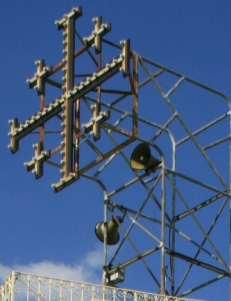


Focal Point

December 2023



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Nativity, Bethlehem**

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Focal Point

Bitton Churches Magazine

December 2023

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Upton Cheyney & Beach
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Editor: Jim Heavens

Phone: 07720 248534

Email:

bittoncm@outlook.com

Website:

www.stmarysbitton.org.uk

*Deadline for the January
edition is:*

Thursday 14th December

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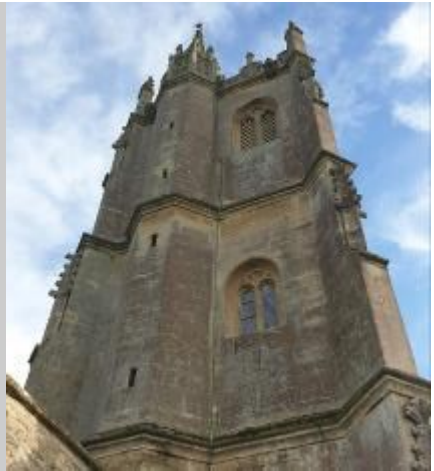
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Photograph of the Church of the
Nativity in Bethlehem by
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BITTON**

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Vicar:

Rev Jeremy Andrew
The Vicarage, Warmley
0117 967 2724

Ordained minister:

Rev Richard Humphrey
Splinters, Kenilworth Drive
Willsbridge **0117 949 0502**

Curate:

Rev Rosemary Radcliffe
revrosemaryradcliffe@gmail.com

Lay ministers:

Ken Gibson
8 Church Road
Bitton
0117 932 2122

David Bailey
Westover, Bath Road
Bitton
0117 932 8949

Churchwardens:

Simon Harris
41 Combe Park
Weston
BATH
07714 615817

Vacancy

Services for December

You are most welcome at St Mary's for all our services

**Sunday, 3rd
December**

Advent Sunday
10.30am Parish Communion

**Sunday, 10th
December**

Second Sunday in Advent
10.30am **Family Café Church and Family Special** combine for a Christmas Gift Service followed by a Cake Sale in aid of Scout funds

Please bring gifts for needy families in the Bristol area.

For children - unwrapped new or nearly new toys, books or toiletries.

For adults – gloves, socks, scarves, hats and toiletry sets for men and women

**Sunday, 17th
December**

Third Sunday in Advent
10.30am Morning Worship
6.30pm Candlelit Carol Service *followed by mulled wine and a mince pie*

**Sunday, 24th
December**

Christmas Eve
4.00pm **Crib Service**
Children are invited to dress up as angels, shepherds or wise men – or even sheep or camels – to take part in the Christmas story with carols

11.00pm **Midnight Communion**

**Monday 25th
December**

Christmas Day
8.00am Holy Communion
10.30am Christmas Praise

**Sunday 31st
December**

Sunday after Christmas
10.30am Benefice Holy Communion

Benefice Prayer Opportunities

Saturday 9 December at 9.00 am
Prayer Breakfast at Bitton Church Hall

Church & Church Hall Bookings

The Church Hall is available for hire and is a popular location for children's parties as well as regular events. For larger events such as community meetings or concerts the Church itself may be more suitable.

For Church Hall bookings contact Jill Gibson on **0117 932 2122**.

Rates from £12.50 per hour.

For Church bookings contact the Social Secretary, Jenny Harris by email on **djacharris@hotmail.com**

Rates from £25 per hour (2 hour minimum hire).

THE SISTERS OF THE COMMUNITY OF THE CHURCH LOAVES AND FISHES MINISTRY

Gifts may be left in St Mary's Church Porch between 10.15 and 11.45 on the First Sunday of each month and will be delivered to the Sisters on the following Wednesday.

The Sisters have made a special request for toiletries:

Shower gel, toothpaste, deodorant, shampoo, conditioner, shaving gel, sanitary towels, nappies, wet wipes, toothbrushes.

