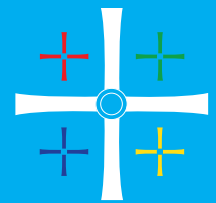


Free for All



THE MAGAZINE OF THE VENTA GROUP

DECEMBER 2019

We Wish You a Merry Christmas

Come and join us as we celebrate the true meaning of Christmas. We have different styles of service to suit everyone we hope.

We will again be telling how so many people followed a star to find our saviour Jesus born in a stable.

And how Jesus is still so relevant to us today.

Follow The Star

See details on page 6 for all our Christmas services and on our website Venta-group.org



"SEE THE NORMAL FOR NORFOLK ARTICLE ON PAGE 5"



"SEE PAGE 6 FOR DETAILS OF ALL OUR CHRISTMAS SERVICES"



"SEE BATS IN BELFRY ON PAGE 6"

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*they think it is good news or not:
"The hopes and fears of all the years are
met in thee tonight."*

It gets better and better, as Brooks picks up on the image of light in the darkness and reworks it, talking about how Jesus is being born into a world of sin, but ready to enter into anyone who will receive him. It's John's gospel again: "to everyone who believes in his name he gives the right to become children of God." He knows he's hit on a really powerful image here, and he repeats it a couple of times in his prayer in the last verse, which is as close to perfect as anything in any hymn book anywhere:

*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*

I suppose I love it so much because it reflects a lot of how the Christmas story became my story. It was realising that God was not far away, as I had always feared, but was closer than I dared hope. It was knowing, no matter what I'd done, that God's light could drive out the darkness in me. It was the promise of a new birth, a new start, with Jesus dwelling at the heart of me.

"Why do you think we celebrate Christmas?" I can hear my son asking his fictional mum. I know why I do. It's because Jesus has come close to me, has forgiven me, has given me new life, has come to live in me. What about you? Hopefully, at the very least, it's about more than just the turkey.

Rob

As I write this, I am sitting in the house of a nice youth worker, pretending not to overhear the sound of my son and his friends trying to make a film about the true meaning of Christmas. At some point in the next hour, apparently he is going to throw a turkey against the wall. I don't even know if it is close enough to Christmas for someone to have found an actual turkey anywhere.

Turkey is not actually my favourite thing about Christmas. Perhaps there is one of the Christmas traditions that you would happily swap for something else. Christmas pudding? Cake? Mince pies? Let's not even mention Brussels Sprouts, shall we?

Christmas carols are like this too. Perhaps you have a favourite, but perhaps there is another which can't you stand! I probably shouldn't be drawn on the one I like the least, but I think my favourite is probably O Little Town of Bethlehem. Part of that is the tune, I think. I used to like Hark the Herald Angels Sing best, but it is so high at the end I am not sure I can sing it any more. It is the words I like best. First of all there is the image of the light of Christ shining in the night of Bethlehem, catching the words of John's gospel:

*"The light shines in the darkness, and
the darkness cannot get hold of it."
Then there is the sense that this is what
everyone has been waiting for, whether*

VICAR OF THE VENTA GROUP

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STOKE HOLY CROSS PAVILION BOOKINGS:

Anita Rose (Parish clerk) 491709

FROM THE REGISTERS

FUNERAL

Muriel Last
18th November
Caistor St Edmund

John Kellam
20th November
Earlham Crematorium

Peter Jarrold
22nd November
Stoke Holy Cross

We continue to pray for all those who have lost loved ones recently, or are remembering someone particularly at this time of year.

We are always happy to record the names of anyone from the villages whose funeral has been held recently, even if it wasn't taken by a member of our ministry team.

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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What is 'normal for Norfolk'?

On the second Saturday in November about 1800 people gathered in the cathedral to be part of the wonderful welcome service for our new Bishop Graham

being "enthroned". It was traditional in form with lots of singing, prayer and rejoicing as well as bible readings by people of all ages. Such a great occasion and many remarked how the two hours simply flew by.

