

# CORNERSTONE

The Magazine of  
**WITNEY CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH**

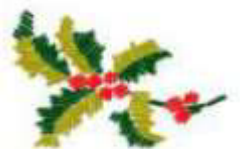


Christ Jesus is the chief cornerstone.

In Him the whole fabric is bound together, as it grows into a temple.  
dedicated to the Lord (Ephesians 2:21)



**December 2024 & January 2025**



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What a year it has been, with world events going from bad to worse. As well as the escalating war in Ukraine and the Middle East, we have had unprecedented wildfires, storms and floods across the world. Millions are displaced, millions are homeless and hungry. Meanwhile, the cost-of-living crisis continues, and food banks in the UK look set to be overwhelmed. Many of us now are facing a hard winter, with seemingly little to be cheerful about. We must also remember, and support, our armed forces during times of war and other conflicts, and the red poppy has been a symbol of Remembrance, of support for the Armed Forces community, and also of hope for a peaceful future, and Dave Wesson, one of our deacons, was out in Carterton on Remembrance Day



And yet, and yet – the message of Christmas is just as real for us today as it was 2000 years ago, and it can still bring us hope and joy for our long-term future. Emmanuel has come, the Prince of Peace, the Son of Righteousness. God IS with us. And HIS kingdom will have no end.



I now turn to some of this month's contents: Lesley Barter writes about the ancient religions & cultures in India; we have a Hi 5's article; Pip Cartwright writes on Mission Aviation Fellowship and along with the standard contributions, some articles have been extracted from Parish Pump, to name but a few

Many thanks for those who have contributed for this edition, but would encourage anyone to consider submitting article(s) for the next edition by either:

E-mail: [terrypowlesland@uwclub.net](mailto:terrypowlesland@uwclub.net)

[jacquipowlesland@uwclub.net](mailto:jacquipowlesland@uwclub.net)

or, just plainly written on paper, which can be typed up

The next 2-monthly edition, covering February & March 2025 is due on **Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> February** and wishing you a Merry



Your Editor

### Contents

1. Editorial
2. Diary
5. Minister's Letter
6. The greatest is love
7. Prayer Letter 215
8. No room? And How Christmas began.
9. The most beautiful story
10. Hi 5's Fellowship
11. The Incarnation
12. MAF and Persecuted Christians
13. Boxing Day 2004 tsunami
14. Seeking Justice
15. Christmas Geese and The everlasting turkey
16. Come see the beauty of the King

# December 2024 & January 2025 Diary

**Services:** 10.30am weekly & 6.00pm on first Sunday of the month

## Dec

1 <sup>st</sup>	am	Rev Bryan Doyle		
	pm	Nanna Blackman	Communion	
7 <sup>th</sup>	11.00am	Saturday Praise		
8 <sup>th</sup>	am	Rev Bryan Doyle		
15 <sup>th</sup>	am	Rev Judi Holloway	Communion	
22 <sup>nd</sup>	am	Rev Bryan Doyle	Carol Service	
25 <sup>th</sup>	am	Revs Bryan Doyle & Judi Holloway	Christmas Service	All-Age
29 <sup>th</sup>	am	Rev Judi Holloway	All-Age	
	pm	Rev Judi Holloway	Madley Park Residential Home	3.00pm

## Jan

4 <sup>th</sup>	11.00am	Saturday Praise		
5 <sup>th</sup>	am	Rev Elaine Kinchin	Hi 5's Café Church	
	pm	tbc		
12 <sup>th</sup>	am	Rev Nigel Lindsay		
19 <sup>th</sup>	am	Rev Elaine Kinchin	Communion	
26 <sup>th</sup>	am	Rev Bryan Doyle		

## Feb

1 <sup>st</sup>	11.00am	Saturday Praise		
2 <sup>nd</sup>	am	Rev Judi Holloway		
	pm	Revs Bryan Doyle & Judi Holloway		
9 <sup>th</sup>	am	Rev Bryan Doyle		

The following events are given for your particular attention:

## Dec

3 <sup>rd</sup>	Lite Bite piece of the Word	12.15pm
5 <sup>th</sup>	Hi 5's Games Taster Evening	Thursday 6.00pm
6 <sup>th</sup>	Bible Study at 3 Grangers Place	repeated on 13 <sup>th</sup> & 20 <sup>th</sup> 2.30 – 4.00pm
10 <sup>th</sup>	Chair-based Exercise Class	repeated on 17 <sup>th</sup> 10.45 – 11.45am
19 <sup>th</sup>	Christmas Carols & Mince Pies	10.30am

