



Christmas 2025

 **St Mary's Parish Church** Kirkintilloch
December 2025
THE PARISHIONER



St Mary's Parish Church

Cowgate Kirkintilloch G66 1JT

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Pastoral Letter ...

Dear Friends,

Recently I found myself in a lovely wee bookshop 23 miles away! Beautiful books, twinkly fairy lights, a log stove and the amazing smell of coffee that hit me when I walked through the door - and tasted pretty good too! It was delightful. As I browsed the titles, I came across a book of poetry by Brian Bilston, entitled: And so this is Christmas, 51 seasonally adjusted poems. Within it, was a poem that immediately caught my eye: It's beginning to look a lot like November. It made me laugh. It resonated with me, as the poet talked about Halloween being reduced to clear and Christmas soon being here, along with the carols, the adverts, and all the lights (it's worth a google). Of course, by the time you read this letter, November will be a memory and we will be very much in the throes of Christmas preparation that seem to get earlier every year. And, if you thought that was bad, I've already spotted hot cross buns in the supermarket! Is there anyone else feeling like me? Tired of always being rushed along to the next thing? Longing to slow down in this season when animals hibernate to be present to the people around you and remember what this season is all about?

That's what hit me this evening, as I flicked through the pages of my monthly magazine that had arrived earlier in the day and was stopped in my tracks by a beautiful two-page picture of a bright nativity scene. The baby Jesus all shiny in his manger and these words, "a simple thing ... amid all the noise, the sparkle and

the fun, for Christians it all comes back to a birth in the humblest of settings, more than two millennia ago. In the darkness of winter, it's a story of joy and hope." Yes, it is.

So, amid all the preparation, all that requires our attention, all that needs to be done, may we give ourselves permission to slow down. Turn away from the rush and take time to pause, breathe, be still and be ... and remember who and what is important as we move towards the end of the year. Love. God's love. Shown so fully and beautifully in Jesus, who came and was born among us, as one of us, that we might know God with us, saving, healing, and making whole. A light for all the world that shines in the darkness and that the darkness can never put out.

Now, that's a story worth slowing down for. That's a story to ponder in a broken and hurting world. That's a story to share.
Thank you for being on this journey with me.

Thank you for all that you will do this month to help others see that God's love is real.

With love and blessings to you all for a peaceful Christmas and a hope filled New Year.

Ruth

The Parishioner Online



www.stmaryskirkintilloch.org.uk

Missed or lost your copy of the Parishioner ... why not go to www.stmaryskirkintilloch.org.uk and see this month's copy. Stephen McKean, Webmaster, has built up previous issues online so you can look back on past copies. Also, if you wish any news or information to be put on the website, please e-mail webmaster@stmarykirkintilloch.org.uk and we will put these on the News page of the Website



Church Office

The secretary, Mrs Denise Japp is available in the office Monday to Thursday 8.00 a.m. – 2.15 p.m., Friday 8.00 a.m. – 2.00 p.m. and may be the first point of contact for general enquiries. Denise will be able to refer you to the person best suited to respond. Church office telephone 0141 775 1166 or e-mail: office@stmarysnursery.uk

Thank you

The family of the late David Craig thank their friends at St Mary's for the beautiful flowers, cards, kind words and thoughtful messages at this sad time. It is a great comfort to know how much people care. Thank you once again. May God be with you today and always.

Parish Register

New Members (By Transference Certificate)

Mrs Frances McKelvie, 5 Cottongrass Court, Lenzie.

We welcome Frances into our congregation and trust she will find peace and joy in our midst.

The good wishes of the congregation are sent to her from St Mary's.

Change of Address

Mrs Elizabeth Henderson, formerly Braes O' Yetts Farm,
now residing at 50 Kingsway, Kirkintilloch.

Funerals

November 28 Peter Fraser, Fellsview Avenue, Kirkintilloch
Our thoughts and prayers are with Peter's family and all those suffering bereavement at this sad time.

Session Report

Advent Charity Collection

The three nominated charities that we will be supporting this year are "Marie Curie", "WaterAid" and "Erskine". If you would like to make a monetary donation, envelopes are available at Church on a Sunday morning. Alternatively, simply hand in your donation, clearly marked for the charity of your choice. Our collection will run throughout the Advent period, and in the New Year, monies will be sent on to the three charities.

Advent at St. Mary's

The lead up to Christmas is always a busy time, particularly in and around the Church. A list of the various services and activities taking place is included in the magazine. Watch out for updates in the weekly intimations!

