

COWLEY ST JOHN
CHRIST AT OUR HEART



CSJ Parish Magazine

Winter 2026





"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." — Galatians 3:28

Bartlemas 900 Celebrations
Procession and Eucharist
Welcoming Bishop Gavin and the Lord Mayor of Oxford
23rd August 2026













Front cover drone photograph by Tom Hughes; Bartlemas celebration photographs by Tony Morris; back cover painting of the angel by David Jones.

Dear Friends,
A very warm welcome to our Christmas and New Year edition of the parish magazine.
As another year draws to a close, we give thanks to God for the many graces and blessings we have received, for the friendships we share, and for the life and ministry of our parish community.
Christmas reminds us of the extraordinary love of God, who came to dwell among us in Jesus Christ. Amid the celebrations, I pray we will all find a little time to pause, reflect and welcome Christ afresh into our hearts and homes.
As we look towards 2027, we do so with gratitude, hope and excitement for all that lies ahead. May the New Year be an opportunity for each of us to renew our faith, deepen our relationship with God, and continue growing together as a prayerful Christian community.
Thank you to everyone who contributes so generously to the life of Cowley St John, through worship, music, volunteering, hospitality, prayer and countless acts of kindness. You are all part of what makes our parish such a special place.
I wish you and your loved ones a joyful and blessed Christmas and a peaceful, hopeful and grace-filled New Year.
If you are able to, please join us for carol singing and Christmas celebrations (key dates included in the magazine).

With my prayers always,
Mthr Martha

St Mary & St John open for Visitors and Prayer
We are pleased to share that, in addition to our regular services and activities, the church is now open during the week - from 10am till 3pm, Monday to Friday - for visitors and for quiet prayer. At these times, the church will be staffed and ready to welcome anyone who would like to come in.
Please spread the word and invite others to come and share in this special place.

COWLEY ST JOHN: Regular services and events

SS Mary and John



St Alban



Sunday at St Mary & St John:
8.00am Said Eucharist (suitable for families)
During school terms this service is Café Church
10.30am Sung Eucharist (suitable for families)

Sunday at St Alban's Church @ 9.30am:
1st, 2nd and 3rd Sunday of the month – Family Eucharist with children's church
4th and 5th Sunday of the month – All-age service with Eucharist (suitable for all ages)

Weekday services
Morning and Evening Prayer
Monday-Friday 8am & 5.15pm at St Mary and St John

Said Eucharist:
Tuesday 5.15pm at St Mary and St John
Thursday 10.30am at St Mary and St John



Our **Community Lunch**: 12 noon on the last Wednesday of each month, offering a delicious meal but also companionship for everyone.
Our **Coffee Morning**: every Wednesday from 10am
Our **Churchyard Lunch:** every Wednesday from 12.30-1.30, continuing our ministry of feeding people experiencing homelessness and food insecurity.
Our **Toddler Group:** every Wednesday from 9-10am.
Our **Story, Song & Shine**: monthly on Wednesdays from 3.30-4.30 for primary-aged children.

Children's Ministry: an update

Our Children's Ministry continues to grow, with a range of activities supporting children and families within the parish and local schools.

- **Children's Church:** Continues every Sunday, providing opportunities for children to explore their faith through Bible stories and creative activities.
- **Baby and Toddler Group:** Meets every Wednesday during term time, offering a welcoming space for young children and their parents or carers.
- **Story, Song and Shine:** Our monthly after-school activity takes place on the first Wednesday of each month, from 3:30pm to 4:30pm.
- **School Assemblies:** Five-minute Bible storytelling sessions continue in our participating local schools.
- **Prayer Spaces, Harvest and Nativity Activities:** Special activities are taking place or being planned at St Mary's CE Primary School and St Frideswide Primary School during October, November and the Advent season.

Miriam Atoro



The Psalms Through the Seasons

Reflection on Psalm 139: Known and Never Forgotten

"O Lord, you have searched me and known me." (Psalm 139:1)

There is something encouraging about Psalm 139. It reminds us that God knows us completely — our thoughts, our hopes, our fears, our joys and even those struggles we find difficult to put into words.

The psalmist tells us that wherever we go, God is already there. Whether we are surrounded by people or sitting alone, whether life is filled with joy or overshadowed by sadness, God's presence never leaves us.

"Even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day." (Psalm 139:12)

These words are particularly helpful when life feels uncertain. We all experience moments when we feel misunderstood, overlooked or perhaps even forgotten. Yet Psalm 139 assures us that we are never invisible to God.

And there is something else that I find deeply moving. God knows everything about us — including our weaknesses, mistakes and shortcomings — and still loves us.

We do not have to pretend to be stronger, happier or more faithful than we really are. We can come before God exactly as we are.

The psalm also reminds us that each human life is wonderfully made and infinitely precious. Whatever our age, race, background, circumstances or abilities, every one of us carries a dignity that comes from being created and loved by God.

Perhaps this is also a challenge to us as Christians: if God sees such extraordinary value in every human being, surely we are called to see that same value in one another.

So, when you next feel anxious, lonely or uncertain, remember the beautiful assurance of Psalm 139:

You are known by God. You are never forgotten. And wherever life takes you, God is already there.

With my prayers,

Mthr Martha

Mental Health Sunday: You Are Not Alone

A Reflection

There is a question we often ask one another, almost without thinking: “How are you?”

And the answer comes just as quickly: “I'm fine, thank you.”

Yet behind those simple words, there may be a very different story. Someone may be carrying grief, anxiety, depression, loneliness or an overwhelming sense of exhaustion. Others may be struggling quietly, afraid that speaking about their difficulties will lead to misunderstanding or judgement.

Mental Health Sunday invites us to look beyond the familiar answers and to remember that every person we meet carries a story we may know very little about.

On Sunday 11 October, we marked Mental Health Sunday at St Mary & St John Church, with Fr Richard preaching and a presentation by Alice and Margaret. I am deeply grateful to all three for helping us reflect on this important subject and encouraging us to consider how we can better understand, support and care for one another. It was a valuable reminder that mental health is something that touches all our lives, directly or indirectly, and that the Church has an important role in nurturing a community of compassion, understanding and hope.

As Christians, we believe that every human being is created in the image of God, precious, loved and worthy of dignity. Our value does not depend on our strength, achievements, happiness or ability to cope. We are loved by God simply because we are God's children.

