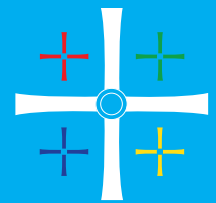


Free for All



THE MAGAZINE OF THE VENTA GROUP

DECEMBER 2020

The people walking in darkness have
seen a great light;
they lived in a land of deep darkness
but a light has dawned on them.

Isaiah 9:2



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This Christmas, I'd like to encourage you to look for light in the darkness.

Did you create a rainbow at the beginning of the first lockdown? Perhaps you drew or painted a picture which you put in the window for people to look at as they walked around the village. Maybe you got creative with different textures. I saw someone who made one out of different coloured boiled sweets that they melted together in the oven. It looked amazing and delicious.

Recently I saw a video of some people competing to paint the best rainbow that they could. It's easy, isn't it? One curved line inside another, a bit of red paint and orange and yellow and... But it wasn't easy, because they had to do it in the dark. There was a bit of help for them – they

put some glow-in-the-dark tape on the brushes and the paper and the pots – but you can imagine it was enormously difficult. Which colour was which?

There were a couple of things that helped, though. One of the contestants noticed that the paints had different scents mixed into them, so that the red paint smelt of strawberries, the orange of oranges and so on. So there was a little hint if you worked hard enough.

But another contestant found some even better help. On the wall was another square of fluorescent tape, and inside that square was a light switch. He couldn't remember anything in the rules about not switching the light on, so he pressed it. Light flooded the room, and the game was changed entirely. (Or it would have been if he didn't turn out to be really, really bad at painting.)

2020 has been dark. In any other year we would have been thinking much more about other major news items, like the Australian bush fires, or Brexit, or the extraordinary US election, but the pandemic has overwhelmed all of them. We have all felt something like fear or anxiety or uncertainty or confusion, perhaps most of us like never before. Maybe we have some of the tools we need to create a picture that's a bit more hopeful, but it is hard to paint in the dark.

There are little glimmers of hope as we try to do this. People have been looking out for each other more than they might have done before; the selfishness of the panic buying gave way soon enough to shopping for isolating neighbours and so many other kindnesses. As I write, a second really encouraging vaccine story has been hitting the news. There's just a sniff of something that might help us along.

But Christmas turns the light on. The coming of Jesus was promised to a people who were walking in darkness: a light would shine. Not just a light to shine into the darkness of the world around us, but into the darkness that's often in us as well: to all the fear and anxiety and so on, I could list a lot of ways in my own life that I choose the dark rather than allowing Jesus's light to shine. And all of that is what he wants to drive out, and replace the whole murky lot with light and life and hope. Trust me: you don't need to wonder if the switch will work, let alone if you're allowed to press it. I'm not even sure that following Jesus is about switching on the light ourselves. If you ask him, he'll do that for you too.

Happy Christmas everyone

Rob

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IN A FUTURE MAGAZINE

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Do you wonder about God?

Maybe you have questions you
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We are proposing to run an Alpha
course on line about faith online on
Thursday evenings start on Thursday
14th January, at say 7.30pm.


To find out more please contact Rob
at the Vicarage.

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NEXT EDITION

Items for the next month's magazine
please send by email to
Henry and Eostre Caswell
by email to

ventafree4all@outlook.com

By 10th of this month please.

The 10th of the month will be the
deadline for all copy for the next
magazine for the time being.

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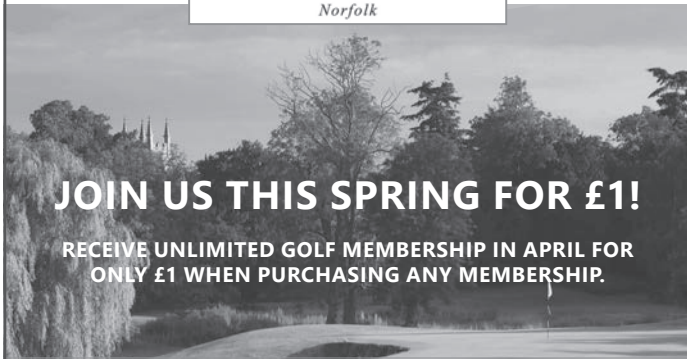
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Sparklers Zoom Sessions

