



St MICHAEL & ALL ANGELS CHURCH

ABINGDON-ON-THAMES

7th December 2025
2nd Sunday of Advent
Regular Service Times

Sundays: Sung Mass, 9.30 am
Tuesdays: Silent Reflections, last Tuesday of the month, 7.30pm (except December)
Thursdays: Said Mass, 12.30 pm
Moving into Stillness, Taizé circle dancing with silent interludes, usually first Thursday of the month, 9.45 am to 10.45 am.

Contacts

Team Rector: The Revd Dr Jennifer Brown
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Team Vicar: Vacancy

Churchwardens: Miss Joyce Kelly (01235 533555 / 07833 535768)
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Associate Priest The Revd Dr A. K. M. Adam (AKMA)
e-mail: akma@sthelens-abingdon.org.uk

Bookings*: Miss Joyce Kelly (as above)

Parish Office: The Parish Centre Office is normally open from Monday to Thursday, **10 am to 1 pm.**

Administrator: During normal working hours phone or leave a message on:
Telephone (01235 520144) or
Mobile (07395 943957)
e-mail: administrator@sthelens-abingdon.org.uk

Web site: <http://www.stmichaels-abingdon.org.uk>

If you would like to receive this pew leaflet electronically, please email pewleaflet@stmichaels-abingdon.org.uk with the subject line SUBSCRIBE

Items for inclusion in the next pew leaflet to be sent to David Duce by midday on Tuesday.
Telephone 522591

pewleaflet@stmichaels-abingdon.org.uk

[*for Baptisms, Weddings, Funerals please contact the Parish Office]

We welcome Fr AKMA to celebrate and preach at Mass today

Today's Gospel: Matthew 3.1-12 – The Proclamation of John the Baptist

Our readings this week include St Matthew's account of the preaching of John the Baptist, which provides an occasion for noticing some of the distinctive ways that the evangelists characterise this fascinating figure from the time of Jesus. For instance, to tackle a big topic first, St Matthew doesn't seem to have heard that John might be related to Jesus (nor do Mark and John; only Luke mentions a family connection between the two). As in Mark, so in Matthew, John simply appears out of nowhere proclaiming the nearness of the Kingdom and his own role as herald of the One Who Is To Come. St Matthew is the only evangelist who suggests that John felt there was anything awkward about his baptising Jesus, but even at this point Matthew doesn't imply that they were cousins; John just seems to know that Jesus was a greater authority than he (John) was. And when John was in prison, he sent messengers to Jesus asking whether he was the One; evidently he didn't definitely recognise Jesus as the one who was more powerful than himself.

However, St Matthew does tell us to think of John as the second coming of Elijah, greater than anyone ever before him. This is one of Matthew's favourite ways of describing Jesus, so it's likely that he really did hold this mysterious prophet of repentance and renewal as second only to Jesus in importance. As such, he's amply worth studying in depth — how the other evangelists describe him, and what we learn about him from sources outside the New Testament (for instance, what Mandaeen religious sources say about him). In the meantime, we can repeat and live by the message that he made his trademark: Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand!

Fr AKMA

SUNDAY WORSHIP AT ST HELEN'S CHURCH St Helen's will live-stream their 10.30 am Eucharist through Zoom. The Zoom link can be found in the St Helen's Church newsletter (on-line). A recording of the sermon (audio and video) will be made available after the service on the St Helen's web site (https://abingdonparish.org.uk/StH/StH_publications.html).

The next *Taizé Prayer service* will be on **Sunday 14 December** in **St Helen's Church at 5.30 pm**.

MORNING PRAYER is normally held at 9.10 am on weekdays at St Helen's Church.

ST NICOLAS' CHURCH PATRONAL FESTIVAL St Nicolas' are keeping their Patronal Festival this Sunday, **Sunday 7 December**. There will be Choral Evensong at **6.30 pm**. All are warmly invited to come along.