The Bible does not pretend that life is always easy. The Psalms are filled with cries of anguish, loneliness, fear and despair. Elijah, one of God's great prophets, became so overwhelmed that he wanted to give up. And Jesus himself wept, experienced deep sorrow and knew what it meant to feel abandoned.

These stories remind us that struggling with our mental health is not a failure of faith. Nor is it something we should feel ashamed of. Faith does not make us immune to suffering, but it can remind us that we need not face suffering alone.

I am particularly moved by the way God responds to Elijah when he is exhausted and despairing. God does not rebuke him or demand that he pray harder. Instead, Elijah is given food, water and rest. Only then is he gently and lovingly invited to continue his journey. There is something profoundly important here. Sometimes the most Christian response to another person's suffering is not to offer advice or explanations, but simply to listen, to sit alongside them, to provide practical support, or to help them find appropriate professional care.

In our parish, we seek to be a community where everyone is welcomed, valued and treated with compassion. But genuine welcome requires more than an open church door. It means creating a place where people can be themselves, where vulnerability is met with kindness, and where nobody feels they must pretend to be well in order to belong.

We cannot solve every problem or take away every sorrow. But we can offer friendship, prayer, patience and understanding. We can challenge the stigma that surrounds mental illness. And we can remember that seeking help, whether from friends, family, a counsellor or a healthcare professional, is not a sign of weakness but often an act of courage.
Jesus invites us, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11.28).

My prayer is that Cowley St John will continue to be a place where Jesus’ invitation is made visible through our words, our worship and, above all, our care for one another.
For sometimes the greatest gift we can offer another person is the simple assurance:
You are seen. You are valued. You are loved. And you are not alone.

With my prayers and every blessing,
Mthr Martha

REFLECTIONS ON SUNDAYS THROUGHOUT NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER

All Souls' Day: Love never dies

On Sunday 1 November, we gathered as a parish to commemorate All Souls' Day, a time when we remember before God those whom we have loved and who have died.

For many of us, this is one of the most moving occasions in the Church's year. It is a time of remembrance, thanksgiving, prayer and hope. We remember those whose lives have touched ours, whose love has shaped us, and whose absence we continue to feel.

There is something profoundly human about remembering. We remember a familiar voice, a smile, a conversation, a kindness, or perhaps the simple comfort of someone's presence. Sometimes these memories bring joy and gratitude; at other times, they bring tears. Often, they bring both.

Grief is, in many ways, the continuing expression of love. We grieve because we have loved, and because the relationships that have shaped our lives remain precious even after death.

This year, as we gathered for All Souls, I remembered particularly our dear Verona Harris, who died earlier this year at the remarkable age of 100.

Verona's long life reminds us of the extraordinary richness of a human story: the many years, relationships, experiences and memories that make up a lifetime. As we remember her, we give thanks to God for her life, for all that she meant to those who knew and loved her, and for the place she held within our parish community.

And, of course, Verona is one among many whom we remembered. Each name we brought before God represents a life of immeasurable worth, a story of love, and a place in someone's heart that cannot simply be filled.

All Souls' Day is not about dwelling only on sadness. It is about bringing our sorrow into the presence of God, trusting that the love we have known is not lost because love never dies.

Jesus tells his disciples:

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places." (John 14.1–2)

These words are among the most comforting in Scripture. Jesus does not deny the pain of separation or the reality of death. Instead, he offers us the promise of a home beyond this earthly life, a place in the eternal love of God.
As Christians, we believe that death does not have the final word. At the heart of our faith stands the resurrection of Jesus Christ, through whom we are given the hope of eternal life.
This does not mean that we cease to grieve. Christian hope is not the absence of sorrow. Rather, it is the quiet confidence that even in sorrow, God is present, and that neither death nor anything else can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Within our Anglo-Catholic tradition, praying for the departed is a beautiful expression of that hope. When we remember our loved ones at the Eucharist, we entrust them once again to God's infinite mercy and love. We give thanks for their lives, ask that they may rest in peace, and look forward in faith to the day when all things will be made new.
There is something deeply consoling about knowing that our prayers unite us with the whole communion of saints: those who worship God here on earth and those who have gone before us into his nearer presence.
In the Eucharist, heaven and earth meet. We gather around the altar not only with those we can see, but within the great fellowship of God's people, united in the love of Christ.
And so, as we commemorate All Souls on 1 November, I invite you to bring the names and memories of those you love before God.
Whether your bereavement is recent or many years have passed, whether your grief is gentle or still painfully raw, there is a place for you and your memories in our worship.
We do not need to find the right words. Sometimes a name spoken quietly, a candle lit, or a moment of silence is prayer enough.
As we remember Verona and all our departed loved ones, may we do so with gratitude for the gift of their lives, tenderness for the sorrow of their absence, and confidence in the promise of Christ's resurrection.
For love does not end at the grave. The love that comes from God is eternal, and in God's loving care we entrust those whom we can no

longer hold in our arms but will always carry in our hearts. Love never dies because God never dies.
Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them. May they rest in peace and rise in glory. Amen.
With my prayers and every blessing,
Mthr Martha

Remembrance Sunday: We Will Remember Them



Every year, on Remembrance Sunday, we pause to remember those who gave their lives in the service of their country. We gather in silence, offer prayers and give thanks for the courage and sacrifice of those who paid the ultimate price for the freedoms we enjoy today. We remember lives cut short, dreams unfulfilled and families whose lives were changed forever by war. We also remember those who survived, carrying the physical, emotional and spiritual wounds of conflict throughout their lives.

I remember a gentleman from a former parish where I served. I shall call him Alex, although that was not his real name.
Alex had served his country faithfully. By the time I came to know him, his wife had died, they had no children, and he was living alone. I remember visiting him in his home. His room was cold because he was trying to save money on electricity. Here was a man who had given years of his life in service to his country, now spending his final years in loneliness, carefully counting the cost of keeping warm. What struck me most was his longing for companionship. He wanted someone to talk to, someone to listen, someone who would take an interest in his life. He had stories to tell, memories to share and experiences that deserved to be heard.
Alex needed warmth, friendship and the reassurance that he had not been forgotten.
He has since died, and I often think about him, particularly on Remembrance Sunday.

His story reminds me that the consequences of war do not end when the fighting stops. For many, the effects continue through physical injuries, painful memories, bereavement, isolation and the quiet struggles of growing old.
We honour those who died in the service of their country. We also honour those who returned home, those who continue to suffer, and those who face their later years without family, companionship or adequate support.

