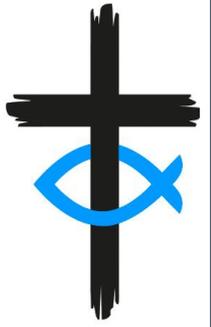




THE NEWS

February 2026

The Magazine of Potters Bar United Reformed Church



Church Dinner

– 14th February 2026

We are working on the evening's entertainment during and after the meal, with some music, and a J.Knott theatrical production involving audience participation – albeit (thankfully) without cupid!

**Price £25 p.p.
– on the night**



Starters: Melon and ham, or Sea food cocktail.

Mains: Salmon crouete or beef bourguignon.

Sweet: Black forest gateaux, Lemon posset and shortbread, or fruit salad.

Drinks : B.Y.O.B.

Timing is 6.30 pm start (sherry) for a 7.00 pm meal



David Ramsay is co-ordinating numbers, so if you are planning to come and have not already signed up, please contact him for tickets, give him your menu choices, and pay on the night.

– or he will contact you – a promise, as well as a threat!

Tel. 01707 647300

e-mail : tabitha.marigold@BTinternet.com



Dear Friends,

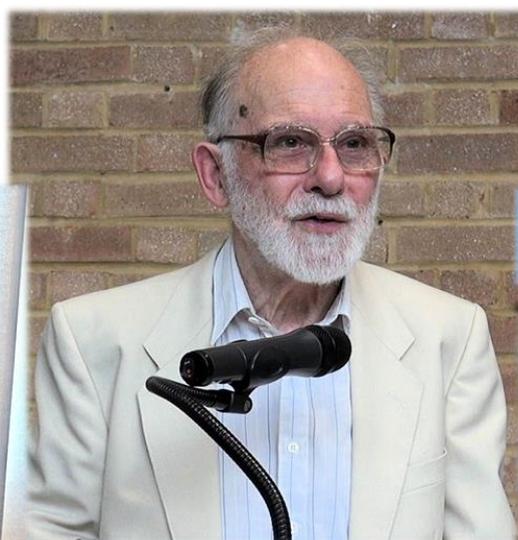
Our last Church Meeting on 18 January was notable for a decision to admit Jenny Blumsom and Maureen Marlow to membership, the ceremony to take place at morning worship on 15 February.

They have been worshipping with us regularly for some time so it is probably somewhat overdue but an increase in members should be celebrated since the recent trend has been for older members on becoming more frail to relocate to be nearer to their children and so lose regular contact with their friends in the Church and Potters Bar generally.

We have a number of regular worshippers who for various reasons have chosen not to become members - adherents in Church jargon. If you feel at home in our Church and with the form of worship and at one with the other worshippers then perhaps you should seriously consider joining. If you ever change your mind you have only to speak to our minister or any of the Elders.

Alastair Maclean
on behalf of the Elders

Maureen



Jenny



Church Officers and Elders**Interim Minister:** Reverend David Aplin**Serving Elders**

David Aplin, Revd. 07900673529

Alastair Maclean 653636

Janet O'Connor 856967

Frank Palmer 873179

Marian Poulton 07795516707

Treasurer (Asst): Alastair Maclean Tel: 01707 335238**Lettings Officer:**

Jane Wood

Mobile: 07879 687569

Chairman Premises & Finance Committee

John Knott Tel: 01707 335238

Charity Lunches

As you will have read my letter in last month's News, I will not bore you with any more information.

However, the cost of the food gets more and more expensive and I know all of you are experiencing this too. So from this month we are increasing the price by £1.00, making it £7.00. This is still a very fair price considering the amount of food that is on offer, and I hope you will agree.

We thank you all for coming month after month and it is wonderful to see so many people from other churches and from outside and we know that you enjoy the friendship as well as the food.

From this month the charity we are raising money for is **Herts Young Homeless** and their Registered Office is in Hatfield, so a local charity which is good.

So see you on the 6th February, and of course the Recital at 12.15.

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Terribly, Terribly Sorry !!

Having attended the University of Edinburgh, Henry Erskine, Lord Advocate of Scotland in the late 18th century, would occasionally return to the University to visit his old friends.

One day he met an especially absentminded, now elderly, tutor of whom he was very fond. He was taken aback when the man greeted him by saying, "I was very sorry to hear, my dear boy, that you have had the fever in your family. Was it you or your brother who died of it?"

Bemused, Erskine replied that it was he who had died. "Ah, dear me, I thought so," the tutor said sadly. "Very sorry to hear it," he kept muttering as he went on his way. "Very sorry."

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Humour is the great thing, the saving thing. The minute it crops up, all our irritations and resentments slip away and a sunny spirit takes their place.

Mark Twain (1835-1910)

Michael Penn - 27/01/1932 - 08/11/2025



With sadness we record the death of Michael Penn, long-time member of the Merlin Magical Society and good friend of Gerald Martin. Michael came to us on a number of occasions as a Merlin Magician but was also a regular contributor to Darkes Fayres, where he ran the Roller ball stall for many years. Sad to lose another good friend of our church. Our thoughts are with Joanie, Michael's wife.



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another good friend of our church. Our thoughts are with Joanie, Michael's wife.

For those who remember the Horakovi's, Robert sent Christmas Greetings to Gabriela and she replied:

My current address is : Horka II, č.p. 40 28522 Czech Republic

I live there with my husband Jan - I remarried as you probably know. The village where we live is outside of Prague where we both work. I finished my psychotherapy training a few years ago and I now work as a certified psychotherapist now. I have my private practice in Prague and once a week I go to a nearby town where is an asylum house for families. I lead there a group therapy for children. Jan used to be a catholic priest, but he left the priesthood several years ago and decided to fulfil his life dream and believe or not - become a bus driver. He has been keeping his professional bus driving licences since his twentieth birthday, and he decided two years ago it was time for change (he is fifty as I am). We married last year in June.

Klara is married and she lives with her husband Pavel in Prague. She works at the Ministry of the Environment as a ministerial officer and she loves the job. Pavel works as a service man for a company building and maintaining internet networks. Barbora also lives in Prague, but she is currently in the Netherlands as an Erasmus intern in a small fashion company. She also loves the job. Her boyfriend Alex stays in Prague studying Academy of Fine Arts. Dan lives in Brno with his girlfriend Bohuška. He studies history and besides it is interested in fitness and cooking. Bohuška studies special pedagogy for education people with disabilities. All three are nice couples and we visit each other as much as we can with regard to our jobs and studies. Jan and all the kids have a very nice relationship and I'm very happy for that.

