

Issue 10:
December 2025



The Taizé
Annunciation Window

A candle in...

THE

WINDOW

News and Views from the Parish of Abingdon-on-Thames

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Winter Jasmine outside the Parish Centre in November.
Picture: David Bevington

Inside our 60th on-line edition:

A Christmas message from the Rector
The usual range of articles to dip into.
You will find some references to the number 60!
Poems
Pictures
Events
And, of course, a quiz and a cartoon

60

From the Rector:

I always look forward to Christmas, but this year I am especially looking forward to sharing Christmas with the congregations of Abingdon-on-Thames for the first time as Rector.

Although I can't be with every congregation on Christmas Day, from the feast of St Nicolas to Epiphany, I will at some point be with each congregation, sharing in the joy of the season. The season of Advent, as we prepare for Christmas, and Christmas itself, can be very busy, so I hope that in the midst of our many activities, we find time to appreciate the wonder and joy of Christmas: God is with us! It is this message that we share with those who engage with church only at this time of year, through our liturgies, our prayers, and our hospitality.

Let us pray for them and for ourselves, that through our celebrations this Christmas, we and all who attend our services will hear the Christmas story afresh and know that God is with us.



A Christmas Sonnet

In so dark a world can this trembling flame,
lit in a stable on the edge of town
where soldiers count and wearily note down
a subject people for their master's fame,
be that light angels adore and acclaim?
Can the small cry of an infant laid down
be for us all the summit and the crown
of love's daring challenge that brings to shame
our dreams of glory, our lusting for power?
All our illusions of gods who at our
cold whim will destroy what we disapprove
find, in the Word made flesh, their swift remove.
This tiny flame extinguished at the Cross
blazes again and transforms all our loss.

Paul Sheppy

The Gospel of John

In November 2022 John Barton gave us an introduction to St Matthew's Gospel. In November 2023, as the lectionary turned in its cycle, the Gospel of Mark and in November 2024 the last of the 'synoptic' Gospels – that of Luke. This year we asked AKMA to give us an introduction to the Gospel of John:

John is similar to the other three gospels in many ways — obviously, the central figure is Jesus, who arrives among the people of Galilee and Judea, conducts a ministry of teaching and healing, runs into hostility among his countrymen and is executed by the Roman overlords as a royal pretender, and who nonetheless rises from death and appears to his bereaved followers. Many of the same incidents appear in John's Gospel: Jesus walks on water, heals a distant person, opens the eyes of a blind man, he is anointed by an unnamed woman whom he commends, interacts with the Roman governor, and is executed with the governor's grudging sentence. There's no question that it's the same story.

At the same time, John tells a story that's markedly *different* from the other three gospels. John features no parables and no exorcisms. John's Jesus *begins* his ministry by stirring up a fuss in the temple, as opposed to the Jesus of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, who comes to the Temple only at the end of his ministry. John places a *positive* value on Jesus' miraculous signs, where the other gospels tend to *look down* on those who demanded signs from Jesus. John begins not with an infancy narrative, but with the familiar poetic passage (1:1-18) that identifies Jesus as the Word, who is God incarnate, through whom everything was created. The prologue's explicit theological teaching, with its extraordinarily expansive estimate of Jesus' importance, stands apart from anything in the other gospels. Where in the first gospels, Jesus stays reticent about himself and his importance, John presents him talking about himself incessantly.

Through the middle of John, Jesus talks at great length, and talks often about himself, but while in other gospels he talks about himself *obliquely* (often referring to himself as the "Son of Man"), in John he addresses his identity more directly. Similarly, while Jesus talks about his Father (and about his own Sonship) elsewhere, John's Jesus *can't wait* to tell people about his intimacy with God the Father. This exalted self-presentation plays into the sharp conflicts between Jesus and his Judaic interlocutors in John. Indeed, John devotes much narrative time to detailing conflicts between Jesus and "the Jews" when other gospels tend to refer to specific Jewish *groups* (Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, and so on). John brings Jesus' ministry to an end not with a eucharistic Last Supper, but with Jesus washing his disciples' feet and delivering a long after-dinner speech. Jesus has already said what he wants to about bread, body, and blood in the context of his feeding miracle in chapter 6. John's Jesus goes to his death almost *willingly*, taunting Pilate in their encounters, and dying not with a cry of agony but with a serene, "It is finished."

One can account for the similarities and differences in a variety of ways. For a long time, critical scholars subscribed to one of three main theories. First, some scholars thought that John wrote to *supplement* the other gospels; they were good, he reasoned, but they needed *more*, which John obligingly provided. Second, other scholars thought that John wanted to *displace* the other gospels. 'No, no, not like that,' they imagined him saying, 'but rather *this* way (truth, life).' Third, another group of scholars supposed that John simply didn't know about the other gospels — or if he did know, he didn't have them at hand to consult, but only remembered vague details about them. Recently, though, Mark Goodacre has revived a suggestion (like the supplementation theory above) that John did indeed know and copy freely from the other gospels, but he intended to show a refined, more *literary* version with some significant theological enhancements.