Our new bishop arrived in a horse drawn carriage and in the traditional manner had to hammer on the cathedral west door with his crook. There followed formal elements to the service including his accepting the archbishop's charge and later his receiving of his very ornate (and indeed rather heavy) cloak and, of course, his bishop's hat. (The pointed form and distinctive yellow colour represent the flames that many Christians will recall appeared over the people in Jerusalem when the holy spirit came on them) He was presented with an amazing pastoral staff by a beautifully dressed young child. A young boy then addressed him saying "Bishop Graham, you are our chief shepherd. Carry this staff as a sign of your care for us in Christ. May the Lord be your shepherd always"



Bishop Graham began his very inspiring sermon wondering "What is 'normal for Norfolk'? Perhaps it's to extend the warm welcome that Rachel and I have experienced? To keep sharing the pride you have in your communities? To be leading the way in low carbon housing? To be creative in literature and poetry? To take care of refugees and feed hundreds of hungry people every day? Perhaps it's 'normal for Norfolk' to choose another Graham as your bishop. We are a dying breed – only 54 new-born boys were given that name last year – you might not make it a hat trick!"

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The talk was based on the journey along the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus where two disciples met Jesus, alive after his crucifixion and burial, but did not recognise him for some time. Apparently, archaeologists and historians can find no place called Emmaus within a seven-mile radius of Jerusalem. So Bishop Graham speculates that - "Perhaps Emmaus is every place? Costessey (Cossey), Happisburgh (Haze-bruh) and Wymondham (Wind'm) and all those other places whose names are so difficult to pronounce in this diocese?"

He concluded his sermon by suggesting - "Perhaps Emmaus is any place where Jesus nudges into our lives and breaks bread with us, where life is transformed by meaning and hope to face the challenges, paradoxes and questions of our era. I pray that finding such life in all its abundance in Jesus Christ will be what is 'normal for Norfolk'. Seeking to tell others how Christ has surprised and heartened us on the way will be 'normal for Norfolk'. As it will be to hear him saying 'This is my body, broken for you,' every time bread is shared; 'This is my blood, shed for you' every time we raise a glass; 'normal for Norfolk' that every dining table, every kitchen table serves as Christ's altar." Amen to that.

From our Venta Group of churches we extend a very warm welcome to Bishop Graham his wife Rachel and their family.



SERVICES FOR DECEMBER IN THE VENTA GROUP

1st December Advent Sunday Service

- 9.00 am Traditional Holy Communion
Caistor St Edmund Church
- 10.30 am Informal Holy Communion
Stoke Holy Cross Church

8th December 2nd Sunday of Advent

- 9.30 am Praise & Worship
Caistor St Edmund Church
- 10.30 am Christmas Café Church
Stoke Holy Cross Hall

15th December 3rd Sunday of Advent

- 10.30 am Christmas Carol Service
Stoke Holy Cross Church
- 5pm - 7pm Drop in for Carols, Readings
Bellringing and Refreshments
Arminghall Church

Tuesday 17th December

- 7.30 pm Traditional Carol Service
Tuesday Group
Stoke Holy Cross Church

22nd December 4th Sunday of Advent

- 4.00 pm Carol Service
Caistor St Edmund
- 6.00 pm Carols around the Tree
Stoke Holy Cross Church Hall

24th December Christmas Eve

- 4.00 pm Crib Service
Stoke Holy Cross Church
- 11.30 pm Carols, Readings and Communion
Caistor Church

25th December Christmas Day

- 9.00 am Christmas Celebration Service
Arminghall Church
- 10.30 am Christmas Celebration Service
Stoke Holy Cross Church

