

DEC 2025-JAN 2026 CHRISTMAS

SPIRE

  
St James  
Hampton Hill

HAMPTON HILL'S PARISH MAGAZINE

YOUR FREE COPY

Christmas  
in  
Bethlehem

Wishing you  
joy and peace

[stjames-hamptonhill.org.uk](http://stjames-hamptonhill.org.uk) or find us on    THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND



## CLERGY



### VICAR Rev Prebendary Derek Winterburn

Derek was born in Orpington, Kent, and ordained in 1986. He served in several diverse London parishes before becoming vicar here in 2016. He is married to Sandra, a teacher, and has two children. A keen photographer, he posts a picture online every day, combining it with a daily walk or cycle ride. He can be contacted at any time other than on Mondays (his day off).

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### ASSOCIATE PRIEST Rev Jacky Cammidge

Jacky was born in Abertillery, South Wales, and ordained in 2015. She is a self-supporting minister, married to Alan, and has three children. During term-time she runs Hampton Hill Nursery School, based in the church hall, with her family.

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### ASSISTANT PRIEST Rev Canon Tim Marwood

Tim taught in London primary schools for 36 years. He was ordained priest in 1996 and was parish priest at Petersham for 13 years, retiring in 2021. He is now a part-time hospital chaplain. Married to Jane, a former headteacher, Tim supports Harlequins RFC and England cricket.

Tel: 073 6928 0040 Email: [frtimmarwood@hotmail.com](mailto:frtimmarwood@hotmail.com)

## How to get in touch with the church



### CHURCH OFFICE

Church & hall bookings, and all general inquiries

Nick Bagge

Nick deals with general enquiries as well as church and hall bookings. The office is open: Monday, Wednesday and Friday 0930-1230; and Tuesday and Thursday 1230-1530.

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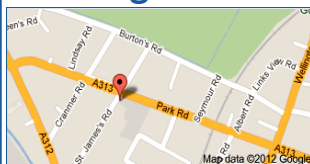
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For all other church contacts please email or telephone the Church Office.

## Finding us



We are on the corner of St James's Road and Park Road. The hall is next to the church. There is unrestricted parking on nearby roads. Buses stopping nearby include the R70, R68, 111 and 285.

## Follow us

For the latest news go to our website [stjames-hamptonhill.org.uk](http://stjames-hamptonhill.org.uk) or follow us on social media:

[@stjames-hamptonhill](https://www.facebook.com/stjames-hamptonhill)

[@stjameshamptonhill](https://www.instagram.com/stjameshamptonhill)

## Church and Hall Hire

The church and hall are available to hire. The church is used for concerts and public meetings. There is also a small meeting room to hire.

The church is equipped with a modern audio visual system, a projector and large screen, and a range of microphones. A five camera mixer desk can be used for livestreams or recordings. The church has extensive stage lighting.

The hall is available to hire for one-off parties or events, or for regular community classes. For all enquiries contact the Church Office (above)

## Support us

The church is a charity registered in England and Wales (1129286). It does not receive grants to cover its running costs. Instead it generates money from supporters and by hiring the buildings.

Support our work:

<https://bit.ly/Give2StJas>



## FROM THE EDITOR

Christmas seems to come round more quickly each year! Our High Street is already lit up over the shops and in Templeton Square. I must admit that when I go out at night I try to drive past them.

Our centrespread is about the Holy Land and the places connected to the Nativity. If you have been to the Holy Land you will know that the situation is very different to the scenes depicted in the Christmas story. Derek writes from first-hand experience, having visited it many times.

I remember Julian Reindorp saying how difficult he found it to sing *O little town of Bethlehem*, having been there himself. Tim features this carol on page 6.

The back page this time is a reminiscence of Christmas and the customs we maintain each year, with some interesting stories.

Our church is busy with all the schools' carol services and concerts as well as our Carol Service and Christmas services.

Details of all these are on page 3.

A happy Christmas and peaceful New Year to all our readers.

