

Good News Parish Magazine

for High Downs

Parish

*Serving the villages of
Eastling, Otterden,
Stalisfield and Throwley*

www.goodnews.rf.gd



**DECEMBER
2024**

- 8th Stalisfield Seniors' Christmas Dinner
Stalisfield Village Hall 4 - 6pm
(Pre-book only)
- 11th Arts Society lecture, Egerton
Millennium Hall, Egerton 2.30pm
- 11th Cocktail making masterclass
The Plough, Stalisfield 7pm
(Pre-book only)
- 11th Otterden & Stalisfield W.I.
Stalisfield Village Hall 7.30pm
- 12th Charing History Society
Parish Hall, Charing 7.30pm
- 14th Stalisfield Children's Christmas Party
Stalisfield Village Hall 2 - 4pm
(Pre-book only)
- 15th Carol Service
Stalisfield Church 5.30pm
- 18th Youth Group Christmas Party
Stalisfield Village Hall 7 - 8.30pm
- 19th Stalisfield Village Carol Singing
Stalisfield Green 6pm
- 20th Carols on the Forstal
Throwley Forstal 6pm
- 20th Copy deadline for January 2025 Good
News - goodnewsmagazine@me.com
- 22nd Carols at the Carps
Carpenters Arms, Eastling 5.30pm
- 22nd Carol Service
Throwley Church 5pm
- 24th Carol Service
Eastling Church 4pm
- 27th Together in Boots walking group
Doddington Church leave at 11.30am

JANUARY 2025

- 25th Quiz Night
Eastling Village Hall 7pm



Christmas Services

Carols by Candlelight

15th December Stalisfield Church 5.30pm
22nd December Throwley Church 5pm
24th December Eastling Church 4pm

Christmas Eve
Midnight Mass 11.30pm Stalisfield Church

Christmas Day
Christmas Communion 10am Eastling Church

**Stalisfield
Village Carol Singing
Thursday 19th December
Meet on the Green 6pm**



Carols on the Forstal at Throwley Forstal

Friday 20th December,
6:00pm

Traditional Carols in the marquee by the
Christmas tree, bring your family and join
your friends and neighbours in Christmas
cheer!

Change of Service time

The Communion service on Advent Sunday,
1st December at Eastling,
will start at 9.00am (not 10.30) and be followed
by refreshments.

All welcome



Christmas is a crazy time of year, don't you think?

We get bombarded with Christmas in the shops in October or earlier and the hype and expectation of the BIG DAY can become all consuming. Have we got all the presents, have we posted out all the cards or emailed the Ecards? Have we got enough food for everyone (usually we have way too much!), have we catered for the all the various dietary needs? Have we got all the decorations, does the house look Christmassy enough? Have we got room for 'Great Aunt Maud' to stay and have we remembered to get sheets and a bedspread for her rather than the duvet that is way too modern and Scandinavian for her taste!

Christmas can feel like a very long 'to do list', a series of tick boxes from October to

December 25th that we often fail to complete and too often feel really bad about.

My message to you is....
"Simplify Christmas".

It's probably far too late for me to be saying this, as your preparations will be well on the way, but let us try to find a moment to be still, to be quiet and to drop all the seasonal busyness and ponder the real meaning of Christmas.

The real meaning is simplicity itself, it was the baby born of Mary, who was the Son of God, who came as the light of the world to teach us how to live in love and peace with each other and who was to bestow upon us the gift of everlasting life. But all this took place in the simplest and humblest of places, away from the chaotic world outside; the most incredible of events took place without the fuss that we now consumes us at this time of year.

So amid the tinsel, turkey and trimmings, find time to be still and know that Jesus came to bring his radiant and unconditional love and peace to us all.

Happy
Christmas and
New Year

Rev. Paula



And there were shepherds...



Luke's story of the birth of Jesus is brilliantly told – the angel's visit to Mary to tell her she would be mother of the long-promised Messiah, the old priest in the

Temple told by another angel that his wife would have a son to be called 'John', who would prepare the people of Israel for that event, and then Mary and Joseph making the 60 mile journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, as required by the Roman census. When they got there, no room at the inn, and they settled instead for a convenient stable, where Mary gave birth to a boy child. Suddenly, Luke changes the tone. 'And there were shepherds ...' – that's what he actually wrote, just like that. 'And there were shepherds', doing exactly what shepherds do, looking after their flocks by night. But this night was different: yet another angelic message – a call to abandon their sheep and go into Bethlehem to see the baby Messiah. They were given directions and a 'sign' to identify Him. He would be lying in a feeding trough. Well, at least they would recognise that.