These different theories depend to some extent on how one supposes that John's Gospel came to be written. On a straightforward reading, the gospel claims to be based on the testimony of 'the disciple whom Jesus loved'; but this somewhat mysterious character doesn't appear until relatively late in the story, and he goes unnamed throughout. Tradition ascribes it to John, the son of Zebedee; he too isn't named anywhere in the gospel (the only 'John' in John is the Baptist), though at the beginning of

chapter 21 he appears with James as one of ‘the sons of Zebedee’. Several popular scholarly theories suggest that it was formed as if they were sediment, as various parts of the gospel were added on to others. The Prologue seems separable from the narrative part of the gospel, and the mighty deeds that the gospel identifies specifically as ‘signs’ might be another source, as might the long monologues Jesus offers (a ‘Discourse Source’). Once one begins down this path, the number of possible sources, and the order in which they were added to one another, multiplies indefinitely; any of them might be right, but evidence doesn’t weigh significantly more heavily for one plan than for another.

Without committing to any single one of these options, I close by pointing to some *fingerprints* of John’s Gospel as we receive it.

First, one very typical mark of John is his favourable view of *signs* of Jesus’s identity, which may be the same miracles and signifying actions that he elsewhere calls *works*. The church has often portrayed Thomas as weak, for wanting evidence that Jesus had risen, but in this he was simply doing what Jesus had encouraged all along.

Second, Jesus refers to himself with many metaphors: ‘I am the way,’ ‘I am the good shepherd,’ and so on. Further, he uses the Greek phrase for ‘I am’ unusually often, in ways that English translations don’t make explicit. Some people suggest that this fingerprint shows John identifying Jesus with God by invoking the Divine Name revealed in Exodus 3: ‘I am what I am’, or just ‘I am’. That’s less likely, though, since the most prominent Greek version of Exodus translates the Hebrew into a Greek expression for ‘I am the Being One’. Either way, John has a (perhaps deliberate) habit of depicting Jesus as saying ‘I am’ a lot.

Third, John favours longer, more richly developed scenes over punchier, shorter ones. For example, you may have noticed times of the year when the Gospel readings just won’t stop talking about Jesus as the bread of life. At one point in Jesus’s address to the disciples on Maundy Thursday, he says ‘Rise, let’s go’, but then he starts talking again — for another three chapters!

Fourth, as I said before, Jesus tangles with his Jewish neighbours a lot in John. But these are not technical theological arguments, as in Matthew, and it’s important to remember that virtually *all* the characters in John’s Gospel are themselves Jewish. One possible clue to why John does this is that the word often translated ‘Jew’ is the same word that one would use to say ‘a person from Judea’; when you read and hear John, pay close attention and notice the number of times John highlights the question of people’s place of origin: Samaritans, Galileans, people debating where the Anointed One might *come from*, and so on. Maybe John is flagging up for us tensions between *Judean* Jews and *Galilean* Jews (and Samaritans, for that matter).

And although the Prologue is a favourite in the church, especially around Advent, it’s not really typical of the rest of John’s Gospel. Nowhere else does John characterise Jesus as ‘the Word’. The Prologue stands in where Matthew and Luke provide stories about Jesus’s birth, but instead of talking about Mary and angels, he talks about the creation of the world. But the Prologue does put particular emphasis on *light* and *testifying* and *truth*, and to the unique love of the Father and the Son, as does the rest of the Gospel.

In weeks to come, listen closely to John, paying particular attention to what he says and doesn’t say, to the ways he tells the story, for pathways to a richer appreciation of the distinctive ways each of the gospels draws us closer to the Lord that each one proclaims.



Picture: David Bevington



Photo: Norman Dawson

Putting Faith into Practice - the third and last talk in the Faith Forum Series on Personal Spirituality

*Maranda St John Nicolle summarised by Rob Rutherford
Maranda is the World Development Advisor for the Diocese of Oxford*

Miranda began by saying that when she started to work in the field of World Development, we all needed a prophetic challenge to take action. The question then was 'What can I do?'. Now, with the plethora of major problems, it is more 'How do I cope?' We are faced with possible climate breakdown, a biodiversity crisis, division into factions, the advent of AI and conflicts – some well publicised, others less so. In this context, how do we live out our faith?. Maranda suggested five headings to guide us:



Some of the books Maranda brought:

Re-centering:

Time spent with God is so important – not just in formal worship but also outside in his creation. We can meditate on what it is to be human (Maranda recommended Rowan Williams book 'Being Human') – what it is to be made 'in the image of God'. She also recommended the 'Ignatian Examen'. The Daily Examen is a technique of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God's presence and discern his direction for us. The Examen is an ancient practice in the Church that can help us see God's hand at work in our whole experience. (see [here](#)) If we watch the news, we can send 'arrow prayers' about it. She described prayer as radical action.

Embracing Complexity:

We need to engage with the detail of quite complex issues. We need to support good journalism and counter mis-information.