Best Wishes

Janet



Cover photo: Church of the Nativity, Manger Square, Bethlehem, at Christmas ©iStock

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A YEAR



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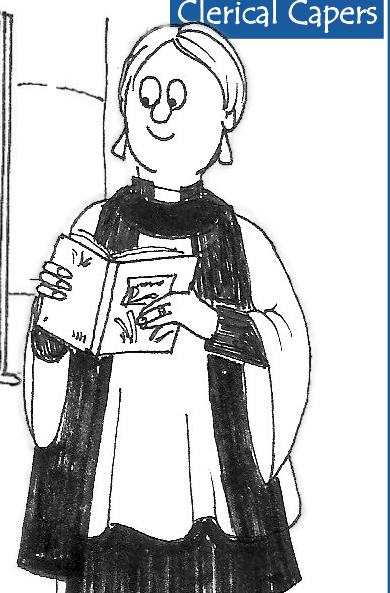
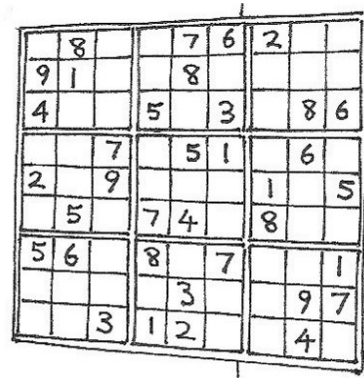
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Sara enjoyed getting people to work out the carols for themselves



# DEREK WINTERBURN



© Stamp Design Royal Mail Group Ltd (2025)

**H**ave you seen all the Christmas stamps for this year? There are five designs featuring scenes from the Nativity, illustrated by Paula Doherty, an artist based in Reigate. Of course, like clergy, each year the Royal Mail has to find a fresh way of presenting Christmas. Last year, they featured cathedrals in the snow and in 2023 lines from carols were matched by colourful paintings.

This year's stamps are similar to 2023 in content, but have the look of collage, as if they are pieced together from different textures. They are vibrant, clear and attractive, but they are not self-explanatory; they cannot be.

Since 2022 there have been fewer denominations of stamps needed so the Christmas story is told in just five pictures — a tall order!

## Mary on a donkey

In the Large Second Class mail stamp we see Mary and Joseph on their way to Bethlehem to be registered. As is traditional, Mary rides a donkey. The stamp cannot explain why this couple are on the road, or their relationship. However, the artist shows us the couple united in attitude and in their direction of travel.

If we have read Matthew's story we will know that God had to smooth out Joseph's hesitation about marrying Mary.

The 'middle' stamp is for First Class post and it has a picture of Mary and the baby Jesus. They are depicted with halos — marking the people as holy. We are not distracted by animals in the stable. Although the baby might be asleep, his eyes are painted with the same style as the mother's, so I think we are seeing them gaze at each other with love.

## Three by three

The fourth and fifth stamps resemble each other and echo the Large Second: three men facing left, the shepherds and then the Magi. The shepherds are looking up to a brighter light — the angels above them; the Magi are following the star in the East.

While the Magi, as usual, are crowned and are carrying their gifts, one shepherd is

# JESUS GETS FIRST CLASS DELIVERY!

carrying a sheep. That might simply be a call back to the carol: 'If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb', but I wonder if it might also be a connection to the First Class stamp — the colour and the orientation of the sheep and the baby

So I am inclined to view this stamp — which must be the most popular of the 150 million sold — as a subtle affirmation of the postal system as well as a very general reference to all the angels in the nativity story.

**I am inclined to view the second class stamp — which must be the most popular of the 150 million sold — as a subtle affirmation of the postal system as well as a very general reference to all the angels in the nativity story.**

are very similar. John the Baptist calls Jesus 'the Lamb of God.'

## Second class puzzle

The first stamp in the sequence, for Second Class, is a bit of a puzzle to me. It shows a single *herald* angel.

If it was simply the first picture in a chronological sequence it would be the Archangel Gabriel (with or without Mary), announcing to her that she will bear God's son.

Although there was a classic annunciation stamp in 2022, we have to go back 10 years to find another on a stamp (and then the archangel looks rather too much like a fried egg!)

