

Free for All



THE MAGAZINE OF THE VENTA GROUP

DECEMBER 2024

Good tidings we bring...

Join us as we celebrate Christmas in 2024

More details on p10 and inside the Christmas card



Here are some great things that have been going on in the Church Hall in November.



There's been something for everyone with our annual Light Party, as well as All Invited and our first ever Vintage Church all happening in the last month.



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Good tidings we bring!

As the least musical person in my family, I do enjoy this time of year especially, because people are busy preparing to play and sing at different concerts and carol services, and the sound of Christmas music begins to fill the house. Last year one of us was learning to play *We wish you a Merry Christmas*, which contains the famous line that you'll have seen on the front of the magazine, and which has given us inspiration for all our church posters and cards this year. We also have a brass player in the family, which gives a very nice festive feel to things, despite this person enjoying wearing a T-shirt which has a picture of their instrument and the words "I Destroy Silence."

The line from the song has its roots in the Christmas story, of course, with the angels' word to the shepherds not to be afraid because "We bring good news of a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." In a world where so much of what fills our screens or newspapers is so often such bad news, here is something which is entirely good.

In a world where we can feel that everything depends on us, that we pay for our mistakes, and that we have to make our own way, the angels bring good news of a Saviour – a rescuer.

If we feel let down, or anxious about the future, or struggling with doubt or uncertainty, the angels bring good news of Christ, God's chosen one, promised from the beginning.



If we feel the world is spinning out of control, whether it is war, or politics, or climate change, or all three and more, the angels bring good news of a Lord, one who holds everything in his hands, and will do forever.

And the one who doesn't just bring good news, but *is* good news, is Jesus: he *is* the Saviour who is Christ the Lord. No wonder the angels tell the shepherds that this is "good news that will cause great joy for all the people."

The Christmas story seems at once so long ago, and at the same time a bit too familiar, so it is hard to imagine now what it was like the first time. But at the time of Jesus's birth, for centuries people felt that they had not heard from God. Had he forgotten them? And into this void comes an amazingly noisy story: heavens opening, angels singing, joy echoing, and babies crying. God speaks: his Word, Jesus comes into the world, and destroys silence in the very best way.

It hasn't changed, really. People still think God has forgotten them, for all sorts of reasons – maybe you do – but he still comes to destroy the silence of our fears, speaking instead good news, bringing great joy, telling of a Saviour who is Christ the Lord.

Happy Christmas, everyone

Rob

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Search Facebook and Youtube for "Venta group of churches"

www.venta-group.org

 @venta_group

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Arminghall

Rob (492305) & Lyn (493422)

Caistor St Edmund

Jani (493572) & Lia (494137)

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Rob Baker (492305)

STOKE CHURCH HALL BOOKINGS:

Karen (07761 076954)
email: karenp1963@hotmail.co.uk

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Dan Ward (Parish clerk) 07563 044849

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your village organisation

IN A FUTURE MAGAZINE

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*Would you welcome a visit from
one of our church team?*

*We will do our best to come and say
hello to new people moving into the
village where possible. We would be
very happy to come and visit you.*

*Maybe you would like us to pray God's
blessing over your new home, for
example. Please do get in touch with
Rob, Lyn or the churchwardens if you
would welcome a visit. Also members of
the church are always pleased to come
and bring communion to you if you
would like to get in touch.*

FOR ALL COPY PLEASE

send by email to

Henry and Eostre Caswell to
ventafree4all@outlook.com

By 10th of this month please.



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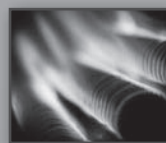
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A Perfect Christmas

In our new home last December, I decided that my Christmas tree was going to look just perfect like one of those in a department store.

However, it did cause me quite a bit of stress getting it like that and probably my husband and family even more. It took me ages to pick just the right tree. Once it was in my house it seemed to be much bigger than it looked outside and did not fit where I had planned so we then spend a few hours moving numerous pieces of furniture as I decided where it fitted best. The trickiest part was then to get it to stand straight and put the twinkling lights on evenly. My son was then in charge of putting the star on the top because he was the only one tall enough to do this and it took him quite a few attempts and cross words before I was happy it looked right. I carefully hung the baubles and re hung them until it looked just as I wanted it. I then took much stick from different family members who did not have the same wish for such a perfectly decorated tree as they kept moving the baubles just to annoy me.

Christmas trees however are not the only things that people like to get just right over Christmas time. Many people put great pressure on themselves to try and make Christmas the perfect day which they think it should be with everybody having a good time. Just as we see in all those famous adverts at this time of year. Great feasts are laid on which are fit for a king and hours of shopping take place, finding the perfect gift for someone before wrapping it in beautiful paper and placing a bow on top are just a couple of examples of this.

