



A NEWSLETTER
FROM THE ANGLICAN
CHURCHES OF
LANERCOST WITH WALTON,
GILSLAND AND
NETHER DENTON

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Dear Friends

I am fascinated by advertisements and the messages retailers are trying to get over to us. More than ever the Christmas ads seem to have a common theme of encouraging people to be extravagant, and spend, spend, spend. They are full of lights, magical journeys, presents and lots of food. One of the adverts even features a young boy circling all the things he wants as presents in a Christmas catalogue.

We are told that Christmas is meant to be a time of giving. For a huge chunk of our society that has been translated into having to spend as much as you can, on presents for everyone. even if you can't really afford it. Ignoring the fact that the recipient might well have much of it already, In the midst of all this spending and excitement the reason for the gift seems to have been forgotten.

The strapline of all those adverts I mentioned earlier seems to be 'this is what makes Christmas special'. Yet the one thing missing from them all, is what Christmas is about, Jesus's birth.

Whilst the adverts focus on presents and spending money to ensure everyone has a happy Christmas, Jesus showed us that we don't need a lot of money to make a difference to others, In fact we don't really need to spend money at all. That is not what giving is about.

We can give time, support, help and anything else that will, in the giving, help those who receive. It is amazing just how much a few words of comfort can affect the recipient of them; or a simple gesture of helping someone in and out of the house with shopping bags.

Jesus of course gave the greatest gift of all, with no finance attached to it. A chance to live with him in his Father's house. To give us this, he gave his life. This gift is worth more than anything money can buy.

I am not suggesting that you ignore friends and family at Christmas, in fact quite the opposite: be generous, but that doesn't need to be in the price and number of gifts. Just remember to be even more generous to those who are in need. We live in a society that is built on wealth, but it should be built on kindness and love, both of which we can give in abundance without cost.

Have a wonderful and giving filled Christmas.

Rev Tricia Rogers

Our Mission Community Leader

Benefice of Lanercost with Walton, Gilsland & Nether Denton

Services in December 2023 and January 2024

DECEMBER

Lanercost: 11am

- 3rd Morning Worship (1st of Advent)
10th Holy Communion
17th 6.30pm CHRISTMAS CAROLS
and READINGS
with Brampton Chamber Choir
24th CHRISTMAS EVE:
4.30pm FAMILY CAROLS
8pm CHRISTMAS HOLY COMMUNION
(the 'midnight' service)
25th No service at Lanercost
31st 10am Mission Community Service
of Holy Communion

Walton: 11am

- 3rd No service
10th No service
17th Holy Communion
24th CHRISTMAS EVE:
3pm FAMILY CAROL SERVICE
25th CHRISTMAS HOLY COMMUNION
31st 10am Mission Community Service
of Holy Communion at Lanercost

Gilsland: 9.30am

- 3rd No service
10th Holy Communion
17th No service
23rd 7pm CAROLS BY CANDLELIGHT
24th No service
25th CHRISTMAS HOLY COMMUNION at
Nether Denton (no service at Gilsland)
31st 10am Mission Community Service
of Holy Communion at Lanercost

Nether Denton: 9.30am

- 3rd Communion by Extension (1st Advent)
10th No service
17th 2pm CAROL SERVICE
24th No service
25th CHRISTMAS HOLY COMMUNION
31st 10am Mission Community Service
of Holy Communion at Lanercost

JANUARY

Lanercost: 11am

- 7th Holy Communion (Epiphany)
14th Morning Worship
21st Holy Communion
28th 10am Benefice Covenant Service of
Holy Communion at Walton
(no service at Lanercost)

Walton: 11am

- 7th No service
14th Morning Worship
21st No service
28th 10am Benefice Covenant Service of
Holy Communion

Gilsland: 9.30am

- 7th No service
14th Holy Communion
21st No service
28th 10am Benefice Covenant Service of
Holy Communion at Walton
(no service at Gilsland)

Nether Denton: 9:30am

- 7th Holy Communion (Epiphany)
14th No service
21st Morning Worship
28th 10am Benefice Covenant Service of
Holy Communion at Walton
(no service at Nether Denton)

10am every Wednesday: a short service of Holy Communion is held at Lanercost Priory

All are welcome at any of the services

Vicar: Revd Angela Hughes (016977 2478)

ahughes@webleicester.co.uk

Winter Solstice

A Midwinter festival has been a part of life since pre-Christian times. When the hours of daylight are fewest, the warmth of the sun weakest, and life itself seemingly at a standstill, our ancestors, the pagan peoples of Europe and Western Asia, kept the festival by lighting bonfires and decorating their buildings with evergreens.

Perhaps they believed that the dying sun could be enheartened by fire, and the returning life of the buried seed assured by the presence of evergreen branches.