'Angel' comes from the Greek word for messenger. So letters and cards delivering news are literally stamped as *Message to be delivered!*

## A talking point

Although it has been suggested that 'religious' stamps were going to be phased out, we can be pleased that for the past seven years (but one, last year) the stamps have illustrated the Nativity.

They cannot tell the whole story and only provoke thought. It is up to us to reflect on them, to draw inspiration from them, or use them as talking points with family and friends.

## St James Services Sundays

Holy Communion (said) 8am

Parish Communion 9:30am **Not 7 Dec**  
Livestreamed on Facebook

Together 3:30pm **14 Dec; 11, 18, 25 Jan**  
Our shorter, all-age service, particularly good for young families

Messy Church 3:30pm **18 Jan**

Compline 8pm **30 Nov; 7, 14 Dec**

**Tue, Thu, Fri** 2-23 Dec; 6-30 Jan  
Morning Prayer 9am

**Wednesdays** 3-17 Dec; 7-28 Jan  
Midweek Communion 9:30am

**Mondays** 1-15 Dec; 12-26 Jan

Ark Playgroup 10am-12pm

Our popular playgroup for under 5s and carers includes crafts, music and play.

**Tuesdays** 2-16 Dec; 6-27 Jan

Connections Café 10:30am-12:30pm  
Join us for coffee, cake and conversation.

## On Christmas Night

Saturday 6 December 7pm

Concordia Voices perform an evening of seasonal classics. Tickets £13 on the door.

## Christingle Sunday

Sunday 7 December 10am

All Age service in aid of The Children's Society.  
Come and take home a candle in an orange!

## Autumn Concert

Sunday 7 December 3pm

Middlesex Yeomanry Concert Band perform Christmas classics. Tickets £15 on the door.

## Leaf Sweep

Saturday 13 December 10am

Please support our annual maintenance day when we clear the leaves and clean the gutters.

## Christmas Services

### Carols by Candlelight

Sunday 21 December 6pm

A traditional service of carols and readings.

### Children's Carols

Wednesday 24 December 3pm & 4:30pm

Carols and the nativity story, crib and crafts. So good we do it twice — choose the time that suits.

### Christmas Night Communion

Wednesday 24 December 11:30pm

### Christmas Day

Thursday 25 December

Holy Communion 8am  
Carols and Communion 9:30am

### Winter Ceilidh

Friday 27 February 7:30pm

Full details are on page 7.



# IN HIS FOOTSTEPS FOLLOWING JESUS

**Birthplace** The Church of the Nativity – note the small doorway!

**A**lthough we often tell our nativity stories without being overly concerned with authenticity, the gospel writers provide a wealth of background material. In particular they often tell us where the events happened. A visitor to the Holy Land soon finds that there are churches built on this site or that: a church marks the spot. While a modern visitor might presume that we can never be so sure, a little investigation reveals that we might be closer to the places of the original events than at first thought.



**For centuries, pilgrims have flocked to Bethlehem to stand in the place where they believe Jesus was born. The Church of the Nativity is one of many buildings that tell his story. But isn't it all a bit suspect? Derek Winterburn follows the trail.**

## Starting at Nazareth

The first chapter of the nativity story is the account of how the archangel Gabriel announces to the Virgin Mary that she will bear God's son. Luke tells us that Mary lived in Nazareth, a hitherto unknown village. It has been calculated that fewer than 500 people lived there at that time. It is now a large mainly Arab town in northern Israel.

There is a vast modern church, 'the Basilica of the Annunciation' in Nazareth. It dominates the skyline in the way that St Paul's used to do in London. Nazareth was a small village in the first century. But the site itself has been respected since Helena (the mother of Emperor Constantine) visited in the fourth century.

Helena played an important role in the identification of the holy places; her method was to ask

local Christians where events took place. She was confident that they had passed on their knowledge from generation to generation, by worshipping in particular places and building churches there.