St Mary's Matters

Simon Harris—Churchwarden



November saw our annual acts of Remembrance, and it was heartening to see a capacity crowd in the church and then assembling by the War Memorial to pay our respects to those who made the ultimate sacrifice. I would like to extend my gratitude to all those that played a part in the service as well as our distinguished guests, so ably led by our own Ken Gibson. A clear statement that *We Will Remember Them*. We also bore witness with the wider benefice to *All Souls Day* for those that we have lost closer to home.

I can't quite believe how quickly the year seems to have flown by and now here we are on short finals for Christmas. The timeless story of an unmarried mother forced to travel and then giving birth in humble surroundings, seems more poignant than ever with current world events.

I do hope that you can find time to come along to one of the Christmas services. There is something for everyone from the Crib Service at 4:00 pm on Christmas Eve, where children are invited to attend dressed as their favourite nativity character from shepherds to sheep and camels (good luck making the costume for that one) to the timeless candlelit midnight communion at 11:00pm. If you fancy a warm-up, we have a candlelit carol Service at 6:30 pm on the 17th with a de-brief over mince-pies and mulled wine after the service. Full details are published in the Services for December section.

Christmas is always a mixed bag of emotions for me. There is always the temptation to be drawn into the portrayal of a perfect Christmas, but of course real life is more complicated.

Continued on next page

Focal Point, December 2023

This can be a time of mixed emotions, celebrating the day but wistful for yesterday and those empty seats around the table. The best advice I have received is manage the expectation, not just for others but also for yourself. Expect that things may go awry and that no plan survives contact with either the enemy or the family! So try to be kind to yourself, as well as to others.

A short note on car parking as we approach these festive celebrations. We have had some useful dialogue with our close neighbours who accept that our church has been a place of worship for several hundred years and that some of our parishioners depend on their car to get to church. But could I just ask you to consider where you park and should there be an emergency, whether an ambulance or fire-engine could squeeze past your chosen parking place.

Wishing all of our readers a merry Christmas and a Happy New Year and I hope to catch-up some time over the festive period.

There's more to discover—

Our website is full of information about what the church has to offer today, its fascinating history and plans to renew its role as an active centre for the whole community.

Make use of its community pages and calendar of local events:

www.stmarysbitton.org.uk



**CAROL
SINGING
IN
BITTON**

**TUESDAY
19
DECEMBER**



**6.30 for 6.45 at the
Christmas Tree
Meet outside the
White Hart for
Carols around
the village to
bring a touch of
Christmas to the
house bound.
Carol sheets
provided but
wrap up warm
and bring a
torch.**

**7.30 at the White
Hart
James and
Jemma invite the
whole community
to sing carols in
the White Hart.
Mulled wine and
mince pies will
be available.**

**Everyone is
welcome**



Rev Rosemary Radcliffe -



A time for Preparation

I'm reminded by a certain *"holidays are coming"* advert (that I'm sure has now given you all an earworm, and I apologise), the 'holy days' are indeed almost upon us. We are now in the time of Advent, when I'm sure in houses throughout the land there will be excited opening of Advent calendars, whether that's a simple chocolate one to a more exclusive cheese, gin or perfume one.

Advent is a time of waiting; of anticipation; counting down the days until Christmas; and, of course, a time of preparation. Preparation for the big day itself, with food to buy and presents to wrap, a house to decorate, and parties to go to. Are you super organised and ready already; or like me will it all happen in that last week in a mad frantic rush?

It can also be a time of preparation spiritually and perhaps emotionally, as for some, this Christmas period is a time of joy and for others it is a time of more complex emotions, with sadness and worry being part of the mix, especially if there has been a recent bereavement or where financial constraints are an issue.



Parish Pump

Continued on next page

Focal Point, December 2023

God is no stranger to all those emotions, and we are invited in this time to pause, to look around and make ourselves ready.

Ready for what?

Well, perhaps to be ready to encounter God in one another. To look out and see a person loved by God, and to be ready to make a connection. It might be in a simple smile, or a "Hello" as you pass some one on the street. You may be in a position to offer some time to volunteer at a local charity, or to donate something. The Juice Community Project, The Salvation Army, and the Community of The Sisters of the Church all try to help families in need with support at this time. If you would like to contribute, there are opportunities around the benefice to do so, with Gift Services and collection points at St Mary's, St Barnabas, and St Anne's Churches. In particular, for children, they are asking for unwrapped: new or nearly new toys, books or toiletries; and for adults: gloves, socks, scarves, hats and toiletry sets.