However, in reality, Christmas for many is far from being perfect. As we look around local communities and our world, we see many people facing all sorts of challenges in their lives and Christmas this year may be a burden because the expectation is we are supposed to be having a great time when life is far from being great. There are many people who are hurting because they have lost a love one, or who are living within a complicated family situation, or are lonely this Christmas time, or themselves are unwell or have a loved one unwell or are anxious or troubled and some who just cannot afford to buy the basics this Christmas time.

And this is exactly why God sent his son to be born as a baby that first Christmas. Jesus' birth was not a perfect scene even though our modern-day nativity scenes may portray it that way. He was born in a smelly animal stable in complete poverty and those who were told about his birth first were the most unlikely people – the shepherds – who were seen as outcasts in society. It was in these far from perfect circumstances that God became flesh and lived amongst us. So not only is God with us when things are good. But God is with us also in our poverty, in our difficulties, in our broken world, in our darkness and in our vulnerability.

God does not need us to have the right Christmas this year, he doesn't need us to have the perfectly decorated tree or the perfectly wrapped presents or largest turkey we can find because none of those things really matter, but the thing which really matters to him is us – everyone of us and that is why he sent his son as a baby to our imperfect world. To bring God's love to our brokenness, to bring us hope and to bring us peace.

May God bless you this Christmas time

Kirsty

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Spring Term 2025

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an introduction"
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Starting on Thursday 23rd January 2025
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please note our change of venue

The course comprises 8 sessions of two
hours each, including a short break for
tea/coffee and biscuits.

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means tested benefits.

Places are limited.
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or by phoning 0300 303 3464,
quoting course no. Q00019645

Do come along and join us!

The WEA is a charity registered in England and Wales
(no. 1112775) and in Scotland (no. SC039239)

Caistor neighbours monthly walks and New Years get-together with drinks and nibbles

Residents and friends of Caistor St Edmund village get together on the first Saturday of the month for a leisurely walk in the countryside, followed by coffee and cakes at Old Hall Barn or sometimes at other homes in the village. We warmly welcome anyone from our village or neighbouring villages to join us. It's always very friendly and easy going and we love to see new faces. If you can't join the walk, you are very welcome to come along just for coffee and chat.

We also warmly invite you to a drinks and nibbles party on Friday 10th January 2025 at Old Hall Barn from 6-8.30pm to wish each other a happy New Year. This is a chance for everyone to chat and catch up with friends and meet new ones. Please bring nibbles and/or a drink to share. This has been a very happy friendly occasion in the last few years, and you don't want to miss it! The fire will be on and there will be plenty of food for everyone.

If you'd like to join in with any of these activities and want to be kept informed of events please email Lia Day at cornelia.mclean1@gmail.com
We'd love to see more new faces and get to know people from in and around our village.

Lia and Brian Day and Jani Wymer. Above is a photo from a recent walk and coffee (it was warm enough to sit in the garden!)



St George's Hall Dementia Support Group



We warmly welcome people living with dementia and their carers to our regular Café sessions in St George's Hall, Upper Stoke Holy Cross on the 2nd and 4th Mondays of each month (except bank holidays) at 10am to 12. There are fun activities also entertainment to enjoy along with good conversation, helpful support and information we also have two subsidised outings a year.

On 28th October the hall underwent a seasonal makeover with attractive table decorations of autumnal flowers, pumpkins and berries supplied and arranged by Ann.

Some eyebrows were raised at the lurid jelly eyeball sweets on display, but it has been noted how many were scoffed during the session (either by design or dare!).

We were regaled by 3 short seasonal stories told by our very own in-house storyteller extraordinaire, Stuart. The usual background conversational hum of the café was hushed for 20 minutes as the stories unfolded and the round of applause was well deserved.

The Craft Team set to in cutting out pumpkin shapes and decorating them from an assortment of artistic materials. Hot off the production line these pumpkins were duly hung from a satin ribbon to briefly embellish the windows; they were later taken down by the artists to enjoy at home. Our friends on adjacent tables continued with their conversations, crosswords, newspaper reading and Triominos. We are a congruous lot.

Please feel free to just drop into the Café, it's a community hub and you will be made most welcome.

Our next sessions are:

Monday 25th November: Christmas Crafts;

Monday 2nd December: our Christmas Party Lunch at The Old Feathers

Monday 9th December: End of Year Christmas Party at St George's Hall

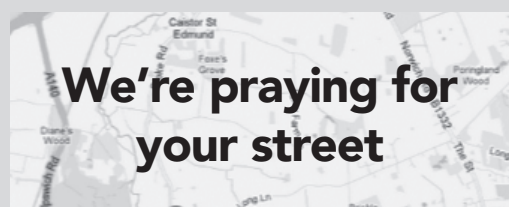
There are no joining fees, just a small charge for refreshments and no referral is necessary.

We are pleased to welcome anyone wishing to become a volunteer, a very rewarding thing to do, and a place to meet new friends.

For information call, 01508 493661, 01508 494742, or 01508 495580

Website is www.st.george's-dementia-support-group.uk

We wish you all a happy and healthy end to the year.



