

December 2025/January 2026

FOCUS

Issue 299



Parish Magazine of St Stephen's, Hightown





Editor's Note

A number of years ago, I taught in a small village school. An annual task was that of producing the Nativity Play, often mistakenly called the activity play by the children. Preparation would begin in October, so that by the time it was mid-December, the children would be word perfect. Roles were carefully cast according to age and ability but the most sought after role for the girls was always that of

Mary. In reality, Mary didn't need to have a speaking part, so an infant child was normally chosen and all she had to do was to cuddle the baby doll and place him in the crib. Simple!

I recall one production in particular when the simple task went horribly wrong:

And so it came to pass that, after all the dress rehearsals, the date of the Nativity Play finally arrived. It was a perfectly clear and crisp late afternoon, the mercury level was dropping obligingly to create the authentic Dickensian Christmas card atmosphere. The play began in the village church.

Angel Gabriel, magnificent golden wings outspread, appeared on the church altar to Mary, who was sitting, doing some quiet knitting. Gabriel, in full flow of his well mastered, lengthy soliloquy, announced to the sweetly smiling Mary that she was going to have a baby and call him Jesus. He was about to continue when Mary, jolted out of her excellent silence, piped up:

"Oh no I'm not, I'm going to call him Joseph after his dad!"

And so there commenced a battle of unscripted words.

Gabriel replied, "Of course you can't! God said he was to be called Jesus."

Mary retorted, more adamantly this time, "No! Miss said I could call him Joseph."

Gabriel, looking straight at me said, "It says in the Bible to call him Jesus!"

Mary just had to have the last word:

"Well, I've changed my mind now and I AM calling him Joseph. Baby Joseph."

It was all too much for poor Gabriel, who flew off to the side altar, wailing.

Mary continued knitting, in silence once again, with a smug look on her pretty face. I quickly ushered in a change of scene.

All the parents were, of course, highly amused at the improvised lines.

What's the famous adage in thespian circles? Never work with children or animals. Should have listened!

Wishing you all a joyful Christmas, Colette.

Dear Friends,

As I sat down to write the letter for this month, the words of the last verse of the Christmas Carol, 'O little town of Bethlehem', came to mind!

'O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray;

cast out our sin, and enter in: be born in us today.

We hear the Christmas angels, the great glad tidings tell:

'O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel'.

And what wonderful words they are for us. The Lord coming to be with us and to change us too!

I don't know about you, maybe it's a vicar thing, but for me the month of December passes by very quickly. With the Christmas preparations, services, carols, plans, presents, decorations, get-togethers, socials, and whatever else comes along, the month is really full and can easily carry us along without our feet touching the ground! And then it's January. New year. New start. New plans. New year's resolutions... perhaps?

Advent – Christmas – Epiphany. The three church seasons we'll journey through in December and January, bring with them opportunities to pause, to reflect, and to renew our thinking. But you know, we are so busy and sometimes miss the opportunity to take that time out to really reflect on what these seasons are all about.

Advent – the season of expectant waiting.

Christmas – the season to celebrate God's saving work in the world, in the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Epiphany – the season of newness, of encounter.

For some, these seasons bring stress, worry, debt, the nightmare of choosing the right gifts, hoping for everything to be just perfect, perhaps missing a loved one, for the first time or the twenty-first time.

In all of this, we need to remember why we are celebrating and who we are celebrating! Jesus is the 'Reason for the Season' after all.

At the centre of these three festivals is a little baby, placed in a borrowed manger, in a borrowed stable. There wasn't even a cradle to rest the baby Jesus. It wasn't grand. It wasn't fancy... but it was amazing! This true story is amazing. Perhaps such an idea might release us from some of the pressures, financial and otherwise that this time of year brings.

Elsewhere, in the Focus, is a list of all our services and events throughout the festive season. You will be most welcome at any or all of them!

'O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel'.

May God bless you this Advent, Christmas and Epiphany.
Keith





Christmas

at St. Stephen's

Sunday 7th December All-Age Eucharist, Toy & Gift Service 10:30am

Sunday 14th December 4pm Festive Afternoon Tea- Tickets £2.50

Sunday 14th December 'Carols around the Tree' 6pm

Saturday 20th December Breakfast with Santa 9:30am Tickets £2.50

Sunday 21st December 'Carols by Candlelight' 6pm

Wednesday 24th December Christingle Service 4pm

Wednesday 24th December Midnight Eucharist 11:15pm

Thursday 25th December Family Eucharist for Christmas Day 10:30am

Sunday 28th December Patronal Festival Eucharist 10:30am

Wednesday 31st December New Year's Eve Eucharist 10:30am

***A very Happy & Blessed Christmas to all in Hightown
From St Stephen's Church and Our Lady of Victories Church***



Christmas Celebrations at Our Lady Of Victories and Holy Family

Saturday 6th December:

11 am Penitential Celebration with personal Confessions in Hightown for the Communities of Ince Blundell and Hightown.