## Jan

6 <sup>th</sup>	Noah's Ark term starts	10.00am
14 <sup>th</sup>	Chair-based Exercise Class	repeated on 21 <sup>st</sup> /28 <sup>th</sup> 10.45 – 11.45am
25 <sup>th</sup>	Witney Book Circle	10.30am
26 <sup>th</sup>	Church Meeting	12.00 noon

## Rotas

### WELCOMING TEAM

<b>Dec</b>	01	Janet Hayes
	08	Pat Smith
	15	Lesley Barter
	22	Jacqui Powlesland
	29	Jean Hodgson
<b>Jan</b>	05	Janet Hayes
	12	Pat Smith
	19	Lesley Barter
	26	Jacqui Powlesland
<b>Feb</b>	02	Jean Hodgson
	09	Janet Hayes



## FLOWERS

Dec	01	Rita Hayes
	08	Christmas Tree
	15	Christmas Tree
	22	Christmas Tree
	29	Christmas Tree
Jan	05	Janet Hayes
	12	Jacqui Powlesland
	19	Judi Holloway
	26	Rita Hayes
Feb	02	Janet Hayes
	09	Jacqui Powlesland



## SUNDAY COFFEE

Dec	01	Sue Birdseye & Claire Woodward
	08	Jacqui & Terry Powlesland
	15	Jean Hodgson & Ann Clack
	22	Elaine Kinchin & Heather Houghton
	29	Pat Smith & Janet Hayes
Jan	05	No Coffee      Café Church
	12	Sue Birdseye & Claire Woodward
	19	Jacqui & Terry Powlesland
	26	Elaine Kinchin & Heather Houghton
Feb	02	Jean Hodgson & Ann Clack
	09	Sue Birdseye & Claire Woodward



## THURSDAY COFFEE (10 – 12)

**Soup Lunch (12.00 – 1.00)** See Rota in kitchen

Dec	05	Pat Smith
	12	Jean Hodgson
	19	Christmas Carols & Mince Pies
Jan	02	Elaine Kinchin
	09	Judi Holloway
	16	Ann Clack
	23	Pat Smith
	30	Jean Hodgson
Feb	06	Elaine Kinchin



**Nanna Blackman as standby - We would be extremely grateful for other people to join**

## SOUND SYSTEM

Dec	01	Terry Powlesland
	08	Nanna Blackman
	15	Tony Houghton
	22	Terry Powlesland
	25	Terry Powlesland
Jan	29	Nanna Blackman
	05	Terry Powlesland
	12	Tony Houghton
	19	Nanna Blackman
Feb	26	Tony Houghton
	02	Terry Powlesland
	09	Nanna Blackman



**For ALL the Rotas, every effort has been made to meet individual circumstances.**  
However, if the dates are not convenient for you, please change with someone else

Dec 06 Sue Birdseye  
 09 Joan White  
 16 Layla Holloway  
 25 Preston Holloway  
 29 Cecily Lau



Jan 02 Benjamin Esapa  
 Joseph Esapa  
 Margaret Esapa  
 07 Storm Wallace Heppell  
 13 Anthony Beechey  
 14 Elaine de Fraine  
 15 Ruth Doyle  
 23 Heather Houghton  
 24 David Kinchin

The following article, written by David Pickup, has been extracted from Parish Pump, and is entitled:

## That coin in your Christmas pudding

There is a tradition, which dates from the Middle Ages, of putting silver coins into Christmas puddings. The first coins used were a silver farthing or penny. After World War One, it became a threepenny bit and then a sixpence. Finding one was supposed to bring you good fortune, but probably it was more likely to break a tooth as you bit into the pudding.

We now pay for most things with plastic or by tapping a mobile telephone. In future, will people put old credit cards or phones in their Christmas pudding? Hope not.

Other coins 'appear' at this time of year. Chocolate coins are traditionally given to children at Christmas time, and in Jewish tradition during Hanukkah. It is said that one night Saint Nicholas climbed on a roof and threw a purse of money down a chimney, which landed in a pair of stockings that a little girl had hung up to dry. Good throw!

## Christmas gifts

Grandfather was talking to his grand-daughter, "When I was a child all we got for Christmas was an apple and an orange." The little girl clapped her hands in joy. "Brilliant! I'd love a new computer and a mobile!"