And why the shepherds, in this glorious story of our salvation? Because the event needed witnesses, and the chosen witnesses would be this bunch of scruffy, smelly shepherds straight from the sheep-pen. Nothing could speak more eloquently of God's purpose than that. This was not a Saviour for the strong, rich and powerful, but for everybody. The carpenter and his wife guarded the Saviour of the world, and the very first witnesses were not kings or priests but a handful of shabby shepherds.

December Prayer Pointers



Sundays - For our clergy and lay folk who lead services in our parishes, celebrating the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Mondays - For joy in families coming together for Christmas.

Tuesdays - For charities working to help others in many different ways.

Wednesdays - For all who have suffered abuse.

Thursdays - For the abusers, that they will reform their ways and gain greater understanding of the results of their selfishness.

Fridays - For world leaders to lead their countries in more peaceful ways.

Saturdays - For new Christians around the world, especially in countries where they could be persecuted for their new faith.

Eastling Church Flower rota



1st & 8th December - Advent Ring
- Leigh-Anne, Altar vases - Mel

15th - Christmas tree up

18th & 19th Decorating for
Christmas - all help welcome

5th January - Suzie

If you would like to join the
flower arranging rota, please call
Bay on 01795 892036.

Otterden & Stalisfield W.I.

The Craft Fair in October was really well attended by stall holders and attendees alike. It was our first attempt at this type of event and as it was so successful we will be repeating it in 2025. The Hall is booked for Saturday 18th October 2025 so make a note of the date, particularly if you would like to hire a table to sell your wares. It is an ideal event for local small businesses.

The talk given by local historian, Henny Shotter, on The Three Wives of Boughton Malherbe, was well received and attended. A couple of our group then went to the church at Boughton Malherbe to further research the information we had learned. We have asked Henny to give us a walking tour of Lenham next year.

The final Meeting of our Group is slightly later in the month than usual, Wednesday 11th December commencing at 7.30 p.m. at Stalisfield Village Hall. In keeping with the festive spirit, we will be making Wreaths or Christmas Decorations if



you wish, so bring along the materials needed to create your masterpiece. We ask that attendees bring a plate of 'Fare to Share' offering of food please. It will be a sociable get together to round off the year.

Although we do not hold a Meeting in January, we will be organising a gathering for lunch at Longacres (Bybrook Barn), Ashford on 15th January at 12.30. Please advise Helen Brooks if you wish to join us.

That just leaves us to wish all the readers of the Good News a Merry Christmas from Otterden & Stalisfield W.I. Should you wish to join our Group, please contact either Helen Brooks, our President, on 07477580727 or Ellie Cameron, our Secretary, on 07775649337.



The Arts
Society
Egerton

THE ARTS SOCIETY EGERTON

The Arts Society brings people together through a shared curiosity for the arts.

We meet at Egerton Millennium Hall on the second Wednesday of each month at 2.30 p.m. (doors open from 2.00). Our next lecture will be:

**Wednesday 11th December at 2.30pm:
The Inventors of Christmas.**

Everyone knows the ingredients of a traditional Christmas; gathering around the Christmas tree, pulling crackers, eating Christmas puddings and mince pies. But where did they start? This lecture looks at characters and personalities of the people who began those traditions or introduced them to this country.

Lecturer **Alan Read** is a gallery guide at Tate Britain and regularly lectures at both London Tates. He also works as a London blue badge guide.



Drinks and festive nibbles after the lecture!

Visitors are always very welcome at £6 (just turn up and pay on the door), refunded if you join. Membership is £40. For further information please contact Christine Willis, our Membership Secretary via cmwillis75@gmail.com or 01233 756377.

See also our website www.theartsocietyegerton.org.uk

Image provided by lecturer

Christmas in Stalisfield

Dates for your diary in December

Sunday 8th: Stalisfield and Otterden

Seniors' Christmas Dinner - at the Hall - 4pm

Prebook only contact Bridget at

bawithell@yahoo.com or on 01795 892125

Saturday 14th: **Children's Christmas Party** at the Hall **2pm prompt!**

(Fun and Games start at 2pm!)