ADVENT/CHRISTMAS/EPIPHANY SERVICES AT ST MICHAEL'S

Sunday 7 December	9.30 am	Sung Mass – Theme: The Prophets
Tuesday 9 December	11 am – 12 noon	Labyrinth Walks
Thursday 11 December	12.30 pm	Said Mass
Sunday 14 December	9.30 am	Sung Mass – Theme: John the Baptist
Tuesday 16 December	11 am – 12 noon	Labyrinth Walks
Thursday 18 December	12.30 pm	Said Mass
Sunday 21 December	9.30 am	Sung Mass – Theme: The Virgin Mary
Wednesday 24 December		Christmas Eve
	3.00 pm	Crib Service
	6.00 pm	Christmas Lessons and Carols
	11.00 pm	At St Helen's Church: Midnight Mass
Thursday 25 December		Christmas Day
	10.00 am	Sung Mass (N.B. later time)
Sunday 28 December	9.30 am	Sung Mass – The Holy Innocents
Thursday 1 January		<i>No Mass today</i>
Sunday 4 January	9.30 am	Sung Mass for the festival of Epiphany
Thursday 8 January	12.30 pm	Said Mass as usual

A full list of services for Advent and Christmastide is available on the Parish web site:

<https://abingdonparish.org.uk/Christmas2025.pdf> and printed copies are available in church.

CHRISTMAS CHEER The concert by Abingdon Chorale in aid of *The Abingdon Bridge* raised **£1,700** all of which will go directly to supporting the young people of Abingdon, providing the guidance and help they need to gain resilience to overcome life's changes.

PARISH OFFICE will close at 1 pm on Christmas Eve and will re-open at 10 am on Monday 5 January.

PEW LEAFLET The 21 December issue will be a double issue, covering the period 21 December to 3 January. The following issue will be for 4 January 2026. Copy for the double issue should be sent to the editor, pewleaflet@stmichaels-abingdon.org.uk by midday on **Tuesday 16 December** and for the following issue by midday on **Tuesday 30 December**.

APPEAL FOR JAMAICA IN THE AFTERMATH OF HURRICANE MELISSA The Diocese of Oxford is the sole link diocese for the Diocese of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands, and is committed to supporting our partners in mission at this difficult time – both through immediate disaster relief and ongoing reconstruction. The Bishop of Oxford's Advent Appeal 2025 is therefore for the Jamaica and the Cayman Islands Diocesan Disaster Relief Fund.



<https://oxford.anglican.org/jamaica-and-the-cayman-islands-appeal.php>

For tax payers the most efficient way to give is via the Diocesan website or the QR code.

BISHOP GAVIN TO TAKE THREE-MONTH SABBATICAL From Diocesan eNews, 27 November.

"Bishop Gavin announced this week that he has been granted a three-month sabbatical, running for the months of December, January and February. He has several things lined up for this period, including a ministry trip to Peru to revisit churches and communities he worked with more than 30 years ago. But the main emphasis of the time will be to recharge his batteries, physically and spiritually, in preparation for the additional responsibility of being Acting Diocesan Bishop after Bishop Steven's retirement next summer."

In the meantime issues that would have been referred to the bishop are to be referred to Archdeacon David Tyler.

FAITH FORUM The final Faith Forum meeting of the current series took place on 23 November at which Maranda St John Nicolle, World Development Advisor for the Diocese of Oxford, spoke on *Putting Faith into Practice (Living the Faith)*. There is no Faith Forum in December, but we will resume with a new series on **Sunday 25 January**.

Recordings of this talk and the first two talks in the series, *Prayer* by Margaret Adam and *Lectio Divina* by Sr Lizzie Ruth CSMV are available now on the parish web site, see https://abingdonparish.org.uk/P_faith_forum.html.