Basis of Union

For completeness, the update that was shared following our visit from the scheme of delegation committee has been included in the Parishioner. We have not received any further information from the committee as yet, and so there is nothing further to report at this stage.

As always, if there is anything you would like to discuss, or if you would like any additional information, then please don't hesitate to get in touch. On behalf of the Kirk Session, I wish you and your families a very happy, safe and peaceful Christmas, with our very best wishes for the New Year.

Kind regards

Gordon Morrison, Session Clerk
07306 205303 morrisgo@sky.com



Church Flowers

The church is decorated each Sunday with flowers. Each arrangement is delivered to someone who is unwell, bereaved or having an over 80 Birthday! To continue this ministry of flowers we depend on donations from members and recently donations have lessened, so we need your help. If you would like to donate to church flowers either on a regular basis or a one-off donation, then please let one of us know. Grateful thanks to all who have donated over the past months.

***Fiona Leishman, Sandra Burns,
Ruth Poynton, Elizabeth Walker
The Flower Committee***

Nursery Update

We hosted our Parents' Evening in November. This was an excellent opportunity for staff to share children's progress with their parents/carers. Children continue to develop skills both indoor and outdoor as the weather changes.

The Nursery Nativity will be held in the sanctuary on Thursday 18th December at 10am. All members of the congregation are invited to join staff, children and parents on this joyous occasion.

Following long and dedicated service with our nursery, Mrs Maureen Nesbitt will retire at the end of this term. Maureen has been a hard-working, loyal, valued member of staff and she will be missed by us all. We wish her many happy years of retirement.

I'd like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the work the staff do throughout the year and wish them all a very Happy Christmas!

Fiona Leishman,
Nursery Convener



ORGANISATIONS ACCOUNTS/AUDITORS

It is that time of year again when accounts need to be prepared for the year to 31 December 2025 for all Church Organisations. I would therefore ask that all treasurers of organisations please ensure that a copy of their annual audited accounts is passed to the Treasurer or Finance Convenor no later than 28 February 2026. These accounts will be made up to their year-end falling into the year to 31 December 2025. The Nursery, Social Committee and Young Church, whose accounts are included in the Church Accounts, should work to a deadline of 31st January 2026 as John and I both go on holiday in February and March respectively..

The members of the Finance Committee who have volunteered to act as auditors for the church organisations are John Pears and Hugh Biggans. The Church Accounts should be submitted to Presbytery and Church of Scotland by 31 March annually, therefore it is very important that these deadlines are adhered to. We need to present the accounts to Session as early as possible to enable them to be audited prior to submission to the relevant bodies. Your assistance in this matter is very much appreciated by John and myself.



Hugh Biggans
Finance Convenor

Kirkintilloch and Lenzie Christian Aid Group

Once again thank St Mary's for the use of our church hall for the Autumn coffee morning which was held on 8th November. At the time of writing the amount raised is just over £1,600. All proceeds will be sent to Christian Aid's Christmas Appeal which this year is focusing on the victims of war. Sincere thanks to everyone who helped or contributed in whatever way to raising this excellent total. Laura Mead from Christian Aid says this " Together we must support families to survive violence against the odds. We must pray that children whose young lives have been torn apart by conflict will one day know peace and comfort. Because when we give, act and pray together, we're united by hope. And with hope a brighter future is possible."

Paul Malcolm



	<u>Advent at St Mary's</u>	
Sunday 30 th November	<u>First week of Advent</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Celebration of Holy Communion• Local Christmas Cards for delivery• Advent Lunch	
Wednesday 3 rd December	<u>Open Doors</u> - Songs of Praise Carol Singing.	
Saturday 6 th Dec.	<u>Celebrate Christmas</u> with KMVC (2:30pm)	
Sunday 7 th December	<u>Second week of Advent</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gift Service• Last day for local Christmas Card delivery.• Pot Plants	
Tuesday 9 th December	Pupils from Lairdsland Primary School joining us for crafts and carol singing.	
12 th & 13 th December	<u>Pantomime - Robin Hood</u> Anathallo Theatre Group	
Sunday 14 th December	<u>Third week of Advent</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Christingle Service (afternoon)	
Thursday 18 th December	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nursery Nativity - in the Sanctuary @ 10am• Blue Christmas Service	
19 th & 20 th Dec.	<u>Pantomime - Robin Hood</u> Anathallo Theatre Group	
Sunday 21 st Dec.	<u>Fourth week in Advent</u> - Nativity	
Wednesday 24 th Dec.	<u>Watchnight Service</u> 11:30pm at St Mary's Parish Church Joint Service with SDMP	
Christmas Day	<u>Christmas Day Service</u> At St. David's Memorial Park - 10:30am	

Dates for your Diary



ST MARY'S PARISH CHURCH - OPEN DOORS DAY

There will, be no Doors Open Day in January but we are planning to have one on Wednesday 4th February 2026 where we hope to have Sally McLellan and John Thomson to entertain us with music and songs.