Prebook only contact Julie on 07584 798415 (evenings) or at julie.beames@hotmail.co.uk

Sunday 15th: **Carol Service** at the Church - 5.30pm

Join the village to celebrate with carols, readings, mulled wine and mince pies!

Thursday 19th: **Village Carols** starting on the Green at 6pm. 2024 collection is for Samaritans

Tuesday 24th:

Midnight Mass at the Church - 11.30pm



Together in Boots at Christmas

However Christmas has left you feeling, we would love to see you

Leaving Doddington Church at 11.30 and returning for soup at 12.15 well behaved dogs welcome too!

Friday 27th December

Enquiries to Lissie on 07790 287878 lissie1710@gmail.com

CAROLS

ON THE

FORSTAL

PLEASE JOIN US FOR THE TRADITIONAL CAROL SINGING IN THE MARQUEE BY THROWLEY'S CHRISTMAS TREE WITH YOUR FRIENDS AND NEIGHBOURS.

AS USUAL MINCE PIES WILL BE SERVED, AS WELL AS MULLED WINE & HOT CHOCOLATE TO WARD OFF THE WINTER CHILL.

**THROWLEY FORSTAL
FRIDAY 20TH
DECEMBER, 6PM**

CAROLS AT THE CARPS

COME AND JOIN FRIENDS AND NEIGHBOURS TO ENJOY SOME CAROL SINGING AROUND THE TREE, AS WELL AS SOME MULLED WINE AND A FIRE TO WARD OFF THE WINTER CHILL.

**THE CARPENTER'S
ARMS, EASTLING
SUNDAY 22ND
DECEMBER
AT 5.30PM**

Christmas Party

Stalisfield and Otterden Seniors' Christmas Dinner

Stalisfield Village Hall

Sunday 8th December - 4pm

Prebook only contact Bridget at

bawithell@yahoo.com or on

01795 892125

**BOOK EARLY TO AVOID
DISAPPOINTMENT**



EASTLING VILLAGE HALL

QUIZ NIGHT

SATURDAY, 25TH JAN AT 7 PM

Tables of up to 8 people

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07754 114670

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Throwley Carol Service Choir

The annual Carol Service will be held at St Michael & All Angels in Throwley on Sunday 22nd

December at 5 pm and if anyone is interested in joining the choir for that occasion please email David Elvin at davidjelvin@gmail.com. It will be mainly traditional congregational carols with a few pieces to be sung by the choir. There will be a number of rehearsals in December before the service.



Christmas Carols

Eastling Church

Come and join our choir for a **Christmas Eve Carol service**. Practices in Eastling church, on Sunday evenings, 5 - 6pm from 17th November.

Just come along or, for more information, call Andrew on 01795 890598

CHRISTMAS SOCIAL EVENING

Bring and share buffet, wine, quiz & entertainment



Thursday, 12th December 2024

Where: Church Barn, Market Place

Time: 7.30pm doors open

Festivities start there!!!



CHARING & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

www.charinghistory.co.uk

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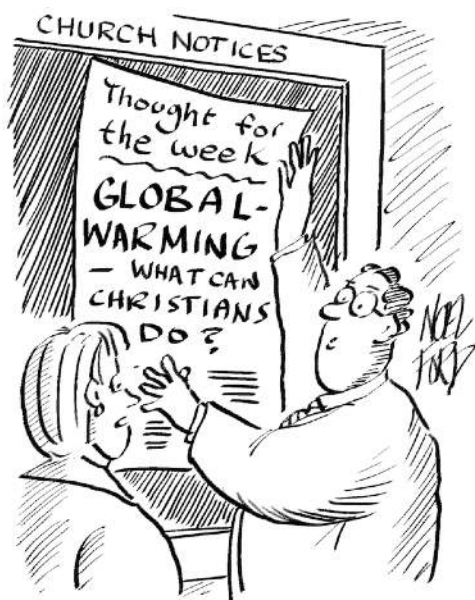
Friday 6th December - 7.30pm

Saturday 7th - 2.00pm and 7.30pm

Sunday 8th - 2.00pm and 7.30pm

Tickets: Adults £10 Under 16 £3

Available from Doddington Service Station, Chequers Inn, and Doughty's butchers, or ring 07944 284173