While Sparklers toddler group has had to pause our sessions at the church hall in Stoke, we're still here to support local families. We run a Zoom session on Tuesdays for parents and carers with children under

5, with a craft activity, songs and time to catch up and connect with each other. You can also find us on Facebook at "Sparklers Stoke Holy Cross", to stay in touch and see what the group has been up to. We've had a couple of weeks of being pirates and making hats and treasure chests in November, and now we're starting to think about the Christmas story together. We'd love you to get involved and the link to join us on Zoom each Tuesday is <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/98439620471?pwd=L1VnSHVLbW9KdXNhKzVDVXVMQ25ZUT09>

Each month we're giving away a bag of goodies to help keep little ones busy – our last one had a firework craft, play dough, a story and a treat for the grown-ups. Please get in touch if you'd like to receive one for your child.

On Christmas Eve we're planning family sessions at Stoke church to celebrate Christmas together, and hoping to see lots of Sparklers families there. See the final page for details and how to book in.

St George's Hall Dementia Support Group Café



This has been a difficult year for our group as, indeed, it has been for everyone. Having closed in March we were unable to have the usual outings which everyone really enjoyed. The companionship, activities and friendship chatting over problems and receiving support has been greatly missed. Our Christmas lunch together and lovely Christmas party will also sadly not take place.

Our members are contacted at regular intervals and all seem to be coping but, obviously, can't wait to get back to the Café. We hope with the vaccine on the horizon that sometime next year we shall be able to re-open, once it is absolutely safe for our very vulnerable members.

In the meantime we hope you all manage to have some form of very merry Christmas. Maybe you can find some ideas online for some crafty activities to tackle and decorate your home.



Comfort and Joy – a tale of two hedgehogs



Last Christmas I received a hedgehog house as a gift from my husband. The family have known of my longstanding love of hedgehogs and so this autumn we had planned the best place to position the hog hotel.

But before we had a chance to put it into our garden, I arrived home from church one Sunday morning in September to find a hedgehog near our doorstep. It was daylight and hedgehogs are not supposed to be outside. If you do find them outside the chances are they are unwell. Whilst I kept an eye on said hedgehog my husband got a box from the garage and put towels/sheets in the bottom and then carefully picked the hog up and placed her in the box. We made her comfortable. In the meantime I searched online to find a group we could seek some advice from. One lady responded from South Norfolk who said she would take the hog in in the morning, if it survived the night. The next morning, having survived the night, the hog was taken to Brocks Barn Hedgehog Rescue by my husband Gary. Gary was asked to name her and so he did, Georgina. I got a message in a couple of hours to say she was a poor little girl – she had lungworm, roundworm and flu – but she had taken some food in a syringe and was curled up in an incubator but time would tell if she would survive. However, the next day we got the news she had died in the night. We had tried. The rescue centre had tried. We had all tried to make her comfortable. And I still needed to place my hog hotel.

A month went by before we put the hog hotel out and in the meantime Gary had found instructions on how to make a feeding station for

hedgehogs. The hog hotel was placed, along with the restaurant and a wildlife camera. It wasn't long before we had a visitor. Every night we have a video and pictures of another hedgehog – we've called him George. What joy he's given us. Seeing George wandering around the garden unbeknown to us. He's sometimes joined by Tom and Jerry too. At the time of writing we don't have a guest in the hog hotel but George seems to like the restaurant and is feeding well.

This year has been difficult for some. Some have been bereaved. There has been little joy in the world. Many have struggled to find comfort or joy. Some have comfort but little joy. At Christmas God offers us comfort and joy. How? Jesus came and still comes, to bring us comfort, to be with us in our discomfort, in times of bereavement. Jesus also came to bring us joy. The angel tells the shepherds "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you: he is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:10-11). The shepherds went and saw Jesus, they had to make a move to find the joy. Just like us, we can find comfort and joy but we have to make a move. However

you mark the end of the year I wish you comfort and joy and may you remember the saviour who has been born and offers you comfort and joy now. If you want to find sustenance, come and feed on him with me and others in the Venta Group of churches in 2021.