With the advent of Christianity, the Spring gods became identified with Christ, and the birthday of the sun with the birthday of the Light of the World.

The early church father Tertullian did not approve of Christmas decorations. "Let those who have no light in themselves light candles!... You are the light of the world, you are the tree ever green...." But by the time of St Gregory and St Augustine, four centuries later, this had changed. Pope Gregory instructed Augustine not to worry about harmless outward customs, as long as the right God be worshipped through them. And so many Anglo-Saxon customs were never discarded, but simply endowed with a new significance.

By 1598 one John Stow of London wrote how: 'Against the feast of Christmas, every man's house, as also their parish churches, were decked with holme, ivie, bayes, and whatsoever the season of the year afforded to be greene.'



:The Light of the World

During the month of December, people are 'counting down' to Christmas Day in an ever-increasing variety of ways.

In my childhood we had a simple card with a traditional picture of a manger scene with doors marked with the countdown numbers and a picture of the different characters behind each. If my parents had extra money to spend, they would buy one with shiny snow made of sparkles!

These days you can pay hundreds to have a gift for each day from toys to jewellery. And don't fret, your pets can have their own also!

Churches don't normally count the days, but they do note the four Sundays before Christmas Day. They give each of those four 'advent' Sundays a theme and light a candle each time. One for the first week, two for the second and so on.

Unlike the secular world, the church counts up, and not down. It increases the light as we get nearer to Christmas Day and then adds an extra light on that day. So, a total of five candles.

Churches vary in their use of colour in the candles. Some will use all white, whilst many only use white for the Christ-light on Christmas Day and 'colours' on the four Sundays.

There again they vary; some use all purple – originally the most expensive colour - as we prepare for The King. In a more modern style, some use blue – perhaps recalling the most associated colour for Jesus' mother Mary. But perhaps reminding us of creation and that we are surrounded by God's love as the earth is surrounded by the blue sky.

And again, others will change the colours for each Sunday, often giving the third Sunday to be pink as we are over half-way through Advent and it is known as *Gaudate* – Joyful – Sunday. Or there are those who make the fourth Sunday pink, as that one is often dedicated to Mary and it's a 'girly' colour.

Have a look at the advent candles in your church, or perhaps in your own home, and think about what the colours mean to you. How do they reflect your faith? Whatever the colour – Have a Good Christmas!

Treading Lightly —

St Mary's Churchyard, Walton Update -November 2023

We have been quite busy in the churchyard in September and October getting it ready for winter.

The main path is nearly weed free and we will continue into the winter keeping it clear of leaves and debris.

The grass in the new part of the churchyard has been regularly mown and mowing will start again in the Spring when the grass starts to grow. Areas of the older part have been strimmed and the grass raked up to promote the growth of wild flowers.

In some parts of the churchyard the grass has been left uncut to provide safe habitats for insects, larvae, caterpillars and frogs etc to hibernate and overwinter. Leaving the grass longer is beneficial for the health of the soil and helps to improve drainage. Yellow rattle has been sown so fingers crossed we will have flowers next Spring.

We would like to thank Keith, Elaine & Anna Nightingale and Seb & Nina for their continued work, support and enthusiasm. They have helped with the strimming, fixed the gate posts and cut down a self-seeded holly tree and some tree branches that were blown down in the recent storms. They have also put together a Bug Hotel to provide a shelter for many insects and wildlife. They are hoping to put up some bird nesting boxes around the churchyard over the winter.

During the winter we will make several small brush hedges using the branches and stems of the tree that has been cut down and we will go around the gravestones removing any self-seeded tree samplings. We are hoping to finish clearing under the holly bush and yew tree near the church door and plant some spring bulbs there.

The Nightingales have photographed and made notes of the engravings on the gravestones and we will use this information to produce a catalogue of the gravestones and hopefully we will be able to re-search the lives of some of the people buried there. Carlisle Archives are very keen to have any information we can give them on the history of our churchyard.

What if.....

What if the gospel stories are true? If they're not true it doesn't really matter. But if they ARE true it matters in all our lives. Every year as we come through Advent towards Christmas we have a new way of looking at the future. If we've got the people looking to the future then we've got a new world to create.

We've got climate change, which we can't avoid, getting stronger and stronger and more and more difficult – getting hotter and hotter and colder and colder. We have to set out a moral, ethical standard by which we live.

These new standards haven't been set by the church but by the weather itself. God is on our side but we're not on God's side. The weather is setting the ethical programme towards the future. We human beings have created the situation which leads to climate change. God intends us to live more simply and meet this challenge. We need to live more simply so that others may simply live. God wants us to think about our lives in a different way and live in a different way. We need to think globally, nationally and locally. We can each start with little things that contribute on a larger scale.