We had very nice Christmas time at our house with a lot of cooking, eating, night walk and Christmas river swimming (just Jan, Barbora and I) - it was fun.

Thank you for all the news from the PB church, I often read the Sunday messages delivered by different speakers and I feel grateful and often encouraged. I wish you all a peaceful rest of the year and all the blessings for the New one.

Gabriela and Jan

Advent Preparations – Decorating the Church

The three line Whip from Barbara Corfe arrives, and you drop what you are doing to join the gathering 'Ladies of the Church' (and Steve of course) and find the boxes of decorations out and trees being assembled - once we can remember how they fit together, that is.



Steve does the big tree.



Some choose comfort over speed?
Some are just surprised at their work.





Meanwhile, Barbara does the Vestibule flower Display.
And Marian the Flowers for Sunday.



In the church the trees are nearly finished, though the naughty Elf may leave Maureen's tree and move around the church. We'll see!



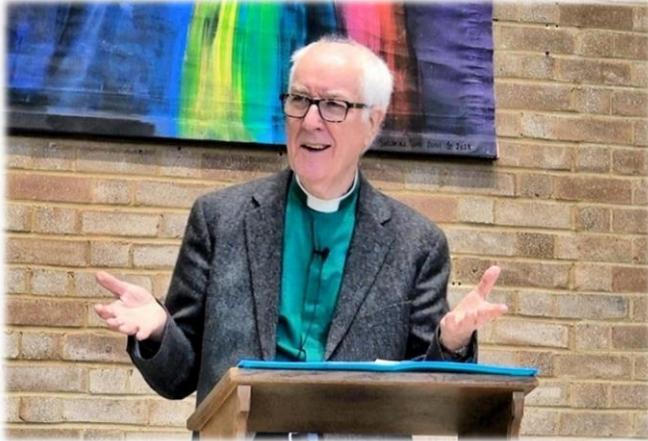
Then
one of life's big questions – how many Ladies does it take to
change a communion cloth?



Well Done Ladies – it all
looks perfect!



Communion Service Sunday 21st December 2025 – led by Revd John Steele



pictures.

Luke's picture was of Mary, a young woman from many years ago, who had just received news that she was to become a mother. You might think that Mary had had little choice in the matter; she was simply told by an angel what was about to happen. The child she would bear would be no ordinary child but be conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and he would be the Son of God. Yet Mary did have a choice. She could have chosen to be a passive participant, merely the vessel through which the Christ child entered the world, or she could embrace God's message wholeheartedly.

Her situation had been one of great upheaval, filled with fear and uncertainty, surpassing even the usual anxieties of pregnancy. She faced loneliness, a sense of dishonour, and the possibility of being ostracised, as she was pregnant and the man responsible for her care was not the father. Though this might have seemed indecent or improper to the society of the time, God's ways were not bound by human perceptions of propriety: God had chosen Mary to play a vital role in His plan.

Mary's wanted to praise God. She'd felt that God was on her side and on the side of people like her—those who were small and overlooked. She'd believed that God was literally overturning the order of the world with the birth of this child, reversing the values of societies like hers - and ours. The messages in Mary's song were profound, John thought. God worked through small, unusual, and unlikely people - like Mary, and like us. In a hymn we were to sing, there was a line about God being at war with human wrong. And when we thought about the day and age in which we were living, the things that were happening in our country and across the world, not a great deal had changed.

The second picture was a vision given to an old man, John, a Christian leader, who had written to encourage and instil hope in his people, convinced that things would not improve on their own, but that God was preparing to wipe the slate clean and begin anew. John's vision had been of God building a new creation - a new heaven, a new earth, and a new city, the new Jerusalem, where God Himself would dwell among His people. All that had marred and ruined human life would be destroyed. In his view, this renewal had already started. His words served as both a warning and a promise: the coming of Jesus Christ could happen at any moment. Though John's prediction about the immediate coming of Christ had not come true, he'd been right about God's intent to rescue His people. God's kingdom had already begun in the person of Jesus Christ, and the New Jerusalem was being established on earth. God already knew the name of the Son to be born of Mary—He would be called Jesus, and Immanuel, meaning "God is with us."

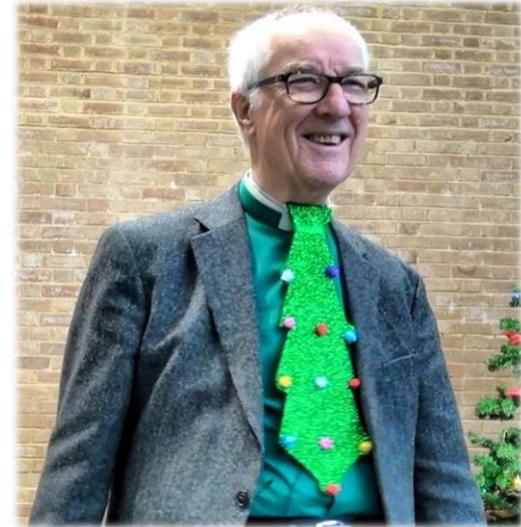
Some of the Apostle John's imagery might perplex us, but it was important to remember that John was a man of his time, seeking, like us, to look beyond the rise and fall of political powers, and the social, economic, and environmental challenges of his day. He'd tried to see what God's answers would be for the world's troubles and hinted that God had a plan for the universe, a plan that was ultimately good, and that in Jesus Christ the outcome was secure. This remained true for us today.

And John hoped that Mary's song and John's vision would provide us with inspiration and hope. As we served in our community, looked at the world, and prayed, we were to remember that small and seemingly insignificant people like ourselves had a role to play in God's work. We were to participate in the fulfilment of God's kingdom in Jesus Christ, trusting that God's purposes were good and would ultimately prevail.

Good to have John and Mary back with us again – the first time, John said, that they'd seen our church decorated for Christmas. And we had more Christmas trees than their church (*well done ladies!*). But not to be outdone, and to get us in the mood for Christmas, John had brought his own tree in the form of a special tie in the shape of a Christmas Tree. And that provided the lead into a Christmas story.