**Annunciation**  
A view of first century Nazareth



The modern church is built on two levels; in the lower level is the *Grotto*, which is said to be the childhood home of Mary. However, archaeologists have excavated further down and uncovered silos, oil presses, and house foundations that can be more confidently dated to the time of Christ.

While it would be foolish to say this particular room was Mary's — it would have been one of these, or nearby.

A later piece of Christian writing places Mary at the village spring, when the Archangel appeared to her. There is only one natural spring in Nazareth — this is now contained within the Orthodox Church of St Gabriel.

Nearby is 'Mary's well', fed by the spring. It is almost certain that Mary (and later Jesus) visited these places.

## Bethlehem's place in story

The Christmas story really is centred on Bethlehem. Unlike Nazareth, Bethlehem was well known in the First Century as the place of King David's birth. It is six miles from Jerusalem, and the road between the two towns, along which Mary and Joseph travelled, remains the same. So a modern visitor can walk into Bethlehem through an entrance that is in the place of the ancient gates.

As well as a series of churches in Israel, a visitor soon encounters many caves. A Bible reader is acquainted with, for example, Jesus's tomb set in rock, but underneath the site of the Church of the Nativity there is a whole complex of caves.

Around 155AD, the apologist Justin Martyr recommended that those who



**Statue Mary** outside the Basilica of the Annunciation

doubted Jesus was really born in Bethlehem could go there and visit the very cave where he was born.

## No room at the inn?

Most people who know anything about the birth of Jesus believe that he was born in a stable because 'there was no room in the inn'. However, it is an open secret among many scholars and Christians in Israel/Palestine that that may not be so. More in keeping with archaeology and local tradition is the understanding that caves would be the inner





**Water** The church over the spring in Nazareth

part of the dwellings, and that the animals would be kept at the front, perhaps in a courtyard or covered area. I have seen such arrangements still in use in Bethlehem and in Jerusalem.

### Church of the Nativity

In any case when Helena visited Bethlehem in 325-228AD she was shown the caves that Justin knew, and she instructed that a church be built over them — fixing the site.

Apparently there was a four metre-wide hole offering a view down into the cave. Shortly afterwards, St Jerome began to live in a neighbouring cave, and there he translated the Old and New Testaments into Latin (the Vulgate Bible); Bethlehem became a great monastic centre. However after an uprising the church was ruined, and then rebuilt by the Emperor Justinian on a grander scale in 614.

The main door of this church is curious: the original was vast, but the Crusaders made a much smaller arch, and then it was made even smaller in the Turkish period to prevent looters driving carts in and out! There is something appropriate about how everyone now has to stoop to enter the church: the *Door of Humility*.

The nave of the church has been extensively restored. When I first went it was a dark, dusty and unattractive place. However, the repairs

have revealed colourful and dramatic mosaics on the walls and floors. But people come to visit the 'Birth Cave'. After what might be a long wait, a visitor goes down some steps into a small space. The walls are covered by leather hangings creating a very claustrophobic space when it is busy.

A fourteen point silver star marks the supposed spot of Jesus' birth. An inscription on the star states: *Hic de Virgin Maria Jesus Christus Natus Est* — meaning *Here Jesus Christ was born to the Virgin Mary*. From there a visitor returns to another church, the later Catholic one, and access to the remainder of the caves. Of course, there is no way of telling if that is exactly where Mary gave birth - it is quite unlikely. Nevertheless, he had to be born somewhere nearby, so here is as good as anywhere.

### Story made real to pilgrims

Many pilgrims find the Church of the Nativity (and the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem) so unlike anything described in the gospels that a visit can be quite disappointing. It does not help that both churches have been fought over by different Christian denominations (which has slowed down any maintenance or restoration work).

But these places are a clear reminder that the story of salvation actually unfolded in real places and that countless pilgrims in earlier times have marked these places with honour and prayer.



**Grotto** Where Mary gave birth to Christ



# Around the Spire

## THE VERY BUSY DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

**THE** local community marks Christmas in many ways — and we are delighted to play our part by hosting concerts, services, talks and celebrations.