Remembrance is more than an act of looking back. It is also a call to care for one another today.
Jesus tells us, *"Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."* (Matthew 25.40)
These words challenge us to recognise Christ in those who are vulnerable, forgotten or alone. Our gratitude for the sacrifices of others must find expression in practical acts of love.

Remembrance Sunday also invites us to pray for those suffering through wars and conflicts across the world today: families grieving loved ones, people forced from their homes, children living in fear, and communities longing for peace.

As we gather this Remembrance Sunday, I will remember those who died in battle and those whose sacrifices helped secure our freedom. I will also remember Alex, sitting alone in his cold room, longing for companionship.
May our remembrance lead us to gratitude, our gratitude to compassion, and our compassion to action.
For we honour the dead most faithfully when we also care for the living.
We will remember those who died. We will remember those who survived. We will remember those who continue to suffer. We will remember the lonely, the forgotten and all those longing for peace. We will remember all of them.

With thanksgiving as we remember,
Mthr Martha

Christmas Day: Imagine God Walking Down Our Street This Christmas

Imagine for a moment that God came to live in your neighbourhood. Imagine him walking along Cowley Road, stopping to chat with people, sharing a meal in someone's home, attending a wedding celebration, laughing with friends, comforting someone who is grieving, and sitting beside a person who feels lonely or forgotten. Imagine God knowing what it feels like to be tired, hungry, misunderstood or rejected. Imagine him experiencing the ordinary joys and struggles of human life.

The extraordinary message of Christmas is that we do not have to imagine it. God has already done it.

In Jesus Christ, God came to earth and lived among us. He walked our streets, ate our food, attended our parties, shared our sorrows and experienced our humanity.

And why would God do something so extraordinary?

Because God desires a relationship with us.

Not a distant relationship, where we occasionally acknowledge his existence, nor one built on fear or obligation, but a personal, loving relationship, deeper, more faithful and more life-giving than any other relationship we could ever know.

God did not come just to tell us how to live. He came to show us how much we are loved. He wanted us to know him, to trust him, to walk with him and to discover the fullness of life that comes from living in his presence.

I find this one of the most beautiful truths of our Christian faith: the God who created the universe desires to be known and loved by each one of us.

And here is something even more remarkable. Whether we believe in him or not, whether we pray regularly or have not prayed for years, whether our faith is strong or filled with questions, God's love for us remains unchanged.

We may turn away from God, forget him in the busyness of life, or struggle to believe that he is there. Yet his desire for us never fades. He continues to love us, to seek us and to invite us into a relationship with him.

That is the wonder of Christmas.

As we celebrate this beautiful season, perhaps we might ask ourselves: Have I made room in my life for the God who desires a relationship with me?
And as we enter a new year, perhaps our greatest resolution could be simply this: to take time to get to know God better, to spend more time with him, and to allow his love to transform our lives.
This Christmas, may we discover afresh the wonder of Emmanuel, *God with us*.
God came into our world because he loves us. He remains with us because he loves us. And whether we recognise him or not, his love and desire for us will never cease.
What greater reason could there be to celebrate Christmas, and what better way to begin a new year than by opening our hearts to that love?
With my prayers and every blessing,
Mthr Martha

Supporting two local charities this Christmas



GRASSROOTS COMMUNITY SUPPORT GROUP AND ACTION NETWORK

At OMA we source, pack and deliver regular and one-off parcels to households across Oxford with food, toiletries and baby supplies.
OMA is funded by the community, for the community. We cannot continue our work without the support of our monthly donors.

At The Porch we provide day long support for homeless and vulnerably housed people wanting to move forward in their lives, away from street-life and addiction.

We encourage our service users (our members) to tackle the issues that prevent them from moving forward towards a more positive lifestyle. Our focus is upon support and nurture, along with challenge.
We concentrate upon housing, health, wellbeing, education and employment. We provide healthy food, practical help, companionship, learning skills, work related skills and opportunities for development.

St Stephen's Day: From the Joy of Christmas to the Cost of Discipleship

Christmas Day is a celebration of extraordinary joy. We gather around the manger, sing familiar carols, and rejoice in the birth of Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God with us. We celebrate the coming of God's love into our world, bringing light, peace and hope.

Then, almost without warning, the Church takes us somewhere unexpected.

On 26 December, just one day after celebrating the birth of Christ, we commemorate St Stephen, the first Christian martyr, a man who was brutally stoned to death because of his faith.

It is a striking contrast. One day we celebrate the birth of a child, surrounded by angels singing of peace on earth. The next, we remember a man murdered for proclaiming the very Christ whose birth we have just celebrated.

Why does the Church place these two celebrations so close together? Perhaps because Christmas is not simply about the birth of a beautiful baby. It is about God's extraordinary decision to enter fully into our human condition, with all its joy, suffering, rejection and pain. The child born in Bethlehem came to reveal God's love, a love that would ultimately lead him to the cross.

Stephen's story reminds us what it means to follow that love. In the Acts of the Apostles, Stephen is introduced as a man *"full of faith and the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 6.5). He was chosen as one of seven men entrusted with serving the growing Christian community, particularly ensuring that vulnerable widows were not neglected in the daily distribution of food.

His calling began with service.

Before we hear of his powerful preaching or courageous witness, we encounter a man called to care for those who might otherwise have been forgotten. Stephen's ministry was rooted in compassion, justice and practical love.

Yet his faithfulness brought him into conflict with those who opposed his message. Accused of blasphemy, he was brought before the council. As he proclaimed his faith in Jesus Christ, the crowd became enraged, dragged him outside the city and stoned him to death.

Even in his final moments, Stephen reflected the love of Christ. As the stones fell, he prayed, *"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."* Then, astonishingly, he cried out, *"Lord, do not hold this sin against them."* (Acts 7.59–60)

Here is the true meaning of Christian discipleship: a faith that serves, a courage that remains steadfast, and a love that refuses to surrender to hatred.

Stephen's final prayer echoes Jesus' own words from the cross. Even as he faced death, he chose forgiveness rather than revenge.

Most of us will never be called to face martyrdom. Yet each of us is called to follow Christ in the ordinary circumstances of our lives: through acts of kindness, standing alongside those who are vulnerable, speaking for justice, forgiving those who hurt us, and remaining faithful when doing so is difficult.