## What would you like for Christmas?

A little girl visited Father Christmas in the local garden centre grotto. He welcomed her with a smile and asked what she would like for Christmas. She gasped, and stared at him in horror. "Didn't you get my email?!"

*Wishing you all a Merry Christmas and a*



## Minister's letter

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

It's that time of year again, when temperatures are falling, trees are looking rather bare, and the days are ever so short! The result – life is lived mainly indoors. Activities include decorating the Christmas Tree, as well as internal and external parts of the house, all which add to the joy and wonder of Christmas. It's a time when family and friends come together, to share memories, stories, and to even partake in some games and sing a carol or two!

There is often a tangible change in the atmosphere – when love, joy, and peace take centre stage. It's often referred to as the season of goodwill. I am of course referring to Advent and Christmas!

Advent is the season dedicated to anticipating the arrival, or advent, of Jesus Christ, the baby in the manger, the Saviour of the world, born on Christmas morning. It is also a time for giving, and many people can be seen hurrying along the sidewalks, peering into brightly lit shop windows, and buying gifts for others.

These gifts are often wrapped in brightly coloured sheets of paper, which at the appropriate time are removed until the gift is exposed.

Let's spend some time this Advent, unwrapping slowly, the greatest gift we can ever receive, the gift of immeasurable love, grace, mercy, peace and joy, Jesus Christ!

As we move through Advent, instead of unwrapping our gift by removing layers of coloured paper, let's unwrap this precious gift carefully and thoughtfully, and appreciate the layers of God's goodness that enfold it. Let's remember, in line with the four themes of Advent, that Jesus is

the source of our hope, love, joy and peace.

The following words from the worship song, Cornerstone, are helpful in remembering that Jesus is our source of hope.

"My hope is built on nothing less, than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly trust in Jesus' Name." No matter what storms may come our way, we can stand securely on the rock-solid foundation of Jesus Christ, our Cornerstone.

God's desire was to show the world His love and He did so, by sending His One and only Son, Jesus Christ, to come and live on earth, and to show His love through the words He spoke, the miracles He performed, and ultimately through His self-sacrificial death on the cross.

Although we may, from time to time, be happy because of life's pleasures and loving relationships, only Jesus can give us inner lasting joy, that is not dependent on life's circumstances, but on His abiding presence – our joy is made complete in Him!

We say these words so often as part of the blessing in a Worship Service – "the peace of the Lord be with you." We can say those words because of Jesus' words to His disciples in John 14:27, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." No matter what troubles come our way, we can be confident that Jesus will help us in our hour of need and be our strength and peace.

Now that we've worked through the layers of God's goodness, in unwrapping our precious gift, Jesus Christ, let's spend some time at the cradle, kneeling, and looking into the face of God and, in awe, beholding His beauty and majesty.



Praise be to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Immanuel God with us, Jesus Christ!

I pray that you will all experience the Spirit of Christ, afresh, this Advent and Christmas, and that you and all your loved ones have a blessed time together, with your hearts filled with His love, joy and peace.

Your brother in Christ,

Bryan

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The following article has been written & submitted by Lesley Barter, and is entitled:

## **And the greatest of these is love**

We live in challenging times. One of the greatest challenges is making sense of the ubiquitous violence and war in God's world. We travel further and further afield which should make us more tolerant of the different cultures around us, but instead we become increasingly protective of our own space. Indeed, it makes us greedy to engulf other territories. I was never more conscious of it when I visited Dharamsala in northern India. It is the headquarters of the Tibetan Government in exile and the home of the Dalai Lama. The Museum of Tibetan Culture is a monument to a lifestyle which no longer exists in Tibet. Tibetan people, like a number of other ancient cultures, are under threat of extinction by greedy world powers hungry for their resources.

There is however a different perspective. India has been the nurturing ground of the ancient religions and there is evidence of it everywhere. The magnificent Sikh temples, the huge and elaborate Hindu

temples, the peaceful Jaine temples and the impressive statuary of Buddhism, not to mention the many mosques and Christian churches. These religions are the backbone of India and they are a way of life for their faithful followers. They are a living thing. Nor should they ever be in conflict. The central tenet of each of them is exactly what we Christians believe in.....loving and caring for other people. It is only when religion is used as a weapon to control people that it becomes dangerous. Radicalism and fundamentalism in any context invites the intolerance that leads to hate.

