and neighbours that night with the amazing news of what they had seen.

Meanwhile, for Mary there followed a time of reflection. She gathered up in her mind all her impressions, and all that the shepherds had shared about the angelic visit. She knew it was treasure, and not to be squandered. Then she quietly pondered in her heart the meaning and significance of all that had happened, so that she would never forget.

Exuberant witness and quiet contemplation are not opposites. They are, in fact, good companions in the spiritual life!

So, this Christmas, let’s be filled with the joy that the Saviour has also been born ‘to us’. May our lives reflect the glory of His coming, even in a small way. May our interactions with friends, colleagues and families during this Advent season reflect the great joy that the angels brought that night, so long ago.

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

So Doku

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

Enjoy.

Solution elsewhere!

Your first parish

The Rectory
St James the Least

My dear Nephew Darren

And so, the old year draws to a close, and you are packing to move to your own first parish in January. Let me give you some final words of advice.

Curates, you will have noticed, are forgiven everything. I hope you have appreciated this period of grace, because come 1st January, all that will change. You will then become responsible for everything that goes wrong in your church. You must be able to mend leaking taps, shovel snow, arrange flowers, mow the churchyard and run jumble sales. You will be expected to know the moment someone falls ill – preferably the day before. In addition, they will expect you to preach profound sermons - in seven minutes flat, and to lead a life of prayerful solitude while being the life and soul of the parish. From the day your predecessor left, he will have turned into a saint. You will be their new disappointment. Be assured that whatever you do, you will always disappoint someone.

Be prepared for phone calls at 3am telling you that someone has left a light on in church, and shouldn't you go turn and it off? You will be asked about car parking arrangements for the October Harvest Service by mid-January, while hymns for the 9 Lessons and Carols will be required by early summer. I

suggest you buy in extra pullovers, overcoats and scarves for life in your vicarage. A good number of mousetraps may well come in useful too.

Welcome to your new life of an incumbent.

Expect that each Sunday morning, as you prepare for the service, there will be a straggling queue of people who want to tell you an astonishing variety of things: there is a large cobweb 30 feet up over the pulpit, they don't like the second hymn on the board, the flowers look rough this week, there may be a bat in the vestry, some child has left a shoe in the back porch, and the car park has broken glass in it.

You may find this a distraction as you prepare for a worship service. But remember that at least they have bothered to come to church at all. In my experience, congregations are always irritating, but at least they do take up a lot of space, and that looks good in the pews. The church would look empty without them.

Your loving uncle,

Eustace

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

So Doku solution



Christmas With St James' Church, Brownhills



Sunday 7th Dec at 10 am – All-Age Communion, followed by the Church Family Christmas Meal*

Wednesday 10th Dec at 7.00 pm – Beer & Carols Evening* at the Jack Jigger Taylor Pub on Brownhills High Street

Saturday 13th Dec – 12 noon – 4 pm – ‘Meet Mary & Joseph’s Donkey’ Event* for all local Children. Come along to see a real donkey, hear the story of Christmas, make crafts and enjoy Chicken Nuggets & Chips.



Sunday 14th Dec at 6.15 pm – Carols by Candlelight.

Thursday 18th Dec at 7.30 pm – Blue Christmas – a reflective service for you if you’re grieving or sad for whatever reason.

Sunday 21st Dec at 4.15 pm – The Christingle Service, for all local children. Come along for an interactive, child-friendly service.



Christmas Eve at 4.15 pm – The Nativity Service, for all local children. Another interactive, child-friendly service, with the Christmas Story brought to New Life!

**Christmas Eve at 11.15 pm – Midnight Holy Communion
10 am Christmas Day – All-Age Holy Communion*, with a toy for each child attending.**



New Year’s Eve Party* – 7 pm – Midnight!

***All marked with an Asterisk Star symbol requires sign-up at St James’ Church on a Sunday during October & November 😊 You can also sign-up to reserve a place at any of these events by calling or texting Rev’d Gayle on 07545 657 636. We would love to see you.**



Christmas Unwrapped!

All of us have received unwanted gifts at Christmas. For Joseph the gift of a child, as recorded in Matthew chapter 1, was not something he really wanted. Although he was engaged to Mary, her pregnancy would be grounds for divorce. Not surprisingly, with the associated social disgrace, Joseph wanted to divorce Mary quietly (Matthew 1:19). However, God intervened in a dream: *'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel, which means, God with us.'* (1:23). In a scary and uncertain world, what does the message of **Immanuel** say to us today?

God is present with us

God assured Joseph that He was working in all that Joseph was going through. The eternal and creator God entered time and space as a baby. This baby is both uniquely divine but also fully human. This means that we can know God personally, not just know about Him. The Holy Spirit is committed to making Jesus' life and character real in us, and bringing meaning to our circumstances, just as He worked in Mary's life.

God is on our side

Christmas touches some raw nerves in our lives, including stress, family rows, loneliness and financial pressures. However, God does not remain aloof from our experiences. In Jesus He enters our world of hopes and fears, joys and disappointments. He understands what we are going through, as He is alongside us. By the cross and resurrection, He gave His life that we might know His love, joy, peace and forgiveness.

For Joseph, as well as us, the Christmas message is one of hope in an uncertain world. It is a time to re-consider the claims of **Immanuel** (*'God with us'*) as we entrust ourselves to Him for the coming year.