The Song and the Vision: two pictures of hope and transformation.

The readings from Luke 1 and Revelation 21 had presented us with two vivid and contrasting



Aeolians Christmas Concert 11th December 2025

We've had Aeolian Singers Christmas Concerts so many times that it's fair to say that it's not Christmas until the Aeolians have sung for us (*which I did!*). A great evening again, with Stephen interspersing the music with anecdotes, readings from choir members, Simon Worley playing for us Bach's 'In dulci jubilo' – though not perhaps as we knew it – and Adolphe Adam's 'O Holy Night' sung for us by Antonia Rusenescu. A wonderful experience!



And if (*as was the case*) the audience just about outnumbered the choir, everybody joined in to sing the hymns and - *clearly having worked up an appetite* - set about demolishing the cheese, buns and sweets on offer during the interval. And wash it down with a glass of wine of juice.



Many good friends to share it all with. And we can hope for another Aeolians visit next Christmas.

A Duo of Christmas Services.

If, like me, you were visiting family on Christmas Day and missed the Christmas morning Service, you were still able to enjoy two services led by members of our church. Two very different personalities, and two very different services – each somehow just right for the moment.

Watchnight Service 24th December - led by Tony Corfe.



Tony's theme was HOPE – “Hear Our Prayers Emmanuel” – in which our hopes (and the hopes of the world) were interleaved with Bible readings, prayers and carols in an intimate atmosphere – just 15 chairs for the 15 people who attended. And at midnight the 5th candle was lit, the baby Jesus was placed in the manger, and Christmas had arrived!



**Morning Service
Sunday 28th December
2025 – led by David
Ramsay**

On the fourth day of Christmas..... David took on leading of our worship. And took as his theme all twelve days!



So we got a 'mille feuille' of prayers and hymns interspersed with David's research on the significance of the 12 days of Christmas for the church, and a sort of quiz challenge on the hidden meaning of each of the days in the "Twelve Days of Christmas" song – a challenge that most of us failed miserably!

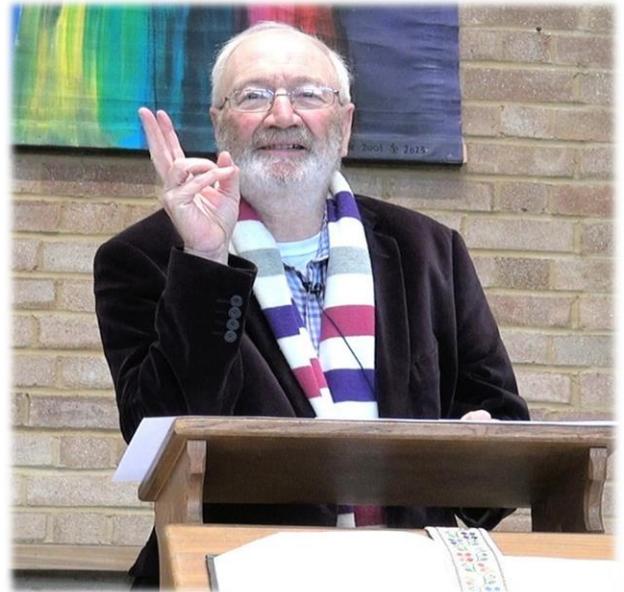
He'd taken the theme of the 12 Days of Christmas, David explained, because Christmas celebrations did not end with Boxing Day but continued for 12 days, spanning the period between the birth of Jesus and the arrival of the Magi.

The 12 days had been established around 567 AD for various purposes: to honour the saints, for personal reflection, spiritual growth, prayer, family time, and enjoyment, culminating in the celebration of the arrival of the wise men.

The familiar song "The 12 Days of Christmas", had been a much later addition. It had likely originated as an old folk song with the melody we knew today composed in 1909 by American Frederick Austin. There were many biblical interpretations of the song: possibly it had once been used as a teaching aid or as a covert way to celebrate Christmas during times of persecution.

Days 1 and 2 - Day One was Christmas Day, when we celebrated the birth of Jesus. Day Two, was St. Stephen's Day. Stephen, one of the early Christian martyrs, had been executed for his faith, and the day was associated with charitable giving. In the song, the "**partridge in a pear tree**" was thought to represent Jesus as a symbol of true love and compassion. The "**two turtle doves**" were believed to symbolise the Old and New Testaments of the Bible.

Days 3 and 4 - Day Three honoured St. John and his Gospel, as well as the revelations attributed to him. It was also a day when the church would bless the wine used in Communion. Day Four, called the Day of the Holy Innocents, remembered the children killed by Herod in his attempt to eliminate the Messiah. The "**three French hens**" were interpreted as faith, hope, and charity. The "**four calling birds**" represented the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.



Days 5 and 6 - Day Five commemorated Thomas à Becket, who had been murdered in Canterbury Cathedral after disagreements with the king. The day was set aside for quiet reflection on his life and our own. St. Edmund of Worcester, a protector of widows and orphans, was also remembered, and the day was dedicated to visiting family and spending time together. The "**five golden rings**" signified the first five books of the Old Testament. The "**six geese a-laying**" symbolised the six days of creation.

Days 7 and 8 - Day Seven was New Year's Day, traditionally a time for games and sports. Day Eight, the day after New Year's, had been dedicated to Mary, the mother of Jesus, recognising her willingness to serve and care for Jesus. It was a day to reflect on the gift of giving. In the song, the "**seven swans a-swimming**" represented the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit: prophecy, serving, teaching, exhortation, contribution, leadership, and mercy. The "**eight maids a-milking**" stood for the Eight Beatitudes.

Days 9 and 10 - Day Nine remembered St. Basil and St. Gregory, both defenders of the faith in the fourth century. The focus was on the unity of faith. Day Ten was the Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus, a day for prayer and reflection. The "**nine ladies dancing**" represented the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit: charity, joy, peace, patience, goodness, meekness, fidelity, modesty, and continence. The "**ten lords a-leaping**" referred to the Ten Commandments.