A powerful example of living faith is evident daily in the Sikh temple of Amritsar. (The large Golden Temple in the middle of a lake that we often see in pictures of India). Each day hundreds of volunteers prepare, cook and feed hundreds of pilgrims as an act of faith. The food is donated and anyone can benefit. Afterwards a vast clean-up operation takes place.

Similarly, each evening, when the scriptures have been processed to their place of rest, hundreds of worshippers set to and clean the temple from top to bottom – whole families take part. It is an act of service that is joyfully done.

India is a profoundly spiritual place in many ways, for all its dirt and squalor. It has reminded me of the ways in which we humans are similar rather than different. At our core we feel for one another in our joys and pain, regardless of our language or colour. As Christians it is our duty and our delight to love one another – a duty which we share with our brothers and sisters on the other side of the world. This Christmas let us remember that our values are not exclusive and although we may not subscribe to their beliefs they do deserve our respect.



## PRAYER LETTER No 215

### December - January

The problem with prayer is that there is some conflicting advice. I have been suggesting that prayer is just a conversation with God and we should feel able to talk to him about whatever, whoever and whenever.

P T Forsyth (1848-1921) was a Scottish theologian, a Congregational minister. He wrote that we should NOT just be “walking with God in friendly talk...you make prayer mere conversation instead of the soul’s great action”.

I understand that, even if I am struggling to agree. Forsyth also wrote, in his book *The Soul of Prayer*: “Lose the importunity of prayer, lose the habit of wrestling and the hope of prevailing with God ...and you tend to lose the reality of prayer”.

I confess I had to resort to the dictionary! Importunity means insisting, being unrelenting. To prevail means to triumph or overcome, have power or influence. I am uncomfortable with this but then I remembered a story tucked into the Old Testament (Genesis 18:23-33). In this tale, Abraham pleads with God not to risk killing any righteous people when he was going to destroy the city of Sodom. And God changed his mind. Later, in Exodus 32:7-14 we read that the Lord relented because Moses pleaded.

Just in case you think YAHWEH, the God of the Israelites was different to the God we know through his son Jesus, here are examples from the New Testament:

In Luke 11: 5-10 we learn of a man who persists in asking his friend for bread – and he is given bread.

Luke 18: 1-8 relates what the NIV entitles *The Parable of the Persistent Widow*. A judge decides to help “because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice”. And then Jesus explains how much God cares about injustice.

I recently considered a passage from John 2, during my daily Lectio365 reading. This is the account of the wedding at Cana. Pete Greig writes that Mary is persistent and has faith that Jesus WILL do something, even though he used that mysterious phrase: “My hour has not yet come”.

The adverbs that Greig writes are interesting: “Defiantly, she ignores...quietly she tells the servants to get ready” to do what Jesus will tell them. Is it really Jesus’ plan not to perform his first miracle here? Can his mother really change his mind? Apparently so and “Mary jump-starts” his ministry!

Are there any parallels we can draw with our prayer life, our communication with Jesus? We know he listens to our opinions and feelings but does that change his plans?

As we wait through Advent and enjoy Christmas; as we hit the slump of the early new year – let us remember to make time to pray. And if there is a situation that keeps going on and on, we too should persist in our prayer for God’s will to be done.

*Please note that for up-to-date prayer requests contact Elaine 07534 879449)*



The following article, written by The Ven John Barton, has been extracted from Parish Pump, and considers the Christmas story, and is entitled:

## **No Room? On the Contrary**

All over the world, doors are being slammed shut this Christmas. As the wars in the Middle East, in Ukraine and in Sudan rage on, millions are losing their homes and places of safety. Elsewhere, hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers and would-be immigrants are on the road, seeking refuge anywhere they can find it.

Meanwhile, in recent years vast numbers of Christians have been forced to flee from their ancient homelands in Syria and Iraq. They mirror the Holy Family's escape into Egypt. Every time yet another infant dies violently, it is a reminder of the first century massacre of babies in the Bethlehem region.

So perhaps this year, one carol will be sung with particular poignancy. It retells the message of angels, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favour rests" and continues:

*Yet with the woes of sin and strife,  
The world has suffered long;  
Beneath the angel strain have rolled,  
Two thousand years of wrong;  
And man, at war with man, hears not  
The love song which they bring:  
O hush the noise, you men of strife,  
And hear the angels sing.*

The angels' goodwill message will persist despite our clamour, for it proclaims God's all-embracing and eternal welcome. Whatever is happening on earth, Heaven's doors are ever open: it is home for everyone. The final biblical vision is of an all-encompassing city: "On no day will its gates ever be shut... the glory and honour of the nations will be brought into it."

