

Stour Vale Benefice  
Christmas in Stour Vale

**Follow the Star**

**Carol Services in December:**

- ★ Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> 3pm Todber—Carol Service
- 🕯 Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> 6pm Stour Provost—Carols by Candlelight
- ★ Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> 4:30pm East Stour—Carols by Candlelight
- 🕯 Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> 6:30pm Fifehead Magdalen—Carols by Candlelight
- ★ Monday 18<sup>th</sup> 6:30pm Kington Magna—Carol service
- ★ Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> 4pm Stour Row—Crib service (village hall)

**Christmas Eve: (Sunday 24<sup>th</sup>)**

- ★ 4pm Buckhorn Weston – Christingle & Crib
- ★ 6pm West Stour – Carol and Crib Service

**Midnight Mass:**

- 🕯 11:30pm Kington Magna with Revd Clare Dean

**Christmas Day:**

- ★ 10:30am East Stour with Bishop Karen
- 🕯 *Traditional services, providing an opportunity for quiet reflection in this busy season.*
- ★ *Services with crafts and puzzles available at a table in church.*
- ★ *Services with activities for children to do whilst sat in the congregation.*

**Please note there will be some changes to Sunday Services**  
so do check the Benefice Services Rota on Page 20.

**Sunday 31st December**

**5th Sunday Benefice Service**  
10:30am Todber—with Revd Angela Syer

## From the Vicar

At this time of year, we begin to be bombarded with images and ideas as to how we create the perfect Christmas? Newsagents' shelves are usually lined with glossy magazines packed with advice on how to plan the best Christmas ever, with mouth-watering recipes to cook, delicious drinks, and suggestions for the perfect present for each member of the family.



There will be beautiful pictures of the tastefully decorated and garlanded home, resplendent with huge Christmas tree, myriad sparkling lights and jewel-coloured baubles. Then there are photographs of the ideal family who all look gorgeous in the latest evening wear or otherwise impeccably presented in Christmas pyjamas against the background of a glowing hearth. Angelic looking children beam behind piles of artistically wrapped presents and there is not a sniffing nose or tantrum in sight.

Our television screens are also filled with stylised images or advice on the perfect Christmas. Big stores compete for the best and most moving Christmas advert – there is usually a theme in which Christmas is “saved” against all the odds. The message being that the department store or big supermarket will provide for all our needs in order to enable the “perfect” Christmas.

Many of us will be looking forward to celebrating Christmas with our loved ones. That shared experience is important. I suspect for most of us, our family Christmases are enjoyable but not perfect however hard we might work at the preparations. Family life is full of the mess of human behaviour-: the overtired and overexcited children, overworked parents, churlish teenagers, embarrassing aunts and other challenging relatives. Not to mention the things forgotten in the busyness of seasonal preparations coupled with the irritable family member who is experiencing a hangover or seasonal cold.

The true image of Christmas is however, not glossy or sparkling, but that of the simple stable at Bethlehem. Not wrapped in garish wrapping paper and tied up with ribbon but a baby wrapped in simple swaddling clothes laid in a manger, because this family has nowhere else to go.

This is the joyful mystery that lies at the heart of Christmas: God becoming human in the birth of Jesus Christ.

*Continued*

## From the Vicar—continued

This I would like to invite you all to discover – or rediscover – the good news of God’s saving love as revealed in the birth of Jesus. It is an opportunity to each of us to ponder in our hearts – as Mary did – what the extraordinary events of the first Christmas might mean for us now and in the years ahead.

Do join us at a church as we hear about the true meaning of Christmas through traditional readings and carols. Details of all the Christmas services in the Benefice are listed in this edition of Octavo or in a special Christmas card which will be distributed to as many households as possible – look out for yours! We are planning a special welcome for children with activities and an invitation to come along dressed as their favourite nativity character.

The perfect Christmas is all about meeting with God made man. God in Jesus who knows and experiences what it is like to be fully human. God who loves us so much, is still prepared to reach out to us however far off we may be. Jesus is the gift to us and fully embraces our less than perfect humanity. The only preparation we need to make is to open our hearts and minds to receive the free gift of life changing love. The promised feast to which we are invited is more perfect and beautiful than we can ever imagine or plan for ourselves. The invitation is extended to all, we just need the humility to accept it.

For many people we know, Christmas is a difficult time. Their Christmas will be nothing like the images with which we are bombarded in the media. For some people, Christmas makes the loss of a loved one even more difficult to bear. Some families will be struggling for different reasons including low wages, debt, illness, and rising fuel bills. Other families around the world will be suffering because of war or other conflict and this year Bishop Stephen has asked to particularly remember the people of Gaza by contributing to the hospital which is run by the Anglican Diocese of Jerusalem. <https://www.jmeca.org.uk/get-involved/donate/current-appeals-0/al-ahli-hospital-gaza-appeal>.

As Christians there are many ways in which we can reach out to those who need our help. Many of us will be motivated to give to charities and donate to the foodbank. Others will invite the person who may be bereaved or lonely to join their celebrations. Whatever we do we are challenged to think about what we can do to bring the true meaning of Christmas to our neighbours and the wider community. After all, love, just like the Christmas tins of chocolate, is for sharing.

I wish you a Christmas and New Year filled with the blessings of the joy, hope, love and peace of Christ.

*Clare*

## Stour Vale Benefice Newsletter

**Are you receiving our weekly newsletter by email?**

It gives details of our church services, news of our events happening across the Stour Vale parishes, plus prayers, reflections, encouragement and much more!