John Smith



136. Art, Science and Religion

Art, science and religion; all are
Branches of the same creative tree.
A search for truth using human intellect, and
An expressive hunger for the meaning of life.

Creative art, in itself an act of worship
To create a thing of beauty using the hands,
Expressing the inexpressible in words and
shapes.
Musical vibrations to touch the soul;
Emotional being in resonance with love.

Logical science, the creation of dimensions;
Substance, distance and time.
Creation of the concepts of life and death
To give order, regulation and a set period of time
For our illusory earthly existence.

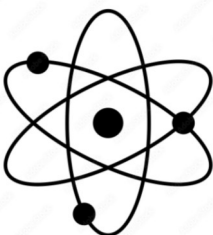
Religions; creations arising from following
Charismatic creatures which inhabit the earth,
Giving glimpses of truth of our source and des-
tiny.
They point fingers to the moon,
But they are not the moon.

Our existence appears to be a separation
From that which Is, which creates
An ache for the meaning and purpose of life;
Ultimately a reunion, a remembrance in Love.

Branches of art, science and religion,
Whose leaves reach out for answers,
Following the glow of the sun,
Looking in the outward direction.

But they forget that the path to Truth is inward;
From leaves to branch, branch to stem,
Stem to root. Unseen and unknown.
A mystery. Not for human intellect.

Bob Morley, September 2023



Approaching Christmas 2023

Swords are no longer used in battle,
so they can't be turned into ploughshares.
War is waged over greater distances
with bombs and rockets,
instruments of mass destruction
with innocent civilians
as massive collateral damage.

How may we view at such a time
the Advent of the Son of God,
a Prince of Peace
born to save the world,
when the paths on which he walked
are torn asunder?
When desperate calls for peace fall on deaf ears,
rendered senseless by the blast of war?

At such a time
it's not the action of the tiger that we need,
not the disguising of nature
with hard-favoured rage,
but the white sheet, the swaddling-cloth,
the voice of reason,
the soothing hand of peace.
But while attitudes
are hardened into hatred
and hostility holds its horrid sway,
what hope is held for humankind?

Think of the baby
born in Bethlehem,
child of a woman,
fathered by divinity,
born to bring a divided world
to reason,
to show the way,
to love one's fellow beings,
to build a new world
founded on respect.

Come back, Jesus.
May the manger
once more beckon,
attracting nearby shepherd
and far distant sage,
and sow once more
the seed of righteousness
upon our soil.

David Bamford

£30m to kickstart Church of England net zero plans

Thousands of churches, cathedrals, schools and clergy houses in England will benefit from a first phase of grants and projects worth £30 million, as part of the Church of England's ambitious plan to achieve net zero by 2030.

The aim is to support the Church in reducing carbon emissions from the energy used in churches, schools, cathedrals, houses and other buildings, saving money by improving the energy efficiency of buildings, and switching to cheaper, more reliable, renewable energy sources.

"The ambition to be net zero by 2030 is at the core of the Church of England's response to the climate crisis – to help safeguard God's creation and achieve a just world," said the Bishop of Norwich, Graham Usher, the Church of England's lead Bishop for the Environment. "

Dioceses, and their parishes and schools, can now take advantage of the first round of grants from the Church of England's Net Zero Carbon Programme, made possible by funding from the Church Commissioners for England.

Harvest celebrations in Gilsland



Bishop Rob, Rev. Tokunbo and Revd Angela led the harvest thanksgiving at Gilsland church on October 8th.

£82 was raised for the Bishop's Harvest Appeal and quantities of provisions were taken to Gilsland School to add to their collection for the food bank.

Lanercosted@gmail.com

Choirs to join premiere of new Carol for Advent and Christmas

The Archbishops of Canterbury and York have warmly invited parishes, choirs, and congregations to take part in the premiere of a special new Christmas carol in 2023.

This new carol, a fresh interpretation of the famous words 'The First Nowell', has been composed by the well-known composer Bob Chilcott, for use by choirs across the Church of England, and is free to download.

The mass carol premiere forms part of the Church of England's focus for Advent and Christmas 2023 'Follow the Star: Join the Song.'

The carol also features in the highly anticipated *Carols for Choirs 6* volume, published by the Oxford University Press, which is now available.

In recent years, The Church of England has successfully engaged millions of individuals with the Christmas message through reflections, special events, music and resources.

This year's theme 'Follow the Star: Join the Song' emphasises the spiritual connection that singing can foster between individuals and God, as we journey from Advent to Epiphany, and the part that carol singing plays in many people's Christmas traditions.

Parishes and choirs can share performances on social media using the hashtag #FollowTheStar.