Questioning our Foundations:

We need to question our views in the light of the Gospel. This may involve standing 'outside our tribe'. What are our underlying values and judgements?

Invest our actions with Importance:

We can feel that we have no agency but we need to hang on to the idea that the 'ordinary' things can matter and can build up the kingdom of God. Even choosing your chocolate is important! Miranda spoke eloquently about the success of Fairtrade agreements particularly those involving cooperatives in the developing world. She also described a network of prayer, set up before the Paris COP21 meeting. Those who prayed were thanked, alongside those who negotiated, when the first global climate agreement - the Paris Agreement - was finally signed.

Cherishing the Human:

How do we cherish the people around us? We need to use our political voice more but in a way that recognises that our representatives are people. How can we work constructively with them?

Advent thoughts

In Advent we are encouraged to think of Jesus' coming – not just at Christmas but at the end of the world. It makes us think of judgement, heaven and hell and salvation. We decided to ask some of our young people and others if they had some questions about it.

Here are some of their thoughts which we decided to put to Keith Ward:

If God is a loving God, why would he send non-believers and people of other faiths to hell?

How can it be fair that people who believe that Jesus is the Son of God, but do evil things, go to Heaven?

What do you think is the precise relationship between the justification of individuals after they die (i.e. being "saved"/going to heaven) and the final judgement? Would you say that the final judgement "completes" (or "consummates") what justification begins?

Does one have to **believe** in life after death to be a Christian or is hope enough?

Do you believe in hell?

Keith Ward kindly wrote the following in response:

On the question about judgment and salvation, the New Testament contains a number of different speculations, from which later theologians have derived differing opinions, depending on what they take to be the most important doctrines.

My own starting point is that God desires everyone to be 'saved' (1 Timothy 2, 4). From this I infer that God will make it possible for all to be saved (be fulfilled by conscious relationship with God). Since most humans know nothing of Jesus, I infer that salvation does not depend on faith in Jesus during their lives (Abraham, for example, did not know Jesus). And so most people will find opportunities for repentance and faith in Jesus after death.

Then, people who have done evil will be 'punished' by seeing and feeling the harms they have caused to others and to themselves. But since God desires their salvation there cannot be an everlasting Hell: there is no word for Hell in the Bible, and nowhere does it speak of everlasting punishment. The Biblical word 'aionios' in Matthew 25v46 means not everlasting, but 'for an age' - and ages, like the Stone Age, come to an end.

Further, Divine punishment will be aimed at reform and repentance, and cannot be simply retributive, if God desires salvation for all. Justification is 'making just', and Christ by his indwelling power will make just (make truly loving, and thus fit for heaven) all who repent, in this world or the next. So I think that justification completes the long process of reformative justice!

This is just one view among many, but it is based on the Biblical belief that God is truly loving. Do Christians have to believe all this? No, you must decide for yourself. Many Christians do not believe in an afterlife, and they can follow Jesus perfectly well. Truth is hard to find, and surely God will not condemn anyone just because they are honestly mistaken - not even me.

A Calendar of Carols: Christmas reflections, prayers and songs of praise

By Gordon Giles.

BRF Ministries, 2024 £12.99

ISBN 978-1-8003-9279-3

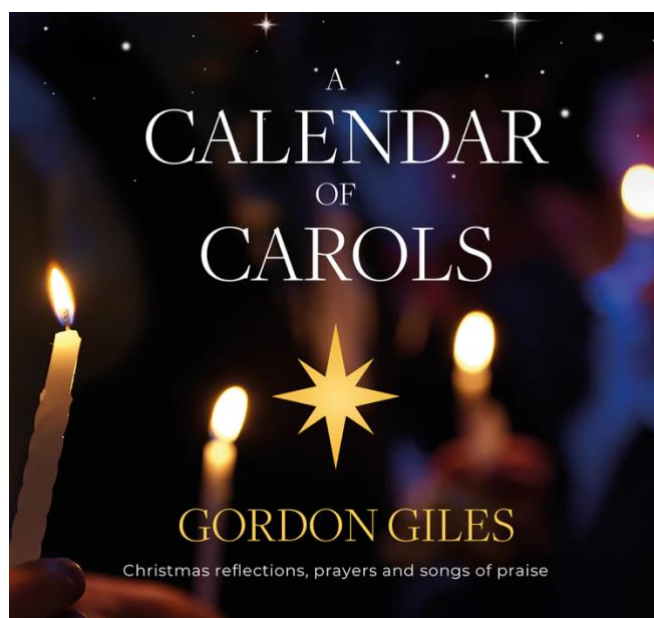
Reviewed by Jen Brown, Rector

Although Advent has begun, it's not too late to start an Advent book if you haven't already. Spending time each day through the season reading something that is spiritually stimulating in some way is a good discipline and often an enjoyable way to prepare for Christmas. *A Calendar of Carols*, published by our neighbours at BRF, is designed to be used as an Advent book, with a carol selected for each day from the 1st to the 25th of December (although you can do more than one each day if you are starting after the 1st and need to catch up!). The text of each carol is given, together with its history and a brief reflection on the carol and thoughts on how each carol fits into the canon of Advent/Christmas music. Each day's reading then concludes with a short prayer.