John Pears

The Churches Walk and Talk Group

The Walk and Talk group has combined friendly conversation with gentle walks around Kirkintilloch, Lenzie and Waterside since 2022. The pace is suitable for all ages, most fitness levels and all are welcome. There is no membership involved in Walk and Talk and all are welcome for occasional or regular walks. If you would like to join us, then please turn up at any of the locations on the following dates and we will be delighted to see you. Unless stated otherwise, the walks start at 1:30 on Thursday afternoons, last approximately one hour and the start points and routes vary, as shown below.

Walk and Talk use a WhatsApp group to link many of our walkers both past and current. If you would like to know what the group are doing, then please use my contact details

below to introduce yourself. The walks are prompted each week on Thursday mornings and a summary of the walk is usually produced on Thursday evenings. There is also the usual group chat and banter as all are encouraged to keep in touch. If you don't like using WhatsApp, then please give me a call and I will keep you informed by other means.

As Christmas Day and 1st January occur on a Thursday, no walks have been planned, but an additional walk has been scheduled for Tuesday 30th December. Please note the change from our regular meeting day. These details are shown in the list of walks given below.

Trevor Patterson

07939 677523

trevor_patterson@outlook.com

11th December
18th December
25th December
30th December
1st January
8th January
15th January
22nd January
29th January
5th February

Kirkintilloch Leisure Centre. Woodilee
The Redbrae. Followed by Christmas lunch
Christmas Day. No walk planned
Tuesday. Kilsyth Road, Strathkelvin Railway Path
No walk planned
Merkland Nature Park
Donaldson Street, Christine's Way
St Columba's Hillhead Church. Including coffee stop in Kirkintilloch
Lenzie Coop
Waterside

Scottish Country Dance Class

will be finishing for Christmas on Tuesday 9th December and restarting on 6th January 2026 when we will be delighted to welcome new members as well as regulars. No experience necessary. The perfect way to get fit after Christmas and banish the January blues. Come along and give it a try.

Margaret Paterson

Fairtrade Stall



Our stall is now stocked for Christmas! Why not visit it and buy your Christmas cards and other goodies? We look forward to seeing you there.

Young Church ...

Young Church welcome children and young people of all ages. We meet in the Church at 11am then go to the halls for age related fun and games. Whether a regular or occasional visitor you can be assured of a warm welcome.

Thanks to everyone who came along to support the Craft Fair; to everyone who helped with donations, setting up, and helped out on the day, our Church Family are a great team. We raised just over £1550. Bless you all and thank you from all the Young Church Leaders.

As this edition covers December and January can we take this opportunity to say we are looking forward to 2026 and the opportunity to have lots of fun sharing the love of God and Jesus with our Young People. We wish everyone a Peaceful and Happy Christmas.

ST MARY'S

YOUNG CHURCH

MEET EVERY SUNDAY

+ 10:45 TO 12:15

We have lots of fun learning more about Jesus using games, crafts, stories, videos and baking.

ALL CHILDREN ARE WELCOME

WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU ANY TIME

Bible Bite

A short story from the Bible

It can be read in the Bible in
Luke chapter 2 verses 8 to 20

Shepherds were paid to look after the flocks out on the hillside. Uneducated and rough, they were usually avoided, or overlooked.





At Christmas we celebrate the birth of Jesus,
God's Son and our Saviour
coming into the world as a baby,
and we look forward to the time
when Jesus will come again,
not as a baby but as the
King of kings and Lord of lords!

read

John 14:3

A baby needs clothes
to keep warm like
a snuggly sleep suit
or a vest and nappy.

What were you dressed in?

Jesus was wrapped in

.....
read Luke 2:7

A baby needs somewhere
to be born like at home
or in a hospital.

Where were you born?

Jesus was born
in a stable in

.....
read Luke 2:1-6

A baby needs
somewhere
to sleep like
a crib or a cot.
*What did you
sleep in?*

Jesus slept in a

.....
read Luke 2:7

A baby needs
a name.

*What name were
you called?*

Jesus was given
a special name
that had a
special meaning.

read
Matthew 1:21-23

HAPPY CHRISTMAS!