29th December 1st Sunday of Christmas

- 10.30 am Group Christmas Service
Arminghall Church

Join us this December at our Christmas Events

Sunday 8th December

9.00am **TRADITIONAL
HOLY COMMUNION**
Arminghall Church

10.30am **CHRISTMAS CAFÉ
CHURCH**
Stoke Holy Cross
Church Hall

Sunday 15th December

10.30am **CHRISTMAS CAROL
SERVICE**
Stoke Church

5 - 7pm **DROP IN for
CAROLS,
BELLRINGING &
REFRESHMENTS**
Arminghall Church

Tuesday 17th December

7.30pm **CAROLS WITH THE
TUESDAY GROUP**
Stoke Church

Sunday 22nd December

4.00pm **CAROL SERVICE**
Caistor Church

6.00pm **CAROLS AROUND
THE TREE**
Stoke Holy Cross
Church Hall

Christmas Eve

4.00pm **CRIB SERVICE**
Stoke Church

11.30pm **CAROLS, READINGS
& COMMUNION**
Caistor Church

Christmas Day

9.00am **CHRISTMAS
CELEBRATION
SERVICE**
Arminghall Church

10.30am **CHRISTMAS
CELEBRATION
SERVICE**
Stoke Church

Bats in the Belfry

St Remigius Church at Dunston has been struggling to cope with the increasing number of bats that are using the church as a roosting and indeed breeding place. The problem is bats tend to poo everywhere and they make a real nasty stinky mess. We have to have the church professionally cleaned by specialists when we want to use it for services and the bats are all protected as endangered species. They are not actually in the bell tower where they would be less of a nuisance. They roost in the interior of the church.

So at Dunston this year, our Curate Lyn writes, we have had to follow the Norfolk saying of "Do different". As some of you may be aware, Dunston church has become an attractive habitat for bats over the last few years. To the extent that this year we were advised by an Archdeacon that we could hold services outside of the church. From Ascension Day until the end of September 6 services have been held in the churchyard (Five communion services and one morning prayer).

We were blessed every day with beautiful weather.

Members of the congregation brought chairs and Roy our churchwarden ensured that the grass was cut sufficiently for us to sit near the east end of the church. As I have only received positive comments we are looking to repeat our outdoor services next year (unless the bats move house in the meantime). Watch this space for details but we will publicize these services earlier – but it will be after the clocks Spring on in 2020. Lyn

However, there is now real hope on the horizon. Bats in Churches is a project to help churches across England which are struggling with the protected creatures and St Remigius is now one

of a small number of churches in Norfolk to have our problem more fully addressed to find a way for the church congregation and the bats co-existing more happily. Surveys reveal that Dunston church is unusual in that we have mainly the less common Brown Long-eared species using the church along with just a few of the more often seen Pippistrelle bats. It is hoped that further surveys this coming year will confirm there may be adequate room for the bats to live above the boarded ceiling of the church within the roof space below the rafters so that if we can seal the gaps the bats use to get into the main church interior we may

avoid the bat droppings in future. It may also be deemed important to have some "bat boxes" placed somewhere in the church for bats to use instead.

As you can imagine, as the bats are a protected species these things all take time, But there is now real hope that, within a couple of years, a works schedule can be put together to overcome the mess within the church. The project does also have some funds available that may pay for the church to be cleaned at least once a year in the meantime. Halleluiaah.



Brown Long-eared Bat

Caistor St Edmund poppy appeal

The Caistor St Edmund House to House collection for the Poppy Appeal raised £239.49. The static / unmanned boxes this year raised £289.13 and the Caistor Church Offertory on Remembrance Sunday came to £208. With £50 from the sale of the wreath a total of £786.62 has been sent to The Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal.

Thank you to all who helped with the House to House collecting. We are sorry if we missed you but we were down this year by two people who normally help with this. (Perhaps you could help next year?)

Thank you to all the local businesses who had boxes on the premises, your support is greatly appreciated. Graham Ford (Hon Organiser for Caistor St Edmund)



Stoke Holy Cross Charity Night was a great success

Seven teams of quizzers enjoyed a really good evening at Stoke church hall on Saturday 9th November as part of the TEARFUND Giant Quiz Night.



Our quiz night was organised by the church to launch our fund raising to support struggling families around Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. We are working with the international Christian NGO Tearfund.

The aim is to help the local people understand how they can make the best use of their particular skills and what little resources they have to better produce and provide for their families in a sustainable way.

The various quizzing groups of friends and neighbours called themselves – THE MIXED BUNCH; THE MIXED BAG; LET'S GET QUIZZICAL; UNIVERSALLY CHALLENGED;

THE GMS; WE'RE HERE FOR THE GIN and FIRST OF THE SUMMER WINE - quite a varied group as you can see from names and the photos.