Crossword Answers

ACROSS: 1, Tabernacle, 7, Absalom, 8, Incas, 10, Roes, 11, Captured, 13, Fright, 15, Cavell, 17, Cycloptic, 18, Herb, 21, Sonar, 22, Amazing, 23, Settlement
DOWN: 1, Taste, 2, Bold, 3, Ramiah, 4, Abiathar, 5, Lucerne, 6, Sacrifices, 9, Saddlebags, 12, Theocrat, 14, Incense, 16, Pilate, 19, Exist, 20, Save.

A Gossip-free life

Can you picture a gossip-free life?

A life where no-one is hurt by gossip. Where no-one experiences the deep pain of feeling they've been betrayed by friends.

A life where you never have to wonder what is said about you when you leave the room.

A life where reputations aren't wrecked by loose tongues. Where no-one is lying awake at night turning over the agony of their lives being ruined by the scandalous comments of others.

A life where your confidences will be kept. Where it's safe to be vulnerable with others and to tell them deep and personal things.

A life where the information shared with you in conversation is always fitting. Where you never have to wonder if it's appropriate to listen to what is being said to you.

Such a gossip-free life sounds wonderful. It's a life we can look forward to in the eternal heavenly new creation.

But it's also a life that has been lived perfectly here on earth—once. Look at Jesus. Never did He speak words that were inappropriate. Not once did he speak from a selfish motive. Jesus did not pass on the personal information of others in order to persuade people to follow Him. In short, Jesus didn't gossip.

The Bible tells us that He was *tempted in every way, just as we are, yet he did not sin* (Hebrews 4:15). Therefore Jesus would have felt the powerful temptation to speak badly of others in order to protect His own reputation. Jesus would have felt the tantalizing desire to just stand there and listen to gossip without stopping the gossipers in their tracks. But Jesus never succumbed to those temptations.

Seeking to rid ourselves, and our fellowships, of the destructive sin of gossip is something God wants for us. Therefore we can be sure He will help us in the battle to eradicate gossip from our lives. He wants us to be gossip-free people.

Could our churches be like that? It needs to start with us.

Edited extract from Just between you and me by Paul Williams

Events Diary

Sunday 7th December—Church Family Christmas Meal after morning service. Cost of £5—please book.

Wednesday 10th December—Beer & Carols at Jack ‘Jigger’ Taylor pub on the High Street at 7pm. Supper tickets available from Joy Powell, £8 each.

Saturday 13th December—Meet Mary & Joseph’s Donkey (it’s a real one!). Please book with Gayle if your child would like some chicken nuggets.

Sunday 14th December—Carols by Candlelight at 6.15pm.

Thursday 18th December—Blue Christmas service at 7.30pm.

Sunday 21st December—Christingle Service at 4.15pm.

Wednesday 24th December—Christmas Eve Nativity service at 4.15pm.

Wednesday 31st December—New Year’s Eve Party from 7pm.

Evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. – Anon

Christmas Services at St James

Christmas Eve Midnight Holy Communion at 11.15pm.

Christmas Day—Holy Communion at 8am

Christmas Day—All-Age Holy Communion at 10am.

Readings for December

Sunday 7th December

10am	Watch out!	Luke 1 v 5-25	
6.15pm	God with us	Isaiah 7 v 10-16	Romans 1 v 1-7

Sunday 14th December

10am	The Scriptures testify	Psalm 12	John 5 v 31-40
6.15pm	Carols by Candlelight	Various	

Thursday 18th December

10am	I will comfort my people	Isaiah 40 v 1, 25-31	Mathew 5 v 3-12
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Sunday 21st December

10am	Mary visits Elizabeth	Psalm 113	Luke 1 v 39-45
4.15pm	Jesus, light of the world	John 12 v 37-46	

Wednesday 24th December

4.15pm	What difference does this baby make?	Various
11.15pm	The Blessed Hope	Titus 2 v 11-14
		Luke 2 v 1-20

Thursday 25th December

10am	The Saviour Child is with us	Luke 2 v 1-20
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Sunday 28th December

10am	A Season to be jolly	Isaiah 61 v 10-ch 62 v 3	John 1 v 1-18
6.15pm	NO SERVICE		

You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you. - Dale Carnegie

Prayer for Christmas 2025

Dear Father,

Christmas is coming. It's all such a rush – planning, shopping, spending, wrapping, posting, stressing! What's it all about?

Lord, help us, in all the rat-race busyness, to make time to focus on that baby at the centre of it all. That baby who is Your Son, who was with You in the beginning and who, with You, created all things; that baby who brings life and light and hope and salvation; that baby who was and is Jesus, God, made man.

Lord, we thank You for that baby-gift to us – the greatest gift there has ever been. Thank You that because He came, grew up, lived, died and rose again, there is light in the darkness of this world's mess – light that can never be put out, that evil can never overcome.

Jesus is the Light of the World. Putting our trust in Him, we thank You Lord, for Christmas – for Your grace and love for us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

By Daphne Kitching



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THE PARISH OF BROWNHILLS WITH OGLEY HAY

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

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Lay Ministers:

Pete Biggs

Liz Corbett	01543 370162
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Graham Sutherland (Reader with Permission to Officiate)	01543 671020
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Roger Corbett	01543 370162
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Lay Chair:

Liz Corbett	01543 370162
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Secretary:

Brenda Stanford	07736 769659
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Treasurer:

Alan Wiley	07823 884061
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Deanery Synod Representative:

Roger Corbett	01543 370162
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Organist and Worship Leader:

Pete Biggs, BEd(Hons), AMusCAM

Safeguarding Co-ordinator:

Roger Corbett	01543 370162
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