Stephen reminds us that Christian faith is not simply something we celebrate. It is something we live.

There is something deeply challenging about remembering Stephen immediately after Christmas. We may still be enjoying the warmth of family gatherings, Christmas meals and beautiful music. The Church gently reminds us that the joy of Christmas carries a responsibility. If we truly believe that God has come among us in Jesus Christ, then we are called to recognise and serve Christ in one another, especially in those who are poor, lonely, neglected or suffering.

The manger leads us to the cross, and the cross to the joy and hope of the resurrection, bringing us full circle to the celebration of God's boundless love, revealed in Christ, who came to give us life in all its fullness.

And so, even as we remember Stephen's suffering and death, we return to the joy of Christmas with a deeper understanding of what we are celebrating. The birth of Christ is the beginning of a love that conquers hatred, a light that darkness cannot overcome, and a life that death cannot destroy.

As we celebrate St Stephen's Day, may we give thanks for his extraordinary witness and ask God for the grace to follow his example: to serve generously, to stand courageously for what is right, and to forgive even when forgiveness is difficult.

With my prayers and every blessing,

Mthr Martha

News



This Christmas, Give the Gift of Kindness

Christmas is a time of giving, sharing and caring for one another. Sadly, some members of our local community are struggling to put food on the table and meet their most basic needs because of the continuing cost-of-living crisis.

This Christmas, we invite you to make a difference by donating food and other essential items to help families and individuals facing hardship.

From 8 November to 8 December, two collection crates will be available at St Mary & St John's Church for your donations. These will then be distributed to those in need in time for Christmas. Every gift, however small, will make a difference and remind someone that they are not forgotten. Thank you for helping us share the love, generosity and hope of Christmas with those who need it most.

A Special Christmas Lunch for Our Churchyard Friends

As many of you know, we are currently fortunate to have grant funding that enables us to provide a weekly lunch for our friends who are experiencing homelessness and regularly spend time in our churchyard.

This Christmas, we would like to offer them something extra by providing a **special Christmas lunch on 27 December**, in addition to our usual weekly provision. Christmas can be a particularly difficult and lonely time for those without a home, and we hope this will offer a reminder that they are remembered.

If you would like to contribute towards this special lunch, please place your donation in an envelope clearly marked "**Churchyard Lunch**".

Every contribution, however small, will be greatly appreciated.

Introducing our new ordinands

Jasmin Anderson

My name is Jasmin Anderson, and I am currently in my second year of training for ordained ministry in the Church of England at Wycliffe Hall, here in Oxford. Training so far has been a wonderful time for learning, reflection and spiritual growth, and I am excited to continue that journey alongside you. I am particularly looking forward to getting to know you all and engaging with the different aspects of parish life. I hope to learn from the church community, while also contributing in whatever ways I can. I am grateful for the opportunity to spend these two terms with you and look forward to the conversations, friendships and experiences we will share along the way.

Jonathan Blackham

Hello everyone, my name is Jonathan! I'm an Anglican Ordinand currently in my 2nd of 3 years studying Theology at Wycliffe Hall in Oxford. My call to ministry came while I was studying my Mechanical Engineering Degree. I found myself being more and more drawn to service with the minister of the Church at the time. After an internship at a church plant, I felt strongly led to pursue discernment. I was born in London and was in All Souls Langham Place until I was 11. After that, my family was Church planting around the country for the next 15 years. So, I got to encounter many different church situations (from non-denom/independent all the way to Greek Orthodox!) and got to see such great hearts for Jesus and His Word! I love to video-game (PC mostly), draw, take walks with my girlfriend Michèle, and enjoy quiet time in nature!

Catherine Halloran

I have just started my first year at St Stephen's House training for Ordination. I am from Brighton, and for the last five years I have been a Children and Families Minister in a church in Hove. I am looking forward to my first placement at St Mary and St John, and getting to know the parish.

Augustine Naz

My name is Augustine Naz, and I am an ordinand training at Ripon College, Cuddesdon. I am sponsored by the Willesden area of the Diocese of London and am studying for an MA in Ministry and Mission. My wife's name is Zerish Javed, my daughter is Andronika, and her younger brother is Raphael Yousuf. I was born and brought up in Pakistan and started ministry in around 2010. I have a Masters in Divinity (a theological degree) from St. Thomas' Theological College, Karachi, Pakistan, and I served in the Laodicea Church in Pakistan for eight years before moving to Dubai. I served for three and a half years in the Anglican Church of Pakistan in Dubai. We moved to the UK in 2022, and I am now in Oxford and looking forward to getting to know all of you!

News from the Churchyard

Discovering Our Heritage:
New Interpretation Boards at St Mary & St John's Churchyard





As part of our National Lottery Heritage Fund project, we have developed new interpretation boards in the churchyard at St Mary & St John's, helping to bring our rich history and heritage to life. Our churchyard is much more than a peaceful green space in the heart of East Oxford. It is a place of history, remembrance, wildlife and community life, with fascinating stories spanning generations. St Mary & St John's Church, built in the nineteenth century, has strong connections with the Oxford Movement and the Cowley Fathers, whose ministry helped shape the spiritual and social history

of East Oxford. Our churchyard also tells the stories of local people and families who have contributed to the life of this community over many years.





The interpretation boards have been designed to make these stories accessible to everyone, while also highlighting the churchyard's natural beauty, wildlife and biodiversity.
We warmly invite you to visit our churchyard, take a little time to read the new boards, and discover some of the remarkable history on our doorstep. Perhaps you will learn something new about a place you have walked through many times!
We are enormously grateful to The National Lottery Heritage Fund and National Lottery players for their generous support, which has made this work possible and is helping us preserve and share our heritage for generations to come.