This very accessible book explores both well-known carols, such as *Once in Royal David's City*, *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*, and *Silent Night* (among many others), and some lesser-used carols, such as Britten's *Hymn to the Virgin* and Rutter's *What Sweeter Music*. There are some oddities. For example, *O Come, O Come Emmanuel* is omitted, while the purely secular *We Wish You a Merry Christmas* is included.

Readers will find interesting facts and stories associated with the origins and subsequent development of the carols included in this collection. For example, did you know that *Joy to the World* was first published in a collection of psalm translations? Some debunking of popular stories attached to some carols can also be found here (spoiler alert: the origins of *Silent Night* aren't as you've heard).

A Calendar of Carols encourages the reader to look again at the words of carols that have become familiar over the years; so familiar, perhaps, that one may overlook the profound meaning that some of them carry and the inspiration to prayer and rejoicing that they can be.



Agnostics Anonymous – November 25th

Can you believe both science and the Bible?

Revd Dr Jen Brown

A personal response by Eluned Hallas to a very interesting talk and discussion.

Are the teachings of science and what the Bible teaches incompatible? The argument from the non-religious side is that science has disproved the things that we read in the Bible (eg evolution v Genesis 1); while *some* on the religious side reject some aspects of science (eg evolution) as not fitting with biblical teaching. So, do we have to choose between believing science and believing the Bible? In her talk Jen explored the relationship between science and the Bible, arguing that belief in both can coexist without conflict when understood appropriately.

The ‘two book model’ suggests that God is revealed through two books - the book of God’s works (nature / science / world) and the book of God’s words (Bible / theology). If we believe that God reveals himself through the natural world and through the Bible, and if we accept that science is the study of the natural world, then there is no reason, from a Christian perspective, to say that we can’t believe both science and the Bible. Both teach us about God, just in different ways, and seek to answer different questions: which could be thought of as How and Why.

The Bible cannot be read as a scientific paper, Genesis 1 does not explain how the universe was formed but does show order arising from chaos, suggests life evolving and changing, and shows a prophetic view of creation’s purpose.

There are questions to which science can (probably) never give an answer eg ‘Do you love me?’. These questions do not invalidate the ‘scientific approach’, they just exist outside it.

The scientific approach is to seek evidence to verify a hypothesis - with truth being demonstrable, and repeatable. The writers of the Bible did not share this approach. Throughout history the ‘evidence’ for God is through personal experience (and from testimony). Christians believe - but cannot ‘prove’ - that God interacts in the world through personal intervention.

What exactly do we mean by believe? Surely, we do not need to ‘prove’ the Bible to believe in it. The Bible helps us discern God, and his will for his people. In discussion, the panellists pointed out that acknowledging belief in the Bible does not mean that it contains no errors. There are passages which are (seem to be) inaccurate or untrue. However, this does not detract from the deep truths revealed in the text.

How can belief in a good creator exist alongside the waste and destruction in evolution (a point addressed in the September AA, see the [October Candle](#) p8)? God created the world with free will; he does not interfere (which is not to say he cannot) but he suffers with his creation.

Are miracles true? They point to a greater truth that is revealed through the narrative; there is nothing an omnipotent God could not do. Whether in fact the stories unfolded as written is not necessary to a belief in the message received by readers now.

The bible was written by many authors, in different styles, to make different points. They were not writing with today’s world view, nor were their readers receiving with our understanding. However, the truths they wanted to share have, if read with the critical eye of belief and understanding of their distinct purposes and interpretations, as much validity now as then.

Yes, it is possible to believe in both science and the Bible, as each has something important to teach us today, as in every age.

From donkey puppets to golden stars – Christmas is coming to TrinityLearning!

Nicola Williams



Just like Santa Claus, we're making our lists and checking them twice as we get together everything we need for this year's Trinity Kingfisher Christmas Services. In total, nine groups from Kingfisher School will join us to enjoy a sensory Nativity story.

Two groups of pupils will visit Trinity Church, where they'll take part in short, interactive services featuring props such as a donkey puppet, chamomile-scented hay, and gold stars. Each child will receive a small resource pack and a song sheet to use during the service and to take home, helping them retell the story in their own way.



The remaining seven groups will take part in in-school services led by TrinityLearning volunteers and staff. To make sure every child can fully take part, we provide a range of large, sensory-friendly resources such as fleece blankets and giant feathers, ideal for children with limited manual dexterity. This enables us to adapt each service so every group can meaningfully engage with the Christmas story.

The Kingfisher School services mark the beginning of an exceptionally busy fortnight at Trinity Church, with eight performances to follow, including Carol Concerts, Nativity Plays, and a St Nicolas celebration. Many of these events are supported by TrinityLearning alongside volunteers who come from many different local church communities.

Come and join us for our TrinityLearning 2026 AGM



TrinityLearning's AGM will take place via **Zoom on 20th January from 6:00–7:30pm**, and we warmly welcome everyone interested in our work to join us.