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Thursdays - Stalisfield Village Hall 6:30pm

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Get in touch for more info:
Rosiezumba2017@gmail.com
07809490982



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Brogdale Road, Faversham
ME13 8XZ

6th December: St Nicholas – a much-loved saint

One account of how Father Christmas began tells of a man named Nicholas who was born in the third century in the Greek village of Patara, on what is today the southern coast of Turkey. His family were both devout and wealthy, and when his parents died in an epidemic, Nicholas decided to use his inheritance to help people. He gave to the needy, the sick, the suffering. He dedicated his whole life to God's service and was made Bishop of Myra while still a young man. As a bishop in later life, he joined other bishops and priests in prison under the emperor Diocletian's fierce persecution of Christians across the Roman Empire.

Finally released, Nicholas was all the more determined to shed abroad the news of God's love. He did so by giving. One story of his generosity explains why we hang Christmas stockings over our mantelpieces today. There was a poor family with three daughters who needed dowries if they were to marry, and not be sold into slavery. Nicholas heard of their plight and tossed three bags of gold into their home through an open window – thus saving the girls from a life of misery.

The bags of gold landed in stockings or shoes left before the fire to dry. Hence the custom of children hanging out stockings – in the hope of attracting presents of their own from St Nicholas - on

Christmas Eve. That is why three gold balls, sometimes represented as oranges, are one of the symbols of St Nicholas.

The example of St Nicholas has never been forgotten - in bygone years boys in Germany and Poland would dress up as bishops on 6th December, and beg alms for the poor. In the Netherlands and Belgium 'St Nicholas' would arrive on a steamship from Spain to ride a white horse on his gift-giving rounds. To this day, 6th December is still the main day for gift-giving and merry-making in much of Europe. Many people feel that simple gift-giving in early Advent helps preserve a Christmas Day focus on the Christ Child.

The Plough Inn

The Plough Inn,
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We are offering a **NEW TAKE AWAY MENU** Wednesdays & Fridays 5-7pm. Please email or call for the NEW menu, great prices, great quality & you can always grab a half/glass when you collect!

Wednesday 11th December 7pm - Cocktail making masterclass - see website for details: theploughinnstalisfield.co.uk/special-occasions/

Christmas Eve 2024 - Open from midday till 5.30pm

Christmas Day 2024 - Open from 12 for drinks

Boxing Day 2024 - Closed

Normality returns from Friday 27th to Sunday 29th

Special opening on Monday 30th 12 – 9pm

New Years Eve 2024 - Open from midday, Pre booking required for dinner reservations

New Years Day 2025 - Open from midday till 6pm

Down time for the team 2025 - We will be closed from 2nd January but back to normal from 8th January to give our team a well deserved break

Job Opportunities available for Pot wash and weekend Bar/Restaurant. Please email CV or pop in.

Keep up to date by following us on Facebook, Instagram or X (twitter)

Stalisfield Road, Faversham, Kent, ME13 0HY

Tel: 01795 890 256 Email: info@theploughinnstalisfield.co.uk



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Website: favershamfeet.co.uk



The Arts Society Faversham



The Arts Society is the UK's leading arts education charity that brings people together through a shared curiosity in the arts. We enjoy illustrated talks on a fascinating wide range of topics, outings to galleries and historic houses and an elegant annual Society Dinner. Meetings are held at The Alexander Centre in Preston Street, Faversham on the 4th Thursday of the month. Come along for a complimentary coffee at 10.20 for the 11am start. You can try us out for a modest fee and no doubt will want to become a member!

23rd January 2025: Our lecturer is Jonathan Conlin, and the subject is: **The National Gallery: 200 years of Art for the Nation.**

2024 was the bicentenary of the National Gallery. The lecturer tells the history of the gallery in 10 paintings. How has our taste in masterpieces changed?

SPECIAL INTEREST DAY

"What do they get up to in there?" On May 8th 2025
10.30-3.15pm.

Lyndon Jones, Roy Campbell.

Learn from two senior Masons about the history of the Masons and take a private tour of the Masonic Lodge of Faversham.

£38.00 including a light lunch.

Contact Maureen Bush, Membership Secretary:
tolly@clara.co.uk or visit our website:
www.theartsocietyfaversham.org.uk



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07746 220 998

Email: michaelratcliff80@gmail.com

Have you heard of the

Stop Scams phone number 159 ?