Safeguarding Sunday 15th November 2026

'Safeguarding Sunday' was launched as a small pilot in 2018. The aim was to connect our worship in church more closely with the ways we keep people safe in our parishes. Since 2018, thousands of churches have started to hold an annual Safeguarding service, usually in November at around the time of National Safeguarding Week.
As Christians, we believe deeply in looking after each other. We know that each person is made in the image and likeness of God, and that care for the vulnerable is a primary Christian duty. We also know that churches haven't always, and don't always, get things

right. Churches haven't always been, and aren't always, the safe places they should be. In the words of Peter Wright, from 31:8, an organisation providing resources for Safeguarding Sunday,
'the voices of victims, survivors and those who have experienced abuse challenge us to humility, repentance and
a renewed commitment to do better'.
The theme suggested by 31:8 for this year is 'Love Protects'. In the coming weeks, we will be preparing intercessions for Sunday 15th November to reflect this theme, and to remind ourselves that looking out for each other is something we all do in our prayers and actions, week in week out. Please do talk to Miriam Atoro, our Parish Safeguarding Officer, Mthr Martha, or any member of the ministry team if you have any questions, concerns or suggestions about how we can best look out for each other in the parish.
Fr David

Music News

We are delighted to welcome Barbara Kennedy as our new Assistant Director of Music from Sunday 25 October 2026.
Barbara will work alongside our Directors of Music, Alex Tester and Lawrence Tao, helping to enrich and develop the musical life of our parish. We look forward to the gifts and enthusiasm she will bring to our worship and extend to her a very warm welcome.
Welcome, Barbara!

As we go to press, interviews are underway to appoint our new choral scholars; look out for them on Sunday mornings!
Mthr Martha



SS Mary and John Choir anthems – August to Christ the King

Lord, I trust thee	Handel
O Lord, increase our faith	Loosemore
Ave Maria	Rutter
Behold, the tabernacle of God	Harris
Sanctus Bartholomaeus	Handl
Lord, for thy tender mercy's sake	Hilton/Farrant
If ye love me	Tallis
By the cross of Jesus	Sumsion
Come, Holy Ghost, the Maker	Gibbons
Holy is the true light	Harris
Thou visitest the earth	Greene
A Gaelic Blessing	Rutter
Ave Verum Corpus	Elgar
Blessed be the God and Father	Wesley
Rejoice in the Lord alway	Anon
Kontakion of the Departed	Anon
So they gave their bodies	Aston
Jubilate Deo	Britten
Cantate Domino	Pitoni

Parish Grant Update

£50,000 from the Diocese of Oxford Development Fund
£50,000 from the Oxford Historic Churches Trust (£25,000 for the disabled toilet and Kitchen and £25,000 for the tower repairs).

St Mary & St John: National Lottery Heritage Fund Project



The Heritage Fund project is one of the largest undertakings in the recent history of the parish. Its purpose is to secure the future of St

Mary & St John as a place of worship while making its remarkable history, architecture and community facilities more accessible.
It brings together three closely connected objectives: conserving the building, sharing our heritage and developing a sustainable future for the church.
The proposed works include urgent repairs to the tower, a new accessible toilet, kitchen and servery facilities, and associated improvements to the church.
One of the most exciting aspects of the project is the opportunity to make the history of St Mary & St John more widely known.
Our heritage includes the Cowley Fathers, the history of religious life in East Oxford, the church's architecture and organ, and the stories of people associated with its churchyard.

St Mary & St John's Church – Building Works Update and Proposed Timeline
With the necessary permissions now in place, we are moving towards the construction phase of this exciting project.

November 2026 – Tendering Process
We will prepare and issue tender documents to interested contractors, inviting them to submit proposals for undertaking the building works.
January 2027 – Preparatory Works and Contractor Interviews
We will interview shortlisted building contractors as part of the process of selecting the most suitable team to deliver the project.
February 2027 – Final Preparations
We will work with the architect and professional advisers to finalise health and safety arrangements, risk assessments, construction management plans and other necessary documentation in preparation for the works.
After Easter 2027 – Building Works Begin
We anticipate that the main building works will commence after Easter 2027, subject to the completion of the necessary preparations.
Our Church Will Remain Open
I would like to reassure everyone that Sunday services will continue at St Mary & St John's throughout the building works.

Although some areas of the church will need to be temporarily closed or restricted for safety reasons, other parts will remain available for worship and appropriate activities. We will keep everyone informed of any changes to access or arrangements as the project progresses. The PCC recognises that building works may bring some temporary inconvenience, and we are grateful for everyone's patience, understanding and support.

This project is about much more than improving a building. It is about preparing our church for the future: creating a place where worship can flourish, where hospitality can be offered generously, and where people of all ages and backgrounds can find a warm welcome.

Thank you to everyone who has supported this vision through prayer, encouragement, generosity and practical help. We look forward to sharing further updates as the work progresses.

14 Magdalen Road: Modular Housing Project

Our proposed modular housing project is an important expression of our commitment to responding practically to homelessness and housing insecurity. The intention is to use parish land to provide low-carbon accommodation, supported by appropriate partnerships and arrangements for residents.

The project has been progressing through feasibility work, discussions with planning officers, design development and funding applications.



Earlier proposals explored different configurations of compact homes. Planning advice highlighted the importance of appropriate internal space, access, amenity space, design compatibility with the surrounding area and the protection of existing trees.

We have also been reviewing construction costs and alternative delivery options to ensure that the scheme is financially viable. Funding discussions have involved church bodies, charitable funders and potential local authority support.

Little acts of kindness

'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'



Just seeing the look of amazement, delight and humility on Bob Morris's face when he was welcomed back to church with applause, prayers, a wonderful cake and such an outpouring of warmth was tribute enough to all those whose kindness had made his attendance possible.

A Heartfelt Thank You to Our Volunteers

As we reflect on another busy and fruitful season in the life of St Mary & St John, I want to express my deepest gratitude to the many volunteers who give so generously of their time, talents and love. May God richly bless each one of you and your families. Thank you for serving so faithfully and joyfully.

There are many ways to get involved; if you are unsure where to begin, simply speak to Mthr Martha or one of the curates after a service or email: vicar@cowleystjohn.co.uk

There is a place for everyone, and your presence — whether weekly, monthly, or occasionally — truly makes a difference.

With heartfelt thanks and every blessing,

Mthr Martha

Your Voice Matters

We warmly invite contributions of all kinds to the next edition of the parish magazine. Whether long or short — a paragraph or a page — your contribution helps us reflect who we truly are: a community made up of many voices. You might write about:

- something that has inspired you
- a moment in church life that has stayed with you
- an act of kindness you witnessed
- a book that challenged or nourished you
- a memory from parish life in years past
- something creative or joyful you want to share
- or suggest a hymn or prayer for the back page
- or even a joke



To contribute to the next edition (deadline 10th January), simply email: vicar@cowleystjohn.co.uk or ejtw@aol.com (Edward).
Thank you for being part of this community, in whatever way you are able.
The parish magazine has been funded through generous giving; please let Mthr Martha know if you wish to contribute to the cost.
May this issue of our parish magazine be a blessing to you — a sign of hope, warmth, and belonging.
With every blessing
Mthr Martha

Open Space, the monthly inclusive, ecumenical meal and service for the queer community and affirming allies, has continued to meet and flourish over the past few months. This community offers a space for gathering, conversation and prayer that has continued to welcome people from across the city and beyond. The service is always informal, reflective, and meditative, structured around cycles of prayer, reading, music, and quiet space.