The questions were set by TEARFUND on Music, Books, Quotes, History, Food and Drink, Sport, Stage and Screen, Geography and the Natural World. Plus we had mix of photos with questions about them. There really was something for everyone.

The "coveted" cup was won in the end by the GMS, a group of chess playing friends invited by our very own Martin; and by just 1 point ahead of the 2 teams who tied for second place. The pictures show Heather proudly holding the magnificent trophy aloft, all of teams in the hall and then the GMS team. And the evening raised some £333 to send off to Tearfund and Tanzania.

On Sunday 12th January we expect to have the person who looks after the Mount Kilimanjaro project visit us to update us on how the project is going. We hope to have more to tell about it then and the people benefitting from our appeal work.



St George's Hall Dementia Support Café



On the 2nd and 4th Monday morning of each month this is a great place to relax for those with dementia and for their carers. Come along and join us for fun activities and refreshments. There's always room for more people living with dementia and their partners or carers to join us, whether on our subsidised outings or at our regular cafe sessions from 10am till 12 noon in St George's Hall, Upper Stoke.

For more information please ring 01508 493661 or 492938, visit our website at <http://stgeorges-dementiasupport-group.btck.co.uk/>

"Our Christmas lunch at the Feathers will be on 2nd December. NO cafe on that day. Members are asked to make their own way to the venue. Anyone who hasn't got transport please ring 01508 493661 before the event and we will arrange a lift. Our party at the hall will be 9th December when Stewart Hull will be playing for us and some light seasonal refreshments will be served. Please note NO cafe on 23rd December."

STOKE HOLY CROSS TUESDAY GROUP

Carol Service December, 2019

If you enjoy traditional Carol Services, the Tuesday Group extends a warm invitation to join with them at the Parish Church, Stoke Holy Cross, on the evening of
Tuesday, December 17th, at 7.30 pm

All the old favourites are there, with the well-loved readings, and there will be tea, coffee and mince pies served at the close of the service. A collection is taken in aid of EACH, and towards the close of a year which has seen so much ill-feeling, hardship, floods and various catastrophes across the globe, it's good to see this great local project finally come to fruition. The new nook building is bright, cheerful, and will help children, their parents and siblings, for whom the need is ongoing.

We invite you to come for a good sing, and to offer EACH your further support.

STOKE HOLY CROSS THURSDAY GROUP

Our next meeting will be held at St Georges Hall on
Thursday 5th December, 2019.

We will be having a lunch and Julie Dawn will be coming to sing for us. This will be our last meeting for 2019 and we will re-commence our meetings on Thursday
6th February, 2020 at 1.30pm

If you would like to come and join us in the New Year you will be made to feel very welcome.

I will therefore take this opportunity to wish all the publishing staff and all you readers a very "Happy Christmas" and a "Happy New Year" from everyone at the Thursday Club.

There will now be no bowls or bingo in December, but we will re-commence in the new year.

Bingo will be on the
22nd January, 2020 - start 1.30pm

Carpet Bowls will be on the
29th January, 2020 - 1.30pm
cost for this is £2

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A BIG THANK YOU

re the new Kitchen and Toilet
at Stoke Church

To all those who donated towards our new kitchen and
disabled toilet at Stoke Holy Cross Church. We could not
have done it without you.

We are justly proud of our excellent new facilities in the church.
We have a spacious and warm toilet with all the essential
facilities for disabled people as well as the usual items and a
baby changing table too. Our local builder Martin Waters from
Poringland has done a great job for us for us with just a little
bit of decorating still to do. And all done in good time for our
Christmas services – So a great place to come and celebrate with
us for all the family.

The photo shows the little kitchen, now in use, which we were
able to fit into the base of the tower with made to measure
sliding doors which can screen it off during services.



Christmas Wordsearch

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

ANGELS	FIELDS	GOD	KING	SHEEP
BABY	FLOCKS	GOLD	MANGER	SHEPHERDS
BETHLEHEM	FOLLOW	INNKEEPER	MARY	STABLE
CHRISTMAS	FRANKINCENSE	JESUS	MYRRH	STAR
DONKEY	GIFTS	JOSEPH	NIGHT	WISEMEN

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