I hadn't till I listened to Radio 4 Money Box on 23rd Nov.

What is 159? 159 is an easy to remember phone service from Stop Scams UK. When a consumer receives an unexpected or suspicious call about a financial matter, they can stop, hang up and call 159 which connects them safely and securely with their bank.

They launched in 2021 and have already had over 800,000 calls for help.

There's good information on their website: stopscamsuk.org.uk/

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Services in our Benefice

1st December Advent Sunday

Jeremiah 33. 14-16, Psalm 25, 1-9, Luke 21. 25 - 36

Eastling 9am Holy Communion

Doddington 10.30am Holy Communion

8th December Advent 2

Malachi 3. 1 - 4, Benedictus, Luke 3. 1 - 6

Throwley 10.30am Morning Prayer

Newnham 10.30am Holy Communion

15th December Advent 3

Zephaniah 3. 14 - 20, Psalm 146. 4 - end, Luke 3. 7-18

Eastling 10.30am Morning Worship

Stalisfield 5.30pm Carol Service

Saturday 21st December

Wychling 5pm Carol Service

22nd December Advent 4

Micah 5. 2 - 5a, Magnificat, Luke 1. 39 - 45

Throwley 10.30am Holy Communion

Newnham 10.30am Morning Worship

Throwley 5pm Carol Service

24th December Christmas Eve

Isaiah 9. 2 - 7, Psalm 96, Luke 2. 1 - 14

Eastling 4pm Carol Service

Stalisfield 11.30pm Midnight Mass

25th December Christmas Day

Isaiah 9. 2 - 7, Psalm 96, Luke 2. 1 - 14

Eastling 10am Holy Communion

29th December Sunday after Christmas

1 Samuel 2. 18 - 20, 26, Luke 2. 41 - end

Doddington 10.30am Benefice Service

5th January Epiphany

Isaiah 60. 1 - 6, Psalm 72, 10-15, Matthew 2. 1 - 12

Eastling 10.30am Holy Communion

Norton 10.30am Morning Worship

Online Daily Worship Continues

As well as the services in our churches, the daily 9am Morning Prayer will continue on the Benefice Facebook Page via

<https://kc-hd.org.uk> .

More information is updated weekly on St Mary's Eastling 'A Church Near You':

<https://www.achurchnearyou.com/church/11982/>

High Downs Parish

Rector Revd Paula Jardine-Rose

07516 411269 paula.jardine.rose@kc-hd.org.uk

Benefice Administrator Joyce Warren

01795 521831 joyce.warren@kc-hd.org.uk

Associate Priest Reverend James (Jim) Pye

01795 890726 jim.pye@kc-hd.org.uk

Reader Caroline Ramshaw (07799 538809)

Anna Chaplain Caroline Ramshaw
ramshawcaroline@gmail.com

Reader Pim Baxter (07710 116269)

Church Contacts

Eastling Andrew Baxter, Warden (01795 890598)

Administrator E mail: stmaryeastling@gmail.com

Stalisfield with Otterden

Jenny King, Warden (01795 890366)

Chrissie Webster, Administrator
(07590 351977)

Throwley David Elvin, Warden (07973 837122)
E mail: david.j.elvin@gmail.com

High Downs Parish Safeguarding Officer

Mark Harlow (07979 864000)

E mail: mark.harlow@kc-hd.org.uk

CONTACT THE GOOD NEWS EDITOR

Hilary Harlow 01795 890338

If you would like to submit articles, or to advertise in the January 2025 magazine, send your submission by 20th December to: goodnewsmagazine@me.com.

Past and current issues of the Good News may be viewed on www.goodnews.rf.gd

Anna Chaplaincy

Please contact our Anna Chaplain, Caroline Ramshaw, if you know of someone who is isolated, alone or unable to attend church.

An Anna Chaplain can offer a listening ear and company. Communion can be brought to you in your own home.



Contact your local Anna Chaplain on:

ramshawcaroline@gmail.com 07799 538 809



Christmas Trees 2024

Thank you for your great support, continued fundraising dedication and warm overwhelming messages of appreciation, all of which last year raised £13,200. These donations are given to 45 local parish churches and 25 charities.