NADOLIG LLAWEN ✨ NOLLAIG CHRÏDHEIL ✨ NOLLAG SHONA
JOYEUX NOËL • FELIZ NAVIDAD • BUON NATALE • GOD JUL • FROHE WEIHNACHTEN

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Helpers Required

We require several new people to volunteer for stewarding at funerals in the church. As long as there is a good number of volunteers then once every 2 or 3 months is all that is required for any volunteer and only if you are available on the day in question. Anyone who would be interested please speak to **Paul Malcolm** or contact him at **578 1520 or 07542516108**. Thank you.

HELP NEEDED

The social committee is looking for help. During the year we provide at least four after-service lunches as well as providing help with catering for other church events. There are many of you who already provide 'ad hoc' help during the year by helping to serve and prepare for events, but we desperately need new blood on the committee itself. This is not arduous or too time-consuming; it involves about two meetings before each lunch as well as helping to set up and serve, if necessary, on the day.

New people often come with new ideas and new ways of doing things and these are always very welcome. Those of us on the committee are a very friendly bunch and most of you already know us well. Please consider coming to join us, the commitment is not huge but very vital. We know that next year will be an important one for the church and during this time everything will probably change, but please if you can help until that time, you will be most welcome. If you are interested, please speak with Jen Biggans who can fill you in with more details about the committee and any commitment.

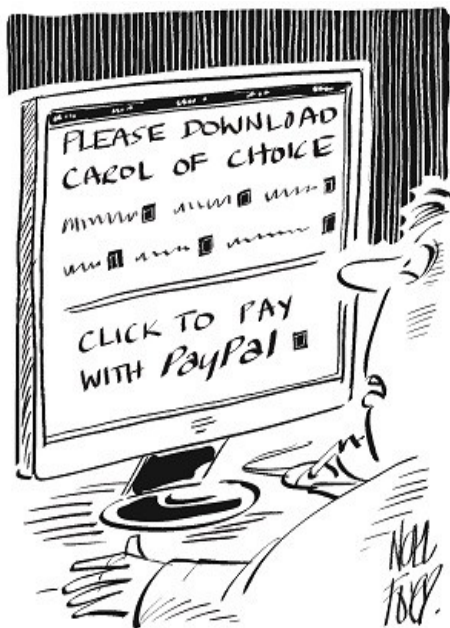
Scottish Ploughing Championships begin with kirk blessing service

A special service giving thanks for the food that we eat and the people and technology used to harvest it was recently held in Inverkeilor Church in Angus, to mark the start of a major competition, the 61st Scottish Ploughing Championships.

The Scottish Ploughing Championships have been held annually since 1963 in a different part of the country and traditionally begin with a 'Blessing of the Plough' service at a church as close to the competition venue as possible.

For the competition's return to Angus for the first time since 2009, with the contest taking place at Arbikie near Lunan. The nearby Inverkeilor Church hosted the service, with the unusual sight of a plough being installed in front of the communion table for the occasion.

The Scottish Ploughing Championship regularly attracts between 90 and 130 competitors each year in categories including vintage, classic and modern tractors, as well as the use of the traditional heavy horses. With 130 entrants, this year's competition at Arbikie was one of the largest championships of recent years.



We've got online carol-singers again!

Men's curious reluctance to ask where they are going

If you are travelling far this Christmas, pray that your satnav works, or that there is a woman in the car. Research has found that men are so reluctant to ask directions that they waste hours and miles every year. Over a lifetime of travel, it can work out to a wasted journey from Land's End to John O' Groats. Very few men will ask for help or check a map to avoid unnecessary travel. They prefer to wander hopefully until they find their route on their own, regardless of how long it takes them.



Which of course has inspired the joke: Why did the Children of Israel wander in the wilderness for 40 years? Because Moses was a man and wouldn't ask directions...

The story of the Christingle

The word 'Christingle' actually means 'Christ Light' and celebrates the light of Jesus coming into the world. Stories of how the Christingle began look back to the Moravian Church, which is found in the Czech Republic. The Moravians have held Christingle services for more than 200 years, and according to them, this is how the first Christingle might have been made:

Many years ago, the children in a village were asked to bring a Christmas gift to put beside the crib in the church. One family was very poor, and had no money for gifts, but the three children were still determined to take something. The only nice thing they had was an orange, so they decided to give the Christ-child that.

But then they discovered the top was going green, so the eldest cut it out, and put a candle in the hole. To add some colour, one of the girls took a red ribbon from her hair and tied it around the middle of the orange. It was hard to make the ribbon stay still, so they fastened it in place with toothpicks. The toothpicks looked a bit bare, so the youngest child added some raisins to them.