Please email Nicola at nic.trinitylearning@gmail.com to receive the Zoom link and a copy of our Annual Report - which will also be sent separately to all our volunteers and supporters. We look forward to seeing you there.

Volunteer Opportunities

Calling all knitters and crocheters

Did you know that each of TrinityLearning's Bereavement Packs includes a tiny handmade teddy bear — a small gift to bring comfort to a recently bereaved child?

This year we've already given out 17 bears, and our stock is running low. We'd love your help to make more! If you can knit or crochet, would you consider making a tiny bear (or two)? We'll provide everything you need. If you'd like to get involved, please email Nicola at

nic.trinitylearning@gmail.com



Get involved in Experience Easter!

It seems strange to be talking about Easter in December, but we are already beginning to plan for Experience Easter 2026 giving schools the option to visit Trinity Church for live workshops or to take part online.

Experience Easter is a series of reflective workshops, specially developed to allow Key Stage 2 children (7 to 11-year-olds) to access the Easter Story in a meaningful way. It is also an introduction to mindfulness, using stilling exercises and simple activities to allow the children to consider their emotions.

We are looking for volunteers to either help prepare simple craft packs or act as storytellers to help with the fully scripted live Experience Easter in Trinity Church. TrinityLearning is committed to Safeguarding and all our volunteer opportunities are subject to safer recruitment procedures. If you would like to get involved, please email Nicola at nic.trinitylearning@gmail.com.



Did you know about Diamonds...?

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Diamond is the hardest and most thermally conductive and has the highest speed of sound of any natural material.

Diamond is the only gem stone made of a single element, Carbon. When pure it is colourless, but can be contaminated with Boron (turning it blue), Nitrogen (turning it yellow/brown) while radiation exposure can turn it green. Lattice defects can produce pink, red or purple.

Most natural diamonds are between 1 billion and 3.5 billion years old, but diamond is not stable at room temperature and pressure; it will turn into graphite, but very, very slowly.

Diamond weights are measured in carats, derived from keration, the Greek word for the carob tree, whose seeds were used as the standard for weighting precious stones. Now, 1 carat is 0.2 grams.



Picture from [here](#):

David, are you interested in the Babylonians?

David Duce

It isn't every day that you receive an email with this subject line, but that was the subject of an email received from Rob Rutherford. Rob observed that this issue of *A Candle in the Window* will be the 60th. He remarked that the Babylonians had a number system based on 60 of which are remnants of this in the number of seconds in a minute, number of minutes in an hour and subdivisions of a degree. He wondered if I might be willing to write an article about this. "Not I", was my initial reaction! I'm a retired computer science professor, neither a mathematician nor historian so this sounded to be a topic far out of my comfort zone.



However, I realised that I might know of two reliable sources of information, MacTutor, a web site put together by the School of Mathematics at the University of St Andrews, and OpenLearn courses at The Open University. A quick search discovered relevant content in both. Then, could I find an Abingdon angle? Yes, but first I will start with a little bit of mathematics.





























Our decimal system, the binary system (widely used in computers), and the Babylonian system are called *positional* systems. In the decimal number written 111, the digit 1 has different values in the three positions. On the extreme right the value is 1, in the middle 10, and at the left-hand end, $10 \times 10 = 100$, hence the total value 111. The system has *base* 10, and ten symbols 0, 1, 2, ... 9. Introducing a little bit more notation, 111 denotes $1 \times 100 + 1 \times 10 + 1$. From right to left, symbols increase in value by a factor of 10.



Computers have been built using the decimal system and one early example is an experimental computer developed at AERE Harwell in the early 1950s. The Abingdon connection is that one of the main designers of that system was R C M ("Dick") Barnes. Some readers will remember Dick, who was a church warden at St Nicolas' Church, and PCC secretary, local historian, amongst many other roles in the church and town. The machine is now preserved in The National Museum of Computing (TNMoC) located at Bletchley Park. One of the tributes at Dick's funeral was given by one of the leaders of the conservation project at TNMoC.





In modern computers though, the binary system is almost always used, primarily for electrical engineering reasons. This system has base 2 and two symbols, 0 and 1. In the binary system 111₂ denotes $1 \times 4 + 1 \times 2 + 1 = 7_{10}$. The subscripts 2 and 10 and later 60 are used to indicate which base is being used.

The Babylonian civilisation replaced the Sumerian civilisation around 2000 BC. The Sumerians had been invaded by the Akkadians around 2300 BC and the Babylonians built on mathematics developed by both. The Babylonian number system is a positional system with base 60. Using decimal symbols, the value of 111₆₀ (base 60) in decimal is thus $1 \times 60 \times 60 + 1 \times 60 + 1$ is 3661₁₀.

The Babylonian system has its own symbol set. The decimal system requires 10 symbols, and a base 60 system requires 60. That doesn't sound like a great idea. The Babylonians had some clever insight though. The symbol set is constructed from just two base symbols arranged in particular patterns, a symbol for 1,  and a symbol for 10, . Other symbols are constructed from these. This results in a set of 59 symbols from 1 to 59. Some examples are shown below.