Lyn



STOKE HOLY CROSS TUESDAY GROUP

Although these notes are being written at a time of year when we remember with ceaseless gratitude the sacrifices made in war, by the time you read them, we shall be in the season of Advent. In the darkest days of winter, Advent signifies the coming of Light, and last evening on the BBC's news bulletin, there was a picture of a bottle of clear liquid being handled. It was described, memorably, as 'Hope in a bottle'. It contained, of course, the new vaccine produced to control and guard against the Covid 19 virus. The result of thousands of hours of work by scientists who have mounted a world-wide crusade to bring light and hope into a world which has seen so much tragedy and darkness over recent months.

We have all missed the 'ordinary', small things in life. Meeting, face to face, with our friends and families; going to the theatre, church, or a football match. Meeting in groups such as our own, although we have spoken together by phone and emails. The bonds have been strengthened, not broken. Although our Carol Service will not take place this year, at some point in 2021 the Tuesday Group will meet together, and hugs will be permitted! Until then, we send you all our Best Wishes for Christmas, and remember that Advent means Light – it shone into our world at a dark time, and it can mean Hope – in a bottle....

THANK YOU LORD JESUS

We give you thanks this Christmas time, because:

You came to be a light,
so that we no longer have to live in darkness
You were born into poverty,
so that we can share the riches of heaven
You came to live among us,
so you understand our weaknesses
You came as our teacher,
and revealed God to us as our Father
You came as a servant,
and gave us an example of how we should live
You came as a sacrifice,
so we could be freed from the slavery of sin
You came to be our saviour,
so we can receive the gift of eternal life
You have promised to come again
in glory to reconcile all things
Thank you, Lord.
May we be ready to welcome you.
Amen

Nativity scenes to colour



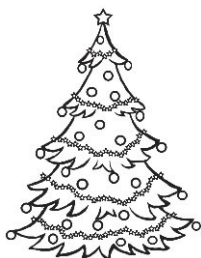
In the middle of this Free for All magazine there are drawings of the nativity on either side. It would be fantastic if you could carefully remove the sheet and colour in whichever scene you prefer, and then display it prominently in your window for others to see. One of them has lots of space for you to add more animals or people or even yourself.

The idea is to give everyone in the village something to look out for as a sort of "Nativity Treasure Hunt" over the Christmas period. How many could you find? Also in this magazine are several drawings related to the nativity.

Maybe you could copy some to make Christmas cards to give to friends or family.

Try our Christmas Family Quiz

With questions for everyone, young and old, this makes a great quiz to try over the Christmas dinner table, between courses, either jointly answering questions or as a competition.



1. Which US president allegedly banned Christmas Trees from the White House
2. Who is the only musician ever to have a UK top 5 album in eight consecutive decades?
3. Which Scandinavian city traditionally supplies the Christmas Tree in Trafalgar Square?
4. Which song has held the Christmas no.1 spot on two separate occasions, sixteen years apart?

5. Which series of films starred Macaulay Culkin and grossed nearly \$500Mn in the box office?

6. Which short film, recorded in English, makes cult viewing in Germany on New Year's Eve and yet is almost unknown in the UK?

7. Which town were Mary and Joseph travelling to & for what reason, when the baby Jesus was born? Score a point for each.

8. Which angels are named in the New Testament? Score a point for each.

9. What is the best selling Christmas single of all time?

10. What were the three gifts bought by the wise men? Score a point for each.



11. True or false - Boxing Day is name after the traditional boxing competitions held by wealthy landowners amongst their workers for entertainment once Christmas had passed.

12. Which is the UK's top selling Christmas single of all time since its release in 1984?

13. Which post code was introduced by the post office in 1999 for letters to Santa's workshop?

14. In the traditional Christmas song, what did my true love give to me on the twelve days of Christmas? Score a point for each

one you get right with the correct number.

So how did you fare?

The answers are on page 7. 25-30 points would be an amazing score.

20 – 25 points is respectable. Less than 15 points and the elves need to give you some homework!

Traditional Christmas Reading

As many of us will be unable to attend a Christmas service in church this year, we hope this reading will inspire and encourage you in these strange times. Jesus truly is our light in the darkness.