There are lots of ways to get involved if you are interested. Please do reach out to us if you are interested in helping, or speak with Emma, Joel, or Matthew after a service.

Our next service, on 29 November, will be themed around Advent. Do join us for the meal at 6pm, the service at 7.15pm, or for both.

Events & What's On

Christmas Community Lunch
Wednesday 16 December at 12 noon



Come and start your Christmas celebrations early with us!
Our December Community Lunch will take place on Wednesday 16 December at 12 noon, rather than 30 December, as we will be away on annual leave.
Join us for a lovely festive lunch and an opportunity to share in the joy and warmth of the Christmas season.
Everyone is warmly welcome





Generously sponsored by the Oxford Community Foundation.





STORY, SONG AND SHINE!

JOIN US FOR STORIES, SONGS, FUN AND FRIENDSHIP
FOLLOWED BY TASTY SNACKS!

Stories with MIRIAM

A professional storyteller bringing stories to life with songs, instruments and imagination



Hear the horn ...
the story is about to begin!

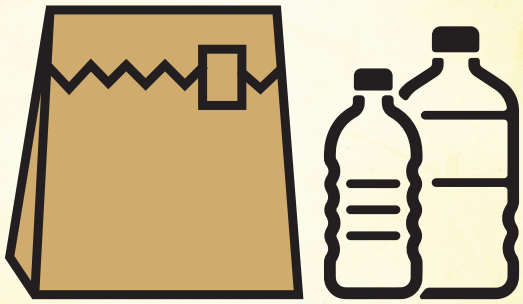


ST MARY AND ST JOHN'S CHURCH, COWLEY

3:30 - 4:30PM
ON THE FIRST WEDNESDAY OF EVERY MONTH

ALL CHILDREN AND FAMILIES ARE WELCOME!

CHURCHYARD *Lunch*



EVERY WEDNESDAY

12:30pm –1:30pm

ALL CHURCHYARD VISITORS ARE WELCOME

CSJ
COWLEY ST JOHN
CHRIST AT OUR HEART
presents

Saturday,
14th November 2026
7:00 pm

Justyna Zańko

Violin • Artist in Residence

Programme:

Georg Philipp Telemann,
Fantasia No. 1 in B-flat major, TWV 40:14

Grażyna Bacewicz,
Caprice No. 1 from *Four Caprices for Solo Violin*

Johann Sebastian Bach,
Sonata No. 1 in G minor, BWV 1001

Georg Philipp Telemann,
Fantasia No. 12 in A minor, TWV 40:25

Grażyna Bacewicz,
Caprice No. 4 from *Four Caprices for Solo Violin*

Henryk Wieniawski,
Alla Saltarella, Op. 10 No. 5

TELEMANN
BACH
BACEWICZ
WIENIAWSKI

Works for Solo Violin



St Mary & John's Church
Cowley Road,
Oxford OX4 1UR

Suggested donation: £10
(includes tea and cake)
In support
of the church tower restoration.

www.cowleystjohn.co.uk

The tale of an Aberdonian and his Wallet

Aberdonians are widely rumoured within Scotland to be extremely canny when it comes to parting with money and to have very short arms and deep pockets.

This particular one feels compelled to maintain tradition. Hence the following tale of loss.

As my wife and I were preparing to drive to church recently a warning light appeared on the dashboard display indicating low tyre pressures. Out with the foot pump and commenced inflating the tyres. My 'man bag' containing my wallet kept slipping off my shoulder and, in an attempt to curb my irritability, my wife pulled the bag off and took possession of it.

Tyres sorted we drove down to SMJ in time for the Thursday morning eucharist.

On arrival, we realised my man bag was missing. Gillian remembered she'd laid it on the footpath against our garden fence. Panic ensued. Gillian raced back to Headington while I remained for the service (much of it was me praying for my wallet).

Gillian returned triumphant and relieved in possession of my man bag (which had been hung from our front door handle) but when I checked inside the bag my wallet was missing. 'michty me, whaurs ma wallet'?

A swift drive home praying the person who'd found my bag on the pavement may have posted the wallet through the letter box (driving licence with address on it) which proved to be the case with contents including cash intact.

Unfortunately, I've been unable to find out who did such a kind act and thank them personally. I have prayed for them and thanked God on their behalf. I'm reminded just how kind and thoughtful strangers can be and how important it is to maintain faith in humanity.

With God's grace we can overcome. All things.

Even an Aberdonian's attachment to his wallet.

Rodney Burr

Film Reviews by Joe Hollies

RESIDENT EVIL

After his original works *Barbarian* and *Weapons*, writer & director Zack Cregger is given a franchise to play with, following in the steps of Paul W.S. Anderson's post-apocalyptic zombie outbreak series starring Milla Jovovich and Johannes Roberts' 2021 reboot attempt, *Welcome to Raccoon City*. This latest adaptation of the video game plays largely in single-player mode with a courier of transplant organs – Bryan (Austin Abrams) – given one last assignment for the night with a package to be taken to Raccoon City. On the way, he speaks on the phone to his girlfriend with whom he has a strained relationship when his car hits a woman walking into the road. However, she's not what she seems, and Bryan finds himself on the run for survival as he tries to reach his destination and a mystery concerning a seemingly unstoppable mutation unfolds. It knows it's based on a video game and has fun with it, bringing some levity to some effective suspense with decent jump scares and some gooey body horror that leads to a third act that is a bit *Die Hard* meets *Alien* and a splat-tastic conclusion.