Jesus, for whom there had been no room at the inn, taught that God's kingdom is home for every race: "I say to you that many will come from the East and the West, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." He reassured those anxious about the future: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms..."

No room in heaven? Don't you believe it!

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The following article, written by Tim Lenton, has been extracted from Parish Pump, and is entitled:

## **Sol Invictus, Emperors and how Christmas began**

It was 1,750 years ago, on 25<sup>th</sup> December 274, that the Roman Emperor Aurelian founded and launched the cult of Sol Invictus as an official religion. He erected a temple and declared 25<sup>th</sup> December a national holiday, to be known as the Feast of the Unconquered Sun. In 336, after the conversion of the emperor Constantine, the Church in Rome began to celebrate Christmas on 25<sup>th</sup> December.

Aurelian, who was born in Moesia – the south-eastern Balkans – rose from modest beginnings to become a strong and successful Emperor at one of the most difficult times in Roman history. He defeated many attempts to destroy the empire from without and within, notably attempts by the Gallic and Palmyrene Empires, and improved the lot of the common people.

His idea in promoting Sol Invictus as the main divinity of the Empire was to try to give everyone a god to believe in without betraying their own gods. However, when

Constantine the Great, who was born during Aurelian's reign, became Emperor in 306 and converted to Christianity, it was the beginning of the end for Sol Invictus – and the start of the dominance of Christianity in the Roman Empire.

The date of 25<sup>th</sup> December was taken over and celebrated as the birthday of Jesus – and has been ever since, though scholars agree that this is an impossible date because flocks of sheep would not have been out in the fields in the dead of winter, and therefore shepherds would not have been out either. Other dates have been suggested, of which perhaps the most convincing is September 11.

It is a happy irony that in English, Christmas can be described accurately as the Feast of the Unconquered Son.

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The following article, written by Canon David Winter, who used to be in the Witney Parish, has been extracted from Parish Pump, reflects on the coming of Jesus, and is entitled:

## **The most beautiful story**

A well-known atheist was being interviewed on Radio 4. When asked how he spent Christmas, he said that he went to Midnight Mass at church. "But you're an atheist", his interviewer protested. "Yes", he replied, "but what they celebrate at Christmas is the most beautiful story ever told."

That 'beautiful story' tells of a Creator who sent His Son to share the life of His creation, to be born as a helpless baby, to grow up as a man of extraordinary wisdom, gentleness and love, who was executed by the authorities for contradicting the traditions of the time. His followers – who today number about

two billion people all over the world – believe that He rose from the dead, and that by His death and resurrection He has made possible forgiveness and eternal life for men and women everywhere.

That is certainly quite a story, perhaps the greatest story ever told, and yes, beautiful. And that is the story that will be rehearsed again this Christmas, in children's Nativities, in hymns and carols, in Bible readings and sermons all over the country. People who stay away from church all year turn up to hear it, and who can blame them? This is a story of hope, of love and of heaven touching earth

Probably the best-known statue in the world is 'Christ the Redeemer', towering over the South American city of Rio de Janeiro, His arms outstretched in blessing. Christmas celebrates the birth of that great Redeemer – a tiny baby laid in a feeding trough.

His birth changed history, His life transformed our understanding of what it means to be human, His death was at one and the same time a tragedy and a triumph. Yes, it is 'the most beautiful story ever told'. Enjoy it again this Christmas.



The following article, has been submitted by David Kinchin, and is entitled:

## Hi'5s Fellowship

Not just a hobby night, but a great time for fellowship and discussion. The Hi 5s programme rolls on with a different event on the 5<sup>th</sup> of each month. November saw the emergence of a

hobby night which saw old fossils, stamps and coins, painting and craft, exotic clothing and musical skills. All so very different but everyone found something interesting to learn and to tell.



Next month (January) is the Hi 5s Café Church at 10.30am on 5<sup>th</sup> January. Blow away your Christmas blues and come along to a unique style of worship and praise. ALL are welcome and please bring a friend or two. For the future – be a part of the Hi5s programme team. New ideas are always welcome.