December begins with Hampton Hill Junior School's Christmas Concerts, closely followed by the Carol Service of the Junior Department of Lady Eleanor Holles School. Over the course of two weeks, these events draw hundreds of families to the church, heralding the busiest period.

Soon after, on 6 December, we welcome the first choral concert by Concordia Voices. The following day, the Middlesex Yeomanry Concert Band return for a concert that includes seasonal music and carols.

There's a brief pause before Saturday 13 December, when Step on Stage Academy of Dramatic Arts presents *The Holly and the Ivy*, their annual charity concert.

Two days later, Teddington Choral Society deliver an evening of carols and Christmas shopping with *Come and Sing Carols*. This event launched last year and proved to be highly successful.

Hampton Hill Nursery School are the final school to hold their Christmas concert in church. Then, the church calendar of events begins with *Carols by Candlelight*.

For details of all the public events, look out for this leaflet, being delivered to homes and shops across the parish.



**THE** local community turned out in force to hear Charlie Dore and Julian Littman sing, including the crowd pleaser, *Pilot of the Airwaves*, that became a hit in the UK and US and launched a successful career for the British singer-songwriter.

## ATTENDANCE IS UP!

**ATTENDANCE** at Church of England churches grew for the fourth year in a row last year.

The overall number of regular worshippers rose to just over one million in 2024, according to the annual Statistics for Mission findings.

It was the second year in a row in which congregations stood above one million since the Covid-19 pandemic.

All Age average attendance on a Sunday also rose 1.5 per cent to 581,000, extending recent rises.

Overall attendance across the week edged upwards by 1.6 cent, to just over 702,000. The increase was driven by a recovery in adult attendance.

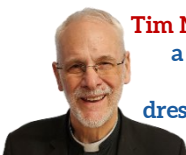
The figures also showed rises in baptisms of adults and young people. Confirmations rose by 5.3 per cent.

While attendance has yet to reach pre-pandemic levels, it is moving closer to the projected pre-pandemic trend and in some cases has risen above the levels that might have been expected had there been no pandemic.





## A STABLE NATIVITY!



**Tim Marwood** recalls a church nativity where a child dressed as the stable stole the show

One of the most popular choices for carol services in the UK is *O little town of Bethlehem*, yet it was written in 1868 by a priest of the Episcopal Church in the US. Rev Phillips Brooks (1835-1893) was Rector of Holy Trinity Church in Philadelphia at the time. The original tune for the carol, *St Louis* was penned by Lewis Redner (1831-1908), the church's organist. Here, we sing the carol to the tune *Forest Green*, adapted in 1901 from an English folk song by Ralph Vaughan Williams, and included in the *English Hymnal* in 1906.

### War-torn land

In our time Bethlehem remains situated in a land torn by conflict. I say remains because the Bible tells us that Jesus's birth took place when his country was under occupation. He narrowly escaped a massacre and became a refugee in another country.

The author uses contrasts throughout the carol: dark streets with shining light, for example, to illustrate the need of this world to receive the gift of Jesus and the message of Justice and Peace for all humanity that he brought through his teaching.

This is a message that remains relevant today when we long for peace in so many parts of a world broken by conflict.

### Squadron of angels

I used to lead a carol service on Christmas Eve where children were encouraged to come dressed as a character from the Nativity; typically we had a squadron of angels, a flock of shepherds, many Marys and one bewildered Joseph, who all took their turn in forming tableaux on a stage in the church as I told the story.

On one memorable occasion the church door flew open and there appeared a large box, covered with straw, with windows and doors, above a pair of legs clad in sackings.

When asked which character they had come dressed as, a muffled voice replied, 'Bethlehem', or, more precisely, the stable at Bethlehem.

This 'costume' was the culmination of a cunning plan by the boy's parents to keep him busy while they made their preparations. Of course, he had to be in most of the tableaux!

It took us weeks to clear every piece of straw from the church, but the memory of that stunning stable has lasted much longer. We will sing *O little town* at our candlelit service on Sunday 21 December. Come early for a seat!