In a letter, the Archbishops write: "We would love to see the carol feature in Christmas programming up and down the country, and we really hope that you will be willing to participate.

Further details about this year's 'Follow the Star: Join the Song' campaign can be found at [churchofengland.org/Christmas](https://www.churchofengland.org/Christmas).



Harvest Thanksgiving at Lanercost

Thank you to everyone in the community who contributed to the two Harvest Appeals at the Priory Church of St Mary Magdalene at Lanercost. Donations have now been sent to the Bishop of Carlisle's Harvest Appeal and to the Carlisle Food Bank.

At our church service we enjoyed singing the harvest hymns again and remembered farmers and food suppliers both at home and elsewhere, especially in these times of unseasonal weather patterns. A donation of £147.50 has been sent to the Bishop's Harvest Appeal – this included £50 from the after-church refreshment fund. For several years the Bishop's Appeal has been supporting Mothers' Union projects for women's literacy and numeracy in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and also work undertaken by Christian Aid in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel. Both projects are making a real difference to people's lives and livelihoods.

Lanercost Primary School had its own Harvest Service with Revd Angela and parents and families were invited. The children presented the story of Miriam - this had been part of this term's work learning about women in the Bible. They sang harvest songs with great enthusiasm and some of the older children had written some very thoughtful prayers on a harvest theme.

Our second appeal was for a bumper effort to supply store cupboard items to the Carlisle Food Bank. This was supported very generously by the parents, staff and children of Lanercost Primary School who donated a vast mountain of tins, packets and jars – enough to completely surround the steps of the font in church. The food-stuffs were then all taken to Carlisle and received with many thanks. The Food Bank is under great pressure as winter is approaching and is at present experiencing very high demand for support from its clients.

Thank you again to everyone who made donations to the appeals, and also to those who helped transport the food to Carlisle.

(. Find out more about the Bishop's Appeal at www.carlisediocese.org.uk and search 'Bishop's Harvest Appeal')

Barbara Riches

Harvest Pie and Pea Supper

Thank you to all those attending the Autumn Fundraiser for St Cuthbert's church Nether Denton held at Low Row Village Hall on Saturday 28th October –

we had Pie, Peas, and Puddings! - along with entertainment including singer James Falder - we raised £507 for our much needed funds – it was a lovely community evening!



Lees Hill WI

We celebrated our 101st birthday with a meal at Skitby on November 15th. At our December meeting, on Thursday 7th, we will be making Christmas wreaths with members Rosie Mitchinson and Jennifer Whiteford. In January we will not have a meeting here but will go to Slaggyford WI for an afternoon tea, and in February Helen and Philip Brown will talk about their recent holiday to Canada and Alaska.

We normally meet on the third Wednesday of the month at Walton and Lees Hill School at 7.30pm. Visitors are always welcome at our meetings and new members are also very welcome. Please contact Rose Riches, 07821 653583+; roseanddick04@talktalk.net for more information.

From the Registers

Lanercost

Burial of Ashes:

11th October – D Alan Gass

Baptism:

15th October - Theo Eneas Schoppa

29th October - Andrew Robert Threlkeld

Gilsland

Cremation:

30th October – George Firman

Funeral & Burial:

13th November – Mary Stewarf

Nether Denton

Baptism :

5th November – Robin Cowan Pitchford

Walton and Lees Hill CE Primary School News

After a restful summer holiday, we all came back into school excited and full of energy for the academic year ahead. The start of the school year came with a few changes; Our newly named classrooms, Oak and Acorn Class, welcoming Mrs Rooney as our new Head Teacher and of course, welcoming our fantastic Reception and Nursery new starters into the school family.

Our school topic for the start of term has been *Amazing Africa*. All pupils have enjoyed learning so many fascinating facts and developing their knowledge on Africa, its countries, animals and culture.



This topic was backed up by a whole school visit to The Lake District Wildlife Park, where we listened to very informative talks about African animals, delivered

by the experienced animal handlers, and pupils spotted African animals all around the Park.

We also enjoyed hosting our Harvest Festival and Community Lunch on October 10th. Parents, carers and family members were welcomed into school to share a delicious lunch with us. Pupils prepared a very tasty crumble for the dessert, so there were clean bowls all round!

Pupils then shared readings and prayers that they



had developed for the Harvest Festival, as well as singing songs they had been practising. For our Harvest Festival, we collected food and toiletries for the Brampton Foodbank. Everybody was so generous with their donations, and they were very gratefully received.

From October 9th to 13th, we held our R.E week in school. Throughout this week, as well as hosting our Harvest Festival and Community Lunch, we

developed our understanding of stories from the Bible and acted out the Godly Play story of Sara and Hagar. Acorn pupils learnt the story of The Little Red Hen and practised songs around this, whilst Oak pupils tied in their knowledge of *Amazing Africa* by learning about Harvest across Africa. We tied up the week by visiting St. John's Church in Houghton, where we met with other local schools to share our plays and stories.