The following article, written by Dr Ruth M Bancewicz, who is Church Engagement Director at The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion in Cambridge, has been extracted from Parish Pump, and Ruth writes on the positive relationship between Science and Christian faith, and is entitled:

### **Meditation on the Incarnation**

*After the bright beam of annunciation  
fused heaven with dark earth  
His searing sharply-focused light  
went out for a while  
eclipsed in amniotic gloom:  
His cool immensity of splendour  
His universal grace  
small-folded in a warm dim  
female space*

This extract from Luci Shaw's poem *Made Flesh* captures something of the wonder of the moment when the second person of the Trinity became an embryo.

How does a single cell turn into an infant, and what does that process say about us – and God? These are the questions that Professor Jeff Hardin, a developmental biologist, asks himself. Having studied theology as well as science, he has a unique perspective on embryonic development.

A new-born baby is made of around five trillion cells. These cells come in hundreds of different types, each of which must be in the correct place for the child's body to function properly. Every new life is the result of intricate and highly ordered processes. Three things must happen as an embryo develops.

The first important process is for cells to take on their identity as types of muscle, bone, nerves, and so on. The second is when each cell learns which part of the body it belongs to. Third, those cells are moved around to form the different tissues and organs. These three are not

discrete stages, but they all happen at around the same time, building up gradually like the different aspects of a picture coming into focus.

All three of these processes are driven forward by the movement of cells, the connections between them, and the signals they pass to each other. Jeff studies a sort of cellular glue which is involved in joining cells together. Making and breaking these adhesions can affect how cells move and signal to each other, their identity in the body, how they are organised as groups, and ultimately their survival. This glue is found on the surface of cells throughout the animal kingdom, including the small worms Jeff's lab studies.

For Jeff, peering down a microscope at tiny worm embryos can be an act of worship. It is also an exercise in art appreciation, as he learns to appreciate the created order. Understanding the complexities of development, while also being aware that God knows that process intimately both as Creator and created, fills Jeff with a profound sense of awe, wonder and worship.

Does the minute scale of our early development, compared to the incomprehensibly vast and ancient universe, give us a sense of insignificance? Psalm 8 says, "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?"

For Jeff and the Psalmist, such feelings can be a positive experience if they serve as a reminder to be humble in the face of a universe that is vastly complicated but also deeply meaningful, made by a God who loves each one of us.

The following article has been written and submitted by Pip Cartwright, and is entitled:

## **Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF)**

Mission Aviation Fellowship has been selected as one of the Church tithes, so I thought that I would give some background to this charity.

MAF is a Christian Mission organisation that can operate over much of the World. It has 135 light planes which cover those areas which are isolated and remote. For example, it operates in the jungle areas of New Guinea and Brazil, the swamps of Sudan and mountain areas of South America.

Imagine if you lived in a community that had no roads and little access to the outside world; How do you reach a doctor if you are sick or injured or receive a decent education? Some countries are politically unstable, like the Congo, and violence is common. MAF has to work with local governments to do their work and are valued by those who govern the areas.

MAF tries to overcome these barriers and provide physical and spiritual care to those that are isolated. The pilots deliver relief workers, doctors pastors, books, Bibles, food and medicine and in many cases, can transport very sick people to hospital.

Passengers, where able, pay towards the cost of the flight, however, those too poor to contribute are not excluded. Costs include maintenance of the aircraft, providing hangers. and of course, they have to build and maintain landing strips quite often in difficult locations.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, MAF have 59 National and 17 international staff members. Apart from being the only flight

operator other than the UN to provide a service between Uganda and the Congo, MAF ministers too those that are fleeing from violence in refugee camps. MAF staff also teach women to read, write and sew. This helps the traumatised displaced women to overcome the horrors they have witnessed. They also support a Bible school which trains pastors and are able to take the Gospel to people who have not yet received the Good News.

MAF is a charity providing a much-needed support for isolated communities. I hope this article will make clearer the valuable work they do in witnessing Gods love for all people.



The following article has been extracted from Parish Pump, and is entitled:

## **Christmas - time to remember Christians facing persecution.**

This Christmas, there are about 360 million Christians worldwide who will not be celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ.

They dare not do so - That's because 1 in every 7 believers globally live in countries where they suffer oppression and discrimination for their faith.

So, instead of going to church and singing carols, they face violence and abduction, while others risk losing their jobs and livelihood. According to the latest World Watch List from Open Doors, there are 13 countries where Christians face extreme persecution, and 37 more where they face general persecution.