*O little town of Bethlehem,  
how still we see thee lie!  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep  
the silent stars go by.  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth  
the Everlasting Light;  
the hopes and fears of all the years  
are met in thee tonight.*

*O morning stars, together  
proclaim the holy birth,  
and praises sing to God the King,  
and peace to men on earth;  
for Christ is born of Mary;  
and, gathered all above,  
while mortals sleep, the angels keep  
their watch of wondering love.*

*How silently, how silently,  
the wondrous gift is given!  
So God imparts to human hearts  
the blessings of his heaven.  
No ear may hear his coming;  
but in this world of sin,  
where meek souls will receive him, still  
the dear Christ enters in.*

*O holy child of Bethlehem,  
descend to us we pray;  
cast out our sin, and enter in,  
be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels  
the great glad tidings tell:  
O come to us, abide with us,  
our Lord Emmanuel.*



Berlin at Christmas

## THE FIRST NOEL?



**Richard Melville** takes a final look at the year 2000, including German visitors and Betty Stewart's retirement.

In our final search of the archives for the year 2000, we find our then vicar Brian looking back even further — 2000 years, in fact, and the impact one new baby had on the world, even when the world did not see it. How life has changed since that very first Christmas!

### Dear Friends,

I wonder what the four weeks before the first Christmas were like? No carol services, not a bauble or a piece of tinsel to be had in the Bethlehem Bazaar, shepherds moaning about the monotony of their job, night after night, always the same. No plum puddings to be stirred or turkeys to be fattened. Of course, there was a bit of a rush on, because of the census. People were having to traipse around the countryside to their ancestral village, just to please the rotten Romans.

I wonder what the four weeks before Christmas this year will be like? I rather suppose we shall be caught in a whirl of preparation - food, drink, cards, presents, parties. But is that really what we are prepared to wait expectantly for? Or is there something else? Something which, like at the first Christmas, was almost totally unnoticed because it was so ordinary.

At the first Christmas it was the very ordinary birth of a very ordinary child to a very ordinary girl. There was nothing world-shattering about it. But that is, of course, exactly the point. Christians believe that God chooses the very ordinary to display the extraordinary - then and now.

### In faith, Brian

### Poorly paid priests!

Jutta Schreur from Charlottenburg wrote about the Diocese of London's partnership with the city of Berlin. Nine members had visited St James's. A lively discussion took place in the vicarage, much helped by Brian speaking fluent German! The discussion centred on whether we faced the same problems, and how different was parish life in the two countries.

We discovered that German priests were

paid considerably more than their British counterparts. This also applied to organists. The salary ours received annually was what a German organist got every month!

The differences in the services excited some. Our visitors found the Anglican services much more colourful than theirs; but they were too formal, especially in morning prayer or evensong.

### Doctor's orders

On St Luke's Day, the sermon came from Janet Taylor, who like Luke was a surgeon. Janet was able to connect her professional experiences with her Christian faith. The calmness and professionalism in which Janet mastered this task was very impressive.

### Betty Stewart

Jean Western wrote about one of our major benefactors, Betty Stewart, as she retired. Although Betty was not ordained a deacon until 1993, she was a Sunday School teacher for 45 years — the majority of which was at St James's. The dedication she put into her teaching carried her through until the church accepted women for ordination, and Betty was one of the first in 1993. She had undertaken her work with tact and sympathy and been instrumental in bringing about a change of heart in several people who had originally been opposed to the ordination of women. The unexpected deterioration of her eyesight and the onset of arthritis had hastened her retirement.

### In the news 25 years ago...

■ **22 Dec** The American superstar Madonna married British movie director Guy Ritchie at an exclusive ceremony in the Scottish Highlands. Gwyneth Paltrow was maid of honour.

■ **29 Dec** London was covered in snow for the first time since 1994 and the Millennium wheel was brought to a halt as wintry weather caused widespread disruption.

■ **12 Jan** Sven Goran Eriksson became the England football team's first foreign coach.

■ **16 Jan** Fuel tanker Jessica ran aground off the Galapagos Islands, spilling fuel and devastating marine life. Over 60% of the iguana population on one island was killed.

