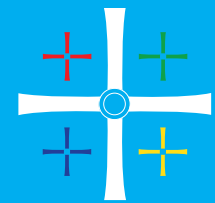


Free for All



THE MAGAZINE OF THE VENTA GROUP

DECEMBER 2025

A red silhouette illustration of a nativity scene with Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus in a manger, surrounded by a star and snowflakes. The text "HOPE IS HERE" is written in large red letters, and "Details of all our 2025 Christmas services and events on p5" is written in smaller red letters below it.

HOPE IS HERE

Details of all our 2025 Christmas services and events on p5

On Remembrance Sunday we welcomed members of the High Ash guide group, newly arrived in Stoke Holy Cross, to our Remembrance Service at Caistor. The Brownies painted some poppy stones which we displayed in the porch by the memorial plaque, and they drew some great pictures based on images from Psalm 46 to show during the service. The Guides did a really good job of the reading as well. Thank you also to the representatives of the Parish Council who came and laid wreaths, and to those from the churches who read out the names of people we remember from all of our villages.



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What makes Christmas?
What makes a perfect
Christmas?



I know there are lots of reasons to think Christmas comes far too early, but when you are writing articles like this in the middle of November, it does really help that the adverts are all on already.

This year there are two very different, but particularly good ones, from opposite ends of the supermarket spectrum.

Waitrose have imagined a perfect Christmas romance, where shy bearded Joe Wilkinson meets superstar actress Keira Knightley at the cheese counter, and falls in love with her through the course of the Christmas season. All is lost when Joe finds a present in her house from a mysterious Mark, but after Joe declares his love with his Nan's

turkey pie, she reveals that Mark is her brother, and that she loves Joe too.

Tesco have gone the other way. A presumably right-wing Grandad has upset the family by "having an opinion"; a couple bicker over the way he is writing Christmas cards; two others sit awkwardly with a neighbour they have nothing in common with; a game of Pictionary descends into a full-on row about who Mum loves the most; a brother and sister can't get on well enough just for one family Christmas photo. "Christmas isn't perfect", a voice says, "but that's what makes it Christmas."

Somewhere in the combination of these two very different stories is something like the true meaning of Christmas. On the one hand, we don't live in a perfect world, and so we won't have a perfect Christmas. People will argue, turkeys will be overcooked or undercooked or somehow both simultaneously, and someone will be ill. For all the very stylised pictures of the nativity story (my main complaint is how clean everything always is) the truth is that Jesus was born into the muck and mess and chaos of human family life, in the midst of an oppressive regime. Christmas has never been perfect.

Except it is. You and I aren't perfect, and the world isn't, but at the heart of Christmas is a love story like no other. It doesn't start at a cheese counter – even a lovely Waitrose one – but at the moment before the creation of the world when God chose to make us out of a desire for love and relationship with us. And God wanted us so much, that despite us turning away from him, he sent his Son at Christmas. It is even more unlikely than the Waitrose advert, as God bridges a gap bigger still than the one between Joe and Keira, and all of humanity is embraced in the greatest romance there will ever be.

I hope you have a lovely Christmas, even if bits of it won't be perfect. But most of all, I hope that this Christmas your attention might be caught by the great love story of the Son of God who came to be with you.

Rob

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FROM THE REGISTERS

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

BURIAL OF ASHES

BERTIE TURNER

5th November
at Stoke Holy Cross

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.

We would love to feature
your village organisation

IN A FUTURE MAGAZINE

just get in touch and we will see
what we can do!

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send by email to Rob to
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By 10th of this month please.

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7	9.30am Praise and Worship at Caistor 10.30am Morning Service at Stoke 3.30-5pm Christmas All Invited at the Church Hall	21	10.30am Holy Communion at Stoke 4pm Caistor Carol Service (refreshments from 3.15pm)
10	7pm Songs of the Season with Acappella Concert at Caistor in aid of Big C and church funds Tickets in advance only on 07557 774520	24	3pm Crib service At Stoke 5pm Christmas Carols at Dunston 11.30pm Carols, Readings and Communion at Caistor
14	10:30am Stoke carol service with the Primary School 6:30pm Arminghall carol service	25	10.30am Christmas morning service at Stoke
18	10:30am Christmas Carols and Coffee and Chat at the Church Hall	28	10.30am Group Christmas service with Poringland benefice at Caistor
20	6pm Stoke Village Carols at the Community Hall		Scan the QR code to go to the Christmas page of our website for more information



Where was Kirsty in October?