INTERCESSORS AND READERS' ROTAS As a result of this appeal two new people will be joining the current four people who regularly lead the intercessions at Sunday Mass. This is an important lay ministry in the church and hence this appeal for more people to join the rota. If anyone else is interested in joining the rota, please speak to Sue Scott. Also if you are interested in joining the readers' rota, please contact to Sue, email: suescott719@gmail.com.

FROM THE BISHOPS is the title of a monthly online column from our four bishops. The latest post is from Bishop Gavin, *A Season of Hope*. <https://oxford.anglican.org/who-we-are/bishops-and-senior-staff/from-the-bishops/>

CARDS FOR GOOD CAUSES are selling a variety of charity cards in **St Nicolas' Church, Monday – Saturday 10.30 am – 3.30 pm**. <https://cardsforcharity.co.uk/>

ADVENT LABYRINTH WALKS St Michael's Church will be open on **Tuesdays 9 and 16 December** between **11 am and noon**. There will an opportunity to walk the labyrinth or simply to enjoy the sacred space. Material for reflection will be available on a different Advent theme each week. A short prayer will be said at the beginning and end of each session, but feel free to come and go as you please. Parking permits are available for use in Park Road.

ALBERT PARK SINGERS CHRISTMAS CONCERT **Friday 12 December at 7 pm**. Free admission with donations to Homeless Oxfordshire and St Michael's Church. Festive refreshments afterwards.

CHURCH IN ABINGDON CHRISTMAS CAROL SINGING – put Saturday 13 December in your diary. Come to the Market Place, from about 10 am, and join us as we sing Christmas Carols together. All musicians welcome – please contact Debra Mcknight, the CiA Administrator, for details of Carols and keys. There will be chairs for those who would prefer to be off their feet. Bring along your Christmas hats and bells, drums, etc. to this wonderful celebration of Christmas. Abingdon Street Pastors will be joining us after the Carol singing to offer hot pasties and drinks to all.

LAMPS Collective are returning with their brand-new Christmas Show! **Saturday 20 December - 3.00pm and 7.00pm – Peachcroft Christian Centre**. Join the OAPs (Old Angel Pensioners) of retirement home *Heavenly Realms*, as they get ready to celebrate Christmas and share memories of the very first one. Hold on to your halo and enjoy a 'holy' new take on the Nativity story! Festive fun for all the family from age 8 upwards. Come along and invite your friends! Suitable for age 8 upwards. Tickets £10 adult, £5 Child/young person (8-18)

Ticket link: <https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/peachcroft-christian-centre/heavenly-realms/e-gpygml>

CHRISTMAS DAY LUNCH 2025 AT PEACHCROFT CHRISTIAN CENTRE Once again we are offering a Christmas Day lunch at Peachcroft Christian Centre. This is for people who are going to be alone this Christmas, for whatever reason, but who would like to celebrate in the company of others. Our catchment area is Abingdon and surrounding villages. Transport can be provided for those unable to make their own way. The lunch is always a joyous occasion, enjoyed by guests and volunteers alike. If you know of anyone who might benefit from joining us as a guest this year, please get in touch with Fiona on: 07503 178893 or via email: christmaslunch25@peachcroftcc.org.

CiA NEWS A printed copy of the **November issue** is on display on the notice board by the Welcome desk. It is also available to download from https://abingdonparish.org.uk/P_communications.html.

A CANDLE IN THE WINDOW The December edition of the Parish Magazine (the 60th on-line edition!) will be available to download by Sunday 7 December (along with previous issues) from https://abingdonparish.org.uk/P_window.php. Lots of reasons why you should download!

Worship

November The celebrants and preachers in December are: 7 December, Fr AKMA; 14 December, The Revd David and Mrs Gwen Bevington; 21 December, The Revd Canon Ruth Pyke and Mrs Beryl Clements; 25 December (10 am Christmas Day), Fr AKMA; 28 December, The Revd Dr Jane Baun.