 1	 11	 21	 31	 41	 51
 2	 12	 22	 32	 42	 52
 5	 15	 25	 35	 45	 55
 9	 19	 29	 39	 49	 59
 10	 20	 30	 40	 50	

Using these symbols, the decimal number 102 would be represented by the symbol for 1, followed by the symbol for 42,   ($1 \times 60 + 42 = 102$).

There are some ambiguities though. The number 2 is represented by two  symbols, but decimal 61 is represented by a  in the 60s position and the same symbol in the 1s position which results in the same representation as decimal 2, , though this can be overcome by adding some space between the two characters. There wasn't a symbol for zero, which results in a bigger problem if there should be zeros between symbols. Thus  could also represent $1 \times 60 \times 60 + 0 \times 60 + 1 = 3601_{10}$. Spacing couldn't solve this problem. Though this didn't seem to cause trouble, probably because the context would resolve the ambiguity, but at a much later date a symbol for zero was added.

Doing arithmetic in this system was interesting, and there was a clever way to do multiplication using tables of squares of numbers and indeed it turns out that there are ways to solve complex weights and measures problems.

Scholars acquired knowledge of Babylonian mathematics from translations of cuneiform tablets. "Cuneiform" derives from the wedge-shaped impressions that form the symbols. The mathematical tablets that have been explored fall into two broad categories, table texts and teaching texts for the emerging profession of scribe.

One tablet now held by Yale University turns out to be the statement of a mathematical problem "I found a stone, did not weigh it. I subtracted one-seventh, added, ... subtracted then weighed it. What was the weight of the original stone?" The tablet gives the answer though sadly the question didn't include the common rubric "explain your working"!

A tablet called Plimpton 322 looks like numbers arranged in a series of columns. There is speculation in what this is, but one theory is that it is a teaching aid for setting and solving problems about right-angled triangles. Choosing numbers from the tables would result in problems that had "nice" solutions.

One question in readers' minds might be "why choose base 60"? The MacTutor article gives several suggestions for example: "You can count to 60 using two hands. On left there are three parts to each finger (excluding the thumb). You then count to 60 by pointing at one of these 12 parts by one of the 5 fingers of the right hand." The authors thought these suggestions unconvincing. Another theory is that the Sumerian civilisation came through the conjunction of two peoples, one with a number system with base 12 and another with base 5. Another is that 60 has a wide range of divisors, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 ... Whatever the explanation, base 60 has certainly been influential in measurement systems used today.

Norman and Elizabeth remember

St Helen's Church was an important part of our life in Abingdon from the outset. We moved from Cheshire, where our girls had grown up, in the summer of 1993, but we paid a visit before we moved and went to the Sunday morning Eucharist. There we were greeted by Jean Pearce acting as sides-person. After we moved in, again we went to the Sunday service. This time we were made most welcome by Les and Joyce Morse as well as Michael Goode, the Rector, and his wife Jenny.



The move had been hard for our elder daughter Mary, but she and her sister, Heather, were welcomed into Enigma, the youth group, and we shall always be grateful to Sue and Mike Austin for that. Eventually both Mary and Heather and their respective husbands were married at St Helen's.

Norman had sung in St John's Church Choir in Kingsley, and introduced himself to David Wickens. David encouraged him to join the choir, where he took over the position (and choir number) of James Manship son of the previous rector who had moved on to be a lay clerk at Worcester Cathedral. Later Elizabeth joined too and the Church Choir has been an important part of our life here. We remember Diocesan Choir festivals and visits to our twin towns in Europe – always on a tight budget. Norman became a leader in Quest and it has been a delight to see a generation of church children grow up to young adulthood.

Outside St Helen's Norman rediscovered rowing and became an enthusiastic member of Abingdon Rowing Club's Masters' squad.

Elizabeth became involved in Mothers' Union almost as soon as our family arrived in Abingdon. Somehow word had filtered through from Chester MU that she had held office in that diocese! She has been branch-leader twice for Abingdon and latterly a trustee for MU Oxford.

At St. Helen's, Elizabeth joined the sides persons rota, became a server, a sacramental assistant, and an intercessor. She joined a house-group where Susan Gee, Sylvia Joinson and Barbara Nettlefold have become close friends. She was part of the re-ordering team 20 years ago when the underfloor heating and nave platform were installed.

Elizabeth's career as a primary teacher changed and she joined Blackwells working in the biology and medicine department before retiring in 2013. She joined the church choir and in the last few years has looked after the robes and music library. Elizabeth has also enjoyed "fun" Monday mornings with the Mother and Toddler group run by Sue Pemberton and Rosalind Rutherford.

She has been a WI member, and with Norman has sung for 18 years with Lower Windrush Choral Society in Witney. Together we have rowed our boat on the Thames, and attended Henley Royal Regatta each year. Elizabeth has taken up Pilates, including on Zoom throughout Covid, and until a couple of years ago, she went running regularly.