As part of my curacy, I have just completed a 4 week placement with the Chaplaincy Team at The Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital. A time which I really enjoyed and gained lots of experience from which will benefit my future ministry working within a parish.

I spent most of my time whilst on placement visiting different patients on the wards who had been referred for a chaplain visit either by themselves, relatives or friends, hospital staff or parish clergy. Each visit was different and was tailored to the individual patients' needs at the time of visit. For those with a Christian faith we would support them pastorally, read the bible and offer them prayer. For those of other faiths we would support them pastorally and arrange for someone of their religion to come in if that was required. However, not all visits were of a religious nature as many on our visiting list did not have a faith but still valued us sitting with them lending a listening ear and support. Often, we would offer support to relatives who were visiting at the same time.

I also was involved with spiritual support at end of life for those patients and families who had requested it. This was a real privilege to be able to journey alongside someone and their loved ones at the final stage of their life.

We as a team also offered support to staff all over the hospital and would often have staff pop into the chaplaincy team office for some support. During my time on placement, we offered extra support to staff on one ward as a staff member had suddenly died at home, and they were in shock. The chaplaincy department also ran a small food bank for staff who were struggling financially and were in need of food for themselves and their families.

Some days I attended training sessions for new members of hospital staff that were led by the lead of the Spiritual Healthcare Department which the chaplaincy team come under. These sessions were to inform these new members of staff the role spiritual healthcare can play in the recovery of patients and how the team can support patients, relatives and staff alike. I also attended a training session on the grief process which I found incredibly interesting and helpful.

It was good to work with a multi denominational Christian team and felt it was very beneficial to those that were visited. There is a chapel on the hospital site where the team was based with access to the chapel garden which was enjoyed by many patients and visitors each day. The chapel also had space for other religions and their practices too including a Muslim washroom and prayer space. Something which I think is good for people to see, different religions working alongside each other.

Before this placement I was unaware of all that the chaplaincy team at the hospital were involved with and what a positive impact their work had on patients, relatives, and staff both for those with a faith and those without.

If you or a relative ever find yourself needing hospital care, then I encourage you to contact the chaplaincy team who would only be most willing to come and offer you their kindly support.

With love and prayers

Kirsty



Christmas Carols and Coffee & Chat

Thursday 18th December

10.30-12pm at the Church Hall

(Donations to our Pantry foodbank very welcome)

More formal communion service 10.30am at Stoke Church



Join us every month for traditional hymns, familiar words from the Church of England communion service, and our usual warm welcome

23rd November - Believing in the Church
21st December - Getting ready for Christmas
25th January - with the Bishop of Thetford

Concert in Stoke Church

We were treated to a wonderful concert in Stoke Church on Oct 25th. Stoke resident, Tatyana Belousova came with her colleague Natalia Stepanova and wowed us all with a mixture of modern songs and well-known pieces from operas such as Tosca and Carmen. Both Tatyana and Natalia are classically trained opera singers. Natalia is also a very accomplished piano player and astonished us with some Rachmaninoff and Chopin. Natalia's son, Andriya who is only 9 years old, also thrilled us with some amazing piano performances including pieces by Berkovich and Liszt. Andriya's name will certainly be one to watch out for in the future, he is clearly very talented.

The evening's programme finished with the Tas Valley Quartet delighting us with The Gressenhall Suite and some dances by Hassler. Thanks to Anna Lipp for organising and compering such a marvellous evening. Let's hope there will be another opportunity soon to hear from these gifted musicians right on our doorstep. The concert raised £550 for the SHX playground equipment fund.



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