The children took their decorated orange lantern to the church for the Christmas Mass. The other children sneered at their meagre gift, but the priest seized upon it with joy. He held it up as an example of the true understanding of the meaning of Christmas, for the following reasons: the orange is round, like the world; the candle gives us light in the dark, like the love of God; the red ribbon goes round the 'world', as a symbol of Christ's blood, given for everyone; the four sticks point in all directions, and symbolise that God is over all: North, South, East and West; and the fruit and nuts remind us of God's blessings.

The Children's Society first introduced the Christingle Service to The Church of England in 1968, and it has since become a popular event in the church calendar. This candlelit celebration is an ideal way to share the key messages of the Christian faith, while helping to raise vital funds to help vulnerable children across the country.

Visit: www.childrenssociety.org.uk

Prayer for Christmas 2025

Dear Father,

Christmas is coming. It's all such a rush – planning, shopping, spending, wrapping, posting, stressing! What's it all about? Lord, help us, in all the rat-race busyness, to make time to focus on that baby at the centre of it all. That baby who is Your Son, who was with You in the beginning and who, with You, created all things; that baby who brings life and light and hope and salvation; that baby who was and is Jesus, God, made man.

Lord, we thank You for that baby-gift to us – the greatest gift there has ever been. Thank You that because He came, grew up, lived, died and rose again, there is light in the darkness of this world's mess – light that can never be put out, that evil can never overcome. Jesus is the Light of the World. Putting our trust in Him, we thank You Lord, for Christmas – for Your grace and love for us. In Jesus' name. Amen.



By Daphne Kitching

The message of Christmas is just as real for us today as it was 2000 years ago, and it still brings us hope and joy for our long-term future.

Emmanuel has come, the Prince of Peace, the Son of Righteousness. God IS with us. And HIS kingdom will have no end.

The many journeys of the Stone of Scone

Some 75 years ago, on 25th December 1950, the Stone of Scone, the coronation stone of British monarchs, was taken from Westminster Abbey in London by four Scottish students as a home rule gesture. They transported it to Scotland but broke it accidentally. It was later left by them in the ruined Arbroath Abbey, repaired and returned to London to be used in the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

From 1996 it was kept in Edinburgh Castle, but last year it was moved to a new museum at Perth – two or three miles down the River Tay from Scone Abbey, where it had been used in the crowning of Scottish kings.

The Stone, also known as the Stone of Destiny, is a block of red sandstone that was taken by Edward I “Longshanks” of England in 1296 and used in the crowning of English monarchs since then. It is still used to crown UK kings and queens – most recently King Charles III in May 2023 – but it has returned to Perthshire for the first time in 700 years and is now freely available to view there.

An old symbol of Scottish monarchy, the Stone was first recorded as being used in 1249 for the inauguration of the boy-king, Alexander III. It was taken by the English as war loot – a symbol of Edward's perceived right to rule.

There are various stories about the origins and history of the Stone. One goes back to biblical times, naming it as the Stone of Jacob, taken by Jacob from Bethel as described in Genesis 28 and then removed to ancient Ireland by the prophet Jeremiah. There are also claims that the Stone at Perth is not the original, and many stories of the intricate measures taken to ensure its safety during the war years.

Ewan has never spent Christmas with Pooh and Piglet



Too many children in Scotland do not have books at home. Books bring magic, comfort and joy.

Make sure no child misses out this Christmas. Donate now to give the magic of books to a child like Ewan.

Decorations by
E.H. Shepherd,
taken from
The House at
Pooh Corner



**Scottish
Book Trust**
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Scottish charity, SC027669

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The Herald

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Registered charity number: 306016



Girlguiding contact information: **Rainbows**

Name: **Mhairi**

Email: **mhairieqs17@gmail.com**

Call: **07503241336**





Kirkintilloch: Trinity Parish Church

St David's Memorial Park
&

St Mary's

Proposed Basis of Union

SMPC Update

2nd November 2025

Our visit from the committee appointed by Glasgow Presbytery took place on the afternoon of Tuesday 28th October. The meeting went well and the team were able to inspect all of the Church buildings (Sanctuary and halls). They were also able to see the Nursery School in operation, both in the halls and in the outdoor play area.

The committee hope, now that the process has started, that it will not take long to conclude the exercise and make their recommendation. Completion in early 2026 feels like a reasonable timescale as things stand.

My thanks to David Tinto, Fiona Leishman and Hugh Biggans for joining Ruth and me for the visitation. Their help and support ensured we were able to provide all of the information the team required.

I anticipate that there will be an ongoing "conversation" as we share questions and information, but in the meantime we "wait and see" and continue to pray for the committee as they undertake this significant task.