Life in Abingdon has been full and happy for over 32 years. We leave with many happy memories and now look forward to new challenges and adventures as we return to Cheshire to be nearer family members in the North West.

Thank you for your love and friendship. We shall miss you all.

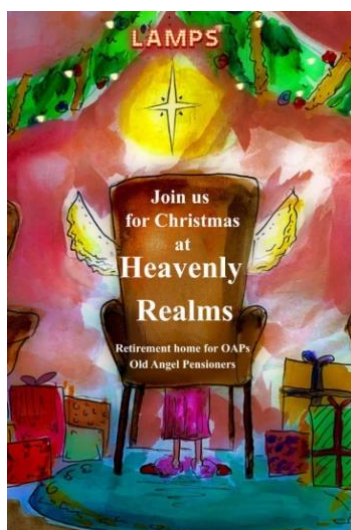
Norman and Elizabeth Dawson.

Events in December 2025

Compiled by Louise Heffernan



LAMPS Collective are returning with their brand-new Christmas show offering festive fun for all the family from age 8 – 800



Peachcroft Christian Centre
Saturday 20th December 7pm

Tickets £10 adult, child £5
Information and booking [here](#):

CiA Christmas Carol Singing – Saturday 13 December.

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. T

here will be chairs for those who would prefer to be off their feet.

Abingdon Street Pastors will be joining us after the Carol singing to offer hot pasties and drinks to all.



Advent and Christmas Services



St Helen's	St Nicolas'	St Michael's
Sunday 30 November <i>The start of the Church year</i> Advent Carols / blessing of the Jesse Tree 5.30 pm	Sunday 7 December <i>The Feast of St Nicolas</i> Patronal Choral Evensong 6.30 pm	Tuesdays 2, 9, 16 December Advent Labyrinth Walks 11.00 am - 12 noon An opportunity to walk the labyrinth or simply to enjoy the sacred space. Material for reflection available, on a different Advent theme, each week. A short prayer begins and ends each session, but feel free to come and go as you please.
Sunday 21 December Carol Service: Christmas Lessons and Carols 5.30 pm	Sunday 21 December 11.00 am Carol Service: Music and readings for Christmas with seasonal refreshments. All welcome.	
Christmas Eve		
Christingle Service 4.00 pm A service for all families. Receive your 'Christ light' and help us raise funds for The Children's Society . <i>Very popular (doors open 3.15 pm).</i> First Eucharist of Christmas 11.00 pm <i>The candlelit 'Midnight Mass'.</i>	Crib service 4.00 pm A special service for young families as we assemble our Christmas Crib, ending in candlelight.	Crib Service 3.00 pm Hear the Christmas story and build the Christmas crib. Families with young children are particularly welcome to this well-attended service.
		Christmas Lessons and Carols 6.00 pm Music and readings for Christmas
Christmas Day		
Holy Communion (1662) 8.00 am with hymns	Holy Communion with carols 10.00 am	Sung Mass 10.00 am
Family Service with Eucharist 10.30 am		
Sunday 11 January 2026		
Epiphany Carols and Blessing of Families for the New Year 4.30 pm A service of music and readings to celebrate the Epiphany season. <i>All families welcome.</i>		

Diamond Quiz

The team!

60

1. 'A girl with kaleidoscope eyes' – who is she?
2. In which novel does Tiffany Case feature?
3. In which stage musical and film is the song, 'Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend' performed?
4. Who wrote the novella, 'The Diamond as big as the Ritz'?
5. Who wrote the novel 'King Solomon's Mine'?
6. Who wrote the lines:

'In a flash, at a trumpet crash,
I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what I am, and
This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood, immortal diamond,
Is immortal diamond.' ?

7. If daisies are our silver and buttercups our gold, what are our diamonds?
8. Who painted this diamond-like picture?



9. What is this Babylonian number?



10. And this one?



Did you know about Sixty.... ?

60

In mathematics, 60 is the 4th Superior Highly Composite number and the 4th Colossally Abundant number – both related to the number of divisors it has.

60 can be divided by 1,2,3,4,5,6,10,12,15,20,30 and 60.

Buckminsterfullerene, C₆₀ is an allotrope of carbon with 60 atoms arranged like a football.

An exabyte is 2⁶⁰ bytes.

60 can be written as: Greek **Ξ'**, Roman **LX**, Armenian **Է**, Hebrew **ס**, Babylonian **𒌷**, Egyptian hieroglyph **𓆎**.

Presents Beneath the Tree



I love to see the Christmas tree
With lights all aglow
And lots of intriguing presents
On the floor below.

I love the anticipation
Wondering what's in the ones for me
Especially that big one
And the one which is so wee.

Good things come in little parcels
Is what my mother would always say
And hopefully she will be right
When I open it on Christmas Day.

But whatever is in those parcels
Beautifully wrapped beneath the tree
I know they are given with lots of love
And that's all that matters to me.