Luke chapter 2 verses 4 -20

Joseph went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields near by, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you; you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.'

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.'

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told

them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.



F	J	C	G	G	P	F	M	W	E	L	S	M	W	S
R	E	L	O	N	D	R	S	E	A	L	A	T	W	O
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F	O	R	D	C	C	N	B	A	G	S	N	A	H	R
T	L	G	Y	I	B	K	Y	E	P	D	I	R	T	F
S	C	E	B	O	P	I	R	N	O	P	I	A	Q	S
L	D	F	A	J	T	N	O	O	J	S	Y	U	H	W
Z	E	R	B	E	A	C	G	K	T	T	G	N	I	K
S	Y	G	E	R	M	E	J	M	H	P	E	S	O	J
A	E	J	N	H	D	N	A	S	H	I	N	I	N	G
V	K	E	L	A	P	S	F	O	L	L	O	W	I	Y
I	N	S	M	E	H	E	L	H	T	E	B	F	R	Z
O	O	U	K	Q	I	H	H	N	G	R	T	A	X	C
U	D	S	H	R	R	Y	M	S	P	S	M	A	G	I
R	A	C	B	C	G	G	G	C	U	I	J	Z	T	W

Christmas Wordsearch

ANGEL

BABY

BETHLEHEM

CHRISTMAS

DONKEY

FOLLOW

FRANKINCENSE

GIFTS

GOD

GOLD

GOODNEWS

HAPPY

JESUS

JOSEPH

KING

LAMB

MAGI

MANGER

MARY

MESSIAH

MYRRH

REJOICING

SAVIOUR

SHEPHERDS

SHINING

STABLE

STAR

Christmas Quiz Answers: 1. Theodore Roosevelt 2. Cliff Richard 3. Oslo 4. Bohemian Rhapsody 5. Home Alone 6. Dinner for one 7. Bethlehem, census 8. Gabriel, Michael, Abaddon 9. White Christmas 10. Gold, frankincense & myrrh 11. False. It was traditionally a day off for servants, and the day when they received a special Christmas box from their masters. The servants would also go home on Boxing Day to give Christmas boxes to their families. 12. Do they know it's Christmas (Band Aid)? 13. XM45 HQ 14. A partridge in a pear tree, Two turtle doves, Three French hens, Four calling birds, Five gold rings, Six geese a-laying, Seven swans a-swimming, Eight maids a-milking, Nine ladies dancing, Ten lords a-leaping, Eleven pipers piping, Twelve drummers drumming



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CHRISTMAS 2020

IN STOKE, DUNSTON, CAISTOR AND ARMINGHALL

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; they lived in a land of deep darkness but a light has dawned on them.

Isaiah 9:2

13

10.30am **Christmas Service**
STOKE HOLY CROSS CHURCH

6.30pm **Christmas Service**
ARMINGHALL CHURCH

24

3pm, 4.30pm **Christmas Eve Family Fun**
STOKE HOLY CROSS CHURCH
11.30pm **Carols, Readings & Communion**
CAISTOR ST EDMUND CHURCH

20

10am **Christmas Service**
CAISTOR ST EDMUND CHURCH
(Listen to the carol singers in the
churchyard from 9.30)

6.00pm **Lighting up our Streets**

JOIN IN FROM HOME ON YOUTUBE AND
MAKE A NOISE WITH YOUR NEIGHBOURS

25

10.30am **Christmas Celebration Service**
STOKE HOLY CROSS CHURCH

IMPORTANT INFORMATION:

All our Christmas events except for **Lighting up our Streets** on 20th December **MUST** be booked in advance using the Christmas page of our website from 1st December. If you will find it hard to book online, please call a churchwarden or the Vicarage for help from 1st December. Please only book for **ONE** of the three Christmas services from 13th-20th December, and for **EITHER** the midnight service **OR** Christmas morning: we will make more space available if we can nearer the time.

All of these services except the Christmas Eve family events will be streamed online on our Youtube page, "**Venta group of churches**". If the family event is unable to go ahead in person, a Crib service will be streamed on Youtube on Christmas Eve at 4pm.



27

10am **Group Morning Prayer**
ONLINE ONLY ON ZOOM
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