As always, I am happy to catch up if there is anything you would like to discuss in more detail.

Gordon Morrison

Session Clerk

St. Mary's Parish Church, Kirkintilloch

07306 205303

morrisgo@sky.com

The Rectory

St James the Least

My dear Nephew Darren

And so, the old year draws to a close, and you are packing to move to your own first parish in January. Let me give you some final words of advice.

Curates, you will have noticed, are forgiven everything. I hope you have appreciated this period of grace, because come 1st January, all that will change. You will then become responsible for everything that goes wrong in your church. You must be able to mend leaking taps, shovel snow, arrange flowers, mow the churchyard and run jumble sales. You will be expected to know the moment someone falls ill – preferably the day before. In addition, they will expect you to preach profound sermons - in seven minutes flat, and to lead a life of prayerful solitude while being the life and soul of the parish. From the day your predecessor left, he will have turned into a saint. You will be their new disappointment. Be assured that whatever you do, you will always disappoint someone.

Be prepared for phone calls at 3am telling you that someone has left a light on in church, and shouldn't you go and turn it off? You will be asked about car parking arrangements for the October Harvest Service by mid-January, while hymns for the 9 Lessons and Carols will

be required by early summer. I suggest you buy extra pullovers, overcoats and scarves for life in your vicarage. A good number of mousetraps may well come in useful too.

Welcome to your new life of an incumbent.

Expect that each Sunday morning, as you prepare for the service, there will be a straggling queue of people who want to tell you an astonishing variety of things: there is a large cobweb 30 feet up over the pulpit, they don't like the second hymn on the board, the flowers look rough this week, there may be a bat in the vestry, some child has left a shoe in the back porch, and the car park has broken glass in it.

You may find this a distraction as you prepare for a worship service. But remember that at least they have bothered to come to church at all. In my experience, congregations are always irritating, but at least they do take up a lot of space, and that looks good in the pews. The church would look empty without them.

Your loving uncle, Eustace



Rev Ruth Morrison presented all the above members with Certificates for 30 years plus service as Elders.
Church Organist and Country Dance Class Teacher.

Where did Christmas cards come from?

Christmas cards have a history which may surprise you: their origins are not of the Church, but of the Post Office and railways.

Of course, very early 'Christmas cards' had been around for hundreds of years, in the form of a simple exchange of Christmas greetings in private letters. The earliest such letter on record was written in England in 1534.

In 1611 a HUGE Christmas card made a one-off appearance. It measured a whopping 33" by 24", and was given to King James I of England (who was also King James VI of Scotland). It featured an illustration of a rose, four poems, a song, and a Christmas message for the king and his son.

Then in 1843 came the creation of Christmas cards as we know them today. One enterprising man was responsible for this: Sir Henry Cole, a senior civil servant who had helped launch the 'Public Record Office', now called the Post Office.

Sir Henry Cole helped to introduce the Penny Post, as it was called. Until then, only rich people could afford the Post, but with the building of the railways, which carried far more packages than a horse and cart (and went much faster), suddenly the Penny Post became possible.

Sir Henry wanted to encourage 'ordinary' people to use the new service. So he came up with the bright idea of a creating a simple card that people could send each other for Christmas. His friend, John Horsley, was an artist, who designed a three-panel card. Two panels depicted people caring for the poor, and the middle panel showed a family enjoying a large Christmas dinner.

They printed about 1000 cards that first year, and advertised under the slogan: 'Just published, a Christmas Congratulations Card; or picture emblematical of old English festivity to perpetuate kind recollections between dear friends!'

The cards sold for one shilling each and could be posted to friends and family for a Penny. There was an immediate, warm response from the public.

Printing methods improved, and by 1860 Christmas cards were produced in large quantities. By 1870 the cost of posting one had dropped to half a penny, and the custom was rapidly gaining popularity. By the early 1900s, the custom had spread across Europe.

The first cards usually included a Nativity scene, and in late Victorian times, robins and snow-scenes. Robins were chosen because the postmen in those days were nick-named 'Robin Postmen', because of their red uniforms.

Christmas cards appeared in the USA in the late 1840s. They were mass produced from 1875, and in 1915 John C Hall and two of his brothers created Hallmark Cards, which today offers 2,000 different designs of Christmas card.

Charity Christmas cards began in Denmark in the early 1900s. They spread to Sweden and Norway, and then on throughout Europe and America.

Last year the Royal Mail estimated that it had delivered 150 million cards during the Christmas period.



What's in a (Christmas) Name?