Eileen Duckett



1. 'Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds' – The Beatles
2. 'Diamonds are Forever' – Ian Fleming
3. 'Gentlemen Prefer Blondes'
4. F Scott Fitzgerald
5. H Rider Haggard
6. Gerard Manley Hopkins in 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection'
7. Raindrops and the morning dew (Hymn, Daisies are our silver, by Jan Struther)
8. Piet Mondrian
9. 2
10. 61

Quiz Answers:
Don't peek!

Useful Weblinks:

Services: for the latest news see the Parish Website:

<https://abingdonparish.org.uk>

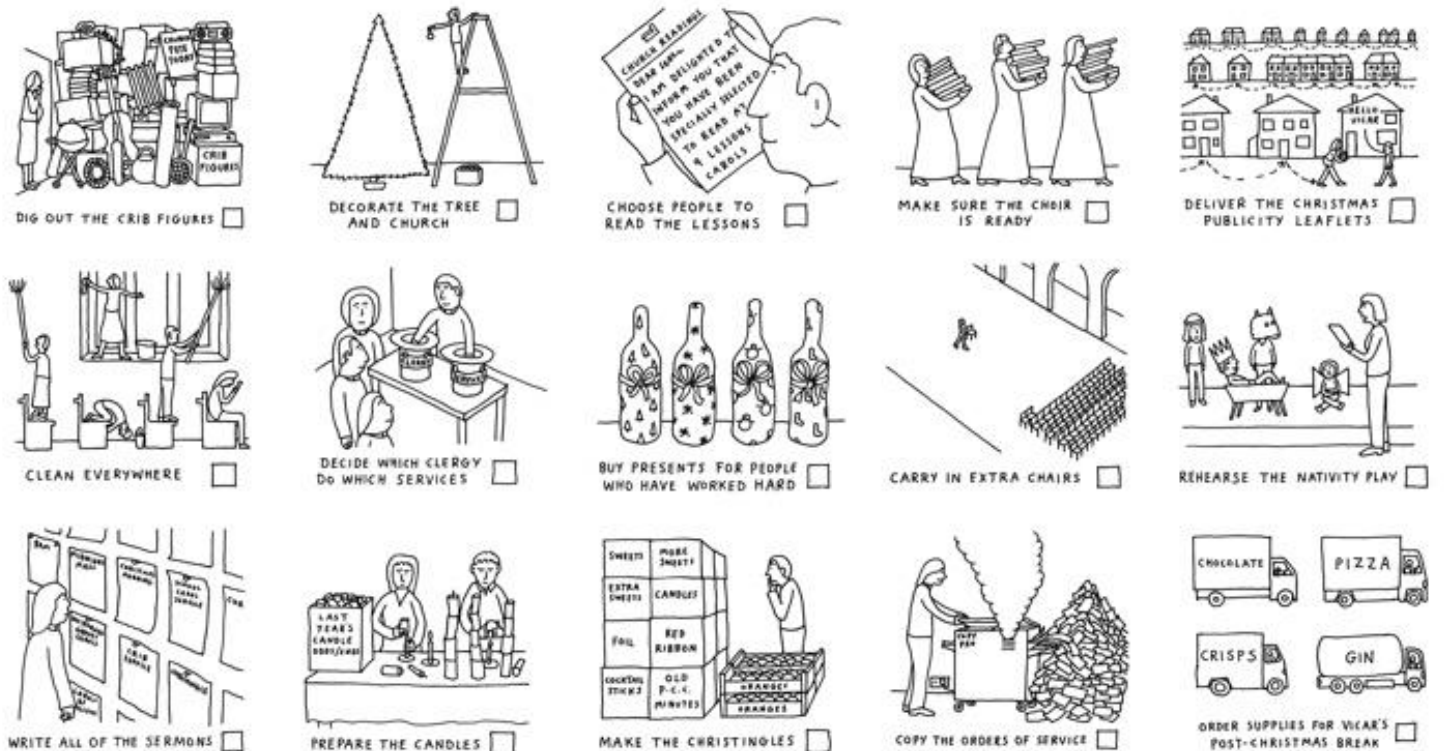
for Church of England links: services, daily readings etc

<https://www.churchofengland.org/>

FOOD BANK. The Abingdon Foodbank is still very busy and anxious to keep up the support. Northcourt Road (Christ Church) is open to receive donations on Tuesday and Friday mornings between 9.30 am and 1.00 pm. The foodbank also operates from Preston Road Community Centre. Donations are welcome there too between 12.00 and 2.30pm on Wednesdays. You can also donate money by sending a cheque made out to *North Abingdon PCC Christ Church*, clearly marked 'for Food Bank' or via the Foodbank website <https://abingdon.foodbank.org.uk/give-help/donate-money/> or the Parish office has details if you want to donate via online banking.

Finally, from Dave Walker:

THE CHRISTMAS CHECKLIST FOR CHURCHES



CartoonChurch.com

Thanks and all good wishes for Christmas and the New Year to all contributors and to you, the readers. The next issue will be published on February 8th. Please help us by sending feedback, ideas and contributions to Candle@abingdonparish.org.uk