It's been a great growing season again, producing a very good selection of Christmas trees available in

many varieties, shapes, colours and aromas, between 5 and 12ft in height. There will also be some over 16ft - ideal for schools, churches, village halls and outside spaces. We will have plenty of evergreen cuttings including berried holly and ivy for Christmas decorating, and hopefully even a sprig of mistletoe nearer Christmas.

We started this fundraising scheme nearly 35 years ago. The procedure is unchanged: please visit to choose your tree from mid-September, and return to collect it from late November or December.

As before, the arrangement is for you to make a donation for your tree; 60% will be returned to your Parish church and the balance will be divided between 25 charities.

This is a great chance for you to raise funds for your Parish church and some deserving charities at the same time.

Please get in touch with us to book a time and date to come to choose your tree, by emailing, texting or phoning. (You can always postpone your visit if the weather is unfavourable.)

Email
nashsfarmhouse@btinternet.com

Landline 01795 532596 Mobile
07910 248 308

**Peter and Alison Howard Nashs Farmhouse,
Luddenham, Faversham**

Eastling Neighbourhood Watch



Village Warden 07794 010 394
or 01795 890848

Police 101 Emergency 999

For any scam or cyber attacks or calls
please report it on
0330 123 2040

Christmas is with us again and the time for joyous celebrations.

The usual reminder at this time of year to not get involved in drink/drug driving as there will be accidents down to people's stupidity which will involve death, injury and sorrow.

Kent police will be having a blitz on this over Christmas in rural areas, so be warned.

If you have visitors over Christmas bringing their dogs with them will you please ensure the dogs have tags on with a phone number, as it is so much easier to trace someone should the dogs get lost than having to wait for any microchips to be identified.

There have been reports of suspicious vehicles touring local villages which, in the case where registration nos are noted, are passed on to be used for future intelligence. So please keep on reporting as it assists in keeping our villages relatively crime free.

Parcel deliveries should be brought inside as soon as possible. Should you not be in you can request the delivery company to put in a safe place or to be hidden from view or goes to a neighbour.

I would like to thank all the people who have contributed to the safe keeping of the local area in the last year and wish you all a very merry and safe Christmas.

Have a good month

Take Care
Alan



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CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS PARTY

Stalisfield Village Hall

Saturday 14th
December, 2pm
PROMPT!

(Fun and games start at
2pm)

Book early to avoid
disappointment.

The children of Stalisfield and Otterden are invited to the Hall for the Annual Christmas Party. From littlies to biggies, every child is welcome.

Pre-book only- contact Julie on 07584 798415 (evenings), or



Stalisfield Youth Group!

Stalisfield Youth Group is for 11-17yr olds.

We meet on Wednesdays, usually twice a month, 7 - 8.30pm in the village hall AND it is free to come.

We have music, gaming, craft, table tennis, table football, outside games in the Summer, craft table, tuck shop (everything 10 - 50p), free cake and drink.



It is a time when young people can relax, hang out and catch up.



Upcoming Date:

Christmas Party

Wednesday 18th December

Contact Catherine 07929 928 046 or clnorwood@doctors.org.uk or see our Facebook page for more details.

Bible Bite

A short story from the Bible

It can be read in the Bible in
Luke chapter 2 verses 1-7

The Roman Empire charged the countries it had invaded taxes, based on the number of people and what they earned.

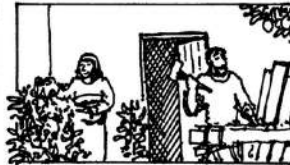
Emperor Augustus gave orders that all people in the Empire were to be registered so they could be taxed.



This census was before Quirinius became Governor of Syria* (*whose own census started riots - Acts 5:37)



When the order came, Mary and Joseph were living in Nazareth.



But Joseph was descended from King David, who had been born in Bethlehem...

so Joseph took Mary to Bethlehem to stay with his family.



Come and meet everyone!



A normal home in Bethlehem.

Stable with mangers
Animals were kept inside
Everyone lived and slept in the living room
Room added for guests and visitors



While they were staying there, Mary's baby was born.

There was no space in the guest room to put a new baby!



So they made a snug bed for Jesus in one of the mangers.