What do your family call him, that cheerful old man in a red robe and floppy hat who pops up everywhere at Christmas? Sometimes he's Father Christmas, sometimes Santa Claus, and in parts of Europe he's Saint Nicholas. That's his real name, abbreviated to 'Santa Claus' by Brits and Americans who don't like to follow the Europeans, and then turned into a more homely, cuddly kind of name for the children. Whatever he's called, his function is the same – delivering presents to children at Christmas.

The first St Nicholas was bishop of Myra, in the country we now call Turkey, in the fourth century. He was known as the friend of the poor, and especially poor or abused children. At (or just before) Christmas he went around handing out presents to them, as well as rescuing some from dreadful circumstances. The red robe our modern Santa Claus wears may be a vague representation of a bishop's garment, and the floppy hat is his mitre!

The original good bishop from 1600 years ago is remembered by the Church on 6th December, and the lucky children in Belgium and the Netherlands get their presents then.

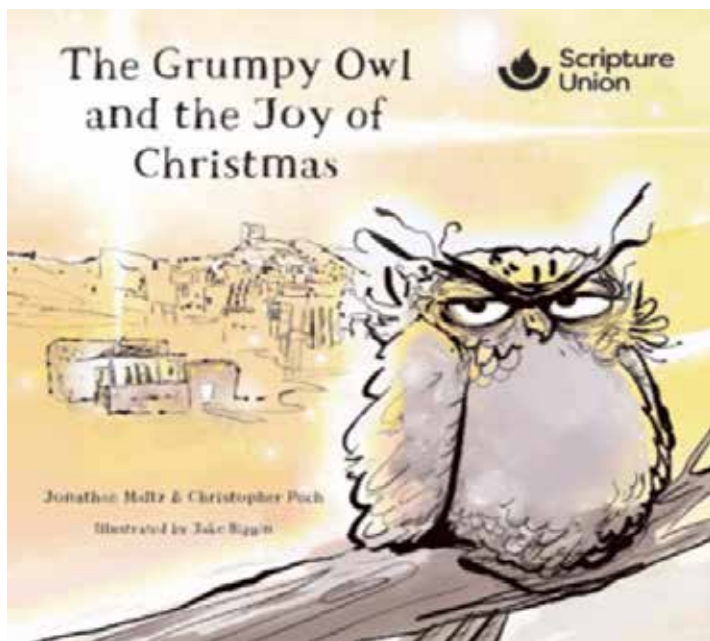
The Grumpy Owl and the Joy of Christmas

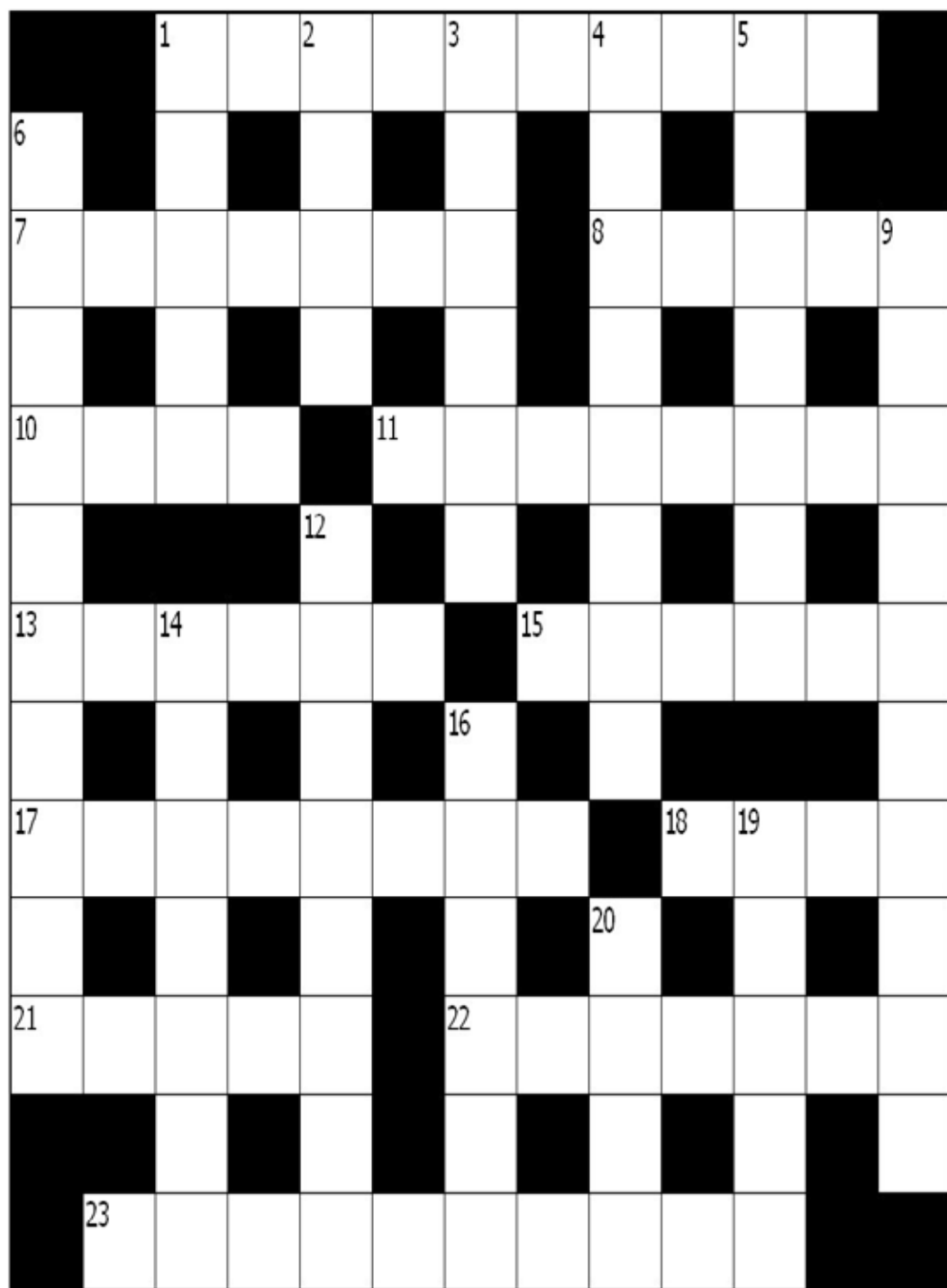
By Jonathan Maltz and Christopher Poch, CHP, £5.49