Commemorations this week include Monday: Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Saturday: Lucy, martyr, 304 and Samuel Johnson, moralist, 1784. Wednesday, Friday and Saturday are Ember Days.

Prophets As the saying goes, “and now for something completely different”. Once in a while one reads an article in a magazine that contains an unexpected twist. Such was my experience last week on reading an interview with Professor Penny Endersby, Chief Executive of the Met Office published in *Ingenia*, the magazine of the Royal Academy of Engineering. The twist was that one of the accompanying photographs was taken in Exeter Cathedral with the caption “... Penny Endersby became canon scientist at the cathedral...”. She was appointed a Lay Canon in September 2023 and what struck me as unusual though was her title, Canon Scientist. One is used to Canon Treasurer, Canon Librarian, Canon Missioner, Canon Theologian, but Canon Scientist?

I wondered how many other cathedrals have Canon Scientists. A web search for the term found a few examples. The Revd Canon Dr Mike Kirby, a radiotherapy physicist and honorary lecturer at the University of Liverpool, was appointed Canon Scientist of Liverpool Cathedral in 2020. Tom McLeish, Professor of Natural Philosophy in the Department of Physics at the University of York and a Licensed Lay Minister, was installed as Canon Scientist of St Albans Cathedral, in November 2021 (a fixed-term appointment), followed by Russell Cowburn, Professor of Experimental Physics at the University of Cambridge, in February 2025. At St Alban’s the role of Canon Scientist is described as encouraging “deeper dialogue and exploration of how scientific discovery can complement theological reflection” and he gave an inaugural lecture entitled “Invisible Wonders: Nanotechnology and the God of Creation”.

I then wondered if other disciplines apart from theology are represented in the titles of canons. A very quick, certainly non-exhaustive, search found a Canon Historian at Salisbury Cathedral, historian and broadcaster Tom Holland who was installed in June this year and is described on the cathedral’s web site as “the first Canon Historian to be appointed in an English cathedral.”

But are there no Canon Engineers? It seems not as such, but there are canons who are engineers. Here in Oxford, Canon Professor Lionel Tarassenko (now Lord and president of Reuben College Oxford), a prominent British engineer and academic, serves as a Lay Canon of Christ Church Cathedral, being appointed to this honorary position in May 2012, and among the first lay canons in the cathedral’s history. The Revd Canon Dr Tim Bull, a residentiary canon at St Alban’s Cathedral and Director of Ordinands in that diocese, lectured in software engineering at the University of Durham prior to ordination. In October this year he gave a course at Salisbury Cathedral on “AI: Questions of Faith - Should we embrace this technology with open arms or approach it with caution?”

Does this have anything to do with the theme for Advent 2 – The Prophets? The question that came to my mind, such as it is, was “Are scientists prophets?” and since AI was mentioned in the last paragraph, I thought to ask a couple of Large Language Models (LLMs). The full answers are too long to include here, so with the risk of bias, I will just include short extracts. Interested readers are encouraged to try this at home, but beware that in general LLMs do not necessarily give the same answer when the question is repeated.

Firstly, a simple Google search with this question, *The AI Overview* to Google search’s answer started:

No, scientists are not prophets, as they use empirical evidence and the scientific method, not divine revelation, to explain the natural world. However, some public scientists adopt a “prophetic ethos” to persuade the public to take action on issues like climate change by framing their work with a sense of urgency and moral authority, a phenomenon explored in works like *Scientists as Prophets: A Rhetorical Genealogy* by Lynda Walsh.

The answer then expands on differences between scientists and prophets (basis for claims, nature of predictions, falsifiability) and similarities and overlaps (public role, charismatic authority, moral dimension). It is valuable to click on the “link” icon at the end of each answer which shows links to sources.

The second experiment was with Microsoft’s Copilot “Your AI companion”, using the default ChatGPT5 engine.