During R.E week, we also had our SIAMS inspection. These inspections are a statutory requirement for all Church of England Schools. Our inspection went fantastically, and we are all so proud of the outcome. The full report can be read on our website.

Just before half term, we welcomed children's author Molly Arbuthnott into school for the day. She shared her brilliant stories with pupils and delivered fantastic workshops. Molly commented on how all pupils were 'lovely' and that our school was 'so inviting'. We had a great day with Molly and thank her for spending the day with us!

To mark Remembrance Day, we held a special Remembrance Children's Worship in school, where pupils completed Remembrance themed crafts, shared poems, and prayers. Pupils also gathered on Sunday 12th at St. Mary's Church, Walton to participate in the Remembrance Service with the community. Thank you to all those who joined this special service.

On Sunday 19th November, we held our fantastic Christmas Craft Fair. There were a number of different Christmassy craft and small business stalls, plus delicious refreshments on offer. It was a brilliant day and a great fundraiser for the school PTFA. We would like to thank everyone involved for making it such a special occasion.

We are already starting to think about Christmas and are looking forward to hosting our Christmas community lunch in December, as well as pupils putting on their Christmas performance. In the New Year, we are excited to be starting our 'wrap-around care' option for pupils and their families, offering childcare from 8am to 4:30pm.

The rest of the term looks set to be filled with lots of brilliant learning opportunities and lots exciting experiences. We can't wait to spend it with our fantastic pupils!

The history of Christmas

The Bible does not give a date for the birth of Jesus. In the third century it was suggested that Jesus was conceived at the Spring equinox, 25th March, popularising the belief that He was born nine months later on 25th December. John Chrysostom, the Archbishop of Constantinople, encouraged Christians worldwide to make Christmas a holy day in around 400 AD.

In the early Middle Ages, Christians celebrated a series of midwinter holy days. Epiphany (which recalls the visit to the infant Jesus of the wise men bearing gifts) was the climax of 12 days of Christmas, beginning on 25th December. The Emperor Charlemagne chose 25th December for his coronation in 800, and the prominence of Christmas Day rose. In England, William the Conqueror also chose 25th December for his coronation in 1066, and the date became a fixture both for religious observance and feasting.



Cooking a boar was a common feature of mediæval Christmas feasts, and singing carols accompanied it. Writers of the time lament the fact that the true significance of Christmas was being lost because of partying. They condemn the rise of 'misrule' – drunken dancing and promiscuity. The day was a public holiday, and traditions of bringing evergreen foliage into the house and the exchange of gifts (usually on Epiphany) date from this time.

In the 17th century the rise of new Protestant denominations led to a rejection of many celebrations that were associated with Catholic Christianity. Christmas was one of them. After the execution of Charles I, England's Puritan rulers

made the celebration of Christmas illegal for 14 years. The restoration of Charles II ended the ban, but religious leaders continued to discourage excess, especially in Scotland. In Western Europe (but not worldwide) the day for exchanging gifts changed from Epiphany (6th January) to Christmas Day.

By the 1820s, there was a sense that the significance of Christmas was declining. Charles Dickens was one of several writers who sought to restore it. His novel *A Christmas Carol* was significant in reviving merriment during the festival. He emphasised charity and family reunions, alongside religious observance. Christmas trees, paper chains, cards and many well-known carols date from this time. So did the tradition of Boxing Day, on 26th December, when tradesmen who had given reliable service during the year would collect 'boxes' of money or gifts from their customers.

In Europe Santa Claus is the figure associated with the bringing of gifts. Santa Claus is a shortening of the name of Saint Nicholas, who was a Christian bishop in the fourth century in present-day Turkey. He was particularly noted for his care for children and for his generosity to the poor. By the Middle Ages his appearance, in red bishop's robes and a mitre, was adored in the Netherlands and familiar across Europe.

Father Christmas dates from 17th century England, where he was a secular figure of good cheer (more associated with drunkenness than gifts). The transformation of Santa Claus into today's Father Christmas started in New York in the 1880s, where his red robes and white beard became potent advertising symbols. In some countries (such as Latin America and Eastern Europe) the tradition attempts to combine the secular and religious elements by holding that Santa Claus makes children's presents and then gives them to the baby Jesus to distribute.

From: <https://christianity.org.uk/the-history-of-christmas/#.W9LmchNKhsM>



Lanercost C of E School

As the nights get darker and the wind turns cool, it is difficult to remember all that we have done this term. It seems a long time ago since our return in September!