Days 11 and 12 - Day Eleven marked the Feast of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, an 18th-century American who converted to Catholicism and was recognised for her charitable works. Day Twelve was Epiphany, when the wise men visited Jesus and presented their gifts—a celebration of the act of giving. The "**eleven pipers piping**" were thought to represent the eleven faithful disciples, and the "**twelve drummers drumming**" stood for the twelve points of belief in the Apostles' Creed.

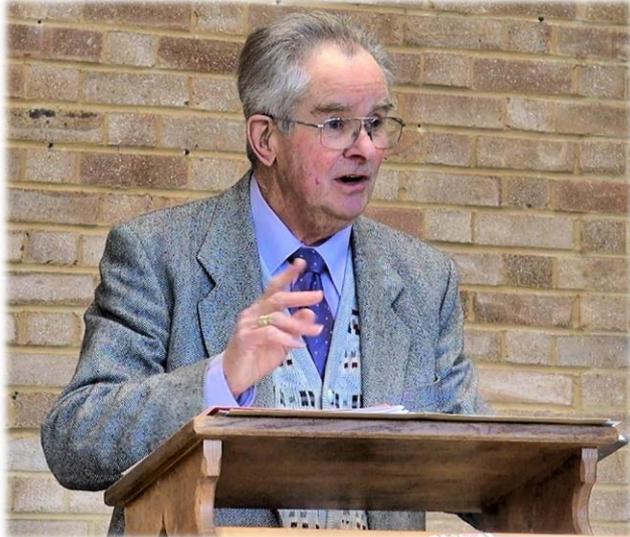
And there we had it - the song "The 12 Days of Christmas" was a festive tune that carried a hidden meaning, reflecting key aspects of the Christian faith and the history of the church. During these twelve days, we were invited to reflect, celebrate, and give thanks.

And our thanks to David for his research and a thoroughly entertaining Service – rounded off by some Christmas melodies played by Stephen.

*Life is not measured by the breaths we take,
but by the moments that take our breath away.*

Morning Service– led by Pastor Peter Gooch

Moving to light the first Advent Candle, Peter gave us his own description of the meaning of the candles. The first candle represented the patriarchs. The second stood for the prophets. The third candle symbolised John the Baptist, the fourth Mary, and the fifth on Christmas Day represented Jesus, the light of the world.



Lighting the first candle took us to God's Promises, through the Patriarchs, about the Messiah who was to come: Abraham was promised that through his descendants, all the world would be blessed. God's promises were kept, and Jesus came through Abraham's line. Isaac was told not to fear, for God would be with him—a promise extended to all of God's people. Moses looked forward to the one whom



God would raise up as a leader, fulfilled in Jesus born in Bethlehem. King David was assured that a king from his line would reign forever, a promise realised in Christ.

Peter had been reading the autobiography of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, a notable Baptist preacher born in 1834 who'd been pastor of New Park Street Chapel in Southwark from before the age of 20 and served for 38 years until his death in 1892. At just 18 or 19, he'd preached "Jesus Saves from Sin" (sermon 365). The sermon centred on Matthew 1:21: "You will name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." Spurgeon had divided his message into three parts:

The Glorious Name: "You will name him Jesus"—meaning Redeemer, Saviour, because he would save his people from their sins. Two Old Testament figures with similar names, Joshua son of Nun and Joshua son of Jehozadak, had foreshadowed Christ. Yet, what they did paled in comparison to what Jesus, the Son of God, had accomplished.

The Wondrous Salvation: "He will save his people from their sins." Titus 2 declared that God's grace brought salvation to all people, though few accepted it. Jesus himself had taught about the narrow gate leading to everlasting life with Christ in heaven - a way that was compressed and hard and found by only a few.

The Blessed People: "His people." Spurgeon noted that Christ's people were not always obvious—they came from all nations, ranks, and backgrounds. The angels would gather these chosen ones from all corners of the earth, as described in Matthew 24. John 1:12 said that those who received Jesus became children of God, possessing both a physical and spiritual birth. Spurgeon had emphasised that not everyone was included; as with Noah's ark, some would be left behind. Jesus had urged us to be prepared for His return, which would come suddenly and without warning - a definite future happening, and not a maybe. The choices we made in life would determine our eternal destiny.

Spurgeon had described the distinguishing characteristics of those whom the angels would gather:

A Sincere Desire for Heaven: Christians eagerly awaited the return of Christ, their Saviour, as Paul had written in Philippians. We were reminded not to be so attached to this life that we would regret Christ's coming. Choosing the narrow way was essential.

A Devout Seeking for God: Jesus had instructed us to seek first God's kingdom and righteousness. We should fill our lives with God's desires, making Him our priority over all other ambitions and possessions, any of which could quickly push God out of first place. Seeking after God and His ways and truth should become the most

desirable aspect of our lives. The psalmist had described longing for God as a deer longs for water—our lives depended on closeness to God.

A Diligent Pursuit of Salvation: Like a train ready at the station, the Gospel invited all aboard—rich and poor alike. Salvation required repentance and faith in Jesus; everyone needed salvation to be restored to God. Hebrews 2 warned against neglecting such a great salvation, confirmed by Jesus' miracles and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

A Great Hatred of Sin: Sin was fundamentally a wrong relationship with God, expressed through wrongful attitudes and actions. Sin was a barrier between a person and God and only God could remove sin's penalty and power. Paul, in 1 Timothy, affirmed that Christ had come to save sinners—no one was beyond his reach. James 4 called us to submit to God, resist the devil, and purify our hearts, while Romans 8:1 assured believers that there was no condemnation, no guilty verdict, and no punishment for those people who were in Christ Jesus.

A sense of Personal Nothingness: Jesus was our Redeemer, Saviour, Lord, and friend—the one in whom we could put our complete trust.

A Humble Reliance upon Jesus: Galatians 2:20 expressed dependence on Christ, who lived within those who trusted Him. Hymns such as "Just a Closer Walk with Thee" and "In Christ Alone" beautifully summarised these themes: our need for Jesus, His saving power, and the assurance and hope we could find in Him.

As we recalled Christ's birth in Bethlehem—where there was no room for Him—we should each ask, "Is there room in *my* heart for Christ? "

And it was a joy to have Jenny Blumsen back in church looking well recovered from her time in hospital.