Here is a beautifully illustrated children's nativity story told from the unusual angle of a grumpy owl who lived in a little old empty barn in Bethlehem.

When a man, a woman and their donkey burst into his barn, making a lot of noise, the grumpy owl decides to fly away to somewhere quiet where he can be

grumpy in peace. But can he find such a place, or will he return to his barn in time for a big, not-at-all grumpy, surprise?





Across

- 1 Provisional meeting place of God and the Jews (Exodus 25:9) (10)
- 7 David's third son, killed when his head got caught in a tree during a battle with his father (2 Samuel 18:14,15) (7)
- 8 They ruled much of the west coast of South America in the 15th and early 16th centuries (5)
- 10 Small deer of European and Asian extraction (4)
- 11 Seized control of (Numbers 21:25) (8)
- 13 Terror (Luke 24:5) (6)
- 15 First World War heroine shot by the Germans in Brussels, Nurse Edith (6)
- 17 Stormy (8)
- 18 A bitter variety of this, together with lamb and unleavened bread, was the Passover menu for anyone unclean (Numbers 9:11) (4)
- 21 Arson (anag.) (5)
- 22 How John Newton described God's grace in his well-known hymn (7)
- 23 Habitation (Isaiah 27:10) (10)

Down

- 1 and see that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:8) (5)
- 2 The wicked man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are as ... as a lion (Proverbs 28:1) (4)
- 3 One of the exiles, a descendant of Parosh, who married a foreign woman (Ezra 10:25) (6)
- 4 He escaped from Nob when Saul killed the rest of his family and joined David (1 Samuel 22:19,20) (8)
- 5 City and lake in Central Switzerland (7)
- 6 Offer your bodies as living , holy and pleasing to God (Romans 12:1) (10)
- 9 Pouches carried by horses (Genesis 49:14) (10)
- 12 One who accepts government by God (8)
- 14 Aromatic substance commonly used in Jewish ritual (Exodus 30:1) (7)
- 16 He asked Jesus, 'What is truth?' (John 18:38) (6)
- 19 Are (Romans 13:1) (5)
- 20 You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will ... his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21) (4)

ACROSS: 1, Tabernacle. 7, Absalom. 8, Incas. 10, Roes. 11, Captured. 13, Frigate. 15, Cave. 17, Cyclical. 18, Herb. 21, Sonar. 22, Amazing. 23, Settlement.
DOWN: 1, Taste. 2, Bold. 3, Ramiah. 4, Abiathar. 5, Lucerne. 6, Sacrifices. 9, Saddlebags. 12, Theocrat. 14, Incense. 16, Pilate. 19, Exist. 20, Save.



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