12 noon: Holy Mass OLOV Hightown

Monday 8th December:

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Masses:

9 am: Holy Mass Holy Family Ince Blundell

7 pm: Holy Mass OLOV Hightown.

Sunday 21st December: 4th Sunday of Advent

9 am: Holy Mass Holy Family Ince Blundell

11.15 am: Holy Mass OLOV Hightown

Wednesday 24th December Christmas Vigil Masses:

3 pm: Holy Mass OLOV Hightown in Spanish

7 pm: Holy Mass Holy Family Ince Blundell in English.

Thursday 25th December: Christmas Day Masses:

9 am: Holy Mass Holy Family Ince Blundell

11.15 am: Holy Mass OLOV Hightown

Sunday 28th December: The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph

9 am: Holy Mass Holy Family Ince Blundell

11.15 am: Holy Mass OLOV Hightown

For regular giving—Everyone benefits

For details, Please contact:

Brian Taylor: 0151 929 2720

Keith Aldis: 0151 929 3612



Magazine part-sponsored by John Gibson - notary services

Services at St Stephen's Church December 2025 and January 2026

Wednesday 3 rd	10:30	Eucharist
Friday 5 th	09:30	Morning Prayer
Sunday 7 th Advent 2	10:30	All-Age Eucharist Toy & Gift Service
	16:00	Toddler Church (1 st Sunday for Dec)
	18:00	Evensong
Wednesday 10 th	10:30	Eucharist
	19:00	Sanctuary @ Seven
Friday 12 th	09:30	Morning Prayer
Sunday 14 th Advent 3	10:30	Eucharist with Healing
	18:00	Carols around the Tree
Wednesday 17 th	10:30	Eucharist
Friday 19 th	09:30	Morning Prayer
Sunday 21 st Advent 4	10:30	Eucharist (Sunday School)
	18:00	Carols by Candlelight
Wednesday 24 th Christmas Eve	10:30	Eucharist
	16:00	Christingle
	23:15	Midnight Eucharist
Thursday 25 th Christmas Day	10:30	Eucharist
Friday 26 th St Stephen's day	10:00	Morning Prayer- Live streamed Facebook
Sunday 28 th Christmas 1	10:30	Patronal Festival Eucharist
	18:00	BCP Holy Communion
Wednesday 31 st	10:30	Eucharist for New Year's Eve
Friday 2 nd 2026	09:30	Morning Prayer
Sunday 4 th Epiphany	10:30	All-Age Eucharist
	18:00	Evensong
Wednesday 7 th	10:30	Eucharist
Friday 9 th	09:30	Morning Prayer
Sunday 11 th Epiphany 2	10:30	Eucharist
	16:00	Toddler Church
	18:00	Evensong
Wednesday 14 th	10:30	Eucharist
	19:00	Sanctuary @ Seven
Friday 16 th	09:30	Morning Prayer
Sunday 18 th Epiphany 3	10:30	Eucharist (Sunday School)
	18:00	Evensong
Wednesday 21 st	10:30	Eucharist
Friday 23 rd	09:30	Morning Prayer
Sunday 25 th Epiphany 4	10:30	Eucharist
	18:00	BCP Holy Communion
Wednesday 28 th	10:30	Eucharist
Friday 30 th	09:30	Morning Prayer

Prayer Prompts for December

Wk1. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the deep darkness, on them has shined a light (Isaiah 9:2)

Wk2. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called, Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

Wk3. Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. (Jeremiah 23:5)

Wk4. Prepare to meet your God, O Israel. (Amos 4:12)

Let us pray for the people of:

St Stephen's Rd, Hester Close and all the people of Hightown

Prayer Prompts for January

From the writings of the great mystic and spiritual teacher, Teresa of Avila

Wk1. A whole lifetime is short. I cannot depend upon anything that passes away. We need, therefore, to cast aside our daily concerns. We need to reflect upon the state of our soul.