That’s a fascinating question—it touches on philosophy, history, and even theology. Let’s break it down:

Scientists vs. Prophets

Scientists

- Seek truth through observation, experimentation, and evidence.
- Their authority comes from reproducible results and peer review.
- They deal with the natural world, aiming to explain how things work.

Prophets

- Traditionally claim insight through divine revelation or spiritual vision.
- Their authority comes from faith, charisma, or religious tradition.
- They deal with meaning, morality, and the purpose of existence.

Then follows more comparison and a heading “A Thought-Provoking Angle”.

Some argue that scientists *function like modern prophets* because they reveal hidden truths and warn humanity about consequences (e.g., nuclear weapons, climate change). But unlike prophets, they don't claim divine authority—only human reasoning and evidence.

So, scientists aren't prophets in the traditional sense, but they sometimes play a **prophetic role** in society by foreseeing dangers and urging change.

The answer concludes with an invitation to delve deeper.

Would you like me to explore this idea from a **philosophical lens** (e.g., Karl Popper, Thomas Kuhn) or a **cultural lens** (e.g., how society treats scientists like prophets)?

I did submit a follow-up prompt to Copilot "What sources did you consult for this answer?"

For my earlier answer, I didn't consult any external sources — it was based on general knowledge and reasoning. followed with an offer to look up relevant references.

I will not comment on these answers, neither content nor style, leaving that as textbooks say, as an exercise to the reader. Some readers might be interested in a series of public lectures (available on-line), *AI As Your Overlord: Assimilation, Acceptance or Resistance?*, being given by Professor Matt Jones at Gresham College, <https://www.gresham.ac.uk/speakers/professor-matt-jones>

David Duce

Ember Days Days of prayer for those to be ordained deacon or priest, have traditionally been observed on the Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays at various points in the year. *The Collect*:

Almighty God, you have entrusted to your Church a share in the ministry of your Son our great high priest: inspire by your Holy Spirit the hearts of many to offer themselves for the ministry of your Church, that strengthened by his power, they may work for the increase of your kingdom and forward the eternal praise of your name; through Jesus Christ ... Amen.

These are days too to pray for theological colleges, their staff and students, and theological educators in general; not least those in these categories in our parish.

2nd Sunday of Advent After the Greeting at the start of Mass, the first and second candles on the Advent Wreath are lit as the celebrant prays this prayer:

Blessed are you, sovereign Lord, just and true:
to you be praise and glory for ever.
Of old you spoke by the mouth of your prophets,
but in our days you speak through your Son,
whom you have appointed the heir of all things.
Grant us, your people, to walk in his light,
that we may be found ready and watching
when he comes again in glory and judgement;
for you are our light and our salvation.

Blessed be God for ever.

reflecting the theme of the Prophets.

Prayers during another Season of Vacancy

The prayer below is the prayer used for the appointment of a new Archbishop of Canterbury. But it is not entirely inappropriate in the current situation as the next stage of ministry in the parish of Abingdon is discerned.

Heavenly Father, shepherd of your Church,
send us a faithful pastor to lead with wisdom, courage, and love,
proclaiming your Gospel, celebrating the sacraments,
and guiding your people in unity and truth.

Strengthen your Church, we pray, and direct us in your ways; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Prayers for the Peace of the World

The three prayers below are taken from a Church of England liturgy for The Peace of the World. If used in a Eucharistic context they would be the collect, concluding prayer to the intercessions and prayer after communion.

Almighty God, from whom all thoughts of truth and peace proceed: kindle, we pray, in the hearts of all, the true love of peace and guide with your pure and peaceable wisdom those who take counsel for the nations of the earth that in tranquillity your kingdom may go forward, till the earth is filled with the knowledge of your love; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, ...

Most holy God and Father, hear our prayers for all who strive for peace and all who fight for justice. Help us, who today remember the cost of war, to work for a better tomorrow; and, as we commend to you lives lost in terror and conflict, bring us all, in the end, to the peace of your presence; through Christ our Lord.