VERITY

In this adaptation of the novel by Colleen Hoover, Dakota Johnson (*Fifty Shades of Grey*) is a struggling author, Lowen, who has a surprisingly twisted meet-cute with Jeremy (Josh Hartnett, *Trap*) on her way to a meeting to discuss being a ghost writer for whom it turns out is the successful writer of morbid thrillers, Verity (Anne Hathaway), who is also married to Jeremy. Agreeing to the book deal, Lowen moves into their swanky home and quickly finds out why Verity needs a ghost writer. Working in Verity's office, Lowen finds a secret manuscript of her apparent autobiography that details the backstory of her and Jeremy's relationship and reveals a dark side to the author. As Lowen reads on, it seems that Verity is getting into her head, and she finds herself getting closer to Jeremy. The set-up is not dissimilar to last year's *The Housemaid* except it's not quite as fun, but it still passes the time and will probably find a home on streaming. A recommendation: time any bathroom breaks carefully so as not to miss the big reveal like I unfortunately did.

Poem/Prayer from Breaking the Rules by Eddie Askew who for many years worked for the Leprosy Mission.

This poem follows a meditation on John 4: 4-10 the story of Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman at the well.

Lord, take it easy, please.
Slow down, I can't catch up with you
Can't find the courage to ignore convention.
Break the mould.

The only thing which holds my life together
Is the rules I make.
That's how I know just where I am,
Safe in a shaky scaffolding
Of do-it-yourself certainty.
Built bit by bit,
From a prepacked kit of orthodoxy.
Individually designed, they say.
But made to sell in thousands.
Market researched, acceptable to all.
Matching décor,
And coming with a lifelong guarantee
Against reality breaking in.

I know just whom to like,
Whom to invite to dinner, who's acceptable.
And who its better kept at arm's length.

And seeing you behave
as though the rules don't matter,
frightens me.
Makes me tremble,
Watching you undo the bolts
That dislocate the framework of my life.
Leaving the house I have built
Vulnerable to the first wolf that comes along.

And others feel just as uncertain, Lord,
I wish you would realize that.

They're happier too,
if they are able to predict
just what you'll do or say.
More sensible all round.
Of course, there'll always be some folk outside,
excluded by my rules,
Unfortunate, But then that's life.

And, suddenly, I notice, with unease,
you standing with them,
outside the boundary wire of my concern.
Not asking that they be admitted to my world,
But offering me a chance
to leave my warm cocoon,
thermostatically controlled by selfishness,
and take my place with them,
and you.
At risk in real relationships,
where love, not law, defines what I should do.

Prayer Calendar

Week beginning	Please pray for…
Sunday 1st November All Saints	• The Universal Church • The media and the arts • All who are sick in body, mind and spirit • The social services • Local government, community and local service leaders • The King, members of parliament and the armed forces • Our homes, families, friends and all whom we love
Sunday 8th November Remembrance Sunday	• The leaders of the nations • Farming, fishing, commerce and industry • Those suffering from famine and disaster • All who work in the criminal justice system • All who work in the medical and healing professions • Peace and justice in the world • Those whose time is spent caring for others

Sunday 15th November Safeguarding Sunday	• Bishops, synods and all who lead the Church • Those living in poverty or under oppression • Victims of abuse and violence, intolerance and prejudice • Victims and perpetrators of crime • Those who work with young or elderly people • Those who work for reconciliation • Those who are close to death
Sunday 22nd November Christ the King	• The natural world and the resources of the earth • Those who are unemployed • The bereaved • The work of aid agencies throughout the world • Schools, colleges and universities • All those whose lives are devastated by war • Prisoners, refugees and homeless people
Sunday 29th November Advent Sunday	• The Church, preparing for the coming of Christ • The worship of the Church • The Anglican Church of Burundi • The Society of S. John the Evangelist • Refugees and asylum seekers • Our churchyard and those who care for it • Our new ordinands
Sunday 6th December Advent 2	• The nations of the world • The leaders of the Church • The Province of the Anglican Church in the Congo • All Saints Sisters of the Poor • Those suffering with dementia • Our renewal project • Our sacristan, altar servers, readers and prayer leaders
Sunday 13th December Advent 3	• Those who are working for justice in the world • The broken, that they may find God's healing • The Church of the Province of Uganda • Oxford Mutual Aid • Families with young children • Our Open Wednesdays and those whom they support • Our organists and choristers
Sunday 20th December Advent 4	• The Church, especially in places of conflict • The Holy Land, for peace with justice and reconciliation • The Anglican Episcopal Church in the United States • The Porch • Homeless people • Our churchyard community

	• Those who look after our church buildings
Sunday 27th December S. John the Apostle	• The Church throughout the world • The Holy Land, for peace with justice, and reconciliation • The Anglican Church of Australia • Those who teach, research and educate • The schools in our parish • Open Space and our LGBTQ+ community • Those involved in our children's ministry
Sunday 3rd January Epiphany	• The revelation of Christ to those from whom his glory is hidden • The peace of the world • The Anglican Church of Korea • The St John's Home, staff and residents • Those in need in our parish • Our clergy and their ministry • All children returning to school
Sunday 10th January Baptism of Christ	• The healing of the sick • All who travel • Christian communities which are persecuted for their faith • The Leprosy Mission • Those who have been baptised recently • Our church administrators, archivists and accountants and the PCC • Parents, siblings and grandparents
Sunday 17th January Week of Prayer for Christian Unity	• The unity of the Church • Archbishop Sarah and the Anglican Communion • Pope Leo and the Roman Catholic Church • The Ecumenical Patriarch and the Orthodox Churches • The leaders of the non-conformist and free Christian churches • The Christian churches in the Holy Land • Greater communion between the churches in Oxford
Sunday 24th January Conversion of S. Paul	• The peace of the world • The healing of the sick • The Church of Nigeria • Those who welcome newcomers to our church and offer hospitality • Those involved in Christian evangelism and outreach • Those who foster community and understanding • Those living with mental illness

Dates for your diary

NOVEMBER		
Sunday 1 All Saints		Services in both churches as usual
	4pm	All Souls Vespers at SS Mary and John
Sunday 8th Remembrance Sunday		Services in both churches as usual
Saturday 14th	7pm	Violin recital at SS Mary and John
Sunday 15th Safeguarding Sunday		Services in both churches as usual
Sunday 22nd Christ the King		Services in both churches as usual
Sunday 29th Advent Sunday		Services in both churches as usual
	4pm	Advent Carols at Bartlemas Chapel
	6pm	Open Space at SS Mary and John: Advent
DECEMBER		
Saturday 5th	4pm	Charles Street Carols at St Albans
Sunday 6th Advent 2		Services in both churches as usual
	4pm	Carols in the Churchyard with brass band, mince pies and mulled wine
Sunday 13th Advent 3		Services in both churches as usual
	6pm	Christmas Community Carol Service SS Mary and John
Wednesday 16th	12pm	Community Christmas Lunch SS Mary and John
Friday 18th	10.30am	Seasonal Meditation –Christmas & mid-Winter
Sunday 20th Advent 4		Services in both churches as usual
Thursday 24th Christmas Eve	4pm	Crib Service at SS Mary and John
	11pm	Midnight Mass at SS Mary and John
Friday 25th Christmas Day		Services in both churches as usual
Sunday 27th	10.30am	Joint service at SS Mary and John