If you would like to receive a copy by email each week, just send your email address to: [octavoeditorsvb@googlemail.com](mailto:octavoeditorsvb@googlemail.com) with the subject title "Newsletter"

**Don't miss out!**



### STOUR VALE BENEFICE FACEBOOK PAGE

Please search 'The Church of England in the Stour Vale' in Facebook or use/click on the link below to find us.



Or go via the Benefice Website—there's a link on the home page. 'Follow' us to keep up to date, and please do 'share' the good news!

[www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100089949903748](http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100089949903748)

### Stour Vale Prayer Group

We meet once a month for a short prayer meeting in which we bring our own concerns and the needs of the world in these troubled times.

Please join us on the Last Thursday of the Month—2pm at East Stour Church  
All welcome!



## Thought for December

This advent, across the Benefice, we are *Bethlehem Bound*. I hope you will join us on our quest, as we journey with Mary, Joseph and other characters from the Christmas story, to the stable at the inn to celebrate Jesus' birth. Like the Wise Men, we will be *Following the Star*. They were very surprised not to find the Messiah where they thought he would be: in the royal palace. Perhaps we will also be surprised at where Jesus turns up, and what we learn about him!

I hope you will join us at some of the services and other events across the Benefice, details of which are on page 5. I also hope you will find time, amid the hustle and bustle of the season, to reflect on the true meaning of Christmas and to seek out Jesus in surprising places.

Most importantly of all, I hope your Christmas is full of the joy and peace that Jesus brought into the world when he came to show us how much he loves us. Please join me in praying the *Bethlehem Bound* prayer:

*With Love Fiona*

## Prayer for the month

Lord of the journey,  
with Mary and Joseph,  
with shepherds and wise men,  
I am Bethlehem Bound.  
Bring me, with them  
to worship before Jesus  
baby, brother, Lord and Saviour  
and so make every journey  
a walk with you.  
Amen



Andrew Nunn

## **Help wanted!!**

Are you a pianist? Could you occasionally play some hymns in church when a regular organist is unavailable? Tuition can be given.

If so, we would love to hear from you.

Please contact Ralph Bowden on 01747 822150.



# New for Advent!



We hope you will join us during Advent as we reflect on the true meaning of Christmas, journeying *Bethlehem Bound*, exploring the Christmas story through the eyes of some well-known characters within it. There will be two opportunities each week to meet together and do this:

On Fridays at 2:30pm we will '*Gather at the Inn*', meeting at The Crown Inn, East Stour to chat about the story and share our thoughts.

On Tuesdays at 7:30pm there will be a service of *Compline*, held over Zoom.

The Zoom details for *Compline* are below and will also be in the weekly newsletter. If you would like to be part of this but are worried about using Zoom then please do get in touch and we'll see what we can arrange. If you don't get the newsletter, or if you'd like a specific reminder of the Zoom details each week, then please let Fiona know ([fjhedges1@gmail.com](mailto:fjhedges1@gmail.com)) and she will arrange that for you.

Both *Compline* and *Gather at the Inn* will be based on the book '*Bethlehem Bound*' by Andrew Nunn. If you would like to use the book for your own Christmas reflections then you can buy it on Amazon here: [Bethlehem Bound: Journeying with the Characters of Christmas: Amazon.co.uk: Nunn, Andrew: 9781786224484: Books](https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/9781786224484) or on Eden here: [Bethlehem Bound: Journeying to the Manger by Andrew Nunn 9781786224484 | Eden](https://www.eden.co.uk/9781786224484) (or from a bookseller of your choice, of course!) A slightly cheaper version is available here: [https://www.re-vived.com/search?type=product%2Cpage&options%5bprefix%5d=last&q=bethlem%20bound\\*](https://www.re-vived.com/search?type=product%2Cpage&options%5bprefix%5d=last&q=bethlem%20bound*)

You don't need to buy the book to attend either *Compline* or the *Gather at the Inn*, but it's an interesting read and a useful prompt to spend some time with God.

Each session of *Compline* and *Gather at the Inn* will stand alone, so feel free to come to as many as you like, but don't worry if you can't come to them all, it won't matter!

If you have any questions, or would like any further details, then please contact Fiona on 01747 838952, email [fjhedges1@gmail.com](mailto:fjhedges1@gmail.com) or Revd Clare on 01747 838171.

Join us as we make the journey, together with Joseph and Mary, heading for the stable, at the inn.

Advent Compline Zoom Link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84912786916?pwd=MEVnLzFvNysxRVQzZHFGE5BMjdpQT09>

Meeting ID: 849 1278 6916      Passcode: 601147

# A Special Invite

if you are young, in age or at heart, to come to one of our **Christmas** Services, dressed as your favourite nativity character! Will you be Mary, Joseph, an Angel, a Shepherd, a Wise Person, an Innkeeper, or something else? Why not check out page 5 and choose a service to come along to?

We'd love to see your **AMAZING** costumes!



## Stour Vale Benefice

**For Sunday services please see the services rota (p20 )**  
**Other services and Benefice related events :**

**Every Tuesday**

Said Morning Prayer 9:30am West Stour

**Monday 15th January**

Knit and Natter 2:30pm East Stour Village Hall  
(NB no meeting in December)

**Thursday 28th December & 25th January**

Stour Vale Prayer Group 2pm East Stour

## Knit and Natter

There is no Knit and Natter in December but we will be back in the New Year on Monday 15<sup>th</sup> January for a normal meeting. All welcome—2:30 - 4:30pm in East Stour village hall.

*Love Bridget*