God our Father, your Son is our peace and his cross the sign of reconciliation: help us, who share the broken bread, to bring together what is scattered and to bind up what is wounded, that Christ may bring in the everlasting kingdom of his peace; who is alive and reigns, now and for ever.

Please pray for:

- Steven (as he prepares for retirement) and Gavin our bishops in this diocese; Stephen, Archbishop of York, and Sarah, Archbishop of Canterbury designate;
- His Majesty King Charles, Her Majesty Queen Camilla, and all the royal family;
- countries where there is conflict, war, persecution, or natural disaster;
- the congregation of St Nicolas' Church, keeping their patronal festival today;
- those training for ministry in the church, the staff of theological colleges and all theological educators;
- residents and staff of the care homes in our parish;
- the suffering, especially those who are known to us and who are on our prayer list;
- the gift of Elijah Rory, in preparation for his baptism, and Frankie collecting his baptismal candle;
- all who have recently departed, and all whose year's mind falls at this time;
- people living in: Ock Mews, Ock Mill Close, Ock Street and Old Station Yard.

Eucharistic Lectionary

Sun 2nd Sunday of Advent	Isaiah 11.1-10	Ps 72.1-7, 18, 19	Romans 15.4-13	Matthew 3.1-12
Mon	Isaiah 35	Ps 85.7-end		Luke 5.17-26
Tues	Isaiah 40.1-11	Ps 96.1, 10-end		Matthew 18.12-14
Wed	Isaiah 40.25-end	Ps 103.8-13		Matthew 11.28-end
Thur	Isaiah 41.13-20	Ps 145.1, 8-13		Matthew 11.11-15
Fri	Isaiah 48.17-19	Ps 1		Matthew 11.16-19
Sat	Ecclesiasticus 48.1-4, 9-12	Ps 80.1-4, 18-19		Matthew 17.10-13

Collect (2nd Sunday of Advent)

O Lord, raise up, we pray, your power and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness we are grievously hindered in running the race that is set before us, your bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit, be honour and glory, now and for ever.

Prayer after Communion (2nd Sunday of Advent)

Father in heaven, who sent your Son to redeem the world and will send him again to be our judge: give us grace so to imitate him in the humility and purity of his first coming that, when he comes again, we may be ready to greet him with joyful love and firm faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Collect (Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary – lesser festival on Monday)

Almighty and everlasting God, who stooped to raise fallen humanity through the child-bearing of blessed Mary: grant that we, who have seen your glory revealed in our human nature and your love made perfect in our weakness, may daily be renewed in your image and conformed to the pattern of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, ...

Some On-line Resources for Worship

A Church Near You Live Streamed events

https://www.achurchnearyou.com/live-stream/?tags=Live_stream&diocese=27

Parish Communications and Links http://www.abingdonparish.org.uk/P_communications.html

St Michael's Prayer and Worship resources page https://abingdonparish.org.uk/StM/StM_worship_resources.html

St Michael's Publications page https://abingdonparish.org.uk/StM/StM_publications.html

Oxford Cathedral: Livestream events will appear on the cathedral's YouTube channel, see

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqz9I9-LbZJAPGtje0gQbbg>.

The University Church of St Mary the Virgin (Oxford) live stream, see <https://www.youtube.com/c/UniversityChurch/featured>

Community of the Resurrection: live streaming and recordings of the community's daily round of prayer and praise <https://www.facebook.com/Join-with-us-103095121647089>. Details of services can be found at the facebook page and also at the Community web site, <https://mirfield.org.uk/live-streaming/>. On Sundays Mass starts around 8.10 am, after Matins at 7.30 am.

Walsingham In addition to the daily live-streaming of Shrine Prayers at 6 pm (5pm on Saturdays). the Sunday Mass is live-streamed (usually at 7.30 am, but check the web site).

<https://www.walsinghamanglican.org.uk/whatson-2/livestream/>