Wk2. We hear the Lord calling to us even when we are still caught up in the pleasures and vanities of this world. God is willing to wait for me for many a day, even many a year.

Wk3. Do not be anxious about what you are to eat or to put on, but leave it to God. In trusting him, I will be free from anxiety.

Wk4. If I have you, God, I will want for nothing. You alone suffice.

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Sunday 14th December

4pm

Tickets £2.50

Entertainment and Jollity

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Do you remember the hit , 'It'll Be Lonely This Christmas' ?

In 1974 it was sung by Mud, before that, Elvis. Well, there's no need to feel lonely this Christmas with so much going on in Hightown. If you are able; get out and join in some of the many festive activities mentioned in Focus; take a walk at dusk around the village to look at the lights; come to one of the services and meet new friends. You will be welcomed like an old friend in Hightown.

Our grateful thanks to all those who help with the Focus magazine: the people who deliver it, those who contribute and special thanks to Martin Butcher, who is our technical guru.



Entries for future issues of Focus to be sent to
Focus.Mag.2023@StStephensHightown.org.uk

Please submit before last day of month

'Word Together' Bible Study

Every 2nd and 4th Wednesday

2pm

Please note that there will be no session on 24th December, the 4th Wednesday, but sessions will be back to normal on 14th and 28th January.

St Stephen's Church

'Souper Troopers' Mondays

**Noon-til- 2
in the Church Hall
All Welcome!**



**Please do come along for company
and a tasty bowl of soup! Give what
you can!**

**Please note Souper Troopers will NOT meet on Monday 29th December. Back on
Monday 5th January 2026. Thank you!**

Sunday Coffee Rota December

7th Hilary Munro

14th Pam Bessant

21st Jane Copeland

28th Di Aldis

Sunday Coffee Rota January

4th Jan Williams

11th Shirley Burns

18th Jayne Cudby

25th Christine Grocott

Brass Rota

December

Colette Hudson and Jayne Cudby

January

Kevin Bradshaw



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Who's Who at St Stephen's

Vicar	Revd Keith Thornborough
Associate Priest	Revd John Reed
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PCC Treasurer	Keith Aldis
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Maize Harvest 2025

Americans call it corn, we call it grain maize. In Hightown, the farmer normally harvests it in late October / November. Forage maize is earlier when it's a bit greener. The forage maize will be used to feed the animals over the winter. This is a relatively new crop in Hightown but it seems to like our soil and conditions.



Toddler Church Fun



It is always such a joy to see and hear our toddler congregation in St Stephen's, every second Sunday. A Bible story, some simple songs and craft, plus refreshments and companionship provide the perfect ending to the a dark and wintry Sunday afternoon. Come and see!

Date For Your Diary

**World Day of Prayer Service, Friday 6th March 2026 at 2pm,
St Stephen's Church
All Welcome**

God in the Sciences

This series is written by Dr Ruth M. Bancewicz, who is Church Engagement Director at The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion in Cambridge. Ruth writes on the positive relationship between Science and Christian faith.

The Incarnation: fearfully and wonderfully made

My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place,

when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. Psalm 139:15-16



You began life as a single cell. For a few hours you were a miniscule but highly complex blob of jelly, until it began to divide: two cells, four, eight, sixteen, a ball, a hollow ball, and then something more recognisably like a living organism. You were still tiny, but developing a nervous system, a head, a body, arms and legs.

Until recently I hadn't thought much about Jesus being an embryo. Somehow, I find that thought even more shocking than His birth. How could God, who made the universe, have become something so completely and utterly vulnerable? Maybe in the past, when the development of a child happened in 'secret', it was possible just to let that part of the Christmas story go untold.

Today, when we see images of a developing child, or even embryos outside the womb, it is harder to ignore the process of Jesus developing into a baby. The incarnation meant that God's Son went through all the stages in the diagram in my developmental biology textbook: 'zygote', 'morula', 'blastocyst', implantation, and so on.

Jesus was there in the beginning, and all life owes its existence to Him. But instead of remaining aloof, He chose to become one of us. The Son of God shared the same kind of DNA as every other organism on the planet. He knows what it feels like to have a body, to feel hungry and thirsty, pain and pleasure, dark and light.