Jesus is Born- Wordsearch

h	k	n	h	t	h	f	a	m	i	l	y
s	t	a	b	l	e	n	e	b	d	h	m
g	p	z	u	c	j	h	g	s	a	n	a
e	m	a	n	g	e	r	u	y	v	b	r
y	v	r	c	l	u	i	e	r	i	r	y
w	o	e	h	e	n	s	s	i	d	o	v
b	j	t	r	i	r	t	t	a	j	o	p
v	e	h	r	y	p	b	a	u	o	m	b
b	s	i	u	h	o	m	e	x	s	s	e
f	u	l	i	v	i	n	g	d	e	q	a
q	s	e	m	p	i	r	e	w	p	s	n
v	i	s	i	t	o	r	s	s	h	n	u

Can you find these words in the grid above?

Baby	Jesus	born
Living	home	David
Nazareth	visitors	room
Quirinius	Augustus	space
family	everyone	manger
Bed	Joseph	Syria
Mary	Empire	taxes
Bethlehem	guest	stable

Managing your finances over the festive season

As Christmas approaches, it's natural for excitement to build. However, for many families, this period can also bring financial stress. We have some practical tips to help manage your finances during the festive season.

Plan ahead with a budget

Start by listing everyone you need to buy gifts for, along with other seasonal expenses like decorations, food, and activities. Determine how much you can realistically afford to spend and allocate your funds accordingly. Stick to your budget as closely as possible and keep receipts for all your purchases. This way, if you need to return an item, you can do so easily.

Prioritise your spending

Ensure that you pay priority debts such as Council Tax arrears first. Remember that household bills often increase during the winter months due to higher energy usage and more time spent indoors. If you have existing debts, it's important not to ignore them.

Avoid debt

Using credit cards and loans can lead to further financial strain if you're unable to keep up with repayments. If you do need to borrow, make sure you understand the terms and have a clear plan for repayment.

Have yourself a thrifty little Christmas

There are many ways to make Christmas special without breaking the bank. Homemade gifts, thoughtful gestures, and family traditions can be more memorable and meaningful than expensive presents. Consider activities that focus on spending quality time together, like baking, crafting, or watching holiday films.

Ask for help if you need it

If the financial strain becomes overwhelming, remember you're not alone. We can check you're receiving the benefits you're entitled to. Our specialist Money Advisers can help you with organising your debts and budgeting.

If you'd like additional support, you can attend our drop-in sessions without an appointment:

- Monday, 10am-12pm, SwaleHouse, Sittingbourne
- Tuesday, 10am-12pm, Sheppey Gateway, Sheerness (except the second Tuesday of every month, which is held at Sheerness East Working Mens Club)
- Wednesday & Friday, 10am-12pm, 43 Stone Street, Faversham Alternatively, email us at www.citizensadviceSwale.uk/email-general-advice (Monday-Wednesday) or call Adviceline on freephone 0800 278 7979. For debt advice, request a call back from our specialist money advice team at www.citizensadviceSwale.uk/debt/.

Winter in the Valley

by Audrey Keen

Frost has come
To the valley and has won,
For nought can struggle up and fight
Against these crystals, cold and white.
Like sticks, the little tree boughs wave;
The leaves, brown mouldy in their grave.
The sun tries hard to kiss and coax
A movement though, from beech and oaks.
But in December frosts begin
And all know that the frost will win.

*In every year there is more to enjoy
And in each month I find a reason to employ
My senses - for imagination craves
To let loose all that my mind saves
For memories.*

by Audrey Keen



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Waiting is not popular in our culture, when so much can be obtained simply at the press of a button! Advent, when we wait for the coming of Christmas, is also an opportunity to learn what it means to be

waiting for the promised return of Jesus.

He says: *'It's like a man going away: he leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. Therefore, keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back'* (Mark 13:34-35).

We live between Jesus' first and second comings and this parable

The Revd Canon Paul Hardingham on waiting for Christmas.

Advent

reminds us of the need to watch and wait, as disciples living faithfully for Him. It reminds us of two kinds of waiting: *passive* and *active*. Imagine you're at the railway station, awaiting the arrival of a train. On the platform a man is asleep, as he thinks there is plenty of time before the train arrives. He is *passively waiting*. There is also a small boy on the platform who is excited about the train coming. He can't sit still and constantly looks down the track to see if the train is coming. He is *actively waiting*, for he expects the train to arrive at any moment.