## REGISTERS

OCTOBER

### FUNERALS

7 Nelly (Elly) Whitehouse-Jansen, 95, Reigate



16 Michael Christopher Julian Reindorp, 81, Hampton Hill.





## BIG CELEBRATIONS, BUT BIG CHALLENGES TOO!



Our link parish, St Luke's, Mercuburi, has been celebrating their patronal saint's day. But, as **Derek Winterbrun** reports, they face big challenges rebuilding their church to withstand more extreme weather.

**S**t James's has a link parish through the London Diocesan partnership with the Anglican Church in Angola and Mozambique (ALMA). The parish of Mercuburi in Northern Mozambique, led by Father Maurício Namilo, is much larger than Hampton Hill — it includes the main town and 44 villages!

We received many photos and videos from a great celebration on St Luke's Day.

The Bishop of Nampula, Rt Rev Manuel Ernestos, ordained two new members of staff, Victor and Albertina, to work alongside Fr Maurício.

It was also the eleventh anniversary of Fr Maurício's ordination.

The service was well attended by local people, by Diocesan Clergy, and officers of the Mothers' Union. It was even broadcast on community radio.

### A building in progress

The church, still under construction, was decorated for the occasion. Fabric hangings from the ceiling provided some shade as there is no roof! St James's has been raising money for the building work.



**Above** Bishop Manuel leads celebrations  
**Left** Father Maurício

Earlier in the season Fr Maurício had visited some of the outlying villages, in particular Namitatar, 30 miles away. He had not been there for six months, since their church had collapsed.

The street was filled with people as a great procession escorted him to the church. They sang, 'Let us greatly praise God, for having sent his servant, Father Maurício.'

### Climate change

Mozambique has a high vulnerability to climate change. The President, Daniel Francisco Chapo, spoke at the Cop30



meeting about the great challenge that the country faces, recalling that cyclones Chido, Dikeledi and Jude 'left a trail of destruction' and claimed more than 220 lives in the past two years.

It is these weather patterns that are making it difficult for the people in Mercuburi to finish their church.



**Right** Albertina and Victor being ordained

## EVENTS AT ST JAMES'S Book tickets at: [friendsofstjames.org.uk](http://friendsofstjames.org.uk)

### DANCE INTO 2026 WITH US

Our events team are back in action in February when we host another ceilidh. Join us for a fun-filled night of dancing, good music and great company — and a unique chance to dance the night away inside a beautiful church.

If you're new to it, a ceilidh is an evening of folk or country dancing.

We're delighted to be welcoming back our live band, Ceilidh Tree, who will guide you through the dance moves. Whether you are new to country dancing, or a regular, we promise a fun night.



## Ceilidh/Barn Dance

**Friday 27 February 2026**

**Tickets £18**

<https://bit.ly/StJCeilidh2026>  
with licensed bar

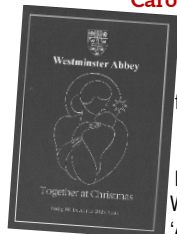




# Home for CHRISTMAS

By the time we reach the beginning of December we have been bombarded by all that goes to make up Christmas in the shops. It seems to get earlier and earlier each year and is hard to bypass. What makes the season special, however, are the traditions or activities that we associate with Christmas, some of which go back years.

## Carol Services



Many of the larger charities arrange carol services in big churches as a means of fundraising, with well-known faces and even royalty taking part. **Susan Horner** was lucky enough to go to the annual carol service organised by the Princess of Wales at Westminster Abbey in 2023.

'As we queued to go in, we were offered mince pies, on the understanding that these must be consumed before entering the abbey.'

'My seat was at the west end of the abbey, but there were screens showing all that was happening at the opposite end. In addition to carols and Bible readings, there were poems, solos of Christmas songs, a piano piece and a drum corps which performed simultaneously at various locations.'

'At the end of the service the Prince and Princess and their three children walked past us on their way out.'

This year's service can be seen on ITV1 on Christmas Eve. Another tradition is *A Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols* from King's College Chapel Cambridge, and this will be broadcast on BBC Two on Christmas Eve.