As we wait, patiently or impatiently for this holy day to come, when we will celebrate again the light of Christ coming into the world, I would like to share with you the Christian Aid Advent prayer:

Father God, help us to wait actively this Advent.

Help us to prepare and ready ourselves to meet Jesus afresh.

Help us to find new ways to share your love with our neighbours.

Amen

God Bless

Rosemary

Jane Clapp



Piano Recital—a gem

Those attending the piano recital in St Marys on 4th November were treated to a beautiful selection of music played by Natalie Morton. The programme included Beethoven's Pathetique Sonata, and nocturnes by Chopin, Field and Debussy.

Tea and cakes were available in the interval and there was a retiring collection in aid of church funds which raised £515.



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Time to Shine



Advent and Christmas 2023

It's Panto Time again – dancing village scenes, chart-topping songs, corny jokes, and the spotlight shining on Aladdin, Widow Twanky, Cinderella, the Ugly Sisters and a whole range of familiar characters in colourful costumes.

In contrast, the nativity story is very drab: a modest stable, an unknown couple and a baby without a proper cradle. And yet this story has a spotlight far brighter than any theatrical one. A shining star.

This year, Christian Aid takes inspiration from the shining star and focuses a spotlight on Bangladesh, one of the poorest and most disaster-prone regions of the world, where they are giving women a time to shine. With the help of Christian Aid's local partner organisation, the women of Kurigram in Northern Bangladesh have set up a business selling their craftwork.

They have been provided with Wi-Fi and learnt how to use social media to sell their goods. These women have become a guiding light in their community – leading the way out of poverty.

Our gifts will help other women to find a way out of poverty. There will be donation envelopes in the pews over the Christmas period. Alternatively you can give online (christianaid.org.uk).

Please give generously and take a moment to fill in the Gift Aid form turning every £1 into £1.25.



BIBLE READING NOTES FOR 2024

Would you like to order a booklet which provides a reading for each day plus some comments? Quite a few people at St Mary's find this helpful and I will be happy to order a booklet for you covering a four month period starting on 1 January 2024.

There is a specimen to look at in Church. Why not try it as you go into the New Year? And if you like them I can add you to the list of people for whom I get them 3 times a year.

Ken Gibson 0117 932 2122

Bitton Remembers



Remembrance Service 2023

ROYAL BRITISH LEGION



There was a large turnout at St Mary's on 12th November for the annual remembrance Service. As ever, the timing of the service was impeccable allowing the congregation to leave the church and arrive at the Village War Memorial in the churchyard in time for two minutes silence at 11 am.



Remembrance Cake





The last post and reveille were sounded by trumpeter, Mark Wilkins, and wreaths were laid by representatives of the church, local councillors, the cadet force and the St Mary's Scout Group. A wreath was also laid by Chris Skidmore MP.

Following the service, those attending enjoyed coffee, tea and a special Remembrance Cake.

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Autumn Fayre



This year's Autumn Fayre on Saturday 28th October proved highly popular. More than 300 visitors came and enjoyed the opportunities for gifts and unusual items from the 16 stalls.

Over £1700 was raised towards the church development project.



Focal Point, December 2023



Thanks to all who helped and participated.

We are looking forward to next year's fayre on the last Saturday in October.

A particular favourite at the fayre was the soup. Jacqui Harris has agreed to share the recipe, which you can find on page 23.



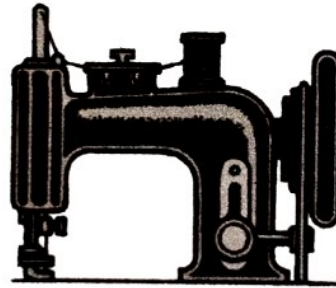
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***Jacqui Harris'* Carrot & Butternut Squash Soup**



This is the recipe for the soup we had at the Autumn Fayre in October at St. Mary's. You can adjust just about any of the ingredients according to your taste..

Ingredients (Serves 4):

4 good sized carrots.
1 small butternut squash
2 medium parsnips
1 medium onion
50g (2oz) butter
2 tblsp Olive oil (or rapeseed or vegetable oil)
2 tablespoons Marigold (Vegan) Bouillon vegetable stock powder. Or any preferred stock cube/stock powder.
2 pints water
Salt and pepper to taste
1 teaspoon Chilli flakes or paprika.