S. John the Apostle	12pm	Christmas lunch for Churchyard Community
JANUARY		
Sunday 3rd Epiphany		Services in both churches as usual
Sunday 10th Baptism of Christ		Services in both churches as usual
Sunday 17th		Services in both churches as usual
Sunday 24th Conversion of S.Paul		Services in both churches as usual
Sunday 31st Candelmas		Services in both churches as usual

Seasonal meditations 2026
SMJ Churchyard – Come Rain or Shine - All Welcome!

Seasonal Meditations in the churchyard is a gentle sharing of poetry, song and silence following the rhythm of Christian and Celtic festivals through the year.

For further information:

gabyhock1@gmail.com or bethisolde@gmail.com

18th December 10.30-11.30 Winter Solstice –Christmas – mid-Winter

PLEASE COME TO CAROL'S 70th BIRTHDAY PARTY

at DEAN COURT COMMUNITY CENTRE
PINNOCKS WAY, BOTLEY, OXFORD, OX2 9DG
on 28 NOVEMBER FROM 7.30-10pm

Please bring a drink or something to eat.
RSVP Carol Chapman, 07901 735561
carolchapman66@hotmail.co.uk



Support for Those in Need: Discretionary Fund

We are blessed to have a generous discretionary fund available to support those facing hardship. If you, or someone you know, is in need, please feel free to contact Mthr Martha in confidence. If you would like to contribute to the fund and help support others in need, please also speak to Martha. Thank you for helping us care for one another.

Examples of help offered include assisting students with the cost of their travel fare to college, assisting struggling families with food and buying a second-hand winter coat for someone in need.

Donations via Bank Transfer
Name: COWLEY SAINT JOHN PCC
Sort Code: 08-92-99
Account Number: 67325896
Donations via Cheques Payable to:
Cowley Saint John PCC, and send to:
The Vicarage, 271 Cowley Road, Oxford. OX4 2AJ

Please use the references: Music, Magazine

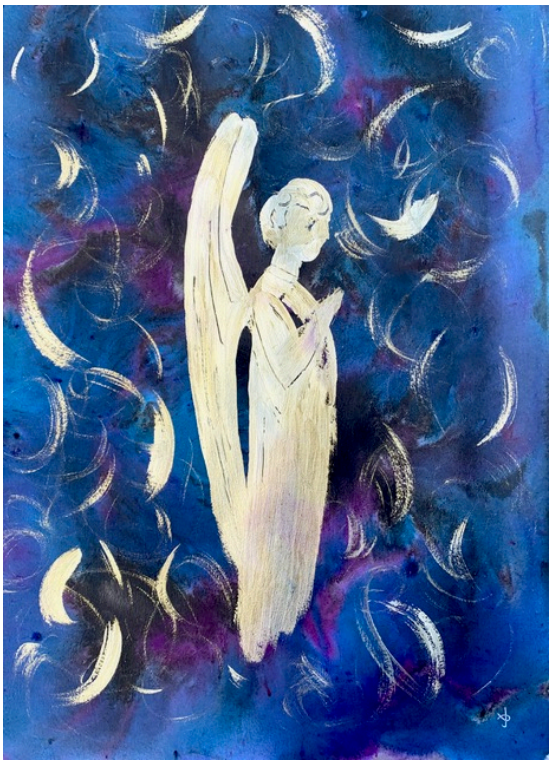
The parish is committed to promoting a safer church.
The **Parish Safeguarding Officer** is Miriam Atoro.
Miriam can be contacted **with any concerns** at
safeguarding@cowleystjohn.co.uk
Or you can contact the Vicar, Revd Martha Weatherill:
vicar@cowleystjohn.co.uk or 0747 290 90 11
The **Diocesan Safeguarding Team** can be reached on 01865 208295 or safeguardingreferrals@oxford.anglican.org for urgent safeguarding concerns.



Betty and John Purves with 'The Church and the Community' wall-hanging, created by members of the parish for the Richard Benson Hall.

We would like to complete the list of those who crafted the various panels in the wall-hanging, so please let us know if you can fill in any of the gaps below or correct wrong attributions.

Row 1: 1? 2 -Mary-Ann Sinclair (Fire), 3 -Petronella Spivey (Oxford), 4 -Mary-Ann Sinclair (Water)
Row 2: 1? 2 -Eileen Mann / Margaret Cullen (Angel), 3 -Betty & John Purves (Community and Diversity), 4 -Janet McCrae (Buttons and Patchwork Design)
Row 3: 1 -Kate Prinsep (Community Heart), 2 -Janet Proudman (Candle), 3? 4?
Row 4: 1 -Elma Brown (Bartlemas), 2 -Father Philip (Chalice),
3 -Rosy Hancock (Chasuble) 4 -Alice Hicks / Ruth Waddle (Alice's Mad Hatter Tea Parties)
Row 5: 1 - Ruth Waddle (St. Mary & St. John Church Garden), 2? 3 -Father Ben (Community and Cross), 4 -Emma Pratt (Stained Glass Design),
Row 6: 1? 2 -Alma Brown (South Porch), 3 -Angela Thomas (Interlocking), 4 -Sarah Tilley (Harvest)





A Prayer for Christmas and the New Year 2027

Loving and gracious God,

As we celebrate the birth of your Son, Jesus Christ, fill our hearts with the joy of Christmas, the peace of your presence and the wonder of your love.

Thank you for walking alongside us throughout the past year, through moments of happiness and sorrow, challenges and blessings.

As we welcome 2027, we rededicate our lives to you. Renew our faith, deepen our love, strengthen our hope and guide us in all that we do.

Bless our families, our friends, our parish and our wider community. Comfort those who are lonely, heal those who are suffering, and bring peace to our troubled world.

May this New Year draw us ever closer to you and to one another, that we may become more faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

We wish everyone a prayerful Advent, a joyous Christmas and a blessed New Year.

Inclusive Church