Did you know that whether you live in the Stoke, Dunston, Caistor or Arminghall, a group of people pray regularly for you and your street?

We also pray for other activities which take place during the week like Sparklers, Embers, the Dementia Support Group, and Thursday mornings in the Church Hall; and for local organisations like the pre-school, school and parish councils, and other things close to home, as well as for global news and the wider church.

If you'd like us to pray for you, your family, or your village organisation, please get in touch. You're also really welcome to join us to pray on Zoom – contact Rob, Lyn or Kirsty (p3)

Tuesday to Friday at 9am & Saturdays at 10am (Celtic prayer)

We'll also be meeting in person to pray monthly in the Church Hall in the New Year, all at 7.30pm

8th Jan 5th Feb 5th March 2nd April

We're so encouraged by all the ways God has been answering our prayers over the 4 years we've been doing this.

Christmas Fair

STOKE HOLY CROSS PRIMARY SCHOOL
SATURDAY 7 DECEMBER
2-4pm

- Raffle
- Crafts
- Wreath making
- Games
- Tombola
- Christmas karaoke
- Christmas party room
- Refreshments
- Mince pies and cookies
- and lots more...

Candlelit Christmas Contemplations

An evening of peaceful traditional Christmas meditations from the original Christmas story.

Enjoy the stillness, take time for personal reflection and prayer amongst a busy season.

Thursday 12th of December
7.45-9.30pm at St Georges Hall,
Upper Stoke.

£6 per participating adult.
Spaces will be given on a first come first served basis. Reserve your space by texting 07917690443.



Stoke Holy Cross Parish Council
and Venta Group of Churches
invite you to

Carols Around the Christmas Tree

**Saturday 21 December
6pm**

**Community Hall
Stoke Holy Cross**

Followed by
refreshments for sale
and a chance to see
the new hall



Christmas Community Choir

Do you like singing carols? Would you like to sing with a group of other people who do too? Last year we got together to form a Community Choir to sing for our carol services across the Venta Group of villages, and we'd like to do the same again this year.

But we need you or rather we need your voice.

So whether you came last year or you didn't, we would love to see you at the Church Hall on the following Friday nights 7.45-9pm 29th November, 6th and 13th December.

If you are coming, or you can't make all the dates, please let me know by emailing lyn@venta-group.org or pop down and have a word at our Thursday Coffee and Chat mornings.

Stoke Holy Cross Thursday Club

Stoke Holy Cross Thursday Club for the over 55's usually meets at St. Georges Hall Upper Stoke Holy Cross the first Thursday each month.

However as we do not attend during the month of January our first meeting in February will be Club Day on **Thursday 6th February 2025 at 1.30pm.**

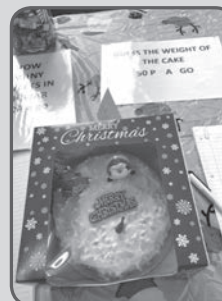
December Dates:

Club Day 5th December at 12 noon as we are having Celebration Food and Music with Julie

Wednesday 11th December is our Christmas Meal at The Feathers and **Christmas Bingo is on the 12th**

The November Fayre was well attended and supported by the general public and that was much appreciated. 100 prizes for the main draw and various stalls as you will see from the photographs taken.

Thank you.



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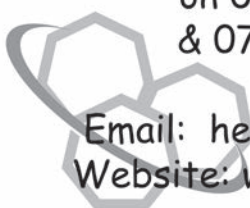


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DECEMBER / CHRISTMAS 2024

IN STOKE, DUNSTON, CASITOR AND ARMINGHALL

1

9.30am Praise & Worship at Caistor
10.30am Morning Worship at Stoke

5

Arminghall Church open for refreshments from 2pm, finishing with prayer at about 3.30pm

6

10am Communion
10.30am Coffee and Chat
all at the Church Hall

8

10.30am Holy Communion at Stoke
3.30-5pm Christmas All invited
at the Church Hall

9

7.30pm Christmas craft evening
at the Church Hall

15

10.30am Family Carol Service at Stoke
6.30pm Carol Service at Arminghall

19

10.30am Vintage Christmas
at the Church Hall (including lunch)

21

6pm Carol singing at the Community Hall,
with a chance to look around afterwards.

22

10.30am Holy Communion at Stoke
4pm Carol Service at Caistor
(Join us for refreshments from 3.15)

23

6.30pm Dunston Carol Service

24

4pm Crib Service for all ages at Stoke
11.30pm Carols, Readings & Communion
at Caistor

25

10.30am All-Age Communion
at Stoke Church

29

3pm Refreshments at Dunston, followed by
Carols at 3.30pm
All dogs and owners welcome

Refreshments are available at all our Christmas events except for midnight, and on Christmas morning.
Video highlights of some services will be shown later at youtube.com/ventachurches

Good tidings we bring...

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people"

Luke 2:10

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