**Trafalgar Square**  
The Butterfields  
gather for  
carol singing

## TREASURED TIMES AT CHRISTMAS

Last year we featured stories from people who celebrated Christmas abroad. This year we hear about celebration at home. And as **Janet Nunn** discovered, there are plenty of family traditions or activities that hold special memories and help to make Christmas come alive.



## Christmas Decorations

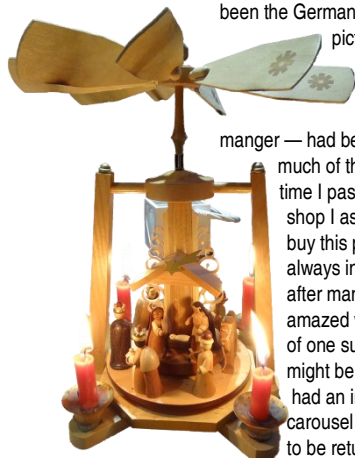
Despite all the jazzing up of Christmas with pre-lit trees, reindeer for the garden and all sorts of decorations, some people do still hang on to treasured decorations.

When **Janet Nunn** was a child her mother bought these three small candles in the shape of choristers and they always come out on Janet's mantelpiece each year all those years later. They are too precious to light!



**Pat Futter** still has the fairy on top of her tree that her mother bought 90 years ago. It is carefully stored away each year and still put on top of her tree.

**Penny Sewell** takes the prize for sheer determination. Every Christmas for 35 years her favourite decoration has been the German nativity carousel pictured left.



'However, one vital piece — baby Jesus in a manger — had been missing for much of that time. Every time I passed a Christmas shop I asked if I could buy this piece separately, always in vain. Finally after many decades I was amazed where the owner of one such shop said he might be able to help. He had an incomplete carousel which was going to be returned to the

manufacturers and there was the identical baby Jesus in a manger! He proceeded to chisel it off its mount and gave it to me as a gift. I was so amazed at his kindness and was so grateful that my patience and faith paid off.'

## Families at Christmas

**Gill Powell** recalls having her first child on Christmas Day. 'I knew that my first child was due around Christmas — in fact I wanted him to come on the day itself. My husband, Geof, and I were staying with my parents. I woke on Christmas Day and began to have contractions while everyone was getting in the festive spirit. The whole family sat down to eat while I was feeling increasingly uncomfortable. I couldn't eat anything, but I didn't want to spoil their lunch! However, as soon as it was finished Geof whisked me off to the hospital.'



'After three hours of labour the best thing happened: I gave birth to Ian. Christmas was still being celebrated — in fact the doctor who checked me out was dressed as Father Christmas! But sadly, the hospital had run out of all the Christmas food so my Christmas meal was postponed for a few more weeks.'

**Val Butterfield**, one of seven children, recalls Christmas get-togethers with the family which happen just before the big day as there are so many of them. 'Our Christmas has always been very exciting. The preparations start in November with a Val, Sara & Pippa shopping day in London, followed by singing carols with the rest of the family round the giant

Norwegian Christmas tree in Trafalgar Square.

'One weekend before the day, our extended family arrive from France, Spain, Scotland, Wales, England and sometimes Australia to spend a weekend together at Pippa and David's. We call this, *Capie Christmas* as Cape was my maiden name. There is a full programme of walks, games, and a quiz. Everyone contributes to the food and Sara always magics up something very special.'

'On Christmas Eve we sing carols outside with a group of friends and local musicians, including David. Christmas Day starts with stockings. We all meet in church for the 9.30 service and then go to my house for sumptuous Christmas goodies round the fire and with the sparkling Christmas tree lights, after which we sing carols round the piano and with the various musical instruments which family members play. Eve, who used to come to church, would also spend the day with us.'

'The family stay for two nights with me. On Boxing Day, we have a champagne brunch, then a lovely walk in Bushy Park.'

'The next day, we round off our Christmas with a performance of the magical ballet *The Nutcracker* at the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden. Their Christmas tree, pictured right, is made out of ballet shoes!'