WORLD DAY OF PRAYER
OUR LADY & ST VINCENT CATHOLIC CHURCH

On Friday, 6th March

At 11.00 am

This year the Service has been prepared by the Women of Nigeria

Altogether 146 countries take part globally, beginning in Samoa

And ending in American Samoa.

Do come and join us if you can

Chris Ramsay

Out of the mouths.....

Children usually picture Jesus as religious artists have painted him through the centuries, as a young man in a flowing robe with a halo over his head.

A six-year-old was explaining how the Father and Son can be recognised: "Jesus and God have this circle over their head and always try to walk carefully so that they stay right underneath it. It then lights up".

Another little girl was painting a portrait that she claimed was of God. When her mother pointed out that nobody knew what God looked like, the girl said, "They will when I'm finished."

Toy Service Sunday 14th December – led by Revd. David Aplin

How time flies! Toy Service 2025 brought lots of 'goodies' for the women, men, and children of our local refuge. We hope the toys and gifts will find their place in a Happy Christmas for all at the refuge.



David shared with us the sad news that **John Cobley**, the secretary of our sister church in Hatfield had died the day before and we held him in our prayers.

David's Address was about **Faith, Patience, and the Promise of Advent**. The reading from James 5 encouraged his audience to be patient, urging them to wait steadfastly for the coming of the Lord, just as a farmer patiently awaited the precious harvest from the earth,



relying on the early and late rains. They were to strengthen their hearts, for the arrival of the Lord was near.

David had been out walking his dog, and spoken with a Romanian neighbour who had talked about the troubling state of the country. David had reassured him that things had a way of working out, highlighting that, despite disagreements and political strife, politicians would ultimately respond to the common sense of the British people – noting that, unlike the French, the British were not prone to rioting, even though they had been driving tractors for longer. In the end, right would out!

Since September, David's life had been dominated by the struggle to prevent the closure of St. Nicholas Primary School in Elstree by Herts Council. The council manager had been particularly harsh, driven more by self-interest than by logic or decency, and some councillors had acted similarly. The lead councillor, despite claiming to be an Anglican, appeared to be able to separate his faith from his political decisions, justifying his actions by stating that faith was not a statutory requirement in education. David wondered whether he was only an Anglican on Sundays.



Although the experiences had been disheartening and upsetting, they could not destroy the soul, which was guarded by the Lord. The outpouring of support from the community had been deeply fulfilling for him, giving hope that justice would ultimately prevail and that the school might be saved. Life presented many challenges, including great sadness from the loss of loved ones, and failures that might be due to our own actions or those of others, so it could feel harsh and unyielding, like a bed of thorny branches left after the petals had fallen from a rose. Yet, just as roses would bloom again in spring, he believed that people, too, would rise from adversity into the light.

Advent was more than simply the four weeks leading up to Christmas, David told us. It also carried the promise that the Son would come again. While no one knew the exact time of this return, and early Christians had thought it might happen within their lifetimes, two millennia had passed and it had not yet occurred. And though it would probably not happen in our lifetime (*he was not holding his breath*), David was sure that our future remained secure through our faith in Jesus Christ. Faith in Jesus Christ provided a steadfast promise: if people repented of their sins, they would be forgiven by Christ's love, freely given. Through faith in Jesus as Saviour, believers would not die but would have eternal life with the Father in the Kingdom of God. Christ Jesus had died, been raised from the dead, and ascended to heaven.

Believers could follow Him through faith. This was a constant promise, available to all who came to Him, and David was sure that our friend, John Cobley, had now received this promise. Through faith our souls were eternal and could not be destroyed.

We welcomed John Knott to our company of Bible Readers. With Maureen's 'Naughty Elf' on his shoulder, one might wonder about ventriloquists – but the readings were given in a clear voice.



David Morris's Photo Corner – each month David will choose us photos, and a story to go with it.

Standing with the Giants.



Background history – “The Standing with Giants” installation is a poignant tribute to the servicemen who lost their lives during the D-Day landings. The silhouettes, each represent a member of the Armed Forces who died on D-Day. They were initially at the British Normandy Memorial in Ver-Sur, France as part of the D-Day 80 commemorations: the silhouettes with heads bowed were on the hillside overlooking Gold Beach. The project was a community effort, using recycled building materials and providing a meaningful space for people to visit and reflect. It was a symbol of the bittersweet emotions faced by many at the end of the Second World War in Europe, with the joy that the war had ended put alongside the reality of absent loved ones who never came home.

They were then moved to Portsmouth and we tried to get tickets for Standing with the Giants at Portsmouth: although extended to January 2026, tickets were all gone. We found that an additional event was being held at Weymouth at Nothe Fort - 255 life-sized silhouettes of military personnel and 3 civilians who lost their lives during the Falklands conflict in 1982.

For us it was our first real outing since Pauline's spine operation. The three days we were away it was wet, breezy and cold but for the time we were in the Fort it was calm, even up on the parapets.

It one of the three events we undertook during the remembrance period, the poppies at the Tower of London and projection of poppies in the Nave of St Albans Abbey. All three events were very moving - each in their own way.



Communion Service Sunday 4th January – led by Mike Findley



With the church calendar offering us the choice of either observing the second Sunday of Christmas or marking Epiphany, Mike had opted for the latter - and we were to explore its significance together. The Lectionary, he noted, was confusing; the prescribed readings for the previous Sunday had covered the flight to Egypt following the visit from the wise men, whose arrival was to be a part of this week's reading. Having enjoyed the '12 days of Christmas' last week in Part-1 of the 'Ramsay Sandwich' we'd been spared this confusion, so it would be for David next week to deal with Jesus' baptism some 30 years later, along with being left alone in the temple many years previously.

Epiphany, celebrated on the 6th of January, was a time rich with symbolism, both theologically and culturally. In many Spanish-speaking countries, Epiphany was marked by grand processions and the exchange of gifts, but at its heart, Epiphany was about recognising all the gifts God had given us and reflecting on their meaning for our lives.

The wise men, who were neither ethnically nor religiously Jewish, had come from afar. Their journey and the gifts they brought—gold, frankincense, and myrrh—carried profound symbolism.