Advent gives us a choice: *how will we wait for Jesus' coming?* Passive waiting doesn't require much

attention on our part. We can live our Christian life pre-occupied with our own concerns, rather than looking to God. However, active waiting involves an eager expectation, as we await Jesus' return or simply look to him coming to us today. All we want is to be found faithful as His disciples. There is nothing more important than being ready to meet our Master!

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County Councillor's Report

Land Drainage

As Chair of the Environment Committee at KCC, I have been in touch with the Lower Medway Internal Drainage Board to investigate whether it would be viable to convert land currently drained using drainage ditches into salt marsh or some other habitat with a high biodiversity value.

Swale's estuary habitats are vitally important to the conservation of wildlife on a European scale, but this is not only important for the environment, it could also reduce future flood defence costs. These habitats play an important role in reducing the energy of waves as they move inshore, so that sea defences are easier to build and maintain, and are less likely to be overtopped during storms.

A number of different schemes and funds are in place to financially compensate landowners interested in making this kind of change, and a reduction in the need for drainage ditches in Swale could potentially reduce the LMIDB's annual bill to Swale Borough Council, which currently stands at around a million pounds per year.

Council Tax

Council Tax was debated at the November KCC full council meeting. Following recent announcements from the Welsh government that council tax will be reformed there to be made more reflective of people's ability to pay, I submitted a motion for KCC to write to the UK government to follow suit.

Following the debate at County Hall, where almost everyone who spoke agreed that council tax was unfair and the whole system needed scrapping rather than reforming, we submitted an amended wording to our motion to scrap council tax and replace it with a new tax more reflective of people's ability to pay. Sadly the amendment to the motion was voted down by the majority of councillors.

Seashells Children's Centre

Following a year-long push from our group at KCC, the council agreed earlier this year to reduce the number of petition signatures required to trigger a debate at a KCC full council meeting from 10,000 down to 5,000. I was pleased that the Seashells Children Centre in Sheerness were able to meet this target with a petition to review the decision to cut funding to the

children's services they provide. A move which was also unanimously opposed by Swale Borough Council's councillors at a recent meeting.

Children's services are vital to ensure our children have the best start in life and grow to be happy, healthy adults, especially in areas where the need for support is greatest. I believe that cutting this funding would be very short-sighted as numerous studies have shown that the financial savings do not reflect the long-term cost to all of us if children's needs are not met and they don't get the necessary support.

Higsted Park

Swale's Green councillors have released a statement regarding the Secretary of State's decision to "call in" the planning decision on this vast development proposed East and South of Sittingbourne. We have all been shocked and angered by this move, which raises huge questions for the future of local planning, and the potential for the proposed Winterbourne Fields and Duchy developments to be similarly taken out of our hands. I am sorry to say that the future of local democracy in planning is looking very uncertain.

Rich Lehmann

rich.lehmann@kent.gov.uk

Shock as planning decision is taken out of Councillors' hands.

Green Councillors Rich Lehmann, Alastair Gould and Terry Thompson were devastated to be told a few hours before the planning committee meeting 7th November, that the planning decision on the enormous development, Higsted Park, South and East of Sittingbourne had been "called-in" by government.

Swale Council's planning officers had recommended refusal of the application because of the terrible impact it would have on Bapchild, Teynham and the surrounding communities and countryside, but the councillors were given notice shortly before the meeting that the Secretary of State would, instead, carry out an inquiry.

Terry Thompson, our Green Party representative on the planning committee, is angry that the decision has been taken out of local control and that an application for development on high grade farmland may be permitted. He says "We are

losing vast areas of agricultural land due to development and climate change. A proper study needs to be carried out to assess the value of this land in terms of national food production, local employment and the environment before any construction is carried out on Kent farmland".

Alastair Gould, who is chair of the committee developing the new Local Plan asks, "What is the point of having a planning committee if we can't even get to discuss the most controversial planning application on our patch, which has cross-party opposition? If this development is given the green light, it will make a mockery of the local planning system and the development of the Local Plan.

Rich Lehmann, leader of the Green Group on Swale Borough Council says "This will be a disaster for local communities and infrastructure. What happened to Labour's promises of

devolution and more powers for local government?

There have been over 700 objections to this planning application, including from National Highways and an agreement locally that the proposals should not go ahead. Where is local democracy in this decision?"

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