Fortunately, there are charities working on



the frontlines to help these persecuted believers. As a way of showing solidarity with our Christmas Christian brothers and sisters worldwide, you may wish to support one of the charities

**Christian Solidarity Worldwide** - specialises in freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). They work in 25 countries across Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. CSW is the only advocacy organisation with a sole focus on freedom of religion or belief that has United Nations accreditation.

<https://www.csw.org.uk/home.htm>

**Help The Persecuted** – works in 13 countries, including the Middle East, Turkey, Iran, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Yemen & North Africa. They currently provide a safe refuge in Lebanon to those fleeing the Middle East Conflict.

<https://htp.org>

**Open Doors** - has been helping persecuted Christians in over 60 countries for more than six decades. They supply Bibles, provide emergency relief and help persecuted believers stand strong for the long-term.

<https://www.opendoorsuk.org>

**Release International** - supports persecuted Christians in 30 countries around the world - prayerfully, pastorally and practically.

<https://releaseinternational.org/>

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The following article, written by Tim Lenton, has been extracted from Parish Pump, and looks back to a major disaster that shocked the world, and is entitled:

## **Remembering the Boxing Day Tsunami of 2004**

Twenty years ago, on 26<sup>th</sup> December 2004, the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami (also called the Boxing Day Tsunami) took

place. A massive undersea earthquake near Sumatra caused a devastating tsunami that swamped coastal areas in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Thailand and East Africa. It was one of the deadliest natural disasters in recorded history, killing more than 230,000 people in 14 countries.

Waves generated by the earthquake and travelling at up to 500mph were believed to have been up to 50ft high in places, and the cost in lives and damage was so extensive because detection and warning systems were relatively primitive, as this was not a prime area for such events. Scientific monitoring and warning plans, led by Australia, have since been considerably improved, but the unpredictability of tsunamis remains a major problem.

The massive surges of water in 2004 swept away buildings and people, and some effects were felt as far away as Somalia on the east coast of Africa, nearly 2,800 miles (and seven hours for the waves) west of the epicentre. Nearer coastlines were hit in as little as 15 minutes.

Aftershocks continued to shake the region daily for up to four months after the original earthquake. The raising of the seafloor reduced the capacity of the Indian Ocean, resulting in a permanent rise in sea level globally by an estimated 0.1 mm.

Since 1900, only two earthquakes have been recorded with a greater magnitude than the Sumatra Boxing Day event. One was in 1960 at Valdivia, Chile (magnitude 9.5) and the other in 1964 in Prince William Sound, Alaska (9.2). Both spawned tsunamis in the Pacific, but the death toll (1655 and 131) was sharply less, because of much lower population density where they came ashore.



The following article, written by Catherine Booton, has been extracted, with permission, from the Congregational Federation series Life-Light, and is about justice



## Seeking Justice

**“Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed. Defend the cause of orphans. Fight for the rights of widows.” (Isaiah 1:17)**

What does it mean to seek justice? How can we do what the prophet Isaiah heard from God? The definition of justice, according to the website Legalbrief is “treating people fairly and ensuring that everyone is held accountable for their actions. It

embodies the idea that laws should protect individuals from harm and provide a way to address grievances when they occur.”

So, when we seek justice, we should be looking for fairness and accountability for all. Sometimes it seems though that if we want to seek justice through legal means it can be a lengthy, and expensive, matter and perhaps that might be why sometimes people choose to take seeking justice into their own hands, which can lead to devastating outcomes. It can be easy for what we might think of as justice, to become revenge. Revenge can be caused by emotional, rather than rational thought. Justice is not about “getting even”, it’s about righting a wrong, in line with what most people would see as incorrect. Revenge is personal, whereas justice is impartial. Revenge can often become repetitive, as the different sides in an argument try to out-do one another. We can see this within the gang environment in places around our country and the wider world – as each gang looks to get revenge for the previous action of the other side, often escalating the violence and terror for families and others in their community. It is also in evidence in the wars going on in our world today. As Israel and Iran have recently traded missile attacks, in retaliation against one another, we have seen the effect it has had on the civilian population in the inevitable fallout of their actions.

As we come towards the time of Advent, we may hear these words in church...