Method:

1. Chop vegetables into chunks and place in heavy saucepan with butter and oil. Sweat the vegetables, stirring initially to get moisture through the veg then place lid on pan and keep on low heat for about twenty minutes or until the veg are soft.
2. Season the veg mix with salt, pepper and chilli flakes (or paprika) to taste. Cook for a couple more minutes to get the flavour in.
3. Add 2 pints of stock - either directly, or add stock powder/ cubes, then add water. (You can use chicken stock if you prefer).
4. Stir the vegetables & stock together and simmer for about ten minutes or so.
5. Blend the soup until it is smooth. Add hot water if it's a bit too thick.

Serve with crusty bread or on its own.....Enjoy!

Follow The Star

Join the Song



Unsplash

Stars and singing play quite a role at any Christmas, but this year they have a central role in The Church of England's message to encourage people to attend church and to join in the song this Christmas.

Christmas carols are perhaps the best known church music and singing not only draws us closer to God, but to each other too as a shared experience.

"The shepherds were astonished to find the night sky filled with angels singing God's praise. And before long they were singing, too ... Centuries later, singing is still central to how many of us celebrate Christmas.



"We invite you this Christmas to follow the star, journey to the manger, join the song and come into the presence of Jesus Christ."

**Archbishops Justin Welby
and Stephen Cottrel**

To underline the theme one of the country's leading choral composers, Bob Chilcott, has composed a new melody for *The First Nowell* which offers a brand new interpretation of the carol. The church choir will be singing this carol during the Candlelit Service of Nine Lessons and Carols on Sunday 16th December. But there will be many other pieces of well-known carols and music at the event too. (See page 7 for all our Christmas services).

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MANY MORE



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Bristol Slavery



Shutterstock

Slavery has been with us always and has been an endemic part of many cultures the world over. That was the message of Gary Best in a fascinating and well attended meeting of the Bitton History Group. His talk was entitled slavery in Bristol, and he described how the trade had grown in the city once the monopoly of the Royal Africa Company was removed from London. What was created was a triangular trade in which three profits were made: in selling manufactured goods to traders on the west coast of Africa, the buying of slaves and their sale for profit in the Americas; and a third profit from the importation of sugar, tobacco and cotton into England.

It was clear that Gary felt that Edward Colston has had something of an unfair press in recent years, compared to many other Bristol families who made profits from slavery and endowed the city with many of its beautiful houses including much of Clifton itself. Colston's family certainly did make money from the trade although most of his money came from entirely different sources. The problem was that the Victorians put up a statue to his memory and his "virtue". Had the city council agreed to change the plaque, the statue might still be in place.



National Portrait Gallery.

The most compelling aspect of talk concerned attitudes and not least those of the church. Slavery was not legal in England although there are plenty of instances of black people being engaged as servants or exotic attendants, but there was little concern about its use abroad. For many years, the church took the view that as slavery was mentioned in the Bible it was acceptable; it was only later that the horrors of the trade were identified and campaigns took place to end both the trade and the ownership of slaves; in the later instance by a huge payment made by the British government to slave owners in compensation.. One man who gained his liberty and wrote a book about his life was Olaudah Equiano (*pictured above*) also did much to change attitudes. He also started the practice of a book tour as he travelled around the country, not only to publicise his book, but to prove himself as the author.

Slavery is still with us. It may not be lawful but it is estimated that there were 17,000 victims of modern slavery in the UK in 2022. The actual figure may be much higher.

Gary's book *Slavery and Bristol* is available online, through Amazon and www.tangentbooks.co.uk.



Bitton Village Residents Association
invites you to



**A Social and Race Night
and
Christmas Tree Lights Official Switch-on
at
The White Hart**



To raise money for the
Bitton Party in the Park 2024

Saturday 9th December
18:30 Christmas Tree Lights Switch-on
19:00 First Race in the White Hart

£2 per bet (Cash preferred)

Free entry
(Yummy curry available for modest donation)

See you there ...



NB If insufficient funds are raised to run the Party-in-the-Park, the money will be used for other BVRA social events

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There is no WI report this month, but we can share the news that its usual author Karen Davidson has been undertaking some special activities on His Majesty's Service, no less.

Karen, along with her choir, was invited to sing at Highgrove for the King's 75th birthday last month.