- Gold represented all the gifts from God: life, power, existence, and creation. It served as a reminder of the abundance and blessings we received.
- Frankincense symbolised awe, mystery, and adoration. It called us to marvel at the beauty of the world around us (especially on a frosty, sunlit winter morning) and to respect creation because it came from God,
- Myrrh stood for pain and the need for relief from sorrow. It prompted us to consider whether we only turned to God in times of trouble, forgetting Him during moments of joy. Myrrh also invited reflection on the need for salvation and healing.

The star that had guided the wise men was another powerful symbol. At Christmas, we'd celebrated that light had entered the world—a light that could not be extinguished. This light not only illuminated the way but also exposed the hidden, murky corners of our lives. It was a challenge and an invitation to examine those neglected areas and seek renewal.

The wise men had demonstrated faith and determination. Though their exact origins were uncertain (they were thought to have been astrologers or Zoroastrian priests from Persia), they had embarked on a long journey not knowing precisely where they were headed and had sought guidance along the way. Their story was a metaphor for our own journeys of faith: did we try to chart our own paths, or did we ask other people to help to point us along the right way?

The reading from Ephesians had emphasised that Epiphany was part of a larger, historic plan from God. God did not abandon the world; instead, He provided a path for reconciliation. God's actions often surprised us, unfolding in ways we did not expect—such as sending a baby to change the world, rather than intervening with power and force. But perhaps the most important message from Epiphany was that Jesus was for everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, or social status. Paul's calling to spread the gospel to non-Jews had been radical at the time, but it underscored the inclusivity of the Christian message. The Christmas story had featured shepherds—ordinary, perhaps uneducated people—alongside the wise men, illustrating that the good news was for all. The symbolism of gifts, light, faith and determination, and being part of God's plan all came together in this core message: the gospel was for everyone, especially those who were different from us.

Too often, Mike told us, churches focused on welcoming those who were like themselves. We should imagine how transformative it could be if each of us made a resolution to bring just one person unlike ourselves into church—someone of a different colour, background, or social status. Wouldn't that change the world.

Diary for February

Sun	1	11.00	Communion Service led by Mr Mike Findley
Thu	5	10.30	Events Meeting
Fri	6	12.15	Lunchtime Recital by Franklin Cing-Jie Tam (piano)
		13.15	Charity Lunch
		14.30	Phoenix Whist Group
		19.00	Choir Practice (every Friday)
Sun	8	11.00	Morning Service led by Mr Martyn Macphee
Sat	14	18.30	Church Dinner
Sn	15	11.00	Communion Service led by Reverend David Aplin including Membership of Jenny Blumsom and Maureen Marlow. Followed by Special Church Meeting
Sun	22	11.00	Morning Service led by Canon Richard Osborn
Wed	25	14.00	Knit & Natter Group in the vestry

Rotas for February

Pulpit Supply

1st Mr Mike Findley 8th Mr Martyn Macphee 15th Reverend David Aplin 22nd Canon Richard Osborn

Duty Officer

1st Frank Palmer 8th Janet Green 15th David Ramsay 22nd David Ramsay

Flower Donations (Arrangers: Chris Ramsay & Margaret Hillyard)

1st Janet O'Connor 8th Mary Deller 15th Joan Gooding 22nd Joan Powell

Communion Preparation

1st Marian Poulton & Heather Rae 15th Janet O'Connor & Mary Deller

Coffee Rota

1st Heather Rae 8th Chris Ramsay 15th Marian Poulton 22nd Margaret Hillyard

Bible Readers

1st Heather Rae 8th Janet Green 15th Jenny Blumsom 22nd Robert Hillyard`

Lunchtime Recital 9th January 2026 – Peter May (piano)

A real pleasure to have Peter back with us. He played for us last time in July 2023 whilst still in his final year at St Albans School. Now at age 20 he's studying at the Royal Academy of Music. We were pleased to be able to welcome members of his family who were there to support him and, like us, to enjoy a well-chosen programme.



Programme:

Partita for Keyboard No. 2 in C minor, BWV 826

J.S. Bach (1685-1750)

- I. Sinfonia*
- II. Allemande*
- III. Courante*
- IV. Sarabande*
- V. Rondeaux*
- VI. Capriccio*

Reflets dans l'eau, from Images, Book 1

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

**Sposalizio from *Années de pèlerinage*,
Deuxième année: Italie**

Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

Alborada del gracioso, No. 4 from *Miroirs*

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

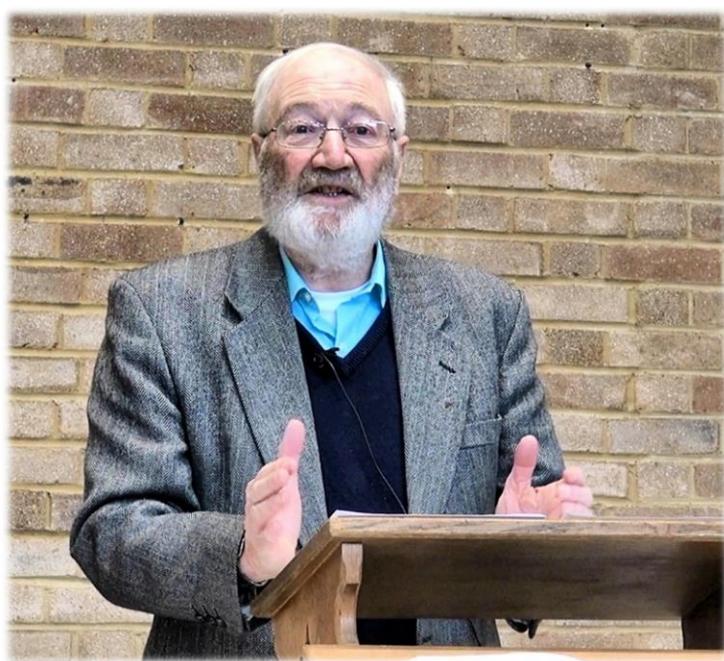


A pleasure to watch as well as to listen. Peter's sinuous fingers seemed to caress the piano keys as he watched over them – almost as if detached – and talked to them, silently. Each pianist who plays for us has their own way of expressing emotion, both in the music itself and the way they move. It's a big part of the close-up recital experience.

We certainly hope he'll come to us again!