This term we have had a huge focus on ensuring a broad and balanced curriculum where the children gain a lifelong love of learning, so it is difficult to pinpoint a couple of moments to share.

At the beginning of each half term, we hold a values morning for all our children and for all our parents and carers in our community. These have proved a fantastic way for our children to learn the choice behind the values of the school, but also the biblical stories that support these values are threaded throughout our everyday learning and every day life at Lanercost. Miss Turnbull always creates a special atmosphere with her Godly Play sessions and the children are delighted to watch with intent as she carefully and respectfully tells the Bible stories using all the incredible characters in her Godly Play box. This is definitely a special moment for everyone! Our other sessions on our values morning have included drama depictions, collaborative art, team building and much more. What makes this even more, is the fact that by doing this in our house teams, the children are able to work with each other across the school, from Nursery all the way to Year Six.

During autumn one, we also all ventured out to be evacuated! As part of our World War II learning, the children dressed as evacuees and were evacuated from Brampton on the train all the way to Haltwhistle.



Photo from : "It started with a train ride" — a new documentary about evacuees to Haltwhistle

Once arrived, the children were greeted with spam or jam sandwiches, followed by listening to a real-life evacuee, activities based on the history of the railway and much more. This brought our World War II learning to life!

As part of a School being an integral part of our community, we held our first community lunch of the year. It was amazing to see so many people from the community coming to our school and enjoy lunch with our children. Not only is this a wonderful experience for our children, to listen to those who live in our community but also it was a beautiful moment to see so many of our community getting to know our younger children. Thank you to all of those who came, we hope to see even more of you at our next community lunch coming up. Our hope, as a school, is to continue to invite our community in and for us to get out into Lanercost so that the school is a central part of our village.

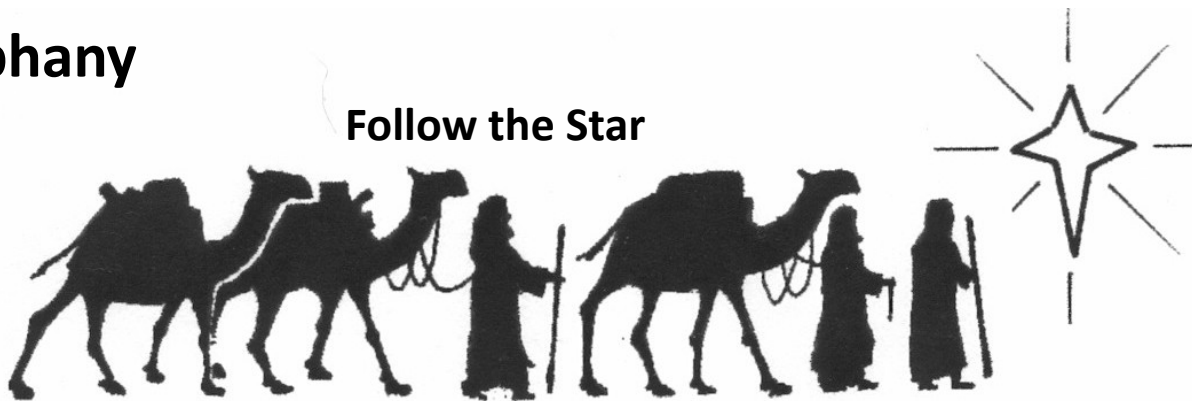
Another fantastic highlight that cannot go unmentioned, was working with other schools in the area to create RE week. RE week is a long-standing tradition amongst local schools where the children focus on a theme within RE, learn about it and then present their learning to everyone. This year, the theme has been women in the Bible and there was an amazing collaboration between the schools which was presented at Houghton Church. Not only were the children able to see each others learning and further their own, but they were able to mix with the children that they will go to secondary school with and build on the friendship bonds created in the past.

A fantastic term at Lanercost and we cannot wait to see what the spring brings!



Epiphany

Follow the Star



Jesus' welcoming committee included Eastern scholars who learned about His birth through their study of astrology. I can't help thinking that the arrival of these people at Bethlehem is a link between a very early form of science (albeit mixed in with their own form of religion) and Christian faith. What better way to discover God than to explore the world and follow the evidence wherever it leads? But what exactly was the star of Bethlehem? Scientists have investigated this question over the centuries, coming up with a variety of answers.

First, there is the idea of a supernova: the massively bright explosion caused by a dying star. On rare occasions a supernova can be seen from Earth with the naked eye, remaining visible for several months. We now know that Herod the Great died around 4BC, so the actual date of Jesus' birth must be a little earlier. The supernovae that might match this timing were one in the Andromeda galaxy between March 8BC and September 7BC, and another in the constellation of Capricorn in the Spring of 5BC.