Karen said: "It was rather special and such an honour. I was lucky enough to get chosen randomly from our 600 strong choir. We are Rock Choir and our choir leader has choirs in Bath, Bristol, Yate, Cheltenham and Stroud. 24 of us went to sing at Highgrove for the King's 75 birthday celebration and for his guests who were local community members turning 75 years old and other guests from the NHS and Windrush. "

Focal Point, December 2023

"We were introduced by Jay Blades from BBCs Repair Shop and sang *Hallelujah*, a favourite of the King as he entered the room.

Along with the 10 songs we also sang to the guests, we sang Happy Birthday to His Majesty as he cut his cake. We were amazed that he stopped to speak on one of our choir members, telling her that our Happy Birthday was the best rendition he'd heard!"



Above—The full choir with Jay Blades from the BBC Repair Shop.

Right— Karen and others in full voice.



Home Energy Advice

As the weather gets colder, you can get advice from the Warm and Well service on how to save energy and reduce your fuel bills.

Warm and Well is managed by Severn Wye Energy Agency on behalf of the seven local authorities in South Gloucestershire and Gloucestershire.

South Gloucestershire Council has been working in partnership with Warm and Well for over 20 years, improving energy efficiency and reducing the risk of fuel poverty.

Warm and Well can help you to:

- save energy in your home
- reduce your fuel bills
- switch energy supplier
- find local installers and tradespeople
- find out about grants

Contact Warm and Well on 0800 500 3076 for advice on paying your bill and information on insulation, heating, grants and loans. You can ask for a home visit and details of accredited installers who specialise in heating and insulation. You can also contact them on their website www.warmandwell.co.uk.

Home energy loan

You can apply for a loan to improve your home with energy efficiency measures and renewable technology installations through Lendology CIC.—www.lendology.org.uk.

Information supplied by South Gloucestershire Council

Update from Dan Norris, Mayor of the West of England for Focal Point Readers

Grants for local shops to cut carbon:

Grants of up to £15,000 for local businesses to cut their energy bills and carbon emissions are now on offer. The green grants are there for premises such as pubs, restaurants and shops to purchase and install energy efficient equipment - reducing their emissions by seven tonnes on average.

Grants are available on a first come, first served basis. For more information please contact: lowcarbonbusiness@westofengland-ca.gov.uk or 0117 332 1520.

Keep Warm this Winter:

It's important to stay above 17°C, especially if you're ill, an older person, or have young children. As Mayor of the West of England, once again I'm running a Keep Warm this Winter drive. For top tips please visit: www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/keepwarm.

Birthday Buses - enjoy Christmas in style:

Don't forget if your Birthday is coming up in December to apply for your FREE bus pass to enjoy the winter season in style.

You can use it to make as many journeys as you like without restrictions throughout the whole of your birthday month.

Head to www.birthdaybus.co.uk for more information and send off your application today.

Let's get jolly with your trolley!

Finally as thoughts turn to Christmas shopping, don't forget to shop local and support our fantastic independents.

DAN NORRIS
West of England
METRO MAYOR



Puzzle Pages

SUDUKO CHALLENGE

6	1			7				
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				8				3
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		3			2		8	
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				4			9	7

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Answers to both puzzles are available on the church website www.stmarysbitton.org.uk - click on **News & Focal Point** or use this QR code



WORD SEARCH

This month's word search is specially for Advent and the period before the birth of Jesus.

e	f	a	m	i	l	y	o	u	n	g	i	p
l	f	r	z	s	z	d	e	v	b	q	g	n
i	y	j	y	r	i	s	z	y	l	u	f	w
z	e	b	m	a	r	r	i	a	g	e	x	i
a	a	p	r	e	g	n	a	n	t	c	u	m
b	r	f	b	l	s	a	v	e	s	h	k	p
e	a	t	y	j	o	s	e	p	h	i	e	o
t	n	c	o	m	p	l	e	t	e	l	m	s
h	g	s	w	e	d	d	i	n	g	d	a	s
c	e	q	n	o	t	h	i	n	g	r	r	i
e	l	m	g	h	p	e	o	p	l	e	y	b
m	f	h	l	j	d	r	e	a	m	n	r	l
c	m	z	k	b	w	i	e	s	h	a	m	e

You are looking for:

Impossible

Elizabeth

People

baby

Messenger

Complete

Wrong

Saves

Young

Israel

Pregnant

Wedding

Angel

Nothing

Marriage

Shame

Joseph

Afraid

Dream

Children

Mary

Family

God

Year

Christmas Prize Quiz

by Carolyn Russell

This month's very seasonal quiz is about Christmas carols and songs. **Name the Christmas songs that contains these lines.**

(As an added bonus this month's quiz has 21 questions)

1. And praises sing to God the King, And peace to men on earth
2. And with true love and brotherhood each other now embrace
3. Angels sung e'er with mirth and glee
4. Field and fountain, moor and mountain, following yonder star
5. Glories stream from heaven afar; Heavenly Hosts sing Al-le-lu-ja
6. Hark, now here the angels sing, a king was born today
7. I'm just going to keep on waiting underneath the mistletoe
8. Later we'll have some pumpkin pie and we'll do some caroling
9. Let earth receive her King
10. Light and life to all He brings, Risen with healing in His wings
11. May your days be merry and bright
12. My mother will start to worry - Beautiful, what's your hurry
13. O what fun it is to ride in a one-horse open sleigh
14. Right down Santa Claus Lane!
15. Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation
16. Strike the harp and join the chorus, Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la
17. The cattle are lowing, the poor baby wakes
18. There's a tree in the Grand Hotel, one in the park as well
19. There's a world outside your window, and it's a world of dread and fear
20. When the snow lay round about, deep and crisp and even
21. When we finally say good night, how I'll hate going out in the storm

Please return your answers by Friday 14th December:

1. By email to bittoncm@outlook.com
2. By sending your answers to Eastover, High Street, Bitton (corner of Golden Valley Lane).

November Quiz Answers

Last month's quiz was about inventors and their inventions

Answers: (1) World Wide Web; (2) Dishwasher; (3) Television; (4) Bouncing Bomb; (5) Dynamite; (6) Windscreen Wipers; (7) Braille System; (8) Spread Spectrum Radio; (9) Telephone; (10) Jet Engine; (11) Hovercraft; (12) Wind Up Radio; (13) Electric Generator; (14) Tin Foil Phonograph; (15) Tesla Coil; (16) Battery; (17) Instant Camera; (18) Rollercoaster; (19) Lawnmower; (20) Steam Engine.

Correct answers :

This quiz proved to be very popular and a number of entries came very close.. Edison's Tin Foil Phonograph proved a stumbling point for some and, in the end we had to be strict and not allow Braille Script for answer 7.

This months winners are:

Alan and Sue Murtagh

OUR NEW QUIZ SETTER?

Sadly, the December Quiz will be the last one set by Carolyn. From January, and for the first six months of 2024, your Quiz Setter will be Kim Scudamore who has kindly agreed to step into the role.

Thank you, Carolyn, for all the fun you have provided for the past 5 years and welcome to Kim from next month.



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The last word

Poles Apart?



The cover photograph on this month's Focal Point is of Bethlehem, not the quaint little town of the Christmas carol, but as it is today.

Bethlehem itself is in disputed territory on the west bank of the Jordan. It is also less than 50 miles from Gaza and from the scenes of daily horror that have been the focus of the western world's media since early October. What, one wonders would be the message of the Prince of Peace to today's events?

One of the aspects of the almost constant news coverage has been the pressure by those representing both the Israeli Government and Palestinians in Gaza to expect the world to take their side. Both have reasons to feel deeply wronged by what has happened in the past two months. The murder of young people at a music festival and kidnappings are repellent but will that wrong be put right by the invasion of Gaza or even the annihilation of Hamas (if that is even possible)?

This pressure to distinctly on one side or another is unfortunately not confined to the conflicts of the Middle East. Frequently, extreme ideas and positions seem to become mainstream, and criticising seems to be taken as evidence of that individuals' support of the opposite extreme opinion; which is often not the case. It is easier not to be critical and to adopt a public position of silence or indifference.

Of course there is no mystery as to what Christ's message would be – that we must love one another. Love itself has many aspects that include understanding, forgiveness and tolerance, seeing things from others point of view and showing an example. It is not easy and few of us achieve it – but do we have a better message; and, in the world of polarities, is love not the answer both to hate and to its more dangerous conspirator - indifference?

May peace and joy be with you, this Christmas.

Jim Heavens



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