Morning Service Sunday 11th January – led by David Ramsay

This was Part-2 of the 'Ramsay Sandwich' - David having taken us through the 12 days of Christmas two Sundays ago. And the experience of preparing two Services had brought it home to him just what a debt of gratitude we owed to our regular worship leaders who did it every Sunday! David has had no formal training, something that perhaps allowed him to offer us a fresh perspective



This Sunday, the Church was commemorating the **Baptism of Jesus by John on the banks of the River Jordan.**

The Jordan, David told us, stretched around 150 miles from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea, winding through a Rift Valley created by geological events millions of years ago. No one knew the exact spot where John baptised Jesus, but it was likely to have been near Nazareth. Jesus' baptism had marked the beginning of his ministry, which lasted about three years and transformed the world.

We'd just celebrated his birth and would soon be marking his death and resurrection at Easter. And it struck David that while we dedicated weeks to preparing for Christmas and Easter, we did not celebrate his baptism in the same way. It had marked a significant chapter in Jesus' life, and without it, the path of Christianity might have been very different (*if in fact it existed at all*).

John the Baptist had been the pivotal figure behind Jesus.

We knew that John was Jesus' cousin, as Elizabeth his mother was Mary's sister. Both had been conceived around the same time—Mary by the Spirit of God, and Elizabeth in the usual manner. This suggested that they knew each other as they grew up, perhaps like cousins in a village. John had become a renowned Jewish preacher, baptising Jews. So before beginning his own ministry, Jesus had approached John for spiritual and ritual purification. This act had elevated John as a significant figure in both Christian and Jewish tradition, and he was also mentioned in other religions, such as Islam, the Druze faith, Mazdaism, and the Bahá'í Faith. John and Jesus were mentioned several times in the Quran, written centuries after their deaths, described as prophets seeking to restore the Jews' relationship with God. John was regarded as a prophet by most major religions and had seen himself as the forerunner to Jesus – who according to Matthew had referred to John as Elijah, foretold in Malachi, and confirmed by Gabriel's announcement to Zechariah, John's father.

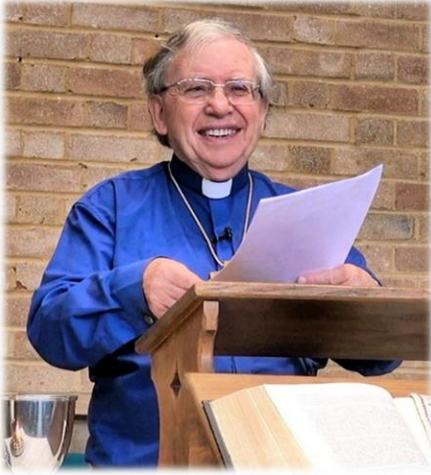
Though John had baptised Jesus, the Bible did not record Jesus himself as having baptised anyone: his disciples performed baptisms, while Jesus focused on healing and other miracles. Those baptised at the time remained Jews but committed themselves to living more spiritual, righteous lives—helping others, forgiving wrongs, and loving even their enemies—principles central to Jesus' teaching. Baptism had been reserved for adults, and had continued after Paul's conversion, as the Gospel spread to the Gentiles. Christians adapted baptism to welcome non-believers into the church. Between 160 and 200 AD, infant baptism had emerged, though not all denominations agreed on this.

So, as the church celebrated Jesus' baptism, it was fitting to emphasise John the Baptist's vital contribution. Without John, Jesus would not have undergone spiritual purification in the Jordan, which was integral to his ministry. John had continued baptising during Jesus' ministry until his death by beheading, ordered by Herod. We read of his diet of locusts and wearing goatskins, but he had been much more than these details.

For David, if Jesus was the light, John had been the “switch” that illuminated the world by baptising him.

And I think he's right, because for me (and as recounted by Mark), his baptism was the moment that God broke through into Jesus's life, something that sent him off into the desert to come to terms with. And we know that Paul and Mohammed had similar experiences, including periods of isolation before they came to terms with their experiences. Without Paul, Christianity might not have spread the way it did. And Mohammed's similar experiences would have helped him recognise a fellow prophet in Jesus. Robert

Communion Service Sunday 18th January – led by Revd. David Aplin.



Well one of this week's lectionary readings answered a few of David Ramsay's questions from last week. John was baptising people at Bethany. And although they were cousins and might well have grown up together, John had not seen anything special about Jesus until God told him specifically that he would see the Spirit come down on him at Bethany.

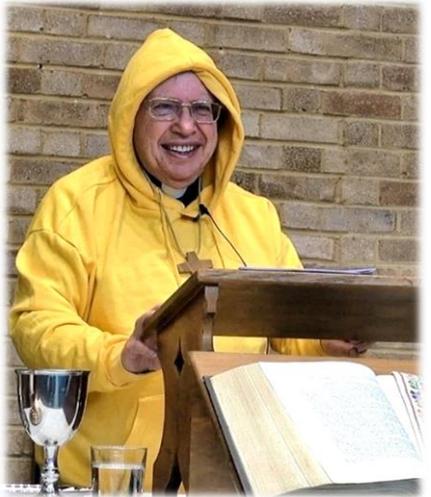
David's sermon focused on 1 Corinthians 1, **"He will strengthen you to the end"**.

Paul had written, "I give thanks to my God, always, for you, because of the grace of God that has been given to you in Christ Jesus." In every way, we have been enriched in Him—both in speech and in knowledge of every kind. The testimony of Christ has been strengthened among us, so that we are not lacking in any spiritual gifts as we await the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In modern times, David thought, society often chased after celebrity—sometimes fleeting, sometimes pursued endlessly, especially through social media, where thousands or even hundreds of thousands of 'likes' could be amassed. But what did this really mean? What was true worth?

It was tempting to look back wistfully and claim that things were better in the past, but the allure of celebrity always brought power. Celebrity could open doors, but it could also blind people, close their ears, and numb their consciences. History gave us sobering examples of how fame and money, mixed with arrogance, had led people astray, and how society had sometimes turned a blind eye to wrongdoing, even within the Church. So, should we strive after fame, fortune, and power? Were these the true measures of our worth?

David had donned his 53rd Wedding Anniversary "suit" to transport us to a pub restaurant in Devon, where he and his wife had celebrated the day with his family. He'd made it clear to the publican that, although his daughter had organised it, he was the one paying. And told he must be a millionaire, he'd responded that having the love of his family, a marriage that had lasted over fifty years, and a life filled with joy, were the true riches.