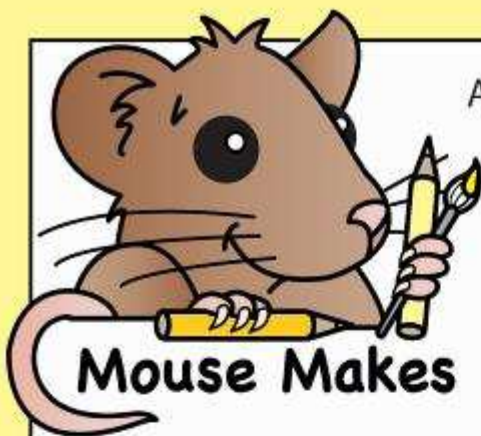
In Psalm 139, the writer is meditating on God's intimate knowledge of him, which began when he was an embryo. There is nothing God doesn't know about him, and even darkness cannot obscure him from God's sight. The incarnation means that God's intimacy with us now extends even further. He became one of us, lived alongside us, and shared our very fragile material nature.

The transcendent God is also immanent, longing for us to relate to Him as Father. He became as fragile as we are so He could rescue us from the messes we so often find ourselves in. With His help, we can remember what it means to be fearfully and wonderfully made.

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Village Organisations and Activities

Tuesday Group, St Stephen's Hall Tuesday morning 10.30am	Beryl Howard & Jan Branigan
Hightown Friendship Group 1st Wednesday at 8pm St Stephen's Hall	Marjorie Walker
Gardening Club 2nd Monday 8pm St Stephen's Hall	Hilary Munro
Bowling Club, Sandy Lane	Diana Killen
Hightown Club	Chris Scrine
Blundellsands Sailing Club	Rohan Pickard RohanPickard@gmail.com Deryk Johnson DerykJ@gmail.com
Yoga Classes, Hightown Club	Rose Billinge
Flower Show	Debbie Underhill underhillsathome@aol.com
Open Mic Poetry Group 3rd Thursday 7.30pm St Stephen's Church hall	Sally Anne tapiabowes@gmail.com Alex
Craft Group, Every Thursdays 1.30-3.30pm, St Stephen's Hall	Sue Taylor
Hightown Parish Council	Jenny Farrar clerk@hightownparishcouncil.uk www.hightownparishcouncil.uk
Community Library, Alt Centre, Lower Alt Rd. Mon 12-2, Tues 1-3,	Linda Munro lindamunro@hotmail.com
Zumba Gold, Dance for all aged 55 plus, Mondays 9.45-10.30, St Stephen's Hall	Nicky Garsforth
Creo Dance Company Mon Tues Wed Thurs Sat Children 3 to 18 years	Georgia Cardwell



At Christmas we celebrate the birth of Jesus,
God's Son and our Saviour
coming into the world as a baby,
and we look forward to the time
when Jesus will come again,
not as a baby but as the
King of kings and Lord of lords!

read
John 14:3

A baby needs clothes
to keep warm like
a snuggly sleep suit
or a vest and nappy.
What were you dressed in?
Jesus was wrapped in

read Luke 2:7

A baby needs somewhere
to be born like at home
or in a hospital.
Where were you born?
Jesus was born
in a stable in

read Luke 2:1-6

A baby needs
somewhere
to sleep like
a crib or a cot.
*What did you
sleep in?*
Jesus slept in a

read Luke 2:7

A baby needs
a name.
*What name were
you called?*
Jesus was given
a special name
that had a
special meaning.

read
Matthew 1:21-23

HAPPY CHRISTMAS!

NADOLIG LLAWEN ★ NOLLAIG CHRÌDHEIL ★ NOLLAG SHONA
JOYEUX NOËL • FELIZ NAVIDAD • BUON NATALE • GOD JUL • FROHE WEIHNACHTEN

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Toddler Time

A new fun group for Toddlers 0-4yr and their carers!

St. Stephen's Church Hall

Fridays 10am-11:30am term time

Play- Craft- Snack- Story- Songs- Fun!

ALL WELCOME!

Toddler Church

St Stephen's Church

1st Sunday in Dec, 2nd Sunday of Jan '26 4pm

A service for pre-schoolers and their families

Fun songs, a bible story, craft and refreshments

We look forward to meeting you!

Youth Club

From age 7

Friday Evening Term Time

6pm until 7.15pm

£2.50 includes snacks and drinks

Contact: Jane Bessant 07776 305 660

**Please note that there will be no youth club
during school holidays**



ST STEPHEN'S CHURCH SUNDAY SCHOOL



EVERY 3RD SUNDAY @ 10:30AM