Next, comes a planetary conjunction. The alignment most commonly associated with the star of

Bethlehem was between Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation of Pisces in 7BC, but not everyone is sure whether this would be extraordinary enough to be the 'star' mentioned in the Bible.

Finally, the bright astronomical object that drew the Magi could have been a comet. This idea came from Sir Colin Humphreys, Professor of Materials Science at Cambridge University, and Oxford astronomer WG Waddington, who found that a comet was recorded by Chinese astronomers between March and May, 5BC. Humphreys then speculated that the 'no room at the inn' scenario came about because Jesus was born during Passover, and the Magi visited Jesus in May or June.

People interpret the biblical account of Jesus' birth in all sorts of ways, but there's very little argument from serious historians that Jesus of Nazareth actually existed. Whatever the true explanation for the 'star of Bethlehem' may be, there's plenty of evidence that an astronomical event could have happened at the time of His birth.

Dr Ruth M Bancewicz

BRAMPTON FOLK SESSIONS
AT
THE HOWARD ARMS
'Live Music by Real People in the Community'
We meet every **third Tuesday of the month** at **8:00pm** and welcome singers, instrumentalists, story-tellers, poetry reciters and anyone who would just like to sit with their pint and listen!
Find out more at www.laverocks.org.uk

Lanercosted@gmail.com

Café Scientifique Brampton

Meetings take place *simultaneously live* at Brampton Community Centre and via Zoom **on the last Thursday of the month**. Doors open 7pm for 7.30pm start (ends approx. 9.30pm) **Cost:** £4.00 (plus 0.35p booking fee) or £5 on the door. (includes a glass of wine and nibbles)

For more information and tickets visit <https://www.bramptoncc.org.uk/regular-activities/cafesci/>

Where did the Wise Men come from?

Magi from the East – it isn't a lot to go on. The Magi had originally been a religious caste among the Persians. Their devotion to astrology, divination and the interpretation of dreams led to an extension in the meaning of the word, and by the first century the Magi in Matthew's gospel could have been astrologers from outside of Persia. Some scholars believe they might have come from what was then Arabia Felix, or as we would say today, southern Arabia.

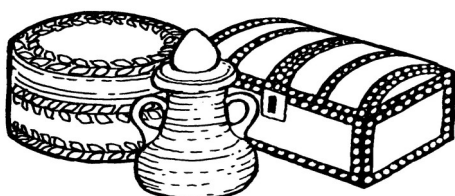
It is true that in the first century astrology was practised there, and it was the region where the Queen of Sheba had lived. She of course had visited Solomon and would have heard the prophecies about how one day a Messiah would be born to the Israelites and become their king.

Matthew's gospel (chapter 2) is clear that the Magi asked Herod: 'Where is the One who has been born king of the Jews? We saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.' So it is possible that in southern Arabia the Queen of Sheba's story of how a Messiah would one day be sent to the Israelites had survived. Certainly, there are a number of other early legends that connect southern Arabia with Solomon's Israel.

To many people this makes sense: that the ancient stories of a Messiah, linked to later astrological study, prompted these alert and god-fearing men to the realisation that something very stupendous was happening in Israel. They realised that after all these centuries, the King of the Jews, the Messiah, was about to be born.

One more interesting thing that gives weight to the theory that the Magi came from southern Arabia is this: if you study any map of Palestine as it was during biblical times, you will find that the old Arabian caravan routes all entered Palestine 'from the East'.

It wasn't until the third century that they were called kings – by a church father, Tertullian. Another church father, Origin, assumed there were three – to correspond with the gifts given



What about the gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh?

The story of the coming of the Magi grew in the telling. By the 6th century they had acquired names: Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar. By medieval times they were considered to be kings. Whoever they were, we do know from Matthew that they brought three gifts to Jesus.

What about their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh? While we cannot know for sure what was in the minds of first century Magi, one Victorian scholar has offered a possible explanation as to the significance of their gifts. He was the Rev John Henry Hopkins, an American Episcopalian minister, who in 1857 wrote his much-loved Christmas carol, 'We Three Kings of Orient Are'.

Gold, said John Henry Hopkins, was a gift that would have been given to a king. Frankincense had traditionally been brought by priests as they worshipped God in the Temple. Myrrh was a spice that the ancients used in preparing bodies for burial.

If that is true, then you could say that the Wise Men, in choosing their gifts for this infant, honoured Jesus with gold because He was King of the Jews, with frankincense because He was to be worshipped as divine, and with myrrh, because He would also become a sacrifice and die for His people.