**“The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine... For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His government and its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity.”**  
(Isaiah 9: 2, 6-7)

And there it is ... the Messiah will rule with fairness and justice. He will bring justice not revenge, fairness not partiality. In following Jesus, we should seek our justice through him, doing what he would do and knowing that all the justice we might seek is right there in his hands.

The following article, written by Canon Paul Hardingham, gives thanks to the God who comes among us, and is entitled:

## Christmas Geese

The story is told of a farmer who didn't believe in Jesus. One snowy Christmas Eve, his wife was taking their children to a service at their local church. He refused to come saying: *'Why would God lower Himself to come to Earth as a man? That's ridiculous!'* So, they left him at home.

During the evening the winds grew stronger, and the snow turned to a blizzard. He heard a series of loud thumps on the window. In the field near his house he saw a flock of wild geese. They had been migrating south when they got caught in the snowstorm. They were lost and stranded on his farm, with no food or shelter.

The man wanted to help the geese and so he opened the doors of the barn, hoping they would go inside for shelter. But the geese didn't do anything, despite the man's efforts to move them. He made a breadcrumb trail leading to the barn and tried to shoo them toward the barn, but they only got more scared and scattered.

Nothing he did could get them to go into the barn: *'Why don't they follow me?!'* Then he realised: *'If only I were a goose and become one of them, then I could save them.'* Finally, he understood the heart of the Christmas message. God has become one of us in Jesus. The eternal creator God has entered time and space as a baby, to show us who God is and how we can know Him.

This Christmas, let's celebrate again this amazing truth that we have a God who knows and can meet our needs in Jesus. *'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel, which means 'God with us''*. Matthew 1:23

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No doubt when we have had a family Christmas gathering, we more than likely try to make the food last a couple of days, but not necessarily 11, and the following article has been extracted from Parish Pump, and is entitled:

## The Everlasting Turkey

On the first day of Christmas my true love said to me

I've bought a big fresh turkey and a proper Christmas tree.

On the second day of Christmas much laughter could be heard

As we tucked into our turkey – a most delicious bird.

On the third day of Christmas people came from just next door,

The turkey tasted just as good as it had done before.

On the fourth day of Christmas came relations young and old

We finished up the Christmas pud and had the turkey cold.

On the fifth day of Christmas, outside the snowflakes scurried,

But we were nice and warm inside, and had the turkey curried.

On the sixth day of Christmas, the Christmas spirit died.

The children fought and bickered – we had the turkey rissoles fried.

On the seventh day of Christmas my true love he did wince

When he sat down at table - and was offered turkey mince.

On the eighth day of Christmas, the dog had run for shelter,

For he'd seen our turkey pancakes and the glass of alka-seltzer.

On the ninth day of Christmas, by lunchtime dad was blotto,

He knew that bird was back again, this time as a risotto.

On the tenth day of Christmas we were drinking home-made brew,

Anything to help us face that steaming turkey stew.

On the eleventh day of Christmas our lovely tree was moulting,

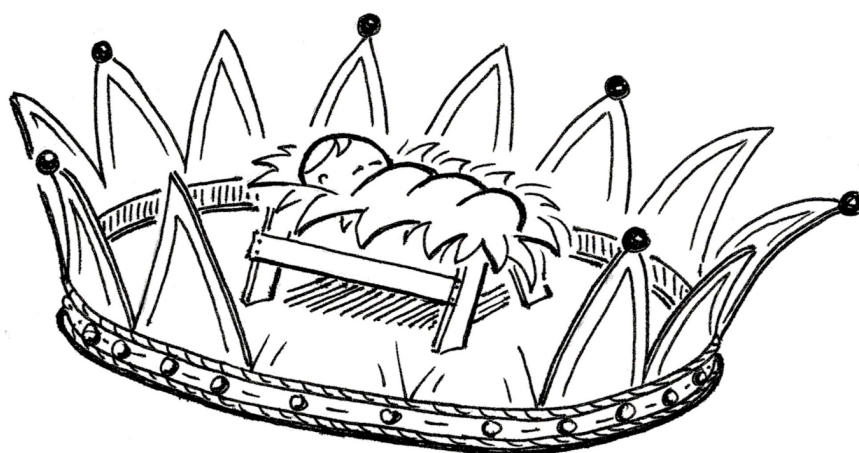
And with chilli, soy and oyster sauce, the turkey was revolting.

On the twelfth day of Christmas we had smiles back on our lips,

The guests had gone, the turkey too – **WE DINED ON FISH AND CHIPS.**

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