He told us about a recent act of kindness made whilst preaching, noting that such moments of kindness and welcome were not about credit or recognition, but about living as Christians—giving of ourselves and caring for others. Kindness and love, both given and received, were central to the Christian life.

The Bible told us that we were enriched in speech—not merely because we could speak, but because we could use words for kindness, for sharing knowledge, and for making a difference. We were called to speak out bravely against injustice and to proclaim the truth of God and Jesus Christ. This was the responsibility of all Christians. We were also enriched in knowledge. As humans, we were created to learn and progress, whether in medicine, psychology, or even pure mathematics – reflecting God's intention for us to keep moving forward in understanding and wisdom.

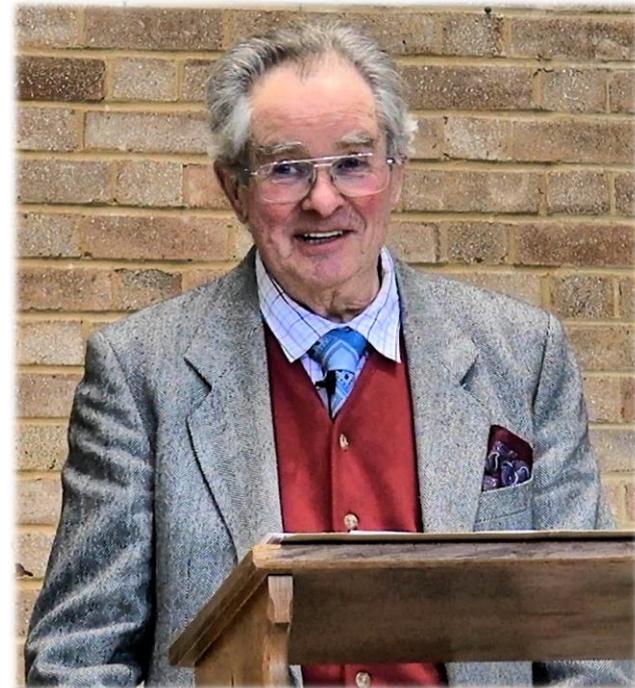
David's journey had taken him to different congregations, different roles, with each new challenge helping him grow. Even when churches had closed or circumstances changed, God had equipped him with the gifts needed for new paths. He talked about the practice of repeating sermons (not for him!) noting that each reading of Scripture could reveal new meaning, shaped by where we were in life and what God was calling us to hear in that moment.

Paul had also written: "He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the partnership of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."

And David had often witnessed people approaching death with a remarkable sense of peace. Even after long illness or suffering, there was a transformation—a readiness and calm that came from knowing God's presence. He recalled with deep emotion how his own family members, and many others, had experienced this peace at the end of their lives. The Lord prepared them, held them, and welcomed them into His arms. He, too, had known a near death moment when he had been ready to follow that path, confident that at its end, he would meet our Lord.

We did not need to fear death or the next life, for God was faithful and would strengthen us to the very end. Our Lord was with us, offering strength, care, and love, and welcoming us home.

Morning Service, Sunday 25th January – led by Pastor Peter Gooch



Good to have Peter back with us in this New Year. He'd brought his computer and PowerPoint slides, and he hoped that the Gremlins that had struck last time had been banished. At least one had remained hidden in his computer, but after a brief pause following the first slide, we got under way.

Children of God and the Light of Christ

"Who are God's children?" Peter asked and referred us to John's Gospel for the answer. All who received Christ and believed in His name would be given the power to become children of God. This was not something to be achieved by natural means or by being born of a human father, but rather it was God Himself who became their Father.

Jesus was described as the eternal and incarnate Word. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was fully God." Everything had been created through Him, and in Him was life, which was the light of all humanity. The light shone in the darkness, and the darkness could not overcome it. The divine nature and matchless greatness of Jesus Christ was declared by John, who highlighted His eternal existence, a distinct person from the Father yet being one with Him, and His role as Creator and source of all spiritual light and life.

Jesus was the light and life for all people. All the spiritual life and understanding that humanity had ever known had come from Christ. Adam and Eve, before the fall, and all who had experienced deliverance from sin, had received their light and life from Him. Nonetheless, many throughout history had refused to know Him or even recognise their need for a Saviour. The light of Christ continued to shine in the darkness of human sin, though it is not always understood or accepted.

Peter reminded us of the gravity of sin and the desperate wickedness of a person's natural heart, as seen in the need for the eternal God Himself to take away the sin of the world. Sin had been shown to be far more abhorrent in God's sight than most realised, establishing the depth of humanity's need for salvation.

A Christian's hope was founded in Christ, Immanuel, God with us. In Him, believers found a strong and lasting foundation for their lives and future. Jesus Christ, being eternal God, was able to save all who came to God through Him, offering a relationship that extended into eternity.

John the Baptist, sent from God, had borne witness to this light so that all might believe, but Jesus had not been recognised by the world He'd created. Even His own people had not received Him. Despite being foretold in the Scriptures and expected by the Jews, He was rejected, despised, and ultimately crucified. Yet, not all had rejected Him. And those who did receive Him and believed in His name were given the right to become children of God.

Christ would always have followers, and He conferred upon them the privilege of being called God's children, adopting them into His family and granting them a dignity and love that surpassed all earthly status or suffering. Though they might be few and despised by the world, they were cherished by a loving Father, provided for in this life, and promised eternal glory. Believers needed to examine themselves to see if they bore the marks of new birth: a sense of sin, faith in Jesus, love for others, righteous living, and separation from the world. Becoming a child of God required receiving Christ as Saviour and believing in Him wholeheartedly. The Bible made it clear that all were in need of God's grace: everyone deserved God's wrath because of human sin. Grace—God's Riches at Christ's Expense—brought forgiveness, salvation, adoption, eternal life, and a home in heaven, all made possible through Christ's sacrifice on the cross. This grace was a gift that had to be personally accepted; only those who did so become children of God. It was available to all, but only a few accepted and received it. Those who did were spiritually transformed, renewed, and sanctified. Paul's letter to Titus affirmed that the grace of God had appeared, offering salvation to all people, and each person had to personally accept this glorious truth.