The Wise Men were the very first gentiles ever to worship Jesus. What faith they had! They travelled for months over difficult terrain, they never saw any evidence of Jesus' kingship, His divinity or His sacrificial death. They worshipped Him through faith in God's promises about Him. Isaiah foresaw this response to Jesus: 'Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.' The Magi's eyes of faith saw clearly and far into the future.

Compare that with the High Priest and religious leaders whom the Wise Men saw in Jerusalem when they first arrived. These head priests knew all about the prophecies of their own coming Messiah, but NOT ONE Jewish religious leader travelled to look for Him in Bethlehem. And it is only six miles down the road!

'The Virgin of the Lilies'

by Carlos Schwabe

How art can celebrate the wonder of this world.



Here we stand with Mary and Jesus above the world: high on the clouds with a glorious path of tall, elegant lilies that lead like a stairway to the earth beneath. This is 'The Virgin of the Lilies' by Carlos Schwabe. He was born in Germany and then lived in Switzerland and France, painting this canvas in 1899 when he was 33 years old.

It is like a scene caught when we look out of the window in an aeroplane. We can see the earth beneath and spot hills and valleys, roads and settlements, and a river weaving its way through the countryside. Mary and Jesus are haloed in a lunar-like radiance. The lilies are symbols of purity and obedience, the qualities that will take them to that scene at Bethlehem which we give thanks for at Christmas. The heavenly light shining out in the painting brings hope and joy to the world below, transforming lives with the wonder of the Saviour's birth.

Jesus holds three nails in his hand as a sign that His life will be tempered by rejection, suffering and death. But the lilies growing tall and straight in the skies are signs of new life and resurrection. The light come down to earth at Christmas can never be extinguished. That light and love are expressed in this vivid, moving painting of Carlos Schwabe as they are caught up in the carol of Christina Rossetti we sing at this time:

*Love shall be our token, Love be yours and love be mine,
Love to God and all men, Love for plea and gift and sign.*

Michael Burgess

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CAROLS BY CANDLELIGHT GILSLAND CHURCH SATURDAY 23RD DECEMBER 7PM

Amid the seasonal rush, pause for some moments of calm and joy this Christmas. Come and join us to sing carols by candlelight in St Mary Magdalene, Gilsland.

Followed by seasonal refreshments
(Everyone will be given a candle but please bring a torch if you can!)



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Carlisle Taize Choir at Gilsland



Once again our annual service on All Souls Evening was enhanced by the glorious singing of the Carlisle Taize Choir. It was a serene and contemplative service, the chants in the darkening church giving the congregation space to recall precious memories of loved ones who are no longer with us. The most poignant moment was during the chants of O Christe Domine Jesu and Bless the Lord My Soul as members of the congregation and choir came forward to light candles in memory.

Those who are faithful will always be with him in love

Wisdom of Solomon 3.9

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f Brampton Chamber Choir making music

Feast of the Holy Innocents

The death of a very young child is perhaps the hardest grief of all to bear. So the 28th December is a very poignant day in the church calendar. It is when the worldwide Church joins with bereaved parents to grieve the loss of babies and young children. For Holy Innocents day recalls the massacre of the young male children of Bethlehem by Herod the Great.

Herod had been told by the Magi, or Wise Men, that a great king had been born in Bethlehem, and he felt shaken. How could a child in unimportant little Bethlehem be so powerful that the stars in the night sky honoured His birth?! Herod took the Magi so seriously that he decided to try and kill this new young rival. He decreed that every male baby of two years and under should be killed. (Matthew 2:1-18).

Bethlehem was not a large place, and Bible commentators estimate that between six and 25 infants were slaughtered by Roman soldiers. Their mothers were inconsolable at the death of their babies, as indeed mothers have always been.

The death of these innocent baby boys of Bethlehem became a feast-day in the western Church by the 4th century. This was because the Church considered them to be martyrs because they not only died *for* Christ, *but instead of* Christ.



Down the centuries, the tragic loss of the Holy Innocents has touched the imagination and hearts of poets, preachers and artists. Though heart-broken parents still grieve today, the Church can offer them one firm assurance: that young children who die to this world will undoubtedly "this day be with Me in Paradise." The One who eagerly said "Suffer the little children to *come unto Me*" will be the last person to turn them away.

CHURCH OFFICE-HOLDERS

Vicar		Rev'd Angela Hughes	016977 2478	ahughes@webleicester.co.uk
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for Children and Vulnerable Adults

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Keith Nightingale 07736725143

Nether Denton

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Carlisle Diocese Safeguarding Advisor

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Deadline for submissions to February issue is 20th January

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Interviews will be held in January and applications need to be received by **14th January**.

Please do contact Tricia to have an informal conversation before applying

Information Pack and Application Form can be obtained from The Team

**Rector: Canon Tricia Rogers,
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email - revtriciar@aol.com Tel 016977 41304**